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Dred: Intemperate Slavery

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In 1825, Harriet Beecher Stowe's father, Lyman Beecher, gave a series of six sermons which helped to launch the temperance movement. In these sermons, published in 1826 and much reprinted thereafter, Beecher used the slave trade as a moral yardstick for the evils of intemperance. In doing so, he built on the moral outrage which brought an end to the legal importation of African slaves in 1808, and further criminalized the trade in 1820 when it was declared piracy. Beecher concluded that, morally reprehensible as the slave trade had been, intemperance was the greater evil, for it did greater damage to the individual soul, and cast a wider shadow of suffering. "We have heard of the horrors of the middle passage, the transportation of slaves, the chains, the darkness, the stench, the mortality and living madness of wo, and it is dreadful," Beecher noted before counting the human cost of bondage to alcohol:

> Yes, in this nation there is a middle passage of slavery, and darkness, and chains, and disease, and death. But it is a middle passage, not from Africa to America, but from time to eternity; and not of slaves whom death will release from suffering, but of those whose sufferings at death do but just begin. Could all the sighs of these captives be wafted on one breeze, it would be loud as thunder. Could all their tears be assembled, they would be like the sea.[1]

Given the rhetorical power of the comparison between the evils of chattel slavery and the evils of alcohol dependency, it is hardly surprising that Lyman Beecher's daughter, writing some thirty years later, would build on her father's work, inverting, in *Dred*, the import of the comparison.

I

The comparison which Beecher made between slavery and intemperance would resonate within both the temperance movement and the anti-

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[1] Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on Intemperance. Delineating Its Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy* (Edinburgh: Scottish Temperance Society, 1846), 21–22.

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slavery crusade. In his Fourth of July Address at Amherst College in 1828, a *Parallel Between Intemperance and the Slave Trade* (1828), Heman Humphrey followed Beecher's lead, arguing that the destructive power of intemperance outweighed the misery and injustice of the slave trade on every count. "When you have poured out your sympathies over a sorrowing mother, and her half-starved children, whose husband and father is pining in western bondage, enter the forlorn habitation of the thrice widowed mother of a drunkard's offspring," Humphrey tells his audience.

> Or when you have wept with that aged pair, on the slave-coast, whose only son has just been carried off by the ruthless man-stealer, come home to New England, and see the only prop of once doting, and now aged parents, falling intoxicated and blaspheming over the threshold of their door; and tell me, whose breach is widest, whose sorrows spring from the deepest fountain? Much as I love my children, let them all grind in chains till they die, rather, infinitely, than become the slaves of strong drink.[2]

The *Western Washingtonian and Sons of Temperance Record* saw alcoholism as "bondage to the Devil … a more degrading and damning servitude than that which the poor negro is subjected to."[3]

African-American reformers also recognized the importance of temperance reform, seeing it as an integral part of their crusade to gain equal rights and opportunities. In his speech on "Temperance and Anti-Slavery" at Paisley, Scotland on 30 March 1846, Frederick Douglass comments:

> The blacks are to a considerable extent intemperate, and if intemperate, of course vicious in other respects, and this is counted against them as a reason why their emancipation should not take place. As I desire, therefore, their freedom from physical chains, so I desire their emancipation from intemperance, because I believe it would be the means – a great and glorious means – towards helping to break their physical chains and letting them go free.[4]

Douglass gave a number of speeches on temperance. "I am a temperance man because I am an anti-slavery man; and I am an anti-slavery man because I love my fellow man," Douglass said.[5] Indeed, he attended the

[2] Heman Humphrey, D.D., President of the College, *Parallel Between Intemperance and the Slave Trade. An Address Delivered at Amherst College, July 4, 1828* (Amherst: J. S. and C. Adams, Printers, 1828), 22–23.

[3] *Western Washingtonian and Sons of Temperance Record*, 17 October 1846, quoted in Jed Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder: Temperance Reform in Cincinnati from the Washingtonian Revival to the WCTU* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 82–83.

[4] *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 1: 1841–46, John W. Blassingame, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 206.

[5] *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series One, Vol. 1, 209, same speech as that quoted above.

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World Temperance Convention in London in August 1846 at which Lyman Beecher was a delegate, though Douglass was not. As Douglass explained in his remarks on 7 August 1846: "Those who would have been most likely to elect me as a delegate, could not, because they are to-night held in the most abject slavery in the United States."[6] In making such a comment, Douglass was arguing against the view that intemperance was a worse evil than slavery. [7]

Douglass was certainly not the only African-American reformer to plead the cause of temperance reform. The minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color in These United States record the intention of appointing agents to further the cause of African Americans with regard to four main rallying points: Education, Temperance, Economy, and Universal Liberty.[8] The Colored Temperance Societies often made the link between temperance and anti-slavery directly in their constitutions and resolutions: "Believing … that the future prospects of the two and a half millions of our brethren, who are now groaning, in our own country, beneath the iron hand of the oppressor, will depend materially upon the state of morals among the free people of color, We, the undersigned colored inhabitants of the city of Pittsburgh and vicinity, pledge ourselves neither to drink, nor buy, nor sell, nor give away any intoxicating liquor."[9]

Nor was Douglass the only abolitionist to point out the connections between intemperance and slavery in a way more congenial to the simultaneous prosecution of both objectives. "The temperance and abolition enterprises are the hope of our country, identical in principle, based on the same broad foundation of human brotherhood, and animated by the same spirit of Christian benevolence and charity," wrote William Lloyd Garrison in *The Liberator* of 14 April 1843. "There cannot be any rivalry between them, and neither of them can ever interfere with the other. The former in point of time, preceded the latter, and mightily prepared the way for it; for a people enslaved by intemperance can do nothing to deliver those who are spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor."[10] At its meeting in New Haven, Connecticut of 9 November 1836, the State Temperance Society of Colored People resolved: "That

[6] Ibid., 340.
[7] W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 214–15.
[8] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention* (1835), 26–27, quoted in Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 104.
[9] *The Liberator*, 14 Feb. 1835, 28.
[10] *The Liberator*, 14 Apr. 1843, 59.

