

Perception by Incongruity: Religion and slavery in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*.

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Declaration

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I, Brian Sibanda declare that the dissertation: **Perception by Incongruity: Religion and slavery in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Frederick Douglass's The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass** is my own work and that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed: Brian Sibanda

BS

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized capital letter 'B' with a horizontal line extending to the right from the top of the letter.

Date: 24 August 2015.

Abstract

This study examines the paradoxical and at the same time interesting relationship between Christian religion and the system of slavery in the American historical context. Through the use of Kenneth Burke's concept and theory of Perception by Incongruity as a theoretical and conceptual framework, this study examines Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Frederick Douglass' *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. In the view of this study, Perception by Incongruity, as a theoretical and conceptual tool has the literary and the rhetorical resources to unmask the ironies and paradoxes involved in slave holding religion and religion holding slaves. The principal research question of the present study seeks to probe the usability of the Christian faith by slave owners to dominate and pacify the slaves, and the instrumentalisation by the slaves of the Christian faith as a liberatory and emancipatory belief. Perception by Incongruity enriches the present study in so far as it unmasks the incongruity and paradox of masters and slaves sharing the same definition of God and faith and still remaining in their conflictual positions of masters and slaves. Since this study is a study in literature, the methods of literature study and textual analysis are deployed in examining the primary texts, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. A multiplicity of secondary texts; in form of critical and empirical literature; are used throughout this study to support observations, arguments and conclusions that are advanced by the study. Summatively, this study observes and concludes that religion, in this case Christianity occupies a perceptively incongruous position where it is suable by people in conflicting situations. Further, where domination, power and capitalism as an economic system meet, religion belongs in the mind and the eye of the beholders who seeks to use it to justify and defend their particular interests and positions.

Key Terms: Perception by Incongruity, piety, impiety,

Dedication

To the two mothers that made all worth it, **Scelile Sibanda** and **Nancy Ngwenya**.

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Chapter One: Background and Context: Religion and Slavery

Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realisation of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.

Marx (1976:131)

When in Rome, do as the Greeks

Burke (1931:302)

1.1 Introduction

The present study posits to use Kenneth Burke's concept and theory of perception by incongruity to examine the paradoxical place of religious faith and its relationship to the system of slavery in the works of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe in the analysis of the complex relationship between religion and slavery. The kind of linguistic impiety used by these writers re-frames the debate over religion and slavery in America and perception by incongruity becomes an enriching way of critiquing Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. Kenneth Burke (1935; 1937) conceptualised the theory of perception by incongruity as a rhetorical tool of critiquing a work of art. Burke (1937:308) defines this perception by incongruity as a "method for gauging situations by verbal 'atom cracking'. That is, a word belongs by custom to a certain category-and by rational planning you wrench it loose metaphorically apply it in a different category. Abram Anders (2006) recently defined perception by incongruity as "a way in which artists push a system of belief or interpretive scheme to its limits by deliberating and creating effects which escape the means of formalisation (p.27)". The two writers who are subjects of this study grappled with questions of the dehumanising effects of slavery on the psyche of the African-American, it is through wrenching the reader out of his or her customary habits of perception that one understands the incongruity of American society and the history of slavery. It is undeniable that religion played a key role in maintaining the system of slavery and also provided the slaves with a usable ideology of revolt

The use of perception by incongruity in this study to examine the stated writers will help to bring these ambivalences between slavery and religion into the

forefront. Burke's perception by incongruity, just like the concept of 'defamiliarisation' by Brecht (1964) disrupts the normal way of things and of perceiving things in an attempt to unveil or get closer to the truth. The examination of the relationship between slavery and religion through the theory and concept of perception by incongruity brings in new perspectives that have the effect of "wilfully wrenching out certain aspects of reality from the context that enveloped them and examining them independently of one another...to illuminate aspects of reality that might have otherwise passed unobserved" (Hughes, 1958:92). The study will also apply Burke's unorthodox notion of piety and impiety as part of the concepts that are chosen to examine texts for linguistic piety or impiety as part of the theory of perception by incongruity.

While the slavery of black peoples might seem to have been a historical condition that was done away with a long time ago, its enduring effects are still felt within the African-American community. Some in the nation do not seem to understand the deep scars that slavery left on the psyche of the African-American, Brit Hume points out that:

To those two men (Eric Holder and Barack Obama), race has been both a shield and a sword that they have used effectively to defend themselves and attack others ...It is depressing at this stage in our national life, after all we've been through on this issue and given the *overwhelming* consensus of civil rights, that this stuff is still going on. (Hume: 2014).

Hume laments that there is still great work that needs to be done in spite of the elevation of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States while the majority of black peoples remain peripherised and marginalised in American

society. The share of the African American person in the grand American dream is still in question many decades after the abolition of administrative slavery.

A deeper understanding of the fractious nature of the African American experience cannot be divorced from its beginning in the land of the brave and free. The black people helped to build the American dream through blood and sweat but for the most part they were relegated to the fringes where they watched others enjoy (Williams, 1964, 88). This is the part that Hume must accept. This is the 21st century but the effects of what happened from the late 1700 are still vivid in the greater consciousness of the African-American. Hyman (1947: 47) writes that one of the metaphors in perception by incongruity is that of “man as an artist’ and hence social problems are treated in terms of rhetorical techniques. The two writers, through the use of rhetoric, as part of the need to deal with the social problems of slavery dissect this fractious nature of the African-American experience under slavery and the accompanying effects. Through the use of perception by incongruity, this study is able to observe how the two writers are forces that deal and challenge social problems in their societies and this is similar to Gilles Deleuze’s (1997) artist literature where the artist becomes the physician of culture who proposes various perspectives for action.

The role of the church and state are contentious even in today’s America. One is quickly reminded of how Barack Obama’s middle name was used as a hatred inciting tactic by his opponents who labelled him as a Muslim bent on bringing about Sharia law into American society. These are the matters that critics have to grapple with although it might be hundreds of years away from the event and historical condition of slavery. We cannot escape the way slavery has shaped not only American society but the experience that the black man has had to endure across the world. The African case of Mozambique’s former leader Samora

Machel who perceived religion as something that society would be better without as it was unscientific, made people passive and submissive and hence could not analyse their problems and divided societies and keeps the oppressed under subjugation points to the contentious nature of religion and power (McKenna, 1997). Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe capture subtly the nuances of the African American experience in different contexts and epochs of history.

Religion has played a paradoxical role where it has been used by the master race to soften the blow and manage the slave race, while on the other hand the slave race has invoked religious faith as its weapon of liberation and source of hope. The project of the present study is to examine, through the use of the theory of perception by incongruity, this double edged role of religion in the history of slavery and the condition of the African American in America. Using the works of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe, this study seeks to probe how religion becomes usable by both the oppressor and the oppressed, and how it can conveniently be turned into a tool by men and women to imagine the world after their own image and aspirations as highlighted by Du Bois in *Souls of Black Folk* (1994) where he demonstrated the indomitable spirit of the enslaved. Du Bois in “The Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy” (p. 191) proved that religion also served to sustain and empower the black race. Religion was the social centre of the enslaved where the church met the religious needs, educational needs, economic needs (aid) provided a safe haven from discrimination and racism (Felder, 1991; Frazier 1964; Lincoln, 1984; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). Religion further helped to shape a collective identity in a cruel and discriminatory setting (Billingsley, 1999; Felder, 1991 and Wilmore 1994).

1.2 Research Question

The crowning question of the present study is: *How does religion, in the context of slavery, become usable by both the enslaver and the enslaved?* This principal question of the study, through the use of rhetorical appeal, will assist the study in the main to understand how in religion continues to provide shelter and cover for vested political and economic interests in American society and beyond in the entire globe.

1.3 Research Objectives

The key objectives of the present study, through the eyes of perception by incongruity, are as follows:

- To investigate the role of religion in the enslavement of black people in America as represented in the work of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe.
- To examine the role of religion in energising the struggles of the black people to cope with enslavement and attain emancipation in America.
- To justify the use of perception by incongruity as a conceptual and theoretical tool of critiquing literature.

1.4 Literature Review and Definitions

This literature review section of the proposal aims to provide the study with a context to define key terms and concepts. This section will benefit the study by giving a contextual background to the major issues of religion and slavery, background of the writers and their narratives. The historical and political contexts in which the writers operated gives the study ability to make observations and arguments on the relationship between slavery and religion, and the writers and their society that they sought to critique from their different loci of enunciation.

1.4.1 Slavery

Slavery existed in the American colonies from their beginning. Africans first arrived in the English colonies in the earlier 1600s. By the time the colonies won their independence about one out of every six people was a slave (Tadman, 1989). In 1669 a Dutch warship brought 20 enslaved Africans to Jamestown. Due to the high need for additional source of labour the slaves were purchased. At first Africans were treated more or less like indentured slaves before the brutal and the dehumanising treatment at the hands of the plantation owners (Tadman, 1989). Davis (1966:28) observed that, “at first Africans were treated somewhat like servants, many earning their freedom by several years of work before the system got brutal with years”.

From 1600 to 1850 Europeans brought 15 million enslaved Africans to America. Most of the enslaved Africans were taken to the plantations of the West Indies

before they were taken to America. The civil war forced an end to slavery with emancipation proclamation of 1863. The 13th Amendment to the constitution outlawed slavery in 1865 in the United States of America. However there remains one nagging question regarding the institution of slavery, why Africans were the victims of the most massive enslavement in human history. When this question is asked a variety of theories emerge to offer explanations. Indeed a prominent answer with a vocal cadre in America places the burden entirely on slaves themselves, that, it was the Africans themselves who created conditions of enslavement. This falls into the category of blaming the victim much like the person who beats up a spouse and then claims that the spouse caused the violence.

In an attempt to answer the question on why the African was enslaved Eric Williams (1967) came up with an economic argument. He argued that slavery was not caused by racism but that racism was a consequence of the African slavery.

Here, then, is the origin of Negro slavery. The reason was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the colour of the labourer, but the cheapness of the labour. As compared with the Indian and white labour Negro slavery was eminently superior...it was the survival of the fittest. Both Indian slavery and white servitude were to go down before the Blackman's endurance, docility and labour capacity (p.12).

This line of thinking became one of the leading explanations for the cause of Negro slavery. For Williams, the answer to the question of the enslavement of Africans must be found in economic rather than racial conditions. Starting for the premise that colour of unfree labour had been consecutively brown (Indian), white and then black, the economic argument says that the first instance of slave

trading in slave labour involved the Native American, that is, the Indian. The immediate successors of the Indian as slaves were the whites as indentured slaves. Due to the persistence labour shortage a black man was introduced to system but Williams (1967) says that “the white servant laid the basis for black enslavement because the planters learned with the white servants what to do with the Africans (p.13).”

Thus he argues that the enslavement of the African was not racial but economic as African labour was cheaper and inexhaustible as compared to the Indians and the Africans “were a more robust race (p18)” than the whites. The economic theory has it that had it not been for the economic downturn involved with the transporting of the white servants this process would have continued indefinitely. It was only because the white servants cost more than Africans particularly since the white servants could work only until their contracts were completed and Africans would work a lifetime. It holds also that Africans were latecomers into a system already established.

Winthrop Jordan (1968) came up with an alternative theory, a socio-economic thesis which investigates the twines of racism and the enslavement of Africans. His theory is an expression of the dual generation explanation of the enslavement of Africans as an alternative to the economic one. Jordan contends that there was an economic idea involved in the ideology behind slavery but goes on to say that the societies from which the impetus for the enslavement of Africans derived already had in them certain racist ideas that could have been developed into full blown ideological foundations by the practice of slavery. The point of the thesis, as a way of escaping the issue of which came first, the hen or the egg, is that racism and slavery “generated each other”. While Williams maintained that

slavery was not born of racism but that racism was the consequence of slavery, Jordan (1968) contends that one should not argue whether slavery caused racism or vice-versa but rather that they seem to have generated each other, hustling the African towards complete degradation;

The enslavement of African and other forms of debasement coincided in the English colonies of Virginia and Maryland with these negative assessments of the character of African perpetual service, the core of enslavement ... consequently the general debasement of the African, permanent service, prejudice against religion, manner and morals, of the African as natural slaves (p. 52).

Thus Jordan's argument is that before slavery the English had come into contact with Africans through trade and had already assumed differences based on physical appearances as he also mentions that before slavery Africans were already being described as 'brutish' and 'cannibals'. Thus two major arguments have emerged in order to try and come to understand why the African was doomed to eternal servitude with Williams saying it was a purely and economic factor and racism came as a way of rationalising the system. Jordan is of the opinion that slavery and racism generated each.

1.4.2 Religion

The institution of slavery survived and even thrived under the monotheistic religious movements of Christianity and even Islam, yet the abolition of slavery was closely connected with debates within religious circles. Religion not only provided the justification for slavery but also its abolition. While religious movements shaped the slave systems that developed in particular societies, the practice and interpretations of those religions were themselves affected by slavery in their midst. Moreover, slaves themselves were active participants in shaping the interaction between the institution that held them in bondage and the religious discourse that explained, justified and ultimately undermined that bondage.

Before an in-depth study of how religion functioned in the American slave era one has to understand the phenomenon of religion. Religion has permeated human life since early and obscured time. Explanation of the phenomenon is as diverse as the north and the south. However, it is generally agreed that the source of underlining essence of all religions is a belief in a supreme force or being. Gerardus Van der Leeuw (1982:3) says that religion comes about in how “man conducts himself in his relation to power”.

According to Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* religion is a force that holds and encourages communal living;

Religion is a cement of society – the means in which man had been led to turn from the everyday in which they are variously

enmeshed to common devotion of sacred things. It wrenches man from the utilitarian preoccupations of daily life, religion is the anti-individualistic for par excellence, inspiring communal devotion to ethical ends that individual purpose, without it dissolution of all moral community into a state of universal breakdown and anomie (2010:13).

Durkheim says that religion is a social institution, which gives meaning to man's existential predicament by tying the individual of transcendent values which is ultimately rooted in his society. However, such an explanation is limited in that it ignores the power paradigm found in religion, a point that is captured by other scholars like Karl Marx and Frederic Engels amongst others.

Marx and Engels (1976) painted the ambivalence of the phenomenon when he explained religion as a tool for social control especially of the masses by those who are in a position of influence and who stand to benefit from such a system and that it is man who created God and not religion and hence it becomes imperative that God should dance to the whims of the creator.

Religion has oftentimes acted as a platform for the ruling class to influence and manipulate the lower class into pacification to keep them from challenging the status-quo... man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-conscious and self-esteem of a man who has either not yet found himself, the state, society, produce religion, an inverted world consciousness because they have inverted the world (p.22).

Religion has two sides to it as it is a site of power struggles, a basis for the controlling of the poor, a sigh of the oppressed or as Marx puts it 'the opium of the poor'. On the other hand it is source of uniting people, giving them a sense of purpose and meaning and also acted as a as a launch pad for social change. Hence during the slave period religion had to be administered cautiously to make a slave docile enough, but not a 'saucy fellow like the carpenter Jesus'

1.4.3 African religion and slavery

Past research has proven it a little difficult to determine the role of the African religion during slavery, as most scholars would argue that when the African slaves arrived in the 'New World' they were devoid of any cultural heritage as it was systematically erased during the passage to America.

The impact of African religious practices has been subjected to an intense debate. There are two schools of thought, Frazier and others argue that the manner in which Africans were captured and enslaved in America stripped them of their African social heritage, religion included. To this end Frazier (1964) says "this was a deliberate process by the slave traders and slave masters, who could more easily maintain control over culturally disoriented and dehumanised slaves (p.26)."

On the other hand scholars like Gershenhorn (2004) amongst others attempt to show that African survivals could be discovered in almost all aspects of black life in America. Subsequent research has indicated that brutal experiences of enslavement and the 'middle passage' did not completely erase the entire African cultural heritage of Afro-American. Frazier maintained that;

Common sense requires us to believe that everything cultural which the Negro brought with him from Africa could not have been eradicated from his heritage...despite the thousand miles which have separated him from his ancestral homeland (1944:87).

However, there were conscious efforts by the slave master to suppress the African religion as he feared that it will lead to the slaves not being satisfied with their condition and challenging the status quo. Frazier (1964) says that;

There was a determined effort on the part of the whites to prevent any resurgence of the African religion...always fearful of the possibility of slave revolts, they even passed laws to prohibit African religious practices (p.28).

These new conditions of slavery in the new world were significant factors in determining what would remain of this cultural heritage as black people struggled for survival in the U.S.

Whilst Du Bois (1994) observes that the African religion in America was not by any means organised, but rather an adoption and mingling of heathen rites and roughly designed as voodooism, allowed the slave to challenge the master though such resistance did not last for long.

