

# Bringing up Topsy by Hand<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** Harriet Beecher Stowe's prescription in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for a healthy future economy after the abolition of slavery calls for an environment in which ex-slaves will be free to make their individual contributions. The novel condemns all efforts of Antebellum society to punish slaves, with the noteworthy exception of the corporal punishment endured by the young girl Topsy, whose antics are not so much offensive as they are merely nonproductive. In this essay, Stowe's seemingly ambivalent attitude toward Topsy is contextualized within the work of the French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their work *A Thousand Plateaus*, as well as in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. The conclusion is that Topsy is not necessarily reformed by her overseer Ophelia St. Clare, but rather is content to engage in nonproductive activity (or "deteritorialized" activity, in Deleuzian/Guattarian parlance) until she finds a good reason to "reterritorialize." Thus, corporal punishment has no effect and no relevance in her situation.

**Keywords** Harriet Beecher Stowe; *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Michel Foucault; Gilles Deleuze; Felix Guattari.

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Despite Harriet Beecher Stowe's sterling anti-slavery credentials, many readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are perhaps nagged by the sense of a built-in hedge, as if

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<sup>1</sup> I take my title from the running joke in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, in which the main character Pip is thrashed regularly by his ill-tempered older sister who has raised him since the death of their parents. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* predates *Great Expectations* by several years, but the double meaning of the phrase "brought up by hand" surely may be applied to Topsy as well as Pip.

the novel's prescription is not for radical transformation, but merely for America's capitalist system to be tweaked a bit in order to make all things well. In particular, the attitude of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* toward corporal punishment demonstrates that the novel displays a certain ambivalence toward authority, economic and otherwise. I argue that the poststructuralist work *A Thousand Plateaus*, by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as the "ur-text" in the critical analysis of discipline, Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, are useful in explaining this seeming contradiction—to wit, that corporal punishment in the novel is generally depicted as a practice to be condemned entirely, yet in one noteworthy instance is delineated as a necessary punishment, albeit one that is lamentably deemed necessary in achieving an intended outcome.

The argument that the novel may be contextualized in terms of capitalism is well established. David Grant, for example, cites Stowe's decision to serialize *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the political journal *National Era* as evidence that "there are affinities between the discourse of politics and her work" which would naturally include issues impacting the political economy (430). Rachel Naomi Klein has also contributed to the debate on Stowe's economic orientation, concluding that the writer "gave powerful expression to the vision of free labor that animated the Republican Party of Lincoln, and [that] she creatively extended those principles to an analysis of women's work at home" (148). While the stance that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* must be considered in light of market economics is well covered by both Klein and Grant, as well as the secondary sources they cite, the precise nature of these qualifications are worthy of closer scrutiny.<sup>1</sup> In particular, I argue that the glaring problem with Stowe's free-market economics may be observed in the punishment inflicted upon the preteen slave Topsy at the hands of Miss Ophelia, a Northerner who abhors slavery but seemingly has little reluctance in keeping a slave in line if one is left in her charge. In essence, my argument is that the treatment of Topsy represents a form of punishment that is aimed at preserving the American capitalist system as a productive mechanism, but one that nonetheless tends to spiral

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1 In fact, Grant's essay also covers the political dimension. He argues that the newly-emerging Republican Party had as a major goal the promotion of "free labor." He further cites Stowe's embodiment of this theme, which I think is quite well supported by numerous instances in the novel. My argument assumes that the outlook described by Grant was indeed that of Stowe. However, I think a bit more can be said about the dynamics of how an individual aligns himself or herself in this struggle.

out of narrative control.<sup>1</sup>

I choose to focus on the economics of corporal punishment in part because it is all too easy to dismiss this particular theme's ambivalence as merely one of the numerous suggested deficiencies and plot-holes in the novel. And while my purpose is not to defend Stowe against these accusations, I would argue that certain episodes in the novel are not necessarily as melodramatic as they first may appear. For example, there are the issues of the angelic child Eva, whose fictional death will strike many readers as being overwrought, and of Tom himself, who seemingly possesses an almost superhuman ability to endure suffering. But, relative to the issue of slave rebellions, these two characters can alternately be interpreted as a smoke-screen comprising the entire middle of the book, providing cover for another African-American character, George Harris, to not only escape slavery through violence in the opening chapters, but also to come back with the full intention of politically destroying the institution in the closing ones.

