

JOHN CLAIBORNE ISBELL



AN OUTLINE OF
ROMANTICISM
IN THE WEST



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John Claiborne Isbell, *An Outline of Romanticism in the West*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0302>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800647428

ISBN Hardback: 9781800647435

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800647442

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 9781800647459

ISBN Digital ebook (AZW3): 9781800647466

ISBN XML: 9781800647473

Digital ebook (HTML): 9781800647480

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0302

Cover image: Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–1819), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Th%C3%A9odore_g%C3%A9ricault,_la_zattera_della_medusa,_1819,_07.jpg

Cover design by Katy Saunders

2. The Frankenstein Dilemma: Romantic Disavowals of Romanticism, 1800–1830

The title Realist was imposed on me as the men of 1830 had the title Romantics imposed on them. At no time have titles given a just idea of things; if it were otherwise, works would be superfluous.

Gustave Courbet¹

Now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.

Mary Shelley²

To ask what ‘Romanticism’ is at the beginning of the twenty-first century may seem little different from asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. “When I make words work harder,” argues Humpty Dumpty to Alice, “I pay them extra;” a laudable solution, but one which describing realities will not allow us.³ This, in essence, is Lovejoy’s famous position: defining the word *Romanticism*, he writes, will either require assuming the word has one accepted meaning, or will be a personal definition leading to “a vast amount of bad history.” “To call these new ideas of the 1780s and 1790s ‘Romanticism’ [...] suggests that there was only one such idea, or, if many, that they were all implicates of one fundamental ‘Romantic’ idea, or, at the least, that

1 “Le titre de réaliste m’a été imposé comme on a imposé aux hommes de 1830 celui de romantiques. Les titres n’ont donné en aucun temps une idée juste des choses; s’il en était autrement, les œuvres seraient superflues” (ctd. in Barrère, “Définitions” 104).

2 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 56.

3 Carroll, *Looking-Glass*, p. 197.

they were harmonious *inter se* and formed some sort of systematic unity. None of these things are true."⁴ Eichner replies that "if we are not permitted to mean more than 'organic dynamicism,' it is much simpler to say 'organic dynamicism,'" and as Peckham writes, any theory of romanticism worth its salt "must show that Wordsworth and Byron, Goethe and Chateaubriand, were all part of a general European literary movement."⁵ One common solution to this dilemma is empirical: if it quacks like a Romantic, then call the thing Romantic. Eichner notes that in sixty years, "some seven hundred articles and treatises have been devoted to this quest."⁶ "The spirit of the age was Romanticism," states MacFarland, adding a quote from Blake, "To Generalize is to be an Idiot."⁷ This chapter prefers to examine some first-hand Romantic positions on the 'Romantic movement' as such; taking Blake's advice to heart, it hopes less to map a field than to open a window for debate, and to raise more questions than answers.

Three pressures complicate its global survey. First, 'Romanticism' is a civilization. Peyre thus contrasts it with other movements: "We could hardly speak of symbolist history or even symbolist philosophy, of realist music or politics, of existentialist music, painting, criticism, and hardly more appropriately of existentialist poetry. Classicism [...] never reached, even in France, a fraction of the reading public."⁸ Second, 'Romantic' works reflect a series of apparently irreconcilable antinomies: male/female; energy/*ennui*; form/chaos; art/science; public/private; group/individual; right-wing/left-wing; nation/exoticism; naïve/ironic; antique/Christian; classic/romantic/realist. Third, as Courbet notes, thing and label repeatedly blur. Behler remarks on "the amazing fact that most of the authors whom we today call Romantic poets did not consider themselves to be Romantics," citing the Schlegels, Novalis and Brentano, Staël and Chateaubriand, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and Byron.⁹ If none of these Romantics use the term, then who did? McGann, in particular, has argued that here we are the unwitting prisoners of forgotten late-nineteenth-century critics. Writing of

4 Lovejoy, "Meaning," pp. 259–261.

5 Eichner, "Genesis," p. 214. Peckham, "Theory," p. 5.

6 Eichner, "*Romantic*," p. 3.

7 MacFarland, *Cruces*, p. 103.

8 Peyre, "Originality," p. 333.

9 Behler, "Origins," p. 110.

'Romantic irony,' Fetzer notes that "the addition of the adjective *Romantic* was apparently the arbitrary decision of a later, influential critic writing in the mid-nineteenth century;" Greene observes that "*neo-classicism* [...] had an obscure birth in uninspired manuals of literary history around the end of the nineteenth century," while Wellek remarks that 'classicisme' has never entered the dictionary of the French Academy and dates *Klassik* in Germany from 1887.¹⁰ As Perkins notes, "The major Victorian critics [...] did not refer to an 'English Romantic Movement,' though they wrote abundantly about the poets."¹¹ Taine names the French school 'Romantic' in 1863, echoing Anatole France, and Pater in 1889 calls it a French and German term. That story has many fascinating aspects, and several recur here: artists show the mellowing of age and personal feuds among Classics and Romantics alike, and critics show ideology and the politics of canon formation. But this study's main focus lies elsewhere, focused on a group of facts that throw our primary sources into a new light. It argues that a common thread does indeed link Europe's major Romantics, despite religion, politics, and national boundaries: their disavowal of their own creation. Goethe, Tieck, and the Schlegels; Wordsworth and Byron; Manzoni, Leopardi, Pushkin, Chateaubriand, Hugo: their parallel remarks show more than personal feuds or late regrets, since it is their own works these romantics disown, and the doubts are there from their first manifestos.

1. German Lands

Historians may call them 'Weimar Classicists,' another term we owe to Wilhelmine scholarship, but Wieland and Herder, Goethe and Schiller, launched the adjective *romantisch* in Germany. Alert critics still struggle with "the common German view that romanticism is the creation of the Schlegels, Tieck, Novalis, and Wackenroder."¹² Wellek argued in 1949 that since Goethe in particular shapes German Romanticism, to sidestep Goethe as 'Classic' is to read the Apocrypha without the Bible, and

10 Fetzer, "Irony," p. 21. Greene, "Neo-Classicism," p. 70. Wellek, *Discriminations*, pp. 68, 74.

11 Perkins, "Construction," p. 137.

12 Wellek, "Concept," pp. 147-148; see also Eichner, "*Romantic*," pp. 60-65, 145-148 and *Period*, pp. 39-42, 48-53; and Wellek, *History*, pp. 1-2.

Eichner repeats this complaint decades later: “matters are not so simple as the reader of most German histories of literature is led to believe.”¹³ In 1798, Novalis uses the noun *die Romantik*, describing a science of ‘Romantics’ akin to physics or numismatics (*Das allgemeine Brouillon*). In 1804, Jean Paul Richter applies this noun to the art of Klopstock, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, and the Schlegels (see his *Vorschule der Ästhetik*). In Heidelberg, 1808, Voss and Baggesen use the agent noun *Romantiker* for living writers, as an insult (*Der Karfunkel oder, Klingelklingel-almanach: Ein Taschenbuch für vollendete Romantiker und angehende Mystiker*). Brentano and Arnim take the insult as a badge of honor, and Romanticists are born (*Zeitschrift für Einsiedler*). Germany’s media debate runs 1801–1808, in essence; Bouterwek’s monumental *Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit* already reviews German *Romantiker* in 1819.

