the unsung hero of *uncle tom's cabin*

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> **"Wait!" said Cassy. "Haven't I waited?—waited till my head is dizzy and my heart sick? What has he made me suffer? What has he made hundreds of poor creatures suffer? Isn't he wringing the life-blood out of you? I'm called on; they call me! His time's come, and I'll have his heart's blood!"**
>
> ***Uncle Tom's Cabin***

> **Myths of the heroes speak most eloquently of man's quest to *choose life over death.***
>
> **Dorothy Norman, *The Hero: Myth, Image, Symbol***

Since its serial publication in 1851 and 1852 and its appearance in book form late in 1852, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been a troublesome work. Not only did it provoke the ire of northern and southern readers alike, but it was also credited by the president of the United States with having incited the American Civil War. Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel has initiated its share of critical wars as well.[1] Recently feminist readers have entered the fray and shed new light on Stowe's novel, accounting for some of its apparent idiosyncrasies with their perceptive analyses of the historical, sociological, political and even personal contexts which gave rise to *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*[2]

Jane Tompkins, one of the most persuasive feminist critics of Stowe's novel, argues that the failure of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to present the problems of slavery in a realistic fashion, Stowe's apparent inability to create characters with some semblance of psychological verisimilitude and the novel's repetitiveness stem from Stowe's woman-centered Christian perspective. In writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Tompkins contends, Stowe did not

create a realistic novel; rather she presents the story of slavery as a retelling of the story of Christ. Thus, Stowe demonstrates the power of self-sacrifice, love, suffering and even death to redeem our country from the evil of slavery; through adroit handling of her readers' emotions Stowe urges the substitution of a matriarchal, feminine morality for a masculine, pragmatic, patriarchal business ethic that turns human beings into commodities. In this respect, Stowe writes directly from the women's tradition of domestic fiction.[3]

But even as we view *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a domestic polemic, as Stowe's attempt to extend the values of motherhood to the realms of patriarchy, the novel still defies sympathetic attempts to place it within an illuminating framework. Critical demands that Stowe deal with the problems of slavery in a realistic rather than allegorical manner cannot be lightly dismissed. When Ann Douglas castigates Stowe for simply apologizing for and sentimentalizing the evils of slavery (Douglas, 1-2, 12) and when James Baldwin calls Stowe's sentimentality dishonest, (Baldwin, 92) they both attack Stowe on her own ground. Stowe professed vehemently to presenting a realistic picture of the horror she assailed. In *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin,* she answers her critics' charges that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* depicts slavery unfairly and dishonestly, maintaining that her novel is a "mosaic of facts."[4] Moreover, by her own admission, Stowe hoped to effect *real* changes in the *real* world; with her novel she planned to combat the pernicious Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.[5] Stowe was, then, at least in her own mind, committed to the truth of her tale as well as to using that truth to bring about political change. While hers was to be a mosaic, it was to be a mosaic of fact and a mosaic of intent, with which Stowe hoped to initiate far-reaching changes in her readers and in her country.

If, however, real, extensive social change is Stowe's goal, then the self-sacrifice, the redemption of the sinner by the death of the saint, which Tompkins so perceptively traces in Stowe's novel, cannot be considered an effective solution to the problems of slavery. By the logic of the domestic ideology which informs *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Tom's death, the last and greatest act of love that we witness, should end the novel. If his death is the victory that Stowe hopes to convince us it is, no other victory is needed. But the novel does not end with Tom's death—some further action, more consistent with the realistic framework of the novel is necessary. And while Stowe's allegory of Christ's suffering may present a moving and exhortatory delineation of slavery, living a life of Christ-like self-sacrifice *would not save lives.* In Tompkins' terms and in terms of the domestic ideology that Stowe seems to espouse, Stowe does not offer an answer to slavery—she simply suggests an acquiescence to it which, by its very passivity, would prolong the existence of slavery. In urging a domestic solution to slavery, Stowe has compromised her very goal—a radical, moral, and feminine reordering of society.

If, moreover, Stowe's novel is as realistic as she and many modern readers claim it to be, if she addresses slavery as a problem caused by real men with base motives, and if she is to accomplish her purpose—to

undermine the system of slavery—then she must demonstrate to her readers how these men can be changed, how their behavior may be effectively modified. However, if the patriarchal establishment is as powerful and as pernicious as Stowe asserts, if slaves were as miserably oppressed as Stowe convinces her readers they were, in *realistic* terms there could be no means to end the suffering; the arrangement of Stowe's mosaic of facts—in which masters are all powerful and slaves abjectly powerless—precludes any change in the plausible universe of realistic fiction. Tom's sacrifice was, therefore, destined to be repeated endlessly; Legree's cruelty was certain to endure eternally, for in his hands "there was power" (358).[6]

Stowe, confronted with a work of fiction she could not end, encountered a writer's nightmare. She had created a system of belief in which love conquers all, but she had involved her characters in a real problem—slavery—which was obviously impervious to the powers of love. Moreover, Stowe's commitment to her readers required that she demonstrate a workable means to end slavery. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* then, Stowe found herself forced to reach beyond the strictures of both realistic and domestic fiction for a means to end her novel and a means to save her characters from the evils of slavery. In Cassy, the hidden, unheard (she is, after all, Cassandra's namesake), powerful Black woman who rules the final dark passages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Stowe creates a hero, the one being, the only being, who can both end the suffering of slavery and bring Stowe's burgeoning narrative to an end.

i

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* then, Stowe obviously wrote within the domestic tradition, which dominated the literary marketplace in America for most of the nineteenth century. But Stowe found herself, because of her subject (the oppression of her Black countrymen and women) and to a certain extent because of her avowed purpose (to awaken American consciousness to the very real evils of slavery), at the beginning of a tradition of American realism.[7] It is just Stowe's straddling of two very strong and influential traditions of American fiction—one associated almost entirely with a "damned mob of scribbling women" as Hawthorne called them and the other the province of a group of canonized male writers—which gives rise to the opposing impulses in the work, challenging and baffling the modern reader.

The problem with Stowe's novel is that she has moved domestic ideology out of the parlor and into the political, economic arena; she has demanded that feminine influence work its humanizing effects not simply on private individuals—errant husbands, drunken fathers and recalcitrant sons—but on those with public, institutionalized power: on bankers, judges, plantation owners and slave foremen as well. But in traditional domestic fiction, the heroine presents no threat to the *status quo:* although she seeks to establish her identity and—to a certain extent—her power, she never attempts to undermine the society in which she exists. According to

domestic ideology and slavery

Along with Tompkins, Ann Douglas and Gillian Brown analyze Stowe's use of domestic ideology in dealing with slavery. Tompkins argues that Stowe's novel employs the sentimental tradition as a means to render democracy and American society moral, to "reorganize culture from woman's point of view"; she takes this position in opposition to Douglas' contention that the ideology of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* served the ruling class—men and masters—by providing a rationalization for the existing economic order and by indicating no means for hindering that economic order. Brown attempts to demonstrate that Stowe not only attacked the economic system of slavery, but that she also revised the literary tradition of domestic fiction. What none of these readers of the novel deal with is that Stowe has moved domestic strategies beyond their usual boundaries.[8]

the tenets of domestic ideology, feminine influence can alter masculine drives, but never is feminine influence set against masculine institutions. As Helen Papashvily points out, the domestic novel chronicles the heroine's struggle to gain and maintain power *within* patriarchal institutions which deprive her of power.[10]

feminine self-sufficiency

Nina Baym argues that the domestic novel tells one story: "it is the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world." The point of this fiction, says Baym, is "the developing of feminine self-sufficiency," a self-sufficiency which allows the domestic heroine to function well and independently within marriage or outside of marriage, but always within the confines of the *status quo.* While the domestic author does reject the masculine text of the heroine's inevitable seduction, she does not project the domestic heroine into other than the domestic realm.[9]

With *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* however, the struggle of the female to maintain power within patriarchal institutions becomes increasingly political, and masculine power becomes more dangerous and less susceptible to feminine control as Stowe shifts her focus from the home to the public, masculine realm.[11] By removing a confrontation between the powerful male and the powerless female from the protective and regulatory environment of the home, Stowe has placed it in the jungle of capitalistic brutality and patriarchal inhumanity; she has crossed over the domestic boundary between public and private, and it is just this blurring of the lines between the traditionally masculine and feminine realms that Senator Byrd complains of to his wife: "it's not a matter of private feeling—there are great public interests involved" (84). Because the point of Stowe's novel is to

undermine the institution of slavery, her female characters find themselves in the position of having not simply to manipulate their husbands or fathers into acquiescing to feminine notions of morality but also of having to subvert the very institutions their husbands and fathers represent. Mrs. Byrd, therefore, must convince her husband that the clear distinction he draws between public and private morality is meaningless and that the political system which he holds in such esteem is corrupt and inhumane.

