

Romanticism, Rhetoric and the Search for the Sublime

Romanticism, Rhetoric and the Search for the Sublime:

*A Neo-Romantic Theory
for Our Time*

By

Craig R. Smith

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This book is dedicated to those who are seeking to save
the environment.

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PREFACE

The Romantics were a remarkable group of artists, speakers, and critics who changed the way we saw the world. They converted the Alps from a hideout for gnomes, trolls, and witches to a sublime hiking haven. Tunnels, caves and mineshafts became sacred entries to Mother Earth.¹ Rivers became sources of life and nationhood, most notably with Father Rhine.² Lakes become tranquil retreats that mirror the landscape. The ocean becomes a vast scene for the ancient mariner. The forest becomes a primeval home of the folklore and the fairy tale. They used their creative talent to re-unite humans with nature and become its “guardian.”³

While many have examined the Romantic Era and its artists, few have examined its rhetorical theory, and none to my knowledge has called for Neo-Romantic rhetoric strengthened by contemporary rhetorical theories that would support it. In fact, some who have analyzed the Romantic Era argued that it terminated rhetorical theory.⁴ This book takes issue with that common assumption for many reasons. First, in my view, the assumption is undercut by showing how the rhetorical theory and practice of bridge figures contributed to the Romantic Era. I will focus on Edmund Burke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Hume who, in reaction to the Enlightenment and because of their own research, stimulated a Romantic theory of rhetoric. Second, I will show that most prominently Percy Shelley created rhetorical discourse to reform government and protect the environment, and in the process, Shelley perfected the rhetorical poem. Others have found rhetorical patterns in Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s

¹ See, for example, Caspar Friedrich’s painting of a *Cave in Harz*.

² See, for example, Johann Herder’s poem, *Rivers of Life*.

³ One of the most prominent humanists, Friedrich Schiller claimed that poets are the “guardians of nature,” in his essay “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” David Simpson, Ed. *Origins of Modern Critical Thought* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge U. Press, 1988), 148-73.

⁴ Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois U. Press, 1989), 58; John Bender and David Wellberg, Eds. *The End of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford U. Press, 1990); Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1971).

poetry.⁵ And I will examine some of their rhetorical tracts later in this book. Third, I will also reconfigure the rhetorical theories of Hugh Blair and Thomas de Quincy to demonstrate how powerful they were and how useful they could be in our own time.

Fourth, it is important to realize that rhetoric played an important role in the education of Romantics, be they politicians, poets or playwrights.⁶ As we shall, during the Romantic Era it was not rhetoric that was being chastised but the proto-sophistry of display. And while the formalism of Neoclassical theory was eschewed across the arts, it is replaced with a natural style that is more inventive, beautiful, emotional and sublime.

In addition to supporting the thesis that rhetoric was alive and well in the Romantic Era, this book, with its emphasis on rhetorical as opposed to literary theory, hopes to contribute to the Green Romantic Movement by creating a Neo-Romantic theory that synthesizes Romantic rhetorical theory with more contemporary rhetorical theories that expand and make rhetoric more potent in our own time.

It is no secret that rhetoric has fallen on hard times sometimes relying on “alternate facts” and “fake news.” In his book *Enough Said*, Mark Thompson, the president and CEO of the New York Times Company, laments the state of political public address in America and Europe. He realizes that discourse based on Enlightenment values such as reasoned and evidence-based arguments has been defeated by the demagoguery that is visceral and sensational. He concludes that we must teach our children rhetoric, in the classical sense of the word. I have spent the better part of my life doing just that. I have also been witness to the rise and fall of the quality of public address in that time span. One of the critical lessons I have learned and tried to pass on to my students is that one must engage the full arsenal of rhetorical strategies if one is to win a campaign of persuasion. The reasoned and truthful speakers will not carry the day unless they appeal to emotions, organize their thoughts and deliver them well.

We have seen this phenomenon in the past and should learn by it. In 1950 Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) gave a speech in Wheeling,

⁵ Richard E. Matlak, “Classical Argument and Romantic Persuasion in ‘Tintern Abbey,’” *Studies in Romanticism* 25 (1986): 97-129; John R. Nabholz, “Romantic Prose and Classical Rhetoric,” and David Ginsburg, “Wordsworth’s *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) and the Epideictic Tradition,” in *Rhetorical Traditions and British Romantic Literature*, Don H. Bialostosky and Lawrence D. Needham, Eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U. Press, 1995).

⁶ John R. Nabholz, “*My Reader, My Fellow-Labourer: A Study of English Romantic Prose* (Columbia, MO: U. of Missouri Press, 1986).

West Virginia before a women's Republican Club. Waving a laundry list he took from his hotel room, he claimed he had the names of 205 Communist subversives in the State Department. The number changed with his speaking venues, but the lie stuck in the public consciousness and McCarthy went on a four-year tear that resulted in the black listing of actors, writers, and directors in Hollywood. Even professors with tenure were fired if they exercised their Fifth Amendment right to avoid self-incrimination. Libraries were purged of "improper" books here and in overseas State Department offices. McCarthy was courageously attacked by Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-Maine) and Henry Luce, the head of Time-Life publications in 1950. He was attacked by President Eisenhower and CBS Newsman Edward R. Murrow in the Spring of 1954. It was to no avail.

