AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

R E V I E W

Richard Price and Sally Price, eds., John Gabriel Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 24, Issue 1, Summer 1990, pp. 253-259

REVIEWS

John Gabriel Stedman. *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam.* Transcribed for the First Time from the Original 1790 Manuscript. Edited, and with an Introduction and Notes, by Richard Price and Sally Price. Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. xcviii + 708 pp. 94 plates. $95.00.

Reviewed by
G. E. Bentley, Jr.

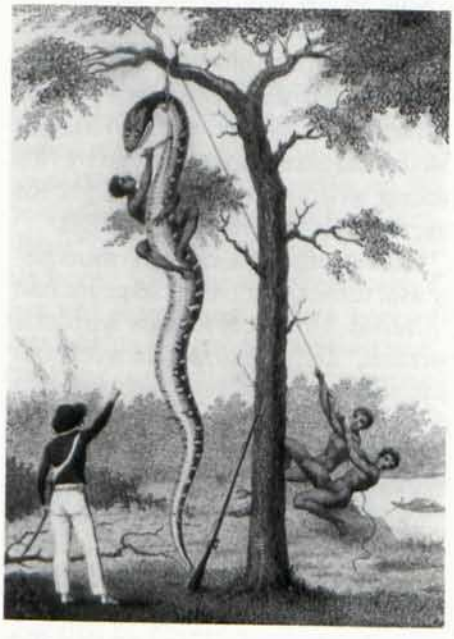
I had a *Je ne say qwoy* about me, of the fasquinating kind, which attracted the girls as the eys of the Rattlesnake attrakts Squirls, and unaccountably persuades them to submission. [XVIII]

This is a fascinating and wonderfully enjoyable book. It is a tale of martial and amatory adventure in the tropics, with fierce rebels hiding in the jungle, nubile maidens bathing in pellucid streams, "tygers" and "vampiers" attacking the camp at night, and white soldiers dying of disease in droves with never a sight of their black enemies. It is a romantic and tragic tale, with the hero falling passionately in love with a 15-year-old slave girl, Joanna, whom he cannot free. It is a tale of the decadence and barbarity of Europeans, torturing their slaves for pleasure, and of the simple nobility of the African and Indian slaves whom the hero learns to love. It is a self-portrait of a fascinatingly self-contradictory character: tender as a child yet killing beasts to see what they taste like; ferociously challenging his comrades to duels, thrice in one day on one occasion (197), yet, the only time when he saw the enemy, closing his eyes so that, if he should chance to kill one of these abused, noble savages, it would be by accident; expecting the sexual services of slaves, yet creating a love story which tore the heartstrings of Europe for a century. It is one of the most vivid and detailed pictures ever made of plantation life with its savage slave economy and its squalor and luxury, and it is a mine of firsthand observation of flora and fauna which may still be seen in Surinam, and of customs and expectations which have, on the whole fortunately, long been dead. The verbal and visual pictures of European barbarity, systematically breaking the bones of a Negro with an iron bar as he is chained to the ground, walling an ancient slave in his hut to die because he was too old to work—these aroused the passionate sympathy and indignation of readers and fanned the flames of abolitionist sentiment, though Stedman himself was a slave-owner, and he believed in the slave trade and the slave system. It is a work full of wonderfully vivid scenes and wonderfully vivid contradictions.

The history of the text is intricate. Stedman recorded at the time the events in Surinam of 1772-1777, wrote them up in 1790, and sent the manuscript to Joseph Johnson the publisher in London in February 1791. The engravings were begun that year, but the text was probably scarcely looked at for some time. Perhaps about 1794 Johnson asked the medical midwife William Thomson to revise or in fact to ghost-write it, which he did very thoroughly and high-handedly. This version was printed and shown to Stedman, who was furious and required that all 2,000 copies should be destroyed (L), and a compromise text was evolved and published in 1796.