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we owe it to our friends, who plead our cause, and to our brethren in bonds as feeling bound with them, to use our influence to do away [with] the use of intoxicating liquors from among us, as a common beverage."[11]

Common ground was perceived by temperance workers as much as by abolitionists. Indeed, Dannenbaum points out that viewing alcohol as "enslaving" predated the abolitionist movement.[12] When Samuel Cary, a leader of the temperance movement in Ohio, encountered an inebriate, he assured the ragged drunkard "that others had broken the tyrant's chain – that he was a man and a brother."[13] Such words recall the emblem of the anti-slavery movement which showed a kneeling slave raising his manacled hands to heaven and carried the embossed question, "Am I not a Man, and a Brother?"

II

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in the shadow of growing violence and rising sectional tension, and as reports emanating from the Supreme Court suggested that the outcome of Dred Scott's case would not be supportive of the anti-slavery cause.[14] She wrote about slavery at a time when the temperance crusade was enjoying considerable public support, spurred by the Washingtonians, founded in Baltimore in 1840. Temperance rather than slavery dominated Northern politics during the first half of the 1850s, particularly the fiercely controversial campaigns within individual states for complete prohibition. These "Maine laws" were so named after a successful campaign brought prohibition to that state in 1851.[15]

[11] *The Liberator*, 3 Dec. 1836, 195.

[12] Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder*, 10.

[13] Ibid., 39.

[14] On 18 February, *Tribune* readers were told that the case would go against Scott, but that the issue of the constitutionality of the Missouri Compromise would not be tackled. On 8 April 1856, readers of the *Tribune* were told that the Court was evenly divided over the issue of whether it could consider the citizenship of free negroes. Pessimistic reports concerning the outcome circulated through June 1856, making more credible Garrison's view that the United State Constitution was essentially pro-slavery, and that any reverence and obedience rendered to the Constitution was injurious to the rights of the slave. For more on the press reports on the Dred Scott Case which anticipated its conclusion, see Vincent C. Hopkins, Jr., *Dred Scott's Case* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 40–41. Given Justice McLean's prominence at the Republican Convention as a possible candidate for the presidency and Henry Ward Beecher's involvement in the 1856 Republican campaign, it seems unlikely that Stowe was unaware of the tenor of such reports. Joan Hedrick notes that the sectional fighting in Kansas was at its peak between December 1855 and September 1856, the period when Stowe was working on *Dred*. See Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 258.

[15] For more on the prominence of the temperance movement at this time see Ian R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800–1860*

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Stowe lived in Maine from 1850 to 1852; in her "Letters From Maine," published in *Uncle Sam's Emancipation* in 1853, she calls Maine "the North Star, and the guiding hand in a movement that is to *regenerate all nations*."[16] Stowe is not referring to the North Star of anti-slavery here, but to the guiding light of temperance reform.

Like other prominent anti-slavery campaigners such as Theodore Weld, Stowe voiced support for temperance before denouncing slavery. She published a number of temperance stories, including "The Drunkard Reclaimed" (1839), "Let Every Man Mind His Own Business" (1843), "Only a Glass of Wine, or, Woman Behold Thy Son" (1853), and "The Coral Ring. A Temperance Tale" (1853). She contributed a temperance tale to T. S. Arthur's *The Temperance Offering* of 1853, and added two new temperance tales to *The May Flower* for its reissue in 1855.

Stowe also had more personal reasons for a concern with temperance in the mid 1850s. Her brother Thomas had fought alcohol dependency, but it was her son Frederick whose problems were of immediate concern. Fred seems to have been an alcoholic from the age of sixteen, just about the time Stowe was writing *Dred*.[17] In an earlier letter to a friend, Stowe speaks of her worries about her son, then only fourteen years old: "There are some southern boys here all *dash* who are very captivating inspiring restless desires for pistols & cigars – & breathing an atmosphere of Devil-may care & I have had great pains to combat various passions of Fred's inspired by such company."[18] For tobacco, Stowe's biographer Joan Hedrick tells us, read alcohol. Slavery was clearly not the only cause on Stowe's mind when she began *Dred* toward the end of 1855, sipping Catawba wine as she wrote, and in the novel that resulted, anti-slavery and temperance became complexly interwoven.[19]

(Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), esp. 3–13 for a quick overview. See also Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder* for a history of the temperance movement in Cincinnati, where Stowe lived from 1832 to 1850.

[16] Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Letters From Maine", *Uncle Sam's Emancipation* (Freeport, New York: Books For Libraries Press, 1970), 157.

[17] See Hedrick, 140. See also, Milton Rugoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 351.

[18] Letter from Harriet Beecher Stowe to Sarah Allen, 22 Oct. 1854, quoted in Hedrick, 255. Hedrick explains that Stowe used "tobacco" as a euphemism for alcohol. It is interesting that Stowe blames Fred's alcoholism on Southern companions.

[19] Hedrick records that on 13 July 1856 Stowe wrote to her publisher asking for another six bottles of Catawba wine "to support the hot weather and the long pull," 260.

