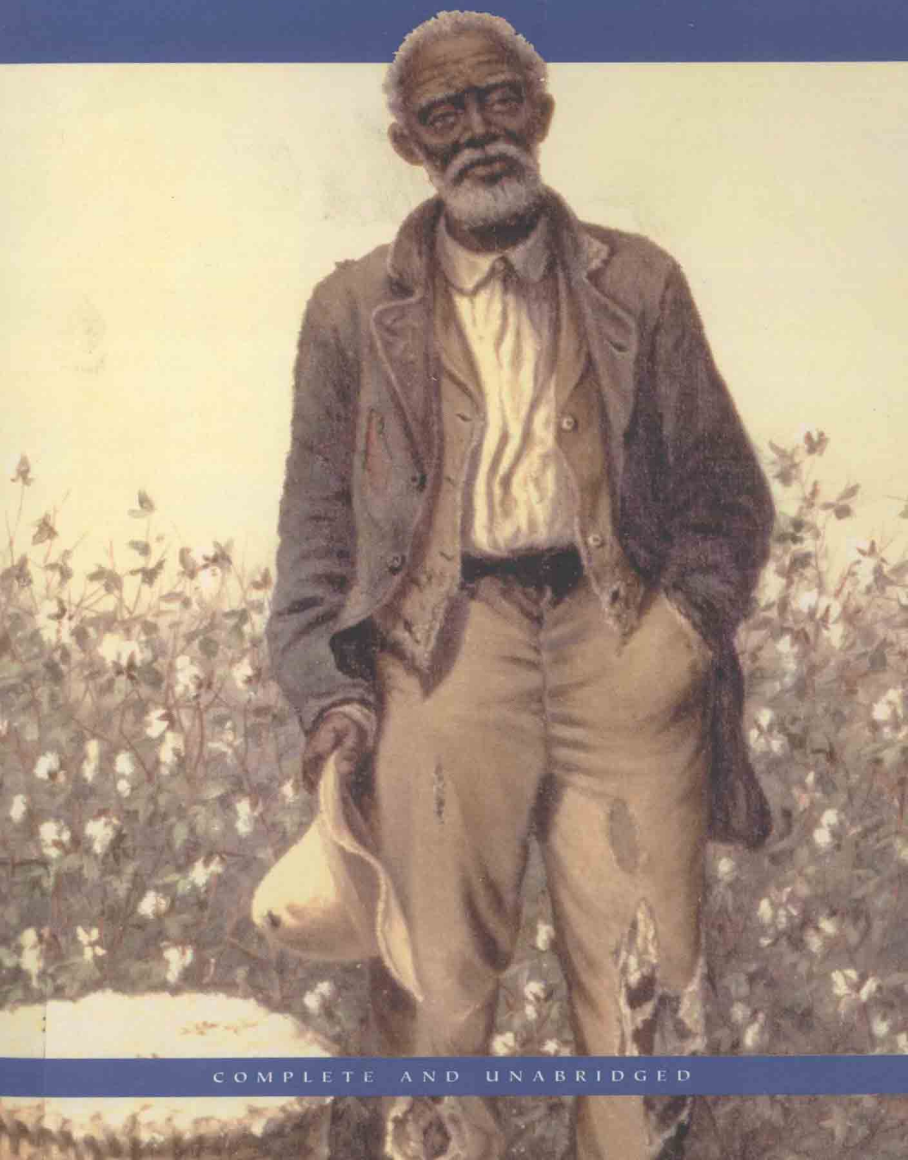


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Uncle Tom's Cabin

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE



COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

or Negro Life in the Slave States of America

Harriet Beecher Stowe

With an Introduction and Notes by

DR KEITH CARABINE

University of Kent at Canterbury



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UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