The struggle between the powerful male and the self-sacrificing female takes on, moreover, frightening sexual overtones. Stowe's overriding concern about slavery seems at times to be the horror that slave-owning men can control slave women "body and soul" (343). In Stowe's novel, masculine power no longer implies simply masculine privilege to deprive a good wife of a new dress or a happy home or even a strong identity. Masculine power and masculinity itself are associated with slavery, with the market economy and with brutality. Femininity is associated still with the virtues of love, self-sacrifice and tolerance, but also with the slave, the woman as victim and commodity—in both the heterosexual relationship and the slave market. Since the powerful male can own the female slave, since he can impose his will upon her, she becomes vulnerable to his sexual appetites. The threat to women in the novel is rape; the threat to slave—both male and female—is metaphorical rape, violation of humanity and dignity.[12] In metaphorical terms, then, the novel presents a problem of sexual abuse: how are the powerless—women and slaves—to prevent themselves from being raped, violated, dehumanized by the forces of slavery.

At least superficially, Stowe espouses the Christian loving solution to the problem she delineates; she believes in the power of prayer and in the strength of love to convert even the most intransigent of sinners: "Christian men and women of the North! . . . you have . . . power; you can *pray!*" She advocates, moreover, self-sacrifice, forbearance, and love in the face of slavery's brutality and inhumanity. In the final analysis, however, Stowe demonstrates that only violence will overcome and destroy the slaveholder and the patriarch—the rapist who threatens the moral, feminine characters of the novel; she shows her reader that this rapist can be annihilated only by a kind of psychological rape.

The rapist in this powerful reversal of roles is Cassy, the sexually and psychologically abused Black woman; the victim is Legree, the representative of all that is most threatening and cruel in Stowe's view of slavery. Cassy's defeat of Legree and by extension her radical overthrow of the patriarchal slavery system, thus, put the lie to Stowe's domestic contention that love and an "atmosphere of sympathetic influences" (457) are sufficient to undermine the evils of the slave economy. If we accept Stowe's metaphor for the arrangement of power in the slave/master relationship, if we view that relationship as a kind of rape—threatened, implied, or actually carried out—we must also attribute to the rapist/owner/master/male the power that is his, and we must consign the victim/slave/female to the position of abject powerlessness that is hers.

It is with the archetypal conflict of Legree and Cassy, then, that the ideological rift in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* becomes most apparent and most irreconcilable. In these terms, Simon Legree becomes the representative of plantation ideology and the quintessential slave holder. Not only is he powerful and menacing, but his power is masculine, tumescent, sexual. He threatens not just individual liberty; he also bespeaks invasion and domination. From his brutal handling first of Tom then later of Emmeline to his metaphorical erection and ejaculation as he abuses Emmeline, Legree exerts his power in the worst, most inhumane manner possible. In his stiffness and coarseness he defies and sullies the feminine virtues that Stowe credits with promising our nation's salvation:

> He was evidently, though short, of gigantic strength. His round, bullet head, large, light-gray eyes, with their shaggy, sandy eyebrows, and stiff, wiry, sun-burned hair, were rather unprepossessing items . . . his large, coarse mouth was distended with tobacco, the juice of which, from time to time, he ejected from him with great decision and explosive force; his hands were immensely large, hairy, sun-burned, freckled, and very dirty, and garnished with long nails, in a very foul condition . . . spitting a discharge of tobacco-juice on his well-blacked boots, and giving a contemptuous umph, he walked on. Again he stopped before Susan and Emmeline. He put out his heavy, dirty hand, and drew the girl towards him. (341-2)

If the threat of slavery is conveyed metaphorically as the threat of rape, we would expect to see in the Black woman—the female slave—the focus of Stowe's interest. And in fact, in Cassy, the most complex and interesting of Stowe's characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* the two most powerful themes of the novel come together: the oppression of women and the oppression of Blacks. For not only is Cassy enslaved by her Blackness, but she is also enslaved by her femininity.[13] In the character of Cassy, Stowe confronts and resolves both the apparent formal inconsistencies and the ideological tensions which make the work so problematic.

The discontinuity in Stowe's work does not, thus, confine itself to the ideological fabric of the novel but extends into the structure of the work as well. Just as Stowe's domestic, feminine solution is powerless to end slavery in the realistic terms the novel sets up, so is her adherence to the domestic fictional convention incapable of bringing her novel to an end. Critics who charge that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* repeats endless scenes of suffering are correct,[14] but they miss the importance of the repetition of these scenes. In them, both domestic ideology and domestic fictional strategies are pitted against forces they cannot quell. Just as the slave/victim cannot repel the master/rapist, so the domestic scene of suffering cannot resolve fictional conflict which derives its content from a brutal power struggle; no structural or thematic resolution is possible. Thus, as Stowe has written the novel, it must go on and on—repeating unresolvedly, endlessly the violent rape of the slave by the brutal master. The question of

how America can end slavery becomes synonymous with how Stowe can end her novel. And Cassy alone can answer both questions.

we spect it grow'd

The publishing history of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* bears witness to the effect Stowe's ideological impasse had upon the work. The novel began as a magazine piece of a dozen chapters in *The National Era* on 5 June 1851; it was to run for about three months, but its serial publication was not complete until 1 April 1852. In September of that year, John P. Jewett, an abolitionist who sympathized with Stowe's view of the slavery question, indicated to Stowe that his firm would like to publish her novel. Although accounts of the signing of the contract for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* vary, Kenneth Lynn maintains that—after his initial overtures to Stowe—Jewett became increasingly nervous as her novel grew and grew. And Stowe herself admitted, "I could not control the story." In February 1852, the novel was increasing in bulk and, from Jewett's point of view, costliness, so he offered Stowe half of the profits from the sale of the novel if she would bear some share of the publishing costs. Stowe declined Jewett's offer, but what remains important and unnoticed is that she did in fact have some difficulty bringing the novel to a close. Neither her fictional strategy nor her ideological solution to the problem of slavery made closure possible.[15]

ii

Stowe's solution to the ideological and structural problems *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presents is quite brilliant. Faced with the indisputable knowledge that the sacrifice of Tom and Eva—for all its fidelity to the domestic ideal—may save souls but will not save lives, Stowe concealed her solution to the problem of slavery in an artfully constructed and brilliantly disguised subtext, which not only advocates violence and brutality, but which demonstrates that only rape and violation can undermine the rapist/master who threatens the feminine and moral characters of the novel. But by opting for a radical but effective solution to the problem of slavery—having Cassy invade Legree's consciousness and drive him to suicide—Stowe is faced with the problem of a female character who is both violently effective and justified in her violence. How is the female writer—raised and nurtured in the women's culture of benevolent nonviolence—to deal with this violence, to convey its efficacy without seeming to approve it? In some respects, Stowe resorts to a certain authorial sleight of hand in dealing with Cassy.

