Michael Eugene Cantrall's Poetry Lexicon

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Literary & Archaic Words

with a Companion List of Romantic & Victorian Idioms

A working reference for drafting verse in the manner of
Keats, Coleridge, Shelley, Tighe, and Hood

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Notes on Use

Abbreviations. n. noun · v. verb · adj. adjective · adv. adverb · prep. preposition · conj. conjunction · pron. pronoun · interj. interjection · contr. contraction.

Alphabetizing. Elided forms beginning with an apostrophe (’tis, ’neath, ’twixt) are filed under their first letter, ignoring the apostrophe.

Elision for meter. Romantic printers marked a silent past-tense ending with an apostrophe (charm’d, kiss’d, o’er-wrought) and left it unmarked, or set it with a grave accent, when the syllable was voiced (blessèd, wingèd). Common syllable-saving forms: o’er, e’er, ne’er, e’en, heav’n, pow’r, flow’r, ’gainst, ’mid, ’neath, ’scape, ope.

Heraldic colors. argent (silver), or (gold), gules (red), azure (blue), vert (green), sable (black), purpure (purple). Keats’s stained-glass "gules" in The Eve of St. Agnes is the classic poetic borrowing.

Second-Person Forms

	Singular (intimate)	Plural / formal
Subject	thou	ye / you
Object	thee	you
Possessive	thy (thine before a vowel)	your
Pronoun	thine	yours

Verb Endings with Thou and He

Present	Thou …	He / she …
be	art	is
have	hast	hath
do	dost (doest, as main verb)	doth (doeth)
can / will / shall	canst / wilt / shalt	can / will / shall
love (regular)	lovest	loveth / loves
Past: were / had / did	wert, wast / hadst / didst	was / had / did

The -eth ending was already literary by the Romantic period; poets used it for solemnity or archaic color, and ordinary "-s" elsewhere.

Part I: Glossary of Literary & Archaic Words

621 entries, A to Z.

A

abashed *adj.* Ashamed; disconcerted.
abed *adv.* In bed; gone to bed.
abide *v.* To dwell or remain; to wait for; to endure or tolerate. Past: abode.
abroad *adv.* Out of doors; astir; widely scattered.
adamant *n., adj.* An imagined stone of impenetrable hardness; unyielding.
adieu *interj., n.* Farewell; a leave-taking.
adown *adv., prep.* Down; downward.
aeolian *adj.* Of the wind; sounding as an Aeolian harp stirred by the breeze.
aery, eyrie *n.* The lofty nest of a bird of prey.
afar *adv.* At or to a great distance.
affright *v., n.* To frighten; sudden terror.
afore *adv., prep.* Before; earlier.
agone *adv.* Ago; past.
ague *n.* A fever marked by fits of shivering; any shuddering chill.
alabaster *n., adj.* A translucent white stone; smooth and white like it.
alack *interj.* An expression of sorrow or regret.
alas *interj.* An expression of grief, pity, or concern.
albeit *conj.* Although; even though.
alway *adv.* Always.
amain *adv.* With full force; at full speed; suddenly.
amaranth *n.* An imagined flower that never fades; an emblem of immortality.
amaranthine *adj.* Unfading; undying; of a deep purple-red.
ambient *adj.* Surrounding; encircling.
ambrosial *adj.* Divinely fragrant or delicious; worthy of the gods.
amid, amidst *prep.* In the middle of; among.
an *conj.* If ("an it please you").
anchorite *n.* A religious recluse; a hermit.
anear *adv., prep.* Near; nearly.
anent *prep.* Concerning; about.
anon *adv.* Soon; presently; at once. "Ever and anon": now and then.
apace *adv.* Swiftly; at a quick pace.
argent *n., adj.* Silver; silvery white (heraldic and poetic).
argosy *n.* A large merchant ship; a rich fleet.
aright *adv.* Rightly; correctly.
arras *n.* A rich tapestry hanging on a wall, often concealing an alcove.

asphodel *n.* The immortal flower said to cover the Elysian fields.
assay *v., n.* To try or attempt; to test; a trial.
assuage *v.* To soothe; to lessen.
astir *adv., adj.* In motion; out of bed.
athwart *prep., adv.* Across; from side to side; in opposition to; perversely.
atween *prep.* Between.
aught *n.* Anything at all ("for aught I know").
aureate *adj.* Golden; ornate.
aureole *n.* A halo; a radiance.
avaunt *interj.* Begone! Away!
aweary *adj.* Weary; tired.
aye *adv.* Ever; always ("for aye"). Also (ay) yes.
azure *n., adj.* Sky-blue; the clear sky; blue (heraldic).

B

bale *n.* Evil, harm, woe.
balefire *n.* A bonfire; a signal or funeral fire.
baleful *adj.* Deadly; menacing; full of woe.
balm *n.* A fragrant ointment; anything that soothes or heals.
balmy *adj.* Fragrant; soothing; mild.
bane *n.* A cause of ruin; poison; death.
bard *n.* A poet; a minstrel-singer.
basilisk *n.* A fabled serpent whose glance killed.
beadsman *n.* One paid or bound to pray for others, telling beads.
beaker *n.* A large drinking cup.
beck *n.* A beckoning gesture; a brook.
bedew *v.* To wet as with dew or tears.
bedight *adj.* Adorned; arrayed.
bedizen *v.* To dress gaudily.
bedlam *n.* A madhouse; uproar.
befall *v.* To happen (to). Past: befell.
befool *v.* To deceive; to make a fool of.
beget *v.* To father; to cause.
begone *interj.* Go away!
beguile *v.* To charm; to deceive; to pass (time) pleasantly.
behest *n.* A command; an urgent request.
behight *v., adj.* To promise; called.
behold *v., interj.* To see; to look upon; Look!
behoove, behove *v.* To be fitting or necessary for ("it behoves us").
beldam, beldame *n.* An old woman; a hag; formerly a grandmother.

