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Harriet Beecher Stowe. *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or Life among the Lowly.* Edited by David S. Reynolds. Ilustrated by Hammatt Billings. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Illustrations. 608 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-984143-1.

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The Power of the Written Word and the Visual: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Hammatt Billings, and the Novel That Changed America

Abraham Lincoln famously greeted Harriet Beecher Stowe at the White House in 1862, "so you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war." Despite the historically contested accurateness of Lincoln's quote, this phrase epitomizes the powerful importance that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* generated in provoking northern and international agitation against racial slavery, which undoubtedly contributed to the outbreak of the American Civil War. Since its initial publication in 1852, Stowe's novel has continued to galvanize popular attention, even hostility, and scholarly scrutiny for more than 150 years. Yet this most recent edition of Stowe's magisterial work, the "Splendid [Illustrated] Edition," has only been published once in the entirety of this book's existence and only then for a very brief duration during the Christmas holidays of 1852. In contrast to other reproductions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the "Splendid Edition" contains more than one hundred illustrations by the artist Hammatt Billings, many of which did not appear in Stowe's original novel or subsequent publishing formats. As scholar David S. Reynolds acclaims in his preface to the "Splendid Edition," Billings's designs further accentuate Stowe's overarching emphasis on the evils of American slavery and her contention "that black people have the same feelings as whites–a revolutionary message in an era when blacks were widely regarded as brutes" (p. ix). For Reynolds, Billings "showed an ability to assume the perspective of ethnic others," by illustrating "the cruel realities of slavery, but never in exaggerated fashion" while deliberately avoiding the reproduction of "racist caricature" (p. xxiv). In short, the "Splendid Edition allows … readers once again to enjoy Stowe's novel in its original freshness, free of stereotypes, distortion, or political bias" (p. xxx).

As Reynolds continually reminds readers in his preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "emotion resonates with special power as we read the Splendid Edition" (p. ix). From beginning to end, Stowe unceasingly evoked the harsh brutalities of racial slavery in the American South, which Billings further heightened through his pictorial representations. For example, Stowe conjured the character of Haley, a slave trader from Natchez, as excessively violent, unpolished, and racist. In accordance with Stowe's characterization, Billings depicted Haley in illustrations as having a whip in hand, either poised to strike an African American slave or to exercise some form of violence, and with contempt written on his face when facing a black man or woman. Further, the absolute violence of racial slavery in ripping apart African American families continually materializes in both the book's writing and illustrations. Similar to the very real horrors and trials endured by slave mothers (enshrined in the many autobiographies of African American women from the nineteenth century, such as Harriet Jacobs's), Stowe's and Billings's replications depict this repulsive violence exhibited against slave women in fiction to awaken antebellum northern sensibilities to this awful reality. From Eliza, the enslaved black mother who runs away with her child from the Selby plantation upon learning of her son's sale to Haley (even leaving behind her husband who remained in bondage), to the separation of Susan from her daughter Emmeline at the slave auc-

tion, Stowe and Billings evoked a haunting imagery in print and visual culture derisive of racial slavery that robbed African Americans of family and community in antebellum America. Even more emblematic of Stowe's underlying message of the violence perpetrated against slave families by the southern institution is the character of Cassy, who embodies the forlorn and fatalistic slave mother who witnessed the complete dissolution of all her familial ties as a consequence of slavery, a demeanor captured perfectly by Billings in his artistic renderings of Cassy as either pitiful and dejected or full of hate and animosity toward her owner, Simon Legree. Yet in the end, Stowe reunited Cassy with her children and their extended families in Canada, thereby redeeming the debased slave mother with her long-lost family, inculcating hope among antebellum northerners, and showing what could be achieved and overcome if the southern institution could be abolished.

