

**HARRIET BEECHER STOWE'S**  
***UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* IN ARABIC**



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**CHALLENGES OF CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSLATION**

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*Harriet Beecher Stone's Uncle Tom's Cabin in Arabic:  
Challenges of Cross-Cultural Translation*

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I dedicate this work to my treasured parents, my beloved husband,  
my great sisters and brothers, and my precious children.



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## ABSTRACT

This book explores the challenges of cross-cultural translation of American literary works into Arabic which, I argue, have prevented many nineteenth-century literary works from being translated into Arabic. I have used the Arabic translations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and an abridged English text accompanying one of the translations as a case study. Since most of the Arabic translations of English and especially American literary works are merely linguistic oriented ones, I reinforce the importance of adopting a period-specific cultural-oriented approach that maintains the cultural context of American literary works, including the historical, cultural, religious, geopolitical, and gender-based elements, during the literary translation into the Arabic culture. I start with discussing the internationalization of American works and the importance of a cultural reading of these works. Reviewing many translations of English and American works in general, I categorize the challenges of cross-cultural literary translation from English into Arabic into the following: cultural, religious, geopolitical, and gender-based ones. While I am not calling for accurate cross-cultural literary translations since it is impossible, however, I am advocating for faithful translations which maintain the literary text's cultural and historical contexts. The accuracy of a literary translation depends on the amount of linguistic skill a translator has while the faithfulness of a literary translation is based upon the translator's sincere effort to include the literary text's entire cultural context including the historical, cultural, religious, geopolitical, and gender-based elements. Using *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a case study, I discuss how the previous challenges had negatively affected the translation process of the work. Despite the fact the work has been translated seven times into Arabic, due to the linguistic-oriented approach, the historical and cultural significance of Stowe's novel has not yet been introduced to Arab readers through translation. Due to the current era of globalization that demands individuals to have multicultural knowledge and understanding and due to the recent cultural and translation projects of literary works from English into Arabic, this book reinforces the importance and possibility of addressing the cultural, religious, geopolitical, and gender-based challenges while using *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an example.



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## CHAPTER ONE

# INTERNATIONALIZATION AND CULTURAL READING OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Many American literary works have been available to readers in the Arab world through translation. However, the historical and cultural importance of many of these works is rarely noticed by Arab readers. Accordingly, this book explores the reasons that prevented the historical and cultural significance of the work from being acknowledged by the Arab readers. By starting with the literary translation process, it is found that it is merely a linguistic-oriented one. Therefore, this book locates the challenges of cross-cultural translation of literary works from English into Arabic which are categorized as cultural, religious, geopolitical, and gender-based ones.

To reinforce the importance of shifting from a linguistic-oriented translation approach to a cultural oriented one during the literary translation of English works, especially American ones, this chapter focuses on the importance of the cultural reading of American texts, especially on an international scale. This chapter specifically focuses on Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* since it is one of the main masterpieces in the field of American antebellum literature and culture. Discussing its genre and Stowe's use of sentimentalism, and placing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the context of slave narratives and other antislavery works, while focusing on issues concerning white supremacy and white/black readership/authorship, this chapter explores the reasons that it became an international bestseller and one of the most famous works in the field of abolition literature and the most widely translated one.

### American Studies and the Cultural Shift

J. Hillis Miller, in the "The Triumph of Theory, the Resistance to Reading, and the Question of Material Base," explains that literary studies have experienced a "universal shift" from language toward history, culture, society, institutions" (283). American literary studies was one of the main areas that focused on such a shift due to its desire to differ and break from British literary ideology. Furthermore, not only did American literary studies move away from the British ideology, rather it had an ideology of its own that "demanded that American authors be defined in opposition to their European counterparts, to the point that the greater the difference, the greater the claim an author has had to being American" (Kohn, Meer, and Todd xiv). Furthermore, the shift toward history and culture demanded a specific kind of reading and analysis of American literary texts. Indeed, Heinz Ickstadt, in

his essay "American Studies in an Age of Globalization," explains that "American studies emphasized the cultural reading of its primarily literary material" (546). This cultural reading is either through a close cultural analysis of the literary text or through understanding the text's cultural indication through the analysis of its mythic structure. This kind of cultural reading is crucially important with literary texts that discuss the social and political spheres of the American culture.

