

**Stedman's *Narrative*:  
its Origins & Transformations**

**Landeg White**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of PhD in Estudos Ingleses e Americanos,  
especialidade de Estudos Americanos  
(Literatura Inglesa, século XVIII)  
Universidade Aberta,  
2001.**

**“The white imagination sure is something when it comes to blacks”**

**(Josephine Baker)**

## Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to the following: to Professor Jan Kees Van Donge for long friendship and recent hospitality, including translating all Dutch materials; to Dr Fernando Clara for locating *Die Sklavin in Suriname*; to Dr Gerald Bar for translating *Die Sklavin in Suriname* and for his discovery and translation of the rare 1803 *Taschenbuch der Reisen* by E.A.W. Zimmermann; to Dr Jeffrey Childs and to Professor Jeanne Penvenne for locating and obtaining Mrs Maria Lydia Child's 'Joanna'; to Professor Stewart Brown for providing a photocopy of Beryl Gilroy's *Stedman and Joanna: a Love in Bondage*; to Professor Ernst Van Den Boogard for advice on Dutch slavery and for the loan of unpublished papers; to Professor Wim Hoogbergen for a morning of fascinating advice about Suriname history; and to the staff of the British Library and of the Algemeen Rijksarchief and the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in Den Haag.

To Doutora Professora Maria Laura Bettencourt Pires, I owe deep gratitude on two counts: first, for appointing me to a position in her department at Universidade Aberta, and secondly for undertaking the supervision of this thesis. These two actions have enabled me to make the latter third of my academic career more productive than seemed possible, and I am everlastingly in her debt.

## Abstract

O tema desta tese de doutoramento é a obra *Narrative of a five year's expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the year 1772 to 1777* de John Gabriel Stedman, publicada em Londres, em 1796, pelo editor radical Joseph Johnson.

Levantam-se duas questões relacionadas com esta obra. A primeira refere-se à escrita do texto, à sua evolução mediante várias versões, e à sua extensa influência nas obras dos escritores ingleses, alemães, franceses e guyaneses que utilizam a história para usos próprios. A *Narrative* começou por ser o diário de Stedman durante os anos em que esteve no Suriname. Este diário tornou-se a base do manuscrito enviado para o editor em 1790 que foi, posteriormente, rescrito por um revisor e publicada como a *Narrative* autorizada em 1796. Entretanto, as origens deste texto importante podem ser traçadas através de duas versões prévias (nomeadamente o *Journal* publicado pela primeira vez em 1962, e a 'Narrative' de 1790, publicada pela primeira vez em 1988). William Blake foi o autor de pelo menos dezasseis das ilustrações presentes nesta edição e de poemas e gravuras que transformaram a história de Stedman. Após 1796, a história – especialmente o relato de Stedman do seu casamento com Joanna, uma escrava da plantação – tornou-se a base de várias peças de teatro, romances, poemas e panfletos em inglês, alemão, holandês e francês.

A abordagem da história deste processo complexo interligar-se-á com o debate, que então decorria, sobre a abolição do comércio de escravos e da própria escravatura. A segunda questão responde ao desafio lançado por Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak no seu ensaio pós-colonial 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' no qual a autora afirma não ser possível dar uma voz aos oprimidos<sup>1</sup>. Na sua busca de idiomas apropriados para a *Narrative*, Stedman descreve os Maroons rebeldes (escravos foragidos) em termos heróicos e neo-clássicos, Joanna é uma heroína pastoral e o próprio autor descreve-se como um homem de sentimentos. Será que esta procura de conceitos literários é bem sucedida na descrição da escravatura no Suriname de então, ou será que apenas se limita a enquadrar os escravos num discurso patriarcal, europeu e colonial? Será que Joanna foi explorada igualmente por 'both the phallus and the pen'?<sup>2</sup> Ou será que o problema reside na incapacidade do perito pós-colonial de ouvir? Esta questão abrange as metamorfoses da história de Stedman, os poemas e ilustrações de Blake e as peças de teatro, romances e poemas a que deu origem, incluindo alguns de minha autoria.

Esta tese, tal como o seu título indica, pretende ser uma contribuição aos Estudos Ingleses e Americanos, na Especialidade de Estudos Americanos (Literatura Inglesa, século XVIII). Os Estudos Americanos constituem uma área multi-disciplinar. A *Narrative* de Stedman seguiram o modelo dos relatos publicados em *Captain Cook's Voyages* e surge contextualizada no âmbito do crescente interesse pela Literatura de Viagens, nas suas dimensões literária, científica e imperial. Ao procurar um estilo adequado, Stedman adquiriu um conhecimento profundo da Literatura Inglesa do século XVIII, e os capítulos 3 e 6 desta tese assumem-se como uma contribuição para esta área de saber. Mas a *Narrative* está localizada no Suriname e, tal como os textos derivados de escritores europeus, representa uma tentativa de descrição de alguns aspectos da vida neste território sul-americano. Os ramos dos estudos literários envolvidos,

portanto, entendem-se além da literatura inglesa e europeia dos séculos dezoito e dezanove para incluir estudos americanos e pós-coloniais com os seus componentes feministas. As pesquisas efectuadas abrangem também a história do comércio de escravos e a abolição do mesmo, em Inglaterra e na Europa, e a história e antropologia da escravatura no Suriname entre outros países. Finalmente, foi necessário trabalhar com textos holandeses, alemães (em tradução) e franceses, além de fontes inglesas e holandesas.

Capítulo 2 apresenta o enquadramento histórico dos temas focados em *Narrative*. Em primeiro lugar, o Suriname e as revoltas dos Maroons que Stedman deveria esmagar, em segundo lugar, a Grã-Bretanha e a longa campanha para a abolição da escravatura. Capítulo 3 problematiza os géneros literários: o heróico, o pastoral e o sentimental tal como eram entendidos no final do século XVIII, recorrendo aos muitos exemplos da literatura do século referido citados na 'Narrative' de 1790. Capítulo 4 analisa a escrita do *Journal* de Stedman (1962) para delinear o processo de criação em alturas e níveis diferentes, ao mesmo tempo que examina o primeiro relato de Stedman sobre a escravatura no Suriname e sobre a sua busca de meios de expressão apropriados. Capítulo 5 estuda a apresentação dos rebeldes Maroons, de Joanna e de Stedman em 'Narrative' de 1790 no âmbito dos conceitos de heróico, de pastoral e de sentimental. Capítulo 6 aborda o impacto que a obra de Stedman teve na pintura, na poesia e nas gravuras de William Blake. Tentaremos provar que Blake desempenhou um papel mais importante do que se reconhece em *Narrative* de 1796. Capítulo 7 analisa as alterações introduzidas pelo revisor na edição de *Narrative* de 1796. Apontaremos o argumento que os cortes levados a cabo pelo revisor, posteriormente corrigidos por Stedman com auxílio de Blake, não resultaram num texto inferior ao original. Capítulo 8 examina as variadas obras que surgiram no rasto de *Narrative* de 1796 desde as peças e romances de Frank Kratter, Thomas Morton, Anónimo, Lydia Child, Eugene Sue, Herman Ridder, Johan Hokstam, Beryl Gilroy, até os poemas de minha autoria sobre o tema. Capítulo 9 aborda a questão proposta anteriormente, a saber: *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Apresentaremos o argumento seguinte: 'Sim, podem, desde que não sejam silenciados pela crítica pós-colonial'. A tese contém quatro apêndices incluindo uma tradução das 'Endechas a bárbara, escrava' de Camões, o texto dos poemas referidos no capítulo 8, o relatório do Col Fourgeoud sobre a captura da arringa de Boni, e o texto de Stedman sobre 'The Execution of the Breaking on the Rack'.

The subject of this thesis is John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana* (London, 1796). Two basic questions are raised about this text. The first concerns its making, as it evolves through previous versions, and its extensive influence in plays, novels, poems and pamphlets by English, German, Dutch, French and Guyanese authors. These include William Blake in whose poems and engravings Stedman's story is creatively transformed. My second question takes up the challenge of Gayatri Spivak's post-colonial essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in which she effectively denies that the oppressed (the 'subaltern') can be given 'a voice'. In his search for appropriate idioms, Stedman cast the rebel slaves in neo-classical heroic terms, Joanna his mulatto 'wife' as a pastoral heroine, and himself as a 'man of sentiment'. What do these self-consciously literary idioms succeed in telling us about slave life in Surinam at the period? The question extends to the metamorphoses of Stedman's story, in Blake's poems and engravings, and in the

various plays novels and poems it has generated, including some of my own.

Two kinds of scientific enquiry are employed. The first involves a close reading of the evolution of Stedman's Narrative, from his Journal to the 1790 manuscript and to the published text of 1796. Each stage involves significant changes in the idioms of representation. This textual scrutiny continues with the study of the works based on the Stedman story. The second enquiry is into the relationship of these texts to history, in particular to the contemporary debate over slavery and abolition. More recently, the context for interest in the Narrative has been the post war rise of nationalism throughout the former European empires, bringing Stedman's work back into print as a valuable historical and anthropological source, and as the inspiration for further fiction and poetry.

## Introduction

The subject of this thesis is John Gabriel Stedman's, *Narrative of a five year's expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the year 1772 to 1777*, issued in London in 1796 by the radical publisher Joseph Johnson.

Two basic questions are raised about this text. The first concerns its making, as it evolves through previous versions, and then its extensive influence in the works of English, German, French and Guyanese writers who deploy the tale for their own purposes. The *Narrative* began as a journal, maintained daily during Stedman's years in Surinam. This became the basis for the manuscript sent to his publisher in 1790, which was then substantially re-written by a copy-editor and issued as the authorised *Narrative* of 1796. The origins of this important text may thus be traced back through two previous versions (the *Journal*, published in 1962, and the 1790 'Narrative, published in 1988). Meanwhile, at least 16 of the plates for the 1796 *Narrative* had been engraved by William Blake, in whose poems and engravings Stedman's story is creatively transformed. After 1796, that story – and especially Stedman's account of his 'marriage' to Joanna, a plantation slave girl – became the basis of several plays, novels, poems and pamphlets in English, German, Dutch and French. My account of the history this complex process will be linked to the on-going argument about the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery.

My second question takes up the challenge of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's post-colonial essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in which she effectively denies that the oppressed (the 'subaltern') can be given a voice.<sup>1</sup> In his search for appropriate idioms for his *Narrative*, Stedman cast the rebel Maroons in heroic, neo-classical terms, Joanna as a pastoral heroine, and himself as a 'man of sentiment'. Do these self-consciously literary idioms succeed in telling us

---

<sup>1</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice', *Wedge* 7/8 (Winter/Spring 1985) pp. 120-130, revised and reprinted in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271-313, and in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 66-111.

anything about slave life in Surinam at the period, or do they simply submerge the slaves within what post-colonial studies terms a patriarchal, European colonial discourse? Was Joanna exploited equally by ‘both the phallus and the pen’?<sup>2</sup> Or is the real problem the inability of the post-colonial critic to *listen*? The question extends to the metamorphoses of Stedman’s story, in Blake’s poems and engravings, and in the various plays, novels and poems it has generated, including some of my own.

The thesis is necessarily inter-disciplinary in the range of reading consulted, and my bibliography reflects this. The *Narrative* is set in Suriname, and it and all the derivative texts represent European attempts to describe aspects of life in this South American territory. The branches of literary studies involved therefore extend beyond eighteenth and early nineteenth century English and European literature to include American Studies and Postcolonial Studies with its Feminist components. My investigation has also drawn on the history of the slave trade and its abolition, both in Britain and Europe, and on the history and anthropology of slavery in Suriname and elsewhere. Finally, it has involved me in working with texts in Dutch and German (through translation) and in French, and with English and Dutch source materials.

Two kinds of scientific enquiry are employed. The first involves a close reading of the evolution of Stedman’s *Narrative*, from the *Journal* to the 1790 manuscript to the published text of 1796. Each stage in the process involves significant changes, both linguistic and in the idiom of representation, as Stedman refines his account in an attempt to plumb its full significance, and as his editor modifies his text in preparing it for publication. This textual scrutiny continues with the study of the different texts based on the Stedman story. Where these are in English, the examination concerns both language and form: where they are in German, French and Dutch, the focus is principally on form.

The second enquiry is into the relationship of these texts to contemporary history, in particular to the debate over slavery and abolition. Stedman’s text and its English derivatives relate fairly closely to stages in the abolition controversy in England between 1787 and the 1834, itself reflecting controversy over the French

---

<sup>2</sup> ‘Both the phallus and the pen are instruments of domination’, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (Routledge, 1989) p. 87.

revolution and over Parliamentary reform. Placing the German, American, French and Dutch versions of this story, and especially the different presentations of Joanna, is more problematic. The texts are too few and the history too broad for anything more than tentative links to be suggested. Even so, there are moments of illumination, as though a searchlight has been directed on to the state of the debate in the countries concerned. More recently, the context for interest in the *Narrative* has been the post war rise of nationalism in the West Indies, and throughout the European empires, bringing Stedman's work back into print as a valuable historical source, and as the inspiration for further fiction and poetry.

Beyond these strictly scientific enquires, concerning variants in the texts and in the historical records, are questions more appropriate to the humanities than to the sciences. It is possible to talk scientifically of genre and no competent critic can ignore this requirement. But it is a fundamental argument of this thesis that as Stedman abandoned the pose of scientific observer and experimented with the literary genres of the heroic, the pastoral and the sentimental, he *got closer to the truth of his historical experience*. In the process, he frequently meddled with the historical record, altering or exaggerating facts and tampering with the chronology. There are moments when his naivety in these matters makes one smile. But the real purpose of the increasing elaboration of his *Narrative* was to explain himself to himself, by honouring Joanna and the rebel Maroons as the central figures in the most important experience of his life. The criticism that is truly enlightening, that fulfils its purpose in sending readers back to the texts to read again with heightened understanding and enjoyment, is the criticism that brings out how such transformations work. It requires something more than scientific method. It requires imagination and the ability to read and to listen, including listening to silence. I believe this ability may be enhanced by good teaching. I also believe that ultimately it is the key to good science.

Two books barely mentioned in the thesis stand out among my recent reading. The first, re-read after some thirty-five years, is Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis: the Representation of reality in Western Literature* (in William Trask's translation of 1953). It is sometimes startling to re-encounter a book and discover how much of what you thought were your own ideas were laid down by its influence many years ago. The scope and erudition of Auerbach's enquiry is supported by the combination of criticism, history and theory he brings to his task. He takes it for

granted that great literature does 'represent' reality (there is no nonsense about 'interrogating' texts – as though the critic belonged to the secret police of some Balkan dictatorship), and that his job is to 'listen' to the conjunction of genius with history. He set a challenging, even dismaying standard, but one that is not to be shirked. The fact that he wrote in exile (*Mimesis* was written in Istanbul during World War 2) and without access to libraries, in a language that recent history had de-valued, reinforces ones respect. Literature, and the criticism of literature, belongs out there in the confrontation with the unspeakable.

The second of these books is provisional and controversial. Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct: the New Science of Language and Mind* presents the conclusions of the most recent (at least, to 1994) research into the Cognitive Sciences. As poet, critic and historian, I am not competent to pass judgement on his findings, except to say his book is rigorously argued and wonderfully readable. But Pinker's theory restores language to us, after the years of behaviourism and linguistic determinism and the proclaimed arbitrariness of 'signs', as an instinct, a universal grammar that guides our understanding of the world, as surely as the salmon's instinct guides it to spawn in the stream of its birth. Faith in language is, in the last resort (or in the current state of research) a faith. But if this is where the 'new Darwinism' is taking us, we can all cheer up a bit.

# Chapter One

## The Texts

In the summer of 1796, John Gabriel Stedman, recently promoted Lieutenant-Colonel on the half-pay list of the British army, published his *Narrative of a five year's expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the year 1772 to 1777: elucidating the History of that Country, and describing its Productions, Viz., Quadrupedes, Birds, Fishes, Reptiles, Trees, Shrubs, Fruits, & Roots; with an account of the Indians of Guiana, & Negroes of Guinea.*<sup>3</sup>

The book was in two quarto volumes, each of just over four hundred pages, and was illustrated with eighty engravings from original drawings made by Stedman. The publisher was Joseph Johnson, famous for a list that included works by Tom Paine, William Godwin, Mary Wolstonecraft, Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, John Howard, and Thomas Malthus among many other radical figures.<sup>4</sup> Over this latest book he had gone to some trouble and expense – hiring a well-known copy-editor to prepare the manuscript for publication, advancing Stedman the considerable sum of £500, and destroying a first print run of 2000 copies when Stedman demanded last-minute alterations. The engravers included Royal Academician Francesco Bartolozzi and the respected journeyman (but unknown poet) William Blake. A limited number of the two volumes were published in large paper issue (Royal quarto) with all plates coloured by hand.

The *Narrative*, as the full title indicates, was one of those old-fashioned travel memoirs impossible to imagine anyone contemplating today (or any publisher willing to sponsor) in which the author gives a full account of the country he has visited and of his experiences there. Stedman offers the reader a history of the colony of Suriname, including what he has been able to find out about the history

---

<sup>3</sup> The full bibliographical details are as follows: *Narrative of a five year's expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the year 1772 to 1777: elucidating the History of that Country, and describing its Productions, Viz., Quadrupedes, Birds, Fishes, Reptiles, Trees, Shrubs, Fruits, & Roots; with an account of the Indians of Guiana, & Negroes of Guinea.* By Capt. J. G. Stedman, illustrated with 80 elegant Engravings, from drawings made by the author. London, Printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church Yard, & J. Edwards, Pall Mall. 1796. Demy 4to. 2 vols., vol. 1 pp. xviii & 407 plus 38 plates and 2 maps, vol. 2 pp. iv & 404 plus 40 plates.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald P. Tyson, *Joseph Johnson: a Liberal Publisher* (University of Iowa Press, 1979), *passim*.

of its Amerindian population and of the African slaves imported from 'Guinea'. He provides, rather more reliably, a full account of its flora and fauna, including some of the earliest descriptions of the ecology of Latin American rain forests. He narrates his regiment's long-running war against the 'rebel' maroon communities of escaped slaves, anticipating a vast literature about guerrilla warfare and counter-insurgency tactics, and offering conclusions based on his personal experience of jungle combat which were still being studied in American military academies in the 1960s. His book is one of the richest, most detailed, and most caustic accounts ever devised of the beliefs, practices, divisions and atrocities of a planter-slave society. Finally, it is one of the greatest love stories of the period. At the very heart of the *Narrative* is Stedman's elaborately wrought account of his 'marriage' to Joanna, a mulatto slave who bore his son John but who died some five years after his regiment was withdrawn from Suriname.

With such ingredients, it is scarcely surprising the book was an immediate success. The engravings were praised for their 'uncommon elegance'.<sup>5</sup> The description of Suriname's slave society provided fodder for both sides in the ongoing and increasingly bitter debate about the abolition of slavery. Translations appeared in rapid succession. Two German versions, both abridged, appeared in 1797, a French version (with additional material by the translator P.F. Henry) in 1798, two Dutch versions in 1799, and an abridged Swedish translation in 1800. The translations began to feed off each other, as though the tale with cuts and additions was being passed on as in an oral culture. One of the two Dutch translations of 1799 was translated from the German while a further Dutch version in 1799-1800 was based on P.F. Henry's French version – as was Borghi's Italian translation of 1818.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> *Critical Review* (January 1797) p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> The full bibliographical details of these texts are as follows: (i) *Stedman's Nachrichten von Surinam und von seiner Expedition gegen die rebellischen Neger in dieser Kolonie in den Jahren 1772 bis 1777*. Benjamin Gottlob Hoffman, Hamburg 1797. 1 vol., 8vo., pp. iii-xiv & 522 plus 7 plates and map. (ii) *Stedman's Nachrichten von Suriname, dem letzten Aufruhr der dortigen Negersclaven und ihrer Bezwungung in den Jahren 1772. bis 1777*. Auszugsweise übersetzt von M.C. Sprengel. Halle. in der Rengerschen Buchhandlung. 1797. 2 vols. in one, 8vo, pp. 279 & 222. (iii) *Voyage à Surinam et dans l'Intérieur de la Guiane, contenant La Relation de cinq Années de Courses et d'Observations faites dans cette Contrée intéressante et peu connue; Avec des Détails sur les Indiens de la Guiane et les Nègres; Par le Capitaine J. G. Stedman*; traduit de l'Anglais par P. F. Henry: Suivi du Tableau de la Colonie Français de Cayenne. Avec une Collection de 44 Planches in-40, gravées en taille-douce, contenant des Vues, Marines, Cartes Géographiques, Plans, Portraits, Costumes, Animaux, Plantes, etc. dessinés sur les lieux par J. G. Stedman. A Paris, Chez F. Buisson. Imprimeur-Libraire, rue Hauterfeuille, no.20. Na VII de la

Meanwhile, Joanna – so tenderly described, so beautifully portrayed - was becoming an iconic figure. First, in a masque-spectacle *Joanna of Surinam* by John Cross presented at the Royal Circus, Blackfriars on July 2, 1804 (for which no known text survives). Next in *Taschenbuch der Reisen*, a German travel anthology compiled by E.A.W. Zimmermann, and simultaneously as the heroine of *Die Sklavin in Surinam* by Franz Kratter, based on the earliest German translation of Stedman's Narrative. Next, metamorphosed as Zelinda, a beautiful octoroon slave, in Thomas Morton's *The Slave: a Musical Drama in Three Acts* with music by Henry Bishop, staged at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden on November 12, 1816. Next in the anonymous novel *Joanna, or the Female Slave. A West Indian Tale*, published in 1824. Next once again as Zelinda in *Gambia, or The Slave*, a revival in November 1832 of Thomas Morton's musical drama of 1816. Next in the short story 'Joanna' in Mrs Lydia Child's *The Oasis*, published in Boston, Massachusetts in 1834. Finally, for the nineteenth century, as the heroine of a French novelette *Aventures de Hercule Hardi (1772)* by Eugene Sue, first published in 1840 and repeatedly thereafter, including an English translation of 1844.<sup>7</sup>

As we shall see in Chapter 2, this intense interest in Stedman's account and in the romance with Joanna reflected the long debate about the abolition of the slave

---

République. 3 vols, 12mo, pp. viii & 410, 440 & 506 plus 44 plates. Dated 1 Brumaire, An 7 (23 October, 1798). (iv) *Reize in de binnenland van Suriname, door Kapitein John Gabriël Stedman*. Met plaaten. Naar het Hoogduitsch door J. D. Pasteur. Leiden : A. & J. Honkoop, 1799. 2 vols. in one, 8vo. (v) *I. G. Stedman's Reisen in Surinam, für die Jugend*, bearbeitet von M. Chr. Schulz. Neue Auflage mit V illuminierten Kupfertafeln. Berlin, in der Schüppelschen Buchhandlung, 1799 & 1805 8vo, pp. iv and 180, with 4 plates. (vi) *Reize naar Surinamen, en door de binnenste gedeelten van Guiana ; door den Capitain John Gabriël Stedman. met plaaten en kaarten*. Naar het Engelsch. Te Amsterdam, den Johannes Allart. 4 vols, 8vo, vols 1 & 2 (1799), vols 3 & 4 (1800). (vii) *Capitain Johan Stedmans Dagbok öfwer Sina Fälttåg i Surinam, jämte Beskrifning om detta Nybygges Inwånare och öfriga Märkwärdigheter*. Sammandrag. Stockholm : Trycht i Kongl. Ordens Boktryckeriet hos Assessoren Johan Pfeiffer, 1800. One vol. 12mo pp. 306 plus one plate. (viii) *Viaggio al Surinam e nell'Interno della Guiana ossia Relazione di Cinque Anni di Corse e di Osservazioni fatte in questo interessante e poco conosciuto Paese dal Capitano Stedman. versione dal franceses del Cav. Borghi*. Corredata del Ritratto dell'Autore ; di una Carta geografica, di rani colorati, ed accresciuta di note e di supplemento del Traduttore sulle altre parti della Guiana, nè visitante, nè descritte dal sig. Stedman. Milano, dall Tipografia di Giambattista Sonzogno, 1818. 4 vols, 12mo, 17 plates.

<sup>7</sup> These texts are as follows: (i) E.A.W. Zimmermann, *Taschenbuch der Reisen oder Unterhaltende Darstellung der Entdeckungen des 18ten Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1803. (ii) Franz Kratter, *Die Sklavin in Surinam* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1804 and Vien, 1805). (iii) Thomas Morton, *The Slave: a Musical Drama in Three Acts*, music by Henry Bishop, staged Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 12 November 1816 (London 1816 and 1818). (iii) Anon. *Joanna, or the Female Slave. A West Indian tale. Founded on Stedman's Narrative of an Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. London, 1824. (iv) Mrs (Lydia) Child, 'Joanna' in *The Oasis*, ed., Boston, 1834. (v) Eugène Sue, 'Aventures de Hercule Hardi (1772)' (Paris, 1840).

trade and of slavery. By 1838 slavery had been abolished in the British West Indies, and by 1848 in all French colonies. With almost uncanny correspondence, Stedman's *Narrative* and its derivatives disappear from the bibliographical record. Over a century elapses between the publication of Sue's novelette and the re-emergence of an interest in Stedman's *Narrative* in the context of European decolonisation. Two abridgements of the earliest texts were published, first of P.F. Henri's French translation of 1798 in a Club Francais du Livre edition in 1960, and then of the 1796 edition with modernised spelling by the Folio Society in 1963.<sup>8</sup> At this stage, however, the story began to take a further twist, with a set of curious and fascinating revelations about the making of the 1796 first edition of the *Narrative*.

In 1962, the English antiquarian Stanbury Thompson published *The Journal of John Gabriel Stedman 1744-1797, Soldier and Author, Including an authentic account of his expedition to Surinam in 1773*.<sup>9</sup> This was based a small green almanac together with a bundle of other papers Thompson had purchased for five shillings from a junk dealer in Pimlico some time about 1940. The title *Journal* is a little misleading. The first third of the book is a memoir of Stedman's early life from his birth to his enlistment in the Suriname expedition, written after he had settled in Tiverton. The remainder is a series of diaries kept more or less daily between October 1772 and July 1796, eight months before his death, but (as we shall see in chapter 4) with important gaps. In 1966 Thompson followed this with a biography, *John Gabriel Stedman: a study of his life and times*.<sup>10</sup>

Thompson's researches over the two decades he spent preparing the *Journal* for publication were mainly genealogical, and he completely overlooked the significance of two interesting revelations. This first, taken up by Geoffrey Keynes in the *Times Literary Supplement* of May 20, 1965, concerned the close

---

<sup>8</sup> These texts are as follows: (i) *Voyage à Surinam par le capitaine Jean-Gabriel Stedman. Edition établie et présentée par Michel Rouzé selon la traduction originale de P.-F. Henri* (sic). Paris : Le Club Français du Livre, 1960. 8vo, pp. 343 plus 68 plates. (ii) *Expedition to Surinam being the narrative of a five year's expedition against the revolted negroes of Surinam in Guiana on the wild coast of South America from the year 1772 to 1777 elucidating that country and describing its productions with an account of the Indians of Guiana and Negroes of Guinea by Captain John Stedman newly edited and abridged by Christopher Bryant and illustrated with with engravings selected from the earliest edition themselves made after drawings by the author*. London : Folio Society, 1963, 8vo, pp vi-viii & 239 plus 12 plates.

<sup>9</sup> Stanbury Thompson (ed.), *The Journal of John Gabriel Stedman, 1744-1797* (London, Mitre Press, 1962).

<sup>10</sup> Stanbury Thompson, *John Gabriel Stedman : A Study of His Life and Times* (Stapleford, Notts: Thompson, 1966).

friendship that sprang up between Stedman and William Blake.<sup>11</sup> It had been proposed earlier by David Erdman in his *Prophet Against Empire* (1954) that certain poems of Blake's, and in particular 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' (1793) had been influenced by his work as engraver preparing the some of the plates for the *Narrative*.<sup>12</sup> What the *Journal* established was that this was no distant professional relationship but a friendship maintained through an active correspondence, with Blake handling Stedman's business affairs and acting as his host during his visits to London. The links between Stedman's writings and Blake are re-explored in chapter 6.

The second revelation in the *Journal* is that Stedman was deeply dissatisfied with the production of his 1796 *Narrative*. 'My book marr'd entirely', he complained. 'Am put to the most extreme trouble and expense ... Bawdy oaths, lies, & preachings, in my unhappy book'<sup>13</sup>, and he apparently succeeded in getting Johnson to burn a first edition of 2000 copies while last minute corrections were made.<sup>14</sup> Unknown to Stedman, the manuscript he submitted to Johnson had been completely re-written by William Thomson, a professional copy editor hired for the purpose. It was only in 1988 that Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam: Transcribed for the First Time from the Original 1790 Manuscript* (henceforth 1790 'Narrative') was published in an edition lovingly and brilliantly edited by Richard and Sally Price.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the history of Stedman's 1796 *Narrative* may be pursued in two directions. First, backwards in time in search of the book's origins in the *Journal* and the 1790 'Narrative', and secondly forwards by examining its legacy in other texts.<sup>16</sup> The transformations of the story illuminate attitudes to slavery over four decades, and one of my purposes will be to locate the texts in the abolition debate. They provide a cautionary example of the ways in which the lives of colonised

---

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Keynes, 'William Blake and John Gabriel Stedman', *Times Literary Supplement*, Thursday May 20, 1965, p. 400.

<sup>12</sup> David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet against Empire: a Poet's Interpretation of the History of his own Times* (Princeton, 1954), pp. 209-223.

<sup>13</sup> *Journal*, p. 385 (composite entry for 24 June, 1785).

<sup>14</sup> Stedman to Charlotta Stedman, Jan. 1, 1796, quoted in *Thompson Life*, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Price and Sally Price (eds.), *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, with an Introduction and Notes* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> These texts are examined in chapter 8.

peoples came to be presented not simply in terms of European idioms and European tastes, but more profoundly as metaphors for entirely European concerns.

But my principal interest is in the representation itself. Stedman was not a great writer – his prose was adequate for a book with a fascinating content – but he was deeply interested in questions of style and genre and, as will be argued in chapter 3, his reading, particularly in eighteenth century texts, was wide. Between the diary entries made in Suriname during the mid-1770s and the completion of his ‘Narrative’ on 1 September 1790, he devised idioms for the presentation of himself, Joanna, and the rebel maroons of Suriname, based largely on that reading. The maroons were conceived of as examples of the ‘heroic’; Joanna as an essentially ‘pastoral’ heroine; and himself as a ‘man of sentiment’. Even before the *Narrative* was published, Blake made these idioms look anachronistic by recasting Joanna as the heroine of a new romantic vision.<sup>17</sup> Then the hack writer William Thomson, copy-editing Stedman’s manuscript, stripped away much of this presentation. Richard and Sally Price, understandably given the nature of their own project, regard Thomson’s alterations as vandalism.<sup>18</sup> Yet in a sense what Thomson did was to cut away Stedman’s decorations, allowing the bare story to speak for itself. The result was a book of undeniable power and influence, sparking the many imitations and re-interpretations already listed. I should, perhaps, make it clear that my preference is also for the 1790 ‘Narrative’, now revealed in all its richness. But it was the 1796 *Narrative* that made history.

## The Life

John Gabriel Stedman was born in on 4 April, 1744, at Dendermonde in the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> His birthplace was the heart of the principal battlefields of the War of the Austrian Succession (known in England as the War of Jenkins’ Ear), involving France, Prussia, Austria, Germany and Britain. The sacking and massacre at Bergen op Zoon, where he spent part of his childhood, occurred in 1747. His father, Captain Robert Stedman, was a commissioned officer in the

---

<sup>17</sup> Initially, in his ‘Visions of the Daughters of Albion’, 1793.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Narrative’ (1790), *Introduction* pp. LI-LXVI.

<sup>19</sup> The following information is taken from Thompson, *Life*, *passim* and from Stedman *Journal*, *passim*.

Scots Brigade, a mercenary regiment in the pay of the Stadtholder of the Netherlands, first established in 1570 to support William of Orange in the revolt against Spain. His mother Antoinette Christina, née Van Ceulen, was a Dutch woman whose irascible temper her son grew up to share. John Gabriel was given no formal education, apart from some French lessons from Sisters of the Soeur Convent, abruptly terminated by his parents when they found him participating in a Mass, and some English lessons from a regimental schoolmaster who was quickly sacked for maltreating him. In 1755-56, he spent a disastrous year in Dunfermline, Scotland, being neglected by his uncle John Stedman M.D., afterwards author of the long forgotten treatise *Lelias and Hortensia*.<sup>20</sup> From this year, Stedman learned only the basis for his later fierce appreciation of Smollett's *Roderick Random*, with its opening chapters about the boyhood ill-treatment of its Scottish hero. Returning to Holland in 1756, he showed promise as an artist, and asked his parents to send him to Italy or Antwerp for training. As he later wrote, 'From the danger of my again being made a Papist, and some other pecuniary reason, this was refused me'.<sup>21</sup> His future was resolved when, on July 14, 1760, he joined his father's regiment as an ensign, subject to the Stadtholder.

Following their revolt against Spanish rule, the United Provinces of the Netherlands, had come into existence with the Peace of Westphalia 1648. The different provinces – Holland, Utrecht, Gelderland, Zeeland, Groningen, Friesland and Overijssel – owed allegiance to the Stadtholder, belonging to the House of Orange, but they had their own Spanish, French, German and Austrian interests.<sup>22</sup> The role of the garrison towns – Bergen op Zoom, Breda, Heusden, Deventer, and Maastricht (to mention only those in which Stedman served) – was to maintain the Stadtholder's authority. This put no strain on the adolescent Stedman's mercenary loyalty (he supported the House of Orange to his dying days). But it left him extremely bored.

The War of Jenkin's Ear had ended with the peace of Aix-La-Chapelle in 1748. As an ensign in the Scots Brigade, with no money or interest and with no wars in the offing, Stedman was doomed to what he lived out over the next dozen

---

<sup>20</sup> Dr John Stedman, *Laelius and Hortensia; or, Thoughts on the Nature and Objects of Taste and Genius, in a Series of Letters to Two Friends* (Edinburgh, 1782).

<sup>21</sup> *Journal*, p.20.

<sup>22</sup> For a survey, see chapter two 'The Dutch Republic in its Dotage, 1747-1780' in Simon Shama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813* (Collins, 1977), pp. 24-63.

years, namely, drinking, womanising, gambling and brawling in one decaying garrison town after another. Trying to make sense of these years long afterwards, he described journeys and love affairs and tried to distinguish patterns ('Heusden was the town where I offer'd incense to Bacchus, Nijmegen to Venus, and at Breda I used something to rattle the dice'<sup>23</sup>). The only real story he had to tell was the evolving mystery of the person he would discover himself to be when he arrived in Surinam. In 1771, he made a fruitless trip to London in search of promotion. The same motive inspired his enlistment in 1772 as a volunteer, with the rank of captain by brevet, in an expedition to Suriname (Dutch Guiana) to suppress the most recent of a succession of slave revolts.

Suriname had been a Dutch colony since the Treaty of Breda 1667 which ended the second Anglo-Dutch war, and it was the Dutch who turned it into a profitable plantation colony.<sup>24</sup> Since the earliest days of the slave colony, runaway slaves had taken refuge in the rain-forested hinterland, forming their own 'maroon' communities. These maroons posed a serious threat to the sugar and coffee plantations, which they raided regularly for recruits, weapons and supplies. In 1760 and 1762 respectively, two of the biggest groups, the Ndjuka and the Saramaka maroons had won their independence by treaty. But fresh runaways resumed fighting during the late 1760s, and on Christmas day 1772 the Scots Brigade, commanded by the Swiss Colonel Louis Henry Fourgeoud, was dispatched by the Estates-General to Suriname to reinforce the local troops and militia. Over the years 1773 to 1777, Stedman took part in seven campaigns, though he saw action only once with the storming of Boni's fortified village at Gado Sabi in 1775. He compiled extensive notes about the peoples and the flora and fauna of Suriname, together with its history, economy and the course of the war. But he became best known for the most important relationship of his life, namely, his love for Joanna, a slave on the Fauconberg plantation. Joanna and he were 'married' in May 1773 and she gave birth to their son John in November 1774. Under Dutch colonial law, the children of such unions were the property of the slave-owner, and much of Stedman's passion and energy was devoted to attempting to secure the manumission of both his son and his wife on a captain's wages. In April 1777, the regiment was withdrawn and he was forced to leave his

---

<sup>23</sup> *Journal*, p. 91 (n.d.).

<sup>24</sup> For a full account, see chapter 2.

family behind, though with John's freedom secured and with the promise that Joanna would be protected by Mrs Godefroy, a wealthy planter he trusted.

Stedman returned to Holland where in 1783, following the fourth Anglo-Dutch war, the Scots Brigade was disbanded. Rejecting the offer of a commission with a Dutch regiment, he sold his company for £1,000 and settled at Tiverton in Devon, on the half-pay list of the British Army. There he began writing his *Journal* and his *Narrative*, along with occasional, very conventional poetry and two texts of which no trace exists, namely, a comedy called *The Devil in Dover, or The Return from the Grand Tour*, and *A Treatise on Duelling*.<sup>25</sup> In 1782, he had married in Holland a Miss Adriana Wierts Van Coehorn, great granddaughter of the famous military engineer Baron Van Coehorn. In November of the same year, Joanna died in Suriname, apparently of poison. Their son John joined Stedman and his Dutch wife in Tiverton and became a midshipman in the British Navy, but was shipwrecked and drowned off Jamaica in 1791. In late 1793, the Scots Brigade was reformed and Stedman, newly promoted Lieutenant-Colonel, was ordered to Dunfermline to report for duty. But he was immediately sent home as unfit for active service. He died at Tiverton on 1 March 1797, a few months after the publication of his *Narrative*. Bizarrely, he left instructions he was to be buried at midnight alongside Bampfylde Moore Carew, self-styled King of the Gypsies, whom he regarded as a kindred spirit and who had been similarly buried at night in June 1758.

## **From Commonwealth to Postcolonial Literature**

My own first encounter with Stedman and the story of Joanna began in 1972 when I bought for 75p a second hand copy of *the Journal of John Gabriel Stedman* at Waterstone's (the tiny antiquarian bookshop, not the subsequent chain-store) in Liverpool. I was then about to embark for Sierra Leone, to take up a position as Lecturer in English at Fourah Bay University College and it was the love story with Joanna that engaged my attention. Two months later, within a fortnight of my own marriage, I wrote on the wooden veranda of our colonial-style bungalow in Freetown the poem that was published in my collection *For Captain Stedman* and that appears in Appendix Two.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Journal*, pp. 337 (n.d.) and 376 (n.d.).

In those days, my prime literary interest was in the forms and language appropriate for representing the experience of colonised peoples. I was interested in this question both as poet and literary critic, and in 1970 I had already bought in a bookshop in the main square of Beira, Mozambique's second city, a copy of *Os Lusíadas* in the edition edited by Hernâni Cidade.<sup>26</sup> Camões fascinated me as the first European artist to have confronted the problems of using a European language and European genres for writing about non-European peoples and landscapes. *Os Lusíadas* is a many-sided poem and no single interpretation can encompass its many meanings. Camões was the laureate of Portugal, of the history of its landscape and peoples, and the plural 'heroes' of *Os Lusíadas* are 'the Portuguese'. He was also a lover of Latin literature, and through Latin of Greek authors, and *Os Lusíadas* can also be read as testimony to the 're-discovery' of classical learning. Yet Camões was also a poet who left all this behind, embarking on a poetic journey where no European poet had sailed before. As the first major European artist to cross the equator, he was the first to face the challenge of finding ways of giving expression to such new experiences, Da Gama's voyage of discovery becoming an extended metaphor for his own explorations in the 'craft' of poetry. Encountering Camões in Beira, when I was about to leave for Quelimane about which he had written so movingly some four centuries earlier.<sup>27</sup> I used him as a touchstone. The evidence is the number of references to him in my collections *For Captain Stedman* and *The View from the Stockade*.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, the intellectual context for such concerns within English Studies was the new so-called 'discipline' of Commonwealth Literature<sup>29</sup>. This had sprung up in the wake of British de-colonisation and the arrival on the scene, apparently from nowhere, of a new generation of brilliant writers from the former British colonies. They included George Lamming, Sam Selvon and V.S. Naipaul from the Caribbean, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, and R.K. Narayan from India. There was no doubting their originality and

---

<sup>26</sup> Luís de Camões, *Obras Completas, com Prefácio e Notas do Prof. Hernâni Cidade*, 5 vols., (Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1947), Vols. IV and V.

<sup>27</sup> *Lusíads*, Canto 5, stanzas 75-84.

<sup>28</sup> Landeg White, *For Captain Stedman* (Harry Chambers/Peterloo Poets, 1983) and *The View from the Stockade* (Dangaroo Press, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> The first department of Commonwealth Literature was founded at Leeds University in 1964.

distinctiveness, and a way was found of containing them academically by proposing an alliance between young novelists, dramatists and poets from the 'old' commonwealth (of Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and the 'new' commonwealth (of Indian, Africa and the West Indies). It was, of course, only from a British metropolitan perspective that these writers appeared to be linked by the commonwealth label. Lecturing on the novelist V.S. Naipaul in Trinidad in the 1960s, I spoke of him as a local writer. Subsequently in Malawi in the early 1970s, I called him a writer from the West Indies. It was only after my return to Britain in 1980 that I found his work featuring on Commonwealth Literature syllabuses, alongside the Nigerian Achebe, the Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiongo, the Canadian Margaret Lawrence and the Australian Patrick White. All these were assumed to be doing new and interesting things with the language and the literary forms they had 'inherited' from what was termed 'the imperial encounter' – an encounter which was assumed to have entered a new phase with national independence and the march of modernisation.<sup>30</sup>

When I published my first book *V.S. Naipaul: a Critical Introduction*, I argued that the problem of the third world writer was essentially a problem of perspective.<sup>31</sup> As a writer from Trinidad, writing largely (in those days) about Trinidadians for a metropolitan audience, Naipaul could not avoid being regarded as the interpreter of one region to another. But it was an aspect of Naipaul's growing stature as a novelist that he could be shown constantly to be questioning the assumptions inherent in the form and language he was using. On the one side was the closed east Indian community of his childhood, with its categorisation by caste, its belief in dharma, in lives governed by a pre-determined destiny, its arranged marriages, its unchanging rituals. Each of these was at odds with the novel's insistence that character is fate, that plots involve choices, and that all individuals must be given equal chances to reveal their humanity. Naipaul instanced *The Princes* by Manohar Malgonkar, in which an 'untouchable' boy grows up to be a left wing politician and 'malevolent revolutionary', lapsing

---

<sup>30</sup> For a summary of these developments, see chapter one 'Introducing the Post-Colonial' and chapter three 'Theory' in Dennis Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (Blackwell, 1998), pp. 1-19 and 56-83.

<sup>31</sup> Landeg White, *V.S. Naipaul: a Critical Introduction* (Macmillan, 1975).

morally by denying his caste: the novel form, Naipaul argues, resists such a judgement.<sup>32</sup> Assumptions about individual worth are inherent to the genre.

The other face of his colonial predicament was the urban, Creole society of the Port of Spain where he spent his adolescence – the ex-slave ‘picaroon society’, valuing trickery and style but lacking any coherent standards beyond an attractive tolerance for eccentricity and failure. Without established rituals, or any social order other than that defined by skin colour or money, it produced ‘characters’ in abundance, but was unable to nurture them or to promote achievement by giving shape to ambition.<sup>33</sup> In short, this ‘third world’s’ third world was a society without ‘plots’, and in the end it was a place to escape from. Each of Naipaul’s Trinidad novels ends with an escape.

Naipaul’s point is that such colonial societies, especially those in the fabricated West Indies, look cruelly vulnerable when defined by the standards set in play by the conventional English novel. ‘Trinidad full of crazy people’ says the narrator of *The Mystic Masseur*,<sup>34</sup> and so they will appear in the hands of an educated commentator deploying a form devised to explore the complexities of class in early capitalist Britain. For Naipaul, it is not enough to find comedy in characters trapped in absurd postures by absurd situations. There are times when the situation ‘satirises itself, turns satire inside out, takes satire to a point where it touches pathos if not tragedy’.<sup>35</sup> This was the context in which I argued as follows:

For Naipaul, then, and I would suggest for other writers in his position, the problem of form becomes the problem of establishing the right perspective. Only by placing himself as author accurately in relation to his material can he convince the reader that his vision is complete, and that he is not taking the virtues of westernisation for granted. What is forced on him by the special circumstances in which he became a writer is a quality of self-consciousness, a nagging awareness that “There’s something absurd about the fictional form: it’s an artificial activity, made-up people taking part in an invented action. The first thing for a writer is to understand why he’s setting these people in all motion. Which leads to the second problem: I didn’t know who I was.”<sup>36</sup>

There are merits in this argument. But, looking back twenty-five years on, I am not sure what I meant by ‘the virtues of Westernisation’.

---

<sup>32</sup> V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London, 1964) p. 226. See also White, *Naipaul*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>33</sup> V.A. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London, 1982), pp. 40-45 and 71-77.

<sup>34</sup> V.S. Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* (London, 1957), p.17.

<sup>35</sup> V.S. Naipaul, ‘London’ in *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (London, 1972), p. 11. See also White, *Naipaul*, pp. 83-85.

In 1978, Edward Said published his *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, a provocative, tendentious but extremely influential survey of European 'oriental' scholarship, which is now regarded as the founding text of the new 'discipline' of Post-Colonial Studies.<sup>37</sup> Surveying a series of English and French scholarly texts from the late-eighteenth to the twentieth century, Said summed up his argument as follows:

My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the orient, politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period ... European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.<sup>38</sup>

Essentially, drawing on the work of Gramsci and Foucault, Said placed knowledge in the context of power. European knowledge of non-European societies both served and reinforced imperial power, and was in turn conditioned by the requirements of power. The invention of the colonised 'Other' served the dual purpose of maintaining control and of strengthening European identity by constructing an awareness of difference.

Said's concern was with European texts rather than 'third world' writers and in his more recent work he has continued to focus on 'the great canonical texts' of Defoe, Jane Austen, Dickens, Conrad and Kipling to reveal what is 'silent or marginally present' in the discourses of imperialism.<sup>39</sup> Obviously, the next development was to investigate the voices of the 'silenced' or the 'marginalized', as the Indian academic Gayatri Spivak attempted in a brief essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak', first published in 1985.<sup>40</sup> Borrowing the term subaltern from Gramsci's prison letters (his code word for the proletariat), Spivak asked whether it is possible to recover from history the voices of the oppressed. She takes as her

---

<sup>36</sup> White, *Naipaul*, p 24, quoting Naipaul's interview with Francis Wyndham, *Sunday Times* (London), 10 September, 1968.

<sup>37</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, (Penguin, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice', *Wedge* 7/8 (Winter/Spring 1985) pp. 120-130, revised and reprinted in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271-313, and in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 66-111.

example those Indian widows who committed ritual suicide ('sati') at their husbands' deaths by throwing themselves on the funeral pyre. The only English records available are those of East India Company policemen, alienated by what they were noting, and incapable of transcribing even the widows names and castes correctly. From them, says Spivak bleakly, it is impossible to 'put together "a voice".'

The extraordinary influence of Spivak's essay has been all out of proportion to its actual merits as an exploration of limited historical records. At one level, what she is reporting on is a failed historical project. Obviously, to a modern Indian feminist, the actions of these widows – what was in their minds as they threw themselves on those dreadful pyres - is difficult to understand, and the available English records throw no light on the matter. But the news that voices have disappeared from history is hardly original. The only reason why these women's names are preserved at all is that the East India Company had banned 'suti' (sic) in 1829, and was consequently keeping track of the practice. An unintended irony of her argument is that we know even less about the husbands than we do about the widows, and that what we do know is entirely the consequence of the widows' actions. It would be perverse to argue that these husbands have been even more 'silenced' by history, but that would be a legitimate conclusion from her historical method. Any good historian is wary of drawing a simple correspondence between the quality of the records and the importance of characters or events, and had I been an editor of the journal to which Spivak's essay was originally submitted I would probably have turned it down.

The fact is that Spivak is not especially interested in history. Appropriately for someone whose first published work was an edited translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.<sup>41</sup> her question 'Can the Subaltern speak?' is essentially philosophical. The title of her most recent book *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason*<sup>42</sup> deliberately echoes Kant. The legendary impenetrability of her essay (the most recent version of which appears in that book) is partly due to the fact that every sentence gestures towards every conceivable theoretical position in an

---

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1976).

<sup>42</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

effort to anticipate possible attack. Addressing the topic of Subaltern Studies as it existed in India in the 1980s, she denies that its project – to allow the voice of the subaltern finally to be heard – is a feasible one. It involves constructing the subaltern as a subject, a collective consciousness, aware of its silencing, and given a voice by the investigator. This can only be done, she argues, by suppressing the heterogeneity of the subaltern and making him/her our contemporary. Against this, she sets an interpretation of Derrida's critique of Western logocentrism in arriving at the conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak, and all appearances of speaking are (philosophically, of course) illusions. I am not competent to write a critique of her *Critique of Kant's Critique*, and I suspect she would repudiate the uses I have made in this thesis of the question with which she began. But since that question was originally addressed to the historical record, I see no reason why a literary historian should not attempt a historical answer – mine being that it depends on the records and on the historian's capacity to listen (including listening to non-English-speakers).

Spivak's writings appear to me to be complemented rather than opposed by those of her rival Indian academic Homi Bhabha. One of her catch phrases is 'strategic essentialism', which she employs to refer to the interrogation or deconstruction of 'essentialist terms' characteristic of imperialism and the enlightenment. For Bhabha, however, this is in itself too 'essentialist' or 'universalist', and his writing is devoted to emphasising the ambivalence and 'hybridity', the 'liminal' or 'interstitial' spaces that characterise such constructions as 'nation', 'identity' and 'resistance'. His focus has shifted increasingly to 'doubly-colonised' women and international migrants as the true representatives of the post-colonial, seeking to find *The Location of Culture* (1994) in the marginal, 'haunting', 'unhomely' spaces between dominant groups.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the work of these three gurus has been attacked in an apparently endless number of critical essays, many of them much better written than the defining texts.<sup>44</sup> It's a curious feature of post-colonial studies that scarcely anyone

---

<sup>43</sup> Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (New York, 1990), and especially *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Robert J.C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West* (Routledge, 1990), Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Blackwell, 1996), and Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures*.

has a good word for it. Rarely can a discipline, at least in the Humanities and Social Sciences, have moved from founding father to terminal crisis in such a short period, but the fact is that most post-colonial critics announce their allegiance by distancing themselves from their subject. Even Gayatri Spivak has declared, in *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* that most of what passes for post-colonial studies in the United States is bogus, and with such proponents who needs enemies?

In one respect, post-colonial studies provided a much-needed corrective to earlier Commonwealth Literature approaches by giving emphasis to the politics of power. In others, it has been a paradoxical, erratic, even contradictory discipline. Talking of ‘the profound silence between cultures which finally cannot be traversed by understanding’, it addresses the concerns of ‘the wretched of the earth’ in abstruse, jargon-ridden English accessible only to a privileged few.<sup>45</sup> Claiming to ‘listen’, it has conspired in ‘silencing’ third world voices by admitting only what it has been predisposed to hear. Flirting with theories of linguistic determinism long since abandoned by professional linguists, it has ignored vernacular languages, both written and oral, making literacy in French or English the first requirement for attention.<sup>46</sup> A basic premise has been that colonised writers are ‘silenced’ until they ‘write back’ in the colonisers’ language, seizing ‘the power to create and re-create the world’.<sup>47</sup> Yet even its canonical authors resist such categorisation. Ngugi wa Thiong’o, for instance, writes mainly in Gikuyu.<sup>48</sup> Soyinka’s English poetry draws heavily and consistently on Yoruba sources,<sup>49</sup> while in the novels and travelogues of V.S. Naipaul anti-colonial revolt is, to say the least, muted. The virtual invisibility of Naipaul’s work in post-colonial criticism is an interesting symptom of the discipline’s provincialism:

---

<sup>45</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (Routledge, 1989), p. 86. See also Terry Eagleton ‘In the Gaudy Supermarket’, review of Spivak *Critique*, in *London Review of Books*, 13 May 1999, pp- 3-6.

<sup>46</sup> See Amit Chaudhuri, “The word ‘Indian’ is almost only ever used, as a taxonomic term in contemporary literature, in connection with the word ‘English’; no one speaks of the Indian novel in Bengali, or Urdu, or Kanmada”, in ‘Lure of the Hybrid: What the Post-Colonial Indian Novel means to the West’, *Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 3, 1999, pp. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 87.

<sup>48</sup> He sets out his reasons in ‘The Language of African Literature’ in Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Currey, 1986), pp. 4-33.

<sup>49</sup> This is true even of ‘Fado Singer: for Amalia Rodriguez’ (sic) in Wole Soyinka, *Idanre and other Poems* (Methuen, 1967), p.47.

many of its insights were present in his work before the discipline formally emerged.

When post-colonial critics complain about the ‘silencing’ of the colonised ‘other’, one wonders if they have ever disembarked from a ship in Port of Spain or from a plane in Lagos and *listened* to this silence. The first rule for anyone engaging in the study of another culture is to gain some familiarity with the language. Researchers into oral or written vernacular literatures like Karin Barber or Isabel Hofmeyr or Duncan Brown (or indeed myself)<sup>50</sup> have been driven to oppose the postcolonial paradigm to make space for the possibility (to take Karin Barber’s example) that oral voices may be reactionary and misogynist.<sup>51</sup> As Brown remarks, ‘it has become increasingly clear that it is not that the colonised has been unable to speak, but that the coloniser (and too often the postcolonial critic) has been unable to hear’.<sup>52</sup> If these criticisms appear somewhat mean-spirited, that too is characteristic of a discipline that has been strong on moral point scoring and short on generosity.

In some ways most reprehensible of all, has been post-colonialism’s reductive approach to history. History is, after all, its very *raison d’être* – without formal and informal imperialism, where would the subject be? Yet all too often the history of Europe’s dealings with colonised countries is spirited away, as in Spivak’s ‘Can the Subaltern Speak’ which began as an ostensible piece of historical research only to branch off into epistemological enquiry. Worse still, the history is invented to suit the needs of a circular argument. The text asserts such-and-such happened. Deconstruction exposes it as a ‘discourse’ justifying inequality, exploitation, racism, chauvinism, or whatever. The real course of events is abolished.

Three examples will make the point. My first concerns Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, of which Stephen Orgel, editing the Oxford World’s Classics edition, remarks, ‘More even than Hamlet, the play tempts us to fill in its blanks,

---

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow’: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yorùbá Town* (Edinburgh University Press, 1991); Isabel Hofmeyr, *We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told’: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom* (James Currey, 1993); Duncan Brown (ed.), *Oral Literature and Performance in Southern Africa* (James Currey, 1999); and Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History* (James Currey, 1991).

<sup>51</sup> Karin Barber, ‘Popular Arts in Africa’, *African Studies Review* 30 3 (1987), p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, *Oral Performance*, p. 10.

to create a history that will account for its action'.<sup>53</sup> Over recent years, that blank has been filled in by post-colonial interpretations that link the play to the attempted colonisation of Bermuda by the Virginia Company in 1609.<sup>54</sup> In this account, Prospero the magician becomes the coloniser, a prototype of British imperialism, while Caliban ('cannibal') is seen as the island's rightful owner, enslaved and brutalised by a bogus 'civilisation'.<sup>55</sup> Building on the centuries' old assumption that Prospero is a self-portrait of a dramatist about to retire to Stratford on Avon (and hence his last play), the claim is made that Shakespeare was providing a model for colonial expansion, legitimising at the outset Britain's long imperialist record.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, two generations of writers from the Caribbean have claimed Caliban as a black resistance hero, taking as their text his defiant boast, 'You taught me language and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse'.<sup>57</sup>

No modern staging of *The Tempest* can afford to ignore some version of this reading. Caliban's claim 'I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island' has rich, unavoidable significance for late twentieth century audiences. It is part of Shakespeare's greatness that there are no 'correct' interpretations of his plays. Ambivalence and ambiguity are always present, and actors who make Caliban sympathetic and Prospero deeply unattractive can always find support in the text.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, it remains the case that such interpretations of the play are deeply anachronistic. As Nicholas Canny, editor of the first volume of the recent *Oxford History of the British Empire* has pointed out, colonisation in Shakespeare's lifetime meant colonisation of the British Isles – settling the western isles and conquering Ireland.<sup>59</sup> The word 'empire' referred to England's relative isolation within Europe, while the word 'British' was intended by James I to express the unity of England and Scotland: neither carried

---

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Orgel (ed.), 'Introduction' to Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Oxford World's Classics, 1987), p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> The standard account is still Charles Mills Gayley, *Shakespeare and the Founders of Liberty in America* (New York, 1917), chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>55</sup> Orgel, Introduction, pp. 23-28.

<sup>56</sup> Orgel, Introduction, pp. 31-36 summarises the debate.

<sup>57</sup> *The Tempest*, Act 1, sc. 2, lines. 362-363.

<sup>58</sup> See also 'A Voice for Ariel' in Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Picador, 2000), pp. 68-93, which shifts attention from Caliban to Ariel as an 'ecopoetic' prototype.

<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Canny, 'The Origins of Empire' in Nicholas Canny (ed.) *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume One: The origins of the Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1998). pp. 1-33.

any implication of 'dominion over foreign territories'.<sup>60</sup> David Armitage in the same volume carries the point further: 'the impress of empire upon English Literature was minimal, and mostly critical where it was discernible at all'.<sup>61</sup> It was not until the middle of the seventeenth century that English colonies in the Americas acquired any secure existence or that slaves were transported westwards, and no Elizabethan or Jacobean dramatist could actually – historically – have been in the business of legitimising New World empire.

If this proves only that post-colonial theory makes for bad history, my second example is more directly related to modern literary interpretations. It concerns one of the classic texts of the post-colonial encounter, namely Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958.<sup>62</sup> The book's quality was recognised from the beginning, Achebe being praised for his balance and restraint, for the skill with which so much sociological information is made integral to the plot, for the sensitivity to language as a theme, and above all for the vividness with which large issues are dramatised.<sup>63</sup> Over the past four decades, the novel has proved well able to stand on its own two feet. Almost without exception, however, Achebe's champions have felt the need to clear space for his achievement by attacking the 'false' picture of Africa presented in books like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (or Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*) before moving on to talk of the superiority of Achebe's portrayal. The image of pre-colonial Africa emerging from the particular narrative devices deployed by Achebe is taken as given, and then re-applied to the novel as evidence of its 'truth'.

It is, of course, part of the novel's argument that colonial accounts of Igbo society are based on prejudice and ignorance, and it would be worth investigating Achebe's imaginative dependence on the recurring stock figure of the outsider who doesn't understand – the District Commissioner (*Things Fall Apart*), Mr Green (*No Longer at Ease*), Captain Winterbottom (*Arrow of God*), and Jean, Odili's American mistress (*A Man of the People*).<sup>64</sup> The fact remains that the

---

<sup>60</sup> Canny, 'Origins', pp. 1-2.

<sup>61</sup> David Armitage, 'Literature and Empire', in Canny, *Oxford History*, p. 102.

<sup>62</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Heinemann, 1958).

<sup>63</sup> C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (Heinemann, 1979), reprints the most important of these papers. The paragraphs which follow are taken from Landeg White, 'Review Article; Literature and History in Africa', *Journal of African History*, 21 (1980) pp. 537-546.

<sup>64</sup> Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958); also *No Longer at Ease* (Heinemann, 1960), *Arrow of God* (Heinemann, 1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966).

picture Achebe presents of pre-colonial Iboland (Nigeria? Africa?) is of a village culture, timeless, pastoral and virtually self-contained, operating within strict geographical limits, fighting wars on a tiny scale, never engaging in long-distance trade and never subject to any substantial change until the coming of the White invaders. It is a picture perilously close to the image of African society presented in the same colonialist books Achebe is attacking – the image of a culture with customs but no history. Its falseness was made amply clear by Omwuka Dike's *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885* (two years before *Things Fall Apart* appeared).<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile, it seems to be taken for granted that Joseph Conrad, on his *Heart of Darkness* voyage, sailed past the villages Achebe describes and damned the inhabitants as 'savages' - this playing its part in the construction of a racist discourse intended to legitimise colonial intervention. But Conrad did, in fact, captain the Congo steamer *S.S. Roi de Belges* in 1890 and there is plenty of historical evidence from King Leopold's Congo to confirm the essential truth of his account.<sup>66</sup> The forest fighting, the wooden palisades crowned with human heads, even the ritual cannibalism he hints at, were not figments of his imagination. Two centuries of slave raiding for the Atlantic trade followed by the appalling cruelties of King Leopold's personal fiefdom had produced a 'horror' dwarfing in scale even the genocide in Ruanda in 1994. Adam Hochschild comments that when he began his historical research into Leopold's rule, it dawned on him that he had heard about the Congo atrocities. But with his lecture notes on *Heart of Darkness* 'filled with scribbles about Freudian overtones, mythic echoes and inward vision', he had 'mentally filed away the book under fiction not fact'.<sup>67</sup> Rosalind Meyer has recently shown how closely the novel comments not only on H.M. Stanley's *How I Found Livingstone* (a narrative in search of a philanthropist), but even more closely the same author's *In Darkest Africa*, recounting Stanley's voyage up the Congo River in search of Emin Pasha, completed just one month before Conrad's own voyage of 1890.<sup>68</sup> Haunted for

---

<sup>65</sup> Omwuka Dike's *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885* (Oxford, 1956).

<sup>66</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: a Study of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Hochschild, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Rosalind S. Meyer, "'Inside like a Kernel": Literary Sources of Heart of Darkness', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 93, Part 2 (April, 1998), pp. 330-344. Her references are to Henry Morton Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa*,

nine years by the atrocities he had witnessed , he produced a novel in which the Thames is balanced against the Congo, the ‘city of sepulchres’ against the jungle, in which the cruelty and folly of colonialism is dramatised, and in which the worst ‘savage’ is the white philanthropist Kurtz. The novel has its flaws, most notably its passages of over-writing. But its history is as authentic as Achebe’s, and its enquiry into the human heart goes much deeper.

Having, however, made these criticism, in order to measure the distance post-colonialism has brought its readers one need only imagine a return to the days when everything was conducted under the rubric of Commonwealth Literature. Students in this area do not, on the whole, keep up with what’s going on in history, anthropology, political science or even in development studies, and Said, Spivak and Homi Bhabha have played indispensable roles in developing an awareness of political context. From their perspectives, the Commonwealth literature paradigm is exposed as naive in two ways. First, for its assumption that all comers to the Commonwealth feast were welcome on equal terms in a celebration of global literary humanism, uncomplicated by power mechanisms. Secondly, for believing imperialism was dead, laid to rest by the flags of National Independence. Those Indian, African and West Indian writers of the 1960s were, after all, intensely nationalistic. It has taken post-colonial studies to restore their political bite.

In longer retrospect, that brief period between British, French and Dutch de-colonisation and the twin oil crises of the 1970s now appears less of a fresh start for the Third World than a kind of ‘Indian summer’ of colonialism. It was believed then (myself included) that modernisation would close the gap between rich and poor nations and that equal voices at the United Nations would bring about equal shares in world government. Neo-imperialism, and the neo-colonialism of IMF conditionality, with country after country governed by NGOs, were not foreseen, nor that in the late twentieth century the drain of resources from Third World countries to the Group of Seven would exceed by a hundred fold the extractions of the colonial period. Still less predicted was the West’s post-1989 political conditionality, demanding the removal of authoritarian governments which, for all their brutality in Human Rights terms, had maintained

---

*Including Four Months’ Residence with Dr Livingstone* (London, 1872) and *In Darkest Africa; or, The Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin, Governor of Equatoria* (New York, 1890).

some degree of social control. Today's armies of children, surviving by atrocity from Mozambique to the Congo to Sierra Leone, reduce post-colonialism to a proper perspective – a kind of re-vamped nationalism, but nationalism without a nation, nationalism in academic exile, with little to contribute to the peoples that are supposed to be its concern.

### **No Such Person as 'The Other'**

Writing as a poet, critic and historian who was engaged with these issues some years before post-colonial studies came along, I find my own position a very curious one. A decade before Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, I had written about the absence of Empire in key nineteenth Century English texts.<sup>69</sup> There was nothing revolutionary about this. I was simply giving voice to the questions put me by West Indian and African students about what Sir Thomas Bertram was doing during his 'absence' in Antigua what this revealed about the wealth sustaining Mansfield Park. Or about how Walter Gay made the fortune in Barbados that enabled to marry Mr Dombey's daughter Florence. Or about why, at the climax of a novel insisting on social and gender equality, Charlotte Bronte felt it necessary to invent for Jane Eyre an uncle (and a legacy) in the Azores before she could be permitted to marry Rochester.

Eight years before 'Can the Subaltern Speak', I had begun publishing (with the late Leroy Vail) a series of papers on the voices of the powerless in southern Africa. These included, among others, protest songs by Sena women working as forced labourers on cotton plantations in Mozambique, work songs by conscripted male workers on the sugar, tea and sisal plantations, and spirit possession songs by Tumbuka women trapped in Malawi in patrilocal marriages while their husbands were absent in the gold mines of South Africa. These papers were eventually collected in Vail and White, *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History*.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, my *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (1987), the history of a village in Malawi from 1850 to 1985, had used oral interviews, archival, and oral literary evidence, to reconstruct the history of a few of the world's poorest, most marginalised people over one and one-third

---

<sup>69</sup> Introduction to Landeg White and Tim Couzens (eds.), *Literature and Society in South Africa* (Longman, 1984), p. 11-14.

centuries.<sup>71</sup> As this study, together with my earlier (with Leroy Vail) *Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique: a Study of Quelimane District*<sup>72</sup>, demonstrates, I had – still in pursuit of Camões – recognised the inadequacy of a post-colonialism that was historically illiterate.

It seems appropriate, therefore, that I explain the perspective from which this thesis is written by describing my own intellectual development after 1975 when my study of V.S. Naipaul appeared. That book's research was done in Trinidad, and I wrote it up in Malawi and Sierra Leone. It was a book committed to the principle that the text was self-sufficient, and I followed the development of Naipaul's thought and technique through his fiction and non-fiction from *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) to *In a Free State* (1971) without engaging with non-literary materials. I had been taught in the days of the New Criticism to believe that the key to a text lay within the text, and that my task as critic was to be alert to its seven types of ambiguity.<sup>73</sup> I still believe there is much virtue in this. But on the very day the book was published in London, I was in the village of Pirira in Mozambique's Zambesi province, recording work songs from labourers on the former Sena Sugar Estates.<sup>74</sup> The experience was intellectually disturbing in two ways.

The first was that in the deafening noise of singers and drummers and the thick press of the crowd, I had no control over events and only the vaguest idea what was going on. Dutifully I recorded song after song – one in particular louder

---

<sup>70</sup> Vail and White, *Power and the Praise Poem*.

<sup>71</sup> Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>72</sup> Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique: a Study of Quelimane District* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1980).

<sup>73</sup> The reference is, of course, to William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). Other key texts were I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (1929), Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947), and Kenneth Wimsatt with Munroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954).

<sup>74</sup> These songs were published in the following: Leroy Vail & Landeg White, "Tawane Machamboro"; Forced Rice & Cotton Cultivation on the Lower Zambesi", *Journal of African History*, vol. 19, (1978), pp. 239-263; Vail and White, "Plantation Protest: the History of a Mozambican Song", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 5, no 1 (1978), pp. 1-28, reprinted in Karin Barber (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture* (James Currey, 1997); Vail and White, "Forms of Resistance: Songs and Perceptions of Power in Colonial Mozambique", *American Historical Review*, vol. 88, no 3 (1983), pp. 883-919, reprinted in *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos*, vol. 2 (1984), pp. 9-62, and in D. Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion & Social Protest in Africa* (James Currey, 1986) pp. 231-276; Landeg White, "Maps of experience: oral and written poetry from southern Africa, in Luigi Zampietro (ed.), *Declarations of Cultural Independence in the English Speaking World* (University of Milan, 1989) pp. 225-244; and in chapters 4, 5, 8 and 9 of Vail and White, *Capitalism and Colonialism* and chapter 2 and 6 of Vail and White *Power and the Praise Poem*.

and longer than the others – and drove back thankfully to a shower and a beer in the company guest house. That evening, translating with my wife’s help from the tape-recorder, I was astonished to find myself transcribing a carefully-shaped poem in triplets, with an intricate pattern of rhyme and assonance. The contrast between raucous performance and fastidious, sophisticated, ‘text’ was unnerving in itself. Then, over the weeks that followed, I found myself recording the same song many times.

Paiva,  
Paiva ndampera dinhero ache,  
*Nsondo wache.*

Paiva,  
Paiva, I’ve killed his money for him,  
*His penis!*<sup>75</sup>

This would be repeated, sometimes (as at Pirira) with verses or an improvised drama added, but maintaining these three lines as the heart of the ‘Paiva’ song. Astonishing, therefore, in interviews, to hear this brief, semi-obscene squib described as follows:

This song can’t be forgotten. Even our children will have to know it. because Paiva was the one who made people suffer. This song, whatever may happen, we have to know. That’s because it’s about what people suffered. All the children will have to be told of the suffering we went through here on earth, and this is the song that we used to sing.<sup>76</sup>

‘It is’, the same informant added, ‘a map (Portuguese, *mappa*) of our experience’.

What I was discovering was the inability of my a-historical, humanist, New Criticism paradigm to explain how the words of such a song could carry such a weight of symbolic meaning. There was nothing in the text itself to explain it. I had to venture outside the text, into local history and anthropology, to grasp its most basic sense. Thus ‘Paiva’ became the Paiva Raposo family, the name behind which the English owners of Sena Sugar Estates operated in colonial Mozambique. The appeal to ‘Paiva’ was an aspect of a strategy deployed by forced labourers to alleviate their exploitation by invoking a kinship relationship between themselves and this capitalist company. The metaphor ‘ndampera dinheiro ache’ (‘we killed his money for him’) was drawn from hunting, with its traditional rules about the distribution of the rewards: the implication is that

---

<sup>75</sup> For a full discussion, see Vail and White, *Power and the Praise Poem*, pp. 198-230.

<sup>76</sup> Group interview, Pirira Village, Luabo, Zambesia Province. Mozambique, 25 Oct., 1975.

'Paiva' is appropriating all the benefits of growing sugar without reciprocity. Finally, the joking curse on 'Nsondo wache' ('His penis!') is a curse on the huge extended family of Paiva Raposos who worked for S.S.E. over eight decades. This revelation of the determining, explanatory force of context – became the basis of the ambitious investigation of oral poetry in southern Africa that was eventually published as *Power and the Praise Poem*. Meanwhile, I had returned to a post in Britain at the University of York and discovered - what had hitherto been a distant rumour – that the death of the author and the disappearance of the privileged text were accomplished facts. While I was away in the bush, the New Criticism had given way to structuralism, and to post-structural post-modernism.

But with two differences. My first surprise was that multiculturalism (the recognition that Britain had become a multiracial society) had sold out from the beginning to relativism. It seemed to be taken for granted that accommodating Caribbean or Indian (or feminist) perspectives meant abandoning what was suddenly being called the 'canon'. In practice, most post-colonial texts were profoundly unsuited to the anti-enlightenment role suddenly being thrust upon them. Admitting Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to the canon, or even Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*,<sup>77</sup> has involved no more seismic shift than, say, accepting Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* after a century of neo-classicism. What is most offensive about multicultural relativism is the implied assumption that special allowances have to be made for these new authors who, being essentially exotic, would not gain admittance on the usual terms. There is a good deal of critical comment on African literature which takes it for granted that intelligence, wit and sophistication are signs of western influence or the products of a neo-colonial education – even of collaboration with the enemy. Wole Soyinka's career, for example, has been peppered with such accusations, not least from fellow Nigerians such as Chinweizu and Achebe himself.<sup>78</sup> Yet the principle source of Soyinka's verbal complexities are the hunting songs of his own people, the Yoruba *Ijala*, marvellous for the brilliance and exuberance of the games they play with language. Similarly, the hard-hitting satire of Jack

---

<sup>77</sup> Franz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington (Penguin, 1967).

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, Kole Omotoso, *Achebe or Soyinka: a Study in Contrasts* (Zell Publishers, 1997).

Mapanje's verse is modelled on the 'poetic license' of his oral sources in southern Africa.<sup>79</sup>

The second difference involved Roland Barthes's provocative joke about 'the death of the author'.<sup>80</sup> As a way forward from text into context, it provided a whole generation of literature lecturers with new and challenging readings. At its heart was a linguistic determinism that insisted that meaning does not emanate from authors and their so-called 'experience' but from the signs and grammars that govern thought – in short, that language speaks us. But the joke worked better for written rather than for oral literature. With a published book in your hand you can afford (rather as the New Criticism did) to ignore for the moment who wrote it. But with oral performance, the death of the author means the show is cancelled and the audience goes home disappointed. Asserting the importance of context does not in any way detract from the authority of the performers who remain central to the tradition. Though their responsibility may be, in part, to reinterpret and re-present familiar material, existing tropes, their authority with the audience depends on the power and originality of their eloquence. Because they can 'speak well', they are credited with 'knowledge' – above all, knowledge of the 'history' they are recounting.<sup>81</sup> Favourite performers are given nicknames such as 'Raleqoele', meaning both cunning and the sound of iron on iron, or 'Sebili' (Wheels) because of his rolling style of delivery, or 'Ralieke' (Mr Worldly) because of his linguistic versatility and knowledge of international events.<sup>82</sup>

In short, moving on from writing about V.S. Naipaul to writing about African history and praise poetry, I was never tempted to give up the idea that literary value had something to do with innate quality, or with the mastery of form and language. Nor did the recourse to context have anything to do with undermining the text. Unstable texts were the very essence of oral performance, and it was through exploring context that it became clear which of them were valued, and why. Nor was I ever tempted to follow Gayatri Spivak (through her work on Derrida) in allying post-colonialism with post-modernism. Of course, one

---

<sup>79</sup> As in, for example, Jack Mapanje, *Of Chameleons and Gods* (Heinemann African Writers, 1981).

<sup>80</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Stephen Heath (ed.), *Image-Music-Text: Roland Barthes* (London, 1977). The essay was written in 1968.

<sup>81</sup> Vail and White, *Power and the Praise Poem*, pp. 71-77.

<sup>82</sup> David B. Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: the Word Music of South Africa's Basutho Migrants* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 58.

key aspect of Derrida's critique of logocentrism was its attack on ethnocentrism, on the specific equation of 'knowledge' with the 'Western thought' of the 'Enlightenment'.<sup>83</sup> But to carry this over into denying the possibility of narratives of liberation seems, to me, to be throwing out the baby with the bath water. Nelson Mandela did not spend twenty-seven years in jail because he was a post-modernist, and nor is his long incarceration to be written off as a philosophical waste of time. Ironically, deconstruction has turned out to be every bit as text-bound as the New Criticism. Calling everything in the world a 'text' was a clever sleight of hand, that has allowed those with a literary training to be experts on virtually any subject (including, as we saw from the brilliant Sokal hoax, quantum physics).<sup>84</sup> But as anyone used to multidisciplinary research knows, the separate disciplines have their own rules and procedures and it has been reductive to collapse them all into 'texts'.

In these matters, and allowing for the shift from formal imperialism to the neo-imperialism of the World Bank and IMF, I continue to agree with Roland Barthes's 1957 statement that 'today it is the colonised peoples who assume the full ethical and political condition described by Marx as being that of the proletariat'.<sup>85</sup> And I agree, too, with Edward Said in his one sentence dismissal of Gayatri Spivak's question ('For indeed, the subaltern can speak, as the history of liberation movements in the twentieth century eloquently attests'), and with his dislike of 'fixed identities battling across a permanent divide'.<sup>86</sup> If I were to reduce my position to a single aphorism it would be this – that the first thing to be learned by anyone engaging in post-colonial studies is that there is no such person as 'the Other'.

## **The Weapons of the Weak**

When Richard Price was trying to trace the history of the manuscript of the 1790 'Narrative', from the moment in June 1795 when Stedman reclaimed it from his publisher Joseph Johnson to its present location in the James Ford Bell

---

<sup>83</sup> Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (Routledge, 1990), pp. 16-18.

<sup>84</sup> The reference is to Alan Sokal's spoof, 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity', *Social Text* 46/47 (spring/summer, 1996), pp. 217-252.

<sup>85</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 148.

<sup>86</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 335-336.

Library, University of Minnesota, he met a certain Miss Sybil Vera Marguerite ('Daisy') Pym.<sup>87</sup> Her sole connection with Stedman was that her father's first wife had been one of Stedman's granddaughters. On her father's death, about 1890, she had come into possession of a large stack of Stedman's papers, which she finally had sold in the 1960s to a couple of young dealers who knocked on her door. She was 97 years old when Price tried to interview her in 1982, and was understandably vague about the transaction. His conclusion was that the papers had, till that date, included the 'Narrative' and the 'Journal' (later bought from a junk dealer and edited by Stanbury Thompson), both now in Minnesota, together with other materials which have become lost.

Miss Pym had not cared about the papers because she despised their author. Her own parents' families were distinguished – 'The Earl of Such and Such and Lady So and So' – and, indeed, she was a direct descendant of the Earl of Leven and Melville and granddaughter of Lady Jane Elizabeth Pym. Stedman, in sharp contrast had been 'terrible man'.<sup>88</sup> His own granddaughter (Miss Pym's father's first wife) had died a certified lunatic, while Stedman had committed the unforgivable crime of marrying 'a black'. Two centuries after Joanna's death, she was still being hated by an dying spinster in Mablethorpe Hall Old People's Home, near Louth on the east coast of England.

Plainly, in writing this thesis, there are some approaches currently emphasised by post-colonial studies that remain very relevant (though, as I have said, it was not through post-colonial studies that I encountered them). Stedman's *Narrative*, in its various versions and derivatives, is an account of a slave society. Power relations of a particularly brutal form are at the very heart of the story, and cannot be glossed over. That power included not only the power of Europeans over Amerindians and slaves of African descent. It was also expressed as the power of men over women. Joanna is not only a slave but a female slave, expected to provide sexual services as well as domestic or plantation labour. It is taken for granted on all sides, her mother and herself included, that the best she can aspire to is to be a concubine or personal servant of a European. Furthermore, the language of these accounts is English, or translations from English into other European languages. In point of fact, the bulk of Joanna's story was played out in

---

<sup>87</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', pp. LXVIII-LXIX.

<sup>88</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', pp. LXVII-LXVIII, quoting Hilda von Barton Stedman.

Sranan, the Suriname Krio which Stedman spoke fluently and used constantly in his dealings with Joanna, with the Free Black soldiers and with the slave population. As shall see, only once in the whole shelf of texts about her (in practice, in the 1790 ‘Narrative’) does Joanna utter a Krio sentence, and the effect is startling – as though a patient in a coma has suddenly spoken. The language of the *Journal*, the two ‘Narratives’, and the subsequent poems, plays, and novels, is itself a reflection of the broader power relations. As Max Weinreich remarked, ‘a language is a dialect with an army and a navy’<sup>89</sup>. Finally, the literary genres Stedman deploys in the gradual evolution of his account – the heroic, the pastoral, the sentimental – are those appropriate to late-Augustan, pre-Romantic England, its hierarchies barely affected as yet by the French or Industrial Revolutions. Stedman himself, as an autobiographical construct, may well thrive in such a context, but what happens to the rebel slaves or to Joanna in the world of Pope’s *Iliad* or Pomphret’s poem ‘The Choice’? In the last resort, was not his casting of Joanna as a pastoral heroine as absurd as his first impulse – to carry her off to Holland as a bourgeois housewife?

Seeking for literary parallels to his romance with Joanna, Stedman mentions only three.<sup>90</sup> First the story of Inkle and Yarico as related by Richard Steele in *Spectator* 11, concerning Inkle the shipwrecked trader and Yarico, the Indian maiden who succours him, only to be sold into slavery as her reward.<sup>91</sup> Secondly, the tale of Lavinia and Palemon, the impoverished gleaner and the prosperous farmer, in the autumn section of Thompson’s *Seasons*.<sup>92</sup> Thirdly, Horace’s *Ode* 2:4 beginning *Ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori / Xanthia Phoceu puus insolentem* (‘Let not my Phoceus think it shame / For a fair slave to own his flame’).<sup>93</sup> Other comparisons he might have invoked are Camões astonishing ‘Endechas a Bárbara Escrava’, in which he takes the Petrarchan conceit that the lover is slave of the

---

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct: the New Science of Language and Mind* (Penguin, 1994), p. 28.

<sup>90</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, pp. 98 and 249.

<sup>91</sup> For a full account of the legend, see Wylie Sypher, *Guinea’s Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIIth Century* (1942, New York, 1969), pp. 122-137.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Heron (ed.), *The Seasons by James Thomson, a new Edition Adorned with a Set of Engravings from Original Paintings, together with an Original Life of the Author and a Critical Essay on the Seasons*, (Perth, MDCCXCIII), ‘Autumn’, lines 177-310. pp. 137-142.

<sup>93</sup> Horace *Odes* 2.4: lines 1-16.

beloved and plunges it straight into his colonial situation ('This slave I own / Who holds me captive').<sup>94</sup> Or the true story of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith.<sup>95</sup>

All these examples (and they multiple in the nineteenth century) in which inter-racial romance is presented as unproblematic, not involving any racial contamination or breach of taboo, have certain features in common. All concern a European man and a strikingly beautiful non-European woman. All occur in frontier situations, far from the man's home, sometimes involving her family but never his. All touch on questions of power, whether nakedly asserted (and interrogated) as in the Camões poem, or negotiated as in the Pocahontas story. All are short-lived, ending with the death of one of the parties – Barbara (perhaps) in the shipwreck off Macau. Pocahontas of smallpox in Gravesend, Joanna (probably) of poison. Finally, none of these relationships produces children (except Joanna's son, John, shipwrecked off Jamaica at the age of 17). Part of what makes them acceptable is that there is no inherited racial taint.

These troubling questions of history, form and language in the context of high imperialism (or, in the case of my own writings, neo-imperialism) have to be confronted. But they are not merely rhetorical questions, and the answers are both tougher and more interesting than the customary post-colonial platitudes. Power in human history is never absolute. It may be lop-sided, even extremely lob-sided, but it is never entirely one-sided. A striking example was given in a paper presented by Professor Robert Roland of the University of the University of Bologna at a conference on Renaissance Portugal held at the Institute of Romance Studies, Kings College, London in 1994.<sup>96</sup> Professor Roland described how under the Portuguese Inquisition New Christians, faced the constant possibility of being denounced as crypto-Jews and of being summoned for interrogation. If they denied the charge but were found guilty, they were burned. If they admitted it, and gave proof of their knowledge of Jewish faith and ritual, they became liable only to have their goods confiscated. As a consequence, new Christians were brought up in full knowledge of the beliefs and practices of Judaism. If ever they were summoned, they would be equipped to provide plausible confessions, the Inquisition inadvertently perpetuating the very faith it was trying to eradicate.

---

<sup>94</sup> For a full translation, see Appendix 1.

<sup>95</sup> *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, 1624, Book III, ch.2.

<sup>96</sup> "Strangers Within", Conference held at the Institute of Romance Studies, Kings College, University of London 30 June – 1 July, 1994.

Writing, for example, about colonial rule in Mozambique, Malawi and elsewhere in southern Africa and the Caribbean, I found it impossible to present coherent historical explanations without taking account of the actions and perceptions of colonised peoples. Colonial rule, for all its military and economic might, spent as much time responding to events as to anticipating or attempting to create them. Even under the most extreme conditions such as, for example, prevailed in northern Mozambique after governor-general Tristão de Bettencourt issued his notorious (and illegal) Circular 818 D-4 of October 1942, imposing six months forced labour per year on all male African adults, the workers retained the power to set limits to their exploitation. Companies like Sena Sugar estates, the Companhia do Boror and the Companhia de Zambesia, found it impossible to levy more than three to four months labour, without provoking such levels of absenteeism (not to mention threatening their supplies of African-grown foodstuffs) as to be counter-productive.<sup>97</sup>

What is true of labour relations is equally true of gender. Whatever physical, legal and economic power men may have wielded at contrasting historical periods, male authority has never been absolute and women have retained the ability to negotiate their relationships. Again, power may be lopsided but never one-sided. If women are confined to the home, then the home becomes an arena of struggle. One of the first blows against the slave-trade involved a sugar boycott, originating in the kitchen.<sup>98</sup> Even when denied access to the most obvious channels of political influence, women have always spoken out and made things happen. In Britain, they campaigned in public to shame men into enlisting for the Napoleonic wars and for World War 1. Working through the Non-Conformist churches, they organised the post-1815 campaign against slavery. They founded and co-ordinated the Band of Hope temperance movement (and later the prohibition movement in America). In South Africa in the 1930s, English-speaking white women took the lead in demanding the prohibition of inter-racial sex, becoming directly responsible for the most notorious of the five pillars of apartheid, the Mixed-Marriages Act. This brief catalogue is tendentious and

---

<sup>97</sup> Vail and White, *Capitalism and Colonialism*, pp. 280 and 308-314.

<sup>98</sup> J.R.Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: the Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 139-141.

highly selective. But it contains more historical truth than the currently standard discourse about patriarchal silencing.

By ‘discourse’ I mean, of course, a particular style of language. But the notion that Stedman employed a language which trapped the ‘subaltern’ Joanna and her fellow slaves in a single, male, Eurocentric, colonial ‘discourse’, is belied in two ways. First, by the variety of genres with which Stedman experiments (pastoral, heroic, the sentimental), and secondly by the fact that in mid-publication he was overtaken (through Blake) by the Romantic revolution, with its different styles of thought, feeling and presentation. The truth is there was never any single colonial ‘discourse’, in English or French or Portuguese or Spanish, rather a variety of discourses, both internal (reflecting debate over time about colonial policy options) and external (reflecting dialogue over time with the colonised). No one with any historical sense, or any experience in reading the historical documents, has any difficulty in understanding this point, nor any difficulty in relating these discourses to the historical facts of political and economic power.