Cassy—like the mythical figure for whom she is named, Cassandra— is destined to speak the truth but never to be heard. Because she is Black, because she is female, because she is a slave, because she is—for all these reasons—powerless, readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* overlook the radical solution to the problem of slavery which she presents: violence.[16] And in her, Stowe fully exploits her readers' prejudices, for Cassy can perform

effective radical acts that would never be permitted to the white women of polite domestic fiction or to a domesticated motherwoman such as Eliza. Cassy speaks the truth of how to kill Legree, how to rid the world of the threat of the slave—master, but Stowe hides Cassy and her message in the dark places of the novel.

And here, in the Cassy sections of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Stowe completely forsakes domestic fictional strategies.[17] As though Eva's death had finally convinced Stowe of the ineffectuality of love and self-sacrifice to halt the juggernaut of slavery, Stowe moves directly from the child's death and its aftermath further south, further from homes, hearths and kitchens, further into powerlessness, degradation and helplessness into the "habitations of cruelty" (350). Her first stop in this dark underworld of suffering is the slave warehouse, where her readers—along with Tom—are afforded a glimpse of the realities of economic traffic in human life. In Stowe's view, as feminist critics have observed, the object of the slave trader is the complete disruption of family unity, and in these passages we see families and women violated mercilessly and brutally.

Because Stowe's subject is at this point so inappropriate to domestic fiction (as it is unaffected by and impervious to domestic ideology), all connections with the domestic women's novel are lost in the ensuing chapters—with one noteworthy exception. Stowe does offer her readers a typical domestic heroine. Ann Douglas claims that Stowe—"never adept at or alert to fictive courtship"—omitted from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "the sagas of romantic courtship that her feminine contemporaries routinely included in their stories—even in their slavery stories." Douglas goes on to observe that "All the women in *Uncle Tom* are already married . . . , determinedly single . . . , widowed . . . , or far too young to be the objects of sexual interest."[18] But in Emmeline, the fifteen-year-old girl whom Cassy saves from Legree, Stowe offers her audience—women fully conversant with the conventions of domestic fiction—a domestic heroine who would immediately capture their attention and who would force them to dwell at some length on the implications of the slave economy.

While Douglas does not recognize Emmeline as an object of sexual desire and by extension as the traditional domestic heroine, other readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seem incapable of perceiving the magnitude of Legree's threat to Emmeline and the impact that threat would have for Stowe's female readers. In a very masculinist reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Leslie Fiedler insists that "We do not remember the turncoat puritan Legree squeezing the virginal breast of Emmeline, eyeing her lustfully," (Fiedler, 265-6). "We," here, obviously does not include the female reader of Stowe's own time or the female reader of today, for the woman reading this book is disgusted to her very soul at Legree's violation of Emmeline's body and her dignity. Moreover, the woman reading this book, especially a woman immersed in the domestic tradition of American fiction at mid-nineteenth century, would immediately recognize Emmeline as a central figure in the struggle for human decency that Stowe delineates.

Emmeline is young, pretty, and—after her mother is sold away from

her—motherless. Most important of all, she very quickly becomes the object of Simon Legree's sexual interest. Like the traditional domestic heroine, she is deprived of support and guidance, perhaps (because of her youth and her beauty) ready for marriage, and forced to manage her resources—her virtue and her intelligence—for her own survival. She is the domestic heroine struggling to preserve her autonomy in the face of masculine aggressiveness. She must, therefore, learn to use her virtues to control or forestall masculine demands. But because she is a slave, Emmeline becomes the potential property of *any* man who can buy her. Thus, Stowe transforms in her novel a potential violation of domestic decorum into a crime against Christianity and human dignity:

> Susan remembered the man's look and words. With a deadly sickness at her heart, she remembered how he had looked at Emmeline's hands and lifted up her curly hair, and pronounced her a first-rate article. Susan had been trained as a Christian, brought up in the daily reading of the Bible, and had the same horror of her child's being sold to a life of shame that any other Christian mother might have. . . . (338)

Stowe's narrative technique here is without parallel, for—with this threat to Emmeline's innocence—she has played upon her reader's most deeply held conviction, the belief that feminine virtue must be protected and maintained at all costs. It is as if one of the unspoiled young heroines of a novel by Mrs. Southworth faced suddenly the prospect of rape and a life of prostitution; the implications of Emmeline's position were certainly obvious to Stowe's readers.

Thus, Emmeline functions centrally in both the domestic realm of Stowe's novel (she is the typical domestic heroine) and the more realistic picture of slavery Stowe offers (Emmeline is threatened with violation because of her status as human merchandise). But the ideological and narrative discontinuities of Stowe's novel prevent any satisfactory resolution of either aspect of Emmeline's precarious position. In sum, Emmeline cannot be rescued. In domestic terms she cannot achieve a virtuous marriage because the man who desires her—Legree—is not a suitable match and, more importantly, does not fall sway to domestic influence.

simon and emmeline

That Legree is construed as a perversion of the standard suitor of domestic fiction becomes obvious when he and Emmeline arrive at his plantation. He tells her, "Well, my little dear, . . . we're almost home!" (351), and he promises Emmeline presents—earrings—and privileges: "I'll give you a pair, when we get home, if you're a good girl. You needn't be so frightened; I don't mean to make you work very hard. You'll have a fine time with me, and live like a lady,—only be a good girl" (352). Thus, the domestic relationship of suitor to potential bride is degraded here to a relationship of prostitution.

And despite Emmeline's reluctance, Legree will have her. He responds neither to the voice of Christian love ("Simon Legree heard no voice," [346]) nor to the softening influence of human decency ("Ye won't find no soft spot in me, nowhere," [347]).

If Emmeline seems doomed within the domestic framework of the novel, she is equally damned in the realistic terms the novel sets up, for—as Stowe points out—Simon Legree's right to own Emmeline is protected by law ("the law considers all these human beings, with beating hearts and living affections, only as so many *things* belonging to a master"). With "the portentous shadow—the shadow of *law*" (12) brooding over the suffering humans in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and over their real counterparts in American life, Emmeline cannot be saved. She is utterly lost.

iii

With some respect to Emmeline's predicament, which would have seemed centrally important to Stowe's female readers, Stowe's narrative demands heroic intervention; no other means of rescue is possible, and to consign Emmeline to a life of sexual abuse at the hands of Legree—no matter how realistic such a strategy may have been—would have compromised Stowe's assertion that some alteration in the slavery system could be—indeed must be—made. Thus, only a figure who can transcend the real restrictions imposed by slavery and a figure who at the same time is able to transform the domestic veneration of feminine virtue into courageous lifesaving action can deliver Emmeline. Only a figure outside the realistic structures of Stowe's novel and beyond the domestic *politesse* of the work can effect Emmeline's deliverance. This figure is Cassy, although Stowe goes to great lengths to conceal Cassy's heroic agency in the novel.

In the sections of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from "The Slave Warehouse" through "An Authentic Ghost Story," Stowe enters into serious consideration of how to save Emmeline, and she entertains two possible solutions to Emmeline's problem—Tom's and Cassy's. As Elizabeth Ammons points out, Tom is the quintessential heroine of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* and as such he speaks for Stowe's adherence to the feminine, domestic solution of love and self-sacrifice as an anodyne to evil.[19] Tom will resist Legree—he will not accept the fact that as Legree says, *"I'm* your church now!" (345)—but Tom resists through Christian endurance. Cassy, on the other hand, is the arch-pragmatist who favors violent overthrow of her oppressor. Her advice to Emmeline is this: "Do the best you can—do what you must,—and make it up in hating and cursing" (386). Stowe tells us that in this debate Tom is right, but she shows us that Cassy is effective. Tom and Cassy actually engage in several discussions on the existence and benevolence of God, on the morality and efficacy of violence, on the advisability of loving one's enemies and on the power of passive resistance. In each discussion, Tom's approach is obviously moral, but Cassy's is clearly efficacious.[20]

Cassy's and Tom's responses to the "wild, forsaken" underworld in which they find themselves reflect the ideological position each maintains.

