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THE NEW YORKER

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THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028-792X), published weekly by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., 20 W. 43rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10036; Steven T. Florio, president and chief executive officer; Lynn Guthrie Heiler, vice-president and publisher; Ruth A. Diem, vice-president and human resources director; Matthew D. Roberts, vice-president and marketing director; Pamela H. Older, vice-president and director of manufacturing; Martha Kaplan, vice-president; Peter Armour, vice-president and circulation director. Branch advertising offices: 111 East Wacker Drive, Chicago, Ill. 60601; 41 Osgood Place, San Francisco, Calif. 94133; Suite 1460, 5900 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90036; 1-11 Hay Hill, London W1X7LF, England; Penn Brown & Associates, Inc., 175 Derby St., No. 36, Hingham, Mass. 02043; Metropolitan Publishers Representatives: 3017 Piedmont Road, N.E., Atlanta, Ga. 30305; 2500 So. Dixie Highway, Miami, Fla. 33133; 3016 Mason Place, Tampa, Fla. 33629; 3 Church St., Suite 503, Toronto, Canada M5E 1M2, Carol Ott & Co., 3500 Maple Ave., Suite 1000, Dallas, Tx. 75219; Catherine Billups & Co., Via Pinamonte Da Vimercate, No. 6, 20121 Milan, Italy. Vol. LXVIII, No. 28, August 31, 1992. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, and for payment of postage in cash. Canadian goods and services tax registration number R123242885. © 1992 by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. THE MAGAZINE'S NAME AND LOGO, AND THE VARIOUS TITLES AND HEADINGS HEREIN ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS, INC., WHICH PUBLISHES THEM THROUGH ITS DIVISION THE NEW YORKER MAGAZINE, INC. Printed in U.S.A. Subscription rates: In U.S. and possessions, one year, \$32.00; two years, \$52.00. In Canada, one year, \$65.27 (includes G.S.T.). Other foreign, one year, \$66.00, payable in advance. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The New Yorker, Box 56447, Boulder, Colorado 80322.

# A CRITIC AT LARGE

## A STUDY IN SCARLETT

**I**N the summer of 1936, American literature divided resoundingly along its oldest fault line, and the resulting chasm seemed to grow wider and deeper with every sale—roughly a million by the end of December—of a hefty new novel called “Gone with the Wind.” On one side of the fissure, patently serious writers and critics conceded that they were hopelessly outnumbered—a fact that the representatives of literature had been bemoaning since at least the middle of the previous century, even before Nathaniel Hawthorne’s famous complaint that he was being driven from the literary marketplace by “a damned mob of scribbling women” and a public taste “occupied with their trash.” It was one such scribbler and her public who now thronged the opposite side.

The fear of a downwardly spiraling culture associated with a new mass audience had taken on, in literature, the specific taint of the superficial sex. While men who did not understand literary art could be counted on, for the most part, to stick to newspapers, the lettered (if not highly educated) female population had long monopolized sales of fiction, corrupting the novel from its noble roots in Romance—in the greater historical sense, as a worldly or spiritual quest—into romance in the distinctly lesser sense of a courtship tale culminating in marriage. In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe produced a novel that was as decried for its domestic bathos as it was celebrated for its moral influence, and that went on to become the biggest best-seller the United States had yet known. (Hawthorne’s com-

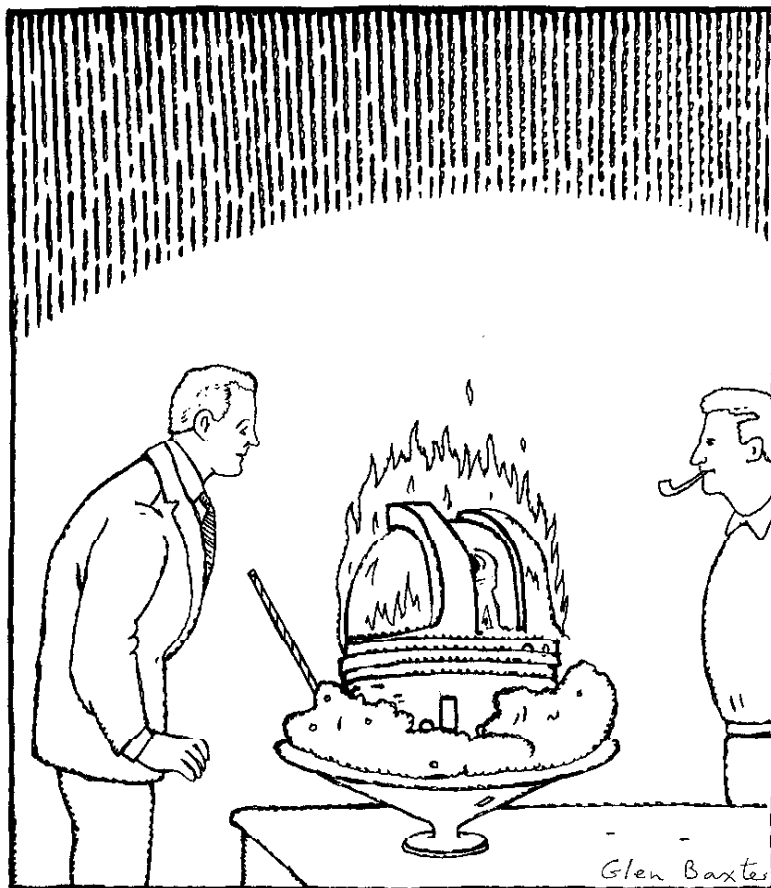
plaint followed “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” by less than three years.) This lengthy precedent could be felt as a kind of pressure slowly building toward the rending contradictions of Margaret Mitchell’s Civil War extravaganza: a triple-decker Victorian romance issued nearly twenty years after the Joycean disruptions of modernism; a book by an unknown writer that sold more copies in its first few weeks than many major authors sold in their lifetimes; a story that took root in the national imagination with the rampant force of a myth or a psychosis; America’s favorite novel and no part of its literature.