In fact, Ickstadt notes that American studies scholars have claimed that some of the American literary masterpieces "expressed the essence of American culture" (547). Other scholars like Sacvan Bercovitch in his work *The Rites of Assent: Transformation in the Symbolic Construction of America* went to the extent of claiming that "America was a literary canon that embodied the national promise" (363). According to Bercovitch, the American literary text has been "invested with all the subtleties of historical process so that history may be understood through the subtleties of literary criticism" (363). Indeed, the American Antebellum culture could be to some extent understood through a cultural reading of the literary texts written at that time. Reading slave narratives and autobiographies including the works of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs gives readers a glimpse of that period. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is, despite the different debates concerning its faithful depiction of antebellum America and racial presentation of slaves, one of the most widely circulated and translated in comparison to other American antislavery literary works. Stowe wrote the work as a response to the Fugitive Slave law. Through her text she addressed and critiqued the policy makers, religious leaders, and the entire American nation and called on them to initiate social reform where slavery is abolished. Thus, it is important to approach Stowe's text through a cultural reading to understand its significance in the American culture of the nineteenth century.

### **The Popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin***

This book does not advocate selecting a literary text for translation based on its popularity, but since many of the translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presented Stowe's work as one of the popular literary texts, then it is important to discuss the text's popularity both on national and international scales. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is considered one of the main American literary texts that played a vital role in shaping American history in the area of abolition and resistance against the Fugitive Slave Law. It is true that there are other works, such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), which were written by those who experienced slavery and therefore considered themselves responsible for representing their people and are actually more capable of presenting accurate representations as well. However, the genre of a work played a vital role in its popularity; a novel was more likely to

be a bestseller than was a narrative, essay, or speech; therefore, Stowe's novel was the most popular anti-slavery work in her time. Furthermore, the writing process of this novel played a vital role in its popularity. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was first published in the form of a serialized novel of forty-one installments in the *National Era* from June 2, 1851, through April 1, 1852. Consequently, it lived with the readers for almost a year. Susan Belasco in her essay titled "The Writing, Reception and Reputation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" states that "the story unfolded--week by week and episode by episode--in the pages of the *Era* and the author [Stowe] responded to requests from both her private and public audiences to extend and further develop the narrative" (29). Accordingly, Stowe's weekly episodes must have started a conversation among the readers. Sarah Ducksworth in her essay titled "Stowe's Construction of an African Persona and the Creation of Identity for a New World Order" explains that "[f]rom June 3, 1851, through April 2, 1852, her serialized story depicting down-trodden victims of chattel slavery created waves of controversy throughout the country" (206).

Indeed, Stowe's novel could have been one of the few factors that encouraged readers to discuss the issue of slavery on a continuous weekly basis. In fact, as antislavery figures, and especially African Americans, commented on Stowe's work the work became more popular. For instance, Langston Hughes in his essay titled "Introduction to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," states that Frederick Douglass initially considered Stowe as a "kindred spirit," and in one of Douglass's letters, he writes that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was "a flash to light a million camp fires in front of the embattled hosts of slavery" (102). Furthermore, Richard Yarborough in his essay titled "Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel" states that Douglass explained that he "saw no reason to find fault with well-meant efforts for our benefit" (71). The African American abolitionist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper also praised Stowe and her antislavery novel by writing three poems in response: "Eliza Harris" in 1853, and "To Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe" and "Eva's Farewell" in 1854. In the first poem, Harper describes Eliza's escape and miraculous crossing over the Ohio River to save her child from slavery. In a move similar to Stowe's sentimental appeals, Harper then condemns the institution of slavery that made slave mothers endure harsh paths to rescue their children. In "To Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe," Harper addresses Stowe and thanks her for pleading for the sake of the slaves and for advocating ending the institution of slavery. In "Eva's Farewell," Harper presents the dying little Eva addressing her father and describing the "glory land" that she is departing to and the rewards being arranged for her by the angels waiting for her. Harper's poems and appreciation for Stowe had a positive significance in terms of reactions of contemporary African Americans to Stowe's novel. For instance, in praising Stowe and her work, black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar in 1898 wrote a sonnet titled "Prophet and