On the other hand, we may find ourselves reluctant to dwell on the initiative of George when we are forced to consider the melodramatic escape of Eliza by skipping over ice-chunks in a river while carrying a child in her arms. However, a close reading of the section reveals that the trader in pursuit simply does not wish to assume any risk at all in aggressively chasing her, knowing that the Fugitive Slave Law had obligated every American to help him recoup his property. In sum, Eliza's escape is credible if one considers the overall outcome and not the minute details, and as we learn in the concluding chapters of the novel, she never spends another day of her life in slavery.

As for little Eva, one should recall that her mother, Marie St. Clare, is probably second in the novel only to Simon Legree in terms of callous indifference to human suffering and downright mean-spiritedness. One may argue that Eva is a foil to show that something good can come out of something bad, and that a beneficial outcome can arise out of slavery even when the prospects seem hopeless, and if so, that the distracting plot-device of a perfect child is subordinate to the overall design of contemplating a broken world that can be fixed. This view also pertains to her father, whose soliloquies may suggest that he is a particularly complex and nuanced character, but who is nonetheless far too weak to effect any positive change on his

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1 Christopher Diller, for instance, weighs in on the classic debate between sentimental and anti-sentimental interpretations of the novel with the insight that "Stowe's novel lends support to each of these positions" (24). I draw attention to Diller's highlighting of the difficulty to contain Stowe's text within one view. This is also true of the overall question of Stowe's attitude toward capitalist enterprise in general, and specifically, her attitude toward the corporal punishment that is traditionally used to force certain non-cooperative individuals into conformity.

own. Eva, one might further argue, represents the hope that the Marie St. Clares of the Antebellum world will simply remove themselves from any sort of social interaction in which they can exploit those less powerful, and that the Augustine St. Clares would eventually find their backbones and liberate their slaves once and for all.

One may also take issue with the shockingly light penalty meted out to Simon Legree, whose punishment seems to be more the self-inflicted result of his drinking and his superstitious nature, both of which are clearly his own character defects. Stowe may dish up a moderate dose of karma for Legree, but his only real punishment from society, as far as I can tell, is one sucker-punch to the jaw from the young George Shelby. In a better world, the Simon Legrees would be summarily handcuffed and tried for premeditated murder.

Likewise, we may also consider that the much-derided acquiescence of Uncle Tom is not entirely supported by the unfolding of events, given that he clearly withholds information from Simon Legree and probably from the traders pursuing Eliza as well, and does so to their economic disadvantage. In fact, many if not most of the suggested plot defects and melodramatic episodes in the novel can probably be addressed with the counter-argument that they demonstrate the inherent inefficiency of slavery. In all the aforementioned cases, one may conclude that the reader is more likely to arrive at the insight that slavery simply does not work than in a meditation on the art of rebellion. In Foucauldian terms, the reader never has the panoptic luxury of entirely apprehending the rebel's essential reality, but is quite aware of the logic of the rebellion itself.

In other words, the function of corporal punishment in the novel is not necessarily to keep the plot moving, but may have something to do with defining the institution of slavery and pointing out its deep economic flaws. As I will demonstrate, Topsy is treated in a manner that in no way brings her behavior into social conformity. Rather, she comes to the decision entirely of her own volition that she needs to achieve a more directed purpose in life. But before analyzing the occurrences in which Topsy is disciplined, it is first necessary to consider how her punishment may be contextualized in the theory of Foucault as well as Deleuze and Guattari.

Because I began with the statement that *Discipline and Punish* is probably the ur-text of critical analysis of punishment, I should elaborate with a citation in which Foucault describes what he considers the epitome of discipline. In a chapter titled "Means of Correct Training," Foucault discusses a seemingly insignificant commemorative coin depicting a 1666 military parade that would otherwise be forgotten if not analyzed at length in *Discipline and Punish*. The coin was

occasioned by a routine event in which parading soldiers apparently distinguished themselves by their having stepped into a remarkable physical display of conformity. Louis XIV's commemorative coin stated on one side that military discipline had been revitalized, and on the other that such was the precursor to victory (188).