Joseph Johnson's investment in it must have been heavy; according to Stedman's diary, Johnson promised £500 to Stedman for the first edition with the prospect of £500 more from the profits (XXXVII), and he must have had to pay at least £10 apiece for the 80 plates (or £800), plus the cost of paper, composition, printing, etc. James Edwards, who appears with Joseph Johnson as publisher on the titlepage, was probably "a largely silent partner" (XXXVIII), and perhaps his role was chiefly the provision of capital. What the Prices have presented is the 1790 manuscript version which recently turned up in the University of Minnesota Library and which differs considerably from the version published in 1796.

The differences between the *1790 MS* and the *1796 publication* may be seen in the accounts of Stedman's reaction when he found out that Joanna is to be transferred to a new plantation (see box on following page).



1. *The skinning of the Aboma Snake*, J. G. Stedman, *Narrative* (1796), plate designed by Stedman and engraved by Blake of the skinning of the still-living giant Aboma snake, which grew from 18 feet long in Stedman's diary to over 22 feet in the 1790 text and still "a young one, come to about its half-Growth."

1790 MS	*1796 publication*
at the mercy of some rascally Overseer—Good God; I flew to the Spot in Search of poor Joanna and found her bathing with her Companions in the Garden.	Good God!—I flew to the spot in search of poor Joanna: I found her bathed in tears.—She gave me such a look—ah! such a look!—From that moment I determined to be her protector against every insult. [LXI]
But lo! with graceful Motion there she Swims Gently removing each Ambitious Wave The crowded waves transported Clasp her Limbs When, When, oh when shall I such freedoms have In vain ye envious Streams So fast ye flow To hide her from a lovers ardant Gaze From every touch you more transparent grow And all revealed the beautious Wanton plays	
But perceiving me She darted from my presence like a Shot, when I returned to [her owner] Mrs. Demelly and declared without the least hesitation . . . that it was my intention (if such could be) to Purchase to Educate & to make even my lawfull Wife *in Europe*, the individual Mulatto Maid *Joanna*. . . .	

The contrasts between Joanna bathing in lascivious waves and bathing in tears of sensibility and between Stedman buying her and protecting her are symptomatic of the genteel alterations made between the 1790 manuscript and the 1796 publication.

One of the inadvertent delights of the book is the grammar. Stedman is the Mr. Malaprop of Martial Sensibility, and the text illustrates some of the wilder shores of diction. Even though Stedman's text was transcribed by two young amanuenses, his own gift for the telling travesty shines through.[1]

When Stedman learned, erroneously as it turns out, that his sergeant had "offered violence to this virtuous woman," i.e., to Joanna, "Heaven and Earth, I Swore imediate destruction to the villain, and having ordered a Negro to Cut 12 bamboe Canes, I retired like one enraged Swearing to assassin him, inch by inch" (158). In the tropics, wounds rapidly became infected, so that "some lost their limbs and others *might have lost* even their Lives, without a temporary amputation did take place" (222). The Surinam jungle really is an amazing place if amputations there can be merely "temporary."[2] Among the Negroes, "Simple incontinuance is among Actions Subjected to the Divine Analthema" (293)—does he mean "incontinence"? The colonel's servant accidentally freed one of his pet parrots, at which "The Poor Valet Stood perfectly Putrified" (342). When the Surinam rattlesnake shakes his tail, he makes a sound "much Like a Rattle from which it Derides its name" (470). There is as much innocent pleasure to be derided from Stedman's talents as a wordsmith as from any other aspect of the book.

Stedman is a heady, impetuous writer, but to call him merely an impetuous character would be tampering with the truth. He cultivated an eccentricity which his superior officers often called madness, and they were not always wrong. Stedman went barefoot in the jungle rather than wear regulation boots; when the "military rot" set in, Stedman's feet did not putrefy, but those of his men and his fellow officers did. (In the frontispiece he is shown barefoot with a slain black rebel.)