General Adviser

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INTRODUCTION

Uncle Tom's Cabin is arguably the most popular and certainly the most influential novel ever written by an American. Published in March 1852, it sold ten thousand copies in the first week and within a year three hundred thousand had been sold in America and nearly one million in England. It was soon translated into all the major European and continental languages, including Welsh, Polish, Hungarian and Russian. By 1860 Harriet Beecher Stowe was the most famous writer in the world. It spawned numerous stage versions in several languages that were highly edited to emphasise the work's melodramatic and sentimental effects; theatrical, minstrel and vaudeville versions were performed in America until the outbreak of World War II and it also generated in the South a new genre of anti-Uncle Tom narratives, dedicated to refuting her case against the peculiar institution of slavery. More pertinently, in 1861, on the eve of the Civil War, it had sold four and a half million copies. This statistic is truly staggering because the

population of the United States was only thirty-two million, including some five million semi-literate slaves, and the book was banned by most Southern legislatures. Thus, if we also discount children, there was one copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for every four or five readers.¹

The story of the conception, writing and publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as Ann Douglas remarks, 'is almost as well known as the story the novel dramatises' (p. 7, 1981). This phenomenally successful novel began most inauspiciously. In 1850 Stowe was thirty-nine years old, the harried mother of five surviving children and pregnant with a seventh, married to Calvin Stowe, a poor theologian recently appointed to the faculty of Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. She was one of the ten children of Lyman Beecher, considered the greatest evangelical preacher of his day, and she lived under the shadow of her six brothers who were famous preachers and authors and of her sister Catherine Beecher, the foremost female educator of her generation. Moreover, Mrs Stowe in 1850 was a minor writer of New England sketches and uncontroversial moral tales who had never contemplated writing a novel and who, as she confesses in her 'Concluding Remarks' to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, had 'for many years of her life . . . avoided all reading upon or allusion to the subject of slavery, considering it as too painful to be enquired into, and one which advancing light and civilisation would certainly live down' (p. 409). She was moved to enter the public arena by three events: the passage of, and the Northern response to, the Fugitive Slave Law in September 1850; a direct appeal by her sister-in-law; and by a vision while she was taking communion in church in February 1851. The greatest political problem facing the United States in the 1840s, as the country expanded ever westwards, was whether the new states should accept or reject slavery. The Missouri Compromise of 1850 was essentially a pro-slavery decision and the Fugitive Slave Law commanded citizens 'to aid and assist in the prompt and efficient execution of this law, whenever their services may be required'; moreover, section seven stated that persons who gave shelter, food or assistance to an escaping slave were liable to a fine of \$1,000 and six months in prison. The Missouri Compromise gave a new lease of life to the unpopular, radical abolitionists led by William Lloyd Garrison, who since 1831 had demanded the immediate, unconditional, uncompensated abolition of slavery. Stowe shared both her

¹ Mason Lowance (ed.), *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader*, Penguin Books, London 2000, p. 292. Hereafter, all references appear parenthetically in the text; for full citations see the Bibliography.

father's lifelong distrust of the 'immediatists' and his advocacy of Colonisation, that is the assisted passage of America's black population to Liberia to found an African Christian state. But, whereas her father supported the Compromise, Stowe shared her brother Edward's and her brother Henry's disgust at Senator Daniel Webster's endorsement of it and their outrage at what she later called the 'inexplicable . . . dreadful . . . apathy of the Christian world of the free North' at the prospect of the trial and return of blacks to slavery (Introduction to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, cited Fields, p. 145). Stowe's first indignant response, in August, 1850 was to send 'The Slave's Dream' to Gamaliel Bailey, the editor of the moderate anti-slavery journal the *National Era*. This parable recounts the refusal of a farmer to assist some fugitive slaves who are soon recaptured, and Stowe, anticipating the moral stance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, invokes not the law of man but that of an avenging voice at the Seat of Judgement thundering, 'Depart from me ye accursed! for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat' (Hedrick, p. 206). Meanwhile, her sister-in-law Mrs Edward Beecher wrote to her, 'If I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that will make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is'; and according to her son Charles Edward Stowe, his mother 'rose up from her chair' declaring, 'I will write something. I will if I live' (p. 145). The origin of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, according to Stowe, occurred in February 1851 when she was taking communion and had 'a tangible vision' of the death of Uncle Tom that stimulated a 'convulsion of tears'. She immediately composed the climax of her tale, the 'victory' of Uncle Tom's death, and read it to her young sons, who too dissolved into tears, 'one of them saying, through his sobs, "Oh! Mamma, slavery is the most cursed thing in the world!"' (cited Fields, p. 147).