I shall not be arguing in this thesis that Joanna, the slaves and the rebel maroons – the subaltern voices – are ‘silenced’ by the linguistic and narrative devices employed by those (including myself) who attempt to recover their stories. Stedman himself was not at all-powerful automaton, armed with a culture, a gender, a language and a gun. He was a man whose experience of Suriname changed him profoundly, and who spent the latter third of his life trying to understand and express that change. That struggle was expressed in his search for expressive idioms, first in the fabrication of his *Journal*, and then in the 1790 ‘Narrative’ and his struggle to get an authentic version of it into print. He was perfectly, passionately aware, that Joanna, the slaves, and the rebel maroons were the prime agents of that personal change, which is why they feature as the heroine and heroes of his account. He was also aware of the paradox that the ‘good writing’ necessary to do them justice by giving them a voice involved (by the standards of the late eighteenth century) degrees of artifice which could come close to falsification. In the final resort, to quote my own poem discussed in Chapter 9:

You could not murder Style to match their Life;  
You saw not Slaves but Men and a dear Wife.

The marvel is, as I hope to make clear, that the voices of the oppressed, which Eighteenth century poetic genres were not well equipped to attend to, *do* resonate through Stedman's account, despite being expressed in a language they did not speak and in idioms they would not have recognised. They even find an echo in the works of Stedman's imitators.

My second chapter provides an account of the historical background to the issues raised by the *Narrative*. First, I describe events in Suriname during Stedman's residence there, with a description of the slave colony and an account of the Maroon revolts he was hired to suppress. Secondly, I provide an overview of the Abolition campaign in Britain, which was the context of the years between the writing and the publication of the 1796 *Narrative*. Chapter Three provides context of a different kind, by discussing the state-of-play of the literary genres of the heroic, the pastoral and the sentimental at the period when Stedman was writing, drawing in particular on the many examples of Eighteenth Century literature quoted in the 1790 'Narrative'.

Chapter Four examines the making of Stedman's *Journal* (1962), drawing on internal and some external evidence to chart the process of its creation at different stages, and examining Stedman's first account of Suriname slavery and of his search for appropriate idioms of expression. Chapter Five analyses the presentation of the rebel Maroons, of Joanna and of Stedman himself in the 1790 'Narrative', showing against the background of the *Journal* his elaboration of the idioms deployed there.

Chapter Six examines the impact of Stedman's writing and paintings on the poetry and engravings of William Blake, taking off from the account originally given in Erdman's *Prophet against Empire* (195?), but refining Erdman's arguments in the light of the information provided the *Journal* (1962) and the 1790 'Narrative'. Chapter Seven examines the changes made, and disputed, in producing the 1796 *Narrative*, focussing especially on the re-presentation of Joanna and the rebel maroons, as what became the definite text for almost two centuries was created.

Chapter Eight discusses the various plays, novels and poems generated by the *Narrative*, beginning with two dramatic presentations from 1804 and ending by introducing my own poems on the subject (1983, 1993 and 1998). Chapter Nine takes up the question 'Can the subaltern speak?', by fleshing out the arguments

summarised in the concluding paragraphs of this chapter. There is a Conclusion, suggesting areas for further research, and four appendices providing the full texts of items discussed in the thesis.

## Chapter Two

### The ‘Noise of Guns’

In Dryden’s ‘Of Dramatick Poesie, An Essay’ (1668), four friends with the Latin pseudonyms of Eugenius, Lysideius, Crites and Neander debate the rules of drama, contrasting the ancients with the moderns and the French with the English.<sup>99</sup> The setting is a barge on the river Thames a little upstream of London Bridge, beyond ‘the great fall of waters which hindered them from hearing what they desired.’<sup>100</sup>

Crites speaks first, claiming precedence for the Greeks who first invented drama in an age when poetry was more esteemed, and who laid down the rules, in particular the unities of time, place and action. Everything done by the moderns, whether French or English, was essentially in imitation of the ancients who had done their business of observing nature to perfection. Eugenius observes that excellent as the ancients were the moderns have excelled them, and that just as ‘natural causes’ are better understood than in the days of Aristotle, so poetry has been improved, with a greater variety of plots and a better understanding of dramatic structure. Lysideius takes the part of the French, using Corneille as his example, and praising him for grounding his plots in history, for observing Aristotle’s ‘unities’ consistently, and for the excellence of his management of rhyme. Neander, who represents Dryden himself, concludes the discussion with a long, essentially empirical defence of what works well on stage – tragi-comedy in Shakespeare, the breach of the unities in Ben Jonson, and the use of blank verse for tragedy. His discourse includes the famous panegyric on Shakespeare as ‘the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul’.<sup>101</sup>

Dryden is described by Samuel Johnson as the ‘father of English criticism’, and the ‘Of Dramatick Poesie’ essay was his first extended effort in establishing priorities and the reasons for them.<sup>102</sup> Intriguingly, the essay begins as follows:

---

<sup>99</sup> John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie: an Essay* (London: Henry Herringman, 1668). See, ed. Ian Lancashire, Rep. *Criticism On-Line* (1996) [http://library.utoronto.ca/www/utel/rp/criticism/of\\_dr\\_il.html](http://library.utoronto.ca/www/utel/rp/criticism/of_dr_il.html).

<sup>100</sup> Dryden, *Dramatick Poesie*, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Dryden, *Dramatick Poesie*, p. 47.

<sup>102</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 2 vols. (London: Everyman, 1925), vol. 1, p. 225.

It was that memorable day, the first Summer of the late War, when our Navy engag'd the Dutch: a day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed Fleets which any age had ever seen, disputed the command of the greater half of the Globe, the commerce of Nations, and the riches of the Universe. While these vast floating bodies, on either side, mov'd against each other in parallel lines, and our countrymen, under the happy conduct of his Royal Highness, went breaking, little by little, into the line of the Enemies, the noise of the Cannon from both Navies reach'd our ears about the City.<sup>103</sup>

The reference is to the second Anglo-Dutch war of 1664-67, culminating on June 12, 1667 in Admiral De Ruyter's famous raid on the British fleet in the Chatham docks when the flagship *Royal Charles* was captured, and the *Royal James*, *Royal Oake* and *Loyal London* and several other ships were burned. Writing after the event, Dryden was well aware this was one of the greatest disasters ever to befall the English fleet, and his reference to 'breaking little by little into the line of the enemies' can only be ironic. The discussion between Neander and his friends is punctuated by the sound of battle, 'little undulations of sound' as 'they perceived the Air break about them like the noise of distant Thunder, or of Swallows in a Chimney'.<sup>104</sup>

When, at the end of their long debate, the friends disembark at Somerset-stairs, Dryden remarks they

stood a while looking back upon the water, which the Moon-beams play'd upon, and made it appear like floating quick-silver: at last they went up through a noise of French people who were merrily dancing in the open air, and nothing concerned for the noise of Guns which had allarm'd the Town that afternoon.<sup>105</sup>

These apparently casual references are not innocent. Louis XIV of France had given diplomatic support to the Dutch, declaring war on England in January 1666, and Neander's celebration of an English victory over French theatre obviously involves certain nationalist claims. Yet it is fascinating to reflect that English criticism (the definition of the canon) began against a background of cannon fire. This was no ivory tower debate, conducted in the academy. In the middle of a war, dangerously close to another kind of reality, Neander and his friends

---

<sup>103</sup> Dryden, *Dramatick Poesie*, p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> Dryden, *Dramatick Poesie*, p. 2.

<sup>105</sup> Dryden, *Dramatick Poesie*, p. 72.

discussed genre, with ‘the commerce of Nations, and the riches of the Universe’ kept firmly in their sights.

The war ended with the Treaty of Breda of 1667, with most of the terms dictated by the Dutch. The English were forced to abandon their claim to control the English Channel. They were permitted to retain the colony of New Amsterdam that they had captured in 1664, promptly renaming it New York, after the Duke of York (later James II). In return, however, they were forced to hand over permanently to the Dutch the infinitely richer South American colony of Suriname.

## Settlers and Maroons

Though the swampy northern coast of South America had been sighted by Amerigo Vespucci in 1499, and though Spain formally laid claim to the area in 1593, the first European settlers were fifty Dutch families who arrived in 1613. They were followed in 1630 by sixty English settlers, but it was not until 1650 when Suriname was granted by Charles II to Francis Lord Willoughby - a grant confirmed by royal charter in 1662 – that permanent colonisation began.<sup>106</sup> Among those who sailed for Suriname was the 23-year old Aphra Johnson (later Mrs Aphra Behn). She found plantations already established, supplied with African slaves by and the Dutch West India Company. Her *Oroonoko; or, the History of the Royal Slave* (1688) is now believed to be largely based on fact.<sup>107</sup>

By 1650, the Atlantic slave trade was already two centuries old, and approximately half way through its grim history.<sup>108</sup> The Portuguese navigators who chartered the West African coast in the fifteenth century did not invent the trade in slaves. For six centuries slaves had been sold across the Sahara into the Sudan and the Levant. But the navigators diverted it into the Atlantic system, bringing captives first to Lagos in the Algarve and later, on the Infante Henrique’s initiative, to Madeira and the Azores, and after his death to Brazil and Spanish America. In the process, they created a traffic that was to mark human history as

---

<sup>106</sup> Summarised from chapter 1 of R.A.J. Van Lier, *Frontier Society: a Social Analysis of the History of Suriname* (The Hague, 1971).

<sup>107</sup> Maureen Duffy, ‘Introduction’, *Aphra Behn, Oroonoko and Other Stories* (Methuen, 1986), pp. 8-10 and 13-15.

<sup>108</sup> My principal source on the slave trade is Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (Verso, 1998).

profoundly as the original discoveries, and that was far too profitable to be left in Portuguese hands.

The Dutch West India Company was founded in 1621. It was modelled on the Dutch East India Company which had already taken over much of Portugal's spice trade, and once the company had achieved footholds in Brazil, it quickly adapted itself to slaving<sup>109</sup>. Yet despite Dutch growing naval dominance in the seventeenth century, the number of slaves transported by the West India Company was probably less than had earlier been carried by the Portuguese. It was only after their short-lived occupation of Brazil ended (they were expelled in 1654) that the WIC was granted the *asiento* to supply the whole of Spanish America and the Caribbean. And only after the WIC was wound up in 1673, to be succeeded in by the Middleberg Company, that the massive eighteenth century expansion of the slave trade got under way, with the Dutch controlling perhaps half the trade<sup>110</sup>. By then, the British Royal Africa Company, founded in 1663, was also on the scene, the naval rivalry that followed contributing to the second Anglo-Dutch war of 1664-1667. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, when slave trading was 'liberalised', independent British merchants trading mainly from Liverpool and Bristol moved in to dominate the slave trade, continuing until the abolition of 1807<sup>111</sup>.

The Dutch occupation of Brazil lasted little more than two decades, but it had two consequences with lasting significance for Suriname. First, it gave them a taste for the profits from slave-grown sugar, coffee and cocoa, neatly complementing those from the slave trade itself. In the Atlantic economy of 1667, Suriname was a far more valued property than New York. Secondly, it brought into Brazil as colonists a number of Portuguese Jews together with New Christians from Amsterdam. Interestingly, the agent promoting this was Padre António Vieira, whose Brazil Company was capitalised by New Christians to whom he promised immunity from the Inquisition (a promise later held against him by the Inquisition).<sup>112</sup> When the Portuguese recaptured Brazil in 1654, many of these Jews moved on to avoid the disabilities re-imposed on them, settling first

---

<sup>109</sup> Blackburn, *New World Slavery*, p. 187.

<sup>110</sup> Blackburn, *New World Slavery*, p. 212.

<sup>111</sup> Blackburn, *New World Slavery*, p. 266-267.

<sup>112</sup> C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415-1825* (Pelican, 1973), pp. 224-225, and Blackburn, *New World Slavery*, pp. 200-201.

in the French colony of Cayenne (later incorporated into French Guiana), and in the 1660s under Lord Willoughby in Suriname. Their presence, and the Amsterdam capital they controlled, was instrumental in making Suriname a Dutch colony from 1667. In 1694, it was reported there were 92 of these Portuguese Jewish families, a further 12 German Jewish families, and 50 individual Jews, owing between them 40 estates and 9000 slaves. It remained a permanent characteristic of Suriname that few Dutch went to live there. The colonists were, for the most part, religious or national minorities – Roman Catholics, Huguenots, and Sephardic Jews while the Dutch contributed capital and their famous *polder* technology in transforming swampy delta regions into viable plantations.<sup>113</sup> By the time Stedman arrived early in 1773, these Jewish families were the longest established group of white colonists in Suriname, and the only ones to have preserved a separate racial and religious identity. A point worth making here, since it will not arise naturally in later contexts, is that when Stedman attacks the planters of Suriname for their cruelty and immorality, he is driven in part by what would now be labelled anti-Semitism. The Jewish slave-owners and the financiers of Amsterdam were the main threats in a world in which he was trying to protect Joanna.

As in British and French Guiana, the Suriname plantations of sugar and coffee were established close to the coast along the lower reaches of the rivers coming down from the interior. As the old Caribbean joke has it, the Guianas were islands surrounded by land. But that land made an important difference, especially in Suriname. The numerical disproportion between planters and slaves reported in 1694 (100-odd families, 9000 slaves) was more or less constant as the colony developed. In 1738, the ratio between whites and slaves was 1:25, and a century later remained 1:20<sup>114</sup>. A decade after Stedman's departure, the ratio in the capital Paramaribo was 1:7, but in the outlying districts where the plantations were located it was 1:65<sup>115</sup>. Given such stark discrepancies, the colonists could never feel securely in control, and the more brutal their authority became the more likely it would provoke an insurrection. But in contrast to plantations elsewhere in

---

<sup>113</sup> Blackburn, *New World Slavery*, p. 501, and Gert Ootstindie, "The Economics of Suriname Slavery", in *Economic and Social History of the Netherlands*, vol. V (Het Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief, Amsterdam, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> Van Lier, *Frontier Society*, p. 53.

<sup>115</sup> Van Lier, *Frontier Society*, p. 53

the Caribbean, the estates in Suriname bordered rivers and rain forest. Suriname, despite its reputation for cruelty, never experienced a slave insurrection. Running away into the forest became the slaves' alternative to open revolt, and the planters had never the resources to restrain or pursue them. The biggest problem for the runaways was that the forest was still populated by Suriname's original inhabitants, the so-called 'Indian tribes' of the vast interior.

The word 'maroon' is said to derive from the Spanish 'Cimarrón', signifying wild or untamed ('cima' meaning 'mountain peak').<sup>116</sup> Its first English usage dates from 1606 as 'Symeroons' meaning 'Black people' who 'fled from Spaniards, their masters'. From about 1700, it had come to refer specifically to runaway slaves in Dutch Guiana (Suriname) and the British West Indies, specifically Jamaica. In Jamaica, Maroon communities were formed from the earliest days of British settlement (after 1655), in the inaccessible and easily defended ridges of the Blue Mountains and in the cockpit country to the east of the island. In 1739, the British signed a peace treaty with Cudjoe, granting independence to his group in return for assistance in putting down slave revolts.<sup>117</sup> But it was in Suriname that the most famous and most enduring of the maroon communities developed, not only surviving to this day, but even constituting Suriname's present day military government.<sup>118</sup>

The location of Suriname plantations, along the rivers and creeks of the coastal region made escape relatively easy. Much of the rain forest was technically swamp forest, flooded for several months of the year and at such times almost completely inaccessible. Colonel Fourgeourd's 'dry season' march in search of Boni's stronghold at Gado Sabi (see appendix 3), discussed in chapter nine, was across paths still knee deep in water. But the plantation slaves knew these forests. It was there they maintained their provision grounds, and kept dugout canoes for fishing. If they resolved to escape, it was to familiar territory, where their owners could not locate them even if they attempted pursuit. But location was only one factor making Suriname unusual.

---

<sup>116</sup> OED.

<sup>117</sup> James Walvin, *Black Ivory: a History of British Slavery* (Fontana, 1993), pp. 256-257.

<sup>118</sup> H.V.E.Thodon van Velsen, 'The Maroon Insurgency' in G.Brama-Shute (ed.), *Resistance and Rebellion in Suriname: Old and New* (Studies in Third World Societies, 43; Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA., 1990), pp. 159-188.

Between 1668 and 1826, when the registration of slaves made an end of illegal imports, some 215,000 African slaves were imported into Suriname.<sup>119</sup> Yet the slave population never rose above 50,000. These figures alone point to two conclusions. First, that the slave population was unable to reproduce itself. This was partly the result of the climate and of disease. But it was principally because the slaves were, quite literally, ‘worked to death’, planter policy being to ‘mark down’ their slaves within ten years on the assumption it was cheaper to replace them than to feed them for the twenty years it took for them to reproduce.<sup>120</sup> The second conclusion is that the ratio of newly imported or ‘salt water’ slaves to locally born slaves was unusually high. In 1740, 90% of Suriname slaves had been born in Africa, while in 1770, on the eve of Stedman’s arrival, the figure was still 70%.<sup>121</sup> Throughout the Americas, it was always the new arrivals that were most prone to rebel or run away.

A Suriname slave might become a maroon in one of three ways.<sup>122</sup> He (since more than 90% were men) might abscond on his own account or in a small group with the intention of joining an existing community in the forest. Or he might move into the forest and build himself a home, living alone near his provision ground, waiting until one of the maroon communities sought him out. Either way, it would be a few days before his owner raised the alarm. Running away was a capital offence, and planters were reluctant to lose the lives of slaves who might simply be working on their farms or visiting relatives in a neighbouring plantation. The third method was to a group of maroons when they were raiding a plantation for weapons and supplies. Slaves might throw in their lot with the raiders, claiming (if they were re-captured) they had been ‘kidnapped’ and were not true runaways liable for execution. Most women maroons were recruited in this manner, with what degree of compliance the existing records cannot tell.

There were never very many maroons in the forest. In 1770, the Dutch historian Jan Jacob Hartsinck (1716-1779) estimated there had been five to six thousand of them as early as 1702, but this figure is now treated as a mere

---

<sup>119</sup> This is the calculation in J.M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 299-301, replacing the earlier accepted figure of 300,000 to 350,000.

<sup>120</sup> Wim Hoogbergen, *The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname* (Leiden, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> This paragraph summarises Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 5-13.

adjective for the fear they inspired.<sup>123</sup> Modern estimates are that some 250 slaves ran away each year, a mere .5% annually of the slave population of 50,000, and that two thirds of these returned voluntarily after a while, finding life in the forest even more arduous than on the plantations. Hoogbergen suggests a total of a thousand to fifteen hundred maroons at any one time as a more plausible figure.<sup>124</sup> It was the circularity of the problem they caused that made it intractable.

The earliest attempts to establish plantations in Suriname, by groups of Dutch and English settlers, had been frustrated by the hostility of the regions Amerindian people, the Caribs and Arawaks. Once the town of Paramaribo had been fortified in 1682, a peace treaty was negotiated with the Amerindians, including a provision that they would not harbour runaway slaves.<sup>125</sup> In the events, relations between the Amerindians and the maroons were always complicated and unpredictable. There were times when the Amerindians assisted the runaways, and others when they collaborated with the Dutch. There were even 'red maroons', that is small groups of Amerindian slaves who lived with the runaways. Boni, for example, the maroon leader pursued by Colonel Fourgeoud in command of the Scots Brigade, was said to have had an Amerindian father.<sup>126</sup>

Once the first maroon settlements were established, the problem returned.<sup>127</sup> As early as 1690, a group of runaways was living in the Devil's swamp north-west of Paramaribo. In 1717, an official report referred to the villages of 'Claes and Pedro' on the Suriname River, a village called 'Negro Will' on the Commewijne River, and other settlements in the Marowijne area. By 1730, the groups were being termed 'tribes', and given the names of the Saramaka, living between tributaries of the Saramacca south-west of the main plantations, the Ndjuka living south-east of the Commewijne River, and the Kwinti still living in the Devil's Swamp. Eliminating them proved impossible. They lived not in permanent stockades but on islands in the swamps, undetectable by Europeans (though their locations were sometimes betrayed by bribed maroon guides) and approached by winding paths of logs hidden underwater. They refused open engagements, leading any patrols sent after them on a hopeless chase through the

---

<sup>123</sup> Van Lier, *Frontier Society*, p. 58, and, Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 22.

<sup>124</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 5 and 22.

<sup>125</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 61.

<sup>126</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 24 and 64.

<sup>127</sup> The following paragraph summarises Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 13-22.

forest swamp they knew infinitely better than their enemies. If their provision grounds were found and destroyed, the set-back was both temporary and counter-productive, since it brought the maroons raiding plantations for supplies. All this was known by the 1730s, remaining to be re-discovered by Fourgeoud and his troops four decades later.

Interestingly, it was the maroons who took the initiative in proposing a peace settlement.<sup>128</sup> In 1757-58, the Ndjuka made a series of raids on seven plantations in the Tempati Creek area, leaving behind notes signed by Boston, one of their captains. Equally interesting is that the terms proposed by the Ndjuka were modelled on the 1739 agreement with Cudjoe, the leader of the Jamaican maroons, a remarkable instance of communication between slave societies in the Americas. As we shall see, Stedman describes the negotiations of 1760 with the Ndjuka, and of 1762 with the Saramaka, in chapter 3 of the *Narrative* in high romantic fashion.<sup>129</sup> Both groups of maroons were recognised as free and independent entities. Both groups agreed to halt their raids in return for an annual payment of supplies, including ammunition (there were disputes afterwards about whether this provision was being fulfilled). Both groups agreed to hand over further runaways.

With these agreements, the colony was back where it had been eighty years earlier following the original Amerindian treaty. But no such settlement could endure for long. Slaves continued abandoning the plantations for the forest, partly fleeing ill treatment, partly encouraged by the independence achieved by the existing maroons. These continued to be, for the most part, African-born slaves, and whether they found refuge with the Ndjuka and Saramaka or whether they formed new separate settlements depended, in part, on older ethnic allegiances. By the 1760s, one new group had come into prominence.<sup>130</sup> These were Boni's maroons, settled in the upper reaches of the Cottica River, and constituting as strong a threat to the sugar and coffee plantations as the Ndjuka or Saramaka had ever been. It was the threat from Boni that Colonel Fourgeoud and the Scots Brigade were recruited late in 1772 to combat. By the accident of history, or rather the accident that Fourgeoud had under his command the author of the

---

<sup>128</sup> The following paragraph summarises Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 26-29. See also Van Lier, *Frontier Society*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>129</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 69-74.

<sup>130</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 29-51.

*Narrative*, it is Boni's name – along with lieutenants Baron and Jolycoeur – that has passed into Suriname history as the archetypal resistance hero.

It is a further irony that Stedman's book, written by a man who was no abolitionist, and re-written by an editor who had authored pro-slavery pamphlets, entered the abolition debate as one of the most powerful of all anti-slavery texts.

## **The Rise of the Abolition Movement**

Opposition to New World slavery was almost as old as the discoveries themselves. "Are not these (Indians) men?" Friar de Montesinos famously asked in 1511, and his concerns about the enslavement of Amerindians by Spanish colonists were even more famously taken up by the Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas.<sup>131</sup> Las Casas's objections to slavery were ultimately derived from *Ecclesiasticus*, chapter 34, v. 22, 'he that defraudeth the labour of his hire is a bloodletter'. His *Brief History of the Indies* (1539) was immensely influential, being translated into Dutch, German, French and English, and resulting in the Court's 'New Laws' of 1542 that banned the enslavement of Amerindians on the grounds that they were vassals of the King of Spain. Yet Las Casas had also proposed 1516 that Spanish colonists should be allowed to import Africans in place of Amerindians, and the first *asiento* was issued in 1518. Before he died, Las Casas was to regret the part he had played in promoting the slave trade, wondering whether God would forgive him.

There is a similar ambiguity about Padre António Vieira's denunciations of slavery. Like Las Casas, he began with the question of the enslavement of Amerindians, in the remote Amazonian provinces of Pará and Maranhão, and succeeded in getting Amerindian slavery outlawed under a new law of 1655. Afterwards, he became increasingly drawn to the question of the cruel treatment of slaves imported from Africa. In a sermon of powerful eloquence preached before the brotherhood of 'Our Lady of the Rosary', a self-help organisation for slaves and free people of colour, he invoked a series of contrasts between masters and their slaves.<sup>132</sup> The masters are depicted as rich, well-dressed, feasting, swimming in gold and silver, and brandishing their whips, the slaves as ragged, dying of hunger, chained, and prostrate. Yet, in an extraordinary peroration, he

---

<sup>131</sup> Blackburn, *New World Slavery*, pp. 127, 134-136 and 150.

invites the slaves to consider themselves as a kind of extreme religious order, offering up their suffering to redeem the world. Catholic Humanism was impressively capable of recognising the humanity of non-Europeans. But the spread of the faith, to which the slave trade was contributing, always took priority over any thought of abolishing it.

The legacy of this in English culture was, initially at least, a deep sympathy for the fate of the Amerindians at the hands of the Spanish Empire coupled with a complete lack of interest in what was being done to Africans by the burgeoning British Empire. Pope's *Windsor Forest* (1713) envisioned Pax Britannica bringing 'Feathered People' trading to the banks of the Thames, and 'Slav'ry ... no more' as 'the freed Indians in their native Groves / Reap their own Fruits, and woo their Sable Loves'.<sup>133</sup> Later, in *An Essay on Man* (1733-34), in lines which were among Stedman's favourites, he imagined an Indian's heaven:

Some safer world in depths of woods embrac'd,  
Some happier island in the watry waste,  
Where slaves once more their native land behold,  
Nor fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold!  
To Be, contents his natural desire,  
He asks no Angel's wing, no Seraph's fire,  
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,  
His faithful dog shall bear him company.<sup>134</sup>

Thomas Gray's 'The Progress of Poesy' (1751-54) traces poetry's distant origins to ancient Greece and to 'Chile's boundless forests' where the 'savage youth' sings of 'Their feather-cinctured chiefs and dusky loves'.<sup>135</sup> Joseph Warton's influential poem 'The Dying Indian' (1755) turns this vision from pastoral resignation to heroic defiance:

The dart of Izdabel prevails! 'twas dipped  
In double poison – I shall soon arrive  
At the blest island where no tigers spring  
On heedless hunters; where ananas bloom  
Thrice in each moon; where rivers smoothly glide,

---

<sup>132</sup> Blackburn, *New World Slavery*, pp. 185 and 209-210.

<sup>133</sup> Pope, *Windsor Forest*, lines 404-410, in John Butt (ed.), *The Poems of Alexander Pope: a one-volume edition of the Twickenham text, with selected annotations* (London, 1963), pp. 209-210.

<sup>134</sup> Pope, *An Essay on Man; Epistle 1*, lines 105-112, in *Poems*, ed. Butt p. 508. Stedman quotes these lines in *Journal*, p. 97 (n.d.) and in 1790 'Narrative', p. 303.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Gray, 'The Progress of Poesy: a Pindaric Ode', lines 60-62, in Roger Lonsdale (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 358-361.

Nor thundering torrents whirl the light canoe  
Down to the sea; where my forefathers feast  
Daily on hearts of Spaniards!<sup>136</sup>

Meanwhile, however, Defoe had written in an extraordinarily matter-of-fact, tradesman's manner about the advantages of the slave trade. The hero of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) has no scruple about selling Man Friday, his Carib companion of many years, into slavery. After he has turned Brazilian planter, and has learned his neighbours needs additional slaves, he fits out an African voyage, explaining how 'easy it was purchase ... not only gold-dust, Guinea's grains. elephants' teeth, &c., but Negroes'.<sup>137</sup> In *Captain Singleton* (1720), the hero along with William the Quaker, captures a slave ship, sails it to Brazil where he markets them all, 'as well the women as the men, and at a very good price too.'<sup>138</sup> The cruel treatment of slaves becomes an issue in *Colonel Jacque* (1722), in which Jacque the hero has to overcome his initial distaste for the whip. He comes to realise that slaves 'must be ruled with a rod of iron', but that brutality is less effective in their management than a calculating lenity.<sup>139</sup> As Wylie Sypher comments, the balancing moments in Defoe's fiction, when he reflects that 'savages' have 'the same powers, the same reason, the same affections' that God 'has given to us', seem less like humanity than an indifference, a practical willingness to acknowledge all sides of the argument.

Smollett's *Roderick Random* (1748), for long Stedman's favourite novel, carries this indifference further. The hero takes part in the siege of Carthage and spends a few weeks in Jamaica<sup>140</sup>. But apart from a passing mention of 'a couple of stout Negroes'<sup>141</sup>, he is blind to the existence of blacks, and slavery is not an issue for Smollett. Later, in an extraordinary twist, he is hired by his uncle, Captain Bowling, to make the three way voyage from Deal to the coast of Guinea to Argentina and back home.<sup>142</sup> They spend six months sailing between the Gambia and Benguela, trading an unspecified cargo, and taking on four hundred

---

<sup>136</sup> Joseph Warton, 'The Dying Indian', lines 1-8, in Lonsdale (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Verse*, pp. 391-392.

<sup>137</sup> Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings*, p. 260, quoting Defoe, *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings*, p. 260.

<sup>139</sup> Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings*, p. 259.

<sup>140</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (Oxford World's Classics, 1981), chapters XXXI-XXXIII and XXXVI.

<sup>141</sup> Smollett, *Roderick Random*, p. 204.

<sup>142</sup> Smollett, *Roderick Random*, chapter LXV, pp. 407-410.

Negroes along with some gold dust. The voyage to the River Plate takes six weeks, during which they lose 'a good many of the ship's company' from typhus, originating among the slaves, but they sell the rest in a very few days 'and could have put off five times the number at our own price'.<sup>143</sup> The episode concludes with the wretched joke that Random had been 'a miserable slave' to the Negroes since leaving the coast of Guinea and was glad to be disposed of them. What is most extraordinary about this adventure is that the profit from it permits the hero to marry his beloved Narcissa.. It is the first time in the English novel that the profit from trading rather a legacy brings out the happy ending, something Dickens would resort to repeatedly. But there's nothing in Dickens to match this combination of the sentimental and the brutal.

The fact is that British anti-slavery sentiment, as opposed to anti-Spanish sentiment, developed very slowly and against a background of huge profits. Significantly, it was the unease provoked by two civil court cases involving commercial issues that put the slave trade at the heart of political debate.<sup>144</sup> First was the Mansfield judgement of 1772. Soon, it became part of the mythology of the anti-slavery movement that Lord Chief Justice Mansfield ruled slavery to be illegal in England. We shall meet this myth in some of the Stedman-derived literature to be discussed in chapter 8. In fact, the ruling was much narrower. It concerned the question of whether slaves who had been brought to England by their West Indian owners and who had deserted could be recaptured and taken back to the colonies by force. The question had arisen repeatedly since 1765, when a slave from Barbados named Jonathan Strong sought treatment for injuries inflicted by his master. The surgeon involved was the brother of Granville Sharpe, a civil servant, who successfully obtained a writ of habeas corpus. Sharpe was the first active abolitionist, and while over the next seven years he obtained similar writs in other cases, he struggled to obtain a definitive ruling, which Mansfield, a specialist in commercial law, struggled equally to avoid making. 'I don't know what the consequences may be,' he remarked in the Lewis case of 1771, when the jury determined the slave was not his master's property, 'if the masters were to lose their property by accidentally bringing their slaves to England'. Finally, in the case of James Somerset in 1772, Mansfield ruled that 'No master ever was

---

<sup>143</sup> Smollett, *Roderick Random*, p. 410.

<sup>144</sup> The two cases are discussed in Walvin, *Black Ivory*, pp. 11-20.

allowed here to take a slave by force to be sold abroad'. It was a landmark case, but it did not abolish slavery in England. Mansfield himself owned a slave, the mulatto daughter of his nephew, Sir John Lindsey, who had lived with his family since her infancy. In 1782, despite his judgement, he took the precaution of drawing up a will, liberating her on his death.

The second of these cases was the bizarrely brutal Zong case of 1783. The Zong was the Liverpool slaver that, bound for Jamaica in 1781 with a cargo of 470 African slaves, threw 131 of those slaves into the Atlantic when they became sick. Collingwood, the captain, claimed that if they died natural deaths, the losses would have to be born by the shipping company. But if, to save the ship, they were jettisoned as cargo, the losses would be covered by marine insurance. Even at the height of the slave trade, this seemed a grotesque claim. But the rationale of slavery had always been that slaves were property, goods and chattels, and at the first hearing the jury sided with the ship owners, granting them compensation of £30 per slave. The insurer's appeal was heard before Mansfield, who frankly conceded the contradiction between the law and commercial practice: 'they had no doubt (though it shocks one very much) that the case of the slaves was as if horses had been thrown overboard.' He ordered a new trial which, in fact, never occurred, the Zong case remaining resolved. But the facts could scarcely have been starker, and modern historians trace a direct line from the Zong case to the beginnings of the abolition movement.

There followed in quick succession Thomas Clarkson's seminal *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786), and the formation in 1787 of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. The abolition campaign, successful in terms of its initial objectives in just twenty years, continues to puzzle historians. Why when it was so profitable both at home and abroad, did Britain turn against the slave trade?<sup>145</sup> For a century following the final abolition act of

---

<sup>145</sup> In Walvin, *Black Ivory*, pp. 303-304, this is presented as a still unanswered question. The vast literature purporting to answer it includes Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (New York, 1944), Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London, 1975), Davis Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Ithaca, 1975), Howard Temperley, "Capitalism, Slavery and Ideology", in *Past and Present* 75 (1977), pp. 94-118, Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery; British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (London, 1986), Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery* (Cambridge, 1987), and Thomas Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, 1992). For a recent summary, see J.R. Ward, 'The British West Indies in the Age of Abolition, 1748-1815' in

1834, British historians argued that the campaign represented a triumph of philanthropy over self-interest. Then in 1944, the Trinidadian historian (and later prime minister) Eric Williams published his revolutionary *Capitalism and Slavery*, arguing the slave trade had financed the industrial revolution in England, creating a capitalist class for whom slavery was an anachronism in the context of free trade and wage labour. Abolition prevailed because it served the same interests as those that prevailed with the parliamentary Reform Act of 1833. The challenge posed by Williams's economic thesis haunts the literature to this day, despite the attempts to 'answer' him, all of them so far proving premature.

It is hard to see how this argument can ever be conclusively settled. The 'British virtue triumphant' view of history (such as that preached by Reginald Coupland, Williams's Oxford supervisor in the 1930s) is unlikely to return.<sup>146</sup> But there will always be loopholes in deterministic explanations, requiring ever more detailed statistics, or ever more finely tuned theories of the stages of capitalist development. Robin Blackburn's encyclopaedic *The Making of New World Slavery: 1492-1800* (1997) ends with a magisterial chapter on 'Primitive Accumulation and British Industrialism'. His conclusion is that 'by 1816 Britain could exploit a far-reaching commercial and industrial ascendancy in the New World', based on Adam Smith's doctrine of independent production and wage labour. But 1816 is post-Waterloo, too late to account for the 1807 abolition of the slave trade, which Blackburn scorns to explain (the word 'abolition' not even featuring in his index). One lacuna relevant to this thesis is why the abolition movement took root in England, but failed to find expression in the similar class formation of early-nineteenth century Holland. From the 1820s onward, all the celebrated material conditions were in place. But nothing happened, until Holland's belated abolition of 1863.

A more promising avenue of enquiry has been the recent shift towards examining the popular base of the abolition movement in late-eighteenth century Britain. The immediate target of the 1787 Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was parliament, where William Wilberforce, MP for Hull, became the committee's representative. But the strategy employed was mass protest or, at

---

P.J. Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 425-428.

<sup>146</sup> For example, in Reginald Coupland, *Wilberforce: a Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 1923 and 1945)

least, the protest of the provincial lower middle-classes – the tradesmen, clerks, drapers, grocers, druggists, booksellers, carriers, innkeepers, printers, entertainers, stationers, ironmongers, shopkeepers of every sort – thrown up by the expanding population and the growth in accumulation.<sup>147</sup> In this, the Society's London Committee was the chief organiser, commissioning and distributing a vast amount of information on the slave trade in the form of books and pamphlets – up to 20,000 copies of each – to selected individuals throughout the country. This was followed by a campaign to set up local corresponding committees, with Thomas Clarkson, for example, travelling some 35,000 miles between 1787 and 1791, first visiting the major slave ports, then making separate tours of the south coast, Scotland the north and the north-east. On these tours he collected evidence that fed back into fresh pamphlets, including the familiar image of the plan and sections of a slave ship (the *Brooks* of Liverpool) that must rank as one of the most brilliantly conceived pieces of political propaganda ever deployed. But Clarkson also established contacts, addressed mass rallies, and advised the new committees on how to proceed – who to lobby, for example, and how to use the resources of the expanding provincial press. (In November 1788, he held a public meeting Tiverton. Sadly, that year of Stedman's *Journal* is missing.)

The tactic of petitioning parliament seems to have originated with the Manchester committee. Between February and May 1788, over 100 petitions were presented to the House of Commons. Though partly co-ordinated by the London Committee, they were locally compiled, and expressed a variety of attitudes on the subject, some demanding the abolition not just of the slave trade but of slavery itself, others calling for better regulation or simply a parliamentary enquiry. A motion to abolish the slave trade was introduced by Wilberforce in May 1789, followed by an enquiry with evidence was taken at the bar of the Commons and a further move to abolish in April 1791.<sup>148</sup> The defeat, by 163 votes to 88, prompted the second, enlarged petition campaign of 1792. This time, 519 petitions were presented to the Commons, 'the largest number ever submitted to the House on a single subject or in a single session'.<sup>149</sup> By contrast with the petitions of 1788, every English County was represented, and Scotland contributed massively. In all,

---

<sup>147</sup> Listed in Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. 8.

<sup>148</sup> Wilberforce's speech of 12 May, 1789, occurs in A Aspinall and E Anthony Smith (eds.), *British Historical Documents Vol. XI 1783-1832* (London, 1971), document 507, pp. 795-801.

<sup>149</sup> Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 80.

the committee had mobilised some 400,000 signatures – from counties, from towns and boroughs, and from individual guilds, universities, presbyteries and provincial synods. It was, as Walvin calls it, the ‘first modern successful campaign of popular politics’.<sup>150</sup>

Initially, however, abolition failed and for three reasons. First, the Commons to which the petitions were addressed was the unreformed parliament of pre-1833. The Manchester committee, for example, described by Drescher as ‘a prototype of the modern social reform movement’,<sup>151</sup> had no MP to address their petitions to because Manchester, the second largest and fastest growing city in England, had no representatives in parliament. A close link sprang up between the abolition movement and the demand for political representation, with the radicals drawing on the metaphor of slavery to describe their condition. ‘To be enslaved is to have no will of our own in the choice of law-makers’, wrote Capel Loftt. ‘Disenfranchisement is the very definition of slavery’, repeated John Cartwright.<sup>152</sup> Even when Wilberforce’s bill passed the Commons in 1792, it fell foul of the House of Lords, which voted to conduct its own enquiry before throwing out the measure.

But by 1792, the link between abolition and political representation was damning in itself. There had always been a link between the London Committee and France, as part of a policy to internationalise abolition to prevent the campaign being accused of allowing Britain’s rivals to seize control of the trade and its huge profits. Early in 1788, information was exchanged with the United States, with the Comte D’Atranda in Madrid and the Chevalier de Pinto in Portugal, and relations were established with the French Société des Amis des Noirs.<sup>153</sup> With the rising tide of revolutionary violence in France, however, and the growth of reaction in Britain, democratic politics – and the political methods of petitioning – could be made to appear subversive. The word ‘liberty’ itself became suspect and the London Committee had to advise against its use in petitions.<sup>154</sup> Significantly, it also tried to ensure the petitions should be signed

---

<sup>150</sup> James Walvin, ‘Foreword’ to Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. vii.

<sup>151</sup> Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 67.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted in Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. 33.

<sup>153</sup> Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. 54.

<sup>154</sup> Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. 60.

only by ‘respectable’ people – that is (in significant contrast to later abolition campaigns) only by adult males.<sup>155</sup>

The tensions created are vividly illustrated by events in Tiverton in 1792. The town clerk, Beavis Wood, opposed the petition idea, arguing that ‘the *sudden* abolition proposed would not be safe or prudent’. These words sound extraordinarily like Stedman’s, and in fact Stedman’s *Journal* records he was on good terms with Beavis Wood and in some hope of being elected to the Corporation, if he remained ‘perfectly quiet’.<sup>156</sup> Beavis Wood goes on, however, to describe those sponsoring the petition as a group of seditious Jacobins and ‘anti-Corporators’, naming in particular George and Martin Dunsford. Extraordinarily, these ‘Jacobins’, otherwise prominent tradesmen of Tiverton, were a former major and a current churchwarden with whom Stedman himself had always been on dining terms, contributing ‘a view of Tiverton’ to Martin Dunsford’s *Memoirs of Tiverton* in 1790.<sup>157</sup> The petition itself (which, as we shall see, Stedman refused to sign) was distributed in Tiverton by the Reverend Thomas Land, curate of St Peter’s Church.

But the link between abolition and Jacobinism was not just the heated rhetoric of the times. It was made graphically specific by the slave rebellion of 1791 in Santo Domingo, as the slaves in this French colony claimed for themselves the right to liberty, equality and fraternity. When this revolt was followed in 1795 by the second Maroon War in Jamaica and by Fédon’s Revolt in Grenada, the abolition movement disintegrated, re-emerging as a political force only in 1804.

## **The Boni Wars**

Despite its reputation for exceptional cruelty, Suriname never experienced a major slave uprising. But the problems caused by runaways and the existence of maroon communities continued to plague the colony after the peace treaties of 1760 and 1762.<sup>158</sup> The hope of the colony’s Court of Policy had been that with the Ndjuka and the Samaraka ‘pacified’, and occupying well-defined areas south of the plantations, the forest in between would be relatively easy to patrol. Given that

---

<sup>155</sup> Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. 113.

<sup>156</sup> *Journal*, p. 370 (n.d.).

<sup>157</sup> Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. 108, quoting John Bourne (ed.), *Georgian Tiverton: The Political Memoranda of Beavis Wood, 1768-98*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, new series, 29 (Torquay 1986), pp. 125-126; and *Journal*, p. 344 (13 Nov., 1792).

<sup>158</sup> The following paragraphs are based on Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 29-51.

refuge with the existing maroon communities would be denied them under the treaties, fresh runaways could be tracked down. In practice, the old circularity of the problem reasserted itself.

Even before 1760, new runaways had begun to settle in small groups along the coast to the east and west of the plantations. After the peace treaties had, in part at least, cut off their access to the south, these groups multiplied. The fact that they were a large number of small groups made dealing with them difficult. It was because the Ndjuka and Saramaka were large, unified 'tribes' that peace treaties were possible. The coastal areas, in effect delta swampland, were even more difficult to patrol than the swamp forests bordering the plantations. Tracking down half a dozen to a dozen huts in that vast wilderness was more a matter of luck than military know-how and, as always, the maroons were masters of the terrain. Some groups, like the 28 men and 4 women led by Kormantin Kodjo, avoided any direct confrontation with the plantations.<sup>159</sup> Kodjo and his followers are interesting for being known only by their Coromantyn (Ghanaian) rather than their plantation names. It is inferred from this that they were 'salt-water' slaves, who preferred to live quietly near their provision grounds than to engage in raiding. By the logic of the slave colony, they couldn't be permitted to live in peace, because of the example they set to the plantation slaves. Once they were detected, however, in 1766 and their provision grounds destroyed, they were forced by hunger into raiding the plantations along the Suriname River for supplies and for the means of raiding – that is, weapons.

At times, these complications became farcical. Another small group of maroons were known as the Tesis, the name of the first of their settlements.<sup>160</sup> They were persistent raiders who, from about 1757, could mount attacks of up to 300 men, but it was 1765 before their village was detected and attacked, and they were driven away, re-settling in different groups on the Cottica and Upper Commewijne Rivers. Given the importance of Tesis, the Court of Policy decided to station a permanent military force there, to prevent the maroons returning. From their new settlements, however, the Tesis continued their raids and the military had no idea where to track them down. In 1769, following an attack on a plantation owned by one of the members of the Court of Policy, a patrol was sent

---

<sup>159</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 47-51.

<sup>160</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 33-36 and 53-55.

in pursuit. Arriving at a plantain-ground, they attacked a group of huts, only to find it was their own military post of Tesisi. When, the following year, the Tesisi maroons attacked the same post the soldiers, confused about who they were fighting, put up only half-hearted resistance before fleeing, abandoning their supplies. The government appealed to the Ndjuka for help, under the terms of the 1760 treaty, and the Ndjuka responded by killing three men and taking eleven women and children prisoners. But when the remainder sought asylum with the Ndjuka, they were welcomed, the Ndjuka telling the government they had become runaways before 1760 and were not covered by the treaty. As for the other Tesisi maroons, they appear to have joined forces with Boni.

What became known as the first Boni War lasted from 1768 to 1776, and included the years of Stedman's own campaigning with the Scots Brigade. As was noted earlier, it is largely the result of Stedman's *Narrative* that Boni has become the best known of the Suriname maroons, along with Baron and Jolycoeur (of whom more below), being represented in history and fiction as a prototype of the just rebel and guerrilla fighter. But the portrait has its truth. Boni was not a runaway. He was a second generation maroon, a so-called 'bush-Creole', born in the forest c.1730, probably of an Amerindian father and African mother. It sounds the right ancestry for someone afterwards taken up as a proto-nationalist – born in freedom, and descended from the two groups most exploited by the slave colony.

The first record of his name in the official archive is equally suggestive. A small group known as the Cassipera maroons, had settled on the eastern border of the colony, in the triangle formed by the coast and the Marowijne River. In 1768 and 1769, they raided plantations along the upper Cottica River. One of the patrols sent in pursuit captured an old man named Asikan Silvester and brought him on a stretcher back to Paramaribo. His story was that he had runaway fifty years earlier and had been living in the forest ever since, as the paramount chief of his group. He hadn't expected ever again to fall into the hands of the colonists, but God had deserted him in his old age. Because of his great age, he had recently transferred his authority to two successors, named Boni and Aluko. Boni now intended pursuing a policy of amalgamating all the separate maroon groups, other than the Djuka and the Saramaka, to make them more effective as a fighting force. After delivering this testimony, Asikan Silvester died in Fort Zeelandia. Despite the extraordinary resonance of the old man's tale, the authorities dragged

his corpse to the gallows, hung it publicly, beheaded it, and exhibited the head on a stake.<sup>161</sup>

Stedman does not tell this story, as he surely would have had he known it, and the next intriguing fact about the first Boni War is that most of what Stedman reports about the maroons is factually wrong. Although his *Narrative* became the popular account of the war, Stedman's name features only once in the official archive in the Algemeen Rijksarchief in Den Haag, where he is listed as an unimportant member of Fourgeoud's staff.<sup>162</sup> He did not have access to military councils, and did not read the official reports. Where he is describing what he heard and saw, he is alert and reliable, but as a soldier on active service he saw very little of his enemy and, with the exception of the battle for Gadi Sabi in August 1775, he experienced no action. This is not to accuse him of misrepresentation. His account is an accurate reflection of the state of knowledge in colonial society of what was happening out there in the forest. It was Paramaribo society that knew very little of the maroons, and exaggerated what it did know. Stedman, as will be discussed in chapters four and five, saw beyond their paranoia to present a deeply sympathetic account of the 'rebel Negroes'. But he was in no position to check his facts, and it is ironical that much of what he got so authoritatively wrong fed directly into the histories, plays and novels that are discussed in chapter eight.

Stedman reports, for example, that the maroons were headed by Baron, Boni and Jolycoeur, in that order. Jolycoeur is described as a 'Samboe' (that is, three-quarters black) who had been a slave on the Fauconberg plantation, and had been protector of Cery, Joanna's mother, who he supported through wage labour in his spare hours.<sup>163</sup> After fleeing to join the maroons, Jolycoeur took part in an attack on Fauconberg, in the course of which the manager, a Mr Schültz, appealed to him as his former master to show mercy. Jolycoeur, in Stedman's account, accused him of raping his mother and flogging his father, before beheading him with a hatchet.<sup>164</sup> Much of this may be true. Schültz was certainly killed in 1772 in the attack Stedman describes (though other testimony says he was killed by

---

<sup>161</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 61.

<sup>162</sup> Loose paper (n.d.) in Den Haag, Holland, Algemeen Rijksarchief, Fagel Collection (ref: 1.10.29), 1805-08. Mission van de Kolonel Fourgeoud aan Zijn Hoogveid Betreffende de Expeditie naar Surinam 1773-76, 4 omslagen.

<sup>163</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 90.

Boni), and Stedman certainly had privileged access, through Joanna, to accounts of what had happened at Fauconberg. The fact remains, however, that Jolycoeur was never an important maroon leader, that he joined the maroons only in January 1772 and was killed in 1773 before Stedman set out on his first campaign.<sup>165</sup>

Stedman describes the maroons as being ‘Commanded by a desperate fellow named *Baron*’, the ‘head of all the Cottica rebels’. Baron, in this account, had been the slave of Gustav Dahlberg who had educated him, taught him the craft of mason, and had taken him on a visit to Holland, promising to manumit him on their return. Instead, Dahlberg sold him to a Jewish owner, who flogged him for refusing to return to plantation work, causing Baron to runaway into the forest. Curiously, in 1775, long before he could have read Stedman’s version, Dahlberg placed a public announcement in the *Wekelijksche Surinaamsche Courant*, denying every detail of this story, which suggests it must have been a matter of current gossip.<sup>166</sup> True or otherwise, the facts are once again that Baron never had the importance Stedman attributes to him. He is mentioned as participating with Boni in a raid in 1769, and as being one of Boni’s sub-chiefs – more accurately, as the chief of a small sub-group of no more than 20 people, normally on bad terms with Boni, but willing to join forces in any raid. He was killed during an attack on a lumber plantation in July 1774.

As for Boni, whom Stedman eventually came to admire and whose house he imitated when constructing his own, Stedman was almost certainly wrong to describe him as ‘a relentless mulatto’ (that is, half-white), and wrong in claiming that he ‘had nothing to do with *barons* Party’.<sup>167</sup> It is fascinating reflection on the nature of guerrilla warfare that much of this erroneous information came Stedman’s way from a Black Ranger called Captain Hannibal on the eve of the capture of Gado Sabi in August 1775 – by which date both Jolycoeur and Baron were already dead.<sup>168</sup> Ironically, the name of the settlement of Boni’s they were about to attack was not Gado Sabi (‘God Knows’) but Holimi.<sup>169</sup> The real Gado Sabi had been captured the previous year.

---

<sup>164</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 271.

<sup>165</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 63.

<sup>166</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 85, and note, p. 635.

<sup>167</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 188.

<sup>168</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 400.

<sup>169</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p 96.

In its opening stages, the war repeated the previous inconclusive skirmishes, with a heightened intensity.<sup>170</sup> Boni's raiding increased in frequency, as he built up his stock of arms and ammunition and of other items the maroons could not manufacture for themselves. But he lost men, while the patrols sent after him had equally mixed success. By 1771, however, there were clear signs of a change of tactics on both sides. Instead of melting into the forest and leading the troops sent after him on a hopeless dance, Boni was beginning to engage the colonists in open battle, ambushing the patrols sent after him. In September, one patrol found he had built a substantial stockade at Buku in the upper reaches of the Cottica River.<sup>171</sup> The stockade was on an island, surrounded by a deep marsh, fordable only by secret paths, and was protected by a three-metre high wooden palisade and by four cannon.<sup>172</sup> In April 1772, troops besieged Buku. But while they were camped across the marsh, unable to find a way across while the tides disrupted their attempts to build a pier, Boni's forces continued to launch spectacular raids, leaving and returning to the stockade apparently at will. Especially alarming to the colonist was the number of formerly loyal, Creole slaves that were deserting with their arms to join Boni (including Jolycoeur in January 1772).<sup>173</sup> On two of these raids, Boni left notes suing for peace, and it was evident he wanted to settle with the colonists on the same terms as the Ndjuka and the Saramaka.<sup>174</sup>

But the colonists, under new governor Jean Nepevu, had also switched tactics, and were no longer interested in peace settlements.<sup>175</sup> First, Nepevu requested reinforcements from Holland, in the form of 1,200 volunteers – including, of course, Captain John Stedman – under the command of the Swiss Colonel Louis Henry Fourgeoud, who had earlier suppressed slave revolts in French Guiana. By the time these troops disembarked in Paramaribo on 2 February, 1773, Buku had already been captured by another armed group, representing Nepevu's second initiative, namely, the *Neeger Vrijcorps* or Black Rangers. These were a contingent of 300 slaves who, in July 1772, were offered their freedom in return for military service, and who – as Stedman was not alone in testifying – turned out to be far more effective as forest fighters than any

---

<sup>170</sup> The opening stages of the first Boni war are described in Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 52-82.

<sup>171</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 68.

<sup>172</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 70.

<sup>173</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 74 and 86.

<sup>174</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 78.

European troops. In September 1772, mainly through the efforts of the Black Rangers, Boni's stockade at Buku had been stormed and destroyed.<sup>176</sup>

For five months after their arrival, Fourgeoud's soldiers were considered superfluous, and an unnecessary expense, and there were calls for them to be sent home. Their arrival coincided with the 1772-73 collapse of the Amsterdam stock exchange and the abrupt suspension of credit to Suriname planters, many of whom faced sudden bankruptcy.<sup>177</sup> Metropolitan creditors found their outstanding loans were based on inflated estimates of the actual worth of plantations, and were forced into becoming, in effect, absentee owners, appointing managers to keep things running. The sale of the Fauconberg plantation in October 1773, at which Stedman witnessed Joanna's auction, was only one example of many.<sup>178</sup> Thereafter, in trying to negotiate her manumission, he found himself dealing with Dutch financiers. Direct profits rather than long-term planning began to dominate plantation management, but profits themselves had gone into steep decline.<sup>179</sup> The literature is divided on whether coffee and sugar prices fell, absolutely or relative to other Caribbean colonies, or whether it was production that declined.<sup>180</sup> Recent work suggests, interestingly, that it was production per slave that dropped by upwards of 30% between the late 1760s and 1780, further reflecting the damage done to the colony's precarious economy by Boni's revolt.<sup>181</sup> In these circumstances, an idle and expensive army was the last thing Suriname planters wanted on their hands.

It soon became clear, however, that Boni was far from defeated. Before the fall of Buku, he had evacuated most of his people, weapons and supplies, and was able to return to his earlier guerrilla tactics. Though it is estimated there were some 450 to 500 maroons operating in the east of the colony in 1773, the forces amalgamated by Boni split up into separate groups – 250 under Boni, 80 under Koromantyn Kodjo, 50 under Baron, among others.<sup>182</sup> They led a wandering existence, tied down only by their provision grounds, which they planted during

---

<sup>175</sup> The later stages of the first Boni war are described in Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 83-104.

<sup>176</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p.80-81.

<sup>177</sup> Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>178</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 175-176.

<sup>179</sup> Oostindie, "Economics of Suriname Slavery", p. 4.

<sup>180</sup> Oostindie, "Economics of Suriname Slavery", p. 6.

<sup>181</sup> Edwin Horlings, "An Economic Explanation of the Late Abolition of Slavery in Suriname", (unpub. paper, n.d., University of Utrecht), Graph A.

the rains, and which were ready to be harvested just when the forest became once again accessible to the colonists' patrols. When one of these patrols was spectacularly ambushed in July 1773 with the loss of fourteen European soldiers, Fourgeoud's troops were finally sent into action.<sup>183</sup>

Fourgeoud had his own ideas about the conduct of the war. He distrusted the Black Rangers and, initially at least, refused to have them under his command. He rejected out of hand the third of Governor Nepevu's initiatives, namely, the proposal to cut a 94 kilometre cordon path through the forest to the east in a wide semi-circle that could be regularly patrolled. Fourgeoud's patrols marched in straight lines following the points of the compass, ignoring natural features, ignoring even tracks and traces of maroon activity. Since they also marched, European style, to the roll of drums, it is hardly surprising they saw nothing of the enemy. By April 1774, his troops were in a state of utter exhaustion, many of them literally naked, after nine months of useless activity.<sup>184</sup> The point deserves emphasis in view of Stedman's savage criticisms of his commanding officer. The archival sources, from Nepevu down, are in entire agreement.<sup>185</sup>

Abruptly, Fourgeoud changed his tactics. The attack on Holimi (Stedman's Gado Sabi) in August 1775 was made with the aid of the Black Rangers and without the roll of drums.<sup>186</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the capture of Holimi was fundamental in that it represented Stedman's only direct engagement with the maroons (his account is discussed in detail in chapter nine). Historically, it was conclusive only in the sense that Boni who, once again, had successfully evacuated his people and supplies, gave up trying to find a refuge in Surimane and in June 1776 crossed the Marowijne River to settle in French Guiana.<sup>187</sup> At a celebratory dinner in February 1777, in the absence of the Black Rangers, Fourgeoud was able to claim his campaign had been a success.<sup>188</sup> By April, when Stedman left Suriname, along with the 100 survivors of the original volunteers, the cordon path was under construction.

---

<sup>182</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 87.

<sup>183</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>184</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 89.

<sup>185</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 89-91.

<sup>186</sup> The capture of Holimi is described in Hoogbergen, *Boni*, pp. 95-98. See also Chapter 9 for Stedman's and Fourgeoud's accounts (with Appendix 3).

<sup>187</sup> Hoogbergen, *Boni*, p. 101.

<sup>188</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 584.

It is testimony to the power of Stedman's *Narrative* – that account twenty years on by an overlooked captain – that so much is known about Suriname in the 1770s, and so little about what followed. Governor Nepevu, with Fourgeoud's belated help, had broken the pattern by which maroons could achieve independent status. But the problem of a slave colony surrounded by swamp forest, accessible to runaways and not to the colonists' patrols, remained a basic fact of Suriname's history. How the logic of oppression and geography were played out between 1777 and the British capture of the colony in 1803, or after 1815 when the Dutch resumed control, has yet to be researched in the kind of detail that exists for the years to which Stedman drew attention.

## **The Second Abolition Campaign**

In 1803, as a side-show in the battle for naval supremacy in the long war against France, the British seized Suriname, remaining in control until it was formally returned to the Dutch at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. In 1806, taking advantage of British possession, the government smuggled onto the agenda of the House of Commons a bill outlawing the slave trade to Dutch Guiana.(Suriname). Wilberforce responded by attaching the provisions of his own Foreign Slave Bill to the proposed legislation.<sup>189</sup> To his and everyone's surprise, the strategy worked, the bill passing into law and paving the way for the Abolition Act of February 1807. The surprise lay in the large majority – 283 to 16 in the unreformed Commons – after years in which even minor reforms (a proposal to limit slave imports to the death rate among slaves: a bill to prevent slaving in the vicinity of the new colony of Sierra Leone) had been stridently rejected.<sup>190</sup> Supporters of the measure were alarmed at the extent of the wartime government's powers ('more than Pitt could accomplish in the plenitude of his power'). Wilberforce attributed his success to Providence.<sup>191</sup>

After the failure of the 1792 initiative, the campaign for abolition had gone into steep decline. The London Committee met only irregularly, ceasing operations in 1797, while Thomas Walker of the Manchester Committee was

---

<sup>189</sup> Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. 186.

<sup>190</sup> Aspinall and Smith, *English Historical Documents 1783-1832*, nos. 507-510 (pp. 795-804).

<sup>191</sup> Aspinall and Smith, *English Historical Documents 1783-1832*, no. 509 'Richard Ryder to his brother Lord Harrowby, 27 Feb., 1807 (p. 803).

arrested for treason. In the climate created by the French Revolution, what Clarkson called 'notions of liberty' were outlawed.<sup>192</sup> In 1804, the London Committee was revived, but as a lobbying group, studiously avoiding the popular petitions of a dozen years earlier.<sup>193</sup> Their objectives, too, were significantly limited. For the next two decades, they consistently denied any plan for the abolition of slavery itself. The assumption was that the ending of the slave trade would force planters to invest in the stock they already possessed – compelling them, in Wilberforce's words, to 'attend, in the first instance, to the preservation and increase' of their 'Negroes', by improve their slaves' conditions.<sup>194</sup> As so often in the nineteenth century, philanthropists spoke in the language of economic determinism, in various degrees of tactic and conviction. While they waited for this to happen, there were two areas of action. The first was to enforce the abolition of the slave trade internationally, by instituting the British Navy's naval patrol in the North Atlantic with the power to intercept slave shipments, and by diplomatic lobbying, especially in the councils of the Congress of Vienna. The second was to collect data about the post-abolition treatment of slaves throughout the British Caribbean.

On both counts, the campaign was frustrated. Internationally, both France and Holland rejected abolition, while events in Portugal led Britain to conclude treaties recognising the slave trade to Brazil - in effect, turning a blind eye to the South Atlantic trade which burgeoned hugely in the first half of the nineteenth century as the indirect consequence of British policies.<sup>195</sup> Meanwhile, on the question of the treatment of slaves, then planters read their economic interests differently. As the unreplenished slave population went into decline, tasks were lengthened, hours increased, and work was re-assigned with woman and children and mixed-race slaves forced into types of heavy field labour from which they had earlier been exempt. In the event, it was not necessary for the London Committee to publicise these facts. The slaves did that themselves.

The period between the abolition acts of 1807 and 1834 saw three of the most violent slave rebellions in the history of the British West Indies. The causes of all three were broadly the same, resentment at the new impositions on Creole slaves

---

<sup>192</sup> Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, pp. 63 and 185.

<sup>193</sup> Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>194</sup> Quoted in James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (Macmillan, 1986), p. 124.

<sup>195</sup> Vail and White, *Capitalism and Colonialism*, p. 17.

and on slaves of colour, coupled with widespread rumours that the West Indian planters were obstructing British measures to free the slaves completely.<sup>196</sup> The first erupted in Barbados on Easter Sunday, 1816. Barbados was unusual in that 93% of its slaves were locally born and that the female slaves outnumbered the male. It had always been assumed that male 'salt water' slaves were the ones most prone to revolt. The rising was short-lived, with only one white casualty, and was brutally suppressed. But it undermined confidence in the ameliorative effects of the 1807 abolition. The second broke out in Demerara on Suriname's western border in 1823. Demerara had a long history both of revolt and of runaways, but it had been a British possession since 1803 and slave imports had stopped. This time 12,000 slaves participated, and three planters were killed. Significantly, the slaves demonstrated demanding their 'freedom', including the right to attend church on Sundays. The third of these revolts confirmed this new Protestant involvement. Known as the 'Baptist War', it began in Jamaica on Christmas Day 1831, and quickly to spread to become the largest rebellion in the island's history, involving 60,000 slaves across 750 square miles of plantations and resulting in the deaths of 14 whites. Once again, it was a revolt of Creoles who were also Black Christians.

These revolts created a profound impression in Britain, and from several perspectives. The first reaction was to the sheer scale of the reprisals – in Barbados, 114 slaves executed; in Demerara, 250 slaves killed in mass shootings and grisly public executions; in Jamaica, 500 killings and executions – these in response to 18 white deaths. The figures demonstrated in themselves that nothing was improving, and when the causes of the rebellions were investigated the facts of the worsening labour regimes became public knowledge. Equally important was the new factor that the rebellious slaves were Methodists, Baptists and evangelical Anglicans demanding, among other freedoms, freedom of worship. When the Abolition movement began in the 1780s, there were some 46,000 Methodists and 15,000 Baptists in Britain, worshipping at 2810 meeting houses. By the time of Jamaica's 'Baptist War', these figures had grown to just under half a million Dissenters with 14,648 places of worship, most of them in the new industrial towns of the midlands and of northern England. The Protestant missionary movement dates from the same period, and missionaries from these denominations had been active in the West Indies from the 1790s. The white hero

---

<sup>196</sup> The following two paragraphs are summarised from Walvin, *Black Ivory*, pp. 271-278.

of the Demerara rebellion was John Smith, of the London Missionary Society, who was blamed by the planters and effectively court-martialled before dying in jail. The hero of the 'Baptist War' was the Black preacher Sam Sharpe, who had 'learnt from the Bible' that slavery was wrong. When the abolition campaign entered its second and final phase, the voice of religious dissent was central.

These developments were matched by two others. First, as the long war with Napoleon drew to a close, radical politics returned to Britain. During the war, while Britain had abolished the slave trade, France had merely suspended it, and news that the French were planning to resume trading brought a flurry of popular protest in the run up to the Congress of Vienna. Voices that had been suppressed since the treason trials of the 1790s began to reassert themselves as abolition, temporarily, became the single, acceptable issue for radical politics. Meetings called in the summer of 1814 were often 'the first major political gathering in the localities for twenty years'.<sup>197</sup> In a revival of the tactics of 1792, and with Clarkson once again the prime organiser, 800 anti-slavery petitions were presented to parliament in a little over a month, signed by 700,000 persons. There followed the modern tactics of lobbying parliament, holding public meetings and mobilising the press – that new provincial press addressed to the growing number of people able to read.<sup>198</sup> Between 1823 and 1831, the Anti-Slavery Society published no less than three million tracts, distributed by volunteers or through local committees.<sup>199</sup> For the first time, too, in British politics, women played a central role, forming 'Ladies' Anti-Slavery Associations' with the function of mobilising support in the family and the community through fund-raising, disseminating literature, and attacking the use of slave-grown sugar.<sup>200</sup> Much of the organising of the public meetings, both in nonconformist churches and in town halls, was undertaken by women, and this time women signed the petitions.

The boycott of slave-grown sugar was, in part, a reprise of the anti-sugar campaign of the 1780s, but with a new ingredient. West Indian sugar was expensive, and the powerful West Indian interest in parliament had persuaded successive British governments to institute discriminatory tariffs against cheaper

---

<sup>197</sup> Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, p. 126.

<sup>198</sup> David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 241-258.

<sup>199</sup> Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, p. 160.

<sup>200</sup> Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, pp. 157-159.

sugar grown in India. From 1815, the campaign against slavery became linked with a campaign to abolish sugar duties, slavery being for the first time being subjected to the economic critique that free labour was actually cheaper. Removal of the sugar duties would expose slavery to free market competition, and hence to its destruction. Slavery was not only immoral, it was uneconomic, and the arguments of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* were added to the cause.<sup>201</sup> From this point in the campaign onwards, it is fair to claim with Eric Williams and Robin Blackburn that the new class created by the industrial revolution, with its ideology of free trade and wage labour, found slavery an economic anachronism. The fact remains that this economic motive for abolition was the final argument added to a campaign that had been in existence for a quarter of a century – which is not to say it may not have been the argument that finally prevailed.

The parliament that eventually abolished slavery was the reformed parliament of 1834, confirming the long-established link between abolition and representation. It was staged abolition, slaves being compelled to work as 'apprentices' for a further six years that, in the event, were regarded as completed in 1838, when all slaves in British-ruled territories were declared free. For the remainder of the nineteenth century, the international abolition of slavery became a central plank of British foreign policy, all in the name of free trade. As Lord Palmerston expressed it in 1842, 'Virtue is its own reward ... and if the nations of the world could extirpate this abominable traffic ... the greatest commercial benefit would accrue'.<sup>202</sup> The naval patrol, instituted in the North Atlantic in 1807, remained operational until 1870, while from 1842 a similar patrol in the Indian Ocean to prevent the movement of slaves from the East African coast to the Americas, the Persian Gulf and the sugar islands of the Indian Ocean.<sup>203</sup> Britain was not entirely maverick in this. Denmark had made participation in slave trading illegal as early as 1792, and the United States two years later, and British policy was pursued through a series of bi-lateral agreements, such as those with Portugal in 1810, Sweden in 1813 and Holland in 1814. But no other country was prepared to institute complete abolition, for the inescapable reason that slavery remained profitable.

---

<sup>201</sup> Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, pp. 144-149.

<sup>202</sup> Quoted in R Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century* (London, 1976), p. 43,

<sup>203</sup> Vail and White, *Capitalism and Colonialism*, pp. 17-18, 20-21 and 23-24.

The irony of deterministic explanations of British abolition is that in the last resort they are idealistic, focussing on motives and expectations rather than on the actual economic forces. Just as the expectation that the 1807 abolition would lead planters to treat their slaves well was confounded, so the hope that ex-slaves would become industrious peasants and wage labourers proved illusory, as the British West Indies plunged into permanent and irreversible decline. In sharp contrast to the French West Indies or to Suriname (where profits per slave were the highest in history between 1820 and 1860), or to the cotton boom in the American south, or to the flourishing sugar and coffee economies of Cuba and Brazil, the British Caribbean languished. By the 1850s, the West Indian planters were claiming to have been vindicated in their view of ‘the Negro’, and a stream of British visitors was reporting on ‘Quashie’s indolence’ in refusing to work for his old masters for a depressed wage. The rise of an aggressively racist discourse in mid-nineteenth century, as what the planters had said about their slaves came to be widely accepted as truth in the general disillusionment about the consequences of abolition, is the saddest possible climax to the narrative of anti-slavery. British racism did not originate in the nineteenth century. Racial discourse was as old as the first contacts with Africa, and was fundamental to the debate over slavery. One of the themes in chapter 6 will be Blake’s confrontation with the language of prejudice. But the period between the ending of slavery and the creation of a new British Empire in Africa from the 1880s, disappointment with the results of black freedom helped to lay the groundwork for a racial interpretation of the world that would condition how that new empire was managed.<sup>204</sup>

Of the European colonial powers, France abolished slavery throughout her empire in 1848, Holland in 1863, Portugal in 1875, Spain in 1886. Recently, the debate that has raged for over five decades since the publication of Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) has focussed closely on the Dutch case, as historians reluctant to dispense with economic explanations, attempt ever more intricate linkages. Rejecting the argument that abolition was an inevitable by-product of the triumph of a free trade ideology, David Brion Davis located the key shift not in the relation of slave colonies to the British metropolis but in the new labour requirements of the industrial revolution. Industrial capitalism needed a labour force willing to move under the stimulus of wages, in contrast to an older

---

<sup>204</sup> Walvin, *Black Ivory*, pp. 328-336.

moral economy of mutual rights and obligations. By claiming the moral high ground for free wage labour, the new capitalist hegemony validated itself, and the existing ruling class, by simultaneously attacking slavery and the older patterns of employment within Britain.<sup>205</sup>

To this model of a capitalist system unconsciously reinforcing its hegemony at a time of deep political unrest, Thomas Haskell opposed a slow shift in conventions of moral responsibility brought about by a widening of trade networks leading to ‘a new cognitive style in Europe’ with a new understanding of the remoter consequences of individual actions.<sup>206</sup> Rebutting Haskell, Davis has turned to Holland for his evidence, noting ‘a strong anti-slavery movement should certainly have emerged in Holland’ if the consequences of mercantile capitalism were sufficient explanation.<sup>207</sup> To which Haskell responded that Davis, too, ‘*should* find it puzzling that the Dutch bourgeoisie passed up the opportunity to legitimise wage labour, accumulate moral capital and bolster its own self-esteem by attacking slavery’.<sup>208</sup> David’s second ‘Reply’ to Haskell invokes the market economy of the fifteenth-century Mediterranean and the mercantilism of the age of the Discoveries, the background to the very origins of the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>209</sup> It seems an argument with the potential to run indefinitely.

To all of which, the Dutch historian P.C. Emmer has argued that the absence of any movement in Holland before the 1850s to abolish West Indian slavery has a perfectly simple explanation. The Dutch colonies that mattered were those in Java and the East Indies. Suriname by the late eighteenth century was no more than an appendage to Java, which had no problem of plantation slavery.<sup>210</sup>

In 1667, with the Treaty of Breda that brought the second Anglo-Dutch war to an end, Suriname had become a Dutch colony as a profitable exchange for

---

<sup>205</sup> Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, chapters 5, 8 and 9, but especially pp. 453-468.

<sup>206</sup> Thomas L. Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility”, Parts 1 and 2, *American Historical Review* 90 (April and June, 1985), pp. 339-361 and 457-566.

<sup>207</sup> Davis Brion Davis, “Reflections on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony”, *American Historical Review* 92: 4 (October, 1987), pp. 797-812.

<sup>208</sup> Thomas L. Haskell, “Convention and Hegemonic Interest in the debate over Antislavery”, *American Historical Review* 92: 4 (October, 1987), pp. 839-878, especially pp. 856-857.

<sup>209</sup> Davis Brion Davis, “The Perils of doing History by Ahistorical Abstraction: a reply to Thomas L. Haskell’s *American Historical Review* Forum Reply”, in Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>210</sup> P.C. Emmer, “One Econocide is Enough! The Ideology of Free Labour and Dutch Colonial Policy in the Nineteenth Century” (unpub. paper, 1992)

New York. Just under two centuries later, it was too remote and unimportant to merit parliamentary time.

## Chapter Three

### Searching for a Style

Stedman was usefully forthcoming about his literary influences. From the moment in his *Journal* when (as we shall see in chapter 4) he announces his discovery of Smollett and his decision to take *Roderick Random* as his Bible, he continues to exploit his reading in his search for an idiom in which to cast his *Narrative*.<sup>211</sup> He had no formal education, classical or otherwise, apart from a brief period of neglect under his hated Scottish uncle, Dr John Stedman and, having joined the Scots Brigade at 15, he regarded himself as self-educated in all the fields he touched on. That these included literature, art, natural history, military history and travel is itself testimony to the breadth of his interests.

On the other hand, almost all the literature he was familiar with was ‘contemporary’ in the sense that it had appeared during his lifetime or shortly before. The most prominent of these were Pope’s *Iliad* (1715-20), and *An Essay on Man* (1733), James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1730), and the anonymous *Jamaica: a Poem in Three Parts* (1777). Other eighteenth century writers he mentions include Henry Fielding (the source of some of his classical allusions), John Pomphret of ‘the Choice’ (1700), and Edward Young of *Night Thoughts* (1742-42). He had read Voltaire who, of course, includes a satiric account of slavery in Suriname in chapter 19 of *Candide* (1759), and he was a warm admirer of the minor poets of the Della Crusca school including Hannah Parkhouse Cowley who was his neighbour in Tiverton.<sup>212</sup> Occasionally, he quotes from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), and somewhat randomly from Shakespeare, as well as from various Latin poets such Horace and Ovid. But his taste in the main was for eighteenth century writers, including eighteenth century translations of the Latin classics, and he was widely read in Abolitionist writings.

---

<sup>211</sup> *Journal*, p. 53 (n.d.).

<sup>212</sup> Della Crusca was the pseudonym of Robert Merry who had studied at the Della Cruscan Academy in Florence, and whose ‘Adieu and Recall to Love’ appeared in the ‘World’ (19 June, 1787). Hannah Cowley was one of many imitators, and the poems of the much ridiculed ‘Della Cruscan school’ were collected in the ‘British Album’ in 1789. See *Dictionary of National Biography from the Earliest Times to 1900*, 22 vols., (ed.) Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (Oxford University Press, 1917), entries for Hannah Cowley (vol. IV, pp. 1307-1308), and Robert Merry (vol. XIII, pp. 295-297).

This reading served him in different ways. Much as he admired Pope and Thomson, and occasionally tried his hand at heroic couplets, he had few pretensions to being a poet. The dominant influences on his *Journal* and 1790 'Narrative' are the novels of Smollett and the voyages of Captain Cook.<sup>213</sup> Cook was an important model for Stedman. In his Preface he is proud to record he has spoken with men 'who were present when Capt. Cook was Shot dead at Owhyhee' and, somewhat inconsistently, his *Journal* notes the occasion:

Today I spoke with one Jack Parkins, late corporal of Marines, who declared to me that Captain Cook, who was killed at Owhyhe. might have still lived, but that they were all in a panick, allowed their arms to be taken out of their hands, and ran in the boats like cowards, leaving the poor man on the beach, alive, wounded, and alone. Parkins saw the Capt. first struck with a cudgel, on the head, and next with a spike, in the neck. He fell, and still crept on his hands to Parkins. When the boat shoved off from shore, Parkins saw him on his back. He was then cut to pieces.<sup>214</sup>

Like Stedman, Cook was self-made and self-taught, unfettered by a classical education, and with a mind open to the non-European world, of which he was a passionate and disciplined observer. Like Stedman, his spelling was erratic, he confused *then* and *than* and *ie* with *ei*, and he often wrote whole pages with barely a hint of punctuation. Like Stedman, he needed a ghost writer – in Cook's case, John Hawkesworth - to prepare his log books for publication. Like Stedman, he was an adventurer. Historically, of course, Cook is a far more important figure, but Stedman was not above claiming a certain rivalry in hardships. The passage about the men present when Captain Cook was shot continues:

These men saw much & Encounter'd great Hardships but whose Narrow Escapes and Wretchedness Comes no more in Competition with the fatalities that I have Experienc'd than a trip over the Channel ought to be compar'd to the Adventures of Alexr. Selkirk on the Island of Juan Fernandos -

---

<sup>213</sup> *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for making Discoveries in the Southern hemisphere; and Successively Performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret and Captain Cook, in the Dolphin, the Swallow, and the Endeavour, drawn up from the Journals which were Kept by the Several Commanders, and from the Papers of Joseph Banks, Esq., by John Hawkesworth*, 3 vols., (London, 1773); and Captain James Cook and Captain James King, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, Undertaken by the Command of His Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere, Performed under the Direction of captains Cook, Clerke and Gore in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution, and the Discovery in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780*, 3 vols., Vols I and II by Captain James Cook, Vol. III by Captain James King (London, 1785).

<sup>214</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 8 and *Journal*, p. 280 (7 May, 1786).

But for all Stedman's protestations about being a simple, straightforward military man, with no literary pretensions and speaking nothing but the unvarnished truth, he was aware of the power of literary form. He was aware, too, in a very eighteenth century sense, of his need to draw on its resources if his tale was to be sufficiently eloquent to win readers over to his view of things. The picaresque, reductive style of *Roderick Random*, and the matter-of-fact science of Captain Cook, were perfectly adequate for his own, soldierly adventures. But for his passion for Joanna, and for the heroism of the rebel maroons, something more elevated was needed, for which he scoured eighteenth century poetry in his search for models. He wanted to acknowledge the woman he had loved, to do honour to the men he had fought, and to invent himself as a man he could admire. As a result, the 1790 'Narrative' interrogates, in a fascinating manner, eighteenth century usage in the 'voyage', the 'heroic', the 'pastoral' and the 'sentimental'.

The account that follows is necessarily over-simplified. Eighteenth century literature is far too diverse and complex to be summed up in a single chapter. This was always known to be the case, but has been demonstrated afresh since the publication of *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* edited by Roger Lonsdale (1985), and the further research that anthology has inspired. Lonsdale's basic argument, that the standard view of eighteenth century poetry derived from those late-eighteenth, early-nineteenth century anthologies produced by Samuel Johnson, Robert Anderson and Alexander Chalmers, was not original *per se*. It had long been established, for example, that the 52 poets selected as the best of the age by for Johnson's *English Poets* (1779-81) were all male and, with two exceptions, all university (or dissenting academy) men or privately educated<sup>215</sup>. But Lonsdale reinforced his point by returning to the original published texts in small volumes and magazines, uncovering a host of interesting voices that had eluded or been suppressed by the anthologists, and that task of re-discovering the century has continued since. In what follows, I am pursuing only those threads that lead, more or less directly, to the uses Stedman made of the writings of his contemporaries in 'forging' his own style. As I remarked in chapter one, he was a writer who devised an adequate idiom for the telling of a remarkable tale. It is the

---

<sup>215</sup> *The Works of the most Eminent English Poets, with a Preface. Biographical and Critical, to each Authour, by Samuel Johnson, L:L:D: (1779-81)*. The prefaces were subsequently collected as Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 2 vols (Everyman, 1925).

route to that idiom I am following here, all too well aware there are many other paths that could be taken in exploring eighteenth century poetry and prose.

## The Voyage

On 7 June 1778 at Sunday morning service, at Loo in Guelderland, Stedman met Sir George Strickland and his daughters, visiting from Yorkshire, and conducted them round the fortifications<sup>216</sup>. The friendship ‘with that amiable family’ ripened, and on 10 June Stedman reports about Sir George, ‘He offers to get my West India voyage published, which I promise to write’<sup>217</sup>. Five days later, his *Journal* records ‘Begin my History of Guiana’. Then on 22 June, he adds ‘I write the journal of my jaunt to Brussels and Antwerp’<sup>218</sup>. As will be seen in chapter four, this appears to be the origin of the long memoir of his life before Suriname that forms the first six chapters of his published *Journal*. Taken together, these entries probably mark a turning point in his life, the moment when he abandoned designs to return to Joanna and Suriname and resolved instead to honour those years in writing. The fact that Stedman felt ‘a great affection’ for Sir George’s ‘eldest daughter, Miss Elizabeth Strickland’, giving her ‘a maca nut for ornament from West Indies’ and receiving ‘paint and pencils’ in return, may have played a part in this decision. He records he left them ‘with a broken heart’, and as late as 1795 his intention was to dedicate the *Narrative* to Sir George. The eventual dedication, to the Prince of Wales, is discussed in chapter seven.

The first reference to the *Narrative*, then, is as a ‘West Indian voyage’, and the linkage of ‘voyage’ with ‘history’ with ‘jaunt’ remains integral to Stedman’s conception. Subsequent *Journal* references to his on-going work are to his ‘Surinam history’ or ‘History of Surinam’ and, when the *Narrative* is in the press, to ‘my book’ or ‘my publication’<sup>219</sup>. The opening sentence of the 1790 ‘Narrative’ justifies his effort in terms of the success of books describing ‘the exploration of foreign countries ... particularly since the first discoveries of the immortal Capt. Cook.’<sup>220</sup> Cook’s voyages had been published to immense acclaim, beginning with John Hawesworth’s edition of 1773 and continuing through subsequent

---

<sup>216</sup> *Journal*, p. 215.

<sup>217</sup> *Journal*, p. 216.

<sup>218</sup> *Journal*, pp. 216 and 218.

<sup>219</sup> *Journal*, pp. 331, 376-377, 383-5, and 395.

<sup>220</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’ p. 27.

volumes compiled by himself. Stedman's eventual chosen title began with the words 'Narrative of an Expedition' etc.

'Voyage', 'History', 'Journal', 'Narrative' and 'Expedition' are all words to reflect on in eighteenth century usage.<sup>221</sup> 'Voyage', which originally meant any journey ('viage'), came to refer specifically to journeys by sea only in the fifteenth century, and to the written account of such journeys from 1699. An aspect of the satire in Jonathan Swift's *The Voyages of Captain Lemuel Gulliver* (1725) is to parody a growing fashion. 'History', in its original sense of 'a relation of incidents true or imaginary', was beginning by the mid-seventeenth century to be confined to indicating a 'register of knowledge of fact' (Hobbes' *Leviathan*, 1651). But the older meaning continued in parallel use, and with no necessary implication that the facts belonged to some distant past. *The History of Tom Jones*, for example, one of Stedman's favourite books, described fictional events which could well have taken place in the year of its publication in 1749. The word 'novel' had not yet become established as describing 'fictions in prose of a certain extent', and by naming his novel a 'history', Fielding meant his fictional biography was not to be confused with 'a romance' and hence with supernatural causes. 'Journal' was another word in flux. Originally a 'book containing notices concerning the daily stages of a route', that is, a timetable, it came later to mean 'a daily record of events', more elaborate than a diary but similarly for personal use. The OED quotes 1671 as the first instance of its usage to mean a ship's log, the daily record of a voyage. Perhaps *Journal* might well have appealed to Stedman as an appropriate title for his *Narrative*, in closer homage to Captain Cook, had he not already applied the word to the record of his early life.

There remain the key words of the title he actually chose. 'Narrative', is a very eighteenth century word, rarely used earlier, signifying a recital of facts (the OED's earliest use of 'narrate' is 1750). Only when displaced by the new, narrower meaning of 'history' does 'narrative' begin its shift towards describing an aspect of the technique of story-telling, whether fact or fiction. 'Expedition', too, was coming into its own. Originally referring to the speed of an accomplishment (from the verb 'to expedite'), it came post-1693 to mean 'a fleet sent out on warlike or other purpose'. More so than 'Voyage' or 'Journal' would

---

<sup>221</sup> The examples that follow are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

have done, the vocabulary of Stedman's eventual title, therefore, located his book very precisely in the context of overseas military enterprise and of scientific fact.

These key words of the title are worth pausing over, because they are all that suggests anything by way of reflection by Stedman on the nature of the book he is writing. After that initial reference to Captain Cook and his claim to writing the unvarnished truth, he is off and at a cracking pace. Occasionally, as we shall see in chapter five, he comments on his method of mixing his styles and he defends his many digressions, demanding patience from his readers (check). But one scours in vain the Tiverton sections of his *Journal* between 1784 and 1790 for any reference to, or still less his thoughts upon, the composition of his great book. He tells us he has finished the memoir of his early years and that selected neighbours are reading it with enjoyment. He meets Hannah Cowley, and we can note subsequently that three embarrassing quotations from the Della Cruscans have found their way into his text. Then suddenly, on 1 September, 1790, he records 'I ended my work'. Six months later, on 8 February, 1791, he sends 'to London a large parcel with manuscripts &c.', having apparently (from the evidence of the manuscript) spent the intervening time getting it copied by two amanuenses.<sup>222</sup> But that is all he tells us. For the rest, we must work from the travel genre to which he was contributing, and the modifications he made to an established form.

