Re-Thinking Uncle Tom: Wrong Turns in Black History[1]

by

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Uncle Tom's Cabin never meant to create an "Uncle Tom." The late 20th century development that saw the name, Uncle Tom, become an epithet is one of the most harmful historical developments of that era. For it closed almost an entire country to the valuable example that could otherwise have remained an object of emulation suited to boosting citizens through the enormous trials associated with racial reconciliation. For that reason alone, it is timely and apt to re-think Uncle Tom.

The Literary Question

First, let's take a general view of the subject. Nietzsche helps here, for he charged Stowe with a grievous error:

> In La Rochefoucauld we find consciousness of the true motive springs of the mind—and a view of these motive springs that is darkened by Christianity. The French revolution as the continuation of Christianity. Rousseau is the seducer: he unfetters woman who is henceforth represented in an ever more interesting manner—as suffering. Then the slaves and Mrs. Beecher-Stowe… (even to develop sympathy for the genius one no longer knows any other way for the past five hundred years than to represent him as the bearer of great suffering!) Next comes the curse on voluptuousness (Baudelaire and Schopenhauer); the most decided conviction that the lust to rule is the greatest vice; the perfect certainty that morality and disinterestedness are identical concepts and that the 'happiness of all' is a goal worth striving for (i.e., the kingdom of heaven of Christ).[2]

Never was more profound appreciation of the significance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* than Nietzsche's. He surmised correctly that the genesis or significance of the novel lay in the creation of the human model of surpassing excellence as a democratic standard. But we should be mindful of the immediate circumstances of the novel's appearance. This is perhaps more important for Americans than any other human beings, since Americans, as it seems, have only recently regarded the work as an example of profound interpretation.

We know what immediately prior generations long thought: The memory of Uncle Tom has not fared well. But what counts—perhaps even to Stowe—is the fact that Uncle Tom's own generation of Americans, though granting him much indeed, granted him less than he deserved. There were numerous examples of intelligent people taking the work seriously. But, with one significant quasi-exception, they were all Europeans. Heinrich Heine, George Eliot, George Sand. All hailed the work as immensely significant, as did countless lesser-known publicists. Stowe, herself, was even moved to note in 1856, that the French, for example, seemed far more adept at penetrating her subtle shades of meaning. But, giving due credit to her judgment and feelings, we may nonetheless argue that what occurred was fitting.

Stowe surely recognized how inherently limited was the American capacity to respond to her teaching. No American could attain that clarity of conviction open to the European without reflecting it in his opinion and actions upon the question of the day. Circumstances, therefore, were more compelling than reflection in itself. For, Americans could do neither more nor less than oppose or defend slavery. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was "called forth" by the Compromise of 1850, the "Fugitive Slave Law." Her work constituted a portion of the arsenals of the combatants. Because her teachings always had to make their way among contending convictions in America, Stowe's American readers were not at liberty to profound her deeper and more settled principles.

One decisive exception to this consideration was Francis Lieber, a naturalized American and among the first American academic philosophers. This adopted South Carolinian suggested a greater importance to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* than could be realized in the event. According to his account, exaggerated perhaps, *Tom's* appearance marked the commencement of a new era in the world. The importance of the work goes beyond its attack on slavery, though arriving at the conviction that slavery must be abolished was necessarily incident to that perception. Lieber's review essay quickly penetrated to the problem of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

First, the direct question is put in the opening of the third paragraph:

> Is a saint like Uncle Tom possible? . . . That Christianity has produced such saints—so pure, lowly, forbearing, so ignorant except in the knowledge of Christ, so lamb-like, we know from the first centuries, and (it) only remains a question whether Christianity may not present itself to the soul of a *peculiarly favored* negro with all the freshness, fervor, singleness and excellence of the first centuries?

This is a slight misunderstanding—but only slight—since the crucial problem is in Tom's slavery rather more than his being negro, as Nietzsche noted. But Lieber returns, indirectly, to show this. He cited the absence of the minister to underscore the purity of the novel's Christianity but also Christianity's anomalous character and presence. The anomaly is human, and to that problem he turns in the ninth paragraph:

> There can be no doubt that slavery appears so frequently doubly hideous *because* brought into such close contact with Christianity, civilization… Where slaves do not partake of our civilization,… no Uncle Tom, no almost white mother torn from her children, no learned black minister sold for a price can appear. Where the whites are not free republicans, the contrasts and all the fugitive baseness cannot appear so staggering to our souls. It is always [so] when an institution draws nigh to end, when it is in a transition period. Paganism at the time of Socrates and in Socrates was not so hideous as in Julian the Apostate nor said Socrates such nonsense about it as Julian…

The anomaly consists largely in the pain given to the civilized when they must witness and indeed participate in the denial of justice to those possessing the very excellences of civilization. The principles Lieber discovered are consistent with the "whole tenor of the modern spirit," if more demanding. He does not shrink from the final affirmation, though he expresses disbelief:

> The character of Saint Clair (*sic*) seems to me psychologically false from the moment of Evangeline's death or rather from the moment of [his] last long conversation with her. This going on 'reading the papers' as before is unnatural *with all those conversations with Tom*. And, then, why the 'At last! at last!' Does such a character become converted by a [slave] and at that moment (?)[3]

It is clear that what Lieber finds psychologically false is, as he admits, what the book demands: that a free republican, however assured of his particular education and status, be open to the example and guidance of excellence, whatever its source.

Under those terms it is insufficient to be repulsed by the anomaly of slavery, for it may even be necessary to recognize the standard of one's own actions and morality in some particular slave—in effect, to become pupil to a master who is a slave. It does not befit free men to be ruled by slaves. And to the extent that such noncoercive, officeless rule is possible, no free man open to its teaching of excellence can assure himself that such will not be the circumstance in which he finds himself.

The significance of the novel might be shown in terms of the author's expectations rather than the novel's actual effect—a task largely fulfilled in other works. [It is highly controversial whether anyone can ever actually ascribe worldly and not merely literary effect to a novel. Nonetheless, Stowe's novel has been subject to considerable speculation on that score. In addition, we were wise to remind ourselves of the not very distant judgments of black American poets, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Langston Hughes and Paul Laurence Dunbar. They accorded Stowe great responsibility for the emancipation of the slaves.] Stowe speaks more directly to Nietzsche. I quote at length:

> There is a twilight-ground between the boundaries of the sane and the insane, which the old Greeks and Romans regarded with a peculiar veneration. They held a person whose faculties were thus darkened as walking under the awful shadow of a supernatural presence; and, as the mysterious secrets of the stars only became visible in the night, so in these eclipses of the more material faculties they held there was often an awakening of supernatural perceptions. The hot and positive light of our modern materialism, which exhales from the growth of our existence every dewdrop, which searches out and dries every rivulet of romance, which sends an unsparing beam into every cool grotto of poetic possibility… this spirit, so remorseless, allows us no such indefinite land. There are but two worlds in the whole department of modern anthropology—the sane and the insane; the latter dismissed from human reckoning almost with contempt.[4]

The spirit of modernity is an unsparing, choking presence; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is an expression of *ressentiment*. The significance of the novel lies in the claim that the inexorable advance of modernity—Nietzschean sanity—is opposed to moral advance. What *Uncle Tom's Cabin* accomplished was the demonstration, yes, of the "identity of disinterestedness and morality." It expanded the range of moral possibilities, raised consciences. The famous *Suppressed Book About Slavery*, in 1856, was already citing Tom's example to prove that "the weak" could become strong and the "meanest," honorable.[5] That is what offended Nietzsche—this romance, this impossible dream. None there were who saw the necessity that the absurdity point beyond itself.

