*A Living Anti-Racist Dictionary for Romanticism*

**FOREWORD**

*A Living Anti-Racist Dictionary for Romanticism* (LADR) began as an initiative by fellows of the 2022 Keats-Shelley Association of America and Romantic Circles’ Anti-Racist Pedagogy Colloquium, Madeleine Roepe and Meg Jianing Zhang, under the supervision of convener Conny Cassity.

We set out to create a hybridized resource that could explore two subjects at the core of this Colloquium: Romanticism and anti-racist pedagogy. This dictionary catalogs terms common in the Romantic period that may require further contextualization in present-day scholarship, and contemporary terms that might influence our understanding of Romanticism as a historical period and artistic movement. Defining terms in this intersectional approach gives both educators and students empowering terminology, concrete references, and teachable examples. It enables us to address histories of oppression in the classroom and reduce systemic harm in perpetuating incomplete or incorrect historical narratives, broadening literary canon in the process. Ultimately, we hope to help to create a more inclusive environment in teaching and learning Romanticism that uplifts and acknowledges suppressed voices, welcoming them into the fold of the field we have all come to value.

Some of the terms in this dictionary are considered offensive and are even used as slurs today – each will be marked clearly, but not censored. We feel that it is our responsibility as part of this project to define the origins of these slurs, explain their resonances in a contemporary moment, and propose alternatives to their usage. This list is by no means exhaustive but begins to address the need for monitoring language that we use every day for these subjects. The reason our dictionary is considered “living” is because we hope that the terms and their definitions will be continuously updated. The generative potential of an online dictionary – as well as its crowdsourcing qualities – was inspired by the *Undisciplining the Victorian Classroom* project developed by Professors Pearl Chaozen Bauer, Ryan D. Fong, Sophia Hsu, and Adrian S. Wisnicki.

In creating a dictionary that is living, we also are influenced by what has come before. Seminal texts like Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), one of the earliest and most influential English dictionaries, and even the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) have cemented their places in Western literary canon not despite their limiting and policing categorizations, but because of them. Dictionaries are anything but apolitical, and there is no such thing as pure, impersonal scholarship. Though we occasionally turn to these texts for historical context, we do depart from them to broaden legacy and signification.

Our work was also informed by various recent keywords projects, particularly that of Raymond Williams. As Williams notes in the Introduction to his radical *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), the “only spirit” in which a Keywords project can be properly done is through the use of “common language” and eager participation (49). And there is little doubt that Williams’s cry for accessible language was not a tribute to the philosophy of the Romantic poets. As scholars, teachers, and students, we must explore, celebrate, and properly adopt “a selection of language really used by men” – the powerful terms, phrases, and sentiments of the everyday.

As well as these theoretical giants, we would also like to extend our gratitude and admiration to the masterful works of Robert DeMaria, Jr. in *British Literature 1640-1789* (2018) and Frederick Burwick in *Romanticism: Keywords* (2015). It is from these two texts that we first drew many of our terms and provisional definitions. We recommend both as supplementary reading for this dictionary. All references made in individual entries will be cited and documented in a Notes page at the end of the dictionary, in order of reference.

As stated, we envision this resource as living and breathing, in the sense that it is just a starting point and fixed to this moment in time. We heartily invite collaboration on this resource from all disciplines in adding to the list, refining our terms, and adding sources. We appreciate your time and patience as we send this fledgling document out into the world, hoping it will do some good.

**DEFINITIONS**

Romanticism

An intellectual and artistic movement associated with revolutionary changes that engaged all of Europe and the United States from the 1780s through the 1830s (1). The Romantic manner and matter, indeed the very word “Romantic,” is derived from the romance. Schlegel traced their persistent popularity from the prose and metrical romances of classical antiquity through the chivalric and Arthurian romances of the Middle Ages, and the heroic romances of Renaissance narrative fiction (2). The romance of the Romantic era was an occasion to explore foreign nationalism and character as well as “strange exotic territories,” in Burwick’s words, necessarily involving the power of the creative imagination. Such ‘romanticizations’ also impact the ways in which we conceive of certain social groups and relationships.

This was a period characterized by secularization, rapid industrialization, the emergence of democratic institutions, the spread of literacy and education, and a greater focus on individual lives and experiences (3).

