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Deceiving America: The 'Marks of Dishonesty' in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Confidence Man*

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Writing about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), 'that cornerstone of American protest fiction' James Baldwin argued against its conventional sentimentality, stating that the 'ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel'. Many contemporary readers share in Baldwin's uncertainty about the authenticity of the feelings evoked by populist sentimental writing in the mid-nineteenth century. At the time when Herman Melville's writing took on ever more unorthodox shapes in his exploration of the limits and boundaries of national identity, Harriet Beecher Stowe tailored the abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from many of the mid-nineteenth century conventions of popular 'sentimental' fiction that Melville assiduously strove to undermine or turn against. This article addresses the relationship between these two authors, placing them both within a framework of questions posed about the 'authenticity' of national identity and its deceiving appearance in the mid nineteenth century.

Baldwin's comments would seem to make us appropriately divide Cassie's performance in the 'authentic ghost story' near the conclusion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from, for instance, Melville's characterisation of Isabel in *Pierre* (1852). By claiming to be the illegitimate half-sister of Pierre, Isabel's entrance in the text splits the monumentalised image of his Glendinning family name into endlessly multiplying questions over its past. Melville defamiliarises gothic conventions through Isabel's shifting and highly ambiguous appearance ('she seemed moulded from fire and air') and language (as she tells Pierre, 'always in me, the solidest things melt into dreams, and dreams into solidities'). On the other hand, Stowe's indebtedness to a framework of convention is shown by the 'white sheet' Cassie wears to haunt Simon Legree's garret:

> It was a cloudy, misty moonlight, and there he saw it! - something white, gliding in! He heard the still rustle of its ghostly garments. It stood still by his bed; - a cold hand touched his; a voice said, three times, in a low, fearful whisper, "Come! Come! Come!" And, while he lay sweating with terror, he knew not when or how, the thing was gone. He sprang out of bed, and pulled at the door. It was shut and locked, and the man fell down in a swoon.

Nevethertheless, Cassie's performance can be used to suggest how appearances in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and more broadly, the language of sentimental writing, can be deceptive. This moment also raises a question mark within the sentimental genre's capacity to mislead an audience. Alerting us to the presence of 'layers of meaning' in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, have argued that Cassie's conventional 'disguise' offers her a role which she may self-consciously inhabit and alter to effectively terrorise Legree:

> What she is doing, quite clearly, is manipulating a familiar fiction: a madwoman herself, she plans to liberate herself and the girl Emmeline, who is meant to be her successor as Legree's mistress, by exploiting the story of the madwoman in the attic. It is, in other words, the enactment of a uniquely female plot that enables Cassie to escape… Cassie exploits the impersonation of madness and confinement to escape maddening confinement.

Gilbert and Gubar still offer a valuable feminist critique of the narratives that determined female identity in the mid-nineteenth century across transatlantic spaces. However, the need to escape maddening confinement in the American Antebellum is clearly not just a uniquely female narrative, but one that intersects with a whole range of associations with imprisonment shared by authors as diverse as Emerson, Douglass, Stowe, Dickinson and Hawthorne (particularly in his 1850 'custom-house' sketch). Melville's centrality to debates about social confinement can be seen across a range of characters, from Bartleby and Ishmael to Isabel and what could be argued as the one of his most radically elusive characters, the anonymous trickster of *The Confidence Man* (1857).

Uncle Tom's Cabin is now synonymous with racial containment on many different levels. As Lynn Wardley puts it, 'Baldwin's indictment of "everybody's protest novel" uncloaks the racist assumptions within the abolitionist Uncle Tom's Cabin'. The emotions roused by sentimental fiction have become a site of fiercely contested criticism tending to become polarised between those who see it as (according to Wardley) a 'document in the service of bourgeois imperialist and racist ends' and those who read 'the sentimental novel's potential to subvert dominant patriarchal operations'. Taken in a new direction, Baldwin's comments about Stowe draw our attention to interpretations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that he himself does not acknowledge, and his suspicion of Stowe's language can in fact point to an alternative ground for a new reading of the sentimental text that does not involve such stark contrast between Melville and Stowe's method of representing identity. To keep the debate about Stowe moving, I would like to argue that we can readopt Baldwin's sense of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s association with 'marks of dishonesty' other ways. Working within and complicating the emotions appealed to by Stowe, her sentimental text is littered throughout by transformations of the body's appearance, moments of elaborate and self-conscious duplicity and theatrical performances like we witness in Cassie's disguise. Such moments challenge whether we can 'trust' what is being 'seen' in Stowe and in doing so 'give ground to speculation about the conservative and hegemonic character of the genre'

These textual ellipses also give rise to broader speculations about the idea of the 'nation' itself. I want to examine how *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s 'marks of dishonesty' may be used as private strategies to escape the maddening confinement of its ruling ideologies. The implication of an inward split or division in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* involves it in contests of public appearances and private meanings that unsettle the reader's relationship with both text and nation in ways that we have come more to expect from Melville's novels and their developing relationship to 'postnational' criticism. By deceiving America, Stowe's characters provide different examples of the social force that 'postnational' discourse addresses:

> As motives for changing existing social models, the figures of race, class and gender moved from the status of objects of social regulation within the national narrative into performative powers, postnational forces able to change that narrative's assumptions […] postnational forces understand every social category as the ongoing antagonism between internalized models and external forces. As such they are

> productive of an internal divide whereby the structures underwriting the stability of the national narrative can undergo transformations.