> The coarse, the low, the mean, the vulgar, is ever thrusting itself before the higher and more delicate nature, and claiming, in virtue of its very brute strength, to be the true reality.[6]

Forrest Wilson cited the *London Times* review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to indicate one barrier to understanding. He implied that the "Catholic" prejudice of that paper prescribed rejection of the "audacious trash" of "the miraculous conversions of those who came into contact with saintly Uncle Tom." Accordingly they saw no connections among the various sketches and characters, each executed singly with considerable skill.[7]

Duvall made a similar remark in his review of responses to the novel. Some critics could not see the book as a whole, "its organic and imaginative sufficiency." Consequently, they only analyzed "the 'arguments' of the book, to challenge the propositional logic of its thesis."[8] The inverted commas he assigned to "arguments" revealed his judgment of this process, a judgment he makes express seven pages later. Hence, we find an impassable gulf erected between Stowe's fiction—her romance—on one side and her logic on the other. She who appealed from the sane-insane dichotomy is mated to it forcibly. Criticism only recently broke away from this crusty mold.[9]

Previously, the occasional threat to do so always ended in a strange withdrawal from the opportunity presented. I have Edmund Wilson and Leslie Fiedler especially in mind, as well as

Duvall's ignoring the evidence in his nose so to speak. Fiedler's original perplexity saw "an astonishingly various and complex book, simplified in the folk mind," and chose originally to treat the simplified version! Wilson, however, is both more perplexing and easier to explain. He had little respect for the literary character of the novel—the "ineptitude of its prose." Still, it captured him.

> . . .what is most unexpected is that, the farther one reads in *Uncle Tom, the more one becomes aware that a critical mind is at work*, which has the complex situation in a very firm grip and which, no matter how vehement the characters become, is controlling and co-ordinating their interrelations.[10]

From this it were but a short glance to the principle by which and for which all this power was coordinated. But Wilson did not pose to Stowe the question, Where are you going? He knew in advance. He set out in his work to dislodge "pretensions to moral superiority" from any and every effort to explain moral-political endeavors. Wilson recognized that people made moral arguments, but he regarded them as fundamentally irrational—at least when claims of superiority were made.[11]

It was accordingly sufficient for Wilson to find that Stowe's preoccupation was not with slavery but with Christian morals (which we "*began* to see in *Dred*"), to rebut any need for analysis of her argument.[12] It is revealing to note that the religious argument of *Dred* had been given almost entirely in expository form in the *Key* already! The same is true of other arguments in *Dred*, save those from "nature." Through analysis the whole argument could have been derived from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or at least its *Key*.

On the lowest level, then, Wilson needed to analyze Stowe's argument. In addition nothing is so necessary to discerning the significance of the novel than to take seriously its argument from moral superiority. Wilson in effect treated Stowe as Nietzsche had done, but with far less awareness of what was at stake. Though he found himself in the grasp of a strong argument, he was unable to query it. His was a neophytish moral or cultural relativism. To judge the significance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in particular and Stowe's work in general, we must re-think the work itself and consider Stowe's own standards of effectiveness.

The Political Campaign

No attempt to explain her writing can abstract long from "practical" endeavors. She found herself in 1853-1854 in the midst of an "association of individuals" dedicated to advancing anti-slavery discussion in Boston at her expense.[13] She considered even association with "ultras" to advance the purpose of her book. Similarly, she self-consciously undertook a campaign to England in 1853 to further the purpose of the book.

> It certainly cannot be agreeable to have such things brought out about one's country, and I, as an American, expect to feel very unpleasant about it, when I get to Europe, but then I do not see any way that a cancer can be cut out without giving pain. . .
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> . . . the city of Charleston is in a perfect state of blockade as to admission of any discussion from the northern free States, and yet I saw advertised by a book-seller there, all the leading English Reviews, each one of which has, within a few months, a very decided article upon slavery. The one in Blackwood I think has a good many statistics. . . There is besides all this, in England, some considerable well meaning but ill guided enthusiasm on this subject. . .[14]

A concrete, practical assault on slavery itself could not be better thought out. And anyone may consult Forrest Wilson's account of Stowe's anxiety in the early phases of the Civil War.[15] The practical purpose was indeed the elimination of slavery. But it is not obvious that an account of "Christian morality" or morality in general is the, or at least a, means of achieving that end. The significance of the novel lies in its successful adaptation of the specific means—the didactic novel—to the specific end envisioned— moral persuasion.

The significance of Stowe's novel lay in its being dedicated to the work of moral reclamation and preaching. Before the close of her life she penned a preface to her "official biography." She closed her preface by handing on the torch—half-way—in

Bunyan's words from *Pilgrim's Progress*: My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage and my courage and skill to him that can get it. She was not embarrassed to have been a preacher and did not quail before the sight of what she had done.

The Political Spin: the Drama

To know Uncle Tom turn to the beginning of the novel and contrast him with its other hero, George Harris. To begin at the beginning, the mechanism through which we view the action of the hero is indirection.[16] Throughout the novel Stowe revealed every significant development of Uncle Tom's character indirectly, in the process of discussing some other primary character or event. While, save for his first appearance, the very reverse is true of George Harris. Uncle Tom's character is rooted in relatedness to others in an extreme degree, to a degree equivalent to the individualism if not isolation of George Harris. (And in the end the consequences of Tom's relatedness overcome the consequences of George's individualism.)

Indirection is the method through which the character of the slave who is yet a slave is revealed when his character is not slavish. Stowe respects the formal requirement that the slave as slave has no will. The slave will speak up as a man when he ceases to be a slave.[17]

Most of the story of George Harris is the story of a free man. Uncle Tom remains a slave for long after George Harris is free. Chapters eighteen through thirty-three, therefore, continue to insinuate Uncle Tom into the drama, rather than to make him the central agent. That is, though by this point he does speak, strictly speaking his speeches continue to be subordinated to the purpose of developing other characters. This is at least the appearance. For by the end Uncle Tom manifestly bears a primary responsibility for the events that have unfolded.

Chapter eighteen reveals Uncle Tom's coming to rule in the St. Clare household on the analogy of Joseph's coming to rule in Egypt. Uncle Tom begins to occupy—and *pursue*—the position of spiritual guide to the least of the slaves as well as to the master. Then, in chapter thirty-three—the last occasion of a mere insinuation of Tom—we have the fullest description of our hero that the novel contains. Though that chapter apparently fulfills the promise of its title, "Cassy" (We do meet Cassy, by name that is, for the first time), it is uncontested that its dramatic pitch—and that of the novel—is Uncle Tom's declaration of independence, "but this yer thing I can't feel it right to do;—and, Mas'r I *never* shall do it,—*never*!" (original emphasis)[18] Thereafter, Tom speaks to us directly and freely. And it must not be neglected that Tom's emancipation came in his first couple of weeks on Simon Legree's plantation, where he remained two or three years longer (the time deliberately left vague by Stowe). Thus, the point of chapter thirty-three is Tom's resistance to Simon Legree.

Chapter one introduced the necessity for a redefinition of humanity. Chapter two offered the open and obvious example of one form of the expression of humanity, the example of George Harris. In chapter eighteen we see a counterexample, a form of humanity represented by Uncle Tom and which remains essentially hidden. (So hidden, in fact, that James Baldwin failed to see it in his condemnation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* above all else for what he calls "its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended").[19] In chapter thirty-three we encounter the question of whether humanity or humaneness endures in the form it assumes in Uncle Tom in a way that it cannot endure in the form it assumes in George Harris.

The novel's account of this perplexity is its account of the standard by which

Uncle Tom is chosen hero over and above George Harris. To understand that choice one would have to look still more closely at the drama of the novel. More precisely, closer attention to the drama reveals why the method of Uncle Tom's emancipation is morally more persuasive than the method of George Harris' emancipation. We grasp Stowe's intent best when we become mindful of the alternatives she confronted. She wished to attack slavery and to reveal the erroneous principle of justice that was its support. She could do so by inveighing against the abridgment of the liberty of men often the equal or superior in capacity to their masters. (This alternative was reflected in the sub-plot of George Harris' escape from slavery.) That approach, however, meant that she attacked the regime itself and thus undermined the notion of an American common good as America then stood. Or, she could appeal to the common good of the American polity. And in that she were required to show what were the true American principles and wherein the practice of slavery departed from them. Thus, she could reveal the prospects for good—even for the lawful masters—threatened by the existence of slavery.

