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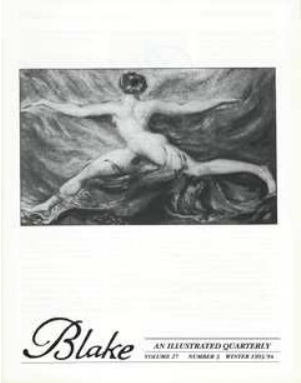

G. E. Bentley, Jr., ed., George Cumberland, The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar: An African Tale in Two Parts

Robert Kiely

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The *Encyclopedia of Romanticism* is then, not one of those books three copies of which "No gentleman can be without . . . one for show, one for use, and one for borrowers"—to appropriate the formulation of the "important collector" Richard Heber reported by Beverly Schneller on "Publishing" (475). But for those who borrow a copy, there is gold to be found. Among others might be mentioned strong entries by Sheila Spector ("Berkeley's Idealism," "Commonsense Philosophy," "Joseph Johnson," "Milton," "Skepticism"), Alexander S. Gourlay ("Richard Cosway," "Lord Egremont," "Thomas Girtin," "Edwin Landseer," "William Hayley"), Esterhammer ("Chatterton," "Insanity and Eccentric Genius," "Kant and Theories of German Idealism"), Frederick Burwick ("Coleridge," "Influence of German Idealism"), Alan Richardson ("Education," "Literacy"), and Jenijoy La Belle ("George Morland"—a discussion memorable not least for the account of the artist's composing, shortly before his death at 41, "his own unvarnished epitaph: 'Here lies a drunken dog'"). The articles on "Children's Literature" (Susan N. Maher), "Ballad" (Robert O'Connor), "Metrical Theory and Versification" (Brennan O'Donnell), "Satire" (Gary R. Dyer), and "Medievalism" (Joseph Rosenblum) stand out with some others—from the last we learn that Christie's first recorded auction of armor occurred in 1789. Fanny Burney may go unmentioned, but the volume recovers a number of women writers, including Agnes Bennett (1750?-1808), who "[t]hough immensely popular in her own day, . . . is now one of the most obscure of her time."

The discussion of "Music" (Doris A. Clatanoff) will interest anyone thinking about the "glee" of the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence*, and it lends a note on which to part with a volume which offers pleasant gleaning:

> The glee, a native vocal music form generally written entirely for male voices, was common in England from 1780 to 1860. Set to the lyrics of writers such as Shakespeare, Jonson, Sidney, John Lily, Nicholas Breton, Dryden, William Shenstone, and Burns, the glee depended on an expressive delivery of its words for successful presentation. Samuel Webbe (1740-1816), a popular and typical glee composer, wrote about 300 glees and published nine volumes of them. . . . From 1787 to 1858, the Glee Club worked zealously to promote glee writing. (395, 396)

Though less than half the length of the volume just noticed, and nearly a hundred words fewer per page, Jean Raimond and J. R. Watson's *A Handbook to English Romanticism* does include entries for some of the items mentioned at the beginning: *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, the Jacobin novel, Nature, and Rousseau. While it omits the "novel topics," lesser-known figures, touchstones, and—unfortunately—such brief bibliographies as the *Encyclopedia* offers, the contributions by an experienced team of Anglo-French scholars combine for a less ambitious but sound and professional overview. Like its competitor, the *Handbook* has its share of howlers and typos (e.g., that Mary Shelley "published a second novel, *Mathilda*, in 1819: [247], "*Sofie*" for "*Safie*" as the name of Keats's friend Reynolds' eastern tale [193]—though the 1814 date listed for its publication does correct the *Encyclopedia's* 1813), and it says nothing whatsoever concerning engraving. Surprising too is a discussion of Coleridge's biography which passes over his sibling situation and the death of his father.

