

# TRANSATLANTIC GROWTH THROUGH SLAVERY AND FREEDOM IN HARRIET BEECHER STOWE'S *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* AND GERTRUDIS GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA'S *SAB*\*

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**Abstract:** This article is meant to be a comparative analysis of the development of the main characters in relation to the dichotomy established between liberty and slavery as presented in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*. The aim of this article is to identify the similarities and differences between both novels as regards their main characters (Tom/Sab), their social discourse (abolitionism/antislavery) or their genre (social novel/romantic novel) so as to highlight the importance of the Cuban writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda as precursor of the antislavery novel, which eventually gave way to the abolitionist genre represented by Harriet Beecher Stowe's seminal novel, published some years later.

**Keywords:** transatlanticism; coming of age; antislavery and abolitionist discourses; religion; education; social discourse; sentimentality; slavery and women's situation.

**Resumen:** Este artículo es un estudio comparativo del crecimiento de los personajes principales en relación a la dicotomía entre libertad y esclavitud desarrollada en la novela *La cabaña del tío Tom* de la escritora norteamericana Harriet Beecher Stowe y la novela *Sab* de la escritora cubana, aunque española de adopción, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. El propósito del artículo es identificar las similitudes y diferencias entre ambas novelas en relación al desarrollo de los personajes principales (Tom/Sab), el discurso social (abolucionismo/ antiesclavismo) o el género (novela social/novela romántica) con el fin de dar a conocer la obra de Gómez de Avellaneda como precursora de la novela antiesclavista, que llegó a su apogeo con la obra abolicionista por antonomasia escrita por Harriet Beecher Stowe años más tarde.

**Palabras clave:** transatlanticismo; crecimiento; discurso antiesclavista y abolicionista; religión; educación; discurso social; sentimentalismo; esclavismo y situación de la mujer.

La esclavitud es una y persigue un fin común de explotación del trabajo, y la nacionalidad del explotador poco quita o agrega. También rechazamos que haya diferencias por la religión del explotador [...] Para la masa esclavizada, la esclavitud fue siempre una y la

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misma, y las diferencias de grados de explotación se originaron en razones económicas [...] También rechazamos todo tipo de connotación racial que determinara una preferencia de los esclavistas por los africanos (Rivas 1990: 87)<sup>1</sup>

There is an extensive and significant corpus of bibliographic studies about the Cuban<sup>2</sup> writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's first novel, *Sab*, published in 1841, in which scholars often remark the fact that this antislavery novel chronologically precedes the publication of the most well-known antislavery<sup>3</sup> novel of all times, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe and published in 1851. An example of these comparative studies is the reference José Servera makes when he mentions that "*Sab* era la primera novela en español en la que se denunciaba esa práctica [la esclavitud], y se adelantaba a *La cabaña del tío Tom*" (Servera 1997: 50) Similarly, Avellaneda's biographer, Carmen Bravo-Villasante, also alludes to both novels and remarks the underlining differences between them when she says that "no obstante los alegatos contra la esclavitud, [...] en *Sab* el elemento abolicionista es lo de menos, y lo más importante es el canto a la naturaleza [...] y sobre todo describir el sentimiento de un mundo primitivo y la fuerza pasional de los temperamentos sensibles" (Servera 1997: 50). Luis Alberto Sánchez also mentions that "entre las primeras novelas idealistas figura *Sab*, por doña Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, [que] trata de la esclavitud del negro en Cuba, [mientras que] *La cabaña del tío Tom* por Harriet Beecher Stowe, es posterior; ella inaugura la guerra entre esclavistas y antiesclavistas" and remarks that "*Sab* no fue tan eficaz porque las circunstancias eran diferentes" (Sánchez 1968: 129). Moreover, Mercedes Rivas also mentions both novels and defends that "en el fondo responden a una actitud semejante ante el problema negro, pues, como afirma Jacqueline Kaye, 'son el producto de crisis surgidas en el seno de sociedades capitalistas de América cuyo sostén fue el trabajo de esclavos'" (Rivas 1990: 164).

The remarkably earlier publication of *Sab* in comparison with other novels of the same genre, especially taking into consideration that its writing was even earlier than its actual publication,<sup>4</sup> turns it into one of the first antislavery novels. *Sab* is considered as

<sup>1</sup> This quotation, through which Mercedes Rivas refers to M. Moreno Fraginals, reveals the universal feeling of rejection towards the abominable institution of slavery, despite the differences in the countries where these practices take place, their religion, the degree of exploitation of the slave, or even his or her race. It is believed that this universal feeling of rejection joins all novels regarded as "antislavery," regardless of the nationality of the author, or the country where these novels were published.