Here also are the first to disown the term. Goethe claims that he and Schiller invented the Classic/Romantic distinction; Pushkin and Heine call Goethe “the giant of Romantic poetry.”¹⁴ Goethe’s place in German Romantic lyric is fundamental; his *Märchen* launched the Romantic literary fairy tale, his *Wilhelm Meister* prompted the Romantic *Bildungsroman*, from *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which Novalis wrote in reply, to Tieck’s *Sternbald*—not to mention *Faust’s* or *Werther’s* impact, and this is a short list.¹⁵ Yet Goethe’s rejection of Romanticism is explicit. In an unpublished *Römische Elegie*, Goethe says that if Werther had been his brother, he would have killed him.¹⁶ On the Weimar stage, he classicizes Kleist; and he refuses Brentano’s *Ponce de Leon*, an 1801 competition entry, preferring Kotzebue and even Terence.¹⁷ He talks of his “horror and loathing” [Schauer und Abscheu] at each contact with Kleist.¹⁸ As early as 1808, he despairs of Germany’s spoiled talents, listing Werner, Oehlenschläger, Jean Paul, Görres, Arnim, and Brentano whom he had praised in 1806; his attacks on “charakterlose” romantic art continue through the 1820s.¹⁹ Expanding on his famous observation

13 Wellek, “Concept,” pp. 147–148. Eichner “Romantic,” p. 10.

14 Pushkin on Literature, p. 465. Heine ctd. Eichner, “Romantic,” p. 151.

15 Eichner, “Romantic,” p. 98. Trainer, *Märchen*, p. 98. Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe* 1: p. 585.

16 Menhennet, *Movement*, p. 122.

17 Staël, *Allemagne* 3: pp. 247–248. Burckhardt, *Repertoire*; also Balayé, *Carnets*, p. 80.

18 Goethe, *Schriften* 3: p. 141.

19 Goethe, *Briefe* 3: p. 92.

that the classic is healthy while the romantic is sick, Goethe notes that “they encounter one another in the emptiness.”²⁰

Germany’s ‘Romantics’ have since Bouterwek and Heine been rather a fluid list, with many common absentees: Herder, Bürger, Klopstock, Schiller, Goethe; Hölderlin, Jean Paul, Kleist. What purpose is served, we may ask, by a history of Romantic lyric where Goethe, Bürger, and Hölderlin are unmentioned? Surely it will only be half a story? Yet the Schlegels, at least, remain Romantic shibboleths for a fastidious post-Wilhelmine tradition, making their own resistance to the term all the more surprising.

Friedrich Schlegel, that modernist, stopped calling modern art *charakterlos* after 1796, instead looking to combine Europe’s old split between the ancient and medieval, classical and Romantic ages, to create the *Indifferenzpunkt* of new art, an equilibrium of the universal in the local. And indeed, Goethe is his model. By 1797 (*Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*), Friedrich’s definition of *romantisch* is “125 sheets long”, and in 1800, Friedrich famously suggests that Romantic art is not dead: “the Romantic type of poetry is still becoming.”²¹ Yet his preceding remark in the same passage goes uncited, on “the prospect of a boundlessly growing classicism.” What impulse makes us suppress half of Friedrich Schlegel’s message? Wellek claims that “the Schlegels were obviously strongly anticlassicist at the time,” and even Eichner deletes just this remark in his meticulous study’s page-long Schlegel extract.²² Berlin’s *Athenäum* writers use *romantisch* in art, like its partner *klassisch*, almost wholly for the past, not the future or even the present. And after Paris in 1802, Friedrich drops his “highly idiosyncratic” usage, consigning the term *romantisch* to history.²³ He calls Jean Paul’s novels “the only romantic products of our unromantic age,” as he had said of

20 “Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde und das Romantische das Kranke,” in Goethe, *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, March 21 and April 2, 1829; “wodurch sie sich denn beide im Nichtigen begegnen,” Goethe’s *Moderne Guelphen und Ghibellinen*, in *Über Kunst und Alterthum* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1827), VI, p. 166..

21 “Bogen lang;” in Baldensperger, “Romantique,” pp. 93–95.

22 Wellek, “Concept,” p. 7. Both Eichner, “Romantic,” p. 112 and Immerwahr, “Romantisch,” pp. 50–54 cite the 116 *Athenäum* Fragment’s “die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden,” but not its talk of “grenzenlos wachsende Klassizität.”

23 Baldensperger, “Romantique,” p. 91.

Tieck's *Sternbald* in 1799.²⁴ Even for Friedrich at his peak, Romantic and classical art are two old parents for a new artistic future. As Behler writes, Friedrich's aesthetic theory tries to unite "two antagonistic aesthetics, to find a synthesis of [...] the antique and the modern, the Classical and the Romantic;" a third epoch will bring "the harmony of the Classical and the Romantic," which the 1800 *Gespräch über die Poesie* [Talk About Poetry] calls the ultimate goal of all literature.²⁵ Moreover, Schlegel not only distrusts his own Romantic label, but also the new art that took his name: around 1800, he writes that "Tieck has no sense at all of art [...] he is absolutely *unclassic and unprogressive*."²⁶ In 1806, he complains to his brother Wilhelm of Goethe's "indecent and scandalous praise" for Brentano's "rabble songs," *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn, 1806): "German scholars have become a band of gypsies; thank God we are out of that!"²⁷ He calls all he dislikes *brentanisch*, and remarks at Kleist's suicide, in 1812, that Kleist had mistaken madness for genius.²⁸ Wilhelm repeats this to Staël six days later, and Staël then quotes it in her *Réflexions sur le suicide* (Reflections on Suicide).²⁹ Friedrich and his brother Wilhelm, meanwhile, turned to the East.

One key to Schlegel's thought may be the mistranslated term *Roman* itself. Eichner stresses three points: "The *Roman* is the dominant form both of the earliest and the most recent post-classical poetry; the central position in the history of the *Roman* is occupied by Shakespeare, [...] the *Roman* is characterized by the vast quantity of forms it can assume."³⁰ For Schlegel, Shakespeare mixes classical *Tragödie* with *Roman*, as does

24 "die einzigen romantischen Erzeugnisse unseres unromantischen Zeitalters;" F. Schlegel, *Kritische* 2: p. 330.

25 Behler, "Origins," pp. 117–119.

26 "Tieck hat gar keinen Sinn für Kunst sondern nur ... [für] Fantasmus und Sentimentalität ... Es fehlt ihm an Stoff, an Realismus, an Philosophie ... Er ist absolut unklassisch und unprogressiv;" F. Schlegel, *Fragmente*, 65.

27 "Goethe hat ... ein ausschweifendes und skandalöses Lob auf Brentano wegen der Pöbellieder in seinem Freimüthigen aufgestellt; die Deutschen Gelehrten ... sind jetzt ein wahres Zigeunergesindel. Gott sei Dank daß wir heraus sind!" in F. Schlegel, *Krisenjahre* 1: p. 292.

28 Brentanisch: F. Schlegel, *Krisenjahre* 1: 246. Kleist "hat also nicht bloß in Werken sondern auch im Leben Tollheit für Genie genommen;" F. Schlegel, *Krisenjahre* 2: p. 239.

29 See Pange, *Auguste-Guillaume Schlegel et Madame de Staël*. Also Staël, *Réflexions sur le suicide* in *De l'influence des passions et autres essais moraux*, ed. Florence Lotterie (Paris: Champion, 2008), pp. 378–379.