That summer, McCarthy was at the height of his powers. Luckily, he overplayed his hand. The country was witness to the Army-McCarthy hearings in which McCarthy attempted to prove that the Army was infiltrated with Communists. During the hearings, he attacked an aide to the attorney for the Army, Joseph Welch. Welch did not respond to McCarthy with evidence or reasoned arguments, he launched an emotional appeal – "Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last?" – that broke through McCarthy's demagoguery. His popularity plummeted; he was censured by the Senate a month later, and he died an alcohol-sotted pariah three years later. Sometimes emotion trumps logic in public moments and if good people are to succeed in those moments, they need to know how to wield pathos.

Today we face another crisis: preserving the environment. Again, those who favor the use of reason and science, which we can trace to the Enlightenment, are often correct in their assessments and criticisms, but they often fail to convince their audiences as Dale Jamieson has made clear in his study of the debate over climate change.⁷ To overcome this problem, a movement has grown out of studies of the Romantic Era that aims to provide a remedy – retrieving Romantic theory for use in our own time, particularly with regard to saving the environment. Catherine Rigby and her colleagues, for example, turn to European Romantic theory to provide a foundation for their approach to ecocriticism.⁸ Ecocriticism has become

⁷ Dale Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle to Stop Climate Change Failed – and What It Means for Our Future* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2014).

⁸ Catherine E. Rigby, Ed. *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (Charlottesville, VA: U. of Virginia Press, 2011). See also, Kate Rigby,

an interdisciplinary study that sparked a revival of the Romantic Era's criticism of the Industrial Revolution. It argues that nature and natural rights provided a foundation for the voices of the Romantics. Recently, Dewey Hall's collection of essays retrieves Romanticism to demonstrate its concern for the environment in British and American Romantics. It features connections between various writers and their ideologies, for example, William Wordsworth's impact on Henry David Thoreau and Emily Bronte. It reveals the impact of scientific theories on literary figures, such as Thomas Malthus' concern over population growth and his influence on Lord Byron.⁹ I hope to extend what is sometime called green Romanticism or Romantic ecocriticism into the realm of rhetoric.

This book is an outgrowth of two earlier publications in which I first began to explore the Romantic Movement. The first is a chapter in my book, *Rhetoric and Human Consciousness: A History*. While composing the fifth edition, I discovered that some of the figures normally placed in the Enlightenment belonged in the Romantic Movement or were at least bridges to it. This discovery led to new research and a reordering not only of the characters I studied but of the chapters in the book. While working on these revisions, I published an article in the *Western Journal of Communication* entitled "Constructing a Neo-Romantic Rhetorical Theory."¹⁰ Many of the scholars who read the article recommended that I convert it into a book because the findings were original and provided a major corrective on the assessment of various rhetorical theorists.

I decided to take up the challenge but to emphasize how a Neo-Romantic theory might serve those who seek to save the planet. I soon discovered that without a context, it would be difficult to understand how the Romantic Era evolved and what it meant to be a Romantic. It would be important to show how Romantic rhetoricians evolved from and/or interacted with Romantic poets, novelists, painters, and musicians. For example, while the scientists of the Enlightenment tended to break nature down atomistically or "torture" it, as Francis Bacon recommended, the Romantics saw nature as organic and contingent. While the scientists saw objects as more and more discrete, Romantics looked for interactions and interrelationships. Scientists such as Newton and Bacon looked at nature

"Romanticism and Ecocriticism," in *The Oxford Handbook for Ecocriticism* Greg Garrard, Ed. (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford U. Press, 2014).

⁹ Dewey Hall, Ed. *Romantic Ecocriticism: Origins and Legacies* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2016).

¹⁰*Western Journal of Communication* 80 (2016): 220-237.

as mechanistic and mathematical, whereas Romantics saw it as infused with spirituality.¹¹

This book's eleven chapters are divided into three parts: part one examines the evolution of the Romantic Era. It begins by tracing Humanism and Scholasticism forward from their roots in Augustine's philosophical writing. It shows how the two schools bounce off one another dialectically, the Scholastic favoring logic and argumentation and disparaging rhetoric, the Humanistic embracing the ancients, their rhetorical theory, and the study of humans. The Scholastic Movement would eventually mutate into the Enlightenment embracing rationalism and the scientific study initiated in the Renaissance. The Humanistic Movement passed through the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation and arrived at crucial bridge figures that presaged the Romantic Era. Hence, a chapter of this book is devoted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, and Edmund Burke. Part two examines the Romantic practitioners beginning with representative artists, then focuses on orators and major rhetorical poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Part three examines the Romantic rhetorical theorists and then deduces a Neo-Romantic theory by supplementing their work with contemporary theories in order to make Romantic rhetorical theory more robust and useful.

¹¹ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971)185-190. See also, Johann Goethe's *Scientific Studies*, Douglas Miller, Trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1988; Friedrich Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, E. E. Harris and Peter Heath, Trans. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge U. Press, 1988). For Schelling, nature is self-re-generating in dynamic evolution. It is thus an inspiration for human creativity, yet another way by which the Romantics link nature and art. For Schelling, as we shall see, it leads to a "world soul."

CHAPTER ONE

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

For some English Romantics, particularly Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley, the Enlightenment had wrought division and alienation, the tragic French Revolution, and ecological ruin resulting from the Industrial Revolution. In reaction to the formalism and metaphysics of the Enlightenment, they sought to overcome the various dualities that had become entrenched in philosophy. The Romantic Movement attempted to re-unite humans with nature and to use their art to protect it. The reunification would result in great joy as would achieving transcendence, two great goals in Romanticism.¹ These goals determined their view of love. It could be *agape*, or *eros*, or *filia*; it could be love of nature, or the transcendent, or the mind, or love of another human being. However, in every case, it was a reaction to the division and alienation that persisted around them and achieving a loving union that brought joy.