This complementary and insightful pairing of the written word and pictorial design is consistently displayed throughout the "Splendid Edition" of Stowe's novel. The most striking example of this pairing is Billings's artistic renderings of characters descended of both African American and white parentage (referred to by Stowe as "mulattoes" or "quadroons"), who bear light skin (nearly indistinguishable from the white characters of the book); pose similarly to their white counterparts; and often dress in the exact clothing as white men and women. In this instance, Billings accentuated Stowe's central message to antebellum society that African Americans and white Americans shared a common humanity and Christian brotherhood (or sisterhood) regardless of racial distinctions, a universal fact violated by the institution of slavery that degraded African Americans. Together, Stowe's written word and Billings's visual artistry "appeal[ed] to Christian sympathy and basic humanity to suggest that whites and blacks [could] live together in harmony" (p. ix).

Yet what Stowe and Billings created in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a southern society utterly dependent and predicated on the social, economic, and political system of slavery legitimated by law and Christianity. Despite being a work of fiction, this picture of the American South constituted a very real and authentic evocation of the antebellum slave society that increasingly became the antithesis of the antebellum North by the mid-nineteenth century. Foremost in this southern slave society was the omnipresence of violence and unfree, enslaved labor. Southern plantations could not have existed without the labor of slaves, which in turn necessitated continuous use of violence to coerce that labor and to preclude the type of everyday slave resistance that proliferates throughout Stowe's novel. In addition, southerners who lacked ownership of slaves similarly participated willingly in the system of racial slavery, evidenced by the slave catcher Tom Loker; his accomplice Marks; and the posse rounded up at a local tavern that tracked down and engaged in a shootout with Eliza's husband, George Harris, and other runaway slaves. Whether violence of a more overt nature, such as the punishments administered to slaves by Legree, or Stowe' more implicit violence of rape, abduction, familial disintegration, denial of education and religion to slaves, racist language, or replication of slavery's violence by African Americans upon their own communities (embodied by Legree's slaves Sambo and Quimbo), the antebellum southern slave society thrived on violence against African Americans. Additionally, the antebellum South's commitment to slavery entailed commodification of human beings, or turning African American slaves into cash values and material tangibles that repudiated the common humanity shared by blacks and whites, thereby legitimating the dehumanization of people. Whether evidenced in the sale of Cassy by her former master to settle his "gambling debts" (thereby employing Cassy as a cash substitute) or the purchase of Uncle Tom by Haley from Selby who sold Tom because he could "bring the highest sum of any" of his slaves, white southerners' considerations of African Americans in antebellum America and in Stowe's novel as commodities rather than human beings testifies to the inhumanity of the southern slave society (p. 53).

However, this very context of a southern antebellum society committed to racial slavery that entailed both violence and commodification of human beings needs to be more readily available to the common reader of this "Splendid Edition." While Reynolds's preface provides enlightening considerations of the importance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to antebellum America and Stowe's revolutionary efforts to subvert the racial underpinning of southern slavery, it is far from being historically comprehensive as it is more concerned with literary mechanics, tropes, and importance of the novel (i.e., the deployment of race in antebellum literature, Billings's use of illustrations to complement Stowe's emotional power of print, manifestations of gender in the book, accusations of racism against Stowe and Billings in characterizing African Americans, etc.). Instead, this reproduction might have benefited greatly from the inclusion of an essay that reflects current historical scholarship concerning antebellum America and southern slavery, such as

the work produced by Walter Johnson or Edward Baptist. Together, Reynolds's literary analysis and the proposed historical context to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would proffer even greater appreciation for and understanding of Stowe's radical work. It would provide a more enriching and insightful understanding of the historical authenticity that Stowe and Billings created in 1852 and would show why this book so enflamed southerners' hostilities to the popular reception of this novel in both the United States and international communities.

Notwithstanding this recommendation, the sheer emotional power of Stowe's written word augmented by the visceral artistry of Billings's illustrations lends credence to a reviewer's claims in William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, that the "Splendid Edition" comprised "one of the most beautiful and attractive volumes [both visually and subjectively] published in the United States" and that this book "has more smiles in it and more tears than any other … [where] the *eye* affects the heart; and here the eye becomes familiar with all the leading personages of the story" (p. viii). In conclusion, the "Splendid Edition" of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should be considered the definitive reproduction of Stowe's monumental novel of antebellum America and slavery.

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