The *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* lists over five hundred accounts of American travel (including Stedman's) published between 1660 and 1800.<sup>223</sup> The fashion for travel writing had begun with Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, first published in 1589, and in an expanded edition ten years later.<sup>224</sup> At his death in 1616, his collection of manuscripts was inherited by Samuel Purchas who published it, along with materials assembled through his own researches, as *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes* in 1625.<sup>225</sup> The twenty volumes of *Purchas his Pilgrimes* remained the standard anthology of early travel writing

---

<sup>222</sup> *Journal*, pp. 333-334, and 1790 'Narrative' 'Introduction', p. LXXI.

<sup>223</sup> G. Watson (ed.), *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 1453-1476.

<sup>224</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation, Made by Sea or over Land, in the Most Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at any Time within the Compass of these 1500 Years*, 3 vols (1589 and 1599).

<sup>225</sup> Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes, Containing a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Land Travels by Englishmen and Others*, 20 vols. (1625).

well into the nineteenth century (though most modern readers know it only through Coleridge's quotations in 'Kubla Khan').<sup>226</sup>

Many of the travels anthologised by Hakluyt and Purchas were inspired less by a search for new worlds than by a wish to find fresh routes to the old. Vasco da Gama's pioneered a new route to the old destination of India. There were practical voyages in search of China or the North-west Passage, and there were travels in pursuit of myth - Prester John, or lost Atlantis, or the settings of Homer's *Odyssey*. Columbus was convinced he had found 'the earthly paradise', while almost four centuries later Livingstone hoped to locate the Biblical city of Meroë and thus vindicate the holy record. But after 1660, when voyages began to be sponsored by the Royal Society, travel began to be justified as in the interests of scientific observation. Dampier, for example, so commissioned in 1699, made it his aim to provide 'a Plain and Just Account of the true Nature and State of the Things described', and it is no accident that several tropical fish and plants bear his name to this day. Richard Steele wrote in 1710 that "Barbarian Customs, Savage Manners, Indian Wars, and Wonders of the Terra Incognita ... are in our present Days what Books of Chivalry were, in our Forefathers."<sup>227</sup> The implication was that truth was being preferred to fiction, and that the rise of travel literature was occurring in broad parallel to the rise of the novel – the 'history' of *Robinson Crusoe* being a paradigm for both.

The eighteenth century boom in travel writing has been matched by the recent boom in critical scrutiny of the literature of travel. Major studies by Barbara Stafford, Anthony Pagden, Neil Rennie and Stephen Greenblatt have demolished any residual notion that travel writing is simple reporting, innocent of any larger designs on the world.<sup>228</sup> Yet, as they challenge the imperial traveller's pretensions to be describing only what he sees, with neither the skill nor the inclination to be

---

<sup>226</sup> The Hakluyt Society, founded in 1846, has since been the main publisher of historical travel writing in English.

<sup>227</sup> Quoted in Claude Rawson, 'A Primitive Purity', review article on Neil Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts: the Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford, 199?), in *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 July 1996.

<sup>228</sup> Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature and the Illustrated Travel Account* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); Stephen Jay Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: the Wonder of the New World* (University of Chicago Press, 1991); Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: from Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993); Neil Rennie, *Far-fetched Facts: the Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

producing ‘good writing’, it remains a little unclear what made, and makes, books of travel ‘literature’. Jonathan Swift, for example, was contemptuous of the notion that straight reporting was of any interest, and contemptuous of Defoe for devoting his career to it. A running joke in *Gulliver’s Travels* is Gulliver’s (gullible’s?) deadpan reporting of wonders that cannot possibly be true.

Plainly, there was a close relation between scientific enquiry and imperialist expansion. When *HMS Dolphin*, under the command of Captain George Robertson ‘discovered’ the island of Tahiti in 1767, their first action was to fire off some grapeshot that ‘struck such terrors amongst the poor unhappy wretches that it would require the pen of Miltons to describe’. Their second was to take ‘possession of the Island In His Maj name, and Honoured it with the name of our Most Gracious Sovereign King George the third.’<sup>229</sup> Tahiti, which ended up a French not a British possession, became after the *Bounty* mutiny in 1789 a composite metaphor for the colonial adventure, involving noble savages, territorial appropriation, guns and disease and accessible girls in a landscape of dazzling luxuriance. With the advent of missionaries and a cash economy, to supplement the guns, Tahiti’s original population was decimated in fifty years.

Yet, despite the genocide which was Tahiti’s post-discovery history, there is something perverse about books like Richard Drayton’s recent *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the ‘Improvement’ of the World*.<sup>230</sup> Drayton’s particular target is Joseph Banks, who visited Tahiti with Captain Cook on his voyage of 1768-1771, and subsequently became director of Kew Gardens. The scientific collection of tropical flora is presented as an exercise in power, as though Kew was nothing more than an annex of Sandhurst. Such books, all-too-obviously inspired by Said’s *Orientalism*, seem blind to the natural world, whether represented by Kew or by the marvels from which the collection was assembled. Accounts of travel that are more interested in the links between science and imperialism than in the experience of travel itself, resemble those post-colonial monographs I criticised in chapter one – more concerned with a

---

<sup>229</sup> Hugh Carrington (ed.), *The Discovery of Tahiti: a Journal of the Second Voyage of HMS Dolphin, written by her master George Robertson* (The Hakluyt Society, 2nd series, No. XCVIII, 1948), quoted in Landeg White, *Bounty* (Dangaroo Press, 1993), p.6.

<sup>230</sup> Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the ‘Improvement’ of the World* (Yale University Press, 2000).

stay-at-home political correctness than in any first-hand experience of what they choose to the ‘other’. Samuel Purchas, by contrast, was fascinated by

the ordinary Workes of God in the creatures, preserving and disposing by providence that which his Goodnesse and Power had created, and dispersed in the divers parts of the World, as so many members of this great Bodie. Such is the History of men in their diversified hewes and colours, quantities and proportions; of Beasts, Fishes, Fowles, Trees, Shrubs, Herbs, Minerals, Seas, Lands, Meteors, Heavens, Starres, with their natural effections: in which many both of the Antient and Moderne have done worthily; but if neernesse of the Object deceive me not, this surmounteth them all in two Privileges, the veritie and varietie, especially of things in this kind remotest and rarest.<sup>231</sup>

The same sense of wonder is expressed in *The Lusíads*, especially in cantos 5 and 10, and in the design of the monastery of the Jerónimos at Belém. In the scientific travel writing of the eighteenth century, that sense of wonder came to be a substitute for an older sense of the sublime.

In Stedman’s case, science and wonder in the form of his observations of Suriname’s flora and fauna were perfectly compatible. As will be seen, they communicated to his readers, including – with added wonder – William Blake. But something he leaves unexplained induced him to transcend ‘simple facts’ in describing the rebel maroons, the depths of his feelings for Joanna, and the turning point in his life represented by his ‘five years’ on the ‘Wild Coast of South-America.’ In his search for a more adequate style, he drew on the idioms of those eighteenth century authors who spoke to him most closely. In particular, he turned to the heroic, the pastoral and the sentimental.

## **The Heroic**

The history of heroic poetry in the eighteenth century is almost entirely a history of poetry in translation. A text of enormous importance in this connection was Sir Richard Fanshawe’s *The Lusíad, or Portugal’s Historical Poem: written in the Portingall Language by Luis de Camoens*, translated into English octavos in 1655.<sup>232</sup> An earlier translation by Fanshawe, of Guarini’s *Pastor Fido* (1647), had been praised by Sir John Denham with these couplets:

---

<sup>231</sup> ‘To the Reader’ in *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, vol 1 (Glasgow, 1905), p. xxxix.

<sup>232</sup> Luis de Camões, *The Lusíads*, in *Sir Richard Fanshawe’s translation*, edited and with an introduction by Geoffrey Bullough (Centaur Press, 1983).

A new and nobler way thou dost pursue.  
To make translations and Translators too.  
[Others] preserve the Ashes, Thou the Flame,  
True to his sense, but truer to his Fame.<sup>233</sup>

The year following the publication of Fanshaw's *Lusiads* Denham expanded on his view of the translator's art as follows:

I conceive it is a vulgar error in translating poets, to affect being *fidus interpres* ... for it is not his business alone to translate language into language, but poesy into poesy; and poesy is of so subtle a spirit, that in the pouring out of one language into another, it will all evaporate, and if a new spirit be not added in the transformation, there will remain nothing but as *caput mortuum* .... and therefore if Virgil must needs speak English, it were fit he should speak not only as a man of this nation, but as a man of this age.<sup>234</sup>

These thoughts on translation were repeated, almost word for word, by Dryden who explained of his version of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1697), that 'taking all the Materials of this divine Author, I have endeavour'd to make Virgil speak such *English*, as he would himself have spoken, if he had been in England and in this present Age'.<sup>235</sup> In the process, a tradition of English verse translation was established that continued through Pope's *Iliad* (1714), and that finds an echo in the 'translator's notes' which preface new versions of classical texts down to the present – including C.H. Sisson's version of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (1980) and my own attempt at *The Lusiads* (1997).<sup>236</sup> For better or worse, making the poet speak 'the language of one's one day' is a practice sanctioned by three and a half centuries of English poetic translation since Sir Richard Fanshawe.

This is not to say the practice has not been controversial. Pope's contemporary, the famous classical scholar Richard Bentley, called his *Iliad* 'miserable stuff', adding 'it is a pretty poem, Mr Pope, but you must not call it Homer'.<sup>237</sup> At stake here is a battle between the scholar and the poet over the ownership of canonical texts. Do they belong to the trained academics that study, edit, amend and interpret them? Or to the poets who re-write them for each

---

<sup>233</sup> Quoted in Bullough, *Fanshawe*, p. 22.

<sup>234</sup> Quoted in Bullough, *Fanshawe*, p. 23.

<sup>235</sup> Quoted approvingly from Dryden's 'Dedication to the Aeneis', by C.H. Sisson, 'On Translating Dante', in *Dante: the Divine Comedy, a New Verse Translation* by C.H. Sisson (Pan Books, 1981), p.42.

<sup>236</sup> See footnote 23, and 'Translator's Note' in *Luis Vaz de Camões, The Lusíads: a new translation* by Landeg White (Oxford World's Classics, 1997), p. xxi.

<sup>237</sup> Quoted in 'A Very Pretty Poem' on <http://www.ancientsites.com/~Epistate/newspaper/Pope>.

succeeding generation of readers? It is not an argument that can ever be resolved because there is justice on both sides. The result is a creative tension that makes English poetic translation worth studying in its own right.

But there is another conflict concealed within eighteenth century translation practice, namely the conflict between what the poets of the Augustan age translated and what they produced on their own account. In sum, it is the conflict between the epics they admired and the satires they actually wrote, between the poetic modes of the 'heroic' on the one hand and of the 'mock-heroic' on the other. One difficulty posed for eighteenth century writers in relating their classical inheritance to the spirit of the new age may be summed up by a simple contrast. In Book 5 of *The Odyssey*, Kalypso is ordered by Zeus, following the debate on Mount Olympus, to release Odysseus whom she has been holding on her island against his will. Rejoicing, the hero goes up into the mountains, cuts down trees, carries them to the shore and within four days fashions a boat in which to sail away.<sup>238</sup> In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), we meet another hero anxious to escape from an island. He climbs into the forest, chooses and fells a tree by burning its base over several days, spends months hollowing out a canoe using rough tools and controlled fire, and delighted with the results. Until, that is, he tries to transport it to the beach to be launched and discovers it is totally immovable. Neither levers, nor rollers, nor trenches can do it. He has to return to the coast and start again with a fresh tree.<sup>239</sup> Odysseus, of course, is half-human, half-divine, able to converse with and occasionally outwit the gods, and to triumph over all men. We accept him as a pattern of virtue, and as the key to his poem's epic machinery. But while we identify with his victories, and especially with his homecoming, our response to the epic's marvellous 'human' touches never deceives us – or at best, only temporarily – into reading his voyage as history. We always know this is myth, and consequently supra-rational. Robinson Crusoe, by contrast, is us. His story has mythical dimensions, but its power begins and ends in the fact that he is human and as fallible as we are. He represents a new type of epic hero, an ordinary man struggling with extraordinary circumstances.

It is never very easy to explain the paradigmatic shift in a culture that creates such changes as the need for the kind of heroes or heroines represented by

---

<sup>238</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, Translated by Robert Fitzgerald (Collins Harvill, 1988), pp. 97-100.

<sup>239</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), pp. 126-128.

*Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders* or *Pamela* or indeed, by Stedman's model, *Roderick Random*. Words like 'enlightenment' or 'Augustan' are metaphors rather than explanations of complex processes and, once again, oversimplification threatens my account. If we are looking for a date for the abandonment in England of notions of a divinely ordained hierarchy in creation, at least as expressed through the doctrine of the divine right of kings, then the execution of Charles I in 1649 seems as good as any. The argument that social order is man made, expressed by the various movements involved in the English Revolution, was based in turn on a growing belief in reason as the key to understanding nature.<sup>240</sup> Though that revolution ended with the restoration of the monarchy in the figure of Charles II, one of the first acts of the new king was to found the Royal Society for Improving Natural Knowledge (1660) closely followed by Greenwich Observatory (1675).<sup>241</sup> Meanwhile, the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, effectively the theorist of the restoration, had fulfilled his ambition to construct a political philosophy as logical and self-contained as Euclid's geometry with his *Leviathan* (1651).<sup>242</sup>

If reason and the rise of science provide important clues to cultural change in seventeenth century English, then the aftermath of the civil war certainly offers another. When Englishmen of 1700 looked back on the previous age, they were almost unanimous in regarding it as a period of barbarism and superstition, when the country was torn apart by religious controversies culminating in that worst of all disasters, a civil war. The belief in compromise, or further, the belief that if only all men could be reasonable in their dealings with each other then all problems could be solved, was held across the political spectrum. If Hobbes was the philosophy of absolutism, John Locke became the theorist of the 1688 settlement. Arguing in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) that human knowledge derives only from experience, he produced in the same year his *Treatise on Civil Government* proposing that rational men were capable of surrendering certain natural rights in forming society's 'original contract'.<sup>243</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Penguin, 1975).

<sup>241</sup> J.P. Kenyon, *The Stuarts: a Study in English Kingship* (London, 1966), p. 114.

<sup>242</sup> Bertrand Russell, 'Hobbes' *Leviathan*' in *A History of Western Philosophy* (London, 1946), pp. 531-541.

<sup>243</sup> Russell, 'Locke's Theory of Knowledge' and 'Locke's Political Philosophy' in *Western Philosophy*, pp. 584-595 and 596-616.

In the epilogue to his *The Conquest of Grenada* (1672), John Dryden compares the modern drama with that of the Elizabethans, in terms that seem astonishing to the modern reader:

Fame then was cheap, and the first comer sped:  
And they have kept it since by being dead.  
But were they now to write, when critics weigh  
Each line and every word throughout a play,  
None of 'em, no, not Jonson in his height,  
Could pass without allowing grains for weight ...  
Wit's now arrived to a more high degree;  
Our native language more refined and free.  
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit  
In conversation that those poets writ.<sup>244</sup>

Armed with these judgements, Dryden set about improving Shakespeare and translating Chaucer into heroic couplets. His terminology, though, is revealing. He is talking about 'refinement', 'conversation', lack of 'improprieties', and 'wit', as the basis of critical estimation. He seems to be talking less about literature than about polite society. Though there will always be some overlap between literary and social standards ('Spontaneity'? 'Naturalness'?), Dryden's are unusual in the degree to which they represent the standards of a particular social class. Interestingly, he is not alone in this. The impulse towards gentrification – tolerance, refinement, conversational manners – is just as strongly represented in the writings of Dryden's contemporary, the dissenter divine Isaac Watts, who was keen above all to prove that puritans were men of good taste.<sup>245</sup>

Linked to these developments was, as always, the growing power of capital in a world increasingly influenced by English trade. One of the first acts of the Royal Society had been to set up a committee charged with improving 'the English language for philosophical purposes'. The committee included Dryden, the poet Edmund Waller, the diarist John Evelyn, and Bishop Thomas Sprat who, in his *History of the Royal Society* (1667), explained their aim as follows:

a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as near to mathematic

---

<sup>244</sup> 'Epilogue to the Second Part of *The Conquest of Granada*, lines 11-16 and 23-26 in James Kinsley (ed.), *The Poems and Fables of John Dryden* (Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 134.

<sup>245</sup> Landeg White, 'The Imagery of the Hymns of Isaac Watts', thesis presented for the degree of MA, Liverpool University, 1964.

plainness as they can; and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen and merchants, before that of wits and scholars.<sup>246</sup>

In large part, this involved the abandonment of rhetoric and the embrace of reason as the new art of persuasion in philosophical and scientific discourse. This development was confirmed by the sudden spate of grammars and dictionaries produced by such figures as John Brightwood, James Greenwood, Isaac Watts and, most famous of all, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), all laying down strict procedures, on the Latin model, for the rules of communication. But that emphasis on 'the language of artisans, countrymen and merchants', in preference to the language of the universities and the Court, reflected among other things the growing power of mercantilism and a decisive shift in Britain's class structure. Pope's vision of London in 'Windsor Forest' (1713) is of prosperous London at the hub of a world system of trade:

The Time shall come, when free as Seas or Wind,  
Unbounded *Thames* shall flow for all Mankind,  
Whole nations enter with each swelling Tyde,  
And seas but join the Regions they divide;  
Earth's distant Ends our Glory shall behold,  
And the new World launch forth to seek the Old.  
Then Ships of uncouth Form shall stem the Tyde,  
And Feather'd People crowd my wealthy Side,  
And naked Youths and painted Chiefs admire  
Our Speech, our Colour, and our strange Attire!<sup>247</sup>

The echoes of Camões in this passage have not been noted, but are surely significant. When the next English version of *Os Lusíadas* appeared, in William Mickle's best-selling translation of 1776, its central theme was the rise of sea-borne empires, with Portugal paving the way for British dominance.<sup>248</sup>

Mercantilism brings us directly back to Defoe, that many-sided tradesman, and to Robinson Crusoe, that supremely self-sufficient individualist, who for twenty-eight years shifts for himself on an unpopulated island without once finding any need to regret his lack of an education in the classics. The English Bible in the *King James Authorised Version* (1611) is all he needs by way of

---

<sup>246</sup> Bishop Thomas Sprat, Bishop of Rochester, *History of the Royal Society* (1667), quoted in John Gross (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of English Prose* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p.153.

<sup>247</sup> Pope, 'Windsor Forest', lines 397-406 in *Poems*, ed. Butt, pp. 209-210.

tradition, and *Man Friday* all he needs by way of labour. When he returns home, via Portugal, he discovers all his previous investments have multiplied and that he is, by the grace of his protestant God, an extremely wealthy man. Defoe was a professional journalist, able to lie like the truth, and his novels were an extension of his journalism. *Robinson Crusoe* was published as a 'true history', based on investigation, and though (like the subsequent *History of Moll Flanders*) the tale it told was extraordinary, its success with the public depended on an appeal to verisimilitude. He was probably aware he was creating a new type of hero. It's doubtful whether he knew he was writing the first English novel.

There is more than one route to the eighteenth century English novel. One was mapped by Ian Watt in his seminal account of Defoe and Richardson, tracing a line through the new reading public with no formal classical education, but a strong interest in practical affairs, and through the growing individualism reflected in increased specialisation in manufacture and trade.<sup>249</sup> It was precisely for these reasons that the established writers disapproved of such productions for such a readership. Swift, for instance, affected not to remember Defoe's name, and Pope included him in *The Dunciad* – making Defoe the only eighteenth century writer to survive that act of literary genocide with his reputation intact!<sup>250</sup> With Fielding, however, for all his disdain of Richardson's *Pamela*, we reach a figure able to claim the novel as part of the classical inheritance. Designating *Joseph Andrews* 'a comic epic poem in prose', he places his novels in a long literary tradition to which he, as 'the founder of a new province of writing', has given a new and original turn.<sup>251</sup> By 'epic poem', he means a comprehensive account of its subject (namely, mid-eighteenth century England) developed through the device of a journey. By 'comic', he means on a human, rather than super-human level, the problems encountered being capable of solution through society's normal conventions. By 'prose', he means rational, credible, realistic, 'much deeper read in natural than supernatural causes'.

---

<sup>248</sup> *The Lusiad, or The Discovery of India: an Epic Poem, translated from the Portuguese of Luis de Camoens with a Life of the Poet*, by William Julius Mickle, 1776.

<sup>249</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel; Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London, 1957).

<sup>250</sup> Defoe is termed 'restless Daniel' in Pope, 'The Dunciad Variorum', Book 1, line 101 in *Poems ed. Butt*, p. 357.

<sup>251</sup> Henry Fielding, 'Preface' to *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742), in Miriam Allott, *Novelists on the Novel* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 59-60.

Bishop Richard Hurd in his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) famously remarked that ‘fancy, that had wantoned it so long in the world of fiction, was now constrained to ally herself with strict truth, if she would gain admittance into reasonable company’.<sup>252</sup> Fielding’s genius was to show how the new form of the novel, which he didn’t invent but marvellously extended, resolved this conflict between reason and the imagination, creating what has become the dominant literary form of the last two and half centuries. But the conflict had already been resolved much earlier, and in a quite different manner, with the invention of a new poetic style which came to be dominant until the 1740s. I am referring not to the ‘comic epic poem in prose’ but to the ‘mock-epic’ or ‘mock-heroic’.

Whether the credit for inventing the mock-heroic is assigned to Butler’s *Hudibras* (1662-78) or to John Dryden’s ‘MacFlecknoe’ (1682), it was Dryden’s poem that set the pattern for the succeeding century. Dryden’s satire is directed again two figures. The second of these was the dramatist Thomas Shadwell who, after a long friendship with Dryden in the course of which they wrote prologues and epilogues for each other’s plays, had broken with him over the portrayal in ‘Absalom and Achitophel’ (1681) of the Earl of Shaftsbury, the Whig leader.. Shadwell is ridiculed as the heir to the Irish poet Richard Flecknoe who had died in 1678. One would like to say something in praise of Flecknoe, who was arrested as a spy in Cascais in 1648 on a journey from Rome to Spain and who managed to extricate himself by claiming to be a musician.<sup>253</sup> Subsequently, he performed on the lute well enough to earn the patronage of João IV, of whom he left an attractive description (‘The king is an honest plain man ... faring as homely as any farmer, and going as meanly clad as any citizen’<sup>254</sup>). Unfortunately, there is little else that can be quoted in Flecknoe’s favour. The lines he wrote about Mr Muley’s ‘Kinta’ three or four miles from Lisbon are every bit as execrable as Dryden claims.

‘MacFlecknoe’ begins:

All human things are subject to decay,  
And, when fate summons, Monarchs must obey:

---

<sup>252</sup> Bishop Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalty and Romance* (1762), p. 153-154.

<sup>253</sup> ‘Mac-Flecknoe’s Father’, in Rose Macaulay, *They Went to Portugal* (Penguin, 1985), pp. 76-85.

<sup>254</sup> Quoted in Macaulay, *Portugal*, p. 82.

This *Fleckno* found, who, like *Augustus*, young  
 Was call'd to Empire, and had govern'd long:  
 In Prose and Verse, was own'd, without dispute  
 Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute.  
 This aged Prince now flourishing in Peace,  
 And best with issue of a large increase,  
 Worn out with business, did at length debate  
 To settle the succession of the State:  
 And pond'ring which of all his son was fit  
 To Reign, and wage immortal War with Wit,  
 Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd, for Nature pleads that He  
 Should onely rule, who most resembles me.<sup>255</sup>

All the principal ingredients of the mock-heroic are already present in this inauguration. There is first the basic seriousness of the style, for the mock epic is in no sense whatsoever intended to undermine the epic. The opening couplet, with its comments on mortality and on death the leveller, together with lines 7-10 introducing the question of the succession, could have easily featured in Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid*. They set the standard by which Flecknoe and Shadwell are being measured. In fact, in these opening fourteen couplets, the only words which fall short of an epic seriousness of diction are 'Flecknoe' (line 3), 'Non-sense' (line 6), and 'Wit' as the object of war (line 12).

That detail points to the second feature of eighteenth century mock-heroic, that it depends for its effects on a close attention to meaning. The reader is expected to discriminate between the serious and the trivial, the sensible and the non-sensible, and to be able to recognise at once that Flecknoe belongs to the world of the latter. When the succession speech continues 'Heaven bless my Son, from *Ireland* let him reign / To farr *Barbadoes* on the Western main' (lines 139-40), it is our knowledge of the empty ocean lying between Ireland and Barbados that gives the lines their effect of bathos. The poem ends with the image of the declaiming Flecknoe plunging through a trapdoor. It is an exact metaphor for how the mock-heroic has been working throughout the poem, the style raising epic expectations, the content plumbing the ridiculous.

For such effects, the heroic couplet was the perfect medium, lending itself naturally to the device of antithesis. Readers are offered a set of alternatives that it becomes their task to rank in order of importance. 'Sense' provides the standard, from which 'Non-sense' is a deviation:

The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
But Shadwell never deviates into Sense.<sup>256</sup>

The appeal to ‘sense’ in the reader is explicit: the lack of sense a ‘betrayal’. The heroic couplet caters precisely for this notion of reading as discrimination. All this in turn is based on the conviction that there are distinctions to be made – between sense and nonsense (in ‘MacFlecknoe’), between Tory and Whig (in ‘Absalom and Achitophel’), between the serious and the trivial (in ‘The Rape of the Lock’), and between good literature and Grub Street (in ‘The Dunciad’). This brings us back, once again, to the Augustan confidence in reason and compromise, and to the belief in a new hierarchy based not on the medieval Chain of Being but on – well, on what precisely? In practice, it seems to have been based on confidence in descent and in a classical education, on the stability of the 1688 settlement and the growing prosperity of the nation through trade, linked with the assumption that the classical epic continued to set the standards by which the modern age was to be judged.

Stedman was a soldier, engaged in reporting on a military campaign. But his notions of ‘the heroic’, at least in respect of himself, were thoroughly eighteenth century, drawing on *Roderick Random* and *Tom Jones* both for patterns of behaviour and as literary models. There is no bombast in his account of himself in action, only a rueful sense of misfortunes and personal failings in his picaresque adventures, coupled with a determined, daily readiness to defend his personal honour. There are elements of mock-heroic in his satire on Fourceoud, his commanding officer, especially in his deflationary use of obscene and scatological language. But true heroism is ascribed only to the rebel maroons, and in his account of them his chief resort is to the idiom of eighteenth classical translation, most notably Pope’s *Homer*. The maroons, he states directly once and implies many times, are like the ancient Greeks in their bravery, patriotism and simplicity. Fighting them, a European army is caught up in a clash of genres, with the ‘epic’ losing the battle but winning the war.

But around the mid-century, a further change in sensibility occurred. In Thomas Gray’s *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (1749), the grand style of heroic

---

<sup>255</sup> MacFlecknoe’ lines 1-14, in Kinsley ed., *Dryden*, p. 238.

<sup>256</sup> MacFlecknoe’ lines 19-20, in Kinsley ed., *Dryden*, p. 238.

poetry was applied, without humour or condescension, to the unlettered rural poor. Boswell quotes the response of the Scottish poet James Macpherson. “‘Hoot’, cried Fingal, ‘to write panegyrics upon a parcel of damned rascals that did nothing but plough the land and saw corn’. He considered that fighters only should be celebrated.”<sup>257</sup> But this mock-heroic reading of the *Elegy* was eccentric. Gray’s poem was recognised immediately as a new and immensely successful version of pastoral.

## The Pastoral

If the eighteenth century was the period in which English poetry reluctantly abandoned its belief in the Heroic, it was also the period in which the Pastoral came into its own. In the ninety years that separate Pope’s and Wordsworth’s first published poems, every possible variation on the pastoral seems to have been attempted by someone – until, early in the nineteenth century John Clare demonstrated there was yet more to be done with the genre. The greater diversity one claims for the pastoral mode, however, the more difficult it becomes to describe exactly what it is. As Annabel Patterson remarks in her *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry*, the definition of pastoral ‘is a cause lost as early as the sixteenth century, when the genre began to manifest the tendency of most strong literary forms to propagate by miscegenation’.<sup>258</sup> Just as have seen the classical epic combining with the romance and with satire to yield separately the novel and the mock-heroic, so the pastoral combines and proliferates in bewildering directions.

John Barrell and John Bull in their *A Book of English Pastoral Verse* take the matter strictly in hand by insisting that, in essence, pastoral is a game in which courtiers play at being shepherds ‘in a ritual celebration of their freedom from economic struggle’. With the courtiers ‘unable to see the labourers in the field, the rural location serves easily as a location for all those more primitive virtues – honesty, peace, innocence, etc. – that are felt to have been irretrievably lost in the sophisticated world of the court’.<sup>259</sup> The anthology claims to have interpreted pastoral ‘in a wide sense’, including poems which, in imitation of Virgil’s

---

<sup>257</sup> Frederick A. Pottle (ed.), *Boswell’s London Journal 1762-1763* (London, 1950), p. 110.

<sup>258</sup> Quoted by Raphael Lyne in ‘Green Thoughts upon the Mower’s Song’, *Times Literary Supplement* (30 May, 1997) p. 13

Georgics, describe rural labour and techniques of husbandry (such as John Philip's *Cyder* (1708) and James Grainger's *Sugar-Cane* (1764)). But it accommodates such pivotal accounts of the late-eighteenth century countryside as Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770) and George Crabbe's *The Village* (1783) only under the heading 'Anti-Pastoral', their accounts of rural misery leaving no room for the idealising courtly, or at least urban, vision. For these reasons, they don't take their selection much beyond John Clare (who had his own historically-exact vision of a golden age in pre-enclosed Helpston), and they deny the possibility of modern pastoral, at least in English poetry:

As the countryside becomes ever more efficiently a dormitory for a managerial and executive elite – pricing the traditional inhabitants out of their homes, just as our machinery has priced them out of their jobs – so the last sad remains of the Pastoral are parcelled up and auctioned off in semi-detached lots. The purchasers of such pastoral remains look round in vain for the Arcadian shepherd or shepherdesses to reassure them that they, too, are in Arcadia; but for them, as much as for Sidney and Pope earlier, the shepherds are invisible, and now for the simplest of reasons – that there are no shepherds left.<sup>260</sup>

For all the undeniable power of this passage, I find its argument perverse in a manner best illustrated by the fact that nowhere in their presentation do the editors make any reference to William Empson's classic study *Some Versions of Pastoral*, first published in 1935.<sup>261</sup> To write on pastoral while ignoring Empson seems extraordinary (not least because Empson was Bull's professor at Sheffield University). In Empson's account, the pastoral mode is altogether more protean, and hence more vigorous, with more political bite, and remains fully available to modern poets in their attempts to make sense of the divisions of the modern world.

Empson begins with some reflections on proletarian literature, analyses double plots as contrasting heroic and pastoral modes, continues with examinations of Shakespeare's sonnet 94 ('They that have power to hurt') and of Marvell's 'The Garden', considers Bentley remarks on Milton, and concludes with discussions of *The Beggar's Opera* and of *Alice in Wonderland*. There is no mention of the court or of Damon and Cloris, Dorcus and Sylvia. But there is a

---

<sup>259</sup> John Barrell and John Bull (eds.), *A Book of English Pastoral Verse* (Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>260</sup> Barrell and Bull, *Pastoral Verse*, p. 432.

good deal about power and powerless and the subtleties of their mutual interrogation. Pastoral for Empson is essentially about contrasts and the odd reflective ironies involved in contrasts, with the limitation that they are socially focussed. It is mode of reflection rather than a genre with fixed forms and props and, of all the ancient 'types', the one that best transcends critical fashion and best survives adaptation to the present age. Making sense of Stedman's use of the pastoral mode, and especially the uses made by his imitators and successors (include myself) will involve some recourse to Empson, But we must start more conventionally, measuring the distance covered by eighteenth century pastoral poetry, by contrasting Pope and Crabbe.

Pope's *Pastorals* together with *A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry* were written, he claimed, at the age of 16, though they were not published for a further five years. They are, deliberately and self-consciously, his poetic *juvenalia*, five-finger exercises in his training as a poet, and his thoughts on pastoral reflect this purpose. He begins by providing a somewhat spurious history. Given that 'the keeping of flocks seems to have been the first employment of mankind, the most ancient sort of poetry was probably pastoral'.<sup>262</sup> The link with the life of shepherds is fundamental to the form, and the 'complete character of this poem consists in simplicity, brevity and delicacy'.<sup>263</sup> However, shepherds are not to be described 'as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceiv'd then to have been.' Occasionally, it will be 'natural' to introduce some knowledge of rural affairs, but the poems should present only 'the best side' of a shepherd's life, 'concealing its miseries'.<sup>264</sup> There is also the implication, repeated in the appended notes that since pastorals were the earliest form of poetry, it is appropriate for young poets to attempt them first. But they are essentially exercises in language and form, and Pope afterwards claimed them to be the most correct and musical of all his writings.<sup>265</sup> If there is the ghost of any social comment or political message, it lies in the denial of any rural realities for the entertainment of a coffee house audience. Later, when Pope returns to pastoral in the opening lines of *Windsor Forest*, he contradicts his *Discourse on Pastoral*

---

<sup>261</sup> William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935, Penguin, 1966).

<sup>262</sup> Pope, 'Pastorals, with a Discourse on Pastoral' in *Poems* ed. Butt, p. 119.

<sup>263</sup> Pope, 'Discourse on Pastoral', in *Poems* ed. Butt, p. 120

<sup>264</sup> Pope, 'Discourse on Pastoral', in *Poems* ed. Butt, p. 120.

<sup>265</sup> Pope, 'Note' to 'Spring. The First Pastoral, or Damon', in *Poems* ed. Butt. p. 123.

*Poetry* by merging the wholly imagined Golden Age with his invocation of a contemporary England where ‘Peace and Plenty tell a STUART reigns’.<sup>266</sup> Mercantilism (those ‘feather’d people’ and ‘painted chiefs’) combines with the appeal to settled, conservative values in a manner which works as poetry, but which is as political as poetry gets.

The contrast with Crabbe’s *The Village* at the opposite end of the century could hardly be more explicit:

Fled are those times, when, in harmonious strains,  
The rustic poet praised his native plains:  
No shepherds now, in smooth alternate verse,  
Their country’s beauty or their nymphs’ rehearse;  
Yet still for these we frame the tender strain,  
Still in our lays fond Corydons complain,  
And shepherds’ boys their amorous pains reveal,  
The only pains, alas! they never feel.  
On Mincio’s banks, in Caesar’s bounteous reign,  
If Titirus found the Golden Age again,  
Must sleepy bards the flattering dream prolong,  
Mechanic echoes of the Mantuan song?  
From Truth and Nature shall we widely stray  
Where Virgil, not where Fancy leads the way?<sup>267</sup>

I can comprehend the impulse that led the two Johns, Barrell and Bull, to classify this as anti-pastoral. Crabbe sets up the conventions of pastoral – shepherd boys, harmonious strains, idealised beauty, the Golden Age – in contrast to ‘the real Picture of the Poor’ which is his subject. Yet they should surely have thought again. Crabbe does not deny the Golden Age, only insist it has ‘fled’ from late eighteenth century England. The premise, that shepherd boys are supposed to be happy lovers, is not denied, but instead used to point their actual, contemporary situation. Without constant reference to the conventions of pastoral, Crabbe’s poem loses much of its point.

With this contrast in mind, between an ostensibly a-political pastoral, tending towards the conservative, and a political pastoral, tending towards the radical – between, in short, Barrell and Bull on the one hand and Empson on the other – it is useful to return to a consideration of Gray’s *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (1751). Gray’s poem was popular from the start, catching something of the mood of the mid-century, and its influence is still powerful in English poetry. The first

---

<sup>266</sup> Pope, ‘Windsor Forest’, line 42, in *Poems* ed. Butt, p.42.

of many things to notice about the poem is the way it collapses the two sides of the mock-heroic, applying the high ‘poetic diction’ of serious eighteenth century verse to the lives of the unlettered and obscure rural poor. Macpherson’s complaint, eccentric as it sounds, is exactly on target in defining the *Elegy*’s originality – that the people celebrated are people who never did anything. One aspect of the poem’s success is that Gray persuades us that there is nothing inappropriate in applying such a style to such a subject.

At one level, his argument is familiar, echoing the ‘death the leveller’ opening of ‘MacFlecknoe’:

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e’er gave,  
Awaits alike th’inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.<sup>268</sup>

The originality here lies not in the moral but the extraordinary precision of the diction, those categories of descent, power, beauty, and wealth defining exactly the bases of social prominence. Gray does not despise them, though he certainly despises the attempts to promote social rank after death in the new, fashionable monuments (‘storied urn and animated bush’) crowding eighteenth century cathedrals. But he advances his argument beyond the theme of equality in death to blame ‘penury’ and the lack of ‘knowledge’ for the plight of the poor, and his examples of what, in other circumstances, they might have become are startling. Hampden, the parliamentarian who defied Charles 1, Milton, the republican poet, Cromwell, the regicide! Not since Marvell’s *An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland* a hundred years earlier had anyone invoked Cromwell by way of heroic example.

It is because of the peculiar force of the names Gray invokes that I disagree with Empson’s criticism that there is a ‘cheat in the implied politics’, as the *Elegy* argues ‘that we ought to accept the injustices of society as we do the inevitability of death’.<sup>269</sup> As befits the author of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951), Empson bases this claim on the careful analysis of a single stanza:

---

<sup>267</sup> George Crabbe, *The Village, Book 1*, in Barrell and Bull, *Pastoral Verse*, pp. 399-400.

<sup>268</sup> Thomas Gray, ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard’, lines 33-36 in Barrell and Bull, *Pastoral Verse*, p. 328.

<sup>269</sup> Empson, *Pastoral*, p. 12.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.<sup>270</sup>

Empson contends that a gem does not mind being in a cave and that a flower prefers not to be picked, and that by comparing the social arrangements of mid-eighteenth century England to Nature, Gray 'makes it seem inevitable, which it was not, and gives it a dignity which was undeserved'.<sup>271</sup> There have three things to say in reply to this. Firstly, I'm not persuaded that a poem of 32 stanzas ought to be judged by just one of them, especially when that stanza is somewhat untypical. It is, for example, the only one in which Gray deploys well-worn metaphors, and the only one in which he inverts the natural order of noun and adjective ('ray serene') to get his rhyme. All the poem's other 63 rhymes follow the normal rules of English prosody, and it may be significant that 'serene' here is used in its Latin sense of 'bright' or 'dazzling', not its English sense of 'calm' or 'quiet', the Latinism explaining the Latin construction. My second claim is that Empson is guilty of over-interpretation. The primary meaning of the stanza is, surely, that worth and beauty often go unnoticed, and I'm not convinced there is any need to press the argument further. If further implications are relevant, they must focus on that word 'waste', rather than on any idea of an unchanging nature. Gray's metaphors mean that it is wrong that such resources should be ignored. The poem's dominant message is in fact is that the social hierarchy is socially created and has nothing to do with birth. For the mid-eighteen century that is a radical message

But my key objection to Empson's criticism is that he has misunderstood the fundamental problem of the relation in this poem between language and form. This is, to quote Macpherson again, a heroic poem about people who did nothing heroic. There is one stanza where Gray records their activities in ploughing fields and felling trees, but in the other 31 stanzas it is impossible for him to base the poem on action – that is, to make it a matter of nouns and verbs. Instead, the

---

<sup>270</sup> Gray, 'Elegy', lines 53-56 in Barrell and Bull, *Pastoral Verse*, p. 329.

<sup>271</sup> Empson, *Pastoral*, p. 12.

nouns are muted, the verbs are in passive or intransitive forms, so that the *Elegy* becomes a poem written almost entirely in adjectives:

Far from the madding crowds ignoble strife  
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;  
Along the cool, sequestered vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.<sup>272</sup>

Remove the seven adjectives here (following Robert Graves' invaluable advice to young poets) and the stanza becomes completely null. It is the adjectives in this poem, up to seven per stanza, which glow and radiate, giving it its special dignity as a kind of inverted pastoral. This, rather than any political complacency, is responsible for what Empson calls 'the massive calm of the poem', its dominant sense of melancholy.<sup>273</sup> But the *Elegy* is a special case, arising from the combination of the subject matter and the poetic style of the age. Forty years later, Wordsworth would demonstrate that it was entirely appropriate to use nouns and verbs in writing about the rural poor.<sup>274</sup> Instead of raising shepherds and ploughmen up into poetry, he had the genius to take poetry down to them. But it took the abandonment of 'poetic diction' to bring about that change.

There are many aspects of Barrell and Bull's versions of pastoral that Stedman would have instantly recognised. The idea of a rural retreat from the noise and corruption of urban society is one. John Pomfret's *The Choice* (1700) is one of the poems quoted in the 1790 'Narrative', with its celebration of a 'private seat .. not little, not too great', and with the attractions of female company ('some obliging modest fair'). Disguise and the confusion of social roles, so that the princess can be peasant girl, mixing sophistication with simplicity, is another. The slide from art to nature, and back again to artifice, is a third, so that Stedman could play fast and loose with facts while claiming to write only the simple truth. But without Empson's emphasis on the shifting ground of pastoral, its ability to mutate, together with its latent political questioning, it is not possible to understand Stedman's deployment of pastoral motifs in his representation of Joanna, a mixed-race teenage slave in a South American colony. That particular 'miscegenation' (to repeat Annabela Patterson's term) is as startling as any of Empson's examples. In exploring pastoral as one aspect of the relation between

---

<sup>272</sup> Gray, 'Elegy', lines 73-76 in Barrell and Bull, *Pastoral Verse*, p. 329.

<sup>273</sup> Empson, *Pastoral*, p. 12.

<sup>274</sup> Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. James (Methuen, 1963).

Europe and her colonies, Stedman anticipated what has become a major mode of writing about the Third World.

There is one further aspect of the *Elegy* which needs comment, namely the representation of the poet himself. The poem begins at dusk, in a country churchyard, with sounds of lowing cattle, a droning beetle, tinkling folds, and a moping owl, near an 'ivy-mantled tow'r', rugged elms and the shade of an ancient yew tree. The props hint at gothic, but at the centre of it all is 'me', the sensitive poet. The Augustan confidence has suddenly evaporated, and we are a long way from the public world, or at least from the coffee house atmosphere, of Dryden and Pope. The note is a new one in eighteenth century poetry, though there are hints of it in Thomson's *The Seasons*, and Gray was as surprised as anyone that it struck such a popular chord. The *Elegy* concludes with eight stanzas that gave Gray much trouble in his various revisions. The table is turned as emphasis shifts to the poet with 'some hoary-headed swain' made commentator. Interestingly, such is the force of 'poetic diction', he is not made to speak like a peasant but in the language of the rest of the poem (though he is given, for the first time, some active, forceful verbs). The peasant's perspective lies in the irony, for what is described is a moody, sensitive, but entirely unproductive figure:

There at the foot of yonder nodding beech  
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,  
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,  
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,  
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,  
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,  
Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.<sup>275</sup>

The epitaph speaks of the poet's humble birth, of his poverty and obscurity as 'Melancholy marked him for her own', of his 'soul sincere' and his capacity for fellow feeling, and, of course his piety.<sup>276</sup> In short, he was a man of sentiment.

## The Sentimental

In the parish church in Hemel Hampstead, Hertfordshire, there is a monument to a lady dated 1820 that lists among her attributes that she was 'Charitable

---

<sup>275</sup> Gray, 'Elegy', lines 101-108 in Barrell and Bull, *Pastoral Verse*, pp. 350-351.

without Display, and Pious without Enthusiasm'. This is a rather late usage of the word 'enthusiasm' in its eighteenth century sense of 'ill-regulated or misdirected religious emotion'. *The Oxford English Dictionary* dates the movement from this meaning to the modern 'rapturous intensity of feeling in favour of a person, principle or cause, etc.' as occurring between the 1770s and 1790s. But it is a useful reminder of the distrust of emotion, especially religious emotion, during much of the eighteenth century.

There are other words that undergo similar shifts in connotation in the gradual movement towards romanticism. None is new to the language, but their associations are increasingly positive. They include 'heart', 'understanding', 'human', 'sympathy', 'compassion', 'pity', 'animals', 'feeling', 'tears', 'melancholy', the 'picturesque', and, of course 'sensibility'.<sup>277</sup> Some, like 'simplicity' or 'naturalness', are better understood through their association with the pastoral, while others, like 'horrid', belong to the gothic. Unlike the mock-heroic or the pastoral, it is hard to credit the sentimental with any intellectual pretensions. The mock-heroic, as we saw, emerged from the clash between the classical inheritance and the Age of Reason, while the pastoral, even at its most purely formal, reflected some concern with the condition of the nation, or with the idea of the good life. But the drift towards accommodating the sentimental seems more a matter of fashion, as what was literally 'out of court' became increasingly acceptable. It was not until the romantic revolution that emotion became linked with knowledge. Wordsworth's claim in *Lyrical Ballads*, that

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil, and of good,  
Than all the sages can.<sup>278</sup>

is one that would have seemed, frankly, incomprehensible to most of the advocates of sensibility and the sentimental. The best one can say is that, from the mid-century onwards, it became fashionable for a rational man to add to his profile the hitherto 'feminine' ability to burst into tears over some affecting scene.

---

<sup>276</sup> Gray, 'Elegy', line 120 in Barrell and Bull, *Pastoral Verse*, p. 35 1.

<sup>277</sup> The English Department of the University of Virginia maintains a useful sensibility website on <http://www.engl.virginia.edu/~enec981/dictionary/termlist.html>

<sup>278</sup> 'The Tables Turned' lines 21-24 in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* ed. Brett and Jones, p. 106.

That this coincided with Mary Wolstonecraft's insistence that women should be considered rational creatures, is one of the ironies of early feminism.<sup>279</sup>

Wylie Sypher usefully draws our attention to the close link between the literature of sentiment and the first stirrings of the Abolition movement, as instanced by Ignatius Sancho's famous letter to Sterne of 21 July, 1766, following Sterne's remarks in his tenth sermon on the evils of slavery.<sup>280</sup> Sancho appealed to him 'to give half an hour's attention to slavery ... that subject, handled in your own manner, would ease the yoke of many'. Sterne's prompt and warm reply referred him to 'the sorrows of a friendless, poor negro girl' just written for chapter vi, volume IX of *Tristram Shandy*. The word is inescapably associated with Lawrence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), and with scenes such as the farewell to Maria and with the peasant weeping over his dead donkey.<sup>281</sup> Sypher is caustic about this (he says 'Sterne – and Sancho – are sentimentalists rather than philanthropists'<sup>282</sup>). But he makes the point in the context of a distinction between tragedy which demands a symbol of 'pity and terror', a great man falling from a height, and sentiment which requires only 'pity', finding it in such figures as the dying Indian and the downtrodden Negro.<sup>283</sup> The literature of sentiment prefers 'to experience the exquisite throb of benevolence' than to do anything practical for the victim.<sup>284</sup>

Thus described, it makes its appearance far earlier than the mid-eighteenth century. It is already present in Mrs Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or, the History of the Royal Slave* (1688).<sup>285</sup>

It is a very curious fact that Stedman nowhere in his *Journal* or 'Narrative' refers to Aphra Behn or to *Oroonoko*, the first novel or 'faction' in English to have a black hero. It is clear that Mrs Behn had first hand knowledge of Suriname, which she visited in 1663 when her step-father was appointed Lieutenant-

---

<sup>279</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, (ed.), Miriam Brody Kramnick (Penguin, 1975).

<sup>280</sup> Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings*, p. 150, quoting Lawrence Sterne, *Sermons of Mr Yorick* (Boston, 1928), I, p. 122.

<sup>281</sup> Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journal Through France and Italy* (Penguin, 1967), pp. 62-64 and 136-138.

<sup>282</sup> Sypher, *Captive Kings*, p. 151.

<sup>283</sup> Sypher, *Captive Kings*, pp. 103-105.

<sup>284</sup> Sypher, *Captive Kings*, p. 105.

<sup>285</sup> Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, or, the History of the Royal Slave* in Maureen Duffy (ed.), *Oroonoko and Other Stories* (Methuen, 1986), pp. 27-99.

Governor.<sup>286</sup> During the course of that visit, she carried on ‘a public flirtation’ with a William Scot, son of the regicide Thomas Scot, who was living there on his brother’s plantation. Late, Scot took refuge in Holland, planning to overthrow Charles II and restore the Commonwealth. Aphra Behn, a passionate royalist, was employed by the British government to spy on Scot and went to Antwerp for the purpose. He seems to have outwitted her, and to have outwitted the British too. Maureen Duffy, Behn’s biographer, is convinced that Scot provided the Dutch with the information enabling them to take Suriname from the British, meanwhile providing the British with warnings which were ignored about the impending Dutch raid on the Medway described in chapter 2. Aphra Behn, then, was not just an author who had preceded Stedman in writing sympathetically about Suriname and black slavery. She was part of the region’s history. Stedman usually read, and took issue with, any literature with a bearing on his own book. Moreover, Thomas Southerne’s or Hawkesworth’s dramatic adaptations of *Oroonoko*, are said to have been staged every season throughout the eighteenth century<sup>287</sup>. They came to influence the dramatic representations of Stedman’s own story, and it is inconceivable that he was unaware of Aphra Behn’s existence, or of the larger ramifications of her career in Suriname, Holland and Stuart Britain.

Stedman may perhaps have felt (as I do) that *Oroonoko* is such a poor piece of work that it was hardly worth his attention. He would certainly have poured scorn on an author capable of praising Oroonoko for killing a tiger ‘which was about the height of an heifer’, or of describing the mouth of the Amazon as ‘almost as broad as the river of Thames’<sup>288</sup>. Much of the novel is grotesquely over-written. Imoinda, for example is described as ‘female to the noble male; the beautiful black Venus to our young Mars ... I have seen a hundred white men sighing after her, and making a thousand vows at her feet, all in vain and unsuccessful’<sup>289</sup>. But Aphra Behn is not so easily dismissed as a possible source. There are touches in *Oroonoko* which reveal her first hand acquaintance with Suriname. Accounts of the hero’s bravery are interwoven, clumsily but revealingly, with passages of documentary. His fight with an electric eel, for

---

<sup>286</sup> The following information is from Behn, *Oroonoko*, ‘Introduction’, pp. 8-10 and 13-16.

<sup>287</sup> Mrs Inchbald, Preface to *Inkle and Yarico in The British Theatre; or A Collection of Plays Which are Now Acted at the Theatres Royal, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, Haymarket and Lyceum*. With biographical and critical remarks: 20 vols. (London, 1824).

<sup>288</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, pp. 74 and 81.

example, mixes fantasy with local knowledge to concoct a genuine Suriname ‘tall-story’, with parallels in the *Narrative*.<sup>290</sup> Her account of the causes of maroonage are identical to Stedman’s, and the first hint of rebellion in Oroonoko arises from his realisation that the child Imoinda is expecting will be born into slavery. There are striking similarities between her account of Oroonoko’s barbarous execution, and the executions already noted in the *Journal* and the ‘Narrative’. Even her amusing descriptions of a marmoset ‘having face and hands like a human creature’, or of the armadillo ‘in white armour, so jointed that it moves as well in it, as if it had nothing on’, sound very close to Stedman’s<sup>291</sup>.

Most remarkable of all is Aphra Behn’s account of an eight-day voyage up river, under Oroonoko’s conduct, to meet some of the Amerindian peoples of the forest. This digression adds nothing to the narrative, but is fascinating for the wealth of ethnographic detail in a piece of writing suddenly closely observed, detailed and informative<sup>292</sup>. If we are looking for ‘noble savages’ in Suriname, then the native Americans are far more plausible candidates. For Aphra Behn, ‘these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin: and ‘tis most evident and plain, that simple nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and vertuous mistress’<sup>293</sup>. By contrast, the West Africa kingdom of Coramantien is described as complex, sophisticated and thoroughly corrupt<sup>294</sup>. Stedman, too, though less gushing, makes the same distinction between the Arawak Indians, whose education ‘being the dictates only of Simple Nature they’r Minds or theyr Bodies are very Seldom deformed’<sup>295</sup>, and the Kings and Courts of West Africa. Interestingly, he quotes as his authority Abbé Raynal, whose *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1774) appeared in fifteen English editions between 1776 and 1806. Raynal, of course, was not impervious to Rousseau’s influence.

It remains uncertain whether these similarities are merely coincidental, or whether he was responding to themes and motifs already present in the language

---

<sup>289</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, p. 34.

<sup>290</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, p. 76.

<sup>291</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, pp. 28 and 72.

<sup>292</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, pp. 77-82.

<sup>293</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, p. 29.

<sup>294</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, pp. 37-40 and 50-57.

<sup>295</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 468.

of West Indian travel - or whether, finally, he had actually read, or watched, *Oroonoko*. But one thing is certainly clear. Stedman was a loyal monarchist, but never an absolute-tist. Oroonoko's revolt leads springs directly from his aristocratic instincts:

And why (said he) my dear friends and fellow sufferers, should we be slaves to an unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honourable battle? Are we by the chance of war become their slaves? This wou'd not anger a noble heart; this would not animate a soldier's soul: no, but we are bought and sold like apes or monkeys.<sup>296</sup>

What is wrong is not the slavery itself, but that the king's son should be enslaved - enslaved moreover at the hands of tradesmen! Even his former subjects, and subsequently his fellow slaves, accept this analysis. When the revolt fails, his followers deserting him, he accepts that he was wrong 'in endeavouring to make those free, who were by nature slaves'<sup>297</sup>. His own choice of death before dishonour is the final proof of his royal nature. The parallel Aphra Behn invokes is 'the deplorable death of our great monarch' Charles I<sup>298</sup>.

As a self-declared royalist and 'man of sentiment', Stedman had no truck with any of this. It is true he flirted with the notion that Joanna had noble African ancestry, but his concern was with the sufferings of ordinary slaves, and especially of slave women. Wylie Sypher's monograph remains indispensable, as the best survey extant of abolitionist literature. But his evident impatience with his subject leads him to the charge that these writers prefer to admire their own compassion than to get results (sentiment, not philanthropy). This is grossly unfair to an abolition movement that achieved its first aim in just twenty years, and its second within another generation. It was certainly unwise of Sypher to claim that Americans knew more about Africans than their English counterparts, describing them more 'realistically' as comical domestics. Finally, though there are clear parallels between abolition and sentiment, as Sypher demonstrates, they are also distinct. The cult of feeling had its own momentum, en route to romanticism, and it took up other causes - prisoners, beggars, deserted mothers, madmen, orphaned children - and other themes such as travel and the beauties of natural world. For

---

<sup>296</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, p. 83.

<sup>297</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, p. 88.

<sup>298</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, p. 33.

the sources of Stedman's self-presentation as a man of sentiment we must look elsewhere.

The most quoted author in the 1790 'Narrative' is the Scottish poet James Thomson (1700-1748). Stedman quotes no less than separate 24 passages from Thomson's works, twenty-two of them from *The Seasons* (1744 edition) and the other two from his 'A Hymn on the Seasons' and from *The Tragedy of Sophonisba* (1730). His liking for Thomson is not difficult to account for. Thomson was a fellow Scot, but with no particular axe to grind about his Scottishness. He had settled happily in the Thames valley and his post-Union patriotism was as direct and uncomplicated as Stedman's own (Thomson was the author of 'Rule Britannia', at least a better poem than 'God Save the Queen'). When Thomson writes about British liberty and foreign tyranny, it might at times be Stedman speaking. But there were other aspects of Thomson to interest Stedman. Thomson was best known, of course, as a poet skilled in natural description. *The Seasons* broke fresh ground in eighteenth century poetry by moving beyond the coffee shop, and outside the town. It provided a version of pastoral in which the golden age was located, not in the distant past or a hoped-for future, but then and there in the prosperity brought by British labour and commerce. Though hardly intellectually demanding, the accounts of spring, summer, autumn and winter were enriched by accurate observation of natural phenomena and, somewhat after the manner of *The Georgics*, a deep knowledge of rural crafts. What is not always remarked, however, is the global range of his descriptions. 'Winter' is not just winter as experienced in the Scottish lowlands or the Thames valley. It ranges as far as the Alps and the Apennines, Greenland and the Polar regions. 'Summer' includes Africa and both Americas, with descriptions of the Nile, the Niger and the Orinoco along with the astonishing and dangerous fertility of nature in the tropics. Stedman loved this material. Of his twenty-two quotations from *The Seasons*, fourteen are from 'Summer', supplementing his own descriptions of rivers and thick foliage, of snakes, and tropical fruits, with the appropriate lines: sunrise or the night, of

Bear me, Pomona! to thy citron groves,  
To where the lemon and the piercing lime,  
With the deep orange, glowing thro' the Green,  
Their lighter glories blend - Lay me reclin'd

Beneath the spreading tamarind, that shakes,  
Fanned by the breeze, its fever-cooling fruit.<sup>299</sup>

My chapter five will show him quoting from ‘Spring’, ‘Summer’ and ‘Autumn’ in reinforcing his representation of Joanna as a pastoral heroine. Most extraordinary of all, however, is a passage from ‘Summer’ which he never directly quotes but which perhaps influenced more directly than anything in Thomson. It is the section where Thomson offers his views about Africans:

Ill-fated race! the soft’ning arts of Peace,  
Whate’er the humanizing Muses teach;  
The godlike wisdom of the temper’d breast,  
Progressive truth, the patient force of thought;  
Investigation calm whose silent powers  
Command the world; the Light that leads to Heaven;  
Kind equal rule, the government of laws,  
And all-protecting FREEDOM, which alone  
Sustains the name and dignity of Man:  
These are not theirs.<sup>300</sup>

Thus far, of course, the description is a series of negatives, with the clear implication that Britain possesses, and demonstrates to the world, all these virtues and qualities so conspicuously absent in Africa. With its celebration of the civilising power of poetry, science, the art of compromise, and the rule of law, the passage reflects the British enlightenment’s self-image, its reasons for considering eighteenth century London superior to its own past self as well as to other parts of the world. But Thomson continues:

The parent-sun himself,  
Seems o’er this world of slaves to tyrannize;  
And, with oppressive ray, the roseate bloom  
Of beauty blasting, gives the gloomy hue  
And features gross: or, worse, to ruthless deeds,  
Mad jealousy, blind rage, and fell revenge,  
Their fervid spirit fires. Love dwells not there;  
The soft regards, the tenderness of life,  
The heart-shed tear, th’ ineffable delight  
Of sweet humanity; these court the beam  
Of milder climes; in selfish fierce desire  
And the wild fury of voluptuous sense

---

<sup>299</sup> Thomson, ‘Summer’, lines 663-668 in *Poems*, ed. Heron, p. 80.

<sup>300</sup> Thomson, ‘Summer’, lines 875-884 in *Poems*, ed. Heron, p. 89.

There lost. The very brute-creation there  
This rage partakes, and burns with horrid fire.<sup>301</sup>

Thomson was not the first or last writer to comprehend Africa in terms of antitheses. The contrasts which long dominated the literature, between darkness and light, savagery and civilisation, superstition and science, emotion and reason, 'hot' and 'cold' cultures, and so on, have given way to our twenty-first century antitheses between 'us' and 'other', oral and literate, the starving and the consuming but charitable rich. Even so, Thomson's lines seem in a class of their own.

Obviously, he had no experience of Africa and, writing in 1727 ('Summer' was the second of the sequence to be composed), there were few extant accounts of African life on which he could draw. But, in addition to being a knowledgeably descriptive poet of British natural scenery and rural life, he was a poet of sentiment - 'the tender pang, the pitying tear /The sigh for suffering worth ... And all the social offspring of the heart'<sup>302</sup>. All the more striking then that Thomson should categorise Africa as being the continent without (of all things) sentiment! It is not just science and the rule of law that are absent. Taste, delicacy, gentility, and propriety are also unknown, along with paternal and marital affection and respect for the old. 'Love dwells not there', he claims, for 'soft regards', 'tenderness', the 'heart-shed tear', cannot survive the sun's 'oppressive ray'. The 'ineffable delights of sweet humanity' belong to milder climes where there are 'humanizing' poets, including presumably Thomson himself.

Preposterous as these lines are, they seem to have impressed Stedman and to have played their part in moulding his mature opinions about slavery. I shall be discussing his apparently anti-abolition sentiments in my final chapter, when all the evidence has been presented, and I do not wish to anticipate my conclusions here. Stedman, too, of course, had no experience of Africa, and his opinions were partly moulded by his exasperation at the claims of both sides in the abolition debate. Thomson's lines, however, made it possible for him present his opinion as the informed view of a man of sentiment. Bad as the slave trade was, and cruel as Suriname slavery was, they could, to a man of feeling, seem preferable to an existence in Africa. More generally, Thomson seems to have assisted Stedman in

---

<sup>301</sup> Thomson, 'Summer', lines 884-897 in *Poems*, ed. Heron, p. 89.

moving beyond *Roderick Random* to his self-presentation in the 1790 ‘Narrative’ as a man whose actions are dictated by deep feeling. When, after much effort, at last he secures his son Johnny’s manumission, he records he was ‘applauded’ – even by corrupt Paramaribo society – for his ‘sensibility’.<sup>303</sup>

There was one further sentimental influence on the 1790 ‘Narrative’, this one extremely local and (thankfully) belated. The *Journal* for 1789 contains the following entries:

22 October: This evening I show my drawings to the ingenious Mrs Cowley, author of *The Runaway, The Belle’s Stratagem &c*, who paid me a very handsome compliment.

24 October: Today had a visit from the celebrated Mrs Cowley.<sup>304</sup>

Mrs Cowley was Hannah Cowley (1743-1809), a Tiverton neighbour, best known as Stedman remarks for a succession of plays of which the *Journal* names the most popular. However, two years before her meeting with Stedman, she had read in the ‘World’ a poem called ‘Adieu and Recall to Love’, signed ‘Della Crusca’, and ‘without rising from the table’ had penned an instant reply under the pseudonym ‘Anna Matilda’. ‘Della Crusca’ was the pen name of Robert Merry (1755-1798), a very minor poet who after various failures and aimless travels had settled in Florence and studied at the Della Cruscan Academy. In 1785, he contributed to the ‘Florence Miscellany’, which included verse by Dr Johnson’s friend Mrs Piozzi, and he returned to London in 1787 to his Platonic encounter with Hannah Cowley. Ridicule followed, as much from the ‘incredibly foolish misuse of epithet, metaphor and alliteration’, the ‘frantic efforts at sublimity’, the ‘obscurity and tasteless ornament’, as from the age gap between the poetic lovers. Thereafter, and with lasting damage to Hannah Cowley’s reputation, ‘Anna Mathilda’ has become a by-word for ‘sentimental versifying’.<sup>305</sup>

On 27 November, 1789, Stedman dined with neighbours in a company of thirteen that included Miss Elizabeth Cowley, Hannah’s 16 year old daughter. The company ‘drank Johnny’s health, and good voyage, who is today just 15’. Johnny, Joanna’s son, had just left home as a midshipman with the *Amity Hall*. In the course of the evening, a hearse stopped ‘accidentally before the door’ and ‘the

---

<sup>302</sup> Thomson, ‘Winter’, lines 70-73 (1726 version), in Lonsdale, *Eighteenth Century Verse*, p. 181.

<sup>303</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 599.

<sup>304</sup> *Journal*, p. 328.

<sup>305</sup> *DNB.*, entries for Robert Merry and Hannah Cowley.

company remarked it was the vulgar idea that one of them would soon be a corpse'. Next day, 'Miss Cowley, one of the company, dropp'd down dead'.<sup>306</sup> It was a moment to draw on Stedman's profoundest emotions, and he wrote a competent epitaph which was published in the *Weekly Entertainer*. He had joined the Della Cruscan school.

He was just nine months away from finishing the 1790 'Narrative', and some tortuously overwrought Della Cruscan verses found their way into his account of the capture of Gado Sabi in 1775. First, a passage from Anna Matilda's 'Stanzas to Della Crusca', which quotes in support of his statement 'nothing Can be more Wretched than a Military Life in a Tropical Climate More so under a Relentless Commander, as *old Fourceoud*':

Let Vulgar Souls Stoops to the fevers rage  
Or Slow Beneath Pale Atrophy Depart  
With Gout and Scrophola Weak Variance Wage  
Or Sink With Sorrow Cankering at the Heart

These be to Common minds the Unwish'd Decree  
The firm Select an illness more Sublime  
By languid pains Scorn their high Souls to free  
But Seek the Swords Swift Edge and Spurn at time.<sup>307</sup>

Two other selections, equally excruciating, are from the poems of Robert Merry ('Yet on his Honour'd Corpse shall many a Gale / Waft the Moist Fragrance of the weeping Rose').<sup>308</sup>

One wonders how this late enthusiasm for some of the worst poetry of the age of sentiment prepared Stedman for the friendship with William Blake, on which he was about to embark (and which is explored in chapter five). That friendship began too late for *Songs of Innocence* (1789) to have left any mark on the 1790 'Narrative'. But did *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), and *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) play any part in his negotiation of the final text of the published *Narrative* of 1796. Even more to the point, had he argued with Blake over the version of his story presented in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793)? When he stayed with Blake in 13 Hercules Building, Lambeth in the

---

<sup>306</sup> *Journal*, p. 329.

<sup>307</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 388.

<sup>308</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 402. See also p. 432.

summer of 1795, did he have explained to him Blake's new method of 'relief etching'? Was he shown the copper plates of the first illuminated books that method made possible, with the images of Orc and of Oothoon chained by the ankle, inspired (as we shall see in chapter six) by Stedman's own paintings? It seems inconceivable that Blake would have withheld them from him, yet the *Journal* records no response. And what of those dinner parties he attended with his publisher Joseph Thompson where he appears to have met Godwin and Fuseli and Mary Wolstonecraft? His 'Narrative' was written, and he was within two years of his death. Perhaps it was too late for further literary influences.

Or just possibly not. In E.P. Thompson's *Witness Against the Beast*, his intellectual biography of Blake, he discusses Blake's interest in millennial interpretations of the social upheavals of the 1790s, and especially his fascination with the imagery of the Book of Revelation ('Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast').<sup>309</sup> A footnote refers us to Stedman's *Journal* for 6 April, 1792:

The news comes of the King of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, being murdered by one, Ankerstrom. One Balthazar Gérard, shot the Prince of Orange, while R-v-r and Demeunier attempted the French King. The Portuguese Tavora and Aveiro families were disgraced for similar deeds ... But despotism dies away. Witness France, whose King may be compared to the Beast in Revelation, whose number is 666, and LUDOVICUS added together makes the same.<sup>310</sup>

Stedman had written to Blake just four months earlier, but it is not known when they first met. Yet the passage is so untypical of Stedman that one wonders: could Blake be its inspiration?

---

<sup>309</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 181-183.

<sup>310</sup> *Journal*, pp. 340-341.

## Chapter Four

### The Making of Stedman's Journal

The earliest account of the years 1773 to 1777 and of Stedman's love for Joanna appears in Stanbury Thompson's edition of the *Journal of John Gabriel Stedman 1744-1797: Soldier and Author*, based on the manuscript Thompson bought for from a junk dealer in Pimlico in 1940. In Thompson's own account:

The man submitted the sheets (the journal comprised about one hundred loose pages, letters, etc.) to me as a job lot, all mixed, all jumbled together, creased, and partly torn, for a few shillings ... 'Ere guv' nor! a pile o' old letters cheap. A dollar the lot. Tek 'em out a mi' road,' were his words ... A quick glance at a few sheets assured me of the fact that I had in my possession an original old 18th century manuscript journal.<sup>311</sup>

'A dollar' in those days was slang for five shillings. It took twenty-two years for Thompson to edit the *Journal* for publication, and another four to complete his *John Gabriel Stedman: a Study of his Life and Times*. Most of his research was antiquarian, conducted through the Scots Ancestry research Society, the Scottish Record Office, the Public Record Office and the British Museum. He also visited the Haus Besselich Abbey in Koblenz am Rhein, home of the von Barton Stedman family, descended from Stedman's brother, where he was able to consult family papers. His concerns were with establishing Stedman's genealogy (descended from a certain Radulphus de Barton, c.1154 in the County of York), and the biographical details of the most prominent people mentioned in the texts.<sup>312</sup> Obviously, the resulting knowledge has its uses, but Thompson gives no shows no signs of sympathy for his subject or engagement with the story it unfolds.

By modern standards, it has to be said his editing is deficient. He intrudes into the text comments of his own, usually detectable by the change in style or chronological shift, altered dates and spellings, deleted passages and included others crossed out by Stedman, transcribed column lists as prose, and (argue Richard and Sally Price) simply misread a large number of words.<sup>313</sup> He is squeamish about transcribing Stedman's sexual activities ('I f—k one of his negro

---

<sup>311</sup> Thompson, *Life*, p. 132.

<sup>312</sup> *Journal*, 'Appendix B', pp. 403-416.

maids' is given as 'I – one of his negro maids'). In general, it has to be said that the gap between his personality as an English antiquarian and the character Stedman presents of himself is extreme and at moments hilarious. Having in his introduction described Joanna as 'the daughter of a rich Dutch planter named Kruythoff' and 'a coloured woman named Cery, a woman it was supposed from good stock', his next paragraph continues in its entirety: 'However, Joanna bore him a son'.<sup>314</sup> That 'however' is wonderfully eloquent of social distaste. (Later, from his biography of Stedman, Joanna is all but eliminated: she is given parts of two pages, being summed up as 'a more or less savage, an aboriginal'.<sup>315</sup>)

All that acknowledged, the *Journal* is not a book one would wish to be without. My own copy, acquired in 1972 from a tiny second hand book dealer in Liverpool, is almost obliterated by annotations over the years.

The title *Journal* is a little misleading, though it is hard to see what else Thompson could have called it in. At its heart is a small notebook bound in green vellum covering the period 29 October 1772, after Stedman had enlisted for Suriname but before his departure from Holland, until 29 April 1774, some fifteen months after his arrival. Afterwards, he described his principal source for the 'Narrative' (1790)

as 'a small green almanack that I Carried in my pocket during the Expedition through Danger – Disease, Famine, water, Smoak and Fire - & which long and Constant Hardships having so much defaced the Above little Green Book that its most Recent Contents became to all but myself unintelligible'.<sup>316</sup>

Into this he copied entries scribbled on scraps of paper or even, as he continues, 'with a Pencil Writing on my Cartridges, or on a *Bleached bone*'. On the last page occurs the following entry:

This small journal contains the space of one year, six months and one day, 1772-3, and is written with the greatest attention, founded on facts alone, by Capt. John G. Stedman, who shall explain it more at large one day, if Providence spares him his life.<sup>317</sup>

---

<sup>313</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', pp. XXIX-XXX.

<sup>314</sup> *Journal*, 'Preface', p. vii.

<sup>315</sup> Thompson, *Life*, p. 128.

<sup>316</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 578.

<sup>317</sup> *Journal*, p. 113 (n.d.).

This is the earliest section of the *Journal* to be written, and it is evident that he intended it from the start to become the basis of a fuller narrative of his years in Suriname.

The Suriname log book continues on other sheets until entries for December 23 and 24, 1776, taken up with sketches of houses he built for himself and Joanna and when his thoughts are plainly retrospective. But there are significant gaps: there are no entries for May 1774 to September 1775 (during which his son John was born, and he fought his most important engagement with the capture of Boni's stockade at Gabo Sabi), or between January and 1 April 1777, when his brigade was withdrawn from Suriname. The first of these gaps may perhaps be explained by an accident described in the 'Narrative'. On the night of June 30, 1775, the 'Box, With my Whole Journal, And All my Paintings that had cost me Above 2 years so Much labour Care and Attention' sank to the bottom of the Commewijne River.<sup>318</sup> Though it was later recovered, and the papers dried 'round a Swinging fire', it is possible some material was lost.

The *Journal* resumes back in Holland at on 31 January 1778 in a bound *dagwyser* (datebook), doubling up as an account book with itemised sums occupying the right hand column. The entries are for the most part compressed and laconic. Then, however, on 7 June 1778 at Sunday morning service, at Loo in Guelderland, he meets Sir George Strickland and his daughters, visiting from Yorkshire, and conducts them round the fortifications.<sup>319</sup> The friendship develops with an exchange of addresses and the following entry for 10 June: 'He offers to get my West India voyage published, which I promise to write'.<sup>320</sup> Five days later, Stedman notes 'Begin my History of Guiana', and on 22 June, 'I write the journal of my jaunt to Brussels and Antwerp'.<sup>321</sup>

The published *Journal* contains no 'jaunt' to Brussels. But there is an account, printed by Thompson as Chapter Five, of an excursion in 1768 to Antwerp and The Hague in search of promotion – the promotion from ensign to Captain he eventually achieved when he volunteered for Suriname, and this may be the passage to which Stedman is referring.<sup>322</sup> It is written not in diary form but

---

<sup>318</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 369.

<sup>319</sup> *Journal*, p. 215.

<sup>320</sup> *Journal*, p. 216.

<sup>321</sup> *Journal*, pp. 216 and 218.

<sup>322</sup> *Journal*, pp. 75-85.

as a memoir and, as such, seems to be the section earliest written of the six chapters, occupying 112 pages, describing his early life until 1772. When the remainder of this early memoir was written it is impossible to be sure. The Holland diary for 1778 stops with the entry for 2 January, 1779 ‘Here I give over keeping journal - and so goodbye!’<sup>323</sup>

He resumes five and half years later on 1 August, 1784 with a day by day account of his journey from Maestricht, first to London and then to Tiverton in Devon where he settled for the remainder of his life. By then, he had acquired his Dutch wife Adriana, and had been joined in Europe by his son Johnny (by Joanna), Joanna’s death in November 1782 having also been passed over in silence. From then until 16 July, 1796, eight months before his death, the *Journal* is kept almost daily, though with gaps, never of more than a few weeks, apparently caused by pages lost from the manuscript. In the course of this diary, on 20 July, 1787, he mentions lending ‘my journals since the year 1744’ to a certain Mr Cholwich, a neighbour, who returned them on 13 August having ‘read it (sic) with great satisfaction’.<sup>324</sup> Subsequently, reminiscing in his diary for 2 February, 1792, Stedman remarks that it was immediately after settling at Tiverton that ‘I wrote my life till the year 1772 ... I after that wrote *The History of Surinam*’.<sup>325</sup>

In summary, therefore, it appears that what Thompson published in chronological order as *The Journal of John Gabriel Stedman* was actually composed as follows:

1. October 1772 - December 1776, the diary of his years in Suriname:
2. January 1778 – January 1779, the diary and accounts book of his first year back in Holland.
3. June 22, 1778, the memoir of his ‘jaunt’ to Antwerp in 1768.
4. February 1784 – July 1796, the diary of his departure from Holland and residence in Tiverton.
5. By August, 1787, the memoir of the years 1744 – 1772 is completed.

It also appears that, although Stedman may have begun the 1790 ‘Narrative’ in Holland in June 1778, following the encounter with Sir George Strickland, the bulk of the book was written only after he had completed his memoir.

---

<sup>323</sup> *Journal*, p. 233.

<sup>324</sup> *Journal*, pp. 318-319.

<sup>325</sup> *Journal*, p. 337.

Listing the order of composition in this manner draws attention to another feature of the *Journal*, namely, that it contains examples of different kinds of writing - a distinction blurred by Thompson's presentation of them as a single text, variously described as 'journal' and 'memoir'. On the one hand, the diary entries of the Suriname years 1772-76, of 1778, the year of his return to Holland, and of 1784 onwards describing his life in Tiverton, are his unpremeditated responses to the events of each succeeding day. They are terse, unpolished, immediate, and at times baffling (24 June, 1795: 'Saw a mermaid. Meat and bread abused.').<sup>326</sup> Occasionally, he corrects himself in mid-sentence, (19 April, 1774: 'Write to Tulling, no! no! I mean Van Halm'<sup>327</sup>), the facts of the moment being his only concern. Only in his later years does he use these diary entries to draw some conclusions about his life - listing the number of nationalities and languages spoken in his household (29 Nov, 1785), or cataloguing 'how strangely I have sometimes escaped from trouble' (2 Feb, 1792).<sup>328</sup>

The account of his pre-Suriname years, however, represents a different kind of writing, involving entirely different chronologies. He is looking back, apparently without the benefit of any diaries kept at the time, interpreting his adolescence and early manhood in the light of his adult experience. It is an exercise in self-knowledge, wholly determined by what he knows himself to have become. Not to labour the point, while the diary entries are often single sentences, usually in the present tense, the memoir of the years 1744 to 1772 consists of long paragraphs with no day-by-day references, and exclusive in past tenses. As far as this memoir is concerned, we can only guess how large the gap may be between the actual events and their later interpretation. When we come to examine the contrast between the Suriname diary and the 1790 'Narrative', however, we shall see the difference very clearly. In the one, he records his day-by-day discovery of who he was and how Suriname operated. In the other, his knowledge of the slave society is complete from the day he lands. It is a distinction we shall be exploring in detail in chapter 5.

Obviously, the chief overall interest of the *Journal* is the portrait it presents of Stedman's life and character. But the circumstances of its piecemeal composition

---

<sup>326</sup> *Journal*, p. 390.

<sup>327</sup> *Journal*, p. 150.

<sup>328</sup> *Journal*, pp. 269 and 338.

mean that the separate sections vary considerably in interest and importance. The diary of Stedman's years in Suriname is far and away the most fascinating. It is the principle source of the 1790 'Narrative' and was compiled with that narrative in mind. Even when the two texts largely agree, there is an interest in noting shifts of wording and emphasis as Stedman writes not for his own eyes only but a public audience. Where they disagree – that is, where the 1790 'Narrative' supplements, or flatly contradicts, the account given in the diary – then much of the evolution of both the form and the content of the 'Narrative' is laid bare. This topic will be a theme of Chapter Five.

The second section written, namely the year-long diary and account book kept in Holland in 1778, is of little interest beyond what it reveals of Stedman's state of mind after his departure from Suriname and Joanna, together with the brief entries about making a start as a writer. By contrast, the twelve-year diary of his residence at Tiverton reveals something, though never quite enough, about Stedman's friendship with William Blake, about the frustrations of his dealings with his publisher Joseph Johnson, and about the evolution of the 1796 *Narrative* - matters to be discussed more fully in Chapters Five and Seven. Much of this section concentrates on the childhood of Johnny, following his story through his schooling and his apprenticeship as midshipman, until his tragic drowning off Jamaica in 1792. These entries are very moving for the intense pride and affection he feels for Johnny, recording every instance of his generosity and adventurous temperament – to his second wife's increasing exasperation<sup>329</sup>. There is another story to be told, in fact, about Stedman's residence in the 'wild coast' of Tiverton, and the domestic tactlessness of his cherishing of Joanna and Johnny at the expense of Johnny's stepmother. On 5 Nov, 1785, he records 'Saint Hubert the Gun-powder Treason, and the fatal day on which my dear Joanna died in Suriname, 3 years ago'.<sup>330</sup> Three months later, on 2 Feb, 1786, he notes 'Today we be married 3 years, – forgot it'.<sup>331</sup> Entry after entry makes it abundantly clear that despite his second marriage and the birth of five more children, he increasingly regards his time in Suriname and his relationship with Joanna as the great adventure and the great love of his life.

---

<sup>329</sup> See, for example, pp. 248 (1 Jan., 1785), 265 (25 Sept., 1785), 276-277 (4-5 April, 1786), 306 (28 Dec., 1786), and 309 (18 Jan., 1787, among many).

<sup>330</sup> *Journal*, p. 268.

<sup>331</sup> *Journal*, p. 272.

Finally, therefore, the memoir of his life between 1744 and 1772, begun in Holland in 1778 and completed at Tiverton between 1784 and 1787, falls into place as an account of the purposeless years of brawling and wenching before Suriname and Joanna. This tripartite division of his life into pre-Suriname, Suriname and post-Suriname is increasingly explicit, with Joanna (to his second wife's growing exasperation) placed at the centre of whatever significance his life may have had. Post-Suriname, it remained only to educate Johnny and to write the account. The memoir also reveals him tracing the growth of his writing style, wrestling with words and syntax as he searches for an adequate idiom – an idiom which he finally achieved in the 1790 'Narrative', only to see it 'marr'd entirely' by his publisher.<sup>332</sup>

Without the 'Narrative' of 1790 or the *Narrative* of 1796, would the *Journal* be worth reading on its own account? Stedman describes his aim as follows:

Whoever reads these anecdotes, I am well satisfied shall give them many a d-mn and the author of them in the bargain. But let them consider; they are reading not a romance embellished with all the fruitfulness of imagination, but a genuine history kept by a man of character, and wrote only for his own gratification, and that of his best friends.<sup>333</sup>

Later, he adds:

As I write for all sorts of people to read this (but only friends during my life) I must expect that, like a dish however good, it cannot please every palate. I however principally write to amuse myself, and as truth best suits my taste, let it be ever larded with oaths and indelicacies.<sup>334</sup>

With more imaginative editing than Stanbury Thompson's, the Suriname diary would have been well worth publishing on its own. As for the rest of the *Journal*, the best that can be said is that it contains odd, tantalising comments and stories. An example is the tale of John Redwood who returned to Tiverton on February 8, 1786 after 16 years in the East Indies 'and whose wife is since twice married'. On February 24, Stedman records 'The East India Sergeant Redwood, sells his wife for one pot of beer to her 3rd husband'.<sup>335</sup> One would dearly love to know more. In general, however, the *Journal's* value is almost entirely secondary to the larger work and, despite the hint in the second of the quotations given above about a

---

<sup>332</sup> *Journal*, p. 385 (composite entry for 24 June, 1775).

<sup>333</sup> *Journal*, p. 43 (n.d.).

<sup>334</sup> *Journal*, p. 73 (n.d.).

<sup>335</sup> *Journal*, p. 273

possible audience in the future, Stedman cannot realistically have anticipated independent publication.

### **Maroons, Rangers and Slaves**

Eventually, as I have already noted, Stedman would describe the ‘revolted Negroes’ as the true heroes of his 1790 ‘Narrative’, drawing on classical epic (though in eighteenth century translation) for the style and even the content of his presentation. In describing himself, he drew on a late-eighteenth language of sentiment. In describing Joanna, he had recourse to the genre of pastoral. How much of this is anticipated in the *Journal*?

In the Suriname diary, there are brief, laconic descriptions, not easily differentiated, of three of his campaigns. These are the expeditions of 2 July to 14 September, 1773, of 24 October 1773 to 15 January 1774, and of 27 March to 18 July, 1776, all to the upper reaches of the Cottica and Commewijne Rivers.<sup>336</sup> There are also partial accounts of his period in command of the fort at L’Esperance, of the aftermath of the capture of Gado Sabi, and of part of his final campaign up until to the closing entry of his Suriname diary in December.<sup>337</sup> None of these descriptions is sufficiently detailed to give the reader any real sense of what was happening, but presumably they were adequate as shorthand notes in spurring Stedman’s memory when he compiled his fuller account. What is recorded, for the most part, is the extreme discomfort of bush warfare and the futility of pursuing guerrillas in their own territory. On July 2, 1773, for instance, he gets his first command in charge the settlement at Charon on the Cottica River,<sup>338</sup> and embarks with five officers, ten men and ‘10 Negroes’ (that is, 10 Rangers, on which more below). This is in rebel territory and dangerously exposed. Within a few days, most of his company has gone down with fever. On August 29 at 11 p.m., news comes that that three nearby plantations, *Peru*, *Zuyingheyd* and *L’Esperance* have been destroyed by the maroons and all the white people killed, and that the rebel negroes will be passing close by the post:

---

<sup>336</sup> *Journal*, pp. 127-135, 136-142, and 165-179.

<sup>337</sup> *Journal*, pp. 144-151 (17 Feb. to 29 Apr., 1774), 155-161 (20 Oct., 1775 to 2 Jan., 1776) and 189-196 (20 Nov. to 23 Dec., 1776).

<sup>338</sup> *Journal*, p. 127.

All is concerned, seeing not above 12 able men to defend a Post which used to keep 300. The Hospital patients broke out and arose to certain death in a view to avoid it, several men dropping down and never arising. Only two small chests of powder was my only ammunition.<sup>339</sup>

When nothing happens, he receives orders to leave his post and ‘seek the track of the rebels’ through the rain forest. There follows a graphic description of what is today called ‘jungle warfare’

being miserably fatigued, half swimming through morass, climbing over fallen trees, roots &c., and creeping on our bellies under them, marching through the most scorching heat, while sun shone and Hell’s darkness after it was set at six. Most of us were scratched, stung, and some blinded by insects, were worried by *makaas*, notwithstanding 4 negroes with cutlasses continually cut up a track.<sup>340</sup>

He reports to Colonel Fourgeoud, his Swiss commander, that he tracked but was unable, with so few fit men, to attack them. When Fourgeoud’s subsequent letter criticises him for this, ‘I throw in public the most horrible invectives ... and sink in the lowest of spirits’.<sup>341</sup> This is the start of a long-running quarrel with ‘the old shaver’,<sup>342</sup> as Stedman nicknames him, involving both tactics and personalities, which takes up most of the entries dealing with the actual campaigns. His immediate discomfort, his personal sufferings, are his main preoccupations. If he looks beyond them, it is to study the flora and fauna, and to think of Joanna (‘I pass my time making baskets for the girl I love’).<sup>343</sup>

In sharp contrast, we learn almost nothing from the *Journal* about the rebel maroons he is fighting – certainly nothing that prepares us for the heroic role attributed to them in the ‘Narrative’. Before embarking from Holland, he describes the purpose of the expedition as being ‘to bring the revolted negroes to their duties’.<sup>344</sup> This is not quite so patronising as it sounds - he is referring to broken treaties rather than to any supposed religious or social responsibilities. But it is only four years later, in the final entries of the Suriname diary, that he offers any hint that their cause may be a just one. Most of the time, they are described as the ‘bush-negroes’, or ‘rebel negroes’, while their principal activities are called ‘murder’ and ‘stealing’. The *Journal* records very little contact with them (though

---

<sup>339</sup> *Journal*, p. 132.

<sup>340</sup> *Journal*, p. 133.

<sup>341</sup> *Journal*, p. 134 (12 Sept., 1773).