Retrieving the monism of Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus, most Romantics sought to return to the perfect one by reuniting mind and body that Descartes had separated. After that, came uniting the human with nature, and then for most once again uniting with spirit or God. Thus, their take on nature had a pantheistic quality. However, this spirituality found in nature could vary widely among Romantics. For some Romantics, God was manifest in nature; for others, the sublime in nature revealed a transcendent God. And for still others, God was manifest *and* transcendent, or in Percy Shelley's case, did not exist at all. The human mind with its wonderful powers of imagination was all Shelley needed in his theology. On this subject, William Wordsworth may have been the most eloquent when he wrote:

¹ Harold Bloom, Ed. *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1970).

From Nature overflowing on my soul,
 I had received so much, that every thought
 Was steeped in feeling; I was only then
 Contented, when with bliss ineffable
 I felt the sentiment of Being spread
 O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still²

Flowing from this quest for Being was the Romantics' commitment to the self-actualization of the human mind. Part of the process is education, whether in school or self-taught. And another part is consciousness raising through the close observation of nature. As we shall see later in this book, when Wordsworth looked out from Mount Snowden, he had a sublime experience that revealed that his consciousness was much broader than he thought it was. The narrative of self-actualization shows up in Goethe's *Meister's Lehrjahre* and *The Prelude* of Wordsworth, many of the poems of Keats and Shelley, and among such German Romantics as Schiller and Schelling. As we shall see, Shelley's road to self-realization was founded on auto-didacticism, which was not uncommon among the Romantics.

Since this book ultimately aims to develop a Neo-Romantic rhetorical theory, it is important to note that the Romantics stressed emotion, narrative, nationalism, beauty, and sublime in their persuasive efforts. The foundation of these themes was nature which in turn meant that the scene was often emphasized over the person in their art and literature.³ And very importantly, inside the scene, the Romantics used their unique powers of observation to transform the mundane into the beautiful or the sublime. By observing – meditating on – instead of merely seeing, Romantics found the spiritual essence of objects in the Romantic moment. The act of devotion to nature in general, or one of its objects in particular, led to a new appreciation of beauty or the sublime.

In one generation, the movement swept through Europe and then crossed the Atlantic to the Americas. In the United States, it spawned a second great awakening among American evangelical churches where Romantic rhetoric flourished. Sensing this sea change, politicians turned away from the rationalistic rhetoric of civic virtue embraced by the founding generation of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Adams and Hamilton and created a civil religion that sparked a wave of patriotism.

² William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill, Eds. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979) 1850/II. 397-402, p. 87.

³ Kate Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville, VA: U. of Virginia Press, 2004), chapter 2.

With the coming of the Civil War, public address became even more Romantic perhaps best represented in the Inaugurals and Gettysburg Address of Abraham Lincoln. He claimed to have learned rhetoric by closely reading the King James Version of the Bible and the works of Shakespeare. Like the first generation of Romantic orators in America, Lincoln understood the power of narrative and the affect of the sublime. His conclusion of the First Inaugural provides a case in point:

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

In the Romantic tradition, Lincoln seeks unity where there is discord, he transcends time, he literally appeals to the mystical and supernatural, and ends with the word nature.

Along with traditional argumentation, his discourse added an aesthetic dimension to political persuasion. The purpose of this book is to resurrect that aesthetic dimension by returning to the generative principles of the Romantic Era and then supplementing them in the conclusion of this study with contemporary, complementary theories. In this way, I hope to synthesize a Neo-Romantic theory for civic engagement in the 21st Century.

The Romantic principles of the late 18th to the middle 19th Centuries are relevant to our own times because the Romantics sought to conserve nature against the Industrial Revolution, cultivate a civil religion-based patriotism and national traditions, establish natural rights including liberty and equality, employ narratives to advance their cause, and encourage creation of sublime rhetoric to reach transcendent spirit. In general, the Romantics opposed imperialistic wars but supported wars of independence, such as those in America and Greece. Percy Shelley wrote of “War with its million horrors”⁴ and Lord Byron died while fighting for Greek independence.

⁴ Accessed at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/shelley/1813/queen-mab.htm>. Line 255. Bennett Cerf and Donald S. Klopfer, *John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley: Complete Poetical Works* (New York: The Modern Library, 1962), 829, line 256. (The full rhetorical poem is considered in chapter 9 of this book.)

Defining Romanticism

Romantics are first and foremost committed to nature.⁵ It is clear they were on to something. Recent studies have shown that spending just a few days in nature improves creativity massively while lengthening our attention spans and lessening aggressive behavior. Visiting the ocean enhances happiness. Experiencing rainfall creates a state of contemplation.⁶ Qing Li recently showed us how forest bathing unlocks our five senses.⁷

Out of the Romantic ground of nature grow many shoots. Some Romantics developed a pantheistic theology arguing that God pervaded nature, or at the least, it reflected God's plan. All Romantics believed that the most *beautiful* things were found in nature and if one attached ideas to them, the ideas became more attractive. Their aesthetic theory enhanced the belief that the *sublime* in nature could strike an audience with awe and held out the possibility of reaching transcendent spirituality.⁸ Nature also provided humans with an overwhelming *emotional* side that could be reached through appeals to the senses. Taking humans back to nature, also produced *natural rights* which could be protected by republican democracy. And it was in nature that most folk tales occurred providing Romantics with *narratives* for their poetry, prose and rhetoric.