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III

Stowe's temperance stories follow the two standard plot formulas for the temperance tale, the cautionary and the exemplary. In the cautionary temperance tale, a young man succumbs to intemperance, sinking rapidly into degradation, insensibility and sometimes death while those close to him suffer helplessly in misery and poverty. After the initial lapse from probity, the descent into debauchery is speedy and complete, leaving characters transformed as quickly and absolutely as Frederick Douglass's kind Baltimore mistress is changed under the evil influence of slavery. In these tales, the family of the intemperate are prey to violence and disease, with consumption a favourite infliction. Sarah Josepha Hale's *My Cousin Mary; or The Inebriate* (1839) follows this pattern.[20] Within the sentimental logic of the temperance tale, it is the victim rather than the villain who must suffer in order to make the reader feel the cruel destructive power of vice. The exemplary temperance tale follows the same story pattern as the cautionary tale except that the decline of the inebriate is halted through the intervention of a temperance advocate before the ruin of his family is complete. In the exemplary temperance tale, the drunkard pledges abstinence and is reformed, becoming a productive member of the community as well as a staunch advocate for temperance. Lucius M. Sargent's "My Mother's Gold Ring" (1833), one of the most popular of all temperance tales, follows this pattern.[21]

T. S. Arthur's enormously popular *Ten Nights in a Bar-room and What I Saw There* (1854) is a cautionary tale with a sub-plot built around the typical exemplary pattern. *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* illustrates the sentimental logic of the cautionary temperance mode, though Arthur preferred mental derangement to tuberculosis as the fate of his innocent female victims of male intemperance, a choice for which precedents such as *The Ruined Deacon* (1834) existed.[22] In *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* a whole community goes to ruination under the corrupting influence of a tavern.

[20] Sarah Josepha Hale, *My Cousin Mary; or The Inebriate* (Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1839).

[21] Lucius M. Sargent, "My Mother's Gold Ring," *The Temperance Tales of Lucius M. Sargent* (Springfield, Mass.: W. J. Holland, 1873), 4–12. First published in Boston in 1833, the 114th thousand had been issued in 1843.

[22] Timothy Shay Arthur, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room and What I Saw There* (London: William Nicholson and Sons, n.d.). Mary S. Fox, *The Ruined Deacon. A True Story. By a Lady* (Boston: Ford and Damrell, 1834).

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In the sub-plot, which follows the exemplary mode of the temperance tale, a young girl dies after being hit by a flying bottle, but lingers, Eva-like, just long enough to save her father from intemperance. Arthur's tale is an interesting precursor to *Dred*, not only because of the wide level of contamination accorded to a single source of infection and the mixing of the exemplary and the cautionary modes, but also because of character motivation. The miller turned tavern keeper gives up honest labour in order to enjoy a more gentlemanly life of leisure, living off the proceeds of the labour of his fellow townsmen. This desertion of morality in the face of potential gain is also characteristic of the community leaders who promote the tavern as a positive good, seeing it as a means to commercial boom and rising property values.

Although Stowe follows the standard formulas in her temperance tales, she is unusual in the extent to which she focuses on the woman's point of view, and in her portrayal of strong women who are able to withstand the mental and physical suffering attendant on having an alcoholic within the family circle. In Stowe's "The Coral Ring," the young heroine's comments turn an intemperate drinker from the brink, and determine him on a course of abstinence. In this tale, Stowe appears to be reworking Lucius M. Sargent's "My Mother's Gold Ring." The ring, which is a wedding ring in Sargent's tale, and the coral ring of a female friend in Stowe's story, acts as a reminder of the pledge of abstinence, once taken. In Sargent's tale, the husband is a confirmed drunkard; in Stowe's, the potential inebriate is a young man tottering on the brink. Although "My Mother's Gold Ring" is ostensibly narrated by the drunkard's wife, the focus of attention is not on the wife, but the husband. "The Coral Ring" uses third-person narration, but the focus is on the young woman's character and influence.

In "Only a Glass of Wine," the ladies who insist on serving wine at a fashionable party are the instruments of temptation and ultimately of ruin. This story follows the usual course from happiness to misery and death, but emphasizes women's responsibilities more than their helplessness. Similarly, it is women's capabilities rather than their pathetic helplessness which features in "Let Every Man Mind His Own Business." In this story, the heroine develops her talents and finds an inner strength when circumstances destroy her accustomed luxury: "Poverty, deep poverty, had followed their steps, but yet she had not fainted. Talents, which in her happier days had been nourished merely as luxuries, were now stretched to the utmost to furnish a support," the narrator notes, "while from the resources of her own reading she drew that which laid the foundation for

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early mental culture in her children."[23] When the heroine's brother offers to rescue her from her situation, she declines, choosing to stand by her husband until all hope of redemption is gone. Her faithfulness is rewarded when her husband is finally saved by a temperance worker touched by the pathos of her situation.

Although *Dred* has been viewed primarily within the context of anti-slavery fiction, there is much to suggest that one needs to read it as a story operating within the double framework of anti-slavery and temperance. Indeed, the prominence which Stowe gives to the temperance message and the use she makes of the parallels between temperance and anti-slavery mark the distance she has travelled from her attempts in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853) to convince Southern readers, with gentle admonishments, of the need for reform. In these earlier works, Stowe had shown her sensitivity to Southern sensibilities, and had attempted to display her even-handedness through a critique of slavery which was based on human failings, North and South, rather than on a regionally based critique. In *Dred*, however, Stowe makes no such concessions. In likening the abuse of power under slavery to the abuses of alcohol, Stowe made her novel particularly unpalatable for the South. Not only was she drawing a particularly unflattering comparison, but she was also reminding her Southern readers of the connections between the anti-slavery crusade and the temperance movement which had weakened the appeal of abstinence in the South. This happened, Rorabaugh argues, "especially after southern subscribers to northern temperance periodicals received unsolicited antislavery literature."[24] Worse still, Stowe's use of the temperance tale carried an implicit argument for the need for intervention.

IV

In *Dred*, one is struck by the prominence given to the sale and consumption of alcohol. Imbedded in the novel as a sub-plot is a highly typical temperance tale. In this sub-plot, Susan Peyton, a member of the great Virginia family now shabby despite its family pride, elopes with Cripps, a poor white adventurer whose harebrained business ventures absent him from the domestic circle for long stretches, leaving his family in the care of Tiff, a resourceful and generous-hearted slave. Cripps returns periodically to drink up the resources Tiff has managed to

[23] Stowe, "Let Every Man Mind His Own Business," *The Popular Tales of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morison, n.d.), 352.
[24] Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 214.

