

The women of uncle toms cabin



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Analyzing the Women of Uncle Tom's Cabin Written in 1852, two years after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act which made it illegal for anyone to offer assistance to a runaway slave(National Center for Public Policy Research), Uncle Tom's Cabin launched a direct attack against all institutions that promote slavery. Its characters and plot serves to convince the reader that slavery is unacceptable – even in instances where the slave and his master appear to have a positive relationship. While Uncle Tom's Cabin is mainly about slavery, its subthemes are also worth a study. For example, its depiction of women is one of the book's most glaring facets which is rarely looked upon. How does Uncle Tom's Cabin regard women? Are women passive or active agents of change? To better understand the role of women in the book, we can use a feminist approach. One view we can use is that of Susan Lanser wherein she promoted a feminist narratology wherein women's writings, feminist points of view and questions of gender are directly addressed. This method aims to look at the socio-political context of the writing so as to understand the voice, context and the plot of the story in a more in-depth manner. While Uncle Tom's Cabin was written before the spread of the women's rights movement, it provided women with a voice to speak out their concerns against the inequality happening in the society at the time. This is unusual since women at the time had no voting rights and they were expected to be passive observers. Hence, it is also important to look into the background of the author. Who is Harriet Beecher Stowe and what motivated her to write a novel which depicted women as morally conscientious, and courageous and more committed than men? Throughout the story, Stowe shows parallelisms between the condition of slaves and that of women but she enjoins women to influence their husbands – the people

who had legal and voting rights – to oppose the evil that slavery is. The women of Uncle Tom's Cabin are depicted in different forms – the ideal woman who tries to find salvation for the wrongs of their husbands and sons (Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird), black women who manage to stay strong in adversity (Eliza), women who are able to bend their husbands to their will even when their intentions are not for the good of everyone (Marie St. Clare), and women who are able to go beyond their prejudices to help others (Ophelia St. Clare). Through the invisible force of women, Stowe shows that social change is within reach. Why did she adopt this stance? By looking at the elements of the story and using Lancer's feminist narratology, we hope to provide the answers to the questions stated above.

Bibliography National Center for Public Policy Research. " The Fugitive Slave Act: 1850." 1850. National Center of Public Policy Research Archives. 3 May 2011 . Stowe, Harriet Beecher. " Uncle Tom's Cabin." 1852. Project Gutenberg. 3 May 2011 .