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剑桥美国小说新论·22  
(英文影印版)

New Essays on

# Uncle Tom's Cabin

## 《汤姆叔叔的小屋》新论

Eric J. Sundquist 编



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# 导 读

北京大学英语系教授 陶洁

近年来,美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课,学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此,在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面,学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而,我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则,然后罗列一些例证,不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通,恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下,我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授,并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪 80 年代中期开始陆续出书,至今仍在发行并出版新书,目前已有五十多种,不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力,估计还会继续发行,主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发,深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则,每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说,论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述,主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述,从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐



释。这些文章并非信手拈来,而是专门为这套丛书撰写的,运用的理论都比较新,其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见,编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心,努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》,也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子,跑吧!》;有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》,也有我们还不太了解的他的《漂亮水手》;有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了,武器》,令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两本作品入选,但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家,包括黑人和白人作家(可惜还没有华裔作家的作品),但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》,甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国,在全世界都有一定的影响,后来被贬为“政治宣传”作品,从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨,人们才开始重新评价这部作品,分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造,甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多,例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献,对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战,强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式,又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家,现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枞树之乡》对美国文学的贡献,分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说,这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在 20 世纪 30 年代曾经风靡一时,此后长期销声匿迹,60 年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志 100 部优秀小说中的一部,被认为是上个世纪头 50 年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里,作者通过分析《在密执安北部》,令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此,这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而,作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词,所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础,又对文本进行深入的分析;既把理论阐述得深入浅出,又把作品分析得丝丝入扣,让人不由得信服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权,出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

## Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to



American novels now widely read and studied. Each volume is devoted to a single novel and begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the novel's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

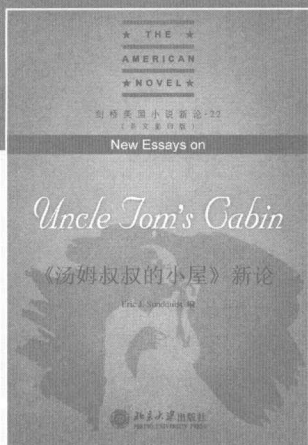
It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of the American novel, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott  
Princeton University

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AMERICAN  
★ NOVEL ★

GENERAL EDITOR  
Emory Elliott

University of California, Riverside



剑桥美国小说新论·22  
(英文影印版)

《汤姆叔叔的小屋》新论

1. 《嘉莉妹妹》新论
2. 《兔子，跑吧！》新论
3. 《向苍天呼吁》新论
4. 《就说是睡着了》新论
5. 《我的安冬尼亚》新论
6. 《漂亮水手》新论
7. 《白鲸》新论
8. 《所罗门之歌》新论
9. 《慧血》新论
10. 《小镇畸人》新论
11. 《白噪音》新论
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18. 《永别了，武器》新论
19. 《只争朝夕》新论
20. 《八月之光》新论
21. 《海明威短篇小说》新论
- \* 22. 《汤姆叔叔的小屋》新论
23. 《他们仰望上苍》新论
24. 《红色英勇勋章》新论
25. 《贵妇画像》新论
26. 《土生子》新论
27. 《去吧，摩西》新论
28. 《美国人》新论
29. 《最后的莫希干人》新论
30. 《豪门春秋》新论
31. 《亨利·亚当斯的教育》新论
32. 《拍卖第49号》新论
33. 《觉醒》新论



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# Contents

Series Editor's Preface  
*page vii*

1  
Introduction  
ERIC J. SUNDQUIST  
*page 1*

2  
Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*  
and the Early Afro-American Novel  
RICHARD YARBOROUGH  
*page 45*

3  
Doing It Herself: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Woman's Role in  
the Slavery Crisis  
JEAN FAGAN YELLIN  
*page 85*

4  
Gothic Imagination and Social Reform: The Haunted  
Houses of Lyman Beecher, Henry Ward Beecher, and  
Harriet Beecher Stowe  
KAREN HALTTUNEN  
*page 107*



5

Sharing the Thunder: The Literary Exchanges of Harriet  
Beecher Stowe, Henry Bibb, and Frederick Douglass

ROBERT B. STEPTO

*page 135*

6

Stowe's Dream of the Mother-Savior: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*  
and American Women Writers Before the 1920s

