Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Global Best Seller, Anti-slave Narrative, Imperialist Agenda

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Abstract: Known in its day for being the second best selling of a book after "The Bible," Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" has had a global presence ever since. While it may not have the wide readership it did in the 19th century, it continues to be one of those books that many people still "know" about without ever having read it. Stowe's book is known for its position against slavery, often depicting the harsh, cruel conditions that slaves had undergone in the Plantation south. Stowe's anti-slave narrative is even credited with helping to start the American Civil War. Widely cited (and most likely apocryphal) President Abraham Lincoln supposedly said to Mrs. Stowe during her invited visit to the White House, "So this is the little woman whose book started the Civil War." Yet does Stowe's book harbor another, perhaps hidden thesis? In the anti-slavery, abolitionist characters such as Miss Ophelia, Stowe voices a post-reconstructionist narrative, one that seems to anticipate (and support) the industrialization of the newly united American republic. Ten years after the publication of “Uncle Tom's Cabin," slavery might have ended in most of the Western world, but as Karl Marx would note, not the enslavement-like conditions. "He learns to control himself," writes Marx about the new industrial worker, "in contrast to the slave, who needs a master." And while admirable in its aim to end slavery, does Stowe's tome help to support an Imperialist agenda of the new industrial era?

Keywords: Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Uncle Tom's Cabin", Slavery, Imperialism, Nineteenth-century Industrialism, Marx

Soon after publication in 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin achieved best seller status. While it is still impressive for a book to become a best seller today, it is more common and expected that a book (or even book series) periodically break a sales record. Not only did Stowe’s book establish itself as an early example of literature becoming a global cultural enterprise, her text also earned the distinction of being the best-selling book in its day after the Bible. Stowe’s story about a fictional slave named Tom and his power to endure slavery in antebellum America “sold 10,000 copies within the first week and 300,000 by the end of the first year” (Hedrick 1994, 223). Sales in Britain would rise even higher, “reaching a million and a half in the first year” of its publication in the United Kingdom (Hedrick 1994, 233). Books such as J.V. Rowling’s Harry Potter series may reach such sales in less amount of time, but few best-selling authors also have the distinction of becoming a political spokesperson or even international figurehead identified with the cause he or she wrote about. Such was the distinction that Stowe found thrust upon her not long after the publication of her anti-slavery narrative. “The literary success of Uncle Tom’s Cabin made Harriet Beecher Stowe’s the most single powerful voice on behalf of the slave” writes Joan D. Hedrick in her biography, Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life (Hedrick 1994, 234). Stowe’s stand against slavery in her book is even credited with helping to ignite the American Civil War. Soon after the War between the States had erupted, President Abraham Lincoln invited her to the White House, where, according to lore, he honored her with the dubious distinction of having broken apart the union. “When she met Abraham Lincoln at the White House in 1862, the lanky, angular president is said to have greeted Stowe, who stood less than five feet height with the words, ‘So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!’” (Hedrick 1994, vi). Without doubt, Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin had a powerful cultural impact on helping to end the institution of slavery in the United States in the 19th century. Yet Stowe did not just attack this vile institution as an isolated evil that needed to be uprooted. Stowe’s fictional work often argues for another economic system to replace slavery in the South (where it was practiced). In addition, Stowe’s support for a more free-market, Capitalist system is another thesis of her great work. Yet today, Uncle Tom’s Cabin is widely recognized as an anti-slavery narrative. Again, Stowe does not just
seek to uproot slavery as if it were a bad plant poisoning the rest of the garden. Yes, the anti-slavery narrative in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is very clear. What is less distinctly noted and recognized is Stowe’s other agenda in her book, that being the promotion of a free-market system where labor is reconfigured according to the profit system of the then newly emerging Capitalist economy in Britain but also many of the northern states in the union which opposed slavery. If the slave Tom is one of the major characters speaking out against slavery, then the Northern abolitionist character of Miss Ophelia is Stowe’s character who promotes a new economic agenda that would soon industrialize a victorious North. Initially, Ophelia is a representative of the missionary spirit crusading against slavery in mid-19th century America. It is an observation that Kenneth Hada makes in his article “The Kentucky Model: Economics, Individualism and Domesticity in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” In addition, Ophelia’s missionary role will later be further underscored in her tutelage of the child slave, Topsy. Writes Hada: “The creation of the character Ophelia, her pilgrimage to the deep South, and her relationship with Topsy recall the conflict over this missionary impulse—a conflict with which Stowe’s audience would have been familiar with” (Hada 1999, 175). But just as Ophelia is a missionary crusading against slavery, I also feel that she is a missionary for a new, Capitalist based-free labor economy. It is a perception that Ophelia’s antagonist in the novel, her cousin the slave owner Augustine St. Clare, seems to have of her. After Ophelia condemns the institution of slavery, St. Clare responds: “Your father settled down in New England, to rule over rocks and stones, and to force existence out of Nature; and mine settled in Louisiana, to rule over men and women, and force existence out of them” (Stowe 1994, 195). Yet forcing existence out of Nature is in many ways, the blueprint for the new economic system that Miss Ophelia wishes to replace slavery with. As Marx observes, “Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature” (Marx 1977, 283). In the emerging industrial reorganization of labor, that process between man and nature will be greatly diminished. The laborer (and nature) will be subservient to the new industrial workshop, whether it be a factory, a coal mine, or something smaller like the kitchen that Miss Ophelia tries to reorganize in the St. Clare household. Her reorganization of the kitchen from slave labor to free labor is also emblematic of Stowe’s other agenda in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, that of promoting a more scientific control of labor, along with reorganizing domestic space towards a market-oriented space where duties are regulated according to profitability.