Legree expects Tom to adapt sufficiently to the plantation so that he can eventually supervise Legree's other slaves; such an adaptation, however, would require that Tom become something other than the "prompt and faithful . . . Quiet and peaceable" man that he is. Legree plans to make Tom an overseer on his plantation, and in Legree's view, "the first, second, and third requisite for that place, was *hardness*. Legree made up his mind, that, as Tom was not hard to his hand, he would harden him forthwith" (359). Unlike Tom, who steadfastly refuses to forsake his faith and humanity for an impenitent belief in Legree, Cassy has become hardened by her experiences, and these experiences have driven her to the brink of violence: "I'm a lost soul," she tells Tom, "pursued by devils that torment me day and night; they keep pushing me on and on—I'll do it, too some of these days! . . . I'll send him [Legree] where he belongs" (376).

Cassy's hardness, her "scorn and pride" (360), serve her well in Legree's domain, for she is able to extend to Tom even the physical help he had offered to a weaker female slave. As Tom picks cotton, he notices a woman nearly fainting with exhaustion, so he places some of his cotton in her sack, saying, "I can bar it . . . better 'n you" (361). Because she fears for Tom's welfare, Cassy warns Tom against such philanthropy, and—being the better adapted to Legree's inhumane system—she is able to help Tom as he helped his failing companion: "Before the day was through, her basket was filled, crowded down, and piled, and she had several times put largely in Tom's" (362). Cassy seems here stronger than Tom, even better than he at offering comfort and aid to those weaker and less fit to withstand the horrors of Legree's underworld.

Stowe thus looks questioning at the source and the effectiveness of both Tom's and Cassy's positions with respect to their own slavery; it seems obvious, too, that Stowe does not affirm Tom's self-sacrificing and long-suffering position as wholeheartedly as feminist readers of the novel contend. In some respects, in fact, she seems to reject the efficacy of Tom's sacrifice. Ann Douglas asserts that Tom triumphs over Legree because Tom understands that "protest . . . is . . . tantamount to playing his [Legree's] game" and that only "belief in all that [Legree] denies" will eventually defeat him.[21] But Tom is involved here in something more than a game. Whether he plays or not, the stakes are his life, and he loses that. Referring to critics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (perhaps like James Baldwin—who finds Tom "divested of his sex" [Baldwin, 94]) Douglas acknowledges that Tom cannot function as an adequate guide for "free but oppressed blacks today." But she goes on to observe that to deny Tom's moral triumph indicates grievous social inadequacies: "only a secular culture in a serious state of impoverishment could permanently equate Uncle Tom's faith with impotence" (Douglas, 27).

But in delineating the slave market, Stowe describes just such a culture, and in terms of those with power, Tom *is* impotent. His virtuous suffering does nothing to save Emmeline—the centrally threatened female figure of the novel; in fact, Tom cannot change Legree's actions at all. With respect to the sexual metaphor Stowe uses to characterize the struggle for power

between men and women, masters and slaves, Legree *will* have Emmeline; her virtue is destined to be lost. Moreover, in Leslie Fiedler's view, Tom himself becomes a victim of rape since he is a victim of those who wield power.[22]

Not only does Tom (who many readers claim is the moral center of the novel against whose actions we are to measure our own) provide no solution to the problem of saving Emmeline, but in some ways he also prevents fulfillment in the novel of a feminist utopian ideal, which offers a radical means of dealing with the evil of slavery. In this way, Stowe's domestic ideology comes into conflict with an incipient radical feminist ideology. Cassy proposes to Tom that they establish an island utopia. After killing Legree, Cassy suggests, they could flee and create a more moral community. She and Tom might, she says, set "all these poor creatures . . . free, and go somewhere in the swamps and find an island, and live by ourselves; I've heard of its being done. Any life is better than this" (406). Tom, of course, rejects Cassy's plan since it involves violence, disregarding apparently the violence done to those such as Emmeline and Cassy, whom Tom could help if he chose to.

Since Tom refuses to commit a violent act, Cassy heroically takes up the challenge: "Then *I* shall do it!" (407). With these words, Cassy places herself firmly in the tradition of alienated American heroes: her response—though it flies in the face of Stowe's avowed domestic ideology—is echoed thirty years later in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn,* when Huck takes a lonely but moral position against slavery, a position he knows will doom him: "All right, then, I'll *go* to hell."

While Tom's position has the moral weight of Christianity behind it, Cassy's carries the persuasive power of action. But Stowe adroitly sidesteps the issue of effective action here and backs off hurriedly from the attractiveness of what Cassy proposes. It is obvious that Tom's way will prove ineffectual: he advises Cassy to run away with Emmeline, but Cassy—fully aware that escape from Legree and the far-reaching power of the slave system is impossible—responds, "I know no way but through the grave" (408). Tom, of course, has no answer to Cassy's very realistic assessment of the potential danger to Emmeline and herself: "Tom stood silent" (408). He—along with Stowe—retreats to the comfort of faith and the power of prayer. In effect, Stowe diverts our attention from Tom's failure to respond realistically to Cassy's arguments: Stowe quotes scripture—for her, the authority beyond conjecture. Tom argues that God saved Daniel, He saved children, He walked on the sea: "He's alive yet; and I've faith to believe he can deliver you. Try it, and I'll pray, with all my might, for you" (408).

The shape of the dialogue at the end of this chapter (Chapter 38, "The Victory") suggests that Tom is offering Cassy advice, but—in fact—he simply refers to the scriptures and God's work without ever tendering any means of salvation or help for Cassy and Emmeline. Tom, in effect, gets credit for a plan that Cassy herself devises for her escape with Emmeline. An idea comes to her ("there flashed through her mind a plan, so simple

and feasible in all its detail, as to awaken instant hope,'' [408]). We do not learn what this idea is, for she and Tom don't discuss it, but by the end of the passage—with a little deception—Stowe construes this plan as Tom's: ''Father Tom, I'll try it!'' Cassy says to Tom, as though he were responsible for Cassy's ingenious scheme to rescue both Emmeline and herself by destroying Legree. Stowe thus *conceals* Cassy's agency in the rescue of Emmeline, just as Tom robs Cassy of her power and agency when she helps him repeatedly. As Legree boasts of his power over Tom, he asks Tom ''Who the devil's going to help you?'' and Tom replies ''The Lord Almighty'' (390). But it is Cassy in this scene who saves Tom from a beating. After she rescues him, Tom—again completely blind to Cassy's aid—says, ''The Lord God hath sent his angel, and shut the lion's mouth, for this time'' (391). Actually, Cassy has shut the lion's mouth and eventually does so permanently.

iv

Legree, the lion to which Tom refers, is eminently suited to life in the ''dark places.'' Whereas Tom resists Legree's evil by refusing to ''harden,'' Legree boasts of his own hardness: ''Look at these yer bones! Well, I tell ye this yer fist has got hard as iron *knocking down* niggers. . . . Ye won't find no soft spot in me, nowhere'' (346-7). Legree's hardness is, of course, central to the metaphor which Stowe uses to characterize masculinity and authority, for Legree's threat is basically sexual, and the possession of hardness indicates his power and manhood. As a slaveholder, he commits rape on those he owns by entering their bodies *and* their minds and corrupting them, imposing his will upon them.

Like most violent men, Legree responds well to violence rather than to the feminine influence that Stowe so lauds in promoting the domestic ideology of her text. Having violated and hardened Cassy, Legree has remained impervious to her softening influences. And despite the fact that Stowe frequently conceals or deflects our attention from the effectiveness of violence in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* she speaks quite openly of how Legree is controlled and managed by violence: ''Some men . . . are decidedly bettered by being knocked down. If a man lays them fairly flat in the dust, they seem immediately to conceive a respect for him; and Legree was one of that sort'' (431).

Revealingly, Stowe concedes the effectiveness of violence in *masculine* hands (''If a *man* lays them fairly flat''), and here she refers to young George, who enters the scene too late to save Uncle Tom but soon enough to flatten Legree. But while she acknowledges the effect of George's aggressiveness toward Legree—Legree at least respects George—she undermines the effectiveness of that violence by having George attack Legree immediately *after* Tom's death. George, thus, has accomplished nothing, but Stowe has given us an important clue to the workings of Legree's character—since he lives by the sword, he will die only by the sword. What

Stowe does not acknowledge—here or elsewhere—is that Cassy alone is powerful enough to wield that sword.