Anti-racism

Anti-racism hinges upon action. It is not an intention or passive, hypothetical yearning to combat racist attitudes and behavior, but the routine practice of “actively identifying and opposing racism” in oneself and others (4). This practice includes campaigning for anti-racist policies that reduce racial inequity, and expressing anti-racist ideas in daily conversation, professional settings, and artwork (5, 6). This term may be hyphenated (“anti-racist”) or unhyphenated (“antiracist”); both are acceptable spellings. In the preferred style of the Keats-Shelley Association of America, this dictionary will hyphenate.

Abolition

see also: emancipation, slavery

The movement to end slavery, leading to its “suppression, destruction, and annihilation” (7), the movement to abolish the Atlantic slave trade and liberate enslaved peoples.

The first major legal attempt of abolition in England was through the Slave Trade Act (1807), which didn’t work because of several loopholes: horrifically, ship captains would throw the enslaved overboard to avoid detection and punishment. The Emancipation Movement brought the Abolition Act in 1833 (8) and even with that in place there were still exceptions: the East India Trading Company could still keep slaves until 1843. England’s entire economy was dependent on slave labor and the abolition of slavery was a grueling, hard-won process.

Texts to teach:

1. The first-person accounts of Charles Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano
2. Thomas Clarkson:“Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade” (1788)
3. Hannah More: *Slavery, A Poem* (1788)
4. William Wordsworth: *Prelude*, Book X (1805, 1850) and “To Thomas Clarkson. On the Final Passing of the Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade” (1807)

Barbarism

see also: indigenous, primitive, savage

A word with Greek origins that entered English through French, “barbarism” was primarily used to refer to manners and behavior or beliefs of many non-Western or indigenous peoples (9). Usage in the 17th to 19th centuries corresponds to Johnson’s entry: “A form of speech contrary to the purity and exactness of any language” and “ignorance of the arts; want of learning” (9).

The term “barbaric” might still be used to describe murderous people or groups, but not indigenous or non-literate peoples due to its negative associations (9). The social meaning of the word had and has an influence on the aesthetic and critical usage, but it seemed more separate from it in the 18th century than it does today (9).

“Barbaric” also meant, literally, base; English was seen as barbaric in comparison to Latin, for example (10). But this form of the word is overshadowed by its xenophobic connotations.

Colonialism

see also: imperialism, Orientalism

The principle, policy, or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country and occupying it with settlers through war or diplomacy for the purposes of extracting resources (11). A permanent settling of people often intertwined with the idea of imperialism.

The term “colony” comes from the Latin word colonus, which means “to farm” – the primary colonies of Britain during the Romantic period were the East and West Indies. Utopian ideals informed the rationale for the expansion of the British Empire and the settling of new colonies, but the essential motive was wealth (12). Colonies were first founded via the East India Company, originally chartered in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth as the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies (13).

The great conflicts of the colonial endeavor chiefly derived from cultural ignorance and xenophobia (14). Impacts include environmental degradation, the spread of disease, economic instability, ethnic rivalries, and human rights violations, all of which can and will outlast colonial rule.

Thus colonialism came into strife with and was modified by aspirations for independence and self-governance during the Romantic period, which it also embraced and encouraged through its rejection of tyranny (13). We can see increased resistance to colonialism by the end of the 18th century.

NOTE: "Colonialism" is often used interchangeably with "imperialism," but they are different! Learn more about their interconnections with our helpful infographic on page 10.

Texts to teach:

1. Eliza Hamilton: *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796)
2. Sydney Owenson: *The Missionary* (1811)
3. Leonora Sansay: *Secret History* (1808)

Emancipation

see also: abolition, slavery

Liberation. The action or process of setting free or delivering from slavery, or more generally from restraints imposed by superior physical force or legal obligation (15). When engaging with Romantic texts, it is vital to consider leading perspectives of the narrative: who is being emancipated? Who is performing emancipation? What does emancipation look like? Is it legal manumission, and/or a transition to indentured servitude? You may consider Maria Edgeworth’s *The Grateful Negro* (1804).

We also recommend the teaching resources generously provided by Brycchan Carey in his collected works. Click the ship below to be taken to his site, “Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation.”

Ethnicity

see also: intersectionality, race

Status in respect of membership of a group regarded as ultimately of common descent, or having a common national or cultural tradition (16). “Ethnicity” usually refers to the collection of shared cultural characteristics among people such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs.

Ibram X. Kendi notes the necessity of ethnic anti-racism: a powerful collection of anti-racist policies that lead to equity between racialized ethnic groups and are substantiated by anti-racist ideas about racialized ethnic groups (17).