Slavery was to him (African), then, the triumph of evil over him. He called up all resources of his religious beliefs to aid. Exorcism, witchcraft, and sacrifices –however the spirit of revolt gradually died away under the untiring energy and superior strength of the slave master (p.199).

African religion acted as form of cushion against the brutalising relationship between the master and slave. Nash (1992:122) contends that “people enduring the kind of daily stress inherent in the master/slave relationship typically turned

to their deepest emotive sources for relief.” Closely connected to this, George Rawick (1972) points out that this African religion managed to foster a sense of oneness amid the institution of slavery.

(Africans) Coming from a culture where the division between the sacred and secular activities was much narrower than in western societies, where life and after life were not regarded as so separate and the present is united with the past and the future. African slaves made religious activities areas of considerable potential creativity and social strength (p.32).

Rawick also observed that on the plantations in the South, slave masters were not so eager to see their slaves instructed in Christianity. However, they were faced with a dilemma as they recognised that the African religion was fostering great sense of collective experience among the slaves.

Realising this, the slave masters were caught in a dilemma. If the perpetuation of African religion fostered a collective identity and fed the spirit of resistance, then it was imperative to replace it with Christian belief. But at the same time the owner was not eager to have his property subjected to a new religion that would make him a less worker until after the promise of humility and obedience (1972:33).

While the African religion was largely unorganised and not uniform it managed to foster a spirit of resistance among the slaves as they faced the brutal treatment of the slave masters. However, this religion was short lived as the master made every effort to crush it and indoctrinate the slaves with Christianity, which was meant to make them more docile.

1.4.4 Christianity and slavery

The beginnings of black slavery can be traced to the request of a Christian bishop, the Catholic Bishop of Chiapa in Mexico, Bartdeme de Las Casaa (Johnson, 1987). Afterwards efforts have been made to understand whether Christianity proper, without external interpretations, condemned slavery or gave religious justification to the institution. While Haynes (2007) is quick to point that Christianity did not cause slavery, he also adds that “but it unquestionably played an important role in justifying and rationalising it, thus allowing it to continue longer than it might otherwise have done (p.81)”. It becomes imperative to do an analysis of the Bible, the compass of every Christian, as to get the Christian view on slavery. Different interpretations of the bible were used to support slavery and also to challenge slavery manly by the masters and slaves and abolitionists.

Graham Ward in *Christ and Culture* (2005) argues that Christianity and by extension Jesus did not exist in isolation but existed within a certain culture that had its own values and assumptions. How people interpret this is governed by a cultural standpoint (2005:4) and Christ as a symbol of Christianity is a ‘cultural event’(2005:21), based on this argument it becomes incorrect to accuse Christianity of going to bed with slaveholders but what was in complexity with

slavery were different interpretations that were given from different cultural standpoints. The Bible was interpreted in various ways to suit various purposes as it shall be seen in the following argument. Carroll and Shiflett in *Christianity on Trial* (2002) shared the same view with Ward as they argue that Christianity was born in a world ‘teeming’ with slaves, a world that had accepted slavery as normal. The antislavery fight according to Carroll and Shiflett was a cultural combat not a religious one. They also maintain that slavery mainly had secular and religious support from thought leaders of the time like David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, Voltaire and even John Locke and it was left to Christians like James Ramsey, Granville Sharp, John Wesley, Frederick Douglass and Nat Turner and Sojourner Truth amongst others to fight slavery

The overview of the interpretations by champions of slavery quoted Leviticus 25:44-46 as sanctioning slavery. However the slaveholders’ interpretation of scripture did not go unchallenged as slaves and abolitionist interpreted the scriptures differently. True Christianity, they argued, never encouraged slavery. The Old Testament only referred to ‘patriarchal servitude’ (Reinders 1989:46) which was voluntary and the example they gave to support their assertion was that it was customary for a poor man to sell himself as a servant.

The southerners also used the argument that the Negroes were descendants of Ham were cursed by Noah through his son Canaan. John Rankin (n.d) in *Letters to slavery*, refuted this genealogy and argued that black people were not the bona fide descendants of Ham. Arguments from the New Testament were based on Paul’s injunctions of submission of part of the slaves especially his Epistle to Philemon. It is from such scriptures that the slaveholders argued for the lawfulness of slavery. The abolitionist argued that slavery should be discussed as

it happened in America, which is a different cultural context (Reinders 1989) echoing Ward concept of culture and interpretations. The abolitionists argued that the Bible should be read as advocating for equality among all men as they were all made in the 'image of God'. Such divergent readings of the Bible, which accepts slavery and at the same time encouraging freedom among the oppressed has laid the book open for different interpretations. Hence the slave period in America found justification for slavery in the Bible and at the same time the slaves found in it a motivating force to challenge the status quo.

The early Christians did not stop to think whether the institution of slavery was in itself immoral. Their chief concern was whether the Bible condoned or condemned it thus they supported slavery. In 1836 the South Carolina Methodist conference declared that "the holy scriptures, so far from giving any countenance to the delusion (of abolitionism) do unequivocally authorise of master and slave" (Knight in McCabe 1964:139)

Along the same lines, the editor of the journal of the Theological Seminary Charles Hodge wrote:

The assumption that slave holding is a crime... is an error fraught with all evil consequences. It merely brings its advocates into conflict with the scriptures, but it does much to retard the progress of freedom. It embitters and divides the members of the community and it distracts the Christian church (1999, 143).

The clergy in America “did not condemn either slavery or the slave trade “while others asserted that the whole tone of the Bible from ‘Genesis to Revelation’ was favourable to slavery” (Mack, 2003, 85).

It cannot be denied, therefore, that Christian churches on both sides of the Atlantic generally supported slavery. Anthropologist, Milton (1999) stated that:

This system of (black) slavery, which at least in the British Colonies and the slave states, surpassed in cruelty the slavery of any pagan country, ancient or modern, was not only recognised by Christian government but was supported by the large bulk of the clergy, catholic and protestant alike (p.81).

The debate on the role of Christianity has another side to it. The counter argument is that Christianity as a religion fought and overpowered the institution of slavery. Christianity inspired the enslaved to fight for their freedom. Paul Johnson states that Christianity has been “the one great religion which had always declared the diminution, if not the final elimination, of slavery to be meritorious” (1987:437). Christianity was also used as the religion of resistance by the slaves and according to Eugene Genovese Christianity created a ‘revolutionary defiance’ and gave the slaves a liberating belief (1974:254). William Loren Katz summed the influential role of Christianity by stating that Christianity inspired Harriet Tubman, hero of the Underground Railroad and liberator of the three hundred slaves, who said ‘I must go down, like Moses into Egypt, to lead them out (1990:76). This is one of the many instances where Christianity inspired the enslaved to liberate themselves.

Thus the acceptance of slavery as part of the fabric of society was so engraved in the social psyche of the Christians that very few voices were raised against it. The

seemingly inherently contradictory nature of the Bible was exploited by champions of slavery to enslave the African.

1.4.5 Religion and power

Religion has been used in the past as a tool of social control. It became a site for power struggle as the slaves and the slaveholders struggled to take God to their side and use Him to their own advantage. The slaveholder wanted to entrench his power as the master and his slaves as nothing but chattel. The slaves desired to topple the status quo hence religion became not only a spiritual but also a physical battlefield for control.

Gary Max (1969) observes that during the slave period religion suddenly took sides with the slaveholder legitimising his holding of fellow human beings under eternal bondage as he noted “the history of slavery exposes how 'God' has suddenly taken sides and has been interpreted for the benefit of the masters. In America religion became the opiate of the slaves (p.23)”.

Religion often acts as a platform for the ruling class to influence and manipulate the lower class into pacification, to keep them from challenging the status quo. Frederick Douglass (2008) pointed out that the church, a symbol of Christian religion, has taken sides with the oppressors;

It has made itself the bulwark of American slavery and the shield of American slaver hunters. Most of its most eloquent divines who stand as the very lights of the church have

shamelessly given the sanction of religion and the Bible to the whole slave system. They have taught that man may, properly, be a slave; that the relation of master and slave is ordained by God, that to send back an escaped bondman to his master is clearly the duty of all followers of the Lord Jesus Christ (p.189).

He further captures this power paradigm when he states how religion has been subverted to serve the interest of the master and reduced the blacks to God's stepchildren.

They convert the very name of religion into an engine of tyranny and barbarous cruelty... It is a religion for oppressors tyrants, man stealers and thugs... a religion which favours the rich against the poor, which exalts the proud over the humble, which divides mankind into two classes, tyrants and slaves which says to the man in chains, stay here and to the oppressor oppress on. It is a religion which may be professed and enjoyed by all the robbers and enslavers of mankind, it makes God a respecter of persons, denies him his fatherhood of the race (p.189).

Out of religion a doctrine of white supremacy and of black inferiority emerged in an attempt to keep the black slave in submission and not to challenge the status quo, which was tantamount to challenging God. Martin Luther King Jnr (1976) stated that theology became a ready ally of commerce;

The great Puritan Divine Cotton mother culled the Bible for passages to give comfort to the plantation owners and the merchants. He went so far as to set 'Rules for the society of Negroes', in which, among other things, Negroes disobedient to their masters were to be rebuked and denied attendance at church meetings and runaway slaves were to be brought back and severely punished. All this, he reasoned, was in line with the Apostle Paul's injunction that servants should be obedient to their masters (p. 201).

A ludicrous religious syllogism was formulated for the inferiority of the Negro “all man are made in the image of God; God as everyone knows is not a Negro; therefore the Negro is not a man”. Thus the morale nerve of religion was atrophied as the white man ended up making God his partner in the exploitation of the Negro. Pillsbury (1880) explained that man make their own god which becomes an ally hence the slaveholder made his own god to justify his supremacy and the inferiority the Negro.

Religion was a political institution. Religion and worship always follow, never lead, in the growth and unfolding of the human race, Man make their gods more than their gods make them, and it is no satire today, 'an honest god's the noblest work of man... while as a nation and government we held slaves, even bred them for the market like colts, we made a god like ourselves and held him, not as accomplice but a principal in all (p165).

Religion was skilfully administered to the slave as to make him submissive, hold the Whiteman in awe and relegated to the beast status in the social hierarchy. Du Bois (1994) captures this philosophy of life when he says that;

Nothing suited his (slave) condition then better than the doctrines of passive submission embodied in the newly learned activity. Slave masters early realised this, and cheerfully aided religious propaganda within certain bounds. The long system of repression and depravation as the Negro attended to emphasise the elements in his character which made him a valuable chattel: courtesy became humility, moral strength degenerated into submission, and exquisite native appreciation of the beautiful became infinite capacity for dumb suffering (p.199).

Thus the suffering Negro whole-heartedly embraced the conception offered of the next world. The avenging hand of the lord, enjoining patience in the world under sorrow and tribulations until the great day when He will lead his dark suffering children home.

The slaves were said to be a cursed race, descendants of Ham. The story of Noah, especially the part where his son Ham (Genesis 9 verse 20-27) is cursed to serve his brothers long functioned as a model for Christians to insist that God meant for Africans to be marked as the servants of others because they are descendants from Ham. Somewhat secondarily they used the story of the Tower of Babel as a

model for Gods' desire to separate people generally united in common cause and purpose.

Initially the whites offered some resistance, but finally saw the intelligence of instructing the slave in Christian religion as to make him content in their suffering. Frazier (1964) states that it was the hope of the slave masters that Christian doctrine whether of the ascetic, rational variety or the emotional revivalist type would be the opiate of their slaves;

Even if their chattels shared nothing of what their labour produced, even if they lost all their rights in life of perpetual servitude they could at least comfort themselves in the knowledge that Christianity sanctified the weak, the poor and the hungry (P.42).

The religious diet was carefully seen that it taught humility and obedience and enforced the balance of power even if the slaves were exposed to religion it was not the ideals of the brotherhood or the story of the Hebrew flight from oppression. However Kalm (1966) notes that to expose slaves to the elements of religious thoughts that would make him submissive while quarantining them from the elements that feed the desire for freedom, as this would tilt the balance of power. He says that, "they had to be careful not to expose slaves to the tenants of the carpenter of Nazareth which made slaves 'proud and saucy' (p.71)".

The slave, after much religious indoctrination, came to see religion as a word of escape from the hard experience of life. The Negro church, which functioned under the watchful eyes of slave owner and overseers, was the only institution, which provided an approved and tolerated place for social activities. Cone (1984) says that in the shadow of the plantation

... dominant attitude was one of unquestioning belief in the reliance upon God as protection against everything that was feared, and an answer to everything that could not be understood...just as God brought droughts, rain, pestilence, and disease for purposes both local and inscrutable, there was no appeal from his election whether with respect to the incidence of contagion or the exigencies of the cotton crop. All is mystery coloured by faith and fatalism, which tendered to dull both striving and desire (P.18).

Benjamin Mays (1938) sees these docile attitudes as traditional compensatory ideas, which were reflected in sermons, prayers, and these ideas he maintained “where conducive to developing in the Negro a complacent laissez-faire attitude towards life (p. 52)”. They tend to support the view that God in his good time and in his own way will bring the condition that will lead to the fulfilment of social needs.

1.4.6 The religion of the slaves

However, whilst the majority of the slaves willingly settled for the position of permanent servitude, some questioned things and challenged the authority of the master. As it has been earlier noted there was always a danger that slaves exposed to Christian religion could glimpse the other side of religion, which talked of liberty and freedom, Kalm (1966) observed that slaves that were Christianised, their masters “would not be able to keep their Negroes so subjected afterwards (p.48)”. Thus while religion served the purpose of the master, the slave also found a basis for challenging his social inferiority standing. Frazier (1964) also noted;

Slaves did not passively accept what the ministers chose to inculcate in them. They drew selectively from white Christianity and shared their own religious experiences in a fashion that not only gave them an area which was semi-independent from the control of the master but also provided an important physiological mechanism for channelling anger and projecting aggression in many ways that would not bring physical retribution from the white community (p.43).

A classic example of a slave who found inspiration in Christianity to challenge the status quo is Nat Turner whose rebellion resulted in the murdering of about 60 whites in Southampton County, (Oates, 1975). Turner the mystic preacher discovered particular relevance in the prophets of the Old Testament. Besides identifying with the slave experience of the Israelites, Turner and other slaves felt that the social righteousness, which the prophets preached, related directly to their situation. The picture of the Lord exercising vengeance against the oppressors gave them hope and inspiration. While the Bible did appear to tell the slave to be

faithful and obedient to his master, it also condemned the wicked and provided examples that could be interpreted to prove God's willingness to use human instruments in order to bring justice. Resistance became central aspect of the church during slavery. The slave spirituals spoke of the fight against slavery as the theologian Cone (1981) pointed out.

The basic idea of the spirituals is that slavery contradicts God; it is a denial of his will... the rejected white distortions of the gospel, which emphasized the obedience of slaves to their masters. They contend that god willed their freedom and not their slavery. That is why the spirituals focus on biblical passages that stress God's involvement in the liberation of the oppressed people (p.14).

Black people sang about "Joshua of de battle of Jericho", "Moses leading the Israelites from bondage", "Daniel in the lions' den" and the "Hebrew children in the fiery furnace". Here the emphasis was on God's liberation of the weak from the oppression of the strong, the lowly and downtrodden from the proud and mighty. The slave reasoned that if God could cool the fire for Hebrew children then he could certainly deliver black children from slavery.

'The sweet chariot' that would 'swing low' referred to the Underground Railroad, a clandestine escape route for slaves. Men like Turner, Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vessey were either inspired by biblical passages or used their roles and skills as preachers to organise armed resistance against the institution of slavery (Moyd, 1979). It is therefore easy to understand why black churches and preachers were declared illegal by the law of many states as they deconstructed white invincibility.

Thus religion has been interpreted and practiced differently by the two races as to reflect the power paradigm between master and slave. It elevated the whites as the chosen race and relegated blacks to the dustbin of social hierarchy as beasts of burden and hewers of wood. Though it should be noted that some slaves interpreted scriptures in an immediate, historical and spiritual sense which enabled them to question the social hierarchy and to deconstruct the mythical supremacy of the white race.

1.5 Profile of chapters

The introductory chapter of the study sets the background and context of the study by pronouncing the key task of the study. The purpose and objectives of the study flesh out the justifications while the research questions spell out the parameters of the study by giving out the list of the questions that the study will attempt to answer throughout its course. It is also in this introductory chapter that key concepts such as religion and slavery and Christianity and power were dealt with in-depth. The second chapter, which seeks to flesh out the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, also delves deeper into the Kenneth Burke's perception by incongruity and the conceptual corpus that it deploys in making its observations and arguments. A sustained critique of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1969) is given in chapter three and how the rhetorical framework of perception by incongruity gets relevant and effective. The fourth chapter through the perception by incongruity framework criticises Fredrick Douglass's *Narrative*. Chapter five is the conclusive chapter of the study and summarises the observations and arguments of the present study. The final chapter sums up the debate and interpretations of the interplay between religion

and slavery, showing how the chosen texts lend themselves to the concept perception by incongruity were perceived reality is challenged and how the piety is turned into impiety as a as theorized by Burke.