If Kentucky slave-owner Augustine St. Clare embodies the voice of the antebellum Southern slave owner, his Abolitionist cousin Ophelia from Vermont is the Northern voice against slavery. Her arrival at her cousin’s household sets the stage for a discourse between these two views, and the two cousins engage in several dialogues defending their views while attacking the positions they oppose. Yet St. Clare is more static as a dramatic character in this course; as the owner of the household that is running comfortably according to his cultural principles, little movement is necessary beyond maintaining the status quo. His cousin, on the other hand, will soon try to implement her anti-slavery principles in her cousin’s household, particularly his kitchen. Stowe does not have St. Clare resist this inroad. St. Clare takes a bemused, almost cynical approach to his cousin’s passionate activism. “I’m not going to have any of your horrid New England directness, cousin,” said St. Clare, gayly…and I’m not going to define my position. I am one of the sort that lives by throwing stones at other people’s glass houses, but I never mean to put up one for them to stone” (Stowe 1994, 159).

If Ophelia does not meet resistance from St. Clare, she meets it in his patriarchal culture. Ironically, it is also Ophelia’s culture, and perhaps more so, since she represents the wage labor industrial Capitalist economy that will eventually replace the Southern slave-owning economy after the American Civil War. It is a position that Lori Askeland hints at in her article, “Remodeling the Model Home in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Beloved*.” Despite the way Stowe shows female empowerment in the 19th century domestic space such as the kitchen, the house itself will still remain a masculine space. Consequently, the Abolitionism that Ophelia will try to bring to St. Clare’s kitchen will also replicate patriarchal values. Ophelia may be partially
successful in at least psychologically liberating some of the slaves in St. Clare’s kitchen (particularly in the initially willful and defiant Topsy). Yet she fails to perceive how the new economic order she is trying to impose in this domestic space dominated by slavery, represents a patriarchy that sanctions slavery. Thus,

A double realm of masculine domination surrounds Stowe’s brave movement toward the increased ‘global’ power of domesticity: the ever-present power of the masculine state that has infiltrated even some of her ideal matriarchies, with which the even more overarching power of God’s slave-owning kingdom operates in complicity (Askeland 1992, 781).

