

ANALYSIS OF THE FILM UNCLE TOM'S CABIN IN THE CONTEXT OF AMERICAN DARK ROMANTICISM

Tom Amca'nın Kulübesi Filminin Amerikan Karanlık Romantizmi Bağlamında Analizi



Öğr. Gör. Enes ÖÇ

Batman Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, Yabancı Diller Bölümü, Yabancı Diller Anabilim Dalı, Batman, Türkiye.
enesoc@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study explores how resistance to slavery is portrayed in terms of both spiritual and physical freedom while analysing the movie *Uncle Tom's Cabin* within the framework of American Dark Romanticism. The film, which is based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's book of the same name, explores how slavery affected people's mental health by highlighting their inner fight against injustice and moral decay. Although American Dark Romanticism focusses on the inner problems of the individual as well as the ideas of sin and redemption, the film retains remnants of this heritage by depicting the struggle of enslaved bodies to attain spiritual liberation. Despite physical captivity, the idea of soul release is depicted in the film, particularly through Tom's character. The emphasis on the evil parts of human nature, the dramatic ambiance, and the moral quandaries all show the impact of Dark Romanticism.. The struggle between conscience and power and the brutality of slave masters are portrayed as reflections of the sin in American society's collective psyche. The film's plot also incorporates themes of sadness, fatalism, and the inherent darkness of people, which are prevalent in the writings of authors like Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this regard, the study assesses *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a story influenced by Dark Romanticism in addition to being an anti-slavery effort. Consequently, the movie emphasises the notion that physical servitude does not necessitate complete surrender; rather, it creates an opportunity for spiritual freedom.

Keywords: American Dark Romanticism, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Captive Body, Resistance.

Öz

Bu çalışma, *Tom Amca'nın Kulübesi* (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*) filmini Amerikan Karanlık Romantizmi bağlamında ele alarak, köleliğe direnişin fiziksel tutsaklık ve ruhsal özgürlük ekseninde nasıl temsil edildiğini incelemektedir. Harriet Beecher Stowe'un aynı adlı romanından uyarlanan film, köleliğin insan ruhu üzerindeki etkisini, baskı ve ahlaki çöküş karşısında bireyin içsel direncini vurgulayarak ele almaktadır. Amerikan Karanlık Romantizmi, bireyin içsel dünyasındaki çatışmaları, günah ve kefarete kavramlarını merkeze alırken, film de tutsak bedenlerin ruhsal özgürlüğe ulaşma mücadelesini görselleştirerek bu geleneğin izlerini taşımaktadır. Filmde, özellikle Tom karakteri üzerinden, fiziksel esarete rağmen ruhun özgürleşmesi fikri işlenmektedir. Karanlık Romantizmin etkisi, filmdeki dramatik atmosfer, ahlaki ikilemler ve insan doğasının kötücül yönlerinin vurgulanmasıyla kendini göstermektedir. Köle sahiplerinin zulmü, güç ve vicdan arasındaki çatışma, Amerikan toplumunun kolektif bilinçaltındaki günahın bir yansıması olarak sunulmaktadır. Nathaniel Hawthorne ve Edgar Allan Poe gibi yazarların eserlerinde görülen melankoli, kadercilik ve insanın içsel karanlığı gibi unsurlar, filmin anlatısında da hissedilmektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, *Tom Amca'nın Kulübesi* filmini sadece kölelik karşıtı bir yapımla değil, aynı zamanda Karanlık Romantizm'in etkileriyle şekillenen bir anlatı olarak değerlendirmektedir. Sonuç olarak, filmde fiziksel esaretin mutlak bir teslimiyeti gerektirmediği, aksine ruhun kurtuluşu için bir alan açtığı fikri öne çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amerikan Karanlık Romantizmi, *Tom Amca'nın Kulübesi*, Tutsak Beden, Direniş.

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Introduction

Slavery, which is as old as humanity itself, has undergone transformations throughout history yet persists as a social construct that deprives individuals or groups of their fundamental right to freedom, treating them as property subject to the control of others. It exists in almost all civilizations, and has managed to survive in different guises until today. In his book *Slavery and Death*, Orlando Patterson explains the slavery as “one of the most extreme forms of relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave” (Patterson, 1982, p. 1). Slavery is also a systematic structure based on the exploitation of people and coming from the past to the present. Societies and civilizations known for their slave practices owe the wealth they have today largely to slave labor and exploitation. America is the most prominent example of this with its agricultural policies based on the slave colony. African-American slavery is a tragic drama of people who were brought from their country in shackles, subjected to all kinds of violence and harassment, and deprived of all kinds of rights. This situation has been processed in many fields and arts, from literature to cinema, and has been the subject of many works and films.

