

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN ENGAGES THE CANON¹

by

W. B. Allen

Michigan State University
Department of Political Science

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The presentation offered here opens the conversation about teaching *Uncle Tom* not from the perspective of a review of the text but from the perspective of the power of the text to introduce the canon. No other nineteenth century work of stature—apart from direct political speech—places readers in subsequent centuries in as direct contact with nineteenth century America as the work of H. B. Stowe. Stowe's political philosophy is almost entirely present in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel we all know illumines fundamental issues of interpretation and teaching. I shall focus on a single illustration: Stowe's use of Alexis de Tocqueville's acknowledged classic, *Democracy in America*.

(By anticipation, however, I should at least note that Stowe produced a directly didactic work [a conscious defense of the didactic novel: *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*], which is an ostensible travel diary that is, in fact, a conscious but inexplicit adaptation of the Tocquevillean perspective.)

Stowe's work pursued the lead introduced by her husband's, Calvin's, project as that was described in his analysis of Tocqueville (the first American critique), "Advantages and Defects of the Social Condition of the United States."² There Calvin insisted that the life of freedom *and* excellence is possible.

Tocqueville's chapter III (of volume one) is Calvin's point of departure, making the case for the regime of equality's openness to moral guidance. He blamed not equality for democracy's threatening elements but the temptations of self-interest that reliance upon rational self-interest as opposed to moral precept makes possible. One finds, he in-

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² Calvin E. Stowe, "The Advantages and Defects of the Social Condition in the United States of America," *American Biblical Repository* 2nd series, vol. 1 (January 1839): 130-161. That Calvin saw Harriet as helping to accomplish his personal goal is clear in this letter: "Why don't you write some more? We look in every issue for a piece from you. The little magazine goes abroad finely . . . You have it in your power, by means of that little magazine, to form the mind of the West for the coming generation." [ALS, Calvin E. Stowe to Harriet Beecher Stowe, May 19, 1842 (Stowe Day Foundation)] Note that Hedrick also cites this letter in her discussion of Calvin's encouraging Stowe to write and comments, "But Calvin Stowe's main concern was not with money but with the influence she could wield over the culture; it was the same Beecheresque plan that had drawn him into Lyman Beecher's wake to the West: Beecher's vehicle was the pulpit and the schools; hers would be the periodical press." [Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 139-140]

sisted, an almost complete equality in *the free states*, where Tocqueville spoke of the nation generally.

Tocqueville, however, provided a moving account of the differences between slave and free states on opposite sides of the Ohio River (the account that is mimicked in the dramatic account of Eliza's and George Harris' escapes and the parallel descent of Uncle Tom aboard *La Belle Rivière*). Calvin disputed the charge that America is untrue to itself, insisting rather that it is negligent in its moral duty. That is the decisive defect of her social condition, since attention to moral duty is *the* predicate of exploiting the advantage of that social condition.

Harriet Stowe, then, used the Tocquevillean metaphor to elaborate a view contrasting with Tocqueville's. This occurs in chapter twelve, in which Uncle Tom declares a certain moral superiority to the city. That declaration, however, is closely tied to the setting in which it occurs. For in that chapter emerges the origin of Stowe's twin themes of ascent from and descent into slavery, centering around the Ohio River.³ Tocqueville contrasted the conditions of American freedom and equality on the opposite banks of the river. That contrast was thematically developed in *La Démocratie en Amérique*.⁴ The opening theme of chapter twelve—Tom's independence of the city—directly reflects the discussion that precedes Tocqueville's account of the relationship between freedom and equality along *la belle rivière*.

The opening of Tocqueville's chapter eighteen is strongly reminiscent of the break between chapters eleven and twelve of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

The principal part of the task which I had imposed upon myself is now performed: I have shown, as far as I was able, the laws and manners of the American democracy. Here I might stop. (Tocqueville, p. 393)

Tocqueville regarded the political account of the American people as insufficient, and he therefore supplemented it with consideration of America's slave and Indian populations. That led to a further moral judgment, but the moral judgment that Tocqueville ultimately rendered is not to be understood—in its own terms at least—to compromise the political judgment he had already made. Tocqueville did not regard the problem of slavery as a “democratic” problem, even while recognizing it as an “American” problem.