On 9 March, Stowe wrote to Gamaliel Bailey to say that she had begun a 'series of sketches' that would run 'through three or four numbers' of the *National Era*; but, 'written at white heat, they grew into a sprawling, panoramic two-decker novel', appearing in weekly instalments from 5 June 1851 until 1 April 1852 (Hedrick, p. 208). The prospective novel was offered to her sister Catherine's publisher, Phillips, Sampson and Co., who turned it down fearing that an anti-slavery book by a woman would be a poor risk and might alienate a sizeable portion of the Southern trade. Such pusillanimous prejudices explain the biggest howler in the history of publishing, but Stowe herself also greatly underestimated the commercial value of her book. Indeed, expecting that it might buy her a new dress, she signed a contract with her father's publisher, Jewett, forgoing his offer to split

profit and risk equally, and accepting instead ten per cent of the sales. The novel was published on 20 March 1852 and despite her modest contract it netted her \$10,000 (over \$500,000 today!) in the first three months of sales, 'the largest sum of money ever received by any author, either American or English, from the sale of a single work in so short a period of time' (Hedrick, p. 223).

Not surprisingly the novel was greeted with outrage in the South, but the vicious abuse of Mrs Stowe shocks even today. She was accused, as Thomas Gossett thoroughly documents, of traducing the essentially beneficent, paternal institution of slavery for all the usual reasons: she failed to understand that blacks were inferior to whites and that the Bible justified and the American Constitution supported slavery; that on the rare occasions families were split it was usually due to 'the evil conduct of the slaves themselves' (p. 195); that whipping was unfortunately (and occasionally) necessary to ensure order; and that the housed and well-fed slaves, as part of the larger family of the plantation, were essentially better off than the 'wage-slaves' in Northern factories. And, of course, her obtuse claim that slavery was a national sin and her wilful recommendation of the higher law of conscience over that of the law of the land were incitements to Northern interference in Southern affairs that could only end in civil war. Meanwhile, they insisted that she had forfeited the right to be called 'a lady' because she depicted 'scenes of licence and impurity, and ideas of loathsome depravity and habitual prostitution'; and because she had forgotten 'all the sweet and social instincts of her sex', she was now fair game. Thus, William Gilmore Simms raved: 'Mrs Stowe betrays a malignity so remarkable that the petticoat lifts of itself, and we see the hoof of the beast under the table' (p. 190), and condemned her 'to perpetual bedfellowship' with the mulatto George Harris for having the effrontery to describe him as a 'handsome' man (p. 203). The ugliest rejection of the novel came in a package addressed to her from somewhere in the South: 'It contained the severed ear of a black with an accompanying card deriding her defence of the "D—n niggers"' (p. 211). Fortunately, Calvin Stowe opened the package and disposed of the ear without letting his wife see it. These fierce and disgusting reactions are actually a back-handed testimony to Mrs Stowe's brave, spectacular legitimisation of abolition and of her passionate assertion of a white middle-class woman's right and ability to intervene in the masculine, public world of politics and policy.

In the Northern states and England the novel provoked a storm of competing and contradictory responses among conservative and radical

