

THE BIGGER SIX COLLECTIVE

Coda: From Coteries to Collectives

As much as Romanticism held up ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, it was also cliquish and exclusive. Images of Liberty leading the people and crowds gathered at St. Peter's Field demanding rights and representation exist alongside those of the quiet parlor, where friends gathered to chat, pontificate, and compete to write the best sonnet or ghost story. Romantic literature—especially that which has received the widest critical attention—was closely tied to coterie culture, and in many ways the study of Romanticism has reproduced that culture. The coterie, however, is not suited to facing the exigencies of the present moment, in or beyond the academy. Romanticism, never the most diverse field of study, risks narrowing further with the devaluation of the humanities coextensive with the rise of the neoliberal university. We believe that an alternative structure, that of the collective rather than the coterie, is a necessary response.

To revise the Romantic—and Romanticist—coterie, it is necessary to reform ourselves into a collective, to make Romanticism inclusive in a way that brings people in from the margins of what has historically been a white Anglo-American field. We imagine an open network of scholars who, rather than sitting in a circle facing each other, stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing the world. Taking our cue from the promises of radical Romantic politics, we mobilize against racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, environmental degradation, and other forms of violent exclusion and erasure. Indeed, we mean to amend our field's prior silence on these matters. We insist that all have a

right to claim Romanticism, to define as Romantic those discourses and texts that do not already fit existing models of Romanticism, to question the central place of European men in the study of Romanticism, and to propose models of the Romantic that reconfigure social positions along more equitable lines.

Our call for Romantic collectivity is not a matter of diversification, of 'going global,' of adjusting the boundaries of Romanticism in the name of an inclusiveness. Rather, it is a call to make our field in the image of those whose access to Romanticism has long been and continues to be actively restricted. Black Romanticisms, Feminist Romanticisms, Subaltern Romanticisms, Queer Romanticisms, Trans Romanticisms, Crip Romanticisms, Indigenous Romanticisms—these are not sub-fields or 'special interests' within an unqualified Romanticism. They are, and they always have been, constitutive of Romanticism as such. There are good reasons for us to attach ourselves to the coterie model of Romanticism—it offers comfort and camaraderie, the grounding that comes from shared experience. There are better reasons to refocus it. Chief among these is an unwavering commitment to the highest ideals of the Romantics, unrealizable from within the secluded drawing room.

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