1.6 Conclusion

This research studies the relationship between religion and the system of American slavery of Africans and power paradigm during the slave era in America as to foreground the study. The research question of the study has been profiled and the objectives of the study fleshed out. Theoretically and conceptually, slavery and religion had a complex relationship that is represented in how the slave masters made claims to religiousness, while on the other hand the slaves themselves used religion to condemn the master as evil. A brief literature review has been provided which shows among many other things that the relationship between the system of slavery and religion was at once a complimentary one and at the same time a highly contradictory one as well. Principally a setting and context to the present study whose crowning objective is to examine the complex relationship between religion and slavery through the perception by incongruity frames of reference has been provided. The next chapter will illuminate the intentions of the study by providing a detailed explication of the theoretical and conceptual framework that the study will employ.

Chapter Two: Perception by Incongruity theoretical framework

At their most basic level, theories provide us with a lens by which to view the world. Think of theories as a pair of glasses. Corrective lenses allow wearers to observe more clearly, but they also impact vision in unforeseen ways. For example, they can limit the span of what you see, especially when you try to look peripherally outside the range of the frames. Similarly, lenses can also distort the things you see, making objects appear larger or smaller than they really are. You can also try on lots of pairs of glasses until you finally pick one pair that works the best for your lifestyle. Theories operate in a similar fashion. A theory can illuminate an aspect of your communication so that you understand the process much more clearly; theory also can hide things from your understanding or distort the relative importance of things.

Dainton and Zelley (2011: 3)

The maker of the gargoyles who put man's-head on bird body was offering combinations which were completely rational as judged by his logic of essences. In violating one order of classification, he was stressing another.

Burke (1935:73)

2.1 Introduction

The conceptual and theoretical framework that this study posits to use is Perception by Incongruity as articulated by Kenneth Burke (1973). In his “Literature as Equipment for Living”, Burke (1973) observed that literature provide the tools for understanding reality and aspiring for better conditions of existence. Slavery occasioned particularly hellish conditions of existence for African Americans as articulated in Frederick Douglass (1982) who had to risk

life to escape slavery. For the reason that it aspires for a clearer understanding of the condition of humanity, and that it claims to gesture for a better condition of life, the theory of Perception by Incongruity becomes ideal in such a study as the present that focuses on slavery and its paradoxical relationship with religion. The task at hand here is to examine the theoretical framework of perception by incongruity as put forward by Kenneth Burke and also its applicability in the study of Stowe and Douglass.

2.2 Perception by Incongruity

Lefevre (2013) argues the Perception by Incongruity is an effective frame work in an exegesis as the dissonance or discordant combination created pushes the audience to reconsider the existing order of things and ‘breaks down previously unbreakable symbolic systems’ (p9). This view is cemented by Blakesley that Perception by Incongruity “cracks disciplinary codes and helps us construct new patterns of experiences and new ways of relating to them” (1999:83). Waisanen adds that the same framework “continually force us to see these issues from more than one angle, creating shocks of insight” (2009:p135) thus making it a relevant tool in social activism (Young, 2010) by allowing the society “overcome the particular blindness of our accustomed usages (Gusfield, 1989:23).

Theoretically and conceptually, this study is premised on the examination of the interplay between slavery and religion as seen through the use of Burke’s Perspective by Incongruity. It is principal to understand how slavery in the process of legitimising and sustaining its project, deployed a rhetoric of religious piety. On the other hand, the anti-slavery movement also mobilised vivid religious narratives to indict slavery as evil and ungodly therefore creating impiousness. Burke (1973) in *Literature as Equipment for Living* defined

literature as offering the tools for the better conception of reality and a push for better tomorrow.

Burke in 1935 raised an important issue of different orientations in which we perceive the world, it is these orientations that that provide our frames of references (Blankenship, Murphy and Rosenwasser, 1974). Of orientations, Burke argued that “an orientation is a largely self-perpetuating system, in which each part tends to corroborate the other parts and “even when one attempts to criticise a structure, one must leave some parts of it intact in order to have a point of reference for his criticism” (1935:169). This further contributes the argument of piety that needs to be converted into impiety. Piety is the expected and followed orientation (George and Selzer, 2007). This is the consistency in which we see the world or expect to see the world. To contextualise, a sense of order in orientation from the masters and also to an extent slaves, was the acceptance of slavery and savagery that went with it as God given and to challenge it was to go against nature which in itself is seen as god ordained. Piety demands that we see the world as consistent and any rocking of the boat or disruptions to the sense of order should be severely dealt with as seen in Fredrick Douglass’s fight with Mr Covey and Malcom X’s short-lived public life. These are a few examples were symbolic disruptions to the sense of order was met with the harshest consequences. Beecher Stowe was labelled a racist by mainly blacks and a nigger lover by manly slaveholding whites and even Frederick Douglass authorship of the narrative was even questioned, all this was a result of challenging piety thus leading to symbolic disruptions that lead directly and indirectly to the abolition of slavery and related orientations. Piety means leaving the structure intact, Perception by Incongruity means taking the structure apart in totality and turning orientations upside down in order to create impiety- thus these writers in this

study sought to bring about pious disobedience by creating symbolic disruptions on their denunciations of the slavery and slave holding religion.

Burke (1935;103) noted that the “universe would appear to be something like a cheese; it can be sliced in an infinite number of ways – and when one has chosen his own pattern of slicing, he finds that other men’s cuts fall at the wrong place”. This not only explains the violent need to maintain symbolic patterns in slave holding religion but wrath and even the violence that these two writers faced with Beecher received death threats and Douglass view on slavery denounced fictitious. The crime being that they challenged the existing pattern of slicing cheese and defended why their “cuts fall at the wrong place”. This was a necessary challenge to existing orientations in order to force the society to rethink and abolish the institution of slavery for Burke argues that “the ultimate result is the need of a reorientation, a direct attempt to the critical attempt to force the critical structure by shifts of perspective (1935:169), in this case the shifts in perspective need to be from both the master and the slave. Perceptive by Incongruity challenges the given sense of order and proves Rockler’s (2002:18) assertion correct that “traditional logic often is not an effective tool ... because people often... refuse to question deeply held cultural assumptions. To persuade people to question their pieties, a rhetor needs to adapt a more complicated strategy”. Hence this theoretical frame work becomes the most relevant and, arguably, effective tool in interrogating the complex relationship between religion and slavery and the related orientations.

The two writers that are the subject of this study, to various degrees used their writing to describe and critique the life conditions and experiences of African Americans in different historical and political epochs. The way a writer, who according to Deluze (1997) is also a critic, responds to particular problems and

interpretations of reality is a matter of rhetoric (Burke, 1954:303) and in this case, through the use of Perception by Incongruity. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1969) and Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1979) will be read and subjected to the Burke's rhetorical tool of Perception by Incongruity as a means of critique. Ross Wolin (2001:38) states that "Perspective by Incongruity, in simple terms pushes to the limit our ability to generate meaning and make sense of the world through rational, pragmatic means. Perspective by incongruity is a violation of piety for the sake of more firmly asserting piety" it thus becomes a more appropriate tool to use in this study as it is a study that seeks to scrutinise a paradoxical relationship between slavery and religion, concepts that are entangled and enmeshed in a continuous and discontinuous relationship. Through Perception by Incongruity, these two writers, as Burke would argue that "deliberately cultivate the use of contradictory concepts" (1935:16) which Burke pointed out that it directly leads to the demise of a segregation state.

Perception by Incongruity becomes an appropriate tool in the exegesis of the given texts and the impact of religion in constructing, maintaining and deconstructing the reality of slavery. It is a tool that forces one to rethink their reality and interpretations of life conditions. Language, as a carrier of reality, is used by the two authors to question and shake the system that held African-Americans under slavery and denied them their humanity. Perception by Incongruity allows one to challenge dominant ideologies like religion and schemes of interpretation that "are so embedded in human thought and language, confronting them requires discourse that shocks and disturbs in a way that 'pries apart existing linkages' and upsets normal patterns of association," (Selby: 2002: 56).

Through Incongruity, Fredrick Douglass made a mockery of slave holding religion and their interpretations of religious scriptures, challenged the stratified

social hierarchy. It is this hierarchy that is ‘rotten with perfection’ (Burke, 1966:9) just as the slave holding religion of the South sense of order that is rotten with perfection. For Burke, “despite any cult of good manners and humility, to the extent that a social structure becomes differentiated, with privileges to some that are denied to others, there are the conditions for a kind of pride. King and peasant are mysteries to one another. Those ‘up’ are guilty of being ‘down’, those ‘down’, are certainly guilty of not being ‘up’ (1966:14)”. The parotic and satiric treatment of slaveholding religion that Douglass uses to undermine the master’s claim to legitimacy is a challenge to such enforced social hierarchies. Comic incongruity will be analysed in depth at a later stage and its effect of disrupting the normal patterns of experience in the process producing new possibilities for the American society and the world at large.

The emotive language and imagery in Harriet Beecher Stowe, what Jane Tompkins (1994: 9) calls ‘sentimental power’ and the inherent contradictions will be a ‘way in’ to understanding *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and how successful is the move from piety to impiety.

In *Permanence and Change*, Burke (1935) argues that the linguistic technique used in Perception by Incongruity is impiety. Piety and impiety are linguistic techniques that should not be interpreted in religious terms. The word piety has broader meaning and means that “loyalty to the sources of our being” (Whedbee, 2001:47). Meaning that piety is our being or identity that is “bound with, and to a great extent determined by, habitual linkages in vocabulary” (Whedbee, 2001: 47). Thus piety is loyalty to a certain perceptive with no alternative possibilities as indicated through language usage. Impiety becomes the opposite as it is the disloyalty to our sources of being, it as “a violation of our common sense assumptions about what properly ought to go with what, and it reveals hitherto

unsuspected linkages and relationships which our customary vocabulary has ignored”(Whedbee, 2001: 48).

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Frederick Douglass’s *The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* by turning religion on its head move from the piety to the impiety and makes some question how religion ought to function. Piety in the normal stable view of the world where religion was seen as condemning Africans to servitude and by challenging this perception of religion and proving slaveholding religion as a fallacy, our perspective of the world is re-shifted. This is closely related to Paul Gilroy (1993) concept of mediating identity and the fluidity of identity. Perception by Incongruity is achieved “by violating our expectations and introducing ambiguity into our vocabulary, Perception by Incongruity serves as an opening wedge that fractures our sense of how the world does and ought to function” (Whedbee, 2001: 48). To understand this concept better, Burke explains using the role of an evangelist whose role is to ask us “to alter our orientations. He would give us new meanings” (1935:27). The conversions in orientations, the different meanings forces a move from what was customarily accepted as normal (religiously sanctioned slavery) to a new position where slavery is challenged and fought from a religious point of view. Perception by Incongruity then functions as a vivid rhetoric of conversion.

From the Christian hymns in the Master’s church to the Negro spiritual songs in the plantations, the poetry and rhetoric of religious faith was mobilised by each side to erect itself as godly and as better than the other. It is therefore pertinent to understand how Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe used rhetoric to highlight the relationship between slavery and religion. Both the enslaver and the enslaved, rhetorically, claim religious faith as their redeeming quality that

elevates them to a higher moral and spiritual landscape. Perception by Incongruity accommodates different interpretations between the master and slave in Harriet Beecher and Frederick Douglass. According to Anders (2006:19), for Burke “it is the competition of schemes of interpretation that true possibility exists and, it is in this area of competition that rhetoric and social struggle make their entrance into our exploration of pragmatisms”. It is through the Perception by Incongruity rhetorical analyses of the works by the two writers, their use of language, visual metaphors and deliberate contradictions, that the competing ‘schemes of interpretation’ can be found. Through their interpretations, the enslaved indict the dehumanizing nature of slavery not only on the slave but also on the master whose use of religion to obtain his dream is shown for what it is, an abdication of human decency. There is an uneasy relationship that leaves the master and slave on the edge of the moral compass. Describing the relationship between the master and the slave, Hegel (1977) posits that:

However, this state is not a happy one and does not achieve full self-consciousness. The recognition by the slave is merely on pain of death. The master's self-consciousness is dependent on the slave for recognition and also has a mediated relation with nature: the slave works with nature and begins to shape it into products for the master. As the slave creates more and more products with greater and greater sophistication through his own creativity, he begins to see himself reflected in the products he created, he realises that the world around him was created by his own hands, thus the slave is no longer alienated from his own labour and achieves self-consciousness, while the master on the other hand has become wholly dependent on the products created

by his slave; thus the master is enslaved by the labour of his slave (p52).

The fact that religion and religious leaders chose to overlook this fact by selectively interpreting biblical scriptures, not to condemn but to condone slavery, shows the low depths to which even the man of the cloth had become accessories to a system. It became the duty of the enslaved to defend their humanity and in the process to remind the enslaver of his own lost humanity. In the same way that the slave masters manipulated religion for their own ends (master's interpretation), the two authors begin their assertions using religious writing techniques to showcase the intricate nature of the relationship between religion and the system of slavery. In the way in which religion got entangled in the crime of slavery, perception by incongruity, in its interest in overturning hierarchies, becomes a potent conceptual and theoretical tool.

Observing the complicity of Christianity in slavery and the silence of Jesus himself on the matter, John Blake notes that:

Jesus' apparent silence on slavery and Paul's ambiguous statements on the issue had dreadful historical consequences. It helped ensure that slavery would survive well into the 19th century in the U.S., some scholars say American Christians who owned slaves had a simple but powerful defence in the run-up to the Civil War. The Old and New Testament sanctioned slavery and, since the Bible is infallible, slavery is part of God's order...The defenders of slavery said Jesus condemned quite a few things that were standard in the Old Testament...He condemned polygamy, violence, easy divorce, but he never condemned slavery (2012: 27).

Blake's assertion enriches this study in that he goes back to the vocation of Jesus as the founder of the Christian religion and observes how his discourse and ministry did not directly confront slavery as a system. Pursuantly, even the ministry of Paul, the later disciple, did not make any bold pronouncements against slavery. The implication of this incongruous relationship between the founder of Christianity and his disciples within an apparent tacit endorsement of slavery by the failure to directly condemn it creates a hierarchy of power that is readable through the effective concept and theory of perception by incongruity.

To the slaves themselves as victims of slavery, religion became a possible and perhaps a practical way of confronting an evil. However, to critics, the Christian religion itself had become part and parcel of the evil. For that reason, this study is interested in deploying the theory of Perception by Incongruity to examine how religion and the sin it was supposed to confront got entangled. Describing the recourse of slaves to religion, Raboteau (1978) says:

Slaves frequently were moved to hold their own religious meetings out of disgust for the vitiated gospel preached by their masters' preachers. Lucretia Alexander explained what slaves did when they grew tired of the white folks' preacher: "The preacher came and ... he'd just say, 'Serve your masters. Don't steal your master's turkey. Don't steal your master's chickens. Don't steal your master's hawgs. Don't steal your master's meat. Do whatsoever your master tells you to do.' Same old thing all the time.... Sometimes they would ... want a real meetin' with some real preachin'... They used to sing their songs in a whisper and pray in a whisper (p34).

In other words there is, within the same religion, two contesting faiths, the faith of the master and that of the slave. The idea of religion as part of the system of slavery and even as an impetus to slavery is explored in the above observation. The religion the master espoused was insufficient to meet the needs and the yearnings of the slaves. A master religion and slave religion emerged in this diametric context. Religion was effectively manipulated by both camps as a technology of vindication and legitimation. The concept and theory of Perception by Incongruity lends itself enrichingly to decoding this paradoxical relationship.

Rhetoric is used by Stowe and Douglass as an elementary delivery tool and is structured in such a way as to intensify the emotion of the idea they are presenting. In order to convert the reader from piety to impiety and call them to action, religious symbolism has to be just as brutal as the imagery used by the enslavers who do not make any apologies for their beliefs and their confidence lies in the fact that neither Jesus, Moses nor the Prophets condemned slavery. The writers leverage the polemic nature of their writing to advance the idea that freedom has to occur outside of the masters' religion and the continued acquiesce to the master is keeping both the master and the slave in a dehumanised state. For its challenge to hierarchies of power and structures of oppression, and its gesture towards better life conditions, Perception by Incongruity provides an opportunity to imagine a freer future for both the master and the slaves as future liberated individuals.