Staggered by the sales figures, distinguished critics were reduced to assailing the patrons of bookstores for being far too eager to reach into their pockets—or, rather, their purses, since, it was recalled, “most book buyers are women”—to pay the unheard-of price

of three dollars for what Malcolm Cowley, efficiently summing up both book and audience, characterized as an “entertainment that will carry them through the idle moments for a whole fortnight.” One of the striking things about initial critical reactions to Mitchell’s work, for and against, was their absolute accord over what it offered—powerful storytelling—and what it lacked: literary style and originality. It was in the value placed on these apparently opposed qualities that ways parted and stands were taken, and the question of whether the term “popular literature” could ever again signify anything more than a bitter oxymoronic joke was widely if sometimes implicitly argued.

Mitchell’s book was continually praised for its “readability,” as though this were not the first and simplest requirement of any book. For a vast audience, however, the logic of this

basic proposition had collapsed into senselessness some years before. And in October, 1936, when William Faulkner published a very different story of the South and the causes and effects of the war, “Absalom, Absalom!,” the *Times*, in a review typical of those the book received, credited it with “one of the most complex, unreadable and uncommunicative prose styles ever to find its way into print.” Like “The Sound and the Fury” and its other predecessors, Faulkner’s new work won only occasional, if intensely felt, praise—for its moral vision, and for what Mitchell’s home bastion, the *Atlanta Journal*, recognized as the “first real step forward” in the novel form “since ‘Remembrance of



ROBERT WAS ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR NEW WAYS TO SERVE SAMBUCA.

Things Past.'” Fourteen years before Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, fifteen years short of the work’s reissue as a Modern Library classic, “Absalom, Absalom!” sold about seven thousand copies, and then disappeared from the shelves.

There was the tone of a counter-offensive in those critical celebrations of Mitchell which crowed over the way she “tosses out of the window all the thousands of technical tricks our novelists have been playing with for the past twenty years,” and which emphasized the importance of her book as “an alternative to the pessimism, obscurity and fatal complexity of most contemporary novelists.” These commendations were offered by Herschel Brickell of the *New York Post* and Edwin Granberry of the *New York Sun*, two of Mitchell’s fervent champions, and Granberry concluded, point-blank, “Could it be possible that ‘Gone with the Wind’ might make it difficult hereafter for the pinched, strangulated novel which pays more attention to manner than matter?”

Even Cowley, one of Mitchell’s harshest early critics, found it possible to conclude that, while “Gone with the Wind” was indubitably not a great novel, it did, almost incredibly, make us “weep at a deathbed (and really weep)” and “exult at a sudden rescue,” and that it possessed “a simple-minded courage that suggests the great novelists of the past.” In fact, among Mitchell’s boldest advocates, both “War and Peace” and “Vanity Fair” were frequently evoked in assessments of her novel’s historic scope and its contrasting pair of leading ladies. (An Atlanta librarian gave a speech introducing Mitchell in which, in all the wisdom of innocence, she added “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes” to this venerable list.) Small wonder, then, that in the excitement of its arrival “Gone with the Wind,” seen by some as the last popular straw, was viewed by others as the exemplary way out of an ever-narrowing and more exclusive modernist dictate, a reading ground of reconciliation for a democracy’s divided audience.

