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"Whiteness" and the Ideology of "Benevolence" in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Ayan Mondal

Abstract

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is one of the greatest nineteenth century novels in the "sentimental" tradition which is heralded as an explicitly "anti-slavery", pro-abolitionist novel. However, the novel can very well be read "against the grain" applying the theoretical tools of the Toni Morrison's "Whiteness Studies" and Mita Banerjee's ideas regarding "minstrelsy". Such a reading can seriously jeopardize the innocent humanist implications of the novel and can expose that the "black" agencies have been made "serviceable" to uphold the ideas of the goodness, kindness, charity and benevolence of the whites. The present article attempts a close textual analysis to show instances where whiteness gets celebrated in the name of the universalist celebration of inter-racial harmony and friendship.

Keywords: Benevolence; Minstrelsy; Romantic racialism; White gaze; Whiteness.

To understand the operations of "whiteness" in a novel like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that is very explicitly anti-slavery and abolitionist, what needs to be first looked into are the implications of "whiteface minstrelsy" that the novelist might have taken recourse to. In fact, throughout the novel, it is the "white" narrator who speaks on behalf of the black protagonist, either in the diegetic or in the mimetic mode and one feels tempted to be in agreement with Mita Banerjee when she argues- "White abolitionism is enabled by literary blackface; the white subject can speak for the black slave only because such articulation is denied to the person who should be the subject of both abolitionism and Stowe's narrative: Uncle Tom himself" (Banerjee 208). In the entire narrative matrix of Stowe's text, therefore, Stowe goes on "witnessing" the "black" experience and simultaneously "substituting" it with her own narrative perspective. It is this act

of substitution that metamorphoses Stowe's text from a mere abolitionist narrative to "an act of literary ventriloquism" (Banerjee 210). However, it is not merely the act of "ventriloquism" that problematizes the issue of "whiteness" in the novel; there is a simultaneous act of the colonizing "white gaze" that arrests the black protagonist in the text. Mita Banerjee theorises this concept of the "white gaze" in the following words:

> The gesture of white legitimation of black writing is synonymous with what could be termed a colonizing gaze. Through this gaze, the white observer not only sees the Other, but freezes him in the moment of writing.(Banerjee 213)

Therefore, the "Other" is hardly allowed to enter the stage in his own right and the very "white" act of witnessing and articulating black agency is imbricated in what Morrison refers to as the "impossible syntax" of "I saw he had seen". Morrison elaborates in *Playing in the Dark*, the implication of the expression with reference to Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* where the white narrator reports about the nigger- "The nigger was still taking her out and I looked and saw he had seen a patch of flying fish burst out ahead" (qtd in *PITD* 72). Morrison further comments- "'Saw he had seen' is improbable in syntax, sense and tense but, *like other choices available to Hemingway, it is risked to avoid a speaking black*" (Morrison *PITD* 72 emphasis mine). Considering the abolitionist stance of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* meant to generate sympathies for the African race, this seems relevant because – "the solace of historical hindsight lies in the exposure of the white gaze as always-already colonizing, *even at the moment of its sympathy for the subject for whom whiteness pretends to speak*"(Banerjee 217 emphasis mine). Therefore, a re-assessment of the text with reference to the ways in which Uncle Tom is portrayed, other black characters are strategically manipulated , the hybrid figures are granted considerable agency and the colonialist motive surfaces at the end, would help understand the symbiotic functionality of whiteness through "blackness".

It is pertinent in this context to talk about the idea of "Romantic racialism", a term coined and elaborated in his essay "Uncle Tom and the Anglo Saxons: Romantic Racialism in the North" by George Frederickson. Frederickson traced the emergence of this benign form of racialism referring back to the times when white racial hierarchy was established in America taking recourse to certain stereotypical ideas of the blacks. In the 1830s, a fresh debate ensued between people who tried to endorse the idea of a single human nature and those who considered deep seated racial differences among different sects. In the 1840s and 1850s, however, the biologi-

cal school upheld the idea that the black man is "incapable of progressive development and self -government because he lacked the white man's enterprise and intellect" (Frederickson 101). It was against this contention that the Afro-Americans signified only limitations and weaknesses, against which the counter-arguments regarding the redeeming virtues of the blacks were placed. Frederickson sums up this new benign idea regarding the blacksvery aptly:

> This comparatively benign view of black "peculiarities" has been neglected by historians …Although romantic racialists acknowledged that blacks were different from whites and probably always would be, they projected an image of the Negro that could be construed as flattering or laudatory in the context of some currently accepted ideals of human behaviour and sensibility. (Frederickson 102)

In fact, that Stowe subscribes to this essentially romantic racialist views in her portrayal of Tom is well evident in the subtle textual nuances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Uncle Tom is the embodiment of the noble, pure, sacrosanct Christian virtues and though Stowe, very overtly opposes slavery, her paternalistic Christian moralities speak of the black person's necessity to assimilate and integrate into a superior whiteness. Uncle Tom, the character, has been very meticulously whitewashed and his portrayal, in a way, parallels the portrayal of slaves in George Fitzhug's *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves Without Masters* which provided the argument that Christianity is a protective agency to "control" the robust energies of the slaves. Uncle Tom, in the text, becomes a representative of the community that is "always already" controlled. The narrator mentions that his "truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindliness and benevolence" (Stowe 19). Uncle Tom's representation in the novel becomes "serviceable" to the needs of whiteness and the nobility and benevolence bestowed upon him is in fact the white man's need to abate the uncontrollable instincts of the threatening black man. Throughout the text, Uncle Tom is not merely Christianized to an abnormal extent but is grossly emasculated and abundantly feminised. Let us look into some specific areas of the text to validate these claims and read the novel again, in the light of Toni Morrison's critical perspective of looking at whiteness vis-à-vis its "other".

The first instance of Uncle Tom's compliance with the master's ideology comes in Chapter VI when, despite knowing that he has been sold by his master Shelby, he refuses to follow Eliza's footsteps. It is ironical that Tom

denies any evil intention that his "white" master might have had in selling him and his strong assertion that his wife and children would be taken due care of- "Mas'r always found me on the spot- he always will. I never have broke trust…It's better for me alone to go than to break up the place and sell all. Mas'r a'nt to blame Chloe, and he'll take care of you and the poor-…" (Stowe 36). This strong compliance with the master and the firm conviction that he means all good, almost at the beginning of the novel sets the tone for the subsequent instances where Tom plays the docile and benevolent Christian soul and surrenders himself to all forms of sufferings. In the same chapter, the "large, broad-chested, powerfully made man" gets sufficiently feminized when he sobs with the contemplation of being separated from his family- "Here he turned to the rough trundle-bed full of little wooly heads, and broke fairly down…Sobs, heavy, hoarse and loud, shook the chair, and the great tears fell through his fingers on the floor…" (Stowe 36). This portrayal of the "weeping" Uncle figure is in fact in keeping with the feminine literary mode- the domestic and sentimental genre. Peter Stonley in his article "Sentimental Emasculations: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Black Beauty*" writes about Tom's "maternal sensuousness":

> This maternal sensuousness, close and nurturing, makes a claim on both the body and the spirit….Stowe invites us as readers to desire and to consume the slave body, and her narrative gaze mimics the trade that it deplores. Any sense of complex humanity is abandoned, allowing Stowe and the reader to take up and inhabit this body with its "full glossy black. (Stonley 59)

The glaring instance where Stowe very tactfully represses Tom's "black, male sexuality" is the one where he saves Eva and draws her affectionate attention. What needs to be focused first is the way Stowe has portrayed Eva as the perfect embodiment of "whiteness" as a contrast to Tom:

> Her form was the perfection of childish beauty, without its usual chubbiness and squareness of outline... …Always dressed in white she seemed to move like a shadow through all sorts of places, without contracting spot or stain…and that visionary golden head, with its deep blue eyes fleeted along. (Stowe 132-33).