A notable example is the 1987 film adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's influential 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, (from now on UTC) widely recognized for its pivotal role in shaping anti-slavery sentiment in 19th-century America. The goal of numerous film adaptations over the years has been to convey this compelling story to the big screen, with varying degrees of fidelity to the source material. The novel that the film was based on got a great attention when published in 1852, selling 300,000 copies within a year. The book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was also appreciated by President Lincoln during the beginning of the 1861 American civil war. In her book, *The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe*, In the introduction, Cindy Weinstein references one of the most iconic moments in American literary history, citing the widely recounted anecdote in which President Abraham Lincoln, upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe around Thanksgiving Day in 1862, is said to have remarked, “So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war.” (Weinstein, 2004, p.1). In his biography of *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, Joan D. Hedrick also mentions that despite not having any formal political background or affiliation with abolitionist societies, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* positioned her as a leading voice against slavery, making her an influential figure in the political and moral discourse of the time. (Hedrick, 1994, p. 234). Directed by Stan Lathan in 1987, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* caused a sudden excitement among the people at that time and helped to change false presuppositions and prejudices about the slavery in the American society.

The film adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presents a dual narrative structure that goes beyond a singular focus on slavery. One storyline follows the spiritual journey and moral endurance of Uncle Tom, a deeply religious enslaved man who remains unwavering in his Christian faith despite enduring immense brutality. The second narrative centers on the escape of Eliza and her family as they flee the horrors of slavery in pursuit of freedom. The movie also portrays a romanticized image of slave fidelity, self-sacrifice, and enduring in the sympathetic but eventually desperate image of Uncle Tom. Actually the movie has two different plots. One follows the predicament of the slave Eliza (Phylicia Rashad) as she runs away to Canada with her young son, Jim, expecting to be reunified with her fugitive husband, George (Samuel Jackson). The other plot, surely, the movie's chief star Tom (Avery Brooks), a particularly precious slave because he is good at numbers and managing accounts besides being a pious man. Tom rejects to run away with Eliza because he thinks other slaves may be sold or separate each other. Simona Tamuli asserts that:

“The story in the novel focuses on two plot. The first is Eliza and George's struggle to escape to Canada and the other is the journey of Tom. However, the movie mainly focuses on Tom instead of George and Eliza. Not only George's introduction is not properly presented for the viewers, their journey is summarized as briefly as possible and therefore the viewer cannot feel much attachment with these two characters” (Tamuli, 2020, p. 65-72).

Tom is also a merciful and devout man whose dignity and strong faith gives him power to resist harsh difficulties while helping other slaves gain their independence from slavery in before the American Civil War. Tom manages to keep his good manners and devoutness until his death because he believes that

they cannot captive his soul but just his body. The film also presents Tom's upright attitude towards the troubles and sufferings he has experienced, his patience and never thinking about escaping and thinking about other slaves besides himself as an example of honorable and unique sacrifice, living on the truths he believes in. In this paper I will examine the movie UTC on the basis of the slavery and how the characters withstand or resist against this, because slavery is the predominant issue in the movie and everything is shaped around this concept. The 1987 film adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—though primarily associated with sentimentalism and abolitionist literature—also engages with key themes of American Dark Romanticism, a 19th-century literary movement that explored human depravity, moral ambiguity, and the grotesque. Stowe examined the conflicts within society especially concerning slavery. The story explores freedom in two ways: physical escape from slavery and spiritual independence. It sets up a clear contrast between enslaved characters (shown as morally good) and slave owners (shown as cruel), but this simple division needs deeper analysis. While Tom's patient suffering and the slaves' hardships highlight the evils of slavery, the story sends mixed messages. It praises quiet endurance as noble while also showing slaves fighting back. Stowe's portrayal of Black characters raises questions about racial stereotypes, and the focus on individual villains ignores slavery's broader economic roots. A closer reading shows how the novel both supports and challenges common anti-slavery arguments through its conflicting views on resistance and oppression.