ELIZABETH AMMONS

*page 155*

Notes on Contributors

*page 196*

Selected Bibliography

*page 198*

## Introduction

ERIC J. SUNDQUIST

CLAR judgments of the merits of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will never be easy to make. Even though the Civil War novelist John De Forest, inaugurating the search for "The Great American Novel" in an 1868 essay in *The Nation*, thought Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel the best candidate to date, the book's phenomenal popularity in its own day and in the century following the Civil War has served to cast suspicion on it among those who define the artifacts of high culture by excluding works that seem to cater to the tastes of the masses. The novel's characterization of black Americans, whether slave or free, has often rendered it objectionable to modern sensibilities. Even Stowe's broad depiction of the role of women in society, because it appears to restrict their moral influence to the circumscribed arena of home and family, has struck some feminist readers as constrained or demeaning. Despite such problems, redefinitions of the place of popular literature, of blacks, and of women in American political and cultural history witnessed over the last several decades have focused new attention on Stowe's masterpiece, illuminating again its complicated and sometimes contradictory powers.

Like any great work of literature, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may well transcend the issues and events of its own era but must nonetheless be seen to be firmly anchored in them. This is emphatically true of Stowe's novel, which is so deeply *political* in nature – despite seeming at times oblivious to crucial realities in America's great debate over slavery – that it has often been considered a strange hybrid of polemic and sentimental melodrama, a work that helped instigate the Civil War and then ceased to have value once its purpose had been accomplished. But it is also a sign of

prevailing twentieth-century notions of literature in America that both polemicism and sentimentality, especially in the heated union of the two forged by Stowe, could discredit the novel. Many major critical studies of American literature in this century have found no place for Stowe, and only recently has she been considered at all central to the great flowering of native literature before the Civil War known as the American Renaissance. The early assessment of Carl Van Doren in *The American Novel* is perhaps typical of most modern critical response: "Leave out the merely domestic elements of the book – slave families broken up by sale, ailing and dying children, negro women at the mercy of their masters, white households which at the best are slovenly and extravagant by reason of irresponsible servants and at the worst are abodes of brutality and license – and little remains."<sup>1</sup>

One might as well say of *Moby-Dick* (as some readers have), "leave out the whales and little remains." The comparison is not entirely idle. Both Stowe and Herman Melville, at almost exactly the same time, wrote epic novels that drove to the heart of American democracy by infusing everyday materials with highly charged political purpose. Melville's novel went largely unrecognized by readers and critics until this century; Stowe's novel, although retaining a popular audience, was progressively lowered in scholarly estimation almost in exact proportion to Melville's ascent – in part because it lacks the complex philosophical intent and dense literary allusiveness of *Moby-Dick* and in part because it is in direct opposition to the rich American tradition of masculine confrontation with nature (the frontier tradition of the "American Adam") that Melville helped to define. Add to this Nathaniel Hawthorne's condemnation of popular female writers as a "damned mob of scribbling women," along with the influential novelistic canon opening out of *The Scarlet Letter*, based on the narrative introspection and nuanced dramatic plotting found, for example, in the works of William Dean Howells, Henry James, and Edith Wharton, and the main terms by which Stowe has been excluded are evident.<sup>2</sup>

Against the standards defined by Hawthorne and Melville (and despite the fact that both Howells and James found the novel something of a landmark in American fiction), *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

has appeared to be awkwardly plotted, overly melodramatic, and naively visionary – a book for children and (what could be thought to amount to the same thing) those women readers who, from Stowe's day on into the twentieth century, have formed the largest part of the popular reading public. "It literally wallows in tears," writes one critic. "There is no subterfuge and no artistry about appealing to the simplest emotions of the reader."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, Edmund Wilson wrote in an important reassessment in 1962 that Stowe's work is comparable to that of Dickens and Zola (as readers in her own day recognized); and the novel has often been read in Europe, both in the original and in numerous translations, as the masterpiece of social realism George Sand, George Eliot, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Hugo, and Heine found it to be.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, contemporary scholars have begun to see in the novel's astute manipulation of the strategies of sentimentality a careful artistry and an engagement of striking, if neglected, political powers. The tradition of the domestic novel to which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* belongs, writes Jane Tompkins, "represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view," an effort that is "remarkable for its intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness" and that "offers a critique of American society far more devastating than any delivered by better-known critics such as Hawthorne and Melville." In this view, the novel's "tearful episodes and frequent violations of probability [are] invested with a structure of meanings" that draw on important nineteenth-century patterns of individual emotion, social equality, and religious belief in order to fix the work, "not in the realm of fairy tale or escapist fantasy, but in the very bedrock of reality."<sup>5</sup>