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assemble, and to father another child. He turns up shortly after the family are introduced. His anxious wife is worn down by suffering and consumption. She dies of misery and tuberculosis while her insensitive husband sleeps off the effects of his overindulgence after consuming the family's dinner and enjoying his post-prandial whiskey and tobacco. Cripps leaves after the funeral, returning some months later with a new wife of intemperate habits and her dowry, a half barrel of whiskey, to set up a grog shop in Tiff's tidy home. The long-suffering Tiff finally flees with his two remaining charges to protect them from corruption and impending starvation. In this typical model of the cautionary temperance tale, the guilty sink lower into depravity while the innocent suffer. In Stowe's version, however, we have the happy ending associated with the exemplary temperance tale, but without the requisite regeneration. This ending, enabled by Tiff's proactive flight, violates formal expectations, but allows Stowe to comment on the injustices of slavery through the juxtaposition of the noble slave and his vicious master. Interestingly, Lydia Maria Child viewed Tiff as the real hero of *Dred*. "I [am] delighted in Old Tiff, from beginning to end," Child noted in a letter to Lucy and Mary Osgood. "His earnestness to get those 'chillen into Canan,' [sic] without thinking anything about himself was charming," Child comments, but wryly notes that "after they inherited a *fortune*, he manifested much less anxiety about their getting into Canaan."[25] Tiff's escape poses little threat to white supremacy, for it is disinterested and is secured through the intervention of benevolent whites.

The main plot-line also hovers between the cautionary and exemplary modes of the temperance tale. Here we are presented with the unsatisfying and unconvincing eleventh-hour release of Nina's fiancé, Clayton, from the narrative logic of tragic inevitability, while Tom Gordon, her intemperate brother, fades from the scene in much the same way that Cripps disappears from the sub-plot. In keeping with Lyman Beecher's description of the symptoms of intemperance, we see in Tom the "extinction of all the finer feelings and amiable dispositions of the soul." Tom displays the "irritability, petulance, and violent anger" typical of the intemperate. His religious feelings have been numbed, leaving him a prey to "animal sensation."[26] When we meet Tom, his appearance is not dissimilar in impact and effect to that of Cripps; indeed, it is Tom who has sunk further into coarse and defiant debauchery. He enters the book

[25] Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland, eds., *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817–1880* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 297–98.
[26] Beecher, *Six Sermons*, 11.

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smelling of brandy and tobacco. Nor is his taste for alcohol the only appetite he fails to control, as becomes clear when he sees Harry's wife, Lisette, and determines to possess her. His use of power is no more moderate than his lust, or use of alcohol: "teach them that you've got the power!" Tom says of his philosophy of slave management, "teach them the weight of your fist! That's enough for them."[27] Theodore Weld, who had been an agent of the American Temperance Society before enlisting in the anti-slavery cause, had argued in *American Slavery As It Is* that the lack of self-control on the part of the slave owner is analogous to the drunkard's inability to control his appetite:

> So it is for the interest of the drunkard to quit his cups; for the glutton to curb his appetite; for the debauchee to bridle his lust; for the sluggard to be up betimes; for the spendthrift to be economical, and for all sinners to stop sinning. Even if it were for the interest of masters to treat their slaves well, he must be a novice who thinks that a proof that the slaves are well treated. The whole history of man is a record of real interests sacrificed to present gratification.[28]

It is Tom's intemperate use of power and alcohol which disrupts the stable Gordon plantation, bringing ruin as his influence infects the wider community. "Intemperance is a disease as well as a crime," Beecher had argued in *Six Sermons*, "and were any other disease as contagious, of as marked symptoms, and as mortal … it would create universal consternation; for the plague is scarcely more contagious or deadly."[29] In her depiction of Tom, Stowe follows the lead of Northern sentimental reform literature, where the effects of alcoholic indulgence and slavery are depicted in similar terms. Both brought on indolence, extravagance, carelessness, thoughtlessness, and indifference. Both fired the passions, with the result that violence, cruelty, and licentiousness were the inevitable result. "Accustomed to wreak their vengeance on their slaves, indulgence of passion becomes with slaveholders a second law of nature," Weld commented in *American Slavery as It Is*, a book from which Stowe quoted at length in *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Weld saw such self-indulgence as a danger to all those around the intemperate slaveholder:

> when excited even by their equals, their hot blood brooks neither restraint nor delay; gratification is the first thought – prudence generally comes too late, and

[27] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp,* ed. Judie Newman (Halifax: Ryburn, 1992), 217.

[28] Theodore Weld, *American Slavery As It Is; Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 132. For confirmation of Weld's connection with the American Temperance Society, see Rorabaugh, 214. Stowe knew Weld's work well, and referred to it extensively in *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

[29] Beecher, *Six Sermons*, p. 12.

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the slaves see their masters fall a prey to each other, the victims of those very passions which have been engendered and infuriated by the practice of arbitrary rule over them, Surely it need not be added, that those who thus tread down their equals, must trample as in a wine-press their defenceless vassals.[30]

Although there is no causal connection between Tom's intemperance and the cholera epidemic, within the logic of the temperance tale, disease is representative of moral contagion. In *Dred*, it is not consumption or madness which is associated with intemperance in the main plot-line, but the dreaded cholera, and it is Nina, the novel's heroine, who takes the role of sacrificial family member.