³ Among the critics who have described the contours of Stowe's moral geography in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are: Lang (“the moral geography of the novel” is one in which “the Ohio River divides heaven from hell...”) [Amy Schrager Lang, “Slavery and Sentimentalism: The Strange Career of Augustine St. Clare” *Women's Studies* 12 (1986): 32], Bellin (who notes the paired plots of “Tom's journey South, deeper into enslavement, and the Harrises' journey North, closer to freedom...”) [Joshua D. Bellin, “Up to Heaven's Gate, Down in Earth's Dust: The Politics of Judgment in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*” *American Literature* 65 (1993): 275], Steele (who equates north with good and south with evil and finds in the Harrises' journey “...a comic counterpoint to the tragic-melodramatic southward and deathward movement of Uncle Tom”) [Thomas J. Steele, S.J., “Tom and Eva: Mrs. Stowe's Two Dying Christs” *Negro American Literature Forum* 6 (1972): 89] and Moers (in describing the “astonishingly rich river motif” of the novel, she points out “its elaborate journeyings of black man and white, crisscrossing down the river to hell and up the river to peace and freedom...”) [Ellen Moers, *Harriet Beecher Stowe and American Literature* (Hartford, CT: The Stowe-Day Foundation, 1978)].

⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, tr. by Henry Reeve (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), vol. I, Ch. xviii, especially pp. 430-431.

What accounts for Tocqueville's judgment is the entirely legitimate argument that the slaves are not in fact Americans. Unlike Justice Taney's *Dred Scott* opinion,⁵ however, this judgment has nothing to do with whether America's principles will tolerate citizenship for blacks. The answer to that question is unquestionably affirmative for Tocqueville. In his mind, what stands in the way is not American theory but American opinion and practice. The unfortunate consequence is that the blacks, no longer able to be removed from America, are nonetheless countryless—barred from participation in any of the saving graces of civilization. This perspective is the same as that which informed George Harris' rebellion. Hence, no principles applicable to political life may be derived from that source. The sad fact, he concluded, is that the "negro's" only "country" is his "home," the shelter "afforded by his master."⁶

The story of George Harris reflects Stowe's acceptance of Tocqueville's argument, so far as it goes. But he continued the argument to suggest the form of modern prejudice. Moderns, he held, have "three prejudices to conquer." These are "prejudice of the master," "prejudice of the race," and "prejudice of colour."⁷ The Stowes, however, argue that only the "prejudice of the master" is crucial; that, in fact, the two latter are included in this one. For that reason, moral equality constitutes the specific response. Moral equality permits moderns to recognize—as the ancients did—those positive differences in capacity among men. Unlike the ancient *ethnos*, however, moral equality is defensible universally and not as an accident of birth. Thus, the story of Uncle Tom reflects the Stowes's refusal to accept Tocqueville's argument that modern opinion cannot be changed.

Uncle Tom's story specifically refutes Tocqueville, but begins under the guidance of Tocqueville's transcendent principles. Stowe, however, carefully distinguished Toc-

⁵ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 1856.

⁶ Tocqueville, op. cit., p. 395. May this reflection have inspired our title, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Consider Tom's hovel on Legree's plantation, which was called his "cabin"—"a fact critics seem to have overlooked," as Donovan points out. [Josephine Donovan, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Evil, Affliction and Redemptive Love* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 101]