Where Ophelia also meets resistance is from the kitchen slaves themselves. Ophelia is seen as a disruptor, not a liberator. With the plans Ophelia has for re-managing the kitchen, neither is she there as a liberator. Ophelia enters the kitchen first as the architect and then as the manager of a new economic system. Only then can she return to her role as an Abolitionist. Until then, she must survey an inefficient domestic space where labor is wasted and commodities are not properly valued. “What is this drawer for, Dinah?” Ophelia asks upon entering the kitchen (Stowe 1994, 181). The slave (and manager of the kitchen) Dinah downplays the significance of a drawer and the items within it. Ophelia quickly dismisses such reply, noting how Dinah is “Shi’less” and then methodically proceeds to take inventory on the contents of a drawer, and noting the domestic and even economic relationship of the items inside, such as “a nutmeg-grater and two or three nutmegs, a Methodist hymn-book, a couple of Madras handkerchiefs” (Stowe 1994, 181). Commodities that are not itemized according to value are commodities that are wasted; therefore, Ophelia quickly rearranges the various items in the drawer according to their worth, a strategy she soon applies to the rest of the kitchen. Thus “Miss Ophelia piled and sorted dishes, emptied dozens of scattering bowls of sugar into one receptacle, sorted napkins, tablecloths, and towels, for washing; washing, wiping and arranging with her own hands” (Stowe 1994, 183). In addition to itemizing commodities according to their value, labor must also be rearranged to follow a similar pattern. Labor cannot be wasted; it must be made efficient as possible. Tasks should be broken down according to the way they can deliver the most profit. Soon after assessing Dinah’s inefficient management of the kitchen, Ophelia proposes what seems to be more a labor-saving way of managing this part of St. Clare’s household. “But you should wash your dishes, and clear them right away” Ophelia says to Dinah (Stowe 1994, 182). For Dinah, such efficiency ironically denies her humanity. Though a slave, Dinah still feels a kinship with St. Clare’s kitchen. In many ways, St. Clare’s kitchen has become Dinah’s kitchen. Though Stowe chides her for this perception, Dinah’s misperceived, almost mystical possession of the kitchen belies a human connection with labor, something that can never be part of the kitchen that Ophelia has already started rearranging, a kitchen as workshop, even factory. For Dinah then, she represents a perception that has no place in a new, Capitalist order, a perception where the individual is in control of at least some aspects of his or her labor. Thus, Dinah “indulged the illusion that she, herself, was the soul of order, and it was only the young uns, and the everybody else in the house, that were the cause of anything that fell short of perfection in this respect”(Stowe 1994, 183). Even if we can feel sympathy for Dinah to feel this way when she herself is the property of another, Dinah mimics a perception that her master St. Clare would also agree with. In supporting the institution of slavery, St. Clare will often invoke Christian and moral principles, even if they do not hold up to any degree of scrutiny. He, like Dinah, subscribes to a more mystical order to the world, even if his morality is built upon a false foundation—a perception that he himself recognizes. “It’s pretty generally understood that men don’t aspire after the absolute right, but only do about as well as the rest of the world” St. Clare says in his defense of slavery (Stowe 1994, 183). But he is trying to define his position through morality, while Ophelia defines her position through profitability. Even if Ophelia succeeds in rearranging the kitchen, she fails to get the slaves to conform to the new arrangement. Nevertheless, in her
temporary defeat, Ophelia speaks in a manner stripped of any religion, hypocrisy, morality. “'Such shiftless management, such waste, such confusion I never saw!'” is how Ophelia summarizes her experience in trying to reform St. Clare’s kitchen (Stowe 1994, 184). Compared to St. Clare’s often cynical but lofty and sometimes poetic replies, Ophelia terse, concrete replies become an effective, almost modern-like weapon easily cutting through elegant but old armor worn by her opponent. After St. Clare analogizes Dinah’s management of the kitchen in martial terms—

But the upshot is, she gets up glorious dinners, makes superb coffee; and you must judge her as warriors and statesmen are judged, by her success (Stowe 1994, 184)

Ophelia replies: “But the waste,—the expense!” (Stowe 1994, 185).

As Noelle Gallagher observes in her 2005 article “The Bagging Factory and the Breakfast Factory: Industrial Labor and Sentimentality in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” Ophelia’s passionate, New England, Abolitionist spirit is more of a façade. What drives Ophelia is the new economic order based on speed and profitability, which she is already laboring in, even if she appears in Stowe’s text in a more managerial position. Ophelia is an agent carrying out duties which she believes are universal, yet she completes her activities without any distinguishing poetry or discourse that St. Clare does in defending his system. Such literary distinction is unnecessary for a kitchen that is run more like a factory. As Gallagher observes about Ophelia’s attempts at reforming the wasteful activity of Dinah’s kitchen: “while meals and washing are generated at breakneck speed, all of the labor required to produce them is performed anonymously: New England workers, like New England households, are indistinguishable from one another” (Gallagher 2005, 181).

