

LITERATURE: AN INTELLECTUAL DOCUMENT

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***Abstract:** Uncle Tom's Cabin is a manifestation of thoughts and feelings or a continuous effort in the writer's thinking activities in a society in her era. She offered an example of an abstraction or essence from a dream or a situation in the future, a goal or a target that she struggles for through the writer's contemplation. She offered other alternatives of other thoughts on freedom. In her book, she argued and reflected her perception about life. Therefore, when Harriet wrote about slavery, it was the result of her reflection on humanity. Uncle Tom's Cabin which was widely influential shows that through their works, directly or indirectly, writers, in general, have given contributions to the development of their nation. This contribution is that they place literature as an intellectual document of the nation. Essentially, a literature can also be regarded as an intellectual model.*

***Key words:** literature, contemplation, intellectual document*

BACKGROUND

Uncle Tom's Cabin, which was written by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) in an evolutionary cumulative way, had affected its readers' mental attitude. They became aware of noticing their

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surrounding environment and, consequently, a desire to liberate their nation from a slavery system emerged. As a result, the Civil War erupted (1861-1865). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was accused of triggering American Civil War. The novel was written by an American woman whose heart was touched and moved when she witnessed slavery during her visit to Maysville, Kentucky in 1833. This place then became her writing's model and background. The first publications of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were sold as many as 3.000 copies. Within one week, the sales number had reached 10.000 copies. In a year, there were 300.000 copies sold in America alone (Hart 1956: 783). Eight printing companies worked hard day and night to meet the demands. Three paper factories tried hard to supply paper for the printing companies and yet the printing companies were still overwhelmed by many new orders. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had made Harriet Beecher Stowe famous worldwide. Abraham Lincoln, the American president at the time, made this comment when he met her: "So this is the little lady who made this big war." Charles Sumner casually said, "if *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had not been written, Abraham Lincoln could not have been elected President of the United States" (cited in McMichael 1980:178).

Uncle Tom's Cabin received pro and contra reactions from several classes. A famous writer at the time said, "Uncle Tom's Cabin has done more harm to the world than any other book ever written." Other critics said that the book was "one of the greatest triumphs recorded in literary history, to say nothing of its moral effect". Other stated that the book was "a triumph of reality," "immortal," while the writer was regarded as "unquestionably a woman of genius" (McMichael 1980: 179). In the contrary, Southern people who owned slaves condemned the book. Those who did not own slaves were also furious because the book had caused the war that took their brothers, fathers, kids, and husbands' lives. Investors from North criticized it because their capital in South shattered. Criticisms kept flowing in The New York Journal of Commerce. Nevertheless, in general, the

book received positive responses from Northern people. George McMichael cites a literary critic from South, Stark Young, who said, "She (Harriet Beecher Stowe) has seen plenty of blacks but cannot make them talk. Her ear is impossible; she has no sense of their rhythm or vividness." McMichael continues by quoting Van Wyck Brooks, who regarded the book as "obvious blemishes of structure and sentimentalism (but) it has a character as a great human document." He also notes Katharina Anthony, a modern commentator, who analyzed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as follows: Mrs. Stowe apparently had a fondness for the South. While she hated it for being on the side of slavery, she portrayed its atmosphere with fire and sympathy. She was the first American writer to take the Negro seriously and to conceive a novel with a black man as the hero. Although it was written with a moral purpose, the author forgot the purpose sometimes in the joy of telling her tale. But from a historical point of view, of course, the great significance of the novel is as a sociological document rather than as a literary classic or work of art. Certainly, it is more than merely a story, as one caustic pen described it, "spattered with murder, lust, illicit love, suicide, sadistic torture, profanity, drunkenness, and barroom brawls." (McMichael 1980: 179).

The above account shows that a literature is considered a social document or an artifact because the literature captures socio cultural conditions that occur in a particular era and focuses on events and affairs that had happened at that time as stated by Bakdi Soemanto (1999:5) that "a literature is an artifact which serves for the common ground based on which any artifacts are its equals". Furthermore, he says that as an artifact, a literature should be treated equally as other artifacts, which give contributions of world's view in a particular era. This statement underlines Sartono's view (1990), a historian who asserts that there are three facts for research.