1. American (Dark) Romanticism and Uncle Tom's Cabin

The early writers of American literature were originally British colonists, and their works reflected a transition into an Anglo-American literary style. During the initial emergence of the "American Dream". Americans struggled to define a distinct cultural and national identity. The British Romantic Movement significantly shaped the development of American Romanticism, which originated in the late 18th century, evolved through the early 19th century, and reached its peak between 1800 and 1850. J.A. Cuddon explains Romanticism in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* as follows:

"A movement in art and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in revolt against the Neoclassicism of the previous centuries... Any list of particular characteristics of the literature of romanticism includes subjectivity and an emphasis on individualism; spontaneity; freedom from rules; solitary life rather than life in society; the beliefs that imagination is superior to reason devotion to beauty; love of and worship of nature; and fascination with the past, especially the myths and mysticism of the Middle Ages" (Cuddon, 1991, p. 455).

The European Romantics had strong impact on the American Romantic movement. The American Romantic period began in the nineteenth century. Bruce Harvey (2023) states in his essay on American Romanticism as: "American Romantics tend to venerate Nature as a sanctum of non-artificiality, where the Self can fulfill its potential (the earlier Puritans tended to see nature as the fallen "wilderness," full of "savage" Indians). American Romantics also champion spiritual intuition or self-reliant individualism (which some intellectual historians argue is a secularized outgrowth of Reformation Protestant radicalism)" (Harvey, 2023). Although American Romantic writers often championed democratic ideals and celebrated individual freedom, these notions were deeply intertwined with the exclusions and inequalities of the era. While the rhetoric of liberty and equality featured prominently in the national imagination, the lived reality of 19th-century America was marked by persistent social stratification and systemic discrimination. Economic opportunity and personal expression were largely privileges afforded to white men, while Indigenous peoples and African Americans were systematically marginalized. Native Americans were frequently depicted through stereotypical or mythologized lenses, effectively erasing their political agency and cultural complexity, whereas African Americans—many of whom remained enslaved during the height of American Romanticism—were largely excluded from the literary and civic discourse altogether. Furthermore, class distinctions and religious biases continued to shape social mobility, reinforcing a democratic vision that was more symbolic than inclusive. In this context, the so-called 'American democracy' espoused by Romantic writers was not a universal ideal, but one limited by race, class, and ethnicity. Another essential component of the American Romantic Movement was transcendentalism. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham explain Transcendentalism in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* as follows: "A philosophical and literary movement which was centered

in Concord and Boston... was neither a systematic not a sharply definable philosophy, but rather an intellectual mode and emotional mood that was expressed in diverse, and in some cases rather eccentric, voices” (Venkat, 2023, p. 1). The Transcendentalists firmly attached the faith that knowledge was based on sensibility and perception. They relied mostly on spiritual things than on religious principles. During the same period, a number of authors—such as Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne—offered a more skeptical and psychologically complex perspective on human nature, diverging significantly from the optimistic worldview espoused by the Transcendentalists. This literary tension gave rise to the movement known as Dark Romanticism, which emphasized themes of sin, guilt, inner torment, and the darker aspects of the human experience. Karthik Venkat, in an article on Dark Romanticism, clarified this concept and made the following comparison with Transcendentalism as follows:

“Dark Romanticism is primarily a 19th century literary movement. It is popularly known as a Sub-genre of the larger Romantic Movement. This is because it retains and expounds several of the characteristics associated with the same. ... In the late 18th century and early 19th century in America, the transcendental movement began to gain representation. The basic philosophy of the movement was a belief in man's spiritual essence and his soul's ability to transcend the physical. Such a picture of the world did not digest very well with everyone. Consequently, we had (as a reaction to the transcendentalist) a collection of works concentrating upon themes of horror, tragedy, the macabre and the supernatural. These works, illuminating the ideas of obscurity of the human mind, its affinity towards the unknown and the dark etc. led to the birth of the dark romanticist” (Abrahams and Harpham, 2012, p. 412-413).