Priestess" where he describes Stowe's courage to write a novel condemning the institution of slavery.

In the same vein, Belasco states that "throughout 1851 and 1852, the ongoing installments of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were a stunning success for Bailey [the *Era's* editor], the *Era* and for Stowe. By the time John P. Jewett contracted to publish the novel in 1852, Stowe was the most popular novelist of the day" (30). As a result, *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* popularity was built up gradually among the readers. By the time of its publication as a book, it was already widely read and known among American readers. However, buying the novel in one single volume was a chance for some readers to have a copy of their own in which they could revisit a powerful story which participated in changing the American culture and for others another chance to read some of the episodes that they might have missed reading in the *Era*.

However, most important, I believe that Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became the most popular antislavery work because it did not aggressively attack white readers. Indeed, being first written in the *Era* governed Stowe's discussion concerning the institution of slavery. Gamaliel Bailey, the editor of the *Era*, wanted to "accomplish the goal of promoting abolition among southerners" Therefore, all of the antislavery arguments and writings in the newspaper, including the episodes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, had to be "moderate and persuasive" (Belasco 24). Bailey adopted "steady persuasion in a variety of forms" including reviews, poems, essays, stories, and articles that "all had a common purpose: to subvert the ideology of slaveholding" (Belasco 24). Indeed, Stowe's text did not attack Southern slaveholders; rather she presented specific types of slaveholders and their different dealings with slaves. For instance, we are first introduced to Mr. Shelby who, although he could have done other things to pay his debt to the slave trader Mr. Haley rather than selling Tom and little Harry, still justifies to his wife that he had sold them only out of necessity. Toward the middle of the novel, readers are introduced to St. Claire, who also treats his slaves with good intentions, but who dies suddenly before freeing Tom. Toward the end of the novel, we meet again George Shelby, now a young man, who manages to free all of his slaves. Despite the brutal characters of Mr. Haley and Simon Legree, most of the other white slaveholders presented in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, excluding Marie, St. Claire's wife, were not willing to treat their slaves with brutality; they were victims of the institution of slavery as well. Therefore, Stowe is addressing them to encourage them to free themselves from the sin of slavery and emancipate all the slaves that they have before it is too late, as in the cases of St. Claire and Mr. Shelby. However, in general, through *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "Stowe sends a message to 'good' white people all over the country," (212) and not only those in the South whom, according to Ducksworth,

may have felt unconnected to the evil of slavery. Her message is that they, through both their silence and hypocrisy, also share the blame

for the crimes of slave dealers. She then charges all upstanding white citizens with a God-given duty to agitate against the chattel system in order to save their own souls and recover the auspicious promise of America's golden future. (212)

Stowe combines her message with a religious duty which is delivered to every white Christian in America. Furthermore, Stowe's work was more popular than other works written on the subject of slavery because she showed the North's support to the fugitive slaves whereas Douglass and Jacobs revealed the racial segregation in the North. Stowe did not attack any of her readers; instead she wanted to convince them to save themselves from the sin of slavery and grant the slaves their freedom.

Another factor that made Stowe's novel the most popular antislavery text, I believe, could be the many subplots and characters Stowe presents to her readers. Although Uncle Tom is the main character, still we learn the stories of many other slaves in every new destination Uncle Tom travels to. However, other antislavery works, such as slave narratives, don't have this variety and number of characters. Josephine Donovan in *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Evil, Affliction, and Redemptive Love* states that "slave narratives tended to focus on one person's unhappy experiences from that individual's point of view. Stowe realized that no one would read a novel that was relentlessly grim" (62). Indeed, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* and Jacobs's *Incidents* contained more harsh representations of slavery than Stowe's text, and Stowe's text outsold all slave narratives and other abolitionist novels put together.