30 Eichner, "Theory," p. 1021.

Schiller in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans: Eine romantische Tragödie* (The Maid of Orleans: A Romantic Tragedy); the *Gespräch* suggests that “Dante, Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Cervantes should all be discussed in a *Theorie des Romans*.”³¹ These facts may illustrate the absurdity in translating *Roman* as *novel* when the term *romance* exists—*romance* will subsume Eichner’s dispute with Lovejoy, where both are right, and force a fruitful rethinking for us of the links between novel and verse romance throughout European Romanticism, from Byron and Pushkin to Mickiewicz and Hugo.³² Eichner notes that the word *Roman* had a wider range “than the English ‘novel’ and ‘romance’ combined.”³³ Yes, indeed! Schlegel’s antipathy is precisely the “sogenannte Roman” or *novel* of Fielding and Richardson. Revealingly, Schlegel later replaces the problem term *romantisch* by *romanartig* or ‘romancy,’ stressing his etymology and locating its pastness.³⁴

For his part, Jean Paul prefers Kames to the Schlegels, who were hardly friends, and attacks their new Fichtean idealism as pernicious solipsism and egotism.³⁵ In 1792, a friend persuades him to delete the word *romantisch* in a title, since it had been “used too often and [...] had acquired a bad reputation.”³⁶ Uhland similarly condemns “what seemed to him the selfish poetry of those blinded by introspection to their nation’s agony.”³⁷ For here is a central paradox: if Romantic art talks of people and nation, how can it ignore its public and national role? The 1803 *Reichsdeputationshauptschluß* and then Napoleon’s crushing of Prussia at Jena in 1806 had left all these writers in defeated and occupied territory, and that burning concern drives many German disavowals. The disavowals also show a series of avant-garde artists finding, in succession, that their message is being distorted by rivals and imitators: Tieck finds the Brentanos histrionic and insincere, and calls Hoffmann a scribbler of grotesques. Heine’s *Die romantische Schule*, 1832–1835, is no encomium. Eichendorff talks of “faded Romanticism” and “juvenile

31 Eichner, “Theory,” pp. 1030, 1041.

32 Ibid., p. 1040.

33 Ibid., “Theory,” p. 1019.

34 Eichner, “Romantic,” p. 110.

35 Wellek, *History*, pp. 100–101.

36 *Jean Pauls sämtliche Werke: historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Eduard Berend, vol. IV.1, *Briefe an Jean Paul 1781–1793*, ed. Monika Meier (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), p. 258.

37 Rodger, “Lyric,” p. 148.

reawakening," while Brentano himself uses *Romantismus* to Arnim in 1803 as a synonym of bad rhyming and empty lyricism.³⁸

'Classic-Romantic-Realist,' runs the old chronology, and its simplicity has a certain schematic appeal, like Ptolemy's cosmogony. Yet, as epicycles multiply, a new starting point may furnish a path forward for research. As Tieck tells Friedrich Schlegel in 1813, he finds no pleasure "in all the things we have instigated," and resents being considered the "head of the so-called Romantic school."³⁹ Friedrich Schlegel himself talks of the "so-called New School" in 1812. *Trivial-, Schauer-, Afterromantik*; critics have coined many tools to keep true and false Romanticism apart. *Goethezeit* polemic is vastly complex, due in part to geography and to endless personal feuds, but when Tieck, Goethe, and the Schlegels reject their *own* creations, something more is at issue. A German scholar, told of a conference on Europe's Romantics, asked if it ran 1800–1804. In this narrow inner sanctum, our high priests will be apostates.

2. The Swiss Confederation

German Romanticism reached the world in translation after 1813, from three writers under one Swiss roof—A.W. (Wilhelm) Schlegel, Staël, and Sismondi—Coppet's *Confédération romantique* (a phrase coined by the Bonapartist *Nain jaune*).⁴⁰ These creators of the genre are again profoundly ambivalent about their romantic dawn. Wellek claimed that Wilhelm Schlegel's "scales are heavily weighted in favor of the romantic"—true only if *romantic* means the dead past, medieval and renaissance.⁴¹ As early as 1797, Wilhelm deplored modern taste: "From Vehmic courts, mysterious compacts, and ghosts there is now absolutely

38 Matenko, *Tieck*, p. 437 cites Tieck on "Affen-Incest" and "Generationen wie die Brentanos," *ape incest* and *generations like the Brentanos*. "weil es zu verbraucht und ... schon in zu schlechten Ruf gekommen ist," ctd. Eichner, "Romantic" 101. "die verblichene Romantik;" "juvenile Wiedererweckung der Romantik;" "eine der Schule entwachsene Romantik," Eichendorff, *Werke*, pp. 1073–1074; "ein solch Gesänge und ein solcher Romantismus ... daß man sich schämt," Brentano, *Briefe* 1: p. 220.

39 "Ich habe überhaupt keine Freude an allen den Sachen, die wir veranlasst haben," in Lüdeke, *Tieck-Schlegel*, p. 169. "sogenannte Neue Schule;" in Eichner, "Romantic," p. 141. See Köpke, *Tiecks Schriften* 2: p. 173.

40 See F. Schlegel, *Botschaft* and also Isbell, "Groupe de Coppet."

41 Wellek, *History*, p. 60.

no escape."⁴² Körner called Wilhelm's 1808 Vienna lectures "German Romanticism's Message to Europe"—their message is that Romanticism is over. To Wilhelm Schlegel, Spain's *siglo de oro* is "the last summit of Romantic poetry;" after 600 pages on the past, he ends with just two on the future of German theatre, lamenting the *Romantic* as "a word profaned in a hundred posters."⁴³ Wilhelm "gradually lost sympathy," writes Wellek, not without evidence, "with the group of which he was supposed to be a leader."⁴⁴ Furthermore, he told Staël's son in 1822, amid his Sanskrit studies, "je me moque de la littérature" [I could care less about literature], and called Görres in 1840 an "ultramontane buffoon"—yet his disavowal of Romanticism came years earlier, in the very works that defined the term.⁴⁵

Staël's *De l'Allemagne* was decisive in bringing Romanticism to the Latin world, Britain, and America. Hugo dates the concept from this "femme de genie," *woman of genius* (in the preface of *Odes et ballades*), while the *Quarterly Review* stated that Staël "has made the British public familiar" with the classical/romantic distinction.⁴⁶ Egli printed 500 pages of polemic Staël caused in France in three years, 1813–1816; Pushkin, Emerson, and Leopardi cited her in founding their national literatures.⁴⁷ Yet her manifesto is also famous for its silences: Wackenroder, Hölderlin; Kleist, Hoffmann, La Motte-Fouqué; the Brentanos, Görres; Runge, Friedrich, Beethoven; and her friends Arnim, Adam Müller, and Chamisso. Arnim had refused to visit the author. The space in her manuscript for Görres was deleted, while Friedrich Schlegel was indignant at his small place in her text.⁴⁸ Niebuhr and Hegel were unknown, like Chamisso; the Schlegels' feuds, and also political expediency, play some part here, but Staël's resistance runs deeper. Though Staël likes *Faust*, she writes that such productions should "not be repeated," rejecting the "singular system" of "the new German

42 "Von den Fehmgerichten, den geheimen Bündnissen und den Geistern ist vollends gar keine Rettung mehr," A.W. Schlegel, *Werke* 11: p. 26.

43 "Der letzte Gipfel der romantischen Poésie;" "auf hundert Komödienzetteln wird der Name romantisch an rohe und verfehlte Erzeugnisse verschwendet und entweiht," A.W. Schlegel, *Vorlesungen* 2: pp. 266, 290.

44 Wellek, *History*, p. 72.

45 F. Schlegel, *Krisenjahre* 2: p. 394, Solovieff, *Allemagne*, p. 50 n65.

46 *Quarterly Review*, October 1814: p. 113.

47 Isbell, *Birth*, pp. 2–3.

48 Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, p. 3: 364a, Isbell, *Birth*, p. 56.

school."⁴⁹ She finds in Germany, as Moreau remarks, "the elements of a new Classicism;" actual Romantics she then puts elsewhere, in ancillary texts.⁵⁰ Thus, Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* reworks La Motte-Fouqué's *Saalnixe*, and her *Sainte Geneviève de Brabant* puts onstage the heroine, though not the plot, of Tieck's seminal 1799 *Genoveva*.⁵¹ Meanwhile, her comedy *Le Mannequin* directly parallels Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*. In 1812, her *Réflexions sur le suicide* speaks out against Germany's 'Romantic ideology.' Seeing Kleist's double suicide as an insult to a suffering nation, Staël strongly condemns the "new school" and its effects: "genius is, in many regards, popular [...] those who torment themselves to draw the public's attention [...] imagine that what revolts the sentiments of the greater number is of a higher order than what touches them [...] Gigantic vanity!"⁵² This verdict is unjust, given Kleist's passionate nationalism (*Die Hermannsschlacht*), while Staël had, in fact, appeared alongside Kleist in the literary journal *Phöbus*. But her mind is fixed on liberating Europe, and romantic egotism is, to her mind, a dangerous poison. She goes on to argue that "when one can be reborn as a nation and thus revive Europe's heart paralyzed by slavery, there must be no more talk of sickly *sentimentality*, of literary suicides."⁵³

Finally, Sismondi's impact has long been neglected outside Italy, where D.M., in 1819, translated Chapter Thirty of his *De la littérature du Midi de l'Europe*, without permission, and called it *Vera definizione del Romanticismo* [True Definition of Romanticism].⁵⁴ But Sismondi himself never uses that noun, and Italy's living Romantics are as strangely missing from his history as are Germany's Romantics from Staël's and Schlegel's famously 'Romantic' surveys. His friend Foscolo appears in the third edition as a translator.⁵⁵ Sismondi's own reaction to Dalla's

49 "il est à désirer que de telles productions ne se renouvellent pas;" *Meister* and the "système singulier" of the "nouvelle école allemande" Staël, *De l'Allemagne* 3: pp. 127, 257.