However, many Romantics enriched their narratives by making them into allegories. The author would retrieve a mythic tale or create one. By using a familiar cultural story as a frame, the author could/would attract the reader who would then be subjected to a subliminal, rhetorical message. The mythic tale covered the message while allowing the writer to reach a wider audience, including those who opposed the writer's point of view.⁹ When set to poetry, as in the case of some of Shelley's calls for

⁵ In *Topologies of the Sacred*, Rigby compares English and German Romantics and their belief that nature was a source of the sacred.

⁶ The research on these findings appear in Florence Williams' recent book *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017).

⁷ Qing Li, *Forest Bathing* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

⁸ Meyer H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971).

⁹ See, Mike Milford and Robert Rowland, "Situated Ideological Allegory and *Battleship Galactica*," *Western Journal of Communication* 76 (2012): 536-51; Christopher Paris, "Poetic Drama as Civil Discourse: *Troilus and Cressida*, an Allegory of Elizabeth I's 'Common Weal,'" *Rhetoric Review* 28 (2009): 128-47; Krista Phair, "*The Gospel According to*: A Theory of Transformative Discursive Allegory," *Communication Studies* 61 (2010): 104-17; Robert Hariman, "Allegory

reform, the allegory becomes a rhetorical poem, which I will examine in more detail in chapter 9.

Various Romantics concocted different combinations of these tenets of Romanticism. Shelley was an atheist who believed the human mind was God, and yet he had a great appreciation of the aesthetic in nature and became an outlaw in defense of natural rights. An orthodox Christian, Edmund Burke argued that beauty refined taste, that national sentiment should protect that which had survived the test of time, and that the sublime could take humans to the spiritual level. However, Burke also realized that horror could be sublime. This theory led to Romantics taking up the supernatural, as in the case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Edgar Allan Poe's short stories.¹⁰

Of the various theorists I shall examine, it is fair to say that the three most prominent elements of Romanticism are *nature* inclusive of emotion, beauty and the sublime, *nationalism* inclusive of sentiment, patriotism and natural rights, and *narrative* inclusive of national folk tales and allegories.¹¹

Plan of Study

Before arriving at a detailed analysis of each of these themes in the later stages of this book, I trace the roots of Romanticism back through the Renaissance and the Humanistic Movement that helped produce it. I will also explore the tension between Humanism and Scholasticism to contextualize their evolution. Thus, the next chapter examines how St. Augustine laid the foundation for the Scholastic and Humanistic Movements, and then takes a closer look at Scholasticism, the great rival of Humanism. Chapter 3 follows the path of Humanism particularly regarding its dialogue with Scholasticism. Chapter 4 uses the career of Galileo as an in-depth case study to show how science was stifled and then incorporated into the Age of Reason. Because the Romantic Movement was a reaction to the Enlightenment, in Chapter 5 I will trace the development of the Enlightenment back to its roots in Scholasticism. These dual tracks will provide a context for a better understanding of the development of the Romantic Era.

and Democratic Public Culture in the Postmodern Era," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35 (2002): 282.

¹⁰ Meyer H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971).

¹¹ Rigby, *Topologies of the Sacred*.

In chapter 6, I will examine the bridge figures that led their followers out of the Enlightenment and into the Romantic Movement. Chapter 7 will survey some of the major artists of the movement including its writers, painters, and musicians. Chapter 8 examines Romantic public address. Chapter 9 focuses on Percy B. Shelley as a case study of a Romantic figure who not only advanced Romanticism's aesthetic agenda, but its political agenda by developing the genre of rhetorical poems. Chapter 10 turns to the two most prominent rhetoricians of the Romantic Era, Hugh Blair and Thomas De Quincey to examine their theories thematically using nature, narrative, and nationalism as guides. The final chapter incorporates contemporary rhetorical theories of scene, affect, hermeneutics, civil religion, story-telling and spiritualism to create a Neo-Romantic theory for use in our time.

I hope to provide advocates of whatever position with more potent means of persuasion. Equally armed, advocates have a better chance of producing the truth. Aristotle believed all that things being equal, the truth will be more likely to prevail. That is so because the truth is easier to maintain than falsehood; what is true is easier to remember than trying to recreate what is made up. My hope is that when added to our current rhetorical arsenal, Neo-Romantic theories will expand and enhance the available means of persuasion. To demonstrate that possibility, I shall use one of the fundamental Romantic goals, preserving the environment, as a case study throughout this book.

Romanticism, War, and Industrialization

The Industrial Revolution was a result of scientific discovery and invention resulting from the work of such important scientists as Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton and William Harvey. These scientists took their empirical methods from the macro to the micro level. Galileo changed our view of the universe; Newton changed our view of the earth; and Harvey changed our understanding of the human body.

These changes in astronomy, physics, and physiognomy led to a rash of inventions that kick started the industrialization of Europe, especially in Great Britain. In that country, James Hargreave invented the spinning Jenny in 1766. James Watt perfected the steam engine in 1768 by giving it rotary motion so it could be adapted to trains, ships and through Richard Arkwright to the power loom in 1787 further revolutionizing the production of cloth. However, the Industrial Revolution did a great deal of damage to the environment, which set off an environmental backlash that became part of the Romantic Movement.