belike *adv.* Probably; perhaps.
benighted *adj.* Overtaken by night; in darkness; ignorant.
benison *n.* A blessing; a benediction.
bereave *v.* To deprive, especially by death. Past: bereft, bereaved.
beseech *v.* To implore; to entreat. Past: besought.
beseem *v.* To befit; to be suitable.
beshrew *v.* To curse ("beshrew me").
besom *n.* A broom of twigs.
bestrew *v.* To scatter over; to strew about.
bethink *v.* To call to mind; to consider. Past: bethought.
betide *v.* To happen; to befall ("woe betide").
betimes *adv.* Early; in good time; soon.
betoken *v.* To signify; to foreshadow.
bewray *v.* To reveal; to betray unintentionally.
bide *v.* To wait; to remain; to endure ("bide your time").
bier *n.* A stand on which a corpse or coffin is laid.
billow *n., v.* A great wave; to swell or surge.
bird-lime *n.* A sticky substance spread to snare birds.
blandishment *n.* A flattering or coaxing word or act.
blazon *v., n.* To proclaim; to emblazon; a coat of arms.
blithe *adj.* Joyous; carefree; light-hearted.
bodeful *adj.* Ominous.
bodkin *n.* A small dagger; a blunt needle or hairpin.
bole *n.* A tree trunk.
bosky *adj.* Bushy; covered with thickets.
bourn, bourne *n.* A boundary; a goal or destination; a small stream.
bower *n.* A shady, leafy shelter; an arbor; a lady's private chamber.
brake *n.* A thicket; a clump of bracken or brush.
brand *n.* A sword; a burning torch.
brazen *adj.* Of brass; shameless.
brede *n.* Embroidery; braid; interwoven design.
brindled *adj.* Streaked; tabby.
brine *n.* The sea; salt water; tears.
brook *n., v.* A small stream; to tolerate ("brook no delay").
burgeon *v.* To bud; to sprout; to flourish.
buskin *n.* A half-boot; an emblem of tragic drama.
by-and-by *adv., n.* Soon; presently; the future.

C

caitiff *n., adj.* A base wretch; a coward; despicable.

canst *v.* Can (with "thou").
caparisoned *adj.* Richly harnessed (of a horse); decked out.
carcanet *n.* A jeweled collar or necklace.
casement *n.* A window opening on hinges.
cate, cates *n.* Delicacies; dainty foods.
censer *n.* A vessel in which incense is burned.
cerement *n.* A waxed cloth for wrapping the dead; grave clothes.
cerulean *adj.* Deep sky-blue.
chalice *n.* A cup or goblet, especially a sacred one.
champaign *n.* Open, level country.
chantry *n.* A chapel endowed for masses for the dead.
chapless *adj.* Without a lower jaw (of a skull).
chaplet *n.* A wreath or garland for the head; a string of beads.
charm'd *adj.* Enchanted; held as by a spell. (Elided form of "charmed.")
charnel *n., adj.* A house for the bones of the dead; deathly, sepulchral.
chary *adj.* Cautious; wary; sparing.
chine *n.* A backbone; a ridge.
chirurgeon *n.* A surgeon.
churl *n.* A rude, low-bred person; a peasant; a miser.
cincture *n.* A girdle or belt; an encircling band.
citadel *n.* A fortress.
clarion *n., adj.* A shrill war-trumpet; clear and ringing.
clime *n.* A region; a climate; a land.
clomb *v.* Climbed (archaic past tense).
cloy *v.* To weary with excess sweetness or richness.
cockcrow *n.* Dawn; the time when cocks crow.
coign *n.* A projecting corner ("coign of vantage").
coil *n.* Turmoil; tumult; fuss ("this mortal coil").
comely *adj.* Pleasing in appearance; becoming.
compeer *n.* An equal; a companion.
copse *n.* A small thicket of trees.
coronach *n.* A Highland or Irish funeral dirge.
coronal *n.* A circlet or garland for the head.
corse *n.* A corpse; a body.
coverlet *n.* A bedspread.
coverture *n.* Shelter; covering.
coxcomb *n.* A vain, foolish fop.
coy *adj.* Shy; modest; reluctant to commit.
crescent *adj.* Growing; waxing (of the moon).
cruse *n.* A small earthen jar.

cumber *v., n.* To burden or hinder; a hindrance.
cymar *n.* A light, loose robe for women.
cynosure *n.* A center of attention; the pole star; a guide.

D

dale *n.* A valley.
dally *v.* To linger idly; to trifle; to flirt.
damask *n., adj.* A rich patterned fabric; the pink-red of the damask rose.
damosel *n.* A damsel.
damsel *n.* A young unmarried woman.
darkling *adv., adj.* In the dark; growing dark.
dearth *n.* Scarcity; famine.
deathless *adj.* Immortal.
deem *v.* To judge; to think; to consider.
deliquium *n.* A swoon; a melting away.
dell *n.* A small wooded valley.
demesne *n.* An estate; a domain; a realm.
descant *n., v.* A melody or song; to comment at length.
diapason *n.* A rich swelling of harmony; the full range of sound.
diaper *v., n.* To ornament with a small repeating pattern; such a pattern.
dight *adj., v.* Dressed; adorned; to prepare or array.
dirge *n.* A lament for the dead.
disport *v., n.* To amuse oneself; play.
doff *v.* To take off (a hat or garment).
dolorous *adj.* Sorrowful; grievous.
dolour, dolor *n.* Grief; sorrow.
don *v.* To put on.
dost *v.* Do (with "thou").
dotard *n.* A feeble-minded old person.
doth *v.* Does (archaic third person).
doublet *n.* A close-fitting man's jacket.
dower *n., v.* An endowment; a natural gift; a widow's portion; to endow.
drear *adj.* Dreary; gloomy.
dreary *adj.* Gloomy; dismal; sad.
dryad *n.* A wood nymph.
dulcet *adj.* Sweet to the ear; melodious.
dun *adj.* Dull greyish-brown; dark.
durst *v.* Dared.
dusky *adj.* Dim; shadowy; dark-hued.