abolitionist groups, blacks and women, with regard to issues of form and genre, and of politics, race and gender that are of great interest because they (broadly) define and anticipate the concerns that vex and divide late twentieth-century critical constituencies, especially the feminists. The anonymous reviewer in the *London Times* (September 1852) sniffily observed: 'We are not ignorant of the mode in which great morals are enforced at our minor theatres, and of the means there taken to impress the imagination and to instruct the intellect by help of domestic melodrama,' and fretted that 'surely there is something more real and substantial in Mrs Stowe's volumes to account for their extraordinary popularity than such absolute and audacious trash' as Uncle Tom's miraculous conversions of the savages, Sambo and Quimbo, into pious, penitent Christians (Ammons, ed., p. 29). Even reviewers who approved of the novel's vigorous critique of the institution of slavery complained either about its excessive sentimentality, especially in the depiction of little Eva, or of its heavy didacticism. Again, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* embodies and reveals the splits in the anti-slavery groups. Thus the conservative New England clergy lauded the novel because it 'has made the public realise . . . the unspeakable wickedness of American slavery' (Gossett, p. 178), and Richard Hildreth, the author of the abolitionist novel *Archy Moore* (1836), claimed that 'but for its admirable realisation of the Christian hero, saint and martyr, it would scarcely have been known out of the small circle of anti-slavery readers' (Gossett, p. 177); but Dr Leonard Bacon, an old friend of the Beechers, also praised both its recognition that 'a distinct *nationality* is . . . a natural yearning with the free and enlightened Africo-American' and its advocacy of Colonisation for the African blacks because they were blows against 'the distinctive doctrines and obnoxious measures of the Anti-slavery Societies' (Gossett, p. 178). Garrison was, however, upset by Uncle Tom's 'submission to tyranny' and thought he was 'a disturbing model for a black hero' (Gossett, p. 173); and black abolitionists, such as Martin Delany – anticipating the attacks of James Baldwin and J. C. Furnas a century later – were enraged by Tom's meek submission to indignities, preferring an alternative hero who would 'have buried the hoe deep in the master's skull' (Donovan, p. 18). Again, black and white abolitionists attacked the novel's support of Colonisation, Frederick Douglass famously telling Mrs Stowe, 'The truth is, dear madame, we are *here*, and here we are likely to remain,' and the editor of the *Provincial Freeman*, a black anti-slavery journal, thundered: 'Death or banishment is our doom, say the Slaveocrats, the Colonizationsts and Mrs Stowe!' (Gossett, pp. 172–3). The novel's defiance of

the Fugitive Slave Law also divided public opinion; only the radical abolitionists were supportive (and even Lincoln in 1860 was not prepared to go so far), whereas reviewers in both the North and the South were dismayed. In recent times, Stowe's exploitation of the devices and values of the mid-nineteenth-century domestic, sentimental novel has generated a (huge) debate about what Jane Tompkins in *Sensational Designs* (1985) has called 'the politics of literary history' (p. 122), whereby 'the male-dominated scholarly tradition' has excluded *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from the 'canon of American literature', preventing 'even committed feminists from recognizing the *value* of a powerful and specifically female novelistic tradition'. In terms that recall the *Times* review, Tompkins laments that 'twentieth-century critics have taught generations of students to equate popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality, and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority' (p. 123). Similarly, modern critics, as we shall see, hold opposing views as to the conservatism or radicalism of the sentimental domestic novel.

It is, I think, no exaggeration to claim that *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, once the most popular and widely debated of all American novels, is still the most controversial in the canon. It has generated radically opposed and contradictory viewpoints because of Mrs Stowe's inconsistent representation of such key issues as slavery, race and gender, which is inseparable from the inherent inconsistencies in her evangelical, utopian agenda.

I

The narrative of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a volatile compendium of many different forms – sermon, jeremiad, hagiography, dramatic debate, sentimental tableau, melodrama and allegory: and the omniscient narrator combines the roles of an evangelical preacher, indignant Old Testament prophet, fond sentimentalist, biting satirist, shrewd, realistic observer and analyst of the customs and mores of three different slave regions of the South and orchestrator of a chorus of voices, ranging from the vernacular of the blacks, slave-dealers, Kentuckians and Quakers to the sentimental discourse of Eva and the biblically inflected speech of Uncle Tom. All these voices and forms, together with a plot that 'is an anthology of partings and separations' (Fisher, p. 107) ending with a flourish of reunions so typical of the sentimental romance, are marshalled to prove (in St Clare's words) that the '“*thing itself* [the institution of chattel slavery] is the essence of all abuse!”' (p. 207); and because the whole of America is implicated in and

responsible for its retention, only the nation's 'repentance, justice and mercy' will prevent, as the novel resoundingly concludes, the onset of 'the wrath of Almighty God' (p. 415).

