George Shelby Punches Simon Legree in the Era

Publication Context and Textual Variation

This digital dissertation project, completed in August 2006, includes a publicly accessible electronic edition of the National Era version of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The edition provides two transcriptions of Stowe’s newspaper text and two sets of archive-quality image facsimiles of the weekly issues in which Stowe’s work appeared. The transcription and page images are based on a bound copy of the newspaper version of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which is held in the Clifton Walter Barrett Collection at the University of Virginia.

This poster highlights textual variants and material publication contexts on 18 March 1852, when for the first time two versions of Stowe’s work were public: the Era’s newspaper installment of Stowe’s work and the John P. Jewett edition (advertised in Era as published on that day). The newspaper serial continued through 1 April. On either side of this paragraph are images from facing pages in the Era. Opposite the page on which Simon Legree says “I don’t sell dead niggers,” the Era printed a report on a Greenville, South Carolina slave auction. Like Stowe’s story, the notice also includes a slave’s dead body. The box at bottom left highlights textual variation between the two versions of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Bottom right is an 1852 Jewett edition facsimile.

Antislavery Entertainment:
"a most imprudent thing, George"

“I don’t sell dead niggers,” said Legree, doggedly. “You’re welcome to bury him when and where you like.”

“Boys,” said George, in an authoritative tone, to two or three negroes who were looking at the body, “help me lift him up and carry him to my wagon, and get me a spade.”

One of the negroes ran for a spade, and two others assisted George to carry the body to the wagon.

George neither spoke nor looked at Legree, who did not countermand his orders, but stood watching, with an air of impatience. He calmly followed them to where the wagon stood at the door. George spread his cloak in the wagon, and had the body carefully disposed of in it, moving the seat, so as to give it room.

“Such a fuss for a dead nigger!” said Legree. The word was as a spark to a powder magazine. Prudence was never a cardinal virtue of the Kentucky boy. George turned, and with one indignant blow knocked Legree flat upon his face; and as he stood over him, blazing with wrath and defiance, he would have formed no bad personification of his great namesake, triumphing over the dragon.

Some men, however, are decidedly bettered by being knocked down.

(282-83)

Textual Fluidity and Two Versions of Uncle Tom’s Cabin

Legree Educates George on Southern Law: “how you going to prove it?”

“Boys!” said Legree, snapping his fingers, essentially. “I’ll like to see you doing it. Where you going to get witnesses?—how you going to prove it?—Come, now!”

George saw, at once, the force of this defiance. There was not a white person on the place; and, in all southern courts, the testimony of colored blood is nothing. He felt, at that moment, as if he could have rent the heavens with his heart’s indignant cry for justice; but in vain. “After all, what a fuss, for a dead nigger!” said Legree. The word was a spark to a powder magazine. Prudence was never a cardinal virtue of the Kentucky boy. George turned, and, with one indignant blow, knocked Legree flat upon his face; and, as he stood over him, blazing with wrath and defiance, he would have formed no bad personification of his great namesake triumphing over the dragon.

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Jewett as Material Publication: “Satanic” Legree?