In her characterization, Nina owes much to Florence, the heroine of Stowe's earlier exemplary temperance tale, "The Coral Ring." Florence, like Nina, is a girl with "about as much real character, as much earnestness and depth of feeling, and as much good sense, when one can get at it, as any young lady."[31] Florence, like Nina, has never "lived with reference to anybody's good, or to anything but [her] own amusement and gratification."[32] It is Florence's cousin who convinces her, as Clayton convinces Nina, to employ her capacity for good while maintaining a hearty disrespect for pretension and hypocrisy. While Florence, following the more optimistic variant of the temperance tale, exerts her influence and saves a young man teetering on the dangerous precipice of intemperance, Nina can neither reform her brother nor contain his destructive power. As a result, she becomes his victim, dying of a disease identified as cholera, but looking very like rapidly accelerated consumption.

Stowe's choice of cholera is telling. It was a disease associated in the public mind with intemperance, uncleanness, and immorality.[33] During the 1849 epidemic, cholera was seen as a divine scourge, a punishment for national sins. "No one can doubt that there is ample occasion for fasting and prayer throughout this land of Slavery, Intemperance, Licentiousness, and War," ran a commentary in the *Utica Christian Contributor*, "but to pray for the withdrawing of the scourge of God which He is wielding over us in the form of the Cholera, without repentance and reformation, is downright hypocrisy, which will only augment the nation's guilt, and provoke the multiplication of the punitive stripes."[34] In response to

[30] Weld, 210.
[31] Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Coral Ring," *The Popular Tales*, 413.
[32] Stowe, "The Coral Ring," 413.
[33] Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849 and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 40–54.
[34] Extract reprinted in *The Liberator*, 19, 31 (3 Aug. 1849), 122.

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President Taylor's call for a national day of fasting, prayer, and humiliation on 3 August 1849, abolitionist Wendell Phillips gave a speech, reported in *The Liberator* of 17 August 1849. "If the Lord has sent the cholera here for any sin," Phillips declared, "I suppose the great sin of the American people is SLAVERY. Those who feel guilty of it may fast – I do not … 'Let the galled jade wince; our withers are unwrung.' We have nothing to do with the great sin of the American people, for we have spent our lives in protesting against it."[35] Stowe, living in Cincinnati during the epidemic of 1849, witnessed its ravages. She lost her beloved baby Charles to the cholera.

The cholera epidemic is central to *Dred*. It provides Stowe with the opportunity to extend the symbolic range of her novel, and to extend the expressive range of the temperance tale as cholera becomes a symbol of the moral corruption of slavery, an instrument of divine retribution, and a catalyst for the sentimental logic of the temperance tale. In *Dred*, cholera is associated with the destructive powers unleashed by intemperate slavery, slavery which saps the capacity for self-restraint and dulls the finer sensibilities. The cholera epidemic appears to fulfil Dred's prophecy at the camp meeting: "They are stumbling upon the corpses! For, Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord, and I will make thee utterly desolate!"[36] But the narrative logic behind the epidemic is not the simple logic of retribution. It is not the intemperate Tom, nor the ne'er do well Cripps who suffer and die. As in the temperance tale, it is the power of their vices to cause suffering which is on display. In his *Six Sermons*, Beecher had spoken of children sacrificed to the Moloch of intemperance, and of wives burned on the funeral pyres of their husbands' alcoholism.[37]

The temperance tale makes a threefold appeal: to self interest, to personal responsibility, and to social responsibility. The potential drunkard is implored not to defile and degrade himself. He is entreated not to bring avoidable suffering to loved ones. Finally, other members of the community are informed of their duty to intervene to prevent the ravages of intemperance. The sacrifice of the innocent serves these appeals in two ways. The sinner is shown his guilt magnified by their suffering, while the sober citizen is made to feel a helpless spectator who longs for intervention. Direct addresses to the reader insist on the importance of social involvement while suggesting the consequences of inaction. The reader's duty to compensate for non-intervention within the novel by action in real life is stressed. Stowe makes it clear that both the dispenser

[35] "Speech of Wendell Phillips," *The Liberator*, 19, 33 (17 Aug. 1849), 130.
[36] Stowe, *Dred*, 340.
[37] Beecher, *Six Sermons*, 21.

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of alcohol and the community at large must take responsibility for placing temptation in the way of the weak-willed. Once the evidence shows a young man sliding into addiction, the community has a responsibility to do everything possible to save him. This is a central theme of Stowe's earlier temperance tale, "Let Every Man Mind His Own Business," as the closing message makes clear: "Every soul saved from pollution and ruin is a jewel to him that reclaims it, whose lustre only eternity can disclose."[38] It is this message of social responsibility which is held before the individualistic reformer by his more proactive friend.[39] A similar point is made in "Only a Glass of Wine, or Woman, Behold Thy Son" when a reformed alcoholic suffers a fatal relapse after being urged to take a glass of wine by his hostess at a fashionable party. Stowe addresses the reader with a string of rhetorical questions:

> And is there not a responsibility on all who ought to be the guardians of the safety and purity of the other sex, to avoid setting before them the temptation to which so often and so fatally manhood has yielded? What is a paltry consideration of fashion, compared to the safety of sons, brothers, and husbands? The greatest fault of womanhood is slavery to custom; and yet who but woman makes custom? Are not all the usages and fashions of polite society more her work than that of man? And let every mother and sister think of the mothers and sisters of those who come within the range of their influence, and say to themselves, when in thoughtlessness they discuss questions affecting their interests, "Behold thy brother!" – "Behold thy son!"[40]

In language echoing with anti-slavery resonance, Stowe emphasizes women's social responsibility with regard to temperance; she is asking her reader to recognize the victim of intemperance as a man and a brother. "Right to Interfere," reads the heading of a piece in *The Liberator*. "What have we at the North, who have no slaves, to do with slavery in the South?" In response to this rhetorical question, Garrison asks his readers to recognize the sympathetic bonds with which God has "bound together the human family." "To stifle these emotions," Garrison argues, "is to do violence to 'the divinity that stirs within us'" and to pave the way for the way for rapacity and injustice.[41]

Within *Dred*'s anti-slavery argument, pleas on the basis of self-interest, personal responsibility, and social responsibility are made. The slave holder is offered two opposing models of behaviour against which to measure himself, the noble Clayton and the debauched Tom Gordon, and

[38] Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Let Every Man Mind His Own Business," *The Popular Tales*, 357.
[39] Ibid., 353–54.
[40] Stowe, "Only a Glass of Wine, or Woman, Behold Thy Son," *The Popular Tales*, 412.
[41] *The Liberator*, 13 Oct. 1836, 172.