One unavoidable consequence of Stowe's compendious narrative is that her depiction of her 'African' characters, such as Topsy, Uncle Tom and George Harris, is deeply inconsistent and janus-faced. Topsy, especially for modern readers, is the most successfully realised negro character in the novel. A 'neglected, abused child' (p. 223), whose mischievousness, deceit, drollery and cunning induce in St Clare (in a damning analogy) 'the same kind of amusement in the child that a man might [take] in the tricks of a parrot or a pointer' (p. 234), she becomes the test case for Miss Ophelia's "real missionary work" (p. 222). The "system makes such children" (p. 229), as Miss Ophelia correctly notes, and in a series of catechisms we learn that she "never had no father, nor mother, nor nothin'. I was raised by a speculator, with lots of others" (p. 224); and in response to her teacher's questions, "Have you ever heard anything about God, Topsy?" and "Do you know who made you?" she (famously) replies, "I 'spect I grow'd" (p. 224). Miss Ophelia, after months of training, resorts to whipping her, and when she concedes defeat, Eva the child evangelist resumes the catechism:

'But, Topsy, if you'd only try to be good, you might -'

'Couldn't never be nothin' but a nigger, if I was ever so good,' said Topsy. 'If I could be skinned, and come white, I'd try then.'

'But people can love you, if you are black, Topsy. Miss Ophelia would love you, if you were good.'

Topsy gave the short, blunt laugh that was her common mode of expressing incredulity.

'Don't you think so?' said Eva.

'No she can't bar me, 'cause I'm a nigger! - she'd soon have a toad touch her! There can't nobody love niggers, and niggers can't do nothin'. I don't care,' said Topsy, beginning to whistle. [p. 261]

Both Topsy's indifference, which masks her self-hatred, and her sharp perception of Miss Ophelia's reflexive phobia anticipate Joe Christmas's self-loathing and his compulsion to provoke disgust for himself in others in Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932). This realistic exchange reveals a genuine critical intelligence at work; but Mrs Stowe's remarkable awareness of the barriers that separate black and white and of the inconsistencies at the heart of both Miss Ophelia and the anti-slavery impulse itself, is immediately followed by an allegorical cameo and an abrupt change of register that is entirely typical of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

'O Topsy, poor child, I love you!' said Eva, with a sudden burst of feeling . . . 'and I think I shan't live a great while; and it really grieves me to have you be so naughty. I wish you would try to be good, for my sake; it's only a little while I shall be with you.'

. . . Yes in that moment, a ray of real belief, a ray of heavenly love, had penetrated the darkness of her heathen soul! She laid her head down between her knees, and wept and sobbed; while the beautiful child, bending over her, looked like the picture of some bright angel stooping to reclaim a sinner. [pp. 261-2]

This is bad writing (*pace* Tompkins) precisely because the 'religiosity' is 'fakery': Topsy's complex humanity is sacrificed because she is ecstatically faked as 'a heathen soul' in a standardised missionary cartoon. Thus we move from a vital interaction between realistically conceived characters to an abstract moral drama in which Eva knowingly repeats Christ's promise of the resurrection, 'and again, a little while, and ye shall see me' (John 16:17) and which draws heavily on religious clichés ('ray of heavenly love'). Positive reading of such shifts of discourse invoke notions of 'polyphony', 'resistant orality' and 'fugitive tongues' (Hedrick, p. 210). But even in Dostoevsky there is not, as Bakhtin claims, '*A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*' (Bakhtin, p. 6); and in Stowe, as is seen here, plurality and resistance quickly yield to a compliant merging of voices. Indeed, whenever the novel becomes insistently allegorical, Stowe's critical intelligence deserts her and she is oblivious to the condescension ('heathen') and moral blackmail ("I shan't live a great while") at the heart of both her own and Eva's evangelicalism.