First, he explains about what is meant by the fact itself. Sartono (1990:2) says that in observing a phenomenon, an event acts as an object of a study. An event is a complex of sub events, such as an accident. The accident only happens once and will not recur. Things left from it are marks or impressions, news, stories and statements about the accident. The statements are called facts. Every single thing communicated about an event is called a fact, not the event itself. There are three kinds of facts, namely artifact, socifact, and mentifact. An artifact is a man-made object (a building, a cloth, etc.); a socifact refers to a social relation event, an interaction; and a mentifact refers to a thought, a reflection, an essay, etc. Furthermore, Sartono says that a fact is a construct. Therefore, a fact cannot be deemed objective; it tends to be subjective as there are elements of a subject therein, among other things are sympathy-antipathy prejudices of races, ethnics, religions, mental ages, social classes, etc. Sartono's statement confirms that a literature is a part of mentifact because it refers to a reflection of thought, an essay about things, situations, conditions or an event that is interpreted or understood (by the author/reader).

As mentioned above, the object of a study in a research refers to phenomena or events and their complex problems. Those phenomena or events are captured, reflected, analyzed, interpreted, and poured in the form of writing by an author as reflected in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. By assuming that a literary work is a result of devotional thoughts, this review on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is conducted by using an expressive approach, which is an approach that emphasizes on the writer as stated by Abrams (1971:22) in the following citation.

A work of art is essentially the internal made external resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind; or if

aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind.

The theory is also applied to observe the writer's thoughts and concepts about human freedom in choosing their way of life; to observe how a freedom can be achieved, and to identify the inhibiting factors in pursuing the freedom. The writer's creativity process is reflected on her word choice in expressing her feelings, perceptions, and thoughts about something.

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the book based on her experience and observation during her stay in South Ohio. She listened to stories told by black people who had achieved their freedom and stories told by white tourists from South. These stories had been her writing inspiration. Her heart was touched when she listened and witnessed the slavery at that time. She then poured her feelings into writing. She talked about humans' freedom in choosing their way of life, how this freedom can be achieved, and the inhibiting factors in pursuing it. According to her, as also stated by Soedjatmoko (via Putra 1993:105), basically, every human is free and freedom is a human's basic need. This statement is explicitly presented by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She emphasizes that, in a broad outline, there are two kinds of freedoms, which are intellectual freedom and physical freedom.

A. Physical Freedom

Cincinnati, which is located on the bank of the Ohio River was taken as the background of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This location is well known as a fertile and wide farmland. To cultivate this wide farmland, many workers were needed. The black people were widely employed as they were cheap and strong. Working in a farmland suited them because they could stand the hot weather and they were physically strong. To meet the demand of farmland workers, black people were

imported from Africa, either voluntarily or forced or kidnapped. They then were sold or contracted to farmland owners and made slaves. These slaves were not different from properties that could be traded and inherited. Many slaves tried to escape to find freedom but they usually could be captured soon after they escaped or they would come back voluntarily because they were famished. Their lack of intelligence and the violence of surrounding nature had made them powerless. Groups of slave hunters and their tracker dogs were ready to bring the runaway slaves back to their owner. In slaves trading, the traders did not consider the slaves' family relations. Husbands, wives, or children could be separated without mercy. The owners considered that in a world of slaves, there are no husbands, wives, and children relations. Marriage between slaves was considered illegal, as said by George to Eliza:

Don't you know a slave can't be married? There's no law in this country for that; I can't hold you for my wife, if he chooses to part us (Stowe 1981:20).

Even though George and Eliza were legalized as husband and wife by a priest, George's owner did not allow him to visit Eliza. This relationship severance conducted by the owner was based on an idea that a slave is nothing more than a thing, which does not have a feeling, and if a slave is sold and moved to a new place, he can have a new partner. Legree bought Lucy, a woman slave, and then paired her with Sambo without listening to Lucy's protest that she was already married. Mamy was also separated from her husband and children when her employer, Marie St. Clare, brought her to New Orleans. Marie thought that a slave does not have similar feeling as hers. She share this thought to Ophelia:

"Don't you believe that the Lord made them of one blood with us?" said Miss Ophelia, shortly.

