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**The moral value of slavery as represented in
Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin***

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Title: The moral value of slavery as represented in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

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Abstract: The aim of this essay is to show how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, represents the morality of slavery and the conflict between this institution and Christianity. It is necessary to talk about the main characters to explain the value of slaves and see how they were treated. Therefore, we explain the power of Christian characters as well as the role that women play in the novel. Feminine characters are very important in the novel and women have a special moral power. Moreover, Christianity is the opposite of slavery and we will see that most of the Christian characters are slaves who find their only hope in God.

Keywords: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, slavery, slaves, woman, slave trade, Christianity, evil, moral value

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Introduction

This essay analyses how the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflects the total lack of slavery's moral values and the conflict between Christianity and slavery. Another important point of it is the moral power of women in the context of slavery and this essay will look into how important it was for society to understand a mother's struggle and the role that women played in that period. Readers interpret the novel as an example of early feminism. Furthermore, we are going to talk about the importance of Christianity and how it affected slaves, because they were extremely religious and they believed that their only hope for freedom was through God, since they thought that their prayers were going to guide them to a better life.

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, her first and most famous book. The novel was very influential in America and was the most famous bestseller of the time; it was surpassed only by the Bible. Beecher Stowe, the first abolitionist writer, wanted to portray the abolitionist cause and transmit anti-slavery thinking to the society. With this publication, slave narratives became more and more popular and emerged as a new genre in America. Even though the novel is fictitious it had the power and importance to change readers' minds and it was capable of changing the society of the time, which was why it was called "the best anti-slavery novel of all times" and became so important to the abolitionist cause, as it is said on the cover page of *Norton Critical Edition* edited by Elizabeth Ammons.

Not only was the novel important to the abolitionist movement, but to the feminist movement too. Except for Tom, the most important characters of the novel are all females that show their struggles as wives and mothers, especially after society starts depending on the "new matriarchy" which gives important roles within the society to women and proves that women are, in fact, capable of taking care of their home without the help of their husbands, as Tompkins suggests. The author gives a voice to the women of the novel. Stowe is, therefore, an anti-slavery and pro-feminist woman who makes people reflect on the topic of slavery and on the horrible situation that black people were going through in America. Nevertheless, the novel was criticized by pro-slave society that supported slavery and slave trade. Critics like Tompkins saw *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a novel written by a woman who, therefore, knew nothing about the

institution of slavery, slaves or the living and working conditions of these slaves. The novel shows the misuse of whites' power over blacks and portrays how slaves were treated, tortured and how they had to endure horrible living conditions while serving their white masters. Slaves were convinced that God was their salvation. They had their hopes in him, thinking that he would guide them to a better life where, no longer slaves, they would be happy. Therefore, the novel criticizes slavery as the most horrible thing that people could suffer and reflects the importance of religion, by showing the faith of the slaves.

Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which forbade anyone within the continental United States to help a runaway slave in any way and obliged them to report the slave to officials immediately. This made the slaves' situation worse. Runaway slaves could no longer seek shelter or help from the Northerners; they now had to escape all the way to Canada in order for them to acquire their freedom. For all of these reasons, this was one of the most controversial laws of the nineteenth century. It also threatened the peace of free slaves and free blacks, since many were captured and sold into slavery again by slave traders who thought they were runaways. Moreover, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is an expression of *ressentiment*" (Allen, 2009, 241), which means that Stowe wrote the novel to show how she felt about the cruelty of slavery and that people cannot support or allow that kind of barbarity.

The most important topic in the novel is religion: Christianity was very important in that time and to American society. As it is said before, slaves were extremely religious people who maintained their faith in God throughout their lives and religion lived on through women, who were the ones who taught their children and husbands to be good Christians. Christian values and slavery are completely opposing ideas. The novel was written for religious readers and, therefore, Stowe wanted to expose these opposing concepts clearly. From the very beginning of the novel, the author shows slavery as the most evil thing in America at the time: she explains that slaves are not seen as human beings, but as objects with no rights or education that belong to their white masters. In the novel, the character of Eva is described as the perfect anti-slavery sympathizer who loves everyone, regardless of race or skin color. She is a little girl born to a rich family, whose mother is not a Christian, and yet Eva represents the most Christian and innocent child whose only purpose in life is to love and be loved.

Slaves were deprived of their right to education because white people thought that they are the only ones who had the right to study and to rise in life. For this reason, racism exists and that is what dehumanizes black people in general. At the time, not only were slaves dehumanized and considered inferior, free blacks were almost always suppressed by the power of whites.

We are going to explain the controversial part of slavery in the second chapter, in which we will also talk about ethics and morality, two very important concepts in this context.