The rhetoric of the leaders and writers of each period in the emancipation of African Americans is conversant with the uneasy relationship between religion and slavery. The discourse of emancipation lies in interrogating this incongruity that infers that temporal earthly needs are not as important as eternal matters. This is captured even today in the revisionist manner in which some contemporary religious figures try to absolve religion of its complicity in defining and transmitting the message of slavery. Muse (2014) argues that:

According to DeMint's revisionist history, 'the reason that the slaves were eventually freed was the Constitution; it was like the conscience of the American people. Unfortunately there were some court decisions like Dred Scott and others that defined some people as property, but the Constitution kept calling us back to 'all men are created equal and we have inalienable rights' in the minds of God. But a lot of the move to free the slaves came from the people; it did not come from the federal government. It came from a growing movement among particularly people of faith, that this was wrong. So no liberal is going to win a debate that big government freed the slaves.' Since Jim DeMint is too much of a coward to have a real debate with a real liberal, it is worth the time to disabuse him of his revisionist history giving credit for ending slavery to the religious right (2014:1).

The argument that Muse is advancing is that freedom from slavery did not come to African Americans as a generous gift from their enslavers or the efforts of humanitarian liberals. The slaves fought for their emancipation, the slaves used the Constitution of America to argue for their recognition as human beings who had a share in American independence. The attempts by contemporary revisionists to credit liberals with helping emancipate the slaves are seen by Muse as the continuation of the hypocrisy of the master race that pretends to be righteousness when in reality it perpetuates evil (Muse 2014). Muse's fundamental argument is that it is a falsehood that American history has been that generous and kindly to the African American and the former slaves. The attempt to credit abolitionists and liberals with the heroism of defending the humanity of the slaves belongs to that category of revisionism where contemporary writers seek to gloss the legacy of the enslavers and portray them as having been humane

and generous when the narratives of such writers as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe, as the this study will show, portray otherwise. That exposition of the emancipation movement and discourse as less than what it has been presented as further gestures to the need for such a tool as the theory of Perception by Incongruity in critiquing history and literature.

Besides the use of religion itself as a psychological and political instrument to contain and domesticate African Americans and maintain piety, the enslavers used the law and the constitution as weapon to justify the subjugation of the blacks. Both religion and the law are seen at the end of the day as ready tools that can be appropriated into the service of the enslavers in disciplining the enslaved, (Muse: 2014). The freedom of the slave was a product of a long struggle. The laws had to be changed and racists gave resistance to the changes. The bible was turned and twisted around to justify slavery as a biblically sanctioned condition that blacks had to obediently live with. Muse (2014) seeks to emphatically charge both religion and the law were in complicity in the enslavement of the black peoples in America.

The above analysis and rebuttal, by Muse, of DeMint's assertions stresses the ambiguous role that religion plays within the narrative of slavery. The chronicle of slavery is complex and gives rise to many counter arguments and it has spawned religious movements such as liberation theology which was seen as a way of helping African-Americans overcome the systemic oppression as James Hal Cone (1990: 56) writes that "a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the Gospel, which is Jesus Christ" is necessary in order to separate religion as an instrument of oppression and religion as a force of liberation.

The Narrative of Frederick Douglass is concerned with the liberation of the black man here and now and not sometime in promised eternity. Liberation theologians might have been inspired to relook at their beliefs because of the work that Douglass did. Until then Christianity seemed to be complicit with the oppression of the masses. In this study, it is noteworthy that the abolitionists also used Christianity to challenge slaveholding. Logically it follows that liberation theologians might have decided to turn religious rhetoric on its head and challenge the existing ideas which were by every means residual in the America of the 1960s and were self-evidently still part of the American cultural fabric that inferiorised blacks.

The rhetorical use of language as a force of social change and liberation is evidenced in exposing the fallacy of proslavery religion as captured in Davis Grossman's (2009) *Writing in the Dark* where writers living in a traumatic society, such as the slave holding one, dig themselves and their societies out of the grave through the use of language. Grossman states that "I write and I feel that the correct and accurate use of words acts like a medicine. It purifies the air I breathe, remove the pollutants, and frustrates the schemes of language defrauders and language rapists" (2009:29). Through the use of rhetorical language, slavery and the proslavery religion are undermined and the 'natural' order of things subverted. In Perception by incongruity, language plays a paramount role as Kenneth Burke (1937:35) argues that "we must consider language as a force that has an impact on the way we experience and act in the world".

Contextually, therefore, history cannot be separated from the present. Barack Hussein Obama, Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell have been accused as "race traitors" by the leaders of Al Qaeda, the group that is carrying out jihad against Americans, (Counterpunch: 2014) while in contrast Fredrick Douglass even Malcom X amongst others are affirmed as a paragon of an honourable black

Americans. The same uneasiness existing in the 19th century is still evident in the rhetoric of the black man and his place in the world that is seemingly mediated by forces not of his own making, (Rushing: 2011). The African American of the 21st century still has to face his struggles by acknowledging the role religion plays in his life and how it can conspire with or challenge the structures of power.

The fact that Frederick Douglas was secretly schooled by his Mistress becomes an indictment of the complicity of religion in not redeeming mankind but enslaving him in a negative circle of oppression. The denials of education, together with the giving of selective religious teachings were roped in to condition the black person and make him and his lot willing slaves. Of James Cone; Jonathan Walton (2008) notes:

James Cone believed that the New Testament revealed Jesus as one who identified with those suffering under oppression, the socially marginalised and the cultural outcasts. And since the socially constructed categories of race in America (i.e., whiteness and blackness) had come to culturally signify dominance (whiteness) and oppression (blackness) from a theological perspective, Cone argued that Jesus reveals himself as black in order to disrupt and dismantle white oppression, (2008: 68).

In other words Liberation theology is a response to the rhetorical proclamation by Malcom X (1976) that Christianity was “a white man’s religion”. Christianity has its roots in the Jewish experience through its patriarch Abraham and different people have adopted it as their spiritual tangents.

The contradictions and different rhetorical interpretations of religion cultivated fertile ground for conflict, and religious texts were used to subjugate the human spirit whilst affirming that humanity is made in the image of God. In other words

the blackman is not human therefore slavery can be justified and he can be used like an animal this explains Burke's concept of piety. This crisis of confidence plays itself out in many ways today in America. African American males marry white women (Fanon: 1986) in what one could consider to be "reverse lynching" of a society that did not respect their manhood, so the crossover effect on their psyche is that since they are now liberated they no longer have to be lynched for being attracted to white women or for white women being attracted to them. The capricious nature of this reasoning is lost to most people. Black women will complain that the most successful black males do not take a second look at them, thereby, missing an important point, the black man has been taught to aspire to whiteness in order to be accepted, a complex which Fanon(1986) considers some kind of slavery in itself, psychological slavery.

Another contradiction is that black women are more prone to be religious than their menfolk. In one and the same line they accuse them of not being man enough by failing to take care of their needs whilst hoping salvation for the menfolk will come from adopting the code that has left him psychologically scared. The black man is therefore in limbo hence the need for writers of African American literature to explore the matter of religion in debilitating the African American. Religion has placed the limits therefore the people have to find their agency in another way. They have to act outside religion in order to discover their potential.

According to Frazier (1986: 18) religion was a, "refuge in a hostile white world" and African-American people used the same potent images, rhetoric and symbolism found in the religious text to assert themselves as human beings as attested by Nelsen:

At another level, however, it has served as a form of cultural identity and resistance to a white-dominated society. The development of African American religion, particularly

during the twentieth century, took a multiplicity of interrelated streams, which makes it a variegated phenomenon that has only begun to be more fully explored in recent decades (Nelsen, 1971: 38).

Therefore, the rhetorical dishonesty of the master is critically examined and the substance of the white man's supremacy is disproved and challenged. The use of Perception by Incongruity in the present study allows for an observation of the contradictions that attend to masters and slaves alike. The black man also claims religious rhetoric as a defence and justification of his humanity and a rebuttal of the hypocrisy of the master who is effectively exposed as a pretender.

The gravest error in analysing the rhetoric used by the authors is when we do it without a context. It is a particular experience to the African-Americans and although not dissimilar to colonialism suffered by other people across the world, the experience cannot be transported, although the psychological and emotional effects of slavery and colonialism are still being felt today.

The religious rhetoric is counter culture born out of frustration with prevailing dynamics and the refusal or the impotence by religious institutions to be the moral compass of their societies. The United States fought a civil war as a result of slavery or so we are told. The northern states fought the south to liberate the slaves in the south. History itself got entangled in incongruity and contradictions.

Religious rhetoric and logic is still part of the template used by both combative sides. It is easy to revert to religion to proclaim your moral right to make decisions that affect a large group of oppressed people as noted by Eugene Genovese who:

Demonstrates in his application of Gramsci's notion of hegemony, the slave owner's paternalistic ideology relied

heavily upon religious themes. That the slaves internalized portions of their masters' ideology is manifested by their belief that Jesus Christ was a meek, humble, and compassionate figure with whom they could converse about their earthly tribulations. A few exceptions aside, they did not picture Jesus as a messiah-king bearing a sword and mounted on a horse ready to lead them in battle against their oppressors, (Genovese: 1974:52).

Therefore American writers such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe had to turn the techniques on their head so as to help the blinded slaves to open their eyes and recognise their agency and take note of the manipulative nature of the white man, in *The Ballot or The Bullet* Malcom X says:

The Time when white people can come in our community and get us to vote for them...is long gone...., the time when that same white man can send another negro into the community... those days are long gone too... This is a call to action for the audience to act but he steers away from it being a message of conversion to Islam by clearly stating that .Islam is my religion, but I believe my religion is my personal business. It governs my personal life and my personal morals (1976: 3).

In a way Malcom X seeks the African-American to regain his agency without having to be affiliated to a religion. He exclaims that he has made it his religion but acting against oppression is the responsibility of all not just those of Islam. Malcom X is called a militant for the forceful nature of his rhetoric.

America's fundamental struggles are fought in the religious and political spheres, they cannot be escaped. The freedom of the slave brought about a civil war. In that war both sides believed they had the moral right to do what they did. The North believed that all man should be free and the south was not will to compromise its economic place by freeing the black people.

It is not surprising to see different identities and interpretations emerging within the context of slaves. The house nigger and the field nigger. Some female slaves became the master's 'mistress whom he used to satisfy his lusts whilst his male children use the female slaves as tools to learn the craft of sex. Hence, everything black is soiled whilst the purity of white women is protected to the point of lynching black man for just looking at a white woman (Buckelew, 1999).

2.3 Conclusion

Perception by Incongruity becomes a useful rhetorical tool in the study Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the life of Frederick* as it allowed these writers to shape their interpretations, to become, in Nietzschean terms, physicians of culture. The use of language and metaphorical images allowed for different interpretations that bring us closer to the truth. For Burke, truth and the search for truth are rhetorical enterprises (Anders, 2006). The writers through their clinicalizing work of art, subvert the nature and expand boundaries and limits; this is true of Burke's Perceptions of Incongruity. Most importantly, the concept and theory of Perception by Incongruity, as the above section of this study has demonstrated, allows the study

to penetrate through contradictions of history and those of the text, including contradictions amongst and within the writers themselves and their critics.

Chapter Three: Perception by Incongruity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Yet if we can bring ourselves to imagine Matthew Arnold loafing on the corner with gashouse gang, we promptly realise how indiscriminating he would prove himself. Everything about him would be inappropriate: both what he said and the ways in which he said it. Consider the crudeness of his perception as regards the proper oaths, the correct way of commenting upon passing women, the etiquette of spitting. Does not his very crassness here reveal the presence of morality, a deeply felt and piously obeyed sense of the appropriate, on the part of these men, whose linkages he would outrageously violate? Watch them- and observe with what earnestness, what devotion, these gashouse Matthew Arnold act to prove themselves, every minute of the day, true members of their cult. Vulgarly is pious.

Burke (1935:77)

An imprisoned man watching a wild beast tearing a child from its mother's arms, the prisoner's response is limited to feelings, not actions as Stowe is accused of being too sentimental and hence the compassion towards the lowly, but a question that is often neglected is that if we feel compassion for mother and child (Tom and the lowly) do we also not feel rage against the beast (slave holding nation)?

Mason (1994:21)

I know not, reader. Whether you will be moved to tears by this narrative; I know I could not write it without weeping.

Mather (1699)

3.1 Introduction

Kenneth Burke wrote *Permanence and Change* (1935), during “the early days of the Great Depression, at a time when there was a general feeling that our traditional ways were headed for a tremendous change, maybe even permanent collapse. It is such a book as authors in those days sometimes put together, to keep themselves from falling apart (Jay, 1989:552)”. It is in this book that he gives better insight into Perception by Incongruity, a time when the current order and pieties had to give way to new senses, were, as observed in Nietzsche were the “subject matter was specifically that of reorientation” (Burke, 1935: 87). Thus Perspective by Incongruity becomes proper glasses into the exegesis of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) which was written during the slavery era and just after the introduction of the vicious Jim Crow law in 1851 starting in Tennessee before spreading. The Burke’s violation of pieties, a sense of what properly goes with what, allows for the exploration of the role of religion during slavery at a rhetorical level. Burke, like Stowe during her time, was living in a divided society and religion was also a diving tool with divergent views for and against the institution of slavery and the liberatory power of religion and hence *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* effectiveness comes from the dissonance created by the embodiment of two contrasting philosophies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X: the bible and the gun thus bringing these two in a dialogue. It is this dissonance that troubled Joswick (1983:257) as he concluded (inconclusively) that Stowe’s crown without conflict forces one either to accept *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as an “uncontested triumph” or a “Wholesale fraud”.

In the introduction of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 1878 edition, Stowe stated that “the story can less be said to have been composed by her than imposed upon her (Forster, 1954). She would later one claim that “God had written the book” (Bellin, 1993:1) thereby setting the stage for Perception by Incongruity by attacking slavery through fluctuating alternatives or juxtaposing views in capturing the responses and resistance to slavery and the proper role played by religion in the context. In the novel we have a juxtaposed society, done through the juxtaposing of characters, views and events. St Claire in Augustine is juxtaposed with his twin Alfred, Topsy and Eva, Tom and Eva, two christs, the religion of the slaveholder and that of the slave, Tom's journey South and Harris's Journey towards freedom in North, two responses to slavery, active and violent resistance of George Harris and the passive acceptance of Uncle Tom as Jane Tompkins (1994: 2) writes that “every character, every scene, and every incident comes to be comprehended in terms of every other character, scene, and incident”

The strong, juxtaposed religious overtones in the novel, which largely appealed to the slaves and Christian, white audience, will be looked at under different subheadings that express different contrasting standpoints. The subheadings will allow for a more analytical analysis of the novel when it comes to the issue of religion and slavery. It is through such contrasting viewpoints that Kenneth Burke (1935) acknowledges that “the forces, by their very juxtaposition or combination within the same community worked together, perhaps in spite of themselves, to create something greater than either force itself: the exchange of ideas, which enhanced the community through the very conflict of its various factions”. The analysis will also bring to the forefront the limited religious perspective of Stowe who, as a Methodist in spiritual orientation, seemed to propagate her religions views through the main character Uncle Tom.

Perception by Incongruity does not need to offer solutions, but need to start a debate, making different standpoints view their perspectives and exchange ideas. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* successfully started the debate though most perspectives are to be found at extreme ends. As part of the exchange of ideas, Tompkins (1994:12) argued that "by abandoning active resistance and choosing to wait for judgement day, it is this internally created conflict that empowered and motivated a nation in the period before the Civil War", Ivan Turgenev and George Elliot hailed it as a masterpiece (Younge, 2002), Alice Crozier (1969:239) stated that Stowe "speaks with the prophets of the of old, reminding the nation of its historical commitments, recording its present struggles, warning of the impending wrath of the Almighty if the nation should betray its covenant and destiny" and she also acknowledges the impact of the Stowe in social reform and attest that despite her failure to realise her black characters, she brought considerably more knowledge and curiosity about the details of slavery as social reality. Philip Fisher (1985) commented that she answered the problematic and philosophically question asked by St.Clare "on what can an individual do" (1969:328), and the answer is that "they can see to it they feel right" (1969: 624) President Lincoln is said to have jokingly suggested that Stowe started the civil war , Sundquist saw it as "political and social polemic" (1993: 367) and Samuels (1992) praised it for leading to the abolition of slavery while Howe (1997:42) commended that the novel's "power to elicit social action" derived "from its ultimate indictment of this world and from its anticipated world to come" were Stowe "persuades her readers not with flames and frying of sinners as Bladwin will want us to believe, but using the image of a deadly world in need of divine intervention and another image of heaven seen through tom and Eva".