50 "les éléments d'un classicisme nouveau ;" Moreau, *Classicisme*, p. 118.

51 Staël, *Corinne*, p. 11.

52 "Le génie est, à plusieurs égards, populaire [...] ceux qui se tourmentent pour attirer l'attention du public [...] vont jusqu'à s'imaginer que ce qui révolte les sentiments de la plupart des hommes est d'un ordre plus relevé que ce qui les touche [...] Gigantesque vanité !" Staël, *Ceuvres* 1: pp. 190–191.

53 Staël, *ibid.*, p. 191: "quand on peut renaître comme nation et faire ainsi revivre le cœur de l'Europe paralysé par la servitude, il ne doit plus être question de *sentimentalité* malade, de suicides littéraires."

54 See Pellegrini, *Storia*, pp. 138–139.

55 Gennari, *Voyage*, p. 208.

Romantic label was to rewrite the entire offending chapter, cutting five paragraphs and adding eighteen (he deletes 461–463 and 470–474 from the 1813 edition, and adds 474–484 in 1829; the rest remains untouched). We lose both his “three romantic unities” and his attack on those hamstrung by “the narrow prejudices of a fatal ignorance.”⁵⁶ We gain, however, his insistence that his “desire for impartiality has not been recognized,” which adds, “we will persist in not aligning ourselves beneath any banner.”⁵⁷ An enemy of popes and dictators, Sismondi does not mention his antipathy to Schlegel, but a letter to the Comtesse d’Albany on 20 June 1816 was discreetly explicit: “Chateaubriand in France, Goethe, Novalis, and Werner in Germany, Lord Byron and Walter Scott in England do not imagine they belong to the same school; and yet it is in the same point that all sin against truth.”⁵⁸

3. The British Isles

In Britain, the word *romantique* dates at least from Pepys (*Diary*, 10 March 1667). The media debate dates from 1811–1831, and the *Lyrical Ballads* from 1798–1800—precisely the dates of the *Athenäum*. Scholars are unanimous in calling this the romantic period. Yet, critics repeat, “none of the English poets of the time [...] recognized himself as a romanticist or admitted the relevance of the debate.”⁵⁹ Wordsworth uses the term ten times in poetry; Coleridge, five; Keats, four times in all his writings, once after the word *werry*, and even Byron just fifteen times in his verse.⁶⁰ Shelley “used [the word] thrice in his prefaces.” Examining each instance, Whalley suggests that Britain’s present-day ‘romantic’ canon avoided the term as a tiresome and vulgar nonce-word, which can only cause trouble, concluding that “the poets themselves never

56 “trois unités romantiques;” “des préjugés étroits dans une ignorance fatale,” Sismondi, *Midi* [1813], 3: pp. 461–463.

57 “ce désir d’impartialité n’a point été reconnu;” “nous persisterons à ne nous ranger sous aucune bannière,” Sismondi, *Midi* [1829], 3: p. 476.

58 Antipathy: Isbell, “Confédération,” p. 309. “Chateaubriand en France, Goethe et Novalis et Werner en Allemagne, lord Byron et W. Scott en Angleterre ne se figurent point être de la même école; cependant, c’est par le même point que tous pèchent contre la vérité,” Sismondi, *Epistolario* 20 June 1816.

59 Wellek, *History*, pp. 110–111, 123.

60 Whalley, “England,” pp. 164, 178 (Wordsworth), p. 178 (Coleridge), pp. 194–195 (Keats, Byron), 233n (Shelley).

applied the term to themselves, nor did their enemies apply it to them."⁶¹ Our use of the term *romantic*, he argues, "has done widespread (but probably not irreversible) damage to the precise appreciation of early nineteenth-century poets and their work," quite apart from its impact on the rest of the canon.⁶² Britain's 'romantics' all knew the term and chose not to use it. So why do we?

Let us consider some authors in sequence. Whalley notes that Wordsworth "never regarded himself as a romantic at all, but took the word to mean barbaric, gothical, grotesque."⁶³ Wordsworth protests Jeffrey's *Lake School* coinage in 1804: "As to the school about which so much noise (I am told) has been made, [...] I do not know what is meant by it nor of whom it consists."⁶⁴ Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* also mentions, like Tieck or Schlegel, "this fiction of a *new school* in poetry."⁶⁵ Lockhart's *Cockney School* and Southey's *Satanic School* were modeled on Jeffrey's term. This may seem a label war, and the Lake poets—Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth—did settle with age. Yet even in 1798, the *Lyrical Ballads*' landmark preface makes for a curious romantic revolution: "The invaluable works of our elder writers, [...] are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse."⁶⁶

Byron, famously labeled one of the dangerous fifth column *Romantici* by an Austrian spy in Venice, seems another likely British romantic.⁶⁷ "We are," he writes, though, in 1817, "upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system—or systems—not worth a damn in itself—& from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are free."⁶⁸ This is intriguing since, in 1821, Shelley for his part remarks that, in *Marino Falieri*, Byron is following a false system, the "pernicious effects" of which will "cramp and limit his future efforts" if unchecked.⁶⁹ In 1821, Byron attacks Bowles, Pope's detractor, saying like Goethe that "I have been amongst the builders of this Babel," and "I am ashamed of it."⁷⁰ To Moore, he writes "As to Pope,

61 Whalley, "England," p. 159.

62 Ibid., pp. 256–257.

63 Whalley, "Literary," p. 242.

64 Perkins, "Construction," p. 131.

65 Coleridge ctd. Whalley, "England," p. 235.

66 Wordsworth, *Works*, p. 735.

67 Byron, *Letters* 4: p. 463.

68 Ibid.: p. 169.

69 P.B. Shelley, *Works* 10: p. 297.

70 Byron, *Letters* 5: p. 559.

I have always regarded him as the greatest name in our poetry. Depend on it, the rest are barbarians."⁷¹

It seems possible to talk of Britain's failed Classical-Romantic debate. Weisinger remarks that discussion of the debate "occurs in the work of Coleridge, Hazlitt, Scott, Robinson, and De Quincey [...] it is hard to understand why the idea was not treated more extensively."⁷² Coleridge borrows this German usage in 1811; by the 1813–1814 lectures, he is reworking Wilhelm Schlegel's terms.⁷³ Hazlitt and the others briefly discuss Staël and the Germans, though De Quincey, who found *Endymion* vaguer "than the reveries of an oyster," claims, with less support than Coleridge, that the Germans deserve no credit.⁷⁴ As De Quincey hints, this seemed a silly European quarrel, alien to Britain: "nobody thought them worth making a sect of," says Byron.⁷⁵ For indeed, the terms arrived late: *romantic* as either a label for the modern, as opposed to its picturesque sense, or Warton's historical usage, echoed in Coleridge, Staël, and Schlegel—though the *OED*, bizarrely, cites Byron's usage of the term in his rejected epistle to Goethe on *Marino Falieri*, not published until 1896, and *Romanticism* from 1831, when Carlyle remarks that "we are troubled with no controversies on Romanticism and Classicism,—the Bowles controversy on Pope having long since evaporated without result."⁷⁶ In France, the term was common and used in analogy with Protestantism.⁷⁷

Artists, media, and the public intersect in canon formation. Britain's 'romantic movement' as a concept is owed to late Victorian scholarship: Mrs. Oliphant's 1882 *Literary History of England* still ignores the term. Perkins cites Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) in arguing that the cultural meaning of works of art—specifically those associated with romanticism—"is determined by the sociological character of the public and by the "institution of art" within which they are received."⁷⁸ Or, as Shelley puts it in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, "Poets [...] are, in one sense, the creators, and in another, the creations, of their age.