The Industrial Revolution had its most devastating impact in Great Britain. In the 1700s, advances in agricultural production were matched by investments in industrial production. Almost yearly new inventions led to increases in productivity. Britain consumed its and its colonies raw materials, turning them into steel and cloth and then selling them to its own people, its colonies and other nations. This mercantile system sustained the British Empire into the twentieth century. By 1850, London was the largest city in the world with half a million people who had to deal with horrible pollution including an inadequate sewage system.¹²

As the Industrial Revolution progressed, cotton and woolen looms and the steam engine were made more efficient. In 1790, cotton mills wove 5,000,000 pounds of cotton into cloth; by 1830, the figure had exploded to 220,000,000 pounds. Mining tore up verdant fields in the north and west of Britain. Coal production amounted to 6,000,000 tons in 1780; it hit 25,000,000 tons by 1830.¹³ The increased burning of coal led to massive pollution which proved deadly in London because the low-lying city regularly suffered from suffocating fog. Industrialization also led to a population explosion and migration to the cities where labor was needed. The development of efficient farm machinery reduced the need for manual labor, yet another inducement to move into urban areas. In 1815, one in every three people living in England farmed; by 1885, the number had dropped to one in eight. In 1815, the most common mode of travel was by horse drawn coaches; in 1885, it was by coal burning, steam belching railroads.¹⁴ In the cities, workers found that low wages were matched by long working hours; child labor was common. Real wages actually fell by about 10 percent from 1770 to 1810.¹⁵ It took six decades before wage gains were achieved. In the United States, the ravages of the Industrial Revolution could be seen in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, cotton looms of Massachusetts and the steel mills of Ohio. Here too child labor was common. The American dystopia was underlined by recurring economic panics such as those of 1837, 1857, 1873, and 1893.

These awful conditions spawned socialist and Communist movements that would attempt to replace capitalism and spur civil unrest. However, the powers that be consistently bested the protesters. In fact, in 1851,

¹² David Cannadine, *Victorious Century: The United Kingdom, 1800-1906* (New York, NY: Viking, 2018.)

¹³ Derek Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone, 1815-1885* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 28.

¹⁴ Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone*, 15.

¹⁵ Tyler Cowen, "Industrial Revolutions Aren't Easy," *The Week* (March 3, 2017): 38.

Prince Albert celebrated the success of the Industrial Revolution in London with a “Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations.” It was housed in the magnificent Crystal Palace, a glass and steel structure that was 1848 feet long, 408 feet wide and reached a height of 100 feet.¹⁶ Over its five-month run, six million people roamed through its 100,000 exhibits.¹⁷

Aside from protesting the devastation of industrialization, for the most part, Romantics sought to halt imperialistic wars. The German provinces had been devastated by the Thirty Years War. With each passing generation, scientific advancements made war deadlier. The beginning the Romantic Movement was marked by the Napoleonic wars. The tumultuous upheaval of the French Revolution at first issued an optimistic call for liberty, fraternity and equality, then fell into chaos and finally dictatorship. Many a Romantic admired the early goals of the revolution only to become disenchanted with the Reign of Terror. They then embraced the Napoleonic Code only to see its author become a dictator. In 1793 and 1794 alone, the revolution led to around 35,000 executions and between 250,000 and 300,000 deaths in the civil war.¹⁸

However, the Romantics generally supported wars of independence and liberation. From its beginning, many Romantic figures supported the American revolutionaries. While dying of tuberculosis, the Romantic composer Frederick Chopin traveled through Europe raising funds for Polish independence. However, the fight for Greek freedom from the Turkish yoke soon became their cause celeb. The poet George Gordon, better known as Lord Byron, fought for Greek independence and died of fever in 1824 at Missolonghi. The Romantic painter Eugene Delacroix used two paintings of the Greek revolution to propagandize the cause. In one, he portrayed the destruction of Chios.¹⁹ In the other, he envisioned

¹⁶ Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone*, 210.

¹⁷ Cannandine, *Victorious Century*, 277. The Crystal Palace was moved to south London and burned to the ground in 1936. And to be fair to Prince Albert he was a great patron of the arts contributing the building of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Natural History Museum.

¹⁸ Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard U. Press, 2017). See also, Donald Greer, *The Incidence of Terror during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1935).

¹⁹ The link between Byron and Delacroix inspired another Romantic emblem, *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827) which depicts Byron’s epic *Sardanapalus*. The painting and the play use the suicide of the Assyrian king as attack on the decadence of aristocrats and the Orientalism sweeping the continent at the time.

Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi, the tragic aftermath of losing the battle to the Turks. In the painting, Greece is portrayed as the heroic Marianne from the French Revolution, which he repeated in his painting *Liberty Leading the People* in support of the revolution in France of 1830 which toppled the monarchy of Charles X, the brother of Louis XVI, who had been decapitated in the first revolution.

Reinforcing the fight for Greek independence, Victor Hugo, the famous French novelist, wrote a poem about the destruction of Missolonghi. The Romantic composer Gioachino Rossini created the opera *The Siege of Corinth* in which a Greek courtesan rejects the overtures of the Ottoman Sultan. Typical of Romantic music, the opera includes a “tempest [that] suddenly roars around us.” The chorus of Greeks sings their song of independence which is modeled on the *Marseillaise*. It was a great success when performed in Paris in 1826.

Across the Atlantic, American Romantics were also concerned with human rights. Henry David Thoreau was not only an ecologist, he was an abolitionist who espoused civil disobedience.²⁰ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was not only a poet, he was a rabid abolitionist. The writer and poet, John Greenleaf Whittier was a founding member of the American Anti-Slavery Society.²¹

Finally, the Romantic Movement was a reaction to the Enlightenment’s habit of privileging of reason, science and technology over emotion, intuition, nature, and the spiritual. The Enlightenment, so named by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, preceded the Industrial Revolution and ran through it. The Enlightenment was the culmination of the Scholastic Movement which, as I will show, can be traced from St. Augustine through Thomas Aquinas and Rene’ Descartes. Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke and Isaac Newton put their trust in reason and science to solve the problems of human kind. Thus, the Enlightenment provides one side of the dialectic with the Romantics.