> I have been . . . cald mad in Scotland, mased in England, fou by the namurois [i.e., Belgians], gek or dol [crazy or mad] by the Dutch, and law [insane in Sranan, the language of Surinam] by the negros in Surinam, owing intirely to my studying to be singular in as much as can be. . . . [XX]

He is always opinionated, but when opposed or frustrated he not infrequently becomes frenzied. Once, in rain and misery

> I lost all decorum, indeed grew perfectly distracted . . . [and] damming the cause of my Misfortune [i.e., his Colonel[3]] . . . I stept half a dozen of Pases back, and to forget my distress I all at once ran my head against a large *eta* tree till I fell in a Swoon covered over with blood. (223)

It is little wonder that "at last it was agreed on that I was certainly *insane*, [he was arrested] and a boat ordered to row me emediately down to Paramaribo" (160). The wonder is that his Colonel, whom he openly despised and defied, did not ship him home at the first opportunity.

Stedman seems to have been not so much willing as eager to smell a fault, and he showed an extraordinary eagerness to wipe out a slight in blood.

> Next getting tipsy with some of my Companions my irrascible temper involved me in Another Despute—Out I & one of Them marched again to the Savannah where nearly under the Gallows we drew our Swords & fought in our Shirts, when I was Deservedly run through the Right Arm & which Ended the fracas. (600)

Even on the voyage home, he quarreled with a shipmate and agreed to fight him with pistols across a table, but their friends discovered the plot and separated them, and they became bosom buddies. And in a final flourish, he offers to fight all comers: "while I have the Severity to unmask vice & folly I at the Same time possess the Generosity to give ev'ry Gentleman that Satisfaction to which I reasonably think he stands intitled" (617). He was clearly a dangerous man to have about the house.

But at the same time he was a man of extraordinary sensibility. He was as easily moved to tears as to rage, and when he finally had to leave Joanna he was prostrate with grief, but "in a few days Reason so far Prevail'd again as almost to make me Ashamed of my too Great Sensibility (*not of my love*)."[4] He wrote a poem "dictated only by Sensibility & Affection" (624), and in his pages his mistress Joanna speaks the very language of sensibility. When he gave her "a present of different Articles

to the value of above 20 Guineas," she sold them back to the vendors next day and returned the money to him:

> "your generous intentions allone Sir (Said she) are sufficient But allow me to tell you that any Superfluous expence on my Account—I will look on as deminishing that good Opinion which I hope you have, and will ever entertain of my disinterestedness, and upon which I shall ever put the greatest value—" Such was the genuine Speech of a Slave who had simple nature for her only education—and the purity of whose refined Sentiments stand in need of no Comment. (101)

One may perhaps accept the genuineness of these refined Sentiments while suspecting the accuracy of the exalted diction in which they are expressed by a 15-year-old slave girl in the Dutch colony of Paramaribo. If she really talked like that, she must have been a great novel-reader.

Stedman was certainly a great novel-reader, he is lavish in quotation,[5] and he consciously formed both his character and his literary style upon novels of sensibility. He deeply admired "Joseph Andrews, tom Jones, and Roderick Random which heroes I resolved to take for my models. . . . R. Random I liked best and in imitation of he [i.e., him, I] emediately fell in Love at the Dancing assembly with a Miss diana Bennet whom I shall call narcissa," after the heroine of *Roderick Random* (XIX). When he finally has to fight the rebel Negroes, "my Sensibility Got so much the Better of my Duty, And my Pity for these poor miserable, ill-treated People Was such, that I Was rather induced to fire with Eyes Shut, like *Gill Blas* when he was amongst the Robbers, than to take a Proper Aim. . . ."[6]

However, it is often Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* in search of the heart's affections which Stedman's *Narrative* brings most irresistibly to mind. In his preface, Stedman defies the conventional critics in a very Sterne way:

> I am going to be told that my Narrative . . . has neither stile, orthography, order, or Connection . . . that some of my Paintings are rather unfinish'd—That my plants fully prove I am nothing of a Botanist—And that the History of Joana deserves no place at all in this Narrative—Guilty . . . & now for my defence—D—n order, D—n matter of fact, D—n ev'rything I am above you all. (7)

And elsewhere he asserts: "I neither wryte for profit nor applause— purely following the dictates of nature, & equally hating a made up man and made up storry" (XX). He speaks of "Johanna in whose Eye was started the precious pearl of Simpathy" (90), and he says of himself: "far from Glorying in any one of my private Actions, I only State them to expose the weakness of human nature, and as a guide for others, in like Circumstances (in some Measure) to rule their Conduct with more Propriety" (161). Except for that astonishing "Propriety," the sentence, like the sentiment, might have come straight from Sterne. He hopes that "the Inditious [Judicious] few" who read him sympathetically may "at intervals throw down the Book—and with a Sigh exclaim in the Language of [Sterne's] Eugenious—Alas poor Stedman" (11). And when he parts from Joanna, he alludes explicitly to the *Sentimental Journey*: "the unfortunate Joanna . . . look'd a thousand times more dejected than *Sterns Maria*" (604).