The awareness of this doubleness, so often neglected in assessments of Stowe, is vital in questioning the reading of 'race' in her sentimental text. By opening a divide between a private, hidden identity and the public duty and social role demanded by the nation, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* aligns before its reader outwardly monolithic constructions of 'race' with sites of inner transformation that 'expose national identity as an artifact rather than a tacit assumption, a purely contingent social construction rather than a meta-social universal'.

If *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Pierre* (both published in 1852) make a provoking comparison that has yet to be fully explored, I want to use these new shifting grounds of criticism to explore how Cassie's performance wearing a white veil in can take us further in yet another direction, towards a more unexpected relationship with Melville's most radical novel of social disguises, *The Confidence Man*. The creation of social illusion by the 'confidence man' has rarely been connected with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In this article, I want to use these two texts to explore the grounds for a more open relationship between two authors who are so often placed at opposing corners of the divided canon of American literature. A view of selfhood based purely on social performance, disguise and manipulation can just as easily be associated with the America featured in Stowe's writing as with Melville's. Drawing attention to the use of theatrical social masks in Stowe's novel offers a way of connecting what has been seen as *Uncle Toms' Cabin*'s highly problematic representation of 'race' with the more radically experienced sense of duplicity and false appearances that we normally associate with *The Confidence Man*'s excoriating critique of racial identity.

Looking at moments like Cassie's 'haunting' where the concept of 'identity' is based upon the idea of a changing social 'performance', I want to consider in this chapter how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* makes use of disguises and transformations (particularly through Eliza and Harry, Black Sam and Andy) in ways that also displace the idea of the nation into a contradictory experience that begins to resemble Melville's 1857 novel of 'No Trust', a text where Michael Rogin claims:

> The distinction between stage performance and stable identity breaks down. There is no longer a character who plays different roles, but only costumes and performances, designating a character no longer there.'

Melville continually establishes doubts and anxieties over physical appearances (for instance, in *Pierre*, whether Isabel is who she appears to be; or the double portrait of Pierre's father) whenever he wants to challenge assumptions of national narratives such as family, law, citizenship, race. In *The Confidence Man* Melville goes even further in making confusions over appearance his primary strategy for satirising American society. On the ship he calls 'Fidele', national identity is just one more marker that can be reproduced, re-inhabited and used for gains, profit, or social anonymity. *The Confidence Man* strips away our certainties in the usual signs by which we read 'America', satirising its inhabitants as a 'flock of fools, under this captain of fools, in this ship of fools', to leave us with a view of selfhood based only on an empty social performance alone. A vivid impression of the disintegration of national life is evoked on board:

> As among Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims, or those oriental ones crossing the red sea towards Mecca in the festival month, there was no lack of variety. Natives of all sorts, and foreigners; men of business and men of pleasure; parlourmen and backwoodsmen; farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heiress hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo hunters, bee-hunters, happiness-hunters, truth-hunters and still keener hunters after

> all these hunters. Fine ladies in slippers, and moccasined squaws; Northern speculators and Eastern philosophers; English, Irish, German, Scotch, Danes; Santa-Fe traders in striped blankets, and broadway bucks in cravats of cloth of gold; fine-looking Kentucky boatsmen, and Japanese looking Mississippi cotton-planters; Quakers in full drab, and United States soldiers in full regimentals; slaves, black, mulatto, quadroon; modish young Spanish Creoles and old-fashioned French Jews; Mormons and Papists; Dives and Lazarus; jesters and mourners, teetotallers and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs; hard-shell Baptists and clay-eaters; grinning negroes, and Sioux chiefs solemn as high priests. In short, a piebald parilament, and Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that species, man.

The long list of adventurers and con-artists resist interpellation, refuse to be ordered into any social hierarchy, sequence, political or cultural uniformity, and seem to share only one final desire: to make money out of each other, through deception, false appearances, the con-trick, the confidence game. If *Pierre* was a desperate attempt to distance itself from national narratives, *The Confidence Man* comically throws them overboard, where 'reality has been absorbed into the fictitiousness of the text'. The only vocation not to be directly mentioned, yet remains prescient to everything taking place aboard the 'fidele' is that of authorship itself. Melville seems intent on discarding layer after layer of meaning in the text until his own authorship is undermined or at least rendered faceless as the confidence man whose description begins the text's decent into confusion:

> At sunrise on the first of April, there appeared, suddenly as Manco Capac at the lake Titicaca, a man in cream-colours, at the waterside in the city of St. Louis.
>
> His cheek was fair, his chin downy, his hair flaxen, his hat a white one, with a long fleecy nap. He had neither trunk, valise, carpet-bag, nor parcel. No porter followed him. He was unaccompanied by friends. From the shrugged shoulders, titters, whispers, wonderings of the crowd, it was plain that he was, in the extremest sense of the word, a stranger.