This exemplary sentimental tableau is entirely typical of Stowe's art (especially after the introduction of Eva in Chapter xiv) and of her designs upon her reader. She saw her 'vocation' as 'simply that of a painter . . . There is no arguing *with pictures*, and everybody is impressed by them, whether they mean to be or not' (Hedrick, p. 208). And, indeed, the heavy allegorical patterning in all the scenes in which the child-evangelist appears prepares us for the presentation in the last third of the novel of Uncle Tom, the black evangelist who also sacrifices his life for others. The melodramatic presentation of moral issues in the antithesis of Eva the 'bright angel' and Topsy the heathen 'sinner' is reworked in the fundamental contrast of the devilish Legree with the Christ-like Tom. The hagiographic depiction of Tom's death at the hands of the brutal Legree is pure Christian allegory whereby '*Uncle Tom's Cabin* retells the culture's central religious myth – the

story of the crucifixion – in terms of the nation's greatest political conflict – slavery – and of its most cherished social beliefs – the sanctity of motherhood and the family' (Tompkins, p. 134). Tom's life is a type of Christ's. Thus he repeats Christ's words on the cross, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit!" (p. 381); like Christ he forgives his enemies and he saves his tormentors; and like Christ's, Tom's sacrifice proves that the meek inherit the earth. They both die to save the corrupt and the powerful and the 'victory' of their deaths shows they are more powerful than their tormentors. For, in this novel, the strident moral patterning asserts that the greatest difference between human beings is neither between slave and slave owner, nor black and white, nor man and woman, nor between Northerner and Southerner, but between the saved and the damned. Dying from this Christian, eschatological perspective is the supreme form of heroism: as Tom 'the martyr' announces, "*I can die!*" (p. 382). And, therefore, Legree's assault on his helpless black victim expresses his impotence and seals his damnation. Hence the narrator's rather gloating apostrophe: 'Yes, Legree . . . thy soul . . . past repentance, past prayer, past hope . . . is already burning' (p. 383), which supplements Tom's saintly warning to Legree, "But if ye don't repent, yours [his torment] *won't* never end!" (p. 382). It won't ever end because this novel insists on the inseparability of the sacred and the secular and Legree will spend eternity in hell, the place reserved by the novel's stark evangelical theology for slave owners and all who, actively or tacitly, accept the splitting of black families and their breeding as 'articles' and 'things'; when, in terms of the sentimental novel's values, the annihilation of the domestic arena is condoned.

The collusion of the narrator's and Tom's voices and 'the higher voice' of the scriptures is the central rhetorical strategy of all the sentimental 'pictures'; and at such moments 'the art' of the novel is Calvinist, a 'a form of onslaught . . . a great revival sermon, aimed directly at the conversion of its hearers' (Ann Douglas, p. 245). Such tableaux are clearly designed to make the reader '*feel right* . . . and the man or woman who *feels* strongly, heathily, and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race' (p. 411). Such 'pictures' back all readers into a corner; if we support slavery or if we are indifferent to it, though we are Christians, we clearly lack compassion for the lowly of the earth and hence we are damned. If we see the evil, there is only one line of action possible – that of young George Shelby who is converted by Tom's sacrifice: "Witness, eternal God! . . . oh witness that, from this hour, I will do *what one man can* to

drive out this curse of slavery from my land!"' (p. 390). And, forthwith, he becomes 'The Liberator' who frees his slaves and offers to "teach" them "how to use the rights I give you as free men and women"; they choose, of course, to remain free with their loving master, and 'An aged, patriarchal negro . . . lifting his trembling hand, said, "Let us give thanks unto the Lord"' (p. 406).

Stowe's insistence on the Christian passivity of Uncle Tom and the pious gratefulness of George's black slaves are clearly designed to counter national and especially Southern stereotypes of the blacks as inferior and violent brutes who are incapable of leading free lives. But her rhetorical strategies and manipulation of the conventions of the sentimental novel together with her representation of the blacks have elicited contrary responses. On the one hand, Phillip Fisher argues that the sentimental novel 'is the most radical popular form available to middle-class culture' (p. 91) because 'Sentimentality, by its experimental extension of humanity to prisoners, slaves, madmen, children, and animals, exactly reverses the process of slavery itself which has as its core the withdrawal of human status from a part of humanity' (p. 100). Similarly, Kenneth S. Lynn argues that Mrs Stowe 'brought to the sentimental novel such an unprecedented seriousness of purpose as to turn an escapist genre into an instrument of social upheaval' (p. 37). Moreover, we need to realise that Mrs Stowe's Christian pictures and her intensely millennialist vision of slavery as a national sin that invites an act of divine judgement deeply influenced her age and were most famously articulated in President Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address which viewed slavery as 'one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come . . . and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so must it still be said, "The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."' And, inspired by such rhetoric, American women sanctioned the sacrifice of their menfolk to ensure that under God all Americans would be free. No wonder, then, that Lincoln, on first meeting Stowe in 1862, allegedly greeted her half-facetiously: 'So this is the little lady who started this great war.' No novel, from this perspective, ever spoke with such directness and force.