Texts to teach:

1. Gretchen Gerzina: *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (1995)

Fetishization

see also: intersectionality, Orientalism, tokenism

Sexual fascination or preoccupation with things not inherently sexual like race, gender, sexuality, or body type that reduces people to certain (usually stereotypical or imagined) characteristics, to a dehumanizing effect (16, 17).

Historically, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have been fetishized in various different and damaging ways. Black men have historically been perceived as a sexual threat to the ‘purity’ of white women, Black women have historically been seen and degraded as promiscuous, Asian women have historically been thought of as submissive and docile, etc. It is important to recognize how these fetishized depictions of race have played into cultural relationships and their depictions within text.

Texts for reference:

1. Anonymous: *The Woman of Colour* (1808)
2. Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)
3. Francoise Vergès: “Creole Skin, Black Mask: Fanon and Disavowal” (1997)

Fig. 1 GOES HERE

Institutional racism

see also: anti-racism, white privilege, white supremacy

Also referred to as "systemic racism," "institutional racism" refers to racism as it is embedded in the laws and regulations of a society or organization, manifesting as discrimination in areas like criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, education, and political representation.

Texts for reference:

1. Brycchan Carey: “Teaching & Learning Guide for: Slavery and Romanticism” (2006)
2. Shelby Johnson, Brigitte Fielder, Kerry Sinanan: “Race, Pedagogy, and Whiteness in the Long 18 C: A Teach-In" (2020)
3. Kathleen Lubey: “Teaching Eighteenth-Century Black Lives” (2020)

Imperialism

see also: colonialism

The formal or informal economic and political domination of one country over the other, which involves creating and expanding the borders of an empire in order to project power. This is complete economic exploitation and political domination much older than colonialism.

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| **Colonialism** | **Imperialism** |
| "Colonus," meaning "colony" | "Imperium," meaning "command" |
| When one country physically exerts its domination through war and/or diplomacy over another country to exploit its resources | When one country creates and expands the borders of an empire in order to project its power |
| Movement of people into new territory, becoming permanent settlers | Exerting control over a region either directly or indirectly  |
| Dates back to the 15th century, when Europe began to colonize Africa and Asia | Much older than colonialism, associated with the Roman Empire |

FIG. 2: Chart graphic illustrating the differences between colonialism and imperialism, adapted from BYJU'S exam prep (48)

Indigenous

see also: barbarism, fetishization, intersectionality, primitive, race, savage

Literally, born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally to the soil, region, etc. (20). But in the context of people, the indigenous are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment (21). Mainstream knowledge is just now catching up to indigenous knowledges, which have been made dormant by hundreds of years of colonization and violence.

As informed by our friend and colleague Dr. Megan Peiser: many indigenous peoples have/do move seasonally and may live across wide swaths of place over the course of a year. Historically they were also forced to flee their lands, and forcibly relocated multiple times since Contact, and may have relationships with multiple land-spaces because of this. You can and should find out what land you’re on, who its original stewards are, and what treaties have shaped your area.

NOTE: Slurs you should not say or read aloud: R\*\*sk\*ns, squ\*w, savage Words that don’t belong to settlers: tribe, spirit-animal, Eskimo, Brave (as a noun), Chief, Indian, powwow

Texts to teach:

1. The writings of Samson Occom
2. Special Issue of *Eighteenth-Century Fiction: The Indigenous Eighteenth Century* (2020-2021)
3. Robin Wall Kimmerer: *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013)
4. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (2017)

Individualism

see also: rights, subject

Defined today as the habit of being independent and self-reliant and pursuing one’s own goals of free and independent individual action or thought without reference to others (22), “individualism” is considered a moral position, political philosophy, and social outlook that favors freedom of action for individuals over collective or state control.

The phrase “the individual Mind” recurs frequently in Romantic writing; Romanticism is commonly seen as the movement which “emphasized individual genius and creativity” (23). Individualism is also thus frequently associated with solitude. Burwick notes that in solitude “the individual regains sensitivity to the myriad phenomena of nature which provide focus to the imaginative powers through both active and passive phases, creative and receptive. Negative effects of this attitude would be that the individual neglects all social responsibility, succumbing to solipsistic delusions. Whereas the positive effects open the [individual] mind to the beautiful and sublime, the negative effects of being alone may render the mind more susceptible to fears and fantasies” (24).

Subjecthood and who is considered an individual with a mind worthy of creative potential is often not extended to BIPOC in this period – the idea of the individual is instead amalgamated and generalized, turned into legend and spectacle.