As if to show how her choice was made, Stowe incorporated both alternatives in the almost parallel plots of the novel. We have the story of George Harris' escape and education as well as the story of Uncle Tom. Indeed, to explain the novel it will be, finally, sufficient to answer the question: Why was Uncle Tom rather than George Harris named as the "hero of our story"? George Harris certainly fits the more traditional—Patrick Henry—model of the American hero. Thus we wonder why the unusual, uncommon man should be chosen as the hero in order to assure our sympathy for the many, the lowly. Why does the democratic American polity require a human model of surpassing excellence in order to attain democratic happiness?

The first critic properly noting the tension between George Harris and Uncle Tom nevertheless failed to perceive the significance of that tension, although he acknowledged the complexity of the novel. Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* relates the tension in the following terms:

> Poor George—his existence is fictional only, not mythic. Unlettered Negroes to this day will speak of a pious compromiser of their own race, who urges Christian forbearance rather than militancy, as a 'Tom' or 'Uncle Tom;' it has become a standard term of contempt. But no one speaks of the advocate of force who challenges him as a 'George,' though Mrs. Stowe's protagonist of that name was a very model for the righteous use of force against force.[20]

One must note, however, that "to this day" hardly dates back further than 1940. Until then Uncle Tom was highly regarded by blacks as well as others and not generally considered a "pious compromiser" (despite Delaney's critique in the 1850s). Stowe knew that Americans—including "unlettered Negroes"—already had the example of Patrick Henry and other exponents of the righteous use of force against force from the American founding. (See the artfully colored portrait of George Washington that hangs from Uncle Tom's cabin wall.[21]) But the criticism was meant to go deeper than that. Fiedler understood Uncle Tom merely as the exponent of a "primitive piety."

For that reason he considered George Harris' "challenge" not merely as a genuine alternative but rather as the *only* way. And Uncle Tom's sentimental character is but the mythic, or rather fictional, creation of a guilt-ridden conscience, hungering for real expiation and not the mere contempt a George offers. The righteous use of force against force was unproblematic for Fiedler and not an affirmation of the right of the stronger. Stowe's view was more sublime and less optimistic. Thus, George was for her an admirable but too limited character, with whom she identified the American founding in some respects.[22]

A latter-day statement that seems closer to the mark is Irving Kristol's plea for fairness to Uncle Tom: "If none reproached him for not demanding his freedom, it was because he evidently already possessed it—that inner transcendent freedom which all noble souls possess, and which the human race will never cease to venerate, so long as it venerates anything beyond its material self."[23]

The Political Philosophy

Uncle Tom's Cabin deals with the question of equality.[24] It depicts the meaning of equality through the vehicle of the greatly superior man: the human model of surpassing excellence.

Dred (Stowe's later, apocalyptic novel), on the other hand, deals with liberty.

There the question of equality is not openly raised. And the really free man is in the state of nature—a state in which moral equality is necessarily present but not of great consequence.

Hence, Stowe emphasized Dred's physical prowess, though he is great-souled; and she emphasized Uncle Tom's spiritual strength, though he possesses great physical prowess.

Stowe believed that an emphasis upon liberty constituted a danger so far as the purposes of civil society were concerned. Where men self-consciously enjoy liberty, understood as an essential freedom of will, they become conscious of their differing capacities. Liberty gives birth to desires that may otherwise be repressed. But not all who experience the desire possess adequate means of satisfaction. Only they who can both desire a thing and obtain it, therefore, seem to be fully free. And all who fall short seem justly restricted.

Yet, they who are deficient in some one respect may not be so in another. And even if they are deficient in all respects, they yet retain the capacity to adapt some means to some ends. In their case liberty is also possible. But it will seem a mean thing in comparison to the liberty of all who command superior means. And the superior will find it difficult to show any respect for the inferior. Without mutual respect for their respective capacities, superior and inferior human beings cannot associate in a single polity devoted to liberty. For the one will enslave the other, from contempt, or be himself enslaved in the default of decisive action, from envy. There is no ground of respect for difference in liberty.[25] Liberty can constitute a principle of civil association only if it emerges from a ground of respect for difference. This necessary condition was the object of consideration in Stowe's first major slavery writing, "The Two Altars." Equality is the ground of respect for difference. Stowe believed that all appeals to civil purposes had to address the polity as if it emerged from a care for moral equality.

The emphasis on moral equality establishes a willingness to obscure distinctions based on capacity as the condition of forming society. Thus, every member of society stands in relation to every other as morally competent to judge no further than his own good. By insisting on a general incompetence or deficiency, however, men undermine all claims to mastery. Thus, they save each for everyone the liberty to command such means as he may to the fulfillment of appropriate desires.

In the "Preface" to the European edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in 1852,[26] Stowe maintained that compromise on slavery was no longer possible. She invited Europeans to emigrate to America, prepared to vote against slavery. The kind of liberty she wished to defend required vigilance still but beyond vigilance the pre-eminence of moral equality.[27] Liberty for all, by necessity, means that moral equality is more important than liberty. For moral equality guarantees but cannot be guaranteed by liberty.

Where liberty is worshipped and nature rules, the superior will subdue the inferior, whether by force or persuasion. Because of nature's indifference to the hopes of human morality, mere law cannot command the hierarchy nature prescribes. Slavery in the modern world is based on the absolutization of liberty as the right of the strongest. And *Dred* argues that soon or late the force of this principle must give the lie to the pretense of social convention. Soon or late must a strong man emerge who is conventionally a slave or inferior. And in applying this regnant principle of justice he will trod the in fact weaker under his foot. *Dred* portends a world of ugly and violent recrimination, logically consistent with the regnant morality. Stowe employs this portent to warn of the necessity to abandon a principle of justice that distinguishes men radically.[28]

This prospect is subdued in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where a defense of moral equality reveals that law or social convention may indeed succeed in masking the hierarchy of nature. In fact, Stowe believed that the purposes of civil society require masking the hierarchy of nature. Nonetheless, the underlying assumption of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* agrees with the assumption of *Dred*: that institutions or social conventions can impose *only* a social hierarchy. The crucial question is whether the social hierarchy will be amenable to the incidence of natural superiority in goodness? The answer is, not where superiority must resist the impulses of law. Moral equality successfully masks the natural hierarchy only when it does not demand the submission of the superior, especially those superior in goodness.

Yet, superiority in goodness, if it is possible, seems to deny the basis of moral equality. It seems to raise a claim to command which both respects differences in men and distinguishes men radically. As if to emphasize this paradox, moral equality also cannot distinguish one people from another, as liberty may. A people dedicated to liberty are distinguished from a servile people. But a people affirming moral equality, as the basis of their claim, is not thereby distinguished from another people ignorant of that principle. That is, they claim no superiority *vis-à-vis* another people, because the principle they affirm asserts a universal deficiency. Only as their attachment to moral equality leads to their enjoyment of liberty can they be said to live a relatively better life. The attachment to moral equality not only disallows radical distinctions among fellow citizens; it disallows radical distinctions among humankind.

Moral equality respects the differences in men only if it is false to say that superiority in goodness confers a title to rule. Distributive justice is giving to every man his due, what is fitting to him. It requires respect for the differences in men. Superiority in goodness is a superiority of judgment with respect to what is fitting. But every member of society stands in relation to every other as morally competent to judge no further than his own good. That men are possessed of differing capacities of judgment does not dispossess them of the claim to judge. Those superior in goodness must possess a superior wisdom about the things good for men; they must be human models of surpassing excellence. If they do not enjoy a title to rule men, it must be that ruling others is not among the good things individual men require as such.

Ruling oneself is a greater good than ruling others. And although they who rule others may, nay, must still rule themselves, they who are ruled are prevented from ruling themselves. Thus, they are denied the greatest human good. It would be singularly unaccountable that they who are superior in goodness would gain, by their goodness, the right to impair the goodness of others. The arbitrary power of judging for others is not good for the judge. The absolute power of judging for oneself is morally necessary. Those superior in goodness exercise such power best. But they preserve that power for themselves only as all men possess it. When those inferior in goodness exercise that power arbitrarily, the good of all is imperiled. Those of inferior capacity require to be guided if moral equality is to be preserved.

