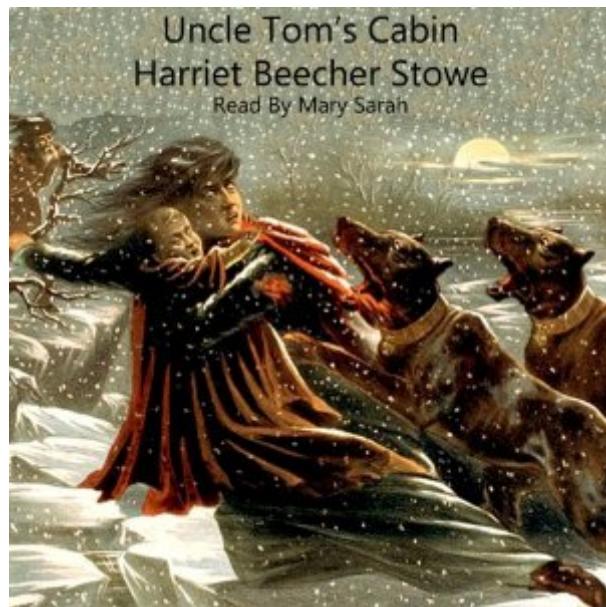


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Uncle Tom's Cabin: Life Among The Lowly



Synopsis

Uncle Tom's Cabin was the best-selling novel of the 19th century and the second best-selling book of that century, following the Bible. It is credited with helping fuel the abolitionist cause in the 1850s. In 1855, three years after it was published, it was called "the most popular novel of our day." A thrilling and important piece of American literature!

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Uncle Tom's cabin is frequently criticized by people who have never read the work, myself included. I decided I finally needed to read it and judge it for myself. And I have to say, that for all its shortcomings (and it does have them), it is really a remarkable book. The standout characteristics of this book are the narrative drive (it's a very exciting, hard to put down book), the vivid characters (I don't know what other reviewers were reading, but I found the characters extremely vivid and mostly believable - exceptions to follow), the sprawling cast, the several completely different worlds that were masterfully portrayed, and the strong female characters in the book. The portrayal of slavery and its effects on families and on individuals is gut-wrenching - when Uncle Tom has to leave his family, and when Eliza may lose little Harry, one feels utterly desolate. As for flaws, yes, Mrs. Stowe does sermonize a fair bit, and her sentences and pronouncements can be smug. Yes, if you're not a Christian, you may find all her Christian references a bit much. (But the majority of her readers claimed to be Christian, and it was her appeal to the spirit of Christ that was her most powerful tug at the emotions of her readers). Yes, she still had some stereotypical views of African-Americans (frankly, I think most people have stereotypical views of races other than their own, they just don't

state them as clearly today). But in her time, she went far beyond the efforts of most of her contemporaries to both see and portray her African-American brothers and sisters are equal to her. The best way she did this was in her multi-dimensional portrayal of her Negro characters -- they are, in fact, more believable and more diverse than her white characters.

I too was surprised by "Uncle Tom's Cabin." I'd expected a poorly written melodrama with (at best) a tepid commitment to abolition and a strong undercurrent of racism. I was wrong. As a novel, I consider it to be better than many of its rough contemporaries (including "A Tale of Two Cities," "Vanity Fair," and "Sartor Resartus"). As an attack on slavery, it is uncompromising, well informed, logically sophisticated, and morally unassailable. It's also exciting, educational, and often funny. The book has flaws, of course. The quality of the writing is variable, as it is in the works of many greater talents than Stowe. Herman Melville is one of my favorite writers, but I'd be hard-pressed to defend some of his sentences--or even some of his books--on purely literary grounds! There are indeed sentimental passages in "UTC." So what? There are plenty in Hawthorne, Dickens, Ruskin, and the Brontes, too...and lord knows our age has its own garish pieties. There are also a couple (only a couple!) of unfortunate remarks on the "childlike" character of slaves, but nothing so offensive as to render suspect Stowe's passionate belief that blacks are equal to whites in the eyes of God and must not be enslaved. (She also says that differences between blacks and whites do not result from a difference in innate ability, and argues that a white person raised to be a slave would show all the characteristics of one). By contrast, Plato wrote reams in defense of slavery and racism, and yet people who point this out are considered spoilsports, if not philistines.

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