Foucault's overall argument, when applied to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, suggests that a matter such as Topsy's being brought into conformity is more akin to the standardization of certain social interactions than an ongoing attempt to preserve the slave economy. In other words, the social pressure imposing discipline is not so much that Ophelia is vested in preserving slavery—and in fact, she emphatically states that she wishes for the institution to be abolished—as it is an expectation that everyone should conform to the standards of his or her community. To see this expectation in progress is best contextualized within the behavior of Tom himself. Seemingly, Tom is as recalcitrant as Topsy in the eyes of the slave traders of the novel, but not in the eyes of Ophelia. The panoptic view of Tom is not problematic for the goal of abolition, because the more closely the reader is allowed to observe Tom's character and motives, the more he resembles Christ. And the more he resembles Christ, the more the reader is implicated in the assumption that Tom's refusal to divulge information to help the slave owners and traders is synonymous with moral perfection. In sum, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* relentlessly undermines the confidence of those sympathetic with slavery who desire the power of information to support their cause.

However, such cannot be said for the attitude-adjustment to which Topsy is subjected by her mistress. Ophelia not only fights against her own “progressive” tendencies when she responds to the exasperating behavior of Topsy, but the narrative itself takes an ambivalent attitude toward the question of whether certain individuals within a society should be shoehorned into conformity. Ophelia, more than any other character, demonstrates the Deleuzian/Guattarian insight that “individuals contain microfascisms just waiting to crystallize” (10). And not only is Ophelia often obliged to forgo her high-minded ideals, but the narrative itself also demonstrates the further Deleuzian/Guattarian principle that

...the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can). (11)

The preceding lines require a great deal of unpacking, but my overall point is that corporal punishment is a conservative form of punishment that does not cease to exist simply because progressive voices wish it to do so, but also is unlikely to be extinguished even among some of those who would normally be receptive to change. Just as the decimated ant colony in Deleuze/Guattari's fascinating analogy preserve itself as an "animal rhizome" by retaining bits and pieces of a trait that has worked in the past, so too do the economics of corporal punishment manage to avoid a profound deterritorialization to the point of extinction (9). Stowe may therefore undertake with all good will a deterritorialization in which slavery is attacked as vehemently as any novelist has ever managed, but the book itself will demand a certain conformity with economic practice that will undermine the original assumptions.

Is it even possible to argue that the novel both undermines slavery and simultaneously supports the discipline of slaves? The answer is yes if one takes into consideration the novel's call to militant action, and further, that it is possible to contextualize this militant action within Deleuze/Guattari's notion of the "war machine." Specifically, one may argue that the institution of slavery at the micro-level described by Stowe is a confrontation between competing forces that—perhaps surprisingly—take factors into consideration other than race alone. In other words, the confrontation between the anti-slavery of Ophelia and the easy pro-slavery sentiments of her sister-in-law Marie St. Clare is best viewed as a minor skirmish in a larger war between competing economic resources. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, the War Machine is ultimately capitalist in nature:

The factors that make State war total war are closely connected to capitalism: it has to do with the investment of constant capital in equipment, industry, and the war economy, and the investment of variable capital in the population in its physical and mental aspects (both as warmaker and as victim of war). (421)

To make their point even more dramatically, Deleuze and Guattari turn in the following chapter "7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture" to the primitive society that was just emerging from the basic hand-to-mouth subsistence of the hunter-gather economy. Their argument is that a primitive society must have certain characteristics to make the construction of war financially possible, and chief among these is a surplus that allows for implements of war to be constructed. A society cannot eat a sword, after all, so the growers/preparers of basic commodities such as grain must be far enough ahead in their productive capacity to allow that community at large

(or the State) to have the luxury of exchanging basic commodities for weapons and other implements. They explain the relationship as follows:

Marx, the historian, and Childe, the archaeologist, are in agreement on the following point: the archaic imperial State, which steps in to overcode agricultural communities, presupposes at least a certain level of development of these communities' productive forces since there must be a potential surplus capable of constituting a State stock, of supporting a specialized handicrafts class (metallurgy), and of progressively giving rise to public functions.(428)