It is important to explain abolitionism and the abolitionist movement in order to further our understanding of the intentions of Harriet Beecher Stowe when writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. An abolitionist movement is created when a group of people fight to abolish slavery or, in other words, when they fight for a society free of slavery. One of the most important abolitionists in history was Frederick Douglass, a runaway who paired up with William Lloyd Garrison and told the story of his life and the horrors he suffered as a slave. In 1845, he published his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself* and further express all the suffering he had to endure when he was a slave. This narrative helped attract many anti-slavery sympathizers, but it also put Douglass in danger because he was admitting to being a runaway slave and, therefore, could be recaptured. Frederick Douglass helped the abolitionist movement and encouraged blacks to fight for their rights. It is important to point out that in this abolitionist movement there were both whites and blacks fighting for the same reason, although it was more important for black people since they were the ones who were kept in servitude. Some abolitionists even risked their lives to save runaway slaves and help them achieve freedom. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exposes the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery perfectly. Furthermore, the novel was written at a moment when the dispute about whether slavery should continue or be abolished was very pervasive and, as we said before, it helped abolitionism by convincing its readers about the horror and cruelty of slavery and showed them how much slaves suffered.

Equally important to mention are the tensions that existed between the North and the South and what caused the American Civil War. Both parts of the nation had different economic interests, due to the fact that the Northern states were mainly industrial and urban and the Southern states were mainly rural; their lives revolved around plantations. The interests of both parties had been defended in Congress but the final decisions

always favored one of the sides, leaving the other discontent. The other important dispute was whether slavery should be legal or illegal, a very controversial problem since slavery existed only in some states. In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States and the first conflicts of the Civil War took place in 1861, when the Confederate army, made up by 11 southern pro-slavery states who had seceded from the U.S.A, started the bombardment of Fort Sumter, which was “the only federal property in the South to remain in Union hands” (Jones, 1995, 216). The war lasted a long period: it started in 1861 and ended in 1865. In 1861, at the beginning of the Civil War, the Union was made up of 21 states and more than twenty million people in population. Moreover, “economic motives no doubt played a part” (216) in the Civil War; however, “nationalism was the central issue of the struggle [...] While the South contended for separate nationhood in order to maintain its distinctive way of life, the North fought to preserve the ideals the Union had come to symbolize” (217). Nevertheless, Lincoln’s main objective was to unify the states in one indivisible nation. By mid-1865, the Civil War ended.

To conclude the introduction, we are going to explain the structure of the essay. The essay will be divided into four chapters examining the issues of moral power of women, the importance of Christianity and how important the novel was to the American society. The first chapter explains the materialistic value of slavery as it is represented in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and shows briefly the conflict between Northern and Southern states through history.

In the second chapter, we are going to explain the importance of women in society and how Stowe wants to emphasize women’s role in the context of slavery. For this reason, the author uses strong female characters, who do everything to save their children and to unify their family.

In the third chapter, we are going to talk about ethics and morality and the conflict between slavery and Christianity. This is the most important chapter because Christianity plays a main role in the context of slavery and in the society of the nineteenth century. Slavery and Christianity are opposing concepts; each one defends completely different values, even though in the novel Christianity is often used as a defense of slavery. Moreover, the author wants to show not only slavery as theme but the influence that Christianity had in slavery, both on the slaves’ part and the masters’. Slaves were not treated as human beings, but were objectified as the result of race

superiority. On the other hand, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* refers in many occasions to the Bible and even represents scenes of it. In fact, Stowe uses irony and rhetorical methods to refer to the Bible and biblical figures.

Finally, the last chapter shows that the novel was the most popular one in the nineteenth century and that it had an important influence over its readers.

The principal source used was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the main secondary source used to write the essay and reinforce our ideas was: *The Stowe Debate: rhetorical strategies in Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by Mason I. Lowance, Jr., Ellen E. Westbrook, and R.C. De Prospro. Although there are more bibliographical references that have been used and read, this is the one used most while writing the essay. The method of the essay is to analyze *Uncle Tom's Cabin* using critic secondary sources which, also, analyze the novel and that help us to study the strategies that Stowe uses to write the novel. Moreover, we choose the book written by Lowance as the main secondary source because it talks about the importance of Christianity in the novel, and this is the principal point of the essay.

The theoretical approach of this essay is to analyze slavery from an historical point of view, but always based on the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. To achieve this goal we use the method that is explained in the previous paragraph.

The materialistic value of slavery as represented in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In this novel, Stowe wants to show and criticize the materialistic value of slavery. Slaves were not treated as human beings, but as objects, property of other human beings who were considered to be superior to them. Slaves were seen by their owners as profit or loss, as mentioned above. The author wants to show the opposite: slaves are human beings and they should have the same rights that white people have; they should not be treated as mere property. "The original subtitle for Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was in fact 'The man who was a thing'" (Johnson, 2008, 160). The subtitle, that Stowe chose when she wrote the novel, explains one of the most important themes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: the fact that slaves were considered and treated as objects and not as people. Seen through the character of Tom, it is also an example of irony, because he doesn't accept being a "thing", since he learns to read and he wants to be more intelligent and, moreover, he dies just to obtain slaves' freedom.