(Dark) Romantic authors focused a lot on the psychological aspects of people and the complexities of human behavior. Sometimes they depicted nature in a dark and frightful manner. Gothic elements of the supernatural, such as the pursuit of truth and the study of the human soul, were also prevalent in Dark Romanticist literature. Edgar Allan Poe (*The Raven*), Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The Scarlet Letter*), and Herman Melville (*Moby-Dick*) are among the central figures of American Dark Romanticism, a movement characterized by its exploration of sin, guilt, spiritual disintegration, and the darker facets of human nature. While not formally part of this tradition, authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*) and Toni Morrison (*Beloved*) engage with similar themes—such as moral conflict, historical trauma, and dark imagery—which align their works thematically with Dark Romantic concerns. These authors' contributions have left a lasting impact on American literature, offering deep insights into the psychological, social, and moral complexities of their respective eras.

The portrayal of evil as an unavoidable force and power as inevitably corrupting are characteristics of Dark Romanticism. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (both the novel and its film adaptations), Simon Legree embodies several Gothic features, making him a quintessential villain in the tradition of Gothic literature. Simon Legree is portrayed as a sadistic, tyrannical figure, aligning with the Gothic trope of the evil patriarch or dark oppressor. According to scholar Alison Milbank, Gothic villains often represent corrupted authority figures who exert excessive control over others, often through violence (Milbank, *Gothic Revolutions*, 2004). Gothic literature frequently explores psychological torment and moral degradation, and Legree exemplifies this. As noted by David S. Reynolds in *Mightier than the Sword: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Battle for America* (2011), Legree is not just a cruel slaveholder but a man haunted by his own guilt and repressed fears (particularly his mother's religious influence). This internal conflict mirrors the Gothic trope of the villain tormented by past sins, akin to figures like Macbeth or Dr. Faustus. Legree's plantation is depicted as a Gothic ruin, a place of suffering and death. In film adaptations, it is often shown with decaying buildings, oppressive shadows, and eerie silences, much like a haunted castle in traditional Gothic fiction. This aligns with Teresa A. Goddu's argument in *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (1997) that Southern plantations in anti-slavery literature were framed as spaces of horror, where violence and supernatural dread coalesce. Some adaptations (such as the 1927 silent film) emphasize Legree's supernatural fears, including hallucinations of ghosts or demonic visions. This aligns with Gothic conventions where villains are punished by spectral forces, reinforcing moral retribution. As Glennis Byron notes in *Global gothic* (2013), the Gothic often uses the supernatural to expose the villain's psychological unravelling. All in all, Simon Legree's character incorporates Gothic villainy, psychological horror, decaying settings, and supernatural elements,

making him a key figure in the American Gothic tradition. His portrayal serves not only as a critique of slavery but also as a Gothic symbol of absolute moral corruption.

The movie also reflects themes of death, separation, equality, individualism, slavery, self-sacrifice and devoutness which are generally accepted human values and in this respect, it contains (Dark) Romantic elements. In addition to depicting the perspective of slavery spiritually, religiously and descriptively with the sense of empathy it awakens in the audience, the movie reflects the idea of liberation of the soul, which is not the body through the hero of the movie Tom. In the movie, although the feelings of innocence, goodness and empathy are processed with the little Eva and Topsy characters, the character of Tom outweighs the fact that he takes a stance against slavery and does what is good and right under all circumstances. With its scenes about the escape from the dark journey of the South to the free North and the violence against blacks, the film especially claims the legal freedoms of Black Americans and was seen as the key that opened the doors in them. As a matter of fact, Stowe, one of the first abolitionist writers, has revealed all the details of the cruelty of American slavery with many characters and we can clearly see this situation in the adaptation of the movie as well. With this work, she depicted the anti-slavery cause and conveyed her anti-slavery thoughts to the society of the period. This adaptation, which brings awareness to society, has contributed to bringing people to face the brutality of the practice of slavery. The fact that religious (Christian) teachings are frequently included in the book in which the film is adapted can be clearly seen as the effect of the author's coming from a religious family. American literary scholar Jane Tompkins emphasizes the moral power of sentimental literature like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, stating that:

“Stowe’s chief aim in the movie and book is to demonstrate Blacks as a community. Her fundamental argument is that blacks go through suffering the same way as whites, and hence it is incorrect to maltreat them. All through the book, Stowe moves toward the thought of slavery from a firm Christian viewpoint. It is not astonishing bearing in mind that she had a very religious family, with her father being a well-known priest” (Tompkins, 1985, p. 42).