How can men be guided by the wise if the wise possess no power to rule them? The model of Christianity provides the answer for Stowe. Those superior in goodness are mainly so because they serve the good of others.[29] They do not usurp the right of judgment, but they supply the appropriate ends or desires and the means suited to the capacities of their fellows. They acquire a mastery over others, largely through opinion. And they do so without respect to their own conventional status. The truest form of mastery not only does not depend upon the law, but also may not do so. Moral equality is the principle that could assure that men are not deprived of the beneficence of superior wisdom at the same time they are protected against despotism.

The strongest defense of moral equality is the demonstration of superior goodness at work under the worst conditions: despotism. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presents an ideal case: The man so far superior by nature that he will rule the opinions of others, including those called his masters, though himself enslaved. But the ideal does not teach the indifference of goodness to conventions so much as it demonstrates the character of the goodness that were possible were impediment removed.[30]

Uncle Tom Triumphant: or, Finding Light in Moral Darkness

Tom's "declaration of independence," as in the case of George Harris, is the expression penultimate to the final refusal to surrender to slavery.[31] And, as George's "declaration" is preceded by an antepenultimate anticipation;[32] there is a parallel in the story of Tom. The point of chapters thirty through forty is Tom's resistance to Legree. The initial chapter recounts of Tom that "He had a master!" in spite of his *own* judgment, upon surveying the crowd of bidders attending the auctioning of St. Clare's estate, that there was not present a single man "whom he would wish to call master." And it is in the final chapter of this series that Tom's "victory" over Legree is consummated in the form of heightened consciousness—consciousness-cum-conscience. Tom's *conscience-raising* demonstrates its power by reclaiming the previously imbruted Sambo and Quimbo and in lighting the fire of Legree's fatal insanity.

> Yes, Legree; but who shall shut up that voice in thy soul? that soul, past repentance, past prayer, past hope, in whom the fire that never shall be quenched is already burning! (*UTC*, 472)

Stowe's unchristian-like conclusion of the utter loss of Legree's soul directly contradicts Tom's plea for Legree's repentance. This points to a distinction between the hero and the author, which completely accounts for Tom's resistance and the character of his *conscience-raising*.

Legree is not a man to the author. He is always regarded as beyond redemption precisely because he is but a form of consciousness the foundation of which is refuted in the person of Tom.[33] Stowe does not deny the Lord's forgiveness, but she disagrees with the notion of an elect.[34] It is she that has Tom implore Legree to repent. What she sees, therefore, is still more comprehensive than what Tom may see. The drama requires this massive intrusion of her personal perspective. To her Legree is rather the "work of the law" than a man, and such law can only be overcome—it cannot be saved. The fire that is burning, the coming revolution, shall overthrow the law. Thus, Stowe does not really undercut Tom, who speaks to the man—the human potentiality— while Stowe speaks only to the institution—the form of consciousness.

Legree became Tom's master by convention only. We have in this story the very model of the failure of the right of the stronger—in the form of law—to create the basis of human conscience. Tom judged that none of his prospective buyers was in fact a master to him. And we are entitled to inquire whether his finding a master did not depend, Hegel-style, on his own consciousness of being mastered? If so, the Hegelian principle has been adapted to its self-refutation by virtue of the Aristotelian dichotomy between legal or conventional slavery and actual slavery, and the resulting denial of an historical basis for the master-slave development of consciousness. That is, consciousness is independent of circumstances insofar as the objective consciousness is a product of the subjective consciousness. Only if subjective consciousness were wholly produced by objective consciousness—environmental determinism—could it then be said that consciousness emerges from circumstances. In addition, that consciousness would always be present or momentary—even in the absolute moment—and there could be no unfolding history, i.e., historical or trans-temporal consciousness, strictly speaking.

Masters and slaves as such, then, would be ephemera without significance. For transcending or overcoming depends on the possibility of a historical or non-momentary consciousness, one not only formed by circumstance but also preserved with reference to circumstance. Even the slave who becomes a master must become a master with reference to having been a slave. This rigidity, nay, ritual of role and type is refuted in the model of Tom, wherein it becomes clear that the transaction of consciousness between master and slave is not two-fold but four-fold. It is insufficient for each to recognize—impute—the special characteristic of the other, since the doing so presupposes what is not self-evident, the recognition of the special characteristic of oneself quite apart from the imputation of another and hence with regard to every possible other. That is, each is always master and slave in potential, and only accidentally either in fact. Consciousness as such derives from the recognition of the accidental as accidental and hence the resulting discovery of the relationship between the subjective consciousness and the objective consciousness.

I wish to make clear that I do not consider *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, nor even the parallel work of Calvin Stowe, an attempt to articulate the philosophy of Hegel. This is not a dialog with Hegel insofar as no pretense whatever is made to answer his every point or every significant point. But it is equally clear that this *one* problem—recognized as deriving from Hegel—is seen as needing a solution. Its relationship to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is also clear. Calvin Stowe made substantial contributions to the novel. Calvin's demonstrated his concern with Hegel in his own work. These two facts could be admitted and yet be thought to be independent. But that is not the case. In the precise chapters we consider we find a textual connection with Calvin's attack on "the Hegelian philosophy."[35] In his attack Calvin Stowe characterized "the Hegelian philosophy" analytically as the complete identification of the perceiving subject and the perceived object.

> Admitting this as a fundamental principle, what is God? Is God the creator of man, or is man the creator of God? The latter of course. The human mind is the only development of God,—only by the workings of the human soul does God arrive at self-consciousness; and if there were no men there would be no God, as there can be no color without an eye, and no sound without an ear. There seems to be recognized a sort of *natura naturans*, a sort of blind, unconscious, fermenting leaven, constantly working; but this never attains to personality or consciousness except in the human soul. ("The Four Gospels…" p. 509 and also *Origin & History*, 260)

I have quoted Calvin Stowe's critique of Hegel in spite of the fact that the skepticism it describes is by now a cliché in the ears of modern philosophy. I quote it to establish the role of the one, direct textual connection in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that enables us to discern why Tom was engendered. Concerning Hegel's thought, Calvin confessed that,

> I have no very definite knowledge of it. It stands before me, in its bulk, and its unintelligibleness, as a huge, shapeless, threatening spectre, most fitly described in the words of Virgil: *Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen adeptum.* (A monster, horrid, hideous, huge and blind.) ("The Four Gospels…", p. 508 and *Origin & History*, 258-259)

The precise Virgilian passage adapted by Calvin to the Hegelian *corpus* was also adapted by Stowe in the opening of chapter thirty of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the account of the slave warehouse.

What might the reader of the novel imagine a slave warehouse to resemble? They fancy some foul, obscure den, some horrible *Tartarus ‘informis, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.’*[36] (*UTC*, 372)

As the reader of these two passages immediately perceives, the application of Vergil is markedly different in each case. Stowe revealed that the reader must not expect evil to come dressed in the role. While Calvin revealed the imposing danger of Hegelian blindness, eventuating in the charge, “Atheistic liberty is the worst kind of tyranny” (“Four Gospels…,” p. 510 and *Origin & History*, 258-259). Nonetheless, it is surely a remarkable coincidence—all the more so since their purposes seem to differ—if Stowe and Calvin both found the applicability of the identical passage in Virgil quite independently. That they have not done so is revealed by the significance in each case of Vergil’s description of Polyphemus. Nor may it be said that Calvin copies Stowe, for he cites Vergil *exactly*. Stowe, on the other hand, is forced to change the text. Vergil’s *informe*, a neuter adjective, has to be changed to the masculine *informis* for the sake of agreement with the *Tartarus,* which replaces *monstrum*. Calvin’s citation must have come no less directly from Vergil than Stowe’s. And we are left to conjecture who inspired this happy coincidence.