E

e'en *adv., n.* Even; evening.
e'er *adv.* Ever.
ebon *adj.* Black; made of ebony.
effulgence *n.* Radiance.
eftsoons *adv.* Soon afterward; forthwith.
eglantine *n.* The sweetbriar rose.
eld *n.* Old age; former times; antiquity.
eldritch *adj.* Weird; unearthly.
elfin *adj.* Fairy-like; elvish; small and delicate.
elysian *adj.* Blissful; heavenly; of Elysium.
embower *v.* To shelter in a bower.
emprise *n.* An adventurous enterprise.
empyrean *n., adj.* The highest heaven; celestial.
enow *adj., adv.* Enough.
ensanguined *adj.* Bloodstained; blood-red.
enthrall, enthral *v.* To captivate; to enslave.
environ *v.* To surround; to encircle.
ere *prep., conj.* Before ("ere long," "ere the dawn").
erelong *adv.* Before long; soon.
erewhile *adv.* A while ago; formerly.
errant *adj.* Wandering; straying.
erst, erstwhile *adv., adj.* Formerly; former.
espy *v.* To catch sight of.
ether *n.* The clear upper air; the heavens.
ethereal *adj.* Light, airy; heavenly; delicate.
evanescent *adj.* Vanishing; fleeting.
eve *n.* Evening; the day or night before a festival.
evensong *n.* Evening prayer; vespers.
ewer *n.* A wide-mouthed pitcher.

F

faery, faerie *n.* Fairyland; the fairy folk.
fain *adv., adj.* Gladly; willingly; eager ("I would fain").
fallow *adj.* Uncultivated (of land); pale brownish-yellow.
fane *n.* A temple; a shrine.
fardel *n.* A bundle; a burden.
fay *n.* A fairy.
fealty *n.* Loyalty; sworn allegiance.

fell *adj., n.* Fierce, cruel, deadly; a hill or moor; an animal's hide.
fen *n.* A marsh; low wetland.
fey *adj.* Fated to die; otherworldly.
fie *interj.* For shame!
fillet *n.* A headband; a ribbon for the hair.
firmament *n.* The vault of the sky.
flagon *n.* A large vessel for wine.
flambeau *n.* A flaming torch.
fleer *v.* To laugh mockingly.
fleet *adj., v.* Swift; to pass swiftly; to fade.
flout *v.* To mock; to scorn.
foison *n.* Plenty; abundance; harvest.
fond *adj.* Foolish; doting; affectionate.
forbear *v.* To refrain; to hold back. Past: forbore.
fordone *adj.* Exhausted; undone; ruined.
forfend *v.* To forbid; to avert ("heaven forfend").
forlorn *adj.* Abandoned; wretched; hopeless.
forlorn hope *n.* A desperate venture; troops sent on one.
forsooth *adv.* In truth; indeed (often ironic).
forswear *v.* To renounce; to swear falsely.
fortnight *n.* Two weeks.
fount *n.* A spring; a fountain; a source.
fray *n.* A battle; a skirmish; a brawl.
fretted *adj.* Ornamented with interlacing pattern (of a ceiling or vault).
frore *adj.* Frozen; frosty.
froward *adj.* Contrary; perverse; disobedient.
fulgent *adj.* Shining brightly; radiant.
fulvous *adj.* Tawny.
fustian *n.* Coarse cloth; pompous, bombastic language.

G

gainsay *v.* To deny; to contradict.
'gainst *prep.* Against.
gambol *v., n.* To leap playfully; a frolic.
garner *n., v.* A granary; to gather and store.
garth *n.* A yard or enclosed garden.
gaud *n.* A showy trinket; a bauble.
gentle *adj.* Noble; well-born; kind.
ghostly *adj.* Spiritual; ghost-like.
gibbous *adj.* More than half but less than fully illuminated (of the moon).

gird *v.* To encircle; to fasten with a belt; to prepare.
glade *n.* An open space in a forest.
glamour *n.* A magic spell; enchantment.
glebe *n.* Soil; a field; church land.
gleed, glede *n.* A glowing coal; an ember.
glim *n.* A light; a candle.
glister *v.* To glitter.
gloaming *n.* Twilight; dusk.
gloze *v.* To flatter; to gloss over.
gonfalon *n.* A banner hanging from a crossbar.
goodly *adj.* Handsome; fine; considerable.
gorse *n.* Furze; a spiny shrub with yellow flowers.
gossamer *n., adj.* Fine cobweb; delicate, filmy.
gramarye *n.* Magic; occult learning.
greensward *n.* Grassy turf.
grisly *adj.* Horrible; gruesome.
grot *n.* A grotto; a cave.
guerdon *n.* A reward; recompense.
guise *n.* Manner; appearance; disguise.
gules *n., adj.* Red (heraldic); red light, as through stained glass.
gyve *n.* A shackle; a fetter.