Texts to teach:

1. George Gordon, Lord Byron: *Manfred* (1817)
2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “This Lime-tree Bower my Prison” (1797), and “The Eolian Harp” (1795)
3. Percy Bysshe Shelley: "Stanzas Written in Dejection" (1818)
4. William Earle, Jr.: *Obi* (1800)

Intersectionality

see also: ethnicity, race

An analytical framework for understanding how various aspects of a person’s many social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality constitutes an acknowledgement that all oppression is linked; everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc. (25).

Texts to teach:

1. Phillis Wheatley-Peters: *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773)
2. Mary Prince: *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831)
3. Kimberlé Crenshaw: *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* (2014)
4. bell hooks: *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000)

Orientalism

see also: fetishization, intersectionality, tokenism

Deriving from the work of Edward Said, the attitude that describes how social, economic, and cultural practices of the ruling Arab elites in the Middle East indicate that they have internalized a romanticized version of Arab Culture created by French, British and later, American Orientalists. While often used to refer to the aestheticization of the East by the West, Said’s definition centers even internalized racism at play in understanding Eastern culture.

Orientalism derives from imperialism and colonialism. In literature and art, it was particularly inspired by the translation into English of The Arabian Nights (1706) and became increasingly prominent during years accompanied by global maritime development throughout the East (26).

Hegel argued that Islamic and Chinese art introduced into European culture a new dimension of the sublime, but the sublimity of Orientalism derived from its extreme religious and cultural difference (27).

Orientalist works thus have numerous links to the Gothic: the medieval setting of the well-known Gothic tale could be replaced with exotic Eastern garb and trappings to similar effect. William Beckford’s originality in a text like *Vathek* lay in combining the popular Oriental elements with the Gothic narrative. This was one more form of popular entertainment defined by the exotic and erotic (26).

Texts to teach:

1. The Turkish letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
2. William Beckford: *Vathek* (1786)
3. Robert Southey: *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801)
4. Matthew Lewis: *Timour the Tartar* (1811) and *The Monk* (1796)

Primitive

see also: barbarism, indigenous, race, savage

Most appearances of the term “primitive” in the late 17th and 18th centuries concern religion, whereas in later periods they tend to concern culture or society more broadly (28).

Johnson defines the former instance as merely “ancient; original; established from the beginning,” such as in linguistic or etymological contexts. The latter he defines as “simple and pure” in the most positive sense (29).

Like “barbaric,” the flexibility of this term has now been mostly lost because of its derogatory, xenophobic connotations – as meaning barbaric or uncivilized – that appear more in the 19th and 20th centuries (30).

Race

see also: ethnicity, institutional racism

A power construct of collected or merged difference that lives socially (31).

The Enlightenment established the modern discourse on race; the consensus until now has been that racial ideology can be traced back to categories of thought invented by the Enlightenment, that the concepts of reason, universalism, and the scientific methods of observation and categorization bear the imprint of racial thought, for it is through such categories that a racial typology has become manifest (32). However, Kenan Malik importantly notes that this is a historical development and not one inherent to epistemology/scientific thinking. Race is not a biological category, but a social and cultural one, the perception of which can shift in context.

A biological antiracist is one that expresses the idea that the races are meaningfully the same in their biology and there are no genetic racial differences (33).

Rights

see also: abolition, emancipation, individualism, slavery, subject

The standard of permitted and forbidden action within a particular sphere, a law or rule; something proper for, or incumbent on, a person to do / one's duty; that which is consonant with justice, goodness, or reason, something morally or socially correct, just, or honorable (34) often established through text (rights||writes).

Wrongs that needed to be eliminated and rights that needed to be enforced were everywhere among the underprivileged population: voting rights, labor rights, women’s rights, educational rights. In *The Rights of Man* (1791), Thomas Paine argued that human rights originate in nature and that it is the role of government to protect those rights (35).

Figures of the period like William Godwin, William Blake, Thomas Hardy, John Thelwell, Horne Tooke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Percy Bysshe Shelley were primarily concerned with liberty, reform, wealth and class and gender disparity as responses from French Revolution, though notably there was little invocation of abolition efforts. Writers like Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano – Sons of Africa – distributed pamphlets, letters, treatises, with Cugoano (unlike many other abolitionists of the late 18th century) calling for the outright abolition of chattel slavery.

Texts to teach:

1. Olaudah Equiano: *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789)
2. Ottobah Cugoano: *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1791)
3. Mary Prince: *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831)

Savage\*

see also: barbarism, indigenous, primitive

From Johnson, originally “wild, uncultivated,” referring to animals or even plants. But like the term “barbaric” or “primitive,” this original and literal definition of this term is now overshadowed by its more negative connotations. The term emerged in 18th century Britain with its own meaning and was rarely used in a flattering way – Johnson originally used “savage” to translate the Latin “crudelis animus” (36).

