

Effects of syntax in uncle tom's cabin



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Uncle Tom's Cabin is powerful not only because of its moving plot, but also because of several literary tools used by Harriet Beecher Stowe to accentuate the evils of slavery. In the book, Stowe contrasts a detached and sarcastic tone with personal side-notes to the reader in order to show traditional opinions of slavery while begging the reader to see the plight of the slaves. Stowe accentuates the dialects of characters in the book to show social position and the effects of oppression on these slaves. One of the effective literary devices Stowe uses is a dry and seemingly objective tone for much of the story, as detached as it would be were she reporting a "case study." She often uses bold generalizations regarding one race or another, then later questions her own generalizations in a plea to the reader for sympathy. She injects a fair amount of sarcasm into these sweeping statements, which shows she does not truly believe her broad generalizations, as in this passage when Tom finds that the slave trader Haley has sold a woman's young son without her knowledge: "To him, it looked like something unutterably horrible and cruel, because, poor, ignorant black soul! He had not learned to generalize, and to take enlarged views." (201) Although Tom's feelings are natural and right, Stowe sarcastically calls them the result of ignorance and coolly calls the whole scene "an every-day incident of lawful trade." (201) However, while writing the instance off as an unremarkable one, she subtly communicates Tom's point of view and thereby suggests the real evil of the event. Her ironic chapter titles, such as "In Which Property Gets into an Improper State of Mind," (159), serve the same purpose. She first calls George the slave "property," then introduces him in the chapter as an eloquent and dignified young man who does not deserve to be cruelly enslaved. By juxtaposing this type of Southern thought

with truths reflecting the minds and emotions of those considered “property,” Stowe shows that the slaves are as much human beings as any white person. Stowe again uses sarcasm regarding the slave trader Haley to mock popular beliefs of the time: instead of calling Haley heartless, Stowe says that he “had arrived at that stage of Christian and political perfection... in which he had completely overcome every humane weakness and prejudice.” (199) By stating the thought in this way, she gives some insight into Haley’s mind and his own justifications for his actions, while effectively debunking his justifications as ridiculous and immoral. By showing both sides of the argument, Stowe’s own argument against slavery is more effective because it debunks the other side before convincing the reader of its own points. Instead of writing in regular narrative style, Stowe regularly addresses the reader throughout the novel, whether in simply inviting them to join the scene or in asking for their sympathy. Through this technique, the reader gains a sense of camaraderie with the storyteller and is forced to take her more seriously when she addresses difficult issues of conscience.

Although fugitive slaves during the time period of Uncle Tom’s Cabin were considered evil for trying to escape, Stowe is able to shed a different light on the issue by asking the reader bluntly: “if it were your Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, how fast could you walk?” (76) In this passage, Stowe forces the reader to put him or herself in Eliza’s shoes and feel all of her pains and worries. By personalizing the cruelties of slavery so that everyone who read the book could feel them, Stowe enabled many people of the time to realize how horrible the institution of slavery really was. Her writing also casts blame on “enablers,” people who may oppose slavery but sit passively by, allowing it to happen; Stowe

rhetorically asks: “ but who sir, makes the trader? Who is most to blame? You make the public sentiment that calls for his trade, that debauches and depraves him, till he feels no shame in it; and in what are you better than he?” (204) Stowe does not blame only the cruel Tom Loker, Haley, and Legree for the problem of slavery; she forces the reader to take responsibility for the problem and thus states that the only Christian solution is to actively work against it. Stowe writes in the natural dialects of each character in the book, to show their social class and the way that they are viewed by society. In general, the higher-educated whites speak more articulately while the oppressed slaves speak very poorly. The effect of this is a clear lowering of the slaves toward the position of animals; they don't even speak like real “ humans.” However, there are some examples where this generalization doesn't apply; this gives the reader some insight into these characters' personal attitudes on class as well as their social background and upbringing. For example, the slave George speaks and carries himself as eloquently as any affluent white man in the story, and more so than some. This may be because of his mulatto heritage, or simply express his realization that he is as good as any other man and may talk the same way that others do. The way George speaks not only gets him safely through Kentucky in disguise, but also shows that he is a man to be taken seriously. The evil slave owner Simon Legree, on the other hand, speaks quite crudely. This effectively shows the reader that he is not of the same class or education as other whites in the book and lowers his ability to be taken seriously by the reader. Slave traders and auctioneers in the book also have more unsophisticated dialects than slave owners; this shows that they are at a lower position in society and probably considered trashy by many

other whites. Stowe's writing techniques made Uncle Tom's Cabin an exciting story, as well as an influential and moving piece of classic literature. Although her ideas were revolutionary for the time, they appealed to people of many demographics because of the way they were presented. If Uncle Tom's Cabin had not been written with such precision and feeling, it might not have made the impact that it did on society and the abolitionist movement.