Slave trade was implemented in the whole country, but very important to mention are the differences between the North and the South of the U.S.A. Even though people tend to think that the Northern states were free of slavery and it was in the Southern states where slavery and slave trade existed, this is not true. There was less slavery in the Northern states because they were urban and industrial and large slave forces were not needed, but slavery did exist and was as inhuman as slavery in the Southern state plantations. The next quotation shows that many governors support this practice and participated in. These could be found not only in the South, but also in the North, like the ones who implemented and supported the Fugitive Slave Act there. Moreover, the North was not the base of the abolitionist sentiment. As mentioned above, there is less slavery in the North and Stowe wants to show that it is the real context of USA, at that time. She explains political facts through the novel, talking about the union of the whole Northern community as a victory:

The trader had arrived at that stage of Christian and political perfection which has been recommended by some preachers and politicians of the north, lately, in which he had completely overcome every humane weakness and prejudice. His heart was exactly where yours, sir, and mine could be brought, with proper effort and cultivation. The wild look of anguish and utter despair that the woman cast on him might have disturbed

one less practiced; but he was used to it. He had seen that same look hundreds of times. You can get used to such things, too, my friend; and it is the great object of recent efforts to make our whole northern community used to them, for the glory of the Union. (Stowe, 1852, 112)

Stowe wanted to show that the South was not the only area of the USA in which oppression could be found, since oppression also exists in the Northern ‘free’ states. Nevertheless, in the North, there were far less slaves and their work was not as hard as the estate work in the South. We know that slavery was cruel and inhuman since its commencement, but there were states where slaves were treated better. The author also shows in the book the terrible working conditions slaves suffered in the South. When comparing the state of Kentucky with the plantations of the low South, we can say that slaves in Kentucky have better working and living conditions. The Mississippi River is essential in the novel because it is represented as one of the most important places in which slave trade takes place. We have to mention that, in the South, there was almost an equal number of black people and whites. The North had a far smaller slave population. In addition, southern states were more interested in the survival of slavery than the northern ones. In the nineteenth century, two new concepts about slavery appeared: the free states and the slave states. These terms become politically important in the antebellum years. Moreover, it is important to mention the difference that existed between slave work in the North and slave work in the South. The slaves who lived in the North were usually domestic servants, while in the South; they needed large slave forces to produce cotton in huge plantations. While in the northern states factories were the central feature of life, in the southern states it was the plantation. Finally, we have to mention that children who lived in the North attended school more regularly than those who lived in the South and therefore, had a better education.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin was written as a vindication to humans’ rights as well as a protest to individualistic values, because slavery was a symbol of materialistic values: “Slavery is not for Stowe [...] a symbol of the profound differences between North and South. Rather it is a symbol of a system of values that places financial gain above all else, a system that [...] reduces a human being to a thing” (Lowance, 1994, 100). In other words, Lowance argues that slavery was defended because of its financial profit. It was

because of this that the people controlling it were considered superior to the slaves. It was not, however, due to a system of differences between Northern and Southern states.

The moral power of women

It is important to talk about the significance of female characters in the novel and what they represent. It is also necessary to include the moral power of women as one of the most important forces in society, as we can see represented in the novel by many female characters. Stowe wanted to show the readers a representation of the ‘new matriarchy’, which was a revolution in antebellum society. Through the novel, women represent the critique of slavery, via their faith.

Female characters are very important in this novel because they have an evident moral superiority. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was written before the emergence of feminism and it helped to influence the women’s rights movement. Therefore, Stowe uses feminist characters as a way of changing the perception about women in society. She wants to show the influence that some women have over their husbands to convince them of the evil of slavery; nevertheless, it is important to remember that, at the time, men were the ones with voting rights, meaning that men had all the political power. As Jane P. Tompkins says: “The new matriarchy [...] constitutes the most politically subversive dimension of Stowe’s novel, more disruptive and far-reaching in its potential consequences than even the starting of war or the freeing of slaves” (Ammons, 1994, 519). This shows that the role of women in society was changing slowly and that women would have more relevance significance in the near future. As Allen suggests, Mrs. Shelby is a good example of the new matriarchy: “that principle is a form of matriarchy- indeed, Emily Shelby’s matriarchy- with the proviso of moral hardheadedness as its necessary condition” (Allen, 2009, 99). In other words, Stowe’s novel has an important influence over the women of that time, changing their way of thinking and opening a new era for them.