Most feminist readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would take strong exception to the argument that Legree is undone by violence. Such critics as Tompkins, Crozier, and Ammons contend that Legree is conquered by his enduring love for his mother, that he is redeemed, as are the other characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* by "motherly love."[23] The effect of such readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* however, is—once again—to deny Cassy's agency and power in Legree's demise. Elizabeth Ammons, for example, argues that it is the pervasive power of Eva's love to which Legree initially succumbs (her lock of hair lovingly given to Tom finds its way into Legree's hands, terrifies him with its power and drives him mad[24]), but, in fact, it is Cassy's *discovery* and *use* of Legree's fear of Eva's hair which finally end his power:

> "Damnation!" he screamed, in sudden passion, stamping on the floor, and pulling furiously at the hair, as if it burned him "Where did this come from? Take it off!—burn it up!—burn it up!" he screamed, tearing it off, and throwing it into the charcoal. "What did you bring it to me for?" Sambo stood, with his heavy mouth wide open, and aghast with wonder; and Cassy, who was preparing to leave the apartment, stopped and looked at him in perfect amazement. (380-83)

Later, as Cassy observes Legree at his drunken revels with Sambo and Quimbo, as he attempts to purge the memory of his mother, she scrutinizes him again, weighing the power of what she has learned about him: "She rested her small, slender hand on the window-blind, and looked fixedly at them;—there was a world of anguish, scorn, and fierce bitterness in her black eyes, as she did so" (384).

To use the metaphor for relationships of power which Stowe establishes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Legree does not so much become vulnerable to loving feelings through his association with his mother as he becomes vulnerable to Cassy's invasion of his mind—a psychological rape. Ironically, the degree to which Legree harbors some guilt, some love, some *softness* for his mother is the degree to which he is susceptible to Cassy's violent, brutal, invasively *hard* scheme to drive him mad.

Stowe, typically backing away from the effectiveness of female violence, writes forcefully of Legree's connection to his mother and how that connection serves to undermine his evil: "There is a dread unhallowed necromancy of evil, that turns things sweetest and holiest to phantoms of horror and affright" (382). But even as Stowe comfortably acknowledges the power of the feminine Eva/mother figure ("that golden tress *was* charmed; each hair had in it a spell of terror and remorse," [383]), she *demonstrates* that Cassy's agency—real, aggressive action—is necessary to accomplish Legree's destruction. After Legree falls victim to the debilitating memories of his mother and the horrifying influence of Eva's lock of hair, Cassy—once again watching and weighing Legree's behavior—

prepares to make use of his weaknesses: "Would it be a sin to rid the world of such a wretch?" she asks herself (384), posing the question Stowe surely stuggled to answer in ending her novel.

If Stowe has difficulty dealing with Cassy's role in Legree's death, Legree himself—or at least his subconscious—acknowledges Cassy's power. Legree suffers two terrifying nightmares in which he is destroyed—psychologically by his mother's memory, but actually by Cassy herself. In the first, as he lies in a "heavy and feverish sleep," a veiled figure (his mother) approaches him, and he begins to feel Eva's hair choking him: "he felt *that hair* twining round his fingers; and then . . . it slid smoothly round his neck, and tightened and tightened and he could not draw his breath." While Legree struggles within his dream with these powerful feminine forces, his real nemesis—Cassy—approaches and destroys him. As he dreams of standing on the "edge of a frightful abyss, . . . Cassy came behind him laughing and pushed him" (387).

Legree's second dream precedes his final defeat at Cassy's hands, and again Stowe asserts that the agent of Legree's destruction is the feminine influence he cannot evade, but she *shows* us that Cassy has, in fact, rendered Legree powerless and invaded his mind, his dreams and his sleeping chamber in a metaphorical rape. As Legree sleeps, he feels "something dreadful hanging over him. It was his mother's shroud." But his mother's shroud alone is not sufficiently terrifying: "Cassy had it, holding it up, and showing it to him." Now the apparition has Legree completely in its power: "He heard a confused noise of screams and groanings; and, with it all, he knew he was alseep, and he struggled to wake himself." Cassy has absolute control over Legree's mind—as he has had control of her body and her freedom—and she enters his room to carry out her terrorist raid on Legree's sensibilities:

> He was half awake. He was sure something was coming into his room. He knew the door was opening, but he could not stir hand or foot. At last he turned, with a start; the door *was* open, and he saw a hand putting out his light.
>
> It was a cloudy, misty moonlight, and there he saw it!—something white, gliding in! He heard the still rustle of its ghostly garments. It stood still by his bed;—a cold hand touched his; a voice said, three times, in a low, fearful whisper, "Come! come! come!" And, while he lay sweating with terror, he knew not when or how, the thing was gone. He sprang out of bed, and pulled at the door. It was shut and locked, and the man fell down in a swoon. (434-5)

Not only does Cassy participate actively in Legree's destruction in this dream, but she also becomes responsible, the language of the scene implies, for what actually occurs in Legree's room. Cassy has, for some thirty pages, been associated with the ghostly activitites of gliding and flitting. She has also been characterized as having cool hands, and she has made clear that she is familiar with strange noises.[25] Thus, all the supernatural phenomena that plague Legree in these scenes can be

associated directly with his tormentor; Cassy not only enters Legree's dreams, but she also brings about most of the action in them.

It becomes clear in this scene that *she* has entered Legree's room in order to terrorize him. In fact, Cassy instills in the impressionable Legree the fears which later become his soul-destroying nightmare. When Legree asks her whether she believes the noises he hears are caused by rats, she replies, "Can rats walk down stairs and come walking through the entry, and open a door when you've locked it and set a chair against it? . . . and come walk, walk, walking right up to your bed and put out their hand, so?" (412).

Cassy *is* the agent of Legree's destruction, and her power is derived in some respects from the rapist's inhumane power that was Legree's. In fact, the room she employs to terrorize Legree (she claims she cannot sleep under this garret because of the horrible noises issuing from the chamber) is one in which Legree tormented and probably sexually violated another slave woman:

> Some few years before, a negro woman, who had incurred Legree's displeasure, was confined there [in the garret] for several weeks. What passed there, we do not say; the negroes used to whisper darkly to each other; but it was known that the body of the unfortunate creature was one day taken down from there, and burned; and, after that, it was said that oaths and cursings, and the sound of violent blows, used to ring through that old garret, and mingled with wailings and groans of despair. (409)

In some ways, Cassy appears to be the typical madwoman heroine of women's fiction, which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar so thoroughly characterized in *The Madwoman in the Attic.*[26] And although there are important differences between Gilbert and Gubar's madwoman and Cassy, Stowe uses the feminine literary tradition of the madwoman to obscure Cassy's real importance as well as to conceal the effectiveness of her violence in overcoming the representative of the most evil aspects of slavery in the novel—Legree. Like the madwoman in the attic, Cassy so far oversteps the boundaries of characteristic female behavior that her madness becomes Stowe's disguise for that behavior. But Cassy's madness has practical, useful results: Cassy does provide a means to end both sexual and racial slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* But the means she provides is not confined to the hysterical and frenzied ragings of the madwoman in the attic or even to the sporadic, unpremeditated bursts of violence to which this madwoman is given. Cassy makes a direct and *planned* attack on Legree; she overcomes him with violence: she deliberately sets out to bring about his death. And this act is decidedly outside the women's tradition of fiction. Only Cassy can end Legree's threat and bring *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to a close; only Cassy provides a workable answer to Stowe's exasperated question, "what can any individual do?" (456).