The fact that the novel takes place on April Fool's day has been pointed to by some critics that after the poor reception of *Moby Dick*(1851) and *Pierre*, Melville used *The Confidence Man* to stage elaborate an joke about both America and authorship. Taking what seems a very different outlook, Stowe strikes a 'great master chord' in the preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which attempts to compose a new strategy for nation building, placing the artist in the centre of American politics. If this can be seen echoing Emerson's call for national culture in the 'American Scholar' (1837) however, it is unsurprising that Stowe's position should also share many of Emerson's contradictions. Taking up what could seem to be incommensurate positions, Emerson's essays could at times demand a collective social response but also opt for the racial individualism as put forward in 'Self-Reliance'(1847). Tony Tanner has noticed in his excellent introduction to *The Confidence Man*, how the persona behind Emerson's essays is a 'sliding self-reliant metamorphoser'. Extending this tacit link between Emerson and Melville's *The Confidence Man* we should also recognise how the 'sentimental' novel can prove to be much more of a changeable and contradictory experience. This will clearly have to be done in spite of Stowe's bathetic assertion that 'My vocation is simply that of a painter, and my object will be to hold up the most life-like and graphic manner possible, slavery, its reverses, changes and the Negro character, which I have had ample opportunity for studying'. It may be nothing new to claim that in her prescription of sympathy for the slave as remedy for a politically divided

America, Stowe's imagery of domesticated national politics turns out to be anything but unified in its relationship to the narratives of race and citizenship. Yet the rightly vigilant criticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a text highlighting the social production of 'race' has been less imaginative in addressing what Stowe tellingly calls the 'reverses and changes' inherent to a more ambiguous representation of identity within sentimental storytelling.

New readings of sentimental genre were first used to strategically challenge the masculine values supposedly embodied in the texts of Melville and Hawthorne. Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* (1985) powerfully questions the patriarchal structures of meaning that constructed an almost exclusively masculine American canon of literature. Her assessments of the cultural work produced by female authors of popular sentimental novels stress how sentimental texts rouse a sense of 'community' rather than 'individualism', 'nurturing' rather than 'disciplining', a valuing of emotions rather than an evaluation of material possessions. Jane Tompkins's vital redeployment of these counter values made way for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to provide a new set of values by which national literature might be judged. Yet this re-alignment offered its own problems for the reception of literature and understandings of the nation, as can be seen elsewhere in Tompkins's arguments. The emotional efficacy pointed to by Tompkins as new literary paradigm can also offer a different form of constraint for the female author:

> Therefore, when Stowe asks the question that is in every reader's mind at the end of the novel- namely, "what can the individual do?"- she recommends not specific alterations in the current political and economic arrangements, but rather a change of heart.

Reinscribing the stark contrast between politics and emotion that Stowe herself saw as a crucial fault within America, Tompkins's appraisal of 'sentimental power' directs the female author away from any contaminations with the fatal ambitions of public sphere. All the same, working alongside Baldwin's suspicion of Stowe's duplicitous language, Tompkins's 'change of heart' can also remain a usefully open-ended tool to guide interpretations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s to different layers of meaning. On the most obvious level, the 'change of heart' in Stowe's text is apparent everywhere through the series of Christian redemptions upon which the heartbeat of Stowe's text's rises and falls. One by one, characters in Stowe's texts are offered up to us in a static relationship between those who hold the potential to become redeemed (from the dissipated St. Clair, the atheist Cassie, Topsy, to Uncle Tom's final assailants, Quimbo and Sambo) and those who have the power of bestowing redemption (Uncle Tom himself, and of course, little Eva). Embedded in this 'change of heart' is an alternative possibility. Rather than reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as static procession of individual choices which are irreversible, the revelatory 'change of heart' can also be read very differently, whereby the emotional power of sentimental fiction recognised by Tompkins works less predictably, making identity emerge as an ongoing series of conflicts and changes, disorientating the audience with a procession of contradictory appearances that leave the grounds for stable national identity far more open to question.

Rather than understanding Stowe's 'change of heart' therefore as a singularly loaded moral choice leading to a over determined outcome, it can be read as the continuous possibility open to her characters having a 'change of heart' within differently felt or imagined environments and situations. Stowe's text may stress literature's capacity to emotionally access a new singular improvement in her audience's public selfhood; but sharing a similar paradox to Emerson's essays, she implies characters such as Cassie or Eliza have the ability as individuals to range through a series of selves, embodied in a network of dramatically changeable emotions that traverse the space between personal instincts and public duty in more open ended and

irresolvable ways. When Stowe famously addresses the reader directly on Eliza's behalf in "The Mother's Struggle" we witness this capacity for a spontaneous access to emotions that opens a new space inside the boundaries of the national identity:

> The boy dropped his little weary head on her shoulder and was soon asleep. How the touch of those warm arms, the gentle breathings that came in her neck, seemed to add fire and spirit to her movements! It seemed too as if strength poured into her in electric streams, from every gentle touch and movement of the sleeping, confiding child. Sublime is the dominion of the mind over the body, that, for a time, can make flesh and nerve impregnable, and string the sinews like steel, so that the weak become so mighty.

