



CJ'S GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN WORDS (MOSTLY FRENCH) FOUND IN REGENCY NOVELS

I hope this dictionary will help you enjoy more fully the Regency books you read by being a quick reference to foreign words in those novels, words which I've run across in my own reading. If you find any other words in Regency novels, of whatever language, that you think would be a useful addition to this reference, please contact me. If possible, I'll add them to the list so other readers of Regency novels can benefit as well.

French:

A

à demain – goodbye; until tomorrow.

à deux – in twos **or** two at a time together as a couple.

accoucheur – obstetrician; doctor who attends women at childbirth rather than a midwife.

(*Acchoucheuse* would be the feminine except there are no woman doctors in the Regency.)

affaire de coeur – affair of the heart, love affair.

à la belle étoile – under the stars, in the open air at night.

Allez-vous en! – Beat it! Be gone! Off with you!

Allons! - Come on! Come! Now!

Alors – Then; Therefore; Next; After that.

amant (m) amante(f) – betrothed, lover.

amant de coeur – literally "heart's lover."

âmes damnées – damned souls.

amie – female friend.

amour – love.

amourette – a casual love affair **or** a flirtation.

a quelque-un - has few; a few; some; little.

au fait - conversant; proficient; well-instructed.

au contraire – on the contrary.

au courant - up-to-date as in clothes or other fashion items.

au naturel – used by English mostly to mean "naked" or "in the nude."

au revoir - goodbye for now; until we meet again.

aux anges – among the angels – highly delighted; in other words, in heaven.

avant-garde – used by English mostly to mean "unorthodox" or "daring."

avoir le cafard – depressed.



B

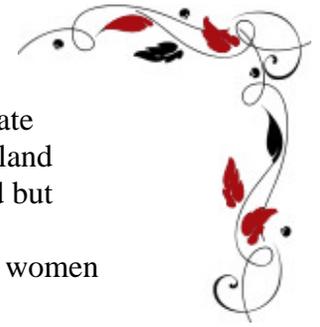
baba au rhum – a sponge cake steeped in rum syrup and invented by the French.
baire - mosquito net (especially over a bed) Creole term from Louisiana French.
beaucoup - much; far; many; large number.
beau-père - father-in-law **or** stepfather.
belle-mère – Mother dear (literary, Beautiful Mother). Also means “mother-in-law.”
belle passion – ardent affection, love.
bête noire – bugaboo; pet aversion; literally "black beast."
bien-aimée - beloved, darling.
Bien sûr! Of course! Naturally!
bonne amie – sweetheart or mistress. (Female says *bon ami*.)
bonhomie – geniality; unaffected affability.
bon matin – Good morning.
bon mot - witticism; witty saying **or** repartee (literally “good word”).
bon soir – Good evening, eve, or afternoon.

C

canaille – bastard; crook; rabble; riffraff.
carte blanche – literally means "white card" or “blank card – a euphemism for offering a woman the position of mistress. It comes from the military term for surrender which seems to have led to its use for a woman who “surrenders” to the position of mistress.
cause célèbre – a widely debated and controversial issue, literally "a famous case."
c'est bien ça – That's just it. That's the way it is.
c'est la guerre – Literally "That's war" but often used to mean "Forget it" **or** "That's the way it goes."
C'est magnifique! – That's magnificent! That's wonderful!
C'est un monstre – He is a monster. (See also *Il est un monstre* below.)
C'était lui - It was he.
chemise du nuit – night chemise; night clothes. (The term "nightgown" was not in general use.)
Chéri – Dear, Darling.
chouchou (m) chouchoute(f) – familiar form meaning pet, cosset, or blue-eyed boy
colichemarde – small but deadly sword cane.
Comme ci, comme ça - so-so; middling.
comme il faut – proper, correct, in good form, well-bred, literally meaning "as it should be."
complice – accomplice; confederate; in a case of adultery, the person the unfaithful spouse has had the affair with who is legally referred to the correspondent; one who is a party to something happening; an abettor.
congé - an abrupt and unceremonious dismissal.
contretemps – untoward accident; vexatious happening; mischance; hitch.
croqueuse de diamants – a fortune hunter, literally "diamond cruncher" (m. “croqueur”)

D

d'accord – agreed; granted. (Literally it means "in accord" or "in agreement.")
décolletage – low-cut or plunging neckline



demense (di-man, men) - possession of land as one's own; an estate or part of an estate occupied and controlled by, and worked for the exclusive use of, the owner; land belonging to or adjoining a manor house or estate. This was a medieval word but still used by some old families.