<sup>2</sup> In spite of her Cuban origins, Gómez de Avellaneda lived in different localities of Spain throughout all her life, and it is precisely in Madrid where her literary career began to arise.

<sup>3</sup> Mercedes Rivas distinguishes between antislavery novels and abolitionist novels, and she regards *Sab* as an antislavery novel, that is, against the institution of slavery. However, she does not claim the novel is abolitionist, since Cuban slaves were not granted their freedom until 1886 (when the so-called "Ley de Patronato" or "Ley de la abolición de la esclavitud" was passed; however, despite the fact this law defended the abolition of slavery in 1880, the slavery regime subtly continued for six years more) and *Sab* was published in 1841, when the abolitionist possibility had not been profusely contemplated yet.

<sup>4</sup> The chronological difference between its writing (towards 1838 according to José Servera) and its first publication (1841) was due to censorship. Even the author herself decided not to include *Sab* in her collected works, *Obras Literarias* (1869-1871, 5 vols.), since its publication in Cuba would not have been accepted due to its marked antislavery discourse.

one of the most important novels of the genre in Cuba,<sup>5</sup> and scholars usually highlight both the fact it was written by a woman and that it develops a noteworthy discourse of social condemnation against different ways of slavery. It is the aim of this essay to analyse the different aspects that contribute to developing this discourse in Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, taking into account chronological and national distances so as to describe how the transatlantic antislavery discourse developed in the nineteenth-century novel in both Cuba and the United States of America.

The antislavery discourse manifests through the development and coming of age of the protagonists in both novels. The main character in *Sab* is presented in contrast with others so as to highlight the difference between social classes, the landlords and the slaves, and thus, develop both the antislavery and romantic discourses that characterise the novel, that is, the opposite, or binary, portrayal of differing pairs of characters in the novel which indicates the social stratification of the Cuban society of the time.<sup>6</sup>

The first character introduced in the novel is Enrique Otway, an English young man, a so-called *buhonero* (seller) who enjoys a period of remarkable economic prosperity, and whose main aim is to arrange his marriage with Carlota, don Carlos' daughter. At the beginning of the novel, Enrique arrives at Bellavista<sup>7</sup>, don Carlos' *finca*, to visit his fiancée Carlota. Enrique belongs to the social class of the *criollos*. He enjoys a comfortable social position, and well-aware of the privileges of his class, he aims at enlarging his economic dominion. As regards his opinions towards the slavery regime, he never declares himself a supporter, although he never complains about it either. Actually, he even sometimes uses it to his own benefit. Through the description of his physical traits in the first chapter of the novel, he is portrayed as a *criollo* in sharp contrast with the male protagonist of the novel, Sab, who is depicted as a *mulato* and a slave. The traits used to describe Enrique Otway's physical appearance seem to have been especially chosen so as to show his social origins, since it is said that "su tez blanca y sonrosada, sus ojos azules, y su cabello de oro [denotaban] que había venido al mundo en una región del Norte" (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 102). Despite the fact that Enrique belongs to the upper-social class, he finds himself in the need to ask Sab for help. At first, Enrique mistakes Sab for a landlord of good breeding due

<sup>5</sup> Important Cuban antislavery novels are Félix Tanco Bosmeniel's *Petrona y Rosalía* (1838), Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco. El ingenio o las delicias del campo* (1839), Antonio Zambrana's *El negro Francisco* (1875), Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés o La loma del Angel* (1882), Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1838), Pedro José Morillas' *El Ranchador* (1856) and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841). Mercedes Rivas mentions this group as the most outstanding Cuban antislavery novels according to tradition. However, scholars do not agree on which of them can be regarded as the first Cuban antislavery novel. José Servera mentions *Sab*, *Petrona y Rosalía*, *Francisco*, and *Cecilia Valdés* as possible pioneers within this genre in Cuba.

<sup>6</sup> Mercedes Rivas mentions that the social stratification of the time in Cuba was based on the three-partite division between the world of the whites (*el amo, la ama, el hijo del amo, la hija del amo, los comerciantes, el personal libre del ingenio* and *los campesinos o rancheadores*), the world of the free coloured men (*el mulato* and *la mulata*), the cimarrones (rural and urban) and the slaves (men and women).

<sup>7</sup> The narrator locates Bellavista at about four *leguas* from Cubitas and about three *leguas* from Puerto Príncipe (today it is known as Camagüey, where Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda came from). The fact that actual places are mentioned reveals the historical and social discourse in the the novel, as happens with Beecher Stowe's novel, where references to real spaces also abound.

to his *mulato* appearance, and so, Enrique asks him about directions to find Bellavista. When Enrique discovers Sab's true identity, his racial and social prejudices lead him to abandon the good manners he had been using to address Sab so far and, from then onwards, Enrique's words acquire "el tono de despreciativa familiaridad que se usa con los esclavos" (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 108).