But worth seeking out are Christian La Cassagnère's relatively lengthy articles on the meta-topics of "Dreams" (though Fuseli's 1782 *Nightmare* is "painted around 1790" [102]) and "The Self"; the latter studies the genealogy of "psycho-cosmic space" and the "plurivocal speech fit to give utterance to the plural subject . . . [a] supreme form of lyricism . . . no longer . . . a lyricism of the first person" (240). And David Jasper, most pertinently for Blake though too briefly, discusses "Religious Thought: Wesley, Swedenborg"; he reports that "there were six communicants in St Paul's Cathedral, London, on Easter Day 1800" (219) and observes that the ideas of Swedenborg and Kant "are often uncannily alike" (220). Bernard Beatty reminds us that "except as the occasion of Shelley's brilliant poem, Peterloo has had more resonance as a political myth in the twentieth century than it had in the nineteenth" (213).

At the price listed, the *Handbook* is another reference whose absence from desks won't be regretted; but if libraries shelve it next to the *Encyclopedia*, one might think of assigning compare-and-contrasts to students just opening new topics.

George Cumberland, *The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar: An African Tale in Two Parts*. Ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr., Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. 361 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Kiely

Had George Cumberland (1754-84?) lived in the sixteenth century he might have qualified as a "Renaissance man." Since, instead, he was an eighteenth-century man of parts and of leisure, heir to a modest but sufficient income, neither a courtier nor a soldier, he is thought of as a gifted amateur, a dabbler in many arts and sciences, a dilettante. His interest and talents ranged from poetry to physics, travel writing to geology, political and social reform to painting and engraving. He was an inventor, a collector of natural and artificial objects, a gentleman farmer, and, most of all, a prodigious writer of essays, poems, journals, and narratives. He and Blake were evidently friends as early as 1780, and Blake's last engraving, left un-

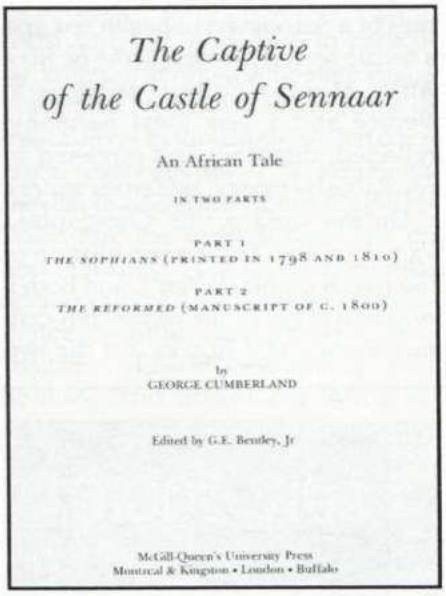
ing, left unfinished at his death, was a message card to Cumberland.

The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar, as G. E. Bentley, Jr. shows in his admirable edition of the text, has had a peculiar printing and publishing history. Part I was printed in 1798, but withheld from publication by the author until 1810. Cumberland feared stirring up controversy and risking prosecution for his radical ideas, yet when the text was finally published it aroused no controversy and little interest. Part II, like much of Cumberland's writing, remained in manuscript form until the appearance of the present edition.

The first problem facing a reader of Cumberland's narrative, once past the fascinating distractions of the author's life and the odd history of the manuscripts, is to figure out what it is. Bentley appropriately calls attention to its affinities with the utopian novel, the romance, and the romantic novel. It is true that the subject matter and the narrator's tone of voice can shift abruptly from Sir Thomas More to Shelley and back again. Like Beckford's *Vathek* and Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, Cumberland's narrative also contains touches of gothic and surreal fantasy.

Without the devastating clarity of Swift or the rich abundance of observed detail of Dickens, *The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar* seems not simply heterogeneous but undecided. The reader is less likely to feel like the observer of a Bakhtinian dialogic than like a traveler following a guide who cannot make up his mind about where to go or how to get there. For this reason, the postmodern reader—especially a reader of Borges or Eco—may be just the audience that Cumberland's mysterious manuscripts were waiting for.

