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Christina
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Who's Afraid of Virginia's Nat Turner?
Mesmerism, Stowe, and the Terror of Things

By turning to a consideration of slave revolt in her 1856 novel *Dred*, Harriet Beecher Stowe appears to be reworking elements of her abolitionist strategy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Robert Levine (2000, xv–xvii) notes how Stowe responds to one strain of criticism among black readers of her classic work and its eponymous hero when she places the character named Dred in the insurrectionary tradition of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner.¹ I agree with Levine, but would add that this shift also involves Stowe's experiment with mesmerism as both topic and method, especially as it relates to the odd interaction of people and things throughout the novel. By 1856, Stowe sees her nation sleepwalking into dangerous territory concerning slavery, and she attempts to disrupt the trance through a clever adaptation of practices taken from an emergent trauma theory in the circum-Atlantic fold, one developing among slaves and focused on perpetrators rather than victims of New World slavery. To confront the fears of perpetrators, these practices rehearsed “newly created states” long before Freud ([1937] 1964, 203) made such rehearsals the ambition of psychoanalysis. Moreover, they developed out of the political upheaval at the end of the eighteenth century and involved forces presaged by Franz Mesmer's decision to make “crisis” his homeopathic engine for cure ([1799] 1980, 102–9). Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism, or the fluid circulating organic and inorganic mass, merged material and psychological concerns that found their ironic expression in issues surrounding the master-slave relationship and natural-rights theory.

Levine gives the most thorough reading of Stowe's *Dred*, elaborating his understanding of her relationship with black abolitionists like

Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown. Because the character based on Turner gathers insurgents around him in the Dismal Swamp, Levine (2000, xxiii) finds in *Dred* a “black counternarrative that . . . challenges and revises the racial politics of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” Various incidents across the color line thread the novel: among the most prominent are the violence wrought when siblings Harry, Tom, and Nina are divided by the condition of their mothers; an evangelical campsite meeting where Dred mesmerically ministers to the crowd; the character Cora, modeled on Margaret Garner, who kills her children as pro-slavery forces align against her; and the white Southerner Edward Clayton who attempts to redress the injuries inflicted on a devout slave named Milly, only to discover that the law cannot support his paternalistic understanding of slavery.

Given the Clayton plotline, legal aspects of *Dred* have received special interest. Laura Korobkin (2007) emphasizes Stowe’s skillful fictional adaptation of the notorious North Carolina Supreme Court decision in *State v. Mann* (13 N.C. 263 (1829)). In so doing, Korobkin enriches Gregg Crane’s earlier reading of the same decision in *Dred* (1996). As in the Clayton trial, the issue central to *State v. Mann* was whether a slave injured by a white man could seek legal recourse; when Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin answered in the negative, abolitionists quickly saw the efficacy of rehearsing the case before the court of public opinion. Like Crane, Korobkin (2007, 380) calls the courtroom scene—in which Judge Clayton hands down a negative decision against his son—a “critical turning point” in *Dred*; it sets in motion Edward Clayton’s eventual withdrawal from both the country and slavery as an institution. More recently, Caleb Smith (2013, 152) also calls Judge Clayton’s decision the “crisis event” of the novel.

But as Levine points out, the story line following Edward Clayton, his fiancée Nina Gordon, and the various slaves in her household forms only part of the narrative. After all, Dred, the character representing the insurrectionary tradition of Turner, presides over the Dismal Swamp, a world initially hidden from the reader but well known to the slaves in the novel. For Levine, Stowe’s belated revelation of Dred’s presence reveals her sensitivity to gathering networks of resistance among slaves (including fugitives like Douglass) and her own struggle to legitimize the claims on which they were based (see Robinson [1983] 2000, xxxii).

In showing Stowe’s uptake of this important legal case, Smith, Crane, and Korobkin all support the general trend of Levine’s reading.

Yet like Crane, Smith discovers a regulatory function in her portrayal of slave insurrection. According to both Smith and Crane, Stowe stimulates the “poetics of justice” summoned through Dred’s prophetic curses while maintaining his function as a limit case, containing the “danger” of his “incendiary” address in the process (Smith 2013, 155). Smith gives us an excellent reading of the Turner confession written by Thomas Gray and its role in the “period’s media infrastructure” (175), but he does not analyze Stowe’s fictional adaptation of the same.² Mary Kemp Davis, who does, also laments that Stowe “kills all hope of slave revolt” by allowing Dred to be murdered before one can possibly occur (1999, 138). Yet Davis hesitates to declare that Stowe “was incapable of endorsing the bloody, eschatological content of Turner’s and Dred’s visions” (139), for she finds in Stowe’s biblical adaptation of Gray’s document and her sly use of David Walker’s 1829 *Appeal* “an ingenious amalgam of literary ventriloquism and parodic discourse” (118).

Davis (1999, 139) effectively unites these critical trends when she observes that Stowe was “divided against herself in writing this text.”³ I concur with Davis that Stowe often struggles against an earlier understanding of her own world as she writes, though I hope in this essay to enlarge our sense of what is at stake in that struggle. Among other things, it involves Stowe’s effort to analyze fears associated with abolition, including pervasive fears of slave insurrection. And she does so through another complicated discourse: that of mesmerism as filtered through its residual associations with the Haitian Revolution.

Mesmerism experienced a wide popularity in the United States in the late 1830s, and critics have long noted how many of our most famous writers developed themes derived from the science, sometimes with a relish sufficient to create controversy. Russ Castronovo (2000, 2001) has shown how the color line often inflected the value of the mesmeric attributes being summoned in these works, especially those merging with other trends in the mind-cure tradition of the nineteenth century.⁴ It is surprising then that Stowe’s decision to imbue the titular character of *Dred* with mesmeric powers has received considerably less attention. This is remarkable since the electric sympathies that Stowe bestows on Dred align him with the second sight that W. E. B. DuBois will later make famous in his *Souls of Black Folk* ([1903] 2007, 3). Thus in the chapter introducing Dred, we learn that the

African race are said by mesmerists to possess, in the fullest degree, that peculiar temperament which fits them for the evolution of mesmeric phenomena; and hence the existence among them, to this day, of men and women who are supposed to have peculiar magical powers. The grandfather of Dred . . . had been one of these reputed African sorcerers; and he had early discovered in the boy this peculiar species of temperament. . . . That mysterious and singular gift, whatever it may be, which Highland seers denominate second sight, is a very common tradition among the negroes; and there are not wanting thousands of reputed instances among them to confirm belief in it (Stowe [1856] 2000, 274).