This initial episode, together with the fact that both men aspire to Carlota's love, despite their differing aims, establishes the contrast and rivalry that will develop between both characters throughout the novel. This contrast of characters will prompt their coming of age as men. Enrique is idealised by Carlota, but we soon learn that both Enrique, and his father Jorge, are only interested in gaining economic profit out of the marriage between Enrique and Carlota. Actually, Enrique states that he cannot help feeling some kind of emotion towards Carlota. Nevertheless, he definitely rejects his intention to marry her once he discovers the amount of the promised dowry does not surpass his expectations<sup>8</sup>. Only the fact that Carlota won the lottery prize<sup>9</sup> urges Enrique to change his mind and fulfill the marriage proposal his own father Jorge had advised him to contrive. The egotism that characterises Jorge is especially manifested when, on his wedding day, he reprobates the fact that Carlota does not look happy, when he is well aware of the fact that her father has left her to visit his son, and that her friend from childhood, Sab, has recently died. Moreover, once Enrique and Carlota are married, Carlota is submitted to a situation of oppression and submission, since she is no longer permitted to enjoy the liberty that characterised her youth at Bellavista, where she lived with her family. Actually, it is mentioned that "Carlota no podía desaprobador con justicia la conducta de su marido, ni debía quejarse de su suerte, pero a pesar suyo se sentía oprimida" (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 259), since Enrique is totally devoted to his business and disregards Carlota once he has already begotten her dowry. Thus, Enrique embodies the master of slaves *per se*, since he contributes to the permanence of the social slavery of the black and the *mulatos*, in addition to being a clear representative of the Cuban patriarchal society where the novel is set. Enrique also contributes to the discourse about the figurative slavery of women, who are enclosed in a domestic space and whose functions are traditionally reduced to the care of the family and procreation, thus denying them any right to intervene within the public sphere of the Cuban society of the time.

If Enrique Otway is depicted as a subject defending and ensuring the continuity of slavery, Sab, the protagonist of the novel is portrayed as the object subjugated to this slavery, thus drawing a contrastive binary structure within the novel. Despite this characterisation, Sab is not representative of the slave population, since he enjoys quite a privileged position for those belonging to his class. Sab is a *mulato* as opposed to the rest of slaves, who are usually black. Actually, it is mentioned that Sab "no parecía un criollo blanco, tampoco era negro ni podía creérsele descendiente de los primeros habitantes de las Antillas" (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 104), and it is hinted that he was probably the

<sup>8</sup> Don Carlos, Carlota's father, is disinherited once it is discovered Carlota aims at marrying a *buhonero*, Enrique Otway, since this fact presumes that, although Enrique may enjoy a buoyant economic position, his father's origins are too dubious to be accepted.

<sup>9</sup> Later on, it is discovered that it is actually Sab the one who won it but gave it to Carlota so as to secure her happiness with Enrique.

result of miscegenation between two different social classes, which was considerate absolutely inappropriate at the time despite its common occurrence. Sab is also in charge of don Carlos' *finca*, and as a result, he is enabled to give orders to the rest of the slaves at Bellavista. He has also received an uncommonly advantaged education for those of his class, since he was instructed under the same conditions of his beloved Carlota. Sab maintains a tight relationship with her and we know that Carlota makes sure Sab is never inflicted with any kind of torture,<sup>10</sup> which normally abounds in other antislavery novels. Finally, Sab is portrayed as possessing a powerful physique, which again endows him with qualities that convert him into a superior being, since the narrator mentions his appearance belonged to "una de aquellas fisonomías que fijan las miradas a primera vista y que jamás se olvidan cuando se han visto una vez" (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 104).

Similarly, Sab's privileged position with respect to other slaves is also rooted in his noble origins, since his mother was an African princess and, as for his father, although Sab mentions he never met him, there exists the possibility that Sab is the son of Don Luis, don Carlos' brother and Carlota's uncle. Consequently, it is hinted that Sab and Carlota might ultimately be cousins, since their respective fathers were brothers. In order to corroborate Sab's noble origins, scholars have remarked the resemblance of his name with that of the Queen of Sheba and he is often identified with the son she had from Salomon,<sup>11</sup> named Menelik. Despite his social class as a slave, Sab's true reason for suffering in the novel is the love he feels towards Carlota, which turns him into a literal slave for love; a totally platonic and idealised kind of love, since not only does social class and race separate them, but Carlota is also in love with another man, Enrique Otway. The fatality of this fact, along with others, converts Sab into a paradigm of the Romantic hero.<sup>12</sup>