The idealized, lustrous portrait of whiteness almost becomes in the present context a parameter through which Tom is to be judged. The narrator emphasizes the childishness, simplicity and innocence of Eva as her "deep blue eyes peered out upon him". After Tom saves Eva from drowning, his new master Haley, and Eva's father, St Clare immediately objectify

Tom and start talking in terms of a shared language of business, power and privilege, which Shannon Sullivan terms "whiteness as possession"- "How cheap could you afford to let him go, to oblige a young lady that's particular sot on him" (Stowe 136) asks Clare, to which Haley replies, "Why, that ar fellow managed his master's whole farm. He has a strornary talent for business" (136). Tom even becomes serviceable to Eva for articulating her "white privilege", whatever her innocent implications, when she almost urges her father to buy Tom- "Papa, do buy him! It's no matter what you pay…You have money enough I know. I want him" (137). The three stark monosyllables "I want him" uttered by Eva, further problematize the issue of white and black sexuality in the context of antebellum beliefs. It is noteworthy that Stowe denies Tom the required outlet even amidst the most opportune moments. Spillers notes in this regard- "Desire in any form for the female must be silenced, cut out, banished, "killed' off, and in particular with reference to the African male sexuality, here rendered harmless "under the auspices of a Christian and civilising mission" (Spillers 558).

Tom's sexuality, here, gets toned down despite the fact that Stowe's descriptions hinted at the possibilities of the white child falling a victim to the predatory black sexual whims. Stowe's description of Tom here, if carefully studied, well bespeaks the possibility- "Tom watched the little lady a great deal,…. He knew an abundance of simple acts to propitiate and invite the approaches of the little people, and he resolved to play his part right skilfully" (Stowe 133-34). Ducksworth reads the passage as one that provides the reader a "suspicion that Tom, though simple-minded, could have been a dangerous paedophile" (Ducksworth 227). It is this possibility that Stowe very discernibly subverts in subscribing to her romantic racialist views. Not only is Eva's sexuality toned down in the projection of her pure and white transcendent morality, but Tom's delineation as one having the "soft, impressible nature of his kindly race, ever yearning toward the simple and childlike" (Stowe 133) sufficiently emasculates him and arrests him in the "child" stereotype heralded by the romantic racialists. In the context of "whiteness Studies", the abnormal naivety that Tom is endowed with merely projects the "white" desire to rob him of the instinctual, "normal" human agency. This is the psychological need of "whiteness" to abate and tame Tom's vigilant gaze and sexual implications. Tom's nobility, discipline and the sense of control therefore get intricately intertwined with the white codes of Christian morality. Kobena Mercer's observations in this context are worth quoting: "representations of black male sexuality are inseparable from expostulations of racial identity… Sex is confirmed as the nature of black male identity

(Mercer 185). Stowe's attempts to subvert and destroy black male sexuality, therefore merely projects the white "desire" to insulate and garb Tom within "white" Christian standards and therefore Tom is portrayed as non-threatening, kind and merciful confined within the frontiers of matriarchy and the home. Mita Banerjee argues- "It is in this lack of artificiality, the impossibility of staging blackness, that Tom becomes confined to the framework of minstrelsy" (Banerjee 223). Hazel Carby maintains, "Stowe was unable to embody the values of true womanhood in a black female character and, instead bestowed them upon her protagonist, Uncle Tom, a black male" (Carby 34). Stonley's comments in this respect are also pertinent enough:

> Stowe is thus ensnared in an equivalent of the madonna- whore syndrome, in that she cannot accommodate sexual appetite with goodness. For Tom to be a hero he must be transformed into an asexual heroine, and, indeed, Tom's gender is re-signified…One can easily understand why Elisabeth Ammons describes Tom as "the supreme heroine of the book."(Stonley 64)

It is striking that in majority of the subsequent episodes and Eva-Tom interactions at St Clare's place, Eva occupies the centre-stage and Tom is sufficiently infantilized. Eva, though a child, is invested with maturity and wisdom and a white Christian power and despite Tom's apparent representation as a parental figure, Eva is configured as the real parent in their relationship. Thus even in their spontaneous sharing of a spiritual bonding, there is a covert celebration of white Christian supremacy. Uncle Tom is merely reduced to a symbol exhibiting infantile Christian sentimentality. In Chapter XXII of the text, when Tom and Eva were seated on a little mossy seat one Sunday evening, Eva read out from the *Bible* – "And I saw a sea of glass, mingled with fire", and pointing to the lake confirmed "there 'tis". Uncle Tom was described merely to passively indulge in singing spiritual hymns , one of them being "I see a band of spirits bright/ That taste the glories there"(239) to which Eva responded "Uncle Tom, I've seen *them*" (239 italics original). The narrator's comment that followed immediately becomes vital enough- "Tom had no doubt of it at all; it did not surprise him in the least. If Eva had told him she had been to heaven, he would have thought it entirely probable" (239). This comment, in fact, subverts the role of the "child" and the "Uncle" in the Eva-Tom relationship and therefore celebrates Eva's white paternalism. In the same chapter when Eva asks her mother "why don't we teach our servants to read" (241), she urges that slaves must be taught to read in order to gain access to the *Bible* and to learn "God's will". This again, is a glorification of Chris-