Tocqueville principally explains this sad state with reference to the differences between ancient and modern slavery. And those differences turn especially on the crucial fact of prejudice in the modern world having assumed an ineradicable status. Among the ancients, the slave was usually of the same race as the master, and often "the superior in education and instruction." [Tocqueville, p. 424] Manumission, therefore, was a ready and frequently used resort. To be clear: the condition for the recognition of the ancient slave's humanity—even his superiority—was the absence of a racial distinction. The implication is that that is the universal condition: positive differences in human capacities are recognizable only on the basis of previously established terms of common identity. A man radically unlike oneself in social, cultural, racial constitution will never be judged one's superior in non-trivial matters. Hence, "we scarcely acknowledge the common features of mankind in this child of debasement. . ." In order "to induce whites to abandon" their prejudices, "the negroes must change" in character *and* physiognomy. The miraculous changes in George Harris' physiognomy reflect precisely this demand (he became less "white" in proportion as he became more free!). Tocqueville, however, believed such miracles to be impossible: "but as long as this opinion subsists, change is impossible." [Tocqueville, p. 426] The condition for the change in character and physiognomy (through intermarriage) is a change in that very opinion which thwarts every attempt to change the condition! It is this judgment that assimilation was impossible—capable of producing only crude caricatures of the Europeans/Englishmen—which creates the need for a demonstration of some ground for the change of opinion apart from the politically desirable goal of assimilation.

⁷ *ibid.*

queville from full-fledged defenders of modern humanism. The dramatic form of the novel itself was inspired by his parallel account of the life in the free and slave states, which aims specifically to reveal how far slavery is inferior to freedom—for the masters.⁸

Tocqueville began by noting that still more stringent social barriers to contact between blacks and whites accompanied the increasing appearance of legal equality at the North. In contrast at the South, the unfettered rules of despotism admit of much more casual relationship between masters and servants. This argument served to repeat and affirm the disqualification of blacks for any kind of citizenship. But it also revealed the foundations of partial citizenship—the limited amenities granted to slaves in the South almost constitute an advance, compared to the infirmities they would suffer in the North. Tocqueville, however, presents this argument not in order to minimize the slave's plight, but to heighten the contrasts between the lives of slave-owners and free men. And nothing stands out so sharply as the fierce and prideful industriousness of the northerners. Thus, as slave states decline in produce and population, free states are fruitful and multiply.⁹ He concluded that a preference for liberty was decidedly less costly *and* more productive than servitude,¹⁰ but three elements affect this conclusion and are important to our story. First, “The white inhabitant of Ohio, who is obliged to subsist by his own exertions, regards *temporal prosperity as the principal aim of his existence.*” (Tocqueville, p. 433, emphasis added) Secondly, Tocqueville does not fail to notice here, as he did earlier, the effect of the Louisiana Purchase on American principles. He argues that the *entre-pot* of New Orleans, as part of a slave state, contributes so to raise the price of slaves as to make any economies impossible in the more northerly slave states. They must live with the market.¹¹ And, finally, nearly every energetic and enterprising slave-owner is a northern emigré.¹²

To Tocqueville, the call of self-interest and the improvident political act of expanding slavery into a highly demanding market joined to perpetuate the institution. Equally clear in his analysis is the expectation that the lure of profit would have led—and might yet lead—to the abolition of slavery if, first, no new market impetus is provided and, second, some way could be found to be rid of the slaves. He had earlier claimed that

⁸ Stowe's *Geography* is apposite here. Tocqueville could not have informed what she wrote in the 1833 edition; what she wrote in the 1855 plainly was so influenced: “Were I inclined to continue this parallel, I could easily prove that almost all the difference which may be remarked between the characters of the Americans in the Southern and Northern States, have originated in slavery...” Harriet Stowe may have wished but did not require that the parallel be extended, for the argument that preceded this conclusion is fully reflected in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. (Tocqueville, p. 434)

⁹ “But this truth was most satisfactorily demonstrated when civilization reached the banks of the Ohio. The stream Indians had distinguished by the name of Ohio, or Beautiful River, waters one of the most magnificent valleys which has ever been the abode of man. Undulating lands extend upon both shores of the Ohio, whose soil affords inexhaustible treasures to the laborer; on either bank the air is wholesome and the climate mild; and each of them forms the extreme frontier of a vast State: that . . . upon the left is called Kentucky; that upon the right bears the name of the river. These . . . only differ in a single respect; . . . slavery. . . Thus the traveler who floats down the current of the Ohio, to the spot where that river falls into the Mississippi, may be said to sail between liberty and servitude.” [Tocqueville, pp. 430-431]

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 432.