Adam Lively (1998) had a different view and labelled the book “an embarrassment”. Sarson (1989) pointed out that “the two time schemes of sentimental stories involve moments when action is impossible: once an outcome is inevitable it is too late to act or to intervene, and, secondly, once an action is in the deep past and has left irreversible damage, even the consequences cannot be lessened...where death is used as the analogy for social, remediable suffering, our general helplessness ... is underlined and the will to act is weakened if not denied. The feeling of suffering becomes more important than action against suffering. Tears become more important than escapes or rescues.” Baldwin (1949) had more crude criticism and simply called it a religious novel, “activated by what might be called a theological terror, the terror of damnation” and accused the novel of reducing slavery to a “to a metaphysical puzzle” (p281) and William Lloyd Garrison (2015) simply accused it of “disarming blacks in the name of Christ and arming whites in the same name” and a “racially motivated text”. Stover accused Stowe of basing her work on hearsay as “she knew nothing about slavery” (Stover, 2003: 149), Thomas Chase (2012) exclaimed “OH what a slanderous book” and Freehling (2002:16) was close behind with his “isn’t it strange how much a pack of lies can do?” and Holmes (1852:62) chipped in by accusing the book of disturbing the piety by accusing Stowe of a “whole tenor of this pathetic tale”. Stowe stood accused of trying to disturb the peace and cause social unrest and Hall (1960) took serious offence and stated at length that “the book is a piece of propaganda; (were) Stowe achieves her aims by making the ‘good’ black characters ridiculously good, and her idea of goodness is entirely informed by a Victorian notion of Christianity” though this view has found its antithesis in Hedrick (1994:32) who posits that “Tom is essentially Jesus- and Jesus was a man whose response to maltreatment was to suffer and take it, in the hope of creating a greater good. No one, so far as I know, has condemned Jesus as a race traitor”. Ward (1966:47) went the moderate way by pointing out that “she was right but she had no right”. Such scathing attack on Stowe and *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin should not come as a surprise as Karen Whedbee (2001:8) observed that “the rhetor must expect to meet the fury when desecrating the alters of an audience’s pieties”. True to the nature and purpose of Perception by incongruity “Stowe opened the floodgates for open conversations about pros and cons of slavery – floodgates that decades of Americans male politicians had struggled to keep shut” (Samuels, 1992:15). The contradicting sentiments and observations expressed here are to be attributed to the contradicting and juxtaposed views on slavery and religion as found in Stowe’s work, true to the perception by incongruity that uses incongruity and dissonance as effective tools to challenge existing pieties as people start question their traditionally held perspectives.

When Harriet Beecher Stowe published her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she gained instant disrepute. Her book helped spread the truth of the cruelties and injustices of slavery across the globe. After its publication, it helped spread the ideas of the abolitionist movement. Though the book may be thought of as sentimentalism, it still brought to light some of the horrors of slavery and the hypocritical Christian ideology of the South and to an extent the North. The fact that the novel was written concerning Christianity and what makes a good Christian as opposed to a hypocritical one makes it a good study for divergent religious attitudes found at that particular time in slave ridden America. This chapter will investigate and analyze different juxtaposing religious attitudes in the novel and an attempt will be made to account for such attitudes.

3.2 Religious Fanaticism: A pious perceptive

“How happy are you who are poor” (Luke 6:26). The concept of necessary suffering or the notion of idealised retribution seems to be blindly idealised by Stowe in her novel. The characters, mostly the slaves, are encouraged to unquestioningly submit to religion as interpreted by, arguably, Stowe herself. The poor, brutalized and seemingly shallow minded slaves, all flock to the gospel of the pie in the sky, making a point that the kingdom of God is a thing to come and hence one should patiently wait for it to come. Just as Nash (1992:189) puts it beautifully that “people enduring this kind of daily stress inherent in the master-slave relationship typically turned to this deepest emotive sources for relief”, or as Mays (1938:26) puts it that;

It is well documented that most slaves looked to religion as an outlet for their grief in bondage...because of the horrors known to slaves on Earth, the prospect of life after death in heaven was an inviting one. Not to say that this strong belief ceased the tortures known to the enslaved, but that strong beliefs in religion, specifically Christianity, eased a bit of the unending pain known to slaves.

The zealously religious slaves never seek to practically alter their dehumanizing condition, but with most of them dutifully submitting to the inhuman treatment of the slave master as a gateway to heaven. Such dutiful submission by slaves is Christian behaviour according to one perspective put across by Stowe. Such docile attitude borders on the issue of religious fanaticism as the slaves throw and submerge themselves into religion without questioning.

The excessive pietism of Uncle Tom, the central character in the novel whose suffering and death is Christ-like, is a classic example of religious fanaticism in the novel. It has been argued that Uncle Tom's values are Stowe's religious values (Goodman, 1998), making Uncle Tom a kind of hero or a religious villain depending on where one is standing. James Baldwin's in *Everybody Protest Novel* (1949) infamously attacked Stowe's chief man, as a 'man robbed of his humanity and divested of his sex (p18). The attack on Uncle Tom for his perceived docility and emasculation is also evident in Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1969), Chester Himes 'Heaven Has Changed' (1990) and Ralph Ellison (1952) *The Invisible Man*.

Stowe sought to point out the injustice of slavery and the need to eliminate it. She obligates blacks to end their own enslavement. Her opinion on how slaves should end their enslavement seems extremely passive. She advocates for a perspective that blacks should remain obedient and subservient to their masters while remaining pious and faithful to God. In the end slaves will gain a greater freedom than what the physical world has to offer them. By having faith in God and refusing to act violently in relation to their masters, they will be eventually rewarded with eternal salvation. Stowe embodies these ideas in the larger than life figure of Uncle Tom. Ngugi waThiongo in *Writers in Politics* (1981) questioned such propagation of such values, and the role of literature in spreading those views.

Why is it that the church is always preaching humility and forgiveness and non-violence to the oppressed? Why do the liberals (like Stowe) preach gratitude, humility, kindness and meekness to the oppressed classes? Why is it that the church does not concentrate its preaching and efforts of conversion

on the very classes and races that have brutalized others...the aim is obvious: it is to weaken the resistance of the oppressed classes and here imaginative literature comes in as a useful medium of mental conditions, making the oppressed believe that the root cause of their problem, and hence solution, lies deep in their spiritual condition, in their sinful souls (1981:23).

Throughout his life, Tom places his faith in God and accepts his fate no matter what the circumstances. An excellent example of Tom's unrelenting faith in the lord and his refusal to act violently against his master is his struggle with an evil and cruel Simon Legree. He never fights back but always turns the other cheek. Tom becomes a man emasculated by religion, a man who not only eschews the mildest form of violence but is seen as being incapable of anger and even as a positive hero. It comes not as a surprise that waThiongo (1981:20) views such people like Tom as an example of "the Christian virtue of spineless humility and longing to be loved by the enemy, which of course is an element of self-hatred and negative self-definition".

For Stowe, it seems, and subsequently to Tom, dying nobly was better than killing an unjust master or escaping from him. To this end Gates and Robbins accuse Stowe of never seeing Tom as a fully developed human being and this can also be seen in her original subtitle which was "The man that was a thing" (Gates and Robbins. 1949,xxx), in this case - a passive thing. Hence Stowe can, from this perspective, be criticised as a believer of non-resistance by the slave to the white man under all possible outrage. Since his time at the Shelby's farm his

favourite hymns like 'Jordan banks', 'New Jerusalem' and 'Canaan Fields' among others speak of an eternal home to come. The gospel of the pie in the sky dulls any striving and the desire to better oneself on earth.

The religious Tom refuses to escape with Eliza when he is told that he has been sold by his Christian master Mr. Shelby and Tom says "No. no....I ain't going....If I must be sold, or all the people on the place and everything go to the rack, why let me be sold (1969: 27). When his day to leave the farm comes, he calmly tells a bitter and angry wife that "pray for them that spitefully use you, the good book says ...Mas'r couldn't help himself; he did right (to sell him) (1969; 37)". Another interesting and very revealing statement by Tom as he tries to comfort himself with the idea that one must suffer so as to gain a place in the eternal heaven, is when he is in transit to St Clare place when he says that "we have here no continuing city, but we seek one to come; wherefore God himself is not ashamed to be called our God, for he hath prepared for us a city (p.123)".

Tom remains a docile character who never fights back, prior to his first beating, he does not defend himself. He says to Legree "Mas'r if you mean to kill me; but as to raising my hand against anyone here, I shall never, and I'll die first" (1969:p.195). He is defiant to Legree but it is for the safety of another of God's creatures. He never raises a hand in opposition to the cruel master just as William Whipper would preach about the resolution of a nonviolence approach to violence though Barksdale adds that "the practice of non-violence to physical aggression is not only consistent with reason, but the surest method of obtaining a speedy triumph of the principles of universal peace (1972:133).

Tom also never resists when he is sent to be punished for his defiance. Instead he boldly states his faith in the Lord, proclaiming that Legree may physically take his life, but will never be able to own his soul because his soul belongs to God as he exclaims “No! no! no! my soul ain’t yours, mas’r! Ye can’t buy it! It’s been bought and paid for by one that is able to keep it, no matter, no matter, you can’t harm me (1969: 214)”.

Thus Tom’s life and way of living are divorced from the earthly faculty and his main concern is the spiritual realm. This accounts for his docile and humiliating life he lives. For Stowe this seems to be ideal Christianity at least for black slaves.

When Tom is on the verge of death after being brutally whipped by the master, he only says of him that “he ain’t do me no real harm...only opened the gate of the kingdom for me that’s all” (1969:215) just as Reverend Taylor says to his son “Ah done lived all mah life on my mah Knees, a –begging n a-pleading wid the white folks ... they did wuz kick me!... N ef Ah so much as talk lika man they try to kill me” (Wright, 1969:209). The statement by Tom amounts to the point of being grateful for being so brutally beaten to the point of death. It is no wonder that Uncle Tom’s name was eventually degraded into a nickname for blacks who are too subservient to whites. He became a stereotype of the passive slave who would do anything his master told him because it was his duty as a slave. Even in the contemporary world he has come to represent the lackey, the moderate, the conciliator and the sell-out. It is such a portrayal of religious Uncle Tom that made him a synonym for self-loathing and for Gates this means a “black man all too eager to please the whites around him... the embodiment of race betrayal and an object of scorn, a scapegoat for all of our political self-doubts” (1949: xi), a model that is to be avoid if real change is to be achieved. This is cemented by

Pipes who accused Mrs Stowe for creating a “fantasy image of the Negro, based on the belief that coloured people were by nature meek and submissive, dependent and childlike; people who humbly accept their cruel fate, even with gratitude” (Pipes, 1967: 3)

The excessive pietism seemingly expounded by Stowe through Tom seems to re-enforce rather than challenge the status quo. Stowe wanted to fight slavery, she, from this perspective, fails to empower her suffering characters, she fails to interpret the Christian message within the context of experience of those who are victims of a hostile society, those who have been stripped of their humanity and reduced to chattels because of the slave institution. The limited religious perspective of Stowe fails to affirm the liberating hand of God through the willingness of the oppressed to revolt against the negative forces around them. Hence her characters like Tom, Eliza, and Emmeline and to some extent Chloe had the gospel of the pie in the sky forced down their throats. The biblical teachings the slaves received tend to be far removed from their situation. They have been given the image of an apologetic God who demands humility to the point of self-pity. Mazobere (1991: iv) captures this attitude when he says that, “Christianity must recognize and take account of the people’s values...It permeates the subject and transforms into a new creation”.

However, Christianity in this novel from this pious perspective fails to transform the subjects (slaves) into new creations to challenge the oppressive system. The slaves do not master a positive response to slavery, most of the slaves grow into what Dick calls “a culture of silence” (1990:4), which is the passive attitude among the oppressed. It is not only Tom who believes that “we must suffer and wait his (God’s) time” (1969: 206), Eliza is one such character whose

unquestioning submission is questionable. She fails to comprehend that her Christian masters do not regard her as an equal. While Eliza's husband George constantly questions his condition and asks "is there a God for us (1969:53)" is claimed by Simeon the Quaker who tells him that the kingdom of heaven is for the poor and suffering who states that "If this world were all, George thee might, indeed, ask where is the Lord. But it is often those who have least of all in this life whom he chooseth for the kingdom. Put thy trust in him and no matter what befalls thee here, he will make all right here after (1969; 54)".

This idea of religion for blacks seems to be rooted in Stowe's perspective of Christian slaves as good slaves. In three out of the four novellas that make *Uncle Tom's Children* (1969), Richard Wright challenges this idea of a good and submissive 'nigga' by placing his black characters in situations where they are forced to kill white people in self-defence, as if to force them out of their cultural piety. Characters such as Big Boy, Mann, Silas and Reverend Taylor come to mind here. Taylor becomes a radicalised reverend as if he is the reincarnated biblical Samson as heard from his favourite spiritual Samson "if I had my way I'd tear the building down" (1969:204) and "some days they gonna burn!!". He finds rage not docility from the Bible's black Christian poetry.

From the perspective argued here, Stowe thinks that slaves were only good if they were very Christian like Tom, Topsy, Emmeline, George and Eliza, not taking into account that slaves already had their own religious and moral base while in Africa. For example; Topsy is described using a derogatory word "wild" occasional until she turned to Christianity and becomes a missionary. Thus Stowe seems to embrace her.

Karl Marx's famous quote "Religion is the opium of the people" (1976:48) comes to life in this novel as character's try to grapple with the horrors of their condition. The issue of religion is problematic because it seems hypocritical for Stowe to say that slaves must behave and worship the Lord when in return for piety they are beaten and promised glory in the future to come. However, this is an important perspective that sets the stage for Perception by Incongruity through juxtaposition with other perspectives.

3.3 Is Stowe or Tom misunderstood: An impious Perspective

Bense (1994:21) praised Stowe for turning the slave holding religion of the slaveholder against itself while at the same time upholding the humanity of slaves, propping them as exemplary Christians who need to be emulated as opposed to Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright. Thus Stowe presents a juxtaposed perspective on religion and slavery, as in the initial perspective, religion was presented as an accomplice in enslaving the Africans in America. Bigger Thomas was by nature what the Southern Whites feared in black people. If we accept this perspective, then it means Stowe has been successful in terms of violating established pieties by portraying slaves as human beings and presenting a juxtaposed perspective from the religious fanatical Tom who fails to have a positive impact in the struggle to abolish slavery. The problematic issue of religion and slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is very complex and multifaceted. Whilst one can safely condemn the seemingly short sighted religious perspective of Stowe, which produced stereotypically docile and submissive characters as heroes, one cannot ignore the other facet that these excessive pious characters have something positive to offer thus creating the dissonance of perspectives in

order to challenge existing perspectives and possibly create new orientations. Beyond the docility, as seen through the character of St Clare, judgement and action emerge as he (St Clare) moves beyond personal acts of Christian kindness and speaks of partaking in a revolution even if it meant he dies ((1969:451) just as Uncle Tom's resistance and Harries fight and flight.

After being ruthlessly and systematically reduced to chattels, many slaves turned to religion to comfort them in their darkest hour, to help them gain the strength to continue in their struggles and to hope that a day would come when they would rise above their condition to a better place after death. On such understanding one can say that Stowe's religious perspective is misunderstood (as seen in earlier contradicting criticism of Stowe) as religion provided a gateway for the suffering slaves. For the characters in the novel Christianity became a symbol of redemption in which they envisioned a future free from bondage, and if earthly escape were not possible, their faith would be rewarded in the afterlife.

While Tom, because of his religion, which makes him a passive victim, one is also forced to realise how the strength of his faith has allowed him to tolerate the horrors that were landed upon him. While Marx's "Religion is the opium of the people" sums up Tom, but also the less famous part of the same quote better sums up Tom's morality and provides a cornerstone for his defence as Marx wrote that "Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world and the soul of the soulless condition (1976:48)".

As one cannot ignore the sentimentalism in the book that also has a positive effect of leading to social change as Bergson, (2002:41) observed that;

By containing horror, then *Uncle Tom's Cabin* contributed to unleashing horror. One is reminded of the Desert Storm, a biblically evocative name, biblical theme song) God is watching us, through suppression of terror unleashed terror in Iraq. Like all propaganda – which it resembles in its heated emotional appeals. Single-minded intensity, and simplified resolution of its own turmoil – Uncle Tom's Cabin succeeds where merely rational approaches might fail. By removing the individual's 'political responsibility' it elicits decisive political action. By promising the 'crown without thorns' it makes the conflict manageable, acceptable, even desirable. And by sitting in judgement itself, it makes judgement seem ultimately unnecessary.

For when Tom is apparently at his most sapine he is, nonetheless motivated by a desire to remain true to his Christian faith rather than ingratiate himself with his master like Adolph. It is from this religious consistency that Tom manages to preserve his humanity and integrity. It is through it that he is able to assist and defend his fellow slaves. Tom manages to keep himself from loathing white masters. When St Clare asks him if he would not be better off a slave than a free man he responds with a straight "No!" "Why Tom, you can't possibly have earned, by your work, such clothes and such a living as I have given you (1969:149)", St Clare tells Tom. However, Tom is adamant and replies "Know's all that mas'r. But I'd rather have poor clothes, poor house, poor everything and have them mine, than have the best, and have 'em any man else's (1969:149)".