<sup>342</sup> See, e.g., *Journal*, p. 140 (12 Dec., 1773).

<sup>343</sup> *Journal*, p. 141 (18 Dec., 1773).

it should be noted that there are no entries covering the attack on Boni's camp at Gado Sabi in August 1775). He sees smoke in the bush and his men take refuge in the fort.<sup>345</sup> He hears occasionally drumming.<sup>346</sup> There is a rumour that fifty of them had been swimming across the Cottica River.<sup>347</sup> He hears gunshot, and not long afterwards a dead manatee is washed down stream.<sup>348</sup> But the only maroons he meets are the ones and twos who have already been captured or who have surrendered voluntarily. He remarks on these, in passing, that they are badly treated<sup>349</sup>. Only in November 1776 (following the *Journal*) does he get a glimpse of the enemy. He is camping at Cofaay when 'an odd event happens':

An old tall *bush-negro* with a white plaid and long *shabble*, approaches the sentry and stands still. I give him the best words to come in the camp to have him alive. He shakes his head, says *no!*, and in a twinkling disappears by jumping in the shrubs. Two men fired at him and both missed at the distance of 6 or 8 paces.<sup>350</sup>

This incident haunted Stedman. In the 1790 'Narrative', the old man becomes 'a Venerable Apparition', and the firing occurs 'Contrary to my Orders'.<sup>351</sup>

What the *Journal* does demonstrate, however, is a significant shift in terminology as Stedman's sympathies develop. Throughout the first year of his journal entries, he makes a fairly consistent distinction between three kinds of Blacks. First, are the 'bush' or 'rebel' negroes, the maroon guerrillas he is fighting. Secondly, there are the 'free negroes', or 'rangers', as Stedman calls them. These were an elite corps of 116 slave volunteers, purchased for the purpose from their plantation owners, who were loosely attached to the Scots Brigade and were their most effective fighters. Thirdly, there are the plantation slaves or 'niggers'. Common though this term was throughout all slave colonies, there is not the slightest doubt that it was meant to be opprobrious. Though Stedman very occasionally, under the pressure of campaigning, describes the rebel

---

<sup>344</sup> *Journal*, p. 114 (12 Nov., 1772).

<sup>345</sup> *Journal*, p. 148 (5 Apr., 1774).

<sup>346</sup> *Journal*, p. 131 (8 and 11 Aug., 1773).

<sup>347</sup> *Journal*, p. 156 (4 Nov., 1775).

<sup>348</sup> *Journal*, p. 158 (3 Dec., 1775).

<sup>349</sup> *Journal*, p. 139 (26 Nov., 1773).

<sup>350</sup> *Journal*, p. 190 (23 Nov., 1776).

<sup>351</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 562.

maroons as ‘bush-niggers’.<sup>352</sup> he never applies the term to the rangers fighting alongside him.

From early in 1774, this terminology changes. In January, campaigning on the Commewijne River, at the climax of a long, angry paragraph itemising his men’s unnecessary sufferings, he adds the following footnote:

NB. The old negro woman, marching between the creek and the Post, pay’d homage to her deceased husband’s bones, who had been murdered on her account, and was buried below a tree in the wood.<sup>353</sup>

It is a haunting moment – the moment of homage over an unmarked grave deep in the rain, the hint of mutual devotion and an act of self-sacrificing heroism. In the *Journal*, the incident stands out as the first recorded moment of sympathy for anyone black. In the 1790 ‘Narrative’, in which Stedman has made his sympathies clear from the day of his arrival in Suriname, the same incident is reduced to a parenthesis.<sup>354</sup> But a change has begun to occur. Two months later, in March 1774, an officer inspects the buildings at L’Esperance where Stedman is now in command, and ‘sends niggers to repair them’.<sup>355</sup> Thirteen days later, Stedman’s entry reads ‘My house being finished, I give a merry night to the negroes &c. that made it, and go to lay with Joanna’.<sup>356</sup> What has happened is that he has worked alongside them (Stedman was never the man simply to supervise), and somewhere below the level of consciousness has learned that they are men. Increasingly, he sees all blacks as individuals, often knowing their names, relishing their dances (‘baniards’ he calls them) and, above all, making record of the brutality of the slave system:

A negro infant lately drowned for crying, by Mrs Sto-er’s own hands, and a negro forced to jump in boiling sugar, who died, by a Director’s cruelty. A negro was lately whipped to death on this plantation.<sup>357</sup>

Though the maroons remain ‘rebel’ or ‘bush’ negroes throughout, the ‘free negroes’ become ‘free men’, and the ‘niggers’, consistently negroes.

Then, towards the climax of the *Journal*, we are offered in rapid succession

---

<sup>352</sup> For example, *Journal*, p. 134 (12 Sept., 1773).

<sup>353</sup> *Journal*, p. 142 (8 Jan., 1774).

<sup>354</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, pp. 227-229.

<sup>355</sup> *Journal*, p.145 (6 Mar., 1774).

<sup>356</sup> *Journal*, p.146 (19 Mar., 1774).

<sup>357</sup> *Journal*, p 149-150 (17 April, 1774).

four hints of the fuller, richer account offered in the 1790 'Narrative', as though Stedman, aware that his departure is imminent, is suddenly catching up on the accumulated impressions of four years. The passages are quoted at some length because they contain the seeds of so much that will follow.

The first incident is startling. Stedman is dining in Paramaribo with a certain Captain Mackneal, where one of the guests, called Fortune Dago-So, turns out to be a Captain of the Djuka Maroons, who had signed a treaty in 1760 with the Suriname colonists, guaranteeing their independence after a century of fighting.

Because I said to Mrs Mackneal the words viz: '*Madam, give that man a dram and he shall go away*', he jumped up, asked if it was my house; where I had so much command, and very bluntly told me if he had me at Owca (i.e., Djuka), he would show me a trick. I was incensed to hear so much from the mouth of a *bush-negro*, and replied him in the most threatening language he ever heard in town before. The fellow left me, and I went in, ate nothing, was not pleased at Capt. Macknail's silence, and repented the dispute with *Capt. Fortune*. After dinner I met him. We spoke together and reconciled.<sup>358</sup>

The first thing to notice about this incident is that, although Stedman appears to have been discourteous, he gives Captain Fortune his due rank. Stedman was notoriously disputatious, losing his temper and issuing challenges over real or imagined slights and insults, especially when on campaign. Yet his quarrels, whether in Holland, Suriname or Tiverton, were always with his social equals, and in his regiment invariably with men of similar rank. It was an aspect of his military gentleman's code, here extended to a Djuka with the rank of captain. The second thing to notice is the political analysis that follows. Stedman had come to believe that the peace bought for the colony by the peace treaties of 1760 and 1762 had been achieved at too high a price. They had created, on Suriname's very borders, flourishing communities who would always pose a threat, if only by the example they posed to the plantation slaves. His entry continues:

The negroes are no fools, and in return presume impertinence, trying dayly to keep the *Whites* more and more in awe of their long beards and silver-headed staves, whom they will at last, at this rate I'm afraid, try in futurity to extirpate altogether, and make the English, American, prophecy true, that shall need no more to send for slaves to the coast of Guinea.<sup>359</sup>

---

<sup>358</sup> *Journal*, p. 179 (26 July, 1776).

<sup>359</sup> *Journal*, p. 179 (26 July, 1776)..

The comment anticipates the fuller political analysis of the 1790 'Narrative', with its emphasis on the folly of Fourgeoud's policy of trying to achieve a similar settlement with the latest rebel maroons. But at its heart is a recognition of the logic of their case ('the negroes are no fools'), and of the folly of the planter's persistent cruelty.

The second of these anticipations concerns what he explicitly calls the 'heroism' of which the rebel maroons are capable. On August 9, 1776, news comes that 'bush-negroes' have 'murdered' Mr Day, the director of the Altona plantation in Para.<sup>360</sup> The language here is consistent with the rest of the *Journal*. But a week later comes the execution. The passage is quoted in full:

Never did I see such a barbarous execution, or did it enter in my thought, that human nature could behave with so much spirit and resolution. I call it heroism in its way. Ty'd on the cross. his hand was chopp'd off, and with a large iron crow all his bones were smashed to splinters, without he let his voice be heard. Receiving at least four strokes on his left leg, and his arms not having been well ty'd, he raised himself on his middle to see what was the matter. All done, and the ropes slacked, he wreathed himself off the cross, when seeing the Magistrates and others, going off, he groaned three or four times, and complained in a clear voice he was not yet dead; not having expected that he was going to be left in this condition, till God showed him more mercy than his judge, but seeing it was their intention, he heartily cursed them, and said they must also die once. He then begged the hangman to finish him, in vain, and cursed him also. Then seeing nothing could help, he must suffer, he said, he had kild a man, and deserved death, but now he cared not if he must suffer twenty days. He then sung and spoke with the people without the least marks of concern, at last laughed and joked with the young women, asked to smoke tobacco and craved a Jew for eight shillings he owed him. The mob tormenting him with reproaches, he called them barbarous dogs, and said that all the white people ought to be damned for their cruelty to the negroes &c., especially the fiscal, for cheating him in this way. He was a handsome young fellow of about twenty – his killing the Director happened in dispute. He declared women had been his misfortune. He lived from about six-thirty o'clock till about eleven, when his head was chopp'd off.<sup>361</sup>

'Spirit', 'resolution', 'heroism', a crucifixion, laughter and satire, contempt for authority, a curse on cruelty, a 'handsome young fellow' who 'declared women

---

<sup>360</sup> *Journal*, p. 181.

<sup>361</sup> *Journal*, pp. 182-183 (16 Aug., 1776).

had been his misfortune – all the elements are here for Stedman to identify with this victim. We shall meet this scene again, creatively modified, and engraved by Blake.

The third of these foretastes of the 1790 ‘Narrative’, occurring one month after the execution on the rack, is another instance of cruelty to plantation slaves. This time, significantly, it is an account of cruelty to a woman:

Sept 7: This morning I saw a sight of horror. A poor half-starved mulatto woman, for having spoke thoughtlessly, was, between two whips, lashed stark naked, till no skin was almost left on her thighs, and legs, up till above the haunches. before the execution she was fettered, both her feet together that she could hardly stir.

Sept: 12: By long intercession, I prevail on Mistress Goetzee to loose Yettee out of her irons to which she consents with the greatest reluctance.

Sept 16: Mrs Van Eyes goes to Paramaribo, after getting another flogging to the poor mulatto Yettee.<sup>362</sup>

In the 1790 ‘Narrative’, Stedman advances this appalling scene to the precise moment of his first setting foot in Suriname. Described in modified detail, and engraved by Bartolozzi, it stands by way of frontispiece, as the very emblem of the slave colony.

Finally, the *Journal* closes with a drawing of the house he built for himself and Joanna at L’Esperance (of which more later). Stedman was rather proud of his house building (his first attempt at construction was on his first expedition to the Cottica River in July 1773, and is entered as follows: ‘Go ashore in Cormoetibo, and build a hutt to cook under. When just finished, it drops to pieces’.<sup>363</sup>) The drawing of the L’Esperance house is the last of three on consecutive pages.<sup>364</sup> He takes pains to explain that the structure, raised on stilts, is a direct copy of the rebel Captain Boni’s house in the stockade at Gado Basi captured in August 1775. Boni, to whom he again ascribes his own rank of Captain, and who ‘was advanced in years and had incurable wounds received in fights’, preferred to sleep some six or eight feet above the earth to avoid the ‘sulphureous and other poisonous and pernicious vapours’ emanating from freshly-cleared forest ground.<sup>365</sup> It is the first

---

<sup>362</sup> *Journal*, p. 185.

<sup>363</sup> *Journal*, p. 128 (11 July, 1773).

<sup>364</sup> *Journal*, pp. 193-196.

<sup>365</sup> *Journal*, p. 195.

and only suggestion in the *Journal* that there may be anything about the maroons to be imitated.

## Joanna

Much fuller than the accounts of the maroons and plantation slaves is the *Journal's* narrative of Stedman's love for Joanna. Though, as already noted, there are significant gaps which can only tentatively be filled with the fuller information in the 1790 'Narrative', even in its incomplete form the story grips and moves. It begins with a series of entries for the period 9 February 1773 when he first set foot in Paramaribo, Suriname's capital, until 8 May when he 'married' Joanna:

9 Feb: Go to sleep at Mr Lolkens who was in the country. I f--k one of his negro maids.

22 Feb: A negro woman offers me the use of her daughter while here, for a certain sum. We don't agree about the price.

25 Feb: Sup in my room with two mulatto girls on bread, cheese and a bottle of claret.

1 Mar: Receive a cordial and two fine oranges from a mulatto girl.

12 Mar: Dine at Kennedy's. 3 girls pass the night in me room.

26 Mar: Dine at Kennedy's. B-e comes to me and stays the whole night.

11 Apr: Dine Demelly's. Joanna, her mother, and Quaco's mother, come to close a bargain with me. We put it off for reasons I gave them.

12 Apr: B- and Joanna both breakfast with me.

13 Apr: B- sleeps with me.

23 Apr: Joanna comes to stay with me. I give her presents to the value of about ten pounds sterling, and am perfectly happy.<sup>366</sup>

It seems clear from these entries that the relationship with Joanna began casually and unromantically as what Stedman himself later calls a 'Surinam marriage' - namely, a form of concubinage supplying a visiting European with a sexual partner in return for a cash payment and subsistence. Stedman appears to have had somewhere between two and seven partners before coming to a deal with Joanna's mother and plainly, despite the arrival of a whole regiment of eligible males, he was in a buyer's market: he is approached by Joanna's mother and Quaco's mother (Quaco became his manservant in Suriname) on the same evening. Finally, it is clear that Joanna herself took the initiative in approaching

---

<sup>366</sup> Selected from *Journal*, pp. 119-123.

him: we learn from the ‘Narrative’ it was she sent the cordial and oranges. Even so, after discussing the ‘bargain’ with Joanna’s mother, he sleeps again with ‘B-e’ before coming to terms. The point of discussing these minutiae is that they differ significantly from the account given of their meeting in the 1790 ‘Narrative’.

However, it is also abundantly clear from the *Journal* that Stedman quickly fell in love with her. From the 23 April entry ‘I am perfectly happy’, his references to her are full of affection. She is ‘my girl’, ‘my wife’, ‘the lovely Joanna’, ‘my dear girl’, ‘my dear Joanna’, ‘my sweet Joanna’, in entry after entry written only for his own eyes.<sup>367</sup> Absent campaigning, he corresponds with her regularly and is deeply grateful for her care of him while convalescing. Despite the many opportunities for sexual adventure in Suriname at all levels of society, he appears to have been faithful to her, inducing his fellow officers and even Fourgeoud, his commanding officer, to be courteous to her. Most significant of all, in tracing the development of his feelings, is his deepening sense of responsibility for her. An entry for 9 June, a month after their wedding, reads:

I dine with Joanna, with whom I resolve to lie no more for certain reasons. Give her a gold medal to remember me, which my father gave my mother the night I was born.<sup>368</sup>

The gift is a lover’s gift, an instance of his talent for creating symbols of which his ‘Narrative’ is the final proof. The occasion is the rumour that the regiment is to be withdrawn, ‘no more disturbances being heard of’. Already, he is concerned about her future and has no wish to depart leaving her pregnant with his child. This refusal to treat her as a sexual commodity develops into a passion to ‘free’ her, which leads in turn to the sobering discovery of how little he has to offer her.

The relationship goes through several crises, each of which bring home to him the fact that she is a slave and that he is helpless to do anything about it. The first, and worst shock comes in October 1773, after his disastrous first campaign on the Cottica River. He is given the temporary rank of Commandant of the Scots Brigade troops at Paramaribo, and at once celebrates his new authority by ‘discharging sour gripe-gut claret, which had been bought for the sick officers and

---

<sup>367</sup> For example, *Journal*, pp. 135 (8 Oct., 1773), 136 (21 Oct., 1773), 142 (15 Jan., 1774), 178 (24 July, 1776), and 221 (24 July, 1778).

<sup>368</sup> *Journal*, p. 125 (9 June, 1773).

men, and buying good wine'.<sup>369</sup> He visits the Governor, and dines out repeatedly. Then on the 8th, despite a fever, he records: 'Crawl out and see the selling of my dear Joanna, and the whole plantation'.<sup>370</sup> The Fauconberg sugar estate was up for sale to pay the owner's debts, and only the good luck that Stedman's friend Mr Lolkens was asked by the new absentee owners to continue as administrator secured Joanna's protection. In some ways, this bleak entry for October 8 is more eloquent than the fuller account in the 1790 'Narrative'.

The second crisis comes in January 1774. He returns from his second campaign to find that Joanna had heard that he was dead. There follow the following entries:

Jan 16: I wait and dine at Mr Kennedy's. Come home sod lame, being no more used to shoes. Joanna a good-for-nothing. Was sod-cripple last night.

Jan 17: She makes me an odd discovery which makes me think.

Jan 18: I hire her from her master, for 10 *bits* a week, and set her to doing for myself.<sup>371</sup>

No further details are given, but at the equivalent moment in the 1790 'Narrative' Stedman describes the habit of slave owners, and especially of their wives, in offering black and mulatto girls as sexual partners to their guests for a small fee.<sup>372</sup> It will be remembered that Mr Lolkens was at that stage acting for Joanna's 'owner', and that it was a maid of Mr Lolkens's that Stedman 'f-cked' soon after his arrival in Suriname. His apparent response, 'to hire her from her master', illustrates neatly the essential contradiction in this whole romance, for only by 'owning' her will he ever be able to 'free' her. We shall see Stedman himself, and all subsequent tellers of this story, wrestling with this dilemma.

From January 1776 onwards, this contradiction is reiterated with repeated rumours about the regiment's withdrawal from Suriname. By then, Stedman was not only husband to Joanna but father to a year-old son John – who, under Dutch law also a slave, the property of Joanna's owner. Their looming predicament is brought home very forcibly by the entries for February 13 and 14:

13: De Graav demits Joanna. I dine Godefroy's.

---

<sup>369</sup> *Journal*, p. 135 (4 Oct., 1773).

<sup>370</sup> *Journal*, p. 135.

<sup>371</sup> *Journal*, p. 143.

<sup>372</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 239-240.

14: La Marre dead. Made above 20 children. De Graav away. Dine Godefroy and pay in retail for Joanna, 500 florins, Holland.<sup>373</sup>

De la Mar was a planter, whose common-law (or ‘Surinam’) wife was Joanna’s sister. After Stedman’s precipitous departure from the Cottica River at the climax of his first campaign, he had taken refuge at De la Mar’s house, and had been startled, and a little appalled, at being greeted as ‘*brother-in-law, viz: myself*’.<sup>374</sup> At De la Mar’s death, he left Joanna’s sister and his ‘above 20 children’ in slavery. With this example starkly before him, Stedman was embarking on arrangements to secure Joanna and Johnny’s future. De Graav was a wealthy planter who, following the sale of October 8, 1773, had become Joanna’s new owner. Mrs Godefroy was another planter, well disposed towards Joanna.

The precise meaning of the negotiations which followed is far from clear, and was apparently not altogether clear to the participants. For the time being, Joanna remained in De Graav’s custody. In July 1776, when arrangements were again in place for the regiment’s withdrawal, Stedman paid a further 200 florins to Mrs Godefroy only to discover that she ‘now refuses to be caution for Joanna and Jack’s liberties, which I cannot believe and makes me mad’.<sup>375</sup> Over the next weeks he courts Mrs Godefroy assiduously, and finally on August 24 strikes the following ‘bargain, infinitely more to my advantage, and that of Joanna, as had she been the caution, viz.’:

*I let Joanna to herself as long as she lives, but then she is to have her liberty at Mrs Godefroy’s entire expense, who capital is her caution. I profit 900 florins, and the buying of a yard and house. Joanna is with a mother, not with a mistress, and free from all taxes and assizes, and assure of her liberty, with all the appendages at her lady’s death, which were not in my power to give her. I also form a request to free Johnny.*<sup>376</sup>

Seven weeks later, ‘Joanna takes possession of her new house’.<sup>377</sup>

It is impossible to establish from the *Journal* alone exactly what this ‘bargain’ meant. The 1790 ‘Narrative’ also leaves the arrangements partly unclear. It is the 1796 *Narrative* that states baldly Mrs Godefroy lent Stedman 2,000 florins to

---

<sup>373</sup> *Journal*, p. 162.

<sup>374</sup> *Journal*, p. 135 (14 Sept., 1774).

<sup>375</sup> *Journal*, p. 180 (3 Aug., 1776).

<sup>376</sup> *Journal*, p. 184.

purchase Joanna from De Graav, on condition that Joanna became her servant for her lifetime.<sup>378</sup> In effect, Joanna had found a more congenial owner.

The 1790 'Narrative' also fills in the essential detail that this arrangement was Joanna's own preference.<sup>379</sup> Shortly after Stedman had struck his 'bargain' with Joanna's mother and Joanna had moved in with him, he recorded for 8 May, 1773, 'Give my wedding', referring to the celebration of a common-law (or 'Surinam') marriage.<sup>380</sup> Stedman's attitude to this marriage became, over time, somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, though inter-racial marriages were permitted under Dutch colonial law (as instanced by the marriage of Eliza Simpson, a free negro woman, to a European in 1767),<sup>381</sup> it was not possible to marry a slave. Stedman's 'Surinam' marriage was, therefore, the only type of marriage available to him. He seems, initially at least, to have regarded it as binding, with the ultimate intention of 'freeing' her and taking her back to Holland when his regiment was withdrawn from Suriname. As we shall see, the 1790 'Narrative' states this ambition explicitly.<sup>382</sup> On the other hand, after his return to Holland without Joanna, Stedman did not regard the Suriname marriage as any obstacle to his marriage, in February 1782, with Miss Adriana Van Coehorn. Legally, of course, he was correct, but the contradiction seems to have embarrassed him. The 1790 'Narrative' omits all reference to the Suriname marriage (only in the 1796 *Narrative* is the ceremony described in detail, a mystery to be discussed in due course). I noted earlier in his chapter his *Journal* entry for Feb 2, 1786: 'Today we be married 3 years, – forgot it'. In fact, he had been married four years: by calling it three, he was able to mourn Joanna's death in November 1782, ten months after his Dutch marriage, with a good conscience.

These contradictions would surface later, and in the *Journal*, he has no need to declare his intentions to himself. We have to infer his plans from his interpretation of the logic of Joanna's predicament in a society that offered her no security. Government officials, plantation owners, plantation managers, overseers, the jealous wives of any of these men, and even the rebel Negroes, for all the justice of their rebellion, pose equally barbaric threats and there can be no refuge

---

<sup>377</sup> *Journal*, p. 187 (14 Oct., 1776).

<sup>378</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, pp. 266-267.

<sup>379</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 100-101 (see chapter nine for a full discussion).

<sup>380</sup> *Journal*, p.124.

<sup>381</sup> 1790 'Narrative', note 79 (p. 635).

for Joanna anywhere except in exile as his wife. In preparation for this, he sets about teaching her to read and to learn her catechism.

But he is disconcerted in his role as rescuer and educator by the discovery that Joanna herself believes she has other options. He is repeatedly taken aback by revelations she is part of a very large family. Her mother, Cery, Stedman has dealt with.<sup>383</sup> Her grandfather, a slave on the Fauconberg plantation, he greets with a gift of six shillings and some meat.<sup>384</sup> But there is also a brother called Henry, an aunt Lucretia, an uncle Cojo, and a number of sisters, to mention only those he mentions himself.<sup>385</sup> And, of course, there is De la Mar, his ‘brother-in-law’. Joanna, in short, belongs to an extended family with connections even among the rebel Maroons. She is reluctant to sacrifice the security of these connections by travelling with him to Europe. He has promised to ‘free her’ but she knows the transaction is beyond his resources and she is not with alternatives. This is the context for the uncertainty of the arrangements described in both the *Journal* and the 1790 ‘Narrative’ over the ‘bargain’ with Mrs Godefroy. In effect, Joanna has chosen slavery rather than marriage and exile. In practice, when his regiment is withdrawn, Stedman leaves his son John in slavery too.

How is he to set about recording this, without making it appear a tale of self-indulgence and irresponsibility – without presenting himself, in short, as no different from any of the other Europeans in Suriname? There is a further problem that preoccupies Stedman in his *Journal*, complementing in important respects his self-discovery as a lover bearing limited gifts. He needs a style which will enable him to do two contradictory things - to document the atrocities, the extremes of disorder in Suriname, while at the same time recording the full undamaged humanity of the victims. Above all, he needs an idiom that will acknowledge the central role of Joanna in his life, not as an object of pity but as an independent woman with whom he has shared love.

The Suriname section of the *Journal* contains only hints of his solution to this problem, in the consistent tenderness of his epithets for Joanna and his thoughts of

---

<sup>382</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 98.

<sup>383</sup> *Journal*, pp. 123 (11 April, 1773), 164 (13 March, 1776), 184 (25 Aug., 1776), and 185 (8 Sept., 1776).

<sup>384</sup> *Journal*, p. 145 (8 March, 1774).

<sup>385</sup> *Journal*, pp. 140 (13 Dec., 1773), 145 (28 Feb., 1774), 147 (21 March, 1774), 175 (12 June, 1776) and 177 (14 July, 1776).

her when separated ('I pass my time making baskets for the girl I love').<sup>386</sup> But these hints, together with such matters as his passion for walking barefoot and his delight in being taken for a 'mulatto' himself with his burnt skin, point to a solution in the idioms of pastoral.<sup>387</sup> From February 1774, he takes command of a fort at l'Esperance on the Cottica river, a few miles downstream from the Fauconberg plantation to which Joanna 'belongs'. Joanna joins him and it is there that she spends her pregnancy. He builds her a house, including a room for her and a room for painting, and for the rest of his time in Suriname, the memory of their seven months at 'The Hope' provides a calm centre, an idyllic contrast to the sufferings of the campaigns and the brutalities and imbecilities of colonial society.<sup>388</sup> The final pages of the Suriname section of the *Journal* are entirely taken up with a lovingly detailed sketch of the house at l'Esperance.<sup>389</sup>

Ironically, Joanna herself seems to have been the source of this style of presentation. It is unlikely to have been an idiom she understood, certainly not in the elaborate versions of pastoral, with extensive quotations from the eighteenth century English poets, we shall be discussing in chapter five. In the *Journal*, she never once speaks, either in English or in Sranam. She is evidently very attentive in fulfilling her side of the 'bargain', sending him supplies and clean linen when he is away campaigning, and being an attractive companion when he is at home. But her thoughts and feelings have to be inferred from Stedman's descriptions – of her 'flood of tears' as he departs for his first campaign on the Cottica River, or his report that 'the poor girl is almost distracted with the thoughts of me going away'.<sup>390</sup> These descriptions, however, are very infrequent, and though Stedman notes their occasional quarrels, he never supplies details.<sup>391</sup>

It is her Joanna's determination to remain in Suriname, under Mrs Godefroy's protection and within her extended family, that, I suggest, is the real origin of Stedman's pastoral idiom. To him, the place is barbarous and his instinct is to rescue and carry her off to Europe. To her, it is home and a place where, for all its cruelties, a measure of security is attainable. Transferring this contradiction to the

---

<sup>386</sup> *Journal*, p. 141 (18 Dec., 1773).

<sup>387</sup> *Journal*, p. 141 (22 Dec., 1773).

<sup>388</sup> The *Journal* covers only three months of this period, viz., 10 Feb. to 29 April, 1774), pp. 144-151.

<sup>389</sup> *Journal*, pp. 193-196 (22-23 Dec., 1776).

<sup>390</sup> *Journal*, pp. 127 (2 July, 1773) and 178 (24 July, 1776).

<sup>391</sup> For example, *Journal*, pp. 143 (17 Jan., 1774) and 146 (14 March, 1774).

written page – the barbarous society, the secure retreat - Stedman finds himself almost inevitably writing pastoral. The blissful months as L'Esperance made Joanna's option a reality. His reading in eighteenth century poetry supplied the rest.

## Stedman

As was noted earlier, within days of beginning his 'History of Guiana' in June 1778, Stedman wrote the 'journal of my jaunt to Brussels and Antwerp'. Subsequently, after settling at Tiverton in Devon, he wrote his memoir for the years 1744-1772 before getting down to serious work on the 1790 'Narrative'. It is as though before he could write his great book, he had first to solve the problem of who he was.

On the title page of the 1796 *Narrative*, he calls himself Captain J.G. Stedman. In fact, before he took up his pen in Tiverton he had been made a Major and before the book was published had been promoted Lieutenant-Colonel<sup>392</sup>. Preferring the title 'captain' is a further sign of the way he came to regard military service in Suriname and the love affair with Joanna as the central experiences of his life. But who was this 'Captain Stedman'? The memoir of his early years attempts an answer.

He is writing long after the event, and it is difficult to establish how far his chronology reflects the order of events and how far his subsequent reflection on them. Somewhere along the line, he gives his *Journal* the title *The Progress of Modern Ambition or The Outlines of a Military Life (being a genuine narrative founded on facts)*.<sup>393</sup> Sure enough, he reports enlisting as an cadet in the Scots Brigade at the age of 13, his promotion to ensign at 16, and his service in several small towns in what is today the south of Holland.<sup>394</sup> Eventually he is promoted to Captain (by brevet) on enlisting for Suriname. Beyond those details, we learn very little from these memoirs about 'military life'. He moves between different quarters – from Bergen op Zoom to Maastricht, and over the next dozen years between Breda, Heusden, Nijmegen and Deventer.<sup>395</sup> But the rationale of these moves is never explained, and he tells us nothing about his duties – only that

---

<sup>392</sup> *Journal*, pp. 197 (editor's note for 1778) and 396 (14 May, 1795).

<sup>393</sup> *Journal*, p. xxiii.

<sup>394</sup> *Journal*, chapter 2, pp. 21-29 *passim*.

‘Heusden was the town where I offer’d incense to Bacchus, Nijmegen to Venus, and at Breda I used sometimes to rattle the dice’.<sup>396</sup> Bachuus, Venus, and the dice: there is evident pride in this catalogue of disorder.

The *Dedication* (to ‘my plain dealing friends, who can read’) contains an aggressive announcement:

D-mn spelling., d-mn writing, and d-mn everything overdone. I am above you all, and which trifles I will be leave, to be corrected by Samuel Johnson, while native genius, naked truth, and simple nature, without disguise or artifice, are throughout this journal to be the guides of my untutored pen.<sup>397</sup>

This targeting of Johnson, to be repeated in the Preface to the 1790 ‘Narrative’ has a special interest. Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary* had famously disciplined the English language, continuing the process outlined in chapter three of fitting it for the purposes of the new age. Defining lexicographer as ‘a harmless drudge’, Johnson nevertheless laid down rules for the grammar, meaning, spelling and usage of English words, in a manner quickly adopted by ‘polite’ society. In practice, Johnson was perfectly aware of the folly of imagining that ‘his dictionary can embalm his language’ given that ‘sounds are too volatile and subtle for legal restraints’.<sup>398</sup> But these wise words were belied by his *Dictionary*’s very existence, which had even marked with an asterisk the words appropriate for use in poetry. To rebel against Johnson, was to put down a marker against the whole process of gentrification in the eighteenth century.

‘Native genius, naked truth, and simple nature, without disguise or artifice’. One wonders whether Stedman, who was generous with his *Journal*, allowed William Blake to read these words. In practice, though, he seems to have been looking backwards towards the mid-century, rather than forwards into Romanticism. In particular, he was remembering his youthful encounter with the novels of Tobias Smollett.

Smollett it was who had nicknamed Dr Johnson ‘the Great Cham’), and, early in his memoir, Stedman records how he come across his mentor. Repeating his ‘D-mn order, d-mn matter-of-fact, d-mn everything’, he continues:

---

<sup>395</sup> *Journal*, chapters 3 & 4, pp. 30-59 *passim*.

<sup>396</sup> *Journal*, p. 91 (n.d.).

<sup>397</sup> *Journal*, p. xxiii.

And now once more to the task of compiling without method or order. I said how I became the old Macaroni, so I did. And throwing aside Plutarch's *Lives*, *Flavius Josephus*, *Spectator* &c., I read romance, setting out with *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random*, which heroes I resolved to take for my models from this date. *Roderick Random* I liked best ...<sup>399</sup>

Writing in his early 40s, he records this as happening in his late teens. The difficulty this raises is that his early behaviour imitates his hero's so closely, while his mature style is so closely modelled on Smollet's, that it is difficult to be certain which takes priority. Is he writing up his behaviour as it really was, or is his style forcing his behaviour into his hero's mould?

The close identification with *Roderick Random* is not difficult to understand. Like his hero, Stedman was ill-treated as a child in Scotland by the uncle, Dr. John Stedman, entrusted with his education. Like his hero, he resolved to be independent and take his chances in life. Like his hero, he is constantly on the move, and constantly short of cash. Like his hero, he is popular with women, has a reputation for writing lampoons, makes a temporary living as a quack doctor, is unjustly jailed, is quick with his fists and his cudgel, gets involved in brawls involving petticoats and chamber pots, and so on. The parallels are so close that whole paragraphs of Stedman's *Journal* of his pre-Suriname years read like deliberate pastiche. Is the following from Smollett or from Stedman's *Journal*?

He answer'd in a brutal manner as I expected, when I immediately knocked him down with my fist but allowing him to rise, after the English way, which he did calling *murder! help! murder!*, when I knocked him down a second time. I was at once surrounded by waiters, postilions &c., whom I kept at bay by continually making a half circle with my arm and clenched fist, which unluckily locked up one of Mistress Van Howten's eyes, who was carried off the field and follow'd by her attendants.<sup>400</sup>

Or this?

My blood being heated with indignation, which banished all other thoughts, I undressed myself to the skin in an instant, and declared, that as the affront that occasioned the quarrel was offered to me, I

---

<sup>398</sup> Preface to Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (1755), quoted in Pinker, *Language Instinct*, pp. 402-403.

<sup>399</sup> *Journal*, p. 53 (n.d.).

<sup>400</sup> *Journal*, p. 90 (n.d.).

would fight it out myself; upon which one or two cried out ‘That’s a brave Scotch boy; you shall have fair play, by G-d’. This gave me fresh spirits, and going up to my adversary, who by his pale countenance, did not seem much inclined to the battle, I struck him so hard on the stomach that he reeled over a bench, and fell to the ground.<sup>401</sup>

The vocabulary in the second passage is slightly more elaborate, pointing to Smollett, but the long, unpremeditated sentences, together with the rhythms and the energy of the syntax are very similar, as is the assumption that such matters are worth writing about.

Did the youthful Stedman enlist for the Caribbean because he wanted adventure and promotion? Or was it because Roderick Random had done so before him? And is the mature Stedman describing how he really lived twenty-odd years earlier? Or is he searching for a not-too-literary style, taking for his model those picaresque ‘histories’ of the 1740s?

Either way, Stedman was plainly ill-prepared by his Smollett for writing the account of his years in Suriname. In the novel, Roderick Random takes part in the siege of Carthage and spends a few weeks in Jamaica<sup>402</sup>. But apart from a passing mention of ‘a couple of stout Negroes’,<sup>403</sup> he is blind to the existence of blacks, and slavery is not an issue for Smollett. From the day of Stedman’s arrival in Paramaribo, however, it is obvious to him that the colony is barbaric. The Smollett-inspired rebel now records his horror at the absence of justice, morality and social order. The diarist who ‘d-mned everything’ finds himself teaching a slave girl her catechism.

Despite its general record of drinking, brawling, gaming, duelling and adulterous assignments in town after regimental town, there are some hints in the early *Journal* which lay the ground for the man he later found himself to be and for the idioms forged later. In short, he discovers in his early self something better represented by Richardson and Sterne than by Fielding and Smollett, namely, a tendency towards the sentimental. ‘I remember,’ he writes, ‘when I was but eight years old, at seeing a carp carved and broil’d alive, on the gridiron, that I cried till

---

<sup>401</sup> Smollett, *Roderick Random*, p. 63.

<sup>402</sup> Smollett, *Roderick Random*, chapters XXXI-XXXIII and XXXVI.

<sup>403</sup> Smollett, *Roderick Random*, p. 204.

I actually fell in a convulsion'.<sup>404</sup> His first English poem, written he says at 16, was an elegy 'On Dead Larks':

Here lie the sweet small lively creatures,  
All depriv'd of their lively features.  
These birds that through the air would fly  
And ring their music through the sky ...

'Tis all compassion moves my heart,  
Who if I could would take their part,  
Against those cruel, so cruel men,  
By whom those harmless birds are slain<sup>405</sup>.

Unremarkable though these lines are, they prepare us for more dramatic instances of sympathy for animals – for his farewell to his dog Milord (quoting Pope on the Indian 'And thinks admitted to that equal sky / His faithful dog shall bear him company'), for his tears over the monkey he kills in Suriname, or his anger in Tiverton over 'a poor cow hamstrung by the infernal butchers. May God damn them'<sup>406</sup>. Sympathy for the suffering of women is also a feature of his character, long before the extreme examples he witnesses in Suriname:

I find a poor woman in labour in a pig sty. I get her relieved by the parish, give her some money and linen &c., beg for her to my landlady, auntie Sloomaker, who declares I was the father; to my great shame, since I never saw this poor wretch before now. The miserable woman calls me an angel sent from heaven to save her life. The child was christen'd by my name, and I publicly derided.<sup>407</sup>

Not long afterwards, visiting a brothel, he finds a wench there 'just at the *down-lying*. Such brutality I detested', and he insists on paying her and seeing her released 'without being touched by one of the company'.<sup>408</sup>

Despite these hints, however, it seems that in the final resort, Stedman intended the memoir of his early years to stand in sharp contrast to everything that happened in Suriname. By the time he wrote it, after his return, he was already beginning to read his life in terms of pre-Suriname and post-Suriname, with the Suriname adventure giving shape and purpose to his military career and his deep sense of romance. I suggest this partly because, as we have already noted, the

---

<sup>404</sup> *Journal*, p. 22 (n.d.).

<sup>405</sup> *Journal*, p. 63 (n.d.).

<sup>406</sup> *Journal*, p. 97 (n.d.), 1790 'Narrative', p. 141 and *Journal*, p. 388 (24 June, 1795).

<sup>407</sup> *Journal*, p. 57 (n.d.).

Suriname part of the *Journal*, in which he is already moving, however hesitantly, in the direction of the heroic, the pastoral, and the sentimental, was written *before* the record of his early years. His choice of *Roderick Random* as his model for those years, and of the picaresque as his style, allows him to present those years as lively and amusing but essentially without direction. After his return to Holland in 1778, he resumes that sense of being without purpose. The *Journal* for that year is as dispiriting to peruse as it must have been to compile. Entry after entry reads ‘In the evening we go to a bawdy house’, ‘to bawdy house – fine girl’, ‘I sleep whole night Cathy Glower’, and so on.<sup>409</sup> Then comes his meeting with Sir George Strickland and the discovery of his new vocation as author, along with the means of making sense of his life in terms of the tripartite division: pre-Suriname (disorderly and direction-less), Suriname (the great adventure of his life), post-Suriname (compiling the record).

Is it pressing the argument too far to link this discovery with the abandonment of his attempts to return to Suriname? In April 1778, he was canvassing the support (with a gift of anchovies) of Major Gysbert Heneman, an officer close to the Prince of Orange, in hope of securing appointment as Lieutenant-Governor of the Dutch colony of Berbicé, neighbour to Suriname.<sup>410</sup> Six months later, during which he corresponded with Mrs Godefroy and received gifts from Joanna, he was offered the post, on unprecedented good terms, and he rejected it. The reasons given in the 1790 ‘Narrative’ are that the directors of the colony could not guarantee that his tenure would be permanent and pensioned, and that he preferred to recover his health in Europe.<sup>411</sup> It is hard to avoid the conclusion that he had changed his mind. In effect, following the June meeting with Sir George Strickland and his first attempts at journal and narrative, he was giving up love and soldiering to be an author. Nine years later, when seriously embarked on both *Journal* and ‘Narrative’, what seemed to be implied in the decisions of June and October 1778 becomes explicit. Writing about his son, Johnny, he remarks:

Jan 18, 1787: Johnny writes his first letter ... in a masterly style of his own, and perfectly well spelt without any correction ... He shall, like me, have an active enterprising spirit. May he meet better success. My

---

<sup>408</sup> *Journal*, p. 70 (n.d.).

<sup>409</sup> For example, *Journal*, pp. 199 (8 Jan.), 203 (25 Feb.), 204 (12 March), 216 (14 June), etc.

<sup>410</sup> *Journal*, p. 208 (13 April, 1778).

<sup>411</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 620. See also *Journal*, p. 228 (21-22 Oct., 1778).

only ambition remaining, is to see my little writings made public. I wish to be an author.<sup>412</sup>

It is touching that the man who once damn-d Dr Johnson taught was pleased that Johnny knew how to spell.

---

<sup>412</sup> *Journal*, p. 309.

## Chapter Five

### Journal to ‘Narrative’

In the newly restored 1790 ‘Narrative’, edited by Richard and Sally Price, Stedman describes his arrival in Suriname in the afternoon of February 2nd, 1773 as follows:

When a stepping on Land the first object I met was a most miserable Young Woman in Chains simply covered with a Rag round her Loins, which was like her Skin cut and carved by the lash of the Whip in a most Shocking Manner. Her Crime was in not having fulfilled her task to which she was by appearance unable. Her punishment was to receive 200 Lashes and for months to drag a Chain of several Yards in length the one end of which was Lock’d to her ankle and to the other end of which was a weight of 3 Score pounds or upwards or upwards. She was a beautiful Negroe Maid and while I was Meditating on the Irons I myself nearly escaped being rivitted by Fascination – I now took a draft of the wretched Creature upon paper which I here present to the Sympathising Reader and which inspired me with a very unfavourable Opinion of the Humanity of the Planters residing in this Colony towards theyr negro Slaves –<sup>413</sup>

Plate number 4, ‘A Female Negro Slave, with a Weight chained to her Ancle’, appears on the next page. It is a powerful introduction to Suriname. Though engraved by Bartolozzi rather than by Blake, this plate (as we shall see in chapter six) became the inspiration for plate 4 of William Blake’s ‘Visions of the Daughters of Albion’, showing Oothoon chained by the ankle.<sup>414</sup>

Visiting Suriname almost two centuries later, the novelist V.S. Naipaul comments on the oddity of this scene (as repeated in the 1796 *Narrative*) – ‘the lacerated slave with the chain, the artist with his pad’.<sup>415</sup> He wonders whether any local people found it curious. It is indeed an odd scene and, especially in this 1790 version, oddly described. The first thing to note about it is that it has no parallel in the *Journal*, where the regiment’s arrival in Suriname is described simply in terms of the exchange of military courtesies. On the other hand, it is not entirely invented. In September 1776, his *Journal* records:

---

<sup>413</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 39.

<sup>414</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, Plate 4, ‘Visions of the Daughters of Albion’, is discussed in chapter six.

<sup>415</sup> V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (Andre Deutsch, 1962), p. 183-184.

This morning I saw a sight of horror. A poor half-starved mulatto woman, for having spoke thoughtlessly, was, between two whips, lashed stark naked, till no skin was almost left on her thighs, and legs, up till above the haunches. Before the execution she was fettered, both her feet together that she could hardly stir.<sup>416</sup>

This incident is recorded three weeks after the description of the Execution on the Rack, as part of the catalogue of atrocities with which Stedman concludes his *Journal*. As we saw in chapter four, it was only in the final months of his residence in Suriname that Stedman saw beyond the obvious barbarity of the colony and began recording the stoicism and heroism of the rebel slaves. He begins the 1790 'Narrative' with what he perceived, both literally and figuratively, almost at the end of his actual adventure there. The whipping of the chained woman is transposed and transformed to shock the reader at the outset with a paradigmatic image of the 'Wild Coast'.

In manipulating his material in this way, Stedman was perfectly aware of what he was doing. 'As to an Oversight in the dates', he remarks in the Preface, 'it Can matter but little if she (Joanna) makes her first appearance on a Friday or if I first landed in Guiana upon a Monday'.<sup>417</sup> In the opening paragraph of chapter one, he insists 'No Art without a genius will prevail / And parts without the help of Art will fail', before adding mischievously 'Let Truth, Simple Truth alone be my Apology'.<sup>418</sup> This resort to 'art' in the name of 'truth' is apparent throughout the 1790 'Narrative', nowhere more so than in his account of his dealings with Joanna. It is the key to the transformation of *Journal* into 'Narrative'.

The image of the chained woman introduces several central themes. First, of course, is the sheer cruelty of the spectacle. The whipping of a woman is shocking in itself, with or without context, though by 1790 Stedman has modified the scene to supply her with 'a rag' to cover her lacerated 'haunches'. Second is the relentless emphasis on injustice, though her 'crime' has been changed from 'having spoke thoughtlessly' (in the *Journal*) to 'not having fulfilled her Task to which she was by appearance unable' (in the 'Narrative'), a charge that relates more directly to the labour of slaves.<sup>419</sup> Stedman himself points the reader to the

---

<sup>416</sup> *Journal*, p. 185 (7 Sept., 1776).

<sup>417</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 8.

<sup>418</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 27.

<sup>419</sup> *Journal* p. 185 (7 Sept., 1776) and 1790 'Narrative', p. 39.

conclusion that the slave-owners are inhuman. Thirdly, while the description itself only hints at the woman's stoicism, in that no complaint is recorded (her 'having spoke thoughtlessly is deliberately omitted'), that stoicism is emphatically the theme of the accompanying engraving which depicts the woman actually bearing the '3 score pounds' weight on her bowed head. She becomes Stedman's icon of Suriname, the suffering slave colony.

Finally there is the portrait offered of Stedman himself. Confronted later in the 'Narrative' with a very similar atrocity, the 'Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave' represented as Plate 35, he insists on his helplessness as spectator:

Thus turning to the overseer I implored that she might be untied from that moment, which seem'd to give her some Relief, but my Answer was from the humane Gentleman, that to prevent all Strangers from interfering with his Government, he had made it an unalterable rule, in that case always to redouble the punishment, and which he instantly began to put in execution – I tried to stop him but in vain ...<sup>420</sup>

Contradicting this, his *Journal* does record instances of successful intervention ('A poor negro girl breaks five pewter plates, which I see, and so by paying the whole save her from a horrid whipping'.<sup>421</sup>). It also records that he *did* protest in the case of the 'half-starved mulatto woman', securing her release from 'her irons' (to which her mistress consented 'with the greatest reluctance') though at the cost of a further flogging.<sup>422</sup> Powerlessness, in short, is a later invention, an aspect of the 'help of Art'.

Naipaul, with his customary acuteness, goes to the heart of the resulting paradox – the oddity of the artist as uninvolved, almost dilettante, more concerned with recording the scene than with preventing it. He notes, without condemnation, the resulting gap between style and content. On the one hand is the romance with Joanna, the idyll, the 'eighteenth-century refinement', the 'fine sensibility which was admired at the time'. On the other is the 'nauseous catalogue of atrocities'. Stedman cannot, Naipaul concludes, 'be accused of sensationalism. Yet one needs a strong stomach to read Stedman today. The Surinam he describes is like 'one

---

<sup>420</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 264.

<sup>421</sup> *Journal*, p. 121 (24 Feb., 1773).

<sup>422</sup> *Journal*, p. 185 (7 and 12 Sept., 1776).

vast concentration camp, with the difference that visitors were welcome to look around and make notes and sketches'.<sup>423</sup>

Stedman presents himself not only as artist but as a man of feeling. His chosen vocabulary stresses misery, simplicity, wretchedness, sympathy and humanity, all words drawn from the language of sentiment. The fact that his emblematic figure is a woman prepares us for his susceptibility towards Joanna and her emergence as the pastoral heroine of his 1790 'Narrative'. Significantly, the whipped woman has been transformed from a 'poor half-starved mulatto woman' to a 'beautiful Negroe Maid'. There follows the bizarre, not to say grotesque metaphor of himself enchained - 'rivitted with fascination' - whether or by her beauty or her bondage, or by both combined, is unclear. It is an image thankfully excised from the 1796 *Narrative*.

The first contrast between *Journal* and the 1790 'Narrative' therefore, is that at the very beginning of Stedman's account, the persecution and heroic suffering of the slave population is summed up in an image which already combines several of the motifs he will be pursuing. The heroic, the pastoral and the sentimental are each present in embryo in this artistically calculated disembarking.

### **The Slaves as Ancient Greeks**

The transformation of *Journal* to 'Narrative' has its origins in a shift on the timing of Stedman's perceptions. The 'Narrative' is obviously based on the Suriname sections of the *Journal*, adopting its basic chronology for long sections, expanding its descriptions and often reflecting its actual phrasing (though, as already noted in chapter four, there are also considerable passages which are either based on missing papers or have been written from scratch). But whereas the *Journal* presents, Stedman's voyage of discovery and self-discovery as evolving over four years, the 'Narrative' presents his mature opinions fully-fledged from the first page. The story is long over and he has been reflecting on it for a dozen years, not least in the context of his difficult second marriage. He is not writing merely 'for his own gratification, and that of his best friends',<sup>424</sup> for he has nothing more to learn. His job is to instruct, aiming at a readership not especially familiar with Suriname but informed at many levels about the abolition

---

<sup>423</sup> Naipaul, *Middle Passage*, p. 184.

controversy. His ‘principal motives’, he declares are that travel books on the model of ‘the immortal’ Captain Cook’s have met with ‘so much success’, and that ‘the Colony of *Surinam* in Dutch Guiana was not as yet perfectly known to this kingdom’.<sup>425</sup>

This is the spirit in which chapter 1 of the ‘Narrative’, concludes with his decision to collect materials for a short history of the colony, while chapters 2 to 4 present us with a ‘General description of Guiana’, geographical and historical up to the moment of his own arrival. That history includes an account of the first Maroon Wars, ending with the peace treaties of 1760 and 1762, in which the results of mature reflection are once again presented by way of prelude. His analysis is wrong in certain historical details.<sup>426</sup> But it reflects accurately the conclusions he drew from his own campaigns of 1773-77.

The events to which Stedman refers were described in my chapter two and what concerns me here are three arguments he presents in respect of them. First, he is adamant that the cause of maroonage is not slavery itself but the ill treatment of the slaves. This argument, not found in the *Journal* and formulated here for the first time, is fundamental to Stedman’s 1790 position, and we shall meet other expressions of it. As for the runaway slaves’ ‘Continual Outrages and deprivations upon the coffee and sugar plantations’, their motives were simply ‘a Spirit of Revenge for the barbarous and inhuman treatment they had received’ coupled with a wish to obtain goods ‘to provide for their Subsistence and defense’.<sup>427</sup> Each successive revolt is explained in exactly the same terms as ‘owing to nothing but their being so cruelly treated by their masters’. The sheer folly, Stedman insists, ‘to have drove these poor Creatures to such extremes by constant ill treatment Speaks of itself’. Capricious cruelty was compounded by the fact that the slaves had no legal redress, their complaints never being heard ‘by the Magistrate that has it in his power to redress them – because *his worship* himself is a planter and scorns to be against his own interest’. Ramming this point home, Stedman (adds with improbable rhetoric) that he has been ‘eye Witness where the Plantation slaves were treated with the utmost Humanity where the

---

<sup>424</sup> *Journal*, p. 43 (n.d.).

<sup>425</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 27.

<sup>426</sup> See the discussion in chapter two.

<sup>427</sup> The quotations in this paragraph are from the 1790 ‘Narrative’, pp. 66-69.

hand of the master was seldom lifted but to caress them, and where the eye of the Slave sparkled with Gratitude and affection’.

Having blamed the masters not the system, Stedman goes on to describe the folly of negotiating peace with the maroons. Though the treaties may appear to have given ‘great satisfaction’ and to have been motivated by ‘good intentions’, their effect was to create free and flourishing communities, living on the colony’s very borders, as a permanent example to the plantation slaves of the benefits of rebellion.<sup>428</sup>

Amply confirming this argument, though without making any explicit connection, Stedman insists on the superior stoicism, integrity and heroism of the rebel maroons. An atrocity of 1730, when eleven re-captured runaways, six of them woman and two of them girls, were executed in different ways, is described in barbarous detail and with the addition, borrowed from his account of the execution of the breaking on the rack, that ‘they went without uttering a Sigh’.<sup>429</sup> This heroic behaviour for which, of course, he has no historical evidence, is complemented – again a-historically – by the claim that the maroons maintained their side of the peace treaties with the utmost integrity (bar some unfortunate misunderstandings, involving independent warlords not included in the peace process). With the aim of letting ‘the whole World now see that Blackmen are not such Brutes as the generality of White ones imagine’<sup>430</sup>, Stedman gives an extended impressionistic account of the negotiations in the forest culminating in the 1760 treaty.

The maroon chief is ‘a very handsome Negroe called *Araby*’. His spokesman is a captain called Boston who ‘asks in a thundering voice’ why the Europeans have brought combs and mirrors instead of the fire arms and ammunition agreed to. Another captain called Quaco intervenes to insist that, despite this evidence of bad faith, the Europeans are messengers only and should not be molested but guaranteed safe passage home. Then, at a second meeting in the forest for the signing of the treaty, Chief Araby insists on the swearing of an oath ‘after the manner in practice by themselves’. Stedman adds the comment that they had all too often witnessed Christians breaking their word ‘whereas for a Negroe to break

---

<sup>428</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 68.

<sup>429</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 67.

<sup>430</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 70. The account in the paragraph that follows is summarised from pp. 70-73.

his Oath is absolutely without Example'. As both parties solemnly drink a potion made up of water, earth, and blood from the arms of both parties, Stedman appends a long quotation from Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad*. The passage is from Book 3, when Agamemnon and King Priam of Troy take their oath before Zeus that they will accept the result of the proposed single combat between Paris and Menelaus as ending the Trojan War once and for all:

From the same urn they drink the mingled Wine  
And add libations to the Pow'rs divine.  
While thus their prayers united mount the sky;  
Hear mighty Jove! and hear ye Gods on high!  
And may their blood who first the League Confound  
Shed like this Wine, disdain the thirsty Ground.<sup>431</sup>

It is not my intention to defend this extended description as an example of either good history or good writing. Obviously, Stedman is casting himself as witness (the 'handsome Negro', the 'thundering voice') to a scene that occurred a dozen years before his arrival in Surinam. Obviously, too, the casting of the rebel maroons as strong, magnanimous and honourable, in contrast to the vulnerable, shifty, and potentially treacherous whites, is a blatant piece of special pleading. Finally, to continue stating the obvious, he is plainly reversing the standard civilised/savage stereotype by casting Araby, Boston and Quaco as heroic figures. The question is, as he invents this scene in a small West Country town, what are his literary models?

It's tempting to assume that Araby et.al., in Stedman's presentation, are archetypal eighteenth century noble savages. Rousseau, in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750), and his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité des hommes* (1755) argued that the spread of civilisation had promoted inequality, luxury and idleness, while private property and the division of labour had created false social divisions and a corrupt morality.<sup>432</sup> Such arguments required the invented antithesis of Man living in a state of Nature, without property, and without the artificial needs and hence vices promoted by science, letters and the arts. It is worth remarking that this Noble Savage was never anything more than an invented 'Other', a hypothetical alternative to the prevailing order. It was, as

---

<sup>431</sup> Pope, *Homer's Iliad* (1715-1720), 3, lines 296-301.

<sup>432</sup> My summary in this paragraph is adapted from chapter XIX 'Rousseau' in Russell, *Western Philosophy*, pp. 660-674.

Rousseau put it, 'a state which exists no longer, perhaps never existed, probably never will exist, and of which it is none the less necessary to have just ideas, in order to judge well our present state'. The Noble Savage was fashionable as Stedman was writing, not least through the writings of his hero Captain Cook who seemed to have located, on his South Pacific voyages, peoples uncannily resembling Rousseau's constructs. It is tempting to link this with Rousseau's part in promoting sensibility through his appeal to the truth of the heart's emotions, and to Rousseau's preference for Sparta as against Athens - for the simple military virtues as opposed to Socrates and Plato. Stedman, after all, was a soldier who enjoyed going barefoot.

But he was also a royalist who dedicated his Narrative to the Prince of Wales, an admirer of William V and a devoted follower of the Duke of Brunswick, a captain who volunteered for a war against rebel slaves, an opponent of abolition and, judging by the quotations in the 1790 'Narrative', an admirer of Rousseau's enemy, Voltaire. Stedman had in common with Voltaire a reactive impatience with nonsense that could make him appear more radical than he really was. He could swear at the parson, and rage against examples of clerical hypocrisy. But that did not stop him teaching Joanna her catechism. He d-mned writing, d-mned everything overdone, but he still took pride in Johnny's spelling. Faced with barbarity, he longed for order and justice, dispensed from above by a responsible class of land-owners. Translated into the slave colony, this took the form of admiration for kindly proprietors like Mrs Godefroy. There is nothing in the *Journal* or the 'Narrative' that suggests any direct knowledge of Rousseau or any interest in theoretically noble savages.

I think there can be little doubt that Stedman's opinion of the heroic potential of his black characters was, first and foremost, the opinion of a professional soldier reinforced by direct experience, or what he loves to term 'Ocular Demonstration'.<sup>433</sup> In the *Journal*, the first black men he admires are the 'Rangers', the corps of slave volunteers, who proved far more successful than the Scots Brigade in fighting in forest conditions. Praising their skills, courage and perseverance, he develops a new respect for the rebel maroons, recognising that the 'negroes are no fools', and that their revolt is a just one and well organised.

---

<sup>433</sup> For example, 1790 'Narrative', p. 357.

Finally, he comes round to admiring the ‘heroism’ of the plantation slaves in enduring the most barbarous of punishments with stoicism and ironic humour.

In the ‘Narrative’, all these claims are repeated. Campaigning on the Commewijne River in November 1773, he finds the Rangers much better adapted to forest fighting. They know how to build temporary shelters (he gives us a long, practical account).<sup>434</sup> They awake after a night of sleeping on the ground in ‘much better health than any of the Europeans’, who have been trying to sleep in hammocks.<sup>435</sup> When supplies fail to arrive and starvation threatens, it is a Ranger who shoots a wild turkey and presents them with it<sup>436</sup>. When their weapons are waterlogged, it is the Rangers who show how to secure them with the bark of a palm tree.<sup>437</sup> When they reach a flooded creek, it is the Rangers who in forty minutes contrive a temporary bridge. Commander Rughcoph swears at them as ‘feegh Shinder-kneghte’, and they show their contempt by swimming the creek or by swinging between the overhanging trees, Stedman himself electing to follow their example.<sup>438</sup> This continues to be his policy, and in following their example by walking barefoot and bathing regularly and eating what they eat, he continues ‘in perfect health’ while two-thirds of Rughcoph’s command is laid up.<sup>439</sup> These reflections continue with an extended passage summing up their qualities.<sup>440</sup> He notes they are ‘extremely difficult to be kept in proper discipline’ because ‘where they know nothing is to be done, they will not march’. On the other hand, when the enemy is close by nothing can restrain them and they are completely fearless. Their skills in tracking, he says, can only be compared to ‘a Dog upon the Scent’, and they detect signs like ‘the broken sprig’ or ‘a fallen leaf trod flat’ that are completely invisible to European eyes. ‘This to be sure’, he concludes, ‘is inconsistent with the modern military tac-tic, but undoubtedly breaths that Spirit of Liberty, which in antient times alone Compleated the Valiant Soldier’. From this point on, throughout the remainder of the ‘Narrative’, the Rangers are presented as courageous, enduring, skilled and tactically correct, compared to the

---

<sup>434</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, pp. 191-192.

<sup>435</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 199.

<sup>436</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 200.

<sup>437</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 199.

<sup>438</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 201.

<sup>439</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 201.

<sup>440</sup> The passage occurs on p. 204 of the 1790 ‘Narrative’.

blundering and fever-ridden Europeans. One ‘of these free negroes’, he concludes, ‘was Preferable to half a Dozen White men in the *Woods* of Guiana.’<sup>441</sup>

The *Journal*, as we saw, records only one fleeting glimpse of a rebel maroon, when the old man steps briefly out of the forest and vanishes again when challenged.<sup>442</sup> In the ‘Narrative’ (describing events for which that section of the *Journal* is missing), Stedman is first aware of them in chapter 18 (June 1775) when several of the Society Troops are ambushed in a marsh near Gado Sabi.

‘This News Proved’, he records, ‘that the Sable foes Were not to be Trifled With ... and My favourite Rangers, Who Wanted no Spur .. now hardly Could be keep’d Back till the Others were Prepared.’<sup>443</sup> The sentence marks the beginning of a shift in the focus of his admiration. The description of the battle for Gado Sabi which followed is one of the high points of the ‘Narrative’, and aspects of the style of that description will be discussed in detail in my chapter 9. What is emphasised, despite their defeat, is the superior general-ship of the ‘Rebel Commanders’, the ‘Celebrated Captains’, and the ‘great Bony’. Their guerrilla tactics are described to him, by a slave significantly called Hannibal and illustrated by a plate-diagram.<sup>444</sup> The emphasis is on the skilful use of very limited resources. Though, inevitably in such an open engagement, Gado Sabi falls to the better-armed attackers, Stedman refuses to call it a victory. Their prize is a blazing ruin, most of the defenders having escaped with all their supplies and the little they possessed by way of weapons, to continue their guerrilla tactics elsewhere. The evacuation of the settlement is carried out under the camouflage of

Shouting Singing, and Firing Round us the whole night of 20th, Viz., Not only to Cover the Retreat of their Frinds by Cutting off the Pass, but by their Unintermitting *Noise* to Prevent us from hearing them, Who were the Whole night employed men, Women and Children, in preparing Hampers or Warimboes With the Finest Rice, Yams, Cassava, &cr for theyr Subsistence During their Escape & of Which they had only Left us ther Chaff, and Dregs for our Contemplation ... And which most Certainly was Such a piece of gerealship in a Savage people ... as Even *Frederick the Great* himself Needed not to have been Ashamed of.<sup>445</sup>

---

<sup>441</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 396.

<sup>442</sup> *Journal*, p. 190 (23 Nov., 1776).

<sup>443</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 360.

<sup>444</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 398 and Plate 54 (top), p. 355.

<sup>445</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 411.

This was the only action Stedman experienced in his seven campaigns. It convinced him that the war was a conflict of equals between Maroons and Rangers, in which the European soldiers had only walk-on parts. When subsequently he comes across several Maroon corpses, two in particular impressing him as ‘Manly Youth’ such as ‘Were never beheld in any Country’, he resorts once again to Pope’s *Iliad* to find an appropriate epitaph.<sup>446</sup> The passage chosen is from Book 5, where the deaths of the twin brothers, Orsiflokhos and Krêthôn, are mourned with the simile of young mountain lions killed by hunters:

So two young mountain lions nurs’d with Blood  
 In Deep Recesses of the Gloomy Wood,  
 Rush Fearless, to the Plains, and Uncontroul’d  
 Depopulate the Stalls, and waste the fold;  
 Till pierc’d at Distance from their native Den  
 O’erpower’d they fall, Beneath the force of Men:  
 Prostrate on Earth their Beauteous Bodies Lay  
 Like Mountain Firs, as Tall and Straight as they.<sup>447</sup>

As for the plantation slaves and, in particular, their heroic endurance under the most barbarous of punishments, the ‘Narrative’ is entirely consistent with the *Journal*, differing only in the greater number of examples and the greater space devoted to them. For those with the stomach to read is, a facsimile of Stedman’s three-page description of the ‘Execution of breaking on the Rack’, along with Blake’s unsigned engraving, appears as Appendix 4. The conclusion speaks for itself, namely ‘How in the name of heaven Human nature can go through so much Torture, With So much Fortitude, is truly Astonishing’.<sup>448</sup>

All this seems a world away from Rousseau, and the question remains where Stedman discovered the particular Homeric idiom of his representation of maroons, rangers and plantation slaves in the ‘Narrative’. The most immediate answer appears to be the anonymous *Jamaica: a Poem in Three Parts. Written in that Island in MDCCLXXVI (1777)*. Given that the poem was published in the year of Stedman’s return to Holland, it seems unlikely he obtained his copy in Suriname. But he knew it thoroughly and quotes from it in the ‘Narrative’ no less than 13 times, more than any other source barring Thomson’s *The Seasons*. These quotations include the following passage:

---

<sup>446</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 432.

<sup>447</sup> Pope, *Homer’s Iliad*, 5, lines 681-688.

And can the Muse reflect her tear-stain'd ey  
When blood attests e'en slaves for freedom die?  
On cruel gibbets high disclos'd they rest,  
And scarce one groan escapes one bloated breast  
Here sable Caesars feel the Christian rod,  
There Afric Platos, tortur'd, hope a God:  
While jetty Brutus for his country sighs  
And sooty Cato with his freedom dies.<sup>449</sup>

One of the cruellest features of slave societies in both Americas was the disappearance of family names, as husbands, wives and children were auctioned separately and anything resembling African family life was suppressed. A grotesque outcome of this was that it became commonplace for slave owners to give their slaves mock classical names, such as Ajax, Aristotle, Venus or Cassius (Clay). Stedman knew of the practice – Joanna's own aunt was called Lucretia, and he adds Nero, Plato, Charon, Ceberus and Medusa as further examples. But it seems to have been the anonymous author of *Jamaica* who showed him how this crude plantation joke could be turned against itself.

That point made, it has to be acknowledged that the device was already established as a commonplace of abolition literature. So far as I am aware, the first author to deploy it was Mrs Aphra Behn in her *Oroonoko: or The History of the Royal Slave* (1688). This novel or 'faction', the first in English to have a black hero, is sometimes for that reason loosely recruited to the 'noble savage' cause. Oroonoko is indeed quite ferociously 'noble', but on the English neo-classical rather than the Romantic model. As was noted in chapter three, Aphra Behn compares her hero with Charles I. Her second comparison is with Caesar, the name with which Oroonoko is re-christened on arrival at his owner's plantation, 'which name', Aphra Behn adds,

will live in that country as long as that (scarce more) glorious one of the great Roman: for 'tis most obvious he wanted no part of the personal courage of that Caesar, and acted things as memorable, had they been done in some part of the world replenished with people and historians that might have given him his due.<sup>450</sup>

---

<sup>448</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 547.

<sup>449</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 524, quoting Anonymous, *Jamaica: a Poem in Three Parts. Written in that Island in MDCCLXXVI* (1777), 3, lines 57-64.

<sup>450</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, p. 63.

Soon after, Imoinda, by then his wife, is re-named Clemene.<sup>451</sup>

Stedman's most visible, quoted source for the device was the anonymous *Jamaica*, but he may well have had wider debts. What is clear is, first, that it was for him a self-conscious *literary* device, an aspect of his mature presentation of his experiences in the long meditated 'Narrative'. It nowhere occurs in the Suriname sections of the *Journal*, though it follows indirectly from his insistence on the 'heroism' of the victim of the breaking on the rack described in its closing pages. Secondly, his manifest preference is for Greek heroes, rather than the standard Roman parallels deployed from *Oroonoko* to *Jamaica*. I can account for this only by suggesting that he preferred Homer to Virgil, or rather, Pope's *Iliad* to Dryden's *Aeneid*.

Interestingly, in the closing pages of the *Journal*, while his 'Narrative' is in the press, he continues quoting and adapting Pope's *Iliad* to express his horror at the French Revolution and the unfolding war in Europe:

The copious slaughter covers all the shore  
And the high ramparts drop with human gore.<sup>452</sup>

### **Joanna, the Peasant Princess**

In writing the Joanna-centred sections of the 'Narrative', Stedman had once again his *Journal* at his elbow and the first point to be made about them is that once again, he is not primarily concerned with the precise dates or the 'facts'. He says little to nothing of the sexual adventures of his first weeks in Suriname. The episode with Mr Lolkens's 'negro maid' whom he 'f-ked' on arrival becomes a comic example of cultural misunderstanding (over the climax of which he draws a 'sable curtain'), and there are no references to B- or the various other girls who spent nights in his room. The arrangement with Joanna's mother is omitted. The two oranges sent him by Joanna become 'a basket of oranges'. The £10 he gave her on his marriage becomes £20, which she instantly returns to him. The gift of six shillings and some meat he made to Joanna's grandfather becomes a gift of six chickens made to himself. The gold medal 'which my father gave my mother the night that I was born', and presented to Joanna in June 1773 when it was rumoured the regiment was to be withdrawn, becomes in the 'Narrative' a gift to

---

<sup>451</sup> Behn, *Oroonoko*, p. 65.

her on the altogether more appropriate occasion of Johnny's birth in November 1774.<sup>453</sup> Revealingly, the arrangement by which Joanna was placed with Mrs Godefroy is brought forward from the final weeks of Stedman's dealings with her to the days before the capture of Gado Sabi in August 1775, making it appear he had secured her future *before* going into battle.<sup>454</sup> Other departures include the very powerful set-piece description of Joanna's auction when, following her owner's flight from the colony all his assets are auctions to pay his debts. Stedman prefaces the account with a description of a morning's stroll round Paramaribo in the course of which he encounters a batch of newly arrived slaves. There follows a description of the slave trade - its African dimension, the middle passage, and the auctioning of the slaves on arrival when they are put on display made to exhibit their limbs 'like a Merry Andrew' - before, his walk concluded, he returns to his house and to the news that Joanna is to feature in the same auction that very day.<sup>455</sup> The passage, for all its great emotive force, has no basis in the *Journal* where Stedman describes himself as laid up with fever and sores and unable to walk.<sup>456</sup>

These 'd-mn matter-of-fact' examples are very minor, but they point to something more interesting about the shaping of this motif in the 'Narrative', namely, that in order to become the heroine of his tale Joanna has first to be separated from her society. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the detailed descriptions of his first encounters with Joanna and of his discovery of his love for her. The two passages are sufficiently extraordinary to require quoting at some length.

Introducing her in chapter 5, Stedman begins with a stylised eighteenth-century catalogue of her beauties:

Rather more than middle Size - She was perfectly streight with the most elegant Shapes that can be view'd in nature moving her well-form'd limbs as when a Goddess walks - Her face was full of Native Modesty and the most distinguished Sweetness - Her Eyes as black as ebony were large and full of expression, bespeaking the Goodness of her heart. With Cheeks through which glows / in spite of her olive Complexion / a beautiful tinge of vermillion when gazed upon - her

---

<sup>452</sup> *Journal*, p. 347 (n.d., 1793), adapting Pope, *Homer's Iliad*, Book 12, lines 27-28.

<sup>453</sup> These examples are from the 1790 'Narrative', pp. 43, 98, 101, 249 and 293.

<sup>454</sup> *Journal*, p. 183-184 (24 Aug., 1776) and 1790 'Narrative', pp. 385-386.

<sup>455</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 175-176.

<sup>456</sup> *Journal*, p. 135 (6-8 Oct., 1773).

nose was perfectly well formed rather small, her lips a little prominent which when she spoke discovered two regular rows of pearls as white as Mountain Snow - her hair was a dark brown - next to black, forming a beauteous Globe of small ringlets, ornamented with flowers and Gold Spangles - round her neck her arms and her ancles she wore Gold Chains rings and Medals - while a Shawl of finest Indian Muslin the end of which was negligently thrown over her polished Shoulder gracefully covered part of her lovely bosom - a petticoat of richest Chints alone made out the rest bare headed and barefooted she shone with double lustre carrying in her delicate hand a beaver hat the crown trim's rown(d) with Silver.<sup>457</sup>

Stedman's hostess explains she is the daughter of a 'respectable gentleman' named Kruythoff, who had five children by Joanna's mother Ceri and died 'in a melancholy state' when their owner, a Mr D.B., refused more than one thousand pounds sterling for their manumission. Subsequently, Mr D.B.'s slaves fled together to join the Maroons. This bankrupted him and the Fauconberg Estate on the Commewijne River was abandoned, leaving Ceri being under the protection of Jolycoeur, one of Boni's captains, and Joanna at the mercy of Mr D.B.'s creditors. Hearing this, Stedman returns to his lodging 'in a State of Sadness and Stupefaction' and falls into a melancholy state from which he is revived by 'a basket of oranges'.<sup>458</sup>

He then leaves Paramaribo for two months, visiting plantations along the Commewijne River and reporting on further atrocities including abuses of female slaves. Returning at the end of April, he enquires about Joanna and learns the creditors are about to send her back to Fauconberg, 'friendless and 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 -

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 ardent Gaze  
From every touch you more transparent grow  
And all revealed the beauteous Wanton plays.

---

<sup>457</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 88.

<sup>458</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 88-89.

But perceiving me She darted from my presence like a Shot, when I returned to Mr Demelly and declared without the least hesitation no less than it was my intention / if such could be / to Purchase to Educate & to make my lawful wife in Europe, the individual Mulatto Maid Joanna which I relate to the World without blushing or being ashamed of while Mr Demelly gazed upon me with Wild Astonishment: -

In this passage my Youth must plead my cause - nor should it at all have been inserted were it not for reasons to be met with in the Sequel, while to those alone who have read the history of Inle and Yarico as related by the Spectator with pleasure and approve of that Gentleman's Conduct - I here make no apology.<sup>459</sup>

There are many layers to this presentation. Once again, the ordering of events - the meeting with Joanna, the journey to the plantations and the report on atrocities there, the second meeting with Joanna when she is at the mercy of the creditors is a rhetorical contrivance and has no basis in the chronology of the *Journal* in which his absence from Paramaribo occupies a few days only in early April concluding, as noted, with Ceri's rejected offer of her daughter. The incident when 'Before dinner I discover two beautiful girls wash naked in the alley of the Governor's garden' is actually recorded as occurring on March 17, 1776, and had nothing to do with Joanna.<sup>460</sup>

Even more striking, however, than this serial fiction is the extraordinary idiom Stedman has devised for presenting her. The first words used of her are 'perfectly streight', 'elegant' and 'well-form'd', leading inevitably to the word 'Goddess', but the suggestion of superhuman graces is modified by reference to 'nature', to 'Native modesty' and to the 'goodness of her heart'. The paradox is enhanced by the catalogue of her features in which racial aspects are noted in careful balance black eyes, olive complexion, prominent lips and dark-brown ringlets offset by blushing cheeks, a small well-formed nose and teeth as white as 'Mountain Snow'. She is both richly dressed with gold bangles and chains, the finest muslin, the richest chintz and a silver-brimmed hat, and at the same time a simple peasant girl, bare-headed and bare-footed, with a hint in the shawl 'negligently thrown over her polished shoulder' at talents for coquetry. She has, in short, the capacity to satisfy every yearning and the paradoxes are maintained

---

<sup>459</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 97-98.

<sup>460</sup> *Journal*, p. 164.

by Stedman's enquiries into her origins. She is on the one hand the daughter of a 'respectable gentleman'. On the other, she is the daughter of a slave (later, when he meets at her grandfather, there are hints of royal descent on the African side), and she has close relatives and a possible protector, Jolycoeur, among the very Maroons Stedman is fighting.<sup>461</sup>

Returning from his visit to the plantations of the Commewijne River, he catches her in a stance in which the goddess and the peasant girl are combined in the nymph surprised while bathing, inspiring the pastiche couplets with their tender eroticism. The jump from these couplets to Stedman's vow to purchase, educate and make Joanna his wife in Europe is in many ways the strangest of all: the goddess, the child of nature, the peasant girl, the lost princess, the nymph, is to become a bourgeois housewife in Holland. Stedman manipulates our response to this by offering the comic spectacle of Mr Demelly's 'Wild Astonishment', by pleading his youth, and by two self-conscious literary references. The first is to Richard Steele's version of the Inkle and Yarico story in *Spectator* no 11 (Thomas Inkle, a London businessman sailing to the West Indies, is shipwrecked off America and succoured by Yarico, an Indian maiden. They become lovers and she travels with him to Barbados where, despite her pregnancy, he sells her into slavery.<sup>462</sup> The second, and deliberately contrasted reference in the paragraph following the passage quoted, is to the tale of Lavinia and Palemon, the impoverished gleaner and the prosperous farmer, in the autumn section of Thomson's *Seasons*.<sup>463</sup>

Plainly, many of these motifs in the presentation of Joanna are mutually contradictory - except from the perspective we have already noted as supplying some cohesion to the *Journal*, namely that they are all versions of pastoral. It is the conventions of pastoral which allow Joanna to be both goddess and peasant girl, royal and rustic, nymph and gentlewoman, the ambiguities of her race, appearance and dress being carried through into every aspect of her existence. The contradictions are resolved when Stedman is appointed to command the settlement at l'Esperance on the Cottica River, and he manages to get Joanna to

---

<sup>461</sup> 1790 'Narrative, p. 249.

<sup>462</sup> *Spectator*, No 11 (1711). Equally, Stedman may have encountered the story in Richard Ligon's, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* (1657), pp. 54-55, or in George Colman the Younger's opera *Inkle and Yarico* (1787).

<sup>463</sup> Thomson, 'Autumn', lines 177-310 in *Seasons* ed. Heron, pp. 137-142.

join him. He builds her a house – a room for painting, a room for Joanna, a kitchen, a hen house, a gallery, and palisades all round. In the *Journal*, the importance of this episode emerged from the number of Stedman's subsequent references to it and the drawing of this house that occupies the final page.<sup>464</sup> In the 1790 'Narrative', it becomes their 'golden age', a paradise of happiness and simplicity, far removed from the corrupt town, the brutal plantations and the unjust war, where Joanna blooms in her fertility, presiding like Milton's Eve over scenes of peaceful hospitality, such as the visit of Stedman's commanding officer.<sup>465</sup>

I shall be arguing in chapter nine that, paradoxically, the origin of this pastoral idiom is Joanna's own interpretation of her situation and of their predicament as lovers, and that it represents her voice speaking through the text as Stedman attempts to do her honour. All too obviously, though, the idiom is not hers, nor one she would have recognised. The question once again, therefore, is where Stedman adapted it from, and indeed what he meant by it. As we saw in chapter three, the pastoral genre – whether judged by certain stock features as in Barrell and Bull, or as a 'state of mind' as in Empson - is so capacious and various as to elude definition, at least from the seventeenth century onwards. But there are certain features of pastoral that Stedman is plainly *not* employing. There is, for example, no element of satire about his portrayal of Joanna in her various roles. Although there are very contrasts to be drawn between the idyll at L'Esperance and the corruption, license and brutality of colonial society, he never sets the one off against the other with any comic or ironic or even moral intention. When he remarks (in the *Journal*) about preferring 'poor Joanna and poor Jackie's (John's) company to any other amusement', he is simply stating a melancholy fact.<sup>466</sup> The pastoral contexts for such companionship, in a succession of small out-of-town houses, are described simply as 'retreats'. Stedman had read his Horace and Juvenal, but he never imitates them in using such rural separation as the means of satirising town or upper class life.

Nor is rural Suriname idealised in any way:

---

<sup>464</sup> *Journal*, p. 194 (n.d.).

<sup>465</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 249-272.

<sup>466</sup> *Journal*, p. 178 (24 July, 1776).

I have already Mentioned the prickly-heat-ringworm-drygripes-putrid fever-boils-Consaca and bloody flux to which one is exposed in this Climate – also the Musquitoes-Patat, and Scrapat-lice, chigoes, cockroaches, ants horseflies wild bees, and bats, besides the thorns, briars and aligators and Peree in the Rivers and to which if added the howling of the Tigers the hissing of the Serpents and growling of Fourgeoud – the dry Sandy-Savanahs, unfordable Marshes, burning-hot Days, Cold-& Damp Nights, heavy rains and short allowance, people may be astonished how any one was able to Survive it – but I Solemnly declare to have Still omitted many other Calamities that we suffered ...<sup>467</sup>

Plainly, there is a great deal in the rain forest and countryside to excite and intrigue and impress him, but his approach is factual – collecting, cataloguing, describing in minute detail, always with precise reference to earlier authorities such as Maria Sibylla Merian, or Edward Bancroft. The immense wealth of natural observation in the ‘Narrative’ is one of its greatest virtues, but it proceeds from the Stedman’s scientific bent and has no bearing on his deployment of pastoral. As for agricultural labour in Suriname, all field work was performed exclusively by the black plantation slaves. The atrocities committed against them, and the maroon revolts they have provoked, are the very reason for his presence in the colony as a volunteer soldier. Though he praises in passing the humane treatment of slaves of Mrs Godefroy’s plantation, significantly a coffee plantation requiring considerably less labour, this seems to be in gratitude for her ransoming of Joanna and he provides no details. The overwhelming impression of the ‘Narrative’ is that slavery – the cultivation of the land – is a system of unremitting brutality. In this, Stedman far exceeds the so-called ‘anti-pastoral’ of Oliver Goldsmith and George Crabbe.

More curious is the absence of any development of the ‘Georgic’ pastoral tradition – those long poems, written in imitation of Virgil’s *Georgics*, about rural life and crafts and the cultivation of particular crops. Poems such as John Phillips *Cyder* (1708) and James Grainger’s *The Sugar Cane* (1764), with their exact accounts of cultivation and processing, are not free from pastoral moralising – though there tend to be gentle contradictions between the dignity of the labour they celebrate and the languid peasants who perform it. Stedman does not refer to either of these poems. But there are strong ‘Georgic’ elements in James

---

<sup>467</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 229.

Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) and in the anonymous *Jamaica* (1777), from both of which he quotes extensively, and he was fascinated by agricultural production. Long and detailed accounts of the cultivation of sugar (chapter 13), cocoa (chapter 24), indigo (chapter 27) and coffee (chapter 29), are interspersed with an abundance of material about coconuts, pineapples, oranges, limes, bananas, avocado pears, vanilla, groundnuts – the list could be extended to the foot of the page. Had Stedman ever become a colonial planter, he would have been extraordinarily well prepared by enquiry and observation. But the potential of that particular branch of eighteenth pastoral forms no part of his literary idiom. It is once again firmly scientific.

For he was up against a simple fact. In a slave colony, characterised by brute power and ungoverned atrocity, the pastoral could be accommodated only in escape. Stedman's first impulse, on falling in love with Joanna, was to rescue her and take her back to Holland as his wife. Faced with her rejection of that 'escape', her insistence on remaining in Surinam in the security of her vast extended family, he was forced to recognise the possibility of some space existing outside the system – the space he eventually located as their house at L'Esperance., and in their various out-of-town houses in Paramaribo. Towards the end of the 'Narrative', he quotes from John Pomphret's *The Choice* (1700), that paradigmatic –and highly popular - poem of pastoral escape.<sup>468</sup> Pomphret's ideal is 'a private seat' near 'some fair town', built on rising ground with fields one side and a wood on the other, containing simple furniture, an audible stream, shelves lined with the Latin classics, and an estate sufficient to provide 'a frugal plenty' but allowing for 'the best wines' (but no 'high drinking'). This carefully balanced middle way he would like to share with two friends, providing congenial conversation and with, conveniently located nearby (but not too close), 'some obliging, modest fair ... For there's that sweetness in a female mind / Which in a man's we cannot hope to find'. It is impossible to paraphrase *The Choice* today without satire creeping in (precisely how 'obliging' was that 'modest fair' expected to be?), but in referring to the poem Stedman plainly recognised some parallel between its picture of an ideal existence and his own version of pastoral withdrawal.

---

<sup>468</sup> I am using the text provided in Lonsdale (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Verse*, pp. 1-4, quoting John Pomphret, *Miscellaneous Poems on Several Occasions* (1702).

But it is impossible to imagine Stedman being long satisfied with Pomphret's insipid vision (at the very least, he would have wanted Homer on those bookshelves). The 1774 idyll at L'Esperance obviously represented a withdrawal, both from the city and from the war, but he celebrates it in a style that insists on something more than geographical distancing:

Not Adam and Eve in Paradise could Enjoy a greater Share of Felicity, than we now did – free like the roes in the forest and disintangled from every care and fashion, we breathed the purest Ether in our walks, and refresh'd our limbs in the Cooling limpid Streams, health and Vigour were now again my portion, while my Mulatto flourished in youth and beauty.<sup>469</sup>

The earlier pastoral motifs – of Joanna as goddess and rustic, princess and peasant girl, nymph and gentlewoman – had all had some social reference, gesturing towards worlds in which these categories had significance. At L'Esperance, they are outside society altogether, outside history, and back in the Garden of Eden. The accompanying quotations are from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). First, from Book 4, describing Eve preparing her nuptial bed 'What day the genial Angel to her friend / Brought her in naked beauty' (italics Stedman's). Secondly, from Book 5, again celebrating Eve's innocent nakedness – 'No veil / She needed, virtue proof; no thought infirm / Alter'd her Cheek'.<sup>470</sup> Thirdly, not without humour, a passage from Book 9, about Eve's pacification of Adam, appropriated to describe Joanna's conquest of Colonel Fourgeoud:

- Her heavenly form  
Angelic but more soft and feminine.  
her graceful innocence, her ev'ry air  
Of gesture, or least action, over aw'd  
His malice ...<sup>471</sup>

Fourgeoud, of course, did not belong in Paradise, The illusion of separation is impossible to sustain, but Stedman sustains the metaphor. As Joanna's pregnancy advances, he confesses, 'It was now I saw the wretchedness of my situation, as much as Adam had done by tasting the forbidden fruit'.<sup>472</sup> The reference is to the new of the death of Joanna's owner in Amsterdam, with whom he had been

---

<sup>469</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 260.

<sup>470</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book 4, lines 712-713, and Book 5, lines 383-385.

<sup>471</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 9, lines 457-461.

<sup>472</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 276.

negotiating her manumission, and the sickening realisation that their child would be born into slavery. Soon after, Joanna departs for Paramaribo for her lying-in, and their cottage at L'Esperance is unroofed by a storm. The idyll is over.