¹¹ *ibid.*, and cf. *UTC*, p. 163.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 434, and cf., *UTC*, Ch. xv, p. 174, the description of the St. Clare family, and the account of Simon Legree.

the “opposite consequences” of slavery and freedom “suffice to explain” the differences between ancients and moderns.¹³ The ancients, it turned out, did not understand the call of self-interest¹⁴--that it could advance freedom. There results the formula of modern humanism: slavery “may be attacked in the name of the master; and, upon this point, interest is reconciled with morality.”¹⁵

How did this argument affect the building of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? In the first place, Stowe uses each of the three elements of Tocqueville's conclusion in constructing her drama, in addition to the dramatic form of the contrast between Ohio and Kentucky. The name of her fictitious steamer, *La Belle Rivière*, has no particular reason to be French, apart from the fact that French is the tongue in which the story of the Ohio's Indian name was related in the version of *Democracy of America* probably read by Calvin and Harriet Stowe.¹⁶ It is certain, at least, that the translation used in his 1839 essay differs markedly from the English translation then available and is a much more literal rendering.¹⁷

Now, if Stowe named her steamer *La Belle Rivière* specifically to call Tocqueville to mind rather than as an incidental reflection of her first exposure to these themes, we should expect what we indeed find, and that is the recurrence of the themes of his discussion of slavery. The slave's countryless status is foremost. We have seen it in George, and we see it yet more profoundly in Tom. In addition we discuss the role of self-interest in modern liberalism, and Stowe offers a new version in response. The argument from self-interest to humanity is thematically raised in chapter twelve. And every schoolboy knows the extent to which Stowe relied on the northerner-cum-southern

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 431.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 434.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 435.

¹⁶ Joan Hedrick mistakenly attributes the naming of the steamboat, *La Belle Rivière*, to Stowe's having “worked the details of Charles Beecher's New Orleans experience into her story” [Hedrick, p. 222]. She claims that Beecher traveled on a steamboat of this name on his journey down the Mississippi and cites *Chariot of Fire: Religion and the Beecher Family* by Marie Caskey as the source of this information. She is mistaken. Here is what Caskey actually wrote: “Charles left for New Orleans in late December of 1838, taking passage on a boat headed down “La Belle Rivière” to the Mississippi.” Caskey, of course, means that Beecher traveled down the Ohio River (often called “La Belle Rivière” because “Ohio” means “beautiful” in the Indian tongue in which it was christened) to reach the Mississippi. Harriet Beecher's first book, the reader must always recall, was a “geography”! [Marie Caskey, *Chariots of Fire: Religion and the Beecher Family* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 151]

¹⁷ One expression shows this more than any other. The French, *sentiment*, is usually rendered as “opinion” in English. So it is in the Reeve translation. But, throughout his essay (“The Advantages and Defects of the Social Condition in the United States of America”), Calvin Stowe repeatedly used the expression, “public sentiment,” where one would expect the more common, “public opinion.” [Stowe, *op cit*] The inference is fair: his head was full of *le sentiment publique*. Many will concede this and *still* maintain that Calvin Stowe's essay is not shown to have any relation to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Note, then, that we might have discussed the use of Thomas Carlyle in H. B. Stowe's chapter twelve. Calvin's essay cited but two philosophers: Tocqueville and Carlyle! Calvin indicates his knowledge of French in the account of his study of Bible manuscripts in his *Origin and History of the Books of the Bible*. [Calvin E. Stowe, *Origin and History of the Books of the Bible* (Harford, CT: Hartford Publishing Company, 1867)]. Among the many libraries he visited in 1836 was the Imperial Library in Paris, where he apparently got on swimmingly with the director. See page 76. This pamphlet cites a letter of 1847, wherein Stowe writes his mother that, “after 25 years of study he now reads ‘Latin & Greek, Hebrew, Syrian, Chaldee, Arabic, German, French, Spanish, & a little Persian’.” [Paige Savery, *Life of Calvin Ellis Stowe: A Chronology*].

slave-owner as a dramatic device. Simon Legree was thought her most successful characterization, with Ophelia St. Clair a close second. We now observe the Tocquevillean implications of that device—Stowe's demonstration that self-interest and morality are not identical; or, what is the same thing, demonstration of the mistaken appeal of rational humanism.