H

halcyon *adj., n.* Calm; peaceful; the kingfisher, fabled to calm the sea.
hale *adj., v.* Healthy, robust; to drag or haul.
halidom *n.* Something holy; a sanctuary ("by my halidom").
hallowed *adj.* Holy; consecrated.
hap *n., v.* Chance; luck; to happen.
hapless *adj.* Unlucky; unfortunate.
haply *adv.* Perhaps; by chance.
harbinger *n.* A forerunner; an omen.
hark *v.* Listen! Hear!
harrow *v.* To distress; to lacerate the feelings.
harrowing *adj.* Deeply distressing.
hast *v.* Have (with "thou").
hath *v.* Has.
haunt *n.* A frequented place.
heath *n.* Open, uncultivated land covered with heather and low shrubs.
heaven's, heav'n *n.* Heaven (the elided "heav'n" counts as one syllable).
heigh-ho *interj.* A sigh of weariness, boredom, or disappointment.

helm *n.* A helmet; a ship's tiller; command.
hence *adv.* From here; from now; therefore.
henceforth *adv.* From this time on.
hermitage *n.* A recluse's dwelling.
hest *n.* A command; a behest.
hie *v.* To hasten; to go quickly ("hie thee hence").
hight *adj.* Called; named.
hind *n.* A female deer; a farm laborer or peasant.
hither *adv.* To this place.
hoar *adj.* Grey-white with age or frost.
hoarfrost *n.* White frost.
hoary *adj.* White or grey with age; ancient.
holt *n.* A wood; a copse; a wooded hill.
howbeit *adv., conj.* Nevertheless; although.
hyacinthine *adj.* Curling like hyacinth petals (of hair); hyacinth-blue.
hymeneal *adj.* Of marriage.

I

ichor *n.* The ethereal fluid flowing in the veins of the gods.
ignis fatuus *n.* Will-o'-the-wisp; a deluding hope.
illume *v.* To illuminate.
imbrue *v.* To stain or drench (especially with blood).
immure *v.* To wall in; to imprison.
impearl *v.* To form into pearl-like drops; to adorn as with pearls.
inane *n.* The void; empty space.
incarnadine *adj., v.* Crimson; flesh-colored; to redden.
incense-breathing *adj.* Fragrant as incense.
ingle *n.* A fireplace; a hearth fire.
inly *adv.* Inwardly; deeply.
inurn *v.* To place in an urn; to bury.
iwis, ywis *adv.* Certainly; indeed.

J

jacinth *n.* A reddish-orange gem.
jasper *n.* An opaque, colored gemstone.
jocund *adj.* Merry; cheerful.

K

ken *n., v.* Range of sight or knowledge; to know.
kine *n.* Cattle; cows.

kirtle *n.* A gown or skirt.
knell *n., v.* The tolling of a bell for death; to toll.

L

lackaday *interj.* Alas.
lade *v.* To load. Past participle: laden.
lambent *adj.* Softly flickering or glowing; lightly brilliant.
lambkin *n.* A little lamb.
languor *n.* Lassitude; dreamy indolence.
lattice *n.* A window of crossed strips.
lave *v.* To wash; to bathe; to flow along.
lay *n.* A song; a ballad; a narrative poem.
lazar *n.* A diseased beggar; a leper.
lea *n.* A meadow; grassland.
leal *adj.* Loyal; true.
lees *n.* Dregs; sediment.
leman *n.* A lover; a sweetheart.
lethe *n.* Forgetfulness; the river of oblivion in Hades.
levin *n.* Lightning.
lief *adv.* Willingly; gladly ("I had as lief").
liege *n., adj.* A feudal lord; loyal.
lily-white *adj.* Pure white.
limn *v.* To paint; to depict.
lissome *adj.* Supple; lithe.
list *v.* To wish or choose; to listen.
lo *interj.* Look! Behold!
lorn *adj.* Forsaken; desolate.
lour, lower *v.* To frown; to look dark and threatening.
lovelorn *adj.* Pining for love.
lucent *adj.* Shining; translucent.
lucid *adj.* Bright; clear; translucent.
lustral *adj.* Purifying.
lustre *n.* Sheen; radiance.
lute *n.* A stringed instrument with a rounded back.
lyre *n.* A harp-like instrument; the emblem of lyric poetry.

M

madrigal *n.* A short love poem or part-song.
magian *adj.* Of the Magi; magical.
main *n.* The open sea; strength ("with might and main").

mantle *n., v.* A cloak; to cover; to blush or flush.
marge *n.* A margin; an edge or shore.
marry *interj.* Indeed! (from "by Mary").
mart *n.* A market.
maugre *prep.* In spite of.
mavis *n.* The song thrush.
mayhap *adv.* Perhaps.
mead *n.* A meadow; a drink of fermented honey.
meed *n.* A reward; a deserved portion.
meet *adj.* Fitting; proper.
melancholy *n., adj.* Pensive sadness; sad.
mere *n.* A lake or pool.
methinks *v.* It seems to me. Past: methought.
mew *v.* To confine; to shut up.
mickle *adj., n.* Much; great.
'mid, 'midst *prep.* Amid; amidst.
mien *n.* Bearing; manner; appearance.
minever, miniver *n.* White fur used in ceremonial robes.
minion *n.* A darling; a favorite; a servile follower.
minstrel *n.* A medieval singer or poet.
moil *v.* To toil; to churn.
morion *n.* A crested helmet.
morn *n.* Morning.
morrow *n.* The next day; morning ("good morrow").
mote *n.* A speck of dust.
mould, mold *n.* Earth, especially of the grave.
murk *n.* Darkness; gloom.
murmurous *adj.* Full of murmurs.
myrtle *n.* An evergreen shrub sacred to Venus.