Despite the different debates concerning the use of sentimentalism in Stowe's novel, I believe, sentimentalism was one of the factors that expanded the popularity of the novel. Stowe wanted her readers to sympathize with slaves and to help end the institution of slavery, and she used sentimentality to try to accomplish those goals. In her preface, she says that she wants "to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us"(xiii). Furthermore, through this sentimentality that awakens the sympathies of readers, Stowe links the white readers with the experiences and feelings of the slaves and in an attempt to create bonds between the slaves and white readers. Stephen Railton in his essay titled "Black Slaves and White Readers" explains that "by this representation of the racial other inside the identities and spheres her readers already cherished--children, mothers, home, food, education, religion--Stowe encourages [white readers] to include the slave inside the circle of their sympathies" (105). Closely reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one could observe that Stowe addresses free readers, who were mainly white, after narrating tragic incidents the slave endured under the institution of slavery to make the readers sympathize with the slaves. Most of the tragic incidents in Stowe's novel happen to mothers whose children are either dead, sold, lost, or about to be sold. Stowe wants free white readers, specifically

women, to experience the feelings of the slave women in order to sympathize with them and try their best to end the institution of slavery.

Furthermore, the element of domesticity in Stowe's novel could also be one of the factors that made it popular among many American readers. "Stowe intertwined domestic subplots with didactic reform--and thereby made the political vividly personal for a mass audience of middle-class readers" (Kohn, Meer, and Todd xiii). Through some of the female characters' dealings within their domestic sphere, including Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird, and Miss Ophelia, Stowe indirectly shows how middle-class women can help in social reform, especially when it is concerned with slavery. Accordingly, I assume that by identifying themselves with the female characters in the novel, many female readers felt that they could participate in social reform and abolition of slavery within their own domestic sphere.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not a work that mostly shows the misery of one slave as in the case of Douglass's and Jacobs's works. Instead it depicts American domestic life in which slavery is an existing condition that should be reformed through the emancipation of all slaves. Following a major strand of antislavery writings that advocated ending slavery by sending the slaves "back to Africa" could be one of the factors that led to the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Many debates took place among the abolitionists concerning this solution for ending slavery. In a letter to Stowe opposing her solution of sending the slaves to Africa Frederick Douglass writes in December 1853 "We are here, and we are likely to remain. Individuals immigrate--nations never. We have grown up with this republic, and I see nothing in her character, or even in the character of the American people as yet, which compels the belief that we must leave the United States" (qtd. in Levine 535). In the same vein, Elizabeth Ammons in her essay titled "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Empire, and Africa" states, "Most African Americans opposed colonization as a racist scheme to remove Americans whose heritage and labor justified their citizenship every bit as much, if not more than, that of anyone else in the United States" (71). Since Stowe advocated such a controversial solution to end slavery, many debates had to take place around her work, which was a condition that made the work more popular.

Moreover, issues related to nineteenth-century white superiority that give whites the agency in both the writing and production fields and issues relating to white/black authorship/readership all played a role in the popularity of Stowe's work. Indeed, unlike Douglass and Jacobs, Stowe did not need to be authenticated by any white figure since she was of the white race. She was free to write whatever she wanted and express her views openly compared to any blacks who wanted to write about the institution of slavery. James Bense in his essay titled "Myths and Rhetoric of the Slavery Debate and Stowe's Comic Vision of Slavery" explains that, "[b]ecause the ex-slave could not assume the same authority as a white author" (194), the truth of the narrative is questioned, and, therefore, such work had to be authenticated by a white

figure. For instance, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* had to be authenticated by William Lloyd Garrison and by Wendell Phillips and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* had to be authenticated by Lydia Maria Child.