One of the traits that define Sab as a Romantic hero is that he is often presented as intimately related with nature and its intricacies. Sab exerts some kind of dominion over the realm of nature and animals. This is particularly shown when it is Sab who saves Enrique twice, when he falls off his horse during a storm and when he slips down in the cave of Cubitas. Another aspect which characterises Sab as a Romantic hero is that, despite being a slave, Sab has received an important educational background and possesses the gift of creativity. Nevertheless, as opposed to Enrique, Sab's education is not only academic, but he also shows a remarkable knowledge as regards the popular traditions of his country, that is, tales, songs<sup>13</sup> and legends that he learnt from the Indian woman, Martina, whom Sab

<sup>10</sup> Episodes including extreme violence inflicted on slaves abound in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, whereas they are totally inexistent in *Sab*. Despite the fact the unjust position and treatment attached to slaves is recurrent in *Sab* (especially illustrated in Enrique's prejudices towards slaves), no slave is submitted to any kind of violence throughout the novel, probably due to the censorship of the time.

<sup>11</sup> Another different interpretation as regards the meaning of his name alludes to the fact that Sab probably belongs to the tribe of the "san" or "bushmen" since it is mentioned that "era su color de un blanco amarillento" (104), and this colour is often attached to the peoples living in certain zones within the African continent. This interpretation is defended by Mary Cruz in the 1976 edition of *Sab*, and it is also cited by José Servera in the 1997 edition of the novel.

<sup>12</sup> The Romantic Movement in Spain, which began towards the second half of the nineteenth-century, becomes appropriate to develop a social discourse of deprecation that will give way to social change.

<sup>13</sup> The first time Sab appears in the novel, he is singing a popular song, probably inspired by the love he feels towards Carlota. In contrast, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, slaves only dance, sing or perform when their masters ask them to do it. In *Sab*, he sings out of his own will.

regards as a mother since he is an orphan. Another trait that immediately associates him with the Romantic hero is the very fact that Sab is a slave in spite of his nobility of birth, since Romantic literature often recovers and gives especial precedence to those characters belonging to peripheral or marginal spaces.<sup>14</sup> Sab also embodies the figure of the noble savage.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Sab also represents the romantic ideal through his spiritual presence all through the novel. His constant presence converts him into an ethereal character commonly found in Gothic tales,<sup>16</sup> which precisely aroused during the Romantic Movement. He is often portrayed as a silent presence that accompanies Carlota, acting as the protective angel of his beloved cousin. This presence, although is never truly identified, is supposed to be that of Sab. Moreover, as an ultimate Romantic trait that characterises Sab, his personality is described through a duality. He is Christian and pagan, submissive and rebellious at the same time, which again underlines his mediating position between the white and the black races, between the privileged and the working classes<sup>17</sup>. On the one hand, Sab has been baptised, his real name is Bernabé<sup>18</sup> and he is a Christian, but on the other hand, we learn of his African origins and the pagan rites he learnt from his adopted mother, Martina.

Similarly, Sab often acts in a submissive way, accepting his fate as a slave. This behaviour is particularly exemplified in the letter he writes for Teresa before he dies, in which he mentions that “la virtud del esclavo [...] es obedecer y callar, servir con humildad y resignación a sus legítimos dueños, y no juzgarlos nunca” (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 265). As opposed to this conservative discourse, in this very same letter, Sab feels unable to accept his condition of slave because he cannot aspire to the love of his cousin and landlady Carlota. His thoughts, filled with rage and passion, features that characterise the Romantic hero, are expressed in the letter where he asserts that “mi alma se lanzaba a aquellos hermosos destinos hasta que un súbito y desolante recuerdo venía a decirme al oído: ‘eres mulato y esclavo’; entonces un sombrío furor comprimía mi pecho y la sangre de mi corazón corría como veneno por mis venas hinchadas” (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 267). Finally, Sab also represents the embodiment of the Romantic hero because of the tragic destiny that awaits him. Since his birth, he is compelled to live as a slave, even though his lord, don Carlos, finally grants him his liberty after accepting Carlota’s request.

<sup>14</sup> In the last chapter of the novel, Sab makes reference to the Shakespearean character of Othello, play that both he and Carlota used to read when they were children. This allusion shows the parallelism between Othello and Sab. Some scholars believe the narrator seeks to remark this parallelism so that the readers sympathise with Sab.

<sup>15</sup> Philosophy developed by the French philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

<sup>16</sup> *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* includes a Gothic episode (number thirty-nine), in which Emmeline and Cassy pretend they are ghosts so that they can hide in the attic of Legree’s plantation. Legree is afraid of going up to the attic because he killed a slave there long ago. At the same time, the fact that both female slaves are enclosed in the attic is not only endowed with social criticism of slavery but also with feminist complaint against the enclosure of women within the patriarchal society.