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is asked to trace the consequences – to self, family, and community – of irresponsible slaveholding. Intemperate slavery unleashes the twin threats of Dred's insurgent forces and the uncontrollable power of lynch law, threatening those interested in preserving the status quo. Stowe touched a place of particular sensitivity for Southerners in alluding to the possibility of open rebellion. Whenever a plot was discovered or rumoured, panic spread through the South. Such panic was fully analogous to the hysterical terror caused by rumours of cholera, which spread invisibly, in seemingly inscrutable ways. Thomas Wentworth Higginson noted the force of such panic in his article on "Nat Turner's Insurrection" (1861). "The most formidable weapon in the hands of slave-insurgents is always this blind panic they create, and the wild exaggerations which follow," Higginson commented. "The worst being possible, every one takes the worst for granted."[42] Not only had panic spread in the wake of Nat Turner's rebellion throughout the South leading to widespread reports of allied incipient insurrections, but the forces called forth to control the rebellion had themselves proved dangerously uncontrollable.[43]

In her plea for slaveholders to take greater personal responsibility, Stowe touches another tender spot, for in doing so she alludes to the image of the widened domestic circle of plantation life which formed an integral part of pro-slavery apologetics, and which was susceptible to romanticization in plantation novels such as John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832). Building on such self-serving images of slavery as a domestic institution, Stowe turns the import of these representations against slavery's defenders. She underscores the greater importance of personal responsibility, given the larger domestic circle of the plantation which includes slave household members as well as free. The extended suffering caused by slave owners who are intemperate in their use of alcohol and power highlights the need for responsible intervention when both self restraint and legal control are lacking. Pointing out that positions conferring power over individuals within the legal, medical or religious community usually had some form of vetting involved, Stowe had used just this argument in *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

> It is only this office of MASTER, which contains the power to bind and to loose, and to open and shut the kingdom of heaven, and involves responsibility for the

[42] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Atlantic Monthly*, 7 (Aug. 1861), 178.

[43] See the comments and newspaper reports quoted by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, ibid., 173–87.

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soul as well as the body, that is thrown out to every hand, and committed without inquiry to any man of any character … To the half-maniac drunkard, to the man notorious for hardness and cruelty, to the man sunk entirely below public opinion, to the bitter infidel and blasphemer, the law confides this power, just a freely as to the most honorable and religious man on earth. And yet, men who make and uphold these laws think they are guiltless before God, because, individually, they do not perpetrate the wrongs which they allow others to perpetrate![44]

In *Dred*, Stowe uses Tom Gordon to demonstrate how wide the circle of misery can become, as lawlessness and violence increasingly threaten the whole community, and force the exile of its most promising citizens. When slave owners ignore both their own self interest and their personal responsibilities, *Dred* implicitly argues, there is a need for intervention. "We make our own laws, and every one of us is responsible for any unjust law which we do not do our best to alter," Clayton says to the assembled clerics who would accommodate themselves to political expediencies of regional politics. "We have the right to agitate, write, print, and speak, and bring up the public mind to the point of reform; and, therefore, we are responsible if unjust laws are not repealed."[45]

As the foregoing argument demonstrates, Stowe is using the structure and rhetorical appeal of the temperance framework with its appeals to self-interest, and personal and social responsibility, but the ending of the novel remains problematic, for it does not follow either the cautionary or exemplary plot exactly, nor does it blend the two modes successfully. Stowe's inability to commit herself fully to the narrative logic of total destruction, or to offer the likelihood of successful intervention signal the presence of other forces at work within the novel. In the escalating crisis of the 1850s, hope could not easily triumph over experience. The logic of contemporary events as well as the power and scale of the destructive forces unleashed within the novel itself mitigate against Stowe's use of the exemplary mode of the temperance tale, with its happy ending prepared by reformation. The slights of hand Stowe uses to preserve a chosen few from the increasingly destructive forces unleashed are therefore necessarily unconvincing. Her ending, focusing on the personal happiness of a few in defiance of the increasingly destructive forces unleashed as the novel builds toward its finale, exists in defiance of the desolation which threatens. As a result, the ending is disturbing in its violation of narrative logic, and threatens to sacrifice the powerfully resonant social messages invoked by the generic structure.

[44] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London: Clarke, Beeton, and Co., n.d.), 69.

[45] Stowe, *Dred*, 541.

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It is the figure of Dred who disrupts the conventions of the standard temperance tale as he moves from the margins of the novel to take centre stage, justifying his eponymous status. Dred's growing significance is dictated less by the role he plays within the plot than by his centrality to the novel's symbolic structures, with his associations to the Dismal Swamp and to the cholera epidemic, which are themselves linked in their threat to the established order of the slaveholding South. The importance Dred assumes suggests that Stowe is torn between the sentimental logic of the suffering innocent associated with the cautionary temperance tale, and the desire to wreck retributive justice for the collective guilt of slaveholding.