Two years afterwards, late in March 1776, it is re-created briefly when he is re-appointed to the command at L'Esperance, and Joanna and Johnny join him for two months. But this is a different pastoral. He follows meticulously the old slave Cramaca's advice about swimming two or three times a day and going lightly dressed and barefooted. With his sheep and poultry and vegetable garden of carrots, cabbages, onions, cucumbers, lettuces, radishes and peppers, he takes pride in claiming 'the name of a Little Farmer'.<sup>473</sup> He encourages his men to lay fish traps after the manner of 'the negroes'.<sup>474</sup> By the end of May, he is able to remark 'The Hope was now Again truly become A Charming habitation', with not one man sick out of the 50 under his command, 'where Sloth, Stink Disease, and Mortality had so Lately before Swaid its destructive Sceptre'.<sup>475</sup> The model for all this is Boni's settlement at Bossy-Cray, his 'high palace on 12 stakes' built in imitation of 'the Prince of the Rebels'.<sup>476</sup> The Maroons as ancient Greeks have replaced Milton, showing him how to recreate the golden age in Suriname.

### **The Man of Sentiment**

In October 1773, Stedman prepared for his second campaign, this time on the Commewijne River, and at the beginning of Chapter 10 of the 'Narrative' he describes the circumstances of his departure from Paramaribo.<sup>477</sup> Instead of the tent boat he expected to transport him, he finds 'a greasy Yoll with a few drunken Dutch sailors' to row him upstream. With one foot in the boat, he has second thoughts, deciding he was volunteering for dangerous service and deserved better treatment, 'swearing I should not move to theyr defence till such time as I should be decently transported, should the whole Colony be on fire'. The English and Americans in the town support him, the Dutch complain a tent boat would cost '30 Shillings', a mob gathers, and a riot breaks out 'before Mr. Hardegens Tavern at the Waterside while hats, wigs, bottles and Glasses flew out at his window'.

---

<sup>473</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 493.

<sup>474</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 495-496.

<sup>475</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 498.

<sup>476</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 489.

<sup>477</sup> The following description is from 1790 'Narrative', pp. 181-183.

Despite the intervention of the magistrates, fighting continues ‘till 10 o’clock at night, when I with my friends fairly keep’d the field, having knocked down several Sailors, planters, Jews, and Overseers, and lost one of my pistols which I threw after the Rabble in my passion’. It ends with the promise of a proper boat the following morning, ‘after which we all sat down and drank away the night’.

Having slept for much of the next day, Stedman is woken by four American captains who insist – ‘independent of the threatening rupture between Great Britain and her Colonies’ – that they should have the honour of transporting him upriver and that he should refuse any boat provided by the authorities. There is much talk about their admiration for the British, and hatred for the British government, and a good deal of further drinking. After ensuring a tent boat would be available for the next stage of his journey upriver, Stedman accepts this proposal. Taking fresh leave of Joanna, he sets off at six in the evening with cheers and volleys and ‘half a dozen bowls of punch’ (all this day’s action described in a single sentence extending over 37 lines). Arriving at his interim destination, Stedman provides the sailors with a dinner of 12 roasted ducks and 36 bottles of claret (‘Being my whole Stock’), and sends them back downstream ‘as drunk as Wine or Strong Spirits could make them’. It would be a mistake to assume that Stedman, the ‘man of sentiment’ of the ‘Narrative’, had completely obliterated the picaresque hero of the pre-Suriname sections of the *Journal*.

He presents himself in other guises. As an officer and a gentleman, with no classical education and no literary pretensions, claiming that ‘truth, simple truth alone’ is his subject<sup>478</sup>. As an artist whose work was admired by none other than the ‘immortal Reynolds’ (Sir Joshua Reynolds).<sup>479</sup> As a naturalist, self-evidently missing no opportunity to describe the flora and fauna of Suriname, no matter how pressing his situation. As a satirist, who sees no reason why ‘Vice ought not to be Expos’d to the World’<sup>480</sup> – in particular the barbarities of plantation society and the follies of his commanding officers Fourgeoud and Seybough. And, of course, as a lover. Stedman is aware that this involves him in presenting diverse materials in a variety of styles. His method, he explains, is ‘to diversify the Sable Scenes of Horror, by more Cheering Sunshine of Content, And to variegate this

---

<sup>478</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 27.

<sup>479</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, pp. 10 and 392.

<sup>480</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 10.

Work in such a manner / if possible / as to make it please both the Stern Grim Philosopher, and the Youthful, the beautiful and innocent Maid.’<sup>481</sup> Later, apologising for constantly interrupting his narrative with passages of natural description, he adds ‘I am well Persuaded that While some of my Readers wish me in Greenland for these Digressions, others wish me at the Devel for dwelling at All on the Expeditions &c ... While I am well Convinced that I Cannot please All the World I Will at Least by those Varieties have a Chance to Gratify a few of every Denomination Without Exception’.<sup>482</sup>

But the consistent feature of his self-presentation in the ‘Narrative’, going some considerable way to reconciling these different guises, is his constant recourse to the vocabulary of sentiment. A website devoted to the language of eighteenth-century sensibility, maintained by the English Department at the University of Virginia lists, list twenty-four items in its ‘broad list of terms for sensibility’.<sup>483</sup> Of these, fourteen are among Stedman’s favourite words and others are close synonyms. For example, he regularly uses the following: virtue, landscape, animals, heart, sense, sympathy, honour, delicacy, horror, character, pity, education, melancholy and taste. In place of Virginia’s benevolence, we regularly find humanity and feeling; in place of madness, we find frantic and distracted and afflicted; in place of physiognomy, we find expressiveness or native grace; and in place of horror, we find dreadful. The only words in the list of terms not used regularly by Stedman are wit, humour, invention and imagination. In their place, we find his preferred insistence that ‘Truth, Simple Truth alone’ is his subject.

Tracing the use of such terms throughout the ‘Narrative’ however, takes us in too many directions at once. Plainly, they overlap at times with the vocabulary of the heroic (honour, virtue) and with the language of pastoral (innocence, taste). As applied to individuals, Joanna is sometimes frantic, Mrs Godefroy is humane, even Fourgeoud shows sense at times. But none of them are creatures of sensibility. Joanna is more frequently described in terms of her steadiness of purpose, Fourgeoud is accused of lacking feeling, while Mrs Godefroy remains a shadowy benefactor. The actual term ‘sensibility’, in practice one of Stedman’s

---

<sup>481</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 116.

<sup>482</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p.147.

<sup>483</sup> <http://www.engl.virginia.edu/~enec981/dictionary/termlist.html>

favourite words, recurs in only two contexts – as applied to himself, and as demanded of the reader.

There are important conclusions to be drawn from this, but they will be clearer when placed in context. As applied to himself, the term most frequently occurs when there arises some conflict between his feelings and the normal course of his duty or pursuit of his interests. One notable instance of this will be discussed in chapter nine, with a detailed examination of his account of the capture Boni's headquarters at Gado Sabi in September 1775, the only direct military action he experienced. His intense sympathy for the rebel maroons, expressed for example in the remarkable confession that he went into battle firing with his eyes shut to lessen the chances of hitting anybody, is summed up in the self-portrait which stands as frontispiece to the whole 'Narrative' – the dejected victor, bowed over the 'Unhappy Youth' he has killed, the caption concluding 'Twas *Your's* to fall – but *Mine* to feel the wound'.<sup>484</sup> But the conflict arises in other situations.

Both as artist and as naturalist, he is eager to collect specimens (he comments in his preface that if his animal drawings show some 'want of action', it is because most of them were dead when they were brought to him).<sup>485</sup> One of those specimens was a monkey, killed primarily for food:

Seeing me on the Side of the River in the Canoo the Creature made a Stop from Skipping after his Companions, and / being perch'd on a branch that hung over the Water / examined me with attention and the greatest Marks of Curiosity, no doubt taking me for a Giant of his own Species, while he shewed his teeth perhaps by way if laughing – chattered prodigiously – and kept dancing and shaking of the bough on which he rested with incredible strength and velocity – at this time I lay'd my Piece to my Shoulder and brought him down from the Tree plump in the Stream but may I never again be more Witness to such a Scene, the Miserable Annimal was niot dead but mortally Wounded, thus taking his Tail in both my Hands to end his torment, I swong him round and knock'd his head against the Sides of the Canoo with such a force, that I was covered all over with blood and brains; but the Poor thing still continued alive, and looking at me in the most Pitiful manner that can be conceived, I knew no other Means to end this Murder than by holding him under Water till he was drown'd, while my heart felt Seek on his account; here his dying little Eyes still

---

<sup>484</sup> 1790 'Narrative', Frontispiece, p. 3.

<sup>485</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 8.

Continued to follow me with seeming reproach till their light gradually forsook them and the wretched creature expired ...<sup>486</sup>

This is the most powerful example in Stedman's writings of that sympathy for animals we noted in the *Journal* – his farewell to his dog Milord, or his anger in Tiverton over 'a poor cow hamstrung by the infernal butchers. May God damn them'. Linking it with sympathy for the suffering of women or of plantation slaves may seem demeaning, until we reflect that it is the monkey's human features (curiosity, laughing, chattering, pitiful manner, look of reproach) that catch at his heartstrings. A central feature of cult of sensibility is sympathy for those weaker, less fortunate creatures entitled to the hero's protection.

Stedman's most emphatic use of the word occurs in his accounts of the arrangements made for Joanna's future. Shortly before his son's birth in November 1774, Stedman had been corresponding with lawyers about the status of a child born of a slave mother and had been told what he knew already, namely 'that no Money or Interest, could purchase its freedom, without the Proprietor's Consent'<sup>487</sup>. He is rescued from his melancholy by the news that planter friend called De Graav has been appointed by Joanna's absentee owner, Mr Lude of Amsterdam, as administrator of her plantation. De Graav assures him that, with regard to 'the virtuous Joanna' and to Stedman's 'laudable motive', he will act to protect their interests. Soon after, Stedman continues, 'I was surrounded by several Gentlemen and Ladies ... Some of whom pleased to call me *Tom Jones*, and others *Roderick Random* – They all indeed congratulated me on my Sensibility ...'<sup>488</sup> The scene is repeated, this time more plausibly (were the works of Fielding and Smollett really known in a Dutch colony, otherwise distinguished by its sensuous brutality?) when Stedman succeeds in obtaining Johnny's manumission as a reward for his services to the colony. Rather than dwell on the irony of this, (his services being, of course, his campaigns against other slaves) he draws the contrast between himself and 'Parents of my acquaintance' who left 'near 40 beautiful boys and Girls' to be raised in slavery, 'many of Whom without being so much as once enquired After.'<sup>489</sup>

---

<sup>486</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 141.

<sup>487</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 291.

<sup>488</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 291.

<sup>489</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 599.

This, of course, is dangerous territory. There was, on the face of it, little to distinguish Stedman from the other European men who had taken slave girls as their concubines in full knowledge of the consequences. In some ways, he was more open to reproach, given that his regiment was bound to be withdrawn sooner or later – by contrast, say, to ‘brother-in-law’ De La Mar who fathered twenty slave children but remained in the colony to his death. Stedman’s claim to being different was first his love for Joanna, which we have no reason to question, and second his willingness to accept responsibility for his son (his pride in, and deep affection for Johnny shine through the Tiverton pages of his *Journal*). But this time, he acknowledges his actions caused controversy. While ‘the well thinking few highly Applauded my Sensibility / many not only blamed me but even publicly derided me from my Paternal Affection which was Call’d a whim, a Weakness &c. &c.’<sup>490</sup> He backs up his actions by appointing a guardian and an executor, collecting his sheep and poultry (from the L’Esperance days) under their care, fighting yet another duel, and trying to get Johnny baptised. Significantly, the priest refuses on the grounds that Stedman would not be around to supervise his son’s ‘Christian education’.<sup>491</sup>

I am straying on to moral grounds, the grounds on which writers from Goldsmith to Jane Austen would find ‘sensibility’ a highly dubious virtue. But one can appreciate how Stedman found in the vocabulary of sensibility a way to express what made him *different* in Suriname. For despite the derision of some of the planters, with their implied charge of hypocrisy, Stedman *was* different – a soldier with a conscience, an artist open to the tropical landscape, a lover where sexual exploitation was the norm. The literature of sensibility, from Thomson’s *The Seasons* to the poetry of the Della Crusicans, provided him with an idiom, largely absent from the *Journal*, by means of which to resolve the problem of placing himself, as narrator, in relation to the tale he had to tell. For once again, as with the heroic and the pastoral, the stance of simple soldier, detached, scientific observer, in short of a Captain Cook in Suriname, failed him in key respects. Captain Cook did not fall in love with a Tahitan girl, or father a son born into slavery, or fight in an unjust cause. Stedman was both drawn deeply into, and profoundly separated from the society in which he played out the most important

---

<sup>490</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 599.

<sup>491</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 600.

events of his life. Like the heroic and the pastoral, 'sensibility', for all its moral ambiguity, served an essential literary purpose.

Which is why Stedman's final appeal is to the sensibility of his readers. In his splendidly rumbustious Preface, where he successively pleads 'Guilty' to want of style, orthography and order, to quoting superfluously, to ignoring Linnean classifications, to 'Bombast', and to dwelling on Joanna who 'deserves no place at all in this Narrative - Guilty', he takes his stand on 'sincerity'.<sup>492</sup> He uses the word with no sense that it is contradicted by his simultaneous emphasis on the 'Truth, Simple Truth' of his account, or on his claims to scientific exactitude on the model of 'the immortal Captn. Cook'. I have been speaking of his employment of the mid-eighteenth century neo-classical modes of the pastoral and the heroic but he is thoroughly 'romantic' in his insistence on the merging of fact with feeling where experience is the foundation of truth. 'Honestly and candidly', he says, he will set forth 'incontravertable facts', in appealing to the readers' 'faith' in the 'feelings of an officer'. The 'Narrative' is, in fact, a thoroughly 1790's book in its denial of any pretensions to literary merit. 'So little do I indeed pretend to be a writer alamode that I feel myself very much at a loss how to give this preface a More proper Conclusion than it had a Beginning'.<sup>493</sup> One hears the same anti-literary affectation in other books put out by Joseph Johnson – in Tom Paine, for example, or Mary Wolstonecraft. More urgent matters are at stake than fine metaphor or well-turned cadences. The 'Defects & Blunders' are matters that 'plain faith in the Annex'd narrative must help wipe away', given the 'Dangers and Distresses I have surmounted'. As for any 'bombast', well, that 'must stop the holes'.<sup>494</sup>

Stedman offers himself, in short, as a personality. 'But Hark – I hear He Ladies say – Good Lord what a strange man is this we have got to deal with?' He concludes in the confidence that their 'enlighten'd understanding & tender Sensibility' ...

Cannot but prompt me to think that one day when we shall be better Acquainted, you will not only shake off that prepossession which a Hundred to one my unaccountable stile has induc'd you for the present to take up against me – but at intervals throw down the book -

---

<sup>492</sup> This and the quotations that follow are from the 1790 'Narrative', pp. 7-11.

<sup>493</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 9.

<sup>494</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 8.

& with a Sigh exclaim in the language of Eugenious – Alas poor Stedman'.<sup>495</sup>

The reference is to Eugenius in Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760), who quotes Hamlet in mourning the death of his friend Yorick.<sup>496</sup> After numerous appeals to the sensibility of his readers, in describing his sufferings in the forests of Suriname, or on the verge of battle, or at the hands of Fourgeoud, Stedman returns to Sterne. In *A Sentimental Journal* (1768) (or possibly in volume 9 of *Tristram Shandy*, published 1767) he finds a model for Joanna's grief at his departure in the figure of 'the poor luckless maiden' Maria whose 'tears trickled down her cheeks' at her abandonment.<sup>497</sup> The 'Narrative' ends with a farewell to 'my Patient Friends who have been pleased to peruse this Narrative of my Sufferings with any Degree of Sensibility ... and whose good nature is ready to forgive the inaccuracies annex to the pen & pencil of a Soldier debar'd from his youth from a Classical Education'.<sup>498</sup>

The invocation of Sterne reminds us of the immense popularity of literature of sentiment from the mid-eighteenth century onwards (as instanced in Lady Bradshage's letter, quoted in my chapter 3), and of the new relationship between author and audience that it implied. Whereas in English neo-classical criticism from Sidney to Dr Johnson, the aim of poetry had been to instruct and delight, the literature of sentiment begins the process, advanced by romanticism, of involving the audience in the psychological processes of literary production. Readers are no longer required to discriminate; they are required to *feel*, the sufferings of the artist constituting a sufficient theme. I am not suggesting that Stedman's contribution to this is anything but reactive. He picks up from James Thompson and Lawrence Sterne and the Della Cruscans something that (despite his claim not to be writing 'alamode') is in literary fashion, and turns it to his own account. It is not until the criticism of Coleridge that sensibility becomes imagination, and English romanticism finds a sophisticated theorist. But in following the current mode, Stedman found a more adequate idiom of self-presentation than Smollett had supplied him with for the early chapters of his *Journal*.

---

<sup>495</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 11.

<sup>496</sup> Lawrence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (Penguin Classics, 1967), p. 60.

<sup>497</sup> Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (Penguin Classics, 1967) pp. 136-140.

<sup>498</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 626.

To the Maroons as Heroes, and Joanna as the embodiment of Pastoral, he added the Narrator as a Man of Sentiment, thus completing his twelve-year search for an adequate style. No sooner had he dispatched his manuscript to Joseph Johnson in February 1791 than the story passed into other hands and became subject to other ways of representing it. Those alternative representations are the theme of my subsequent chapters, beginning with the engravings and writings of William Blake.

## Chapter Six

### Meeting Blake

It was David Erdman in his *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1954) who first wrote of the link between Stedman and William Blake.<sup>499</sup> Specifically, he explored the connection between the romance with Joanna and Blake's 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' (1793). Erdman's book is a classic of Blake scholarship. In 1954, however, the only evidence of a link with Stedman was the fact that Blake had engraved sixteen plates for the 1796 *Narrative*. Knowing nothing of the *Journal* (1962), and nothing of the 1790 'Narrative' (1988), he naturally assumed like everyone else that the 1796 text represented Stedman's considered opinions. The question that arises is whether Erdman's arguments and conclusions are substantially affected by the information that has become available since he wrote.

The bulk of this new information comes from the *Journal*, and it begins with Stedman's entry for December 1, 1791:

About this time I received about 40 engravings from London, some well, some very ill ... About this time I begin to use a glass as my eyes are spoilt with too much writing and drawing, for my Surinam History. I wrote to the engraver Blake to thank him twice for his excellent work, but never received any answer.<sup>500</sup>

This obviously a summary of recent activity, presumably covering the period since November 2, when he returned from a four month visit to Scotland. His publisher Johnson had been in possession of Stedman's manuscript since the previous February, and had begun the process of publication by putting out plates to professional engravers.<sup>501</sup> Because the engravers worked independently, Johnson's practice was to register the plates as 'published' in order to protect his copyright, though they were not, of course, put on open sale. As a consequence we know which of the plates Stedman received on 1 December. There were 48 of them, all printed as 'published' that same day. Most of them portray flora and fauna, together with maps and vistas, while a few illustrate indigenous weapons

---

<sup>499</sup> David Erdman, Chapter 10, 'Visions of the Daughters' in *Blake: Prophet Against Empire: a Poet's Interpretation of the History of his own Times* (Princeton, 1954), pp. 209-223.

<sup>500</sup> *Journal*, p. 336.

<sup>501</sup> *Journal*, p. 332 (8 Feb., 1791).

and musical instruments. Eleven of them are signed, by such known names as T. Conder, Inigo Barlow, and Anker Smith. The remaining 37 are unsigned. Tantalisingly, none of these plates bears Blake's signature. The thirteen plates which are signed by him (plus 3 others unsigned, but normally attributed to him) were registered by Johnson on December 1, 1792, December 2, 1793 and December 1, 1794.

This suggests is that, in addition to the 16 plates normally attributed to him, several of the 37 unsigned plates must also have been engraved by Blake. Somehow, either because they were marked as such, or because he recognised their quality and made enquiries, Stedman knew which plates these were. It is very tempting to try and identify them, but two difficulties intervene. The first is that Blake, as a professional engraver, was perfectly capable of producing work indistinguishable from that of his journeymen colleagues. Peter Ackroyd goes so far as to remark that Blake's bread-and-butters engravings are not 'in any degree remarkable' ('there is nothing so interesting as his illustrations for Stedman's *Narrative*').<sup>502</sup> Plate 52, for example, (registered December 2, 1793) depicting 'Limes, Capsicum, Mamee Apple &c.', bears his signature but no other distinctive signs. The groundnut is finely drawn, but the capsicum looks withered (had Blake ever seen one?), and the other fruits are uninteresting. One would never have taken this for Blake's work had he not signed it.

The second difficulty is that Blake already had his imitators. The most interesting of the 48 plates dispatched to Stedman in December 1791 are undoubtedly the following:

- no. 12 'The Toucan and the Fly Catcher'
- no. 21 'The Blue and Yellow and the Amazon Macaw'
- no. 45 'The Anamoe and Green Parrots of Guiana'
- no. 65 'The Humming Bird, with its nest and Grass Sparrow'
- no. 67 'The Yellow Woodpecker and Woodo Louso Foulo'
- no. 75 'The Spoon Bill & the Jabiru of Guiana'.

In each case, the elegance and animation of the composition, together with such details as the engraving of the tree trunks and the grass and the turbulence of the sky, are very similar to plates 18 and 42 (from 1793) depicting 'The Mecoo and the Kishee Kishee Monkies' and 'The Qwuato and Saccawinkee Monkies'. Blake

---

<sup>502</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (Vintage, 1999), p. 212.

was fascinated by birds, and especially by tropical birds such as the bird of paradise on the title page of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794). In printing his poems he regularly used of images of small birds, along with vines and tendrils, to reinforce the meanings of particular words. It is not difficult to imagine him seizing the opportunity to engrave Stedman's watercolours of birds from Suriname. However, one of these bird representations, no. 27 'The Agamy and Powesse or Wild Turkey', containing very similar details, is signed by Barlow, and the others could well be his work too.

The fact remains that Stedman knew which was Blake's work, and was enough of an artist himself to spot their merit and to congratulate him. It is worth noting that Stedman understood the art of engraving: in December 1784, he had designed, engraved and distributed at his own expense a 'most striking likeness' of the newly disgraced Duke of Brunswick (see chapter seven).<sup>503</sup> Was it a direct consequence that, of the remaining 32 plates engraved over the next three years, no less than 16 were allocated by Johnson to Blake? The correspondence that might have proved the point is lost. But if this is indeed what occurred, it would illustrate something I hope to demonstrate in a moment, namely, that Blake was increasingly drawn into the production of the 1796 *Narrative*.

The first recorded meeting with Blake is recorded as 'Call on Mr Johnson and Blake' on June 21, 1794, but it is likely that they had met earlier.<sup>504</sup> One possibility is that they may have met before Stedman's letter of December 1791. Some time prior to the completion of manuscript of the 'Narrative', several of Stedman's paintings (including the originals of plates 4, 8, 53 and 61) were exhibited in London and were praised by Sir Joshua Reynolds as 'Verry Expressive, And upon the whole an Excellent Performance – While it was also Highly Approved of by Messrs Cossway, Rigaud, Cross, Humphreys, and many others -'.<sup>505</sup> Richard Cosway was a well-known miniaturist while John Francis Rigaud and Ozias Humphrey were members of Sir Joshua Reynolds' Royal Academy. Blake had been Reynold's

---

<sup>503</sup> *Journal*, p.247 (24 Dec., 1784).

<sup>504</sup> *Journal*, p. 352.

<sup>505</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 392.

student, and was closely associated with Cosway and Humphrey. It is possible that Blake, too, saw these watercolours and that Stedman's repeated letter renewed an existing acquaintance.

There are gaps in the *Journal* for June 16 – November 2, 1791, for June 26 – October 9 1793 (when Stedman visited Holland, passing through London), and for January 1 – May 21 1794. It seems unlikely that, having already corresponded with Blake, and being evidently eager for a meeting, he would have passed through London without trying to make contact. There is also an intriguing reference in his *Journal* summary of the year 1793 to the arrest in France of 'Miss Wollstonecraft and Miss Williams, yet two of the most steady democrats in France'.<sup>506</sup> Miss Williams is Helen Maria Williams, arrested along with Tom Paine in the anti-Girondist sweep of 9-10 October, 1793, and subsequently author of *Memories of the Reign of Robespierre* (1795). Miss Wollstonecraft is, of course, Mary Wollstonecraft whose *Vindication of the Rights of Women* Johnson had published in 1792 (and who, in fact, avoided arrest that October night through the astuteness of Imlay who, over-riding all her principled protests, had registered her as his wife and an American citizen). But how did Stedman learn of these events? Was it because as early as 1793 he was already attending Johnson's famous dinners? When he next refers to Mary Wollstonecraft in June 1795 ('Mrs [sic] Wollstonecraft robb'd of 3,000 pounds sterling in France'), he has plainly dined out for his information.<sup>507</sup>

1793 was also the year in which Blake did the bulk of his work on the plates, 'publishing' 12 of them on December 2. He had already completed in 1792 the tenderly erotic colour plate 'Europe supported by Africa and America', which forms the *finis page*, together with no. 11 'A Negroe Hanged Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows', and no. 68 'Family of Negroe Slaves from Loango'. Six of the plates engraved in 1793 (also the year of Blake's poem 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion') maintain and develop this concern with Negroes and slavery, while others include the wonderfully vivid representations of the Aboma Snake (no.19) and of different types of monkeys (nos. 18 and 42). It would, to repeat the point, be surprising if, passing through London that summer, on his way to and from Holland, Stedman failed to pay his respects.

---

<sup>506</sup> *Journal*, p. 344 (n. d.).

<sup>507</sup> *Journal*, p. 387 (composite entry for 24 June, 1795).

Once contact had been established, however, the friendship between the two men developed rapidly, and throughout the whole tortuous process of publishing the 1796 *Narrative* Blake seems to have been the one person with whom Stedman remained on consistently good terms. These events belong to the chapter that follows this, but it is worth collating the relevant entries for the light they throw on Blake's role in events.<sup>508</sup>

Nov. 7, 1794: Send a fresh drawing of myself to Mr. Bartolozzi, for frontispiece.

Dec. 30: My last print came from London, by Bartolozzi, in all 82.

May 25, 1795: At *Saracen's Head*, London. Twelve chapters printed and marred.

June 5: I force Bartolozzi to return my plates ... then take home my spoilt manuscript, and repair all plates.

June 9: Gave a blue sugar cruse to Mrs Blake ... Dined Palmer, Blake, Johnson, Rigaud and Bartolozzi.

June 24 following: On Midsummer day receive the first volume of my book quite marr'd, oaths and sermons inserted &c. ... Gave oil portrait to Mr Blake ... Din'd at Blake's ... My book marr'd entirely. Am put to the most extreme trouble and expense ... Bawdy oaths, lies and preachings in my unhappy book ... A hot quarrel with Johnson ... I reconcile Johnson and cancel best part of first volume ... Dined Johnson's twice lately ... I visit Mr Blake for 3 days, who undertakes to do business for me when I am not in London. I leave him all my papers ... D-mn Bartolozzi. He goes away ... Johnson uncivil all along ... Two days at Blake's.

Sept, 1795; Saw Johnson. From his w—an insolent epistle ... Blake was mobb'd and robb'd.

Dec. 18: Send a goose to Johnson and one to Blake ... Johnson sends me a blurred index – such as, the book good for nothing.

As we shall see later, there is more in similar vein.

What is interesting about the above entries is that while quarrelling violently and repeatedly with his publisher Johnson and at least twice with Francisco Bartolozzi, at that time the better known (and better paid) of the two engravers, Stedman remained on excellent terms with Blake. Stedman was a notoriously difficult house guest (I omitted one of the June 24 entries, viz, 'I kick the landlady of the *Saracen's Head*'),<sup>509</sup> but he stayed at Blake's on at least two occasions and dined there regularly. There was even space in the relationship for Stedman to be critical of Blake's work. In his 'Directions for the Plates' included with the

---

<sup>508</sup> The following *Journal* entries occur between pp. 361 and 392.

<sup>509</sup> *Journal*, p. 389.

manuscript of the 1790 'Narrative', eight of those Blake had engraved in 1792 and 1793 are marked in pencil 'to correct'.<sup>510</sup> These are no. 7 'A Coromantyn Free Negroe or Ranger Armed', no. 25 'Sculs', no. 35 'The Flagellation of a Samboe Female Slave', no. 49 'A Surinam Planter in his morning dress', no. 68 'family of Negroe Slaves from Loango', no. 76 'The Celebrated Gramman Quacy', and no. 80 'Europe supported by Africa and America'. Most important of all, we are told Blake 'undertakes to do business for me when I am not in London. I leave him all my papers'. Stedman's business at this time was partly military (he was restored to full pay on June 24, with the final settlement of the affairs of the Scots Brigade), but it is hard to imagine Blake playing any part in this negotiation. Stedman's other, and principal business, was the production of his book – the supervising the text and the plates, arranging for the dedication, and finalising the list of subscribers. The latter could be done, and was done, back home in Tiverton. The remainder seems to have been left to Blake, the *Journal* mentioning fifteen letters to Blake over the first five months of 1796.<sup>511</sup> The conclusion must be that Blake played a part in the production of the 1796 *Narrative* additional to his work on the plates. In effect, Blake saw the book through the press, ensuring that Stedman's final wishes were respected. Some of the consequences of this conclusion will be discussed in chapter seven.

### **Blake's 'Creative Transformations'?**

The real significance of the passages just quoted from Stedman's *Journal* is the light they throw on the work of Blake, that incomparably greater writer and artist. Three areas need to be explored. First is the relationship between Stedman's original sketches and watercolours and Blake's engravings for the 1796 *Narrative*. Second is the influence of those engravings on Blake's own illuminated manuscripts. Third is the use Blake makes of what he learned of Stedman's experiences – perhaps through conversation, perhaps through access to the manuscript of the 'Journal' in Johnson's office – in his poetry.

By the time he engraved the first of Stedman's plates in 1791, Blake was already involved in the Abolition controversy. As was described in chapter two, the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade had been founded in

---

<sup>510</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', note 38, p. XCII.

<sup>511</sup> *Journal*, p. 395 (n.d.).

1787. Within a year, John Newton, Thomas Clarkson, Hannah More and Ann Yearsley had published tracts and poems supporting abolition, and a mass petition had been launched in Manchester. Significantly, also in 1788, Blake had invented his new method of 'relief etching', and legislation was passed forbidding the employment of children under the age of eight years as chimney sweepers: the act noted children as young as four were being sold by their parents to the trade.<sup>512</sup> Before his first contact with Stedman, the enslavement of children (both white and black) had found its way into two of the most rapturous and disturbing poems in Blake's 'Songs of Innocence' (1789).

'The Chimney Sweeper' and 'The Little Black Boy' are lyrical monologues by children who poised on the very edge of experience.<sup>513</sup> Unlike most of the other poems in the volume, celebrating innocence in a language largely 'innocent' of irony or subversive meanings, these boys are dimly aware there is something wrong the society into which they have been born. The little black boy already knows he is 'black, as if bereav'd of light', while the chimney sweep reports on the practices of his profession – shaving the sweeper's hair, for example, so it won't catch fire - in a manner teetering on the very brink of knowledge. For all their apparent simplicity, these are two of the most difficult poems to read in the English language, for the challenge Blake throws down to his readers is to look beyond the cruel circumstances of the two children and learn from their still enduring innocence. We are asked to overcome our adult sense of irony, of the dreadful gap between the words the children employ and the world they are about to enter. As Blake instructs us in 'Holy Thursday', another of these on-the-verge poems, 'Then cherish pity; lest you drive an angel from your door'.<sup>514</sup>

'The Little Black Boy' was one of the few poems of Blake's known during his lifetime, and it became both in Britain and America one of the most popular texts of the abolition debate. Some readers, beginning with S. Foster Damon's study of 1924, have found the poem sentimental and patronising and, in the closing lines, offensive in its assumption that the little black boy's servitude will

---

<sup>512</sup> Aspinall and Smith (eds), *English Historical Documents, Vol. XI 1783-1832*, p. 742, Doc. 484: 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'Report of the Committee of the House of Commons on the petition against the employment of boys in sweeping chimneys', 23 June 1817.

<sup>513</sup> I am using the texts from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul 1789 – 1794 The Author & Printer W. Blake*, ed. Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford University Press, 1970), Plates 9-10 and 12.

<sup>514</sup> Blake, *Songs*, Plate 19.

be perpetuated in heaven.<sup>515</sup> Torn from its context in the heyday of the slave trade, it has become a misunderstood and over-analysed poem, and I would like to prelude my discussion of Stedman's impact on Blake by discussing an example of Blake's handling of the issue of slavery before the two men met.

### **The Little Black Boy**

My mother bore me in the southern wild  
And I am black, but O! my soul is white,  
White as an angel is the English child:  
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree  
And sitting down before the heat of day,  
She took me on her lap and kissed me,  
And pointing to the east began to say:

Look on the rising sun: there God does live  
And gives his light, and gives his heat away,  
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive  
Comfort in morning, joy in the noon day.

And we are put on earth a little space  
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,  
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face  
Is but a cloud and like a shady grove.

For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear  
The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice,  
Saying: come out from the grove my love & care,  
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.

Thus did my mother say and kissed me.  
And thus I say to little English boy.  
When I from black and he from white cloud free,  
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy:

Ill shade him from the heat till he can bear,  
To lean in joy upon our fathers knee.  
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,  
And be like him and he will then love me.

The poem begins with a problem, the little black boy's awareness of his difference. He was born far away in 'the southern wild' and, unlike the angelic

---

<sup>515</sup> For a full discussion, see Lisa Kozlowski, 'The Little Black Boy' (December, 1995) on website <http://virtual.park.uga.edu/wblake/SONGS/9/9koxlows.bib.html>

English child, his skin is funereally black. Already, he is protesting ('but O! my soul is white'), but his mother teaches him another response.

Her problem is that of any parent rearing children in an unjust society. How long is the child's innocence to be protected? How soon should he be admitted to an adult awareness of cruelty and exploitation? The little black boy already has some intimation that slavery is the destiny of thousands who resemble him. But for his mother, Blake's creation, there is in fact no problem. Innocence, for Blake, is not a negative quality, an absence of experience. Innocence is a faculty, a possession to be cherished. It is the source of vision and of love. Experience, in the world of the Fall, is loss. So the mother's task is to maintain her child's capacity for vision by offering him a vision of himself which both acknowledges and transcends his intimation of difference.

She begins where they are both sitting, in the shade of a tree before the day's furnace has reached its peak. She points to the sun, and identifies as God's habitation. God is the source of heat and light and life, of all comfort and all joy, but the beams of love are too strong for humans to bear, and they need shade. The black skins of black people are that shade:

And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face  
Is but a cloud and like a shady grove.

The day will come when 'our souls have learn'd the heat to bear' and the shade will be no longer necessary. The 'cloud will vanish', and God will summon his lambs from the shady grove, and all will dance around his golden tent. So the mother argues and her tale stops there. But the little black boy draws his own conclusion – that the little white boy is ill-equipped to bear the beams of love emanating from God's throne, and that he will need protecting until he is able 'To lean in joy upon our Father's knee'. The concluding two lines, so far from perpetuating the little black boy's servitude, show him assisting the little white boy in his approach to God. As the illuminated engraving and the obvious sense of the words each emphasise, it is the little black boy who makes the paternalistic gesture of stroking the little white boy's hair, assisting him towards a vision of human equality.

But where did Blake derive this image of black people being closer to the sun, and therefore to the source of light and heat and love and comfort and joy? The answer is, from the pro- and anti-slavery propaganda of the Abolition debate.

Two issues were indirectly addressed by Blake's imagery. The first was the contention that the West Indian plantations could be run profitably only with African labour. White indentured servants had been tried in Barbados, including Cornishmen exiled there after the failed Monmouth rebellion of 1685, and French engagés had been taken to San Domingo in the 1730s.<sup>516</sup> But though they tended to cost only half the price of a slave from Africa,<sup>517</sup> they could not survive the climate and, like the Amerindians before them, could not endure the rigours of plantation labour. Slaves from Africa were the planters' answer, better adapted to the heat of the Caribbean sun. Though Africans, too, died in great numbers and normally died young, the claim that they bore the climate better was justified. The jump from this pragmatic assertion to the claim that slavery itself was justified and that abolition would bring ruin to the West Indies omitted several intervening stages of argument. But in the latter quarter of the eighteenth century, the argument that there was no substitute for Black, sun-inured labour, given the seventy million pounds sterling investment involved, proved the planters' strongest card.<sup>518</sup> Blake's claim that the Little Black Boy is better able to bear 'the beams of love' takes up and subverts this argument.

But it also addresses a larger argument about the role of climate in creating difference between the races of mankind. Perhaps the oldest version of this was the Phaethon myth, the Greek tale about Apollo's son who borrowed his father's sun-chariot but, frightened by the signs of the Zodiac, steered the sun too close to the earth, creating drought and desert and scorching the black people of Ethiopia. The myth is potentially racist, given its implication that Black people were created by mistake. But as deployed from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Camões' *The Lusíads*, it seemed – and seems – innocent of racist overtones.<sup>519</sup> It was Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) which first applied the theory of climate to explain racial inferiority. "There are countries," he writes, "where the excess of

---

<sup>516</sup> Blackburn *New World Slavery*, pp. 230, 293, & 297-8.

<sup>517</sup> Blackburn *New World Slavery*, p. 241,

<sup>518</sup> Speeches of Lord Penrhyn and Mr Cruger, Debates in the House of Commons on the Slave Trade, 11 and 12 May 1789 in Aspinall and Smith (eds.), *English Historical Documents Vol. XI 1783-1832*, Doc. 507, pp. 801-802.

heat enervates the body, and renders men so slothful and dispirited, that ... slavery is there more reconcilable to reason.”<sup>520</sup> Adopted by abolition debate, the climate theory was deployed by both sides – as evidence that all men share a common humanity, difference being merely a matter of climate, and as evidence that God had used climate as His instrument to separate the races. Thus, we find Thomas Clarkson arguing that a black skin is no more than a ‘universal freckle’, blackness being ‘occasioned by the rays of the sun striking forcibly and universally on the *mucous substance* of the body, and drying the accumulating fluid’.<sup>521</sup> He takes the example of Jews, forbidden by their religion to intermarry, yet ‘the *English Jew* is white, the *Portuguese* swarthy, the *Armenian* olive and the *Arabian* copper’, differences in appearance being caused by ‘a combination of those qualities, which we call *climate*’.<sup>522</sup> Quoting no less an authority that the Abbé Raynal, author of *The History of the Two Indies*, he goes so far as to claim that children born of black parents in cold climates become progressively whiter.<sup>523</sup> In sharp contrast, Edward Long, probably the most obnoxious of the pro-slavery propagandists, whose *History of Jamaica* appeared in 1774, argued unambiguously that Blacks were ‘a different species’,<sup>524</sup> above the orang-outang but far below Europeans in the scale of nature:

As their persons are thus naturally deformed ... their minds are equally incapable of strong exertions. The climate seems to relax their mental powers still more than those of the body; they are, therefore, in general, found to be stupid, indolent, and mischievous.<sup>525</sup>

It is a short step from the language of this to the mother sitting with the Little Black Boy under an African tree and using images of sun and shade to illustrate her argument. But the jump in meaning could not be greater. What the mother teaches is the equality of the races before God. What the Black boy concludes, from this version of the climate argument, is that the White boy is inferior and needs his benign protection until he is able to share equally in God’s love.

---

<sup>519</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 755 fol., and Cameos, *The Lusíads*, I, 46 among other refs.

<sup>520</sup> Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* trans. Thomas Nugent (Cincinnati, 1873), I, p. 276.

<sup>521</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (Philadelphia, 1786), p. 131.

<sup>522</sup> Clarkson, *Essay*, p. 129.

<sup>523</sup> Clarkson, *Essay*, p.127, quoting Abbé Raynal, *The History of the Two Indies*, trans. Justamond, (1788), Vol. 5, p. 193.

<sup>524</sup> Edward Long, *History of Jamaica* (1774), quoted in Sypher, *Guinea’s Captive Kings* p. 40-41.

<sup>525</sup> Long, *Jamaica* quoted in Sypher, *Guinea’s Captive Kings* p. 55.

Two conclusions suggest themselves, appropriate to the concerns of this chapter. First, that Blake was thoroughly versed in the literature of the slave trade long before his encounter with Stedman's manuscript. Secondly, that he was capable of such a degree of creative transformation that 'The Little Black Boy' quickly soared free of its sordid context, as the link between its imagery and the language of figures like Edward Long was forgotten. With the 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' (1793), Blake would enact a similar transformation of Stedman's own story.

### **Stedman's Art**

The relationship between Stedman's drawings and watercolours and Blake's engravings for the 1796 *Narrative* has been much debated. However, given that none of the originals from which Blake worked has survived, any conclusions must be tentative. In a letter written in 1799, Blake complained that 'to engrave after another painter is infinitely more laborious than to engrave one's own inventions', though he added 'I have no objection to engraving after another artist. Engraving is the profession I was apprenticed to.'<sup>526</sup> It is plain he felt constrained to respect the style of the drawings and watercolours from which he was working.

It is also clear that Stedman was a far from negligible artist. We have the evidence of his *Journal* that, at the age of ten, his father 'discover'd in me a genius for painting, which he resolved to cultivate', sending him to Scotland for the purpose.<sup>527</sup> On his return to Holland the following year, he records:

The next thing was, in what manner to dispose of me for my good and future benefit, when my talents for drawing were so universally admired, that my parents were advised not to neglect them: but to encourage me, since, in that line, it was generally thought, I would make a figure by proper cultivation, not inferior even to Rubens or Vandyck.

This was the real and general opinion. I embraced the proposal of becoming a painter, and masters were chosen at Bergen op Zoom, to instruct me in first beginnings, but which I all peremptory refused from merely a motive of pride, scorning to be instructed by block-heads in their profession which I, though a boy, discover'd and proved them to be.

---

<sup>526</sup> Blake to Dr Trusler, 23 Aug., 1799 in Michael Mason (ed.), *The Oxford Authors: William Blake* (OUP, 1988), p. 61.

<sup>527</sup> *Journal*, p. 9 (n.d.).

What then, I proposed to be sent to Italy or Antwerp, where I was convinced I might learn the art in full perfection.

But no! from the danger of my again being made a Papist, and some other pecuniary reason, this was refused me, and from which moment I refused to be a painter.<sup>528</sup>

We have already noted Stedman's own evidence that an exhibition of the originals of several of the plates was praised by Sir Joshua Reynolds, together with Richard Cosway, John Francis Rigaud and Ozias Humphrey.

Thirdly, there are constant references in the *Journal* to his activities as a painter, including sketches, watercolours and portraits, including the 'oil portrait' mentioned in the composite entry for 24 June 1795, and which the context suggests may have been a portrait of Blake himself. Several of his planter friends in Suriname, including Mr Goetzee and Mrs Godefroy, both of whom had been kind to Joanna, were rewarded before his departure with portraits and watercolours of their various plantations.<sup>529</sup> There is even a reference in the 1790 'Narrative' to '18 Figures in Wax' presented in September 1777 to 'His Serene Highness' the Prince of Orange, representing 'the free *Indians of Guiana* & negroes *slaves of Surinam* in different occupations on an Island Supported by a Crystal Mirror, & Ornamented with Solid Gold'.<sup>530</sup> Equally intriguing is a *Journal* reference (22 August, 1789) to his employment at Tiverton of a young woman called Betty Moon 'to serve as anatomator for painting'.<sup>531</sup> The word 'anatomator' does not occur in the Oxford English Dictionary, but it presumably means artist's model – an extraordinary thing for him to have organised in a small Devonshire town at the period. There can be little doubt that Stedman regarded himself as far more of an artist than a writer, and that his contemporaries concurred in this opinion.

Finally, we have the evidence accumulated by the heroic and meticulous researches of Richard and Sally Price, who have tracked down 15 of Stedman's original drawings and paintings.<sup>532</sup> Only two of these were engraved for the 1796 *Narrative*, and neither of them by Blake. Seven, belonging to Stedman's heirs, are watercolours, of various ships at sea. Of these, four are pen-and-ink sketches of

---

<sup>528</sup> *Journal*, p. 20 (n.d.).

<sup>529</sup> *Journal*, pp. 185-186 and 189 (13 Sept., 26 Sept., and 9 Nov., 1776).

<sup>530</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 620.

<sup>531</sup> *Journal*, p. 327.

<sup>532</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', note 35, pp. LXXXIX-XCII.

the different houses he built in Suriname, including the house at L'Esperance. They were reproduced in the *Journal*, but have since disappeared. The remaining two are a watercolour of a horse and groom, probably depicting his 'black boy Qwaacoo' and dating from 1777, and a portrait of the Duke of Brunswick, Stedman's commander for over twenty years, which was engraved for public sale in 1784.<sup>533</sup> As the Prices acknowledge, with admirable restraint given the industry and scope of their research over three continents, these 'do not permit a full assessment of his artistic skills'.<sup>534</sup>

The two that were engraved for the 1796 *Narrative*, however, are striking for the contrast between Stedman's and the engraver's (Inigo Barlow's) representations. Half-plate 73 (top), entitled 'Manner of Sleeping &c. in the Forest', was based on an original watercolour dated 1776 and measuring 14.6 by 10.5 cms. As the Prices remark, Stedman's painting is far superior both artistically and ethnographically to the published engraving (see fig XX).<sup>535</sup> To make the engraving a half-plate, Barlow has shifted the perspective from vertical to horizontal. Stedman's vivid depiction of the Amazonian rainforest, with its different layers of vegetation, is converted to an open riverbank scene with one shade tree. The cooking fire with its drying clothes has been shifted from under Stedman's hammock, where it served to ward off mosquitoes, to the right of the scene where the smoke will not intrude on his comfort, and the cooking pot has acquired a distinctly English shape. Two of the slaves have been eliminated, while the African squatting posture of a third has been changed to a sitting position. There are other, minor changes - Stedman's pipe, his parrots, his boxes, his powder pouch and wallet, the roughness of the thatch all disappear. Their cumulative effect is to transform the scene from a soldier's, overnight camp into something more akin to a gentleman's retreat. Similarly, half-plate 73 (bottom), also engraved by Barlow, has turned Stedman's rough sketch of the house at L'Esperance into an elegant thatched cottage Norfolk-style (though it is fair to add Barlow may have worked from a watercolour by Stedman based on the sketch which appears in the *Journal*).<sup>536</sup>

---

<sup>533</sup> See chapter seven for an account.

<sup>534</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', p. XLIII.

<sup>535</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', p. XLVI.

<sup>536</sup> *Journal*, p. 194 (n.d.) and 1790 'Narrative', Plate 73 (bottom), p. 566.

If Inigo Barlow's two engravings for Plate 73 reveal how much of Stedman's artistry was forfeited in the process of reproduction, there are two other pieces of evidence which throw some light on how Blake may have contributed to the engraving of Stedman's sketches and paintings. The first is an example discussed by Robert Essick of an engraving by Blake for a volume entitled *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island* (1793). The book included a sketch of an Aboriginal family of New South Wales, drawn by Governor King. Blake's version takes the original sketch as raw material for delightful engraving, in which the family has been transformed (in Essick's words) from 'poor and naked aborigines into noble savages'. The figures, which were bunched together in King's drawing, are repositioned so that, which they remain very obviously a family group, they are also separate individuals. The father strides ahead purposefully, his spear and cutlass at the ready. The mother is carrying a sling and a trap containing a fish, details added by Blake, while on her shoulders her child is grinning mischievously as he hangs on to her thick hair. Behind strides a youth, the very image of his father and hence binding the group together. In contrast to the 'simplified caricatures' of Governor King's sketch, each of the faces shows an intelligent alertness.<sup>537</sup>

The trouble with this argument is that, while it accords well with the intense dignity and humanity of Blake's engravings of slaves in the 1796 *Narrative*, it assumes that Stedman was no better an artist than Governor Smith and that any truly admirable feature of the engravings represents Blake's contribution. The example demonstrates that Blake was capable of creative transformations. It doesn't prove that such transformations were necessary in Stedman's case. In the final resort, we know only that Stedman thought he was a better artist than author, that his paintings were admired by knowledgeable contemporaries, and – perhaps the accolade which matters – that Blake took his work seriously and, despite their deep political differences, became his friend.

### **Stedman's influence on Blake**

The influence of Stedman's watercolours on Blake's writings and illuminated works is easier to establish, building on the arguments of David Erdman's

---

<sup>537</sup> Robert. N. Essick, *William Blake: Printmaker* (Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 53.

*Prophet Against Empire* (1954). Erdman begins with the plates from the 1796 *Narrative* that became famous, consolidating Blake's reputation as one of the finest engravers of the period. Six, in particular, became were deployed repeatedly in the four decades of debate over the abolition of slavery. They were;

- plate 11 'A Negroe hanged Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows'
- plate 22 'Group of Negroes as Imported to be Sold for Slaves'
- plate 35 'The Flagellation of a Samboe female Slave'
- plate 49 'A Surinam Planter in his morning dress'
- plate 71 'The Execution of breaking on the Rack'
- Plate 80 (endspiece) 'Europe supported by Africa and America'

So often were these images reproduced that they have passed into English culture, being familiar to people who have no knowledge of Stedman or that they refer specifically to Suriname. I knew them from my childhood (the central figures in the abolition campaign were heroes in Baptist circles), and I assumed they were pictures from Jamaica where the Baptist church had a large presence. One of my surprises in first reading Stedman's *Journal* in 1972 was to re-visit these images and discover for the first time their connection with Blake.

Erdman well describes the power of these plates:

Blake's engravings, with a force of expression absent from the others, emphasise the dignity of Negro men and women stoical under cruel torture: the wise, reproachful look of the *Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows* (pl.11) who lived for three days unmurmuring and upbraided a flogged colleague for crying; the bitter concern in the face of a Negro executioner compelled to break the bones of a crucified rebel; the warm, self-possessed look of his victim, who jested with the crowd and offered to his sentinel 'my hand that was chopped off' to eat with his piece of dry bread: for how was it 'that he, a white man should have no meat to eat along with it?' Though Blake signed most of his plates, he shrank from signing his engraving of this bloody document *The Execution of 'Breaking on the Rack'* (pl.71). But the image of the courageous rebel on the cruciform bit into his heart, and in the *Preludium of America* he drew Orc in the same posture to represent the spirit of human freedom defiant of tyranny.<sup>538</sup>

Plate 71 is, of course, the image we first encountered in the closing pages of Stedman's *Journal*, where he added the comment 'Never did I see such a barbarous execution, or did it enter my thought, that human nature could behave

---

<sup>538</sup> Erdman, *Blake*, pp. 213-214.

with so much spirit and resolution. I call it heroism in its way'.<sup>539</sup> It was the ultimate source of his portrayal of the rebel Maroons as the heroes of his 1790 'Narrative'. In the Preludium to his poem *America*, Blake portrays Orc, his symbol of revolution and the spirit of living, chained in crucifixion to a rock under a weeping tree while Adam and Eve lament and protest, unable to enjoy lives without freedom.<sup>540</sup>

At a different level of influence are other images from the *Narrative* which re-appear in Blake's poems and illuminated works. Plate 19 'The Skinning of the Aboma Snake', depicts an enormous anaconda, suspended from a tree while Stedman supervises its skinning – the intelligent, sardonic snake gazing directly into the eyes of the Negro who has climbed up its writhing body to plunge a knife into its neck. In Plate 11 of 'America', a snake similar in size and intelligence but moved to the horizontal, carries three children on its back as, smilingly, it bears them to safety.<sup>541</sup> Interestingly, these influences are not confined only to plates engraved by Blake. The half-plate 57 'the Vampire of Guiana', though engraved by Anker Smith, has strong affinities with the spectre haunting Albion in the opening plate of Blake's 'Jerusalem'.<sup>542</sup> Stedman himself described the vampire bat at the 'Spectre of Guiana'.<sup>543</sup> Then there is the question of 'Tyger'.<sup>544</sup>

Generations of students have commented that the illustration to Blake's 'Tyger' in *Songs of Experience* bears little resemblance to the fiery beast of the poem. Geoffrey Keynes describes one version of the plate in which 'the animal ... appears to smile as if it were a tame cat', while Peter Ackroyd calls the image 'ludicrously comic; it has all the expressiveness of a stuffed toy'.<sup>545</sup> None of the versions looks remotely like the Bengal tiger most of us envisage from Blake's description. I have suggested, for example, in lectures over many years, that the Tyger's 'fearful symmetry' is a reference to its black and tawny markings.

---

<sup>539</sup> *Journal*, p. 182 (16 Aug., 1776).

<sup>540</sup> The plate is reproduced in David V. Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake: William Blake's Complete Illuminated Works with a Plate-by-Plate Commentary* (Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1974), p. 139.

<sup>541</sup> 1790 'Narrative' Plate 19, p. 142, and Erdman, *Illuminated Blake*, p. 149. E.P. Thompson's *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) has a section (pp. 95-105) discussing the great variety of serpent images in Blake, including eight representative plates, but I do not detect any link with the Aboma snake.

<sup>542</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, note 12, p. 216.

<sup>543</sup> His title for Plate 57, 1790 'Narrative', p. 430.

<sup>544</sup> Blake, *Songs* Plate 42.

<sup>545</sup> Blake, *Songs*, note to Plate 42, p. 149, and Ackroyd, *Blake*, p. 147.

But, given the strong possibility that his main source was Stedman's 'Narrative', it seems worth enquiring what sort of beast Blake actually had in mind. Chapter 18 begins by describing 'A Tyger taken in the Camp' (was it, perhaps, here Blake encountered this obsolete spelling of the word? In the 1796 *Narrative*, it is corrected to 'Tiger'.<sup>546</sup>) After acknowledging that some authorities deny there are tigers in America, Stedman goes on to give an account from 'Ocular Demonstration' of three types of 'Tygar' (sic).<sup>547</sup> First, the Jaguar, which is described as being 'of a Tawny Orange Colour', spotted with various black markings on the sides. Particularly emphasised is the strength and ferocity of the creature, and its great size, no less than 6 feet long. 'Witness', he says, 'the Print of that Enormous tiger (sic) foot Seen by Myself in the Sand'. Second is the 'Couguar', not so heavy as the jaguar, with a small head, thin body, tremendous claws and teeth, 'the Eyes prominent, and Sparkling like Stars'. Third is the 'Tiger-Cat', described as extremely beautiful but not much larger than some cats in England, 'a Very Lively Animal, With its Eyes Emitting Flashes of Lightening - But ferocious, Mischievous, And not Tameable Like the Rest'. Finally, he makes mention of the 'Jaguaretta', which he admits he has never seen. These descriptions are prefaced by two references. The former is to 'Bankes's Sistem of Geography' containing a dramatic account of the capture of 'a tiger' in West Africa.<sup>548</sup> The latter is to a memorial in Battersea Parish Church to a certain Sir Edward Winter who, among his other achievements, is described as having drowned a tiger in the River Ganges with his bare hands.

Blake's 'Tyger', then (and much to my regret) was not necessarily Asian, the word being applied in his day to various large cats on three continents. There are certain elements in Stedman's descriptions that could well have fed Blake's poem. The 'couguar's' and tiger-cat's prominent, sparkling, flashing eyes are the most obvious of these ('In which distant deeps or skies/Burnt the fire of thine eyes?'). Others may include the 'print of that Enormous tiger's foot Seen by Myself in the sand' ('What dread hand, and what dread feet?'), and the emphasis on the sheer power of the animal. Finally, of course, there are Stedman's two illustrations in

---

<sup>546</sup> But see Ackroyd, *Blake*, pp. 147-148 for other possible sources.

<sup>547</sup> The descriptions, including the quotations given are from 1790 'Narrative', pp. 356-359.

<sup>548</sup> Stedman's reference is to p. 342 of Thomas Bankes et al., *A New Royal Authentic and Complete System of Universal Geography Ancient and Modern* (n.d.).

plate 48 of the 1796 *Narrative*, viz., 'The Jaguar and Tiger-cat of Surinam'. Though these two half-plates were engraved unimpressively by Inigo Barlow, they show marked similarities to Blake's engraving in *Songs of Experience*, both of 'Tyger' and, indeed, of the lioness in 'The Little Girl Found'.<sup>549</sup> Of course, the 'Tyger' of Blake's poem is a creature of the imagination, leaping from the page into the thickets of our minds. But the argument pursued in the last two paragraphs does at least explain why Blake's engraving looks so little like a tiger.

The most striking of these connections, however, is Stedman's A Female Negro Slave with a Weight Chained to her Ankle (pl.4) which although engraved by Bartolozzi, is visibly the inspiration for plate 4 of 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' showing Oothoon chained by the ankle.<sup>550</sup>

Blake worked on this poem simultaneously with working on the plates for the *Narrative*, and published it in 1793. The poem begins with a speech by Oothoon, announcing her love for Theotormon, and plucking a marigold of 'sweet delight' which she places between her breasts to carry to him in her 'impetuous course'. But Bromion rapes her, claiming her as his property ('stamped with my signet') along with 'the soft American plains' and 'the swarthy children of the sun'. The remainder of the poem is made up of speeches by the three principal figures. Bromion declares his sexual, religious and economic lordship, grandly allowing Theotormon to marry his 'Bromion's harlot, and protect the child / Of Bromion's rage that Oothoon shall put forth in nine month's time'. Oothoon appeals to Theotormon to see beyond his 'five senses' and recognise her essential innocence in a world where love is instinctive. Theotormon, wrapped in abstraction, is unable to respond except with questions of his own ('Tell me what is a thought and of what substance is it made?'). Bromion continues to declare his ownership of the material world – 'the joys of riches and ease' – and Oothoon is left to lament her sexual, cultural and metaphysical bondage in a world by Urizen, the 'mistaken Demon of Heaven', here appearing for the first time in Blake's mythology. Meanwhile, the Daughters of Albion, themselves enslaved and looking to America for liberation, 'weep a trembling lamentation'.

---

<sup>549</sup> Blake, *Songs*, Plate 35.

<sup>550</sup> The plate is given in Erdman, *Illuminated Blake*, p. 132. I am using the text from *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 196-202.

Erdman was the first to explore the relationship between the *Narrative* and Blake's poem, arguing that the triangular relationship between Oothoon, Bromion her owner, and Theotormon her frustrated lover, reproduced in essentials the predicament of Joanna and Stedman.<sup>551</sup> Oothoon, of course, is Joanna, stamped with Bromion's 'signet', just as in Plate 68 of the *Narrative*, engraved by Blake, the head of the 'Family of Negro Slaves from Loanga' is visible stamped with Stedman's initials.<sup>552</sup> Bromion is both planter and overseer, and Theotormon the lover, helpless to deliver her from slavery. Erdman relates this to the three sides in the debate on the abolition of slavery and the slave trade, culminating in 1793 when the first vote on abolition was defeated in the British parliament. Oothoon is cast as the voice of the enslaved, not just in Africa or as Africans in the Americas, but as native Americans ('American Indians') and as the 'daughters of Albion'. Bromion, contrast, speaks for the slave owners, making speeches that, Erdman argues convincingly, reflect in their sentiments and cadences the true voice of the West India faction at Westminster. Once again, as in 'The Little Black Boy', Blake is taking the argument that Africans were 'inured to the hot climate' and therefore necessary for 'labour under a vertical sun' and turning the image on its head.

In this reading, Theotormon, becomes the timorous abolitionist, making distinctions as Wilberforce attempted in the 1790s, under Burke's charge of Jacobinism, between abolishing the slave trade and complete emancipation. Erdman quotes, with telling relevance to Oothoon, Wilberforce's stance on the 'Vice Society' based on the proposition that women's love is sinful. But he goes further, seeing in Stedman himself the very image of the hesitant abolitionist and casting him as the model for Theotormon.

In developing this argument, Erdman naturally assumed that Stedman was the true author of the 1796 *Narrative* and that the pro-slavery bias detectable in that volume represented Stedman's considered opinion. Thus, Erdman quotes Stedman as claiming that Africans in Africa were 'perfectly savage', that 'sudden emancipation' would be a disaster, and that in any case conditions were quite different in British colonies<sup>553</sup>. Detailed examination of the charges made between

---

<sup>551</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, chapter 10, pp. 209-223.

<sup>552</sup> 1790 'Narrative', plate 68, p. 535.

<sup>553</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, p. 215.

the 1790 'Narrative' and the published text of 1796 is the subject of Chapter 7, but enough has been said about the *Journal* and the 'Narrative' to demonstrate that Erdman's original charge must fail. Not only did Stedman not write the material Erdman attributes to him. It is clear that Blake was fully aware of Stedman's anger and frustration over what had been done to 'mar' his book – so much so that, as we have seen, Blake became in the end the only person with whom Stedman was prepared to deal.

On the other hand, a great deal of the information that has come to light from the *Journal* and the 'Narrative' serves to reinforce Erdman's arguments. Erdman assumed that 'Blake was familiar with the narrative, available in Johnson's shop, at least with the portions explanatory of the drawings', and that he was 'probably' the 'Blake (Mr Wm.) London' whose name appears in the list of subscribers.<sup>554</sup> In fact, this latter figure was 'more likely' to be the William Blake of Aldersgate Street who is known to have subscribed to the London Abolition Society in 1788.<sup>555</sup> But Erdman's assumption that Blake knew Stedman's text is amply born out by everything that has been demonstrated about their growing friendship and mutual trust. It seems inconceivable that, during Stedman's visits to Blake's home, the two men did not discuss the question of colonial slavery.

On February 20, 1792, two months after his letter to Blake thanking him for the quality of his engravings, Stedman's *Journal* records "I refuse Mr Sampson & Parson Lamb to put my name on the petition, for the abolition of slaves".<sup>556</sup> This refusal, at the height of the controversy over the first Abolition Bill, must have astounded and bewildered the parson and his friend, who knew the story of Stedman's marriage to Joanna, and were aware that Johnny Stedman, Joanna's son, was living with him in Tiverton as a loved and fiercely protected member of his family. Stedman's reasons for refusing to support abolition will be discussed in chapter nine. They appear to be a consequence of the arrangements he had made for Joanna's safety at the time of his departure from Suriname, together with the horror of his reaction to the French revolution and, in particular, to the slave uprising in San Domingo. Whatever their logic, it seems likely that his views would have become known to Blake, and that Erdman's designation of Stedman

---

<sup>554</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, p. 213.

<sup>555</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction' note 42, p. XCIII.

<sup>556</sup> *Journal*, p. 339.

as a reluctant abolitionist is retrospectively justifiable. The irony is, of course, that by the time the 1796 *Narrative* was published, such views were anachronistic. The very fact that such stark portraits of the brutality of the system came from a writer who opposed abolition only gave them greater force, enlisting Stedman's writings in a cause he rejected.

Nevertheless, Erdman's argument is unsatisfactory on two counts. First is the fact that biographical explanations are always unstable, being plausible in some particulars but not in others. J. Middleton Murry, for example, suggested in 1933 that 'behind this (poem) is faintly concealed the personal story of Mary Wolstonecraft' who from 1790 had been ardently pursuing the artist Henry Fuseli to the point of proposing, to Fuseli's wife, they set up a *menage à trois*.<sup>557</sup> Instead of responding free of all jealousy, Mrs Fuseli sent her packing – off to France and her meeting with Imlay. Fuseli was a friend of Blake's, and it is possible that the portrayal of Oothoon in 1793 as a sexually emancipated woman might, for some readers, have called to mind the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. But no other evidence backs the suggestion. Similarly, the situation in the poem – with Oothoon and her owner, who has raped her, chained back to back while Theotormon weeps over her loss of 'purity' – bears really very little relation to Stedman's predicament, even in symbolic terms. Secondly, Erdman's acknowledgement that the story has been 'creatively modified' underestimates the transformations Blake has wrought, and misrepresents the real source of Blake's inspiration. For while the Stedman-Joanna story undoubtedly resonates through 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion', Blake's model for Oothoon seems to me not Joanna herself but rather the composite figure of the endpiece, 'Europe supported by Africa & America'.<sup>558</sup>

Erdman discusses this plate, remarking on the fact that the picture appears to depict the Negress, the native America and the European embracing in 'sisterly equality', yet in fact the 'darker sisters' are wearing slave bracelets' while the Europe 'wears a string of pearls'.<sup>559</sup> Erdman adds, 'the bracelets and pearls may be said to represent the historical fact; the handclasp, the ardent wish'. In the coloured version of this plate, however (which Erdman may perhaps not have

---

<sup>557</sup> J. Middleton Murry, *William Blake* (London, 1933), p. 108.

<sup>558</sup> 1790 'Narrative', endpiece, p. 619.

<sup>559</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, p. 214.

seen) the ‘slave bracelets’ become gold while the ‘pearls’ are simple a string of blue beads.<sup>560</sup> There is no difference in status between the three women, while Stedman’s title for the picture ‘Europe supported by Africa and America’ suggests a dependence not unlike that of the little white boy in the concluding stanzas of Blake’s ‘Little Black Boy’. For Oothoon, in the poem, is not represented as black, or even as brown. She is described as having ‘soft, snowy limbs’ and ‘pure transparent breast’ and she is associated with the ‘new-washed lamb’ and ‘the bright swan’.<sup>561</sup> In Blake’s illustrations to the poem, both in the frontispiece and the title page, Oothoon is not represented (as Erdman claims) as ‘the American Indian of the emblem, with the same loose black hair, sad mouth, and angular limbs’.<sup>562</sup> She is visibly white, her hair blonde and abundant as it droops below her grieving figure (the frontispiece) or billows behind her as she flees from Bromion (the title page).<sup>563</sup> It will be remembered that in the opening words of the poem it is the ‘daughters of Albion’ who are described as ‘enslaved’.

Stedman, as we have seen, puts Joanna at the heart of a book dealing with warfare, cruelty, injustice and corruption. She represents a gentle, slightly mysterious retreat from a world that is unbearable, but in the final resort what Stedman has done has been to borrow from all the various uses to which the pastoral idiom was deployed in the eighteenth century and put Joanna at their centre. As was argued in chapter three, these uses could be enormously varied. They ranged from the urban satire of *The Beggar’s Opera*, to the rural escapism of Pomphret’s ‘The Choice’, and including the collapsed pastoral in of Gray’s ‘Elegy’ (in which only poverty and the lack of education mark out the rural poor as different). But, in all its variety, the pastoral idiom in the eighteenth century is rarely put to revolutionary purpose. It is hard to think of any eighteenth century text that is unambiguously utopian.

Blake, in absolute contrast frees Joanna at a bound from the tapestry of literary allusions Stedman has woven around her. He sees the parallels between the treatment of women in Albion and Suriname, between brutality and commerce, and between Locke’s sense-bound knowledge and religious

---

<sup>560</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, ‘Introduction’ p. XLI and endspiece, p. 619.

<sup>561</sup> ‘Visions of the Daughters of Albion’, lines 43, 47 and 87 in *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>562</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*. p. 221.

<sup>563</sup> See Plates 1-3 of ‘Visions of the Daughters of Albion’ in Morris Eaves et. al., *William Blake: the Early Illuminated Books*, vol. 3 (Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 243-247.

orthodoxy, all 'filaments in the web of the materialist mercantile world'.<sup>564</sup> Joanna is transformed into Oothoon, the 'soft soul of America', the New World still revelling in the liberty of its revolution, to whom the 'enslaved' daughters of Albion look for hope. Oothoon is also Woman, bound by rape to a loveless marriage, but yearning for free love, for 'happy copulation'. Oothoon is Africa, the 'swarthy children of the sun' bought for money and stamped with Bromion's signet.<sup>565</sup> In three guises, she appeals to Theotormon to accept her innocence. While Bromion rages about law and fire and eternal chains, and Theotormon weeps about lost happiness, Oothoon sings of a world without jealousy or abstraction, without purchase or sale, a world of instinct and natural fruitfulness and joy:

'The sea-fowl takes the wintry blast for a covering to her limbs  
And the wild snake the pestilence to adorn him with gems and gold;  
And trees and birds and beasts and men behold their eternal joy.  
Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!  
Arise and drink your bliss; for everything that lives is holy!'<sup>566</sup>

'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' was an important poem in Blake's development, introducing for the first time the canonical figure of Urizen. This tyrannical creator, priest and law-giver, the apotheosis of the rational, seems to have been called into existence by the need for something to represent Oothoon's opposite, figuring the sexual, cultural and metaphysical trap in which she finds herself. Urizen re-appears in the companion poem 'America: a prophecy', which was also written in 1793 and which also draws on Stedman's 'Narrative' through the image and description of the chained figure of the Promethean rebel Orc, the symbol of America.<sup>567</sup> Both references are brief and – typical of Blake – unexplained. But in view of Urizen's overwhelming importance in *The Los Poems* ('The Book of Urizen' 1794, 'The Book of Los' 1795, 'Milton' 1804, and 'Jerusalem. The Emanation of the Giant Albion' 1804-1818), together of course with the

---

<sup>564</sup> Ackroyd, *Blake*, p. 177.

<sup>565</sup> 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion', lines 1-3, 29 and 184 in *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 196-197 and 201.

<sup>566</sup> 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion', lines 219-223 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 202.

<sup>567</sup> *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 205-213. Unlike the *Oxford Blake*, Ackroyd *Blake*, pp. 168-171, treats 'America' as the earlier written of the two poems.

accompanying plates, it seems fair to mention how hugely creative over a sustained period were the effects of that brief artistic encounter with Stedman.<sup>568</sup>

E.P. Thompson argues in *Witness Against the Beast* that the years 1788-1794 were central to the development of Blake's thinking. First as, with the aid of Boehme and Swedenborg, he brought his Dissenter's (possibly Muggletonian) antinomianism to bear on the mechanistic teachings of Locke and Newton, working out the meaning of his 'visions' and the terms of his rejection of eighteenth century rationalism. Secondly, and especially in 1793 after he had given up wearing his *bonnet rouge* in the streets of Lambeth, as he worked out the terms of his rejection of the apparent alliance between antinomianism and Jacobinism. Tom Paine's assault on Church and State appealed to him viscerally. But Paine's commercialism, his version of the state as a joint-stock company in which all had equal shares, appalled him for its dependence once again on Locke's and Newton's materialism. What was needed was 'some utopian leap, some human rebirth, from Mystery to renewed imaginative life'.<sup>569</sup> It would be ludicrous to attribute any of this development in Blake's thinking specifically to the influence of Stedman. But the version of Stedman's love for Joanna as presented in 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion', and particularly the plate of 'Europe supported by Africa and America' which I have suggested was the inspiration for Oothoon, did provide Blake with the first metaphor, or framework of metaphor, for his mature thinking. To that extent, Stedman was important to Blake.

For he never forgot Theotormon and Bromion and above all Oothoon. In 'Europe: a Prophecy' (1794), the 'nameless shadowy female' who 'rose from out the breast of Orc' complains to her mother Enitharmon that all her sons are born into slavery:

I bring forth from my teeming bosom myriads of flames,  
And thou dost stamp them with a signet.<sup>570</sup>

Enitharmon later laughs to see (Oh, woman's triumph!):

Every house a den, every man bound, the shadows are filled  
With spectres, and the windows wove over with curses of iron;  
Over the doors 'Thou shalt not', and over the chimneys 'Fear' is  
written,  
With bands of iron round their necks, fastened into the walls

---

<sup>568</sup> The poems appear consecutively in *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 309-514.

<sup>569</sup> Thompson, *Witness*, p. 193.

<sup>570</sup> 'Europe: a Prophecy' lines 48-49 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 215.

the citizens.<sup>571</sup>

We are in the world of *Songs of Experience*, also 1794, with the ‘Thou shalt not’ of ‘The Garden of Love’, The Chimney-Sweeper, and the ‘mind-forged manacles’ of ‘London’.<sup>572</sup> But there are echoes, too, of the branding and chaining of Stedman’s images. And sure enough, Enitharmon, the female, wakes from her eighteen-hundred-year sleep, and her song is the poem’s Prophecy:

‘I hear the soft Oothoon in Enitharmon’s tents,  
Why wilt thou give up woman’s secret, my melancholy child?  
Between two moments bliss is ripe.  
O Theotormon, robbed of joy, I see thy salt tears flow  
Down the steps of my crystal house.’<sup>573</sup>

In ‘The Los Poems’, the central theme is the endless war between Urizen ‘the primal priest’ with his abstraction and cold horrors, and Los who is rent from his side, the fallen rebel with his hammer and anvil, the embodiment of creation and energy. Out of the ‘anguish’ engendered by his response to Urizen’s Los gives birth to Pity or Enitharmon, who in turn gives birth to the man-child Orc, whom Los fetters with ‘the chains of jealousy’. Urizen responds with his own act of creation and then, disgusted by his ‘sons and daughters’, confines them in ‘the Net of Religion’.<sup>574</sup> In this primal re-working of the *Book of Genesis* and of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (elaborating the themes of Blake’s ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’), Oothoon, Theotormon and Bromion play marginal roles. Yet in ‘Book the First’ of ‘Milton’, Theotormon and Bromium are presented, deeply ambiguously, as contending ‘on the side of Satan, / Pitying his youth and beauty’,<sup>575</sup> while at the birth of Rahab, daughter of Leutha, who also speaks up for Satan, we are told:

In dreams she bore Rahab, the mother of Tirzah, and her sisters,

In Lambeth’s vales, in Cambridge and in Oxford, places of thought;  
Intricate labyrinths of times and spaces unknown that Leutha lived  
In Palamabron’s tent, and Oothoon was her charming guard.<sup>576</sup>

---

<sup>571</sup> ‘Europe: a Prophecy’ lines 188-193 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 219.

<sup>572</sup> *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 273, 269 and 274.

<sup>573</sup> ‘Europe: a Prophecy’ lines 238-242 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 221

<sup>574</sup> The quotations are from ‘The Book of Urizen’, lines 1, 119, 294 and 401 in *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 309, 312, 317 and 320.

<sup>575</sup> ‘Milton, Book the First’, lines 105-106 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 334.

<sup>576</sup> ‘Milton, Book the First’, lines 304-307 in *The Oxford Blake*, p.340.

Later in the poem, while Oothoon remains the ideal of joy and fruitfulness ('soft Oothoon / Pants in the vales of Lambeth, weeping o'er her human harvest'<sup>577</sup>), Theotormon is cast as an ally in of Voltaire and Rousseau in perverting Swendenborg's vision, weaving 'a new religion from new jealousy'.<sup>578</sup> The 'mill's of Theotormon' ('dark satanic mills'?) are the setting where Urizen's sons labour ('Their numbers are seven million and seven thousand and seven hundred'), under the supervision of 'the Spectre' (depicted as Stedman's vampire bat).<sup>579</sup>

In the last of the 'Los Poems', the 4000-line 'Jerusalem', Bromion and Theotormon are mentioned only briefly but powerfully in the general catalogue of Albion's miseries under the Spectre:

Hampstead, Highgate, Finchley, Hendon, Muswell Hill rage loud  
 Before Bromion's iron tongs and glowing poker reddening fierce ...  
   Loud the cornfields thunder along  
 The soldier's fife, the harlot's shriek, the virgin's dismal groan,  
 The parent's fear, the brother's jealousy, the sister's curse,  
 Beneath the storms of Theotormon.<sup>580</sup>

Later they reoccur as two of the four sons of Jerusalem 'that were never generated', dominated the 'four provinces of ireland', and the 'four universities of Scotland, and in Oxford and Cambridge and Winchester'.<sup>581</sup> They are the allies now of Bacon and Locke and Newton as well as of Voltaire and Rousseau in driving 'the labourers at the furnaces ... round the anvils of death'.<sup>582</sup> Still Oothoon remains the beautiful refuge, in whose palace 'every angle is a lovely heaven / But should the watch-fiends find it, they would call it Sin'.<sup>583</sup> Finally, is it stretching the point too far to associate Stedman's plate 'Europe Supported by Africa and America', which I have suggested as Blake's inspiration for Oothoon, with the vision in chapter 3 of the 'feminine, most beautiful, threefold /Each within other'?

Over her beautiful female features, soft flourishing in beauty,  
 Beams mild, all lobe and all perfection, that when the lips  
 Receive a kiss from gods or men, a threefold kiss returns  
 From the pressed loveliness. So her whole immortal form threefold  
 Threefold embrace returns, consuming lives of gods and men,

---

<sup>577</sup> 'Milton, Book the Second', lines 558-559 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 580

<sup>578</sup> 'Milton, Book the Second', line 663 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 351.

<sup>579</sup> 'Milton, Book the Second', lines 991-992 and 1027-1028 in *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 360-361.

<sup>580</sup> 'Jerusalem, Chapter 1', lines 559-560 and 563-566 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 397.

<sup>581</sup> 'Jerusalem, Chapter 3', lines 967-968 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 476.

<sup>582</sup> 'Jerusalem, Chapter 3', lines 1034 and 1036-1037 in *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 478-479.

<sup>583</sup> 'Jerusalem, Chapter 2', lines 386-387 in *The Oxford Blake*, pp. 386-387.

In fires of beauty, melting them as gold and silver in the furnace.<sup>584</sup>

By this stage, of course, Blake was not so much echoing Stedman as echoing himself. Had Stedman read ‘The Book of Urizen’, or survived long enough to admire ‘Milton’ or ‘Jerusalem’, it is extremely unlikely he would have recognised the slightest connection between Blake’s persistent imagery and his own work. Creative transformation is just that, an imaginative leap whose origins are only obscurely discernible. I have argued that Blake was more deeply involved in the production of Stedman’s *Narrative* than has hitherto been recognised. I think it is demonstrable, too, that Stedman’s writings and paintings marked Blake’s thinking and supplied him with an imaginative framework at a crucial stage of his development, both as engraver and poet.

Anything further than this is mere surmise, but I cannot resist further speculation about the basis of their apparent friendship. Stedman apparently thought Blake an efficient businessman, and we may smile at that misconception. Blake would have found Stedman thoroughly conventional in his religion and (as will be discussed in chapter seven) increasingly reactionary in his politics. If they discussed the abolition of slavery and the slave trade, the two men must have agreed to differ. On the other hand, Peter Ackroyd suggests that Blake’s tolerance of Stedman’s views may reflect a degree of disenchantment with Joseph Johnson and his radical circle, or at least a relish for ‘contraries’, and I find this persuasive.<sup>585</sup> If the autumn 1793 was indeed the date of their first meeting, this was after Blake had given up wearing his Jacobin *bonnet rouge*. Both men were irascible, impatient of cant – satirical, for instance, about Dr Johnson.<sup>586</sup> Stedman, who defined himself as a military man, was concerned about the fate of ordinary soldiers and Blake will have found this sympathetic (‘And the hapless soldier’s sigh /Runs in blood down palace walls’<sup>587</sup>). He would also, of course, have found in Stedman a knowledgeable appreciation of the engraver’s craft, and he self-evidently responded to the power of Stedman’s watercolour images. But, on the slight evidence we have (in the absence of their correspondence), there seems also to have been genuine warmth between the two men. If Stedman told of his

---

<sup>584</sup> ‘Jerusalem, Chapter 3’, lines 906-911 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 474.

<sup>585</sup> Ackroyd, *Blake*, p. 175.

<sup>586</sup> Ackroyd, *Blake*, p. 164, quotes Blake’s squib: ‘A ha To Dr Johnson / Said Scipio Africanus / Lift up my Roman Petticoat / And kiss my Roman Anus.’

<sup>587</sup> ‘London’, line 12 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 274.

frustrated wish to have studied art in Italy, Blake would have instantly understood. I suggest that Blake saw beyond Stedman's conventional views and his military pride to something deeper – his endless fascination with the natural world, as revealed in the flora and fauna of the *Narrative*, and the romance and deep humanity of his dealings with Joanna and the Suriname slaves. Blake was incomparably the greater writer and artist, and Stedman plays only a small part in his story. But Stedman had the wit to earn Blake's friendship, and that seems no mean epitaph.

## Chapter Seven

### Author

Stedman was perfectly aware from the outset that the manuscript of the 'Narrative' he dispatched to Joseph Johnson in February 1791 would have to be substantially re-written before publication.

In his 'Preface to the Manuscript', he lists the faults of his work boldly and prophetically:

I am going to be told that my narrative besides its not being interesting to Great Britain has neither stile, orthography, order or Connection – Patcht up with superfluous Quotations – Descriptions of Animals without so much as proper names – Trifles – Cruelties – Bombast &c. to which all Accusations I partly plead Guilty – I say partly, but with very great Sincerity – Next that some of my paintings are rather unfinish'd – That my plants prove I am nothing of a botanist – And that the History of Joanna deserves no place at all in this Narrative – Guilty – Still besides all which I may be perhaps mistaken in a few of the Dates &c. &c. - & now for my defence – D—n Order, D—n matter of fact, D—n everything I am above you all -<sup>588</sup>

This doesn't sound like an appeal for assistance in revising his work. Yet he continues:

... having been debarr'd from a Classical Education & being next to a stranger in this Country, I have even had very little time for Lecture & still less for Compiling this Laborious work, Which was never once Corrected or indeed wholly intended for the press.<sup>589</sup>

There follows an 'Advertisement to the Reader' that, so far from addressing to the general public, requests first that those who handle the manuscript should 'keep it perfectly clean from greasy spots', given the effort and expense it has taken him to produce it. He acknowledges inaccuracies, admitting that the text has never been 'revised or corrected', and asks for secrecy and discretion, 'the whole being not intended for the press'. Some of the personal revelations about gentlemen who are named might expose the author 'to great Confusion, and even Danger – were they literally under their present dress to appear before the public.' Before that can happen, 'this Narrative where every Thing is now put down at Random' will have

---

<sup>588</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 7.

<sup>589</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 9.

to be ‘properly prepared for the Eye of the Publick by the able Pen of a candid and ingenuous Compiler’.<sup>590</sup>

Plainly, some degree of editing was anticipated, even invited. Given the explosion that followed, the first question to arise is, just how much revision did Stedman anticipate? Obviously, he concedes problems over spelling and sentence structure, including presumably his eccentric punctuation, marked by dashes and (elsewhere) slashes, and random capitalisation. These were the sort of matters that, as he remarked in the Dedication to his *Journal* and in the context of the same ‘D-mn everything’, could safely be left ‘to be corrected by Samuel Johnson’.<sup>591</sup> Soldier and lover, he scorned to be judged by such bourgeois pedantry but, if his publisher had scruples about the general tidiness of a book, it was not for an author to object. Secondly, Stedman was aware that some of his ‘Quotations from better Writers’, employed to make his ‘want of Stile, Elegance &c. ... more palatable to some of my Readers’, might seem superfluous and need to be excised.<sup>592</sup> Thirdly, he seems to have been worried about libel. There is an interesting, but unanswerable question here. The great legal authority of the eighteenth century, William Blackstone, had stated that libel had two remedies, ‘one by indictment and another by action’.<sup>593</sup> Was Stedman in 1790 afraid of legal proceedings, with the possibility of imprisonment (‘Confusion’), or of being challenged to a duel when he was no longer of an age to respond (‘Danger’)?

It is quite possible such revisions were all he had in mind. His *Journal*, between December 1791 and the shock on 25 May 1795 of finding ‘12 chapters printed & mard’, is far more preoccupied with the state of the engravings than with what may be happening to his prose style.<sup>594</sup> But one word in the passages quoted above seems to anticipate more extensive interference with his manuscript. He remarks that he ‘has had very little time ... for *Compiling* this Laborious work’, and that it awaits ‘the able Pen of a candid and ingenuous *Compiler*’ (my italics). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘to compile’ in the sense of ‘to compose an original work’, and ‘compiler’ as ‘original author or composer’, are obsolete meanings, last used in the seventeenth century. Those meanings

---

<sup>590</sup> These quotations are all from 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 25.

<sup>591</sup> *Journal*, p. xxiii.

<sup>592</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 8.

<sup>593</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries* (1768) III, 125.

<sup>594</sup> *Journal*, pp. 336-380 passim.

appear closer to Stedman's usage than that the modern sense of 'bring together materials from various sources to form a volume', such as a dictionary or encyclopaedia. The curious thing is that Stedman employs the same word both for himself as author and for the unknown, prospective editor. It would seem that Stedman's publisher, Joseph Johnson, could be forgiven for assuming he had *carte blanche* to have the whole manuscript re-written - as indeed he arranged to do.

### **'Compiler' & Publisher**

William Thomson was the 'ingenuous *Compiler*' chosen by Johnson to edit Stedman's manuscript, and *The Dictionary of National Biography* still preserves an entry for this otherwise long-forgotten literary journeyman.<sup>595</sup> He was born in Perthshire, Scotland, in 1746 and was trained initially for the Scottish church, being ordained in 1776. But he 'soon displayed tastes and affinities discordant with his office', meaning apparently that he appreciated good food and wine, and like so many other Scotsmen of the eighteenth century he set out for London to make his way as a man of letters. After five years of struggle, he won 'notice and regard' by completing volumes 5 and 6 of Watson's *History of Philip III of Spain* (1783) after the original author's death. From then until his own death in 1817, 'he wrote on almost every subject, producing pamphlets, memoirs, elaborate biographies, voyages, travels, commentaries on Scripture, and treatises on military tactics.' The DNB continues dryly, 'He even essayed novels and dramas, but seems to have avoided verse'. Between 1790 and 1800, he was responsible for preparing the historical section of Dodsley *Annual Register*, and from 1794 to 1796 he owned and was principal contributor to *The English Review*. As was noted in his obituary, 'it would be impossible to write the history of the literature of the reign of George III without assigning him a place, if not very elevated, at least somewhere conspicuous among others of that period.'<sup>596</sup>

That same anonymous obituary notes that during the 1790s he was commissioned to write 'tracts in defence of the slave trade' by West Indian interests 'holding forth *golden temptations* to needy men of letters'.<sup>597</sup> Richard

---

<sup>595</sup> DNB entry for William Thomson, vol. XIX pp. 754-755.

<sup>596</sup> Anon., 'William Thomson, LL.D.', *Annual Biography and Obituary*, 2 (1818), p. 74.