demimonde – literally "half-world"; refers to women supported by their lovers or to women of doubtful reputation.

de rigueur – obligatory; indispensable; imperative; required by etiquette.

déshabille – undressed **or** being dressed carelessly.

destrier – steed; charger; war-horse. (Medieval word that was sometimes still used.)

de trop – too much, too many, superfluous, unwanted, in the way, unwelcome.

dites-moi – Tell me about it! (in the sense of "Don't I know that!")

doucette – sweetheart **or** sweetie.

douceur – sweetness; mildness; agreeableness of manner; kindness (specifically. a gratuity).

In the plural, it means dainties; tidbits; delights - as of society; comforts - as of home.

It can also mean gallant remarks **or** compliments.

droit de seigneur – Medieval right of a lord to deflower his vassals' brides.

E

eau de nil - (literally, Nile water) a hue of green, usually in silk.

écarté (ée) – isolated; remote; out of the way; secluded.

éclat – used in English to mean brilliance of success or showy display.

élan – impetuosity; ardor; dash; rush.

embrasse-moi, mon mari – Kiss me, my husband.

enceinte - pregnant. (Often used as "pregnant" was considered by many to be a vulgar word.)

en déshabille- in a state of undress.

en famille - in or with one's family; amongst ourselves; informally.

enfant terrible – a brat **or** unruly child.

en masse – in a mass; in a body; all together.

ennui – complete boredom with life.

en tête-ê-tête – in private (conveying a sense of intimacy); face to face.

entr' acte – interval between two acts of a play or opera.

entre nous – in confidence; between you and me.

éperdu d'amour – madly in love.

épris – enamoured, taken with; in love; infatuated,; smitten with (*de epris*)

et ainsi de suite – and like that (or thus); and whatever follows; and soon

et j'y tiens - and I am yours.

F

fait accompli – accomplished fact; thing already done.

fauteuil – armchair or easy chair.

fauteuil d' orchestre – an orchestra seat in a theatre.

faux pas – social indiscretion; slip in behavior; breach of etiquette or propriety; misstep.

fecundatio ab extra (Latin) – a rare but not impossible occurrence. (This is an English legal term.)

fête – feast; festival; public holiday; entertainment; merry-making; party.

fête champêtre – village fete; outdoor festival or a garden party.



fiancé(m) fiancée (f) – person to whom one is engaged to be married.

fille de joie – joy girl (In other words, a prostitute).

force majeure - superior force **or** irresistible compulsion **or** disruptive and unexpected event which prevents one of the parties to a contract from fulfilling contractual responsibilities.

fraises des bois – wild strawberries.

frisson – a shiver; a shudder.

G

garçonnère – Quarters for male guests or family bachelors who require privacy, i.e. bachelor's quarters.

gauche - left as in *rive gauche* (left bank), can also refer to someone who is clumsy or tactless.

gaucherie – awkwardness.

glacé - smooth and polished **or** frozen; icy.

grand amour – great love.

grand dames - great ladies (meaning the leaders of the haut ton in the Regency period).

Grand-Guignol – blood and thunder, used to characterize plays involving macabre and gruesome incidents.

grandmère – grandmother.

gris-gris – African charm, amulet or fetish; It is a voodoo word from New Orleans area and thus part of Louisiana French.

H

habit - outfit, attire, coat.

haut ton - *haut* means high or haughty. Generalized to mean high tone, high fashion or high social standing or class. Since *ton* means the upper class, the *haut ton* is the crème de la crème like America's famous 400.

hein? (familiar) - Eh? What? as in "Don't you agree?"

Honi soit qui mal y pense – motto of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, the garter being the symbol of the highest order of knighthood in England, said to have been constituted about 1348. (means "Shame to him who thinks evil of it")

I

Il s' appelle Caliban – He is called Caliban.

Il est un monstre – He is a monster. (See also *C'est un monstre* above.)

Il va sans dire- It goes without saying.

immédiatement! – At once! Without delay!

in flagrante delicto – (actually Latin meaning "while the crime is blazing; in the very act, red-handed).

J

J'ai un escalier - I have a stair (a nonsensical statement).

Je comprend – I see. I understand.

Je ne réalise - I did not realize.

Je regrette - I am sorry.