Topsy must be brought in line not because she is a slave who is expected to know and kowtow to her betters, but because her place in the micro-economy of the St. Clare household ill-serves the larger economy of the abolitionist cause if she wastes resources.<sup>1</sup> Here, we may then draw a bright line between the recalcitrance of Tom, Eliza, George, and various other minor African-American characters, with that of Topsy. In all of the aforementioned cases, the confrontational actions of the characters are aimed at economic disruption of the slave-owning society, however minor, but not of sheer economic chaos. Tom, his wife Chloe, and certainly Sam and Andy, all contribute a sort of “non-production” in order to give Eliza a chance to escape, but this non-production is nonetheless a valuable commodity if we assume that they are part of an open conflict with an enemy. What’s more, George in running away not only hurts the immediate cause of his owner, but also causes long-term economic disadvantage in depriving the enemy of a brilliant industrial designer. Therefore, the question of whether any of these characters deserves a beating rests not only a moral proscription against such practices, but also on the fact that they all engage in a valuable form of commodity-production.

Not so Topsy. She may be one of the more interesting characters in the novel, but she is nonetheless economically non-productive for both the plantation and for her alleged protector Ophelia. First of all, Topsy makes very clear even at her young age of 8 or 9 that she cannot be placed within the context of other African-Americans because she has no origins and no history. Ophelia learns this to her exasperation:

“Never had any mother? What do you mean? Where were you born?”

“Never was born!” persisted Topsy. (Stowe 224)

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1 Rachel Naomi Klein has written that, like “many nineteenth-century northerners, Stowe identified freedom with contractual wage relationships” (137).

When Ophelia continues her interrogation, Topsy has an even more interesting response:

“Never was born,” reiterated the creature, more emphatically; “never had no father, nor mother, nor nothin’. I was raised by a speculator with lots of others.” (Stowe 224)

Topsy is thus introduced to the reader as a bright kid. She is undoubtedly correct in her latter statement: Stowe presumably chose the word “speculator” very deliberately, for the reader has already been informed that African-American slaves were often compelled to reproduce so that they would have valuable children to sell on the slave market. And even though the servant Jane immediately defines the term for Ophelia, we should note that Topsy refers to her first owner as “a speculator.” Surely she knows his name, but relegates the individual to generic insignificance. That he is thus deprived the individual from any individual dignity, but also shows the moral bankruptcy of the occupation that he pursues. Topsy is also correct in her statement that she was “never born,” if being born is defined as a birth in circumstances similar to that of Ophelia or any of the St Clares. Simply stated, she is an economic necessity that precedes the fact of her conception, and she is intelligent enough to know this.

The dysfunctionality of Topsy to which Ophelia particularly objects is not her alignment with an ideology inimical to slavery, for we must take Ophelia at her word that she earnestly desires for the institution to be destroyed. In fact, we may better understand Ophelia’s feelings toward Topsy by contrasting Topsy with Tom. As already noted, it may be argued that Tom’s actions do not further the continuance of slavery because he steadfastly refuses to offer assistance to the slavers who demand his help in apprehending runaway slaves. Topsy does not do so either, but the reason that Tom is presumably a properly behaving individual to Ophelia, while Topsy is not, is that Tom has demonstrated his value in the very market economy that David Grant and other critics suggest is the linchpin of Stowe’s world view.

In short, Tom is an able cost-accountant if given the opportunity to provide this professional service. In a passage that is easily overlooked, Tom is said to be much more adept at helping Augustine St. Clare manage the finances of his estate than the happy-go-lucky Adolph (or Dolph, as he is sometimes addressed).<sup>1</sup> St. Clare

<sup>1</sup> I can’t recall any other African-American character in the novel who is addressed both by his formal name and by a familiar diminutive. This is presumably a minor touch on Stowe’s part to show that Augustine St. Clare treats his slaves as well as he can—short of giving them their papers of freedom, at any rate.



explains that “Tom understands cost and come to; and there may be some end to money, by and by, if we don’t let somebody do that” (189). Even the cook Dinah’s free-wheeling work ethic may be overlooked by Ophelia, especially after St. Clare informs her that Dinah prepares “glorious dinners” (197). True, Dinah is chaotic in her approach to domestic work, as many commentators have noted.<sup>1</sup> However, St. Clare also adds that she should be judged for the end-result, just as the high-status “warriors and statesmen” of the world are judged (197). Therefore, one may argue that both Tom and Dinah are acceptable to Ophelia because both exemplify a professional competency that would be just as important a social contribution to a country that had no slavery.