Polyphemus is the cyclops of Odyssean legend who, after having his single eye expunged, is described by Vergil as a horrid monster. The darkness in which he wandered is as necessary to his monstrousness as his shapeless gigantism. The connection between this account of “the Hegelian philosophy” and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is found in the source and character of this darkness. In “the Hegelian philosophy” this is *produced* by the notion of subjective determination of objective fact—or, the discovery that human lights are the *only* lights of understanding and reality. Hence, the darkness is a moral darkness—incapacity to relate the human things in any terms broader than immediate circumstance and conditioning. Stowe presents the blinding force of human lights—the “light of the present”—in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. There is, in addition, the characterization of Tom’s transition to Legree’s plantation as a transition to inhabiting “dark places.”[37] Tom, you see, leaves the light of *St. Clare*. But the darkness of Legree’s farm is imparted less by the dense tropical foliage that surrounds it than by the identical moral darkness Calvin Stowe finds in “the Hegelian philosophy.” It is most significant that *all* of Tom’s moral instruction on the plantation takes place at night, sometimes without even the light of a candle. Stowe agrees with Calvin: the dark place is but a space in the mind—consciousness willfully narrowed to a single principle, “the determinate force of will.” (*UTC*, 457) Whether Calvin is correct to have reduced “the Hegelian philosophy” to the one-eyed blindness of the “fact-value” distinction is a question that can occupy profound thinkers at a later time. Our task here is to make clear the myth of Tom. And it is undeniable that he serves to carve out of darkness a greater sphere for the moral work of active intellect.

Tom, the Freeman

At this point in our narrative it should be clear that but one thing is necessary to the consummation of this task. Tom need be conscious—demonstrably so—of the misfortune which has befallen him. Thus, he must reveal how he shall preserve his liberty in the obvious case where the whole point is to deprive him of it. The author wastes no time in furnishing the materials of this drama. In chapter thirty-one, “The Middle Passage,” Legree unwittingly (so little is he master) hurls down the gauntlet when he discovers Tom’s Methodist hymn book.

> ‘I have none o’ yer bawling, praying, singing niggers on my place . . . *I’m* your church now! You understand,—you’ve got to be as *I* say.’ (*UTC,* 386, original emphasis)

In chapter thirty-two, with the slaves trudging along behind his wagon in a dusty trail, Simon ordered his tribe to produce mirth: "Strike up a song, boys." He was wholly surprised and not a little angered to be met from Tom's lips with

> Jerusalem, my happy home.
>
> Name ever dear to me!
>
> --- --- --- (*UTC*, 392)

Legree silenced Tom and demanded something "rowdy." "One of the other men" satisfied master's craving to dispose of the bodies and souls of others. Here began Tom's resistance to Legree. In light of Legree's previously announced distaste for "Methodism" on the occasion of their first meeting, Tom's defiance was a declaration of hostility. The sequence of events following is a steady escalation of tension, culminating in Tom's declaration of independence in chapter thirty-three. This declaration has been described above. But I wish to reiterate that it comes in the first few weeks of Tom's presence at the Legree farm. There follow two years or more of struggle, culminating in Tom's triumph. We require now but to describe what that triumph consists of.

At the close of these chapters, Stowe provides a thumbnail summary of Tom's

Life:

> An eternal, inexorable lapse of moments is ever hurrying the day of the evil to an eternal night, and the night of the just to an eternal day. We have walked with our humble friend thus far in the valley of slavery; first through flowery fields of ease and indulgence, then through heart-breaking separation from all that man holds dear. Again, we have waited with him in a sunny island, where generous hands concealed his chains with flowers; and, lastly, we have followed him when the last ray of earthly hope went out in the night, and seen how, in the blackness of earthly darkness, the firmament of the unseen has blazed with stars of new and significant lustre. (*UTC,* 466)

This summary would suggest that Tom was not at all conscious of the full nature of this struggle—"his chains" were "concealed" from him. That, however, would render both his judgment of Legree and his "unaccountable prejudice in favor of liberty" wholly inexplicable. This result is avoidable by only one device. The author's rare use of "we" in the expression, "we have walked with our humble friend," suggests that the summary offers a perspective other than Tom's and not peculiarly the author's, namely, our own. The likelihood of this is greatly increased by the appearance of bright new stars, which expand or transcend the earthly horizon. The new stars or *lustre* come into our view as the completion of that common sense perspective which characterizes the summary. Hence, we see in and through Tom consequences of his triumph that, in the nature of things, could only be secondary or even unconscious in him. The summary is an objective account of Tom's life including the illusions.

Tom's triumph takes on a slightly different form for us when we attempt to understand it as he understood it. But let us note the author's coloring—a third level if we will—before attempting to recover Tom's sense. Throughout these eleven chapters the most common metaphor is the biblical "morning-star" frequently applied to Tom.

The most common trope is darkness or some variant of that, including biblical characterizations. And the most common reference—if the indirect references through biblical allusions are permitted—is the reference to wisdom. The connection among the three tropes is suggested in the epigram to chapter thirty-five.

> And slight, withal, may be the things that bring
> Back on the heart the weight which it would fling
> Aside forever; it may be a sound,

> A flower, the wind, the ocean, which shall wound,—
> Striking the electric chain wherewith we're darkly bound.
> *Childe Harold's Pilgrimmage*, Canto 4 (421)

Stowe's abridgement of stanza twenty-three, in the fourth canto of Byron's poem, replaces the repressed grief he described with a notion of the willful narrowing of the human horizon. Hence the darkness is self-induced. Or, moral incapacity is seen to result from the conscious effort to reduce the "weight" of cosmic relations in individual reflection. This application of Byron's poem is enhanced in chapter thirty-four, when Stowe makes use of the excised second line to confirm her point. There, Tom challenged Legree with the latter's insignificance in the face of eternity. Where, in Tom, the same conception produced "light and power," its effect on "the sinner's" self-induced darkness was "like the bite of a scorpion." (*UTC,* 434)

The light, the brightness, the morning-star which is Tom, is none other than the human horizon in itself.[38] Legree's darkness is the extreme recursion from that horizon.

Wisdom is that saving instrument which serves rather more to alleviate than to forestall darkness.

> Few—none—find what they love or could have loved.
> Though accident, blind contact, and the strong
> Necessity of loving, have removed
> Antipathies—but to recur, ere long,
> Envenom'd with irrevocable wrong;
> And Circumstance, that unspiritual god
> And miscreator, makes and helps along
> Our coming evils with a crutch-like rod,
> Whose touch turns hope to dust—the dust we all have trod. (Byron, cxxv)
>
> Yet let us ponder boldly—'tis a base
> Abandonment of reason to resign
> Our right of thought—our last and only place
> Of refuge; this, at least, shall still be *mine*;
> Though from our birth the faculty divine
> Is chain'd and tortured—cabin'd cribb'd,
>   confined,
> And bred in darkness, lest the truth should shine
> Too brightly on the unprepared mind,
> The beam pours in, for time and skill will couch the blind. (Byron, cxxvii)

Byron, of course, is not authority for Stowe's views beyond the version of the stanza she cited. But we have discovered already that the willful narrowing of the human horizon is related to the notion of circumstance as the human tutor. Stowe suggests a wisdom that transcends the circumstance yet answers to its every necessity. The initial epigram in this series of chapters invoked the complaint of divine indifference to evil prevailing over good. (*UTC,* 384) That complaint, of course, was the song of Legree's slaves. The final epigram in the series closes with Tom's song: "Deem not the just by Heaven forgot!"[39]which was "invented" by Stowe as a more apt expression of her purpose than the poet's "Nor let the good man's trust depart."[40]

Simon Legree's world of darkness is a world in which subjective consciousness of power is confused as objective evidence of power. When Legree reflected on Tom's persistent and belittling resistance, he was seized with paroxysms of anger and frustration.

> ‘I *hate* him!’ said Legree, that night, as he sat up in his bed; ‘I *hate* him! And isn’t he MINE? Can’t I do what I like with him? Who’s to hinder, I wonder?’ And Legree clenched his fist, and shook it, as if he had something in his hands that he could rend in pieces. (*UTC,* 467, original emphasis)

The characteristics of Tom that create Legree’s frustration and doubt are such as led irreversibly to Tom’s triumph. But Tom triumphs rather over Legree’s world of darkness and only incidentally over Legree. Tom had answered Legree’s incredulous “Isn’t he MINE” some years earlier. In this moment of Legree’s mortal attack, therefore, the question is but the faintest glimmer of a dawning consciousness of impotence in Legree. And it anticipates a vulnerability to conscience, which never takes redemptive shape in Legree but succeeds in torturing him.[41]

Tom’s triumph consists of the mastery of conscience—a heightening of conscience to the point that it provides *the* defense against the false images of consciousness. Tom characterizes his triumph in that moment—following his declaration of independence—when Cassy counsels him to “give up!” The advice brings a shudder to Tom, partly because he recognized in it the voice of his own weakness. Cassy boldly asserts the incompatibility of right and strength—the former is subordinated to the latter. She boldly asserts God’s indifference to the fate of at least some men. And she conceives of the circumstances on Legree’s plantation as raising implacable barriers both to doing good and receiving good. (410-411) As the author herself had done before, (*UTC,* 394-397) Cassy concludes the brutalization of the slaves to be complete. Paradoxically, Cassy counsels a prudent regard for oneself,—attachment to worldly things—the precise foundation of the brutalization.