Je sais . . . – I know . . .

Je suis coupable – I am guilty.

Je suis désolé- I am sorry.

Je sais tout – I know everything; I know all.

Je t'adore – I adore you.

Je t'aime – I love you.

jeune – young.

Je veux parler avec d' épaule - I wish to speak to your shoulder. (a nonsensical statement).

Je vous en prie - I entreat you; I beg you (to please listen to me).

joie de vivre – delight in being alive.

jolie femme – pretty woman.

L

la marée –Used by man to refer to his wife but literally means **bride**. The French for wife is “femme” or for administrative purposes, “épouse” which is “spouse” or “femme mariée” which is married woman.

le coup de foudre – thunderhead **or** love at first sight.

le gredin – scoundrel, rascal, rogue.

le Miche Agoussou – Louisiana Creole word for the Demon of Love.

M

ma belle – my beauty.

ma chérie -feminine of my dearest **or** my darling.

Mais chacun à son goût – But everyone to his own taste. (or *chacun son gout*)

Mais oui! - But yes!

Mais oui, absolument! – Oh yes, absolutely!

maman – mother.

mangez - eat (from *manger* which means "to eat").

mariage – French spelling of marriage.

ma soeur- my sister.

mélange– medley; mixture.

ménage – household.

ménage à trois – literally, a "household of three" but referring to three adults having sexual relations and living in the same household. It is never translated into English.

Merci beaucoup - Thank you very much **or** Many thanks.

mésalliance – French form of "misalliance."

meurtrier – murderer **or** *assassin* which is also a French word).

miche – round (loaf) Slang: used to refer to a woman's breasts.

mignon (m) mignonne (f) – darling.

mon ami– my friend. (m.) *mon amie* (fem.)

Mon ange – My angel.

mon chéri –masculine of *ma chérie*.

Mon Dieu! – My God!

moue – pout.

mon mari – my husband.



N

naturellement – of course; naturally.

navires – ships.

néanmoins - however; nevertheless; yet.

nécessaire – a dressing case or toilet set with such items as scissors, files and grooming items, fitted inside. It was often made of wood, which might be decorated or covered with leather, and often had a looking glass (a mirror) fitted inside the lid.

Ne dites pas ça! – Don't say that, not here!

négligé - in English, negligee - another name for a peignor (see below) or sometimes an elaborate and sexy nightdress. (In French, *négliger* is a verb meaning “neglected” or even sloppy in dress. The French word for a nightdress is *chemise de nuit*)

n'est-ce pas - isn't it?; doesn't it? (pronounced nayss pah).

O

on dit – used by the Regency English to mean "rumor" as in "The latest *on dit* is that ..."

However, in French, *on dit que* means rumor, scandalous talk, hearsay as in "rumor has it" or "they say..." while “a rumor” is “une rumeur”

outré or outrée - extravagant; exaggerated; eccentric; bizarre; outraging propriety or decorum; indecorous, improper

outré de – exasperated by

P

Pardonne- moi – Pardon me, Excuse me. Or, the more formal version, *Pardonnez-moi*.

parterre (literally, on the ground) - also called parquet circle. The rear section of seats, and sometimes also the side sections, of the main floor of a theatre, concert hall or opera house or (English definition) an ornamental arrangement of flower beds of differing shapes and sizes forming a garden.

parti - group; also match, catch (as for marriage); side, part; party; matrimonial candidate.

parvenu – upstart; one who has forced his way into a higher social class; in Regency slang, a mushroom.

Pas de ce charabia – Not with all this gibberish! Stop all this commotion!

pas importe - not important.

pauvre - poor, unfortunate.

pauvre homme – poor man.

peignoir- In English, this usually refers to a woman's loose dressing gown, usually elaborate and sexy. In French it just means dressing gown, even a boxer's robe. *Robe de chambre* is also used for dressing gown.

petite – (n) little one (adj.) little.

peut-être – perhaps.

piéd à-terre – apartment for occasional use.

pince-nez - eyeglasses with a spring to grip the nose instead of side bows.

placée - Creole term for mistress or courtesan.

point non plus - the “no more” place or state (in other words, without funds, “broke”)

porte cochère – covered area for going from carriage to door of house.

poseur – show-off; affected person.

pourquoi – why, what for?



près - near.

Q

Quelle horreur! - How dreadful! How shocking!

Qu'est-ce que c'est? – What is this? What is that? **or** just "What is it?"