<sup>17</sup> Sab performs a mediating task that resembles that of the Romantic bard, who was presumed to mediate between the common man and a divinity or superior entity through his poems.

<sup>18</sup> The festivity of San Bernabé is celebrated on the 1st of June, which is precisely the month through which the actions of the novel take place. If we take into consideration that Sab dies at this time, a clear identification can be established between Saint Bernabe and Sab. This coincidence favours the reading defended by some scholars who believe that Sab represents a martyr figure.

However, Sab's condition as a slave lasts up until the moment of his death,<sup>19</sup> which precisely takes place when Enrique and Carlota are celebrating their wedding. Thus, Sab's condition as a slave almost lasts eternally. Moreover, Sab's death is often interpreted as a sacrifice which ultimately turns him into a martyr figure, that is, a character that accomplishes a superior state due to his sacrifice for others. This fact almost converts Sab into a biblical figure, since Sab dies for love, he is tempted (Sab is tempted to kill Enrique when he falls off his horse, but Sab finally decides to save him instead), and he is also a saviour (Sab saves Enrique's life twice, and he also saves Luis, Martina's son, from the fire).<sup>20</sup>

In Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Sab's parallel character is Tom, a black and older slave who lives with his wife, aunt Chloe and his family within the cabin at Arthur Shelby's mansion. Avellaneda's Sab and Beecher Stowe's Tom share their goodness and submission towards their respective landlords and landladies, in addition to the fact they are depicted as having superior souls. They are both men that, despite their fate as slaves which they cannot change, become empowered through their enormous capacity for sacrifice which finally leads them, through different circumstances,<sup>21</sup> to their death. Both Sab and Tom love to the extreme and this turns them into biblical figures. However, there are also remarkable differences in their characterisation. The source of Sab's strength can be found in the love he feels for his cousin Carlota. This love leads him to sacrifice his own happiness for that of Carlota when she marries his beloved Enrique. In contrast, Tom's strength lies in his profound faith.<sup>22</sup> In many chapters of the novel, Tom reads or recites verses from the Bible, despite his precarious education, especially when he undergoes situations of extreme pain and torment.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Sab and Tom are also differing as regards their opinions about slavery. Tom is a docile slave submitted to his fate. Actually, when Eliza, a female slave from the plantation informs Tom about Shelby's intention to sell him to Haley, Tom, as opposed to Eliza, her husband George Harris and her son Harry, decides not to escape,

<sup>19</sup> It can be claimed that Sab's condition as a slave for love lasts even after his death since the last words he utters are: "Yo he amado, yo he vivido...ya no vivo...pero aún amo" (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 272). This quote shows the eternal love Sab feels for his lady Carlota. As a consequence, a parallelism can be established between the master/loved subject and the slave/loving subject.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to representing the Romantic hero, Gómez de Avellaneda's novel includes many of the characteristics attached to Romanticism such as the importance of nature, the relevance given to popular folklore, the Gothic traits, the personal subjectivity, the local customs and the popular linguistic expressions used by the Cuban people.

<sup>21</sup> Tom dies as a consequence of the tortures his master Legree inflicts upon him. Sab dies after his long journey to give Enrique don Carlos' letter, where the latter urges Enrique to marry Carlota. Sab dies of exhaustion and pain after the marriage between Enrique and Carlota has taken place. It is meaningful that Sab precisely expires once the wedding has been celebrated. This fact reinforces the idea that Sab dies of heartache. The difference in the deaths of both Tom and Sab shows the differing discourses underlining both novels. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is more socially and politically oriented, whereas *Sab*, despite its undeniable antislavery feelings, is more often considered a romantic and sentimental novel.

<sup>22</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe was brought up within a Calvinist family. Actually, her father, Lyman Beecher, her brothers and her husband, Calvin Stowe, were Calvinist preachers. Because of the fact she was a woman, Harriet was not allowed to preach. Some scholars believe that she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to make up for this inability to preach publicly and so she decided to express her beliefs through literature.