Dred is a potential vehicle for divine vengeance as well as a prophet heralding that judgement and suffering. The cholera epidemic, anticipated by his jeremiad, and the Dismal Swamp, which is quintessentially his territory, are linked together as threats to the safety of the community. The atmospheric theory of the spread of cholera was still current when Stowe wrote *Dred*, and the Dismal Swamp which gives the novel its subtitle is a morass – spawned by slavery, and standing ready to bring death and destruction.[46] "The importation and dissemination of fevers for filthy lucre's sake would not be endured," Beecher wrote in his fourth sermon on intemperance, the "construction of morasses and stagnant lakes sending our poisonous exhalations, and depopulating the country around, would soon be stopped by law."[47]

In *Dred*, Stowe shows a legal system incapable of containing the poisonous exhalations of slavery, and traces the logic of her father's rhetoric. Despite her portrayal of Dred as strong, noble, and charismatic, the logic of Dred's position as prophetic voice and active agent of doom, and the association between him, the swamp, and the pestilential cholera severely limit both his heroic potential and the utopian prospects of his maroon colony within the Dismal Swamp. "There is no principle so awful through all nature as the principle of *growth*. It is a mysterious and dread condition of existence, which, place it under what impediment or disadvantage you will, is constantly forcing on; and when unnatural pressure hinders it, develops in forms portentous and astonishing," comments the narrator in describing Dred and linking him symbolically to the swampland which is his element. "The wild, dreary belt of

[46] See, for example, Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*, 3–6.
[47] Beecher, *Six Sermons*, 22.

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swampland which girds in those states scathed by the fires of despotism is an apt emblem, in its rampant and we might say delirious exuberance of vegetation, of that darkly struggling, wildly vegetating swamp of human souls, cut off, like it, from the usages and improvements of cultivated life.''[48]

The Dismal Swamp, Dred, and the cholera epidemic exist as agents of punishment not only within the sentimental temperance argument, but also within the logic of retributive justice within anti-slavery argument. Within the temperance framework, Dred acts as a voice crying in the wilderness, foretelling the suffering of the many for the sins of the few. In the anti-slavery framework, Dred must be seen as a fiery presence ready to visit vengeance upon all those who traffic with the evil of slavery. Here the distinction between innocence and guilt, a distinction central to the sentimental logic of the suffering innocent within the temperance framework, breaks down. Within *Dred*, the circle of corruption widens to include all who hold slaves or support the institution of slavery. In this context, it is only Tiff and Clayton who prove worthy of salvation. Significantly, Nina is saved after suffering and death, paying for her years of thoughtless frivolity supported by the suffering of others. Her salvation after death is foretold by Dred, who tells Clayton that ''the angel having the seal of God is gone forth, and she shall be sealed in her forehead unto the Lamb.''[49] Sacrificed by the temperance framework, she is redeemed after death for the good deeds of her more mature, serious self within the anti-slavery framework.

As prophet and potential vehicle of divine judgement, Dred must be drawn larger than life. He must be a credible instrument for wrecking vengeance on the community. In this respect, his potential as a charismatic leader, able to summon the forces of insurrection, is as important in giving him the necessary stature as the biblical authority Stowe claims for him. But, because of the function Dred plays within the novel, slave revolt is not seen as a heroic fight for freedom, but as a spectre of devastation analogous to the nightmare of cholera. Stowe's Dred is less a man than the embodiment of terrible forces. It is hardly surprising that Thomas Wentworth Higginson, writing about Nat Turner's revolt on the eve of the Civil War, felt that Stowe's portrait fell short of capturing either Nat Turner's heroism or his potential:

> Who shall go back thirty years and read the heart of this extraordinary man, who, by the admission of his captors, ''never was known to swear an oath or drink a drop of spirits,'' – who, on the same authority, ''for natural intelligence and

[48] Stowe, *Dred*, 616.

[49] Ibid., 472.

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quickness of apprehension was surpassed by few men," "with a mind capable of attaining anything," – who knew no book but his Bible, and that by heart, – who devoted himself soul and body to the cause of his race, without a trace of personal hope or fear, – who laid his plans so shrewdly that they came at last with less warning than any earthquake on the doomed community around, – and who, when that time arrived, took the life of man, woman, and child, without a throb of compunction, a word of exultation, or an act of superfluous outrage? Mrs Stowe's "Dred" seems dim and melodramatic beside the actual Nat Turner.[50]

One can clearly see the lineaments of Dred in Higginson's portrait of Nat Turner, but Stowe's character is shaped by forces beyond the historical parallel Higginson so rightly points to. Dred is a powerful character because his significance is fuelled by the key metaphors with which he is associated. He is a disturbing presence, in part, because of the forces he represents. But Dred is also a disturbing presence because of the tension he brings to the narrative structure of the novel. His role as prophet and agent of retribution strains the temperance framework without breaking free from it.

The stress point can be seen in the way agency is attributed. The tendency of the temperance tale is to remove or restrict the agency of the sentimental victim while the reader's benevolent sympathy is solicited on behalf of the sufferer. The paralysis of the suffering innocent within the fictional framework contrasts with the reader's ability and consequent responsibility to act within the wider world.[51] At the same time, the sufferings of the innocent confirm the drunkard's agency and responsibility for the pain and distress within the fictional framework. The chain of responsibility traced within the fictional framework confirms the complicity of those tangentially involved in the support of the economic and social systems which sanction and support intemperance, as well as the complicity of those who fail to take a stand in opposition to those systems. This suggests the extent of the reader's possible complicity within the wider world as well. The dynamics of agency within the temperance tale are in sharp contrast to the politics of retributive agency, where the responsibility of the sufferer is confirmed more directly, and payment is exacted for wrongdoing. The dynamics of retributive justice do not sit comfortably with the sentimental logic and multiple appeals of the temperance tale.

The retribution which Dred heralds does not fit neatly with the logic

[50] Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," 185.

[51] For a fuller discussion of this compensatory model of agency see Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 104–8.