N

naiad *n.* A water nymph.
nathless, natheless *adv.* Nevertheless.
nay *adv.* No; not only so, but.
ne'er *adv.* Never.
'neath *prep.* Beneath.
nectarous *adj.* Sweet as nectar.
nepenthe *n.* A drug of forgetfulness; anything that eases sorrow.
nigh *adv., adj.* Near; nearly.
nightshade *n.* A poisonous plant.

nimbus *n.* A halo; a radiant cloud.
noisome *adj.* Offensive; noxious.
nonce *n.* The present occasion ("for the nonce").
nought, naught *n.* Nothing.
nurseling *n.* An infant; a nursling.

O

o'er *prep., adv.* Over.
oblivion *n.* Forgetfulness; the state of being forgotten.
oft *adv.* Often.
oftentimes *adv.* Often.
olden *adj.* Of old; ancient.
ope *v., adj.* To open; open.
orb *n.* A sphere; a heavenly body; the eye.
oriel *n.* A projecting bay window.
orient *adj.* Lustrous (of pearls); eastern; rising.
orison *n.* A prayer.
osier *n.* A willow; willow wands for basketry.
ousel, ouzel *n.* The blackbird.

P

paean *n.* A song of praise or triumph.
palfrey *n.* A gentle saddle-horse.
pall *n., v.* A cloth spread over a coffin; to grow wearisome.
palmer *n.* A pilgrim.
palsied *adj.* Paralyzed; trembling.
panoply *n.* A full suit of armor; a splendid array.
paramour *n.* A lover.
pard *n.* A leopard.
parlous *adj.* Perilous; dangerous.
passing *adv.* Exceedingly ("passing fair").
pellucid *adj.* Transparent; clear.
penitent *n., adj.* One who repents; repentant.
peradventure *adv.* Perhaps.
perchance *adv.* Perhaps; by chance.
perforce *adv.* Of necessity.
philomel *n.* The nightingale.
pinion *n., v.* A wing; to bind the arms.
plaint *n.* A lament; a complaint.
plash *n., v.* A splash; a puddle; to splash gently.

plaudit *n.* Applause; praise.
pleached *adj.* Interwoven (of branches).
plenteous *adj.* Abundant.
plumed *adj.* Feathered.
poesy *n.* Poetry; the art of poetry.
portal *n.* A grand door or gate.
portent *n.* An omen.
prate *v.* To chatter.
prithee *interj.* I pray thee; please.
puissant *adj.* Powerful; mighty.
purfled *adj.* Embroidered or decorated along the edge.

Q

quaff *v.* To drink deeply.
quail *v.* To shrink back in fear.
quietude *n.* Tranquility.
quire *n.* A choir.
quoth *v.* Said.

R

rack *n.* Wind-driven cloud; destruction.
raiment *n.* Clothing.
rampire *n.* A rampart.
rapine *n.* Plunder; violent seizure.
rathe *adj.* Early; blooming early ("the rathe primrose").
ravin *n.* Plunder; prey.
reck *v.* To care; to heed.
recreant *n., adj.* A coward; a traitor; unfaithful.
rede *n., v.* Counsel; advice; to advise or interpret.
requite *v.* To repay; to return in kind.
rill *n.* A small stream.
rime *n.* Hoarfrost; also, rhyme.
riven *adj.* Torn apart; split.
rood *n.* The cross; a crucifix.
roseate *adj.* Rosy.
roundelay *n.* A song with a refrain.
rout *n.* A disorderly crowd; a fashionable party; a defeat.
rue *v., n.* To regret; regret; the herb of grace.
russet *adj., n.* Reddish-brown; coarse homespun cloth.
ruth *n.* Pity; compassion.

S

sable *adj., n.* Black (heraldic); mourning.
salver *n.* A tray.
samite *n.* A heavy silk fabric, often interwoven with gold.
sapphirine *adj.* Sapphire-blue.
sate *v.* Sat; also, to satiate.
'scape *v.* To escape.
scathe *n., v.* Harm; injury; to harm.
scrip *n.* A small bag carried by a pilgrim or shepherd.
scrivener *n.* A scribe.
sedge *n.* A coarse grasslike marsh plant.
sennight *n.* A week.
sepulchre *n.* A tomb.
seraph *n.* An angel of the highest order.
sere, sear *adj.* Dry; withered.
shade *n.* A ghost; a spirit of the dead.
shallop *n.* A light open boat.
sheen *n.* Brightness; shimmer.
shrive *v.* To hear confession and absolve. Past: shrove, shriven.
silvan *adj.* Sylvan; of the woods.
sith *conj.* Since.
slake *v.* To quench; to satisfy.
slumberous *adj.* Sleepy; drowsy.
somnolent *adj.* Sleepy.
sooth *n., adj.* Truth ("in sooth"); true.
sore *adv.* Grievously; greatly ("sore afraid").
sough *n., v.* A soft murmuring of wind; to sigh.
spangled *adj.* Glittering; studded with points of light.
sprite *n.* A spirit; an elf.
spume *n.* Foam; froth.
starveling *n., adj.* A starving creature; thin, famished.
stilly *adj., adv.* Still; quiet; quietly.
strand *n.* A shore; a beach.
stripling *n.* A youth.
strown *adj.* Strewn.
supernal *adj.* Heavenly; celestial.
susurrus *n.* A whispering or rustling.
swain *n.* A country youth; a lover.
sward *n.* Grassy turf.

swoon *v., n.* To faint; a faint.
sylvan *adj.* Of the woods; wooded.