Stowe's position responds to each of the dilemmas posed through George Harris and establishes the specific form of "moral hardheadedness."¹⁸ That seems to be a necessary condition for the discovery of a non-provisional connection between self-preservation and morality" We look to a middle ground, having learned that, where humanism sacrifices morality, Quakers sacrifice self-preservation. Tocqueville is the starting point of the middle ground. Through consideration of his argument we learn that morality is the victim of humanism precisely because of humanism's utopianism when logically extended. The requirement of an "exception" reveals the defect of the principle. Hence, it argues the necessity of a non-utopian moral horizon. Such a horizon will comprehend or suggest the realm of law. For Stowe believes that the generation of belief is the first step toward attachment to law.

How incongruous then! Chapter twelve opened with the declaration that Uncle Tom has no city. In the light of our discussion of Tocqueville, that may mean only that his slavery is complete. We must be careful. We require to know the way in which Tom may be said to have no city, even more than we require to know the kind of city George will eventually have.^{Appendix}

Chapter twelve opens with the Bible:

We have here no continuing city, but we seek one to come; wherefore God himself is not ashamed to be called our God; for he hath prepared for us a city. (*UTC*, p. 134)¹⁹

We recognize in these passages from the "letter to the *Hebrews*" the thrust of the passages in the last chapter of *Revelation*.²⁰ Stowe said that these words "kept running through his head" as Tom set off on his journey with Haley. Since he was working from memory—though she assuredly was not—we may be allowed to quote the two separate

¹⁸ In applying Bettelheim's concept of the "informed heart" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Shipp describes a condition similar to my concept of moral hardheadedness. He writes of the character George Harris: "Mrs. Stowe never presents George's passionate feelings as unjustified; in fact, she supplies him with more than ample justification. Nevertheless, she invariably suggests that any emotion uninfluenced by intelligence is as potentially life-threatening as intelligence uninfluenced by emotion." The type cast in George Harris is contrasted with the type cast in Miss Ophelia, whose spiritual journey in the novel entails opening her heart. But, as Shipp reminds us, "Feeling alone does not give one an *informed* heart." (Original emphasis) Shipp finds an admirable model of the "informed heart" in the character of Mrs. Shelby in whom he perceives that "'Sensibility' precedes 'principles,' and together they combine to produce 'practical' results. Here, then, is the most fundamental formulation of Mrs. Stowe's prescription for humankind." [Robert Hosford Shipp, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Ethos of Melodrama." PhD Dissertation. Columbia University, 1986, p. 42, 34, 35].

¹⁹ The text cited throughout is the Oxford edition, edited by John A. Woods, 1965. Hereafter, *UTC*, with page references noted parenthetically

²⁰ As often but not always occurs, Stowe does not identify the source of these passages. In this case, the reason seems to be that she wants them to be regarded as a single passage, rather than separate and distinct.

passages she has brought together as one. The first, here, is actually subsequent in *Hebrews*.

That we have here is not a continuing city, but we will seek one that is coming. *Heb.* 13:14.

But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: on account of which God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city. *Heb.* 11:16 (Emphasis added)

In the “letter to the *Hebrews*” the contexts of the two passages is the development of contrasts between Sinai and Zion. And in the earliest passage, the reference to “country” involves discussion of the “promised land” as well as reference to the land the Jews would leave. The context of the old law is the concern with an earthly city. By eliminating the first clause of *Hebrews* 11:16, Stowe succeeds in collapsing Sinai and Zion into a single conception. But, by taking the result clause of *Hebrews* 11:16 (wherefore...) and transforming it into a result clause for *Hebrews* 13:14, she makes the task of seeking a future city the specific cause or origin of divine grace. Just as the earthly Sinai is eliminated, so is the transition to Zion, or the heavenly city. And the human effort of seeking a future city is paralleled with God’s preparation of a city. The conclusion: where God has prepared for men a city, it can only bear divine sanction that men should seek a city. The correction of *Revelation* is excupated!