In other words, neither Tom nor Dinah is compliant in furthering slavery, but both are readily adaptable to a market economy that abolishes forced servitude and allows individuals to provide whatever benefit they can to the betterment of society. Tom the accountant, Dinah the chef, Chloe the restaurateur (who is both an excellent cook and is also highly organized and methodical), and certainly George the industrial designer, would all be able to make important contributions in a slave-free future economy. In fact, one may also argue that Stowe imparts versatility to many of the characters: Tom, for example, is not only good with numbers, but is also competent as an interpreter of Biblical passages and as a public speaker; George is adept at inventing useful machinery, but is also a good organizer and leader. Topsy, by contrast, does not initially establish any niche that Ophelia considers valuable. True, Topsy is no more an advocate of a slave system than George or Tom (who, in another easily-overlooked passage on p. 283, tells St. Clare of the importance of freedom). But the difference is that Topsy does not align herself with the market usefulness that Ophelia—and probably Stowe herself—values so highly.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Topsy’s initial actions resemble the deterritorializations that Deleuze/Guattari describe in *A Thousand Plateaus*. An example is her theft of the glove and

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1 For example, Rachel Naomi Klein maintains that Dinah’s kitchen is aimed at demonstrating “that the system of slavery could not provide Dinah, a talented but entirely untrained cook and housekeeper, with the sort of education or discipline necessary to the maintenance of household order” (139).

2 Alicia Rutkowski draws attention to the fact that Topsy is expected by Ophelia to be a mere servant at the very outset of their relationship (86). Thus, another explanation for Topsy’s initial action is that she may simply be acting out a clichéd role befitting the lowly position that she has inherited: to wit, a servant who steals at the first opportunity. The fact that the ribbon and gloves have no value reinforces this view, as does Topsy’s later exclamation that Ophelia would “soon as have a toad touch her” (Stowe 261). If Topsy is caught between an absurd situation of being both an adopted “daughter” of sorts and a household servant, then a dissociative act of symbolism makes good sense.

ribbon soon after she is purchased by St. Clare and turned over to Ophelia (Stowe 226). The theft is an entirely dissociative act that has no rational explanation. For one thing, neither item provides any material benefit whatsoever to the girl: the adult Ophelia's gloves are much too large to fit an eight-year-old girl's hands, and the hair ribbon is of no use to Topsy because she is totally neglectful of her hair that is "braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction" (Stowe 221). Besides, Ophelia has already had her head shaved before the incident takes place. Finally, it is inconceivable that the young girl would be able to sell either item, considering that she has no freedom of movement and because she is still too young for black-market bartering, assuming that the items have any trade value at all. In essence, the pair of gloves and ribbon are both rubbish to Topsy, and her being called to account for them turns the performative value of language into rubbish as well.<sup>1</sup>

Ophelia's performative statement, in essence, is that "you are a liar and a thief, Topsy, and my acknowledging this fact will label you as such." Topsy defends herself with some deft legal hair-splitting in which she "declares" that she did not steal the ribbon. Reminiscent of the modern politicians who in congressional testimony "don't recall" events of the past, Topsy turns performative language on its head by "declaring" a statement that has no necessary connection to actual events. "Seed it till dis yer blessed minute" may be nonstandard English, but it also detracts from the fact that Topsy is technically accurate, although involving herself in agile verbal prestidigitation. She has never "seen" the ribbon in past tense because she literally had never "previously seen" the ribbon before secreting it away in her sleeve.

Topsy may still receive a beating, but she has successfully (albeit passively) resisted Ophelia's attempt to turn her either into a mendacious thief or an acolyte who guiltily promises to become a better person. And even though she does eventually admit to the gloves and ribbon when promised that she will not receive a beating if she confesses, Stowe notably reverts to third-person narration to recount Topsy's penance. In fact, the last words we hear from Topsy on the matter are that "if you's to whip all day, couldn't say no other way" (226). Again, is she referring to the factual evidence, or simply reflecting that it's best to state one's platitudes in rhymed couplets like the ones often heard in the religious hymns often sung by people like Ophelia?

Finally, we discover that Topsy has confessed to the purloining of the gloves

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1 A useful essay on performative language in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is that of Debra K. Rosenthal, who focuses on the conjurer Cassy in the latter part of the novel.

and ribbons, but in doing so actually confesses to crimes that haven't even taken place. When pressed to fess up about any other incidents, Topsy states that she also took Eva's necklace and destroyed the servant Rosa's coral earrings. The only problem with this statement is that Eva soon traipses through the room wearing the necklace, and declares that it has not been out of her possession for even the briefest period. Then Rosa drops by with the coral earrings in her ears.