Stowe's romantic racialism, much commented on by her readers, no doubt compels her to embellish the association between so-called African attributes and the mesmeric trances engaging the popular imagination of her day. But there is a larger story about an emergent trauma theory that Stowe begins to chart when she links mesmerism with slave revolt. Stowe learned from Douglass in particular how slaves attended to emotional registers of their master's behavior. Douglass carried this knowledge into his abolitionist practice, and Stowe quickly uses his work as a resource in her own effort to address the escalating violence around her. In this essay I hope to make visible the tension between the sentimental strategy Stowe famously inscribed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (see Berlant 1998) and her new exploration in *Dred* of the mesmeric crisis as it was taken up by thinkers like Douglass. If the first depends on familiar but discrete bonds of sympathy between her reader and slaves like Uncle Tom, the second involves recognition of uncontained levels of terror compulsively linking emancipation with slave insurrection. The title *Dred* deliberately puns on that terror, working to undo what Brian Massumi (2010) has called its "preemptive logic."

Terror is a word that has been associated with Stowe before, most famously in James Baldwin's reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where he accuses Stowe of inciting a "theological terror" with her depiction of the "hot self-righteous" Christianity to which Tom is sacrificed ([1955] 1994, 498). Baldwin compares this terror to the intensities later shaping lynch mobs and the larger failure of Reconstruction that still contaminated experience in the twentieth century. This argument has the authority of history on its side. But attributing the wellspring of that

violence to the “fear” (498) guiding Stowe’s method in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* overlooks her shifting focus in *Dred*, whose title cleverly alludes to the affect in question. There the affective intensity, even more than the character Dred, becomes the vehicle through which Stowe puts her reader *en rapport* with the contagious terror that abolition could actually generate. She does this by producing a disparate set of crises throughout the novel in order to defuse them. In the process, Stowe takes special pleasure in investing the transitional word *thing* with electric properties throughout the text. The proliferation of the word *thing* as an agent of crisis tells us something of the distance Stowe and her readers could sometimes travel, exposing a latency of thought that promised new social meaning and practice, for it channels by redirecting the same terror that Baldwin sought to expose.

Such an approach involves a consideration of affect far apart from the dyadic structure of moral sentiment in which the object of sympathy was an exoticized and distanced version of oneself. No longer content merely to rally her readers into a sentimental identification with the passive, loving slave, Stowe now enters dangerous territory where the “Man That Was a Thing” becomes radically independent. Like many characters in *Dred*, those who distort the meaning of such independence by calling it revenge actually remain within the dyadic structure of moral sentiment through the process of projection. In her effort to move beyond the closed-circuit fantasies of sympathy and revenge, Stowe deploys the fluid property of things in the crisis state. In doing this she unsettles the tidy subject-object relation on which fear of revenge and expressions of sympathy equally depend.

Most histories of psychoanalysis take us back to the dynamic associated with the mesmeric crisis or the mimetic condition channeled through currents Mesmer referred to as *animal magnetism*. In his quest for a “newly created state” Freud (1964, 203) often sought a redistribution of psychic interest (*Besetzung*) in a manner first explored by Mesmer. By 1843, one aspect of this method was coined *hypnosis* in an effort to control its unruly social implications (Zwarg, 2010, 15–18). But reducing the crisis state to the hypnotic relation also narrows the rich dynamic between people and things opened through Mesmer’s enlightenment approach, and that dynamic in particular meshes with the emergent trauma theory being improvised by men and women caught in the machinery of New World slavery. Whereas the psychoanalytic session was designed to make one accountable for the “perceptions of

the finite ego," the mesmeric encounter put one in touch with "transpersonal domains" (Fuller 1982, 57). Notably, this transpersonal dynamic reflected a widening focus on the notion of circulation, whether formulated as the flow of a planetary action like gravity, the rapid charges informing theories of electricity, or the simple redistribution of people and goods in the extensive circulation made visible by New World slavery. The crisis state theorized by Mesmer goes beyond the medical understanding of crisis as a crossroads where a good or bad condition might result. For Mesmer, the crisis state was homeopathic, that is, a deliberate reproduction of the charges needing rebalancing. The currents flowing through bodies and things alike harmonized such charges.

If Mesmer's idea of animal magnetism invited scorn among the established scientific community, his attention to currents connecting live and inert bodies also fostered new inquiry into obscure channels of mediation and transmission. Moreover, as James McClellan (1992, 175–80) has shown, mesmerism became implicated in the Atlantic trade of people and things when it surfaced in the French colony of St. Domingue in 1784. A student of Mesmer, Antoine-Hyacinthe Puy-ségur took a mesmeric tub aboard ship for use in his Atlantic crossing; upon arrival, he installed many in the poorhouse of Cap François. More significantly, when slaves demanded tubs for themselves, the mesmeric dynamic was perceived to have spread among the slave community and out to the Maroons. While some slaveowners hoped to exploit the therapeutic properties of Mesmer's cure to enhance their sale value, a richer part of Mesmer's influence reached into a population caught up in the aura of revolution with which his work got oddly enmeshed on a global scale.

According to Henry Ellenberger (1970, 73), Mesmer himself made the association between mesmerism and radical abolition when he boasted that his science enabled the Haitian revolution.⁵ But we do not have to endorse Mesmer's inflated view to consider the thread making such connections possible, as Douglass does when he attributes mesmeric powers to Madison Washington in his 1853 novella about slave revolt. Given its complex association with the Haitian revolution, the therapeutic qualities of Mesmer's crisis state found resonance among slaves like Douglass, who from an early age studied the fearful responses of slaveowners. Over time, Douglass recognized that one of

the “*things*[s] to be abolished” ([1855] 2005, 87) was the dread triggered by the idea of black emancipation among Northerners and Southerners alike. The work of defusing the association between abolition and the violence of slave insurrection was not easy and required careful rehearsals (or in Mesmer’s terms, the generation of a second mimetic crisis) in order to expose the false source of those fears, which may well explain the endless repetitions we find in Douglass’s lectures and narratives. Stowe’s decision to make Dred a mesmeric figure at first appears a stylish reflection of popular culture and no doubt it was. Yet at a deeper level, it also signals her developing understanding of the association between mesmeric practice, emancipation, and slave resistance that she was learning from Douglass. As I hope to show, Stowe’s strategic deployment of the word *thing* throughout the novel recalls her earlier thinking about the status of slaves like Uncle Tom, but it also serves to enact the therapeutic function of the crisis state by rehearsing the rapid association between emancipation and slave revolt. For paramount among the fears regarding abolition and emancipation was the idea that “things” could become radically independent as people only to enact revenge. As things come alive throughout the pages of *Dred*, the novel rehearses such fears in an effort to address them as phantoms of affect rather than fact.