It is the spectre of brutalization that governs Tom’s triumph. He is motivated rather or primarily by the desire to preserve a certain character of soul. Tom commonly speaks in the singular of *his* struggle and *his* victory, while Cassy and the others characteristically speak in the plural of *their* submission and *their* degradation. Tom is a naïf.

> ‘Poor critturs!’ said Tom,—‘what made ’em cruel? and, if I give out, I shall get used to ’t, and grow, little by little, just like ’em! No, no, Missis! I’ve lost everything,—wife, and children, and home, and a kind Mas’r,—and he would have set me free, if he’d only lived a week longer; I’ve lost everything in *this* world, and its clean gone, forever,—and now I *can’t* lose Heaven, too; no, I can’t get to be wicked, besides all.’ (*UTC,* 411, original emphasis)

Tom’s perspective of his life’s history differs radically from our own. First, where we find an earthly illumination Tom sees the prospect of heaven. And secondly, what we regarded as an illusion (“his chains concealed with flowers”) Tom clearly sees as mere misfortune. In consequence, the eternal and comprehensive loss of everything is nothing other than a matured insensitivity to worldly things—the discovery that such things are suspended by the rarest cords of unlikelihood and vitiated, shot wholly through with accident. In our perspective, Tom was deprived of hope. In his perspective, hope is radically founded on and limited to the power to form one’s own soul. For this reason he considers Legree’s slaves “poor critturs.” Even as he describes the process of habituation—conditioning—he is incredulous as to its power.

It is proper that Tom struggled to avoid brutalization. Stowe had declared that “the whole object of training” of “the Negro” was “directed towards making him callous, unthinking, and brutal.” (*UTC,* 375) In resisting the intention of the training to which he is subject, Tom proves not only that he is wrongly enslaved but also, paradoxically, that *he is no slave at all!* Tom’s triumph is a triumph over slavery—or, a triumph over the foundation of that form of consciousness suggested in the expression “callous, unthinking, and brutal.” Cassy mistakenly believes Tom’s appeal to Heaven to be the expression of a fear of Hell. She reminds him, again paradoxically, that the slave will not be held responsible for the wickedness he is forced to practice. Tom considers that the true defeat: to be deprived of responsibility for one's character, to be merely a victim. It may be that the wicked slave will not go to hell, Tom admits. But he will yet be wicked. '. . . it won't make much odds to me how I come so; it's the *bein' so,*—that ar's what I'm dreadin'!' (*UTC,* 412, original emphasis) Tom's triumph consists in the defense of the priority of self-control to all other forms of human endeavor. No other point in the novel produces a like intellectual experience. Cassy is awed, stupefied—"a new thought" had struck her.

> 'O God a' mercy! you speak the truth! O—O—O!'—and with groans, she fell on the floor, like one crushed and writhing under the extremity of mental anguish. (*UTC,* 412)

The light that floods Cassy's mind is the bright, new star we found in Tom. Our perspective differs from his, because we are yet in need of discovering what he already knows. Tom would have shocked us if he had originally declared that his victory did not consist in either winning his liberty or assuring his salvation. We could have thought those two to exhaust all possibilities. We now can see that it is of no consequence that Tom did not win his liberty in the conventional sense—a fact that he even recognized. And his salvation is not the end by which his victory is characterized, even if it is a fit reward.

Stowe entitles chapter thirty-eight "The Victory." The chapter is headed by a biblical epigram, which suggests the two-fold victory over the fear of death and the pains of an after-life.[42] But Tom does not die in this chapter nor is death threatened save as the constant companion of mortal combat. Here Tom met the test that exceeded the heroic and dramatic confrontation. He witnessed and endured day by day, week after week, and month after month the conditioning that corroded the slaves' humanity. No longer naive,

"Tom no longer wondered at the habitual surliness of his associates." (*UTC,* 444)

The gloomiest problem of this mysterious life was constantly before his eyes,—souls crushed and ruined, evil triumphant, and God silent . . . Tom wrestled, in his own soul, in darkness and sorrow. (*UTC,* 444) Nor could holy word illumine this darkness.

> He . . . drew his worn Bible from his pocket. There were all the marked passages, which had thrilled his soul so often,—words of patriarchs and seers, poets and sages, who from early time had spoken courage to man,—voices of the great cloud of witnesses who ever surround us in the race of life. (*UTC,* 445)

And Legree was attentive to the decline in his spirits—ready to assail naive faith and to couple the assault with an appeal to self-interest. Legree contrasted the "lying trumpery" of religion with his own concrete nature. However limited the concrete individual "can do something" and as such is a sure guide to the future. Tom did not descend so low. He resisted the ultimate despair, that there is absolutely no connection in the world between goodness of soul and justice of reward,[43] and he began the re-ascent with a vision of "one crowned with thorns." Tom discovered that it were insufficient to transcend the pleasant and desirable things, that indeed one must transcend the needful things, in order to assure self-mastery even to the last degree.

> . . . he that hour loosed and parted from every hope in the life that is now, and offered his own will with an unquestioning sacrifice to the Infinite. (*UTC,* 446)

Thus did Tom pass through his wilderness.[44] He did not change; he simply had to face the ultimate test. Tom's victory is over himself, which makes it a victory far superior to that of George Harris. His victory over Legree is a secondary but natural result of his self-mastery.

This important chapter concludes with a demonstration of the kind of activity that accompanies heightened conscientiousness. Tom's ensuing cheerfulness and helpfulness become the standard (and threat) of the entire plantation. He began to master his "associates" even as he had begun to master Legree’s opinion *before* the ultimate test.[45] He began to re-establish the moral authority he exercised in the Shelby plantation. In few words, Tom demonstrated the existence of the human residuum by reclaiming these imbruted souls to the ranks of humanity. He demonstrates the triumph of the human model of surpassing excellence in the worst of circumstances.

Finally, Uncle Tom-cum-Father Tom (he is never called “Uncle Tom” by any adult in the novel!) recognizes and accepts his responsibility for having raised the hopes of a people who but the day before were resigned to life without hope. Challenged by an awakened Cassy to murder their common oppressor, Tom recoiled in horror. He stuck to his original argument, “good never comes of wickedness!” But this answer is insufficient in a way that the previous fear of being wicked at all was not. We may point out by analogy that being good could be even more compelling than “not being wicked.” And it is Tom who has awakened in Cassy and all the slaves a desire to be good. To Tom, as we have seen, the punishment of the unjust is the work of God. But may it not also be incidental to securing the good? Cassy thinks it is. ‘Any life is better than this. . .’ ‘What has he made me suffer? What has he made hundreds of poor creatures suffer? Isn’t he wringing the life-blood out of you? *I’m called on; they call me*!’ (*UTC,* 452, emphasis added)

For most human beings the desire to defend the good is irresistible—as Stowe reminded the Quakers. And they who arouse in others a love of the good must bear the responsibility for the consequences. Tom accepts his responsibility by offering the dual alternative of a blood-free escape for Cassy and his continued dedication to exercising moral leadership among the remaining slaves (for whom, eventually, must not the first alternative also become necessary?). The force of Tom’s proposal results from its being inessential to deflecting Cassy from the murder she had meditated. Tom suggests the escape only *after* he has stilled the blood-lust, and in frank recognition that it “t’an’t natur’” for Cassy to resist the passion to defend the good.