Analysis of this passage could go on and on, but I think it is sufficient to state that Topsy's intention is neither to become a penitent in the moral care of Ophelia, nor to become her adversary. Topsy simply does not commit herself, and this is precisely what makes her actions exemplary of the deterritorializations of Deleuze and Guattari. Granted, it seems that the girl will try to avoid a beating if she can do so, but she is either unable or else disinclined to align herself in such a matter as to ensure the safety of her own skin. Just as Tom presumably would wish to avoid a beating if he could do so, he nonetheless sacrifices himself to help prevent others from getting the same treatment or worse. In short, Tom's actions may in certain ways be similar to those of Topsy, but he is not an example of deterritorialization.

Topsy, by contrast, does not initially take sides, and there is no evidence that the threat of beatings has any effect on her at any point in the novel. True, she changes her attitude, but her doing so has nothing whatsoever to do with a threat of physical punishment. Tellingly, Ophelia adheres to what Stowe describes as a New England type of education, in which the goals are "to teach them the catechism, sewing, and reading; and to whip them if they told lies" (225). Her more analytic cousin Augustine St. Clare, by contrast, informs his brother after witnessing the brother's son beat a servant boy his own age that corporal punishment only serves to "frighten him into deceiving, if you treat him so" (247). As for Topsy, St. Clare informs Ophelia that whipping is unlikely to be effective, given that he has already "seen this child whipped with a poker and knocked down with the shovel or tongs, whichever came handiest" (239).

For Topsy's part, she feels the pain of the whippings, as we see several times in the text. St. Clare, in fact, explains that he resolved to purchase Topsy from her former owners because, in passing by their eating establishment every day, he was "tired of hearing her screaming, and them beating and swearing at her" (222). Ophelia nonetheless cannot get the notion out of her head that corporal punishment is the proper pathway to moral reform, and after the seemingly benign act of Topsy's using Ophelia's shawl to form an Indian turban (presumably a nondestructive act), elects to whip her. However, she is almost taunted into resorting to the measure of corporal punishment:

‘I don’t know anything what I shall do with you, Topsy’

‘Law, missis, you must whip me; my old missis allers whipped me. I ain’t used to workin’ unless I get whipped.’

‘Why Topsy, I don’t want to whip you. You can do well, if you’ve a mind to; what is the reason you won’t?’

‘Laws, missis, I’s used to whippin’; I ‘spects it’s good for me.’

With this, Ophelia elects to try whipping as a remedy, and presumably on more than one occasion:

Topsy invariably made a terrible commotion, screaming, groaning and imploring, though half an hour afterwards, when roosted on some projection of the balcony, and surrounded by a flock of admiring ‘young uns,’ she would express the utmost contempt for the whole affair. (232)

Topsy may react with pain to the beatings, and she has the physical scars to show evidence of her lifetime of treatment, but she simply cannot be whipped into conformity.

In fact, one may be tempted to argue that Topsy’s change of heart is one more questionable plot device to join the others mentioned earlier. Her conversion has come due to her interaction with Eva, who has insisted that she loves her and that she is willing to sacrifice herself to bring others to Christian devotion. We last hear Topsy’s voice after Eva has died, when Ophelia observes that she has secreted something inside her clothing and once again suspects her of nefarious doings. As it turns out, Topsy is merely hiding a lock of hair that Eva gave her as a remembrance, a small Bible that was also a gift from Eva, and a few strands of black crepe from the funeral. She begs to be allowed to keep the items, and St. Clare consents. Soon, he signs over Topsy to Ophelia, who will take her north and give her freedom.

Stowe has thus bracketed the first and final speaking appearances of Topsy with a seeming theft—the first, as I argued, consisting of a meaningless act of dissociation involving worthless objects, but the second involving the legitimate possession of three things of little or no value to anyone else but Topsy. The lock of hair and the black crepe from the funeral are remembrances of the living girl and the realization that Eva’s relevance must now be invoked through the act of remembrance. As for the Bible, the book itself is of little material value because it is

inexpensive and readily available, particularly in the religious South. But for Topsy, a girl who has learned to read with ease and who is a much quicker study than Eva herself, any book providing an ample source of reading is a gateway to self-discovery.