“The Political Ontology of Threat”

Both of Stowe’s abolitionist novels mix the discourses of law, church policy, and antislavery, as many have noted. The contradictions they produce across her narratives provide some purchase on the popularity of her work, for they can expose structures of feeling not yet fully formulated or policed. Later confounded by Stowe’s success as a novelist, Henry James ([1888] 1953, 595) unwittingly gave an apt gloss to her method when he advised writers to become “people on whom nothing is lost.” Many things were lost on Stowe, of course, but her powers of retention, honed by her interest in transmissions of affect that were also part of emergent counterpublics, served her abolitionist projects well. Key attributes of the mesmeric history that Stowe took from Douglass provide a case in point: the unique merger of people and things on which the crisis state depended worked to destabilize the privatized understanding of sympathy informing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Dred does not depict a slave rebellion for Stowe's reader. Nor, for that matter, does it fully develop the specter of one. Dred's speech summoning insurrectionary fervor contains apocalyptic tones, yet he heeds the advice of Christians like Milly telling him to wait. Even so, the cost of such temperance is exposed when a private rather than collective attempt at retaliation for the murder of another slave, Hark, results in Dred's death. Stowe's decision to rein in what Robert Levine (2000, xx) calls the "black rage" of Dred involves many things, including no doubt a private dread concerning insurrection that she was working through. Yet borrowing from Douglass as she does allows us to see how the accusation of rage reflects "the hermeneutic of danger" (Ferguson 2011, 23) that is also part of his world. Rage such as that expressed by Dred could be more than justified, as Douglass knew well, yet the quick and universal attribution of rage to the slave population also enabled behavior among Southerners and Northerners as killing as the structures of slavery itself.

No one has followed the ironic reversals of such responses more provocatively than Brian Massumi, who argues that there is in fact a "political ontology of threat" (2010). By its very nature, threat involves a temporal dimension. That is, the anticipatory quality of threat makes danger come "from the future. It is what might come next. Its eventual location and ultimate extent are undefined. Its nature is open-ended. It is not just that it is not; it is not in a way that is never over" (53). As a result, the affective register opens onto an endless series of new feelings of danger; and as these become detached from any factual base, they accumulate sufficient energy for violent preemptive action. Thus, for example, the specter of another Haitian revolution constantly renewed itself as a threat in the minds of many in the slaveholding United States. More importantly, however, that event generated "a surplus-remainder of threat potential" contaminating "new objects, persons, and contexts" (60). In effect, the threat of insurrection became sufficiently "ambient" to make the resort to "preemptive power" both a common and "environmental power" (62).

Lauren Berlant (2011, 15) has recently noted how emphasis on the structural elements of traumatic events can bypass a range of "affective atmospheres" through which people negotiated their lives. Certainly, such atmospheres permeated antebellum America, particularly the intensities felt among the people defending slavery against a

strengthening abolitionist movement. Significantly, the threat felt on both sides of the master-slave relationship took a different course according to the uneven power dynamic. Free to elaborate unchecked, those in control more readily converted their psychic dread into violent preemptive action. Actors like Douglass could not afford to ignore such responses, for they formed an important measure of the environmental power with which he hourly contended. No one made more apparent than Douglass how the material realities of slavery held powerful consequences for the psychology of those in power. Yet we have not always listened to his take on the problems associated with this accumulating surplus of threat among them. Stowe, I would argue, begins to listen to that other register, and *Dred* is the result.

In this sense, the Clayton trial provides one of many “crisis event[s]” in the novel (Smith 2013, 152), for the dread of vengeance at the heart of Judge Clayton’s legal decision appears to match the potential for slave violence simmering in *Dred*’s secret world. Yet Stowe is at pains to show how the ambient threat the judge imagines is not the equivalent of the latter but more likely its catalyst. Judge Clayton makes clear that slavery can only exist when slaves are stripped of their “will” and reduced to their legal status as things: “THE POWER OF THE MASTER MUST BE ABSOLUTE, TO RENDER THE SUBMISSION OF THE SLAVE PERFECT” (Stowe 2000, 353). Needless to say, such an argument concedes the inherent violence of the institution of slavery. But more importantly, Judge Clayton’s logic is preemptive and builds upon the intensities of affect presumed to be “*inherent in the relation*” of slavery:

“No man can anticipate the many and aggravated provocations of the master which the slave would be constantly stimulated by his own passions, or the instigation of others, to give; or the consequent wrath of the master, prompting him to bloody vengeance upon the turbulent traitor; a vengeance *generally practiced with impunity, by reason of its privacy.*” (354)

Identifying the perpetrator of vengeance assumes an abyssal form here: a surplus of fear breaks down the familiar boundaries of subject and object to expose the porous border of person and thing at the heart of slavery itself. Indeed, things often live on that porous border, as Bill Brown (2001) has shown: neither object nor subject, things can slip between these states, triggering uncanny realizations. If things

32 American Literature

usually turn back into objects under the control of our gaze, our relation to objects is sometimes playfully destabilized when a residual thingness reasserts itself. Unless, of course, those things are slaves.

The long shadow of Roman law informs the legal case in Stowe's novel in which *dominium*, or property, was recognized as "a relation between a person and a thing, characterized by absolute power of that person over that thing" (Graeber 2011, 198). Orlando Patterson (1982, 31) views this notion of property as deriving from slavery, for the idea of having "a relation between" people and things makes more sense when people were defined as "things," as they were in Roman law. Following Patterson, David Graeber (2011, 205) argues that this definition contaminated the idea of freedom when it became part of natural-rights theory. That is, freedom came to be understood "essentially as the right to do what one likes with one's own property. In fact, not only does it make property a right, it treats rights themselves as a form of property." This meant that freedom itself became a property, with the auxiliary contradiction that "freedom *could* be sold" (206):

To say that we own ourselves is, oddly enough, to cast ourselves as both master and slave simultaneously. "We" are both owners (exerting absolute power over our property), and yet somehow, at the same time, the things being owned (being object of absolute power). . . . Just as lawyers have spent a thousand years trying to make sense of Roman property concepts, so have philosophers spent centuries trying to understand how it could be possible for us to have a relation of domination over ourselves (207).