Edmund Burke uses this word to describe female Native Americans, though mostly it refers to men (36). Johnson elaborates that a savage is, “a man untaught and uncivilized; a barbarian” (37).

Many 18th century writers apply this term to groups of human beings living outside the bounds of European capitals with obvious bigotry (38) or opposed to civilization, as was the case of Richard Bentley in Johnson: “Those savages were not then, what civilized mankind is now; but without mutual society, without arms of offense, without houses or fortifications, an obvious exposed prey to the ravage of devouring beasts” (38).

However, not all depictions were hostile; the trope of the “noble savage” begins with John Dryden and Daniel Defoe. As DeMaria notes, generating admirable social feelings “opens up new possibilities for evaluating indigenous peoples,” but this is done by tokenizing them or making them exceptional in subverting racist expectations; this is not empowering or the foundation of any kind of equity.

This word is considered a slur used to describe indigenous peoples as detrimental as the n-word is to Black communities. Avoid using it when you can, and consider censoring it in your materials.

Texts for reference:

1. Robbie Richardson: *The Savage and the Modern Self* (2018)

Slavery

see also: abolition, emancipation, individualism, rights, subject

The condition of being a slave, servitude, bondage; a state of subjection or subordination (39). A slave is one who is considered the property of, and entirely subject to, another person, whether by capture, purchase, or birth; a servant completely divested of freedom and personal rights (39).

An estimated 1400 Black people were held in servitude in England until 1772 (40). The system of slavery was justified by claims that the Africans were sub-human, uneducable, incapable of functioning on their own (40).

Throughout the Romantic period we find literal and figurative uses of this term, and it is rare to see discussions of the literal usage in the 18th century (41). Slavery was often used as a comparison to politics under tyranny, but figurative descriptions of marriage were much closer to the term’s original meaning than figurative political descriptions (42).

In fact, Johnson highlights a basic contradiction between the rhetoric and the practice of American freedom fighters in his *Works*: “We are told, that the subjection of Americans may tend to the diminution of our own liberties: an event, which none but very perspicacious politicians are able to foresee. If slavery be thus fatally contagious, how is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?” (X.454). Johnson does this same thing elsewhere in his own work.

Literal and first-hand representations of slavery in the period, rare as they are, include Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* in 1789 and Mary Prince’s *History* in 1831.

Subject

see also: individualism, rights

A vexed term, "subject" can mean a person who is under the control of another or owes obedience to another, bound by an obligation of allegiance, service, or tribute, and also an active agent (43). In his entry for “Society,” DeMaria notes that Edmund Burke contends with this subject/subjection dialectic in the period: “Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection” (44).

Samuel Coleridge sees Romanticism as a revolutionary art movement shifting impetus/attention from the objective to the subjective when he describes art as a primarily subjective experience in the Biographia Literaria (45). The Romantic period shone a light on who could be considered a subject unto themselves and who was a subject under the control of others – who could experience independent, subjective experience? Often, the answer proved to be exclusionary, even if not stated outright.

Tokenism

see also: institutional racism, fetishization, Orientalism, white supremacy

The practice or policy of making merely a token effort or granting only minimal or symbolic concessions to minority or suppressed groups (46), which becomes especially apparent in recruiting people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of equality. American Civil Rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. states in *Why We Can’t Wait* (1964) that tokenism only constitutes a minimal acceptance of Black people to mainstream society, as it is not equality for all but rather a selected few. He decries it as an act of deception offering false pride without real power that only serves to discourage protest, often linked with internalized racism.

White privilege

see also: institutional racism, intersectionality, white supremacy

The societal privilege that benefits white people over non-white people, particularly if both are otherwise under the same social, political, or economic circumstances. Canon is founded on forms of privilege. To be informed and responsible scholars of a historical period, we must acknowledge the privilege inherent to canonical writers (especially when it comes to their more radical work and/or depictions of allyship). We can never take an uncritical view of their work and ours, even if we deeply respect and value that work.

White supremacy

see also: institutional racism, white privilege

A term proposed as a clearer alternative to “racism,” as it refers to the historically-based, institutionally-perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege (47).

White supremacy must be understood as a system rather than as a problem of personal prejudice and individual acts of discrimination (47). Only then may it be interrogated and dismantled.

Texts to reference:

1. Carol Anderson: White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide (2016)

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