T

tabard *n.* A herald's tunic.
tabor *n.* A small drum.
taper *n.* A slender candle.
tapestried *adj.* Hung with tapestries.
tarn *n.* A small mountain lake.
tarry *v.* To linger; to delay.
teen *n.* Grief; vexation.
tenebrous *adj.* Dark; gloomy.
thee *pron.* You (object, singular).
thence *adv.* From that place; from that time.
thew *n.* Muscle; sinew; strength.
thine *pron.* Yours (singular).
thither *adv.* To that place.
thou *pron.* You (subject, singular).
thrall *n.* A slave; bondage.
threnody *n.* A song of lamentation.
thrice *adv.* Three times.
thrid *v.* To thread.
throe *n.* A spasm of pain.
thy *pron.* Your (singular).
tilth *n.* Tilled land; cultivation.
tiring-room *n.* A dressing room.
'tis *contr.* It is.
tocsin *n.* An alarm bell.
trammel *n., v.* A hindrance; to entangle.
travail *n.* Painful toil; the labor of childbirth.
trencher *n.* A wooden platter.
tresses *n.* Long locks of hair.
troth *n.* Faith; a pledge ("plight one's troth").
trow *v.* To believe; to suppose.
trull *n.* A strumpet.
tumulus *n.* A burial mound.
turret *n.* A small tower.
twain *n.* Two.
'twas *contr.* It was.
'twere *contr.* It were; it would be.

’twill *contr.* It will.
’twixt *prep.* Between.
tyrian *adj.* Purple or crimson (of Tyrian dye).

U

umbrage *n.* Shade; offense.
unwept *adj.* Unmourned.
unwonted *adj.* Unusual.
upbraid *v.* To reproach.

V

vale *n.* A valley.
vassal *n.* A servant; a dependent.
vasty *adj.* Vast; immense.
vaunt *v., n.* To boast; a boast.
vaward *n.* The vanguard; the forefront.
verdant *adj.* Green with vegetation.
verdure *n.* Lush greenery.
vermeil *adj., n.* Vermilion; bright red.
vernal *adj.* Of spring.
vert *n., adj.* Green (heraldic).
vesper *n.* The evening star; evening prayer.
viand *n.* An item of food.
votary *n.* A devotee.
vulpine *adj.* Fox-like; cunning.

W

wain *n.* A wagon. "Charles’s Wain": the Big Dipper.
wan *adj.* Pale; sickly; faint.
wanton *adj.* Playful; unrestrained; capricious.
wassail *n.* A festive toast; revelry.
wassailer *n.* A reveler.
weal *n.* Welfare; prosperity.
weeds *n.* Garments, especially mourning clothes ("widow’s weeds").
ween *v.* To think; to suppose.
weird *n., adj.* Fate; destiny; uncanny.
welkin *n.* The sky; the heavens.
well-a-day *interj.* Alas.
wend *v.* To go; to travel.
whelm *v.* To engulf; to overwhelm.

whence *adv.* From where.
wherefore *adv.* Why; for what reason.
whilom *adv., adj.* Formerly; once; former.
whilst *conj.* While.
whit *n.* The least bit ("not a whit").
wight *n.* A creature; a person.
wildered *adj.* Bewildered; lost.
wildwood *n.* Uncultivated forest.
wimple *n.* A veil covering the head and neck.
windflower *n.* The anemone.
winsome *adj.* Charming.
wist *v.* Knew.
withal *adv.* Besides; also; nevertheless.
woebegone *adj.* Sorrowful in appearance.
wold *n.* An upland; open, rolling country.
wont *n., adj.* Custom; accustomed ("as was his wont").
wormy *adj.* Infested with worms (of the grave).
wot *v.* Know; knows.
wrack *n.* A wreck; ruin.
wraith *n.* A ghost; an apparition.
writhen *adj.* Twisted.
wroth *adj.* Angry.

Y

yclept *adj.* Named; called.
ye *pron.* You (plural subject).
yea *adv.* Yes; indeed.
yeoman *n.* A farmer who owns his land; an attendant.
yesteryear *n.* Last year; time gone by.
yon, yonder *adj., adv.* That over there.
yore *n.* Long ago ("of yore").

Z

zephyr *n.* The west wind; a gentle breeze.
zone *n.* A girdle or belt.

Part II: Idioms of the Romantic & Victorian Eras

Off-the-cuff exclamations, oaths, and turns of phrase heard in British and early American speech, roughly 1780 to 1900. The grey note gives region and register; "archaic" marks expressions that were already old-fashioned or deliberately antique by the Romantic period, useful for period color or comic effect.

Exclamations of Surprise and Wonder

Gracious me! Mild surprise or dismay. [Brit. & Am.; genteel, often female speech.]

Goodness gracious! Surprise or alarm. [Brit. & Am.; polite.]

Good gracious! Surprise, sometimes indignation. [Brit. & Am.]

Bless my soul! Astonishment, often kindly. [Brit.; older gentlemen, clergy.]

Bless me! Surprise; a softened oath. [Brit. & Am.]

Mercy me! / Mercy on us! Surprise or alarm; a plea for mercy. [Brit. & Am.; domestic, rural.]

Good heavens! Surprise or shock. [Brit. & Am.; respectable.]

Heavens above! Strong surprise. [Brit.]

Heaven and earth! Amazement; something enormous has happened. [Brit.]

Well, I never! Astonishment (short for "I never heard / saw the like"). [Brit. & Am.; colloquial.]

I never did! Same as above; incredulity. [Brit.; colloquial.]

Well, I declare! Surprise; mild protest. [Esp. American South; also Brit.]

Upon my word! Surprise or indignation; an assurance. [Brit. & Am.; polite.]

'Pon my word / 'Pon my soul! Clipped forms of the above. [Brit.; gentlemanly, sometimes comic.]

Upon my soul! Earnest surprise or assurance. [Brit.]

Lawks! / Lawk-a-mercy! / Lawk-a-mussy! "Lord!" softened; surprise or dismay. [Brit.; servants, rustic speech.]

Lor'! / Lor' bless you! "Lord!"; surprise or fond dismissal. [Brit.; working-class London.]

La! / La, sir! Affected surprise or coyness. [Brit.; fashionable ladies, late 18th c. to Regency.]