In this novel, we can see men’s role in history; women always do the main work at home while men wait for their wives to serve them in everything they need: “Men provide the flour, but women bake the bread and get the breakfast” (Ammons, 1994, 522), this sentence reflects the fact that men are in charge of providing the money in their home or, in other words, they are in charge of the family’s financial stability, but women do the rest of the work, including working for their men to make them feel good and comfortable. Male supremacy is a significant characteristic of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* society, but Stowe wants to emphasize the importance of women with her use of

relevant female characters. Moreover, the author uses satire to claim women's power: "Stowe risked alienating the patriarchal power base of her society, and those upon whom women and slaves alike were dependent for their freedom" (Lowance, 1994, 65). Mr. Bird is an example of a man influenced by his wife. He is a senator who approves a law to forbid assistance to a runaway slave, but when Eliza arrives at his home and Mrs. Bird wants to help her escape with her son Harry, he does not stop her. Men's superiority is related to traditional values. However, Beecher Stowe shows feminist beliefs, presenting women as equals to men in intelligence, bravery and spiritual strength.

Another important theme is that of sexual abuse of female slaves. They are sold to provide their owners with pleasure, as we can see in the characters of Cassy and Eliza at the beginning of the novel, when the slave trader Haley wants to buy Eliza as his "fancy maid", but Mr. Shelby does not approve it: "'Well Eliza?' Said her master[...] 'By Jupiter' said the trader [...] 'there's an article, now! You might make your fortune on that ar gal in Orleans, any day. I've seen over a thousand, in my day, paid down for gals not a bit handsomer.' [...] 'Mr. Haley, she is not to be sold' said Shelby" (Stowe, 1852, 4). This quotation reflects how women slaves are seen and treated as sexual objects by many of slave's traders, in the novel. In terms of the law, if a black man rapes a woman he is punished with death, but a white man can do it without impunity. Slave women had no legal recourse in case of rape, because their bodies legally belonged to their owners. On the other hand, women are used as a representation of God, because they were in charge of teaching their children to be good Christians. Moreover, almost all women characters in Stowe's novel are Christians, no matter if they are whites or blacks. They try to show their children and husbands that the way to find happiness in life is to follow God. As Tompkins explains: "The woman in question is God in human form. [...] Motivated by self-sacrificing love, and joined to one another by its cohesive power" (Ammons, 1994, 159). This affirmation makes us see that Christianity and the love of God are represented throughout the whole novel in women characters like Eliza or Eva.

The novel also shows the model of female government in contrast to the patriarchy of slavery. Women wanted to show that they were able to govern their own lives and household as well as take care of their family: "there are women who have an extraordinary talent for command, and tact in educating" (Stowe, 1852, 178). We can

see this model of female government in Mrs. Bird, Eliza and Mrs. Shelby. Nevertheless, there is a character in the novel that represents just the opposite, Marie St.: “Such a housekeeper Marie St. Clare was not, nor her mother before her. Indolent and childish, unsystematic and improvident, it was not to be expected that servants trained under her care should not be so likewise” (179). Moreover, sexuality is sometimes used as a way to mitigate the conditions of their enslavement which led to many white women sympathizing with slaves, as Mrs. Shelby does in the novel: “and you, mothers of America,- you, who have learned, by the cradles of your own children, to love and feel for all mankind” (384). The law did not protect black women and they were seen as their owner’s property so they had to be subservient to them. Women could not have scruples, sense of shame or feelings; they just had to serve their owners, which we can see represented in the character of Emmeline. Susan is a slave mother who fights to protect her daughter through love and religious instruction. Emmeline is just fifteen years old when she is separated from her mother and sold to Simon Legree for sexual enslavement. However, if a woman was sold to sexual enslavement, she had to have an impeccable education and she was instructed to be a perfect religious woman, which resulted in these slaves having a higher education than the rest:

Susan and Emmeline, had been the personal attendants of an amiable and pious lady of New Orleans, by whom they had been carefully and piously instructed and trained. They had been taught to read and write, diligently instructed in the truths of religion, and their lot had been as happy an one as in their condition it was possible to be. (285)

Tom and Eliza are seen as the strongest characters who expected the same thing from society, but they belong to different sexes. Eliza is seen as the perfect Christian mother and heroine who fights for her son’s freedom and suffers the horror of being a black slave: “It is impossible to conceive of a human creature more wholly desolate and forlorn than Eliza” (43). Moreover, Eliza has the courage and strength to save her son’s life, even when she is far away from her husband. Meanwhile, George (Eliza’s husband) is fleeing to Canada in hopes of being free and helps Eliza and Harry, even though they could not be together in Kentucky because marriages between slaves were not permitted. She is loved by her owner Mrs. Shelby and, although she does not want to sell Eliza’s son, Mrs. Shelby does not manage to convince her husband to keep Eliza and her son together, which leads to Eliza’s escape. She knows that she should obey her