At Legree's plantation Tom does acts of kindness to other slaves like the incident in which he dumped handfuls of cotton from his bag into a woman's bag whose health was failing her. Tom continues his limited defiance when ordered to whip the sick woman by Legree he refuses by saying "as to my raising my hand again anyone here, I never shall I'll die first!" (1969:191). When two slaves escape from Legree's place, he asks Tom to tell him if he knows anything about it and threatens him with death if he refuses, "I know, mas'r, but I can't tell anything. I can die" (1969:201). And die he does. Christina Zwarg in *Fathering and Blackface* (1989:63) observed that "in the system of belief which undergirds Stowe's enterprise, dying is the supreme act of heroism ... death is the equivalent not of defeat but of victory; it brings an access of power not a loss of it; it is not only the crowning achievement of life, it is life".

Bush (2000:39) argues that those that analyse Uncle Tom's death as a weakness of Stowe's advocacy overlook "Tom's integrity, dignity, and strength of character and fails to recognise that he dies not out of submission to Legree but to uphold his convictions: his resolve not to indulge the whereabouts of the slave Cassy".

Contrast emerges here, while Stowe is seen as advocating for religious fanaticism, it can also be argued that she advocates for true Christianity, that we see in slaves, as a challenge to the status quo. For this slave holding status core is not human and has denied the humanity of slaves, it is a rotten order that Burke (1935:43) singles out through the use of Perception by Incongruity "for, despite any cult of good manners and humility, to the extent that a social structure becomes differentiated, with privileges to some that are denied to others, there are conditions for a kind of 'built in' pride. King and peasant are 'mysteries' to one another. Those 'up' are guilty of not being 'down' and those 'down' are certainly

guilty of not being ‘up’.” The South’s desire to maintain its strictly enforced social hierarchy devolved into staunch defence of segregation’s system of giving ‘privileges to some that are denied to others’. Burke (1935:21) described pieties as society’s “sense of what goes with what” and especially amongst the people of the South there long existed a sense, inculcated through years of slavery and segregation, that whites are masters and blacks belong to slavery. It is through the contradictory writing of Stowe that, according to Fiedler;

Stowe’s grand plan comes out clearly when one notes that it is Tom’s Christian principles in the face of his brutal and dehumanising treatment that made him a hero to whites. It should be remembered that Stowe’s target audience were the white people for she believed that it was them that needed to be convinced of the humanity of the slaves for she envisioned her story as a moral tale to provoke a white Christian audience to condemn slavery as she writes in her first pages...“the object of these sketches is to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race; as they exist among us; to show their wrongs and sorrows, under a system so necessarily cruel and unjust as to defeat and do away the good effects of all that can be attempted for them, by their best friends, under it (1992:13).

This is also clearly demonstrated through contrasting Tom and his tormenter Simon Legree, the Northern slave holder turned plantation owner, who was created to enrage Stowe’s audience with his cruelty. Such anti-social hierarchy portrayal violently outraged the Southerners who “declared the work (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*) to be criminal, slanderous, and utterly false.” (Fiedler, 1992).

Because of the new orientation created by Stowe, Fiedler (1992:35) further points out that when the book came out “a bookseller in Mobile, Alabama, was forced out of town for selling copies. Stowe received threatening letters and a package containing the dismembered ear of a black person. Southerners also reached by writing their own novels. These depicted the happy lives of slaves, and often contrasted them with the miserable existences of Northern white workers”.

Fiedler (1992:13) argues that Stowe’s effectiveness in challenging the existing social order should not be judged using the current world view as what is now in the 21st Century is regarded “as sentimental, racist text was at the time received as vicious polemic gains against slavery in general and against the fugitive slave law in particular”. The dissonance created was so effective to the extent that Yarborough and Sylvan (2002:67) gave testimony describing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as an “epicentre of a massive cultural phenomenon ... the tremors of which still affect the relationship between black and whites in the United States today”.

Stowe tried to offer a solution to slavery and the solution was “praying and acting so that you feel right” (p.225). The solution might not be in keeping with the emotional outpouring of her attack on slavery but Williams (2001:41) points out that the book “did more in the service of the liberation of the oppressed than any other book of its time”, and Tom’s death is not the death of solution but “both a personal victory and a spur to action; her investment in the rewards of heaven promised by Christianity does not stop her from advocating major social reform. In her concluding remarks to the novel, Stowe writes that Christ’s will shall be ‘done on earth as it is in heaven’ and warns that the day for vengeance will come to a nation that harbours slavery. The complicity of Christian clergy in this injustice is, she writes, what motivated her to write *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Spingarn:

2012). The glaring contradictions and juxtapositions in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, whether deliberate or not, is what makes this work of art effective and it forces a discourse to take place about slavery therefore creating a platform for perceptions to be altered thereby creating a new trajectory for deliberation about religion and slavery during the slave era (Davila, 2002)

From the contradictions, one can also argue that Stowe advocates non-violence, obedience and piety as a solution for the slaves because they are black and at the same breath preaches resistance and defiance. The black characters in the book are stock types with only three means to confront their enforced degradation, submission (through religion), brutalisation and defiance. Uncle Tom is like a lamb to be killed, the converted George is exiled and the born again Topsy turns to Africa for missionary work. It seems Africa is for free Christian blacks and heaven is for dead Negroes. For Stowe it seems no African is good for America. Like most liberals she believed that the support for the downtrodden demanded sympathy rather than solidarity. Like most liberals, she thought that “liberation could only be granted by the good grace of the powerful rather than achieved by the will and tenacity of the powerless (waThiongo 1981:15)”.

In one polemical passage Stowe asserts that “there is one thing that every individual can do (about slavery), they can see to it that they feel right” (1969:225). This brings to the forefront the question of Christianity, which is non-violent and submissive as a solution to slavery as it seems to aggravate the already deplorable condition of the slaves. Such religion fails to produce tangible results. For Stowe real-life heroes like the religious slave rebel Nat Turner and Sojourner Truth are not sources of inspiration for her slaves who tip-toe through life and

hope to go to heaven. Thus such religion as Christianity does not offer a practical solution as it encourages prayer as a means of fighting slavery. It is appropriate that one again quotes waThiongo who speaks extensively about white liberals like Stowe. He talks about the non-violent way of achieving equality as an illusion:

This is the white liberals dream of a day when black and white can love one another without going through the agony of violent reckoning.... Liberalism fosters the illusion in the exploited of the possibilities of peaceful settlement and painless escape from the imperialist violence, which anyway is not called violence but law and order (1981:20)

Two perspectives have already emerged, religion being used as a tool for keeping slaves in bondage as they happily wait for the second coming of Jesus and also a contrasting perspective were the religion is used by those in bondage and around them to violate the institution of slavery. A scenario were Tom is an emasculated religious fanatic and simultaneously a hero to the last just a Thomas Brook (1997:13) observed that the “novel is full of contradictions” this is where lies the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for it makes one question these perspectives thereby starting a communal debate and engagement.

3.4 Pharisaic pious Christian Ideology of the South

On the genealogy of morals, Nietzsche states (1994) that “if a temple is to be erected, a temple must be destroyed; that is the law” Stowe systematically does so by bringing out clearly the pious religious hypocrisy of the South that she had

to move to impiety for as Burke (1935:21) states that through Perception by incongruity “in order to create new pieties or new senses of what properly goes with what, the old pieties must first be recognised before they can be violated.” In this particular case, Stowe had to recognise the pretentious slave holding religion of the South. In this scenario one has to start with a quote from St Clare that captures the complex network involved here;

We have planters, who have money to make by it (slavery), clergymen, who have planters to please, politicians, who want to rule by it, may warp and bend language and ethics...they can press nature and bible, and nobody knows what else, into service (p.72).

Thus under the current order of things, religion is bent into service of those who are powerful to achieve their ends and maintain the pious, the rotten order of things. The world of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not different as Mays (1938:64) pointed out that the world of the South was bent in denying the slaves liberty, a point which is highlighted by Stowe that “Christianity constituted an important basis for anti-democratic movements in the south to deny liberty to a large number of people, primarily, though not solely, slaves” (Giles, 1994:16).

For slave traders and owners, the bible became a place where the institution of slavery was justified and maintained. Stowe exposes the hypocritical religion of the self-proclaimed Christians in the novel. Religion is intelligently and skilfully manipulated to side with the white master and to condemn the Blackman to eternal servitude with German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche arguing that it cultivated moral slaves as “it was always not the faith, but the freedom from the faith, the half-stoical and smiling indifference to the seriousness of the fait, which

made the slaves indignant to their masters and revolt against them” (1997:34) The biblical scriptures are selectively chosen and ministered to the slaves as to make them content, even grateful with their suffering. With religion as a partner, the master can enslave the black race and yet still hope to get preference in heaven when he dies. Religion was manipulated to serve the racist notions of the religiously hypocritical whites just as waThiongo observes that “these white racist lies were reinforced by religion, Christianity especially, which saw God, Christ, angels, in terms of whiteness, while sin and the devil were black and heaven was depicted as a place where the elect of God would wear white robes of virgin purity, while hell was depicted as a place where the rejects of the white God would burn to charcoal (1981:15)”.

From the first chapter of the novel we are introduced to Christians, Mr. Shelby and wife, who have become the gentlemen and lady slaveholders. They see themselves as staunch Christians and attempt to take good care of their slaves, but still fail to see the slaves as people who are equal to the whites. Though it makes Mr Shelby feel “bad” to sell Eliza’s son and Tom to the trader Haley, he still does so despite his conscience and exhortations from the wife. The action by the Christian Mr Shelby goes against the doctrine of liberty and love for one another, which are the basics of Christianity.

Stowe by exposing the hypocrisy is trying to impress strongly upon the reader the degenerate effects of slavery not only upon the slave but the master as well. It demonstrates the absurdities of slavery. Mr Shelby’s actions are strongly contradictory to his anti-slavery statements. He is not respectful of his slaves, for example, when Shelby and Haley are discussing the ensuing trade, Harry enters the room and Shelby has him dance around like a monkey and then tosses raisins

at him. By exposing such hypocrisy and invoking the fury of the slave holding religion, Stowe is living up to the Perception by Incongruity rhetor as Karen Whedbee (2001) notes that “the rhetor must expect to meet the fury when desecrating the alters of an audience’s pieties”.

Another interesting case of analysis when it comes to religious hypocrisy of the master is Marie St Clare. The very religious Marie fails to reconcile herself to the idea that God made everyone equal. The cruel Marie who goes to a “fashionable church, to be very religious, who always makes a point to be very pious on Sundays” (1969:160), makes it a point that slaves know their “place” in society, that is, at the bottom of the social hierarchy. She takes pains to see that the slave Mammy does not have time to rest. She also separated Mammy from her husband and two children. The slaves have only St Clare’s protection from the wrath of the pious mistress. Marie’s attitude on slavery is summed up when she quotes Dr G’s sermon to St Clare:

The text was, “He hath made everything beautiful in its season; and he showed all the order and distinctions in society came from God; and that it was so appropriate...that some should be high and some low, and that some were born to rule and some to serve....he applied it so well to all this ridiculous fuss that is made about slavery (1969:162).

Dr G is not the only Clergyman who has the planters to please and the status core or the piousness to maintain. The Clergyman on the boat carrying Haley and Tom among others constantly quotes scripture selectively to support his stance that

God sanctions slavery by arguing that “it’s undoubtedly the intention of the Providence that the African race be servants. ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be’, the scripture says....It pleased Providence for some inscrutable reason, to doom the race to bondage, ages ago; and we must not set up our own opinion against that (1969:127).

Hence the Clergy believe it is a sin to lift a finger against slavery. Mr Wilson cannot be left out in the hypocritical group. He tries to convince the escaped George who is his friend to go back into bondage, as it is the will of God as says – “But you know how the angel commanded Hagar to return to her mistress, and submit herself under the hand; and the apostle sent back Onesimus to his master.... The apostle says, “Let everyone abide in the condition in which he is called (p.118)”.

Mr Wilson instead of helping George to gain his liberty, piously encourages him to return to his slave condition. Such understanding of religion, which condemns one race and blesses the other, a norm in the South cannot be universal and its intentions are questioned the readers thus making them relook at their perspectives and thereby violating their pieties. The Clergy preach humility, submission and patience to the oppressed, something that they would not dare themselves practice. The most docile slave is promised heaven just like the most brutal master. These clergy are in the same hypocritical category as Mr Peck in Well’s *Clotel; or the Presidents’s Daughter* (1990) who expressed his religious piety by preaching to his slaves before whipping them.

Though Legree hates religion, he knows when it comes in handy. Legree once in a while throws in a verse or two to assert his “God given” authority and to cow slaves into submission, using religion as an extension of the whip, he says to Tom “Didn’t you ever hear, out of yer Bible, “Servants obey yer masters? An’t I yer master Didn’t I pay twelve hundred dollars, cash for all ther is inside yer cussed black shell (1969:192)”.

The inherent contradictions leave no one untouched, even the seemingly good Christian lady Miss Ophelia who comes to the North. She confesses to St Clare that she would rather touch a frog than touch Topsy (a slave girl child under her charge). By extension the hypocrisy of the North is exposed through Miss Ophelia. The North is known for priding itself with being liberal and sending missionaries to African though they would not welcome fugitive slaves to their homes.

Chapter Four: Perception by Incongruity in Fredrick Douglass

The lion, if the usual psychoanalytic theory of symbolization is correct, is the male or father symbol par excellence. Yet the lion is scientifically included in the cat family, whereas the cat emotionally is female. In both great poetry and popular usage, it is associated with female attributes. Here we have, in our rational categories, an association which runs entirely counter to the associations of our emotional categories. A linkage emotionally appropriate becomes rationally inappropriate

Burke (1935:73)

How can a slave and his master both worship the same God? Then both of them expect their prayers to be answered, by this very same God?"

Clarke (1993:67)

4.1 Introduction

In *I Have Come To Tell Something about Slavery* (1841) Frederick Douglass tells of a scenario during a religious revival where a young woman fell into a trance and upon waking up, she declared that she has been in heaven and during this scenario, "her friends were all anxious to know what and whom she had seen there; so she told the whole story. But there was one good old lady whose curiosity went beyond that of all the others-and she inquired of the girl that had the vision, if she saw any black folks in Heaven? After some hesitation, the reply was, "Oh! I didn't go into the kitchen!" This becomes an appropriate entry point into understanding Douglass's *Narrative of slave* (1978) as he seeks to disrupt the religious supported racist social hierarchies where the whites are born superior to

the inferior blacks whose rightful place is in the kitchen. The two incongruous symbolic associations of religion presented by Douglass are also typified in the example that Burke gives of a lion (king of the jungle) who is perceived as male but yet a cat which is perceived feminine there by creating a dissonance of what is and what ought to be.

The autobiographical text by Frederick Douglass *The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1978) captures the power paradigm found in religion as religion is subverted to serve the interest of the master. The text is relevant for analysis as it shows how deplorable his (slavery) situation was, the terrible chastisements inflicted upon his person, the outrages perpetrated upon the mind by those professing to have the same mind in them as that was in the biblical Jesus. As if whips, chains, thumbscrews, blood-hounds and overseers were not enough to keep the slave down and give the protection to the ruthless masters, religion was also used to annihilate any barrier of humanity and resistant from the slave. Douglass describes the effect of a religious profession on the conduct of both master and slave.

Applying Kenneth Burke's developed theory of perspective by incongruity to Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, means that one has look at the new perspectives on religion and slavery brought about through the oddly juxtaposed symbols that are used to influence the audience by challenging normal thinking habits. Frederick Douglass did the taboo by attacking religion and its relation to slavery and by so doing affirmed true religion and brought to light the scourge of slavery on the both the master and the slave. The incongruous combination of humour and religion created the necessary impropriety that eventually lead to the popularity of the *Narrative* and its subsequent contribution to the abolitionist cause. By humorous treatment and the juxtaposing of the slaveholding religion and the true religion of Christ brings about a new perspective, which is, to use Holly Stevens' words "the loss of belief in the sort of God in whom we were all

brought up to believe” (1967, 348). Undoubtedly religion played a proactively role in the enslavement of the black race and also in their subsequent emancipation. Douglass challenges the slaveholding religion that was entrenched in the South by incongruously treating it humorously and juxtaposing with the true Christianity of Christ. This new perspective is deliberate and rhetorically created not only to desymbolise religion (Dame, 1970) but also an acknowledgment by Douglass of religion and the sense of the sacred and also an acknowledgement of a religious perception determines a social order. Hence the slave holding determined the social order and the piety had to be challenged by Douglass through incongruity – that is challenging the “stable frames of reference which direct human perception and determine judgements about what is proper in a given circumstances (Burke, 1935: 23)”.