The contrast between “country” and “city” is also meant to be instructive. A country is a place where men live, presumably in a city. Its status is not only earthly, but also exclusive. One country is always distinguished with reference to another. A “better country” is a country that is better *than* some other country as well as better *for* men. A city, on the other hand, is a way of life, whether in this world or the next. In the Gospel, it seems clear that the earthly way of life itself does not endure, but an enduring way of life approaches. In Stowe’s version, ambiguity surrounds the word “continuing” as it surrounds the Sinai/Zion conception. It may mean that the earthly city, as it is, is not continuing and thus follows the suggestion in *Revelation*. Or, it may mean, with the Gospel, that the earthly city as such is not continuing. In the latter view, the defects of the earthly way of life are irredeemable in this world. In the former view, there is hope of earthly salvation.

Through Tom we may be able to conceive which of the two views is intended. That he should be independent of the city—that he should have transcended—will have differing consequences depending on the view we adopt. If the earthly way of life as such is defective, his independence will bear disregard for earthly things in general as opposed to disregard for mere specific practices. If the earthly way is correctible, his independence will bear the mark of a superior conception of human life on earth. And the principles of the Gospel, thus interpreted, will give rise to a course of action.

These words . . . kept up, somehow, a strange sort of power over the minds of poor, simple fellows, like Tom. They stir up the soul from its depths, and rouse, as with trumpet call, courage, energy, and enthusiasm, where before was only the blackness of despair. (135)

The trumpet does not only herald the opening of the gates of heaven. It also gives the peal of approaching battle. And the characters of soul aroused—"courage, energy, enthusiasm"—seem more generally to be appropriate to the struggle for the life and death of morality than to the enjoyment of beatific felicity. Though none may doubt of Tom's evident heavenly aspirations throughout the novel, it is not clear that he may have had other—earthly—aspirations as well.

Tom is an unusual character. His detachment from earthly concerns has not blinded him to the regard for such things. We begin to see the emergence of moral hard-headedness in chapter twelve, when Tom is informed, at once, that Haley will be pausing in their journey to purchase more slaves and, accordingly, will "clap you in jail" for the sake of security. Tom's reaction proceeded, first, through the attempt to imagine the circumstances of these new victims. Did they have families? Would they feel as Tom did about separating from them? Only then did he reflect upon the indignity of being thrown into jail.

(He) had always prided himself on a strictly honest and upright course of life. Yes, Tom, we must confess it, was rather proud of his honesty, poor fellow—not having very much else to be proud of . . . (*UTC*, p.135)

Tom's reaction yielded first space to others, even others unknown to him. And even his concern with himself centered not on any possible discomfort, but upon the indignity. What is omitted, too, is important. Stowe's understated and reluctant confession reveals that she, too, regards her hero as unusual (even if pride in one's honesty were sufficient!); he almost seems a just victim of injustice, wholly unmoved by vengeance—the indignant defense of his own things—or even an energetic demand for liberty.²¹ The very honesty upon which he placed so great emphasis seems an entirely private affair. If it has a social bearing, it is indirect. This is reflected in his quiet concern for others.

Tom's situation differs not at all from that of all of the other slaves. What explains his different reaction? Must not he too deal with Aunt Hagar's question, sobbed out when she was counseled to "trust in the Lord" upon Haley's acquisition of her son, "What good will it do?" (*UTC*, p. 139) His answer lies, perhaps, in the very private nature of his moral hardheadedness. His belief is as much for his own sake as for the Lord's sake and more for his own sake than for others in spite of his regard for the welfare of others and contempt for his own. The contrast between Tom's self-controlled, dignified parting and that of every other slave—including Eliza—is striking. His seemed far the less passionate though so much the more filled with pathos (even Aunt Chloe rose to the occasion, refusing to "cry 'fore dat ar old limb," Haley). It fully reflects a lack of attachment to this life and city. Tom has transcended his time and city. And every apparent attachment results rather from a voluntary will (informed by private moral standards).