Gallagher’s observations about Ophelia’s attempted reformation (and industrial transformation) of Dinah’s kitchen is also emblematic of the market-oriented, free-labor driven economy of the anti-slave, Northern states of Antebellum America. Ophelia is not just a character proselytizing Abolitionism; she is also a proselytizer for a new free-labor market system that has already taken root on northern soil a decade before the Civil War. Though primarily an ideology espoused by the new Republican party (which would elect Abraham Lincoln) free labor was a concept that often went hand-in-hand with Abolitionism. It is a thesis that Eric Foner supports and develops in his 1970 text, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War. For the Republican party in particular, the philosophy of free-labor was more ideologically important than the ideology of Abolitionism. “Political anti-slavery was not a merely a negative doctrine, an attack on southern slavery built upon it,” Foner writes, “it was an affirmation of the superiority of the social system of the North—a dynamic, expanding capitalist society” (Foner 1970, 11).

This dynamic expansion, however, was not perceived as an autonomous individual enterprise. Just as Ophelia attempts to reform the kitchen along a factory-like assembly line, (where each kitchen worker is tied to a specific type of labor and where commodities are itemized according to their value) the free-labor ideology of the newly established Republican Party sought to enjoin the wage-labor paid worker to a large, regulating institution such as a factory. The free, Northern (and soon industrialized) worker was never seen as an artisan, working independently or even semi-independently in his own workshop or studio. As Foner observes, the Republican Party (which supported this ideology) may not have proscribed a limit on any individual financial gain a worker might accrue; yet neither was the worker ever perceived as being separate from his factory or from her kitchen which would always be managed by a higher social class. It may not have been the plantation slave owning class of the South; nevertheless, the northern free-laborer was never supposed to become an independent artisan producing his own goods or managing her own kitchen. Thus, “the mobility of the age of the independent producer, whose aspiration was economic self-sufficiency, was superseded by the mobility of industrial society, in which workers could look forward to a rising standard of
living, but not self-employment” (Foner 1970, 33). Such ideological smugness and sense of superiority was prevalent in the North in the years before the civil war, an observation that John Ashworth makes in his 2011 article: “Towards a Bourgeois Revolution? Explaining the American Civil War.” According to Ashworth, Northern opposition to the Southern plantation society was not based just on opposition to slavery. Many Northerners opposed their brethren in the South for failing to acknowledge a new Capitalist-based economy. “Northerners, especially in the final decades of the antebellum Republic, congratulated themselves on the progress of their economy and on its superiority...All Northerners, whether manufacturers, merchants, farmers or wage-workers, were invited to participate in these celebrations” (Ashworth 2011, 196). And is this not the position and stance of Ophelia? In a telling comparison between her and Marie St. Clare, (St. Clare’s wife) Stowe delineates the two conflicting cultures, aristocratic-based, slave-owning South, with up-and-coming, bourgeoisie North. St. Clare’s wife Marie is a woman that “patronized good things...--diamonds, silk, and lace and jewels” (Stowe 1994, 156). Marie has a more ethereal presence. She appears as one born from a class that has long since assumed its right to rule based on inheritance as opposed to productivity and self-made values. Marie then is a creature who is “so slender, so elegant, so airy and undulating in all her motions, her lace scarf enveloped her like a mist” (Stowe 1994, 156).