4.2 Slave Holding Christianity

Douglass in 1846 attacked the Free Church of Scotland for accepting financial help from slaveholders;

Every imaginable excuse for slaveholding was brought forward by these men eminent for their learning—men who claim to be the heaven-appointed instruments for the removal of all sin. I heard these men, standing up there, appealing to the sympathies of those who heard them to remember the slaveholder, and not one rose who spoke of remembering “those in bonds as bound with them.” They were called on to look on the difficulties in which the slaveholder was placed. Their manacled bondmen were not thought of for a single

moment, but, like the Levite of old, they “passed by on the other side” (Douglass, 1979).

This rebuke is a rebuke of the slaveholding holding religion which represented by the Levite who passes by ignoring the “manacled bondmen” lying on the side of road to Jericho yet professing to be followers of Christ. Douglass metaphorically examined this unidentified ‘manacled bondmen’ and pronounced him to be a slave form the United States of America. This metaphorical anecdote allows one to distinguish the religiously maintained social hierarchies in American with the Levite with his hypocritical religion occupying the seat of honour and the slave manacled and ignored on the roadside. This allows allows one to distinguish between true religion that “sends its votaries to bind up the wounds of those who have fallen among the thieves,” and the slaveholding religion as practised by Free Church of Scotland that “leaves the bruised and the wounded to die” (Douglass, 1982: 99-100).

Perception by Incongruity is against hierarchically structures (Levite and Bondsman) that are set as stable frames of references (pities) and as is the case in Douglass’s *Narrative*, the enslaved blacks are touted as inferior to the civilised whites slave holders who “ride about in their carriages ... with the finest of cloth on their backs, with ring upon their fingers, and in enjoyment of every luxury that wealth can buy” (p7) at the expense of black pain. For Burke, (1969: 307) this “principle of order” needs to be corrupted and during the slave era this hierarchy was sustained by religion which Douglass says “sanctifies the system under which I suffer, and dooms me to it, and the millions of my brethren in bondage” (1978:24-25). This is cemented by Ambrose who attests that most Christians in the slaveholding South:

understood slavery as a familiar relation between unequal members of a hierarchically structured and divinely ordained

household ... such a relation, like all relations, carried with it duties and obligations that flowed from God. Ministers continually reminded their flocks that how well individuals fulfilled or failed to fulfil those duties and obligations would bear heavily on the fate of their immortal souls” (1988:62)

Fredrick Douglass challenged these religion supported hierarchical structures by exploring the contradictions and tension in religion thereby undermining slavery. For Burke , hierarchies tend to taken as natural for the ‘hierarchic principle... is embodied in the mere process of growth, which is synonymous with class divisions of youth and age, stronger and weaker, male and female, or the stages of learning, from apprentice to journeyman to master” (1969:141), hence a ‘normal’ society is where things stay “in their appointed place. Symbolic boundaries keep the categories pure...what settles the culture is ‘matter of place’ – the breaking of our unwritten rules and codes” (Hall, 1996). Hall further adds that;

If the differences between black and white people are ‘cultural’, then they are open to modification and change. But if they are ‘natural’ – as the slave holders believed – then they are beyond history, permanent and fixed. “Naturalisation” is therefore a representational strategy designed to fix ‘difference’ and thus secure it forever (p224).

The religious supported slavery was a social order that Douglass in his *Narrative* sought to violate. Such an entrenched social order “blinds us to other views, we develop a ‘trained incapacity’ and strongly resist attempts to alter our perspective. Indeed, new views seem impious to us because they violate our sense of what

properly goes with what and produce guilt in those attracted to them (Solomon, 1988: 186-87). Fredrick Douglass' use of humour and juxtaposition became an appropriate rhetorical approach "redeploying and destabilising" (Butler, 1990: P122) these oppressive social hierarchies and this he achieves by shocking and disturbing the "normal patterns of association" (Rosteck and Leff, 1989:327). By juxtaposing the slaveholding religion and the Christianity of Christ and this combined with the humorous treatment of slave holding religion, Douglass disturbed the 'natural' order of things as Hall (1996:17) commented that "what really disturbs cultural order is when things turn up in the wrong category" just as Fredrick Douglass turned up in the wrong category – an eloquent and learned slave in a system that suppressed such attributes. It is through the juxtaposing of the two kinds of religion that humour emerges in that we find the slave holding ridiculous and brings about 'subversive laughter' (Butler,1990: 33)

What made slave holding religion difficult to challenge was because it was accepted as part of American culture and social hierarchy hence Douglass had a more complex task in in fighting just like the other abolitionists of his time;

On the one hand, they had to execute the delicate task of showing that straightforward, proslavery conclusions did not adequately exegete the biblical texts. On the other hand, they also were compelled to perform a religious high-wire act by demonstrating why arguments against slavery should not be regarded as infidel attacks on the authority of the Bible itself. (Mark, 1998:44)

Douglass succeeded where most abolitionists failed because he strategically juxtaposed the slaveholding religion and the Christianity of Christ thereby

disrupting the “normal patterns of association” (Rosteck and Leff, 1989: 330) instead of just focusing on facts and logic.

Douglass attacks the Slaveholding religion, which created the existing social hierarchy. However his attack on the slave holding religion should not be taken as an attack on Christianity proper as has been mistakenly argued by Ernest (2009:67) who accused Fredrick Douglass of just paying lip service to Christianity and is also accused of using Christianity for “rhetorical packaging for promoting his antislavery views in a largely Christian culture meaning that Douglass was preoccupied with packaging (being more rhetorical) than being sincere. Sharon Carson (1992) not to be outdone argued that the Fredrick Douglass’s *Narrative* “powerfully and symbolically indicts mainstream Christianity at its foundation” and Hutchins (2014: 296) enthusiastically accused Douglass of “destabilising the Bible and rejects Christianity proper, transforming sacred text into a tool for accomplishing more central concerns, namely abolition and related social concerns”. This is a failure by these critics to appreciate the rhetorical strategy used by Douglass to juxtapose religious perspectives not only to show the tension in religion but also a strategy to not to criticize Christianity but to criticize interpretations. Just as Thomas Auld would frequently “tie up a lame young woman, and whip her with a heavy cowskin upon her naked shoulders, causing warm red blood to drip; and in justification of the bloody deed, he would quote this passage of scripture – “he that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth not, shall be beaten with many stripes (1978:44)”.

It such irreligious interpretations that Douglass was attacking to the indictment of Christianity. The interpretation by Auld shows that he does not understand the parable as Rudoff (2000:227) further contends that by quoting the passage out of

context that “by reciting the verse, he does not condemn his slave to human punishment but condemns himself to divine punishment”. This goes into the portray of the slaveholding religion as ludicrous and empty as one gets to juxtapose it with Christianity proper just as much as there is inappropriate juxtaposing in Auld’s statement between the sacred and the bloody - further drawing on perception by incongruity.

Slave holding is a hypocritical, partial, and corrupt type of religion which is practised by slaveholders and by those who stand to benefit from the slave institution. To fully capture this type of Christianity, where the slaveholder has made God his principal partner in evil, one has to quote one of Douglass’s famous statements in which he attacks the religious pomp and show;

We have men stealers for ministers, women –whippers for missionaries, and cradle –plunderers for church members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cow skin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly JesusHe who sells my sister, for purposes of prostitution stands forth as the pious advocate of purity (1978:178).

Going into the text we find slave masters who use religion as an extension of the master’s tools of control. Douglass starts by contradicting the slaveholders’ interpretation of the bible, and in this case the story of Ham, the story found in Genesis was interpreted in such a way that it justified slavery as the black race was explained as the cursed descendants of Ham, who were cursed to eternally serve their brothers (taken by slaveholders to mean their white brothers). Thus slavery came to be interpreted, or rather, misinterpreted as God’s will. Douglass’s

seeks to do away with the force of the argument that blacks were destined to be slaves of the whites. He says;

A very different looking class of people are springing up at the South, and are now held in slavery, from those originally brought to this country from Africa, and if their increases do no other good, it will do away the force of the argument, that God cursed Ham, and therefore American slavery is right. If the lineal descendents of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved, it is certain that slavery at the South must soon be unscriptural for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who...owe their existence to the white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their own master (1978:50)

Other scholars like Lott (1999), have also reduced to obscurity the biblical evidence for this belief in the servitude of the blacks. He makes his argument based on the interplay of races during the Old Testament biblical times as “Noah’s curse did not point specifically to black people because Cush and Canaan were both sons of Ham. Ethnologists who use Biblical reference to establish racial distinctions that imply black people inferiority employ ‘a curious chain of evidence’ for there is no African race, that it is, no group with pure African blood (p.58).”

Gosset quoted in Mutyasira (2002) clearly indicates how the racist whites sought to make religion their principal ally in their quest for the domination of the black race not only in Africa but the world. Gosset explains that race inequalities were God ordained just like the white America tried to explain that servitude is God’s plan as He cursed Ham to eternal servitude.

Fundamental race inequality was not a painful fact, as one would somehow have to be accustomed to it. Rather it was a triumphant demonstration of the working of the almighty. Far from lamenting the gradual disappearance of the American Indian, for example, we should see in his extinction merely the reflection of the will of God in preparing the land for a better race.... Similarly, the troubles of the native people over the world, as vexing as they might be, were merely a logical manifestation of cosmic process, the replacing of the inferior with superior stock (p.102).

An interesting case of analysis is Master Thomas Auld and his wife. The very pious couple is regarded by Douglass as most mean and cruel, attributes contrary to the kindness and mercy preached in the Bible. Despite the savage beating administered to the slaves by these religious masters, they went to the extent of starving them. Exposing the level of hypocrisy of these self-proclaimed Christians who profess to have the same mind as the one that was in Jesus as Douglass attests that “a great many times have we poor creatures been nearly perishing with hunger, when food in abundance lay mouldering in the safe and smoke-house, and pious our mistress was aware of the fact; and yet that mistress and her husband would kneel every morning to pray that God bless them in basket and store! (1978:96).”

Such deviation from the basics of the teachings of Christianity up to laughable levels was not something uncommon. Hypocrisy among the slave masters was the norm. Olaudah Equiano in his slave narrative laments the hypocrisy of the

masters as they sought to fulfil their lust of gain at the expense of the religion they claimed to be practicing and laments “O, ye nominal Christians! Might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? (1988:27-28).”

Such open hypocrisy makes mockery the idea of a just God and Christianity as a religion with a human face at the same time making the slaveholding religion ridiculous and empty. The basic principle of giving food to the hungry and clothes to the naked is disregarded, as it does not suit the convenience of the master. Mr Thomas later on experienced religion at a Methodist camp meeting contrary to common belief and expectations that he might emancipate his slaves, “neither made him to be human to his slaves... it made him more cruel and hateful in his ways (1978:150)”. He comes much worse after the getting of religion as he found religious sanction for his cruelty. His profession of religion solidified his good reputation in religious circles as Negro breaker. Despite all the pretences Mr Thomas became one of the shining lights of the church as Douglass observed that;

...despite such religious hypocrisy, Mr Thomas became a distinguished member of the church. He made the greatest pretensions to piety. His house was the house of prayer.... He very soon distinguished himself among his brethren, and was soon made a class-leader and exhorter. His activity in revivals was great, and he proved himself an instrument at the hands of the church in converting many souls (1978: 97-98).

An example of how he found religious sanction to his devilish acts is how he constantly whipped a lame helpless girl at the same breath quoting scripture out of context. Douglass says that of Master Thomas Auld, “I have seen him tie up a lame young woman, and whip her with a heavy cow skin upon her naked shoulders...in justification of the bloody deed, he would quote ‘He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes’ (1978:98-99).” The only crime that this young woman was being punished for was that she was lame and could not be of much help to the master in terms of labour. He later on chased the girl away and Douglass was correct to sarcastically remark with high emotion that “here was a recently converted man, holding on upon the mother, and at the same time turning out the helpless child to starve and die, Master Thomas was one of the many pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them (p.99).

Mr Edward Covey, a religious but poor white man and farm renter is renowned for his reputation of breaking down slaves, of turning them into beasts who never question things but are content with servitude. Added to such qualities, Mr Covey was a “professor of religion, a pious soul, a member and class leader in the Methodist Church (p.99)”. Whilst he gave the slaves enough to eat, he overworked them just as much as the master ideal was to convert the slave into a mindless drudge who obeyed every command and worked efficiently for the master’s profit. He also thrived on deceiving and his religion was made to conform to his way of doing things again here Douglass the slaveholding as a laughable shame thus challenging the dominant social perceptions and ‘natural’ order of things with Covey making religion answer to his whims as “everything he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the

Almighty...I do verily believe that he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God (p.104)”.

To show the ridiculous levels of hypocrisy and double standards among these slaveholders one has to look at how Mr Covey transgress one of the great commandments of Christianity, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ He forced his slave woman to commit a sin of adultery. She bought Caroline for ‘breeder’ and hired a married man Samuel Harrison to live with and impregnate her. She gave birth to twins, an addition to Covey’s wealth.

There is nothing that can equal such level of religious hypocrisy. To his credit Covey, though temporary, manages to break Douglass in ‘body, soul and spirit.’ Such laughable religious attitude as displayed by Covey, Auld and others is compared with that of an irreligious Mr William Freeland. He made no pretensions to or profession of religion but had some respect for humanity. To this end Douglass comments on the religion of the South as “...a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,-a justifier of the most appalling, barbarity, a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds, and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slave holders find the strongest protection (p.117).”

Not living far off Mr Freeland were Ministers of the Reformed Methodist Church. Reverend Daniel Weeder who occasionally whipped his slaves to remind them of the master’s authority. There was also Reverend Rigby Hopkins who whipped his slaves in advance of deserving it. Of Hopkins Douglass writes that “and yet there was not a man anywhere round who made higher professions of religion, or was

more active in revivals, more attentive to the class, love-feast, prayer and preaching meetings, or more devotional in his family, that prayed earlier, later, louder and longer, than this same revered slave- drive, Rigby Hopkins (p.119).”

It seems the higher the pretensions to religion the crueller the master thus an indictment of slaveholding religion. Douglass also mentions the incident were Christians, Wright Fairbanks and Garrison West, both class leaders, disbanded the Sabbath School led by Douglass.

Douglass also proves how slavery is injurious to both the slave and the master. Mrs Hugh was a pious and caring person, actually she was the first white person to show kindness to Douglass. However, with time ‘slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities’ and she became far crueller than her unchristian husband. Thus true Christianity and slavery cannot co-exist unless one adopts the slaveholding type of Christianity, which is not Christianity proper. Douglass says of the mistress that;

In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere chattel...slavery proved as injurious to her as it did me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm and tender hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, cloths for the naked...slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities (1978:81).

Christians, or rather, those masters who make religious pretentious, in the text are the cruellest ones. These slaveholders are meant to be juxtaposed with unchristian slaveholders like Mr Freeland and Hugh who have some respect for humanity. To this end Douglass says that “for of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others. It was my unhappy lot not only to belong to a religious slaveholder, but to live in a community of such religionist (1978:117).

Such pretensions to Christianity as seen above leave one without much doubt that Christianity has been manipulated to serve the interest of the master. Religion in whatever form has been made to conform to the standards of man, a point that is beautifully captured by Pillsbury (1880:165) that “religion as a political institution, religion and worship always follow, never leads in the growth and unfolding of the human race. Men make their god’s more than gods make them, and it is no satire today, ‘An honest god the noblest work of men’.

4.3 Christianity of Christ

This is what can be called Christianity proper which juxtaposed with slaveholding religion which was part of the American culture during the slavery period and Douglass clarifies the two by explaining that;

what I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the slaveholding religion of this land, and

with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked (1978: appendix).

By juxtaposing the two, the fallacy of the Slaveholding religion is exposed and the readers' perceptive are challenged as they are forced to question the 'natural'. By juxtaposing the two antagonistic religious perspectives, Douglass created a dissonance that disrupted the audience's sense of what ought to be. Through this dissonance, the slaveholding religion is exposed as "empty and ludicrous" (Bingham 1817: 26). No direct reference is made to the Christianity of Christ in the text but Douglass believes it was Christian of Mrs Hugh to treat him kindheartedly though it was short lived. This is the pure, peaceful and impartial Christianity as compared to the salutary, deceitful, false and hypocritical religion of the slaveholders, practised by the likes of Covey, Auld, Hopkins and Rigby amongst others. These are presented "as professing to love God whom they have not seen, whilst they hate their brother whom they have seen (1978:181)". It is against this understanding that Douglass, after Master Auld's getting of religion, hoped that he would be more humane, but it seems his religion was not Christianity proper. He made a distinction between slaveholding Christianity and the Christianity of Christ. He argues that slaveholders are like the biblically Pharisees who did not attend to the weightier matters of the law, mercy and faith. Hutchins (2014:186) points that Douglass in the *Narrative* was against the use of religion and the bible to control the conduct of slaves not Christianity itself and Sharon Carson weighs in here by stating that in the *Narrative* Douglass remained

“firmly within the Christian tradition, merely reversing the terms of the southern slaveholders and countering their scriptural interpretations”.