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of the suffering innocent. None the less, his presence does not completely shift the book away from the sentimental basis of the temperance tale. It is a strange variant of retributive justice which punishes widely while leaving the chief villain in command, but such is the logic of the suffering innocent within the temperance narrative. It would seem that the eleventh-hour escapes of Tiff with his charges and Clayton and the remnants of his household are linked to the incomplete shift toward retributive justice which Dred signals. Within the temperance framework alone, this muddled happy ending makes no sense. However, Stowe's unwillingness to commit herself fully to the narrative logic of total destruction is logical if she is protecting the most innocent members of the community from retributive justice.

Dred is a disturbing presence in another respect as well, for he exhibits a problematic racial politics characteristic of Stowe's other work, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The appeal of *Dred* is to a white audience made up of potentially intemperate slave holders and sober citizens without the inclination to interfere. As Stowe seeks, on the one hand, to use the temperance tale to instil some sense of social responsibility into this audience, she also threatens her audience with the spectre of retributive justice and impending damnation. Both because of the nature of the appeals and threats made to an implicitly white audience, and because of the generic template Stowe has used, the possibility of using Dred to portray black heroism is severely limited.

Stowe had other narrative frameworks she could have used to structure her novel. It is interesting, therefore, that she chose to use the temperance tale in preference to the possibilities for extolling African-American heroism suggested by Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1853) or by Lydia Maria Child's "The Black Saxons" (1846).[52]

Child's story provides a particularly interesting comparison, not least because Stowe's depiction of the maroon colony in the Dismal Swamp bears a striking likeness to the central scene in Child's story, but the resonances and framing of the scene are handled very differently. In Child's story, set during the war of 1812, Mr. Duncan observes a meeting on a lush island in the middle of the swamp called to discuss plans for insurrection. Mr. Duncan is a compassionate slave holder who has just been meditating on Thierry's *History of the Conquest of England by the Normans*. Contemplating the fate of his ancestors, he notes, "They tamely submitted to their lot, till their free, bright beauty passed under the heavy

[52] "The Black Saxons" was first published in *The Liberty Bell* in 1841. It was reprinted in *Fact and Fiction* in 1846 with an epigraph added.

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cloud of animal dullness, and the contemptuous Norman epithet of 'base Saxon Churls' was but too significantly true." None the less, he notes, the example of the heroic outlaw, Robin Hood, showed that "they did not relinquish freedom without a struggle."[53] Mr. Duncan disguises himself in blackface and follows his slave to the clandestine meeting. There he listens to a debate over whether, if the British land as rumours suggested they would, the slaves should murder their masters in the act of claiming their freedom. Although an intelligent and charismatic speaker argues that no mercy should be shown, it is the voice of Christian forbearance which prevails. Greatly relieved, Mr. Duncan makes his way home, asking himself: "Was the place I saw to-night, in such wild and fearful beauty, like the haunts of the *Saxon* Robin Hoods? Was not the spirit that gleamed forth as brave as *theirs*?"[54] Such thoughts do not lead Mr. Duncan either to free his slaves or act against the individuals involved. Instead, he takes the mildest form of coercive action consistent with diminishing the threat: he advises the local magistrates to forbid all further slave meetings until after the end of the war.

Where Child emphasizes the heroic nature of slave resistance and asks her readers to recognize such activity as a mark of the imperatives of a noble human nature subjected to degrading oppression, Stowe emphasizes the "otherness" of her outlaw hero and the terrible vengeance hanging over the slaveholding South and the nation: "Because ye despise his word, and trust in oppression, and perverseness, and stay thereon; therefore, this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly in an instant! And he shall break it as the breaking of a potter's vessel!"[55] Stowe sets the date of Dred's clandestine meeting as the Fourth of July, but it is the biblical echoes which are the strongest, suggesting that Dred is merely the instrument of divine vengeance, a vengeance stayed temporarily, but not for long.

Jean Fagan Yellin has noted a certain ambiguity with regard to the figure of the kneeling, manacled male slave made famous by Wedgewood's emblem. With his muscular body and balanced stance, is he about to rise and break his bonds himself?[56] Such a possibility is realized in a portrait of Nat Turner which is not drawn, but is described in Thomas Gray's *The*

[53] Lydia Maria Child, "The Black Saxons," *A Lydia Maria Child Reader*, ed. Carolyn Karcher (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 182–83. [54] Ibid., 191.

[55] Stowe, *Dred*, 573.

[56] Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 8–9. For more information on the role of iconography in the anti-slavery movement, see Yellin's book.

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Confessions of Nat Turner (1831). Gray depicts Turner in prison, displaying, in the process, the impact of his confession upon his listener:

> The calm, deliberate composure, with which he spoke of his late deeds and intentions, – the expression of his fiend-like face, when excited by enthusiasm, – still bearing the stains of the blood of helpless innocence about him, clothed with rags and covered with chains, yet daring to raise his manacled hands to heaven, with a spirit soaring above the attributes of man; – I looked on him, – and the blood curdled in my veins.[57]

In this image, the chained, bloodstained hands and fiend-like face change the kneeling, manacled slave from victim to monster. Such are the racist nightmares from which *Dred* is built. The "theological terror," a terror of damnation and horror of blackness, which James Baldwin saw in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, stalks the white community in the form of Dred's unrealized apocalyptic potential.[58]

While clearly troubled by her fear of divine retribution, Stowe pulls back in horror from a vision of black retributive justice and insurgency. In the end, both her courage and imagination fail in the face of the latter possibility. For all his charisma, intelligence, strength, and righteousness, Stove cannot fully recognize the Promethian potential of her black hero, nor can she bring herself to unchain him.

[57] Thomas C. Gray, *The Confessions of Nat Turner, Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Va.* (Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing Co., 1969), 11. The *Confessions* were first published in Baltimore in 1831.

[58] James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," *Partisan Review*, **16** (1949), 581.

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