
‘The Sentiments of Universal Christendom’: The Transatlantic Reception of Stowe

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Abstract

In 1853, a year after the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe made her first European visit at the invitation of two British abolitionist groups. At a stately gathering in the home of the Duchess of Sutherland, Stowe was presented with two intriguing gifts. The first: a 26-volume petition, bound in large black Moroccan leather folios, containing one-half million signatories to an address authored by Lord Shaftesbury, “The Affectionate and Christian Address of Many Thousands of Women of Great Britain and Ireland to Their Sisters The Women of the United States of America.” The second gift was a personalized jewelry piece from the Duchess of Sutherland herself: a gold linked bracelet patterned on slavery shackles and inscribed with the dates of the British empire’s ending of the slave trade, emancipation in its colonies, and reserved space for eventual American abolition. This paper sets *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the space of the transatlantic by arguing that Stowe came to represent for British sympathizers an important investment in anti-slavery and “the black Atlantic” (Gilroy, 1995). In this paper, I draw on the international acclaim of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and surrounding literary and gifted language of “right feelings,” “common cause,” “universal Christendom,” and “humanity,” to situate these objects in the transatlantic sentimental bonds of shame, emancipation, social reform, modern capitalism, and the formation of whiteness. This paper will also raise questions about “literary whiteness” (Morrison, 1992), the commodification of race in material and print culture, and the gendered assumptions of sentimental and moral reform in nineteenth-century British and American empire.

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