The danger posed by such a model for character and for writing is that the stereotype is likely to overcome and control the man and the facts. Despite his penchant for casual killing of animals and personal enemies, Stedman clearly thought of himself as a paragon of sensibility, his complaint about his enemies such as Colonel Fourgeoud is usually that they lack sensibility, and those he admires, such as the slaves in general and Joanna in particular, are chiefly admirable for their native delicacy of sentiment; there are lots of Noble Savages in his book but very few Civilized Noblemen.

And our suspicion that soldiers and slaves don't usually talk in such high-falutin' sentiments and diction is multiplied when we discover that Stedman systematically falsified this aspect of his text when he was writing up his on-the-spot diary "founded on facts allone" (XXVII) into the manuscript for his book. Some of the alterations of fact are simply a traveler's way of dramatizing his experiences; an anaconda he saw was 18 feet long in his diary but grew to "22 feet and some inches" in the 1790 text, and was still "but a young one, come to about its half-Growth" (illus. 1), and, where the diary says that "the air was Poisoned by mosketos," the 1790 *Narrative* says: "So very thick were the Musquitoes now that by Clapping my two hands against each other I have kill'd in one Stroke to the number of 38 upon my honour" (LXXXVII). Perhaps it is chiefly naturalists who will be dismayed by such alterations, but some of the changes are more fundamental in their effect upon most readers.

2. William Blake, "The Little Girl Found," (*Songs* copy c, pl. 35), courtesy of Mrs. William Drysdale.

The love story of Stedman and Joanna caught the imagination of readers of sensibility,[7] and it was repeated in novels, plays, and poems throughout Europe for many years.[8] The central features are the hero of sensibility who falls in love with the 15-year-old quadroon slave girl, who is a paragon of beauty and sensibility. (The nubile *Female Quadroon Slave of Surinam* in the transparent skirt who has apparently forgotten her under-garments in Stedman's plate is probably Joanna herself.) They cannot marry because she is a slave, he tries unsuccessfully to buy her freedom, and after five years he returns in despair to Europe, leaving behind his octoroon son and his love. It is indeed a pretty and a tragic tale, and Joanna may well have been a paragon of sensibility, but the facts are a good deal more complicated than this, not to say more sordid.

The hero of sensibility should always be in love, but he will rarely do more than hint at sex—though if he is a hero of the Sterne mold he will hint quite a lot. But Stedman was a conscious lady killer; he "attracted the girls as the eye of a Rattlesnake attrakts Squirls, and unaccountably persuades them to submission" (XVIII), and when he stayed with friends in Paramaribo he expected the handsomest or at least the handiest slave girl to hop into bed with him—and he was rarely disappointed. In his diary he identified his bedmates (sometimes more than one at a time) only by initials, and he said quite unambiguously that he "f——d" them.[9] He remarked that the slaves were not permitted to be either christened or married but that there was a form of "Surinam marriage" in which a European bought the services of a slave woman for the period of his residence in Surinam, whether or not he was already married. The practice was widespread, with clearly defined obligations on both sides. These features of the diary were blurred in Stedman's 1790 *Narrative* and almost completely obscured in the ghostwritten text printed in 1796. The social facts of Surinam life are different in the diary, the 1790 *Narrative*, and the 1796 publication, and the first version is almost certainly the most accurate of the three.