For their part in the dialogue, the Romantics argued that privileging science and reason was damaging to artistic pursuits because they

Both are subversive works aimed at monarchy. Delacroix became a darling of the Paris salons and would eventually paint nearly 200 paintings.

²⁰ Laura Dassow Walls, *Henry David Thoreau: A Life* (Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago Press, 2017.)

²¹ Philip F. Gura traces how these Romantics often dreamt of utopias where they could escape the sins of industry and society. See *Man’s Better Angels: Romantic Reformers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 2017).

discouraged inspiration.²² Instead, Romantics saw beauty and the sublime, particularly in their natural state, as inspirational forces. The British Romantics used French stylistic theory to start a renaissance in beautiful writing and speaking. For example, John Baillie's *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747) was a forerunner to the Romantic movement because it showed how to construct strikingly beautiful images that engage the emotion and inspire an audience to a transcendent state. A year later, Adam Smith incorporated the French belletristic movement into his theory of aesthetic prose. He expanded the Neoclassical province of rhetoric to include Longinus' *On the Sublime*, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and Isocrates' thoughts on social and civic responsibility. Because of the French influence on Scotland, Smith was able to tap into Bernard Lami's *L'Art de Parler* (1675) and Charles Rollin's *De La Maniere d'Enseigner et d'Etudier les Belles-Lettres* (1726-28). Soon after, other English writers borrowed from Germany's new *sturm und drang* movement to supplement their arsenal of literary and rhetorical strategies. Wordsworth's and Coleridge's visits to Germany reinforced the connection.

While some Romantics respected reason, especially bridge figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Edmund Burke, reason is not emphasized in the rhetorical theory of the Romantics because they believed that artificial form and reason could overwhelm the natural. In 1757, Burke, the Whig parliamentarian whom I will examine in more detail in chapter 6, provided a bridge from Enlightenment thinking to the Romantic era when he argued that purity was achieved by refining taste. Taste was achieved by viewing the beautiful in nature and in works of art. Such activity could overcome the way in which society tended to pull the individual toward the popular and/or familiar rather than the tasteful. Like many Romantics, he carried his theory into the political realm; for example, he saw nature as an organic model for the proper functioning of the state.²³ Each institution of the state, the church, the parliament, the press, interacted through the ever-evolving contract between citizens and their government. Burke not only

²² Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Times of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, Henry Hardy, Ed. (London: John Murray, 1990), 57. Hans Kellner attributes the Romantics' turn to the medieval period to their view that the Enlightenment created a "desiccated world." "Is History Ever Timely?" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 44 (2014): 234-242, 237.

²³ Thus, we should be clear that Romantic rhetorical theory is about the beauty and inspiration of nature and should not be confused with the rhetoric of romance. For more on the latter, see Pamela VanHaitsma, "Queering *The Language of the Heart*: Romantic Letters, Genre Instruction, and Rhetorical Practice," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44(2014): 6-24.

wrote about taste and political speech,²⁴ he demonstrated his craft in the House of Commons often with ornate allegories. Thus, he demonstrated that Romantic theory can be employed in civic debate. In turn, his writing and speaking had a major influence on Hugh Blair and Thomas De Quincey, major contributors to the Romantic theory that followed.²⁵

Another major influence on Blair and De Quincey was the Scottish philosopher David Hume, a friend of Burke's whom I will also take up in chapter 6. By carefully examining how emotion worked in the decision-making process, Hume provided an important foundation for Romantic theory. He believed that Enlightenment thinkers had vastly underrated the role of emotion in everyday life in general and in persuasion specifically.²⁶ By the time of his death in 1776, Hume had inspired his Edinburgh salon mate, Hugh Blair to create beautiful sermons and a theory of *belle lettres* oratory.²⁷ Reflecting Hume's influence, Blair wrote that "[P]assions are the great springs of human action."²⁸ He saw these springs as a source of aesthetic experience that could lead audiences to the sublime or the spiritual. He believed that because humans were ruled by emotion, appeals to the understanding required emotional reinforcement.²⁹ As part of the Scottish Renaissance, he inspired others to study the aesthetic side of rhetoric. Fourteen years after Blair's death in 1800, Thomas De Quincey was drawn into that circle when he visited and eventually moved to Edinburgh.

Speaking and writing about the endowed natural rights of humans, the Frenchman Jean-Jacques Rousseau, at first a leading Enlightenment political theorist, became a Romantic poet, playwright and philosopher. He argued that before humans were socialized, they were good souls in their natural setting. He would enhance a civil society by having its members

²⁴ In 1758, Burke added a theory of taste to his 1757 study *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1798), 30-39.

²⁵ See James L. Golden and Edward P. J. Corbett, *The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell and Whately* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 56, where Blair cites Burke's work. See also , Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres*. Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran, Eds. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois U. Press, 2005). Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Harold F. Harding, ed. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965) based on Blair's, *Lectures on Belles Lettres* (London: J. Canwell, 1838).

²⁶ Hume extended Locke's notion of how ideas associate with one another in his *Treatise on Human Nature* published in 1739.

²⁷ Hume's theory was reinforced in Edinburgh by Thomas Reid in his book *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Edinburgh, 1788).

²⁸ Golden and Corbett, *The Rhetoric*, 122.

²⁹ Golden and Corbett, *The Rhetoric*, 16.

leave the office or factory for the temple of nature where they could recreate and re-create themselves.