71 Byron, *Letters* 5: p. 274.

72 Weisinger, "Treatment," p. 479.

73 Wellek, *History*, p. 152; compare his "Concept," p. 15.

74 Lucas, *Decline*, p. 39.

75 Weisinger, "Treatment," p. 486.

76 *Oxford English Dictionary*, Classical.6.a. Carlyle, *Works* 14: p. 149.

77 See Goblot's "Les Mots protestants et protestantisme sous la Restauration."

78 Perkins, "Construction," p. 142.

From this subjection the loftiest do not escape."⁷⁹ Canons shift, and in 1985, the fourth edition of *The English Romantic Poets* brought startling news: "the inclusion of Blake."⁸⁰ Expanding that brief male canon from five to six is one thing, but calling Blake *romantic* only renews our dilemma. As Massey remarks, Blake despises *chiaroscuro* and insists on absolute clarity of line, like Ingres the classicist, yet unlike Turner or Delacroix: "the mere passage of time does not give us the right to simplify their lives in retrospect."⁸¹ Mellor meanwhile argues that an entire female romantic tradition, including ten of the day's twelve most popular writers, disavowed basic male romantic tenets: "Mary Shelley," she notes, "was profoundly disturbed by what she saw to be a powerful egotism at the core of the romantic ideology."⁸² Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey* (1817) for a reason, and Scott, "with whom, more than with anyone else, the adjective 'Romantic' was associated during their lifetime," shares Austen's ironic distance from romantic excess.⁸³ As David Simpson remarks of Raymond Williams, "Goldsmith, Crabbe, Cobbett, and Clare are more important to his narrative than Wordsworth or Keats or Shelley. This has surely had the effect of making Williams's work more ignorable than it deserves to be."⁸⁴ The fine poet Crabbe, "Pope in worsted stockings," still suffers from our feeling that history led elsewhere, as do Moore and Rogers, despite immense contemporary success. If we want to see what the romantic age read with pleasure, Blake, Keats, and Shelley should not head our list.

4. Italy, Russia, Sweden

Milan was, after Heidelberg, only Europe's second city to have an explicitly 'Romantic' group, with a media debate between 1816–1827.⁸⁵ Italy and Germany, as such, were geographical concepts. Critics date Italian Romantic debate from Staël's 1816 article on internationalism, which had four replies within the year: in support, Breme, Borsieri, and

79 P.B. Shelley, *Works* 2: p. 174.

80 *The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research and Criticism*, ed. Frank Jordan (New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America, 1985), p. vii.

81 Massey, "Phrase," pp. 402, 409.

82 Mellor, "Women," p. 284.

83 Pierce, *Currents*, p. 293.

84 In Curran, *Companion*, p. 13.

85 Wilkins, *Italian*, pp. 400. 411–413.

Berchet's *Semi-Serious Letter*; vehemently against, Leopardi. Berchet wants 'popular' art, while to Leopardi, the Romantics do not see that poetry needs 'myth' or illusion.⁸⁶ In Milan, media debate was skewed by Austrian occupation, as elsewhere by other local circumstances. In the *Conciliatore*, Visconti argues that "romanticism does not consist in the lugubrious and the melancholic."⁸⁷ The age's two great poets, Leopardi and then Foscolo in 1827's *Della scuola nuova drammatica in Italia*, attack 'Romanticism,' though they fit its European profile.⁸⁸ Curiously, in Staël, Leopardi finds a firm ally against "the romantic system" and a *bellissima, solennissima* [very lovely, very solemn] "condemnation of the horrors and excess of terror so dear to the romantics."⁸⁹ Foscolo for his part ignores the Romantics in his survey of recent Italian literature appended to Byron's *Childe Harold*.⁹⁰ After 1821, Breme was dead, and as active patriots, many Italian Romanticists were in prison like Pellico or Borsieri, or in exile like Foscolo, Berchet, and Gabriele Rossetti, thus prematurely ending the movement: "It seems hardly surprising that a modern student could argue that there really was no Italian romanticism."⁹¹

Though Milanese, Manzoni stands apart, thanks in part to his five years in Paris, 1805–1810: Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel, and Scott helped to shape his plays *Carmagnola* (1820) and *Adelchi* (1822), and his novel *I promessi sposi* (1827). Wellek calls Manzoni "the one great Italian who expressly proclaimed himself a romanticist," although begging the definition; when asked if romanticism would last, Manzoni "replied that the name was already being forgotten, but that the influence of the movement would continue."⁹² Three treatises explain the views of this self-proclaimed "bon et loyal partisan du classique," or good and loyal supporter of classicism.⁹³ There are people, he says, who by the term *Romanticismo* understand "a hodgepodge of witches, of specters, a systematic disorder, a striving for the extravagant, a forswearing of

86 See Moget, "Milan," Pange, "Article," and Isbell, "Italian".

87 "Il romanticismo non consiste nel lugubre e nel malinconico," ctd. Ragusa, "Romantico," p. 317.

88 Wellek, *History*, pp. 264–265; see also Martegiani, *Non esiste*.

89 "Bellissima condanna del sistema romantico;" "una solennissima condanna degli orrori e dell'eccessivo terribile tanto caro ai romantici," Leopardi, *Opere* (1969) pp. 50, 46.

90 Foscolo, *Opere* 11.2: p. 490.

91 Wellek, *History*, p. 264.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 261, McKenzie, "Italy," p. 33.

93 Manzoni, *Opere*, p. 1683.

common sense." If such were indeed its character, says the prince of Italian Romanticism, it would deserve oblivion.⁹⁴

As Wellek deduces from his vast reading, "one important argument for the coherence and unity of the European romantic movement emerges from an investigation of the minor literatures—the 'predictability' of their general character."⁹⁵ Van Tieghem's equally global survey supports this view.⁹⁶ This chapter is briefer, but let us linger for a moment on two exemplary cases, Russia and Sweden. Pushkin in *Boris Godunov* (1831) lists himself in the romantic camp and calls the work a "truly romantic tragedy;" yet in 1830, he praises the poet Glinka for "not professing either ancient or French Classicism and not following either Gothic or modern Romanticism."⁹⁷ His 1831 review of *Joseph Delorme* talks once more of "the so-called *Romantic* school of French writers." Mersereau adds that "among his contemporaries only Goethe categorically qualified as a *Romantic*."⁹⁸ Gogol's 1847 history of Russian poetry simply avoids the term. In 1836, Gogol calls the romantics "desperately audacious people like those who foment social rebellions."⁹⁹ Tegnér, "traditionally the foremost romantic in Swedish literature," states similar views over two decades—writing in his *Om det Romantiska i Grekiska Poesien* (1822–1824) that "romanticism degenerates into the fantastic and marvelous through the misuse of freedom," and he condemns French taste in 1841 for "the cannibalistic style they seem to view as the principal constituent of Romanticism."¹⁰⁰ In both these countries, the curious stress on France and revolution is worth noting; other countries tend to stress Germany and reaction, while talk of Britain focuses on Byron, Scott, and the *Edinburgh Review*.

94 "non so qual guazzabuglio di streghe, di spettri, un disordine sistematico, una ricerca stragante, una abiura in termini del senso commune," Manzoni, *Opere*, p. 1726.