Fear of slaves by definition was a fear of *things*, which is to say a fear unwittingly exposing a lack of control over objects under possession, including one's dominion over oneself. Such contradictions enveloping the status of slaves perpetuated a sense of crisis where the future was uncertain, generating proactive violence. To counter this environmental power, people (or things) like Douglass began to rehearse a different future, whereby that pervasive sense of crisis was recast altogether.

Of course, showing the psychic structures fostering fear is not always enough to transform the sense of terror pervading abolitionist rallies. As Freud ([1927] 1961, 165) later notes, "resolution and correction of the delusional ideas" are less likely to cure "paranoic attacks" than a withdrawal of the affective charge that had been lent to those ideas in the first place. Such withdrawal entailed redundant rehears-

als, whether through the mimetic channels of transference or the subtle revaluing of crisis repeatedly at work in a Douglass performance. However experimental in its uptake of the mesmeric crisis, Stowe's focus on the shifting value of things can be seen as her effort to rebalance the psychic economy of such affective attachments. If the ambient sense of threat is conceived as a crisis, Stowe reproduces the conditions of that crisis through the shifting valence of things in an effort to defuse dangerous responses in advance.

With uneven success, Stowe attempts in *Dred* to redirect a response to emancipation that came with the legacy of Haiti and the tradition of Denmark Vesey and especially Nat Turner. She does so by stepping beyond her resort to personal feeling, with its familiar dyadic structure, and taking up the collective and electric properties of the crisis state where sentimental distance is sometimes collapsed in uncontained transmissions of terror. Such relays, for example, lie at the heart of the "vigilance association" formed by Tom Gordon (Stowe 2000, 528), the plantation owner who organizes against the abolitionist sentiments of another slaveowner, Edward Clayton. As "a conductor introduced into an electric atmosphere will draw to itself the fluid, so [Tom] became an organizing point for the prevailing dissatisfaction" (527). Stowe could easily invite the reader to sympathize with a sentimental "object" like Uncle Tom. But her ambitious project in *Dred* proved more challenging: it was impossible to engage the dread of abolition, whose project was to promote things to the status of men, without stimulating residual uncertainties about things coming alive that were beyond her own experience and control.

To be clear, both Stowe and Douglass experienced a deep ambivalence concerning violence as a strategy for abolition, which means violence never completely lost its authority in their thinking. Yet Stowe's imagined horizon concerning these matters differs from the horizon Douglass often encountered directly when the unbearable excesses of slave power manifested themselves. For Stowe, violence taken up as an abolitionist strategy almost always assumed an eschatological dimension and quickly folded back into the narrative of a Wrathful God. Ironically, this way of thinking stimulated a form of sympathetic response that served to increase rather than lessen private feelings of dread. Conversely, for Douglass, the call to arms with which he constantly struggled, both internally and in debate with other abolitionists, assumed a more sophisticated form, one especially attentive to

environments of support. Such was especially the case when his ongoing discussions with John Brown pushed him to frame a tactic of violence more closely resembling what DuBois would later call a general strike than a full-throttle slave rebellion.

The Crisis of Things

Greeley abolitionists early teased the relationship between abolition and mesmerism by arguing that the nation needed to be “abolitionized.”⁶ Without directly participating in the popular practice as white Northerners were picking it up, Douglass quickly saw the relationship between the abolitionist lecture scene and the transforming crisis state so central to Mesmer’s séance. As Ann Taves (1999, 101–17) points out, many aspects of the mesmeric encounter resembled the conversion experiences of evangelical practices, particularly among Methodists, and may even have contributed to the religion “made together” by whites and blacks in the South. Douglass, a Methodist himself, understood the potential in those connections as we see in “My Religious Nature Awakened,” a chapter from *My Bondage and My Freedom* ([1855] 2005, 129–35). Here Douglass subtly weaves together his youthful embrace of Methodism with his simultaneous awakening to the power of abolition. Significantly, he does so by noting a parallel in the emotional responses slaveowners exhibited concerning abolition, Nat Turner’s 1831 rebellion, and the religious gatherings Douglass attended at the same time. Fear of slave insurrection in particular had a contagious quality, in which an actual event could later proliferate a sense of ambient menace and the desire for preemptive action. Douglass (2005, 130) subtly aligns the lingering “fear” and “rage” stimulated by the Turner rebellion with the “alarm and terror” associated with abolitionism and certain aspects of religious experience. All three resulted in “avers (ion)” and “threat(s)” from the master class (133), which Stowe, for her part, begins to channel in *Dred*.

Once on the lecture circuit, Douglass repeatedly emphasized how New World slavery valued an entire population as things, lending irony to his quest for the “thing to be abolished” (2005, 130). And when he finally decides in 1855 to include a brief mention of Nat Turner’s rebellion in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass pays close attention to the intensities generated by Turner, precisely because while the insurrection “had been quelled . . . the alarm and terror had not subsided”

(130). When Douglass introduces Turner, he does so carefully, knowing well that the mere mention of Turner could still produce heightened affective responses. By contrast, when Stowe introduces Turner into her novel *Dred*, she has license to elaborate on the topic as a white woman. While Stowe carefully enfoldes that discussion into a domestic love plot, she also broaches intensities generated by Nat Turner, but only after reading *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in which Douglass introduces Turner and his own religious awakening in the same chapter.

Closely studying the fearful responses of slavery's perpetrators was a necessary component of the tool kit through which Douglass and others negotiated their worlds. Thus Mr. Auld's extreme reaction to the reading lessons his wife gives Douglass as a child provides an early and recurring scene throughout his narratives. Once free and on the lecture circuit, Douglass discovers that fear of slave revenge was hardly restricted to Southerners, and in the "Editorial Correspondence" of the March 9, 1849, *North Star*, he sets about theorizing this "pro-slavery demon." In so doing, Douglass begins to describe the scene of an abolitionist lecture as a collective therapeutic encounter, going so far as to call resisting and boisterous audience members "patients" and the black abolitionist "operative" or lecturer "the doctor." This sensitivity later allows Douglass (2005, 155) to show how the men breaking up his Sunday School classes hastily accused him of being "another Nat Turner" simply because he was teaching slaves to read. In *Dred*, Stowe (2000, 313) dramatizes the significance of this inflated reaction when she has one of her characters explain how the mere image of a spelling book in the hands of a slave could trigger as much "alarm" as if the slave had been holding a rifle. As she shows, these responses could be contagious and produce violent preemptive policies among whites. Such affective responses acted like the money form of slave power, accumulating a surplus of violent potential.