In contrast, Ophelia is utilitarian, presented with more of a sense of uniformity; indeed, she is even soldierly in the way she presents herself. She is aware of her duties the same way a newly-minted lieutenant is soon after receiving his first command. His troops he has recently taken command of may not understand or even respect him; it does not matter, for this young lieutenant is strongly convinced of the superiority of his duties and how they cannot be superseded. Thus, even though Ophelia is also stylishly dressed, she stands next to Marie St. Clare with a “stiffness and squareness, and bolt-uprightness, [which] enveloped her with as indefinite yet appreciable a presence as did grace her neighbor; [though] not the grace of God” (Stowe 1994, 156). Despite the moral high ground that Ophelia may have as an Abolitionist, she operates more like a foreman for the new economic order that will soon impose itself on the South after the victory of the North. Even though she is a guest, Stowe describes Ophelia’s stay in St. Clare’s house as a “regency” for which she “was up at four o’clock...having attended to all the adjustments of her own chamber” after which she will then prepare “for a vigorous onslaught on the cupboards and closets of the establishment of which she had the keys” (Stowe 1994, 179). Ironically, Ophelia’s determined attempts to economically transform St. Clare’s kitchen is almost evangelical in nature, a point that Ashworth observes about the North which was not only concerned with continuing to consolidate a free-labor market system on its soil, but also to expand (and impose it) on the South. As a result, an “increasing number of Northerners...argued instead that the North must itself expand and that Northern capitalism was profoundly threatened by the prospect of plantation-slavery in the West” (Ashworth 2011, 202). In a similar manner, Ophelia is not just driven by her Abolitionism; she is also driven by a Capitalist system for which all social classes (excluding the slave class, which must be abolished) must be tied into. The merchant, the farmer, the factory worker, and even the factory owner must all be subsumed to the economic ideology that will itemize goods to a new value (based on their mass production) and also the labor that produces and markets these goods. Ophelia in particular, is an evangelist of this new economic system and in many ways, also Stowe’s book, which not only vehemently opposes slavery, but also prescribes and condones the new economic system that will replace slavery. Thus, “The demise of the Confederacy meant not merely the end of slavery but the triumph of Northern values...which stressed the compatibility, indeed the inseparability, of democracy and capitalism, [which] became the values of the nation” (Ashworth 2011, 2011).

This is a position that one scholar even poses for President Abraham Lincoln, the president but also symbol for the man trying to preserve the union of the United States. Yet in the article, “Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln: A Curious Convergence,” Robin Blackburn observes how the president was trying to preserve the union for a new economic order to take deeper root, and not
just to uproot slavery. “As a politician, he [Lincoln] was a champion of free wage-labor and the market revolution,” Blackburn observes (Blackburn 2011, 99). The man who wrote the Emancipation Proclamation was also a man compelled to follow the free-market, wage-labor system that would replace slavery. Lincoln not only embodied the ideology of Abolitionism, but also of early Capitalism. While it may seem a stretch, Blackburn presents evidence of how this thesis has already been given significant scholarly research. “That the Civil War was an ‘irrepressible conflict’, that its roots lay in different labour-regimes…are not novel propositions” Blackburn concludes (Blackburn 2011, 107). While Lincoln himself did not initially support Abolitionism, his Republican party had come to existence around the platform of Free-Labor. It was this ideological perspective, (more than anti-slavery) that shaped Lincoln’s policies and perspectives as a politician and President. “The Republican watchword, ‘Free Labour, Free Soil, Free Men’ was designed to indict the ‘Slave Power’ and, however vaguely, to offer rights, land and recognition to the labourer” (Blackburn 2011, 119). Lincoln held a similar, mystical view of the laborer, according to Eric Foner. Despite the surge in industrial growth that was already taking place in some Northern states, Lincoln clung to the view of the laborer being part of a more smaller, familial, shop type enterprise, similar to the way Ophelia imagines the slaves in her cousin’s kitchen after they are emancipated. “Lincoln declared that the majority of northerners were neither capitalists or employees—rather, they worked for themselves in shops and farms” (Foner 1970, 30). Ophelia may share a similar sentiment, yet when she is given temporary custody of St. Clare’s kitchen, she tries to implement a more industrialized approach to itemizing commodities and also duties. Despite the way she fails at this venture, she will get another chance to replace not just the institution of slavery, but also to replace it with a system that for her seems only natural and even scientific. If Ophelia fails to turn around a small staff of slaves, she will succeed in the education of a still young, unrefined, defiant but impressionable slave in the girl, Topsy.