Described in their escape, Stowe tries to open a new location for Harry not by imagining a retreat to another geography outside America (which becomes even more significant bearing in mind Stowe has been heavily criticised for advocating the policy of African repatriation), but by describing a private relationship that takes place inside its boundaries that resists the economic values on human property enforced by the slave system. It is not by getting to Canada that Eliza gains freedom from the slave system, but in distinguishing a set of values through her protection of Harry that pushes them beyond the nation's hegemonic economy of meanings. The description of mother and child together provides a set of alternative values through which human relationships could be experienced outside racial narratives. Emphasising the movement, touch, feeling and warmth circulating between them, Stowe's description joins the bodies of mother and son together to transform them into an image of one interwoven body. The overriding emphasis upon this moment as a complex inward sensation rather than a visibly determined spectacle maps out a powerful reverse of Stowe's sentimental fiction. The fluctuating outlines of Eliza and Harry operate as another category of deception that rearranges their relationship with the national identity.

Baldwin's belief that sentimental fiction can represent an 'inability to feel' can be revised to suggest that Stowe critiques in such moments those political institutions that oppress 'feeling' itself. This transforming experience of intimate human contact is not divorced from political concerns and it does not have to be confined to a location of solely feminine experience. Stowe's language draws us towards Whitman's adhesiveness, and the spontaneity of human contact and its regenerative social powers. The 'electric streams' that Eliza experiences can be seen to move across the same margins of political debate in Whitman's 'preface' to *Leaves of Grass* (1855) and forms a similar attack upon the idea of a social hierarchy. The force of the epiphany blurs mother and child together, producing not the sentimental unity we might expect but 'sinews like steel'. Simultaneously emotional and mechanical, their togetherness expands the boundaries of a moment of private transgression into a potential site for both male and female resistance.

Just as the 'romance' genre has been accused of 'turning away' from the political scene of America, when in fact it is more likely to present a transformation of those terms through which the national scene is confronted, so the language of the 'sentimental' can be reconfigured in ways that avoid separating Stowe from a more complex relation to national politics. As Eric J Sundquist argued, 'nothing in American culture was more infused with the doubleness at the heart of slavery than the sentimental ideal of domesticity.' Stowe's political exploration of the fragmented status of womanhood in the mid-nineteenth century leads towards a space within the national identity that might be occupied by those intersecting identities of gender, class and race subjected to a maddening confinement. Affirmation of the individual's momentary capacity to stand outside these social categories is heard by Eliza in the form of a voice which comes as if

from beyond the texts to which Eliza is bound: "Yes sure! said the mother, in a voice that startled herself; for it seemed to come from a spirit within, that was no part of her".

At the same time, this clearly does not mean we can claim on behalf of Stowe's characters permanent recourse to unconditioned truths beyond the society to which they are bound. Any redefinition of the more uncertain spaces within Stowe's texts of course has to recognise and work within the master narratives of 'race' that are explicitly conjured in the preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The harming effect of these ideologies is all too visible in the way we witnessed Eliza's child prior to their escape:

> "Now Jim, show this gentleman how you can dance and sing." The boy commenced one of those wild, grotesque songs common among negroes, in a rich clear voice, accompanying his singing with many comic evolutions of hands, feet, and whole body, all in perfect time to the music.
>
> "Bravo!" said Haley, throwing him a quarter of an orange.
>
> "Now Jim, walk like old Uncle Cudjoe, when he has the rheumatism," said his master.
>
> Instantly the flexible limbs of the child assumed the appearance of deformity and distortion, as, with his back humped up, and his masters stick in his hand, he hobbled about the room, his childish face drawn into a doleful pucker, and spitting from left to right, in imitation of an old man.
>
> Both gentlemen laughed uproariously.
>
> "Now, Jim," said his master, "show us how old Elder Robbins leads the palm." The body drew his chubby face down to a formidable length, and commenced toning a psalm tune through his nose, with imperturble gravity.

Here, the commodified form and racially fixed representation uncomfortably model a cross section of (for Stowe) characteristically 'African' attributes. The slave characters within Stowe's text can all too often seem like either uncritical reproductions of the racialised stereotypes of the mid-nineteenth century. Stowe's aesthetic of blackness can be seen here explicitly reproduced in the child, whose fetishised body (we are introduced to him through a description of 'His black hair, fine as floss silk, hung in glossy curls about his round, dimpled cheek) can be bent to imitate a range of 19th century typologies of his 'race'. The incongruity in watching a young child impersonate an old slave draws attention to Stowe's assumption that the adult slave is himself already childlike, physically predetermined towards 'wild grotesque' songs, and comic dancing.