master, but when she realizes that Mr. Shelby is going to sell Eliza's son to pay a debt, Eliza decides to run away with him. Finally, Mrs. Shelby is very happy when she finds out that Eliza managed to escape before the slave trader caught them. Even though slaves are not treated as human beings with real feelings, they know that they deserve a better life. We see everything she is capable of doing to save her son's life and be with him. She has to cross the ice on the Ohio River at night from Kentucky to Ohio: "The frosty ground creaked beneath her feet, and she trembled at the sound [...] she wondered within herself at the strength that seemed to be come upon her" (43). This symbolizes the change from slavery to freedom. She will take any kind of risk to protect her son because she always considers herself second to her child, as we can see in this scene. Eliza is a strong mother and, as we said before, she would do everything and anything to protect her son: "Her virtue, in sum, consists of a human and maternal instinct that is primordial and archetypal" (Lowance, 1994, 169). She wants her son to be free and, at that time, the Northern states were free states. When Eliza is in Ohio, she finds Mr. Bird's home. The Fugitive Slave Act forced any citizen who found a runaway slave to return it to its owner, and this is exactly what happens to Eliza, but fortunately, Mr. Bird decides to help her, influenced by his wife.

As the example of Eliza, this essay shows that mothers have an important value in the novel; Stowe shows that women play a special role in society as mothers, housekeepers and Christian influences over their husbands and children: "The mother figures in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are modeled on biblical precedents and examples of motherhood" (165).

Morality: conflict between slavery and Christianity

As we could see in the previous chapter, women are the most religious characters in the novel, as well as the slaves. It is important to explain the relevance that religion has in the novel and how the author shows the conflict between slavery and Christianity. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a representation of the role religion played in the society of the Civil War and it not only has slavery as a main theme, but the influence that religion had in slavery. In the novel, we can see the problem of injustice and immorality at several levels: economic, political and theological, as well as the conflict that exists between slavery and Christianity which divides the characters into two groups: Christians and non-Christians:

Pointing out that Stowe divides *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into two groups, Christians and non-Christians, Jean Fagin Yellin notes that the Christians in the novel tend to be white women and slaves and that the non-Christians are mostly white men. Yellin examines the implications of race and gender on Christian values [...]. (Rosenthal, 2004, 71)

The author wants to show political arguments in an emotional way. To do this she explains characters' feelings as a human capacity and moral sense in relation to religion. Slavery consists in human beings being the property of other human beings: this is the evil of slavery. When a master sells a slave, he is selling a human being. Slave trade is present during the whole novel; at the beginning, we can see one of the most important stories. When Mr. Shelby sells Tom and Eliza's son Harry to Haley, it is a clear example of slavery's materialistic purpose. Haley sees slaves as a profit or loss, not as people with feelings. This materialistic value of slavery represents the creation of moral injustice. Mrs. Shelby appreciates Eliza; she is against slavery and thinks that slaves should be treated as white people, in other words, as equals:

This is God's curse on slavery! [...] a curse to the master and a curse to the slave! I was a fool to think I could make anything good out of such a deadly evil. It is a sin to hold a slave under laws like ours, -I always felt it was,- I always thought so when I was a girl, -I thought so still more after I joined the church; but I thought I could gild it over,- I thought, by kindness, and care, and instruction, I could make the condition of mine better than freedom- fool that I was! (Stowe, 1852, 29)

The novel was written in 1852, two years after the Fugitive Slave Act was passed, declaring that no one could offer aid or assistance to a runaway slave. Stowe used the novel to make the reader see the horrors of slavery, by contrasting it to Christianity, in hopes that the reader would see the opposing nature of the two. As seen in Topsy's character, slaves see themselves as objects. Topsy is a child who does not value herself and who feels her life is meaningless. Furthermore, she is a wild child because she has no family at her side and she grew up as a slave. Lowance says that "Topsy is presented as a stereotypical figure [...] one whose innocence and impish behavior suggests the taint of original sin that needs Christianizing by Eva" (Lowance, 1994, 168). Topsy is a child who lives at Eva's home as a slave and has lived there since she was born. Eva, on the other hand, "is represented as a neoclassic figure, a sculpture of ideal proportions though she is only six years old" (171). Therefore, Topsy cannot understand the importance of a family as she has never had one nor does she value herself as a human being due to the lack of love that a family gives a child.

Masters treat their slaves as things that belong to them; they believe that they are superior and better than slaves. As a result of this "superiority," racism is still presented in many cultures, as we can see. An example of this way of thinking is Marie St. Clare who feels superior to slaves because she does not see them as humans; therefore, she does what she wants to them without feeling guilty. Slavery objectifies human beings, as is represented in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This way of seeing human beings as objects dehumanizes slaves and is a consequence of slave trade. One of the worst aspects of dehumanizing slaves is depriving them of education and intelligence, which means humanity and dignity; they have to be how their owners want them to be and have no right to have an opinion or make their own decisions. In addition, slaves' children were also treated like objects and they begin to work at a very early age, another example of inhumane treatment: "slaves began to enter the labor force at a very early age and those who survived usually remained productive until quite advanced ages" (Fogel, 1989, 52). In the next passage, we can see the dehumanizing nature of slavery when a child has to grow up away from his/her mother; we can also discern the difference between Mr. Shelby and Mr. Haley. As we will soon explain, some masters are better than others. Mr. Shelby is an example of a good master because he treats slaves as human beings and wants to keep slave families together, but he loses his values when he needs money

and sells his slaves to a slave trader like Haley (even knowing that he treats slaves as objects, but then so does Mr. Shelby since he uses them as commodities and abuses them constantly). Stowe wants to show that treating slaves “humanely” is not possible if you forget that slaves are human beings like white people are, who also need their families, even though they need money; as we can see it in this passage:

‘I would rather not sell him," said Mr. Shelby, thoughtfully; "the fact is, sir, I'm a humane man, and I hate to take the boy from his mother, sir.’
‘O, you do? – La! yes – something of that ar natur. I understand, perfectly. It is mighty onpleasant getting on with women, sometimes, I al'ays hates these yer screachin,' screamin' times. They are *mighty* onpleasant; but, as I manages business, I generally avoids 'em, sir. Now, what if you get the girl off for a day, or a week, or so; then the thing's done quietly, – all over before she comes home. Your wife might get her some ear-rings, or a new gown, or some such truck, to make up with her.’ (Stowe, 1852, 4-5)

Nevertheless, the author decides to use irony and rhetoric, because she shows that the “good” treatment of slaves comes from the hands of masters such as Mr. Shelby or Mr. St. Clare, who are kind to their slaves; although this is of course ironic because slavery is always evil and should not exist. We can see the “good” side of slavery when the novel talks about Mr. Shelby and when we compare that with the worst kind which is represented in characters such as Legree. Stowe wanted to emphasize that difference, although she also wanted readers to see that slaves suffered even when they had kind masters.

No matter if the master is kind or evil slavery is always a bad thing, but slaves can through religion find hope and think that their life could change for better. Therefore, Religion was very important in the average slaves’ life, and their beliefs and values were influenced by what religion said and imposed on them. Slaves could not say which statements of religion were true and which ones were not, but they had absolute faith in God anyway because, in their minds, they believed in a God that cared for them and helped them through their most difficult situations. In other words, they put their hopes in God, thinking and hoping that better times would come. They are able to see symbols of glory and the immortal life that is coming even in the worst scenes of torture:

Scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart. What man has nerve to do, man has not nerve to hear. What brother-man and brother-Christian must suffer, cannot be told us [...] there was One whose suffering changed an instrument of torture, degradation and shame, into a symbol of glory, honor, and immortal life; and, where His spirit [...] can make the Christian's last struggle less than glorious. (Stowe, 1852, 358)

Slaves thought that the only way to be free was through their faith in God. Without faith everything was lost. The previous quotation explains that even the worst things they had to endure in life were considered symbols of honor and Christian love. To be able to present the “real” and the “ideal” image of America, Stowe uses polyvalence: “Stowe’s capacity to evoke the Christian ideal is such that the language of the text acquires polyvalency in which the real and the ideal images of America are often conflated” (Lowance, 1994, 67), which means that Stowe uses a symbolic language to make the reader feel that even the most ideal and fictitious passages of her novel are the real representations of slavery and Christianity; that it is the truth about what is happening in the American society at that time.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin reflects a conflict between slavery and Christianity. Slavery is seen as “evil” opposed to the love of Christ. Christians should not have tolerated slavery, but slaves were more religious than their masters, which was contradictory because they were the ones suffering the injustice. Christianity and slavery are incompatible, but, in the novel, Christianity is often used as a defense of slavery. Mrs. Shelby tells her husband that she is against slavery, showing him that slavery is cruel, inhuman and against Christian love. She just needs to express that she will never see slavery as a right thing: “Abolitionist! If they knew all I know about slavery, they *might* talk! We don’t need them to tell us; you know I never thought that slavery was right – never felt willing to own slaves” (Stowe, 1852, 29-30)

Slavery is something profoundly negative and the love of Christ is what maintained slaves’ hopes for freedom. Christianity teaches devoted people to love their enemies, as Christ forgave the men who crucified and betrayed him. The character of Uncle Tom follows the example of Jesus and forgives his awful master, Legree. He is the perfect Christian martyr: “Thus Stowe brings to a close the narrative of Tom as Christian martyr” (Lowance, 1994, 176). At the end of the novel, we can see another

representation of Jesus in Tom because he dies and becomes a symbol of freedom for the rest of the black people, just like Jesus died in the cross to save the sinners: “Stowe comments directly on the parallel between Tom’s death and Christ’s” (109). Moreover, Eva is also a symbol of Christian love and dies by the evil of slavery. She teaches her father to love slaves and to treat them like their equals and convinces him that slaves deserve to be free. Stowe shows the importance of Christianity for the slaves, introducing symbolic quotations of the Bible. There are characters who personify God and religion and other characters who personify evil and slavery which is very interesting and ironic because the ones who are suffering are devoted, and the owners are not. The next quotation represents the cruelty that African race suffered in America and the compassion that Christians should have over them:

What do you owe to these poor unfortunates, oh Christians? Does not every American Christian owe to the African race some effort at reparation for the wrongs that the American nation has brought upon them? Shall the doors of churches and school-houses be shut upon them? Shall states arise and shake them out? Shall the church of Christ hear in silence the taunt that is thrown at them, and shrink away from the helpless hand that they stretch out; and, by her silence, encourage the cruelty that would chase them from our borders? If it must be so, it will be a mournful spectacle. If it must be so, the country will have reason to tremble, when it remembers that the fate of nations is in the hands of One who is very pitiful, and of tender compassion. (Stowe, 1852, 385)

As it is explained in the previous passage, some characters of Stowe’s novel represents God and some of them the worst things a human being could do. Therefore, if Tom and Eva represent good things and are the personification of God, Legree is the personification of evil and is seen as the villain of the novel, since the first time he sees Tom. Eva and Tom are the perfect votaries, and Legree represents evil, “Simon Legree is the epitome of the evil Stowe perceives in her culture” (Lowance, 1994, 105). First of all, Eva is described as a morally perfect white character and she does not see any difference between blacks and whites. She loves Tom and makes him happy while he is her father’s slave and Eva guides people around her to follow Christ. We could say that she is the symbol of the perfect Christian, even though she is just an innocent child who cares for everyone’s happiness and, for her, the only thing people need in order to be

happy is to be loved. “Eva’s instinctive association with Tom is given in the exchange where ‘type’ and ‘antitype’ meet each other” (171), where Tom is the perfect slave since he obeys his master and knows that his role in life is to serve others while Eva is the “antitype” because she is a white child, descendent of a rich family who treats slaves as equals and wants them to have the same rights white people have:

"O, Topsy, poor child, I love you!" said Eva, with a sudden burst of feeling, and laying her little thin, white hand on Topsy’s shoulder; "I love you, because you haven’t had any father, or mother, or friends; – because you’ve been a poor, abused child! I love you, and I want you to be good."
(Stowe, 1852, 245)

Eva is one of the most emotional characters and creates suspense in the reader. She represents the slaves’ suffering from the most sentimental way and perspective. When Eva is dying, she decides to meet everyone in her house, her family and the slaves, and tell them that they should have faith and be good Christians. She manages to make an adult, Miss Ophelia, who learns to see slaves as people with feelings, love them. Eva is sick and dies of natural causes and she is grateful to be in Heaven with God, as the good Christians are. “As Richard Brodhead observes, ‘Little Eva does not merely die but makes a scene of her death. Through this representational labor she opens up a space that both enables and actively solicits deep emotional participation’” (Lowance, 1994, 31). The character is essential when trying to understand the relation between Christianity and slavery, and also, to show the reader that a white girl like her could love and appreciate a “negro” like Tom. It is important to mention that Tom’s friendship with little Eva starts when he saves her from drowning and Eva convinces her father to buy Tom and save him from Haley. The relation between Eva’s death and Tom’s separation from his child is a metaphor, because Tom suffers Eva’s death as if she was his daughter; in the scene, we can clearly see and feel how much Tom appreciates her.

Tom is the main character of the novel; he is described as a notably religious man, who is against materialism, because materialism is what slavery is about and it contradicts spiritual and human love: “Tom’s role [is] as a teacher of the good and the paradox of the opposition between goodness and morality” (Allen, 2009, 130-131). The author shows a man who suffers the horrors of slavery but never loses his faith and hope; he is a good father and a good example to his children. Tom thinks that faith in God is the

key for slaves to achieve freedom and the right way to happiness, which is why his courage and strength are based on Christian love. Eva and Tom are the perfect behavior models. Tom serves Legree and is the perfect servant, even though Legree abuses him constantly. "Mas'r Legree, as ye bought me, I'll be a true and faithful servant to ye. I'll give ye all the work of my hands, all my time, all my strength; but my soul I won't give up to mortal man" (Stowe, 1852, 330). Tom is the perfect example of Christianity, because he is able to forgive, accept and love without consider all the horrors he has suffered because of slavery. Some critics like Allen show Tom as a passive character, which means that he is much of a martyr.