The landmark Romantic poets are well known. After returning from a sojourn in Germany, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his friend William Wordsworth laid out theories of Romantic prose alongside their poetic efforts.³⁰ Wordsworth's manifesto for the Romantic Movement is contained in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800, a book of poetry to which Coleridge contributed, and which I explore further in chapter 7 of this book. Wordsworth led the Romantics to suspect the industrialization of England.³¹ As Wordsworth wrote in the opening of *The Prelude*, "escaped/ From the vast city, where I long had pined/ A discontented sojourner: now free, / Free as a bird to settle where I will."³² When he moved to the Lake District of England, the rhetorician Thomas De Quincey sought out Wordsworth and Coleridge, and became conversant with them as he started his own writing career.

Short though their lives were, John Keats and Percy Shelley left an indelible mark on the world of poetry with their love for nature, image, and imagination.³³ These Romantics used nature's lens to discover beauty and see transcendent truth in it. This formulation equated structure in prose, poetry and persuasion with natural organic elements such as symmetry, harmony, proportion, delicacy.³⁴ Shelley becomes a case study in chapter 9 of this book not only because of his poetry but because of political persuasion and advocacy of natural rights. As a rhetorician, he represents the outlaw side of the Romantic Movement. As a practitioner, he advanced the genre of the rhetorical poem.

There is also something to be said for Romanticism's liberation of women as novelists and poets. George Sand (Aurore Dupin), the female lover of Chopin, wrote best-selling Romantic novels. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and her sister Emily's

³⁰ H. J. Jackson, *Those Who Write for Immortality* (New Haven, CT: Yale U. Press, 2014).

³¹ Lois Agnew, *Thomas De Quincey: British Rhetoric's Romantic Turn*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois U. Press, 2012), 7-8.

³² Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850, 1850/I*. 6-9 (p. 29).

³³ Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 1-2. Blake also elevates imagination to new heights in his theory. He sees it as "Divine Vision." *Poetry and Prose*, (London, 1927), 1023-24. Rene Wellek notes the influence of Vico on the Romantics' notion of imagination and reveals that Coleridge was in possession of a copy of Vico's *Scienza nuova. A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950: The Later Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 134-35.

³⁴ Golden and Corbett, *The Rhetoric*, 14.

Wuthering Heights are classic examples of Romantic narratives and the new freedom of women to compete with men in the literary marketplace even though they often had use pseudonyms or publish anonymously. The Bronte novels of 1847 attacked patriarchy and the working conditions of women. Shelley's novel is particularly interesting because of its attack on science. And I will visit it again in chapter 9 during the case study of her husband.

While these and other painters, musicians, poets, and novelists identified themselves as Romantics, rhetoricians were less likely to do so.³⁵ One reason was that rhetoric is usually more concerned with the immediate, the political, and the powerful than it is with the aesthetic.³⁶ Yet, as we shall see, along with Burke, there were effective Romantic orators. As Hume, Burke, Blair, and De Quincey commented, the aesthetic can trigger powerful forces. We will review these orators since this book seeks to revive and supplement their approach to rhetoric.

When was the Romantic Era?

There is some debate over the actual placement of the Romantic Era. Paddy Bullard places the opening date at 1750 while M. H. Abrams places it at 1789 with fall of the Bastille.³⁷ As we shall see, the truth probably lies somewhere in between and depends on the country you are studying. I personally prefer the date of 1757 when Edmund Burke published his *Enquiry into the Sublime*; however, one could just as well use 1775 with start of the American revolution and Burke's call for "Reconciliation with America." Few deny that the Romantic Movement reached its zenith with the national revolutions of 1848 which witnessed a change of monarchs in France and Austria and the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels. While 1848 also marked the last demonstration by the Chartists in England, a subset of its members including Dante Gabriel Rossetti founded the Pre-Raphaelite School that was fond of chivalric times. In 1849 in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, John Ruskin brought

³⁵ Bialostosky and Needham, *Rhetorical Tradition and British Romantic Literature*, i.

³⁶ The link to "culture and political nationalism" in Romantic rhetoric in America can be found in Annie Storr's "Ut Picture Rhetorica: The Oratory of the Visual Arts in the Early Republic and the Formation of American Cultural Values, 1790-1840," Dissertation, U. of Delaware (1992).

³⁷ Paddy Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge U. Press, 2011); Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*.

the Romantic Era to architecture when he complained about how industrial buildings were destroying cities.

Clearly, the Romantic Movement had varying influence in different countries and among different artists that would be felt after that time. For example, the Victorian Age in England began with ascension of Victoria to the throne in 1837 and ended with her death in 1901, though a Victorian style in literature came into its own in 1860, the Romantic Movement continued under Victoria's rule.³⁸ From 1874 to 1879, Bedrich Smetana composed six tone poems as *Ma Vlast*, my country, which included his famous tribute to Bohemia's famous river, the Moldau. The late 19th century composer Peter I. Tchaikovsky was nothing if not Romantic. His *1812 Overture* tells the nationalistic tale of his motherland defeating the dictator Napoleon; his *Pathetique* is drenched in emotionalism. He brought his music to America in 1891 when he conducted on opening night at Carnegie Hall. At the opening of the twentieth century, Jean Sibelius reinforced Finnish pride by revising his *Finlandia* (1900).

Back in Great Britain, the Romantics persisted into the new century led by the Irish poet William Butler Yates (1865-1939), perhaps the most noted late Romantic. He relied on Irish folk tales and mythology for his stock and trade. The warrior Cu Chulainn appears in his poems and plays. His Celtic visions include magical rituals. Oengus/Aengus embodies his poetic imagination in *The Dream of Oengus*, which reveals Yates' Romantic attachment to nature: "I went out to the hazelwood, / Because a fire was in my head, / And cut and peeled a hazel want, / And hooked a berry to a thread . . . / walk among long dappled grass, / And pluck till time and times are done/ The silver apples of the moon,/ The golden apples of the sun."