Karl Marx later picks up on these associations when in an October 11, 1861, *New-York Daily Tribune* article he refers to Stowe's public letter to Lord Shaftesbury pleading the Northern cause. Assuming the mocking tone he often reserved for the *Economist*, Marx ([1861] 1972, 53) castigates "organs of the London Press" for affecting in their response to Stowe "an utter horror of Slavery" while sustaining "ill-concealed sympathies with the South." Discovering numerous and repetitive contradictions threading their argument, Marx quotes defensive passages that match those attributed to Southerners in *Dred*:

“In the very same numbers in which these papers tell us that they cannot sympathize with the North because its war is no Abolitionist war, we are informed that ‘the desperate expedient of proclaiming Negro emancipation and summoning the slaves to a general insurrection,’ is a thing ‘the mere conception of which is repulsive and dreadful’” (56).

The “thing” most “repulsive and dreadful” to Southern sympathizers in England is the association of “Negro emancipation” with slave insurrection. As both Stowe and Marx understood, the too-rapid alignment of abolition with slave revolt could create a false equivalence. In *Dred*, Stowe early emphasizes this common response to abolition when Clayton shares with his friend Frank Russel the negative reaction fellow Southerners were having to his philosophical turn against slavery. In doing so, Russel anxiously acknowledges the danger Clayton is in, confessing as well to his own simmering fear of “insurrection,” exclaiming, “That’s the awful word, Clayton! *That* lies at the bottom of a good many things in our state, more than we choose to let on” (Stowe 2000, 469).

Strategic recognition of that alarm could take two forms: harnessing and rechanneling it into newly created states through abolitionist lectures and literature, as Douglass and Stowe attempted, or allowing it to go viral in an outright rebellion in the tradition of Haiti and later Turner. Douglass, like Stowe, preferred to labor through the former, though both understood how the simmering power of their mesmeric characters (Dred and Madison Washington) drew intensity from the ongoing atrocities of slavery itself. The mesmeric association with the Haitian revolution carried a complex double valence concerning violence: it was both a symptom of slavery and a radical strategy to destroy the institution altogether. Douglass knew well that those in power would not concede the pervasive violence of slavery. Yet he also believed he could offer others less directly associated with the institution of slavery a deeper insight into the violence to which they nevertheless contributed. Stowe picked up on his effort to delineate aspects of abolition that might allow both perpetrators and victims to shift away from cycles of revenge and preemptive violence.

The growing strength of the abolitionist movement after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law gave Douglass some confidence in his reformist approach, yet the volatile events of the decade continually challenged his resolve, especially when his ambition to imagine an appropriately destructive yet nonviolent end to slavery became ever more elusive. By 1856, he concedes that the “constant aggression”

needed “to keep the slave in the slave relation” would eventually be met with equal force ([1856] 1985, 127). In 1857, his tone turns particularly acute when he lectures on the Dred Scott Case and observes: “The world is full of violence and fraud, and it would be strange if the slave, the constant victim of both fraud and violence, should escape the contagion. He, too, may learn to fight the devil with fire, and for one, I am in no frame of mind to pray that this may be long deferred” ([1857] 1985a, 170). Douglass attempts even here to qualify violence as a “contagion” brought on by the institution of slavery itself. He takes some care, moreover, to frame slave insurrection as one tool in the arsenal of abolition that can lead to peaceful resolution, as he does three months later in a famous speech in Canandaigua, New York ([1857] 1985b), honoring the anniversary of Emancipation in the British West Indies. In 1856, J. M’Cune Smith had argued that such celebrations of the events in the British West Indies gave too much agency to whites, offering that blacks should instead celebrate Vesey and Turner (see Douglass 1985b, 200n29). Douglass addresses his comments directly to Smith in his Canandaigua lecture, whose audience was largely black, by noting that the West Indian slaves too were “rebellious slaves” (1985b, 207), crediting them along with the British for their own emancipation. No doubt prodded by Smith, Douglass briefly mentions other important slave rebellions as well, including Turner’s, yet he does so by observing that such were always part of a larger abolitionist ambition: emancipation. That is, Douglass continues to sustain the position that emancipation from slavery was the goal of radical abolition, not vengeance. Douglass cuts a very fine hair in so doing, however: for those defending slavery always presumed to know—not always incorrectly, though usually in projected form—what the “contagion” of their “fraud and violence” might entail.

The Confessions of Nat Turner: Things Fall Apart

Stowe uses the word *thing* promiscuously throughout *Dred*, blending the legal discourse of slavery with her growing recognition that the word itself could generate mock dialectics of latent and belated experience. Thus Nina Gordon, the young slaveowner whose love story we follow, defensively observes that “people think it’s a dreadful thing to be an abolitionist” just before she confesses to her own growing hatred of the institution of slavery (Stowe 2000, 152). Even then, when the confession about slavery leads Nina to ask her lover, Edward Clayton,

“Why don’t we blow it up, right off?” (152), her question rehearses as it resolves the crisis of value she is working through. To be an abolitionist does not demand the explosive mode Nina initially and comically adopts; it does demand a withdrawal from the dread to which it was attached. For the same reason that Douglass emphasized the end of abolition (emancipation) and not its means, so too did the circuits of dread flattening differences between Turner and Douglass need to be brought into view and recontextualized. Through its clever use of things in crisis, Stowe’s novel can be said to invest in that process of recontextualization.

Thus while much of Stowe’s rhetorical energy goes into a familiar sentimental presentation of the process whereby the institution of slavery has converted people into things, the interest of her novel resides in abolition’s pressure to transform things into people and the false sense of crisis that ensues from it. Not so much denigrated (or even ignored), human attachment to things becomes absorbed here as transforming work, what Winnicott might call the play vital to the location of culture itself. Nina, who as a slaveholder functions in her early sallies as a thoughtless consumer of things, also represents a stay against those who might trivialize the potential of her attachment to things. As a personification of use value, Nina also brings things to life, including “everything that is bright, everything that is lively, and everything that is pretty” (Stowe 2000, 46). Along with the specter of abolition as a thing to be dreaded, things are consistently confused in Nina’s world: love letters become bills, suitors become librettos, and the account of her shifting sense of things is part of the work and play of the text.