tian ideals of discipline, ethics and morality that literacy might endow the slaves with. The novel's idealization of the sentimental implications of religion, therefore, glosses the real problems and adversities of slavery as an institution. Even Eva's fervent wish in Chapter XXV, "And promise me, dear father, that Tom shall have his freedom as soon as…I am gone" (254) conveys her reluctance to forego her paternalistic white authority as long as she lived, even if that meant being kind , sympathetic and merciful to the slaves. So pervasive was Eva's influence on Uncle Tom, that even when his spiritual faith faltered under the continuous torments of Simon Legree, in a visionary fit he could still listen to the gentle voice of Eva: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and the rivers they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned…for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour" (319). This voice of Eva that merges with the Lord's own solemn announcement of being the saviour in fact proves magical in restoring the spiritual faith of Tom during his moments of crisis. In fact, Tom, as many critics hailed, in his deep engagement with Christian ideals of spirituality was merely indulging in a "comic syncretism", comic, because it is a weak and imperfect imitation of white religious standards. The oft-quoted passage in Chapter IV of the text, describing Tom's religious inclination reads:

> Uncle Tom was a sort of patriarch in religious matters. …it was in prayer that he especially excelled. *Nothing could exceed the touching simplicity, the child-like earnestness of his prayer* enriched with the language of Scripture, which seemed so entirely to have wrought itself into his being, as to have become a part of himself, and to drop from his lips unconsciously; *in the language of a pious old negro*, he "prayed right up". (Stowe 27 italics mine)

The "child-like earnestness" of Uncle Tom's nature and even his religious commitment immediately create an unwritten binary between what Mita Banerjee calls "comic copy and dignified original" (Banerjee 228). The language of the "old pious Negro" is therefore to be dismissed as fake or at best imperfectly mimetic of white religious sensibilities which are legitimate and authentic. Tom merely "plays" white and by doing so he does not end up becoming a black preacher but only an absurd "religious patriarch". Even when Tom is "whitewashed" with the precepts of an ennobling Christian sensibility, he is never really allowed to free himself from the colonising "white gaze".

Regarding the issue of Tom's coveted "liberty", there are certain instances

from the text that need to be addressed. In Chapter XXVIII, when St Clare informs Tom that he is going to make him a free man and that he needs to get ready for setting out for Kentucky, Tom is in fact preoccupied by a sudden flash of joy. St Clare casually started a conversation with Tom stating that he might not have such clothes nor earn a livelihood as at present by working as a "free man" to which Tom argued-"I'd rather have poor clothes, poor house, poor everything, and have 'em mine, than have the best, and have 'em any man's else…"(279). This expectation that the text raises about Tom's self-realisation of eking out an independent living, which, however poor, is his own, is thwarted by Tom's indulgence in the melodramatic sentimental rhetoric about his Master's benevolence in the following lines. When Clare points out that Tom is to leave his household by a month or so, Tom replies- "Not while Mas'r is in trouble…I'll stay with Mas'r as long as he wants me, - so as I can be any use". (279) Wh"n Clare again asks Tom- "And when will my trouble be over?". Tom further adds- "When Mas'r St Clare's a Christian" (280). This postponement of his freedom for the sake of the master's alleviation of his personal problems or his advocacy of Christianity, is in fact an attempt at precluding the real troubles of slavery and a passive submission to its institutionalized contours.