On the other hand, however, locked into her evangelical agenda, Mrs Stowe does not appreciate – given the intractable political realities facing America in 1851 – that both Tom's heroic espousal of non-violence and George's noble manumission of his slaves are purely utopian solutions to the problem of chattel slavery. And, not

surprisingly from the perspective of the blacks struggling for civil and political rights both in her own age and a century later, Uncle Tom's triumph is, in James Baldwin's words, 'metaphysical, unearthly', and he is 'robbed of his humanity and divested of his sex' (p. 13), and Stowe's 'virtuous rage' is a form of 'theological terror, the terror of damnation' (pp. 12, 13). Thus, Stowe seems to be unaware that her pious idealisation of Uncle Tom and George Shelby's slaves inadvertently demeans them because her tableaux can neither encompass nor represent human complexity. Thus, even though Stowe's rhetorical strategies, her sermonising and her idealised pictures spoke forcefully to American mothers and rejuvenated the fading abolitionist cause, to many post- Second World War readers they were held to have contributed to 'the wrong-headedness, distortions and wishful thinkings about negroes in general and American negroes in particular that still plague us today', and the very name Uncle Tom is now 'a hissing and a by-word' (Furnas, p. 105).

Uncle Tom's Cabin is, then, compassionate and 'radical' but, also, deeply conservative, in ways that Fisher and Lynn ignore, on issues of race and politics; and this contradiction is most evident in Mrs Stowe's representation and uses of George Harris. In the novel Harris is an intelligent, resourceful mulatto whose dreadful experiences at the hands of a 'vulgar, narrow-minded, tyrannical master' (p. 12), who believes, ' "It's a free country . . . the man's *mine*, and I do what I please with him" ' (p. 14), powerfully demonstrate that what the whites experience as law, the blacks experience as madness. Like the abolitionists, he appeals to the tenets of the Declaration of Independence and to the fight for liberty of the founding fathers of America to justify his own militant desire for freedom in a country whose laws rob him of citizenship. He feels, therefore, that he does not belong, and his willingness to fight for ' "the right . . . to be a man and not a brute; the right to call the wife of his bosom his wife, and to protect her from lawless violence" ' (p. 356) invokes the spectre of a slave revolt and the possibility, voiced by St Clare, that the political revolutions that shook Europe in 1848 may well occur in America. Harris the atheist, Republican hero and potential revolutionary, who shoots his pursuers during his freedom flight to Canada, is clearly both the antithesis of Uncle Tom, who prays for his tormentors and finds freedom in heaven, and a threat to the novel's Christian domestic agenda. Their two plots never intersect, and the Harrises' flight to freedom occupies only three chapters (xiii, xvii and xxxvii), until George reappears in the penultimate chapter of the novel ('Results') where his miraculous

conversion in Chapter XIII (to which I will return) is not only reconfirmed, but he is presented as both a triumph and a most unlikely spokesman for the evangelistic values that Uncle Tom incarnates.