These scenes provided exactly the kind of representation which made *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 'a very bad novel' for James Baldwin, who describes the resemblance of Eliza's child Harry to 'a darky bootblack doing a buck and a wing to the clatter of condescending coins'. If Baldwin's image helps us to understand Harry's racial containment within Shelby's home and nation; it also make us vividly recollect the character of Black Guinea aboard the Fidele In *The Confidence Man*. ' A grotesque Negro cripple', Black Guinea draws a crowd by begging aboard the Fidele. As we watch him playing to the crowd, his physical appearance also becomes transformed through his endeavours to secure the charity of the other passengers:

> In short, as in appearance he seemed like a dog, so now, in a merry way, like a dog he began to be treated. Still shuffling among the crowd, now and then he would pause, throwing back his head and opening his mouth like an elephant for tossed apples at a menagerie; when, making a space before him, people would have a bout at a strange sort of pitch-penny game, the cripple's mouth being at once target and purse, and he hailing each expertly caught copper with a cracked bravura from his tambourine

The continually uncertain relationship of a crowd of onlookers to the physical body is a recurrent motif of antebellum fiction, from the scaffold scene in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Whitman's visual image that proceeds the preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), and many less noticed scenes in Melville's fiction, such as 'A Flogging' in *White Jacket* (1850). These demonstrations function as contests between categories of official discourse and private feelings and dramatise the difficulty of distinguishing between defining our public and private selves. Black Guinea's highly problematic social visibility magnifies these signs of disorder taking place within the national body in 1857. The 'darkie' of the antebellum nation offers a range of different appearances seen by different onlookers: he embodies the contradictory status of a freed 'slave'; the abject physical status of a 'dog'; alternatively he disarms the viewer with a 'freak-show' as he opens his mouth like an 'elephant', before entertaining them with his tambourine like a popular stage artist. In each respect and in each viewing Black Guinea presents us with a different response to the social issue of 'race'. Susan Ryan argues,

> Melville's text never resolves the mystery of the beggars blackness, nor does it assure readers that the confidence man's subsequent persona's are reliably white […] If, as Michael Rogin writes, "beneath the masquerade of The Confidence Man, there is nothing at all" then perhaps all of *The Confidence Man*'s racial identities, like his other identity markers, are masquerades. His is a series of projections with no underlying substance, at least none that the novel allows us to discern. At issue for many late-twentieth century readers, then, is his intelligibility […] rather than his essence

Confusion over Black Guinea's identity, whether or not we can judge if he really is one manifestation of the 'confidence man' is dramatised in the way Black Guinea is able to draw money from the spectators from what would seem to be opposite principles. Gaining the 'charity' of the audience means gaining their 'confidence' in the authenticity of the signs of his racial identity, and also the facts of his physical deformity. But, as the mocking attentions of the crowd imply, these two characteristics do not stay separate. Through Black Guinea, Melville plays on the close connection between 'blackness' and 'deformity' that existed in the antebellum nation. This tacit connection was put forward by increasing numbers of anthropologists who sought to construct the fiction that the black race was biologically inferior and degenerated from the white, a view that could just as easily be disseminated among northern abolitionists as southern pro-slavery advocates.

Thus, in *The Confidence Man* any sympathy vote for Black Guinea's crippled condition is underlined by racist implications for the perception of his body. The 'charity' given to Black Guinea simultaneously signify liberal sympathy and racial distrust. The performance with which he pleases the crowd as he catches their money in his mouth and swings his tambourine not only blurs the distinction between Black Guinea's appearance and the onlookers 'confidence' in its authenticity; Melville shows how it can do away altogether with the need to make such a distinction. Adding a further layer meaning, Black Guinea may paradoxically gain the 'confidence' of some of his audience because they already believe they know, that of course he

is a ‘fake’ or a con-man, a ‘minstrel’ performer. But instead of defusing the issue of racial conflict within a harmless form of entertainment, an increasingly menacing subtext develops within the scene. The throwing of coins may be what procures Black Guinea’s continuing performance, but as the clattering of coins in his direction becomes more and more insistent, Melville simultaneously implies that the charity of the ‘more playful almoners’ has a malicious undercurrent. As the coins mix with ‘buttons’, these are now aimed like missiles as if to interrupt and to end the play acting, as if it has begun to remind the onlookers of their connection with the brute economic and political realities of American class and racial oppression suggested by Black Guinea’s mute minstrelsy. Whether a black cripple or a white trickster, Black Guinea is allowed no further space of his own, but is crowded around with demands, ‘asking him, had he any documentary proof, any plain paper about him, attesting that his case was not a spurious one’.