"No, indeed, not I! A pretty story, truly! They are a degraded race."

"Don't you think they've got immortal souls" said Miss Ophelia.

"Oh, well," said Marie, yawning," that, of course---nobody doubts that. But as to putting them on any sort of equality with us, you know, as if we could be compared, why, it's impossible! Now, St Clare really has talked to me as if keeping Mammy from her husband was like keeping me from mine. There's no comparing in this way. Mammy couldn't have the feeling that I should. It's different thing altogether--of course, it is; and yet St. Clare pretends not to see it. And just as if Mammy could love her little dirty babies as I love Eva!" (Stowe 1981:178).

Those slaves were treated like animals as seen when the owners checked them before buying. The buyers checked the slaves as if they checked horses before buying them as what has been done by Haley and Legree.

Haley here forced his way into the group, walked up to the old man, pulled his mouth open and looked in, felt of his teeth, made him stand and straighten himself, bend his back, and perform various evolutions to show his muscles; and then passed on to the next, and put him through the same trial (Stowe 1981:124). Newly purchased slaves usually had their hands and legs cuffed on their way to their owners' places so that they would not runaway.

This slavery system that violated human rights was recorded by Mrs. Stowe as what it was. Violence performed by the owners to their slaves was also shown in Shelby family, an owner that was considered kind hearted. When Shelby was involved in a debt and she needed a large amount of money, she was forced to sell her best slaves, including Tom. She promised Tom that as soon as she earned enough money, she would buy him back. She fulfilled her promise. She went to Legree's place to buy Tom, but she was too late because Tom was found dead with his body severely wounded from Legree's brutal

treatment. Physically, the slaves had no ability to have a control over themselves. Owners' power and strength took control of them. Harriet Beecher Stowe did not end her writing when Tom died. She continued with further action performed by George, a former owner of Tom. George freed all of his slaves and expressed words that awakened black people's spirit to be free: “..Think of your freedom, every time you see Uncle Tom's cabin; and let it be a memorial to put you all in mind to follow in his steps, and as honest, and faithful, and Christian as he was” (Stowe 1981:433).

The freedom had been achieved by the slaves, but did it stop there? Freedom has to be followed up by good education for them. Education is expected to improve and enhance their living standards, making a person capable of being independent.

B. Intellectual Freedom

Harriet Beecher Stowe reflected the situation and condition of her era according to her perception. Not only did she describe the characters' physical appearance in her book but also their inner struggle. Through these characters, she offered several alternative forms of other thoughts. In her book, she argued and reflected her perception about life. She made a continuous attempt in thinking activities. Those activities were called contemplation/meditation which includes several activities, which were, first, argumentations/reasons (causes, reasons; consideration; intelligences), and, second, reflections on self-experiences from the past. The argumentations contained understandings of intellectual processes involved in thinking and problem-solving efforts, and motives to take action or behave. This description shows that contemplation emphasizes on thinking activities or intellectual. According to Chaplin (2000:252), intellectual characterizes a person with interests particularly in ideas and learning. The key word of that

definition is an idea that means a mental picture (an impression), an activity plan, or a hypothesis. A mental picture relates to a matter of mind, intellect, memory, or a process associated with the mind, intellect, or memory, while a hypothesis is a question that has to be answered through an experiment, or through a series of observations (Chaplin 2000: 297). Harriet Beecher Stowe showed how Tom contemplated in facing his suffering.

THE INHIBITING FACTORS IN PURSUING FREEDOM AND EFFORTS TO GAIN FREEDOM

Harriet Beecher Stowe noticed that freedom is the most important thing for human life and that gaining freedom is every individual's right. However, not every individual has that right completely. This thing can be reviewed by how far the individual can choose. This statement was confirmed by Sudjatmoko that freedom lies in the breadth of possibilities to choose. A freedom will increase as the choices become wider. Each choice will add experience of an individual and change the individual's personality (via Putra, 1993:101). According to him (102), there are several efforts to widen the choices, which are science, education, culture, religion, and history. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the efforts presented by Harriet Beecher Stowe focused on discourses of strength, power, and ideology, education and religion. Each of the discourses is presented in the followings.