The Myth of Uncle Tom

Tom dies in the arms of young George Shelby. As he did on the day he departed the Shelby farm, he finds it necessary to admonish George not to revile his (Tom s) “owner.” But this last occasion is no mere political savvy, looking to Tom’s own interest. Tom instructed George in the manner in which the “myth of Tom” should be related back in Kentucky. “. . . it’s nothing but love!” Tom wishes that his death scene would not be related truly. And he asks George not to pray for hell for Legree. ‘O, don’t!—oh, ye musn’t!’ said Tom, grasping his hand; ‘he’s a poor mis’able critter! it’s awful to think on ’t! O, if he only could repent, the Lord would forgive him now; but I’m ’feared he never will!’ ‘I hope he won’t!’ said George; ‘I never want to see *him* (original emphasis) in heaven!’ ‘Hush, Mas’r George!—it worries me! Don’t feel so! He *an’t done me no real harm*,(emphasis added)—only opened the gate of the kingdom for me; that’s all!’ (*UTC*, 477-478)

Tom lends support to Calvin Stowe in the long battle he maintained within the church: the institution of slavery is to be reviled as beyond salvation, not the men. Still, Calvin’s antagonists may be accorded this much: it may be that the men cannot be saved *within* the institution. Legree’s salvation may depend on abolition, as the radicals would have it, while Christians are restrained from damning him, as the Stowes would have it. But even this generosity of sentiment must be judged rather by the absence of “real harm” than by the specific character of the sinner. The secret to Uncle Tom is that, while ordinary folk and even folk as extraordinary as George Harris never could have borne it, they never “laid a glove on” Tom.

Stowe makes clear that the nature of man is more seriously in question than the nature of Christianity. It is necessary to affirm a natural tendency to justice in order to avoid despair. What

Christianity may add or subtract from this tendency is a legitimate subject of inquiry, but it may not be the starting point. For this reason, the opening chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* introduces "a man of humanity," while the center of the work seeks to unveil the differing kinds of humanism. And the conclusion, Tom's myth—accepting the argument from equality that man is never "a creature to be trusted with wholly irresponsible power"—finds it necessary to obscure the truth that "the honorable, the just, the high-minded and compassionate," never "the majority anywhere in this world," are accordingly subjected to the abuses of the low. Just as it is ultimately true that "nothing" can protect the slave "but the *character* of the master,"[46] it is equally true that nothing secures the good in this life beyond the character of the bad.

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[1] A paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of The Southwest Political Science Association, panel on "Founding Principles in American Literature" held in New Orleans, Louisiana, March 25-27, 2005.

[2] Nietzsche, F. (1967). The Will to Power. New York, Random House.

[3] ALS, Francis Lieber to George Ticknor, Mar. 14, 1853 (Huntington Library). The account of Lieber's reaction is strengthened by the remarks cited from his correspondence in works such as Gossett. His reaction differs substantially from his reports of reactions by other southerners, except those going to the fact that it was widely noticed and evidently important.

[4] Stowe, H. B. Dred. Boston. Sampson & Company. Ch. I, "Life in the Swamps," p. 5.

[5] Carleton, G. W. (1968). Suppressed Book About Slavery. New York, Arno Press.

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[7] Wilson, R. F. (1941). Crusader in Crinoline, the Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company.

[8] Duvall, S. (1963). "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*: The Sinister Side of the Patriarchy." New England Quarterly: 3-22.

[9] Recent exemplars would include: Sachs, who finds in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "a coherent stylistic scheme" and notes that many critics have entirely overlooked the strategic and self-conscious element that is integral to all of Stowe's work…" [Sachs, E. E. (1992). Describing a Sphere: A Definition of Space in American Women's Domestic Fiction of the Nineteenth Century, University of Wisconsin., p. 65, 132]; Donovan who compares "Stowe's surface style" to a "'verbal quilt,'" adding that "events are set side by side so as to comment silently on one another" or "to change the mood or the aesthetic effect" [Donovan, J. (1991). *Uncle Tom's Cabin:* Evil, Affliction, and Redemptive Love. Boston, Twayne Publishers.]; Camfield, who points out that "the antirationalism of Stowe's work…has in part kept most twentieth-century critics from seeing the fully elaborated philosophical basis of her work." [Camfield, G. (1988) "The Moral Aesthetics of Sentimentality: A Missing Key to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." Nineteenth Century Literature 43:3, p. 335.];

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and Shipp: “Once we recognize the presence of the author’s genuine thematic concerns, we may begin to suspect that none of her choices are arbitrary or accidental.” [Shipp, R. H. (1986). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Ethos of Melodrama, Columbia University]. Weinstein proposes an underlying rationale for the approach taken by Stowe and her contemporary colleagues, suggesting that “in order to present themselves as active social agents, female authors had to present themselves as artists capable of projecting visions of the world worthy of both ethical and artistic genius.” [Weinstein, D. J. (2000). Educating sympathy: Imagination and convention in works by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, State University of New York at Buffalo. Sundquist’s assessment is that “The triangular entanglements among the role of women, the place of blacks in American history and society, and the radical powers of Christianity cannot be pulled apart or reduced to easy schematic interpretations. Precisely their knotted complexity reveals how inadequately *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* has been understood and how central it is, as a literary and political document, to the American experience.” [Sundquist, E. J. (1986). New Essays on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.] Also noteworthy and usual for the time at which he wrote are Levin’s comments : “It seems to me likely that the extraordinary popular success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* may owe as much to the book’s intellectual power as to its strong sentiment.” and “To see the richness of the historical evidence in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, … we must study the complex reality of the whole book.” [Levin, D. (1971). “American Fiction as Historical Evidence: Reflections on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” Negro American Literature Forum 5:4, 133, 154].

[10] Wilson, E. (1962). Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War. New York, Oxford University Press. Emphasis added.

[11] ibid., pp. xxxi-xxxii.

[12] ibid., p. 37.

[13] Garrison, Phillips, May, Calvin Stowe, and H. B. Stowe were the association. ALS, H. B. Stowe to H. W. Beecher, Jan. 13, 1854. (Stowe-Day).

[14] H. B. Stowe to Daniel R. Goodloe, Feb. 9, 1853, Andover, in Stephen B. Weeks, “Anti-Slavery in the South. . .” Southern History Association 2:2 (April, 1898).

[15] Forrest Wilson, op. cit., pp. 478-479.

[16] Camfield quotes an 1868 reader of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (E. P. Parker) who was alert to Stowe’s use of indirection: “‘She does not *tell*, but *shows* us what it is. She does not analyze, or demonstrate, or describe, but, by a skillful manner of indirection, takes us [there]…and allows us to see [the system of slavery] as it really is.’” [Camfield, G. (1988). “The Moral Aesthetics of Sentimentality: A Missing Key to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” Nineteenth-Century Literature 43(3): 319-345. Likewise, Shipp emphasizes that “Mrs. Stowe’s characters *are* what they *do*.” [Shipp, R. H. (1986). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Ethos of Melodrama, Columbia University. Original emphasis]

[17] The conclusion here may be doubted, if one takes “Persistent Sam,” Aunt Chloe, and Cassy to “speak up” independently in their expressions either of angst or ambition. I would insist, however, that each of these examples, as we shall see, represent the fundamental submission to slavery on the part of the slaves. That is particularly true of Cassy, whom Uncle Tom must reclaim from this character deforming submission. Mullen discusses the resistant orality that was part of the slave oral tradition, noting that “Nineteenth-century black women writers struggled in their texts to reconcile an oral tradition of resistance with a literary tradition of submission.” [Mullen, H. (1992). Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Our Nig, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* and *Beloved*. The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America. S. Samuels. New York, Oxford University Press. She presents the “resistant orality,” however, as a means to defend oneself rather than to free oneself.]

[18] The text cited throughout is the Oxford edition, edited by John A. Woods, 1965. Hereafter, *UTC*, with page references noted parenthetically.

[19] I am prepared to accept the argument that Baldwin is principally focused on that descendant of Uncle Tom, “Bigger Thomas” from Richard Wright’s Native Son. The fact would remain that he thus would have more reason to question Bigger’s attributed pedigree than to assimilate to the protest novel. [Baldwin, J. (1949). “Everybody’s Protest Novel.” Partisan Review 16: 578-85.]

[20] Fiedler, L. (1960) Love and Death in the American Novel. New York, Stein and Day, p, 264.