Baldwin would have recognised the vital difference between Stowe’s representation of Harry who remains determined by racial narratives (at least until rejoined with his mother Eliza) and Melville’s representation of Black Guinea’s distorted play upon racial identity. The critical distance maintained between these two authors could be said to be embodied in the differences between these two characterisations. Stowe uncritically reproduces what are now vividly seen as embarrassing traits given to the African-American child, where a white viewers controlling gaze establishes the imitative nature of his ‘black’ selfhood. The ‘instant’ flexibility of the young child’s body, however, does make us return our attention to the constructedness of physical appearances throughout the sentimental novel. Stowe’s dramatisation of Eliza’s child clearly reduces his identity into a ‘thing’ despite the ‘humanising influence’ Stowe accords the ‘artist’ in her preface to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Even here, however, the child’s fluid transformations question how easily ‘things’ can be displaced between differing perceptions of the same event. Mark Seltzer’s *Bodies and Machines* (1992) has addressed this underlying problem in Stowe’s text:

> The emphatic transgression of what Stowe sets up as the founding difference between persons and property poses something of a problem in a novel originally subtitled “The Man That Was A Thing” and centred on representing “the feelings of living property”. And although the uncertainty about relations between persons and things is nowhere more insistent than in a novel about the peculiarities of slavery, such uncertainty characterises not merely ‘sentimental’ fictions but also later nineteenth century American “realist” and “naturalist” writing generally.

Seltzer’s conclusion here is interesting because usually it is the literary ‘romance’ of the 1850’s that is seen paving the way for late nineteenth century fiction. It is Hawthorne who we are told should lead to James, not Stowe. Seltzer’s quote however suggests that the textual indeterminacy that is valued in Hawthorne or Melville also finds its way into Stowe’s hazy boundaries between ‘persons’ and ‘things’. From this position we can not only explore how the ‘sentimental’ and ‘romance’ overlap in their registering of uncertainties within the body of America. This intersection leads back to a dialogue between Stowe and other forms of writing vital to mid-nineteenth century debate. In *Walden* (1854) Thoreau’s quest to strike a hard bottom of ‘reality’ runs around on the problem of how multiple representations are open to the ‘simple’ objects of nature that were a source of inspiration for his political resistance.

In *Black and White Strangers* (1993), Kenneth Warren echoes Baldwin’s arguments to neatly sum up why Stowe has been regarded later realist authors like James and Howells as an ‘inspiration and a problem’:

> The success of her novel confirmed the belief that fiction could achieve social and political ends yet her success seemed to accommodate a deplorable aesthetic. Her characters were often sentimentalised, her plot often creaky, and her attention to craft apparently non-existent.

Contemporary literary criticism often endorses this stance, questioning the 'unrealistic' standards of Stowe's sentimental fiction. Yet Stowe's text can offer us a critique of its own upon the concept of a 'social real' just as Melville, Hawthorne, or later, as Howells or James attempted. Harry highlights how the body in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* becomes divided between incommensurable forms of social meaning. Stowe's relationship to a hierarchy of national narratives for 'the dominant Anglo-Saxon race' may be much closer than that of Melville's, but it breaks down when subjected to the erratic boundaries of private emotion experienced by Harry's mother, Eliza. Developing upon this ambiguous space, I want to argue that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can reveal the body knowingly participating in performances where play-acting represents a form of resistance to institutional regulation of private emotions.

A more pointed, and surprisingly overlooked example of self-conscious division between public appearance and private feeling can be found in Black Sam and Andy's self-conscious manipulation of their own African-American racial identity, designed to prevent Haley's capture of Eliza and Harry. I would like to explore the possibility that Black Sam and Andy's subterfuge challenges the critical assumptions about the monolithic production of race in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in a particularly subversive way. Initially, the comical characterisation of these two black slaves unfolds through conversations which appear distanced from the signs of intelligence that Stowe privileges her more Anglo-Saxon characters. 'In Which the Reader is Introduced to a Man of Humanity' makes it clear that what makes Shelby a 'gentleman' is a recourse to educated standards for which Haley, on the other hand, whose speech is satirised for being 'in free and easy defiance of Murray's Grammar', cares little. Yet the ambiguity concerning who Stowe is specifically referring to as the 'man of humanity' leads us into other areas of doubt. Black Sam and Andy comic illiteracy as slaves, which ostensibly places them as inferior even to Haley, can provide a play upon language which draws to the readers attention to their acute understanding of the position they occupy under the slave system 'benevolently' run by Haley:

> "Well, yer see," said Sam, proceeding to gravely wash down Haley's pony, "I'se' quired what ye may call a habit o' bobservation, Andy. It's a very important habit, Andy; and I commed yer to be cultivatin' it, now yer young. Hist up that hind foot, Andy. Yer see Andy, it's bobservation makes all the differnce in niggers. Didn't I see which way the wind blew dis yer morning'? Didn't I see what missus wanted, though she never let on? dat's ar's bobservation, Andy. I 'spects it's what you may call a faculty. Faculties is different in different peoples, but cultivation of em' goes a long way."
>
> "I guess if I hadn't helped your bobservation dis morning, yer wouldn't have seen your way so smart," said Andy
>
> "Andy", said Sam, "you's a promisin' child, der an't no manner o' doubt. I thinks lots o' yer Andy; and I don't feel no ways ashamed to take idees from you. We oughtenter overlook nobody, Andy, cause the smartest on us gets tripped up sometimes."