95 Wellek, *History*, p. 170.

96 Van Tieghem, *Romantisme*.

97 Pushkin ctd. Saprynkina in Sötér, *European*, p. 106. In Wellek, *Discriminations*, p. 69.

98 Mersereau, "Pushkin," pp. 38–40.

99 Gogol quoted in Proffer, "Gogol," pp. 121–122.

100 "så urartar äfven det romantiska genom frihetens missbruk till det phantastiska och vidunderliga;" "Det [...] kannibaliska tyckas de anse för Romantikens hufvudelement," Tegnér ctd. Mitchell, "Scandinavia," pp. 380–381, 394.

5. France

French media debate runs largely from 1813–1830, but the English borrowing *romantique* as an alternative to *romanesque*— ‘romancy,’ perhaps—reached France in 1776–1777, in passages on gardening by Gerardin and Rousseau.¹⁰¹ *Romantique* describes not only the scene, but also “the touching impression we receive from it,” an epochal distinction which empowers the consumer.¹⁰² Chateaubriand’s *Essai sur les Révolutions* borrows the term early from d’Agincourt: the man later massages chronology to call Staël and Byron ungrateful imitators, though in fact he launched his career attacking Staël, and the Byron letter he alleges dates from 1802, when Byron was fourteen.¹⁰³ His famous “critique de beautés,” or critique of beauties, is also silently borrowed from Staël and the Germans. “The Romantics—my sons,” Chateaubriand proclaims, yet the rest of his judgments are “full of the clichés of classicism.”¹⁰⁴ He revises his *Génie du Christianisme* to replace *mélancolique* with *sérieux*, to prefer Homer now to Milton, to praise Sophocles, and to add a *peut-être* to his praise of Dante.¹⁰⁵ His aim, he says, is to “put [...] the classic tongue in the mouth of my romantic characters.”¹⁰⁶ But we cannot ignore his public impact. Chateaubriand, like Goethe, Tieck, or Byron, deplors the consequences of his early writings: “A family of poet Renés and prose-writing Renés has pullulated,” he writes, dreaming of destroying *René*, which “has infested the spirit of part of our youth.”¹⁰⁷ “If in the past we fell too short of the romantic,” he argues, “now we have overshot the mark.”¹⁰⁸

“Je suis un romantique furieux,” wrote Stendhal in 1818, *I am a furious romantic*.¹⁰⁹ Wellek says of Stendhal that he is “the first Frenchman

101 Baldensperger, “Romantique,” p. 76.

102 Logan Pearsall Smith, “Four Romantic Words,” in *Words and Idioms: Studies in the English Language* (London: Constable, 1925), p. 81.

103 Chateaubriand, *Mémoires* 1: p. 418.

104 See Chateaubriand, *Lettres*, p. 363: “O mes fils! Combien vous êtes dégénérés!”

105 Moreau, *Classicisme*, pp. 88–90.

106 “mettre [...] la langue classique dans la bouche de mes personnages romantiques,” Chateaubriand, *Mémoires*, p. 452.

107 “une famille de René poètes et de René prosateurs a pullulé” (p. 462); “infesté l’esprit d’une partie de la jeunesse,” Chateaubriand, *Mémoires* 1: p. 462..

108 “Si jadis on resta trop en deçà du romantique, maintenant on a passé le but,” Chateaubriand, *Œuvres* 11: p. 579.

109 Stendhal, *Correspondance* 1: p. 909.

who called himself a romantic."¹¹⁰ Van Tieghem prefers, as many do, to group Stendhal among writers "still"—rather tellingly—classic by taste or temperament, who toyed with some aspects of Romanticism while belonging in another box: "restés classiques," remaining classic, he calls them.¹¹¹ He adds that the generation of 1840's "réaction contre l'ère romantique est systématique," its reaction against the romantic era is systematic, which is more teleology.¹¹² But is there not some sleight of hand involved in refusing the term to those who claim it, while forcing it on those who resist? The term, after all, is theirs, not ours. By 1823, Stendhal sharply divides his liberal Italianate *romanticisme*, a *hapax legomenon* in France, from *émigré* reaction and "the German gibberish many people today call *romantic*."¹¹³ He despises Chateaubriand and Schlegel and rejects Vigny, Lamartine, and Hugo, whose *Han d'Islande* (1823) disgusts him.¹¹⁴ Stendhal seems Italian much as Coleridge the critic seems German, standing apart from his national contemporaries.

What then of the great romantics, Hugo, Vigny, Musset, and Lamartine? In 1824, Lamartine remarks, "I am neither classic as you understand it, nor romantic as they understand it," adding, "the two rival absurdities, in tumbling, will make way for truth in literature."¹¹⁵ The ever-subtle Musset, often presented as naïve, detests writing "three words when two will do."¹¹⁶ Musset parodies his much-cited *Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836) in his less-quoted *Histoire d'un merle blanc* (1851), proud to be white among blackbirds. Flaubert the ironist took *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), as it happens, from Musset's earlier *Dupuis et Cotonet* (1836–1837), dogged provincial catalogers of romantic's bizarre semantics in the 1830s: "From 1833 to 1834, we thought romanticism consisted in not shaving, and in wearing large-breasted starched waistcoats."¹¹⁷ The arch-romantic Hugo later suppressed his

110 Wellek, "Concept," p. 10.

111 Van Tieghem, *Romantisme*, p. 461.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 463.

113 "Le galimatias allemand, que beaucoup de gens appellent *romantique* aujourd'hui," Stendhal, *Racine*, p. 75.

114 Wellek, *History*, pp. 245–251.

115 "Je ne suis ni classique comme vous l'entendez, ni romantique comme ils l'entendent;" "les deux absurdités rivales, en s'écroulant, feront place à la vérité en littérature," Lamartine, *Correspondance* 2: pp. 276, 266.

116 "Trois mots quand il n'en faut que deux," in Moreau, *Classicisme*, p. 317.

117 "de 1833 à 1834 nous crûmes que le romantisme consistait à ne pas se raser, et à porter des gilets à larges revers, très empesés," Musset, *Ceuvres*, p. 876.

1820 remark about having never “understood this difference between the classic genre and the romantic genre.”¹¹⁸ Barrère notes that Hugo “stood himself in 1824 outside the two camps among the ‘conciliators’ and repudiated ‘all these conventional terms that the two parties toss about reciprocally like empty balloons.’”¹¹⁹ Hugo uses the term with caution after 1824—qualified by *dit* or ‘so-called’ in 1826, for instance—and almost never after 1830. His revised *Littérature et Philosophies mêlées* (1834), at the height of the textbook romantic period, would instead talk of terms that he “always refused to pronounce seriously;” in 1864, he even claims that “he who writes these lines never used the words *romanticism* or *romantic*.”¹²⁰ In 1827, his famous preface to *Cromwell* seeks to change tradition safely, unlike “some unenlightened partisans of *romanticism*,” and calls precisely like Deschamps for “powerful dikes against the irruption of the common.”¹²¹ Thus, Deschamps’s “War in peace-time” in *La Muse française* of 1824 had demanded a “powerful dike” against modern “adventurous innovation.”¹²² Moreau has brilliantly shown echoes of Molière and fragments of Corneille in *Cromwell*’s verse, as indeed in Constant’s *Wallstein*. Once again, our touchstone romantic manifestoes are ambivalent; or rather, they simply refuse the pat all-or-nothing teleology encouraged by literary historians.¹²³

Moreau talks of Nodier’s “*duplicité souriante*,” his *smiling duplicity*.¹²⁴ Despite his romantic *cénacle*, Nodier, in his turn, rejects the label, talking of “this often ridiculous and sometimes revolting genre,” and adding: “the romantic genre is a false invention.”¹²⁵ Nodier’s 1822 preface to

118 “Nous n’avons jamais compris cette différence entre le genre classique et le genre romantique,” Hugo, *Conservateur* 25.III.1820.

119 “se rangeait en 1824 en dehors des deux ‘camps’ parmi les ‘conciliateurs’ et répudiait ‘tous ces termes de convention que les deux partis se rejettent réciproquement comme des ballons vides,’” Barrère, “Définitions,” pp. 94–95.