<sup>23</sup> As an example, Tom dies as a consequence of the tortures his master Legree inflicts upon him. Nevertheless, Tom's profound faith leads him to forgive his own executioner. This is why Tom has often been associated with the biblical Messiah.

but accept the fate his master has decided for him. Tom never contemplates the possibility of escaping, but he accepts the fate that has been planned for him.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, he becomes a martyr whose sacrifice prompts the salvation of the rest of slaves.<sup>25</sup>

In the first chapter of the novel, Mr Shelby and Mr Haley are having a conversation. Both discuss the possibility of selling Tom so that Shelby, his master, could face his economic insolvency. The fact that Tom's destiny is fixed by his masters at the beginning of the novel resembles the initial episode of *Sab*, where Carlota's destiny is being fixed through her arranged marriage to Enrique Otway.<sup>26</sup> However, Sab, as opposed to Tom, is never made to face the fact of being sold to another landlord, the separation from his family or a violent treatment. His situation is not representative of the rest of the slaves, since he manages them and he is enabled to direct the rest of slaves in the *finca*. Despite Sab's more optimistic situation in comparison with Tom, it is only Sab the one who shows some degree of rage and impotence as regards his destiny as a slave, since his condition prevents him from affirming his love for Carlota. Nevertheless, Sab never entertains the possibility of rebellion and he remains submissive, although never to such a high degree as Tom does.<sup>27</sup> However, Sab's moments of rage resemble those of Beecher Stowe's George Harris, Eliza's *mulato* husband, who is compelled to face that his relegation to a lower post despite his wit and intelligence. George Harris often feels enraged and manifests his harsh disapproval of his master. His will for freedom will eventually lead him to escape to Canada providing a manifest against slavery that is worth quoting:

Why, now comes my master, takes me right away from my work, and my friends, and all I like, and grinds me down into the very dirt! And why? Because, he says, I forgot who I was; he says, to teach me that I am only a nigger! After all, and last of all, he comes between me and my wife, and says I shall give her up, and live with another woman. And all this your laws give him power to do, in spite of God or man. Mr. Wilson, look at it! There isn't *one* of all these things, that have broken the hearts of my mother and my sister, and my wife and myself, but your laws allow, and give every man power to do, in Kentucky, and none can say to him nay! Do you call these the laws of *my* country? Sir, I haven't any country, anymore than I have any father. But I'm going to have one. (Beecher Stowe 1986: 187)

Despite their development, the characters in *Sab* are portrayed as representative types of their social classes, except for Sab, whose character is not considered a paradigm within the slave population<sup>28</sup>, given his privileged position as manager in Bellavista. In contrast, in

<sup>24</sup> Calvinism, the religion Beecher Stowe professed, defended that a person was predestined at birth, that is, he or she was already condemned or saved. However, Beecher Stowe's religious beliefs underwent changes throughout her life.

<sup>25</sup> After Tom's death, George Shelby, Tom's first master's son, grants all his slaves their freedom, and allows them to work for him provided their labour is remunerated.

<sup>26</sup> The parallelism between slavery and the situation of women in society is often remarked.

<sup>27</sup> The fact of portraying submissive and submitted slaves, as is the case with Sab and Tom, is aimed at awakening the sympathy of the readership and lead them to forget the image of the violent slaves who rebelled in Haiti in 1791. The portrayal of the slaves as docile was imitated by later works. However, the exaggerated docility some slaves, like Tom, show in the novel was harshly criticised by twentieth-century scholars.

<sup>28</sup> It is argued that Gómez de Avellaneda chose a superior slave, Sab, as the main character in order to awake the sympathies of her readership, since the reading public basically consisted of the privileged



*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the characters are often representative of their social classes, but their complexity and psychological development defy any consideration as typified characters.

In addition to characterisation, both novels present thematic aspects that contribute to developing the antislavery discourse. One of them is the parallelism established between the situation of the slave and that of the woman. In *Sab*, we are introduced to the female characters of Carlota and Teresa. Carlota's only destiny is getting married, whereas Teresa devotes her life to the spirituality of a convent. In Beecher Stowe's novel, we find a multiplicity of female characters like Emily Shelby, aunt Chloe, Eliza or Cassy who, despite belonging to different races and social classes, either depend on their husbands, in the case of the white females, or depend on their masters, in the case of the female slaves.<sup>29</sup> However, it is especially in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that we find women willing to fight against a pre-established destiny. This is the case with aunt Chloe who, after having been separated from her husband Tom, decides to make a living of her own and be able to pay for the liberty of her husband. Eliza, despite being on her own because her husband escaped to Canada, decides to run away with her son before being sold to Haley. This discourse of female rebellion is never hinted in Gómez de Avellaneda's novel. There are, though, strong female characters, as is the case with Teresa, but her destiny is fixed and she is unable to escape it. In contrast, as happens with Sab, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, there are many female characters that cannot possibly mend their situation, as happens with Prue,<sup>30</sup> or female characters that simply choose not to do anything to improve their condition as women despite their privileged position, as happens with Marie St. Clare.