Perhaps to antagonize her, (but also to test her ability as a reformer) St. Clare purchases a small abused slave whose care and education he temporarily releases to his cousin, Ophelia. Initially, she is repelled. “What on earth did you want to bring this one for?” Ophelia says with exasperation to her cousin (Stowe 1994, 207). “For you to educate…You’re always preaching about educating” her cousin replies (Stowe 1994, 207). Initially repelled, Ophelia is soon intrigued by her new charge, perceiving the child in a Christian (i.e. civilized) perspective despite the dirt she brings, but also the welts from her earlier beatings, (presumably for being an insubordinate slave). Topsy is also a perfect student for Ophelia. Topsy may be initially defiant and wilful; she does, however, speak in the language of commodity, labor, and market value, a language that underscores Ophelia’s Christian sense of duty. In reply to Ophelia’s questions about her origins, Topsy replies how she “was raised by a speculator” (Stowe 1994, 208). Ophelia then tests her new pupil for a sense of religious knowledge by asking her about God; to this question, Topsy expresses ignorance. Given Ophelia’s strong Christian and seemingly moral background, a plausible response from her would be one of shock. Instead, having dispensed with her theological duties, Ophelia gets down to the economic possibilities regarding her new pupil. “ ‘Do you know how to sew?’ said Miss Ophelia, who thought she would turn her inquiries to something more tangible” (Stowe 1994, 210). Ophelia will try to instruct Topsy in her catechism, and Topsy will prove defiant just as she does when Ophelia tries to instruct her for domestic duties. Nevertheless, Ophelia will train Topsy for rudimentary labor skills, which can then be applied to a larger sphere, such as a kitchen. Thus, Ophelia tries to educate Topsy to look after her own chamber, an enterprise that is not very successful with the way Topsy steals from other members of the household as well as lying to her instructor. At one point, Ophelia is so distraught that she considers whipping Topsy as a way to make her adhere to her instruction. Such an approach would give into the system of slavery that Ophelia abhors. Also, such an approach would fail to make Topsy productive in any way. Ophelia will only focus on giving Topsy specific duties and hours similar to a free-laborer who has failed to achieve independence.
as an artisan and is now entering the factory, for which he must be trained for. “She [Ophelia] instituted regular hours and employments for her [Topsy], and undertook to teach her to read and sew” (Stowe 1994, 215). Still, Ophelia will have a relapse, and briefly whip Topsy (upon the child’s suggestion). The result not only fails to educate Topsy, but also to emphasize the failure of slavery and corporal punishment. Ophelia realizes that she has overlooked Topsy’s mental and also spiritual development; therefore, she begins instructing Topsy in the Christian catechism. Topsy is a quick and adept learner. St. Clare questions the value of such an education; he fails to see to see how religious instruction will make Topsy a better and more docile domestic slave. Superficially, this is what Ophelia’s moral instruction seems geared towards. But Ophelia’s Christianity is a New England Christianity. One of man’s greatest sins is idleness. The only cure for idleness is work. Furthermore, idleness is the result of freedom. For Ophelia (and the Christianity she espouses) freedom is the cause of damnation; labor is the way women and men reintegrate themselves back into a community where each member is responsible for his or her own upkeep. It is a lesson that Ophelia makes sure Topsy not only learns, but even pronounces before her slave-master St. Clare. “‘Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will,’” Topsy recites, “fell from the state wherein they were created” (Stowe 1994, 218). For the Abolitionist in mid-19th century New England already undergoing the changes of the industrial revolution, complete freedom of the slave was never the pursuit. Like the factory wage laborer who has already proven to be more productive and cost-effective than the Southern plantation slave, the man and woman of bondage must still remain valued according to their needs in a market driven economy. It is an observation that John Ashworth makes in his article “The Relationship between Capitalism and Humanitarianism.” In a market economy where all are free, some members will “subvert the rules by which the game is played” (Ashworth 1987, 822). Therefore, freedom must be restricted. But for the Abolitionist, men and women could still remain spiritually free, a paradigm that Ashworth claims to frame Abolitionism. Thus, “The abolitionist argued that the market must be barred from dealing in human beings so that man himself, with his social conscience, and his ‘soul immortal,’ could become the prop for the new social order” (Ashworth….823). It is as such a prop that Topsy (and several other slave characters in Stowe’s novel) will become by the end of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. After Ophelia has established Topsy’s education as a future domestic or market laborer, Stowe is also ready to pull her back from the narrative, noting how she and other props like her will be reintroduced later on when they are needed to support her book’s economic thesis. Having been “fairly introduced into our corps de ballet,” Topsy will “from time to time” make an appearance “with other performers” (Stowe 1994, 219).