<sup>597</sup> *Annual Biography and Obituary*, 2, p. 108.

and Sally Price take this as indicating he held pro-slavery views, making him a dubious choice for the task of re-writing Stedman's work. But the obituary makes it clear this was done purely for the money. Thomson also regularly attended Johnson's radical literary evenings (on one occasion snoring loudly through a presentation by Mary Wolstonecraft), and it seems unwise to accuse a man who sold his pen to quite so many masters of holding any identifiable convictions. His reputation was as someone who 'could always produce respectable and sometimes even excellent results'.<sup>598</sup> and Johnson presumably assumed he was placing Stedman's manuscript in competent hands.

In the introduction to their magnificent edition of the 1790 'Narrative', Richard and Sally Price describe many of the changes William Thomson brought about.<sup>599</sup> Thus, they demonstrate that so far from the 'minor rephrasing' they claim Stedman to have anticipated, Thomson imposed four basic types of alteration. The first were stylistic, as he changed spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure, made some transposition paragraphs or of material between text and footnotes, translated foreign phrases, and excised many of Stedman's quotations. Secondly and, of course, closely linked with the first, was Thomson's concern for propriety. Sexual allusions were deleted, or mentioned euphemistically ('A couple of hungry whores', for instance, became 'A brace of the frail sisterhood'), and all scatological references were 'purged' (a metaphor I enjoyed). The Prices' example is worth quoting:

The 1796 publication omitted the passage that described Colonel Fourgeoud's joy, after a discouraging day of vainly pursuing his rebel slave foes through the forest, at finding a pile of 'reeking S--- (declaring) he was now perfectly sure of following the Enemy,' upon which a grenadier embarrassedly stepped forward to admit, '*this was me and please your Honour*'.<sup>600</sup>

Under this heading, too, was the deletion of references to Stedman's own wilder side, to his tantrums and brawling and hard drinking and depressions (continuing a process already well advanced in the development from *Journal* to 'Narrative').

Thirdly, Thomson was careful to excise anything potentially libellous. Fox's libel law of May 1792, would have made such changes necessary, even without

---

<sup>598</sup> *DNB.*, Vol. XIX, p. 755.

<sup>599</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', pp. LI-LXV.

<sup>600</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', p. LIII.

Stedman's previous concerns in the matter. That draconian law empowered both the attorney general and local magistrates to charge anyone who 'wickedly, maliciously, and seditiously did publish and cause to be published ... scandalous, malicious and seditious libels concerning therein among other things diverse scandalous, malicious and seditious matters concerning the People, Nobles, Ecclesiastical Dignities, Government and Constitution of this Kingdom'.<sup>601</sup> Stedman's *Journal* for 4 June 1792 notes 'A proclamation against libels', and it is hard to believe he would not have felt threatened by it.<sup>602</sup> Curiously, however, many of Thomson's changes simply involved replacing names by abbreviations – Mrs Stolker, for instance, who allegedly drowned a baby for crying and then whipped its mother for trying to retrieve the body, appears in the 1796 text as 'Mrs S—lk-r'.<sup>603</sup> Two Suriname clergymen, accused by Stedman of maintaining concubines, are offered the legal protection of similar transparency.<sup>604</sup> But other attacks, closer to home, were deleted altogether. They included many of Stedman's savage criticisms of his commanding officer Fourceoud, whom he charged with favouritism, sadism, and neglect of his men, together with another officer Lieutenant Colonel Seybourn, with whom Stedman had quarrelled incessantly.

Thomson's fourth set of alterations may loosely be described as political in the sense that they shifted the balance from 'Narrative' to *Narrative* in the presentation of material about colonial slavery and the slave trade. The Prices argue that while Stedman in 1790 was, if not an outright abolitionist, at least eager to ameliorate the conditions of transport and the working lives of slaves, the 1796 *Narrative* was closer to a pro-slavery position. This was done mainly by the deletion of many complimentary references to the maroons, rangers and slaves, especially of passages where they were compared favourably to Europeans, but partly too by the insertions of such comments as the following in the 1796 Preface:

---

<sup>601</sup> Gerald P. Tyson, *Joseph Johnson; a Liberal Publisher* (University of Iowa Press, 1979), p. 131, quoting indictment against S. Jordan for Hilary Term, 38 George III, 1798; Public Record Office MS: KB 10/50 (Indictments 1797-8).

<sup>602</sup> *Journal*, p. 341.

<sup>603</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 179.

<sup>604</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 18.

As to the shocking cruelties that are here so frequently exposed, let it suffice to say, that to deter others from similar inhuman practices, and teach them virtue was my sole and only motive; while, on the other hand, it must be observed that LIBERTY, nay even too much lenity, when *suddenly* (sic) granted to illiterate and unprincipled men, must be to *all* parties dangerous, if not pernicious. Witness the *Owca* and *Saramaca* Negroes in Surinam – the *Maroons* of Jamaica, the *Caribs* of St Vincent, &c.<sup>605</sup>

I want to re-examine these differences between the manuscript and the *Narrative* later in this chapter, focussing especially on the representations of the rebel maroons, of Joanna, and of Stedman himself. But first, it is important to look again at the assumption that the changes the Prices have listed were necessarily Thomson's responsibility. It may well be that the Prices are largely correct – the evidence not conclusive either way, and what evidence there is they present with great circumspection.<sup>606</sup> But the great flaw in their argument is that Thomson's own manuscript is not available for purposes of comparison. The Prices present the final text of the 1796 *Narrative* as an 'unhappy compromise', given 'the battered author's' financial circumstances and his rapidly failing health.<sup>607</sup> This emphasis is understandable, given the immense editorial labour and sheer detective work that characterises their edition. It is only human that they should wish it to stand as what Stedman definitively wrote, as opposed to what his publisher and copy-editor produced in his name. But there is a counter-case to be examined.

The first point to notice is the sheer improbability that Joseph Johnson would have had a hand in any such transformation of Stedman's text as the Prices describe. Johnson is a remarkable figure who deserves a more secure place literary history than the passing mentions normally accorded him.<sup>608</sup> To have published, and in many cases been the first to publish, Joseph Priestley, Henry Fuseli, Benjamin Franklin, Antoine Lavoisier (first English version), William Cowper, John Newton, Tom Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Horne Tooke, John Howard (the prison reformer), William Blake, William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, Thomas Malthus, Maria Edgeworth, and Humphrey Davy among

---

<sup>605</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. xvii.

<sup>606</sup> See, for instance, 1790 'Narrative', note 58, p. XCVI, where they acknowledge 'they cannot be sure Stedman himself did not contribute some of the changes' to the final text.

<sup>607</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. LI.

<sup>608</sup> The following paragraphs derive from Tyson, *Joseph Johnson*, chapters 1-4 *passim*.

many others, is remarkable in itself. But Johnson was always something more than a commercial publisher.

His background was in the Baptist church, first in Everton where he was born in 1738, later in the Byrom St. Chapel in Liverpool. It was through this connection that he became apprenticed in 1754 to the London bookseller George Keith, a specialist in religious tracts, and when in 1761 he set up shop himself his first publications were religious pamphlets. A schism in the Baptist Church between the Particular Baptists (strictly Calvinist with a strong emphasis on predestination) and the General Baptists (best remembered as the progenitors of the modern missionary movement) saw Johnson moving increasingly towards the Unitarians. But his Baptist links remained fundamental, and when his first shop as burned down in January 1770, it was Baptist philanthropists in Liverpool who united to re-establish his business in London's St Paul's Churchyard.

Publications on religious themes remained important to him, with a series of books and pamphlets campaigning against the Corporation and Test Acts (discriminating against Dissenters) and in defence of Unitarianism. But was also founder and proprietor of the *Analytical Review*, the liveliest journal of the period, which ran from 1788 to 1798 when it was suppressed following Johnson's imprisonment under Fox's libel law. As he branched out into political and social issues, with science, medicine and education featuring strongly in his lists, ideas of reform and self-improvement took precedence, and he was always ready to publish a book he believed in, whether or not it was commercially viable or politically dangerous. He became, in short, a publisher with a strong social conscience, and an enduring friend and patron to his chosen authors. The most visible expression of this was his famous weekly dinner parties, on Sunday or Tuesday evenings, when authors gathered at his shop. As we have seen, Stedman attended some of these gatherings, beginning possibly as early as 1792. Godwin variously records the topics of discussion as 'monarch, Tooke, (Dr) Johnson, Voltaire, pursuits, and religious' and as 'talents and Burke', 'Voltaire and Cicero', and 'Brissot, Mirabeau, and juris-prudence'.<sup>609</sup> Apparently, Johnson himself rarely participated, being happy to provide the food and wine and to seize on any prospective publications. Mary Wollstonecraft, in particular, benefited from his steady encouragement and patronage, while Godwin acknowledged receiving

financial support. Ironically, authors being what they are, they one thing they complained about Johnson, once they had appeared under his imprint, was that he seemed less commercially-minded than they had hoped.

Gerald Tyson, his biographer, sums him up as follows:

Johnson followed a 'liberal' path. This means that the books he issued tended consistently to oppose the status quo, to challenge the established givens, and to dissent from received opinions. Instead there was an emphasis on innovation and experimentation, on the exotic rather than the domestic; content was preferred to form. Such diversity, Johnson and his authors reasoned, produced greater social and intellectual vitality: a country was strong in proportion to the variety of attitude and beliefs it could nourish.<sup>610</sup>

Later Tyson adds, 'From the liberal writers Johnson published, three minorities received attention: slaves, Dissenters and prisoners'.<sup>611</sup> His publications on slavery and the slave-trade were unequivocally abolitionist. They included the definitive *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (1788) by the former slaver turned Anglican priest John Newton.

None of this proves conclusively that Johnson would not have set out to alter Stedman's text in the manner of which the Prices complain, but it makes it highly unlikely. As we shall see, Stedman's final complaint about his publisher was that he was 'a damn'd Jacobin rascal'. This sounds both more like Johnson, and more like the sort of things Stedman was in the habit of saying. There remains the Prices' suggestion that the changes may have happened without Johnson's knowledge, on William Thomson's initiative. But this is to cast Thomson as a writer with a cause rather than as a hack who lent his pen to many causes. His reputation was that of a professional who gave satisfaction. Johnson's commission would have been a valuable one, and his requirements were well known.

The third figure undoubtedly involved in the preparation of the *Narrative's* final version was Stedman himself. David Brion Davis, writing in *The New York Review*, was the first to suggest that, given the appalling casualties suffered by British troops in the 1790s in the Windward islands and Saint Domingue, 'Stedman, as a retired army officer and conservative royalist ... may well have

---

<sup>609</sup> Quoted in Tyson, *Joseph Johnson*, p. 122.

<sup>610</sup> Tyson, *Joseph Johnson*, p. xvii.

<sup>611</sup> Tyson, *Joseph Johnson*, p. 88.

approved the attempt to transform his *Narrative* into a pro-slavery tract'.<sup>612</sup> This provocative idea is worth investigating further, by drawing once again on the evidence of Stedman's *Journal*. In chapter six, I listed several of the entries for the 1790s with a view to demonstrating William Blake's involvement in the making of the 1796 *Narrative*. I now list the entries, some repeated from that chapter, which throw light on the present discussion.

May 25, 1795: At *Saracen's Head*, London. Twelve chapters printed and marred.

June 5: I force Bartolozzi to return my plates ... then take home my spoilt manuscript, and repair all plates.

June 24 following: On Midsummer day receive the first volume of my book quite marr'd, oaths and sermons inserted &c. ... Saw Finsbury Square & Lackington ... My book marr'd entirely. Am put to the most extreme trouble and expense ... Bawdy oaths, lies and preachings in my unhappy book ... A hot quarrel with Johnson ... I reconcile Johnson and cancel best part of first volume ...

Sept (n.d.) following: ... leave London with the Bath stagecoach. Went on the evening of 16th December, 1795.

Dec. 18: Johnson sends me a blurred index – such as, the book good for nothing.

1796 following: I send besides to London, Hansard, a complete index, above 650 names, a complete list of 200 subscribers, a complete direction for 80 plates, a complete errata, with 60 faults, a complete table of 30 chapters contents, a complete form for a title page, a complete preface, and a complete dedication to the Prince of Wales ... I charged Hansard not to trust the above papers with Johnson. Mr Hansard, the printer, writes me that all, all, all is well, and printed to my mind and wishes. I am pleased, but Johnson, the demon of hell, again torments me by altering the dedication to the Prince of Wales &c .&c., he being a d-mn'd infernal Jacobin scoundrel. I send away the last cancels as late as the middle of May 1796.<sup>613</sup>

Several conclusions may be drawn from these notes, with varying degrees of certainty. The first is that Stedman went to London in May 1795, apparently in anticipation of his book's publication, and on the 25th was horrified by the sight of the printed version of the first 12 chapters. These chapters represented the bulk of the first volume of 15 chapters. His response was to seize back his manuscript and take it 'home' (in practice, to the *Saracen's Head* inn where he was staying). On 24 June, he had sight of the whole of volume one, and commented again in disgust, 'The first volume of my book quite marr'd'. The entry dated 24 June is a

---

<sup>612</sup> David Brion Davis, 'The Ends of Slavery', *The New York Review* (30 March, 1989), p. 30.

<sup>613</sup> *Journal*, pp. 380-395, *passim*.

long, composite record of his London dealings until early October, and exact dates cannot be assigned to what followed. Two entries are suggestive, however. The first notes simply ‘Saw Finsbury Square & Lackington’. James Lackington (1746-1815) was another well-known London bookseller, with extensive premises at the Temple of the Muses at Finsbury, and selling by his own claim one hundred thousand volumes annually.<sup>614</sup> It cannot be proved that Stedman, having recovered his manuscript, was looking for an alternative publisher. To have committed himself so far would have been very expensive, given the investment Joseph Johnson had made in the plates for which, of course, he had already secured the copyright. Even so, the encounter with James Lackington may well have had a bearing on the ‘reconciliation’ with Johnson, as a result of which the first volume was destroyed. A letter from Stedman to his brother’s wife in Holland confirms this point. The letter has disappeared, but was existed as late as 1966 to printed in Stanbury Thomson’s *John Gabriel Stedman*. It is dated January 17, 1796, and reads, ‘My book was printed full of lies and nonsense, without my knowledge. I burnt two thousand vols., and made them print it over again, by which they lost 200 guineas. You have no idea of the villainy and folly I have to deal with. However, I have overcome them all ...’<sup>615</sup>.

Having effectively postponed publication for a full year, Stedman remained in London until 16 December, when he returned to Tiverton, entrusting all future dealings with Johnson to William Blake. It is reasonable to conclude from this that, by this date, a new manuscript had been produced, one more acceptable to Stedman, including revisions to volume 2 which, of course, had not been typeset the previous June when Stedman first made his complaints. On 18 December, he received in Tiverton the ‘blurred Index’, making his final complaint about his book, this time apparently with respect to the quality of the production. Indices are normally produced when a book is in proof, so that it is, once again, reasonable to assume that the revised *Narrative* was in first proof by December 1795. From that date on, Stedman insisted on dealing directly with Blake and with the printer Hansard, sending the title page, revised index, errata, chapter headings, and new dedication directly to the printer, with the injunction not to let Johnson see anything. Hansard was able to assure him that ‘all, all, all is well, and printed

---

<sup>614</sup> Tyson, *Joseph Johnson*, p. 12, and *Journal*, p. 385, note 1.

<sup>615</sup> Thompson, *Life*, p.75.

to my mind and wishes', though he was further exasperated with Johnson over changes to the dedication. The *Narrative* finally appeared over a year late in the autumn of 1796.

Stedman's complaint about the printed version of volume one was that 'oaths and sermons' had been inserted, that there were 'bawdy oaths, lies and preachings in my unhappy book', that 'my book was printed full of lies and nonsense', and finally that the index was 'blurr'd.'. It is difficult to establish any clear correspondence between these complaints and the alterations Richard and Sally Price have documented. 'Oaths', even 'bawdy oaths' are personal matters, and one man's curse is another man's blasphemy. Perhaps Stedman objected to a particular style of swearing being attributed to him. But it is hard to reconcile this with the Prices' complaint that his volume had been bowdlerised. 'Sermons' and 'preachings' are another matter. Stedman was touchy about organised religion, especially in its Presbyterian varieties, and his *bête noire* was Dr John Stedman, his uncle and childhood tutor, author of the (apparently) unreadable *Laelius & Hortensia*. In these matters, context is all and the contexts are not available. In general, though, Stedman's complaints are not about cancellations or distortions, but about *insertions*. We do not know how many of Thomson's 'oaths' and 'sermons' were excised from the final text. As for the further changes, to which the Prices suggest Stedman might have taken exception, it is worth considering some further entries from the *Journal* covering the period between the 'Narrative' and the *Narrative*.

However radical Stedman's views may perhaps have been in the Suriname years and their immediate aftermath, in the sense of being critical of existing social arrangements, the revolution in France, and its wider ramifications, effected him deeply, though not always rationally:

Politicks of 1793: France has become a den of thieves, incendiaries and assassins, with law or religion. No more Sunday, no more nobility, the calendar and weekdays altered into nonsense. Towns are call'd communities. All women without exception ordered to cohabit with men, to promote population on pain of death. All bastards to be nationalized. The unhappy Dauphin, the King's only son, bound to a rascally shoe-maker, and the Princess Royal converted to a prostitute – both beautiful and well behaved children.<sup>616</sup>

---

<sup>616</sup> *Journal*, p. 345 (n.d.).

While this is no more than the record of the wild rumours reaching Tiverton, Stedman's reactions to the Convention's declaration of war on Britain and the Dutch Republic in Feb 1793, and the dispatch of 60,000 British troops to Haiti to suppress Toussaint-l'Ouverture's insurrection, drew better informed responses. Holland and the West Indies were, after all, the most important sites of his life. He records regularly and meticulously the deaths of officers who had been his friends, the sufferings of British troops from the '*Yellow Fever*, or pestilence, raging in the West Indies'.<sup>617</sup> He followed closely the capture of Dutch towns like Heusden, Nijmegen and Breda, where he had spent his youth, and Maestricht where he had married, while 'the late Scots regiments there, of Bentinck and my own Stuarts, also Rentwicks, are cut to pieces by the French'.<sup>618</sup> As for the issues of slavery and the slave trade, as we saw in Chapter two, the mood of the whole nation changed after 1791 following the failed Abolition and the San Domingo revolt. From then until 1800, when a new generation took up the cause, it was the West Indian lobby, the voice of the slaver-owners, which prevailed.

All this provided a macabre background to the progress of the production of his *Narrative*, and it is not surprising that over these years, his mind darkened. It happened to better minds, such as those of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and he consoled himself by an increasing national pride- 'May God preserve (our) worth King and happy constitution from age to age, amen! in spite of outward enemies, and inward discounted scoundrels till they expire'.<sup>619</sup> The complaint expressed by George Cumberland, Blake's fellow engraver, in 1795 that '*Great Britain* is hanging the Irish, hunting the Maroons, feeding the Vendée, and establishing the human flesh trade',<sup>620</sup> would have found Stedman unsympathetic on all four issues. Perhaps the final blows were the 1795 Maroon revolt in Jamaica and the 1796 Carib rebellion in St Vincent. with the accompanying 'murders &c. &c.'. <sup>621</sup> These overturned the opinion Thomson had, perhaps, attributed to him, that such things could not happen in British colonies. More to the point, they supplied Stedman with the final sentence of the passage quoted above from the 1796 *Preface*. The Prices attribute this *Preface* to Thomson, as part of their discussion

---

<sup>617</sup> *Journal*, p. 347 (n.d.).

<sup>618</sup> *Journal*, p. 363 (n.d.).

<sup>619</sup> *Journal*, p. 347 (n.d.).

<sup>620</sup> Quoted in E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1968), p. 179.

<sup>621</sup> *Journal*, p. 390 (n.d.).

about the shift of the balance of the book's argument towards a pro-slavery position. But the *Journal* entry under '1796 following' (probably, for May) makes it quite clear that Stedman himself sent the final version of the *Preface* directly to Hansard the printer, receiving in return the assurance that it had been 'printed to my mind and wishes'. The sentence blamed by the Prices on Thomson is Stedman's own, representing his own response to the most recent West Indian revolts.

There is one further consideration that is not discussed by the Prices, nor analysed in Stanbury Thompson's biography, but that has a direct bearing on Stedman's political views, namely, the fact that he was born and brought up in what is now the Netherlands. He was forty years old when he settled in Tiverton, and most of those forty years had been spent under the rule of the Stadtholders William IV and V. It is true that he cherished his Scottish descent, but the actual year he spent in Scotland being tutored by his uncle Dr John Stedman was a hated memory, and his subsequent visits to Scotland were made only to settle legal matters connected with an inheritance. It is true, too, that he drank a toast annually on St Andrew's day. But this seems to have been a regimental tradition rather than a nationalist gesture and his first loyalty was always to the regiment. Like the poet he admired, James Thomson, he preferred to be Scottish at a distance.

His first experience of radical politics came not with reading in English newspapers of the storming of the Bastille, but closer to home with the revolt of the Dutch patriots in 1781.<sup>622</sup> By the second half of the eighteenth century, the fabulous wealth of the Dutch republic had evaporated. While the finance houses of Amsterdam prospered, Dutch share of world trade had been carved up between Britain, France and Denmark, who no longer needed the Dutch as middlemen. Many crafts like shipbuilding and sail-making, and the processing and re-export of commodities like sugar, indigo, cotton and tobacco, were in sharp decline. Poverty and decay were what visitors like Boswell to Holland most noted, instead of the industry and prosperity they had come to study. In September 1781, a pamphlet was circulated which is taken by historians to mark the beginning of the Patriotic Revolt. It demanded a free press, and was authored by Baron Derk van

---

<sup>622</sup> This and the following paragraph are summarised from Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, chapters 2 'The Dutch Republic in its Dotage, 1747-1780', pp. 24-63, and 3 'The Patriot Revolt, 1781-1787', pp. 64-135.

Capellen who had earlier protested against the farming of taxes and against aristocratic patronage in political placements. Capellen claimed to speak for the rights of 'the people', by whom he meant (in Simon Schama's words) 'petty traders, artisans, craftsmen, merchants and shopkeepers'.<sup>623</sup>

There followed seven years of popular agitation - street confrontations between Patriots and supporters of the House of Orange, disputes fought out in the press and the courts, and political pamphleteering with national rallies producing draft constitutions - much of it uncannily anticipating the events in France from 1789 onwards. But when William V was unceremoniously expelled from The Hague and individual towns like Hattem and Elburg came out in open revolt, civil war threatened. Amsterdam merchants were unimpressed by Capellen's statement he would rather sacrifice the colonies than sacrifice a free press, and Prussia and England also had interests to protect. In October 1787, following the arrest of the Prussian Princess Wilhelmina, William V's queen, Prussian troops invaded in support of the House of Orange. The Stadtholder was restored and the Patriots overthrown and exiled. This curtain-raiser to the French Revolution was done.

There are no entries in Stedman's *Journal* between 2 Jan 1779 when he signed off with 'I give over keeping journal' and 1 August, 1784 by which time he is already preparing to leave Maestricht for England.<sup>624</sup> There is nothing in his own words to explain his key decision to start a new life in Tiverton, Devon, a town with which he had no connection. But there is one key piece of evidence. In 1775, when Stedman was still in Suriname, the Dutch had refused a British request to withdraw the Scots Brigade to fight in America. Parallels were already being drawn between the original Dutch rebellion against catholic Spain, which had brought the United Provinces into existence at the very dawn of their golden age, and the American War of Independence, in which Dutch sympathies were entirely with the rebels.<sup>625</sup> Then, on 18 November, 1782, midway through the fourth Anglo-Dutch War and following several petitions by officers of the Scots Brigade to be allowed to fight for their country, the Estates-General effectively disbanded it. Its uniform and regimental colours were to be substituted by Dutch equivalents, the 'Scots Duty' regimental march replaced, and its words

---

<sup>623</sup> Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, p. 66.

<sup>624</sup> *Journal*, pp. 233 and 237.

<sup>625</sup> Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, pp. 57-63.

of command were to be given in Dutch, not English. Officers were required to abjure their allegiance to the British Crown or lose their commissions and quit Dutch service. As a result, sixty-one officers, including Stedman, resigned, eventually securing commissions with equivalent rank on the half-pay list of the British Army.<sup>626</sup> Even then, however, Stedman stayed on in Maestricht, the garrison town where, in February of that same year, he had married Adriana Wierts Van Coehorn.

His final abandonment of his Dutch home coincided with the sacking of Louis, Duke of Brunswick, who had served as regent during William V's minority. Brunswick, targeted by the patriots as a foreign spy (he was a commissioned Austrian field-marshal) had been pilloried as a malign influence on the young Prince of Orange.<sup>627</sup> Stedman's personal response was immediate. Even before moving on from London to Devon, he published on 24 December 1784 at his own expense

A Most Striking Likeness of Lewis, Duke of Brunswick, late Field Marshal in the Dutch Service by an officer more than 20 years under his command. Published according to Act of Parliament by F. Jones, Grosvenor Street<sup>628</sup>.

The portrait, engraved by Stedman himself, depicts the Duke being simultaneously saluted and given his marching orders by an effete-looking William V. The inscription, from Pope's 'Prologue to Mr Addison's Tragedy of Cato' reads as follows:<sup>629</sup>

No common object to your sight displays  
But what with pleasure Heav'n itself surveys  
A brave man struggling in the storms of fate  
And greatly falling with a falling state.

A copy, with a flattering address, was sent to the Duke of Brunswick in Aix la Chapelle.<sup>630</sup> One hundred others were distributed to officers of the corps and other friends, and a further hundred put on sale at a shilling each. Stedman's engraving

---

<sup>626</sup> *Journal*, 'Preface', pp. vii-viii.

<sup>627</sup> Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, p. 80.

<sup>628</sup> *Journal*, p. 247.

<sup>629</sup> Pope, 'Prologue to Mr Addison's Tragedy of Cato', lines 19-23, in *Poems*, ed. Butt, p 211.

Later, in 1795, Stedman employed the same two couplets to introduce his Ode to William V, Prince of Orange, on the occasion of his 48th birthday (*Journal*, p. 373 (21 March, 1775).

<sup>630</sup> *Journal*, pp. 252-253.

stands in striking contrast to the hostile cartoons of 'Fat Louis' circulating in Holland.<sup>631</sup>

To sum up, Stedman's first experience of the radical patriotism that was to convulse Paris and excite London in 1789 was that it had disbanded his beloved regiment and disgraced his commanding officer of twenty years. He had little need to look any further for his political bearings.

With all these things in mind, it seems to me that the argument that the differences between the two narratives are the result of Thomson's distortion of Stedman's authentic, more radical text, is unsubstantiated. We do not know how many of Stedman's objections to the chapters he first saw in the summer of 1795 were answered by his destruction of that first edition. We do not know how many of the Thomson's changes earned Stedman's acquiescence, given that he knew his manuscript would have to be edited for publication. We do not know how many of the changes represent his revised opinions, given the darkening political scene. His comments to his brother, complaining of lies and nonsense and of the villainy and folly he has had to deal with, concluded with the claim 'I have over come them all'. All in all, this does not sound like 'an unhappy compromise'. I make these points because, marvellous as the 1790 'Narrative' is revealed to be, with the vigour of its counter-pointed styles and the powerful orality of its direct address to the reader, the 1796 *Narrative* is also a great book. As I hope to show, in my next section, not all the changes, whoever made them, are for the worse. Moreover, there are three changes that Richard and Sally Price acknowledge they are unable to account for. The first concerns the author's name on the title page, the second the dedication to the Prince of Wales, and the third the account of Stedman's marriage to Joanna.

The first problem arises from the fact that on the title page of the manuscript, Stedman's name is given as 'Lieut. Col. J.G. Stedman'. Joseph Johnson had evidently expected the book to appear under this name: in the *Analytical Review* he had described the author of the *Narrative* 'which in a short time will be published' as Lieut. Col. Stedman, following Stedman's promotion from Major while the book was in the press.<sup>632</sup> So why Captain Stedman? The Prices have no answer, but the explanation surely lies in that title page Stedman dispatched

---

<sup>631</sup> See plate ?.

<sup>632</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', p. LVII.

directly to Hansard the printer in May 1796 with the instruction ‘not to trust the above papers with Johnson’.<sup>633</sup> It was Stedman’s own, last-minute choice to go down to posterity as the captain he had been during the part of his life he most cherished – when he saw active service and was Joanna’s lover. I remarked in chapter four he had a gift for symbols, and this was his final exercise of that gift.

The dedication to the Prince of Wales replaced an earlier dedication to Sir George Strickland whom, it will be remembered, Stedman had met in Bergen op Zoom in Holland in June 1778, and who had ‘offered to get my West India voyage published’.<sup>634</sup> It was as a result of this crucial encounter that on June 15 Stedman began his *History of Guiana*, and on the 22nd wrote the journal of his jaunt to Brussels and Antwerp. On the change of dedication, once again, the *Journal* clarifies events. In December 1795, Stedman was visited in Tiverton by a certain Major Wemyss of the 11th regiment, Stedman noting ‘he speaks 3 languages, I speak 5’.<sup>635</sup> As a result of this encounter, Wemyss wrote to General St Leger, who took up the matter with the Prince and secured the necessary permission.<sup>636</sup> We know nothing more of Wemyss save that soon afterwards he married an acquaintance of Stedman’s from the nearby village of Cotleigh.<sup>637</sup> But it means the alteration arose as a result of Stedman’s connections, not Johnson’s, and in that sense was his own initiative – not least because he once again tried to outwit Johnson by dealing directly on the matter with Hansard. Dedication to the Prince of Wales was a sound commercial choice: twenty years later, when Jane Austen dedicated *Emma* to the same Prince, then Regent, her publisher John Murray cashed in with a print run of 2000 copies, her largest edition yet.<sup>638</sup> But the sequel is significant. Johnson learned of the new dedication and, says Stedman, altered it, ‘he being a d-mned infernal Jacobin scoundrel’.<sup>639</sup> Richard and Sally Price are probably correct in suggesting that the Johnson, with his radical connections, objected to the dedication on political grounds. But what happens then to their claim that, in general, Stedman had reactionary opinions foisted upon him in the production of the 1796 *Narrative*?

---

<sup>633</sup> *Journal*, p. 395 (n.d.).

<sup>634</sup> *Journal*, p. 216 (10 June, 1778).

<sup>635</sup> *Journal*, p. 392 (18 Dec., 1795).

<sup>636</sup> *Journal*, p. 394 (n.d.).

<sup>637</sup> *Journal*, p. 395 (n.d.).

<sup>638</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: a Life* (Penguin, 1998), p. 248.

<sup>639</sup> *Journal*, p. 395 (n.d.).

Thirdly, there is the matter of the wedding with Joanna, on which more below.

### **The ‘New’ and Final Narrative**

The first thing to note about William Thomson’s revisions is that he cut Stedman’s manuscript from the 303,000 words of the original to some 222,000, a reduction of 80,000 words, or just over one quarter. All authors complain about such practicalities of the publishing business, but the effect was that the *Narrative* could be published in two rather than three quarto volumes. As a campaigning publisher, Johnson was always concerned that his books should be affordable. Indeed, in the 1790s, the price of books was in itself a political issue. One of Johnson’s authors, Thomas Cooper of *A Reply to Mr Burke’s Invective* (1792), one of thirteen replies to Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution* published by Johnson (including Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women*) was specifically warned by the attorney general:

Continue if you please to publish your reply to Mr Burke in an octavo form, so as to confine it probably to that class of readers who may consider it coolly: so soon as it is published cheaply for dissemination among the populace, it will be my duty to prosecute.<sup>640</sup>

Stedman’s *Narrative*, with its expensive plates, did not fall into this category of publication, but in cutting the original text to two octavo-volume format, Thomson whatever his other failings was proving himself a professional.

Many of Thomson’s cuts involved no more than tightening up Stedman convoluted, somewhat self-indulgent prose, and it has to be said frankly that they are improvements. The following passage from the beginning of Chapter Six, chosen precisely because it is innocent of the broader issues discussed by Richard and Sally Price, will illustrate the point. Stedman’s original text is as follows:

Now died our Lieutenant Collonel *Lantman* while a number of our officers lay seek – amongst whom at last / in place of joy and dissipation / pale mortality began to take place, & which from day to Day increased amongst the private Men at a most Lamentable rate –

---

<sup>640</sup> Quoted in Tyson, *Joseph Johnson*, p. 124.

Next day Were inter'd with Military Honours the remains of the deceased Lieut. Colonel, in the centre of the Fortress *Zelandia* – where all criminals are imprisoned – and all field Officers Buried – and where I was not a little Shock'd to see the Captive rebel-Negroes – and others – clanking their Chains, and roasting *Plantains* and *yams* upon they'r graves – which I could not help putting me in mind of so many helish fiends in the Shape of African-Slaves, tormenting the Souls of their European perscutors, in which number by the *Navy* or *army* ought with Justice not to be included who come not to inspire Revolts but to Quell them –<sup>641</sup>

Thomson's revision is as follows:

On the 21st of May our Lieutenant Colonel, Lantman, died, and a number of our officers lay sick.

Instead of gaiety and dissipation, disease and mortality now began to rage amongst us; and the devastation increased from day to day among the private men, in a most alarming proportion. The remains of the deceased officer were interred with military honours, in the centre of the fortress *Zelandia*, where all criminals are imprisoned, and all field officers buried. At this place I was not a little shocked to see the captive rebel negroes and others clanking their chains, and roasting plantains and yams upon the sepulchres of the dead; they presented to my imagination the image of a number of diabolical fiends in the shape of African slaves, tormenting the souls of their European persecutors.<sup>642</sup>

Thomson's negative changes involve correcting Stedman's aural but often inconsistent spelling (Collonel and Colonel, seek for sick, encreased for increased, etc.), correcting his apparently random use of capitalisation (why 'day to Day', '*Plantains* and *yams*', '*Navy* or *army*'?), and imposing eighteenth century practice on his punctuation (commas, semi-colons and full stops in place of Stedman's dashes and slashes). The positive changes involve gains in precision. 'Now died' becomes 'On the 21st of May', a detail otherwise only to be inferred from Stedman's page heading (1773 – May 21, 22). The conjunction 'while' is changed to 'and', avoiding the implication that the sick officers were supposed to be tending the dead colonel. 'Joy', an individual emotional or spiritual state, is replaced by 'gaiety' with its more accurate social dimensions. Stedman's feeble 'Pale mortality began to take place' is changed to 'disease and mortality now began to rage', while 'lamentable rate', becomes 'alarming proportion', so that grief ceases to be primarily an effect of numbers. Greater precision of vocabulary

---

<sup>641</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 102.

<sup>642</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 63.

leads to better shaped sentences, with the contrasts hinted in Stedman's version ('officers ...private men': or 'in place of joy and dissipation, Pale mortality') made to supply the structure of genuinely compound sentences. The total effect is that the meaning is sharper and crisper. The horror of Stedman's image of the black prisoners, clanking their chains and roasting their plantains on the graves of dead officers, appearing like the souls of dead slaves come back to torment their persecutors, has greater force in Thomson's version. This shows up in turn the redundancy of Stedman's final two clauses, which Thomson cuts as being, at the very least, inconsistent in tone with the rest of the passage. This passage as a whole is untypical only in that Thomson cut 22 words or some 18% in place of the 27% cut from the manuscript as a whole. In other respects, it is fully representative of Thomson's copy-editing.

The excision of Stedman's opinions while retaining what he actually saw is nowhere better illustrated than in Stedman's account of the slave trade.<sup>643</sup> It will be recalled Stedman begins by describing the arrival of a fresh cargo from a Guinea-man, a drove of men, woman and some children looking like 'walking Skeletons covered over with a piece of tand leather'. He quotes Ezekiel 37 ('can these bones live'), but adds he 'perceived not one Single down-caste look amongst them all', and that on the whole the sailors treated them kindly. He then proceeds with a review of the Abolition debate, claiming to have 'read Mr.Clarkson's Essays ... with pleasure', along with 'all the debates and newspaper Controversies', but protesting about misinformation and prejudice on both sides. Africa, he says, is acknowledged to be uncivilised, but is typical of mankind in that it is governed by kings and princes perpetually at war. War is necessary, 'to prevent a general Stagnation of the Globe', and 'to thin and preserve the human Species' otherwise thinned by natural calamities and disease, and is no more against nature than weeding gardens to make room for fresh plants. Wars in Africa are trivial affairs compared to those raging in Europe. Fifty of the battles described by Clarkson in the course of the slave trade cause less destruction than one half of a European engagement, and the number of slaves transported is tiny compared to those dying in Europe from war, poverty and disease. He wishes the philanthropists would begin by paying attention to the poor at home, the soldiers and sailors who are dragooned and press-ganged, then reduced to beggary when

they are wounded, the starving unable to provide for themselves, the prostitutes walking the streets.

As for the West Indian colonies, they can only be cultivated by African labour and it would be unfair to deprive the planters of their investment. African labour should be *dependent* (Stedman's emphasis) but 'proper restrictions' (which he outlines later in chapter 29). Once the colonies have been reformed, the trade itself can safely be abolished for the slave population will replenish itself. But for the time being, the trade remains necessary and emancipation would be something 'I take Liberty to prophesy, that thousands and thousands shall repent it'. He then proceeds to describe how slaves are disposed on arrival in the New World, and returns to his lodging to find Joanna herself is due to be auctioned that day. This long section of some seven pages Thomson cuts to a summary page and a half, retaining little more than what Stedman has observed himself by way of contribution to the debate.<sup>644</sup> The revision focuses far more effectively than the original text on the key image of the slaves being unloaded in Surinam and on the horror of the discovery that Joanna is to feature in the same auction.

Where Stedman remarks dismissively that 'Linaen names may easily be added by the Connoisseurs',<sup>645</sup> Thomson supplies the Linnean classification for those species of flora and fauna described in the text he was able to identify (in fact, as Richard and Sally Price remark, many identifications are still uncertain).<sup>646</sup> Where Stedman adds information in footnotes, Thomson (like all good writers) normally includes it in the text. For example, the accusation that 'the Rev. Mr. S-dh-s, Mr.T-ll-t, &c' kept 'sable-coloured' concubines carries much greater weight when incorporated directly into Stedman's description of the 'Surinam marriage'.<sup>647</sup> Many of Stedman's personal observations and asides, such as his comments on the ugliness of European women are treated as idiosyncratic and superfluous. Like the exception of the '*Navy or army*' above, they have been edited out.

---

<sup>643</sup> The following is a summary of 1790 'Narrative', pp. 167-175.

<sup>644</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, pp. 112-114.

<sup>645</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 8.

<sup>646</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Appendix A', p. 673.

<sup>647</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 18.

Stedman had anticipated that his ‘superfluous quotations’<sup>648</sup> would be slashed, and Thomson (who presumably read these words) obliges. There are 150 quotations in the 1790 ‘Narrative’, of which Thomson cuts 106. Those slashed include many of the passages from Virgil’s *Georgics*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Thomson’s *The Seasons*, the anonymous *Jamaica*, and from the Della Cruscan and other minor eighteenth century figures such as Pomphret and Edward Young. They also include a number that are unattributable, some of which may be Stedman’s own. What are cut, in other words, are the quotations reinforcing the pastoral and sentimental elements in Stedman’s work. The heroic quotations from Pope’s *Iliad* are mostly retained. In making these cuts, Thomson seems to have been guided by the need to shorten the manuscript, by whether the quotation seems effective or otherwise, and by his own literary tastes. Though the anti-pastoral, anti-sentimental slant needs further examination, it may be said in general that what disappears includes a good deal of very dull eighteenth century couplets: what remains is usually good in its own terms, and provides an apposite comment on the text.

In pursuit of this, he occasionally moves quotations around. In the 1790 ‘Narrative’, the powerful lines from the anonymous *Jamaica*, prophesying slave revolts, feature almost incidentally in chapter 18 in the context of a minor skirmish with the maroons. Thomson brings them forward to Chapter 3, describing the causes of maroonage and the atrocity of 1730 when eleven captives suffered ‘a most shocking and barbarous execution’:

Some Afric chief will rise, who scorning chains  
Racks, torments, flames, excruciating pains,  
Will lead his injur’d friends to bloody fight,  
And in He flooded carnage take delight;  
Then dear repay us in some vengeful war,  
And give us blood for blood and scar for scar.<sup>649</sup>

Though written after the event, quoted here the lines take on the force of prophecy. Similarly, the ‘What good man’ quotation from ‘*Jamaica*’ with its lines about ‘sable Caesar’s’ and ‘sooty Cato’, is shifted from its rather nondescript context in chapter 26 to chapter 24 where it follows an account of ‘the heroic

---

<sup>648</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 7.

<sup>649</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 360, and 1796 *Narrative*, p. 34.

behaviour' of a rebel maroon brought to trial and executed 'amongst the most excruciating torments'.<sup>650</sup> Other measures to increase the effectiveness of the quotations are to standardise the spelling and punctuation, occasionally to shorten them slightly and, where Stedman's quotation is in the original Latin, to provide the English translation. (Curiously, however, the Prices attribute the translation of Horace's *Ode* 'Ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori', quoted in chapter 12, to 'JGS' (that is, to Stedman), despite their general claim that Thomson was responsible for the changes in the 1796 *Narrative*.<sup>651</sup>)

Finally, Thomson adds 8 quotations of his own. Five of them, two from Pope's *Iliad* and three from the *Old Testament*, are added to Stedman's description of the capture of Boni's stockaded village of Gado Sabi in August 1775. I shall be examining Stedman's description of this battle, the only direct engagement he experienced in Suriname, in chapter 9 as part of my answer to the question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' As will be seen, Stedman's account emphasises the heroism of the black combatants, his scientific interest in military tactics, and his own sensibility to others' suffering. Thomson appears to have felt he showed too little sense of his possible impending death, and the extra quotes ('Behold the battle is before us and behind us ... and there is no place for us to turn aside') add a sombre undercurrent to the account.

One consequence of the shortening of the text and the honing of Stedman's style into better balanced sentences incorporating a more accurate vocabulary is that the 1796 *Narrative* becomes a lot more like the kind of book Stedman claimed it was supposed to be. The principal charm of the 1790 'Narrative' is that deploys a great variety of styles, all set in deliberate counterpoint. Stedman begins by affecting the plain, manly, un-literary style of the simple soldier who has found himself in foreign parts. If he has a model, it is 'the immortal Captn. Cook'.<sup>652</sup> As we saw in chapter 3, this is the characteristic rhetoric of a hundred years of travel books between the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the affectation of a 'hardy virility' being closely linked with the claim to a 'scientifically educated eye'.<sup>653</sup> Contrasted with the plain statement of his scientific travels, however, is the calculated high comedy of his descriptions of his seven campaigns, in satire

---

<sup>650</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 524, and 1796 *Narrative*, p. 335.

<sup>651</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 689-690 (note to p. 249), comparing p. 249 and 1796 *Narrative*, p. 167.

<sup>652</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 27.

<sup>653</sup> Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*, p. 49.

and angry fantasy directed against his superior officers. In these passages, which are often very funny, the picaresque style adopted from *Roderick Random* is deployed - a blend of caricature, expostulations, great oaths and gales of laughter, the vocabulary earthy, the sentences short and exclamatory, relishing as their target hypocrisy and incompetence. This same style works well for Stedman's assault on Surinam's settler society, such as the famous set-piece description of the Surinam planter, his long day one tiring round of every variety of self-indulgence.<sup>654</sup> Counter-pointed with these in turn are, of course, the passages of heroic, the pastoral and the sentimental that are my immediate subject. As Stedman explains:

I hope (it) will make it the more excusable when I introduce Sometimes Scenes of a more lively Nature however inconsistent with either natural History or the account of a Military Expedition – I wish to diversity the Sable Scenes of Horror, by the more cheering Sunshine of Content, And to variegate this Work in such a manner / if possible / as to make it please both the Stern Grim Philosopher and the Youthful, the beautiful and innocent Maid. This shall ever be my desire and my Study -<sup>655</sup>

Significantly but appropriately, Thomson cuts this passage, and the general effect of his larger cuts is to produce a book in a single style much closer to that of the retired officer with scientific interests presenting an accurate report than the actual manuscript Stedman had submitted for editing.

The accusation that Thomson's changes give the *Narrative* a pro-slavery bias is, to quote Scottish law, 'not proven'. It is true that, in the course of cutting the long discussion of the slave trade, he declares 'the national character of these people ... is perfectly savage'.<sup>656</sup> 'Savage' is not a word in Stedman's vocabulary, and must be regarded as an intrusion. Yet Stedman's brief references to Africa remain unaltered. Four times, he describes the African antecedents of slaves he has encountered. First, there is Joanna's grandfather, 'who told me he was born in Africa, where he had once been more respected than any of his Surinam masters ever were in their country'.<sup>657</sup> This becomes the basis of the claim that Joanna is

---

<sup>654</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 363-366.

<sup>655</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 116.

<sup>656</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 112.

<sup>657</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, pp. 166-167.

well-descended on both sides of the racial divide. Secondly, there is the rebel maroon on trial who begins his speech in the courtroom ‘I was born in Africa where, defending my prince during an engagement.’ He goes on to complain he was sold on the coast of Guinea by his ‘*own countrymen*’, cruelly treated on the plantation of his purchaser ‘who is now to be one of my judges’, even more cruelly treated by Boni whose rebellion he joined, before finally being captured in the forest where he had taken refuge from all mankind.<sup>658</sup> Thirdly, there is ‘a goodlooking new negro’ (called William in the 1790 version), who tells him ‘my father was a king and treacherously murdered by the sons of a neighbouring prince’. Seeking revenge, he was captured and ‘sold to your European countrymen on the coast of Guinea – a punishment which was deemed greater than instant death’.<sup>659</sup> Finally, there is Quaco, his personal slave, whose history is given as follows:

My parents lived by hunting and fishing: I was stolen from them very young, whilst playing on the sands with two little brothers; I was put into a sack, and carried for several miles. I afterwards became the slave of a king on the coast of Guinea, with several hundreds more. When our Master died, the principal part of his slaves were beheaded and buried along with him; I, with some other children of my age, were bestowed as present to the different captains of his army; and the master of a Dutch ship afterwards had me, in exchange for a musket and some gun-powder<sup>660</sup>.

In both Stedman’s account, and Thomson’s version of it, the kings and princes and barbarians are fairly evenly distributed.

Thomson has no difficulty in retaining Stedman’s description of Africans as ‘our brethren’.<sup>661</sup> He repeats Stedman’s ‘I love the African negroes’, and deploys the Abolitionists’ argument from climate in accounting for ‘the complexion of a negro’ which ‘is entirely owing to the burning climate in which he lives, and an atmosphere still more heated by the sandy deserts, over which the trade winds pass before they reach the habitable parts ... and I am of opinion that the woolly texture of their hair is an effect proceeding from the same cause’.<sup>662</sup> He describes

---

<sup>658</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 334.

<sup>659</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 369.

<sup>660</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 369.

<sup>661</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 112.

<sup>662</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, pp. 113 and 358.

the Guinea trade as ‘execrable’ (Stedman’s less precise word was ‘cursed’).<sup>663</sup> Thomson concludes (with specific reference to the plate of *Europe supported by Africa and America*) ‘we only differ in colour, but are certainly all created by the same Hand’.<sup>664</sup> Given that Stedman was not an abolitionist and actually opposed emancipation, the distinction between the two positions seems imperceptible.

Thomson insists more than once that the brutalities Stedman describes do not occur in British colonies. One of these additions occurs at the climax of the description of the ‘Execution of the Breaking on the Rack’ where it carries particular emotional force.<sup>665</sup> The insertions became irrelevant after the Jamaican maroon revolt of 1795 and the Carib uprising in St Vincent the following year, but it remains far from clear that Stedman would have objected to them. Surinam, as the quotation from *Candide* cited earlier illustrates (and as Richard and Sally Price concur), had long been a by-word for particular brutality within the slave societies of the Caribbean, and Stedman was nothing if not patriotic. Thomson actually excises several of Stedman’s tributes to, for example, ‘*British soldiers and sailors, a braver and more generous People than Compose both its Army and Navy not existing*’.<sup>666</sup> Finally, the point has already been made that the strongest words attributed to Thomson by the Prices, that liberty ‘when suddenly granted to illiterate and unprincipled men, must be to all parties dangerous if not pernicious’, belong to the *Preface* which was demonstrably Stedman’s own work.

In the absence of any manuscript by Thomson, no absolute conclusions are possible. But it appears the differences between the 1790 ‘Narrative’ and the 1796 text are more the effect of the cutting of 80,000 words, and the tightening and sharpening of the vocabulary and sentence structure, than of any deliberate shift of emphasis. However, there is one exception – the presentation of Joanna.

Barring cuts and the very occasional insertion of ‘savage’ judgements (in every sense of the word) Thomson leaves largely untouched the idiom of Stedman’s portrait of the slaves, rangers and rebel maroons. He emphasises the stoicism, integrity and perseverance of the slaves, particularly under the savage punishments they endure without complaint. He accepts that their unremitting ill-treatment is the principal cause of the slave revolts – the Surinam of the 1796

---

<sup>663</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 418.

<sup>664</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 435.

<sup>665</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 383.

<sup>666</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 204.

*Narrative* remains overwhelmingly a brutal society – and he repeats with little alteration Stedman’s account of the treaty of 1760. The superior general-ship of the maroons is again praised, and he accepts that the rangers make better soldiers.<sup>667</sup> They are ‘valiant’ and ‘gallant’, not only being more adapted to forest fighting, but exhibiting that ‘spirit of liberty of ancient times’ which is the mark of the true warrior.<sup>668</sup> Finally, he retains most of the Homeric quotations by means of which Stedman suggests the rangers and maroons are the true heroes of his story.

The ‘sentimental’ fares less well, with many of Stedman’s personal opinions and the majority of the quotations from James Thomson and the Della Cruscan eliminated. Thomson, evidently, was not a man of sentiment. But the episode of the monkey, along with Stedman’s tears, is retained, as too is the general praise of his ‘sensibility’ for his concerns about Joanna.<sup>669</sup> Where, as in the description of the capture of Gado Sabi (see chapter nine), Stedman’s sympathy for the rebels is integral to the account, it remains unaltered.

By contrast, the main victim of the 1796 *Narrative* is Joanna. Most of the tapestry of allusion and quotation woven around her in 1790 is simply cut away by Thomson. With them disappear all the subtle paradoxes in which the different possibilities of Joanna’s character and situation were suggested.

Thomson preserves the opening description of Joanna quoted in full in chapter five, with one interesting alteration. Stedman’s reference to ‘her olive complexion’ becomes ‘the darkness of her complexion’.<sup>670</sup> The change appears demeaning, but Stedman is describing Joanna’s blush (‘a beautiful tinge of vermilion’), and the conjunction ‘in spite of’ makes better sense if the contrast is with a ‘dark’ than an ‘olive’ skin. But more is involved here than Thomson’s customary sharpening of Stedman’s vocabulary. The demonstration that the dark-skinned Joanna could ‘blush’, the visible sign of modesty and a sense of shame, acquits her at once of that promiscuity which was, in pro-slavery discourse, supposed to mark the character of African women. From this, not unpromising beginning, Thomson goes on to provide a portrait of Joanna significantly different from Stedman’s, in which her essential ‘goodness’ subsists in her acceptance of

---

<sup>667</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 102.

<sup>668</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, pp. 13 and 137.

<sup>669</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, pp. 92-93 and 197.

<sup>670</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 52.

her inferiority. One inevitable component of this is the virtual elimination of the idioms of pastoral that Stedman wove round her.

Thus, the long description quoted in chapter five of Stedman's proposal of marriage is savagely chopped to a single sentence. Gone is the nymph surprised in bathing, and gone too the tenderly erotic couplets. Instead, Stedman finds her 'bathed in tears' (rather than bathing) and offers at once to be her 'protector' (with no mention of marriage).<sup>671</sup> Thomson, in fact, consistently emphasises the differences in their status, differences which Stedman's deployment of the pastoral had deliberately subverted. These changes are very minor but their effect is cumulative, so that, for example, Stedman's 'the misfortune of her birth' becomes 'the lowness of her birth', while his wish to end his life 'with her' becomes a wish to end his life 'on this spot', and so on.<sup>672</sup> De La Marre becomes 'a friend' rather than a 'brother-in-law'.<sup>673</sup> The description of the 'golden age' of their residence at 'The Hope' in March and April 1774 with Joanna glowing in her pregnancy, is muted with, for instance, the successive quotations from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, portraying Joanna as Eve, cut to a single example.

These modifications throw into greater prominence Joanna's 'speeches' as the reader's means of assessing her, and Thomson's treatment reveals further role he assigns her. Some are simply invented for her, continuing that commitment to moral sentiment which Stedman had himself introduced. Others are revised in the light of Thomson's opinion of her true status. The 1796 version of the speech quoted in chapter five is as follows:

I am born a low contemptible slave. Were you to treat me with too much attention, you must degrade yourself with all your friends and relations; while the purchase of my freedom you will find expensive, difficult and apparently impossible. Yet though a slave, I have a soul, I hope, not inferior to that of a European; and blush not to avow the regard I retain for you, who have distinguished me so much above all others of my unhappy birth. You have, Sir, pitied me; and now, independent of every other thought, I shall have pride in throwing myself at your feet, till fate shall part us, or my conduct become such as to give you cause to banish me from your presence.<sup>674</sup>

---

<sup>671</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 85.

<sup>672</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, pp. 167 and 424.

<sup>673</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 107.

<sup>674</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 61.

This is the speech of a loyal servant addressing a master who has treated her well. There is no mention of marriage (it is ‘too much attention’ would be degrading), and no references to the ‘ways of my Ancestors’, simply a pledge of service. Joanna is not even allowed to claim equality of soul with the ‘best European’, but instead to ‘hope’ that she has a ‘soul’ incidentally ‘not inferior to that of a European’ (there being inferior Europeans).

It is possible that these changes reflect a pro-slavery bias, but I detect about them a rather stronger whiff of Scottish Presbyterianism. Overwhelmingly, and without anywhere criticising Joanna, Thomson disapproves of Stedman’s dealings with her. He closes his account of their first meeting and subsequent marriage with the words ‘I shall beg leave to conclude a chapter, which, methinks I hear many readers whisper, had better never had a beginning’.<sup>675</sup> He begins chapter sixteen, following on the idyll at The Hope with ‘I now return to the principal object of my Journal, viz., Fourgeoud’s military operations’.<sup>676</sup> These are both insertions, and are typical in shifting Joanna away from the *Narrative*’s centre to its fringe. One consequence of the sharpening and tightening of Stedman’s grammar and vocabulary, and of the removal of his personal opinions and of many decorative quotations, is to expose the relationship with Joanna as being just another ‘Surinam marriage’, albeit one marked by a good deal of mutual affection. Plainly, the addition of ‘a decent wedding, at which many of our respectable friends made their appearance’ belongs to this context, though whether inserted by Thomson for ‘decency’s sake or (as the Prices suggest) by Stedman himself to correct the balance of Thomson’s version, is impossible to say’.<sup>677</sup>

Disapproval may, of course, have more than one source, and Presbyterianism is by no means incompatible with racism and social snobbery. But I hear behind many of Thomson’s changes a strong Edinburgh accent, the voice of the Kirk rather than of the West Indian lobby. Did Stedman detect it too, and did it put him in mind of the dreaded Dr John Stedman, author of the unreadable *Laelius and Hortensia*. This hated uncle was never far from his mind. He jokes in the original Preface ‘after my learn’d Kinsman’s performance was Tax’d to be without originality or information – yet, O heavens how should I laugh aloud to be told

---

<sup>675</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 62.

<sup>676</sup> 1796 *Narrative*, p. 223.

<sup>677</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, ‘Introduction’, note 54, p. XCV, quoting 1796 *Narrative*, p. 62.

that my unstudied theme possess'd both'.<sup>678</sup> If Thomson's style did echo that of his tutor during the miserable year he spend in Scotland at the age of 11, it would go a long way to explain his furious reaction to the proofs he saw in May 1795 – 'oaths and sermons inserted &c. ... Bawdy oaths, lies and preachings in my unhappy book'.

Curiously, though, little of this would have been detectable by Stedman's first readers. Unaware of Thomson's disapproving interventions, they would have read such phrases as 'a chapter, which, methinks I hear many readers whisper, had better never had a beginning' as little more than the equivalent of Joanna's blush. Even Thomson's insistence on the social difference between the lovers may have seemed to recognise the obvious. I have already made it clear that, if a choice is necessary, I prefer the newly edited 1790 'Narrative'. For all the years separating it from the *Journal*, it remains a young man's book, full of the exuberance of his adventure and the enduring memory of his great love. It has the immediacy of oral performance, with the storyteller's personality shining through its very lack of polish as an eighteenth century text. But it was the 1796 *Narrative* that was immediately publishable, and that entered history with the editions and translations and abridgements and imitations that followed. It became a key text in the cause of both abolition and emancipation, all the more powerful for its evident moderation. Naipaul's reaction, that the Suriname of the *Narrative*, with Stedman's descriptions reinforced by Blake's engraving's, resembled 'one vast concentration camp' is surely closer to the spirit of the book than the suggestion of a pro-slavery bias.<sup>679</sup> Something, moreover, Thomson could not eliminate was the sheer power of the love story as narrative. It is even arguable that by cutting away Stedman's elaborate decorations, allowing the bare facts to speak for themselves against a tone of Presbyterian disapproval, he threw the romance into greater prominence.

In 1870, The Reverend Charles Kingsley, evangelical priest and author of *The Water Babies*, made a long anticipated visit to the island of Trinidad in the British West Indies. Deeply versed in the natural sciences and acutely sensitive to people and landscapes, his was nevertheless the very voice of late-Victorian morality. In his delightful memoir of the visit, *At Last*, Kingsley writes:

---

<sup>678</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 9.

<sup>679</sup> Naipaul, *Middle Passage*, p. 184.

What a genius was Stedman. What an eye and pen he had for all natural objects. His denunciations of the brutalities of old Dutch slavery are full of genuine eloquence and of sound sense likewise; and the loves of Stedman and his brown Joanna are one of the sweetest idylls in the English tongue.<sup>680</sup>

The reference is, of course, to the text of 1796.

---

<sup>680</sup> Charles Kingsley, *At Last: a Christmas in the West Indies* (Macmillan, 1896), p. 93.

## Chapter Eight

### Derivatives

This chapter examines the uses made of Stedman's *Narrative* by subsequent writers, mainly novelists and dramatists, and it has to be acknowledged that most of the texts are uninspiring. Studies in the sociology of literature, disinterring works that time has long since confined to oblivion, can be rewarding. Better than most other historical sources, they remind us of opinions and attitudes that once appeared normal, or at least entertaining, but have been overtaken or reversed by historical change. But such studies need to match a close reading of the texts under discussion with a deep knowledge of the historical context. I hope to demonstrate some limited correspondence between the works resurrected in this chapter and the 'history' they make use of, most visibly in the development of the debate in England from Abolition to Emancipation. But for the most part, the novels and plays I am describing range so widely from England to Germany, France, Holland and South America, and are so loosely distributed over a period of two hundred years, that the kinds of close correlation which make historical readings illuminating, even when the texts are unrewarding in their own terms, will not be possible.

Forgotten texts may also be worth studying as source material, illustrating how a major author has transformed such unpromising matter. For example, Arthur Brooke's poem about 'a couple of vnfortunate louers' who preferred the counsel of 'dronken gossypes and superstitious friars' to the 'authoritie and aduise of parents and frendes' became the main source of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>681</sup> In such cases, both what authors have taken over and what they have rejected as unusable, can be equally revealing in documenting the marvel of the transformation. Similarly, there is often much to be learned from studying the evolution of a genre. Books on such themes as 'One Hundred Women's Novels before Jane Austen' are lucky if they manage to exhume more than a handful of texts still worth reading. But the light they throw on Jane Austen's achievement in

---

<sup>681</sup> Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (Methuen, 1977) p. 41

transforming the genre (and, incidentally, on women's far-from-silenced writing and reading habits) can be invaluable.

If, in this chapter, I were able to demonstrate the gradual evolution of the Stedman story from its primitive beginnings to Blake's 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' and the 1796 *Narrative*, it would be easier to make the topic interesting. But I am dealing with derivatives not sources, and the reader's first hope of the literary historian – that he or she will resurrect a lost masterpiece – is also going to be frustrated. What follows is a mixed bag of second rate texts and lost opportunities as a succession of international authors 'appropriate' (for once, the jargon word *is* appropriate) a rich narrative for their own limited purposes. On the other hand, writers of the second or third rank can often be very interesting as people. It has also to be acknowledged that for Franz Kratter and George Coleman the Younger and Mrs Lydia Child and Eugene Sue, their versions of the Stedman-Joanna story were but single episodes of immensely varied careers. I should be sorry not to have encountered Kratter and Mrs Child, together with the transvestite Johan Edwin Hokstam and the gentle Beryl Gilroy (but my time spent with the off-form Eugene Sue was entirely wasted).

### **The *Narrative* in Translation**

The transformations of the 1796 *Narrative* began with the spate of translations that followed hard upon its publication. Two rival German translations, the first by Wilhelm Jacobs and Freidrich Kries and published in Hamburg, the second by M.C. Sprengel and published in Halle, appeared in 1797, the second being reprinted in the same year as volumes 8 and 9 of Sprengel's travel compendium *Auswahl der Besten Ausländischen*.<sup>682</sup> Germany, of course, had no slave colonies and, unlike the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese, ships of German origin or operating from Brandenburg, played only a minor part in the slave trade. German interest in the *Narrative*, at least initially, seems to have arisen from its contributions to geography and natural history aspects rather than from its contribution to any local abolition debate.

---

<sup>682</sup> For details, see footnote 4 to chapter one, and Bibliography (Primary Sources).

In sharp contrast, P.F. Henry's French translation of 1798 adds four appendices by the translator.<sup>683</sup> The first supplements Stedman's description of Suriname with a short account of neighbouring French Guiana (Cayenne). The second appeals for the specialised knowledge of Dutch engineers in dyke construction to tame the rivers of the Guianas. The third elaborates on, and partly corrects, Stedman's description of the cultivation of coffee. The fourth is on the theme of abolition. It declares the translator to be 'a friend of freedom' who, though previously a planter in French Guiana and the 'owner of many slaves', has welcomed the French revolution and the universal Rights of Man, with the abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of the slaves. The appendix appeals for the revival of the French Guiana plantations under a system of free labour (so he can become a planter 'without remorse'), and for a staggered but final emancipation in Dutch Suriname and English Jamaica. Finally, with an eye on San Domingo, he praises the courage of Black people ('the Blacks are not incompetent') who have 'gained their freedom contrary to the wishes of their masters'. The translation, published in Paris, is dated 1 Brumaire, An 7 (23 October, 1798), one year before the coup of 18 Brumaire that brought Napoleon to power (in 1802, he restored slavery throughout the French Empire).<sup>684</sup>

The two Dutch translations that appeared in 1799 and 1799-1800 are easier to account for.<sup>685</sup> The *Narrative* concerns a Dutch colony, discussing policies much debated in Holland particularly since the financial crises of the 1770s, and naming many familiar names (it is probably coincidental that 1799 was the year Suriname reverted for a decade and a half to being a British possession). The first of these translations is by J.D.Pasteur, and published in Leiden, the second by J. Allart and published in Amsterdam. Interestingly, Allart's translation includes a translation of the four appendices from P.F. Henry's French edition. As we saw in my chapter two, there was no audience in Holland at the time for material on abolition. Perhaps it was Henry's appeal for Dutch expertise in dyke building that appeared to the point. A Swedish translation from the English by Trycht i Kongl, published in Stockholm

---

<sup>683</sup> See footnote 4 to chapter one, and Bibliography (Primary Sources).

<sup>684</sup> The Appendices also appear in Vol. 4 of *Reize naar Surinamen, en door de binnenste gedeelten van Guiana: door den Capitain John Gabriel Stedman*, 4 vols (Amsterdam, 1799-1800).

<sup>685</sup> See footnote 4 to chapter one, and Bibliography (Primary Sources).

in 1800, and an Italian translation by Cav. Borghi of Henry's French version, including the four appendices, published in Milan in 1818, conclude this particular stage of the dissemination of Stedman's text.<sup>686</sup> By then, the story was becoming popular in other forms.

### **German Sentiment 1: Zimmermann's *Taschenbuch der Reisen***

E.A.W. Zimmermann's *Taschenbuch der Reisen*, or 'Pocketbook of Travels', is best described by its subtitle, namely 'An Entertaining Account of Discoveries of the Eighteenth century concerning Countries, People, and Products, intended for every class of reader'.<sup>687</sup> The edition published in Leipzig in 1803 is the 'second instalment' of a series that continued with volumes devoted to other parts of the world (volume 4, for example, published in 1805, deals with North America). Opposite the title page is a picture of 'the Noble Johanna' (sic), engraved from the original by Heinrich Schmidt, but with the image reversed - presumably so she can be facing the title. The text includes five pages describing Johanna in highly idealised terms and drawing an explicit moral. It refers back to the 'lively and terrible union of mulattos and Negroes' which followed the 'mad idea' of the French National Assembly of introducing 'immediate liberation' in Haiti.<sup>688</sup> The Haitian 'coloureds' had suffered 'greater humiliation' than elsewhere in the West Indies, being forbidden to wear shoes and socks or display jewellery. By contrast, the 'coloured people' in British territories remained honest and loyal supporters of the government even during slave uprisings.

This proposition would have looked dubious even as early as 1803. In its support is adduced the 'tender' and 'noble' Johanna, Zimmermann being apparently unaware that Suriname during her lifetime was not British but Dutch. She is described, following the *Narrative* closely, as the daughter of Cery, a black slave, and Kruythoff, a planter who died of a broken heart after failing to secure his family's manumission. The catalogue of her beauties is a repetition of Stedman's, but her chintz petticoat is modified to 'almost transparent' revealing

---

<sup>686</sup> See footnote 4 to chapter one, and Bibliography (Primary Sources).

<sup>687</sup> *Taschenbuch der Reisen oder Unterhaltende Darstellung der Entdeckungen des 18ten Jahrhunderts, in Rücksicht der Länder, Menschen und Productenkunde. Für jede Klasse von Lesern. von E.A.W. Zimmermann (Leipzig, 1803).*

<sup>688</sup> Zimmermann, *Taschenbuch*, p. 54.

her ‘Greek contours’.<sup>689</sup> This titillating addition notwithstanding, the author abruptly changes course as her beauty becomes of no importance compared to her ‘most sentimental and noble soul’.<sup>690</sup> There follows an account of her selfless devotion to Stedman that is exaggerated to the point of fiction. She nursed him, we are told, through several highly infectious diseases, completely disregarding the danger to herself (she did nurse Stedman, but there was no risk of infection). She not only restored his gifts worth £20 (they had been worth £10 in the *Journal*, £20 in the *Narrative*), but added her own money to offset the merchants’ loss of profit. ‘No, Stedman’ she is made to declare, ‘you are not rich. Through your love I am rewarded enough.’<sup>691</sup> The inaccuracies continue. Johanna and her son are described as ‘free’ at the time of Stedman’s departure (she is left to the ‘motherly care’ of Mrs Godefroy), and Johanna dies perhaps of ‘sorrow’, perhaps of ‘poison’ at the age of 19 (instead of 25). Zimmermann does detect Stedman’s intention to take Johanna to Europe as his ‘die Seinige’, making his the first published account to imply a formal marriage. Johanna’s refusal is described in terms of ‘the bitter envy of European women’ and the impossibility of Stedman’s family welcoming her (‘they would be insulted’).<sup>692</sup> The only other significance of *Taschenbuch der Reisen* is that it marks the first of all the attempts that are discussed in this chapter to ‘appropriate’ Joanna in support of a cause she would not have recognised.

## **German Sentiment 2: Kratters *Die Sklavin in Surinam***

The first dramatic performance of Joanna’s story was Joanna of Surinam, a masque-spectacle by John Cross staged at the Royal Circus, Blackfriars Road in the summer of 1804.<sup>693</sup> But the first for which a text exists is Franz Kratter’s *Die Sklavin in Surinam* (180?).<sup>694</sup> Kratter, whose work is all but forgotten today, was a popular and controversial writer and, in his time, one of the first representatives of the Austrian enlightenment. He was born in Oberdorf am Lech in 1758, but his name is particularly associated with the town of Lemburg where for twenty-five

---

<sup>689</sup> Zimmermann, *Taschenbuch*, p. 56.

<sup>690</sup> Zimmermann, *Taschenbuch*, p. 56.

<sup>691</sup> Zimmermann, *Taschenbuch*, p. 57.

<sup>692</sup> Zimmermann, *Taschenbuch*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>693</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900, Vol. IV; Early Nineteenth Century Drama* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 286.

<sup>694</sup> Franz Kratter, *Die Sklavin in Surinam* (Frankfurt am Main, 1804, and Wien, 1805).

years from 1800 he directed the local theatre staging, presumably among others, a series of his own plays, including the prize-winning *The Conspiracy Against Peter the Great* (1790). His dealings with Lemberg deserve further investigation. In 1786, fourteen years before his appointment to the local theatre, his two-volume *Brief Letter about the Present State of Galicia* had been hung by the town's professors on the local gibbet with the inscription 'This is in place of the knavish satirist Franz Kratter'<sup>695</sup>. The book was subtitled *A Contribution to Statistics and the Knowledge of Mankind*, and was advertised as 'published in Leipzig', though it had actually appeared in Vienna. There is plainly another story here, though one beyond the scope of this thesis. Kratter's Suriname play of 1804 is presumably based on one of the two German translations of Stedman's *Narrative* that appeared in 1797.

The first surprise of this version is that the heroine, Joanna-figure of the title, is described in the *dramatis personae* as 'Cery, a White Slave'<sup>696</sup>. Cery, of course, was the name of Joanna's actual mother, a slave woman whom Joanna's Dutch father, along with their children, was unable to emancipate before his death. Kratter's play actually records this history as part of his heroine's background, 'Cery' being the daughter of a English man and a 'mulatto' woman. We are told that he always treated her and her mother kindly and honourably but that their owner, the planter Falkenberg, refused to agree to their emancipation. We are even told that when Stedmann (sic) offers to marry Cery and take her to England, she worries that the fine European ladies 'will darken me from all sides', asking, 'Won't he soon be ashamed of his American slave?'<sup>697</sup> But Kratter never bothers to resolve the resulting contradiction, that his heroine cannot possibly be 'white'<sup>698</sup>. This is a play, then, which from the title page resolutely dodges the question of inter-racial sex, presumably in deference to the sensibilities of his Austrian audience.

That said, it is not an unsophisticated piece of work. Its message is resolutely pro-abolition and anti-slavery arguing, in the context of late eighteenth-century German literature of sentiment with its 'cult of friendship', that people can only

---

<sup>695</sup> Quoted on the website of the Österreichischer Bibliothekenverbund, 88 (KRATTER, Franz).

<sup>696</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 4.

<sup>697</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 124.

enter into binding relationships on the basis of free choice. But it is not an easy play to pin down. The main characters are as cardboard as they come, divided between good and bad solely by their attitude to money. The greedy are the wicked, while the generous flaunt their disinterestedness to the point of idiocy. But the play is no melodrama, and though Cery as heroine and Stedmann as hero are briefly disappointed, they are never in the slightest danger and the happy ending is never in doubt. The very real horrors of the historical Suriname dissolve in the face of Kratter's sentiment. What conflict there is exists at the level of fixed ideas, yet without the play ever becoming a debate in the manner, say, of Ben Jonson or Bernard Shaw. At the same time, it is agile enough in providing variations on the greed/generosity theme to hold our interest to the end. Some of these variations are even genuinely comic.

The play opens with Stedmann's return as conquering hero from the war against the rebel maroons. The victory is his alone and his commanding officer, Beerenhoek, is jealous and critical. Stedmann has promised his soldiers, black, mulatto and white, a bonus, but Beerenhoek refuses to honour the promise and calls the soldiers 'dogs', leaving Stedmann compromised<sup>699</sup>. Auguste van der Waard arrives, a young planter whom the audience soon realises is in love with Stedmann. While Stedmann vows to sell all he has, Auguste promises to raise a fund for the soldiers. She approaches Lude, Cery's owner, for a contribution, making a distinction between 'righteous money' and the 'blood-stained money' of slavery<sup>700</sup>. Lude has been boasting with Sextus about slave punishments ('flesh on the whip by the tenth blow'<sup>701</sup>) and when Stedmann arrives to reinforce Auguste's plea, Lude responds scornfully with just half a guinea. Meanwhile, Cery whom Stedmann loves has asked him for a guinea, and he is troubled about what seems like her greed ('You seem to love money, Cery'<sup>702</sup>). It transpires she wants the money to help Falkenberg, her former owner, who is now destitute. Stedmann is amazed by this – 'Your enemy? The murderer of your father? The cruel tyrant

---

<sup>698</sup> There were, of course, White indentured labourers in some West Indian colonies (see chapter two), including Suriname, but not at this period and, crucially, their children were never born into slavery.

<sup>699</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 24.

<sup>700</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>701</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 56.

<sup>702</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 45.

Falkenberg’ – and has no further doubts about the worth of this ‘heavenly creature’<sup>703</sup>.

With so many high-minded people around, it is no surprise when Commissioner Wallmoden arrives, sent by the Governor with a warrant to arrest Sextus for whipping a slave girl to death. In the Suriname of this play, there is justice for slaves. Lude protests about the ‘disproportionate’ and ‘unChristian’ level of the fine – 500 guineas for a girl who cost only 20<sup>704</sup> – and a comic scene follows in which Stedmann persuades Lude to let Sextus go the galleys and employ a black overseer instead. Stedmann praises the man he has in mind as orderly, diligent, obedient, honest, competent, punctual, adding, ‘He will hit mercilessly if he has to, but he will not cut their Achilles tendon because the slaves will not be able to escape him anyway.’<sup>705</sup> ‘The devil take all overseers’, says Lude, ‘who are good people’<sup>706</sup>, before succumbing to the promise that, unlike Sextus, his candidate would not steal money nor pilfer Lude’s Westphalian bacon and his Malaga wines. It is the one Germanic moment in a play which otherwise floats free of location. The clinching argument that a black overseer will cost Lude half as much as Sextus has done. Lude is won over and abandons his overseer’s defence,

Cery arrives and Stedmann discovers from bruises on her arm that she, too, has been beaten by Sextus. As he rants and raves (‘The cannibal! ... I won’t bear it! I shall go mad!’<sup>707</sup>), Cery praises her father for teaching her, after his failure to emancipate his family, to ‘be resigned to her fate’ as a slave.<sup>708</sup> Rebellion being out of the question, resignation is better than despair. Stedmann vows to save her, by redeeming and marrying her, and taking her to the ‘fatherland’ where she will be ‘a virtuous example against the vanity of English women’<sup>709</sup>. Cery demurs, refusing to accept any commitment that might make him unhappy. No sooner has this been settled, however, than Cery *does* rebel. Jolycoeur is brought in as a prisoner, leader of the rebels Stedmann has defeated, and she at once recognises

---

<sup>703</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>704</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 54.

<sup>705</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 60.

<sup>706</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 53.

<sup>707</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 65.

<sup>708</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 63.

<sup>709</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 67.

her 'second father', the protector of her mother from Falkenberg<sup>710</sup>. She defends him vehemently and, rather than see him executed on the rack, offers to die in his stead, which he curtly refuses ('I am a man and I know how to die'<sup>711</sup>). This brings us to the end of Act 2.

Auguste returns, soliloquising about Stedmann's virtues, including his collection of paintings, sketches, maps and writings, but when Stedmann enters, he gives all the credit to Quacko, Auguste's former slave and now Stedmann's servant. She praises him instead as a great teacher ('I'm astonished at the great progress the boy has made in such a short time'<sup>712</sup>), and he admits he is proud of Quacko,. But he turns down what is, in effect, a proposal of marriage ('Though this is paradise, who could hold it against me that I long to be back in my fatherland?'<sup>713</sup>). Cery arrives to announce that she has helped Jolycoeur escape. Though Stedmann reckons her life must be forfeit ('His punishment will now be yours'<sup>714</sup>), Auguste takes her under her protection and recommends pleading with Beerenhoek who has long wanted to possess her. When Beerenhoek arrives, she kisses him ('This means goodbye'<sup>715</sup>) and tells Jolycoeur's story - that after working as a slave by day, and working free lance by night to earn the freedom of Cery's mother's freedom, Falkenberg treacherously sold him 'to a cruel Portuguese'<sup>716</sup>. Beerenhoek agrees to pardon Cery so long as the arrangement is kept secret, but when Stedmann returns she blurts out that she is safe. Stedmann confesses he loves Cery, and Beerenhoek, furious at being outwitted ('Who is commander of Suriname?'<sup>717</sup>), resolves to dispatch Stedmann to Holland on the next boat.

As the play moves to its climax, the focus is on who will possess Cery. 'Cery is expensive', declares Lude, her current owner, 'But then again not expensive because she is very good merchandise':

Cery is healthy, young, and beautiful. She reads, writes and does accounts, and knows how to keep a household book. She knits, sews, irons and embroiders. She knows how to bleed someone. She brews

---

<sup>710</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 68.

<sup>711</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 69.

<sup>712</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 72.

<sup>713</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 76.

<sup>714</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 78.

<sup>715</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 81.

<sup>716</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 86.

<sup>717</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 96.

medicines from herbs for the health. She cooks tasteful dishes. She sings and plays on the lute. She's invariably cheerful. She doesn't lie, doesn't steal and doesn't drink the Malaga wines. She doesn't intrigue. You can trust her, body and soul, with anything that is yours.'<sup>718</sup>

Stedmann is the first to negotiate. He doesn't dispute Lude's price of £1,000, but he needs time to raise the cash – by selling everything he has, by drawing on an inheritance, by mortgaging his wages as a soldier, and by offering Lude his paintings and notebooks (Lude offers 3 shillings per cwt.). When Lude refuses, Stedmann approaches Beerenhoek for a loan. Beerenhoek too refuses ('I am a Catholic. I don't lend money'<sup>719</sup>), but privately resolves, now he knows the price, to purchase Cery himself. Only his greed prevents this strategy bringing the play to a premature conclusion. His bidding stops at £850 and, while he threatens to force Lude to comply, Lude privately resolves to raise the price to £1,200.

It is, of course, Auguste van der Waard, the good-hearted planter (distantly modelled on Mrs Godefroy) who settles everything. When Beerenhoek returns, willing to accept Lude's price of £1,000, he is told Cery has already been sold. Stedmann re-enters with £1,000 in hand, raised for him by Quacko from his loyal soldiers, and is given the same information. Stedmann and Quacko swear eternal friendship, and Stedmann and Cery play out a touching separation scene. There is an interlude as Beerenhoek tries to prevent Stedmann carrying the truth back to Europe about his treatment of the soldiers and the conduct of the campaign. He threatens him with arrest, only to be told the boxes are already on board ship and that any arrest will only confirm Stedmann's account.

Then Auguste steps in. She has already renewed her offer of marriage to Stedmann ('Take me as your property'<sup>720</sup>), and has held a long conversation with Cery, in the course of which she learns that Cery is prepared to make any sacrifice to ensure Stedmann's happiness. She responds by resolving not to be outdone in devotion by a slave. There is much talk about friendship and willing self-sacrifice. Then Auguste tells Stedmann, 'I took the liberty of getting you a small souvenir'<sup>721</sup>. She has bought Cery from Lude for £1,200, and now hands her over,

---

<sup>718</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>719</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 132.

<sup>720</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 118.

<sup>721</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 170.

reconciling Cery to the arrangement with the order ‘Obey your new master’,<sup>722</sup>. The fact that this is said with a smile, and that Cery falls willingly into Stedmann’s arms, does not resolve the contradiction that a play arguing that love must be entirely free can only be brought to a happy conclusion by an act of purchase. It would be nice to think Auguste’s smile was deeply ironic, but the play already contains too many unconscious ironies for such a reading to be plausible.

The Suriname of *Die Sklavin in Surinam* should, by all logic including the chop logic of its ending, be a cruel place. Lude and Sextus discuss slave punishments with a certain crude relish, but the arrest and sentencing of Sextus contradicts all Stedmann’s evidence about the lack of justice for slaves, and makes the maroon rebellion unnecessary. Though Jolycoeur is allowed his moments of bravado, with a reference back to his personal, private virtues, his crime of rebellion stands unquestioned, and Stedmann’s ‘victory’ at the play’s opening is treated throughout as unambiguously a triumph of good over evil. That it is also a triumph of tactics over far superior numbers only reinforces the point. As individuals – Cery, Quacko, Jolycoeur, and Stedmann’s anonymous nominee for overseer – slaves may be admirable, but not *en masse*, while loyalty and resignation to their fate are the basic requirements of their virtue. This is why the slave-owning Auguste can also be a paragon, to the point of denouncing the buying and selling of human flesh. On her own plantation, the benevolent owner and the grateful, submissive slaves have achieved a relationship that transcends the priorities of the market.

Yet even in the private domain, the play contains unintended ironies. When Lude lists Cery’s qualities as ‘merchandise’ – all those thoroughly domestic virtues, plus beauty and good humour – Stedmann concurs absolutely. Though the ‘ownership’ of humans is wrong, the virtues of a good slave are identical with those of an ideal wife, and he longs for her to ‘belong’ to him. The play preaches choice in such matters, arrangements willingly entered into, but despite the smiles in the final scene, Cery is given no option. There is even a moment when Stedmann comments that her status as a slave makes her more interesting to him (‘Were you not a slave my eye would not find you half so pleasing’,<sup>723</sup>). Kratter is

---

<sup>722</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 173.

<sup>723</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 63.

writing a century before his fellow countryman Freud, but the psychology of a hero who prefers a partner who was taught by her father ('his best legacy') to submit as a slave must surely have raised eyebrows in Vienna even in 1804. The remains the contradiction I mentioned at the start, that Cery is in this play is 'passing for white', the inter-racial dimension both of colonial sex and of the literature of sentiment being beyond examination. By contrast with the historical Joanna who found security in her extended family, Cery is unencumbered by living relatives. It is as though she is a castaway, sold into slavery, so that her rescue by Stedmann merely restores the norm.

All that said, and said with emphasis, *Die Sklavin in Surinam* remains an engaging play. It is firmly abolitionist, so that even at this distance in time its heart is in the right place. It accords the black characters - Quacko, Jolycoeur, Stedmann's soldiers - a degree of dignity not always present in the literature of the period (and utterly absent, for example, in the novella by Eugene Sue to be examined below). It displays pace and variety, the theatrical skills of a popular dramatist who knows his craft. And though the 'good' characters are tediously virtuous in their proclamations of sentiment and the cult of friendship, the 'bad' characters have an undeniable reality. Lude's insistence, in his two scenes of comic bargaining, on the determining power of market forces ('What brings in money will never be abolished'<sup>724</sup>) echoes loud in our own time, as does Beerenhoek's attempt to censor Stedmann's *Narrative*. On such matters Kratter was evidently speaking from the heart, and the play's message is that what comes from the heart endures.

### **British Sentiment 1: Morton's *The Slave***

On 12 November 1816, *The Slave: a Musical Drama in Three Acts*, was staged at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.<sup>725</sup> It was set in Suriname and the action concerned the love of Clifton, an English army captain, for Zelinda, a 'quadroon slave', who is the mother of their son.<sup>726</sup> Other prominent roles were

---

<sup>724</sup> Kratter, *Die Sklavin*, p. 158.

<sup>725</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900, Vol. IV; Early Nineteenth Century Drama* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 364. See also p. 465 for *Gambia: or The Slave*, the same play revived on 13 November, 1832.

<sup>726</sup> Thompson *Life*, p. 39 - claims Stedman's widow had complained about the use of her husband's name in John Cross's 1804 spectacle *Joanna of Surinam* - hence the pseudonym Clifton.

those of Gambia, a slave from Africa, Mrs Lindenberg, Zelinda's benefactor, Colonel Lindenberg, her owner and the play's villain, and Miss Von Frump, a rich lady of Surinam who wants Clifton for herself. The author of the piece was Thomas Morton, best known for such successful comedies as *The School of Reform*, or, *How to Rule a Husband* (1805) and later *A Roland for an Oliver* (1819). The music was by Henry Bishop, once revered as 'the English Mozart', now chiefly remembered as composer of the ballad 'Home, sweet home'.<sup>727</sup>

*The Slave* was a popular success. It entered the repertoire of abolitionist dramas on more or less equal terms with *Oroonoko*, which in Southerne's or Hawkesworth's adaptations is said to have been staged every season throughout the eighteenth century, and with George Colman the Younger's *Inkle and Yarico*. *The Slave*, too, was performed throughout Britain, riding the popular tide of anti-slavery sentiment. At York, for example, at the parliamentary election of 1826, one candidate declared, 'On the gradual abolition of colonial slavery, I am happy to believe there are not two opinions in the country.'<sup>728</sup> Shortly afterwards at the York's Theatre Royal, both *Inkle and Yarico* and *The Slave* were performed twice within eight months and to packed houses. For the second of these performances, at Easter 1828, the role of Zelinda was played by Miss Love of Covent Garden, the most popular contralto of the day. A reviewer commented that the quality of 'deep feeling which characterises Zelinda' proved the perfect foil for 'this fascinating actress'.<sup>729</sup>

Curiously, *The Slave* is an imagined sequel to the *Narrative*, providing the lovers with a happy ending linked emotionally, though not dramatically, to the British abolition of slave trading in 1807. The play begins with the arrival in Suriname of Clifton, an English army captain. Clifton is returning after a period in Europe (the Napoleonic wars) during which he has raised and gambled away the money needed to purchase the freedom of Zelinda and their infant son. Clifton is shame-faced about his foolishness but a further war against the rebel maroons provides the means, after many complications, of gaining his wife's and son's freedom and sailing with them to England.

---

<sup>727</sup> Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 22 vols., (ed.) Stanley Sadie (Macmillan, 1980), entry for Henry R. Bishop, pp. 741-745.