More important, perhaps, is Stedman's deliberate and consistent alteration in his accounts of his relationship with Joanna. In the 1790 *Narrative* and the 1796 book, he falls in love with a beautiful slave girl, tries to buy her freedom, wins her love, persuades her to live with him, and is eventually parted from her by the brutal facts of a slave economy. But the facts are not so simple. Stedman first met Joanna when her mother brought her to him to offer her services for a price, an offer which he accepted enthusiastically. He went through a Surinam marriage with her, but of course this did not entail either a "Christian" marriage or her freedom, and any offspring were naturally slaves of Joanna's owner. He referred to her in his diary only by her initials, like the rest of his casual bedmates, and it was only in writing up his diary of the 1770s ten years later, in 1786, that he gave her a name and the character of a heroine, as opposed to that of a lover. There seems to be no reason to doubt that Stedman loved her in his fashion, a fashion not controlled by confinement to one sexual partner, or that Joanna loved him, but their separation was *not* controlled by the facts of a slave economy. When an extraordinarily generous Surinam friend of Stedman offered to lend him the enormous sum to buy Joanna's freedom, Stedman accepted joyfully, but "Joana was unmoveable even up to Heroism, no Persuasion making the Smallest impression on her till She said we should be Able to *Redeem her* by Paying the Last farthing that we owed" (507). There is also some evidence that she was alarmed by the prospect of living as a half-caste quadroon wife in Europe where she knew she would be looked down upon at least until her husband could get out of debt and provide an "independence" for her, and she preferred to remain a slave. Mind you, she was a very comfortable slave, living in a house built for her in the garden of her patroness, with servants (slaves) of her own to wait on her. In worldly terms, Joanna was surely right to stay in Paramaribo.

At any rate, the grounds of the initial relationship between Stedman and Joanna were simply commercial and sexual, and the reason she did not leave with him was not simply because she was a slave but because she did not choose to become free under terms which required her lover to assume a heavy load of debt.

One of those said to have been influenced by Stedman's *Narrative* is his friend William Blake,[10] particularly in his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* with its "parallels between Theotormon's love for the gentle ['Enslav'd'] Oothoon, whom he is unable to set free, and Stedman's love for the enslaved Joanna."[11] But comparing Stedman's war diary with the text which he prepared for the press and with the bowdlerized version which was in fact published, Richard and Sally Price have discovered that the truth was far different from this.

Stedman has deliberately romanticized the history of his relationship with the child Joanna, it was this romantic picture which captivated the world, and it was this romantic notion of an innocent maiden exploited by a brutal slave society which is said to have influenced Blake in his creation of Oothoon and the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* in 1793. But if Blake knew Stedman well, as we know he did from Stedman's diaries and as he must have if he used the story of Stedman and Joanna in 1793, three years before Stedman's *Narrative* was published, is he not likely to have known as well that the romantic story in Stedman's *Narrative* is partly fiction and not fact? And is Blake, who passionately opposed all forms of slavery, likely to have derived his ideas on slavery from a man like

Stedman who was not only a slave-owner but who consistently defended the institution of slavery? Stedman's defence of slavery is not nearly so plain in the published version of his *Narrative* as it is in the manuscript submitted to the publisher, but it must have been plain in his conversation. The important relationship between Blake and Stedman can now for the first time be examined in useful detail because of the new Stedman materials which have just been brought to light. And the victimized innocent Joanna-Oothoon is not so easy to recognize in the real Joanna who was offered by her mother as a bedmate to Stedman and who refused to be freed.

One of the features of his text upon which Stedman prided himself, and upon which Richard and Sally Price have expended enormous pains, is the description of flora and fauna. Whenever he sees a new bird or beast, he shoots it, describes it, and eats it. And remote though these beasts seem from William Blake taking his ease at Lambeth beneath the poplar trees, some of them may well be important in understanding his poetry. One night Stedman was "Bit by the *Vampier* or *Spectre of Guiana*"; "Between the Tips of the Wings [of another vampire-bat] I found to be 32 inches and a Half, While some are Above 3 Feet" (428, 429). This may well be the origin of Blake's depiction of the spectre as a vampire in his later prophecies.[12]

Yet more important to most of us is his account of "tygers" which may well be related to Blake's "The Tyger."[13] In the first place, in the eighteenth century a "tiger" meant not the enormous feline of Asia to whom we confine the term but almost any large wild cat.