In Part I, "The Sophians," a rich young Venetian named Memmo (a pun Pynchon or Barth might envy) finds himself imprisoned in a stone castle somewhere in a kingdom resembling Egypt. His sole fellow prisoner is Lycus (Like us?), an elderly


The Captive
of the Castle of Sennaar

An African Tale

IN TWO PARTS

PART 1
THE SOPHIANS (PRINTED IN 1798 AND 1810)

PART 2
THE REFORMED (MANUSCRIPT OF C. 1800)

by
GEORGE CUMBERLAND

Edited by G.E. Bentley, Jr

McGill-Queen's University Press
Montreal & Kingston • London • Buffalo

Greek, who has filled his years of captivity by decorating the walls, ceilings, and floors of the castle's interior with ingenious and elaborate architectural designs, "three dimensional sculptures," and vistas. Lycus is a master of trompe l'oeil. Indeed, everything about the castle, like everything about the narrative, strains eerily for verisimilitude while showing itself to be hopelessly sealed off from reality.

In a further stage of removal, Lycus narrates for the benefit of Memmo (who later remembers and records it) the story of his journey into the heart of Africa where he discovered the land of the Sophians. Though the travel through jungles and encounters with African tribes anticipates H. Rider Haggard, the descriptions of life among the Sophians mixes familiar eighteenth-century utopian dreams of peaceful communal living and "natural religion" with fantasies of untroubled and unrepressed sexuality, union without marriage, an exchange of partners without divorce, and a liberal, unembarrassed attitude toward the body.

If the reader is led or misled into looking for a "center" in this many-layered invention, he or she will not encounter the empty horror of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, nor a simple rationalistic moral. While "calmness," "order," and "tranquillity" have been attained by the apparently ideal Sophian society, the agitations and unfulfilled desires of the Greek narrator and his Venetian cellmate are never far from the surface of the text. In admiring the wholesome and unselfconscious nudity of the Sophians, for example, Lycus cannot help leering. His preoccupation with "every fleshy protuberance," "the red, porous, and . . . warm points of the body," and the perfect shapes worthy of Phidias verges on soft porn because, for the storyteller, the objectified and dehumanized figures are occasions of curiosity, longing, and forbidden pleasure. Insofar as the "perfect" society is described and interpreted by an imperfect narrator, it floats in a Borgesian realm in which philosophical idealism, delight, and frustration are permanently entangled.

In Part II, "The Reformed," Cumberland literally attempts to clean up his act. Lycus dies and Memmo, the Venetian, escapes imprisonment and embarks on his own journey into the heart of Africa. The even more "perfect" society that he encounters is composed of descendants of Italian followers of the fourth-century monk Jovinius who attempted to reform the early Church, was declared a heretic, and escaped to Africa with a band of disciples. The Jovinians do not drink wine, they have no fine arts, they spend long hours at prayer in church, and they definitely do not practice nudity. Everyone lives simply, contributes to the common well-being, and has a voice within a benevolent patriarchal "democracy." In short, they sound like eighteenth-century reformed Protestants, tranquilized Methodists, or talkative Quakers.

The word most frequently repeated in "The Reformed" is "clean." Houses, streets, clothing, nature itself seem "cleaner" in the land of the Jovinians than elsewhere. It is understandable, then, on one level, even if inconsistent with the apparent moral of the social allegory, that the Venetian narrator grows homesick for his beautiful but tainted city. Memmo returns to Venice,

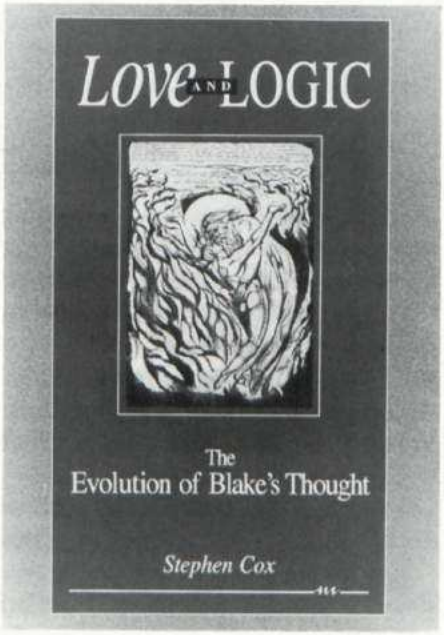
immerses himself in its enchanting, melancholy, dank atmosphere and discovers to no one's surprise that his beloved has taken the veil. He retires to a family castle, committing himself to a life of celibacy and good works—far enough from the Jovinians to idealize them, but close enough to the sullied Rialto for an occasional visit. Though Cumberland has tried alternately to reproduce the scoured virtues of a Scandinavian health spa and a sedate revival meeting in the heart of Africa, Memmo, his hero, recalls us to Venice and a less ideal harmony, reflected, distorted, and rendered irresistable by murky, odiferous waters.