Furthermore, another important factor that played a role in the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Stowe's family reputation. Stowe was part of a very famous American family, the Beechers, who were also known for being "persuasive in their influence" (Belasco 25). Indeed, Dr. Leonard Bacon, a contemporary of Stowe, states that "this country is inhabited by saints, sinners, and Beechers" (qtd. in Belasco 25). Since the male members of the Beecher family, especially Stowe's father, Lyman Beecher, and her brother Henry Ward Beecher, were commonly heard by the American people, reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was then I suppose a chance for American people to know what a female member of the Beecher family has to say. Furthermore, it could be viewed that Stowe carried the religious thoughts and ideas of her father, who was widely respected in American society at that time.

### ***Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Questions of Race and Black Representation**

Despite its undeniable popularity, toward the end of the nineteenth century *Uncle Tom's Cabin* started to face a lot of criticism that it was a racist text that could not represent African Americans. Michael Mayer in his essay titled "Toward a Rhetoric of Equality: Reflective and Refractive Images in Stowe's Language" states, "Many African American critics only with great difficulty can see *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as anything but a novel by a white woman writing about a topic about which she knew nothing" (238). In the same vein, Richard Yarborough explains that many African American critics have adopted the opinions of Martin Delaney, who asserted in an April 1853 letter to Frederick Douglass that no white person can represent a black, and that the black question in America can only be solved by violence, not passivity (70). James Baldwin is one of those critics who strongly criticized both white writers and readers, particularly Stowe and her white readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In his essay titled "Everybody's Protest Novel," he states that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a bad novel associated with "dishonesty" (496). He claims that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does not represent black identity since the black characters are strikingly presented with passivity and that the "negroes" are shown as "lovable figures presenting no problem" (497). Sarah Ducksworth also surveys the different reviews of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and concludes that "history shows that even in the wake of appreciation for Stowe's antislavery support, the portrayal of passive Uncle Tom was problematic for blacks who believed that every human being's highest duty is to resist the tyranny of oppression" (233). Not only did some critics negatively view Stowe's portrayal of Uncle Tom, Stowe's presentation of other slave characters has been harshly critiqued. For instance, Baldwin claims that since Eliza and George are the most courageous slaves who did not act in passivity but instead fled to Cana-

da to break from the institution of slavery, Stowe shows them “as white as she can” (497). To reinforce his argument about the whiteness of Eliza and George, Baldwin compares Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and explains that Blacks should follow the violent steps of Thomas Bigger in destroying white power instead of passively submitting to it as in the case of Uncle Tom. Presenting Uncle Tom as a passive character, Baldwin further explains that Stowe has robbed him of his humanity and masculinity (498). It is not my purpose here to defend or argue against Baldwin’s argument, but it is important to note that some gendered readings of Stowe’s text claim that Stowe presented Uncle Tom with feminine qualities to reinforce women’s empowerment through her text by showing that the morals of forgiveness are associated with women more than they are with men.

Baldwin does not only criticize white writers; he extends his criticism to include white readers. According to him the white writers of any protest novel are “being forgiven, [by white readers] on the strength of their good intentions, whatever violence they do to language, whatever excessive demand they make of credibility” (499). Baldwin claims that inaccuracy of presenting the black identity cannot be forgiven even if gaining greater freedom for blacks was the goal of the white writer. So, according to him, Stowe’s depiction of weak and comic black characters should not be praised regardless of Stowe’s intention of writing the novel to help to abolish the institution of slavery and critique the Fugitive Slave Law.