[21] While numerous Stowe scholars have noted the presence of this portrait in Tom’s cabin, none seem to have understood the device. Consider these examples: Riss states that “Rather than seeing this ‘negrification’ of Washington as Stowe’s effort to expose the hypocrisy of distributing liberal rights to according to race, I will argue that this moment exemplifies Stowe’s belief that racial homogeneity can provide the only

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secure foundation for either a familial or political community." [Riss, A. (1994). "Racial Essentialism and Family Values in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." American Quarterly 46(4): 513-544. To Brown "the portrait of George Washington (in blackface)…poignantly underscores… the marketability of slaves." [Brown, G. (1990). Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America. Berkeley, University of California Press.]

[22] Note the character of George's "Declaration of Independence," which affirmed his liberty but neglected its basis in moral equality as such. *UTC*, Ch. 12, "The Freeman's Defence."

[23] Kristol, I. (1965) "A Few Kind Words for Uncle Tom." Harper's Magazine. 230:95-99, p. 98.

[24] The novel's evident focus on equality is, however, missed by too many scholars, such as Saunders who goes so far astray as to assert that it "failed to advance the cause of equality." [Saunders, C. E. (2002). Houses Divided: Sentimentality in the Function of Biracial Characters in American Abolitionist Fiction. Princeton, Princeton University.]

[25] Boyd's analysis of the models of power in *Dred* acknowledges the enslaving potential of such unbounded liberty, although he errs in his belief that Stowe saw matriarchy as its alternative. [Boyd, R. (1991) "Models of Power in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*." Studies in American Fiction. 19 (1), p. 305.

[26] Published by Berhnard Tauchnitz at Leipzig, and reprinted in the 1965 Oxford edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Page references refer to the reprint edition.

[27] *UTC*, p. ixiv: "for they who enslave others cannot long themselves remain free."

[28] It is common enough for those who have analyzed *Dred* to emphasize that the novel voices warning; Hartshorne, for example, describes it as a "novel about that day of vengeance" [Hartshorne, S. D. (1995). "'Woe Unto You that Desire the Day of the Lord:' Harriet Beecher Stowe and the Corruption of Christianity in *Dred, A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*." Anglican and Episcopal History 64: 280-299.] and Berghorn as a warning of God's judgment, of Apocalypse" [Berghorn, D. E. (1988). "The Mother's Struggle:" Harriet Beecher Stowe and the American Anti-Slavery Debate., University of Pennsylvania.]. Several critics share Hamilton's sense that, in the end of *Dred*, "Stowe pulls back in horror from a vision of black retributive justice and insurgency." [Hamilton, C. "*Dred*: Intemperate Slavery." Journal of American Studies. 34 (2): 257-277.] None of these critics, however, have uncovered the deeper, philosophic underpinnings of this warning, although Cotugno moves in this direction with her understanding that in *Dred*, "…Stowe attempts to move the nation back to its founding principles…" [Cotugno, C. D. (2001). Form and reform: Transatlantic Dialogues, 1824—1876. Ph.D: 2001, Temple University.]

[29] Steele emphasizes the good done by Tom, seeing in his character an intentional echo of "the Suffering Servant of the synoptic tradition." [Steele, S. J., Thomas J. (1972). "Tom and Eva: Mrs. Stowe's Two Dying Christs." Negro American Literature Forum 6(3): 85-90, p. 85.] Smylie discusses the ways in which "Tom… demonstrates the 'sympathies of Christ" and "shows his willingness to become a vicarious sacrifice, to give up his own life protecting others." [Smylie, J. H. (1973). "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* Revisited: The Bible, the Romantic Imagination, and the Sympathies of Christ." Interpretation 27: 67-85, p. 82.] Lewis likens Tom to "the head servant, a 'patriarch in religious matters,' Christian teacher, friend to women, the downtrodden, and oppressed in the model of Christ." [Lewis, G. S. (1992). Message, Messenger, and Response: Puritan Forms and Cultural Reformation in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Oklahoma State University, p. 205.]

[30] A point Shipp cogently described in his dissertation.

[31] What is a matter of weeks in George Harris' case, however, is a matter of years for Uncle Tom!

[32] The conversation with Mr. Wilson.

[33] Stowe's deliberate use of the conventions of melodrama and her defense of the genre is discussed in Book Three of the longer work of which this is a précis. Here, however, it is worth noting comments by Brooks that in melodrama "The villain is simply the conveyer of evil, he is inhabited by evil" and "The world according to melodrama is built on an irreducible manichaeism, the conflict of good and evil as opposites and not subject to compromise." [Brooks, P. (1976). The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess. New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 33, 36.]

[34] Strout finds that Uncle Tom's Cabin "was in large part a protest against the Calvinist doctrine of human inability to merit salvation." Strout, C. (1968). "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Portent of the Millennium.":. n.s. 57: 375-385, p. 379-80.] To Donovan Stowe "seems to be moving away from the arbitrariness of orthodox Calvinism and toward a religion in which people can choose the path of salvation…by electing a change of heart within themselves…" [Donovan, J. (1991). *Uncle Tom's Cabin:* Evil, Affliction, and Redemptive Love. Boston, Twayne Publishers, p. 46.]

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[35] As also occurs in the novel's climactic account of humanism. Calvin Stowe launched an early attack upon Hegelian philosophy in his article, "The Four Gospels as We Now Have Them in the New Testament and the Hegelian Assaults on Them," published in Bibliotheca sacra in 1851. He later incorporated much of that argument into his *Origin and History of the Books of the Bible.* [Stowe, C. E. (1851). "The Four Gospels as We Now Have Them in the New Testament and the Hegelian Assaults on Them." Bibliotheca sacra 8: 503-529.] [Stowe, C. E. (1867). Origin and History of the Books of the Bible. Hartford, CT, Hartford Publishing Co.]

[36] Aeneid, iii, 658.

[37] Chapter xxxii. On the applicability of "the Hegelian philosophy" in this context, the following suggestive passage is relevant:

> Spirit in this case, therefore, constructs not merely one world, but a twofold world, divided and self-opposed. The world of the ethical spirit is its own proper present; and hence every power it possesses is found in this unity of the present, and, so far as each separates itself from the other, each is still in equilibrium with the whole. Nothing has the significance of a negative of self-consciousness; even the spirit of the departed is in the blood of his relative, is present in the self of the family, and the universal power of government is the will, the self of the nation. . . what is present means merely objective actuality, which has its consciousness in the beyond; each single moment, as an essential entity, receives this, and thereby actuality, from another, and so far as it is actual, its essential being is something other than its own actuality. Nothing has a spirit self established and indwelling within it; rather, each is outside itself in what is alien to it. [Hegel, G. W. F. (1931). The Phenomenology of Mind. New York, The MacMillan Co, p. 510-11.]

[38] In Lewis' analysis "Star is the biblical morning star, Christ, and is used interchangeably for Eva America, and in allusions to Tom. Eva is mythic, allegorical, noble, and if America can rid itself of slavery, it can be like the morning star in God's kingdom, as she is, restored to its innocence, and as Tom is when morning star (Christ) looks down on man of sin, purified by his sacrifice." [Lewis, G. S. (1992). Message, Messenger, and Response: Puritan Forms and Cultural Reformation in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Oklahoma State University, p. 247.]

[39] *UTC,* p. 466, and note.

[40] She substituted her line for the original first line in William Cullen Bryant's "Deem not that they are blest alone," fifth stanza.

[41] Compare p. 457, *UTC*

[42] I Corinthians, 15:57. Cf., verses 55, 56, & 58.

[43] Cf. Brooks on melodrama: "The *reward* of virtue…is only a secondary manifestation of the *recognition* of virtue." [Brooks, P. (1976). The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess. New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 27. Emphasis added.]

[44] That Tom should travel through such wilderness is intrinsic to the melodramatic structure, which typically includes "…a threat to virtue, a situation—and most often a person—to cast its very survival into question…" [Ibid, p. 29.]

[45] *UTC,* pp. 400-401.

[46] The religious radicals are not right, in the last analysis, although despotic slave owners must occur in some number. This result is in fact the work of human nature, as much as or more than the work of conditioning. While the institution is unjust or sinful, the men may or may not be.