O my stars! / My stars! Surprise; invokes fortune. [Brit. & Am.]

My stars and garters! Comic astonishment. [Brit.; Victorian.]

Great Scott! Strong surprise. [Brit. & Am.; mid-to-late Victorian.]

By Jove! Surprise or emphasis. [Brit.; gentlemanly, very common.]

By George! Surprise or determination. [Brit. & Am.]

By gum! Surprise; a minced oath. [N. England & Am.]

Jiminy! / Jiminy Cricket! Surprise. [Brit. & Am.; the latter chiefly American.]

Gee whillikins! Amazement. [American; mid-century on.]

Jumping Jehoshaphat! Comic exasperation or surprise. [American; later 19th c.]

Holy Moses! Surprise. [Brit. & Am.; later 19th c.]

Land sakes! / Land's sakes alive! Surprise ("Lord's sake"). [American; New England & rural.]

Sakes alive! Surprise or alarm. [American; rural.]

Heavens to Betsy! Surprise or dismay. [American; later 19th c.]

I swan! "I swear"; mild astonishment. [American; New England.]

I vow! Surprise; assurance. [Brit. & Am.; old-fashioned.]

As I live and breathe! Surprise, especially at seeing someone. [American & Brit.]

Can it be? Incredulous wonder. [General; poetic.]

Oaths, Assurances, and Asseverations

By all that's holy! A solemn oath or vehement protest. [Brit. & Am.; dramatic.]

By heaven! / By heavens! An earnest oath. [General; heightened speech.]

By my troth! "By my faith." [Archaic by 1800; poetic or comic.]

By my halidom! "By what I hold sacred." [Archaic; antiquarian, Walter Scott style.]

By my faith! / I' faith! "Truly." [Archaic; poetic, Shakespearean echo.]

By the powers! Emphatic oath. [Irish, Brit.]

By the Lord Harry! Comic oath. [Brit.; older usage.]

On my honour! A pledge of truth. [Brit. & Am.]

On my life! A strong assurance. [General.]

As I hope to be saved A solemn assurance. [Brit. & Am.; earnest.]

Depend upon it Be assured; mark it. [Brit.; Austen era through Victorian.]

I'll be bound I'm certain; I'll guarantee it. [Brit.]

I warrant you / I'll warrant I assure you. [Brit.; older, rustic.]

I dare say / I daresay Probably; I suppose. [Brit. & Am.]

Mark my words Remember what I say; it will prove true. [General.]

Sure as eggs is eggs Absolutely certain. [Brit.; colloquial.]

As sure as death Beyond doubt. [General.]

May I never stir from this spot "May I be struck still" if untrue. [Brit.; colloquial, dramatic.]

Strike me dead (or blind) I swear it's true. [Brit.; low or comic.]

Heaven be my witness A solemn appeal to heaven. [General; heightened.]

Upon my life and honour Double assurance. [Brit.]

Odds bodkins! / Ods fish! Old minced oaths ("God's body," "God's flesh"). [Archaic by 1800; comic or antiquarian.]

Zounds! / Gadzooks! / Egad! Old minced oaths ("God's wounds," etc.). [Archaic or comic by the Romantic era.]

Marry! "By Mary!"; indeed. [Archaic; Elizabethan echo.]

Dismay, Grief, and Lament

Alas the day! Woe for this day. [Archaic-poetic.]

Ah me! / O me! A sigh of sorrow. [Poetic; common in Romantic verse.]

Woe is me! I am miserable. [Archaic-poetic.]

Lackaday! / Well-a-day! Alas. [Archaic; rustic or poetic.]

Heigh-ho! A sigh of weariness or longing. [General; poetic and colloquial.]

Heaven help us! Dismay at a situation. [General.]

Heaven forfend! God forbid. [Brit.; formal or mock-solemn.]
God forbid! / Heaven forbid! Let it not happen. [General.]
Mercy on my soul! Alarm or penitence. [Brit. & Am.]
Would that it were otherwise A wish against the facts. [Literary.]
Would to God / Would to heaven I wish fervently. [Literary; scriptural echo.]
The pity of it! Lament at waste or sorrow. [Literary.]
Poor soul! / Poor creature! Sympathy. [General.]
Bless his (her) heart Affectionate sympathy. [Brit. & esp. American South.]
Gone to his reward / gone to glory Died. [Brit. & Am.; pious euphemism.]
Gone the way of all flesh Died. [Scriptural; general.]
Gathered to his fathers Died and buried with ancestors. [Scriptural; formal.]
Wear the willow To mourn a lost or unrequited love. [Brit.; traditional, poetic.]
Sick at heart Deeply grieved. [General.]

Vexation and Exasperation

Confound it! Damn it (softened). [Brit. & Am.]
Hang it! / Hang it all! Exasperation. [Brit.]
Dash it! / Dash it all! Mild exasperation. [Brit.; Victorian.]
Drat it! / Drat the thing! Annoyance ("God rot"). [Brit.]
Deuce take it! / What the deuce? Exasperation; "devil." [Brit.; gentlemanly.]
The devil take it! Strong annoyance. [General.]
Plague take it! / A plague on it! Curse on it. [Brit.; older.]
A pox on it! Curse on it. [Archaic; robust.]
Botheration! Mild annoyance. [Brit.; comic.]
Blast it! Annoyance. [Brit.]
Tarnation! Damnation (softened). [American.]
Dad-blamed / dad-burned Damned (softened). [American; rural.]
Out upon it! / Out upon you! An expression of reproach. [Archaic-literary.]
Fie! / Fie upon it! For shame! [Archaic-literary.]
For shame! Rebuke. [General.]
Go to! Come, come; reproach. [Archaic; Shakespearean.]
Avaunt! Begone! [Archaic-poetic.]