While *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is traditionally studied within the contexts of abolitionist literature and sentimentalism, the film adaptation also exhibits key themes aligned with Dark Romanticism, particularly through its treatment of sin, suffering, death, and moral collapse. Much like Hawthorne's depiction of inherited and societal sin, the institution of slavery is portrayed not as a singular moral failure but as a pervasive, systemic evil that implicates both individuals and the culture that sustains it. Characters such as Simon Legree embody the moral rot and spiritual decay central to Dark Romantic villains. The deaths of Eva and Uncle Tom are stylized in the film in ways reminiscent of Poe's aesthetics of death—peaceful, transcendent, yet profoundly tragic. Their deaths are not just narrative endpoints but moral commentaries: Eva represents innocence destroyed by a corrupt world, while Tom dies a martyr, echoing the idea of redemptive suffering amid overwhelming evil. Characters like Augustine St. Clare, though sympathetic to the anti-slavery cause, are paralyzed by moral indecision. This mirrors the internal conflict of Hawthorne's characters, who are often torn between public virtue and private guilt. St. Clare's failure to act decisively leads to tragic consequences, emphasizing the cost of passive complicity. The film's visual style—often marked by shadowy interiors, harsh contrasts, and emotionally charged spaces—recalls the Gothic atmosphere of Dark Romantic literature. The plantation, as a setting, becomes a symbolic space of spiritual desolation, echoing the decaying houses and bleak landscapes in Poe and Melville's fiction. For instance, the 1987 television film adaption repeats Gothic horror clichés by using gloomy lighting, a spooky silence before aggression, and a pervasive feeling of fatality to depict Tom's execution-style beating at Legree's hands. But his death becomes a spiritual triumph because of his unshakeable faith and serene acceptance of his fate. This embodies the Dark Romantic idea that, like Melville's tragic protagonists who attain a type of immortality, true freedom can only be found via suffering. Given the period in which the book was written, slavery was widespread in America at the time. The book's strong stance against slavery had a significant impact on the public. However, it also faced harsh criticism from certain groups. Stathan's film (UTC-1987) is equally important in terms of changing the perspective against slavery and showing the effect of cinema in influencing large masses of people. The fact that the actors chosen for the film also showed strong acting and deserved their roles has also made the film a classic today.

2. The Soul's Freedom: Slavery and Faith in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Freedom is a historically contingent concept that has been interpreted and applied differently across civilizations, shaped by cultural, legal, economic, and philosophical contexts. The idea of freedom or being free has been in the form of an ongoing struggle of people to establish superiority over each other in terms of race, color or status since the existence of human beings. From Roman notions of *civitas* to the feudal constraints of medieval serfdom, and the racialized structures of modernity, the meaning and accessibility of freedom have shifted dramatically—often tied to systems of inclusion and exclusion. In Roman civilization, freedom (*libertas*) was intricately connected to *civitas* which is the status of Roman citizenship. To be free in Rome was not merely to be enslaved but to possess the legal rights and privileges granted by the state, including the ability to vote, own property, marry legally, and seek protection under Roman law. During the medieval period, particularly in feudal Europe, freedom took on a social and economic dimension tied to one's relationship to land and lordship. Most peasants were serfs, bound to the land they worked and to the authority of a feudal lord. The modern era, particularly from the 17th to the 20th century, witnessed the rise of racialized systems of domination, most notably through colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and segregationist ideologies. Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality (e.g., in the American and French revolutions) were paradoxically accompanied by the expansion of racial slavery and imperial conquest. The desire of some people to see themselves as superior in terms of race, color or nation and to enslave, dominate or rule other people or nations has continued in a controversial and problematic way until today. As a matter of fact, Aristotle, an important figure from Ancient Greece, in his *Politics* argues that there should be a distinction between the people to govern and the people to be governed:

“It is also from natural causes that some beings command and others obey, that each may obtain their mutual safety; for a being who is endowed with a mind capable of reflection and forethought is by nature the superior and governor, whereas he whose excellence is merely corporeal is fittest to be a slave; whence it follows that the different state of master and slave is equally advantageous to both” (Aristotle, 1999, p. 8).