The declaration by Uncle Tom that he would stay at Clare's place "as long as he wants me" is in fact an utterance of his whitewashed self that prefers passivity to rebelliousness. Further, it is merely the benevolence of the master that gets highlighted through the sentimental speech of the slave who considers the master's household to be his surrogate- familial space. A second instance where the possibility of his freedom comes is in Chapter XXXVIII entitled "The Victory". Being continuously tortured both physically and psychologically by Simon Legree, when the dejected Tom is visited by Cassy, Tom is straightaway asked- "Tom, wouldn't you like your liberty?" (361), Tom instantly replies- "I shall have it, Misse, in God's time". Cassy, however instigates Tom to consider whether he would have his liberty that very night, by escaping Legree's place through the back door that very night while he is intoxicated with brandy.

Again, Tom's decision to defer freedom till "God's time" suggests his indifference to his status quo and his reluctance to come out of his dismal and wretched condition. Tom's portrayal in this light not merely cocoons him into perpetual psychological incarceration but leads him into a passive and unquestioning acceptance of such enslaved status. What is further noteworthy is that Tom forbids even Cassy to indulge in any kind of rebellious outburst. When Cassy retorts back stating "Then I shall do

it" (361), Tom again goes on to give Christian ideological references to oppose her decision- "The Lord hasn't called us to wrath. We must suffer and wait his time" (362). "The dear, blessed Lord never shed no blood but his own, and that he poured out for us when we was enemies. Lord, help us to follow his steps, and love our enemies" (362). The chapter ends with Tom's triumph in persuading Cassy to go the Christian way and wait for the right time to be emancipated:

> "Father Tom, I'll try it! She said suddenly.
>
> Amen! Said Tom;" the Lord help ye!" (363)
>
> Tom's defence of his position through a Christian frame of reference is suggestive of his assimilation into the design of whiteness and a reiteration of the tropes of black inferiority. Frederick Douglas's views on Christianity is worth quoting in this context:
>
> [Christianity] is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,- a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,- a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,- and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. (117)

The way Tom and her creator cover the real problems of slavery by Christian precepts and principles suggests therefore, Tom's indoctrination into the standards of White supremacist ideas. Richard Yarborough's comments on Stowe's portrayal of Tom can be quoted in this context-"In an attempt to make Tom the ideal Christian, however, Stowe deprives him of most of his imperfect human nature; he becomes as St Clare observes, "a moral miracle"" (Yarborough 54)

Rightly does Brian Borst argue- "By glorifying Tom, Stowe misrepresents the hardships of actual slaves. Though she writes that Tom "saw enough of abuse and misery to make him sick and weary,", Stowe nevertheless primarily takes a more optimistic approach that is quite incongruous with the sufferings slaves had to go through" (Borst 12-13). Tom appears trusting, where he has every reason to behave as radically distrusting, refuses to speak ill about the most brutal of his masters Legree and is ready to provide him assistance even in his dying moments. The death of Tom has also been adequately Christianised because his sufferings have been compared with ordeals of Christ, his black abjection gets expressed through the image of the crucified Christ in the text.

Tom's sufferings, therefore, seem necessary for the process of his salvation and subsequent enlightenment. One seems to agree with Borst when he argues- "…what is clear is that Stowe here shifts attention from actual black suffering under slavery to that of white Christians seeking to help them" (Borst 53).Richard Yarborough in his essay on Stowe very aptly sums up Stowe's strategies of black characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Yarborough writes-" Of necessity, Stowe falls back upon popular conceptions of the Afro-American in depicting many of her slave characters. (Yarborough 47)

Having considered at length Stowe's portrayal of the character of Tom, it is pertinent now to analyse how Stowe has handled the other black and mulatto characters in the novel. The way Stowe employs the black pranksters Sam and Andy, merely provides a comic relief to the rather tensed escape of Eliza and Harry from their slave trader Haley. They merely play the role of "tricksters" as in blackface minstrelsy and have no substantial role in helping the fugitives to be emancipated. They merely act as "bumptious, giggling, outsized adolescents" (Yarborough 47,) always eager to please the white mistress rather than having any substantial preconceived plan to provide assistance to Eliza and Harry. Given to strained malapropisms and a very lingering syntax, they have only been employed to provide amusement.