A. A Discourse of Strength, Power, and Ideology of XIX Century in Southern America

White people despised black people and considered that they were only worth working as slaves, not more than that, in compliance with their interpretation on master and servant relations stated in the Bible:

22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; (Colossians 3:33-5: 1) (taken from New Testament Scripture; Arnoldus Ende Publishing Jakarta 1978).

The word “obey” which means to adhere and the word “flesh” which can be translated as skin became key words for the white people. They manipulated those two words for their importance. Obedience was a must for the slaves despite the fact that the obedience was not intended to please the masters but was driven by fear of God. While the word “flesh” was interpreted as skin color difference. It is a fact that Jesus was born with white skin color, not black. This is a clear sign from the Lord that white people were more superior to the blacks. Moreover, black color is always associated with things that are dirty, despicable, and bad.

Freedom, equality of right, and democracy, which were disclosed in “The American Dream” only applied to the white people. Democracy was more intended to the high-class society. What was The “American Dream”? America was formed by immigrants who came from various countries with various reasons. Most of the immigrants came from Europe, particularly from England. They left their country to seek better economic opportunities which was also accompanied by a desire for religious freedom and/or freedom from political suppression.

Between the years of 1620-1635, the entire England suffered economic difficulties. Even the most skilled craftsmen earned insufficient income. Bad harvests worsened the suffering even further. In addition, agricultural lands began to decrease as they were increasingly used for sheep breeding. The growing wool industries needed more supplies of wool so that the sheep breeders took over the lands that were formerly agricultural lands.

In 1625, Puritan leaders in England were also feeling increasingly depressed. This class demanded a thorough Protestantism against national churches and suggested simpler forms of worship. Their reformist ideas were threats to the King's authority. Therefore, some priests were not allowed to preach and eventually they, accompanied by their congregation, moved to America. Their move was successively followed by other groups; many of which were wealthy and had high positions. Towards the end of the next century, the Puritan stamp had been given to half a dozen England colonies.

Political considerations also influenced many people to move to America. In the 1630's, an arbitrary government of Charles I in England made the people to have stronger desire to move to America. Many officers and people of Charles I who disagreed with his government went to seek their fortune in Virginia, Southern America. Since the discovery of tobacco management and processing that suited European tastes in 1912, Virginia developed into plantation areas that spread rapidly from estuary areas to most of south lowlands of Mississippi River. Many of the owners of the plantations became wealthy and lived in aristocracy life because most of them were nobles and landlords who had fled from England and still maintained their ancestral traditions. In the field of religion, they were more pleased with a religion that gave priority to tradition and hierarchy such as Anglican and Catholic.

The plantations in Virginia developed rapidly particularly because they were supported by black slave labor, which came from Africa through West Indies trade route. The black people arrived in America mostly because they were forced despite the fact that some of them intended to come to the New World to achieve a better life, similar to white people immigrants.

In general, the immigrants adapted to the culture of the earlier settlers. They used the language and law of England, although only

limited to elements that had been adapted to America's conditions. The result was a mixed culture with characteristics of individual freedom. The same wishes of the immigrants, which were reaching better economic opportunities, gaining religious freedom, and escaping from political oppression, were revealed in "Trinity of American Ideology" namely liberty, opportunity, and progress and later was better known as "The American Dream." It can be said that "The American Dream" is an expression of dreams, hopes, and wishes of immigrants or an America's ideology because the concepts served as principle opinions that gave directions and purposes to continue surviving. This ideology was manifested because of the immigrants' similar background although they came from various nations and also because of the Puritans' influences who controlled most of the colonies in America. Puritans had a number of expectations, some of which are entrepreneurs, democracy, and reformation. Entrepreneurs were always associated with hard work and activities of individuals. They personally determined, developed, and managed their business and activities. Hard work did not mean suffering, in the contrary, hard work was a manifestation of their devotion to God because for them it was part of their faith. Therefore, being an entrepreneur was a part of human efforts to achieve perfection in life. In addition, the Puritans always sought reforms to restore their puritanical streak or purity if there was a setback in their ideology.