This particular scene specifically alters what is usually cast as Stowe's relationship to race, suggesting after all that Stowe's text conceals a greater awareness of the production and social meaning of these archetypes within the great 'master chords' of nation. What Black Sam's

humorous malapropism 'bobservation' reveals is an educational jeremiad passed between one slave and the other. Like Jim's 'faculty' of sixth sense in *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Sam's awareness of his 'faculty' of 'bobservation' is open to more interpretations than merely displaying the gullibility of the slave. What Black Sam is doing is teaching Andy to distinguish between public and private roles. Like a pair of 'confidence man', they are learning how to 'deceive' America. The recognition that this faculty can be 'different' in 'different people' suggests a more shrewd awareness of discrepancies between ways of 'seeing' an event; or for that matter, the differences between seeing a 'person' rather than a 'thing'. Whilst they take care of Haley's horse, Sam repeatedly names and renames his friend, 'Andy', as if to emphasise the difference between the private relationship with his friend and the public slave duties that bind them together.

This more complex awareness has often been dismissed as outside the capacity of the 'creaky plots' of sentimental genres to convey; a deficit highlighted by comparison with the ironic labyrinths of meaning contained in Melville's plots. Yet Haley can equally be seen as the manipulated subject of their confidence tricks as Delano is subject to the theatrical performances of Babo in 'Benito Cereno' (1856). And just as, for instance, Douglass also tells us how he was 'compelled to resort to various stratagems' in his autobiographical *Narrative of the Life of An American Slave* (1845), so too Sam and Andy are engaging us in a tacit awareness of their positions as social actors. What the two slaves have been discussing is their role in preventing the departure of Haley from going after Eliza and her child. The effectiveness of their play upon the dominant association of the slave with dim-wittedness has been all too effective. Before chasing after Haley's horse, Sam takes on the appearance of the primitive 'savage', by wrapping his head in a hat of palm leaves:

> Sam's palm-leaf had been ingeniously disentangled from all pretensions to braid, as respects its brim; and the slivers starting apart, and standing upright, gave it a blazing air of freedom and defiance, quite equal to that of any Fegee chief […] Like the sword of Coeur De Lion, which always blazed in the front and thickest of battle, Sam's palm leaf was to be seen everywhere when there was the least danger that a horse could be caught

Sam's hat, of course, has been purposefully designed to scare Haley's horse away as he pretends to give chase and capture it. Sam's manipulation of his own appearance, however, is also a play upon the exotic images of race being disseminated through the expanding imperial cultures of America through which Haley's awareness of the slave would be conditioned. In other words, Sam knows that while he is orchestrating the continual prevention of the horses capture, he is only acting as Haley might expect: just as Babo, in 'Benito Cereno'(1856) orchestrating his own strategies, 'acts' exactly as Delano expects. Sam's enjoyment in controlling the scene lies not simply in being able to momentarily frustrate Haley's authority. Taken more seriously, his performance carried out with all the freedom and defiance of a 'Fegee chief', enabling an 'escape' which mounts a political challenge to the system of control represented in Haley's ownership of Eliza and her child: an act of subversion which draw yet more significance by being framed against the history of America's imperial exploitation of the south sea islands.

Black Sam and Andy characterisations may at least suggest Stowe is more dextrous with her characterisations than at first appears to be the case. Taken with Haley in the hot pursuit of Eliza, Sam continues to deploy strategies of doubleness which play confidence tricks upon the slave owner. In response to Haley's questioning about whether Shelby's possesses 'tracking dogs', or which is the fastest path from Shelby's estate, Sam's 'bobservation' of Haley's racial predisposition ensures that he can continue to confuse and subvert his authority behind a mask of ignorance: 'Sam knew exactly what he meant, but kept on a look of earnest and desperate

simplicity'. Black Sam and Andy are not the only slaves in the text entirely capable of playing upon their owners cultural values. At the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* we are told how Sambo and Quimbo perform 'dances and singing' to distract Legree's anger. Taken with Cassie's elaborate plan and theatrical performance, the fluctuating boundaries of Harry and Eliza's body, Black Sam and Andy's behaviour highlights the continual presence of masquerade in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Both Melville and Stowe use subterfuges and 'marks of dishonesty' that successfully create a space for the individual character to stand at least temporarily outside the hegemonic national identity using a veil of theatrical disguise.