The redefinition of the canon of classical American literature that has accompanied the rise of feminist scholarship in the last twenty years has had to confront a still greater, and less easily resolved, problem in the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It is a problem defined with abrupt succinctness in the title of J. C. Furnas's book, *Goodbye to Uncle Tom*. Appearing in 1956, Furnas's thorough study of the novel's relationship to the realities of slavery, its popularized versions, and its derivative cultural stereotypes revealed in great detail what he saw to be Stowe's role in perpetuating "the miscon-

ceptions, Southern and Northern, the wrongheadednesses, the distortions and wishful thinkings about Negroes in general and American Negroes in particular that still plague us today." What Furnas wrote then is without doubt true, perhaps more true, thirty years later: Many black Americans "have made her titular hero a hissing and a byword," such a hated epithet connoting meek servility and offensive minstrel-like traits that many of them "would rather be called 'nigger' than 'Uncle Tom.'"<sup>6</sup>

Although Tom's appellation, "Uncle," is a conventional sign of kinship and familiarity in slave life, and although he is portrayed by Stowe as a young, broad-chested, powerful man, his passive martyrdom at the hands of Simon Legree has become an unfortunate image for the entire novel. In the same vein, James Baldwin's famous claim that the novel is activated by a "theological terror" in which "black equates with evil and white with grace" trenchantly defined the appeal to a race-prejudiced Calvinism latent within Stowe's best intentions.<sup>7</sup> Like the attempts by black individuals or groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to proscribe the novel or ban its dramatizations, the brilliant critiques by Baldwin and Furnas recognized disturbing elements in the novel that cannot be explained away. Any reformation of the canon of American literature that sets out to give *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the central place it deserves cannot afford to take lightly, much less ignore altogether, such problems in the book itself or in the cultural images it has engendered.

Upon its publication, the novel immediately produced a flood of imitative drama, poetry, and songs that capitalized upon its most saccharine scenes. The melodramatic apotheosis of Eva and bowdlerized scenes of minstrel humor appeared in consumable artifacts – dioramas, engravings, gift books, card games, figurines, plates, silverware, and needlepoint. Stage versions and the traveling "Tom troupes" that performed them purged any radical messages from the blackface drama: Topsy became a star, singing "I'se So Wicked" and "Topsy's Song: I am but a Little Nigger Gal"; the famous minstrel performer T. D. Rice "jumped Jim Crow" in the role of Uncle Tom; the South appeared as an arena of light-hearted fun (in the P. T. Barnum version, Tom was rescued from Legree by



George Shelby); Tom and Eva were reunited in cardboard heavens; and abolitionism itself was attacked in such songs as “Happy Are We, Darkies So Gay.” The increased popularity of Tom troupes following the Civil War – some 400 by 1899 in one estimate – was not diminished by the fact that blacks finally played a few leading roles. Blackface white actors returned again in the earliest of many film depictions, beginning with a twelve-minute version in 1903; but Sam Lucas starred as Tom in the first black film lead in 1914. Harry Pollard’s monumental 1927 remake had a \$2 million budget (\$20,000 for real bloodhounds, a staple of stage versions); an animated Uncle Tom starred Felix the Cat; Shirley Temple performed as the Eva of a Tom troupe in *Dimples* (1936) and was paired with Bill “Bojangles” Robinson as Tom in *The Littlest Rebel* (1935); Judy Garland was Topsy in *Everybody Sing* (1938); Betty Grable and June Hoover were twin Topsyies (also a tradition on stage) in *The Dolly Sisters* (1945); and Abbott and Costello masqueraded as Simon Legree and Eva in *The Naughty Nineties* (1945).<sup>8</sup>

Given this extraordinary record of cultural abuse, it is little wonder that Richard Wright satirically entitled his collection of stories about black life in the Jim Crow South *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1940) or that Ishmael Reed has burlesqued Stowe’s novel and its fictive descendents in *Flight to Canada* (1976). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* can now barely be read with an open mind. Leaving aside the post-Civil War versions of Stowe’s melodrama (which belong to the continued history of American racism in popular culture epitomized by films like *The Birth of a Nation* or *Gone With the Wind* and the novels that spawned them), one might note that the popular reaction of the 1850s may well have *concealed* the novel’s guarded subversive power by containing it within ostentatiously marketable forms that would reaffirm the basic prejudices of Stowe’s audience. The author herself wrote a dramatic version entitled “The Christian Slave” that was never staged; and she too derived crude sentimental verse from her own fiction (based on such themes as “Eliza Crossing the River,” “Eva Putting Flowers Round Tom’s Neck,” and “Topsy at the Looking Glass”).<sup>9</sup> However, these efforts keep central what the minstrel versions either suppressed or rendered irrelevantly comic or absurdly pious: namely, that in its most fundamental sense, the