To accomplish this closure in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Cassy must transcend both traditions in the novel—the domestic and the realistic. Cassy has

cassy and the madwoman

The madwoman that Gilbert and Gubar find haunting women's fiction displays several important differences from Cassy. First, and probably most important, is that, while she does provide a vehicle for Stowe's "rebellious impulses," for those acts forbidden to the more acceptable female characters of the novel and to the creator of the novel herself, Cassy is never "suitably punished in the course of the novel" as Gilbert and Gubar assert the madwoman figure must be; Cassy is certainly the madwoman/witch of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* but she is not the "damned witch" that Gilbert and Gubar delineate (78). Stowe allows Cassy's effective but violent actions to go virtually uncommented upon and completely unchastened. Moreover, Gilbert and Gubar insist that with Cassy, "Stowe explores one way in which women can escape the confinement of the ancestral mansion without becoming either suidical or murderous" (533). Cassy is, however, both suicidal and murderous (not only does she contemplate suicide, but she also murders her own child), and it is precisely her suicidal recklessness and her murderous rage which finally allow the novel to end after she brings about Legree's destruction.

Gilbert and Gubar, moreover, disregard Cassy's agency in Legree's death and the effectiveness of her actions in saving Emmeline. They assert first that "Stowe's revolutionary books insist that maternal sensations and feminine powerlessness alone can save a world otherwise damned by masculine aggression" (482), but they claim, somewhat contradictorily, that, "the woman who most successfully exacts female retribution is the maddened slave [Cassy] who dominates the final chapters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin"* (533). What they apparently ignore is the fact that Cassy's retribution is the act which saves the world of the novel, and hers is not an act of maternal sensation or feminine powerlessness. Overlooking the pointed aggressiveness of Cassy's actions toward Legree, Gilbert and Gubar argue, finally, that Cassy's plan is simply to save Emmeline, but Cassy so far exceeds the requirements necessary for their escape from Legree that a directed and violent hatred must be recognized as part of her attitude toward the man. In fact, she has told Tom that she will someday be driven to murder Legree. In terms of Gilbert and Gubar's theory of the maddened double, then, if Cassy is the double of any character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* she is the double—in that she matches him in violence, aggressiveness, and potency—of Simon Legree.

certainly progressed far beyond her victimized but resistant domestic sisters, but she has equally exceeded, with her cold-blooded violence, the rebelliousness of many of the real slaves—especially the women—from whom Stowe drew her portraits. In fact, Cassy is so unparalleled that she is the only major Black character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* never mentioned in Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin,* in which Stowe attempted to substantiate the claims about the evils of slavery which she made in her novel. It is as if Cassy were—in Stowe's view—so far beyond what any *real woman* could accomplish that Stowe found no analogue for her in actual American events.

V

For Stowe and for her readers, Cassy becomes a kind of mythic hero; she accomplishes that which no ordinary mortal can—she makes life possible for the slaves of Stowe's novel, and she demonstrates how America can be rid of the likes of Simon Legree. She brings about, in fact, the state which Dorothy Norman says is always the result of heroic action, the affirmation of life: "Myths of the heroes speak most eloquently of man's quest to choose *life over death.*"[27] On her heroic mission, then, Cassy enters Legree's underworld, the "habitations of cruelty" (350), to meet and conquer Legree on his own terms with his own weapons. To do so, the first step Cassy must take is to divorce herself from the feminine ideology that has made her—as it makes Tom and all the other suffering, feminine characters of the novel—endure rather than refuse her oppression.

Cassy, like Emmeline, is at first a suitable and attractive domestic heroine. Unaware, initially, that she is Black, she is raised in her father's affluent household with her white brothers and sisters. When her father dies, however, she is sold from one uncaring, unscrupulous man to the next, and her anger grows as her awareness of her position in the universe is made clear to her. She rebels furiously, she tells Tom, against one of her masters: "Then *he* came, the cursed wretch! He came to take possession. He told me that he had bought me and my children; I cursed him before God, and told him I'd die sooner than live with him" (373).

But it becomes immediately obvious to her that rebellion is impossible for a woman with domestic responsibility; her children make her vulnerable in a way that she would not be alone. As long as she is a mother, Cassy is without defense; she cannot rebel against her master: "I gave up, for my hands were tied. He had my children" (373). Her master does, in fact, sell her children, cutting Cassy off from the domestic ties which maintain her docility and his control over her. Cassy is mad with rage, but she realizes that she is helpless before her master's power. Cassy, still tied to and in effect weakened by her belief in the domestic ideal of motherly love, does not become truly dangerous or powerful *until* she realizes she will never see her children again. Her first rebellious act is the attempted murder of her master, and it follows upon her realization that her children are lost to her. Since her ties with domestic ideology are slowly being loosened, Cassy has little left to lose, and she is, therefore, becoming a dangerous woman.

Cassy's next rebellious and murderously effective act is to ensure that she is never again subverted by the tenets which govern woman's sphere: she murders her own child. Made pregnant by her new master, Cassy claims to want to save the baby from a life of pain, but the effect of this infanticide is to free her to become the most dangerous and the most powerful character in the novel. She explains her action to Tom: "I would never again let a child live to grow up! I took the little fellow in my arms, when he was two weeks old, and kissed him, and cried over him; and then I gave him laudanum" (375).

Cassy is frequently deprived by readers of the novel of the agency and

power she earns with this rebellious and frightening act. Elizabeth Ammons, for example, says of Cassy's murder of her own child, "These cruelly severed ties between mothers and children occur throughout Stowe's exposé of slavery" (Ammons, 156). The ties between Cassy and her child were, indeed, cruelly severed, but they are severed by Cassy herself, not by the system she fights against. Cassy frees herself by killing her child; she makes herself capable of heroic action by this sacrifice. Other children's deaths in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are not engineered by their own mothers, and Cassy—no matter how deeply moved we are by the extremity of her pain—has accomplished something powerful with this murder.

Killing her child, severing her bonds with love, motherhood, domesticity, Cassy goes "down to death's door" (375)—a woman prepared to curse any man and a woman powerful enough to carry out any curse she makes. Cassy is now beyond morality, beyond the forces of love which Stowe claims will save America from the evil of slavery, but ironically, she is the only one in the novel dangerously free enough to act against slavery. She denounces every value that holds Tom in his oppressed position: God ("I never prayed since my children were sold . . . when I try to pray, I can only hate and curse," [407]), religion and morality ("There's no law here, of God or man, that can do you, or any one of us, the least good," [368]), Emmeline's maidenly innocence ("And now, he's [Legree's] got a new one,—a young thing, only fifteen and she brought up, she say, piously. Her good mistress taught her to read the Bible; and she's brought her Bible here—to hell with her!" [369]), and love.

Despite her admissions to Tom that what Tom says concerning God and endurance and self-sacrifice is convincing, Cassy is fully immersed in the horror of her situation. Unlike Tom, who Kenneth Lynn says "never surrenders to circumstance," (Lynn, xxiv) Cassy functions according to a situational ethic; she knows where she is and who she is up against. She intends, moreover, to do something about her plight. Unconcerned about her probable damnation ("I'm a lost soul"), she vows to rid the world of Legree: "I'll send him where he belongs,—a short way, too,—one of these nights, if they burn me alive for it!" (376).

The more deeply into the dark regions of Legree's domain Cassy is drawn, the more like Legree she becomes in order simply to survive. In terms of shifting sexual roles in Stowe's novel, Elizabeth Ammons discusses the contradiction in gender between Tom and his beloved Eva, Tom becoming the domestic heroine and Eva the representative for the suffering Christ (Ammons, 154). But she does not discuss the even more revealing contradiction in gender between Legree and Cassy. As Legree—through the memory of his mother and the influence of Eva—becomes softer, more vulnerable to feminine influence and domestic feeling, as he actually becomes more feminine himself, Cassy becomes harder, more impervious, more imperious. While the feminine characters in the novel remain susceptible to penetration by the evils of slavery (Eva moans, "these things sink into my heart," [224]), Cassy becomes inviolable. And

her increasing hardness is associated with her power over Legree. Cassy, originally "a woman delicately bred," has suffered and altered deeply under Legree's influence: "he crushed her, without scruple, beneath the foot of his brutality." But Legree's viciousness also effects threatening changes in Cassy: "as time, and debasing influences, and despair, hardened womanhood within her, and waked the fires of fiercer passions, she had become in a measure his mistress, and he alternately tyrannized over and dreaded her" (411).