At this point, Harris is also coerced to collude in the novel's political agenda of Colonisation and to submit to and articulate the novel's 'romantic racialism'.² Stowe was not a racist in any modern sense because she did not believe in the *de facto* inferiority of the blacks and she supported black aspirations to equality and civil rights; rather she believed that races, and indeed people from different regions of the same country, have different and essential characteristics and peculiarities that reflect climate, environment, geography, mores and culture. (Thus, 'Great, tall, raw-boned Kentuckians' are said to have 'the easy lounge peculiar to the race' [p. 97].) Whites and blacks for Kinmont and Stowe manifest different traits because this was part of 'God's plan for the gradual fulfilment of man's intellectual, moral, and spiritual potentialities' (Fredrickson, p. 435). Harris's plan for the future of his 'enslaved African race' in Liberia (p. 400) on the grounds that he is fulfilling God's scheme for 'the African race' which 'has peculiarities yet to be unfolded in the light of civilisation and Christianity, which, if not the same with those of the Anglo-Saxon, may prove to be, morally, of an even higher type' (pp. 401-2), is, therefore, based on the romantic racist's faith in the moral superiority of the Africans to the cold, self-reliant, industrious, rational Anglo-Saxons. From this perspective, Stowe's fervent vision of Colonisation (which after all recommends segregation as the political solution to the problem of slavery in America) is the inevitable consequence of her 'romantic racialism'. Thus, throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she casts her Africans as natural Christians because of 'their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childlike simplicity of affection, and facility of forgiveness' (p. 167). Such passive, dependent virtues are, however, deeply suspect for two obvious reasons: they damn with ecstatic praise, suggesting that Africans are as much natural slaves as they are natural Christians, and they imply (and the plot endorses) that Africans can only be accepted as

² 'Romantic racialism' is George Fredrickson's term (Ammons [ed.], *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. 433). He was the first to point out that Stowe's racial stereotyping is virtually identical to that espoused by Alexander Kinmont's *Twelve Lectures on the Natural History of Man* (1839). Kinmont delivered the lectures (1837-8) in Cincinnati, where 'his attempt to combine ethnology and religion in a new system . . . caused a great stir' (Fredrickson, p. 434). Mrs Stowe lived in Cincinnati from 1832-50.

full human beings and as superior to whites if they *are* or *become* Christians. And even as Christians they never qualify as 'Americans' in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Stowe always calls her blacks either 'Africans' or 'Ethiopians', thereby dissociating herself from the more militant wings of the anti-slavery movement and the black abolitionists who demanded rights for negroes as men and Americans. Moreover, Colonisation in 1851, as Harris grants (and Stowe, rather shamefacedly, admits) was favoured by "our oppressors" and was used by conservative forces "as a means of retarding our emancipation" (p. 401). Africa then serves, as it did historically, as a safety valve for anxieties about miscegenation and slave rebellions (most slave rebellions were led by mulattoes) shared by North and South alike. Thus, Harris's paean – "*Our nation* shall roll the tide of civilisation and Christianity along its shores, and plant there mighty republics . . . for all coming ages" (p. 401) – is from this perspective, millennialist cant that betrays Mrs Stowe's and her nation's grave anxieties about the emancipation of Africans in America itself.³ Liberia is then a utopian solution to the prospect of sectional conflict that her very assault on the institution of slavery reinforced; and, concomitantly, 'Mrs Stowe's miraculous plotting, so typical of the sentimental novel, unites all the sundered black families and functions conservatively to suppress the very resistance to slavery her novel advocates. Moreover, this final segregation of the Africans contradicts Stowe's use of the separation of families and the deaths of children to plead with her readers to imagine or relive common human experiences, and to identify with suffering across racial and regional divides' (Susan M. Ryan, pp. 760–1).

Stowe's messianic view of history has grave consequences, also, for the novel's sentimental agenda, because the African characters and the African nations evoked at the end lose their individual reality in the God-ordained, cosmic 'drama of human improvement' (p. 167). Furthermore, Harris's 'trust that the development of Africa is to be essentially a Christian one' endorses and lays bare the contradictions at the heart of the evangelical missionary impulse, because the spreading of the gospel is not only an evasive political solution to slavery, but it is ineradicably implicated in the spread of imperialism. A sorry fate for Stowe's feminine, maternal world vision, and one that contemporary feminists, such as Tompkins, Elizabeth Ammons and Gillian Brown,

3 In 1851 Colonisation was a marginalised and redundant programme. By 1840 only 1420 negroes had been sent to Liberia and the colony was struggling to survive.