Of course, the narrator and nearly every character in *Dred* use the word *thing* frequently and some very striking things get said as a result. The openness of the word often challenges the idea that the future must be imagined through what Massumi (2010, 63) refers to as the “metaphysics of *feeling*” associated with emancipation. In the dynamic of fear that we have been following, a sense of ambient threat pervades the understanding of abolition. This “affective fact” leads to preemptive violence since, once felt, a threat sustains itself endlessly “in the nonlinear time of its own causing” (54) with little regard to existing conditions. *Dred* contains a series of confessions expressing the same uncontained sense of threat, from Russel’s obsession with insurrection to Judge Clayton’s legal decision against the abused slave Milly, in which he confesses the need for preemptive violence against all slaves.

These confessions underline the fear Stowe inscribes in her title. Their power draws, moreover, from Stowe's careful use of the famous *Confessions of Nat Turner* recorded by Thomas Gray. Copyrighted and published by Gray shortly after Turner's execution, this confession constitutes the classic response to Turner. People have read the document in many ways, but the tendency among whites to assume the truth of Gray's report quickly became integral to the early readings especially. Today historians view the document differently, noting the tension between Gray's control and Turner's subtle influence over his thinking.⁷ In her appendix, Stowe begins with the signatures attached to the document, as if to wink at their authority, even as she too wishes to endorse aspects of Gray's report.

Throughout *Dred*, the threat generated by men like Turner is mobilized by Stowe to show how things might be otherwise. Rather strikingly, the word *thing* appears at least twelve times in the early pages of Gray's document, perhaps reflecting the cognitive dissonance he experiences when he takes up his task.⁸ As a result, a different understanding of Turner appears to hover in the familiar if benign properties to which the word *thing* seems to refer. We discover that Turner "reflect[s] on many things," reading books "whenever the opportunity occurred" (Greenberg 1996, 45). In this sense, the early section of Turner's confession matches the curiosity and ingenuity we find throughout the Douglass narratives, a point not lost on Stowe, who imagines a less violent future for insurrectionists like Dred had their talents been given a chance to flourish as Douglass's did upon his escape from slavery.

Thus we learn, too, that Turner's religious awakening takes him in a different direction from Douglass. According to Gray, Turner becomes particularly fascinated with one passage from the Bible: "Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and all things shall be added unto you" (Greenberg 1996, 45).⁹ Turner notes, however, that he became confused about those things, for after his first attempt to run away, he returned to the plantation to the dismay of his fellow slaves. According to Gray's account, Turner's inspiration in the Dismal Swamp (the location Stowe also uses for Dred's inspiration) had been a warning that he had been directed too much "to the things of this world" (46). Returning to slavery under these conditions, Turner begins his quest for "a certainty of the meaning" (47). And as the violence begins, the word *thing* disappears. Of course, by accusing Turner of "endeavoring" in his thinking to "grapple with things beyond its reach" (41), Gray characterizes his own state of

mind. Faltering in his understanding of the raid, Gray drops the word *thing* in deference to the certainty he finds when enumerating the murders Turner and his men commit together.

Stowe attaches sections of Gray's document to her appendix, though she does not assume that Gray's document can speak for itself. In fact, Stowe reverses the familiar dynamic of medium to voicing that Gray may have depended on. If Gray assumed he was playing the medium through which Turner could speak, Stowe turns this assumption around to make Turner the medium through which the voice of Gray, among others, might be heard and assessed. Indeed, Dred never stages a full revolt in the manner of Turner: as a medium, Dred is less important as a character than for the energy he channels through people around him. Thus he becomes the general model for rehearsing, then decoding, the sense of crisis concerning abolition pervading the pages of *Dred*. Perhaps the most vivid example of this type of mediation occurs in the courtroom scene when Clayton's father gives the verdict on Milly's case. Judge Clayton, we recall, refused to grant slaves recourse to legal action against abusive owners. The case refers to injuries suffered by Milly, but Clayton watches the slave Harry as they both listen to Judge Clayton and suddenly hears the language of his father's argument differently. "Never had Clayton so forcibly realized the horrors of slavery as when he heard them thus so calmly defined in the presence of one into whose soul the iron had entered" (Stowe 2000, 355). However familiar the bond of sympathy that Stowe sets up between Clayton and Harry, it is the repetition afforded by the relay from Judge to Harry that amplifies the preemptive logic of slavery: "*Dominion is essential to the value of slaves as property, to the security of the master and the public tranquility*" (355). In other words, Clayton—who until then had viewed slavery as a "guardian institution" for the "weaker" race (355)—now recognizes through the sense of crisis his father's verdict transmits how fear and preemptive violence toward things lie at the heart of slavery's legal apparatus.

The Terror of Things Reading

Not surprisingly, the interface of books and things becomes one of the primary concerns of *Dred*. Like Turner and Douglass before her, Stowe explores the critical edge that can emerge from such a relationship, including the strange proliferation of terror that developed around it. Throughout her novel, Stowe highlights and elaborates what Douglass

reports concerning the fears associated with reading in the aftermath of Turner's revolt. After all, the prohibition against teaching slaves to read, and the violent reinforcement of that position, make Clayton move his entire plantation's population to Canada. At the same time, Stowe balances the actions of Dred with those of characters like Harry in an effort to keep distinct the reading habits of men like Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass.

When Nina posits in her own defense that "people are made differently. Some like books, and some like things" (Stowe 2000, 215), Clayton subtly attempts to close the gap between her vibrant sense of things and the dullness of books by noting that history's most influential books were "written by men who attended to *things* more than to books" themselves (215). Good books thus become important as things in themselves and as the attentive focus of things as they are. As Stowe demonstrates through Clayton, however, one's relationship to the significant thingness of books depends on a willingness to "use books aright" and to engage "the labor of thinking" necessary to uncover the significance of one's rapport with them (215, 216).

Indeed, this sense of the labor congealed in books goes to the heart of Stowe's use of things in the novel, for the process by which things might be newly interpreted remains her primary concern. Stowe challenges her reader to consider the limits imposed on Dred in this regard. The ease with which Turner was said to have learned to read remains one of the more extraordinary aspects of Gray's text. Stowe endorses Gray's notion of Turner as a quick study, though in her fictionalization she restricts Dred's reading after he retreats to the Dismal Swamp. In addition to the Bible, Dred has only the "volume of nature" at his command (Stowe 2000, 210). But having "no recurrence of every-day and prosaic ideas to check the current of the enthusiasm thus kindled" (210), Dred acts out, at least in part, what someone like Ralph Waldo Emerson could only imagine in the confines of his study. Moreover, in this last comparison there is the suggestion that a focus on the things of this world would have enabled Dred to seek something rather less certain than the "day of judgment" (499). For that matter, the text endorses the idea that Dred's abolitionist ambitions might have been better honed had he not been so deprived of "the light of philosophy and science" (510).