These other performers will include the former slave George Harris (and his family) who will eventually escape to the North and soon leave for Liberia where they will become proselytes for new Christian order, underscored by a Capitalist, market-driven economy. “I go to Liberia, not as to an Elysium of romance, but as to a field of work” George Harris writes towards the end of the novel (Stowe 1994, 376). It is a route that Topsy will also take after Ophelia takes her home with her to Vermont. While Ophelia’s community may not initially warmly receive Topsy, the child’s quick ability to work soon earns her a place of respect in her new community. Similar to the community Ophelia was raised in, she is repelled by the African ancestry and culture the same time she is repelled by the institution that enslaved them. “I’ve always had a prejudice against negroes…and it’s a fact, I never could bear to have that child touch me” Ophelia confesses to her cousin, St. Clare (Stowe 1994, 246). If Topsy earns a place of respect in Ophelia’s community, it is due to her diligence as a domestic worker and also as a Christian (and one who requests baptism herself, Stowe notes) (Stowe 1994, 377). It is an observation that Noelle Gallagher makes in her study of industrial and domestic space in Uncle Tom’s Cabin. As an independent laborer, Topsy (like George Harris) symbolizes the triumph of market-based free labor over slave-labor. “as her [Ophelia’s] domestic apprentice…Topsy, like George, eventually pursues employment which is spiritually as well as financially gratifying” (Gallagher 2005, 183).
Having emancipated herself as a free-wage laborer (and also as a Christian) Topsy is now ready to join other former slaves like George Harris “as a missionary to one of the stations in Africa” (Stowe 1994, 377). Topsy will now replicate the education that Ophelia has taught her, but Topsy will do so in Africa, thus extending the global reach that will eventually become the drive for the 19th century Capitalist economy (which will often result in colonies in Africa and Asia). As a result, Topsy’s departure for Africa not only puts her in the role of a colonialist, it also underscores Stowe’s endorsement of the industrialized, free-labor economy, as Gallagher observes, noting how “the two former slaves’ pursuit of personally rewarding employment ultimately provides one of the novel’s strongest endorsements of the free labor ideal” (Gallagher 2005, 183). In contrast, the plantation-driven South only sought limited national expansion, as Blackburn observes. In the eyes of many Southerners, slavery would survive with a few more states admitted with slave-holding status. Citing Marx’s analysis of the American War-between-the-States, the South “would strive to incorporate the border-states and ensure slaveholder-hegemony throughout North America” (Blackburn 2011, 104). But as Stowe shows in her anti-slavery novel, the economy of the North (and also of the future) is heading beyond domestic shores for continents such as Africa.

Without argument, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is a diatribe against slavery. As noted in the introduction to this paper, Stowe’s book is even credited with helping to ignite the Civil War, which would finally abolish slavery in the United States. Yet Stowe’s most well-known work can also be examined for other themes and perspectives. Besides being a tome against slavery, Stowe’s novel is also a critique of the domestic space that 19th century American women such as Ophelia would occupy or supervise. Several studies have already been done on this subject, such as Lori Askeland’s “Remodeling the Model Home in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Beloved*.” According to Askeland, Stowe also used *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to explore “the domestic ideal as a new form of global empowerment” (Askeland 1992, 802). Nevertheless, Askeland concludes that Stowe’s re-modeling of domestic space in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* continued to replicate patriarchal culture (Askeland 1992, 802). Just as it was a patriarchal culture that sanctioned slavery, it is also the same patriarchal culture that sanctions the wage labor-based, Capitalist economy. Even with the way Stowe’s tome is a well-argued, critical attack against slavery, it fails to attack the patriarchal system that sanctioned slavery and will sanction the post-Civil War capitalist economy. If Stowe “began…using the domestic ideal as a new form of global female empowerment…her matriarchal ideal does not finally alter the basic structure of the patriarchy” (Askeland 1992, 801). Just as there is plausible evidence to show how Stowe’s anti-slavery narrative mirrors a 19th century patriarchal culture while exploring space that is strongly female-oriented, I will argue that such space also reflects the wage-labor, market economy emerging at the time of this book’s composition. Ophelia may introduce herself to her readers as an Abolitionist with prejudices. Yet when she tries to take control of her slave-owning cousin’s kitchen (and later, one of his child-slaves) she will also enact a managerial, almost colonial-like role in her attempt to make both kitchen and kitchen-labor more productive. Ophelia’s designs are based on profit, not altruism. (Perhaps then her flawed Abolitionist idealism is no accident). While *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* delivers a strong, unforgettable argument against the institution of slavery that defined almost half of the states in the mid-19th century U.S., it also anticipates the victory that the anti-slavery states will soon achieve. And besides this victory being marked by the emancipation of Africans forced into inhumane labor, it will also herald a new economic order where a freeman’s labor must nevertheless be restricted and traded to the rules of a Capitalist based-market economy.
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