Cassy's power over Legree is conveyed in specifically sexual terms—she is his mistress sexually and his "master" emotionally—just as his power over her has been sexual: he has made her his physically as well as materially. The similarities between Legree and Cassy extend, moreover, deeply into the psychological terrain of the novel. Not only is Cassy's power over Legree sexual, but the manner in which she wields her power over Legree is precisely the manner in which he wields his over her. Gilbert and Gubar observe that Legree has driven Cassy mad (Gilbert and Gubar, 533) but in the end, it is Cassy who triumphs over Legree by driving him mad. And just as Legree has loosened his last hold on his humanity by committing matricide (Gilbert and Gubar characterize the effect of Legree's actions on his mother as matricide [Gilbert and Gubar, 535]) so Cassy loosens her hold on decency by killing her own child.

Thus Cassy, by means of her relationship with Legree, is transformed from virtuous, domestic heroine to angry, invasive aggressor. Jane Tompkins contends that the characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* do not unfold before us in psychological complexity, that each represents rather a certain type in the allegorical drama that Stowe sets before us: the distinguishing features of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* she explains, "are not those of the realistic novel but of typological narrative. Its characters, like the figures in an allegory, do not change or develop but reveal themselves in response to the demands of a situation. They are not defined primarily by their mental and emotional characteristics—that is to say, psychologically—but soteriologically, according to whether they are saved or damned" (Tompkins, 90).

Cassy, however, does unfold before us in all her psychological complexity. She comes to hate Legree just as she comes to hate her position as his racial and sexual chattel. And as her attitude toward her double oppression changes, hardens, and becomes murderous and rebellious, she engineers an effective end to her own oppression. Cassy truly stands outside the allegorical framework of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which Tompkins establishes. She struggles for victory over the powers of darkness; she is not, therefore, consigned as are Eva and Tom and all the others in the novel to unresolved and unrelieved suffering. She does not, in Tompkins terms, simply *repeat* in different form the same suffering endured by the feminine characters of the novel; instead she radically alters the power balance of the struggle by becoming as hard and invasive as the man and the system she struggles against.

In the epic struggle between Legree and Cassy, Cassy goes so far as to taunt Legree for his increasing softness and femininity. Since she has

cassy and control

Some objections may be raised to characterizing Cassy as a violent or non-feminine figure in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Douglas, for example, sees Cassy as essentially femimine, but feminine in a dangerous way. Cassy, she says, "turns female influence into tacit terrorism." But I would argue that terrorism ceases to be feminine influence and instead becomes a strategy of the master/male. Nor can we argue that Cassy is simply the Gothic heroine rattling around in the attic of Legree's corrupt domain. In Ellen Moers' terms, the Gothic heroine is tested by the interior of the Gothic mansion because she cannot carry her adventures into the world at large. The true Gothic heroine does not control the interior; she is rather controlled and challenged by it. But Cassy does control the interior of Legree's house; she goes so far as to control the interior of his psyche.

We see in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* then, a reversal of sexual roles between Cassy and Legree, for in controlling and manipulating the interior of Legree's house, Cassy tests and threatens Legree with that interior, and Legree becomes the Gothic heroine. Cassy actively and aggressively drives Legree to his death. She is not plagued by the self-doubt or the divided self of the Gothic heroine as Karen F. Stein sees her, and her actions—though not overtly violent—are purposeful and hostile enough to bring about a violent destruction of Legree. Moreover, the metaphors Stowe uses to discuss Cassy's action and the implication of Cassy's actions are sufficient to convince us that violence is the only way to deal with Legree.[28]

entered the lists and plays now by his rules, any hint of womanliness is only to be derided. In order to prevent Legree from overworking Tom, Cassy tries to convince Legree that Tom won't work as hard if he is beaten. Cassy torments Legree about the possibility of a smaller harvest than his competitors. The dialogue between Legree and Cassy is, in Stowe's terms, quintessentially masculine—that is, both sexual and violent—in its implications: "If your crop comes shorter into market than any of theirs, you won't lose your bet, I suppose? Tompkins won't lord it over you, I suppose,—and you'll pay down your money like a lady, won't you? I think I see you doing it!" (388). Legree and his fellow planters engage in an adolescent masculine competition about largeness (to determine who has "the heaviest crop") and hence about power, and Cassy derides Legree for looking not like a brute but like a lady—like a woman, a sexually and materially powerless being.

Cassy also begins to terrorize Legree about the noises she claims to hear in his house, and she taunts him about the inadequacy of his "pistols"—or his masculinity—to deal with the forces which surround him. She calls Simon to listen to a "wild shriek" from the garret. As Legree's terror becomes obvious ("Legree's knees knocked together; his face grew white with fear"), Cassy continues her torment:

"Hadn't you better get your pistols?" said Cassy, with a sneer that

froze Legree's blood. "It's time this thing was looked into, you know. I'd like to have you go up now; *they're at it.*"

"I won't go!" said Legree, with an oath.

"Why not? There an't any such thing as ghosts, you know!" (413)

During this scene, Cassy's "game" (414) with her victim becomes more violent while Stowe's metaphors for that game become more cruel, more aggressive, and more sexual. Cassy recognizes her power over Legree, and Stowe conveys this power as invasive and painful, as a kind of psychological rape: "Cassy perceived that her shaft had struck home; and, from that hour, with the most exquisite address, she never ceased to continue the train of influences she had begun" (411). Not only does Cassy invade Legree against his will with her psychological shaft, but her very actions to drive Legree mad become thrusting and assaultive:

> In a knot-hole of the garret, that had opened, she had inserted the neck of an old bottle, in such a manner that when there was the least wind, most doleful and lugubrious wailing sounds proceeded from it, which, in the high wind, increased to a perfect shriek, such as to credulous and superstitious ears might easily seem to be that of horror and despair. (411)

Cassy, finally, enters Legree's mind and drives him to his eventual death by drinking. She torments him so thoroughly and so mercilessly, reshaping his will to her own desires, that he succumbs to madness and death. It is true that the spirit of Legree's mother is instrumental in his downfall, but it is Cassy who has the freedom, the furious anger, the power to push Legree over the edge. Most feminist readers of the novel, however, argue that Tom's suffering makes possible the social regeneration that will radically re-order corrupt pre-Civil War America. Elizabeth Ammons argues that Tom's self-sacrifice inspires young George Shelby to free his slaves, bringing about "limited but concrete social change, a change that begins in one young man's heart and radiates from there to bring one small segment of the social order in line with the values of Mrs. rather than Mr. Shelby, the mother rather than the father" (Ammons, 160). But, in truth, Cassy has killed the most heinous representative of the evil slavery system, and appropriately it is little Emmeline—the figure most horribly threatened by Legree and most indebted to Cassy—who recognizes both Cassy's uniqueness and her heroic valor: "Cassy, how well you have planned it! . . . Who ever would have thought of it, but you?" (415).

Despite Cassy's success at dispatching Legree, Stowe retreats quickly from these scenes of Cassy's triumph and immerses Cassy once more in her appropriate domestic sphere. Cassy rediscovers her daughter Eliza and becomes again a mother—as she was, in Stowe's terms, intended to be—and not a murderer. In fact, under Eliza's maternal care, in "the bosom of the family," Cassy is made wholly feminine again and is able to reject the qualities which allowed her to bring the suffering in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to an

end: "Eliza's steady, consistent piety, regulated by the constant reading of the sacred word, made her a proper guide for the shattered and wearied mind of her mother. Cassy yielded at once and with her whole soul, to every good influence and became a devout and tender Christian" (443). Cassy—once again a mother and a practicing Christian, once again held firmly in check by Stowe's domestic ideology—accompanies George, Eliza, and their family to Africa. Finally, under cover of George's leadership and authority, Cassy will enjoy the utopia she proposed intially to Tom. But now this utopia is properly of George's creation; as a man, he is after all much more suited to the establishment of future governments.