Cecil Sharp retrieved English folk music which influenced the compositions of Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958).³⁹ "The Lark Ascending" is one of his quintessential romantic works. After buying an orange grove in Florida, Frederick Delius (1862-1934) produced romantic suites. Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) disclosed nature and folk tales to his readers in his poetry, songs and plays while advancing natural rights in his politics, for which he was executed by the Spanish authorities. Serge Rachmaninoff maintained Romanticism in his music until he died in 1943.⁴⁰ And while some writers are categorized as Victorians, they continued to extend Romantic themes. For example, the novelist Thomas

³⁸ De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 9.

³⁹ Cannadine, *Victorious Century*, 457.

⁴⁰ Howard Hanson's *Second Symphony: The Romantic* was used as a score for the horror film *Alien* in 1979.

Hardy (1840-1928) encouraged his readers to avoid the “madding crowd” and in *Tess of the D’Ubbervilles* railed against the Industrial Revolution. In fact, one could argue that since its inception, Romanticism has continued to surface in works of art and rhetoric to the present time.⁴¹

The Romantic preservation of nature has also continued. The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty was established in England in 1895. Under Presidents Ulysses Grant and Theodore Roosevelt new national parks were created in the United States.

The Decline of Romanticism

Even during its height, Romanticism was under attack by Enlightenment thinkers and even some Humanists. Lord Macaulay, who like Alexander Pope before him, proclaimed that “The noblest earthy object of the contemplation of man is man himself,”⁴² criticized the Romantics for turning away from the study of humans to the study of nature. In 1824 he sarcastically remarked, “The herd of bluestocking ladies and sonneteering gentlemen seem to consider a strong sensibility to the ‘splendour of the grass, the glory of the flower,’ as an ingredient absolutely indispensable in the formation of a poetical mind.”⁴³

The conversion from the dominance of the Romantic to the dominance of the Victorian is marked by several traits. First, in literature, the Victorians tended to be novelists, while Romantics tended to be poets. In fact, it must be said that the Victorians brought the novel into its own. Second, the Victorians liked narrative confessions of resurrection from downfalls; these contritions sometimes involved conversion experiences. Third, while both groups condemned the Industrial Revolution, the Victorians focused on people, especially the poor in cities; the Romantics focused on nature in the countryside. For the most part, Victorians painted pictures of orphanages, criminals in the streets, illness, slums, sweatshops

⁴¹ Paul de Man argues that Yeats is best read as a Romantic. *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984),145-238. “Yeats sees himself . . . as a more conscious Shelley who would be well aware that his spontaneous images are signals that reach him from a divine realm, and that the task of his poetry consists in recording those signals,” 167. De Man claims Yeats was a disciple of Shelley, 222. Yeats published his poetry from 1889 to 1939. His Romanticism stemmed from his love of Irish folklore and the Irish revolutionary cause.

⁴² Lord Macaulay, *The Miscellaneous Writings and Speeches* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1871), 41.

⁴³ Macaulay, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 41.

and working class, while the Romantics take us away to lakes, mountains, the solar system, and seas. The Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes about *The Cry of Children*. Charles Dickens gives us the orphan in *Oliver Twist*, the plight of the poor bookkeeper in *A Christmas Carol*, and a condemnation of child cruelty and the legal system in *Bleak House*. His Romantic elements include a sense of humor and optimism, and echoes of the Romantic distrust of the Enlightenment in his novel *Hard Times*, which condemns those obsessed with reason and science because they eviscerate the imagination. He also condemns the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities*. William Thackeray went after greed, hypocrisy, and snobbery in *Vanity Fair*, *The Newcomes* and *Pendennis*. Thus, while the Romantics sought the beautiful and the spiritual, the Victorians were more materialistic utilitarians who sometimes used Romantic themes.

The decline of both eras is usually marked by the rise of so-called “Realism” based on the discoveries of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud, who inspired such artists as August Strindberg, Emile Zola, Edvard Munch, and many others. Springing out of the Romantic Era, Zola (1840-1902) developed a theatrical naturalism and became a passionate lawyer who would help to rescue the falsely condemned Captain Dreyfus. Zola had opposed the 1870 war with Germany and was vindicated by its result. His novels and plays show how the environment influences our lives. He was particularly concerned with the effects of the Industrial Revolution and corrupt politics; but he turned to psychology to reveal hidden motivations in his characters. Zola died of carbon monoxide poisoning when his enemies clogged his chimney.

August Strindberg (1849-1912) was a contemporary of Zola and influenced by him. He believed realistic characters were more important than plot, and thus turned away from the Romantic emphasis on scene and narrative. He often explored the causes of emotional insecurity in Freudian terms. He himself suffered a nervous breakdown, which he described as psychic murder. It helped him show audiences how his characters’ mind worked. He advocated equality for women and satirized the upper class and politicians. For this reason, he was put on trial in 1884 for blasphemy and then acquitted. Ten years later he abandoned his psychological approach and sought to take his audiences to the spiritual level through chamber plays, written for audiences of no more than 160.

The great rival of Strindberg was Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) another writer who lived through the Romantic Era and sought to replace it with the new realism. His most famous plays include *Hedda Gabler*, *Brand*, and *An Enemy of the People*, in which a man stands up to his community and its traditions. In 1858, he became director of the Christiania Theater