
Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin: Themes Raised Due To Historical Circumstances

Harriet Beecher Stowe was born on June 14, 1811 in Litchfield, Connecticut. Her father was a preacher and her mother had died when she was just 5 years old. She had 12 siblings growing up, to many of which were abolitionists. Catherine, her older sister, played a big role in Harriet's life, teaching her about feminism and women's rights. Catherine founded the Hartford Female Seminary, which Harriet had attended, and taught at later in her life. In 1832, Harriet moved to Ohio and went on to teach at other schools, along with writing different types of literature during her time there.

While in Ohio, Harriet met many runaway slaves and heard their stories of how they got to where they were and what they had been through during their lives. She had also visited a slave plantation in Kentucky and saw what really went on during the daily life of a slave. After this, Harriet decided to join the Semi-Colon Club to learn how to write correctly, and to develop skills she can use. In this club, she met many people who influenced her to speak her mind.

In 1849, Harriet's son died due to a cholera epidemic, which ended up helping her relate and feel for the many mothers of slaves who had been separated from their children, only to never see each other again. Along with this, in 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act was created, which allowed southern slave owners to track down their runaway slaves that had made their way to the north. This had infuriated all abolitionists, and was the breaking point for Stowe. After this, she ended up writing Uncle Tom's Cabin, which showed everybody in the north what they were really fighting for. The book had sold over 300,000 copies in the first year it was released, and continued to be performed in plays, as well as being written in many different languages.

Stowe played a big part in the start of the Civil War, as well as the abolishment of slavery. She became a prominent writer during the time of the Civil War, and went around speaking to crowds to spread the abolitionist movement around the country. In doing this, she got to meet Abraham Lincoln, who had said to her "So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war" (Lincoln, November 1862). She went on to speak in Britain and in parts of Europe to spread the abolitionist movement and what she did for the United States to end slavery. She moved to Massachusetts in 1853 and taught at another school, and ended up moving again to Hartford, Connecticut. She later died on July 1st, 1896.

Literary Criticism

In Uncle Tom's Cabin, Stowe had modeled the characters off of people she had met in real life when she visited the slave plantation in Kentucky. However, many people didn't believe that the characters were based off of real people like they were supposed to be. Along with this, many people thought Stowe tried to relate characters from her story to those in the bible, which people saw it as her trying to spread Christianity. However, people fail to realize that many people used Christian imagery at this time period for their depictions of characters, not just her. An example of this is Tom being compared to Moses or Jesus because of the way he tried to spread his faith in Christianity, as well as the way he put slaves ahead of him to be free, rather

than becoming free himself. Stowe was just trying to show how Christianity was used to unite the enslaved and that not only white people are Christian. To show this, Tom even lost his life for his faith in Christianity.

Another thing people criticised Stowe for was making the book over dramatic. An example people used was Eva dying. Stowe believed death was a good thing rather than a bad, and should be portrayed as such. Frederick Douglass, an African American who had escaped slavery, praised Stowe for what she had done for all slaves and for representing African Americans in the abolitionist movement. Martin Delaney, an African American Nationalist, did not like the fact that Stowe, a white female, was representing the African Americans in the abolitionist movement. He believed their social progress should not be dependent on a white person. Douglass did not agree with Delaney, and believed that they should accept Stowe's help. He believed she had already done so much for all slaves, and that they should be thankful for what she has done for them.

Delaney ended up accusing Stowe of stealing other African American's writings to make her own. Douglass remained on Stowe's side, which caused a big debate between the two of them. Through all of this, Stowe never became what Douglass thought she would. However, he still respected her for all she had done for slaves. Many authors through the 90's had criticized the book as well. Langston Hughes said it was "The most cursed and discussed novel of it's time". George Orwell call it "the best bad book of it's time" and Leo Tolstoy praised the book for what it did to help slaves in the country.

Author's words

The major theme of Uncle Tom's Cabin is good vs evil. The idea that reflects this is shown throughout the whole book using slavery as evil and the Christian faith and ethics as the good, along with the many people throughout the story who were abolitionists. An example of the good is when George Shelby says " I will do what one man can to drive out this curse of slavery from my land" (Stowe 278). George said this at Tom's grave after being infuriated by someone who had no respect for Tom, or any slave. Another example is when Tom is being threatened to be killed, but he tells the man who is going to kill him "Do the worst you can, my troubles'll be over soon; but, if ye don't repent, yours won't ever end!" (Stowe 350). Tom is saying that he'll regret what he is doing if he doesn't repent to God, as he'll be judged and sent to Hell by God. This is another instance of Christianity playing a big part in Tom's life, as well as many other slave's lives, and it played a big part it how they thought and how they acted. Tom had also said to his master " Mas'r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, i could save ye, I'd give ye my heart's blood" (Stowe 350). This just shows that no matter how much damage the slave owners could've done to Tom, God would want him to forgive them and help them, so he would.

An example of the evil in this story and this time period is the way slaves were treated as property. In the story, Marie said " If i had my way, I'd send that child out, and have her thoroughly whipped" (Stowe 278). Most slave owners were extremely disrespectful and didn't care what they did to the slaves. They used to even break up families and send slave's children to a different plantation, to where they would never see eachother again. It was even said "How can it be otherwise, when a system prevails which whirls families and scatters their members, as the wind whirls and scatters the leaves of autumn?" (Stowe 298). This just shows that

families are sent across the country just to never see each other again. It was said at the end of the book "Northern men, northern mothers, northern christians, have something more to do then denounce their brethren in the south; they have to look at the evil among themselves"(Stowe 372). This was being said because during this time, the northerners shamed the south for still having slaves, but nothing more than that. Most northerners weren't doing anything that would've made a real change in the world they were living in.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Uncle Tom's Cabin heavily reflected the time period it was written in. It reflected how Christianity played a huge part in slaves lives and what they believed in, and an example of this is "I don't know anything about politics, but i can read my Bible" (Stowe 69). It also showed the point in history where slaves started to revolt, and would do anything to become a free human, which shows when George says "I won't be taken Eliza, I'll die first! I'll be free or i'll die!" (Stowe 16) on their search for Tom and Eliza's son when they are sold down the river. George also said " We don't own your laws, we don't own your country; we stand here as free, under God's sky, as you are; and, by the great God that made us, we'll fight for our liberty until we die" (Stowe 194), which is just another example of what slaves though at this time, and that they were ready to do anything to gain their freedom. So, these are just a few examples of how the book reflected what was really going on during this time period of history.