Sambo and Quimbo, arguably the most notorious and immoral among the black characters in the novel act rather brutally and cruelly to Uncle Tom, punctiliously working under the corrupt instructions of their master Simon Legree. They become jealous of their fellow slaves, hate each other, distrust their fellow plantation workers and it took the continuous efforts of Uncle Tom to forgive them and make them realise the errors in their ways. Lacking in religious faith their representation seems to at odds with the romantically racialised representation of the pious Uncle Tom. If the brutal institution of slavery has corrupted them beyond bounds, it is Uncle Tom whose piety and steadfast faith in Christ transforms them into knowing the real essence of life. They become responsible for the excruciating sufferings of Uncle Tom, but ultimately become receptive to what Richard Yarborough calls "Christian rehabilitation" (Yarborough 50). Yarborough states about them- "witnessing Tom's agony brings about an immediate change, and they shed tears of repentance and grief when exposed to the Holy Word" (Yarborough 50). The conversion of Sambo and Quimbo from radical perpetrators of the corrupt white master's orders to their indoctrination into the mores of civilised Christianity represented by Uncle Tom therefore testify to the dissolution of sin by divine interven-

tion. Not merely Tom, Sambo and Quimbo also begin to be whitewashed therefore through their revived and resuscitated entities.

The characterization of Topsy as the glaring "black" other of Eva is worth exploring. Topsy is introduced in Chapter XX of the novel as a clear foil to the character of Eva. The narrator states:

> She was one of the blackest of her race; …The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness and cunning, over which was oddly drawn , like a kind of veil, an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity. (Stowe 217)

A little while later in the same chapter, Stowe underlines the contrast between Eva and Topsy explicitly- "The Saxon born of ages of cultivation, command education, physical and moral eminence; the Afric, born of ages of oppression, submission, ignorance, toil and vice!"(225). Sketching Topsy as the complete polar opposite of Eva's sacrosanct and white purity, describing her as a victim of child abuse and constant torture who is inured to whipping, Stowe portrays Topsy as "natural" in terms of her genesis- "I spect I grow'd. Don't think nobody never made me" (Stowe 221). Topsy's portrait as the eerie, boisterous and uncontrollable child heightens and enhances, all the more Eva's "whiteness". Richard Yarborough rightly argues:

> On one side stands the precocious cherubic Eva, whom Stowe describes as "an impersonation in childish form of the love of Christ". On the other is Topsy, who embodies an innocent but still dangerous lack of self-control and restraint…Eva holds the key to the black child's conversion as she tries to touch her "wid, rude heart" with the "first word of kindness". (Yarborough 49)

What the novel almost repetitively conforms to, is this motif of conversions that sets all black, uncontrolled selves right through Christian discipline and order. If Uncle Tom becomes an epitome of the "benevolent" black whom the institution of slavery has already "whitewashed" and humanised, Eva in the novel represents just the initiation of the process. In fact, this possibility of conversion and rehabilitation of wildest of hearts is what the novelist emphasises time and again, by taking recourse to tropes of romantic racialism. Topsy is not individualised as a black because even her uniquely black characteristics become amenable to disciplined and codified Christian treatment. Yarborough has it right when he states- "In Stowe's world, to be born black is to be born a pagan, but paradoxically

close to a state of grace; once a character's heathen African nature is controlled, redemption becomes a possibility"(Stowe 50).

What needs to be considered next is the way Stowe handles the mixed-blood blacks, that is, the hybrid figures in her novel. How much "white-washing" does Stowe require to portray them as full-fledged characters in her novel? It is interesting to note that in Stowe's world, the mulattos are closer to "whiteness", be it in their physical attractiveness, in the diction they take recourse to and the choices they make. In contrast to Uncle Tom's sheer passivity and apathy to rebel, Stowe's portrayal of Eliza and George Harris is important as their actions reflect their individual struggle to come out of their pressing adversities. As far as the crossbreed Eliza is concerned, Stowe endows her with strong maternal instincts, emphasising her obsessive love for her son, Harry. Eliza's initial stance of blind reverence to her master and mistress ("I always thought that I must obey my master and mistress, or I couldn't be a Christian" (15)) changes when she becomes sure of her master's decision to separate her from her child. George Harris, however, who did not receive the benevolent treatment that Eliza did from his masters, openly declares to Eliza- "I ain't a Christian like you Eliza; my heart's full of bitterness; I can't trust in God. Why does he let things be so?"(15) and decides upon a bright and promising future:

> "So, Eliza, my girl", said the husband, mournfully, bear up, now,
>
> And good-by, for I'm going"
>
> "Going, George! Going where?"
>
> "To Canada", said he, straightening himself up; "and when I'm there, I'll buy you; that's all the hope that's left us. You have a kind master, that won't refuse to sell you. I'll buy you and the boy;-God helping me, I will" (Stowe 17)

In chapter X1, George in his interactions with the white acquaintance named Mr Wilson, offers a serious dig at the hollow and deceitful notions of the country:

> Mr Wilson, *you* have a country, but what country have I, or any one like me, born of slave mothers? What laws are there for us? We don't make them,-we don't consent to them… (Stowe 100)

These comments by George immediately posit him as Uncle Tom's "other", who is aware of the practical situations around him and is ready to

take prompt actions to evade his misfortunes or adversities. George's rebellious nature and Eliza's strong and overpowering maternal affection that drove her apart from her benevolent master and kind mistress suggest their contrastive natures with Uncle Tom's sentimental indulgence in religious scriptures and his subsequent insulations from concrete, practical and feasible actions. Yarborough is right to assess- "Eliza and George rival any white in the novel in nobility of character and fineness of sensibility. That in a sense they *are* white suggests that they represent not only Stowe's attempt to have her target audience identify personally with the plight of the slaves but also her inability to view certain types of heroism in any but "white" terms" (51)

It remains to be said that Stowe's final views on the newly emancipated slaves are also controversial enough. In the final chapter of the novel entitled "Concluding Remarks" , Stowe puts her views in dialogic form through a series of questions which she answers one after the other. One of the questions put by the narrator runs thus- "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?"(405). The narrator's voice adds further- "Do you say, "We don't want them here; let them go to Africa'? (405).The answer that Stowe offers in the guise of the narrator, however, once again betrays her endorsement of the white supremacist ideologies. Stowe writes:

> Let the church of north receive these poor sufferers in the spirit of Christ, receive them to the educating advantages of Christian republican society and schools, *until they have attained to somewhat of a moral and intellectual maturity, and then assist them in their passage to those shores, where they may put in practice the lessons they have learned in America*. (405 emphasis mine)

Stowe's comments convey that even after the slaves are legally emancipated, a lot needs to be done to alleviate their intellectual penury and to hasten their moral maturity. The problem is two-fold. First, the view that the Afro-Americans can no longer be assimilated in the mainstream pan-American culture, but require a separate entity as a separate race in Africa. Second, the sense of white paternalism in further "whitewashing" the slaves with its ideological state apparatus like the schools and churches, further celebrates whiteness, albeit in a new way. In this epilogue, many of the enslaved characters receive their emancipation, but sadly enough, most of them move to Liberia, an American colony at Africa. This trope

that Stowe takes recourse to is another way of endorsing the colonialist mindset. Borst's views on the same are worth quoting:

> Colonization was commonly promoted, though obviously controversial, at the time, even among (white) abolitionists. It was argued that, since the slave trade had originally started with kidnapping Africans, the enslaved belonged on that continent and should go back once they were freed. This racialist view excluded the notion that freed slaves could make a life of their own in America, even in the North. (Borst 20)

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, despite being a politically overt abolitionist novel, conforms to racial stereotypes, whitewashes its black protagonist Uncle Tom in the fashion Aphra Behn whitewashes the royal slave in *Oroonoko*, conforms to the romantic racialist views and indirectly endorses the colonial mindset. This "against the grain" reading of the novel through the critical lens of Toni Morrison's "whiteness" thesis as forwarded in *Playing in the Dark*, therefore destablilises conventional understandings of the text as much as it unravels the subtle operations of white supremacist ideologies. One remembers Morrison's comment in *Playing in the Dark* – "Certainly no American text of the sort I am discussing was ever written for black people- no more than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written for Uncle Tom to be read or even be persuaded by" (Morrison, *PITD* 16-17). By employing an assumed ethnicity, "whiteness" in the text "re-Christianizes" itself and the black intermediary becomes "serviceable" in the text to facilitate white self-critique. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, therefore is an abolitionist narrative that denies the slave an agency to "look up", reciprocates the "white gaze" of the white observer and makes the "Other" function only as "a mirror in which the dominant[white] culture recognizes its own straying from the path of righteousness" (Banerjee 232).

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