One of famous Puritans' dreams was democracy, in which individual freedom is guaranteed in the interest of public welfare. Therefore, aristocracy and slavery does not fit in the American nature that promises equal opportunities for every individual in determining their own destiny. This Puritans' dream also became the dream of immigrants who came to America. With some additions the ideology called "The American Dream" was then formed. It consisted of ten aspects, namely liberty (the right of every individual to live free without any interference from other parties), democracy (the right of

every individual to determine their own fate on their own accord), equality (the right of every individual to obtain equality in rights regardless of their race, origin, and social status; women have equal rights as men, no differences in payment and type of work; and no restrictions for foreign workers' movements), people's wellbeing (the right of every individual to enjoy pleasures of life and be free from poverty), no class stratification (the right of every individual to move from a lower class to a higher class, including elimination of class differences), opportunity (the right of every individual to participate both in politics and economy), education (the right of every individual to get equal education to develop themselves and gain opportunities to reach a better life), limited government power (the right to limit excessive government intervention), peace (the right to live peacefully including the right to solve problems or disagreements in nonviolent ways), and progress (the right to obtain an infinite progress in all fields including economy, politics, and culture).

B. Education

Education is an effort to give its participants the ability to expand their choices (Sujatmoko via Putra 1993:102). Through education, not only can one learn to master science, but also learn to respond to challenges creatively and responsibly. Therefore, according to Sujatmoko, education is expected to foster abilities to build oneself.

The abilities that must be possessed are (36-37) the ability to digest the information thoroughly by increasing sharp analytical skills, to think integrally and conceptually, to reason rationally so that one is not surrounded by fear and not being irrational, the ability to be responsible, to own social sensitivity and solidarity; being sensitive to social injustice, to own self respect and self confidence so that one can stand by himself and can have initiatives, to be able to identify ethical

moral dimension in social or technological changes, to be able to interpret religion provisions so that their relevance to new problems and developments are revealed. Concisely, he emphasizes that the most important thing in education is an increase in learning capacity, which is a lifelong learning skill (37).

Harriet Beecher Stowe clarified this statement in her book. Through her characters, she showed that they would not have choices without being educated. They became human beings that were not critical, not able to express themselves as human beings who sought and uphold the truth, and not able to release themselves from various dogma and doctrines that tied them. Mansur Fakhri, the writer of the introduction of the book *Ideologi-Ideologi Pendidikan (Education Ideologies)* written by O'Neil (2001:xii) writes the following statement.

Apa hakikat pendidikan dan mendidik sangat bergantung dari kaca mata ideologi mana yang dipergunakan . . . pendidikan diuji untuk melegitimasi atau melanggengkan sistem dan struktur sosial yang ada, atau pendidikan harus berperan kritis dalam melakukan perubahan sosial dan transformasi menuju dunia yang lebih adil. Kedua peran pendidikan dilematis, pendidikan tersebut hanya bisa dijawab melalui pemilihan paradigma dan ideologi pendidikan yang mendasarinya.

(The nature of education and to educate highly depends on the ideological perspective which is being used to perceive..... education is tested to legitimate or perpetuate existing social systems and structures, or education must play a critical role in making social changes and transformations toward a more equal world. These roles are dilemmatic; the education can only be answered through a selection of its paradigmatic and ideological underpinnings.)

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, education given to black people was religion education, which was given informally and delivered in accordance with interpretations.