Scorn and Disbelief

Fiddlesticks! Nonsense! [Brit. & Am.]
Fiddle-de-dee! Nonsense! [Brit. & Am.]
Stuff and nonsense! Rubbish! [Brit.]
Balderdash! Senseless talk. [Brit.]
Humbug! Fraud; nonsense. [Brit. & Am.]

Pshaw! Contempt or impatience. [Brit. & Am.]
Tut! / Tut-tut! Disapproval. [General.]
All my eye (and Betty Martin)! Nonsense; humbug. [Brit.; colloquial.]
A fig for…! I don't care at all for… [Brit.; older.]
Not worth a straw (a fig, a button) Worthless. [General.]
I don't care a rush I don't care at all. [Brit.; older.]
Tell that to the marines! I don't believe you. [Brit.; naval origin.]
Go to grass! Go away; get lost. [American.]
Fudge! Nonsense! [Brit. & Am.]

Agreement, Approval, and Encouragement

To be sure Certainly; of course. [Brit. & Am.]
Just so Exactly. [Brit.]
Quite so Indeed. [Brit.]
Capital! Excellent! [Brit.; Victorian.]
Famous! Splendid! [Brit.]
Bravo! Well done! [General.]
Hear, hear! I agree. [Brit.; parliamentary.]
Bully for you! Good for you (sometimes ironic). [American; mid-century on.]
Well and good Fine; acceptable. [General.]
With all my heart Gladly; sincerely. [General; warm.]
Nothing loath Quite willing. [Brit.; literary.]
Fain would I I would gladly. [Archaic-poetic.]
God speed you / Godspeed Good fortune on your way. [General; farewell.]

Courtesy, Greeting, and Leave-Taking

Pray, sit down / Pray tell Please; do tell. [Brit. & Am.; polite.]
If you please Please; also ironic emphasis. [General.]
I beg your pardon Excuse me; what did you say? [General.]
Begging your pardon With respect (to a superior). [Brit.; servants, tradespeople.]
Saving your presence Pardon the coarse remark. [Brit.; apologetic, rustic.]
I make bold to say I venture to say. [Brit. & Am.; formal.]
Your servant / Your humble servant Polite greeting or sign-off; sometimes ironic dismissal. [Brit. & Am.]
I take my leave Farewell. [Formal.]
Fare thee well / Fare you well Farewell. [General; poetic.]
Good morrow Good morning; good day. [Archaic-poetic.]
God be with you / God bless you Farewell; a blessing. [General.]
How d'ye do? A formal greeting. [Brit.]

My dear fellow Friendly address. [Brit.; gentlemanly.]
Old fellow / old boy Familiar address between men. [Brit.; Victorian.]
Lord love you An affectionate exclamation. [Brit.; London colloquial.]
Thank my stars / thank my lucky stars I'm fortunate. [General.]

Feeling and Condition

In a brown study Absorbed in gloomy thought. [Brit.]
In high dudgeon In deep resentment. [Brit. & Am.]
Down in the mouth Dejected. [General.]
Out of sorts Unwell or ill-humored. [General.]
Blue-devilled / in the blue devils Melancholy; depressed. [Brit. & Am.; Romantic era.]
Low in spirits Melancholy. [General.]
All of a twitter / all of a flutter Nervously excited. [Brit.]
In fine fettle In good condition. [Brit.]
Fit as a fiddle In good health. [General.]
In a taking Agitated; upset. [Brit.]
In a pucker In a state of agitation. [Brit.; colloquial.]
Heart-whole Not in love; unattached. [Literary.]
Over head and ears (in love) Deeply in love. [Brit. & Am.]
Cock-a-hoop Exultant. [General.]
Half-seas over Drunk. [Brit.; nautical.]
In one's cups Drunk. [General.]
On tenterhooks In anxious suspense. [General.]

Circumstance and Comment

A pretty kettle of fish An awkward mess. [Brit.]
A fine how-d'ye-do An embarrassing situation. [Brit.]
At sixes and sevens In confusion. [Brit.]
Neither here nor there Irrelevant. [General.]
Not to be sneezed at Not to be dismissed lightly. [Brit. & Am.]
Hobson's choice No real choice. [Brit.]
By hook or by crook By any means. [General.]
Cheek by jowl Close together. [General.]
Hither and thither / hither and yon Here and there; to and fro. [General; poetic.]
Ever and anon Now and then. [Literary.]
Ere long Soon. [Literary.]
In the twinkling of an eye Instantly. [Scriptural; general.]
A month of Sundays A very long time. [Brit. & Am.]
Since Adam was a lad For ages. [Brit.]

Raining cats and dogs Raining heavily. [General.]
Done to a turn Cooked perfectly; just right. [General.]
In the suds In trouble. [Brit. & Am.; older colloquial.]
On the parish Living on public poor relief. [Brit.]
Beyond the pale Outside acceptable bounds. [General.]
Mind your p's and q's Be careful of manners. [General.]
Cut a dash Make a stylish show. [Brit.]
Cut (someone) dead Pointedly ignore. [Brit.; society.]
Set one's cap at Try to win (a suitor). [Brit.; Regency & Victorian.]
Pay one's addresses to Court. [Brit. & Am.; formal.]
Throw over Jilt. [Brit.]
Lead (someone) a merry dance Cause trouble; mislead. [Brit.]
Make a cat's-paw of Use someone as a tool. [General.]
Take French leave Leave without permission or farewell. [Brit.]
Sow one's wild oats Indulge youthful excess. [General.]
God save the mark! / Save the mark! An apology for an ill-omened or unseemly remark; also ironic. [Archaic; Shakespearean echo, still used by Victorians.]