On the surface, the Christianized Part II appears to be a repudiation of the pagan utopia of Part I, and both a rejection of life in late eighteenth-century Europe and Britain. Yet the two parts of Cumberland's odd and entertaining narrative do, in the end, make a kind of sense together. They are not so much the fantasies of a mad genius nor the visions of a political radical as the dreams of a man who frequently wishes his times were different (freer, healthier, more rational, more peaceful, more fun), but who, at the end of the day, is comfortable enough to settle at the edge of things as they are.

Stephen Cox, *Love and Logic: The Evolution of Blake's Thought.* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992. 314 pp. $32.50.

Reviewed by
Angela Esterhammer

Stephen Cox's new book is well worth reading for what it says about Blake, about Blake's critics, and about the evolution of ethical, aesthetic, and logical thought over the past two centuries. *Love and Logic* will no doubt become best known for its determined opposition to postmodernist readings of Blake. Postmodernism is widely defined here to include deconstruction as well as other forms of poststructuralism, historicism, and psychoanalysis; the most consistent targets of the argument appear to be critics like McGann, Hilton, Essick, Glen, Larrissy, and Mitchell. In defiance of all critics who stress the undecidability and indeterminacy of Blake's texts, Cox's aim is to remind us that, Blake's time not being our own, Blake lived in a logical universe dominated by a concept of objective truth, and his unfailing purpose was to persuade readers to reject error and embrace that truth, even though he was all too aware of the difficulties of representing it.



Blake wants to make the clearest possible distinction between truth and falsehood. . . . Nothing could be farther from his ambitions than the projects of those postmodern theorists who have abandoned, with no visible sign of regret, any attempt to locate a reliable truth. (235)

What makes this a powerful and relevant rebuttal is that (as Cox notes) most postmodern critics have at least implicitly coopted Blake's intentions into their argument, claiming not just that his texts are responsive to postmodern readings, but that Blake himself more or less consciously anticipated postmodernism.

Cox embarks on his reading of Blake with a strongly worded defense of authorial intention and its importance for interpretation. He deflects some, if not all, of the customary arguments against intention-oriented criticism by clearly defining intention in logical rather than psychological terms: it is not Blake's purported marital problems that are significant to his vision of love (though Cox is occasionally tempted to allude to them anyway), but the effective choices he makes as an author, choices which organize his worldview and limit the referential scope of his texts. Cox acknowledges the influence of economist and philosopher of human action Ludwig von Mises on this critical perspective, but one is also tempted to draw comparisons with E. D. Hirsch, Jr., and Cox's previous publications show that his approach derives from a sustained investigation into hermeneutics and the limits of interpretative method.

Thus Cox's book resolutely reads the direction of Blake's logic from signs that others have found indeterminate or infinitely referential. If it is true that "some readers may be surprised . . . by [an] emphasis on logic, and hence on reason" (1), as Cox initially suggests, the excellent introductory chapter should convince many of those readers that logic may be regarded as the organizing principle of Blake's vision. "Logic," here, is primarily the establishment of relationships between ideas, and Cox maintains that Blake's favorite methods for handling ideas are substantialization (giving ideas a physical and spatial form), universalization (expanding the scope of individual ideas), and identification (equating ideas with one another). Blake's poetic works then become experiments with different ways of grasping and arranging concepts, par-