Another aspect that is present in both novels is that of pathetism and sentimentality, in which way it is developed in both novels and how it contributes to developing the social discourse. The romantic and sentimental discourse in *Sab* acquires great relevance since, it is through the platonic love between Sab and Carlota, that the antislavery discourse is conveyed. In contrast, in Beecher Stowe's novel, romantic relationships are only contemplated on certain occasions, such as the separation between George Harris and Eliza to gain their liberty, but they are only taken into consideration so as to emphasise the injustice of slavery. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, love does not acquire the degree of sentimentality that characterises *Sab*, but it is associated with the concept of universal love and humanity, illustrated through characters such as Tom or Eva. In Beecher Stowe's novel, love is also manifested through solidarity between slaves (Tom helps Cassy and Emmeline), between slave and master (Tom saves Eva and teaches Augustine St. Clare to be temperate), and between slaves and other masters (Eliza and her son find refuge in different houses belonging to white masters such as Mr. Symmes, the Birds or even a community of Quakers). Finally, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, love is also manifested through the institution of the family, which acquires an especial relevance throughout the novel.<sup>31</sup>

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classes. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Beecher Stowe also chose a superior slave, Tom, to sympathise with the readership. However, in that case, Tom's superiority is not social, but spiritual.

<sup>29</sup> A traditional parallelism is often established between master/man and slave/woman.

<sup>30</sup> Prue appears in the nineteenth chapter of Beecher Stowe's novel. She is an alcoholic slave who lost her own baby because she had to breastfeed her lady's son and she did not have enough milk to feed both children. Later, we discover Prue is whipped by her master and that the injuries cause her death.

<sup>31</sup> It is believed that all slaves belong to the same family because they all share the same situation. This is ratified by the fact that, at the end of the novel, we discover that Eliza is Cassy's daughter and that Madame

It can be argued that sentimentalism subordinates the social discourse in *Sab*, whereas social content becomes more prevalent in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This is the reason why episodes of extreme violence and vexation are not included in *Sab*, but are significantly present in Beecher Stowe's novel. The American writer decided to include different episodes of mistreatment and tortures experienced by slaves such as Tom, Prue or Cassy so as to denounce the horrible situation to which slaves were submitted. In Gómez de Avellaneda's novel, Sab suffers when he is pursuing a journey to give Enrique don Carlos' letter. Sab is extremely tired and feels acute pain because of Carlota's marriage to Enrique. However, unlike Tom, who dies as a consequence of torture, Sab dies of heartache. Actually, Sab is never mistreated throughout the novel. Tom matures through sacrifice, Sab comes of age through the sufferings caused by unrequited love.

In sharp contrast with Avellaneda's novel, religion and Christian faith become relevant aspects in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Scholars have often established a parallelism between Tom and the biblical figure of Jesus, since he is presented as the protector of the oppressed, he is tempted by the demonic character of Simon Legree, he sacrifices for Cassy and Emmeline, and his death ensures the liberty and salvation of many slaves. Little Eva also resembles a biblical figure since, before her death, she gathers the slaves in her plantation around her death bed, she grants them their freedom and gives them a lock of her hair; an action that has often been interpreted as reminiscent of the Eucharistic communion. Moreover, allusions to verses from the Old Testament related to the oppressed peoples from Egypt are often quoted by Tom, thus justifying, through the use of sacred words, the abolition of slavery that is defended in the novel.<sup>32</sup> The final rhetoric question that the narrator asks is meaningful enough: "Are not these dread words for a nation bearing in her bosom so mighty an injustice? Christians! Every time that you pray that the kingdom of Christ may come, can you forget that prophecy associates, in dread fellowship, the day of vengeance with the year of his redeemed?" (Beecher Stowe 1986: 629).

Education is also an important theme related to the antislavery discourse that is not equally presented in both novels. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, education becomes relevant because it is believed that the behaviour characters will show when they are adults strongly depends on the instruction they receive as children. On the whole, the mother figures are in charge of instructing their children, and it is only through the educational role of their children, that women acquire some importance in society. As an exception, there is George Shelby, the son of the Shelby family, who volunteers for educating Tom and his family, before Tom is sold to Haley. In contrast, education is not given much prevalence as a determinant factor for the future of the slaves. However, Sab is characterised as an educated *mulato*, a feature that contributes to highlighting his aura. Nevertheless, in Gómez de Avellaneda's novel, it is Enrique and his father Jorge, who have received a good academic formation. In *Sab*, education is often presented in contrast with sentiment, which acquires

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de Thoux is George Harris' sister (these surprising family links resemble the rhetoric figures, such as the "peripeteia," traditionally used in the classical tragedies).

<sup>32</sup> Despite the biblical justification used in favour of abolition, some characters in the novel (Tom among them) quote biblical passages to prompt the rest of slaves to remain humble and accept their fate. In this way, Beecher Stowe criticised those who used the Bible to justify slavery.

a major relevance as opposed to instruction. Moreover, in *Sab*, education is not contemplated as a source to prompt abolition.