C. Religion

Religions shape public views about the meaning of life, their relations with others, their nature, and the transcendental entity. Religions are propulsions for individual and public actions (61). The slavery theme presented by Harriet was covered by a deep religious atmosphere. Tom was illustrated as a very religious person. In his suffering, Tom was closer to his God. He even had time to read one to two verses to Cassy who was already in despair. Cassy was no longer able to work hard in the field. Cassy's faith in Jesus as a gracious and merciful God had faded. Cassy's suffering had made him no longer believe in Jesus' compassion and he felt disappointed until Tom asked him to read the bible he gave. When Cassy read "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," he gained his faith back. St. Clare and Eva also practiced their religion properly, different from Legree who was not happy when he saw Tom praying or reading the bible. Legree felt that Tom had more respect to God than to him.

"...Here, you rascal, you make believe to be so pious,- didn't you never hear, out of yer Bible, "Servants obey yer masters?" An't I yer master? Didn't I pay down twelve hundred dollars, cash, for all there is inside yer old cussed black shell? An't yer mine, now body and soul?" he said, giving Tom a violent kick with his heavy boot; tell me!" (Stowe4 1981:358).

On behalf of the verse, Legree repressed Tom. He felt that his action was in conformity with his religion. Legree's action, as a matter of fact, showed the narrowness of his knowledge. His interpretation of the verse was more self-oriented and partial. Tom's faith was very

strong so that when Legree said God could not save him when Tom was in a trouble, Tom said calmly: "...I'll hold on. The Lord may help me, or not help; but I'll hold to Him, and believe him to the Last!" (Stowe 1981:187).

Tom's comprehension on a verse was deep and wide. Words in the bible "Servants should obey their masters" were not taken for granted as performed by Sam and Quimbo. These two slaves obeyed all the words came from their master, Legree. They would beat their friends without hesitation if they were ordered by their master, whereas Tom firmly refused to say where Cassy hid. He was not even afraid of being persecuted unto death. Tom translated the word "obey" to his master only within the limit of humanity. Tom only held to the words that God told his people to love each other as they love themselves. With a keyword "love," Tom believed that as long as the master loves his slaves, it is natural for the slaves to obey their master's words. He believed that only bodies that can be bought whereas souls belong to God as he told Legree when he was threatened to be tied on a tree and surrounded by fire.

Master Legree, as you bought me, I'll be a true faithful servant to ye. I'll give ye all the work of my hands, all my time, all my strength; but my soul I won't give up to the mortal man. I will hold on to the Lord, and put his commands before all—die or live; you may be sure on't. Mas'r Legree, I an' t a grain afeard to die. I'd as soon die as not. Ye may whip me, starve me, burn me,—it'll only send me sooner where I want to go. (Stowe 1981:377).

Tom bore all of his sufferings patiently because he believed that Jesus suffered much more than him, and believed that those who committed crimes would pay for what they had done on the "Judgment" day. Being a very religious man, Tom, as described by Stowe, was willing to forgive Legree, who had made him suffer,

before he died.: “..He's (Legree) a poor mis'able critter. It's awful to think on't! Oh, if he only could repent, the Lord would forgive him now; but I'm feared he never will” (Stowe 1981:414).

Tom also thought that what Legree had done to him had brought him wisdom because it opened the way to the heaven for him:

“I hope he won't! Said George. I never want to see him (Legree) in heaven.”

“Hush, Mas'r George! It worries me. Don't feel so, He an't done me no real harm—only opened the gate of the kingdom for me; that's all!” (Stowe 1981:414).

The previous explanation clarifies that education and religion are used as tools to repress others. Harriet Beecher Stowe focused on those two things as objects of study when she talked about human's basic need, freedom.

CONCLUSION

Uncle Tom's Cabin is a manifestation of thoughts and feelings or a continuous effort in the writer's thinking activities in a society in her era. She offered an example of an abstraction or essence from a dream or a situation in the future, a goal or a target that she struggles for through the writer's contemplation. She offered other alternatives of other thoughts on freedom. In her book, she argued and reflected her perception about life. Therefore, when Harriet wrote about slavery, it was the result of her reflection on humanity. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which was widely influential shows that through their works, directly or indirectly, writers, in general, have given contributions to the development of their nation. This contribution is that they place literature as an intellectual document of the nation. Essentially, a literature can also be regarded as an intellectual model.

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