Through the moments I have explored in this article, I hope to have offered at least a provisional starting point from which to begin unwinding the complex strands of culture and politics that might join two important nineteenth century texts, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Confidence Man* with ideas being developed in contemporary postnational criticism. This may provides us with an alternative view America in the 1850's: a time when continually delayed promises of equality, placed under the strain of slavery, were increasingly felt either as grand hoax by southern slave and white northerner alike. Alerting ourselves to the 'marks of dishonesty' in both Melville and Stowe shakes our belief in the ideas of Antebellum authorship we have grown overly-comfortable with: the typified Melvillean voice saying 'no in thunder' from the margins and the popular author overtly conditioned by his or her own public appeal. Since literary representation in the age of the 'American Renaissance' has always tended to conceal as much as it cares to explain, we can no longer trust the ambiguous spaces in Stowe and Melville to remain apart. It may be time to consider the showmanship of both Melville and Stowe's texts and authorship in the same light as we would consider Mark Twain's literary 'masquerades'. As Huckleberry Finn would tell us, all acts of reading involve some serious 'stretchers'.

Hopefully, this can restore for us a more alluring, openly changeable life within the heart of a more politically challenging canonical fiction. Alongside other mid-nineteenth century texts that question the gap between the public and the private*, The Confidence Man* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* develop a fragmented view of American society that became thoroughly familiar to authors of the later 'realist' text, establishing images of a divided nation that then became redeployed throughout the modern, postmodern and now what some consider to be our 'postnational' culture. A feature shared by these diverse literary cultures is the image of 'America' whose future can no longer be coherently narrated through recourse to an imaginary and symbolically unified past, and whose present tilts towards crisis. Melville and Stowe are placed within this unsteady divide, occupying often contradictory positions which leave us viewing the character of the author if anything, as equivocally positioned as the confidence men, evangelicals, tricksters, slaves and hustlers who inhabit their fictions and deceive America.

Endnotes

1. James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son (Penguin Books, ed. 1995) 20
1. Herman Melville, Pierre (Penguin Books ed.,1996; 1852) 7
2. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Harper Classics) 425-426
3. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (Yale Nota Bene, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1979) 534.
4. Lynn Wardley, 'Relic, Fetish, Femmage: The Aesthetics of Sentiment in the Work of Stowe' in Shirley Samuels ed., The Culture of Sentiment (Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York: 1992) 206
5. ibid.
6. Donald Pease, National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1994) 4-5. My use of the term postnational also comes from texts such as Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan ed., Cultures of United States Imperialism (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1994) and Donald Pease, 'National Narratives, Postnational Narration' Modern Fiction Studies (1997:43.1)
7. Donald Pease, National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1994) 5

8. Note, for instance, Stowe hints at a hidden split within Legree's past bearing similarities to Pierre's: Legree 'at an early age, broke from her, to seek his fortunes at sea'. Whilst Isabel opens up doubt about the identity of Pierre's father, Cassie's appearance plays upon a guilt-stricken memory of the departed mother whom Legree abandoned.
9. Michael Paul Rogin, Subversive Genealogy (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1979) 244.
10. Herman Melville, The Confidence Man (Oxfords World's Classics, 1989) 8.
11. Michael Paul Rogin, Subversive Genealogy (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1979) 254
12. Herman Melville, The Confidence Man (Oxfords World's Classics, 1989) 1
13. Tony Tanner, intro., The Confidence Man (Oxfords World's Classics, 1989) xiii
14. Jane Tompkins, Sensational Designs. The Cultural Work Of American Fiction 1790-1860 (Oxford University Press: New York and Oxford, 1985)
15. ibid., 132
16. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Harper Classics) 53
17. Eric. J. Sundquist 'Slavery, Revolution, and the American Renaissance' in The American Renaissance Reconsidered ed., Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London, 1992) 19
18. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Mothers Struggle" Uncle Tom's Cabin (Harper Classics) 52
19. ibid., "In Which the Reader is Introduced to a Man of Humanity" 5
20. James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son (Penguin Books, ed., 1995) 20
21. Herman Melville, The Confidence Man (Oxfords World's Classics, 1989) 11-12
22. Susan Ryan, 'Misgivings: Melville, Race, and the Ambiguities of Benevolence', American Literary History, Winter 2000, Volume 2, Number 4.
23. The Confidence Man (Oxfords World's Classics: 1989) 14.
24. The problem of interpretating visible signs in texts produced through political divisions 1850's in a continual tension, from The Scarlet Letter, Thoreau's quest to strike a hard bottom of 'reality' runs around on the problem of how multiple representations are open to the 'simple' objects of nature that were a source of inspiration for his transcendentalism
25. Mark Selzer, Bodies and Machines (Routledge, New York and Oxford: 1992) 48
26. Kenneth Warren, Black and White Strangers . Race And Literary Realism (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London: 1993)
27. ibid., 72.
28. For an informative development on these mid-nineteenth century contexts for deceit and play acting see James W. Cook The Arts of Deception. Playing With Fraud in the Age of Barnum (Harvard University Press: 2001)
29. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Harper Classics) 51
30. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Harper Classics) 50.
2. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Harper Classics) 59.