A worship conducted by persons who refuse to give shelter to the houseless, to give bread to the hungry, clothing the naked and who enjoin obedience to a law forbidding these acts of mercy, is a curse, not a blessing to mankind hence the nature of slaveholding religion. The bible addresses such persons as “scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, who pay tithes of mint, anise, cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and faith”. (Matthew 23:23). Thus the *Narrative* goes against the sanctioned religion of the master as it is subtly contrasted not only with Christianity proper but even when contrasted with those who do not profess to any religion.

Though in passing, Douglass manages to bring in another aspect of Christianity. Religion, which Christianity is part of, can be said to be more than prayers, it involves song and dance. The Negro spirituals were part of the Negroes’ religion and also a form of resistance to the cruelties of slavery. As much as the Slave masters and holders appropriated religion as their tool to keep Africans in servitude, the enslaved to the contrary to the piety, used religion not to obey the master as was interpreted in scripture, but used it as a liberatory force. In Douglass’s *Narrative* slaves chosen to go to the Great Farm House would sing;

I am going to the great House farm!

O, yea! O, yea! O! (p.57)

However, on the surface it would seem a silly song by slaves who were fascinated by the idea of going to the Great Farm House. While this might be partly true, the song, on an analytical level shows some form of yearning for a 'Great House' on the part of the slaves. A house where, black people will be finally accorded justice and equality, a land of plenty. The "Great House" can be taken to symbolically mean not only Heaven but also the nation of American, a 'Great House' that has refused to accommodate the slaves. Thus such songs as the one sang by these slaves express a desire for a better living. Douglass says of such songs;

They breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains...the songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart and is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears (1978:58).

Other works of art reflect such experiences, where, through religious songs, the Africans in bondage have managed to stay alive and hopeful. Charles Chesnut in *The Marrow of Tradition* comments after hearing the Afro-Americans singing;

They showed a cheerfulness of spirit which enabled them to catch pleasure on the wing and endure with equanimity the ills that seemed inevitable? The ability to live and thrive under adverse circumstances the surest guarantee of the future? (1969:61-62)

The songs imparted some form inspiration to the suffering blacks just as much as the Rastafarians in Orlando Patterson's *Children of Sisyphus* would be inspired by singing;

The lion of Judah shall break every chain

And give us victory

Again and again (1964:103)

This is summed up by Sullivan (2001) that the slaves used music as a form of defiance without raising the suspicion of the slave masters Sullivan correctly observed that;

A form of music emerged among African – Americans that was deemed acceptable and even encouraged by slave owners- the African American spirituals. To slave owners it appeared that African-Americans were converting to Christianity and singing the praises of their new found religion. Slave owners welcomed this apparent conversion, as embracing Christianity represented submission to European-based ideology... African spirituals were allowed relative freedom as a musical expression which superficially praised a Christian God, but developed meaningful undertones that served to communicate, without detection by whites, subversive messages of support, unity, and revolt, and even directions to the underground Railroad (p24).

For Douglass, Christianity, despite what the slave masters preached, the real meaning was not emphasised in those scant passages favoured by the masters to legitimise their doings. Not all slaves were passive recipients of such demeaning form of Christianity. Though most slaves tended to be submerged in religion, a few reinterpreted scripture in a more relevant and practical manner that it not only

gave hope for a future bliss in Heaven but also hope of a better life on earth. To this end Wall (1984) says that;

Religion is supposed to function in certain ideological way so that the subject accepts certain well defined practices. Thus, while religion is designed to keep the Afro-American in an oppressed condition, here black people subverted that institution and used it to assist them to withstand the cruelty of the American experiences (p.13).

Thus in the Douglass's *Narrative* Christianity proper enabled the slaves to face up to the daily challenges and at the same time be not crushed by those challenges. Douglass saw the relevance of Christianity amongst the downtrodden as it builds an ambition to be free just as much as he believed that it played a pivotal and positive role while he was in slavery;

In the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained, like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise (1979:36)

While the slaves, through the spirituals appeared to be conforming to the slave holding religion, because of their biblical and spiritual language they, unknowing to the master, they expressed the slave's defiance and desire for political freedom. According to Douglass;

They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. (1979:324)

Fowler (2015) cements the subtle but effective nature of the spirituals by acknowledging that it may have escaped white Christians' notice that slaves assigned this double meaning to songs, which outwardly seemed to be about the liberation found in death and heaven. But this cover of co-orthodoxy with white Christianity concealed many subversive doctrines in the Christianity of slaves. While white, slave-owning Christians had the paternalistic belief that they were bringing converted slaves into the fold" (Fowler, 2015) and Reagon (1965: 37) adds that "in a system like slavery, where open critique is dangerous, the spirituals by their sound become a dissenting voice". It is from these spirituals that Douglass made a resolve to fight the institution of slavery and fight for his rightful place as a human being not as a beast of burden as purported in the slave holding religion.

Christianity proper delivered slaves from bondage and did not recognise the social hierarchies skewed in favour of the slave holders hence Douglass in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2008) references are made to black religious leaders like Turner, Toussaint L'Ouverture and Madison Washington.

4.4 Conclusion

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave by Douglass exposes the religion of the masters for what it is, a hypocritical thing, which is used as a basis for the controlling of slaves. The slaveholders make pretensions of religion as they selectively chose scripture to entrench the existing status quo of master and slave relationship and to justify their cruel treatment. Religion and religious institutions just exist to rubber stamp and not lead in the growth and unfolding of the human race hence the varying interpretation of scripture in that of the slaveholder and that which is proper and humane.

By stressing his identity as a slave, Douglass invoked a set of pervasive cultural assumptions about slaves, that they were ignorant and childlike, incapable of learning, dependent on their white masters, and suited only for servitude. Douglass enacted a persona starkly incongruous with those assumptions.

Tonn and Endress (2001) applied perspective by incongruity in their rhetorical study of Ross Perot's 1992 presidential bid. They wrote, "Burke conceives of shifting perspectives by means of incongruity planned, as a rhetorical strategy designed to open space for reform by disrupting conventional norms, and likens it to the deliberate antics of a court jester" (p.287). By the incongruous juxtaposing of the slaveholding religion and Christianity proper, the Samaritan and the Levite, Douglass managed to "shake the foundation" of "the white Christian churches," (Carson, 1992: 19-20). By creating new pieties, Douglass did not reject Christianity but reinterpreted it thus providing an alternatives frames of reference for slaveholding religion which is the Christianity of Christ undergirded by an active liberation theology.

Existing Levite perspectives are challenged by Douglass as they are presented as empty and ridiculous and the audience is presented with a new perspective that demands Christianity to be a liberating force and it actively seeks the liberation of the slaves. Contrary to what was preached in the master's church, the language of providence in the *Narrative* empowers the enslaved and advocates for their liberation. Dissonance created by these perspectives places the church in an awkward position as Douglass provides no middle ground between the religion that oppresses and the religion that liberates;

Let the Church, then, look to it, for here is the source of her weakness, attracting, as well from the sky of truth, as from the clouds of error, the exterminating bolt and the devouring fire. Her new moons, appointed feasts, Sabbath days, solemn assemblies, are no atonement for refusing to do justice. She is under the law to cease to do evil, and learn to do well. She must seek justice and relieve the oppressed. In a word, she must abolish slavery, or be abolished by slavery. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, has the same lesson to-day as in the days of Jesus. The axe is laid at the root of the tree. Usefulness is the price of existence (Douglass, 2000: 323).

Thus religion, in its relationship with slavery, proved to be a double-edged sword in that while it made slaves more subservient and justified their servitude, it undeniably led to the rebellion by the "manacled Bondsman" ignored by the roadside to Jericho. The perspective of the Levite, the status core, is shaken to the root for it hypocritically places the enslaved at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the white enslaver at the apex for they are superior. The counter perspective of the Samaritan is presented as a challenge to existing pieties, thereby forcing

the audience to re-examine their own perceptives towards religion and slavery and this *Narrative* contributed to the abolitionist cause and to the continued debate between the slaveholding religion and Christianity proper and this Douglass achieved by the incongruously bringing the two perspectives together.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Perspective by incongruity, is especially “prevalent in the rhetoric of unstable or transitional periods; that is, in eras such as the twentieth century when social fabrics have been strained by unrest, revolution, and a general uncertainty about the future” (Hoban, 1977:165) and the slave era does qualify as unstable period. The standpoint of the dissertation is that Perception by Incongruity is an effective rhetorical tool in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the *Narrative* in challenging the slaveholding religion. Religion, an important institution in the existence of mankind has, during and after slavery, been subverted to serve the different interests of the Master. The bible and ‘science’ were interpreted to mean that the white master is a superior being and the enslaved black man is inferior and their enslavement was to their benefit. The slave masters used religion to maintain the status quo and to keep the African in eternal bondage, while on the other hand the slaves reinterpreted religion, specifically Christianity, either to challenge the status quo vis-à-vis their alleged beast status or found a means to escape the harsh realities of slavery, engaging in religious fanaticism. An examination of the uses of perspective by incongruity in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the *Narrative* shows that Douglass and Stowe sought to supplant a traditional view of a slaveholding religion with liberating Christianity and the one way they did that was to juxtapose a new or opposite perception with a favoured, traditional one, in the process making the old perspective appear undesirable to the audience.

Stowe and Douglass forced audiences to reconsider their views towards religion and slavery through perspective by incongruity. Stowe’s rhetoric though could be said to be less strong, less radical, and easier to accept than Douglass’s. Stowe, in order to create new values, new behaviours, and new ways of perceiving the world

presented two conflicting perceptions. The liberal perspective of Stowe, though writing during slavery like Douglass failed to realise that the oppressed have an active role to play in their own destiny. Douglass, a Christian slave, unlike Stowe is motivated by his Christian religion to free himself from bondage, even if it means fighting the cruel Mr Covey. His own interpretation is different from the liberal perspective of Stowe because his religion allows him to deal with his condition on 'this side of the Jordan'. One perspective presented by Stowe, where religion seems to be interested in keeping slaves docile, failed to interpret the Christian message within the context of experience of those who are victims of a hostile society. She presents characters like Tom, Chloe, Eliza and Topsy among others who are turned into religious fanatics and their desire to free themselves from bondage is dulled. Her interpretation and understanding of Christianity fails to empower her slave characters to challenge the oppressive environment but are turned into docile, humble and a foolish lot who cheerfully endure the hardships on earth in return for after life bliss, just as much as the slave masters wanted their slaves to be.

Yet Stowe wanted to fight the institution of slavery. This she did by presenting a contradictory perspective from the initial one of religiously fanatic slaves who gloriously wait for the second coming. The dissenting perspective is of slaves who use religion as a form of resistance just like Tom's defiance of Legree. She also presented most of the religious slaveholding masters as hypocritical and unchristian thus the two presented perspectives, the bible and the gun, created a dissonance in perspectives that forced the audience to question their pieties.

This contradictory approach does not make Stowe any less effective or confused as she did not want to alienate the audience by being radical as Sonja (1979:14) points out that;

The more radical the juxtaposition of images, the more threatening to the reality the rhetoric will be; at the same time, the greater potential for failure the technique will have. For if a juxtaposition is too radical, audience members will feel so threatened that they simply will retreat into their own special reality and refuse to consider the arguments of the rhetor. Communicators who use perspective by incongruity, then, must employ it cautiously. They must introduce a notion that is jarring enough to initiate the process of re-thinking, but at the same time, they must not present an image that is so strong that it immediately alienates the audience.

Through the use of persuasive sentimentalism Stowe sought to turn proslavery on its head and through pacifism turn piety into impiety. Impiety offers new possibilities as much as Uncle Tom is presenting a new possibility. The book is an animated sketch of the relationship between religion and slavery, the master and the slave, economics and politics, agency and apathy - these complexities are the building blocks that mould the characters that we meet. Their moral radars are controlled by a force that none of them can control, it only takes the collective resolve of characters like Eliza, Cassy and indeed Shelby to redefine the meaning of the relationships that exist in the book. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* changed the perception that people had about slavery. There is a legend that says when Harriet Beecher Stowe met the then President Abraham Lincoln he remarked "you are

the woman who sparked the war”. The veracity of the statement is in doubt but it is testament to the way it changed the American political landscape and the debate surrounding slavery.

Uncle Tom's Cabin remained effective in seeking to supplant an old perspective with a new one as evidenced in the extreme responses that she generated after the publication thus increasing the awareness of the role of religion in slavery by juxtapositioning mutually - exclusive notions of the ‘bible and the gun’. Stowe was successful in making her audience question the slaveholding religion.

In his *Narrative*, Douglass contrasted his early experiences of Christianity: Christianity proper and slave-owning religion. Slave-owning religion is presented as empty and reprehensible as exemplified by Mr Auld and Mr Covey that taught him that the more a master professed to religion, the more cruel he became as opposed to Mr Freeland who was least religious but most kind and Douglass to this end adds that;

I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,—a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,—and a dark shelter under, which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Where I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me. (1979: 369)

Such a juxtaposition of the Levite (slave holding religion) and the Samaritan (Christianity proper) was effective in creating what Hickman (2013:361) terms the “theodical crisis”. It is this created dissonance that led to shattering of slaveholding religion and the resurrection of Christianity Proper. Christianity proper is a liberating religion as seen even in Douglass’s ‘liberating violence’ in fight with Covey and what Malcolm X calls ‘necessary violence’. The history of the Hebrews in the Bible and God’s intervention in human affairs to stop man’s inhumanity to man seems to inspire slaves to question their oppression were God entered the conflict on the side of the oppressed and that God used the very language that Pharaoh understood, the language of force and violence, making it clear that He does validate the use of liberating violence. It was not irreligious of Douglass to fight Covey or for the other slaves to yearn for freedom, nor was it irreligious of the Islamic Malcolm to preach violence in the name of self-preservation. Through the use of contradictions and comic rhetoric Frederick Douglass went against appropriateness and challenged the church for standing in the way of freedom. He mocked the religion of the slave holding masters and their excessive brutality as compared to those who did not practise religion. He also sees the ridiculous in an attempt to rationalise slavery using the Bible. It is through this use of the ridiculous treatment of proslavery religion that Douglass opens up possibilities of freedom and equality.

Douglass and Stowe do not limit themselves to looking at slaves and religion, but also the religion of the masters as they hypocritically subverted religion to justify their slaveholding practices thus arguing against the traditionally held perspective as “Perspective by incongruity attempts to shatter the world created by traditional rhetoric that fosters long-accepted religious teachings. The rhetor arguing against tradition who employs this technique begins inside the traditional world or reality with an image that conforms to that reality. But then a jarring, opposing image is

introduced that forces the auditor or reader to re-think and question--at least momentarily--the components of his or her world” (Sonja, 1979:17). Douglass parades the likes of Auld, Covey, Weeder and Hopkins among others as examples of religious hypocrisy. Stowe has such characters in Haley, Marie St Clare, Mr Shelby, Mr Wilson and Miss Ophelia. This is not to say that all masters were hypocrites but a few examples of masters whose conduct was very Christian are provided but they just remain a minority, and in Stowe's case they remain unconvincing.

The common argument that comes from the created incongruity is that during slavery religion, mainly Christianity, has been used as a tool for social control. It became not only a spiritual, but a physical battlefield for control as the oppressed and the oppressors took God to their side and used Him to their advantage. While it was the intention of the masters to see their slaves submerged into religion of Christianity, not all slaves adopted a ‘wait God will take care of everything mentality’ but some, though few, saw in the very religion the liberating hand of God and challenged the slave institution.

Stowe and Douglass in their attempts to transform the accepted ways of slavery and religion committed impious act thereby joining a successfully league of dissenters with the likes Socrates and Sonja, all guilty of impieties for urging a different interpretation of social realities (Hoban, 1977: 172). Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* (1978) better concludes perception by incongruity as form of rhetoric used in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the *Narrative*. Zarathustra is labelled a blasphemer, a breaker of taboos and “evil” in the sense that he seeks to debunk established categories of what ought to be by saying and doing things that fly in the face of “good taste,” “propriety,” and “conventional morality.” Out of his

dissent, social transformation is achieved. Stowe and Douglass out their “evil,” (debunking existing assumptions of the slave holding religion) emerged a debate that contributed the abolition of slavery and restored the morality of Christianity and Nietzsche (1978: 116) observed that “whoever must be a creator in good and evil, verily he must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the highest goodness, but this is creative”. Douglass and Stowe were successfully in creating ‘new eyes’ and re-created the relationship between religion and slavery and in the process discrediting an unacceptable perspective and creating an alternative one.

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