<sup>728</sup> Quoted in *Walvin, England, Slaves and Freedom*, p. 160.

<sup>729</sup> *The York Herald and General Advertiser*, 11 Aug., 1827 and 7 and 12 April 1828, and *Yorkshire Gazette* 4 and 11 Aug., 1827 and 5 and 12 April, 1828.

This happy ending is possible because the Suriname of this play has floated strangely free of history. The politics of the arrival of an English ship bearing the governor and soldiers with the effect that ‘the colony is saved’ are left unexplained.<sup>730</sup> Though slavery is an evil there is no sympathy wasted on the rebels. ‘What have the revolted negroes made of their acquired liberty?’ asks the governor, and his reply is ‘To burn, insult and massacre even their own countrymen.’<sup>731</sup> Gambia, the faithful slave of the play, refuses to join the rebels because ‘there is a state worse than slavery - liberty engendered by treachery, nursed by rapine, and invigorated by cruelty’,<sup>732</sup> and all the speaking characters in the play agree. The bloody insurrection in Barbados in April 1816 when 120 slaves were killed and a further 144 executed, is part of the context here. But the argument makes dramatic sense only because there is very little evil in this play’s Suriname. The slave-owning planters, with one exception, belong to the comic sub-plot, involving debts and the colonial marriage market. This sub-plot is very tame, consisting for the most part ~ bizarrely in a play about race - of jokes about Londoners, Scotsmen and Yorkshiremen. The opportunity to use a setting in Suriname to re-introduce something of the whiplash of Restoration comedy is not taken.

The play’s villain, Lindenburg, son of Zelinda's benefactor, is indeed a slave owner. But he has learned his villainy in France where, under the alias of Chevalier Alkman, he cheated Clifton of the money intended to redeem Zelinda and made insulting advances to Clifton’s sister. This is, we must remind ourselves, the year after Waterloo, with the French still resisting international abolition. Back in Suriname, Lindenberg rejoices to find himself the ‘owner’ of Clifton’s wife and son:

Whether the Chevalier Alkman or Colonel Lindenberg, this at least seems certain, that the dear wife of Captain Clifton’s bosom, and the heir of all his honours, are my slaves - the creatures of my will - the drudges of my wants - the minions of my pleasures.<sup>733</sup>

---

<sup>730</sup> Morton, *Slave*, p. 1.

<sup>731</sup> Morton, *Slave*, p. 3.

<sup>732</sup> Morton, *Slave*, p. 5.

<sup>733</sup> Morton, *Slave*, p. 50.

Such cardboard villainy is of little consequence and Clifton and Zelinda are never in the slightest danger. What redeems the play, giving it touches of reality, is that the 'Slave' of the title is not Zelinda at all but Gambia, the African. It is through him that the different aspects of slavery are present and he takes over the play to the point that later performances were sometimes entitled *Gambia, or the Slave*.

In the opening scene, Gambia confesses, in the staccato bursts of rotund prose Thomas Morton has devised for him, that he was a 'slave' in Africa - the 'slave of fierce ambitions; revelled in luxuries purchased by blood; stimulated by European baubles, hunted my fellow men.'<sup>734</sup> His own sale was 'just retribution', and he makes a point in Suriname of lightening the tasks of a fellow slave he remembers trading. There are echoes of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* here who before he became 'the royal slave' had traded his captives. But Gambia's superiority lies not in his royal ancestry but his moral gestures. He is in love with Zelinda and has saved her child from the 'aboma snake' (anaconda). He is angry that Zelinda is faithful in Clifton's absence, insisting the Englishman will never marry her - 'the white cheek of Europe would be crimsoned at the monstrous indignity'.<sup>735</sup> But his presumption to the hand of Zelinda (who is seven-eighths white) is unacceptable and he reverts to the role of faithful retainer.

He saves Clifton's life in a scuffle with the rebel Maroons (earning the tribute, 'African! ... Behold me bend before thee'<sup>736</sup>), and performs heroically in the wars. The high point of the play comes when Clifton is honoured by a grateful council with the privilege of setting one slave at liberty. His hand hovers over the paper with Zelinda's name on his lips, but it is Gambia's that he inscribes. The speech which follows, for all its creaking rhetoric, was apparently a show-stopper:

Free! a man! let me control this strong emotion! it will not be! thou open, liberal air! - thou teeming bounteous earth thou interminable expanse of heaven - thou spontaneous wilderness of nature! - thou art mine! all, all are mine! for I am nature's free-born child! - liberty! give me the language of gods, to tell that I am free! the tongues of angels, to burst forth the gratitude of a heart swelling with its dignities! bursting with its joys! alas! I am unfit for thanks or converse! a few moments, spare me - generous Briton! prophetic be my tongue! when,

---

<sup>734</sup> Morton, *Slave*, p. 4.

<sup>735</sup> Morton, *Slave*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>736</sup> Morton, *Slave*, p. 28.

through thy country's zeal, the all-searching sun shall dart his rays in  
vain, to find a slave in Afric.<sup>737</sup>

Throughout the play, Gambia is guided by superior principle, not only managing the plot and setting standards of heroism but growing to become the very pattern of virtue. When he discovers Lindenberg's guilty secret, that he has been branded in France as a thief, there is a scene of repentance and reconciliation, the branded slave African embracing the branded European with Lindenberg exclaiming, improbably, 'African, thy virtues have subdued me.'<sup>738</sup>

The revival of the abolitionist campaign as a popular movement after 1815 has often been linked to the growth of nonconformity in Britain and to the parallel success of Baptist and Methodist missions among the slave populations of Barbados and Jamaica. In James Walvin's words, nonconformists 'not only (and naturally) supported their mission to the slaves, but ... were also unanimously outraged at the injustices doled out to their enslaved co-religionists.'<sup>739</sup> By 1815, in sharp contrast to the 1790s., it was possible to present the slaves as the better Christians, and *The Slave* does so emphatically, and not only through the actions attributed to Gambia. When in the play's opening scene Clifton returns to Zelinda to resume their former relationship, he is greeted by this speech, a distant echo of Stedman's teaching of the catechism to Joanna:

Clifton, hear me. The sacred truths you taught me, I believed,  
believing, I obey. I still may be thy tender, faithful friend - still a fond  
mother to thy helpless boy still the slave of man, but not the slave of  
vice.<sup>740</sup>

- to which Clifton responds 'sweet monitress' and goes out to make arrangements for their Christian marriage.

But *The Slave* is also a play about British virtue. In the final scene, Gambia hears he is to accompany Clifton and Zelinda to England (ironically, as their servant):

---

<sup>737</sup> Morton, *Slave*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>738</sup> Morton, *Slave*, p. 68.

<sup>739</sup> Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, p. 134.

<sup>740</sup> Morton, *Slave*, p. 18.

England! Shall I behold thee? Talk of fabled land, or magic power!  
But what land, that poet ever sung, or enchanter swayed, can equal  
that, which, when the slave's foot touches, he becomes free.<sup>741</sup>

A mythology of abolition is being invoked here, taking off from popular misconceptions about the Mansfield judgement. *The Slave* is very much a play of its time, poised between the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the start of the mass campaign for total general emancipation. British initiatives already taken provide the mainspring for one part of the story. It is possible now for the Stedman-Joanna romance to be retold with a happy ending, for the trade has been stopped and the absolute power of the slave-owner thereby broken. But emancipation remains to be achieved, which is why the play's centre of gravity shifts towards Gambia. He is waiting to be freed, and looks towards England as the agent of his freedom. So far as the author of *Joanna, or the Female Slave*, the last of the appropriations of Joanna's story is concerned, he will look in vain.

### **British Sentiment 2: the Anon. *Joanna***

This short novel, published anonymously in 1824 with the subtitle *A West Indian Tale* is a sorry piece of work. It is based on the *Narrative* and continues William Thomson's task of cutting and distorting what Stedman wrote. The focus is narrowly on the lovers, with most of the Suriname material simple excised. The theme is the pathos of Stedman's (rather than Joanna's) situation that in that in order to 'purchase' her he has to leave her side and suffer in successive military campaigns. Even the irony that these campaigns are against rebel slaves is ignored: the heroes of Stedman's manuscript are only a dangerous backdrop. The one memorable moment in the book is the exquisite banality of its ending. In the *Narrative*, Stedman bids Joanna farewell but the ship is delayed and he returns for a second leave-taking, whereupon Joanna turns 'the colour of death' and sinks in her chair. In the novel, Joanna drops dead in his arms:

Again and again I pressed her lifeless form to my bosom. The boat  
delayed for me for a few moments.<sup>742</sup>

---

<sup>741</sup> Morton, *Slave* p. 71.

<sup>742</sup> Anonymous, *Joanna, or the Female Slave: a West Indian Tale* (London, 1824), p. 174.

This anticlimax is imposed on the author not only to avoid the complications of Stedman's second marriage, but to bring to a climax a struggle for 'possession' of Joanna between Stedman and her owner:

My only wife! O, agony! though mine  
By every law, both human and divine,  
Yet o'er thy form, though not thy free-born soul,  
A sordid master holds his cursed control.<sup>743</sup>

Throughout the novel, incompetently but disturbingly, all the metaphors for marriage are drawn from slavery, Stedman's passion to 'own' her, to 'obtain' her, to make her 'belong' to him, to make her 'his', and to 'possess' her, being finally consummated when she eludes her 'owner' and dies in his arms. This, apparently unconscious theme is the only one the story presents, but in an introductory essay the author has imposed two further conclusions on the events.

The first is his (surely, her?) opinion that the main conclusion to be drawn from Joanna's story is not that slavery is an evil but that it must appear an evil when imposed on superior persons like Joanna:

General emancipation must appear to every reflecting mind neither practicable nor advisable ... The greater misfortune of slavery consists not altogether in the word slave, that is could the epithet be applied to the mere working man: but when the opprobrious term applies to men, some of whom might become competitive either in the race of virtue or in the field of fame, with the most favoured European, the mind must be armed with impeccable fortitude to bear meekly the bitter reproach.<sup>744</sup>

The second is that if people like Joanna can be identified and liberated and given a Christian education, they can marry people of their own colour and cease pursuing white men. Both these arguments are far removed from Stedman's intentions, but they follow with a certain perverse logic from the idiom of his own presentation of Joanna. By the 1820s, Joanna had passed through the hands of so many writers she could be put to the purpose of almost any argument.

---

<sup>743</sup> Anon, *Joanna*, p. 68.

<sup>744</sup> Anon, *Joanna*, 'Preface', p. viii.

## The Independent Republic of Coloured Citizens

Lydia Maria Francis Child (1802-1880) was a self-styled Massachusetts housewife and an enormously prolific writer on a wide variety of topics. Her books included housekeeping and marriage manuals, uplifting anthologies, children's stories, potted histories of Boston, histories of native Americans, several volumes of personal correspondence, and one novel which has found a modern editor, namely *Philothea: or Plato against Epicurus: a Novel of the Transcendental Movement in New England*.<sup>745</sup> But she has two stronger claims on our attention. First, as pioneer feminist, author of *A Brief History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations* (1835), and *The Patriarchal Institution, as described by members of its Own Family* (1860), together with biographies of Lady Russell, Madame Guyon, Madame De Staël and Madame Roland.<sup>746</sup> Secondly, as an tireless abolitionist, from *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans* (1833) to *The Right Way, the Safe Way, Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies and Elsewhere* (2nd ed., 1862). Her anti-slavery and her feminists interests are combined in what has remained her best known book, namely *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, by Harriet A. Jacobs, edited by L. Maria Child (1861).<sup>747</sup>

The story of Stedman and Joanna came to her attention when she published in *The Oasis* (Boston, 1834) some forty pages of extracts from the 1796 *Narrative*, together with a new engraving of Joanna by G.G. Smith.<sup>748</sup> The extracts focus almost exclusively on Joanna, but are enlivened with brief glimpses of Quaco's 'generosity', and of the commiseration of the Black Rangers for the 'poor Europeans, and by editorial comments taking Stedman to task for various failures

---

<sup>745</sup> Original title, Lydia Maria Child, *Philothea: A Grecian Romance* (1845), or Kenneth Walter Cameron (ed.), *Philothea: or Plato against Epicurus: a Novel of the Transcendental Movement in New England with an Analysis of the background and meaning for the community of Emerson and Thoreau* (Hartford, 1975).

<sup>746</sup> L. Maria Child, *Brief History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations* (1835), and *The Patriarchal Institution, as described by members of its Own Family* (1860), Mrs Child, *The Biographies of Lady Russell and Madame Guyon* (1832) and *The Biographies of Madame De Staël and Madame Roland* (1832).

<sup>747</sup> There are modern editions of *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans*, edited with an introduction by Carolyn L. Karcher (University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), and of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, by Harriet A. Jacobs, Edited by L. Maria Child. Now with *A True Tale of Slavery by John S. Jacobs*; (both) edited with an Introduction by Jean Fagan Yellin (Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>748</sup> 'Joanna', in Mrs (Lydia Maria Francis) Child, ed., *The Oasis* (Boston, Benjamin C. Bacon, 1834), pp. 65-105.

in correctness or consistency. Her comments are simultaneously school-marmish and rather endearing, and she is not without taste and humour. She is sarcastic about Stedman's occasional verse, noting it 'does not contrast very favourably with the vigorous simplicity of his prose'.<sup>749</sup> She assures 'fastidious readers' that abolitionists 'have no wish to induce any one to marry a mulatto, even should their lives be saved by such an one ten times'.<sup>750</sup> Rather in the manner of the German *Taschenbuch der Reisen* of 1803, the extracts that follow give strong emphasis to Joanna's devotion to Stedman in her role as housewife, nurse, mother and companion. Despite her views on 'the patriarchal institution', Lydia Child has no doubt that this particular 'mulatto' earned her right to be Stedman's wife. But she overlooks entirely Joanna's declared preference for remaining with her extended, matrilineal family, insisting Stedman 'might have paid Mrs Godefroy and sent for his wife to England long before 1783', and rebuking him for not calling her 'his wife'.<sup>751</sup> (Interestingly, we shall meet this complaint again in Beryl Gilroy's novel: both authors are referring, of course, to the 1796 *Narrative* from which the word 'wife' was expunged.).

She acknowledges that 'Captain Stedman appears to have been extremely kind-hearted, and strongly prepossessed in favor of the African character'. She described his horror at the cruelties he reports on ('cruelties, which the imagination of the most "fanatical" abolitionist could never have conceived'), and she comments with strong approval on his sensibility towards the dying monkey. Yet, even he opposed abolition ('Alas' she concludes 'for the inconsistency and selfishness of man!', plainly referring to the male sex).<sup>752</sup> And she rebukes him further for describing the maroons as 'Rebel Negroes'. They were, she insists, in a phrase which marks her as a true Daughter of the American Revolution, 'an independent republic of coloured citizens'.<sup>753</sup> By such means and in such language was 'the beautiful and excellent Joanna' recruited to the cause of American Abolition.<sup>754</sup>

---

<sup>749</sup> Child, 'Joanna', p. 73.

<sup>750</sup> Child, 'Joanna', p. 65.

<sup>751</sup> Child, 'Joanna', p. 104.

<sup>752</sup> Child, 'Joanna', p. 105.

<sup>753</sup> Child, 'Joanna', p. 65.

<sup>754</sup> Child, 'Joanna', p.104.

## Pantomime

Richard and Sally price call Eugene Sue's 'Aventures de Hercule Hardi (1772)' a 'two volume romance based loosely on the *Narrative*'.<sup>755</sup> In fact, it is a 57,000 word novelette, published with a companion story 'Le Colonel de Surville' in a single volume entitled *Deux Histoires* (1840), and later collected in the growing volumes of his *Mysteres de Paris* (first edition, 1842-43).<sup>756</sup> An English translation by Henry C. Demine *The Mysteries of Paris: a Romance of the Rich and Poor* was published in New York in 1844.

Eugene Sue is the pen name of Marie-Joseph Sue who was born in Paris in 1804 and turned to journalism after a brief period as a naval surgeon. As with Charles Dickens in England, Sue's career was bound up with the huge expansion of journalism in the early nineteenth century, linked to the growth of literacy and the development of steam-driven iron presses and of machine-produced paper. He became famous for his serialised stories, available in cheap instalments, and appealing to a new class of readers thrown up by the industrial revolution. Melodramatic and often deeply implausible, these enormously increased the circulation of the newspapers in which they appeared. Despite his socialist sympathies (he was elected Deputy for the Seine in 1850), he was a well-known *bom vivant* and a member of the exclusive French Jockey Club. Unlike Dickens, only two of his books are still read. *Les Mysteres de Paris*, with its descriptions of lower class Parisian life, is said to have influenced Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, while *Le Juif Errant* (1844-45) is a re-telling of the medieval legend.

After the mix of sentimentality, incompetence and missionary earnestness in the anonymous *Joanna, or the Female Slave*, Sue's 'Aventures de Hercule Hardi' reads like pantomime. It's hard to detect any larger purpose in his mixture of cardboard characters and sensationalised events other than to entertain – unless, perhaps it is to confirm Parisian readers in their simpler prejudices about the rest of the world, Holland as well as Suriname, which may in turn be part of what they find entertaining. Sue's debt to Stedman is acknowledged in typically casual and haphazard form. First when one of the Dutch milkmaids in the opening section refers, entirely superfluously, to someone known locally as 'the butcher Stedman', and secondly by means of a footnote reference to the *Narrative* in its original

---

<sup>755</sup> 1790 'Narrative', 'Introduction', p. LXXXIII.

English version but with the wrong date (1780) appended.<sup>757</sup> The biggest of these debts is the broad context of inter-racial romance against the background of war against the rebel slaves in Dutch Suriname. But along the way, Sue also borrows the episode of the aboma snake (though, typically, this particular anaconda has swallowed one of the soldiers), the ‘spectre’ of the vampire bat (which becomes part of the paraphernalia of the Indian medicine woman, and the figure of Cojo, Joanna’s uncle, who wore a silver armband engraved ‘True to the Europeans’, along with other minor details.<sup>758</sup> However, the tale of the Indian chief’s daughter who offers her life or her hand in marriage to save the life of the ‘pale face’ who is about to be sacrificed to ‘The Great Spirit’ owes more to the Pocahontas story (see chapter 9) than to Stedman. Sue’s ‘Indian tribes’ are partly Sioux or Cherokee (they scalp their victims) and partly Caribs (they are cannibals), and their only link with the Amerindians of the *Narrative* is their knowledge of poisonous plants.

The story, which runs as follows, is as feeble in its full treatment as it sounds in summary. It begins in Holland near the port of Vlissingen early in 1772 with three milkmaids, looking as though painted by Rubens, in a landscape of lush meadows and fat cows, looking as though painted by Breughel. The girls are discussing the pros and cons of having a farmer for a husband, or a sailor like Berthe’s betrothed Keyser, who is often at sea for long periods. Hercule Hardi appears, wandering in a dream out of a patch of woodland, and takes fright at the sight of Berthe’s cow. The girl’s tease him about his nervousness (is he also afraid of butcher Stedman’s dog or Keyser’s parrot?) and he replies that he leaves them alone if they leave him alone. His youth, sensitivity and timidity established, we are taken home to be introduced to his grandfather, an old soldier of French Protestant Huguenot stock, who has campaigned all over Europe in various wars. He has named his grandson Hercule Achille Victor Hardi and, totally blind to the young man’s pacific temper, is planning a military career for him. An interview takes place in the old man’s armoury where, surrounded by muskets and sabres of every description, he reads to Hercule a letter he has received from an old friend Major Rudchop, describing in lurid terms his campaigns against the cannibal

---

<sup>756</sup> M.J. Eugene Sue, ‘Aventures D’Hercule Hardi (1772)’ in *Deux Histories* (Paris, 1840).

<sup>757</sup> Sue, ‘Hercule Hardi’, pp. 2 and 5.

<sup>758</sup> Sue, ‘Hercule Hardi’, pp, 4, 7, 120, 23 and 30-32.

Indians and rebel slaves in Surinam. The letter ends with an appeal for volunteers and Hercule, who is speechless with shock, is volunteered, the old man praising his sang-froid.

The scene shifts to the forests of Dutch Guiana where a small group of feathered and tattooed Piannakatowa Indians are preparing to attack a coffee plantation, under the watchful surveillance of loyal slave called Cupidon (who wears the armband 'True to the Europeans').<sup>759</sup> The plantation is called Sporterfigdt and is owned by Adoë, the orphaned daughter of its former master who was noted for his kindness to his slaves. Adoë is 20 and, with the help of an overseer called Bel-Cossim, runs a happy plantation of 'docile Coromantyns' and 'cruel Luangos' which is only slightly less productive than its more brutally-managed neighbours.<sup>760</sup> We first meet Adoë in the company of Mami-Za, Bel-Cossim's mulatto wife, and Jaguarette, a Piannakatowa girl found abandoned in the forest after an Indian attack and adopted by Adoë's father. Jaguarette is 16 and has grown up as Adoë's 'savage companion'.<sup>761</sup> Mami-Za, who wears a robe and a turban more *Arabian Nights* than Caribbean, is telling Adoë's fortune from the tarot cards. She prophesies Adoë will marry within the year an intrepid young warrior with blonde hair who is at that moment sailing from Europe, but that the figure of a panther shadows her happiness.

This sounds like Hercule's cue but in fact there are seven intervening chapters, mostly irrelevant to the main plot. There is a description of Bel-Cossim and his regime, accompanied by what is in essence a defence of slavery (slaves, like all people with 'few needs', are described as happy with their condition if not over-worked).<sup>762</sup> There is a fuller account of the Piannakatowa Indian chief Ouwou Kourow, and of Zam-Zam, the leader of the rebel slaves, who are assumed to be out in the forest across the Commewijne river preparing an attack. A neighbouring planter called Oultok le Borgue turns up asking for Adoë's hand though, tactlessly, he brings his two mulatto mistresses with him. There is an account of Cupidon's home life, with some satiric comment on his wife's love of accumulating possessions, including an engraving of the Prince and Princess of Orange. Hercule Hardi, now Captain Hardi, turns up at the beginning of

---

<sup>759</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', p. 7.

<sup>760</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', pp. 9 and 11.

<sup>761</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', p. 20.

<sup>762</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', p. 11.

chapter 15 under the command of Major Rudchop of the 17th Infantry who is making Sporterfidgt his forest headquarters. As a volunteer, Hercule's reputation for bravery has preceded him to Surinam, and both Adoö and Jagarette (who dresses especially for the occasion) fall in love with him. Adoë tells him what the cards have predestined and that if he accepts his fate he should declare it with a bouquet of flowers. Since she is both beautiful and heir to the plantation he complies, but he is interrupted by Jaguarette who tells him she is the panther foretold by the cards and that he must be hers. Jaguarette plots with some of Ouwou-Kourow's Indians to drug and kidnap Adoë and deliver her to Oultok le Borgue's plantation. Meanwhile, unknown to her, her mother Babouin-Knify (also unknown to her) has been conducting a huge and noisy divination ceremony at a meeting between Ouwou-Kourow and Zam-Zam at Bousy-cray, Zam-Zam's 'principal establishment' in the forest.<sup>763</sup> Her advice, in her capacity as Ouwou-Kourow's soothsayer (whom Zam-Zam also respects), is that the moment to attack is propitious. Sue helpfully explains at this point that the motives of the rebel maroons are plunder and revenge, and those of the Piannakatowa Indians scalps and a cannibal feast. Launching their attack, they encounter Major Rudchop coming with 800 men to attack Bousy-cray. In the confusion, Hercule and a certain Sergeant Pepper are captured, and taken first to Bousy-cray and afterwards to Ouwou.Kourow's home village, where the final scenes are played out.

Jaguarette has fled there from Sporterfidgt, her treachery exposed, and is recognised by her mother. When the pale-face prisoners are led there to be sacrificed to the Great Spirit, Jaguarette pleads with her mother to save Hercule's life while Babouin-Knify pleads in turn with Hercule to release her daughter from the spell he has cast on her. Hercule turns down the prospect of settling among the Piannakatowa and marrying Jaguarette ('I will marry the savage and have a family of little savages. Há! Há!'<sup>764</sup>), and when Adoë is also brought there (Oultok le Borgue being preoccupied with his mulattos), the three palefaces are led out to execution. 'There was no longer', we are told, 'any hope of saving the prisoners', but suddenly there is a earth-shaking explosion and a fire ball and, while the Indians rush off to save their village, Jaguarette leads the Europeans into the forest

---

<sup>763</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', p. 27.

<sup>764</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', p. 41.

and to safety.<sup>765</sup> Back at *Sporterfidgt*, the hero marries the heroine despite a last plot by Oultok le Borgue, and Hercule Hardi is confirmed to the end as a supreme exponent of *sang froid*.

In all this, Sue's characterisation is rudimentary. In describing the novelette as a pantomime I am referring to Sue's method of throwing outrageously simple stereotypes – the cannibal chief, the scalping Indian, the fainting heroine, the intrepid warrior, the fortune-telling mulatto – into situations of comic contrast, and letting events take their course. Each new character is introduced with a block paragraph describing his or her hair, eyes, complexion, moustache (if relevant), neck and shoulders and general bearing followed by an itemised list of what they are wearing, and by some brief remarks on the moral and intellectual characteristics that correspond to these physical attributes. Sergeant Pimper, for example, is described as follows:

Pimper, âgé de quarante ans, était d'une taille moyenne, maigre, osseux, basané; il portait un habit vert à collet orange, croisé et boutonné sur la poitrine, un col de cuir, une colette et de grandes guêtres de cuir: ses cheveux gris, aplatis le long de ses tempes, allaient de se réunir en une queue, serrée d'un ruban noir, qui lui tombait au milieu du dos. .... D'un flegme, d'un courage à toute épreuve, son épée au côté, sa giberne aux reins, sa carabine au dos, sa hallebarde en main, le sereregant semblait marcher aussi à son aise au milieu des épaisses forêts et des savanes noyées de la Guyane, que s'il eût paradé sur la grande place d'Amsterdam.<sup>766</sup>

At this point, Sue's characterisation ceases. No one changes or discovers anything. As the plot unfolds, they bounce off each other like dodgem cars in Sue's fairground, each locked in their separate capsule, and with no more serious interaction than my metaphor suggests. The drawings by J.A.Beugé, engraved by A.Revieille, reinforce this impression.<sup>767</sup> Adoë looks insipidly virtuous, Jaguarette glowers with treachery, Zam-Zam resembles a Kurdish brigand, while Major Rudchop and Sergeant Pimper (Pepper in the English translation) with their long coats and drooping moustaches look uncannily like the Beatles on the cover of their 1967 album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*. Dickens' caricatures are recognisably one-dimensional human beings, frozen into caricature by their

---

<sup>765</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', p. 41.

<sup>766</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', p. 17.

<sup>767</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', pp. 1, 24, and 37.

ingrained habits. With the possible exception of Hercule's grandfather, Sue's are cardboard travesties, cartoon figures, brought to life only by the occasional touch of humour.

The scene in the grandfather's armoury, when Rudchop's letter about the aboma snake, which swallows one of his men, and about Sergeant Pepper's presence at Ouwou-Kourow's daughter's wedding, when he inadvertently participates in the cannibal feast, turns genuinely hilarious when his grandfather interprets Hercule's terrified silence as *sangfroid*. This becomes a running joke, with all of Hercule's distraught refusals to face up to his situation taken as evidence of his single-minded bravery. There is another good joke when Adoë is interrogating Major Rudchop about his new recruit and, on the authority of the Tarot cards, describes him in detail. 'How the devil did you know he was blonde?' exclaims the major, with a rare touch of reality.<sup>768</sup> But apart from such pantomime collisions, the plot is feeble in the extreme and it is full of loose ends. Keyser, for example, turns up in Surinam in command of one of the transport barges. He is the only character in the tale that knows Hercule is not really brave. But no use is made of this knowledge and he is never mentioned again. Oultok le Borgue turns up at *Sporterfidgt* to propose to Adoë with two mulatto mistresses in tow. This demonstrates his social barbarity, but it leaves unexplained why, when the Indians bring Adoë to him, he remains too preoccupied with his mistresses to attend to her. The twists and turns in Jaguarette's behaviour are explained in terms of her being caught between two worlds, while it is hard to imagine a more inept denouement for a popular storyteller than the earthquake and fire which saves the palefaces when 'there was no longer any hope'. One's first thought is that Rudchop and his 800 men must be responsible, but they have vanished from the plot without trace.

All in all, the Stedman story deserves better than this. Sue is writing at a time when slavery still existed in the French West and Indian Ocean islands and when abolition was again becoming an issue in French politics. At the risk of sounding like some humourless Anglo-Saxon inquisitor of the politically incorrect, I don't find it admirable that he should convert Stedman's heroic maroons into savages allied to stereotype cannibals, and that Joanna should become Jaguarette, the perfidious Indian betrayer of a pure French heroine. Much as Sue has borrowed

from the *Narrative*, there is a great deal more he has neglected to listen to. Of all the texts under examination in this chapter, with their confusions and hesitations and ambiguities, Sue's *Aventures de Hercule Hardi* is the only one which is unapologetically racist.

## Dutch Sentiment

J. Herman de Ridder's *Een Levensteeken op eem Doodenveld* (*The Sign of Life on the Field of Death*) is described by Richard & Susan Price's as 'a Dutch novel' that has 'drawn on Stedman'.<sup>769</sup> It turns out to be a missionary tract made up of short narratives and essays, appealing for the conversion of the Maroons. Only the first 30 pages of a 189 page text derive from the *Narrative*, with a brief account Fourgeoud's 'sixth campaign'. Fourgeoud defends his Rangers, claiming (utterly out of character, and borrowing Stedman's words) that one Ranger is worth six European soldiers, before setting out through the forest to capture the village of Gado Sabi which is described as belonging to the triumvirate of Baron, Jolycoeur and Boni.<sup>770</sup>

The scene shifts to a dinner party in February 1777, with Stedman and the planters Reysdorp and Dahlberg present. Baron's history is outlined. He had been a slave of Dahlberg, who educated him and took him to Holland and promised him his freedom (Baron is described as looking forward to wearing shoes). Back in Suriname, however, Dahlberg sells him to a Jew. Baron rebels, is imprisoned in Fort Zeelandia, but escapes to join the Maroons. Jolycoeur's story follows, including ('my pen almost refuses to write this down'<sup>771</sup>) Stedman's account of his mother's rape by Schultze, Baron's Jewish owner, and Jolycoeur's revenge. Finally, Boni is described, a 'son of the wilderness', the offspring of a European Christian and a seduced slave, who took to the bush and demonstrated his powers of leadership. Boni was effective, courageous, and not to be bribed.<sup>772</sup>

There follows an interlude, in which slavery is described as both unnatural and expensive, given that its costs include the costs to the colony of suppressing

---

<sup>768</sup> Sue, 'Hercule Hardi', p. 18.

<sup>769</sup> J. Herman de Ridder *Een Levensteeken op eem Doodenveld* (Schoonhoven: Van Nooten, 1857).

<sup>1790</sup> 'Narrative', 'Introduction', p. LXXXIII.

<sup>770</sup> de Ridder *Levensteeken*, pp. 1-7

<sup>771</sup> de Ridder *Levensteeken*, p. 12.

<sup>772</sup> de Ridder *Levensteeken*, pp. 8-20.

the maroons who have rebelled only through ill-treatment. Governor Wigbold Crommelin is praised for signing the treaty of 1761 (sic, for 1760) with the Oucans (Ndjuka) and Saramacans (Saramaka), and Boni's maroons are praised for preferring death in their settlements (a list of these is copied from Stedman) to captivity. Returning to the dinner party of February 1777, it transpires the occasion is Fourgeoud's celebration of the end of a successful campaign and the withdrawal of his troops from the colony. But, notes the author, the two companies of Rangers are not present and no mention is made of their contribution to Fourgeoud's success.<sup>773</sup>

Effectively, what this mission author has done has been to draw from Stedman's *Narrative* material demonstrating that the maroons and slaves are worthy of missionary endeavour. The maroons, despite occasional cruelties, are the product of a cruel system and have been far more sinned against than sinning. Baron, Jolycoeur and Boni were all betrayed by their European masters before they chose a life of freedom, and all showed redeeming qualities. The slaves, when freed to become Rangers, showed how brave, skilful and trustworthy they could become. yet even they went unrewarded – the text continues to describe the Rangers' mutiny of 1805 when several absconded to join the Oucans. Separate essays follow, on the Suriname Indians who are described as having no vices except when corrupted by alcohol, and on later Maroon history, drawing on the testimony of a certain Kappier who was post-holder in 1835. They are cleanly and healthy people, but inclined to polygamy, immortality and drunkenness. Nevertheless, a converted Christian Maroon would be 'better than a Jew'. As for the plantation slaves, Christianity would be a better form of discipline than the whip. He book concludes with an appeal for support for a new Moravian mission to the Maroons and for general emancipation. As we saw in chapter two, by 1857 these arguments, even by the standards of the Dutch abolition debate, were deeply anachronistic.

## **Interlude**

At this point in history, all interest in Stedman, Joanna and Suriname goes underground for just over a century. Evidently, there is some correspondence

---

<sup>773</sup> de Ridder *Levensteeken*, pp. 21-30.

between fascination with the story and the course of the abolition debate. In England, the musical drama *The Slave* (1816), revived as *Gambia, or the Slave* (1832) and the novel *Joanna, or the Female Slave* (1824) mirror fairly accurately the contours of that debate. Similarly, though less closely, Lydia Child's 'Joanna' (1834), Eugene Sue's 'Aventures de Hercule Hardi' (1840), and Herman de Ridder's *Een Levensteeken op eem Doodenveld* (1857) are topical in that they reflect, though from very different perspectives, stages in the arguments about slavery in the United States, France and Holland. The disappearance of the tale after the 1860s – when abolition has been almost universally secured in the European colonies and the American south – is also suggestive. This was, at least in the first instance, a tale of, and for its times. Even the Austrian Franz Kratter, for whom abolition is not a national issue and who makes his Cery white, turns the Stedman story into a contemporary drama of sentiment.

Interest revived in 1960, with a new edition of P.F. Henry's French translation of 1798, followed by an abridged Folio Society edition of the 1796 *Narrative* and by R.A.J. Van Lier's editions in 1971 and 1974 of the original *Narrative* and of the 1799 Dutch translation.<sup>774</sup> This time, the context was the rise of nationalism throughout the European colonial empires and the stirrings of interest in the origins of the territories in the Indian sub-continent and Indian Ocean, in Africa and in the Caribbean that had become, or were about to become independent nations. The literature generated by this global happening is far too vast for summary, but one distinction seems useful. It is that between those authors working within traditions of European scholarship to chart the rise and progress of the new nations, and those who challenge from the periphery the basic assumptions of that scholarship in an attempt to create cultural space for the formerly colonised. Of the enormous range of themes that have evolved from the post-colonial encounter, the following texts address just two – those of colonial resistance and feminism. Ironically, both draw directly and indirectly on the writings of a man who was not remotely interested in nationalism and its by-products. In his edition of *Journal of John Gabriel Stedman* (1962) and his *John Gabriel Stedman: a Study of his Life and Times* (1966), Stanbury Thompson could not have shown less concern for the climate of the age.

## **Guyanese versions: 1. Hokstam's *Boni*.**

Johan Edwin Hokstam's novel *Boni* (Amsterdam, 1983) is by far the most bizarre of the texts discussed in his chapter. The work of a Surinamese transvestite, it contains a photograph on the back cover of its mixed-race author dressed as a woman, and the dedication reads 'to the woman in myself, the source of everything that is good and true'.<sup>775</sup>

Hokstam claims in his preface that Stedman's *Narrative* (1796) and L. Collis's *Soldier in Paradise* (1965) are his sources for a story in which, although 'a large part is romanticised, I tried to give the facts as precisely as possible'.<sup>776</sup> Most of the story is set, however, long before 1773 when Stedman's account begins, and neither Stedman nor Joanna play any part. Internal evidence makes it clear that Hokstam has drawn on some of the oral evidence still current in Suriname of the kind later used by Wim Hoogbergen in his *The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname* (Leiden, 1990). The account of Boni's death, for example, the legend of Maisa his first love who demanded, unsuccessfully, a monogamous union, and the account of his fourth wife's adultery and betrayal are examples. That said, Hokstam's 'history' is not very reliable. Boni is described as the son of Cery (historically, Ceri, Joanna's mother) and of the planter Kruijhof who, though Cery herself is the slave of Mr D.B. (historically, Joanna's father), has been her lover since she was 12 years old. The settings of the Fauconburg plantation and of the military post at L'Esperance are used, as is the financial crisis of the mid-1770s, leading to the bankruptcy of planters like Kruijkof, together with the disagreements between Fourgeoud and Govenor Jean Nepveu over tactics. But Colonel Fourgeau (sic) is introduced in 1772, two years earlier than his actual arrival in Suriname (Hokstam is perhaps following oral testimony here, crediting Fourgeourd with the capture of Boni's headquarters at Buku), and there are improbable descriptions of planters chasing runaway slaves through the forest and shooting at them from horseback. As Hoogbergen points out, the planters never risked pursuit, certainly not on horseback, and they wanted the military to recover, not kill their property.<sup>777</sup> The rebel maroons Jolycoeur (d. 1773) and Baron (d. 1774) are presented as rivals to Boni, long after the archives record them as

---

<sup>774</sup> For details, see footnotes 6 and to chapter one, and Bibliography (Primary Sources).

<sup>775</sup> Johan Edwin Hokstam, *Boni* (Amsterdam, 1983), dedication facing title page.

<sup>776</sup> Hokstam, *Boni*, p. 2.

having been killed. That said, it is worth reflecting that Stedman, too, drawing on contemporary gossip (that precursor of oral testimony) recorded Jolycoeur and Baron as still alive.

As a romance, then, the novel's principal interest is as a written record of the oral memory, supplemented by its private significance to an extremely marginalized author. Boni, the hero, is presented in authentic 1970s fashion as a 'courageous freedom fighter' who 'tried to do everything to make the negro free'.<sup>778</sup> He is born in the forest, where Cery has taken refuge after a raid on Mr. D.B.'s plantation, and brought up by his grandmother who teaches him to stand up to the planters and to reject European values. After his initiation (in celebration of which five mulattos are executed), he becomes a rebel and raids plantations to obtain arms and powder. Jolycoeur, who (following Stedman's account) joins his group after killing Schulze, the Jewish planter who raped his mother, is one rival. Baron is another. But Jolycoeur is over-fond of European luxuries and Baron, who has been to Holland, is a trans-sexual. Both are implicated in betraying Boni when his stockade at Buku is captured in 1772, the Rangers (with whom Baron has contacts) finding a track through the swamp ('They don't have boats and they can't fly, so there must be a path'<sup>779</sup>).

After the flight of Boni's Maroons to French Guiana, he is betrayed a second time at the battle of Aroeku by a loose alliance of Oucans (signatories to the 1760 Treaty), Indians, Coloureds, his childhood friend Mbono who has defected to the Rangers, and finally his adulterous fourth wife. Shadowy 'Parliamentarians' and 'Philanthropists' also play their part in his final torments, and he dies a Christ-like figure. Hokstam's own identification with the suffering Boni, assailed on all sides, is a little too obvious, though the inclusion of a trans-sexual and a woman among the tormentors seems odd given his own declared psycho-sexual preferences.

## **Guyanese versions 2: Beryl Gilroy's *Stedman & Joanna*.**

Beryl Gilroy, author of *Stedman and Joanna: a Love in Bondage* is also Guianese, though from the former British rather than Dutch Guiana.<sup>780</sup> Her links

---

<sup>777</sup> Personal communication from Dr. Wim Hoogbergen, Universiteit Utrecht, 12 October, 2000.

<sup>778</sup> Hokstam, *Boni*, p. 1.

<sup>779</sup> Hokstam, *Boni*, p. 221.

<sup>780</sup> Beryl Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna – a Love in Bondage: Dedicated Love in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1991).

are with Britain rather than Holland and she writes in English and not Dutch. Her parents came to London in the 1950s with the first wave of West Indian migrants and she subsequently became the first Black teacher to be appointed by the then London County Council, rising to become head of Beckford School in the borough of Camden. She turned to writing after the death of her husband Pat Gilroy in 1975, and has produced two short novels, an autobiography and a collection of poems. *Stedman and Joanna* is her most ambitious work, and it remains provisional. Though published in New York by Vantage Press in 1991, it has long been out of print, and the new edition announced but not yet published by Peepal Books, Leeds, has apparently been substantially rewritten. It follows that discussion of the text must also be provisional.

The blurb says Stedman's *Journal* 'was the impetus for the writing', and the Holland and London sections of the novel confirm this source.<sup>781</sup> But the bulk of the text, chapters 2 to 7 of a total of eight, draws directly on the 1796 *Narrative*. Joanna's appearance, for example, and her speeches are from the *Narrative*, while the description of the Breaking on the Rack is part *Journal*, part *Narrative* and part her own gloss on the dreadful event. For long sections, the novel is, in fact, another abridgement, though the overall theme is very different from that of *Joanna, or the Female Slave*, and there are important additions. These are best summed up by Gilroy's subtitle *Dedicated Love in the Eighteenth Century*. It links with the dedication to her deceased husband, and with her long pedagogical career.

Some of these additions are embarrassingly inept. It is possible that Stedman's early reading was in Defoe, Hume and Dryden rather than Smollett and Fielding, though the change seems unnecessary. But it is quite impossible that he should pay for his trip to London by auctioning his father's copy of a book by William Blake, or that he should spend the voyage reading the *Songs of Mr Blake* (Blake was 15 years old in 1772). Chronology is not this author's strongpoint. Towards the end, she has Johnny, Stedman's son by Joanna, joining in him 1884 - then within pages taking part in the family's journey from Holland to Tiverton that has already been located in 1882. Other egregious errors include attributing the anonymous lines beginning 'Some Afric chief' to Stedman himself, and concluding the tale with Stedman's vow to devote himself to the abolitionist

cause. As with Hokstam's *Boni*, the first rule of a historical novel is that it should plausibly interpret (or plausibly question) the known facts.

Embracing the freedom to invent, *Stedman and Joanna* becomes a love story played out against the background of family. That some of the family members involved are slaves is less important than that they are family. Very little interest is shown in the war against the rebel maroons. It is acknowledged that they have been driven into the forest by cruel treatment, but they are emphatically not hero figures. Bonny (sic) is guilty of atrocities, such as cutting off the leg of a mixed-race child, and his 'priests or Obeahmen' are dismissed as 'evil wizards' guilty of promoting 'ignorance and superstition'.<sup>782</sup> Slave rebellion may be just, but it takes the form of appalling atrocities and Gilroy's best conclusion is that 'the system produced dangerous people on both sides'.<sup>783</sup> Meanwhile, the Rangers are virtually eliminated from the story, mentioned only as 'men of darkness',<sup>784</sup> their potential for brutality emphasised, while such features as their skills in the forest – finding water, for instance, when the Stedman's platoon is dying of thirst – are transferred to Quaco, Stedman's loyal slave. A sad hash is made of the attack on Gado Sabi, which is described as deserted while a different settlement altogether is burned, and the night time battle or words between Fourgeoud and the maroons transferred to a further occasion. All three modifications feature as mere interludes in the main romance. Such is the focus on the love story that once, in mid-campaign, Stedman pours over a letter from Joanna and falls asleep thinking of her, only attending the following morning to another letter warning him that three plantations have been burned and that his camp is about to be attacked.

On the family theme involved in the Stedman story, however, Gilroy is acute and offers a more plausible explanation of Joanna's motives than any other author. The account begins again with some further unhistorical additions. Stedman's first sight of Joanna is described in terms of 'music and all the light and shade of poetry', and when he demands an account of her from his host Mrs Demelly she replies, 'Only if you play me a Mozart sonata upon your violin, Mr Stedman'.<sup>785</sup> Stedman, of course, was an artist, not a musician and Mozart at this

---

<sup>781</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, inside cover.

<sup>782</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>783</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 89.

<sup>784</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 57.

<sup>785</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 43.

juncture would have been 18 years old. The Joanna of the *Narrative* was not literate and spoke only Sranan. It will be remembered that Stedman set about teaching her the catechism. But in Beryl Gilroy's account, she 'read fluently in Dutch and German and spoke heavily accented English' but 'for fear of being accused of forgetting her station, she was careful to conceal her accomplishments'.<sup>786</sup> Later, this becomes 'Joanna's father had taught her to play the spinet and sing and read in German and French and High Dutch'.<sup>787</sup> Later still, at an evening of music and dancing presided over by the black Mrs Zubbly Sampson ('a very genteel affair where the most up-to-date pieces of young Mr. Mozart were played'), Joanna sings to Stedman's violin accompaniment Sir Philip Sidney's 'My true love hath my heart and I have his'.<sup>788</sup> Given Joanna's accomplishments, Stedman's courtship of her is conducted through Donne ('I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I / Did till we loved'), and again on her pregnancy ('Where like a pillow on a bed / A pregnant bank swelled up').<sup>789</sup>

Ironically, Gilroy's methods here are not unlike Stedman's as he turned his bald, laconic *Journal* into the 1790 'Narrative', placing Joanna in a tapestry of literary quotation derived from Milton and eighteenth century pastoral. But more is involved here than a difference in literary taste, with Beryl Gilroy showing a twentieth-century preference for late sixteenth century poets. Stedman's pastoral was part of a larger strategy, involving heroic maroons and a narrator of sensibility. It was not intended to set her culturally apart. Furthermore, as I shall be arguing in chapter 9, it was the outcome of many years of reflection by Stedman on the significance of Joanna's preference to remain in Suriname rather than accompany him to Europe. 'Pastoral' implied the possibility of retreat, even within the slave society. Gilroy has interesting things to say about Joanna's preference. But the effect of attributing to her such accomplishments is simply to separate a 'civilised' Joanna from a savage background. In the process, she comes dangerously close to echoing the argument of the 1824 novel *Joanna, or the Female Slave*, that slavery was not wrong *per se*, only wrong when applied to

---

<sup>786</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 45.

<sup>787</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 84.

<sup>788</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p.128.

<sup>789</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, pp. 48 and 84.

superior creatures like Joanna. There are, in fact, ‘blissfully happy’ slaves in this novel, a judgement repeated from Stedman but entirely without irony.<sup>790</sup>

Far more convincing from every aspect is the description of Joanna’s wedding, where the author draws on her knowledge of Guianese custom. Whenever she does this, as in children’s songs or her folklore account of how the toucan got his large beak, the writing gains in authority and charm. The wedding involves a ritual test:

We sat together to receive congratulations and to distribute small gifts. When it was over, Joanna disappeared among the women. It was now Cery’s turn.

‘You have to “know” Joanna, and if you don’t, you have to pay me. A man must know his woman,’ she said curtly.

They brought before me a woman draped from head to foot in a sheet.

‘That is Joanna?’ Cery asked expectantly.

‘No’, I said. ‘Too short’.

A huge wave of laughter poured over the room. I offered Cery a present of a handkerchief like those she wore. They now brought out another person. I could clearly see it was Joanna’s plump sister Beatrice, who was well on the way to being a little barrel.

‘No,’ I said again. ‘Too plump. Not Joanna’.

Cery held out her hand again.

Finally they brought out the stately Joanna. I pulled off the sheet and called out, ‘Here she is. Joanna!’

Cery then questioned us about how we intended to live together in harmony and then counselled us in the ways of a good wife and a good husband.<sup>791</sup>

The threat to such community and social harmony comes from slavery. The scene continues

‘Where is Lolkens?’ I asked.

She shrugged. ‘Exercising his ownership rights somewhere.’

‘And the overseer?’

‘Asleep somewhere also. This is a big plantation! Women are many and have choice’.<sup>792</sup>

The evils of plantation slavery in this novel are described almost exclusively in terms of the sexual vulnerability of slave women. This was an important theme in the *Narrative*, not least with respect to Joanna, but it was placed in the broader

---

<sup>790</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 83.

<sup>791</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>792</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 52.

context of the economics of slavery and the general cruelty and injustice of slave regimes. Among Stedman's most horrifying descriptions were the punishments of male slaves and the punishment of female slaves *by women*. Gilroy's legitimate theme is the ownership of women by men outside the structures of the family.

This is Joanna's constant worry, that she could be 'given orders to be of service to visitors to Fauconberg', and she shows Stedman a medal containing a herb to put potential lovers to sleep.<sup>793</sup> Returning from his first campaign he finds her with a bruised face. A soldier had accosted her and dragged her to Stedman's house, where she gave him a drink and he fell sick with dysentery. 'It is what I fear most', she says, 'that no matter how horrid, how drunk, how disgusting the man, I must obey'.<sup>794</sup> Stedman's own behaviour in the matter is the cause of the only serious quarrel between them. On a visit to the Spokesgift plantation (the setting in the *Narrative* for the set description, with engraving, of the life of the Surinam planter), Stedman is offered Cecily, a slave girl. In an invented but powerful scene, Joanna's fury knows no bounds ('being European is not your colour, it is what you do'<sup>795</sup>), and Stedman is chastened. So single-mindedly does Gilroy present this issue that she distorts Stedman's evidence. Stedman introduces the case of Jette de la Marre, Joanna's fourteen year old cousin, who though baptised and educated was sentenced to be whipped along with her family for refusing to do plantation work. His point is to show how vulnerable Joanna remains, despite the privileged position he has secured for her as Mrs Godefroy's domestic slave. Avoiding this social nuance, Gilroy interprets 'plantation work' as sexual abuse, adding the sequel that Jette murders her owner while disguised as a man, and gets away with it.

The emphasis given this theme might suggest that Joanna would be delighted to accept Stedman's offer of marriage and refuge in Europe. Gilroy's special insight is to stress the inter-connection between slavery and the extended family. In the last resort, Stedman and Joanna is a novel about family. Where the *Narrative* sees Joanna as an individual, and tends to find her family an intrusion, Gilroy's novel presents her as constantly surrounded by relatives. The wedding is necessary, Cecily tells Stedman, because 'Joanna did not just come from smoke'.<sup>796</sup> The

---

<sup>793</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 57.

<sup>794</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 80.

<sup>795</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 80.

<sup>796</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 49.

crucial scene of Joanna's auction is read by Gilroy – for the first time in all this literature – as a *family* tragedy ('There were all there, the sleepy white-haired old man, Beatrice, Cery, Cojo, Joanna, Henry, all of them.'<sup>797</sup>). Joanna's rejection of Stedman is cast in terms of family:

'Here I am among my own people, among family, among friends. I have no right to leave them to their suffering. My mother will grow old. Then whither will she wander? Abandoned to the woods to live a solitary life? Like a wild pig?'<sup>798</sup>

Significantly, too, in Gilroy's version, Stedman too has a mother – an interfering mother who writes regular reproachful letters about his failure to make his fortune or marry an heiress, and about the foolishness of his infatuation with a slave girl. In a final twist, it is she who writes to Joanna in triumph, announcing her son's marriage to Adriana Wierts – a letter that Stedman is represented as believing may have caused Joanna's death (he learns subsequently from Mrs Godefroy that she was poisoned).

Writing as 'a cross-cultural psychologist' who has lived much of her life in London, Gilroy puts her final judgements of Joanna into Stedman's mouth:

She possessed many fine qualities, but was unaware of them. She was content to do as she was told, surrounded by the women of her family and satisfied to know that they were close.<sup>799</sup>

and

Her thoughts of motherhood, wifehood, and love had all been shaped in the institution of slavery, and what I offered her was beyond her comprehension. She could not understand the inner workings, the bones, the blood, and the muscles of the life of a woman in freedom.<sup>800</sup>

This is a little heavy-handed, but I suggest it comes closer than any previous writer to a convincing portrait of the historical Joanna. I shall be returning to the issue in chapter 9.

Meanwhile, it is pleasant to record that Beryl Gilroy concludes her account with a strong attack on Stanbury Thompson, editor of the *Journal*, for excluding

---

<sup>797</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 71.

<sup>798</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 119.

<sup>799</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 148.

Joanna and Johnny from his genealogical table of the Stedman family. Stedman and Joanna she insists, with her concern for family, were ‘married’.<sup>801</sup>

The finest work of literature inspired by Stedman’s story was Blake’s ‘Visions of the Daughters of Albion’ written three years before the *Narrative* was published. Nothing afterwards remotely compares with Blake’s transforming genius. At best, the works surveyed in this chapter have been second rate, even as propaganda. At worst, they have been mediocre. Before considering whether even bad literature can throw any light on the subject in hand, I want to return to the question posed on my opening chapter, the question that is the rationale of post-colonial studies, namely, Can the Subaltern Speak?

I have also to come to terms with my own contributions to this literature. Chapter 9 begins with an account of my own poems on the theme of Stedman and Joanna.

---

<sup>800</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 156.

<sup>801</sup> Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna*, p. 181.

## Chapter Nine

### Can the Subaltern Speak?

In Appendix 2, I print four of my own poems on the broad theme of Stedman's love for Joanna.

The first, a sequence called 'For Captain Stedman', eventually became the title poem of my first published volume of poems in 1983.<sup>802</sup> But it was actually written in November 1972, ten days after my arrival in the West African city of Freetown to take up a post in Fourah Bay College in the University of Sierra Leone. This, in turn, was one week after my marriage to Alice of mixed English, Indian, and African descent, who had already been my partner for two and a half years. At that stage, my only source was my recently purchased Stedman's *Journal*, and I hadn't encountered the *Narrative*, or any of the related literature. I wasn't aware, in fact, of the long record of the re-cycling of this story to which I was contributing.

The surface connection between the poem and our immediate circumstances seems too obvious to need exploring. At the time, however, this 'meaning' was no more than a vehicle for an entirely different preoccupation. Shortly before we left England my friend, the Malawian poet Jack Mapanje, had given me a sheaf of his latest poems. In contrast to the limp, attenuated lyrics I had been writing on a variety of themes, including the theme of my recent deportation from Malawi, Mapanje's poems were fiercely rhetorical, the sentences sustained over up to a dozen six-stress lines, with rich imagery and a cumulative rhythm that I envied. I wanted to do something similar, and the epigraph from Stedman's *Journal* ('I must now make an apology for my style, which is turned by G-d!, so very insipid that I myself am tired with it') was at the front of my mind as I wrote the long third section of the poem, beginning 'Stedman, your Smollet-dabbed journal brags loud/ of yourself'. Only after I had completed this section did I realise it needed an introduction, and so added the rather melodramatic opening section about the surprise of Stedman's 'marriage', and the quieter lyric of part 2 about the contradictions of his pastoral retreat.

---

<sup>802</sup> Landeg White, 'For Captain Stedman' in *For Captain Stedman: Poems* (Harry Chambers/Peterloo Poets, 1983), pp. 34-36.

Twenty-nine years on, this poem remains for me essentially a poem about style, and in particular, a poem about the language required to achieve two contradictory things – to document the atrocities, the extremes of disorder in colonial or ex-colonial societies, while at the same time recording the full undamaged humanity of the victims. In the last resort, of course, as in all writing about atrocities, this contradiction is impossible to resolve. The style I attribute to Stedman, in part 3 of the poem, moves from the violent picaresque of the first paragraph, describing his quarrels with his fellow officers, to the gentle lyricism of his portrait, both in painting and in words, of the woman he wishes to honour and with whom with whom he has shared love. The conclusion is a pastiche of pre-Romantic heroic couplets:

Stedman, your gentle melancholy Art  
Distils the noble chaos of your heart,  
Weeps o'er the victims of a barbarous Age  
But distances to Elegance, Outrage;  
You could not murder Style to match their Life;  
You saw not Slaves but Men, and a dear Wife.

Writing like this I was, of course, simply mimicking Stedman's own view of his alternatives.

The second poem, a pair of sonnets entitled 'Joanna', was written in October 1990, when I was on research leave from the University of York and living in Alcabideche.<sup>803</sup> By then I had read both the 1796 *Narrative* and Richard and Sally Price's new edition of the manuscript of 1790, together with several of the items discussed in Chapter Eight. I had also learned about the Blake connection, and was oppressed with the sense that Joanna had passed through the hands of so many English writers that she could be made to suit the purposes of virtually any argument. That Stedman had been genuinely in love with Joanna seemed beyond doubt. But what had been her feelings for him? And what happened to her as she passed from his *Journal* through the different versions of the *Narrative* and into the acrimony of the Abolition debate? Did anything survive of the person she really was, with the thoughts and feelings Stedman must have known at first hand?

---

<sup>803</sup> Landeg White, 'Joanna' in *The View from the Stockade* (Dangaroo Press. 1991), p.43.

Reflecting on this, I wrote suddenly one Sunday afternoon, when my wife was absent visiting a former school friend in Peniche, the two contrasting sonnets telling their tale of mutual misunderstanding, and of social and cultural incompatibility. Stedman is represented as feeling that, for all his passion, Joanna ultimately eluded him, while she responds by recognising that she could never have held him permanently and the ‘hardest part’ was the illusion of hope he had given her as a slave. Her death, never fully explained in any version of the story, is here attributed to her suicide on news of his marriage.

The third of these poems ‘The Three Graces’ was written on holiday the following year, once again in Alcabideche. It is presented in Portuguese as well as English because only the Portuguese version has as yet been published.<sup>804</sup> The reference in the opening lines it to the images of Africa, Portugal and Brazil on one of the azulejos in the Palácio at Queluz. But my translator, Professor Hélio Osvaldo Alves of the University of Minho, was astute enough to recognise the ultimate source of this image in Blake’s plate of ‘Europe supported by Africa and America’, and to use it as the front cover of his selection of my poems *Superfícies e Interiores*. In effect, the poem becomes my own (much muted) celebration of Oothoon.

The fourth of these poems ‘Against Roderick Random’ must slightly puzzle any readers I may have, and slightly puzzles me though I still relish its rhetoric.<sup>805</sup> It picks up Stedman’s admiration for Smollett and Fielding and (somewhat pointlessly) quarrels with his failure to make certain distinctions. ‘Lisbon Henry’ is preferred to ‘Smellfungus’ (Fielding’s nickname for Smollett the traveller in Italy and France), as too are ‘Yorick’ (Laurence Sterne in his guise as author of *Tristram Shandy*) and ‘pious Sam’ (Samuel Richardson, as author of *Pamela*). The final quatrain implies that Stedman, too, transcended Smollett’s picaresque vision when he became Joanna’s ‘angry and devoted’ husband. What’s going on here is basically, once again, an argument about style, though my proposed alliance of Fielding, Sterne and Richardson *against* Smollett raises more questions than it resolves. It was another ‘holiday’ poem, and perhaps should not be interrogated too seriously.

---

<sup>804</sup> Landeg White, ‘As Três Graças’ in *Superfícies e Interiores: Poemas: Introdução, Seleção, Tradução e Notas de Hélio Osvaldo Alves* (CEMAR, 1995), p. 69.

<sup>805</sup> Landeg White, ‘Against Roderick Random’ in *South* (CEMAR, 1999), p. 24.

The question that concerns me in this chapter is what precisely is going on when a poet does this kind of thing. Or at least, to throw some light on this large question by trying to answer a more limited one: namely, how much of the ‘real’ Joanna is genuinely represented and how much suppressed by the type of writing this thesis has been examining. ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ was the title of Spivak’s essay which I discussed in Chapter One, and I appropriate it here as my own title. I am referring, of course, not only to Joanna but also to the broader representation of slaves and maroons in the whole range of texts that have been under consideration.

In closing pages of ‘Narrative’, Stedman quotes what he calls the Latin adage, ‘Vox audita perit, Litera scripta manet’ (‘the word once pronounced perishes, the written letter remains’)<sup>806</sup>. In documenting differences between the *Journal*, the 1790 ‘Narrative’ and the 1796 *Narrative*, I have felt at times as though I was conducting an exposé, the ‘true facts’ of the Suriname *Journal* being veiled under literary idioms that were already, even as Stedman wrote, being rejected by a new generation of Romantics. It is time to look even more closely than before at what is going on, demonstrating Stedman’s artifice before asking whether the artifice is ‘truer’? My focus is first on one of the highpoints of ‘Narrative’, namely, the battle for Gado Sabi, 1775, and then secondly, once again, on the presentation of Joanna.

### **Gado Sabi, 1775**

The maroon settlement at Gado Sabi was on the coast of Suriname, near the Marowijne River, and therefore close to the border with French Guiana. Its capture in August 1775 was not a decisive engagement. Boni and his followers had fled there after the capture of his much more formidable stockade at Boucou in September 1772. Boucou had been north of Gado Sabi, and hence closer to the plantations along the Cottica River, and it had been surrounded by a swamp fordable only by paths hidden below the water level and known only to the defenders. It had taken government troops five months to penetrate and destroy Boni’s headquarters, a victory only made possible by the creation of the Rangers corps of freed slaves in July 1772. Even then, only five of Boni’s men were killed

---

<sup>806</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 615.

and four captured, along with forty-four women and children. The rest escaped in the forest to build a new fortified village and plant their crops of rice and cassava at Gado Sabi. These events had, of course, preceded Stedman's arrival in Suriname in February 1773.

From Gado Sabi, Boni's men had continued raiding. They ambushed and massacred a platoon of thirty Society soldiers in June 1773 – the occasion when the first orders were cancelled for the Scots Brigade to withdraw from Suriname – and in August destroyed plantations along the Commewijne River during Stedman's own first campaign. But Gado Sabi was more of a hideout than a fortress, barely fortified and badly armed. The effect of its capture was to drive the Boni and his rebel maroons across the Marowijne River into French Guiana, where two groups of them settled permanently in 1776 and 1777.

The battle of 19-22 August, 1775, was Stedman's only direct engagement during his seven campaigns, and he describes events in great detail<sup>807</sup>. As was noted in chapter four, the pages of the *Journal* covering this episode are lost, so that it is not possible to study how his presentation developed over the fifteen years between the battle and his description of it. His respect for the Rangers, and his belief that there was something 'heroic' about the endurance of slaves under extreme punishment, are recorded in the *Journal*, together with his sense of himself as a man of feeling. What I find striking, in respect of the question raised by this chapter, is how full, rich and plausibly authentic his account becomes as a result of his recourse to the language of sentiment and the heroic. It is not, of course, his own actions that he describes as 'heroic', rather those of the Rangers and the rebel slaves. After the battle, his judgement of Colonel Fourgeourd was that 'had he Possess'd All the Military Virtues of Caesar, or Alexander, they must have been Despicable While he Wanted the Feelings of a man'<sup>808</sup>, and it is plain that he reckons he himself has passed this test. He goes into battle as a man of sentiment.

Stedman's comments are given added pungency by a comparison between his account and Fourgeourd's own official report of the engagement, located in the Algemeen Rijksarchief in The Hague and published here for the first time<sup>809</sup>. My

---

<sup>807</sup> The description is given in the 1790 'Narrative', pp. 389-411.

<sup>808</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 451.

<sup>809</sup> Den Haag, Holland, Algemeen Rijksarchief, Fagel Collection (ref: 1.10.29), 1805-08. Mission van de Kolonel Fourgeoud aan Zijn Hoogheid Betreffende de Expeditie naar Surinam 1773-76, 4

original plan in comparing the two accounts was to demonstrate the superiority of Stedman's, given the literary resources he was deploying. Fourgeoud's version, however, turns out to be not merely the worse of the two but a barely competent performance, reinforcing vividly everything Stedman said about the inadequacies of his commanding officer. It is worth noting, if only in parenthesis, that Stedman's name appears only once in the official account (and, indeed, in the whole Algemeen Rijksarchief<sup>810</sup>), in a list of officers appended to Fourgeoud's reports. It is the power of his *Narrative* that has reversed the historical assessment.

Fourgeoud's report is a daily log covering the period 5 to 26 August, 1775. He keeps a careful record of the times his company began marching each morning, paused for rest or refreshment, resumed marching, and made camp for the night. He is meticulous in noting the direction and formation of each march – 'north and later north-west', 'north-north east and sometimes even more to the east', in two columns at 30 paces, in three columns at a forced march, and so on. But he gives no hint of the rationale of these manoeuvres. At least twice, he gives a distinct impression they are marching in circles<sup>811</sup>, and once, he makes the deliberate decision to march away from the sound of the enemy<sup>812</sup>. He reports on a landscape of forest, savannah and creeks, but almost entirely in terms of mobility. Swamps and creeks impede his march, while 'a small elevation' allows him to make camp and a forest permits them to hang hammocks. Four times he uses the word 'beautiful', three times for 'sandy stretches' where they can march on dry land and once for a forest where they can have a good night's sleep<sup>813</sup>. But there is barely a hint of a tactical reading of the terrain in which he is about to fight his only serious battle of the whole four-year campaign. He notes the signs of habitation – abandoned huts, fishing implements, recent fires, cut trees, a water hole, a leaf with cooked rice, the tracks of 'a handicapped person'<sup>814</sup>. But he tells us nothing about forest fighting – that is, fighting an invisible enemy on his own ground – and he crosses swamps without taking any precautions against ambush.

---

omslagen, Missive van den Colonel Fourgeoud, dat: 26 Aug., 1775, translated from the Dutch original by Dr Jan Kees Van Donge.

<sup>810</sup> Personal communication from Dr. Wim Hoogbergen, Universiteit Utrecht, 12 October, 2000.

<sup>811</sup> Missive, 15 and 17 Aug., 1775.

<sup>812</sup> Missive, 11 Aug., 1775.

<sup>813</sup> Missive, 9, 10, 11 and 17 Aug., 1775.

<sup>814</sup> Missive, 16 Aug., 1775.

The only precautions he mentions are that his company should be prepared for ‘an alarm’ at night, and that fires may only be lit on his express permission<sup>815</sup>.

When he comes across a former village of the rebel maroons he counts the huts, and when he finds their provision grounds, he paces them out methodically – 40 by 100 paces of cassava and tobacco, 1010 by 100 paces of rice – before just as methodically destroying them<sup>816</sup>. The battle itself is given half a page and less than a paragraph. We are told his troops advanced at a forced march, which was difficult because of fallen trees, that the Blacks tried to halt the advance ‘with fierce fire’, that his columns regrouped in a *tête de poire* formation, and that the rebels covered their retreat by setting fire to their village<sup>817</sup>. His low casualties (four ‘lightly wounded’) are unexplained, and the fact that, for the most part, the enemy escaped with their families and provisions is glossed over. The one hint of colour in the account is his report (20 August) of an exchange of shouting in the night and his recording of one of the rebels’ *beaux mots* (‘You can do what you like, Satan’s children; within three years I will be governor of the whole colony’)<sup>818</sup>. We shall hear more of this shouting in a moment.

Fourgeoud’s report is, of course, what Stedman claimed his ‘Narrative’ to be – the plain, unvarnished account of a simple soldier concerned only with ‘fact’ and ‘truth’. That his version tells us so much more about what actually occurred on those August days and nights in the Suriname forest is a tribute to his greater intelligence and imagination, and his greater command of literary resources. There are four stages to his description. Stage one is taken up with a narrative of their journey through the forest from the military outpost of Barbacoeba on the upper Cottica River to the outskirts of Gabo Sabi, and in the course of this journey four themes are emphasised. The first is the absolute contrast between the fighting capabilities of Colonel Fourgeoud and the two hundred European soldiers under his command, and the one hundred rangers. Stedman notes his dismay that the rangers, his ‘Black Favourites’, have not turned up, being unwilling to serve under Fourgeoud.<sup>819</sup> A violent quarrel breaks out among the Europeans, to be repeated on the morning of the battle, over military etiquette and the minutia of correct

---

<sup>815</sup> Missive, 6, 7 and 16 Aug., 1775.

<sup>816</sup> Missive, 20 Aug., 1775.

<sup>817</sup> Missive, 20 Aug., 1775.

<sup>818</sup> Missive, 20 Aug., 1775.

<sup>819</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 389.

dress and deportment, as though they were on parade in Holland rather than fighting in swamp and rain forest. After the Europeans have reached Gado Sabi, the rangers join them, and it is here that Stedman makes his remark about one Black soldier being worth six Europeans in the forest which is their natural element.<sup>820</sup> The second preoccupation is his continued natural observations. All through the journey, and throughout the course of the battle itself, he keeps pausing to note a type of grasshopper camouflaged as a green leaf or a carnivorous spider eight inches long, or to describe the precise nature of the swamp they are wading through – not a quicksand exactly, but a kind of crust suspended over a muddy abyss into which a man could disappear within seconds.<sup>821</sup> As elsewhere in the ‘Narrative’, these observations are presumably written up directly from (missing) pages of the *Journal*. But inserted on the eve of battle, they strongly reinforce our impression of a calm, curious, even stoical temperament, and a reliable guide to the main events being recorded.

The centrepiece of this first stage is Plate 53 depicting ‘A Rebel Negro armed & upon his guard’.<sup>822</sup> In his description, Stedman asks us to note the ethnographic details – the closely plaited hair, the pointed beard ‘like that of all Africans when they have no opportunity to Shave’, the firelock and hatchet which are his weapons, the pouch made of animal skin, the amulet or ‘Obia or Amulet tied About his Neck, in which he Places all his hope and Confidence’, and the cotton sheet which serves him as a covering and as a bed at night.<sup>823</sup> But these are incidental to the portrayal of an efficient, intelligent warrior with no superfluous dress or possessions (or body-weight), and a formidable enemy. He cannot forbear to add that this was one of the figures exhibited to Sir Joshua Reynolds who found it ‘Verry Expressive, And upon the whole an Excellent performance’.<sup>824</sup> In sharp contrast, he repeats earlier descriptions of the sufferings of European troops in the forest, and appeals to readers ‘who have a Heart to Simpathise with our Sad Sufferings’,<sup>825</sup> reiterating that they were

---

<sup>820</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 396.

<sup>821</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, pp. 394 and 396.

<sup>822</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, facing p. 390.

<sup>823</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, pp. 390-392.

<sup>824</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 392.

<sup>825</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 395.

a Parcel of Poor, emaciated, forlorn, and I may say half Starved Creatures, in a Strange Country, who were Dying by Dozens, and Scores, without Assistance, or Pity, frequently with not so much as a friend to shut their Eye Lids, and Always Without a Coffin or Shell to receive their bones, being for the most Part Promiscuously thrown together in one Pit, no Better than I have seen a heap of carrion thrown for the Dogs.<sup>826</sup>

Sensibility, at this stage, is something required of the reader who follows the Europeans into battle against a heroic enemy.

Meanwhile, Stedman provides a second set-piece prelude to the encounter with an evocative eve-of-battle pastoral.<sup>827</sup> They have camped and Fourgeoud, knowing they have no hope of taking Boni by surprise, has given permission for them to lay cooking fires. Stedman has been given some pigeon peas by a Sergeant Fowler. Typically, he breaks off to explain what pigeon peas are, how grown and harvested and, again typically, invites Fowler and a ranger appropriately called Hannibal to share them with him. Thomson's *Autumn* description of 'Black and Deep' night introduces a long conversation, in the course of which Hannibal explains the tactics Boni's maroons will deploy against them the following day. It will be forest fighting, the only target being the flash of the previous discharge. That being the case, a maroon will move to a new position each time he has fired, while his colleague in a different position waits to return the fire his own shot has attracted. By this constant shifting 'in a See Saw manner', they make themselves effectively invisible, while there is always a third colleague standing by to take the place of anyone who is killed. Stedman is too interested to be dismayed by this ('I Perfectly Understood his meaning'), and he supplements the explanation with a diagram.<sup>828</sup> He continues with what he has learned from Hannibal about 'the great Bony' and his 'Celebrated Captains', including Jolycoeur who had been Joanna's mother's protector and whose reasons for rebellion were 'great .. indeed', and about their various forest settlements, some already destroyed, some yet to be discovered. He quotes some names – Gado Sabi, their target, meaning 'God alone knows it & no person else'; Boucou, the settlement destroyed in September 1772, meaning 'it shall moulder before it Shall be taken'; Boosy Cray, meaning 'He Woods Lament'; Kebree me, meaning

---

<sup>826</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 396.

<sup>827</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 397-401.

<sup>828</sup> 1790 'Narrative', facing p. 398.

‘Hide me O ye Surrounding Verdure’, and others.<sup>829</sup> Richard and Sally Price take Stedman somewhat to task for romanticising these names, arguing Kebree me means merely ‘Hide me’, and Boucou (probably) ‘fog’. But Stedman’s whole point is that he thought them ‘so verry *Sentimental* (orig. ital.) / as helping to illustrate our ideas of this Negro Nation’.<sup>830</sup> The passage concludes ‘Such were the names of the African Warriors And their Settlements, And now in the hopes of a Glorious Victory – viz to do good without Committing Cruelties I shaked hands with the Black captain Hanibal, and fell most Profoundly Asleep’. He awakes to Thomson’s *Summer* description of ‘The powerful King of Day / Rejoicing in the East’, heralding the day of the attack.<sup>831</sup>

In sharp contrast to Plate 53, showing a rebel at home in the forest, Plate 54 depicts a ‘March thro’ a swamp or, Marsh in Terra firma’, on the approach to Gado Sabi. Fourceoud with a melancholy-looking Stedman to his left along with others of the Scots Brigade, is shown armpit deep in water.<sup>832</sup> Their uniforms are sodden, their muskets useless since they are impossible to re-load ‘Without Wetting the Lock’, and they are gazing around them, close to panic, as maroons snipe at them from the tops of palms. As they land, they stumble across the bones of Captain Meyland’s platoon, ambushed in this very swamp in the engagement that revealed Boni’s whereabouts. For Stedman, it is once again a melancholy scene, reinforced with a quotation from Robert Merry’s ‘To Ana Matilda’. This time one can be quite sure Stedman is enlarging and elaborating on what he may have written in the *Journal*. As we saw in chapter 2, ‘Anna Matilda’ was Hannah Cowley, Stedman’s Tiverton neighbour, and one of the Della Cruscan poets.

Tho’ on the Plain he Lies Outstretch’d and Pale  
Without one friend his Stedfast eyes to Close,  
Yet on his Honour’d Corpse shall many a Gale  
Waft the Moist Fragrance of He weeping Rose.<sup>833</sup>

Perhaps Stedman was drawn to that image of the being ‘not so much as a friend to shut their Eye Lids’ quoted above. For the rest of the stanza, and of the poem, it

---

<sup>829</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 400.

<sup>830</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, ‘Introduction’ note 7, p. LXXXV, and p. 400.

<sup>831</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 401.

<sup>832</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, facing p. 402.

<sup>833</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 402, quoting Robert Merry ‘To Anna Matilda’ lines 69-72 in Anna Matilda, *The Poetry of Anna Matilda* (1788).

has to be said that for once his attraction to the sentimental contradicts rather than supplements his devotion to 'plain truth'.

Sergeant Fowler's reaction to the bones is to be 'terribly Sick ... being Fascinated to the Ground without he Could Absolutely Advance one Single Step' (if only that had been his reaction to the Della Cruscan poem!). Stedman damns him for 'a Pityful Scoundrel', and leaves him behind, only to note later that, at the first sound of firing, Fowler 'had Rush'd to He front, And fully reestablished his *tarnished* Character, by fighting the Enemy at my Side like a brave fellow'.<sup>834</sup> His own reaction to battle fire is different. First, he encounters a small party who are evacuating Gadi Sabi carrying plaited hampers, that characteristically he describes in detail, containing the 'Most Beautiful Clean'd Rice, that ever I saw'. Approaching closer, he admires 'the most beautiful Oblong Square field with Rice in full ripeness that ever I saw in my life'. Then the Rebel Town itself, 'in the form of an Amphitheatre Shelter'd by the foliage of a few Ranks of Lofty Trees, Which they had left Standing, the whole Presenting a truly Romantic and Enchanting *Coup Doeuil* to the Unconcerned Spectator.'<sup>835</sup> In the same spirit of sensitive detachment, he notes tactics exactly as Captain Hannibal had described, together with the maroons' pathetic belief in their power of their amulets to protect them from being shot ('So much for *Priest Craft* in every Country').

But then comes a truly remarkable confession:

Even at this Moment my Sensibility Got so much the Better of my Duty, And my pity for these poor miserable, illtreated People Was such, that I Was rather induced to fire with Eyes Shut, like *Gill Blas* when he was amongst the Robbers, that to take a Proper Aim, of Which I had Frequent Opportunities.<sup>836</sup>

The reference is to Alain-René Lesage's *Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* (Paris, 1715-35), and in particular to the episode when the hero is forced by his abductors to take part in a robbery (book 1, chapter 9), but aims blind so as not to be accountable for murder. But Stedman's circumstances are very different. His unwillingness to kill stems from his 'sensibility', his 'pity for these poor miserable illtreated people', and here he touches on a taboo of military literature,

---

<sup>834</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 404-405.

<sup>835</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 404.

<sup>836</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 405.

namely, the known reluctance of soldiers to kill in combat. In the standard contra-literature, this theme dates from battles in the American civil war, when rifles abandoned in the field were found to have been loaded as many as nineteen times but never once fired. Stedman's admission ante-dates this by three quarters of a century, and as a contribution to the literature not of pacifism but of sentiment.

By this stage, they are about to enter the town when 'a Rebel Captain' (Stedman consistently credits the maroon leaders with his own rank) deliberately rushes from house to house, setting the whole on fire. This 'Masterly Manoeuvre not only prevented that Carnage to Which the Common Soldier is too Prone in the heat of Victory, but gave them the Opportunity of Retreating With their Wives and Children.' They retreat with their supplies through 'the Unfathomable Marsh Which we soon found to Surround them', leaving behind an undetermined number of dead but not a single prisoner.<sup>837</sup> At this point, we are referred to the frontispiece of the 'Narrative', Stedman's self-portrait, 'Where I may be seen After the heat of the Action Dejectedly Looking on the Body of an Unfortunate Rebel Negro Stretch'd at my feet.'<sup>838</sup> Barefoot, his uniform open to the chest, his pistol dangling, his sword sheathed, he has propped his musket and bayonet and is reaching for his flask of water, while a maroon lies dead at his feet. Behind them, Gado Sabi is in flames and the rival armies mill around like ants disturbed from their nest. The scene is framed by luxuriant vegetation, and by five palm trees, symmetrically arranged. Stedman's self-composed caption reads:

From different Parents, different Climes we came  
At different Periods. Fate still rules the Same.  
Unhappy Youth, while bleeding on the ground,  
'Twas *yours* to fall – but *mine* to feel the wound.

Engraved by Bartolozzi, it balances the tender end-piece showing 'Europe supported by Africa & America', engraved by Blake. So positioned, opposite the title page, it becomes a comment not just on the capture of Gado Sabi but of his whole melancholy 'Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam' - an image of the author as a man of feeling, and a powerful repudiation of the whole campaign.

---

<sup>837</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 405-406.

<sup>838</sup> 1790 'Narrative', facing title page.

The final stage of this battle account describes its remarkable aftermath. He village is looted of what survived from the flames, and Stedman is shocked to observe the Rangers 'Employ'd Playing at Bowls with those heads they had Chop'd off', before smoke-drying the jaw bones and the right hands of their victims to carry home as trophies.<sup>839</sup> It is interesting that his editors, Richard and Sally Price who, as liberal anthropologists, are normally eager to 'explain' unusual slave or maroon behaviour in terms of tradition or ritual, avoid comment on this episode. Stedman's comment is that '*man* the Boasted Lord of the Creation, is in his Natural State nearer Connected to the Brute, than Civilisation /Which in other Words only is Polity'.<sup>840</sup>

The Europeans hang their hammocks and go to sleep, only to be awoken in the pitch darkness by the noise of firing. They spend the rest of the night on their bellies, anticipating an attack, when 'a Most Abusive Dialogue Ensued, between the Rebels and the Rangers'. The maroons reproached the ranger as 'Poltroons and Betrayers of their Countriment', challenging them to fair combat and 'swearing they only wanted to Wash their hands in the Blood of Such Scoundrels'. The Rangers answered the maroons were afraid to show their ugly faces, that they had deserted their masters being too lazy to do their work while they, the Rangers, 'Would Stand by the Europeans till they Died'. The stand off continued with songs and horns and renewed firing, until 'Poor Fourgeoud Entered in The Conversation, by the help of myself ... Which Created more Mirth than I before heard in the Colony':

He Promised them Life, Liberty, meat, Drink, and All they Wanted, but they Replied with a Loud Laugh, that they Wanted Nothing from him Who seemed a Half Starved frenchman, Already Run Away from his own Country, that if he Would Venture to give them a Visit in Person, he Should not be Harmed, And might Depend on not returning With an Empty Belly – They Call'd to us that were more to be Pitied than themselves, Who were only a Parcel of White Slaves, hired to be shot at, & Starved for a Pence a day, And that they Scorned to Expand much of theyr Powder Upon such Scarcrows ... but if the Planters and Overseers dared to Enter the Woods themselves not a Soul of such Scoundrels should ever return ...<sup>841</sup>

---

<sup>839</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 407.

<sup>840</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 407.

<sup>841</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 408-409.

The altercation ends at dawn, at which point they discover that the night's 'Unintermitting Noise' had been a ruse to cover the maroons' retreat through the swamp, with their families and their provisions. It is this that Stedman praises, by way of conclusion to his account, as 'Such a piece of Generalship ... as must have done honour to an European prince & Even *Frederick the Great* himself.'<sup>842</sup>

Can we conclude from this battle description that the 'subaltern' has spoken? The first thing to be said is that the description carries conviction as a remarkably detailed and vivid account of the engagement. As we have seen, Stedman liked to pretend he was recording what he witnessed and taken part in, in the plain, simple style appropriate to a soldier. He claimed, in short, to be writing without a style. Yet it was his readings in the literature of sensibility that led him to present himself, in mid battle, as a man of feeling. This involved not just the confession that he feels pity for the victims ('Twas *yours* to fall - but *mine* to feel the wound'). It involves the remarkable confession, rare in military literature, that even under fire he returned fire with his eyes shut (he could have been court-martialled for this) to avoid the spectacle of killing. There follows the equally remarkable implication, rarer still in military memoirs, that being an efficient fighter (like the Rangers) involves being something of a barbarian. To fight effectively, one needs to throw off the 'polity' of 'civilisation', and he records his horrified admiration of the Rangers for being capable of this (and of Fourgeoud for having the common sense to tolerate their game of 'bowls'). From here, of course, it is a short step to the superior, if contradictory ethic of 'the heroic'.

H.D.F. Kitto identified one fundamental insight of *The Iliad* as being Homer's understanding that the death of one's enemy is tragic too.<sup>843</sup> It was Stedman's readings in the literature of the heroic that provided him with the idiom of his presentation of both Rangers and maroons. Bravery, stoicism, and tactical skill, in all three superior to modern European military etiquette, were qualities he found expressed in Homer. Under the guidance of 'the heroic', he was able to see further than his contemporaries into the real abilities and essential humanity of the men he was both fighting alongside and fighting against. His battle account is the more complete for many-sided.

---

<sup>842</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 411.

<sup>843</sup> H.D.F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Penguin, 1951), pp. 55-58.

So, have ‘the subaltern’ (whom, in this context, I take to be the maroons) ‘spoken’, or have they simply been given a voice to counterpoint Stedman’s self-presentation? It seems to me that to present the question this way is to demand the impossible. Within the limits of human discourse, what more could Stedman do? The maroons have been admired, envied even, and the causes of the rebellion and their behaviour in that rebellion have been honoured. What they are, it is true, has largely been inferred from their conduct and their circumstances, and only once, on that night of exchanged insults, have they been given an actual voice. But that voice, echoing from the forest, rings true with everything else that is said about them. There are gaps in the account. We don’t meet the maroons as individuals. We don’t meet any captive woman, seized in raids and anxious to return to their husbands (any more than we meet potential victims of child abuse). But these very absences are a tribute to Stedman’s truth. He records what he experienced, guided by the literary models available to him. When we turn to the presentation of Joanna, the argument may be carried further.

## Joanna

Only seven times in the whole 626 pages of the 1790 ‘Narrative’ is Joanna made to express an opinion, and on six of these occasions the subject is her adamant refusal to leave Surinam and to accompany Stedman to Europe as his wife. On other topics – the maroon rebellion, the state of the colony, the treatment of slaves, her own family, her own ambitions, her feelings for Stedman, the idyll at L’Esperance, the birth of Johnny, the repeated rumours of Stedman’s departure - she says not a word, though she must surely have been the source of some of Stedman’s information. At the very least (in her role as his ‘sleeping dictionary’), she must have contributed to his knowledge of Sranan (Suriname Krio). Joanna spoke no English. Sranan was the language of their relationship, and of the examples he quotes in chapter 26, it is agreeable to speculate she may have been the source of *Sweety muffo* (‘Good eating’), *Anansy tory* (‘A pleasing tale’), and perhaps even of *Mee Saloby you langa alla Mee Hatty so langa mee leeby* (‘I will Love you with All my Heart so long as I Live’).<sup>844</sup>

---

<sup>844</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 516.

Seven times, however, an opinion is attributed to her. On the second of these occasions, we hear what sounds like her authentic voice when, on the news that Mrs Godefroy is to be her protector, she bursts out in Sranan, *Gado sa bresse da woma!* (God will bless this woman).<sup>845</sup> In the context of her long silence, the effect is startling, as though something long repressed has broken to the surface. There can be no doubt that she was better pleased by this arrangement with Mrs Godefroy than by any alternative Stedman had to offer. In interpreting Stedman's translations of her other six expressions of opinion, we must give priority to the one statement she made unmistakably in her own voice. Of these six, two are descriptive summaries, and two are given as is given as reported speech. The fifth is the speech attributed to her in response to his first proposal to educate her and take her to Europe. Her response, spoken 'with downcast looks, and tears dropping upon her heaving bosom', is presented as follows:

I was born a low, contemptible Slave, to be your Wife under the forms of Christianity must degrade you to all your Relations and your Friends, beside the expense of my Purchase and Education, but I have a soul I hope not inferior to the best European, and blush not to acknowledge that I have a regard for you who so much distinguishes me above the rest - nay that now independent of every other thought I shall pride myself / by in the way of my Ancestors / to be your all and all, till fate shall part us, or my Conduct Shall give you Cause to Spurn me from your Presence.<sup>846</sup>

Before rejecting this speech as wildly improbable, we must do Stedman the justice of recognising his need to translate her decision for English readers. Further, that a literal translation would not be adequate. He had to make her refusal seem like the rational choice of a real, cultural alternative.