> The Count *De Buffon* Asserts that there are *no* Tygers in America but . . . I shall Describe them from Occular Demonstration, as I found them, and Leave to the Reader to Determine Whether they are Tygars or Not . . . . [He begins with the jaguar, whose] Shape is in Every sense . . . like that of the *African* Tigers. . . . Another of the Same Species is the *Tiger-Cat* [i.e., an ocelot], Which is Extremely Beautiful, this is not Much Larger than I have seen some Cats in England. . . . The Tiger-Cat is a Very Lively Animal, With its Eyes Emitting flashes of Lightning;—but Ferocious, Mischievious, And not Tameable Like the Rest. . . . And the Tiger Cat I Present the Reader With a Drawing . . . . (357-59)

Blake's etched beast for "The Tyger" and "The Little Girl Found" (see illus. 2), which looks remarkably docile, may not be "Much Larger than I have seen some Cats in England."

More important, the Tyger was believed to be not only insatiably ferocious but to live on blood; they

> Tear and Mangle . . . [their prey] in A Dreadful Manner, only for the Sake of the Blood, of Which this Ferocious Animal is Never Glutted . . . Whose Savageness and Thirst After Blood is such that it Cannot be Tamed . . . All these Animals . . . having Murdered they Drink the Blood Warm. (358-59)

However remote this may be from the truth, it was certainly a basic part of European belief about the tyger, and it is fairly plainly the belief of the speaker of Blake's "Tyger." The fearful ferocity of the beast in "The Tyger," the basic contradiction between the life of the beast and the life of the speaker, were commonplaces of European belief, as they were in Stedman's book. But of course it is only the idea of the tyger which has terrified the speaker of Blake's poem; he is in mental bondage to a myth, and the reality may be seen in the docile creature of Blake's design—or in the ocelots "not Much Larger than . . . some Cats in England" in Stedman's design.

3. J. G. Stedman, *Narrative* (1796), plate designed by Stedman and engraved by Blake, depicting a Negro hung by the ribs from a gibbet. Note that Stedman was not a witness of this scene, which happened years before his arrival in Surinam, and he drew it only from hearsay.

Stedman's book provided welcome ammunition for the abolitionists, though the extensive brutality of the 1790 *Narrative* was much mitigated in the 1796 published text.[14] The details of treatment of slaves he gives are horrifying. For instance, in 1730

> One Man was hanged alive with an Iron hook struck through his Ribs upon a Gibbet—and two others being chain'd to Stakes were burnt to death by Slow fire—Six women were broke alive on the rack—and two Girls were decapitated—through which Tortures—they went without uttering a Sigh. (67)

Indeed, the Negro hung by the ribs to a gibbet was the subject of a sensational picture by Stedman which was engraved by William Blake and has frequently been reproduced as a representation of the characteristic barbarity of the institution of slavery (illus. 3).

But note that Stedman never saw what he depicts here—it happened forty years before he reached Surinam—and that Stedman himself was far from being an abolitionist. He was a slave-owner himself, and, though he attacked the excesses of slave-owners, he defended the institution of slavery. He admired the Negroes greatly—a slave who showed sympathy for a white man he was ordered to flog "*almost* had induced me to deside between the Europeans and African in this Colony—that the first were the greatest barbarians of the two" (103), and he speaks of "the african Negroe (whom in every respect I look on as my brother)" (144)—but he does not think it inappropriate

that his brother should be his slave. And he says that, under a well-regulated slavery in Surinam, the Negroes would be better off than they had been in Africa:

> the greatest number of . . . [Negro Slaves of Guinea] under a well regulated Government, may live happier in the West Indies, than they ever did in the Forests of Africa. . . . Besides, I cannot help thinking it ungenerous thus wishing to deprive the West India *Planters* of their Property, by a Sudden abolition of the Slave Trade . . . (171)
>
> Hail; thou Happy People, Who under the Name of Slavery enjoy often the Purest Bliss . . . [when they] have the Good Fortune to be Under a Master Who is Really a man, Enjoy that State of Felicity, that is Superior to most, & even inferior to none. (541-42)

