

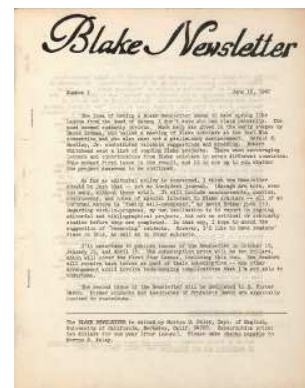
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY  
**BLAKE**

N O T E

**Blake's engravings for Captain John Steadman's  
Narrative, of a five years' expedition**

Suzanne R. Hoover

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## NOTES

From Professor W. H. Stevenson, University of Ibadan, Nigeria:

1. Dura (Jerusalem 90:62) is probably Jura. The Gaelic spelling is Dhura; the island is famous for its rocky sea-caves.
2. No-one seems to have noticed that the Countess of Egremont to whom Blake dedicated his Vision of the Last Judgement did not exist, according to the Peerages and standard biographies! In fact, the Earl married secretly a woman he had lived with for some time. She was not publicly acknowledged as Countess, but she did exist.
3. Cratelos (Erdman-Bloom p. 493, Keyens '57 p. 555) should read Cratetos: the verses are a translation from the Creek of Crates of Thebes, via Stobaeus' Anthology.

From Robert P. Kolker, Columbia University:

In his annotations to the Dedication to the King section of Reynold's Discourses, Blake parodies a couplet which Malone attributes to Pope. The couplet is 'They led their wild desires to woods and caves, / And thought that all but SAVAGES were slaves.' Blake's parody is 'When France got free Europe 'twixt Fools & Knaves / Were Savage firt to France, & after; Slaves.' Both Keynes and Erdman keep Malone's original attribution which is, as it turns out, incorrect. The couplet is not from Pope, but from Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel, lines 55-56.

From Mrs. Suzanne R. Hoover, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass.:

References to Blake in print in the 1790's are so rare that virtually any item, however slight, is of interest to us today. It should therefore be noted that the British Critic for November 1796 (VIII, 536-540) reviewed a work with engravings by Blake: Captain John Steadman's Narrative, of a five years' expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam. (Another review, of an Englished edition of Burger's Leonore with three plates by Blake, appeared in the British Critic two months earlier and is listed in the Bentley and Nurmi Blake Bibliography, pp. 5, 230).

Blake had engraved at least thirteen, and possibly sixteen, of Steadman's eighty-six designs for his book. (For the attribution of three unsigned plates to Blake, see Bentley and Nurmi, p. 159). The reviewer for the November, 1796, British Critic was on the whole pleased with the text, but thought the plates "very unequal; some would do honour to the most elegant, whilst others would disgrace the meanest, performances." As in

the September review, Blake's work was specifically criticised, although his name was never mentioned. For example, the reviewer thought that

the representations of the negroes suffering under various kinds of torture, might well have been omitted, both in the narrative, and as engravings, for we will not call them embellishments to the work.

Blake could have taken this criticism as being in part directed against him. Among the plates bearing his name were "A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows," and "Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave." He did not sign, but probably did engrave, the plate entitled "The Execution of Breaking on the Rack."

Further along in his article on Stedman the reviewer pronounced upon the quality of the plates. He noted five of them, by title, for their bad drawing or faulty execution. Among them was Blake's witty engraving of "The skinning of the Aboma Snake, shot by Cap. Stedman," surely one of the best plates in the book. "The snake in the plate," observed the reviewer,

must be greatly out of proportion with respect to the man. In the narrative it is expressly affirmed to be about the thickness of the boy Quaco; but in the plate it far exceeds that of the man David. . .

(Elsewhere, one is pleased to find, the quality of the plate did not go unrecognized; Bentley and Nurmi [p. 160] note that an article on Stedman in the London Review singled out the same plate as "a very good print.")

The British Critic, founded in 1793, was from the first devoted to High Church religion and Tory politics; it regularly failed to take quite seriously contemporary experiments in literature and art. We would not expect it to have championed Blake. And yet, the magazine's very conventionality and inability to comprehend change led to some curious "happenings": for example, an approving, if rather bored, review of Lyrical Ballads, simply because the reviewer was not able to find in the volume "any offensive mixture of enmity to present institutions, except in one or two instances, which are so unobtrusive as hardly to deserve notice." The same affection for "present institutions" led to a violent attack by the same magazine on George Cumberland's outspokenly anti-Academic Thoughts on Outline -- once again, with engravings by Blake. But more of this another time.