Next time he quotes her, he resorts instead to reported speech. Stedman has paid Mrs Godefroy 500 florins on account, and she responds by offering to let him take Joanna and Johnny to Holland:

Which the other as Nobly as Firmly Refused, declaring that independant of all other Considerations, she Could never think of Sacrificing one Benefactor to the Interest of Another, and that he own happiness or even mine Which was Dearer to her than Life, Should never have any Weight, till the Debt of her Liberty should be Pay'd by me or by her own industry to the Last Farthing, and Which she did not

---

<sup>845</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 385.

<sup>846</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 100.

Despair to see one Day Completed – She added, our Separation Should only be for a time, And that the Greatest Proof I could ever Show her of my Real Esteem, was now to undergo this Little Trial of Fortune, like a Man, Without so much as heaving a Sigh in her Presence.<sup>847</sup>

‘At this moment’, the passage continues, he learns that De La Mar, his ‘brother-in-law’ has just died, leaving Joanna’s sister a widow and his ‘2 beautiful children’ in slavery. (It may be recalled that the *Journal* at this point mentioned ‘above 20 children’, and that the news preceded the payment of the 500 florins.)<sup>848</sup>

In the ‘Narrative’, Mrs Godefroy renews this offer three times. First in July 1776, when the regiment actually embarks for what turns out to be a premature withdrawal:

this Excellent Woman Renewing her Entreaties that I ought to carry Joana and her Boy with me to Holland, but to no Purpose, 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 – Thus Situated we both Affected to bear our Fate with resignation while both were Equally Tormented with the Agonies of Death.<sup>849</sup>

Secondly, in August 1776 when ‘this day / Poor Joana being inflexible in her Resolution / I Ratified the Agreement with the Good Mrs Godefroy in presence of her mother & Other Relations’,<sup>850</sup> and thirdly in March 1777 on the occasion of his actual departure when ‘her steady answer was as before Viz,:

that dreadful as appeared the fatal separation, which she forbode was for the Last time never to meet again, yet she Could not but Prefer the Remaining in Surinam, first from a Consciousness that with propriety she had not the disposal of herself - & Secondly from pride, wishing in her Present Condition Rather to be one of the first among her own class in America, than as she well Convinced to be the last in Europe at least till such time as fortune should enable me to establish her above dependence.<sup>851</sup>

---

<sup>847</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 470.

<sup>848</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 470 and *Journal*, p. 162 (14 Feb., 1776).

<sup>849</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 507.

<sup>850</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 550-551.

<sup>851</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 603.

I think we are entitled to conclude from all this that, on what was to Stedman the most important issue of all, Joanna has not been silenced. When he proposes marriage, her answer is a firm ‘no’, repeated five times with ‘inflexible resolution’. But, of course, the issue is not so clear cut. Under the arrangements permitted by Suriname law, she was already ‘married’. The problem was that Stedman was leaving, and his proposal – on each of the occasions it was repeated – entailed departure for Europe. That ‘departure’ involved more than a journey. It meant abandoning one way of life for another, in a mixture of feelings and beliefs and motives that Stedman’s reporting part clarifies, part obscures. I think we can reject as improbable the principal reason Stedman attributes to her. Joanna’s refusal is unlikely to have been based so clearly on the suggestion that the buying and selling of people was justified and that he still owed 1300 florins for her.

It is worth repeating what the deal with Mrs Godefroy entailed. Unable to afford Joanna’s manumission, Stedman arranged for Mrs Godefroy to ‘lend’ him the 2000 florins required, on condition Joanna remained her property while the debt was paid off. By the date of his departure, he had succeeded in paying 700 florins. Attached to the arrangement was a promise that Joanna would be manumitted on Mrs Godefroy’s death. One can appreciate why this bargain suited Mrs Godefroy: she was getting a slave worth 2000 florins for just 1300, with the prospect of further instalments. One can understand, too, why Stedman felt he had done his best for Joanna, given her refusal to accompany him to Holland. Shortly before he embarked, one of De La Mar’s daughters, a baptised 14 year old called Miss Jette,, was dragged to court in chains for refusing to the work of ‘a Common negro Slave, neyther which she had ever Expected, or to which she had at all been brought up’.<sup>852</sup> The court sentenced her to submit, with a flogging thrown in for her and all her relatives’ ‘disobedience’: on the town clerk’s intervention, this sentence was suspended, but her owner’s right to make her do any work he required was upheld. Stedman was entitled to feel he had released Joanna from such a fate. As Mrs Godefroy’s possession, she was confirmed as a house slave, though his belief on departing that he had guaranteed her eventual freedom seems optimistic, and he never paid off any further portion of the debt.

---

<sup>852</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative’, p. 598.

But why did Joanna prefer becoming Mrs Godefroy's slave to sailing with Stedman to Holland? A point she makes three times, and that is inferred on a fourth, that that 'the Debt of her Liberty' must be 'Pay'd by me or by her own industry to the last Farthing', and that 'she had not the disposal of herself'. These statements are not easy to interpret. I have already rejected the implication that she meant that the buying and selling of people was justified and that he still owed 1300 florins for her. There is the further implication, also I think to be rejected, that her virtue, which Stedman insists on, subsisted in her acceptance of her slave status. Significantly, all these statements were made in Mrs Godefroy's presence. They are can plausibly be read as declarations of unswerving loyalty to her new owner, and it is not impossible that she regarded Mrs Godefroy's offers to let her go as provocative, deliberately testing her reliability. Whether Joanna intended to be drawing a direct parallel between slavery and Christian marriage, I do not know. The irony may have been unintended. What she is surely insisting on, though, is that the choice Stedman is presenting her with is not a real choice. He hasn't the money and he can't afford her, and no amount of special pleading can circumvent that awkward fact.

The brief versions we are given of her other speeches, however improbable they may sound, tell us a great deal. In the first, the one presented as a direct translation, she begins by defining her status as 'slave' and talking about the effects of an alliance on Stedman's 'Relations and your Friends'. Family was enormously important to Joanna. I noted in chapter four how Stedman was repeatedly taken aback by revelations of that family's extent. There was her mother, Ceri, her grandfather a slave on the Fauconberg plantation, a brother called Henry, an aunt Lucretia, an uncle Cojo, a number of sisters, and, of course, De la Mar, his 'brother-in-law' with his twenty children, all cousins of various types. Joanna, in short, belonged to an extended family, with protectors like Captain Jolycoeur even among the rebel Maroons.

A historical anomaly is relevant here. Normally, in slave colonies throughout the Americas, families were deliberately divided. Suriname differed in that from the first founding of the colony it was standard practice to sell slaves not as individuals but as groups. In practice, this meant men could be sold separately but women, children and other dependants were sold together. The effect of this was that the family that mattered to slaves in Suriname was the matrilineage. A slave

child would know his or her mother and grandmother and their female relatives (and young male siblings) rather better any relatives in the male line. How far this perpetuated customs the slaves brought from Africa, and how far it was a by-product of Dutch slave law is uncertain<sup>853</sup>. Its consequence for Joanna would have been that her mother, aunts and sisters were more important to her as ‘family’ than any tie she felt with Stedman.

Then, following the collapse of the Amsterdam stock exchange in 1773, and a sharp increase in absentee ownership, the practice of selling families as units began to be neglected. Stedman’s difficulties in identifying Joanna’s Amsterdam owners following the sale of the Fauconberg estate, together with their willingness to sell Joanna as an individual property (2000 florins!), illustrate this change. It put families like Joanna’s under increased strain, strengthening their determination to stay together and act together. Significantly, on four of the occasions mentioned above, when Stedman is negotiating with Mrs Godefroy, signing the deal, paying instalments, or about to depart, Joanna’s relatives are present as communal witnesses to every aspect of the arrangement. Stedman notes this fact only in passing, but it is probably the key to her refusal to sail with him to Holland, to join whatever family he possesses and where she is sure she will not be accepted as a equal member. He was asking her to give up what she regarded as her security, on the hazard of a continuing personal regard, and there is no record in the *Journal* or ‘Narrative’ or *Narrative* that he ever informed her about the family she would be joining.

Her second statement in the first speech is a ringing declaration of her equality, ‘I have a soul I hope not inferior to the best European’. She is, obviously, contrasting her sense of her own worth with the status accorded her by the Europeans she knows (she continues by making an exception of Stedman). This is the theme she returns to in her fifth refusal, where she prefers to be ‘first among her own class in America’ than ‘to be the last in Europe’. In the elaborate hierarchy of race and class in colonial Suriname, she has a secure position with Mrs Godefroy – a mulatto rather than a sambo or a black, a house slave rather than a plantation worker. When she dies, Stedman’s footnote indicates ‘*in a female negro Slave & three Score Sheep had Consisted the Live Stock of Poor*

---

<sup>853</sup> Personal communication from Dr. Wim Hoogbergen, Universiteit Utrecht, 12 October, 2000.

Joana'.<sup>854</sup> She had been sufficiently privileged to own a slave herself. As for what she knew about Europeans from their conduct towards her, there was nothing to tempt her to throw away the social status she had gained at home to join the underclass in Holland or in Britain.

The third point Joanna makes in her first speech is to draw a contrast between being a wife 'under the forms of Christianity' and 'in the way of my Ancestors'. Stedman's proposal had included educating her, and as we have seen he began teaching her the catechism (apparently, the Anglican variety, despite his Presbyterian upbringing). She seems to have been unimpressed by this. As a slave she could not contract a Christian marriage, and the fact that Miss Jette, de La Mar's daughter, had been baptised did not excuse her from plantation labour. The scepticism implied in her preference for the 'way of my Ancestors' is amply confirmed by the seventh of the opinions attributed to her in the 'Narrative'. After finally securing Johnny's 'Letter of his Free Emancipation' from the Suriname authorities in considerations of her services to the colony, Stedman, supported by a certain Captain Small, tries to get his son baptised. The priest refuses, on the grounds that Stedman is not going to be around to bring him up as a Christian, when 'Coming to Joana, who had him dancing on her Lap, she Ask'd us with a smile if we Really thought herself the worse for the omission of the Ceremony, to which we both Replied no'.<sup>855</sup> It is a gentle, but significant rejection of another of Stedman's apparent gifts, and it gives added force to the language of her first refusal to be taken to Europe, viz., '*independent* of every other thought I shall *pride* myself / by in the way of my Ancestors / to be your all and all' (my italics). I hope I have established the point that the awkward idiom Stedman has devised for her in fact conveys a great deal.

Writing the history of these refusals presents Stedman with a problem. The cadences he has devised for her, particularly in her first speech, derive not from pastoral but from the eighteenth century drama of moral sentiment - that type of drama ridiculed by Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* in which the characters outbid each other in virtuous sentiments. Joanna's 'virtue' is made to appear to depend on her awareness of the 'price' of freedom and education, to the point of rejecting Christian marriage and opting instead to be his mistress 'in the

---

<sup>854</sup> 1790 'Narrative', p. 625.

<sup>855</sup> 1790 'Narrative', pp. 600-601.

way of my Ancestors'. It is a fascinating formula, apparently invoking cultural relativity to absolve him of final responsibility. In fact, it is the nearest he ever comes to acknowledging her complete independence of him. His first reaction to Suriname, presented in the image of the Flagellation of the female Slave, had been that the place was barbaric, and the first expression of his love for Joanna was an impulse to rescue her. Her refusal of that rescue, her preference for the security she already possessed in the slave colony, is I suggest the origin of the pastoral idiom he devises for her.

I repeat my earlier contention, that this is not merely a matter of falsifying the record by changing dates and facts. There was no particular need for him to mention Joanna in his 'Narrative', certainly not to place her at its very centre. He could have left the relationship in the idiom he used to describe the night of his first arrival, namely, 'Go to sleep at Mr Lolkens who was in the country. I f—k one of his negro maids.' (for much of the story Joanna also belonged to Mr Lolkens). Honouring Joanna, acknowledging her place in his life as a woman with whom he had shared love, meant finding a different language. When she rejects marriage and Europe, he had, I suppose, the option of acknowledging that what he had done for her was to fund her transfer to a more congenial owner. Instead, he listens intently to her insistence that there is within Suriname a secure place for her, insulated from the colony's barbarity, and he translates that insistence into the pastoral genre. It is not, of course, a genre she would have recognised, nor expressed in a language she understood. But its origin was her own preference and, once embarked on, it allowed Stedman to celebrate her – as peasant and princess, nymph and goddess, virginal Eve and devoted mother – in a manner that, even allowing for the changes made in the 1796 *Narrative*, has resonated with readers over two centuries.

Choosing Milton and Pomphret and Thomson as his models, however, had one very curious consequence. Admirers of Stedman have been disconcerted by his failure to support Abolition. His *Journal* for Feb 20, 1792, records his refusal to sign Parson Land's parish petition 'for the abolition of slaves'.<sup>856</sup> The Reverend Thomas Land, then curate of St Peter's, Tiverton, must have been astonished that Johnny's father, of all people, should refuse to sign (everyone in Tiverton knew

---

<sup>856</sup> *Journal*, p. 339.

Johnny's background), and that surprise has echoed down the two centuries since. But Stedman was never the man to dabble in abstract schemes of reform, and with the issues defined for him by Joanna's preferences he draws back from favouring immediate abolition, favouring gradual amelioration at the initiative of a reformed land-owning class. The fact that the pastoral option has been made to seem credible in Suriname makes him prefer the *status quo* plus reform, and ties him firmly to the existing hierarchy.

The alternative would have been to follow Blake, to support abolition, abolish all hierarchies, and represent Joanna as Oothoon. But such visionary romanticism would have distorted the historical record even further. The fact is that 'listening' to Joanna, that 'subaltern voice', can lead us to some uncomfortable conclusions.

### **Appropriations of the *Narrative*.**

So far in the chapter, the question has been proposed in a way close to Gayatri Spivak's original enquiry – whether the voices of the 'oppressed' can speak to us out of the historical record. The question is a historical one, taking off from the 'facts', though we are already faced with the paradox that it was Stedman's vivid imagination and his recourse to self-conscious literary devices that allows those voices resonance. They speak out not from his *Journal* but his 'Narrative'. But what happens when the story is 'appropriated' by authors who have little or no concern with historical truth? Who are using it to support a moral or ideological position, or who are writing simply to entertain? And what is 'truth' once it is detached from the attempt to establish certain historical 'facts'?

Turning to the representations of 'the subaltern' in the texts examined in chapter eight, we are confronted with the familiar irony that the 'popular' writers – Eugene Sue in particular, but the charge can also be brought against Franz Kratter and George Coleman the Younger – are the ones least concerned with giving voices to the oppressed. Sue's pantomime stereotypes are a travesty of the *Narrative*, while Kratter and Coleman, though abolitionist in sentiment, write as they do in the interests of sentiment, more concerned with perpetuating a European literary fashion than with documenting the lives of Europe's victims. Cast by Kratter as Cery, Joanna becomes 'White'; cast by George Coleman as Zelinda, she becomes fashionably octoroon, and a cardboard figure in both re-

incarnations. Ironically, too, it is the anonymous pro-slavery novel *Joanna, or the Female Slave* that genuinely addresses one aspect of Joanna's historical predicament – that life should have more to offer her than becoming the concubine of a visiting European. By addressing, however incompetently, the facts of Stedman's 'Suriname marriage', the pro-slavery novel hits on a truth Stedman understandably suppresses and that eludes the popular and the sentimental.

The fact is, as I remarked in chapter eight, that in respect of these 'popular' writers, the word 'appropriation' is (for once) appropriate. Joanna's story is being made to suit purposes far removed from Stedman's manifest wish to honour her. She has become Zimmermann's self-denying nurse, proof that the British (in contrast to the French) know how to treat people of 'colour'. She is Kratter's embodiment of 'sentiment', outbidding Auguste van der Waards' commitment to self-sacrifice. She is Morton's Zelinda, a truer Christian than Captain Clifton, and a prototype of Victorian sexual morality. She is Sue's Jaguar, the slinky oriental temptress, whom Hercule Hardi rejects, choosing his half-witted French heroine Adoë instead. Meanwhile, throughout all these versions, the maroons are black devils, rebels with at best a partial cause, their 'freedom' anarchy, their 'future' best secured under a benign European rule. Whether the question is even worth asking of such mediocre texts is open to some doubt.

It was the post World War 2 movement towards de-colonisation that brought Stedman's *Narrative* back to public attention, with new editions in France (1960), Britain (1963), the United States (1971) and Holland (1974)<sup>857</sup>. The rise of nationalism through the European empires required accounts of the 'nation', and studies of anti-colonial 'resistance' supplied nationalism's historical dimension. As the *Narrative* came back into print in Britain and France, interest was focussed not on the love story, nor on the long-dead issue of abolition, but on its uses as a historical source. In particular, it was valued for its vivid portrayal of slave society, with reference not only to Suriname but to the Caribbean and the southern United States.

This was the driving force behind Richard and Sally Price's extraordinary quest to get into print for the first time what Stedman actually wrote in their wonderful edition of the 'Narrative'. We are all in their debt, but it has to be said

that their primary interest in the text is as a source for historical and anthropological data. They praise Stedman in their introduction for being ‘a keen observer’ who took pains to ‘distinguish his sources and to separate first- and second-hand accounts’,<sup>858</sup>. ‘Whatever his own mixed intentions in writing and publishing’, they continue, ‘his own critical apparatus is relatively accessible’<sup>859</sup>. No phrase could be more revealing of a divergence of interest. Where they catch him out in ‘embellishments’, they tend to take him to task – as, for example, in his translations of the names of maroon villages (‘the fanciful products of a romantic sensibility’<sup>860</sup>), or the four foot added between *Journal* and ‘Narrative’ to the length of the aboma snake<sup>861</sup>. Indeed they regard the whole portrayal of the relationship with Joanna as ‘romanticised’ and ‘somewhat idealised’, projecting ‘an image of his own conduct in the colony that now seemed appropriate, from the perspective of his life as a middle-aged gentleman established with his wife and children in the English countryside’<sup>862</sup>. Curiously, they say this while also acknowledging that his ‘Suriname marriage’ to Joanna was ‘the most meaningful personal relationship in Stedman’s life’<sup>863</sup> – an appreciation which is, of course, precisely the effect of Stedman’s ‘embellishments’.

Meanwhile, and entirely coincidentally, Stanbury Thompson was conducting the amateur, antiquarian research which resulted in his edition of Stedman’s *Journal* (1962) and his *John Gabriel Stedman; A Study of his Life and Times* (1966). Thompson, who was an unsuccessful writer of essays and ghost stories, became interested in Stedman solely as a consequence of his accidental discovery of the manuscript of the *Journal* in a Pimlico junk shop ‘about the year 1940’. He had no interest whatsoever in de-colonisation or in ‘subaltern voices’. He describes Joanna as ‘more or less a savage, an aboriginal’, and the aftermath of her love for Stedman, in the form of plays put on at Covent Garden, as ‘scandalous gossip’.<sup>864</sup> It is hard to imagine Stedman’s affairs falling into less sympathetic hands. Yet, in the quarter of a century he devoted to the topic, Thompson did succeed in identifying, by way of footnote references, no less than

---

<sup>857</sup> These editions are listed in footnote 6 of chapter one and, of course, in the bibliography.

<sup>858</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative, ‘Introduction’, p. XV.

<sup>859</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative, ‘Introduction’, p. XV.

<sup>860</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative, note 7, p. LXXXV.

<sup>861</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative, note 21, p. LXXXVII.

<sup>862</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative, ‘Introduction’, p. XXXV.

<sup>863</sup> 1790 ‘Narrative, ‘Introduction’, p. XXXVI.

460 of the persons mentioned in the *Journal*, as well as supplying full genealogies of Stedman's Scottish ancestors, and such industry deserves to be acknowledged. So, too, does the dogged determination that led him to publish both the *Journal* and the *Life* (like all his other works) at his own expense.

The *Journal* became the principal source of Beryl Gilroy's *Stedman and Joanna: a Love in Bondage* (though she has also drawn on the *Narrative*), as well as of the title poem my own *For Captain Stedman*. It is intriguing to reflect that this puts Gilroy and myself in something of Stedman's own position in the years before 1790, that is of working a series of rough journal entries into a literary text. The obvious difference is that what was for Stedman a spur to his memory became for Gilroy and myself a challenge to the imagination. The power of the love story as recorded in the brief notes of *Journal* is that it leaves the imagination free to invent, to elaborate on the shorthand and to fill in the gaps. Gilroy takes the opportunity to explore the relationship between Joanna's extended family and Stedman's offer of a bourgeois marriage. My own explorations, as already explained, are into questions of style and language, and into the difficult psychology of a relationship across the boundary of slave and free. Essentially, both of us imitate Stedman in using the resources of literary forms to reach a fuller understanding of Stedman's and Joanna's situation. I believe Gilroy's focus on the theme of family genuinely illuminates the story and its lack of resolution. I hope that my own presentation (in the 'Joanna' sonnets) of a pair of lovers divided by a barrier of incomprehension is also illuminating, though I have been alarmed to discover that my conclusion – suggesting Joanna's suicide – was anticipated by the unsympathetic and unimaginative Stanbury Thompson in his *Life*.<sup>865</sup>

But, of course, representations of reality involve something more than attempts to get at the historical truth of what occurred between a small group of individuals in Suriname between 1772 and 1777. Those literary versions of the Stedman-Joanna story from the early nineteenth century onwards have other agenda. They range from simple pro- or anti-slavery propaganda, or missionary endeavour or Parisian snobbery, to the simple nationalism of Hokstam's guerrilla fighters and to Gilroy's idealised version of inter-racial love as a model for our times, all driven by the attempt to find something representative in the realistic. In

---

<sup>864</sup> Thompson, *Life*, pp. 128 and 39.

<sup>865</sup> Thompson, *Life*, p. 38.

Erich Auerbach's terms, Stedman may be seen as attempting to use, and to subvert, the neo-classical doctrine of types just as the moment when distinct levels of style were being made obsolete by realistic forms of representation. Each of the authors discussed subsequently (except Sue with his pantomime stereotypes) may be described as attempting to imitate something 'out there', a historical reality, without reference to any notion that there exists a proper style for representing figures like Joanna or the rebel maroons or the low-ranking soldier Stedman. At the same time, each finds, or attempts to find, some significance in the story that transcends the attempt to establish what actually occurred.

It is at this point, of course, that the dazzling and overwhelming superiority of Blake's transformation of the story reasserts itself. 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' makes no gesture in the direction of historical verisimilitude, or the social particularities of a Dutch colony. The very idea of representing reality – of copying nature – was anathema to him. The visible world was in thrall to Satan, and the poet's and artist's task was to reveal it in its transcendental state. One trembles with pleasure to think how he would have annotated the question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' with his scribbled marginal obscenities. The poet who conversed with Milton and the Angel Gabriel, would hardly have been balked at the 'Thou Shalt Not' of Gayatri Spivak, and there is no evidence that he considered any subject whatsoever as beyond the scope of his imagination. The case was made in chapter six for claiming that Blake's transformation of the Stedman-Joanna story was the first of his poems to express his mature understanding of the connections between three apparently distinct themes. Locke's theory of perception made mankind a slave to his senses, materialism made him a slave to commerce, while established religion kept him a slave to Satan. Oothoon's complaint is not simply that she has been raped. 'They told me', she mourns, 'I had five sense to enclose me up / And they enclosed my infinite brain into a narrow circle'.<sup>866</sup>

For the rest of us, however - and by 'us', I mean we who don't see visions but who have, in our contrasting ways, recycled this tale since the early nineteenth century - there is a lesser requirement that is almost equally rigorous: it is the requirement to listen. It has to be said that the more one reflects on Spivak's prohibition, the more astonishing it appears. How well subaltern voices are

recovered will always depend on scholarly assiduousness, on the range and richness of the sources investigated (from archival records and oral testimony to linguistics, songs, totems and tree rings), and on the imaginative sympathies and literary abilities of the researcher. But the notion that it can't be done is belied by a wealth of texts, from Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Oscar Lewis's *The Children of Sanchez* to James C. Scott's *The Weapons of the Weak* (including several studies mentioned in this thesis).<sup>867</sup> I do not see why false modesty should prevent me noting that there are scholars who would add my own *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* to this distinguished list.<sup>868</sup> The trick is to go and do the work, not sit at home deconstructing what other people have done according to pre-determined, essentially metropolitan fashions.

In E.P. Thompson's *Witness Against the Beast*, he comments on the way certain kinds of intellectual culture lose out in the course of history. Tracing back from the present, the winners appear to be 'rationalism, political economy, utilitarianism, science, liberalism', with the eighteenth century enlightenment as their remote ancestor.<sup>869</sup> Blake, he argues, is best understood in the context of the vigorous alternatives, at times explicitly counter-enlightenment, anti-Locke, anti-Newton, identifying the most promising 'vector' from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries and hence into Blake's illuminated books as the teachings of Ludowick Muggleton. The Muggletonians are almost completely obliterated from history. They kept themselves hidden even when they flourished, and their trace is all but undetectable. Yet Thompson succeeded in meeting 'the last Muggletonian', and in uncovering 82 boxes of records.<sup>870</sup> More, he demonstrated the fertility of their ideas, made permanent through the transforming power of Blake's poems – to such effect that when he announced himself as being a 'Muggletonian Marxist',

---

<sup>866</sup> Blake, 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion', lines 62-63 in *The Oxford Blake*, p. 198.

<sup>867</sup> See, for example, footnote 48 to chapter one. The other texts mentioned are Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington (Penguin, 1967), Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (Random House, 1961), and James C. Scott, *The Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985).

<sup>868</sup> Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge University Press, 1987). When I asked the historian Martin Chanock if he could get me a photocopy of Spivak's essay, his astonished reply was that my whole career had been devoted to demonstrating that the subaltern could speak. Chanock is author of *Law, Custom and Social Order: the Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), now republished by the International African Institute as a 'classic in anthropology'.

<sup>869</sup> Thompson, *Witness*, p. xviii.

<sup>870</sup> Thompson, *Witness*, p.p. 115-119.

he found a whole audience in agreement.<sup>871</sup> Are we supposed to write this off as academic fantasy? So much of history makes better sense when the voices it has submerged are brought to light. So much of literature is illuminated by what Auden terms 'the defeated' - even when, in the final resort, the exercise extends to contemplating their silence.

Stedman knew he had been changed for ever by his encounter with the 'subaltern'. His various accounts – in the *Journal* and the two Narratives – are both sufficiently complete and incomplete to give freedom for the imagination to participate in his, and Joanna's, and their story. Stedman speaks eloquently and at inordinate length. But Joanna and the rebel slaves are far from silenced, and we are free to supplement their admittedly muted dialogue with the insights of our own understanding, and whatever literary resources we may have been gifted with.

We are talking, in other words, of literature with its endless resonance. Can the subaltern speak? Of course! It is a question of one's willingness and ability to listen. And then to represent.

---

<sup>871</sup> Thompson, *Witness*, p. xxv.

## Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

This thesis has focussed on the making of Stedman's *Narrative*, as it evolved through his Suriname journal and his 1790 manuscript to the published text of 1796, and on its extensive influence in the works of English, German, French and Guyanese writers who deployed the tale for their own purposes. Of these various texts, the 1790 'Narrative' and William Blake's 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion', together with associated poems, have proved to be by far the most interesting. Less compelling, but useful, has been the links established between the plays, novels, poems and pamphlets in English, German, Dutch and French, and two distinct historical backgrounds. First, the long argument about the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery, and secondly the revival of interest in Stedman's text from the 1960s as a source for nationalist writing and for a renewed debate about the history of New World slavery.

My second concern, taking up the challenge of Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', has been to demonstrate that Stedman's experiments with the heroic, the pastoral and the sentimental do indeed open a window on the world of the oppressed. Further, that there is no single colonial or patriarchal 'discourse' operating through the various texts discussed, but a variety of discourses, differing with the individual and in place and time, and ranging from the sensitivity of Stedman and Blake to the bigotry of the anonymous author of *Joanna or the Female Slave* and to the frankly racist Eugene Sue.

It seems unlikely that much more will ever be learned about the evolution of Stedman's 1796 *Narrative* from the *Journal* and the 1790 manuscript to the published text. Only in the unlikely event of William Thomson's provisional copy-edited manuscript coming to light would it be possible to draw any further substantial conclusions. Discovery of Stedman original watercolours would throw fresh light both on his talents as an artist and on their relation to Blake's engravings, but it is hard to see how any researcher could do more than Richard and Sally Price have already in their efforts to locate them. There are a handful of missing pages from the *Journal* that one day may turn up, clarifying such matters as the date of Stedman's first meeting with Blake. Most fascinating of all would be the discovery of the missing Stedman-Blake correspondence. Fifteen of Stedman's letters to Blake are mentioned in the *Journal*, some of which seem to

have received replies. As Peter Ackroyd remarks, 'the friendship throws interesting light upon Blake', particularly upon the breadth of his sympathies.<sup>872</sup> There is also the matter of his missing comedy and his treatise on duelling.

But the most fruitful area for further research is likely to be the period of Stedman's life, between the submission of his manuscript in 1790 and its publication in 1796 - more precisely, the period between his first contact with Blake in 1791 and his final departure from London in December 1795. Several members of Joseph Johnson's circle kept journals and were active correspondents. Henry Fuseli, Richard Cosway, Joshua Reynolds and William Godwin are examples of artists and writers with whom Stedman is known to have come into contact, and they may have left reminiscences. The point of such research would be to re-write the biography of Stedman, using the materials which have come to light since Louise Collis's sentimental *Soldier in Paradise* (1965) and Stanbury Thompson's unsympathetic *Life and Times* (1966). Of these materials, the most important is obviously Roger and Susan Price's indispensable edition of the 1790 'Narrative'. But they also include Wim Hoogbergen's detailed monograph on the Boni wars, which transcends all previous research on Stedman's military activities in Suriname, together with publications by the Devon and Cornwall Record Society, throwing light on events in Tiverton in the late eighteenth century. One focus of this thesis has been on the evolution of Stedman's writings, from the Suriname diary to the Tiverton-written memoir of his early life to the 1790 'Narrative' and to the final published text. There is a sense in which all these writings are autobiographical. It would be interesting to place that evolution against the background of his Tiverton years, from his arrival in this Devon town in 1784 as a half-pay officer with a Dutch wife and a mixed-race son, and the final version of his Suriname years as the summation of his life. A 'biography' of that 'autobiography' might come closer to comprehending him, with some illumination of his times, than any study hitherto in existence.

---

<sup>872</sup> Ackroyd, *Blake*, p. 176.

## Appendix 1

### Endechas a Bárbara escrava

Aquela cativa  
Que me tem cativo  
Porque nela vivo  
Já não quer que viva.  
Eu nunca vi rosa  
Em suaves molhos  
Que pera meus olhos  
Fosse mais fermosa.

Nem no campo flores,  
Nem no céu estrelas  
    Me parecem belas  
Como os meus amores.  
Rosto singular,  
Olhos sossegados,  
Pretos e cansados,  
Mas não de matar.

Ca graça viva,  
Que neles lhe mora,  
Pera ser senhora  
De quem é cativa.  
Pretos os cabelos,  
Onde o povo vão  
Perde opinião  
Que os louros são belos.

Pretidão de Amor,  
Tão doce a figura,  
Que a neve lhe jura  
Que trocara a cor.  
Leda mansidão,  
Que o siso acompanha;  
Bem parece estranha,  
Mas bárbara não.

Presença serena  
Que a tormenta amansa;  
Nela, enfim, descansa  
Toda minha pena.  
Esta é a cativa  
Que me tem cativo,  
E, pois nela vivo,  
É força que viva.

## Stanzas to the Slave, Barbara

This slave I own  
Who holds me captive,  
Living for her alone  
Who scorns I should live,  
No hybrid rose  
Drenched in dew  
Had ever to these eyes  
Half such beauty.

The flowers in the field,  
And the stars above  
    In their beauty, yield  
To my love.  
Distinct in feature,  
Eyes dark and at rest,  
Tired creature,  
But not of conquest.

Here dwells the sweetness  
By which I live,  
She being mistress  
Of whom she is captive.  
Her hair is raven,  
And the fashion responds,  
Forgetting its given  
Preference for blonde.

Love being Negro  
At so sweet a figure,  
The blanketing snow  
Vows to change colour.  
Gladly odedient  
And naturally clever,  
This may be expedient,  
But barbarous, never!

Quiet presence  
That silences storms,  
All my disturbance  
Finds peace in her arms.  
This is the vassal  
Who makes me her slave,  
Being the muscle  
That keeps me alive.

## Appendix 2

### For Captain Stedman

'I now must make an apology for my style, which is turn'd by G-d! so very insipid, that I myself am tired with it. D-mn spelling. d-mn writing, and d-mn everything overdone.'

1

By G-d! Johnny, near pistoll'd  
in your cradle, that pigeon's  
crop you stuck up nanny's bum,  
Jacobite schoolblows, raped  
by your uncle's maid, and Mrs Mallet  
tendering her carcass to an ensign  
lampoons and duels and haylofts,  
punch and plackets, it makes  
devilish fine reading!

and Joanna: not surprising  
a mulatto slave girl be thrust  
in somewhere, eh Johnny?  
That's a ripe sketch you shape  
of her, a ripe joke this nigger-  
wench costlier than your fortune!  
But wife? Two thousand florins?  
A son? By G-d! Captain, that's  
devilish unChristian!

2

Therefore at L'Esperance,  
the colony at war,  
you built your house  
of grass and wattle,  
a room for your girl,  
a room for painting,  
a kitchen, henhouse,  
palisades, a bridge,

Captain and artist,  
wounded in the campaign,  
you carved a pool  
downstream, under  
the bamboo lances  
whose amber  
drenched her body

sheerest gold

Soldier and lover,  
the revolt subdued,  
you limped nightly  
barefoot through  
the mangrove's  
gothic doorways  
to the Dutchman's plantation  
and her side.

A grass and wattle  
studio at L'Esperance;  
if only there were  
diamonds, you prayed  
searching upstream;  
if only fighting  
rebel blacks sufficed  
to buy her freedom.

3

Stedman, your Smollt-dabbed journal brags  
loud of yourself, viz., I told the bugger  
he ought to know a dog's turd from another  
after getting so many, viz., I pass my time  
making baskets for the girl I love, viz., d-mn  
Order, d-mn Matter-of-fact, d-mn Everything!  
and Captain you do, with five challenges  
one month, no slight, no oversight, no lost  
button or bruised bum too trivial to curse  
and bring to cutlasses, yet such chivalrous  
brawls, only with Captains! Johnny, you bore  
a code in your fevers, far beyond Paramaribo  
up brimming blackwater rivers where forests  
choke in their creeper-hammocks, and Negroes  
racked and handlopped, splintered on wheels,  
hamstrung, scalded in sugar-vats, skewered  
blistering by furnaces, and girls' breasts  
mistress-whipped to blood for their masters'  
fondling – Captain, your pen nib splutters Oh  
Fie! for every gouge, brand, manacle, every  
throat self-slit and earth eating, the horror  
of nightly nightmares and Joanna's auction!

So what in the name of sketching are these  
arabesques, these slender Egypto triangles  
strutting the skylines of your history, viz.,  
your *Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition*

*Against the Revolted Negroes in Surinam?*  
Or these all-but nudes? such poised despair,  
such healthy breasts and thighs! are they  
Slaves, these buxom Maori-haired Italians?  
Or Joanna, your dear dead girl, whose wife-  
maddening monument to five years' loving  
on the Wild Coast your book it, how can  
poison lie in ambush for this lilting virgin,  
a straw hat in her hand, this barefoot  
gipsy with the tight curls, her dark breast  
proffered to a curving, friendly world  
of formal palms and odorous orange groves?  
Stedman, your gentle melancholy Art  
Distills the loyal chaos of your heart,  
Weeps o'er the victims of a barb'rous Age,  
But distances to Elegance, Outrage;  
You could not murder Style to match their Life;  
You saw not Slaves but Men and a dear Wife.

[Landeg White, *For Captain Stedman* (Harry Chambers/(Peterloo Poets, 1983)  
pps 34-36]

## Joanna

1

The hardest part, writing the account  
A dozen years after in a another country,  
The hardest memory was her utter  
Separateness. She had lain in his arms  
So soft, so pliable, he was the bridge  
Straining above her, drowning  
In her depths as she ebbed to the sea.  
He was the leaky dam at L'Esperance.

Writing the account, her death made  
Believable his lost age of gold.  
But he knew it was never so. For  
All the rich tapestry of poems  
he wove round her, a fuck  
Was a fuck. It left her untouched.

2

I was slave, not so? The hardest  
Part was he touched me with hope.  
Not in bed as he pounded me  
With his soft pestle, but after  
When sweettalk could get him no more  
And he sang his poems. he built me  
A pool at L'Esperance by the gold  
Waterfall. I loved him, nearly.

But he's just a man. No money, like  
My father. Soon he'd want younger  
Girls to pound out his pride, and where  
Would I hide in England? So I laughed.  
When he married I smashed my mortar  
And drank my poison. And felt sure.

[Landeg White, *The View from the Stockade* (Dangaroo Press, 1991), pp. 43]

## As Três Graças

Em todos poeirentos ao fundo das livrarias  
Ou nos azulejos dos velhos e belíssimos palácios,  
Elas ainda lá estão, as Três Graças,  
A Portuguesa, a Índia e a Negra Brasileira,

Abraçando-se ou em tríptico, cada qual fazendo mostra  
De todos os seus encantos menos um e oferecendo  
presentes, a maçã, o mango, a papaia,  
Enquanto à sua roda se desprendem as apropriadas

Copas das bananeiras, das palmeiras e de ramos de oliveira.  
Elas celebram as riquezas, a fecundidade  
De um império em bancarrota. São três Evas  
Com as respectivas serpentes, o Destino do Homen

Em três continentes. Mas quem não se há-de encantar  
Com a sua qualidade de irmãs. Cada qual é diferente  
Mas perfeita. Deixam-nos sonhar inocentemente  
Com o amor universal (pelo menos entre as mulheres).

Landeg White, *Superfícies e Interiores: Poemas: Introdução, Selecção, Tradução e Notas de Hélio Osvaldo Alves* (CEMAR, 1995), p. 69.

## The Three Graces

In dusty tomes at the back of livrarias  
or on tiles in the loveliest of the old palaces,  
they are still there, the Three Graces,  
Portuguese, Indian and Brazilian Negress,

embracing or in triptych, each displaying  
all but one of her charms and proffering  
gifts, the apple, the mango, the pawpaw,  
while around them curve the appropriate

fronds of banana, palm and olive branch.  
They celebrate possession, the fruitfulness  
of a bankrupt empire. They are three Eves  
with the appropriate serpents, Man's fate

on three continents. But who is not charmed  
by their sisterhood? Each is different  
but perfect. They let us dream innocently  
of universal love (at least among womankind).

## Against Roderick Random

Yet another 18C turnpike satire,  
the author-hero's rollcall of venal  
judges, bibulous clergy, schoolmasters  
crazed by their humdrum pedantry,

but in this saga, such is anti-  
romantic Smellfungus, not an honest  
postillion lad or chambermaid  
downright with her bosom, among 'em.

Give me Lisbon Henry any hour, or  
Yorick who mocked the novel's A to B,  
or pious Sam who knew maidenheads  
meant everything to those underneath.

Then there was Stedman, random artist,  
who worshipped this book to abandon,  
but found in the swamplands of slavery  
himself as husband, angry, devoted.

[Landeg White, *South* (CEMAR, 1999), pp. 24]

## Appendix 3

### **Appendix to the official letter of the Colonel Fourgeoud.**

**Extract (excerpt) from the diary covering the 5<sup>th</sup> of August till the 26<sup>th</sup> of that month, 1775.**

*5<sup>th</sup> of August 1775.*

We broke up camp at daybreak, setting off at eight o'clock; to avoid difficult ways, we took the course to the East, then pushed North and later North West through a swamp in which the water reached knee level; this lasted till about two o'clock when we found a very small elevation and remained there to make camp.

*6<sup>th</sup> of August.*

We set off marching at five thirty; again we took a Northern North-western direction and found ourselves immediately in an open reed savannah; which brought us to a big creek (that we thought was the Barbacoeba creek); and that extended to the North-North East and sometimes even more to the East; we followed the creek in that direction and we rested at nine o'clock; at a quarter to ten we broke up camp again; we continued on this quite bad passage, continuously following the creek; until half past two when we made our camp as well as we could; we hung our hammocks as high in the trees as was possible; we did not make huts as the whole surface was under water; nevertheless we allowed fires to burn until seven o'clock.

*7<sup>th</sup> of August*

In the morning we set off marching as on the day before; all the time following the creek that all the time extended in a North Eastern and Eastern direction; we marched most of the time in water or savannah; this was covered by thick mud in which small creeks found their way to the big creek; at eleven o'clock we found a small elevation where we rested; at 12 o'clock we marched on; near that creek there were no trees to be seen; and only swamp and reeds and grassland; we found as well that the creek had become much smaller; at half past two we left the creek and marched East; to look for some forest to make camp nearby and to fix our

hammocks; we got stuck however until four thirty into a very dense and waterlogged savannah, full of reeds; then we found a small elevation; there we hung our hammocks as high as possible; in layers of four or five above each other; we permitted fires to be lit as long as anyone wished.

*8<sup>th</sup> of August*

We started marching again at the usual hour; we did not follow the creek very closely; at nine o'clock we came to the creek again and marched in the direction South-east and found when we penetrated further into the savannah that the creek came to a dead end; we left the creek and marched in a South easterly direction; all the time we went through reeds and not grasslands with water coming to the knees, continuing until about seven thirty in the evening to find a resting place. Then we found a few trees and some elevated land where we made camp as well as we could.

*9<sup>th</sup> of August*

At half past seven in the morning we set off marching again, though beginning to be short of supplies; we crossed some small plateaux; mainly dead end creeks which we cut through and swamps of makka; at ten o'clock we rested and at eleven we marched on again; mainly in a South easterly or Easterly direction; the quality of the road was uneven; one moment there were swamps of makka and pine; the next moment beautiful sandy stretches; we made camp on one of the latter at half past three; however we did not build any huts; at four o'clock a soldier from the Society who had been about three hundred paces away from the company, reported that he had heard maroons talking; and as this was so close to our path we sent out a patrol (consisting of two officers; three non-commissioned sergeants, forty corporals and privates) to the place where the soldier thought he had heard voices; this patrol came back and reported not have seen or heard anything; after that I gave instructions for the night, how each of them was to behave in case of an alarm.

*10<sup>th</sup> of August*

The march started at half past five in an Eastern and South Eastern direction; we found that a considerable number of Cabbes or Coemae trees had been cut; at half

past eight we found a maroon camp; consisting of about thirty two huts; it was about ten months old; we think it is the one named Ciber (so-called) Coudre; this village close to the Marowijne river has been so named by Captain Stoelman. We continued to follow the ridge, and again continued to find Cabbes or Coemae trees that had been cut; at half past ten we found a bend in a creek where there were a lot of fishing implements; and that was fenced by a stockade. We rested on the ridge from eleven for about three-quarters of an hour; then we continued our march on the ridge taking as many shortcuts as possible; at twelve o'clock we again found our huts close to a small creek. We continued to follow the same course until about half past one, all the time along the same ridge; then we changed course to the South West (as we did not have more than four days supplies left, which were considered necessary to reach again the Barbacoeba). We then passed a deep swamp which was traversed by small elevations; at half past three we found a beautiful sandy ridge where we then made our camp at about eight o'clock. In the evening we heard shouting in the distance in a North-north easterly direction; when we listened carefully it was clear that it was playing or shouting made by niggers; it may have been of joy, or maybe of sadness; this lasted till about three o'clock in the morning; when a big downpour made an end to it; a nigger –one of the bearers while out looking for firewood in the evening - also found a path that followed the ridge from east to west.

### *11<sup>th</sup> of August*

As we did not have more supplies than for four to five days at most; we did not consider it advisable to go in the direction of the shouting and cheering; the latter seemed to be about two to three hours from where we were; and we continued therefore in our direction of West-south-west along the ridge on the path of the maroons. The column of the Society soldiers marched on the left side with thirty paces distance in between; at nine o'clock we hit on a much used maroon path; running from East to West along a "Bierre Bierre" savannah; shortly afterwards we each in turn passed two small creeks and found places here and there where a single fire had been made; probably three to four days ago; and also "Cabbes and fir trees" poles which were probably cut at the same time; we rested at 11 o'clock and at 12 we continued our march; all the time following the beautiful dry road along the ridge in a West and West-south-west direction.; at half past twelve we

found a place where somebody had dug for water. At one o'clock we passed a maroon camp which was maybe three to four days old and about 10 to 12 huts; and in one of those we found a old tree stump still smouldering; around the camp and also some distance away from it we found some recently cut trees; at about two o'clock we struck the path that we ourselves had made to march from Port Jerusalem to the Barbacoeba creek; we found that we were on the right track to the place where we had been on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August as we saw the mark of one of their spies in the trees; we marched further along the path until we reached the camp of the 1<sup>st</sup> of August; we arrived there at three thirty; we found that this camp had been burnt down by the maroons and we made our new camp in exactly the same place.

*12<sup>th</sup> of August.*

In the morning at daybreak we continued the path to the Barbacoeba creek, where we arrived at ten o'clock.

*13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of August.*

Rearranged everything: we cleaned our weapons as well as repacking our supplies.

*15<sup>th</sup> of August.*

At midday we were on the old road again back to the camp of the 1<sup>st</sup> of August; where we arrived at four o'clock; at six in the evening a patrol from the Free Corps arrived with some letters that I replied to by 7.30. We were therefore ready to leave early the following morning.

*16<sup>th</sup> of August.*

At daybreak the patrol of Free Blacks left again and we continued our march along the last path we were on; up until the place where we had heard the maroons shouting and jeering; we arrived there at eleven o'clock; we rested there until twelve; we reconnoitred the area and found a reasonably big and fresh path; running East-south East and changing to North East and north-North East; as we followed the path it lost itself regularly in the bush to re-emerge big and well-maintained; prints showed that some handicapped person had been walking there

not more than three days since; we went over the same ridge and made camp at three o'clock without huts or fires.

*17<sup>th</sup> of the same month.*

At daybreak we went marching again; the column of the Society troops marched to our left; we continued following the path of the maroons; walking at first East; then East-South-East and South-East. At seven o'clock the path turned so much south that we chose to pass through the swamp on our left in order to move to other ridges in the direction where he had heard the shouting and jeering of the maroons; we tried also to find other signs of the maroons; we crossed the swamp in northerly direction; arriving on the other ridge we continued North as much as possible; but we were obstructed by a large marshy "Brerie brerie" savannah which did not permit us to follow any other course than North West and West and as a result of which course we came back again on the path of the 10<sup>th</sup> of August and exactly at the place where we had crossed the swamp. We had heard the shouting and jeering there; we rested at half past nine; some of the Blacks had climbed into high trees in order to look for some forest dividing the swamp; which would offer us the possibility of crossing there. When the Blacks descended they told us that the savannah was about one and a half-hour wide; at the other side they had seen a beautiful tall forest. That seemed to be roughly the distance that the shouting and jeering had come from and that made us decide to camp there; and to investigate.

*(18<sup>th</sup> of August missing: the mss continues)*

We learned that the Savannah was somewhat narrower at that point, but nevertheless it was just as deep as elsewhere; we rested there and returned again at eleven to the place where we camped yesterday. We arrived there at two o'clock and remained there before deciding to continue on our path from that point taking a Northerly course to the place where we passed the swamp and where we had left the maroon path. We also decided to continue on this path along the ridge until we could pass the swamp to the north. At half past seven in the evening we again heard the blacks shouting and jeering; not yet as clear and it seemed also to be a little more to the east. Captain Dorig of the Society's Troops then reported that he was missing two men, who had probably lost the path.

*19<sup>th</sup> of August.*

We started our march at daybreak; we marched back along the path till the place where we passed on the 17<sup>th</sup> the swamp. And continued following the maroon's path, that went Easterly along the ridge. We rested at half past nine near three "Barbekotte" which we had made about eight days since. After half an hour's rest "Conducteur" Wind arrived with a company of 90 pieces of Free Blacks; who had received the order to follow me; he brought as well a letter from the governor and one from commander Terrien. At eleven the march proceeded in three columns along the ridge: the troops of the Society on the right and the column of blacks on the left; each maintaining a distance of about 20 to 30 paces. At half past twelve we found on our way a freshly made "Marimbo" as well as a leaf on which there were traces of rice cooked. At noon we passed a very old retreat camp of the blacks and we dropped after an hour from the ridge into coppice; there the path turned into Northern direction and it turned into savannah and which later on became open savannah; that was a swamp which resembled an creek that had dried up; behind this we found a small village and two pieces of cultivated land; which had lately also been found by Captain Mayland; we marched on from there an end into high forest and made camp at three o'clock.

*20<sup>th</sup> of August.*

Like yesterday we started the march at daybreak in three columns continuing along the road of the maroons, the road which had also been taken by Captain Mayland; the road ran South East and South; through woodland and afterwards turned North-North East. At 6.30 we struck on a road through mangroves where water reached to our middle; this mangrove was cut off by a 'Bierrie Bierrie' or reed savannah and by no means a small one; it was the one where Captain Mayland and his troops had been attacked; we then reached the ridge where Captain Mayland's camp had been the scene of a second attack and we continued along the path of the blacks exactly as Captain Mayland had noted in his journal. The path runs from east to west and we followed the path in a western direction and the path turned sometimes North Western direction; it being an extra large and well trodden path; at about eight o'clock we found five old sentry huts. The ridge continued and the path on it also. At 9.30 we made a halt and marched

further at ten o'clock; and after having marched for half an hour the head of the column encountered a few Blacks; one of those Blacks shot at the head of the column. Immediately the head of the column advanced and the blacks ran away; they threw away what they had with them, which were 7 to 8 "pagalen or warimbo" containing rice. All troops continued thereafter at a forced march; this march lasted for about half an hour; then the head of the column came to the fields (these were about 40 paces long and 100 paces in width; and were planted with "Carro", cassava, tobacco, "tresjes" and other different types of fruit.

At the entrance to these fields a few Blacks were posted as sentries, probably the fugitives who shot at the head of the column and who were shot at in return by the head of the column. The troops continued at a forced march; which was difficult in the fields as these are always criss-crossed by fallen trees. When we had crossed these fields we came to a small swamp and woodland, because the second field was cut off from the first; then we found the village; the Blacks had by then positioned themselves to our right and they tried to halt our advance with fierce fire; they were however forced to retreat after a charge by our troops and their continued forced advance; the Blacks however continued to fire; then we headed straight for the second field, which was planted with rice and "carro"; in length it was about 1010 paces and about 100 paces in width; there the maroons defended themselves as much as they were able to given their haste; they were positioned in front as well as on the flanks in the fields; they made charges from time to time with up to 20 to 30 guns. Our three-column attack regrouped in a "tete de poire" formation; all the time at a forced march and charging until we came close to the village, and the maroons saw then that they could not stop us but withdrew behind the village which they burnt down. By means of the fire they were able to cover their retreat (because the flame covered the whole ridge and prevented us from marching on); they could cover their retreat especially well as there were deep swamps on both sides. A soldier of the Society troops and three of the Free Corps were lightly wounded. One of the maroons was wounded on the right side; he carried his gun on his arm; but it is very likely many others were wounded; because from everywhere the Blacks had retreated we found a lot of blood.

At noon: after the supplies and the rear guard had marched to the head of the columns; we had rested a little; then at one o'clock we sent a group of 50 men

from the Free Corps; a captain, two officers; two sergeants; four corporals and 50 privates to patrol around and to see were they had taken up their positions after retreating. That group returned and reported to have seen two Blacks; however, these went on the run and could not be overtaken; also they reported that further north they had seen various paths which crossed “Mourietsie” trees and large swamps. Again, at four thirty some maroons came from the swamp side and charged us several times without success. The “Piquettes” (pickets) pursued them and hunted the attackers in their rapid retreat and continued to chase them in a swamp which was unknown till then.

The soldiers had orders on an alarm to form a cordon around the camp (that I had ordered to be built at the burnt out village); I instructed them to keep weapons on guard the whole night. At ten in the evening the maroons came from two or three different sides firing between 20 and 30 shots; they did not hit anything after which they got into conversation with the Free Corps Blacks from a distance in the swamp; shifting from friendly conversation to exchanging invectives. Among the “beaux mots” they produced was: “You can do what you like Satan’s children; within three years I will be governor of the whole colony”. That conversation and exchange lasted till two o’clock in the night when they bade farewell with a few shots.

*21<sup>st</sup> of August.*

In the morning we found out that the village consisted of two parts, comprising in total 83 houses; most of them two storey houses; and several of them consisting of small apartments. We also found in the ashes many goods that could not burn: axes; picks, shovels, iron pots; kettles; some gunbarrels and locks and other small items.

At ten in the morning, one captain; two lower commissioned officers; two sergeants; 100 corporals and privates together with thirty solders from the Free Corps along with all the carriers were summoned. The first mentioned were to give cover to the last mentioned. The last mentioned were to destroy the fields of rice and carro. These returned at one o'clock; they reported to have found in the South-south East yet another field, 190 paces long and 100 wide, planted with rice, which they had also destroyed.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, we sent out a group of two captains; two lower commissioned officers, 4 sergeants; 100 corporals and privates; together with the greater part of the Free Corps to find again the path along which they had retreated. They returned at four thirty and reported that they had found a path, and that on this path were some maroons; one of the Free Corps had fired at them and had probably wounded them. However they fled with loud cries so rapidly that it was almost impossible to see or hear anything of them.

At half past five we organised two pickets; one comprising an officer and 25 privates, at about a hundred paces from the camp in the rice field; and one of 20 from the Free Corps near the village. We gave orders that everything had to be ready so that we could march early in the morning.

*22<sup>nd</sup> of August.*

At eight o'clock in the morning, we started marching in three columns; we left behind two captains and 100 other officers; non-commissioned officers and privates with all carriers in the camp to provide cover; we followed the path that we assumed to be one along which they had retreated and we followed this; and after half an hour we had crept round to the northern direction and back again; at this point a patrol of the Free Corps came to report that their column (being the one on the left) had again discovered a large field about 100 paces in length and between 50 and 60 in width; planted with young cassava, ripe "carro" and other fruits and that in addition there was a village of about 33 houses; that all had been inhabited and that were still burning..

We marched there with the other columns and after having inspected the site, we returned to the camp at the burnt out village; after arriving there we resolved not to abandon the position, but to send a detachment to the Barbacoeba to get supplies; to that end we ordered two captains; two subaltern officers; two sergeants; 100 corporals and privates with 36 from the Free Corps to march in the morning with the empty chests and other containers.

*23<sup>rd</sup> of August.*

At daybreak, the detachment marched as ordered. At ten o'clock a carrier (a Black) came to say that they had seen a field to the North East of the village. A patrol was dispatched immediately consisting of an officer and twenty-five

privates together with 20 Free Corps; to inspect and destroy it. At one o'clock, the patrol returned and reported that the field was planted with rice almost ready to be harvested and that it was 400 paces long and hundred paces in width; at two o'clock, a detachment of one captain; two subaltern officers; three sergeants, fifty corporals and privates and twenty five from the Free Corps were summoned and ordered to destroy the field to the east of the village which was planted with cassava and 'carro'; they returned at three after having carried out that task; at half past four, the company returned which had been sent out to obtain supplies and their report is appended below:

**Report** of my subordinates who were in a detachment consisting of a captain; two subaltern officers; four sergeants and ninety two privates; and one leader of thirty free blacks told to collect and escort supplies to be carried by 120 carriers (blacks) from the negro village on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1775 from the Cottica Camp. Close to the Barbacouba creek.

*23<sup>rd</sup> of August.*

We started marching at six in the morning; continuing on the path that we had discovered, coming from the East and at half past nine we came to a "Bierrie Bierrie" swamp and crossed it to reach the ridge; there we were attacked fiercely by maroons; we split the head of the columns and tried to approach the ridge to the left and the right from the middle; when we reached the ridge the maroons fled shouting loudly; we arranged ourselves in half a circle to provide cover for the carriers and boxes; when everything was safely on the ridge we marched a little higher and arranged the boxes while forming a circle around them and we posted guards. Two Free Blacks were wounded in this attack. I sent a sergeant and some Free Blacks to collect the medicine bag and also sent "Toctoe" to the front to collect the wounded at the head of the swamp; at which moment a shot was fired at us; we returned with some shots; after which they retreated; we remained there another two and a half hours in the hope that they had heard the shots as far as in the negro village; however when we heard nothing I judged it better to return again with my detachment instead of marching on (as I did not know whether the blacks would have prevented me again, blocking my passage, and whether therefore we could return at a reasonable time with the provisions). In order to inform the commanding officer, I sent sub-lieutenant Noot with a detachment again into

the swamp and commanded the carriers to follow; when they were all in the swamp, the Free Blacks at the left and the head of the column to the right and the rearguard gave them cover; when we reached the other side; we marched on to the camp where we arrived at four o'clock.

In the camp called the negro village, dated as above, Signed, A.A.Bols.

After having received the above-mentioned report; everybody was ordered to prepare to march before first light.

*24<sup>th</sup> of August.*

At daybreak a detachment of two commanding officers; two captains; five subaltern officers, 120 non-commissioned officers and privates; together with a group of 40 Free Corps Negroes was sent to provide cover for all carriers (Negroes), that went along to destroy the gardens to the North West of the big village; meaning the village of thirty three houses. This aforementioned detachment returned at eleven o'clock and everybody rested then until twelve o'clock when we set off marching in three columns; in the same manner as we had arrived. At four o'clock, we arrived at the "Bierrie Bierrie" savannah where Captain Mayland from this side and Captain Bols from the other side had been attacked by maroons; we crossed that in three columns; we marched onwards till the camp of the 19<sup>th</sup> of August without finding a trace of Negroes.

*25<sup>th</sup> of August.*

Marching started at daybreak along the path which we had come on, from the Barbacouba creek; we rested at the site where we crossed the swamp on the 17<sup>th</sup>; at twelve o'clock we again rested and at four o'clock we arrived on the campsite of the 1<sup>st</sup> of August between the Condre and Barbacouba creeks; where we camped again.

*26<sup>th</sup> of August.*

At daybreak we made march again; I sent a patrol ahead of about 80 heavy rifles; so that the carriers with the provisions could follow after us; the path went past the post *s'Landswelvaren* (the wellbeing of the country); at twelve o'clock we arrived in the Barbacouba creek; there we received the reports of the post

*Commepagnion* and *Temptation Xth.* and in the afternoon I wrote letters to the governor and councils informing them of the events that had occurred; also to the Commander of Paramaribo;

Signed: L.H. Fourgeoud.

# Bibliography

## 1. Primary Sources

### a) Historical

Den Haag, Holland, Algemeen Rijksarchief, Fagel Collection (ref: 1.10.29), 1805-08. Mission van de Kolonel Fourgeoud aan Zijn Hoogveid Betreffende de Expeditie naar Surinam 1773-76, 4 omslagen.

A. Aspinall and E. Anthony Smith (eds.), *English Historical Documents, Vol. XI 1783-1832* (London, 1971).

*The York Herald and General Advertiser*, 11 Aug., 1827 and 7 and 12 April 1828.

*Yorkshire Gazette* 4 and 11 Aug., 1827 and 5 and 12 April, 1828.

### b) Literary

1. 1796 *Narrative of a five year's expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the year 1772 to 1777: elucidating the History of that Country, and describing its Productions, Viz., Quadrupedes, Birds, Fishes, Reptiles, Trees, Shrubs, Fruits, & Roots; with an account of the Indians of Guiana, & Negroes of Guinea. By Captn. J.G. Stedman, illustrated with 80 elegant Engravings, from drawings made by the author.* London. Printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church Yard, & J. Edwards, Pall Mall. 1796. Demy 4to. 2 vols., vol. 1 pp. xviii & 407 plus 38 plates and 2 maps, vol. 2 pp. iv & 404 plus 40 plates.

2. 1796 Idem no 1. Large paper issue (Royal 4to), with all plates coloured by hand.

3. 1797 *Stedman's Nachrichten von Surinam und von seiner Expedition gegen die rebellischen Neger in dieser Kolonie in den Jahren 1772 bis 1777.* Benjamin Gottlob Hoffman, Hamburg. 1 vol., 8vo., pp. iii-xiv & 522 plus 7 plates and map.

An abridged German edition, translated by Christian Wilhelm Jacobs and Friedrich Christian Kries.

4. 1797 *Stedman's Nachrichten von Suriname, dem letzten Aufruhr der dortigen Negersclaven und ihrer Bezwungung in den Jahren 1772. bis 1777.* Auszugsweise übersetzt von M.C. Sprengel. Halle. in der Rengerschen Buchhandlung. 2 vols. in one, 8vo, pp. 279 & 222.

An abridged German translation.

5. 1797 idem no. 4. Vols 8 & 9 of Sprengel's *Auswahl der besten ausländischen geographischen und statistischen Nachrichten zur Aufklärung der Völker und Länderkinde.*

**6.** 1798 *Voyage à Surinam et dans l'Intérieur de la Guiane, contenant La Relation de cinq Années de Courses et d'Observations faites dans cette Contrée intéressante et peu connue; Avec des Détails sur les Indiens de la Guiane et les Nègres; Par le Capitaine J. G. Stedman; traduit de l'Anglais par P. F. Henry: Suivi du Tableau de la Colonie Française de Cayenne. Avec une Collection de 44 Planches in-40, gravées en taille-douce, contenant des Vues, Marines, Cartes Géographiques, Plans, Portraits, Costumes, Animaux, Plantes, etc. dessinés sur les lieux par J. G. Stedman.* A Paris, Chez F. Buisson. Imprimeur-Libraire, rue Hauterfeuille, no.20. Na VII de la République. 3 vols, 12mo, pp. viii & 410, 440 & 506 plus 44 plates. Dated 1 Brumaire, An 7 (23 October).

An abridged French translation with four appendices by the translator, on the French colony of Cayenne, on dykes, on the cultivation of coffee, and on the abolition of slavery.

**7.** 1799 *Reize in de binnenland van Suriname, door Kapitein John Gabriël Stedman. Met platen. Naar het Hoogduitsch door J. D. Pasteur.* Leiden : A. & J. Honkoop. 2 vols. in one, 8vo.

A Dutch translation of 3.

**8.** (1799 & 1805) *I. G. Stedman's Reisen in Surinam, für die Jugend, bearbeitet von M. Chr. Schulz.* Neue Auflage mit V illuminierten Kupfertafeln. Berlin, in der Schüppelschen Buchhandlung. 8vo, pp. ii.iv and 180, with 4 plates.

An abridged German edition for children.

**9.** 1799-1800 *Reize naar Surinamen, en door de binnenste gedeelten van Guiana ; door den Capitain John Gabriël Stedman. met platen en kaarten. Naar het Engelsch.* Te Amsterdam, den Johannes Allart. 4 vols, 8vo, vols 1 & 2 (1799), vols 3 & 4 (1800).

A translation of 6, including materials by the French translator.

**10.** 1800 *Capitain Johan Stedmans Dagbok öfwer Sina Fälttåg i Surinam, jämte Beskrifning om detta Nybygges Inwånare och öfriga Märkwärdigheter.* Sammandrag. Stockholm : Trycht i Kongl. Ordens Boktryckeriet hos Assessoren Johan Pfeiffer. One vol. 12mo pp. 306 plus one plate.

An abridged Swedish translation by Samuel Odmann.

**11.** 1800 *Kleines Magazin von Reisen zur angenehmen und belehrenden Unterhaltung der Jugend. Nach den neuesten deutschen und ausländischen Originalwerken, bearbeitet von Schulz.* Erstes Bändchen mit 5 Kupfertafeln. Berlin 1800, bey Oehmighe dem Jüngern. 8vo, pp. xii & 180 plus 3 plates.

An abridged German translation for children, almost identical with no. 8.

**12.** 1803 *Taschenbuch der Reisen oder Unterhaltende Darstellung der Entdeckungen des 18ten Jahrhunderts, in Rücksicht der Landers, Menschen und Produckenjunde. Für jede Klasse von Lesern.* von E.A.W. Zimmermann. Leipzig,

**13.** 1804 *Joanna of Surinam*, a masque-spectacle by John Cross, Royal Circus, Blackfriars, London, 2nd July (no text available).

- 14.** 1804 Franz Kratter, *Die Sklavin in Surinam* Frankfurt am Main (also Wien, 1805).  
A German play based on 3.
- 15.** 1805 (1809) *Curious Adventures of Captain Stedman. During an Expedition to Surinam, in 1773 ; Including the Struggles of the Negroes, and the Barbarities of the Planters, Dreadful Executions, the Manner of Selling Slaves, Mutiny of Sailors, Soldiers, &c., and Various other Interesting Articles.* London : printed for Thomas Tegg, III, Cheapside.  
An Abolitionist pamphlet, written in the third person, picking out sensational scenes, and adding 3 pages on 'The Loss of His Majesty's Ship, Romney'.
- 16.** 1806 Second edition, corrected, of no. 1. Th Payne replaces J. Edwards as co-publisher.
- 17.** 1809 *Stedman, toneelspel in vijf bedrijven*, Amsterdam.  
A Dutch translation of 14.
- 18.** 1813 reissue of 15.
- 19.** 1816 *The Slave : a Musical Drama in Three Acts*, by Thomas Morton, music by Henry Bishop, staged Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 12 November 1816: London, 8vo (also performed under the title *Gambia ; or, The Slave*: see 1832).
- 20.** 1818 *Viaggio al Surinam e nell'Interno della Guiana ossia Relazione di Cinque Anni di Corse e di Osservazioni fatte in questo interessante e poco conosciuto Paese dal Capitano Stedman. versione dal franceses del Cav. Borghi. Corredata del Ritratto dell'Autore ; di una Carta geografica, di rani colorati, ed accresciuta di note e di supplemento del Traduttore sulle altre parti della Guiana, nè visitante, nè descritte dal sig. Stedman.* Milano, dall Tipografia di Giambattista Sonzogno. 4 vols, 12mo, 17 plates.  
An Italian translation of 6, retaining the translator's additional materials.
- 21.** 1824 *Anonymous, Joanna, or the Female Slave: a West Indian Tale* London.
- 22.** 1832 *Gambia; or, The Slave*, Musical Drama, revived version of 18. S.W. Theatre. 13 November.
- 23.** 1834 'Joanna', in Mrs (Lydia Maria Francis) Child, ed., *The Oasis*, Boston, Benjamin C. Bacon, pp. 65-105.  
Extracts from 1 with summaries of deleted portions.
- 24.** 1838 *Narrative of Joanna : an Emancipated Slave, of Surinam. (From Stedman's Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam.)* Boston 16mo, 5-57 plus unrelated anti-slavery verse 59-64.  
Reprinted from 22, with new plates.
- 25.** 1840 M.J. Eugene Sue, 'Aventures D'Hercule Hardi (1772)' in *Deux Histories*, Paris.  
A novelette based loosely on 6 (English translation in 1844).

- 26.** 1857 J. Herman de Ridder *Een Levensteeken op eem Doodenveld*, Schoonhoven: Van Nooten. A partly fictional mission tract, drawing on the Stedman story.
- 27.** 1960 *Voyage à Surinam par le capitaine Jean-Gabriel Stedman. Edition établi et présentée par Michel Rouzé selon la traduction originale de P.-F. Henri* (sic). Paris : Le Club Français du Livre. 8vo, pp. 343 plus 68 plates.  
A one-vol. abridgement of 6.
- 28.** 1962 *The Journal of John Gabriel Stedman, 1744-1797*. Edited by Stanbury Thompson, London, Mitre Press.
- 29.** 1963 *Expedition to Surinam being the narrative of a five year's expedition against the revolted negroes of Surinam in Guiana on the wild coast of South America from the year 1772 to 1777 elucidating that country and describing its productions with na account of the Indians of Guiana and negroes of Guinea by Captain John Stedman newly edited and abridged by Christopher Bryant and illustrated with engravings selected from the earliest edition themselves made after drawings by the author*. London : Folio Society. 8vo, pp vi-viii & 239 plus 12 plates.  
A modernised abridgement of 1.
- 30.** 1966 *John Gabriel Stedman : A Study of His Life and Times*, by Stanbury Thompson, Stapleford, Notts : Thompson.
- 31.** 1971 *Narrative of a five year's expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the year 1772 to 1777. Elucidating the history of that country, and describing its productions, viz., quadrupedes, birds, fishes, reptiles, trees, shrubs, fruits, & roots; with an account of the Indians of Guiana, & Negroes of Guinea. By Captain .J .G. Stedman, illustrated with 80 elegant Engravings, from drawings made by the author*. Printed for the Imprint Society, Barre, Massachusetts. 2 vols., 4to.  
New edition of 1, with introduction and notes by R.A.J. Van Lier.
- 32.** 1972 *Idem no. 28, bound in one volume* : Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press.
- 33.** 1974 *Reize naar Surinamen en door de binnenste gedeelten van Guaiana I-IV. Opnieuw uitgegeven naar de oorspronkelijke editie Amsterdam 1799-1800. Met inleiding en aantekeningen door Prof. Dr. R. A. J. van Lier, Hoogleraar aan de Landbouwhogeschool te Wageningen*. Amsterdam : S. Emmering. 4 vols in two.  
Facsimile reprint of 9 plus a Dutch version of the introduction and notes to 30.
- 34.** 1983 Johan Edwin Hokstam, *Boni*, Amsterdam.
- 35.** 1983 *For Captain Stedman : Poems* by Landeg White, Harry Chambers/ Peterloo Poets, Liskeard, Cornwall.

36. 1984 *Slave Song* by David Dabydeen. A collection of poems with plates from 30.
37. *Reize naar Surinamen door den Capitain J.G.Stedman* Walburg Press, Zutphen, ed. Jos Fontaine on behalf of the Suriname Aluminium Company. An abridged version of 32 with English summaries and versions of the plates in colour.
38. 1988 *Narrative of a Five years Expedition against the revolted negroes of Surinam*, by John Gabriel Stedman. Transcribed for the First Time from the Original 1790 Manuscript. Edited, and with an Introduction and Notes, by Richard price and Sally Price. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
39. 1990 *Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth Century Slave Society*. Edited by Richard price and Sally Price.  
Abridged paperback version of 38.
40. 1991 Beryl Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna – a Love in Bondage: Dedicated Love in the Eighteenth Century*, New York.

## 2. Secondary Sources

David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empire 1415-1980* (Yale University Press, 2000).

Chinua Achebe, *The African Trilogy: Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God* (Picador, 1988).

Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (Vintage, 1999).

Miriam Allott, *Novelists on the Novel* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

Hélio Osvaldo Alves, 'O Lago de Todos os Recursos: Discorrendo sobre uma Ideia de Cultura', em Hélio Osvaldo Alves (ed.), *Toda uma Maneira de Viver: Ensaio de Cultura Inglesa* (Universidade do Minho, Braga, 2000), pp. 11-43.

Anonymous, *Jamaica: a Poem in Three Parts. Written in that Island in MDCCLXXVI* (1777).

Anon., 'William Thomson, LL.D.', *Annual Biography and Obituary*, 2: 74-117, 1818.

Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London, 1975).

David Armitage, 'Literature and Empire', in Nicholas Canny (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume One: The origins of the Empire: British*

- Overseas Enterprise to the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 99-123.
- Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (Routledge, 1989).
- Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: a Critical Biography* (Penguin, 1971).
- Karin Barber, 'Popular Arts in Africa', *African Studies Review* 30 3 (1987).
- Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow': Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yorùbá Town* (Edinburgh University Press, 1991).
- Karin Barber and P.F. de Moraes Farias, *Discourse and its Disguises: the Interpretation of African Oral Texts*, Birmingham University African Series no. 1 (Centre of West African Studies, 1989).
- John Barrell and John Bull (eds.), *A Book of English Pastoral Verse* (Oxford University Press, 1975).
- Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Jonathan Cape, 1972).
- Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Stephen Heath (ed.), *Image-Music-Text: Roland Barthes* (London, 1977).
- Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Picador, 2000).
- Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and Other Stories*, ed., Maureen Duffy (Methuen, 1986).
- Thomas Bender (ed.), *Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, 1992).
- Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (New York, 1990).
- Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).
- Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (Verso, 1998).
- William Blackstone, *Commentaries* (1768).
- William Blake: The Oxford Authors*, (ed.) Michael Mason (Oxford University Press, 1988).
- John Bourne (ed.), *Georgian Tiverton: The Political memoranda of Beavis Wood, 1768-98*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, new series, 29 (Torquay 1986).
- C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800* (Penguin, 1965).
- C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415-1825* (Penguin, 1973).

Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947).

Duncan Brown (ed.), *Oral Literature and Performance in Southern Africa* (James Currey, 1999).

Luís de Camões, *Obras Completas, com Prefácio e Notas do Prof. Hernâni Cidade*, 5 vols., (Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1947), Vols. IV and V.

Nicholas Canny (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume One: The origins of the Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

Amit Chaudhuri, 'Lure of the Hybrid: What the Post-Colonial Indian Novel means to the West', *Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 3, 1999, pp. 5.

Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African* (Philadelphia, 1786).

L. Collis, *Soldier in Paradise: The Life of John Gabriel Stedman, 1744-1797* (London, 1965).

(Captain James Cook), *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for making Discoveries in the Southern hemisphere; and Successively Performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret and Captain Cook, in the Dolphin, the Swallow, and the Endeavour, drawn up from the Journals which were Kept by the Several Commanders, and from the Papers of Joseph Banks, Esq., by John Hawkesworth*, 3 vols., (London, 1773); and Captain James Cook and Captain James King, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, Undertaken by the Command of His Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere, Performed under the Direction of captains Cook, Clerke and Gore in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution, and the Discovery in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780*, 3 vols., Vols. I and II by Captain James Cook, Vol. III by Captain James King (London, 1785).

David B. Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: the Word Music of South Africa's Basutho Migrants* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Helena Neves da Costa Gonçalves, 'A Mulher Ideal do Século XIX; Sexual ou Assexuada?', em Hélio Osvaldo Alves (ed.), *Toda uma Maneira de Viver: Ensaio de Cultura Inglesa* (Universidade do Minho, Braga, 2000), pp. 45-59.

Reginald Coupland, *Wilberforce: a Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 1923 and 1945).

Davis Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Ithaca, 1975).

- Davis Brion Davis, "Reflections on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony", *American Historical Review* 92: 4 (October, 1987), pp. 797-812.
- David Brion Davis, 'The Ends of Slavery', *The New York Review* (30 March, 1989), p. 30.
- Davis Brion Davis, "The Perils of doing History by Ahistorical Abstraction: a reply to Thomas L. Haskell's *American Historical Review* Forum Reply", in Thomas Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolition as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, 1992), pp. 6-7.
- Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Penguin, 1994).
- Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1976).
- Dictionary of National Biography from the Earliest Times to 1900*, 22 vols., (ed.) Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (Oxford University Press, 1917).
- Omwuka Dike's *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885* (Oxford, 1956).
- Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the 'Improvement' of the World* (Yale University Press, 2000).
- Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery; British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (London, 1986).
- John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie: an Essay* (London: Henry Herringman, 1668).
- John Dryden, *The Poems and Fables of John Dryden* (ed.) James Kinsley, (Oxford University Press, 1958).
- Stephen Jay Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: the Wonder of the New World* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- Silvia W. De Groot, 'The Boni Maroon War 1765-1793: Suriname and French Guiana', *Boletim de Estudos Latinamericanos y del Caribe* 18 (1975), 30-48.
- Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Blackwell, 1996).
- Terry Eagleton 'In the Gaudy Supermarket', *London Review of Books*, 13 May 1999, pp- 3-6.
- Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, *William Blake: the Early Illuminated Books*, vol. 3 (Princeton University Press, 1998).
- P.C. Emmer, "One Econocide is Enough! The Ideology of Free Labour and Dutch Colonial Policy in the Nineteenth Century" (unpub. paper, 1992).
- William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).

- William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935, Penguin, 1966).
- David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet against Empire: a Poet's Interpretation of the History of his own Times* (Princeton, 1954).
- David V. Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake: William Blake's Complete Illuminated Works with a Plate-by-Plate Commentary* (Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1974).
- Robert N. Essick (ed.), *The Visionary Hand : Essays for the Study of Blake's Art and Aesthetics* (Los Angeles: Henneset and Ingalls, 1973).
- Robert N. Essick, *William Blake: Printmaker*, Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Franz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington (Penguin, 1967).
- Sir Richard Fanshawe, *Luis de Camões, The Lusiads, in Sir Richard Fanshawe's translation*, edited and with an introduction by Geoffrey Bullough (Centaur Press, 1983).
- Charles Mills Gayley, *Shakespeare and the Founders of Liberty in America* (New York, 1917).
- John Gross (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of English Prose* (Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 22 vols., (ed.) Stanley Sadie (Macmillan, 1980).
- Richard Haklyut, *The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation, Made by Sea or over Land, in the Most Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at any Time within the Compass of these 1500 Years*, 3 vols. (1589 and 1599).
- Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and then origins of Humanitarian Sensibility", Parts 1 and 2, *American Historical Review* 90: 2 & 3 (April and June 1985), pp. 339-361 and 457-566.
- Thomas L. Haskell, "Convention and Hegemonic Interest in the debate over Antislavery", *American Historical Review* 92: 4 (October 1987), pp. 839-878.
- Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Penguin, 1975).
- Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: a Study of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Macmillan, 1999).
- Isabel Hofmeyr, 'We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told': Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom (James Currey, 1993).

- Wim Hoogbergen, *The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname* (Leiden, 1990).
- Homer, *The Odyssey*, Translated by Robert Fitzgerald (Collins Harvill, 1988).
- Edwin Horlings, "An Economic Explanation of the Late Abolition of Slavery in Suriname", (unpub. paper, n.d., University of Utrecht).
- Stephen Howe, *Afrocentricism: Mythical pasts and Imagined Homes* (Verso, 1998).
- Bishop Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762).
- R Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century* (London, 1976).
- C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (Heinemann, 1979).
- Samuel Johnson *The Works of the most Eminent English Poets, with a Preface. Biographical and Critical, to each Author, 1779-81.* 2 vols. (London: Everyman, 1925).
- J.P. Kenyon, *The Stuarts: a Study in English Kingship* (Fontana, 1966).
- Geoffrey Keynes, 'William Blake and John Gabriel Stedman', *Times Literary Supplement*, Thursday May 20, 1965, p.400.
- Geoffrey Keynes (ed.), *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul 1789 – 1794 The Author & Printer W. Blake*, (Oxford University Press, 1970).
- Lisa Kozlowski, 'The Little Black Boy' (December, 1995) on website <http://virtual.park.uga.edu/wblake/SONGS/9/9koxlows.bib.html>
- S. Lee, 'John Gabriel Stedman', *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol..LIV (London, 1898).
- Roger Lonsdale (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (Oxford, University Press, 1984).
- Raphael Lyne in 'Green Thoughts upon the Mower's Song', *Times Literary Supplement* (30 May, 1997) p. 13.
- Rose Macaulay, *They Went to Portugal* (Penguin, 1985).
- Jack Mapanje, *Of Chameleons and Gods* (Heinemann African Writers, 1981).
- J. Middleton Murry, *William Blake* (London, 1933).

Rosalind S. Meyer, “‘Inside like a Kernel’”: Literary Sources of Heart of Darkness’, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 93, Part 2 (April 1998), pp. 330-344.

William Julius Mickle, *The Lusiad, or The Discovery of India: an Epic Poem, translated from the Portuguese of Luis de Camoens with a Life of the Poet* (1776).

Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin, 1986).

Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* trans. Thomas Nugent (Cincinnati, 1873).

Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare’s Plays* (Methuen, 1977).

V.S. Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* (London, 1957).

V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London, 1962).

V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London, 1964).

V.S. Naipaul, ‘London’ in *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (London, 1972).

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, ‘The Language of African Literature’, in *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Currey, 1986), pp. 4-33.

Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900, Vol. IV: Early Nineteenth Century Drama* (Cambridge, 1960).

J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: the Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Frank Cass, 1998).

Kole Omotoso, *Achebe or Soyinka: a Study in Contrasts* (Zell Publishers, 1997).

Gert Ootstindie, “The Economics of Suriname Slavery”, in *Economic and Social History of the Netherlands*, vol. V (Het Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief, Amsterdam, 1993).

Stephen Orgel (ed.), ‘Introduction’ to Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Oxford World’s Classics, 1987).

Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: from Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993).

Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empire* (Weidenfield & Nicolson, 2001).

J.H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (Penguin, 1973).

Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope: a one-volume edition of the Twickenham text, with selected annotations* (ed.) John Butt (London, 1963).

- J.M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Frederick A. Pottle (ed.), *Boswell's London Journal 1762-1763* (London, 1950).
- Richard Price (ed.), *Maroon Societies ; Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 2nd ed., rev., Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Richard and Sally Price, 'John Gabriel Stedman's 'Journal of a Voyage to the West Indies in Ye Year 1772. In a Poetical Epistle to a Friend'.' *New West Indian Guide* 59: pp. 185-96.
- Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes, Containing a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Land Travels by Englishmen and Others*, 20 vols., (1625).
- Abbé Raynal, *The History of the Two Indies* trans. Justamond, (1788).
- Neil Rennie, *Far-fetched Facts: the Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford University Press, 1995).
- I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (1929).
- Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (Unwin, 1946).
- Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, (Penguin, 1995).
- Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993).
- Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780-1813* (1977, Fontana Press, 1992).
- Simon Schama, *Citizens: a Chronicle of the French Revolution* (Penguin, 1989).
- C.H. Sisson, 'On Translating Dante', in *Dante: the Divine Comedy, a New Verse Translation* by C.H. Sisson (Pan Books, 1981).
- Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (Oxford World's Classics, 1981).
- Alan Sokal, 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity', *Social Text* 46/47 (spring/summer, 1996), pp-217-252.
- Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery* (Cambridge, 1987).
- Wole Soyinka, *Idanre and other Poems* (Methuen, 1967).

*Spectator*, No 11 (1711).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?': Speculations on Widow Sacrifice', *Wedge* 7/8 (Winter/Spring 1985) pp. 120-130, revised and reprinted in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271-313, and in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 66-111.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard, 1999).

Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature, and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760-1840*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 1984.

Lawrence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (Penguin Classics, 1967).

Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (Penguin Classics, 1967).

Wylie Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings : British Anti-Slavery Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, University of North Carolina University Press, 1942. (New York, 1969).

Howard Temperley, "Capitalism, Slavery and Ideology", *Past and Present* 75 (1977), pp. 94-118.

E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1968).

E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (Merlin Press, 1978).

E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

James Thomson, *The Seasons by James Thomson, a new Edition Adorned with a Set of Engravings from Original Paintings, together with an Original Life of the Author and a Critical Essay on the Seasons*, (ed.) Robert Heron (Perth, MDCCXCIII).

Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: a Life* (Penguin, 1998).

Gerald F. Tyson, *Joseph Johnson : A Liberal Publisher* (University of Iowa Press, 1979).

Leroy Vail & Landeg White, "'Tawane Machamero': Forced Rice & Cotton Cultivation on the Lower Zambesi", *Journal of African History*, vol. 19, (1978) 239-263.

Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Plantation Protest: the History of a Mozambican Song", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 5, no 1 (1978), 1-28.

Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique: a Study of Quelimane District* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1980).

Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Forms of Resistance: Songs and Perceptions of Power in Colonial Mozambique", *American Historical Review*, vol. 88, no 3 (1983), pp. 883-919, reprinted in *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos*, vol. 2 (1984), pp. 9-62, and in D. Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion & Social Protest in Africa*, pp. 231-276 (London, James Currey, 1986).

Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History* (James Currey, 1992).

R.A.J. Van Lier, *Frontier Society: a Social Analysis of the History of Suriname* (The Hague, 1971).

H:V:E:Thodon van Velsen, 'The Maroon Insurgency' in G.Brama-Shute (ed.), *Resistance and Rebellion in Suriname: Old and New* (Studies in Third World Societies, 43; Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA., 1990), pp. 159-188.

David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Dennis Walder, *Post-Colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (Blackwell, 1998).

James Walvin, *Black Ivory: a History of British Slavery* (Fontana, 1993).

Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel; Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London, 1957).

Landeg White, 'The Imagery of the Hymns of Isaac Watts', thesis presented for the degree of MA, Liverpool University, 1964.

Landeg White, *V.S. Naipaul: a Critical Introduction* (Macmillan, 1975).

Landeg White, 'Review Article; Literature and History in Africa', *Journal of African History*, 21 (1980) pp. 537-546.

Landeg White, *For Captain Stedman* (Harry Chambers/Peterloo Poets, 1983).

Landeg White and Tim Couzens (eds.), *Literature and Society in South Africa* (Longman, 1984).

Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

- Landeg White, "Maps of experience: oral and written poetry from southern Africa, in Luigi Zampietro (ed.), *Declarations of cultural independence in the English speaking world*, 225-244 (University of Milan, 1989).
- Landeg White, *The View from the Stockade* (Dangaroo Press, 1991).
- Landeg White, *Bounty* (Dangaroo Press, 1993)
- Landeg White, *Superfícies e Interiores: Poemas: Introdução, Selecção, Tradução e Notas de Hélio Osvaldo Alves* (CEMAR, 1995).
- Landeg White, *Luis Vaz de Camões, The Lusíads: a New Translation* (Oxford World's Classics, 1997).
- Landeg White, *South* (CEMAR, 1999).
- Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (New York, 1944).
- Kenneth Wimsatt with Munroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954).
- Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (ed.) Miriam Brody Kramnick (Penguin, 1975).
- William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798* (eds.) R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (Methuen, 1963).
- Robert J.C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West* (Routledge, 1990).