Qu' est-ce qu' il - What is this? **or** What do we have here? What is he or it...?(to introduce a question.)

R

raison d'être - reason for living or for existing.

retroussé – turned up or rolled up, tucked up or snub (as in a snub nose).

S

sacrebleu! -Confound it! Damn it!

Sang de Dieu! – God's Blood!

sang-froid – coolness, composure, calmness.

sans – without.

sans doute – without doubt.

s'il vous plaît – if you please.

soigné – elegantly simple applied to grooming and style of dress, carefully done, well-groomed.

souris – mouse.

succès de scandale - scandalous result or scandalous issue.

T

taille – size, height, stature.

Tais-toi! – Be quiet, Be silent, Hold your tongue (said to a young person or to one with whom one is on familiar terms.

Taisez-vous! – Hold your tongue! (said to an adult)

tendresse – tenderness, tender affection, love, fondness.

Te souviens de Jenna Magnier? - You remember (recall) Jeanne Magnier?

tête à tête – literally "head to head": (n) a private conversation or interview (adv) privately, confidentially. Also *en tête à tête* – face to face, in private.

Tiens! – Hel-lo!, Oh, Oh!, Whoa! : It is an expression of astonishment or calls attention to something.

tirage - draw; drawing.

Touché! – Hit! You got me on that one!

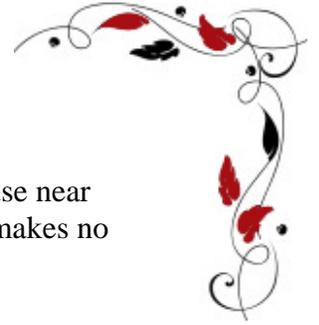
toujours – always, forever.

Toujours d'moi – Forever mine. *Toujours mien or mienne* (m. or f.)

tour de force – feat of strength or skill; in English, an exceptional achievement.

Trône d'Amour - (literally, Throne Love) the most austere style of cravat ties after the Oriental. It must be extremely well-stiffened with starch and is formed with a simple knot and a horizontal dent in the middle of the wrap.

trottoir – pavement, footpath.



U

une fille publique – a prostitute.

Une maison bleue près du pain miche a beaucoup des habits rouges - The blue house near the round loaf of bread has many scarlet coats (a spy code phrase and so it makes no sense).

une plaquemine – a green persimmon (someone who is tight with her money).

V

veilleuses – (n) nightlights (v) to turn down **or** turn low.´

visage belle - beautiful face.

voyez-vous? –Do you see?

Vraiment! – Really! Truly! Is that so? Do you?

Other Foreign Words used in Regency novels:

a cavaletti – Italian - describing trotting on a pony or on horseback.

a chuisel mo chroi– Irish for "the very pulse of my heart."

al fresco – Italian for open air or in the open air (out of doors) as in having a picnic *al fresco*.

amorini –Italian for cupids as on the ceiling paintings.

carina – Spanish for "sweetheart." (said to a woman)

conde – Spanish for the rank that, in English, is a count, the same rank as a English earl.

condesa – Spanish for "countess".

Dios mio! – Spanish for "My God!" (swear words)

Dios Santo! – Spanish for "Holy God!" **or** "Holy Christ!" (swear words)

fiore – Italian for "outside"

lo siento – Spanish for "I'm sorry."

mhuirnin – Irish for "beloved, love, or sweetheart."

mi amor – Spanish for "my love."

mi dulzura – Spanish for "my sweetness." (said to woman)

nashtar – Middle Eastern word for a 4-bladed knife with blades curved like long, wicked fingernails that is a lancet used to harvest poppy juice for opium.

non compos mentis – Latin meaning not of sound mind

no puedo – Spanish for "I can't."

Por Dios!! – Spanish for "By God!" (swear words)

por favor – Spanish for "please."

poveretta, o, non ci credo – Italian for "Poor thing! I can't believe it."

Que demonios! – Spanish for "What devils!" (swear words)

querida– Spanish for "beloved" **or** "dear". (said to a woman)

ridotto (ridotti) Italian for a fashionable club or pleasure resort, devoted to dancing, dining, and (often) dissipation originally; a public entertainment with music and dancing, often in masquerade, very popular in England in the 18th century; in *music* an adaptation of a piece from the full score.

sotto voce – Italian for "in an undertone or whisper."

tesori – Italian for "treasures."

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