Here, then, Stowe has solved—with a kind of ragged genius—the intensely disruptive problems her novel poses. She has restored and venerated the domesticity and feminine system of values slavery threatened to obliterate. She has maintained, at least superficially, her Christian commitment to endurance, forbearance and love as anodynes to cruelty and inhumanity, but she has, at the same time, dispatched Simon Legree neatly and eternally. With Cassy restored to motherhood, sanity, Christianity, and the bosom of the family—and, even more important, safely out of the way in Africa—Stowe can finally conclude her novel, the resolution of which she has had to postpone since Tom's death.

Revealingly, these concluding sections of the novel are very short and to the point, for once Stowe has resolved the problem of Legree, she is free to bring her massive tale to an end. The chapter titled "Results" is not really about results at all, for Cassy has already accomplished the desired results before George and Eliza finish the tale for us. And Stowe's indifference to the particulars of this section of her narrative is revealed by the first sentence of that chapter: "The rest of our story is soon told" (440). Stowe hurries through these pages, seemingly breathing a great sigh of relief that the world of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is finally rid of the likes of Simon Legree.

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notes

Work on this essay was first begun in Dr. Elaine Showalter's NEH Summer Seminar "Women Writers and Women's Culture," Rutgers University, summer 1984.

1. For balanced, generally positive assessments of Stowe's novel see, for example, Edward Wagenknecht, *Harriet Beecher Stowe* (1965); Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore* (New York, 1962); Kenneth S. Lynn, Introduction, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Cambridge, 1962); and John R. Adams, *Harriet Beecher Stowe* (New York, 1963). For a sampling of very negative readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* see Alexander Cowie, *The Rise of The American Novel* (New York, 1951); Authur Hobson Quinn, *American Fiction* (New York, 1936); James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," *Partisan Review,* 16 (1949), 578-85; rpt. in Elizabeth Ammons, ed., *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe,* (Boston, 1980), 92-97; Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel,* (New York, 1966); and J. C. Furnas, *Goodbye to Uncle Tom* (New York, 1956).

2. See, for example, Ammons, "Heroines in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,*" *Critical Essays*, 152-165; Alice Crozier, *The Novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (New York, 1969); and Gilliam Brown, "Getting in the Kitchen with Dinah: Domestic Politics in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,*" *American Quarterly,* 36 (Fall 1984), 503-523.

3. Along with Tompkins ("Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History," *Glyph* 8 [1981], 79-102); see Helen Papashvily, *All the Happy Endings* (New York, 1956); Lynn, "Introduction"; and Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977).

4. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London, 1853), 1.

5. Annie Fields, *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston, 1897), 130.

6. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly,* ed. Kenneth S. Lynn (Cambridge, 1962). This edition follows the text of Jewett's first American edition of 1852. All further references to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will be to this edition; page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

7. In fact, Lynn says of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his "Introduction," that "in an era when American literature was still romantic . . . Mrs. Stowe had produced a work that throbbed with the spirit of realism." Ann Douglas concurs, characterizing the work as a "panoramic realistic novel" (Introduction, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* [New York, 1981], 16) and pointing out that Stowe moved beyond the concerns of her sister writers of domestic fiction, "piety, deference, and domesticity," to "whatever subject matter compelled her."

8. See Tompkins, "Sentimental Power," 81; Douglas, *Feminization,* 11-12; and Brown, "Getting in the Kitchen," 507.

9. Nina Baym, (*Woman's Fiction,* Cornell, 1978), 11 and 40.

10. Papashvily contends that the domestic novel presented a convertly rebellious message to American women in that it provided them with a set of guidelines for dominating and managing men. Papashvily stresses the covert nature of the domestic heroine's actions: she never provided a direct threat to masculine authority. Rather she used her powers to manage masculine power. The domestic heroine opts for the "proper" role of male and female, but to maintain her power, she entered into an "emasculation process" (211) aimed at her mate.

11. Douglas points out that fictional responses to Stowe's novel disparaged Stowe's novelistic forays into the public realm. Other women writers who discussed slavery in their works "expressed firm disapproval of Stowe's outspoken exposé of the peculiar institution." Stowe was, in fact, "unladylike" in her whole approach ("Introduction," 15).

12. Leslie Fiedler has observed that the threat to humanity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is frequently rendered in terms of the threat of rape; there are, he claims, sexual implications in Tom's beating by Quimbo and Sambo, and in Eva's death scene (*The Inadvertent Epic,* [New York, 1979], 35-6). Feminist readers, such as Crozier, concur in asserting that the real victim in Stowe's novel is the family and by extension the violated black woman who is torn from her family and exploited sexually by her white masters, *Novels.*)

13. In her discussion of the psychology of the slave woman in America, Barbara Omolade perfectly characterizes the relationship bewteen Cassy as slave/woman and Simon Legree as master/man: "Patriarchal society would define the perfect man as the perfect master, and it was the submissiveness of the slave woman that made her the perfect slave and the perfect woman. After all, a man's power over a woman was like the master's power over a slave." ("Hearts of Darkness," in *Powers of Desire,* ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, [New York, 1983], 357).

14. According to Fiedler, "The chief pleasures of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are . . . rooted not in the moral indignation of the reformer but in the more devious titillations of the sadist; not love but death is Mrs. Stowe's true Muse" (*Love and Death,* 266).

15. See Charles Edward Stowe, *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston, 1889), 156-7 and Lynn, "History of the Text," *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* xxv-xxvi.

16. In fact, Fiedler claims that we do not remember or recognize the danger Cassy faces: "though we *know* Emmeline and Cassy are cowering in the attic at the moment that Quimbo and Sambo under Legree's direction are beating Uncle Tom to death, it is only the latter scene which we *feel*" (265), and Baldwin completely overlooks Cassy, claiming that there are only three important black characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin:* "Apart from her lively procession of field-hands, house-niggers, Chloe, Topsy, etc.—who are the stock, lovable figures presenting no problem—she [Stowe] has only three other Negroes in the book." According to Baldwin, these three include George, Eliza, and Tom (93-4).

17. Although Brown identifies Cassy's actions toward Legree as murder, she still sees Cassy as functioning within the domestic realm. "Through Cassy's strategem," says Brown, "Stowe instructs women to exploit their idealized status: to domesticate and literalize their spirituality, to enact Eva's saintly mission by taking immediate abolitionist action." But women like Cassy who are powerful enought to "pull their strings" (522) cannot be said to be truly within the domestic tradition.

18. Douglas, "Introduction," 17.

19. Ammons, "Heroines."

20. See, for example, their discussions of the existence of God (368) and their debates over violence, love, and passive resistance (407).

21. Douglas, "Introduction," 24.

22. All feelings associated with rape [in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*] have been transferred to the final archetypal scene in which Tom has become the passive victim, and his ravisher, in a strategic mythological inversion, the book's most *macho,* Anglo-Saxon and lustful character, Legree, who is assisted, to be sure, by Sambo and Quimbo (*The Inadvertent Epic,* 36).

23. Crozier, emphasizing the feminine and domestic contexts which gave rise to the ideolgoy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* points out that "Stowe dramatizes the evils of slavery largely in terms of its destructive effect on families," and the beings charged with rescuing this family from these evils are the mothers in the novel: "mothers are made oracles of moral truth" (24).

24. See Ammons, "Heroines" and Crozier, *Novels.*

25. Cassy is said to glide (410, 415, and 428), to flit (414), and to have cool hands (412-13). She is, moreover, completely familiar with the stange noises of the house (410).

26. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, 1979), 78.

27. Dorothy Norman, *The Hero* (New York, 1969), 11.

28. See Douglas (19), Ellen Moers, *Literary Women,* "The Female Gothic," and Karen F. Syein, "Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic" in *The Female Gothic,* ed. Juliann Fleenor (London, 1983).