

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Excerpt from Chapter 1 (Scene in which Mr. Haley is asking Mr. Shelby to sell Harry, Eliza's young son):

“Lor bless ye, yes! These critters an’t like white folks, you know; they gets over things, only manage right. Now, they say,” said Haley, assuming a candid and confidential air, “that this kind o’ trade is hardening to the feelings; but I never found it so. Fact is, I never could do things up the way some fellers manage the business. I’ve seen ’em as would pull a woman’s child out of her arms, and set him up to sell, and she screechin’ like mad all the time;—very bad policy—damages the article—makes ’em quite unfit for service sometimes. I knew a real handsome gal once, in Orleans, as was entirely ruined by this sort o’ handling. The fellow that was trading for her didn’t want her baby; and she was one of your real high sort, when her blood was up. I tell you, she squeezed up her child in her arms, and talked, and went on real awful. It kinder makes my blood run cold to think on’t; and when they carried off the child, and locked her up, she jest went ravin’ mad, and died in a week. Clear waste, sir, of a thousand dollars, just for want of management,—there’s where ’t is. It’s always best to do the humane thing, sir; that’s been *my* experience.” And the trader leaned back in his chair, and folded his arms, with an air of virtuous decision, apparently considering himself a second Wilberforce.

1) Historical setting

- Written during intense conflict over **American slavery**.
- Published at a time when laws and public arguments about slavery were escalating.

Key idea: This novel is not “just entertainment.” It is a **public argument** in story form.

2) What the book shows (content + themes)

- **Family separation** and the selling of human beings
 - **Law vs. conscience:** What if the law protects injustice?
 - **Personhood:** What happens when people are treated as property?
 - **Faith under pressure:** How belief shapes courage, endurance, and choices
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3) How the book persuades (literary + rhetorical tools)

Genre strategy: It is written to move the reader's **compassion and moral clarity**.

Rhetoric (the 3 classical appeals):

- **Ethos (credibility):** Who seems trustworthy and why?
- **Pathos (emotion):** Which scenes are meant to break your heart—and why?
- **Logos (reason):** What conclusion is the story trying to prove?

Craft moves to notice:

- **Character contrasts:** different kinds of masters, victims, helpers, bystanders
 - **Parallel stories:** multiple plotlines show slavery's reach
 - **Narrator pressure:** moments where the author pushes the reader toward judgment
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4) Impact and effect

- The book became extremely popular and intensified national debate.
- It helped many readers **feel** the injustice, not just hear about it.

Important skill: popularity ≠ perfection. A famous work can be powerful *and* flawed.

5) Critical reaction (how people responded)

- Many praised it as a moral witness against slavery.
- Many attacked it and produced rebuttals.
- Later critics argue about whether some portrayals rely on stereotypes—even while condemning slavery.