Indeed, slavery is essential to a great empire:

> if we really wish to keep our remaining antiatlantick possessions that lay between the Tropicks, I in that Case do maintain, that they can never be cultivated but by Negroes alone Neither the fair European, or the American Indian, being adequate to the task—then the Grand Question that remains to be solved is—are these Negroes to be Slaves or a free People—to which I answer without hesitation—*dependent*, & under proper restrictions. . . . (172)

Here we might find Blake agreeing with him, that empire is indeed built upon slavery. However commonplace Stedman's sentiments and however inconsequential his arguments, they were clearly deeply felt and freely expressed. There is no doubt that Stedman admired Blake and depended on his friendship, as his diary tells us, but it is difficult to understand how Blake can have been so accommodating to such a conventional bigot or how he can have based the "free love" and fundamental anti-slavery aspects of the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* upon such a man as Stedman.

Stedman was a good artist whose work was admired by Sir Joshua Reynolds (10, 392). Unfortunately, though the Prices discovered the diary of the 1770s and the 1790 manuscript text, they did not find Stedman's drawings which were engraved by Blake and others. They did, however, find enough other drawings to demonstrate his general competence, and Erdman's suggestion that "Blake must have taken liberties [in engraving the plates] with Stedman's intentions, . . . clever as it is, seems wide of the mark." Indeed, some of the improvements to Stedman's drawings were certainly commissioned by Stedman himself. For instance, in 1790, before the book had even been submitted to the publisher, the Royal Academician John Francis Rigaud wrote that he had painted

> A small oval portrait of Mr. Stedman, formerly a Major in the Scotch brigade in Holland, now on half pay in England; he having, with several others, thrown up his commission in Holland, when they would have made them alter their oaths. This little portrait is intended to direct the engraver in regard to his likeness and expression, in a frontispiece to his book, descriptive of the Dutch Settlement at Surinam, and the history of the war against the Negroes. I only did the head; but the figure, drawn by himself, represents him, after having killed a Negro in war, leaning upon his gun.[15]

4. William Blake, *America* (1793), plate 11, with a snake "with similar neck harness and straddling figures and the same overall contours" as Stedman's anaconda (see illus. 1). Courtesy of the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Further, what Erdman calls "slave bracelets" on the black and red women in the engraving of "Europe Supported by Africa and America" are colored gold in the colored copies, and what he calls "pearls" on the European woman are colored as "simple blue beads" (XLI). This indicates some of the dangers of generalizing on incomplete evidence. Stedman's 1790 text often refers to the colors of the plates, but apparently it was only the large paper copies which were colored.

> *A* comparison of his original watercolor for plate 73 [top] with contemporary hand-colored examples suggests that either Stedman or a master colorist with access to Stedman's original watercolors made the specimens that the other colorists used as models. For there is a remarkably close correspondence between the colors of the original and the engravings, which would have been unlikely without direct copying; in both, for example, Stedman's lapels are precisely the same shade of pink, his jacket the same blue, and his trousers the same gray. [XLVIII]

Can William or Catherine Blake have been among the colorists? It is odd that the subscription list does not indicate which buyers had paid for large paper colored copies. The present text reproduces all the 1796 plates save the two titlepages.

The edition is in almost every respect as admirable in its editing as it is exciting in its contents. Sally and Richard Price have bridged admirably the disciplines of botany, zoology, ethnology (their own field), literature, and history. The text seems reliable, they have pursued all the leads I can think of with vigor, learning, and imagination, and they have produced a remarkably satisfactory book. My only complaints are that there is no table of reproductions and no general index—an astonishing omission—and that the binding is distressing, which is scarcely their fault. Their edition of Stedman's original narrative is a formidable accomplishment and has put all those concerned with Surinam, Stedman,

Blake, social history, and stimulating scholarship deeply in their debt. I hope that many may take the same pleasure in the work that I have.