At the end of the novel, Tom dies of Legree's abuses, but he dies to give the rest of the slaves their freedom. Therefore, Tom and Eva both die to "save" others and guide them to Christianity, considered to be the right path. They are the perfect representations of God: "Eva and Tom both are willing to sacrifice themselves for others, both have an almost instinctive understanding of Christianity" (Lowance, 1994, 33). Tom and Eva's deaths are a representation of Jesus' death, who died on the cross to save the neighbor, as mentioned before. At the end of the novel, George Shelby tells his slaves the importance of Uncle Tom and how he represents slaves' freedom: "think of your freedom, every time you see uncle tom's cabin; and let it be a memorial to put you all in mind to follow in his steps, and be as honest and faithful and Christian as he was" (Stowe, 1852, 380). To represent evil, Beecher Stowe chooses the character of Simon Legree, who is the most atheistic and villainous character. He is the owner of many slaves, even the owner of Tom at the end of the novel. His slaves suffer sexual abuse and even murder; for this reason, he shows the worst aspect of slavery, even though slavery is bad from any point of view. Legree is an example of a character who does not feel any kind of compassion for the slaves; he is considered the antagonist while Tom is the hero. Even when Legree abuses Tom constantly, he is able to forgive him and even love him, which is another biblical representation of Christ, as previously stated. He forgives and loves his oppressors: "Stowe constructed her characterization of Tom, the martyr for Christian love and virtue, and it is with biblical rhetorical strategies that she develops her narrative of Christ among us in the person of a persecuted black slave who forgives his oppressors" (Lowance, 1994, 176)

Uncle Tom's Cabin's popularity

To conclude this essay, it is necessary to mention that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a really important book that became very popular among readers and was well received. On the cover page of *Norton Critical Edition* edited by Elizabeth Ammons, it is said that “in the nineteenth century *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold more copies than any book in the world except the Bible. It was quickly translated into thirty-seven languages and has never gone out of print. The book had a far-reaching impact, and deeply affected the national conscience of antebellum America”, which proves that the book had an important political value at that time.

It is said that, Abraham Lincoln told Harriet Beecher Stowe: “so you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war” (Silver, 2010 , 151); however, there is no proof of this statement being true, but the book was published in 1852 and the Civil War started less than a decade after the its publication. The novel gives the readers a different point of view on the institution of slavery, explaining economic and political causes and consequences of it. It also helped Americans decide what kind of country they wanted to live in. Moreover, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helped women decide what kind of life they wanted to live. It is because of this book that, from the moment of its publication, feminist movements become more powerful and popular.

Nineteenth-century family and women's periodicals provide an important part of the historical context for Stowe's novel. [...] The success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* appeal to the rhetoric of domesticity depended on having a mass audience familiar with its conventions. Nineteenth-century women's periodicals helped to educate this audience in these conventions by helping to develop, articulate, and disseminate the cultural creed of ‘woman's sphere.’ (Lowance, 1994, 74-75)

The previous passage explains that Stowe was inspired by American women and mothers to write the novel and its success went hand in hand with domesticity and familial conventions. Moreover, the novel helped promote the power of women in society and some readers even felt identified with the characters.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the main goal of this essay is to analyze slavery situation from a historical point of view, but always based on Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. There are two important points to explain in slavery's context: the power of women and the importance that religion has at that time; the conflict between slavery and Christianity.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was written before the beginning of the feminist movement and, as we can read in this essay, the moral power of women is very important in the novel. Even though we can see men's supremacy in society, Stowe wants to focus mainly on women's roles throughout the entirety of the novel. A clear example that shows the struggle not only mothers but women in general had to endure during that time is perfectly embodied in the character of Eliza, who does everything she can to save her son's life and give him freedom. She is also a perfect example of the strength of women, especially given that she is one of the two main characters of the novel. In some cases, women had enough influence over their husbands to convince them of the evil of slavery, but they lacked voting rights so men were the ones who had the political and economical power in society. This male superiority was related to traditional values. On the other hand, slave women had no legal recourse in case of rape because their bodies belonged to their owners by law. Black women were unprotected by both the law and public opinion: they were merely considered property of their masters. Therefore, Stowe uses feminist characters as a way of rebelling against the society of her time, mainly because women were in charge of passing on Christian values to their children and husbands.

The most relevant topic that we have to talk about in this essay is religion, because it is the one topic with the most importance throughout the novel and also of the society of the time. The novel represents the contrast between slavery and Christianity and the evil nature of slavery opposed to the love of Christ and slaves' belief and faith. In addition, slaves are treated like mere property and not as human beings, which is an important point to talk about when we are analyzing slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Beecher Stowe emphasizes the similarities between the characters of the novel and the Bible:

Stowe has carefully appropriated rhetorical modes from the Bible to reinforce her central argument about the essential evils of slavery, and she carefully orchestrates biblical types, [...] To make her arguments cohere,

she employs the Bible not only for the moral authority that only the Bible can invoke, but also as a rhetorical control [...] by recapitulating biblical characters and figures and by renarrating episodes from the Bible. (Lowance, 1994, 159-160)

It is, also, necessary to say that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had an important influence over its readers, because the novel was a total success and it helped open the eyes of many people of the time against the cruelty of slavery. Furthermore, it helped create the first feminist movements as a result of the influence it had over women and the rise of the “new matriarchy”.

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