29.10: Uncle Tom’s Cabin versus Benito Cereno versus The Heroic Slave

If “Benito Cereno” depicts black slaves as intelligent, but vicious peoples and The Heroic Slave depicts them as heroes, Uncle Tom’s Cabin seems to be a good middle ground more grounded in reality than the other two. Between these three works, Uncle Tom’s Cabin is far more well-rounded with a number of characters and diversity in their race, thoughts, and personalities.

“Benito Cereno” had multiple black characters, but only really focused on Babo. The Heroic Slave only focused on the hero Madison Washington. However, Uncle Tom’s Cabin has a variety of black characters with their own separate outlooks on life and their own predicament. We have Eliza, a quarter-black slave who is essentially a handmaiden to her master’s wife, Mrs. Shelby. She is treated very well by her masters and is educated. However, her husband George has an awful master who wants to keep him uneducated and treats him terribly. While George complains about his master and decides that the only option is running away, Eliza begs him to wait it out and have patience with God.

The white people are differently characterized as well, offering different ideas and opinions on slavery. Mrs. Shelby seems to be the most sympathetic to the slave’s plight, getting extremely upset when she learns her husband is selling Eliza’s son and doesn’t like the idea of owning slaves. Mr. Shelby is fine with owning slaves but is hesitant to sell Eliza’s son to Mr. Haley. Mr. Haley’s morals seem to be far more flexible concerning slavery. The only reason he does not want to separate slave mothers with their babies is because it would “cause damage to the article”. He does not see black people as people, while arguably Mr. and Mrs. Shelby have a more favorable outlook. Throughout all three stories, slavery has been a recurring theme, but the most inclusive of all attitudes and aspects of slavery is Uncle Tom’s Cabin.