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The distinction between the master upper class and the slave lower class has been imposed on society since ancient times and this situation has continued up to the present day, and the lower class has adopted and continued to exist. This was even more evident in the case of slaves brought from Africa in the Americas of the 1800s, who were deprived of all rights and subjected to all kinds of inhumane treatment. Stanley M. Elkins focuses on this matter in his book *Slavery* as:

“A slave is in absolute bondage; he has no civil right, and can hold no property, except at the will and pleasure of his master.” He could neither give nor receive gifts; he could make no will, nor could he, by will, inherit anything. He could not hire himself out or make contracts for any purpose—even including, as we have seen, that of matrimony—and thus neither his word nor his bond had any standing in law. He could buy or sell nothing at all, except as his master's agent, could keep no cattle, horses, hogs, or sheep and, in Mississippi at least, could raise no cotton” (Elkins, 1976, p. 59).

The depiction of slavery in the film *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is deeply embedded in a framework of Christian moral and spiritual values, where religious belief functions not only as a source of personal identity and resistance but also as a lens through which ethical dilemmas are interpreted. The moral contrast between characters such as Tom, Eva, St. Clare, and Legree is constructed largely through their relationship to Christian values such as mercy, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and divine justice. At the heart of the narrative is Uncle Tom, a Christ-like figure whose faith in God and adherence to Christian ethics serve as his primary mode of resistance against the dehumanizing structure of slavery. Tom's refusal to whip another enslaved person, even under extreme duress, reflects a profound moral autonomy grounded in Christian nonviolence and the principle of loving one's neighbour. The transformation of Tom's worldview is further catalysed by his relationship with Eva, the child who embodies a kind of innocent, saintly piety. Her death, portrayed almost angelically, reflects the Romantic and Christian notion of

redemptive suffering. Her wish to emancipate the slaves before her death becomes a symbolic act of moral awakening, influencing Tom and briefly giving him hope for liberation.

Legree's desire to "break" Tom's faith is also philosophically significant. It reveals an existential conflict between spiritual freedom and physical bondage. While Tom is enslaved in body, his refusal to relinquish belief in divine justice suggests a higher, metaphysical liberty. Thus, religious conviction emerges not as escapism but as a mode of inner liberation, in contrast to the materialistic and violent worldview represented by Legree. We can witness this at the conversation between Tom and Mr. Legree in the movie as follows:

“Uncle Tom: That strong woman is sick and there's no way that I am gonna be her. You mean to kill me for it and I can't stop you but I am not gonna raise my hand against that woman. It is a sin.

Mr. Legree: Sin. You hear that he called us sinners. Well we haven't got ourselves a powerful holy critter here you. Bible boy you read the Bible the Bible says obey the master, well he knows your master did not pay good money for you boy. (He was beaten by Legree again) well now you gonna answer me boy.

Uncle Tom: Nobody can buy my soul!” (Sherick and Lathan, 1987)”.

This dialogue powerfully encapsulates the ethical and spiritual core of Uncle Tom's character and offers a striking example of moral resistance grounded in religious conviction. When Tom refuses to whip a sick enslaved woman despite Legree's brutal threats, he positions himself not as a passive figure of submission, but as a conscientious objector, whose moral compass is rooted in Christian ethics. His declaration “*It is a sin*” underscores the central theme of moral autonomy in the face of systemic evil. Here, sin is not defined by legal or social codes but by an inner, spiritual law grounded in the sanctity of human life. The most profound moment occurs when Tom asserts, “*Nobody can buy my soul!*” This statement represents the climax of his ethical defiance and reinforces the post-Enlightenment idea of the inalienable soul, echoing both Christian theology and Kantian moral philosophy. Despite being physically enslaved, Tom asserts spiritual sovereignty, rejecting the idea that his moral agency can be owned, commodified, or coerced. In doing so, he exemplifies the paradox of inner freedom amidst external bondage, a key theme not only in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* but also in the broader tradition of American moral literature. The dialogue also exposes the perverse misinterpretation of scripture by Legree, who cynically cites the Bible to justify obedience and control. This moment critiques the historical use of religion as a tool of oppression and contrasts it with Tom's authentic, sacrificial Christianity which is a religion of compassion, conscience, and resistance.