[1] We know that the verbal grotesqueries of the *Narrative* text are his, for they are paralleled in his manuscript journal in his own hand, though they were all masked in the genteel prose of his ghostwriter in the 1796 edition and all subsequent ones.

[2] Should it be "timely"?

[3] "Stedman's sharpest personal criticisms in the 1790 manuscript were reserved for his commanding officer, Colonel Fourgeoud, and it is here that the 1796 publication was most extensively edited" (LVIII).

[4] Page 606. The 1988 text reproduces the slash (/) that Stedman used for a parenthesis, but I have normalized this peculiarity.

[5] "*I*nterlarding . . . with a few Quotations from better Writers," as he calls it (8); this is one of the elements extensively purged in the 1796 edition.

[6] Page 405. But note that during four years in Surinam he was only in battle once, so elusive and skillful at guerrilla warfare were the runaway slaves.

[7] He depended upon having a "Reader who Possesses Sensibility" (508).

[8] A review in *The British Critic* Nov. 1796: 539, concluded that "The tale in particular of Joanna, and of the author's attachment to her, is highly honourable to both parties" (*Narrative* LXI).

[9] Sally and Richard Price remark that in the only previous printing of these diary references in 1962, "Thompson took Stedman's characteristic and unambiguous diary references to having 'f——d' one or another woman (or having been 'F——d' by same) and printed them as 'fooled'" (XXX).

[10] See D. V. Erdman, "Blake's Vision of Slavery," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15 (1952): 242-52, and Geoffrey Keynes, "William Blake and John Gabriel Stedman," *Times Literary Supplement* 20 May 1965: 400.

George Cumberland may have modeled the hero of his *Captive of the Castle of Sennaar* (part 1 printed in 1789; part 2 in MS of c. 1800; the whole to be published by McGill-Queens University Press in ? 1990/91) on Stedman's character.

[11] XLII; the Prices do not note in this context that Joanna could have been free had she chosen. Here the parallel breaks down fundamentally, I believe, unless we conclude that Oothoon is in chains not to male chauvinists or white slavers but to herself.

[12] See James Bogan, "Vampire Bats and Blake's Spectre," *Blake Newsletter* 10 (1976): 32-33.

[13] Richard and Sally Price remark: "Blake's famous 'Tyger! Tyger! burning bright / In the forests of the night' and its accompanying illustration . . . may well be related to Stedman's 'Tiger-Cat . . . its Eyes Emitting flashes of Lightning' . . . or his '*Red* Tiger . . . Eyes prominent and Sparkling Like Stars' " (XLII). The chronological difficulty ("The Tyger" was published in 1794 with *Songs of Experience* and Stedman's text is 1796) is surmounted by the hypothesis that either Blake saw the text in the course of making his engravings for the book or that he was told these details by Stedman himself, who clearly knew Blake quite well.

The Prices remark profitably (XLII) that "The snake that three figures sit astride in Blake's *America* (1793, [pl.] 11 [illus. 4]) seems to be an imaginative ninety-degree transposition of the anaconda he engraved that same year for Stedman's plate 19—with similar neck harness and straddling figures and the same overall contours." However, their endorsement of Erdman's suggestion that Blake "shrank from signing his engraving of this bloody document, 'The Execution of Breaking on the Rack,'" ignores the fact that it was normally the writing-engraver rather than the design-engraver who added the inscriptions to the plates.

[14] For instance, in place of Stedman's consistent praise of the morals and persons of Negroes, "the 'national character of [the African] people' was now described as being 'perfectly savage'. . . . Stedman at one point credited the rebel Negroes with what he called 'humanity' for sparing the lives of his own men, but by 1796 the editor had completely altered his intentions by simply changing the word to 'hurry'" (LXIII). The ghostwriter, William Thomson, was himself writing pro-slavery tracts at the time (LXIV-LXV).

[15] Stephen Francis Dutilh Rigaud, "Facts and Recollections of the XVIIIth Century in a Memoir of John Francis Rigaud Esq. R. A.," ed. William L. Pressly, *Walpole Society* 50 (1985): 82, a reference not in the new edition of Stedman which was generously drawn to my attention by Richard Price.