Stowe continually strives to show the difference between Douglass and Turner in her novel, and on one important occasion she chooses the character of Anne Clayton to illustrate it. A prudent woman, protective

of her brother, Anne harbors little interest in marrying, a preference frustrating to her suitors. When Clayton finally decides he disapproves of slavery and begins to set in motion activities that will gradually allow his slaves to become wage earners on his plantation, Anne, like Douglass, teaches the slave children to read and write. Upset by this turn of events, Anne's neighbor Mr. Bradshaw pays her a visit to discourage the practice, and Stowe shapes the conversation between them to expose the foolishness of Bradshaw's fear. Initially Bradshaw chastises Anne for "teaching niggers, and having reading and writing, and all these things, going on" (Stowe 2000, 312), articulating the slave power complaint that is a common theme of the novel. Bradshaw goes on to explain his position through an analogy drawn from his own reading experience involving a man who fashioned a cork leg that took on a life of its own. Initially confusing to Anne, the analogy used by Mr. Bradshaw to describe the danger he feels concerning slave literacy is worth pausing over since it registers the ambient threat concerning "all these things going on" that Douglass constantly observed in his audience.

Stowe understands that we are in the realm of fantasy here, and the hallucinatory register of Bradshaw's response to Anne's activity is important. The tale emerges as an intrusive memory from Bradshaw's reading, and as such it exposes the false associations he tends to make when threatened by Anne's behavior. Bradshaw oddly confesses to Anne that her school reminds him of the man who whittled his own prosthetic leg "with such wonderful accuracy" that it came to life and walked him to death (Stowe 2000, 312). Comically, Bradshaw cannot stop himself from elaborating his analogy, and so we hear that the leg "ran off" with the man's body (312), dragging with it first the corpse and then the skeleton. This elaboration, if not the story itself, has the quality of folklore, as if stolen from the realm of oppressed people who do not need books to be aware of what Tiff, the lowly slave, calls "dese yer things" (227). At the same time, Bradshaw speaks with a certainty that exposes a perpetual dread: "And it's running with its skeleton to this day, I believe" (312). Bradshaw laughs anxiously as he delivers this line, as it inevitably speaks to the heightened fear underlying the legal prohibitions that he hopes to uphold.

But the analogy remains important for another reason: it brings into play the sense of the body politic that Stowe fabricates for Southern slaveowners even as it returns us to the problematic status of things in their world. Notably, Stowe imagines a challenged political body with a

member missing. In the analogy, the slave functions as a thing replacing another thing, insofar as the amputated limb might be designated as such. In that function, the prosthetic limb assumes the attributes of a phantom limb, or all the sensations of the severed part come alive with a vengeance. An animated sense of violent things saturates the analogy. A cork leg turns aggressively human and a spelling book becomes a rifle, as the unbearable contradiction of things irrupts in a crisis of rebellion.

Gutta-Percha Things

The inner logic of the analogy also builds on a materiality of prosthetic devices, for at this moment in history lifelike limbs were replacing simple pegs such as the one sported by Herman Melville's Ahab. This change occurred in part because of shifts in technological knowledge, particularly vulcanization, whereby a limb might be formed out of a type of rubber product, including at this moment the rather interesting and important substance gutta-percha (see Terry 1907). Although taken from the sap of trees like other rubber products, gutta-percha had the unique quality of being elastic when warm and hard when cool. This malleability enabled it to be refashioned when reheated, giving it a transitional quality, like the word *thing* itself. In 1851, companies shaped it into a variety of commodities including dolls, golf balls, artificial limbs, dental fillings, and coating for telegraph cables being laid on the ocean floor.

And canes. Which can form another type of prosthetic device, however vain. Indeed, Stowe well knew how these popular canes could display the prosthetic effects of capital that New World slavery served to induce in slaveowners. Stowe anticipates that her reader will associate this substance with the Southerner Preston Brooks who, outraged by the famous "Crime against Kansas" speech by Charles Sumner, raised a gutta-percha cane against him on the Senate floor (see Ratner and Teeter 2003). As Levine (2000, xiv) notes, Stowe deliberately adds a scene to *Dred* involving a similar assault on Edward Clayton by Nina's wicked brother Tom.

In fact, Stowe adds not one but two such assaults with Tom Gordon wielding a gutta-percha cane. It is true that the attack on Clayton most resembles the famous attack in Washington since Clayton, like Sumner, is struck when he cannot help himself and remarks on it before he

loses consciousness. But an earlier assault on the slave named Harry is equally important. Significantly, Harry resists in both scenes, the first time presumably with the cane itself, while in his response to the assault on Clayton both a rifle and the specter of Dred are his weapons.

As in the story told by Mr. Bradshaw, Stowe invites her reader to consider the preemptive rage of the slaveowner in both scenes. This gutta-percha cane, first admired for its style and its ingenious design and emblematic of Tom's wealth, this auxiliary prosthetic limb come alive with fury, first gets used upon Harry, who has just spoken against the crime of slavery. Moreover, Harry's speech includes the sexual overtones that so enraged Brooks (Sumner spoke of Senator Butler's embrace of "the harlot, Slavery") for it is only after he identifies himself as Tom's "brother" (Stowe 2000, 388), insinuating in the process the sexual impropriety of their father, that Harry receives a sharp blow from Tom's cane. By creating two assaults with the gutta-percha cane, Stowe shows how abolitionist and slave will necessarily respond according to their status as person or thing. With the second attack on Clayton, moreover, Stowe generates a crisis state through which her reader can analyze the fear being enacted both too early and too late for Clayton to comprehend. Indeed, that Clayton himself tries to calm Harry in the initial scene by suggesting "you don't know what you are saying" (388) perhaps allows Stowe to knock some sense into the character later on when he is attacked by the same man. And this may well be the point: Harry knows by his very existence what the crime of slavery entails, while Clayton, a recent convert to the abolitionist cause, can only understand the effects of slavery belatedly. As Stowe's namesake, Harry shows some of the latent value of her work with this character. Because members of her white audience "do not even know how fair is freedom for [they] were always free," the narrative voice insists that such freedom must be understood through "the views and reasonings of those who have bowed down to the yoke, and felt the iron enter into their souls" (445). But Stowe's failure to give equal imaginative energy to the lives of various slave characters like Harry belies her own movement toward that goal.

The Confessions of Margaret Garner: No Little Thing

Yet to understand both the power and limit of Stowe's text we need to consider another key moment in the novel where an appeal to sentiment disrupts the relay of affect with which Stowe has been working.