Many other critics have claimed that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is a racist text because of its racial stereotypes of some of the black characters. Indeed, “Stowe has been unfairly accused of subverting her ostensibly Abolitionist purpose by creating characters that exhibit significant and culturally powerful racial stereotypes. Her text, the argument runs, is basically a racist tract in sheep’s clothing” (Mayer 236). For example, J.C. Furnas in *Goodbye to Uncle Tom* regards *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as racist propaganda which aims to “instill or strengthen racist ideas” (107). For many critics the racist ideas are more significant in Stowe’s comic depiction of slave characters. Yarborough States that

[o]f necessity, Stowe falls back upon popular conceptions of the AfroAmerican in depicting many of her slave characters. As one result, the blacks she uses to supply much of the humor in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* owe a great deal to the darky figures who capered across minstrel stages and white imaginations in the antebellum years. (47)

Concerning Stowe’s comic depiction of Sam and Andy, who “ultimately seem little more than bumptious, giggling, outsized adolescents,” Yarborough argues that their efforts of helping Eliza in her escape are not sincere since they did not have “any real desire to help the fugitives,” rather they were only trying to “please their mistress” (47). Yarborough further criticizes what he

describes as Stowe's racist stereotypes and claims that her work negatively influences future writings about African American race.

Since I totally disagree with Yarborough's argument, I defend Stowe's comic depiction of these characters in great detail in the third chapter of this study in my discussion of Stowe's use of colloquial dialect in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

However, many other critics defended Stowe and her text from this harsh criticism. For instance, Josephine Donovan argues that Stowe had to include comic characters in her book since she wanted her work to be read and since the exact reality of slavery cannot be fully written or read. She explains that Stowe "acknowledges that the book is a very inadequate representation of slavery [since] slavery in some of its workings is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it strictly as it is would be a work that could not be read; and therefore one can \_find\_ refuge from the hard and the terrible' by inventing scenes and characters of a more pleasing nature" (62). Furthermore, according to Belasco, the writing process of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also forced Stowe to present certain characters in the way she did. "This creation of striking characters was crucial to the serial novelist, who was more concerned with scenes that had to work as independent installments than with the full integration of plot lines" (30). Most important, other critics defend Stowe and her novel by pointing out that it was the first novel to present black characters as major ones. Stephen Railton states that "[a]s just about the first novel to feature blacks in prominent roles, it [*Uncle Tom's Cabin*] is trying with great rhetorical skill and courage to put a human face on the racial other" (107-08). Furthermore, Michael Mayer explains that "[d]espite the tradition of negative assessment focusing on stereotypical misrepresentation, the characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reinforce Stowe's anti-slavery position rather than deliberately subvert her intent" (237). Mayer further explains that Stowe uses mirroring techniques to reinforce her rhetoric of equality among blacks and whites. He states that a strand of Stowe's rhetoric for equality is the "use of reflective naming, emphasizing identical names in order to establish parallels and contrasts": there are two Georges; one white and one black; two Toms, one white and one black; and two Henrys, one white and one mullato. According to Mayer, "these choices are not by chance. In one case the naming suggests similar identities; in the other two naming evokes a significant contrast of personalities" (241). In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* all of the naming comparisons are for the benefit of the slaves since the slaves are morally superior in comparison to many of the white characters in Stowe's novel. So, it could be said that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages of the representation of slave figures in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Until now controversy surrounds Stowe's text, and research is still taking place concerning issues of race. Some current scholars are arguing that Stowe's text is not a racist one. In their introduction to *Approaches to Teaching Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Elizabeth Ammons and Susan Belasco state that race is still

a challenge in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* but "it is important to historicize race theories and attitudes so that [we] do not simply judge Stowe by values of our own day" (2). Indeed, Susan Nuernberg in her essay "Stowe, the Abolition Movement, and Prevailing Theories of Race in Nineteenth-Century America" states that issues of race were debated in Stowe's own time and what is portrayed in her novel is "representative in general of ideas and attitudes held by others in the abolitionist movement and in the antebellum American culture"; therefore Nuernberg asks, "Do we downgrade Stowe because she shared many of the misconceptions about race common in her day?" (43). In the same vein, Sophia Cantave in her essay titled "Who Gets to Create the Lasting Images? The Problem of Black Representation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" defends Stowe and states that "Stowe wrote her novel at a time when African humanity, intelligence, and subjectivity were still being debated" (99). So, despite the confused racial representation in Stowe's novel, I believe that it was courageous enough for Stowe to discuss the slaves' condition and call for their rights in a society that regarded slaves as inhuman.

