



UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Everyone has heard of it...few these days have read it.

- Why not read it? Why is it neglected?

In its time - Bestseller second only to the Bible - first American novel to sell more than 1 million copies

Widely read in era when novels were treated as communal property

- borrowed and passed around
- read aloud to entire households at a time
- Richard Henry Dana wrote about Uncle Tom being read to an entire railroad car
- Ralph Waldo Emerson observed that it was the "only book that found readers in the parlor, the nursery, and the kitchen in every household."

This book achieves something very special - it helped people understand the horrors of slavery in a way that people hadn't.

- Endows slavery with human dimensions
- Helped trigger the war by influencing popular opinion against any actions protecting slavery

HOW DID IT GET REMOVED FROM LITERATURE CLASS READING LISTS?

1 - Changing Criteria on What Considered "Good" Lit

Stowe's focus was completely different than "important writers"

In 1941, Matheson wrote a literature theory book called *American Renaissance*.

Wrote about Literature from 1850-1855 & focused on the "Renaissance" of Emerson/Thoreau/Whitman/Hawthorne/Melville

- First to call Emerson/Thoreau/Whitman Transcendental Optimists and Hawthorne & Melville Transcendental Pessimists
- These guys were all talking about the individual, the possibilities of the self, the great resources of the self.

Stowe was talking about something COMPLETELY different! The story of the self is NOT her story!

- Her story was about: Family, Relationships, Group, Connection, Mothers & Children, Husbands & Wives

Emerson/Thoreau/Whitman had NO concept of these things!!!

- Uncle Tom is published precisely at the time of *Moby Dick*, *Walden*, *Leaves of Grass* but completely different in theme!

Uncle Tom has been written off as sentimental in the sense that this is a criticism

This is because the criteria of what is good changed - literary people had hardened

- Everything associated with tenderness, families, & religious belief was considered "sappy"
- Modernism preferred complex characters, psychologically twisted

2 - "Tom Shows" reduced the respectability of the book

- Tom Shows were extremely popular all over the country - even the world
- They showed sensational aspects of the story - not true to the real storyline or real characters
- Tom shown to be a shuffling caricature of obsequious servility

MAIN FEATURES OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

1 - Importance of Family

Stowe's story is about families trying to stay together or trying to reunite after being separated

- It's about all that people will sacrifice for the sake of their family
- It's about the longing for family if you never had one (Topsy) and the transforming power of the love of a family

Books about family were universally popular

Literary elite changed - Became harder-hearted

- Lost their understanding of the importance of family because of the emphasis on the individual in literature considered "good"
- Individualism of the Romantic Writers - especially the Transcendentalists (Thoreau/Whitman) took over the entire literary community

2 - Appealed to all ages

All ages read it - a big read-aloud for families - People read it in groups together

Separation of Children's Literature from Adult Literature

- With literary elite looking down on family-oriented books, lots of the great classics got relegated to the children's section.
- Adult lit became filled with psychologically complex and often twisted characters

3 - Christian Worldview

As Transcendental, Existential, & Evolutionary thinking began taking over, Christian values & morals lost their place in literature
Previously, Christian values & morals had dominated literature

- There was good & evil

Even non-Christian authors (Dickens, Dumas, Verne) wrote stories reflecting Christian morals & values

- where characters understood right from wrong & felt guilt when they did wrong
- where family/community/relationships were important to the storyline

The new modern thinking celebrated the complicated & twisted characters who did wrong

- We are to understand & excuse their evil because of the psychology behind it
- We are to see that the source of evil - society - was responsible for a character's sin, not the character himself

With absolutely no understanding of the Gospel, the literary elite could only see a Christ-like character like Tom as weak and "servile"

- They could not understand the strength of sacrifice!

If you do not understand the Biblical model, the story and characters can seem "sentimental" and simple

If you DO understand the Biblical Model, the characters become complex

- Tom is NOT a simple character, but rich & complex!
- Non-Christian literary experts see Tom as weak and victim-like

Big Theme in the book - Spiritual freedom is possible even under physical slavery

You cannot really be owned because they cannot own your soul - only Jesus can own your soul

- Tom is Free-er than Legree
- Legree is more a slave than Tom - Legree is a slave to sin
- Tom is free - bought & paid for by Christ - and he knows it and lives it...it affects how he carries himself
- As a result, Legree hates Tom.

4 - Role of Women

Stowe showed the importance of women - her story demonstrates that women are key!

She was a "feminist" in the original sense of the word - which most people do not understand.

She was not a feminist in the modern sense

- where women are considered powerful because they too can succeed in the realm of men - the traditional male role

Feminism of that time - as portrayed by Stowe in Uncle Tom - believed the real power in the world lies

- NOT in the halls of Congress
- NOT on the battlefields
- NOT in the courtrooms
- BUT in the kitchens, in the parlors, by the family hearth! :-D

The real power lies in the hands of women in the sphere of home.

- The women are raising the next generation.
- The women have tremendous influence over their husbands.

Stowe's sister was a huge promoter of this original brand of feminism

- The idea was - since women are so influential & powerful, they must be well-educated & trained to use their influence wisely
- Trained and educated to run a home intelligently and raise the next generation well
- Not just live a superficial life, but live intentionally to have a positive impact on the world!

Catherine Beecher opened two school for girls

- She wrote one of the very first books on Home Economics for moms and wives to manage their homes in a professional manner.

The recognition in all of this was that what women were doing at home was so extremely important

- Lots of homeschooling moms share these beliefs - Glenn Beck says that homeschooling moms are the "Sara Connors of this generation!"