Like several other African-American characters in the novel, Topsy ends up deliberately choosing to make her career in Africa, in her case as a missionary and educator. We have already seen that she is intellectually capable of such a role, but what may be a bit more puzzling is whether or not the conversion itself is ambivalent. After all, we have observed time and again that Topsy is the center of attention and commands a great deal of respect from the other children as a ring-leader, including Eva. The question we must ask ourselves is the following: is the self-reform of Topsy a sort of miraculous conversion, or is she merely doing as an adult what she was always best equipped to do? She may be in Africa, but she is still a leader of children, and we are assured that she is quite effective:

...we have heard that the same activity and ingenuity which, when a child, made her so multiform and restless in her developments, is now employed, in a safer and wholesome manner, in teaching the children of her own country. (403)

Disregarding the “own country” statement, we must also suspect that Topsy is doing precisely what she was doing at the age of 8 or 9, and in the same spirit in which she maintained that she was the product of a speculator. The only difference perhaps is that the death of Eva (a girl her age) has awakened Topsy to the realization that she must do something with her life.

Who or what might her new “speculator” be, if she has one at all? One thing for certain is that he is not her flogger. Her earlier activity after arriving in the St. Clare household may have been a Deleuzian/Guattarian deterritorialization, but as is the case of most individuals who go against the grain in society, the recalcitrance is unlikely to be maintained indefinitely. Stowe therefore invites the reader to assume a fundamental change of heart on the part of Topsy, but the likelihood is also clearly implied that Topsy may simply have grown up to follow her instincts. Like George the industrial designer, or Tom if he hadn’t been beaten to death, Topsy naturally assumes her most productive role in the economy, although in her case this role is as a paid teacher and missionary funded by her church organization back in New England.

Still, we cannot write off the Topsy episode as simply a happy ending, and we are prevented from viewing Stowe’s message regarding corporal punishment as a

condemnation of a practice that is simply ineffective. The last beating we observe in the St. Clare household, in fact, is ambivalent on the question of whether sacrifice will ever purge society of corporal punishment as a means of enforcing dominance. Marie St. Clare, soon after the death of her daughter, becomes enraged by a seemingly insignificant action of one of her personal servants, Rosa, and sends the unfortunate woman to a local “whipping-establishment” to be given 15 lashes. The terrified Rosa implores Ophelia to intercede on her behalf, but the callous Marie St. Clare emphatically states that beatings are good for slaves and that Rosa is only lucky that she is not beaten more severely.

We never find out what happens with the beating, and we never hear from Rosa again. Nor do we even discover if she is sold with Tom and the other field servants when Marie liquidates the estate. If Rosa is taken with Marie to her father’s plantation as one of the handful of remaining household servants that she requires for her hypochondriacal leisure, then Rosa presumably tiptoes around her mistress in constant fear that another peccadillo will lead to a second beating. But Stowe’s ambivalence on the fate of Rosa could also simply suggest that the slaves of the world should be liberated from the Marie St. Clares, while skirting the question of whether corporal punishment serves any purpose. In other words, Stowe may suggest that Rosa’s beating is an atrocity, but that she, like any other member of a functioning capitalist society, may need an occasional dose of discipline in some form or other to keep the free-enterprise system running smoothly.

In sum, corporal punishment in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is shown to be ineffective and usually cruel, although Stowe never refutes the view that some form of discipline—whether involving physical beating or not—is necessary for a society to run smoothly with all individuals doing their fair share. Stowe unmistakably makes the case that Uncle Tom should not be beaten to death, nor should Dodo receive a thrashing from the arrogant young Henrique St. Clare, but the deterritorialized behavior of Topsy is another matter that is far more ambiguous. As Christopher Diller concludes in his essay on the novel’s sentimentalism, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* employs many “shape-shifting” features that is in part exemplified by Stowe’s having rewritten the preface to address her European readers. In fact, the disparate elements and particularly the multi-part conclusion “instance her pragmatic attempt to reform existing cultural and political commonplaces” (Diller 33). Thus, while we can read the novel in such a way as to see that Topsy’s behavior is ultimately a productive mechanism, Stowe leaves the novel with ambivalence on the question of whether discipline is necessary to make one productive.

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