Furthermore, some researchers defend Stowe by stating that she did not advocate for racial equality but rather to abolish slavery. Susan Nuernberg states,

Readers who reject *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because it portrays African Americans in an offensive way should know that Harriet Beecher Stowe did not write it to advocate racial equality in the secular and social sphere. She aimed to put an end to slavery, to what stood in opposition to her notions of Christian morality, which required the abolition of slavery to purify the nation of sin. (37)

It could have been either hard for Stowe to call for slaves' racial equality in a white male dominated society or she had not yet been convinced of the slaves' rights for racial equality. However, it is not my purpose here to defend Stowe or argue against her work; instead I would only like to state that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had an effect to advocate for abolishing slavery in America. It was courageous for her to raise her feminine voice in the midst of a patriarchal society.

### **International Popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin***

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a famous bestselling text not only in the United States; in fact it travelled all over the world. It travelled through translation where English is not the spoken language. By 1853 it had been translated into many languages including French, German, Welsh, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Norwegian, and Slovenian. John Mackay in his essay titled "The First Years of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Russia" explains that Stowe's novel was "published in

at least sixty-seven different editions in Russia between 1857 and 1917; well over seventy separate editions in at least twenty-one different languages appeared in the Soviet Union between 1918 and 1991” (67).

Furthermore, Venuti in *The Scandals of Translation* states,

Since the 1970s, the drive to invest in bestsellers has become so prevalent as to focus the publisher’s attention on foreign texts that were commercially successful in their native cultures, allowing the emotional and translating process to be guided by the hope of a similar performance in a different language and culture. (124)

Indeed, many American literary works were translated into Arabic during the 1950s, and the first Arabic translation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* appeared in 1953; from that date until 2011 the work has been translated into Arabic seven times in more than thirteen different editions.

One of the possible factors that made it the most translated antislavery work could be due to the existing myth of it being the novel that caused the Civil War in the United States. Many of the prefaces and introductions of the translation include President Lincoln’s supposed statement to Stowe: “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that started this Great War!” In the introduction to *The Transatlantic Stowe*, the editors state that Stowe

had a complex mythic status in American consciousness: she is supposed to have single-handedly brought the abolitionist crusade against slavery to fruition yet also to have created our culture’s most pernicious image of African Americans. As a result, her work has been too influential and controversial ever to be forgotten. (xiii)

It is regarded as a work that marked and changed the history of the United States. Furthermore, “Stowe has been understood primarily within her national boundaries as an American author writing about American issues. This is curious because the international success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* arguably made Stowe the most internationally visible American writer of her time” (Kohn, Meer, and Todd xi). This success, I believe, is due to the fact that Stowe’s portrayal of slave oppression is applicable to many forms of oppression around the world. Therefore, it was considered as a call for reform applicable to many different kinds of oppression worldwide. “Readers across Europe interpreted the story not solely as American but as a text that spoke for them; it became a book that reflected issues of oppression and reform in their own nations” (Kohn, Meer, and Todd xviii). In Russia during the 1850s, Stowe’s text was read as “an allegorical attack on and description of Russia’s own serfdom-based society” (Mackay 67). Therefore, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* faced

many kinds of pressure that caused it not to be widely available in the Russian literary market.

The editors of *Transatlantic Stowe* also state in their introduction that “in many ways, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its travels becomes a different text” (xviii). During its travel to the Arabic culture through linguistic translation, I believe, Stowe's text became a completely different text because it lost its entire historical and cultural context that marked its significance and importance in the antebellum culture. Despite that “Harriet Beecher Stowe's fiction of American slavery had become transatlantic....[and] had partly come to represent the process of cultural translation” (Kohn, Meer, and Todd xi), the Arabic linguistic-oriented translations of Stowe's work made a cultural reading of the text a seemingly impossible task. By excluding the historical context, the Arabic translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had prevented Arab readers from being introduced to the mid-nineteenth-century American culture.