²¹ It is this aspect of Tom's characterization, perhaps, that has led to misperception of his overall character by many; see, for example, Saunders: "... the very qualities that made [Tom] an effective argument for abolition also helped to sustain a belief in racial inequality... Tom is an ineffective vehicle for an argument for racial equality because he is insufficiently masculine." [Catherine Elizabeth Saunders, "Houses Divided: Sentimentality in the Function of Biracial Characters in American Abolitionist Fiction" (PdD dissertation, Princeton University, 2002), 411]

He is free to attach himself to such earthly things as he will, precisely because he is not attached by his own prejudices. Tom seeks no country, for there is no country for the only city he is prepared to recognize.

What remains of chapter twelve serves to affirm that Tom is the model of the “man of humanity” to whom the reader was introduced in chapter one (hence, his ability to instruct young George in gentlemanliness). The author commences the story, in effect, by putting an end to the irony she had originally created. Haley is explicitly rejected as the humane man—the irony has served its purpose. (*UTC*, p.148) So, too, are rejected the “enlightened, cultivated, and intelligent” men who support him by maintaining the system. Stowe attributes the character of their principles to their capacity to generalize and to that view of habituation that Haley presented in chapter one. It was there that he described his system of dealing with the natural human emotions that embarrass the trading business. He resorted to management principles based on “humanity.” And the foundation of Haley’s humanity was the recognition that habituation could so direct people’s “‘spectations” that they would get used to all sorts of things. Their affections, in his view, are largely social conventions, and there is an appropriate set of conventions for slaves, which are neither worse nor better than any one else’s. (*UTC*, p. 9-10)

The specific occasion for Stowe’s rejection of Haley is an example of his management at work. At a stop above Louisville, he acquired a woman and her ten-month old son. The previous owner, however, neglected to tell her she was being sold. Entering into Haley’s “quiet way” of managing the business, he told the woman she was off to Louisville to hire out as a cook and join her husband. Once she was aboard *La Belle Rivière* and nothing was to be done for it—following his method—Haley broke the news. She protested, but was soon quieted. Subsequently, Haley negotiated the sale of the baby to a fellow passenger who was happily disembarking at Louisville. This sale, too, was not announced beforehand. As the steamer reached Louisville and the slave woman departed to the guards in prayer of a glimpse of her husband, the new “father” walked away with the child who had been left sleeping. Again, the ship departed, and the woman returned to confront Haley’s management. The child was gone, the ship afloat, and nothing to be done for it. There was less to be said on this occasion. The woman’s great grief inspired doleful but silent remorse. Haley surrendered to her plea to be let alone, convinced that she would come around. She left the ship in the dead of night. (*UTC*, pp. 144-150.)

Haley’s attempt to cultivate a form of detachment to facilitate the business of trading seems almost a parody of Tom’s stoic if not cowardly detachment. But Stowe employs the parody to demonstrate the self-cultivation to which Haley and the nation were subject. The habit of generalizing so about habit, she suggests, induces blindness as to the character of soul that could enter into such practices. Because the practice of habituating others habituates oneself, it makes a difference for oneself what habits one seeks to induce in others. Tom, who suffers through this transaction, is the direct contrast, for “he had not learned to generalize, and to take enlarged views.” (*UTC*, p. 149) *His* detachment comes not at the cost of denying a common humanity. The example is completed when Haley, in search of the woman, questions Tom. Tom saw no need to provide this information; he judged his actions by consideration of the necessities of the system of slavery. In short, he did not regard Lucy’s suicide as any of Haley’s business.

But Haley persisted, for he was sure that Tom, from proximity, must have known. And fortunately for himself, he resorted not to threats, but an appeal to Tom's honesty: "Tom, be fair about this yer." Tom's private morality brings the response and reveals the source of every objection to Tom's character. Tom's morality is incapable of making, in its turn, the kind of exception that Haley's morality would permit had Haley found it of profit to break his promise to place Tom in a good family.