120 “s’est toujours refusé à prononcer sérieusement,” Hugo, *Littérature* 1: p. 191. “Celui qui écrit ces lignes n’a jamais employé les mots *romantisme* ou *romantique*,” Hugo, *Œuvres* 2: p. 208.

121 “quelques partisans peu avancés du romantisme;” “des digues plus puissantes contre l’irruption du commun,” Hugo, *Préface*, pp. 260, 267.

122 Deschamps, “La Guerre en temps de paix”: “digue puissante;” “innovation aventureuse,” Deschamps, *Œuvres* 4: p. 13.

123 . See Moreau, *Classicisme*, pp. 175–176 and Constant, *Wallstein*, p. 109.

124 Moreau, *Classicisme*, pp. 166–167.

125 “le genre souvent ridicule et quelquefois révoltant qu’on appelle en France romantique,” Nodier, *Bertram*, p. 70. “Le genre romantique est une invention fausse,” in Moreau, *Classicisme*, pp. 166–167.

Trilby calls the *romantique* “un fort mauvais genre” [a very bad genre]¹²⁶ Saintine remarks that in 1820 the Romantics included Guiraud, Lebrun, and Soumet, the latter of whom authored the *Scrupules littéraires de Mme de Staël*, yet by 1830 they were Classicists, changed by the excess around them. Gautier’s *Grotesques* mock the *barbouilleurs* or “daubers” of local color; his *Les Jeunes France* mock the young who no longer find Chateaubriand romantic enough, as does Sand’s *Histoire de ma vie* (1855), which also smiles at Hugo’s dealings with these *marmots*, or “brats from his own school.”¹²⁷ Perhaps most frustrating, as Sismondi found, is to see discretion ignored by one’s readers. Bizet makes *Carmen* romantic simply by discarding Mérimée’s ironic frame, while Mérimée’s *Colomba* says of *couleur locale*: “Let whoever wishes explain the sense of these words which I understood very well some years ago.”¹²⁸ In short, this first-generation *romantisme mitigé* is not some ‘Preromantic’ failure of nerve or vision: since Schlegel invented the term, romanticism was never more than half a pole, except to fools and historians. When Barante talks of classic and romantic genius meeting, that is not neoclassical reaction, but an echo of Berlin; when the *Globe*, on the other hand, praises the end of 1820-style “romantisme hypocondriaque” [hypochondriac romanticism], it sees therein, as Moreau says, “the triumph of true romanticism.”¹²⁹ Compare Guizot to Fauriel, in 1820, on the “mania of chopping truth in two and only wanting half.”¹³⁰ Compare Jouffroy saying the Romantics “thought that people were tired of the beautiful. They therefore made the ugly.”¹³¹ Staël, Constant, and Fauriel, like Ladvocat’s theater collaborators, rework their romantic translations to find this new Berlin synthesis of classic and romantic art.¹³² Or compare Berlioz—who for Gautier belongs with Hugo and Delacroix in the “Romantic trinity”—on a scene he stole from Shakespeare for *Les Troyens*: “and I virgilified it.”¹³³ Beethoven,

126 Nodier, *Contes*, p. 97.

127 Moreau, *Classicisme*, p. 332; “On ne trouvait plus Chateaubriand assez romantique,” brats, Sand, *Œuvres* 2: p. 159.

128 “Explique qui pourra le sens de ces mots, que je comprenais fort bien il y a quelques années, et que je n’entends plus aujourd’hui,” Mérimée, *Gazul*, p. 759.

129 Barante, *Études* 2: p. 139. Moreau, *Classicisme*, p. 196.

130 “la manie de couper en deux la vérité et de n’en vouloir prendre que la moitié,” Guizot in Glachant, *Fauriel*, p. 22.

131 “ont pensé qu’on était las du beau. Ils ont donc fait du laid,” Jouffroy, *Cahier*, p. 48.

132 See Isbell, *Birth*, p. 2 and “Présence;” see also Moreau, *Classicisme*, p. 216.

133 “Hector Berlioz paraît former avec Hugo et Eugène Delacroix la trinité romantique,” Gautier in Barzun, *Berlioz*, p. 243; “et je l’ai virgilianisée,” in Legouvé, *Souvenirs* 2: p. 189.

who seems to Delacroix “romantic to a supreme degree,” comments in later years that he can learn only from Bach, while Delacroix, observing his own growing distaste for Schubert, remarks: “I have been enrolled willy nilly in the romantic coterie.”¹³⁴ Sand notes that “the romantics, having found in him their highest expression, believed that he belonged exclusively to their school.”¹³⁵ His resistance to this hijacking emerges when asked if he was happy at the romantics’ triumph: “Sir,” replied Delacroix, “*I am classic.*”¹³⁶

6. Conclusion

This study asks a question which has been sidelined by history with disturbing ease: how can we explain romanticism’s repeated disavowals by the very thinkers who had been its pioneers, and indeed its theoreticians, throughout Europe? While traditional narratives talk of this term being tainted in the decades which follow the ‘romantic period,’ and attacked from outside by a classical old guard, it seems surprisingly clear on reflection that the term never attained a position of acceptance from which to fall, even among its coiners. The durability of our traditional narratives looks increasingly like a simple tribute to the power of myth. As Marilyn Butler argues, “Going out to look for ‘romanticism’ means selecting in advance one kind of answer.” Ultimately, the price of these preconceptions is the way they “interfere with so much good reading.”¹³⁷ Was it not limiting to reduce Britain’s ‘romantic age’ to six male poets; to discuss the Germans with Goethe absent; to date French romanticism from 1830, while the Italians meanwhile cite two French authors in 1816?

A new reading can perhaps help resituate the pressures on which our systematic disavowals depend. Hesitations glibly read as proof of ‘Preromantic’ insipidity here emerge, with some support from context, as the result of many factors: the persistence of a classical taste born

134 Delacroix, *Journal* 1: p. 201. “on m’a enrégimenté, bon gré mal gré, dans la coterie romantique,” Véron, *Mémoires* 1: p. 273.

135 “Je commence à prendre furieusement en grippe les Schubert, les rêveurs, les Chateaubriand,” Delacroix, *Journal* 1: p. 340. “les romantiques, ayant trouvé en lui leur plus haute expression, ont cru qu’il appartenait exclusivement à leur école,” Sand in Moreau, *Classicisme*, p. 248.

136 “Monsieur, répondit Delacroix, je suis classique,” Andrieux, *Rabbe*, p. 61.

137 Butler, *Romantics*, pp. 186–187.

of old-regime education and reading, the return to norms thought more solid and durable after a period of experimentation, and the understandable distaste of pioneers who see their terms being hijacked by alleged followers with quite different agendas. Ironically, a whole group of 'Preromantic' writers like Staël and Sismondi were subsequently condemned by their successors, precisely for *not* sharing their successors' own concerns. Here, one can meet the different generational roles of the avant-garde and 'grand public' in shaping historical movements, as well as the difficult relationship between romantic desires for a truly popular national art, on the one hand, and the realities of vulgarization on the other. The later shape of the nineteenth century will reflect these particular problematics. Clearly, one might also expect ample evidence in praxis to support this study's conclusions, but to strike at the core of certain persistent myths, the label itself, as actually used by the artists in question, is splendidly explicit.