Furthermore, Heinz Ickstadt states that since the rise of American studies in the twentieth century, “American studies emphasized the cultural reading of its primarily literary material” (546). Indeed, many American literary works including Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflect the history, culture, and politics of the United States. Therefore, it would be appropriate to investigate if American literature, whether in its main language or when translated into a different language which is of a different cultural setting, is read in a way that reflects its culture. Being an Arabian person, with a Bachelor's degree in English literature from an Arabic university, who has had the opportunity to specialize in American literature in an American university, I found that most of the American literary texts read in the Arab world, whether translated or in English, do not emphasize the cultural reading. Therefore, I felt that it is my responsibility to locate the challenges that face cross-cultural translations of American literary texts into Arabic in order to encourage the cultural reading of these American texts in Arabic.

It is true that many American literary works have been translated into Arabic, but not many Antebellum American works were chosen for translation; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the only antebellum nineteenth-century American literary work discussing slavery that has been translated into Arabic. However, I have chosen Stowe's text as a case study for this book because it has been translated more than once into the Arabic language.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as one of the top bestsellers in nineteenth-century American literature, Stowe's novel is an appropriate choice. There are seven existing Arabic translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The first translation appeared in 1953 while both the sixth and the seventh appeared in 2009. In general, all of the seven translations along with the abridged English version printed with the 2005 translation are mainly plot-oriented unsuccessful ones. Stowe's work has been translated without taking into consideration the historical, political, cultural, and reli-

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<sup>1</sup> I will discuss the Arabic translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in chapter three.

gious contexts that shaped it. Most of the translated versions simply convey the story of a slave named Tom who manages to cope with different forms of torture at the hands of his white masters until he dies at the end of the novel after portraying a heroic example of forgiveness. All of the translators have made similar omissions, modifications, and summarizations during the translation process.

Another reason that I chose this work is the fact that Stowe's novel advocates women's rights through her creation of strong female characters, whether enslaved or free and white. Presenting such characters is a challenge in an Arabic, patriarchal culture. Predictably, the stories of the women slaves--Eliza, Chloe, Prue, Cassy, and Emmeline--are referred to only briefly in the translations. Furthermore, the white women in the novel, Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird, and the Quaker women are not fully presented in the Arabic translations. Eva is only presented as a young girl who shows sympathy to slaves while her mother, Marie, is presented in a way that shows her complaining character and disgust for slaves. Therefore, through the use of feminism as a theoretical framework, I discuss the gender-based challenges that face the cross-cultural literary translation of American works into the Arabic language and culture.

Furthermore, I chose this novel because of Stowe's use of sentimentality as a narrative strategy in her antislavery novel. I was struck by the fact that most of the translations either omit or modify the voice of the narrator along with her sentimental message. Much research has been done on sentimentalism in nineteenth-century American literature generally and on Stowe's use of sentimentality as a narrative strategy, including Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, Joanne Dobson's "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature," and Robyn Warhol's "Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator: Earnest Intervention in Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot." My research will continue the scholarly conversation on Stowe's use of sentimentalism in a different context.

Therefore, the purposes of this study are multiple. Concerning the field of literary translation, it will be one of the few works that discuss the cultural, religious, geopolitical, and gender-based challenges facing the cross-cultural translation of nineteenth century American literary works into Arabic. Arabic culture is a tribal one and is also considered, to a certain extent, a conservative one; therefore any American literary work which encourages individuality and self-reliance either does not get translated into Arabic or those elements are excluded. Furthermore, the religious challenges that face the literary translation of American literary works into Arabic exist because most of Arab countries are Muslim ones; and when American works are assumed to reflect Christianity they are less likely to be translated. However, when works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* do get translated, the Christian references are omitted.

The geopolitical factors are also considered challenges that hinder the translation of some American literary works into Arabic. The history of