This return to sentiment happens when Stowe attempts to explain through her depiction of Harry's sister Cora the radical method of Margaret Garner, the slave woman who killed her own daughter. Perhaps, as Cora says, "It's going a long way round to find out a very little thing" (Stowe 2000, 439), though in her case that little thing is the death of her children by her own hands: a fate preferable to the soul murder of her children in the cruel hands of slavery. The most radical event of Stowe's novel, these killings remain uncensored even as they embody the deepest relay of dread in the text. Stowe bases her character on Margaret Garner, whose story created quite a sensation in 1856 when she killed one of her children as slaveowners threatened to take her family into custody. Stowe dramatizes a courtroom confession that did not likely occur. Like other abolitionists of her day, Stowe uses the Garner case to condemn slavery *tout court*.

As in the Turner confession, Stowe hopes once more to put the slaveholders on trial, though this time she finds it difficult to rehearse the sense of crisis Cora's actions instill in them no doubt because her own affect has to be flattened in the process. Stowe is determined to make Cora both defiant and rational in order to refute the reports of insanity circulated to explain Garner's behavior. But instead of channeling more interactions and sayings to provide the event a full hearing, Stowe takes a costly shortcut. The "very little thing" that Cora addresses remains the question of who killed the children. Because Stowe uses the word *thing*, this moment at first seems quite promising for it challenges her readers to consider again the little things they think they already know. Yet no sooner does Cora call attention to her situation in this enigmatic way than she pronounces, with a chilling certainty, that she is "glad" to be the agent of her children's death (Stowe 2000, 439).

In so doing, Stowe follows the odd path of the word thing in Gray's document. When Turner begins to seek certainty about things, as I noted previously, Gray's account drops the word to provide a detailed account of the killings. The challenge Cora throws out to her audience exposes the limit of Stowe's method: "If any of you mothers, in my place, wouldn't have done the same, you either don't know what slavery is, or you don't love your children as I have loved mine" (2000, 440). Familiar to readers of Stowe, this return to personal feeling cuts against the active rehearsal of fear's contagion used elsewhere throughout the novel. In so doing, the mesmeric relay is abandoned and the crisis foreshortened to the individual. No longer an invitation to collective critique, the appeal to personal feeling draws Stowe and

her readers back to familiar territory, or so it would seem. Stowe has her reader imagine that a mother's love could help one understand "what slavery is." Yet while Stowe's reader might easily find familiar the loss of a child against a parent's will (as when death might take him or her), many would have found the need to destroy a child an alien knowledge.

Strikingly, Stowe's move echoes the sentimental strategy that Gray invokes at the opening of his document where he directly appeals to mothers: "Many a mother as she presses her infant darling to her bosom, will shudder at the recollection of Nat Turner, and his band of ferocious miscreants" (see Greenberg 1996, 42). Like Gray before her, Stowe uses Garner's horrific tale (and Cora's confession) to support her earlier appeal to sympathy without allowing the collective crisis at the center of such a confession to speak. Mirroring Gray's tactic as Stowe unwittingly does here once more exposes the closed-circuit fantasies of sympathy and revenge. Yet as Toni Morrison makes evident in *Beloved* (1987), her fictionalized account of the Garner story, neither sympathy nor horror can adequately account for Cora's act; simply too many things are involved in this type of social crisis, for it represents the ultimate contagion of the preemptive logic of fear, now resonating all the way down to a mother's decision to destroy her own children. As Morrison understands all too well, a tale such as Garner's needs to animate much more completely the preemptive terror threading the social and cultural fabric of Stowe's world as well as the slaveowner's.

Stowe's resort to private feeling and sentiment serves as a retreat from the broader collective considerations operating in the novel when its mesmeric practice is in play. This retreat takes us back to the fantasy of the body politic that Stowe playfully summons through Bradshaw's confession to Anne. Bradshaw's analogy of the prosthetic leg depends on the understanding that slavery is a thing added to the body of the nation, rather than an infected limb of the same. Such an understanding of the nation is one that many abolitionists appear to share. In calling slavery the "harlot" of the Southern states, for example, Sumner creates a similar sense of something added to the political body, another type of auxiliary prosthetic, one filled with sexual promiscuity. The outrage such a metaphor created in Sumner's assailant forms some measure of slavery's horror, as Stowe understood. Yet too often such figures of speech rub off on the people so enslaved. Or fail them, as they do Cora when an appeal to mother love occludes the phantom limb of a body politic and its swollen levels of fear. Cut the gangrene of

slavery from a body so conceived and the material and psychic things responsible for its festering still tingle as structures of feeling.

The preemptive and devastating power of such a response remains an elusive yet enduring obstacle to abolition. Sadly, levels of uncontained dread prove even more challenging after emancipation, as Douglass and DuBois will experience firsthand. Thus, in his biography of John Brown, DuBois ([1909] 2007) deepens the value of crisis by returning to its mesmeric roots; and like Stowe, he mines the archives of Douglass to do so. My point in this essay has been to show how Stowe engages an emergent traumatic theory through her attention to the mesmeric crisis in Douglass. In a recent MLA Presidential Forum, Ariella Azoulay (2014) asked what conditions might allow perpetrators to stop being perpetrators. How does one open a way forward out of nests of privilege too often maintained through violence? This question, drawn from the conference theme of "Vulnerable Times," already held deep significance for abolitionists like Douglass. Deflecting the paranoid style contaminating political and social worlds of a slaveholding democracy required acute psychological insight. Such insight developed from a long tradition of vigilant observation among slaves and informed a diverse and evolving repertoire of resistance. With uneven results, Stowe begins to explore that tradition through the crisis of things in *Dred*.

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Notes

- 1 Also see Rowe (2002) and Duquette (2008).
- 2 Smith (2013) brilliantly considers Turner in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs but overlooks his striking appearance in Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855).
- 3 For another excellent reading of unresolved issues in *Dred*, see DeLombard (2007).
- 4 For an account of mesmerism/spiritualism and dissenting black performances, see Brooks (2006, 123).
- 5 For a case of a rebellious slave using mesmerism, see Pluchon (1987, 66–69).
- 6 For use of the word *abolitionized*, see Fanuzzi (2003, xii–xiii).
- 7 See Greenberg's 1996 introduction. See also Smith (2013, 151–75).
- 8 For this observation, I'm indebted to Sundquist (1993, 27–134).
- 9 Sundquist (1993, 23) attributes this passage to Matthew 6:33 and to Luke 12:31.

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