In Louisiana, Uncle Tom's faith is profoundly tested by the hardships he endures. However, the two sources that sustain him spiritually and emotionally are Christ and Eva. Despite the abuse he suffers, Tom never attempts to escape. Instead, he urges Cassy to run, revealing his commitment to others' liberation even as he accepts his own suffering. Religion plays a dual role in the world of slavery: it is both a tool of spiritual endurance and a mechanism of control. Slaves are often taught that being obedient to their masters is a sign of goodness and moral virtue. In this way, slaveholding society manipulates Christian teachings to justify subjugation, presenting the status of the slave as part of a divine order. When Tom defies Simon Legree's order, he is brutally beaten. His refusal to participate in violence results in a fatal punishment—he is whipped until his body is broken. Such acts of cruelty are portrayed as common under slavery, where the death of a slave holds economic consequences rather than moral weight. The enslaved, viewed as property, are replaced as one would replace a broken object.

The film presents two contrasting responses to slavery: Uncle Tom, who endures suffering through religious conviction, and George Harris, who refuses submission and escapes to seek physical freedom. For Tom, true liberation is found in spiritual faith and devotion to God. He believes that Christian love offers strength, courage, and the promise of eternal peace. Dying as a faithful Christian is depicted as a form of victory—especially for those denied earthly justice. Tragically, by the time George Shelby, the son of Tom's former master, arrives to purchase and free him, it is already too late. Tom's death serves as both a spiritual triumph and a moral indictment of the system that allowed it.

2.1. The Triumph of the Soul in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In cinematic adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the tension between bodily captivity and spiritual freedom is portrayed as a central theme, reinforcing the moral and theological underpinnings of the narrative. Uncle Tom's unwavering faith in God serves as the foundation of his resistance, allowing him to maintain inner peace and moral integrity despite the physical brutality he endures. In a visually poignant moment during a beating, Tom clutches his Bible to his chest, symbolizing that while his body may be constrained, his soul remains beyond the reach of his oppressors. As one intertitle affirms: "You may own my body, but my soul belongs to God" (Sherick and Lathan, 1987). This scene visually and philosophically underscores the dichotomy between external domination and internal liberation—a key motif in both Christian doctrine and abolitionist thought. This theme culminates in Tom's death, which is often portrayed in film adaptations as the emotional and spiritual climax of the story. His final words, "I see the promised land. I am going home to my Lord" (Sherick and Lathan, 1987), signal a transcendence that elevates death into a form of ultimate liberation. The cinematographic use of soft lighting and a glowing aura around Tom in these scenes visually conveys his passage into a sacred realm beyond suffering. His peaceful expression, juxtaposed with Legree's rage, reinforces the idea that although Tom's body has been destroyed, his soul remains untouched and victorious. In this light, Tom's martyrdom becomes a profound assertion of spiritual agency in the face of dehumanizing violence.

Conclusion

Slavery represents one of the greatest violations of human freedom. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's assertion that "man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains" aptly encapsulates the condition of the enslaved in American history. The legacy of slavery and systemic racism which deeply rooted in the 19th century continues to cast a long shadow. Although the legal abolition of slavery marked a turning point, its social and psychological consequences, particularly through institutionalized racism, persisted well into the modern era. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written as an abolitionist response to slavery, captures the brutal realities of racial oppression. Its film adaptations further amplify the novel's anti-slavery message by vividly portraying the physical and psychological torment endured by enslaved individuals. Scenes of whipping, starvation, and sexual violence reflect the mechanisms of control that forced slaves into obedience through fear and domination. One of the most powerful moments in the film occurs when Uncle Tom sacrifices his life rather than betray another enslaved person. This act redefines freedom not as the liberation of the body, but as the unwavering integrity of the soul which is a spiritual triumph over physical bondage.

While often interpreted through the lens of sentimentalism and political activism, both the novel and its film adaptations also embody key elements of American Dark Romanticism. The narrative explores the darker dimensions of human nature: the sadistic cruelty of Simon Legree, the moral paralysis of St. Clare, and the psychological anguish of Tom all reflect a world mired in ethical contradictions. Through Gothic imagery, the aesthetic of suffering, and the motif of death as redemption, the film adaptation intensifies the emotional and philosophical depth of Stowe's original work. Ultimately, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—in both literary and cinematic form—serves as a powerful abolitionist statement while simultaneously engaging with the themes of Dark Romanticism. By exposing the corrupting influence of power, the fragility of moral virtue, and the spiritual resilience of the oppressed, the story presents a haunting critique of a society complicit in its own moral failures.

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