What then is our new narrative to be? As we survey post-Revolutionary Europe, certain key themes recur. Friedrich Schlegel's call for a new art to replace the antithesis between Europe's older 'classical' and 'romantic' ages—painfully misread by imitators, media, and public alike as a call for 'romantic' war on the past. Butler refers to the younger British romanticists as neoclassicists, while della Chiesa calls romantic and neoclassical art "two interdependent aspects of a single phenomenon."¹³⁸ Indeed, as Jordan remarks, "Artz's idea that neoclassicism and romanticism are parallel movements may strike literary scholars as peculiar, though art and music historians are quite familiar with it."¹³⁹ As Sötér notes, "the parallel existence of romanticism and classicism matters so much that [...] certain phenomena of both can only be explained from their parallel nature," adding in answer to our somewhat facile teleology that "the classical period of both Goethe and Schiller was as much 'modern' as the poetry of Novalis."¹⁴⁰ Remak calls romanticism "the desire ... to have synthesis follow antithesis." He later stresses our new attention to the romantic fusion of classic and romantic art, emotion and Enlightenment, realism and fantasy, which later ages

138 "due aspetti interdipendenti di un stesso fenomeno," della Chiesa, "Neoclassico," p. 31.

139 Jordan, *Romantic Poets*, p. 88.

140 Sötér, *European*, pp. 52, 72.

forgot, concluding: "In this sense romanticism had better equilibrium than they did".¹⁴¹

Lubich points out the crucial place of parody in this narrative, citing *Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura*, Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey*, and Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*. Like Byron's *Don Juan*, *Kreuzgang* and *Onegin* both ridicule the whole storehouse of romantic cliché: "Pushkin uses *Onegin* [...] to deal an ironic *coup de grâce* against his former poetic self."¹⁴² Peacock's *Scythrop* is modeled on Shelley; Byron sent Peacock a rosebud in thanks, and Shelley wrote back: "I am delighted with *Nightmare Abbey*. I think *Scythrop* a character admirably conceived and executed." As Lubich remarks, Shelley "actually named his own rooftop study 'Scythrop's Tower.'¹⁴³" Eichner observes that in the media debate, adversaries added to the semantic confusion and ridicule, providing romantic artists "with a further reason for not applying the term to themselves." If we ignore these subtleties, he notes, "the writings of the romantics will inevitably be misinterpreted."¹⁴⁴ Immerwahr adds that the term could not be cleaned of all its negative implications, contributing to the emergence of 'romantic irony.'¹⁴⁵ Europe's romantics thus connived with their adversaries to wink at their own enthusiasm, from Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* onward. Butler argues in consequence against "the received view that [...] a Romantic Revolution occurred, which worked a permanent change in literature and in the other arts [...] In reality there would seem to have been no one battle and no complete victory. It is not even clear that there were defeats."¹⁴⁶ From this new and wider field, a long series of critical antinomies may lose their sense of urgency: the classic/romantic/realist series for one, along with the amputations and falsehoods it has entailed.

How was this elegant new synthesis lost? Brown is incisive: "Far from being a repudiation of the Enlightenment, romanticism was its fulfilling summation [...] repudiation and triumph are its most visible gestures, which have led to conventional accounts of the war of romanticism

141 Remak, "Key," p. 44; and in Hoffmeister, *Romanticism*, pp. 340–342.

142 Lubich in Hoffmeister, *Romanticism*, p. 321.

143 Lubich in *ibid.*, p. 316.

144 Eichner, "Romantic," pp. 12–13.

145 Raymond Immerwahr, "The Word *Romantisch* and Its History," in *The Romantic Period in Germany*, ed. Siegbert Praver (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 59.

146 Butler, *Romantics*, p. 183.

against Enlightenment reason."¹⁴⁷ Perkins also points to the sense that the age was new, brought on by the French Revolution: "the 'spirit of the age' was always described as impatient of authority or limits." Ironically, he adds, this periodization cast Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Scott as revolutionaries, though all were solidly conservative by the 1810s.¹⁴⁸ Our new narrative's second theme is thus the ensuing tug of war between artists who witness this hijacking of their conciliatory or synthetic agenda, and a public drift they cannot control. As Whalley argues, "the specific symptoms of this emerging category seem always to be most pronounced in the *minor* figures."¹⁴⁹ Our third and final theme is the Faustian bargain this media bandwagon represents for artists deeply concerned with a public and national art. What happens to art when it speaks to, and for, the nation? Must artists compromise their program in order to be heard? The radical Shelley's late works went unpublished, as the legislator in him yielded to the nightingale. Blake's verse prologue to *Milton* became a literal hymn of the establishment, still sung during my childhood in Britain's public schools. Even Byron, so much the master of his myth, lost his very name from the title page of *Don Juan*. We speak, and the public ultimately hears what it chooses: indeed, these radical thinkers spoke and saw their politics disallowed. They stood their terms, their books and careful manifestos on Europe's vast and confusing post-Revolutionary stage, and saw them hijacked by forces beyond their control.

Ironically, this new world of contingency is nowhere more evident than when crossing the new national frontiers these artists helped to create. As Simpson remarks, "there has never been a single entity called 'Romanticism,' and this very knowledge may be read out of the Romantic writings themselves."¹⁵⁰ Heine opens *Die romantische Schule* (1833) by stressing that French and German romantics are different animals; Stendhal and Leopardi show Italy's distinctness; Britain's artists and media see 'romantic' as a foreign term.¹⁵¹ The label 'romantic' is a political coin in Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic Europe, one

147 Brown writing in Curran, *Companion*, pp. 38–42.

148 Perkins, "Construction," pp. 134–136.

149 Whalley, "Literary," p. 236.

150 Simpson in Curran, *Companion*, p. 20.

151 "diese [Schule] in Deutschland ganz anders war, als was man in Frankreich mit diesem Namen bezeichnet," Heine, *Werke*, p. 1169.

whose local value depends on our knowledge of local politics. What van Tieghem calls critics' "esprit exclusivement national" [exclusively national spirit] can therefore lead to a dangerous blindness.¹⁵² And here lies another reason for the term's almost immediate distortion. As Wellek says of France, "just as in Italy, a broadly typological and historical term, introduced by Mme de Staël, had become the battle cry of a group of writers who found it a convenient label."¹⁵³ That danger is for us to judge, not to ignore.

At the root of this old misreading, finally, is another fiction, born by a further irony of the deep, if ambivalent, romantic desire to speak to and for the people in unmediated speech: the fiction that artist and consumer are one being. For romanticism is perhaps, above all, a change of audience, the shared fruit of artistic, industrial, and political revolution. Stereotype printing, romantic art, and a vast consumer market are born in symbiosis. In that romantic triangle of artist, product, and consumer, the new bourgeois publics were disturbing bedfellows. Contemporary readers' letters naively reveal their appropriation of the romantic artist. "I recognized myself in it [...] I said to myself: This is me," writes one; "this is not you [...] it is me," writes another to Hugo.¹⁵⁴ Seeing this shift with his usual flair, Hugo uses it the same year in a preface to his romantic readers: "madman! to think I am not you."¹⁵⁵ Yet text and romantic label, as Sismondi's hapless fate makes clear, remain forever separate events; they are as divorced as thing and word, artist and consumer, despite romantic myth and generations of historians. Lovejoy suggests that the term *Romantic* has "ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign."¹⁵⁶ I would argue that this was true, on a European scale, by 1820. Look, for example, at the case of Britain. No artists can govern the myth they launch, that much is the contract of Promethean creation. Yet this, after all, is a strange fate for the great to suffer, to be colonized by their own epithet while they yet lived and protested. Goethe, Tieck, the Schlegels, Sismondi, Manzoni, Leopardi, Pushkin, Byron, Stendhal, Hugo, Delacroix: when Europe's

152 Van Tieghem, *Romantisme*, p. 15.

153 Wellek, "Concept," p. 12.

154 "Je m'y suis reconnu ... je me suis dit: C'est moi," A. Julien in Moreau, *Classicisme* 267; "Ce n'est pas vous ... c'est moi," Ulbach in Simon, "Hugo," p. 293.

155 "Ah! insensé, qui crois que je ne suis pas toi," Hugo, preface to *Les Contemplations*.

156 Lovejoy, "Discrimination," p. 253.

romantics line up to reject the “so-called romantic school,” how can we so easily have backgrounded their resistance to the label? Every public will impose a persona on its artists, a fictive *Doppelgänger* they only half control. But which, after all, are we here to judge: that strange romantic myth, or its creators?