The title of chapter twelve is "Select Incidents of Lawful Trade." In the chapter, Stowe labored to tie *every* consequence of slavery to the law, which permitted it. She derived the debauched "public sentiment" from the force of the law and practice. All fall with the rejection of Haley's humanity. She has made him a representative of the law, of the city. The purpose is to question the value of the city's teaching. She concludes with an example of the "exception" at work. America strives to rid the seas of the foreign slave trade; the interstate slave trade flourishes. The point may not be made clearer: the guiding principle of humanism (her name for modern liberalism) is the universalism of ideal morality, subjected to particular exceptions. The ordinary abolitionist approach is to oppose the ideal morality (higher law) to the exception. Stowe's Uncle Tom presents an alternative to the provisional connection between self-preservation and morality, which does not require abstraction from an earthly way of life. Thus, Tocqueville has been corrected.

Appendix

We begin by proving that Tom is not a naïf.

In chapter ten, Tom was being carried off by Haley, who had stopped at a blacksmith's to have the fetters enlarged to suit Tom's build. During the interval, young George Shelby caught up with them. He had been speeding on horseback, since Tom was off before George had ever heard of the sale. George was furious. He rated Haley for his monstrous inhumanity—buying and selling men and women. The trader was out of ear-shot as the young boy promised Tom, "I'll knock that old fellow down—I will!"

No you won't, Mas'r George; and you must not talk so loud. It won't help me any, to anger him. (*UTC*, p. 115)

We may almost add to Tom's prayer, "needlessly," as Tom demonstrates for the first time acute awareness of his general situation—of the political reality. This much is clear. He is not stupid. And he is not acculturated—at least not in ordinary terms. George was calmed but momentarily. As he heated up again, Tom became emphatic: ". . . it won't do *me* any good." (*UTC*, p. 116, original emphasis) A moral outburst on his behalf, which ends in harm to himself, seems unreasonable.

From thence Tom turned to finishing touches of his contribution to the education of young George. He begins with the counsel of respect to his father, apparently for George's own good, and to "keep close" to his mother. George is perfectly acquiescent. But Tom knows the temptations to which he will be subject and so continues. George is to realize that, by nature, he will be inclined to some degree of evil thought or deed. But he must resist nature by cultivating gentlemanliness. All the time Tom is cautious to acquire George's permission for speaking so. But he reminds the lad of his great seniority and complete concern for George's own good. He ends by advising George to be a "good Mas'r like yer father; and be a Christian, like yer mother." George is calmed. He promises to be a "first-rater." Tom's double-awareness of his perilous circumstances and solicitousness for George's welfare raises a delicate but unavoidable difficulty.

Though not blinded to slavery's defects, Tom appears to wish to make the best of it. He assumes that slavery will continue to exist and asks only that being transformed wholly into Emily Shelby's matriar-

chy ameliorate it. Young George is to become the man-woman who guides this refounding. If Tom, himself, were not governed by Emily's conception, as we have elsewhere argued, is this perspective consistent?

Perhaps the notion of the man-woman points a way out. Emily wished to effect mitigating moral graces through her own—noiseless feminine—influence. She would improve the lot of slaves without ending slavery. However, to keep slavery means to rely upon Mr. Shelby, masculine ineptitude and self-interest. That seems to preserve still too great a distinction between masculine worldliness and what fully developed, mature chastity must be. (Remember that Quakeress Rachael Halliday presided in her matriarchy “noiselessly.”) Masculine worldliness, tempered as Tom suggests, would seem incapable of preserving slavery as such. Arthur Shelby is a worldly failure, and Tom knows it as well as the reader. We get glimmers—if not light—when we suspect that the use of Arthur as a model for George envisions not the perpetuation of slavery but rather subjection to influences friendlier to freedom than to further slavery. Emily employs noiseless influence and not rule in behalf of right, while Arthur Shelby attempts rule unsuccessfully in behalf of interest. Shelby's moral defect is that he lacks Emily's purpose and is unfit to rule, while Emily's practical defect is that she lacks the capacity to rule. Meanwhile, Tom acquires mastery of souls while neither ruling nor attempting to rule. Using Shelby as model raises the prospect that only someone who does not, and moreover may not, rule can be a “soul” master. Tocqueville's ancient slavery raises its head. Only if this view is correct are we able to understand in a non-Tocquevillean way Tom's independence of the city and, on this occasion, his only apparently contradictory awareness of his political situation and the future of slavery.

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