Finally, there is a clear social, historical and progressive discourse within Beecher Stowe's novel which is not so prevalent in Gómez de Avellaneda's novel.<sup>33</sup> *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is described as a social novel since it portrays the slavery nineteenth-century society in the United States, providing myriad information about both masters and slaves, by means of a descriptive, and on certain occasions, even personal, narrative clearly aimed at attaining abolitionist purposes. In *Sab*, through an omniscient narrator, we become aware of the motivations of the characters, although the action is basically focused on the central figure of Sab. As opposed to *Sab*, Beecher Stowe's novel includes references to the historical reality of the times as is the case with the "Fugitive Slave Act,"<sup>34</sup> which conceded attributions to slave masters to recover those fugitive slaves and punished both slaves that managed to escape and those who helped them to escape. This law is mentioned in chapter nine, when Eliza and Harry are helped by the senator Bird who, despite having voted for this law and being aware of the consequences derived of its neglect, helps these fugitive slaves to take refuge in Mr. van Trompe's house. All these events turn *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into a realist and socially-marked work, whereas *Sab*, despite the fact it also involves a clear manifest against slavery in Cuba, can be termed as a romantic novel rather than a social or historical novel.

As regards the social discourse that both novels develop, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* contains a progressive ideology, since it includes different ways to abolish slavery. One of them consists in migrating to another country (George Harris travels to Canada, and afterwards, Harris and the rest of his family move to Liberia) to set up a colony of free slaves<sup>35</sup>. In contrast, the discourse developed in *Sab* can be considered as reactionary, and even somehow conservative, since, even though it manifests the injustice of slavery, neither abolition nor any alternative solution to placate the situation is ever mentioned. Moreover, Sab continually represses any attempt at rebellion that he might feel.

All in all, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can be considered as an abolitionist novel, since it defends the disappearance of slavery within the American society in the second-half of the nineteenth-century that would eventually lead to the Civil War (1861-1865), which would put an end to slavery in the United States.<sup>36</sup> *Sab*, apart from portraying sentimentalism, romanticism and the unfeasible love between Sab and Carlota, it is defined as an antislavery

<sup>33</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe based her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, on different antislavery narratives, reliable witnesses and her own experience as an observer of the social reality of her country.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Clay presented the namely "Fugitive Slave Act" to the Senate. It consisted in a new law addressed to the fugitive slaves that was more severe than the prior law, which was passed in 1793.

<sup>35</sup> The possibility for slaves to escape to other countries and create a new community, instead of granting them their freedom, was harshly criticised in the twentieth century. This aspect, together with some stereotypical characterisations of slaves, were significantly criticised by the black readership.

<sup>36</sup> The meeting between President Abraham Lincoln and Harriet Beecher Stowe is often mentioned by scholars. Lincoln's words as regards the great stir caused by Beecher Stowe's novel are often quoted: "So this is the little lady who made this great war?" (Donovan 1991: xvii). This quote is often mentioned to ascertain the social importance of Stowe's abolitionist novel and the social conscience it awoke, which finally gave rise to the American Civil War.

novel, since it contains a discourse against slavery, but it is not termed as an abolitionist<sup>37</sup> novel as happens with Beecher Stowe's novel, because there is an important temporal distance between its publication date and the time when slavery was abolished in Cuba. This temporal distance has led scholars to define *Sab* as an antislavery novel, or a forerunner example of the abolitionist novel in Cuba, but never as an abolitionist novel, because it would be anachronistic. Likewise, *Sab* also contains different passages that bring to the floor the submissive situation of women, but it cannot be considered as a feminist novel either. In order to justify this point, in the first chapter of the second part of the novel, Sab meets Teresa at night to give her the awarded lottery ticket to help her marry Enrique. Teresa, of course, is not aware of Sab's intentions and guesses that he wants to see her to discuss any plans of insurgence of the slaves. In contrast, Sab tells her that "los esclavos arrastran pacientemente su cadena: acaso sólo necesitan para romperla, oír una voz que les grite: '¡Sois hombres!' pero esa voz no será la mía, podéis crearlo" (Gómez de Avellaneda 1997: 206-7). This excerpt implies that Sab never defends any revolt that would give way to the abolition of slavery, although he complains about the situation of slaves constantly. Nevertheless, Gómez de Avellaneda's novel should be regarded as a precursor of the abolitionist novel, since its relevance would influence the progressive changes that would ultimately result in the abolition of slavery in Cuba at the end of the nineteenth-century.

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<sup>37</sup> There are exceptions, since Marina Gálvez includes *Sab* in her chapter devoted to the abolitionist novel in Latin America in her work *La novela hispanoamericana (hasta 1940)* (Gálvez 1991: 114).