The book moved into an even larger realm of democratic access when it was sold to the movies, a month after publication, for the record sum of fifty thousand dollars. Although the film, produced by David O. Selznick, was the subject of intense national curiosity

throughout the three years it was being made, Mitchell refused to have anything to do with it, apart from recommending Georgia friends to serve as consultants on matters of authenticity in custom, dress, and even Southern horticulture. (They kept dogwoods from blooming during cotton-picking time, and the cotton itself from springing up along a plantation’s front lawn.) Mitchell never set foot in Hollywood.

Arriving there, however, at the time of the big sale was William Faulkner, forced to hire himself out as a screenwriter—not for the first time—after the commercial failure of all his recent work. A letter written that September suggests his reaction to the “Gone with the Wind” phenomenon: shifting among film assignments like “Slave Ship” and “Splinter Fleet,” he announced to his agent that he was determined to sell “Absalom, Absalom!” to the studios himself, and, furthermore, he said, “I am going to ask one hundred thousand dollars for it or nothing.” Nothing is what he got. Faulkner made it clear that he had not read Mitchell’s book (“No story takes a thousand pages to tell” was his full pronouncement), and his only other reflection on its significance may be inferred from a letter written in the summer of 1936, from Mississippi, in which, updating Hawthorne, he lamented his lost habit of “writing trash” and added, “I seem to be so out of touch with the Kotex Age here.”

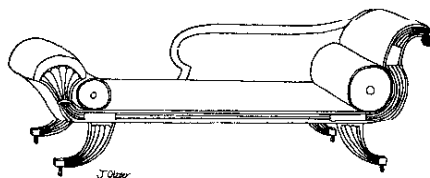
By late 1939, when Selznick’s “Gone with the Wind” was nearing release, a Gallup poll found that an estimated fifty-six million five hundred thousand people were planning to see it. Fulfilling all expectations, the overwhelming adoration accorded the movie and its stars certainly reinforced the popularity of Mitchell’s book, and has very possibly preserved it. In the public mind, the two versions have merged to the point where it is difficult to say anymore whether “Gone with the Wind” is in essence a novel or a movie, and, in fact, the distinction may not mean much: Mitchell’s characters long ago burst through the restraints of their form and, like folk- or fairy-

tale figures, passed directly into the mainstream consciousness.

The much remarked “readability” of the book must have played a part in this smooth passage from the page to the screen, since “readability” has to do not only with freedom from obscurity but, paradoxically, with freedom from the actual sensation of reading—of the tug and traction of words as they move thoughts into place in the mind. Requiring, in fact, the least reading, and making the least investment in an embodying language, the most “readable” book allows its characters to slip most easily through nets of words and into other forms. Popular art has been well defined by just this effortless movement from medium to medium, which is carried out, as Leslie Fiedler observed in relation to “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” “without loss of intensity or alteration of meaning.” Isabel Archer rises from the page only in the hanging garments of Henry James’s prose, but Scarlett O’Hara is a free woman.

When, in 1913, Henry James saw one of the innumerable stage productions of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” that had sustained the book’s fame and its message over the decades, he recognized this “leaping” quality of popular art. “Uncle Tom,” he wrote, “instead of making even one of the cheap short cuts through the medium in which books breathe, even as fishes in water, went gaily roundabout it altogether, as if a fish, a wonderful ‘leaping’ fish, had simply flown through the air.” Having accomplished this feat, “the surprising creature could naturally fly anywhere, and one of the first things it did was thus to flutter down on every stage, literally without exception, in America and Europe.” Margaret Mitchell labored over a book, not a screenplay; she doubted for a time whether “Gone with the Wind” could be filmed at all. (“I don’t see how it could possibly be made into a movie,” she wrote to her publisher, who had intimated otherwise, “unless the entire book was scrapped and Shirley Temple cast as ‘Bonnie,’ Mae West as ‘Belle,’ and Stepin Fetchit as ‘Uncle Peter.’”) What her work reflects to perfection is the state of affairs in the republic of letters during a period when all popular art aspired to the condition of the movies.

**Y**ET the ancestry of “Gone with the Wind” extends back far beyond Hollywood. In a proud genealogy



ogy sketched out for her publisher, Margaret Mitchell noted that some of her forebears had sailed to America "with the Hector MacDonald colony after the failure of the Stuart uprising," a family legend that constitutes only the most literal element in the author's heritage from Walter Scott. The valiant Scottish clans of the Waverley Novels, aligned against the English in the cause of the exiled Stuart kings, became a near-worldwide sensation in the early nineteenth century, and Scott's romantic nationalism stirred a deep chord of response from France to Italy to Russia—which is to say, from Balzac to Manzoni to Pushkin. In the raw new American literature, Sir Walter's twilight-of-a-nobility theme was reworked in books like James Fenimore Cooper's "The Last of the Mohicans," in which the tragic aristocrat of the Highlands was resettled among the tribes of the New World's frontier. Cooper begins with an epigraph from "Richard II": "Say, is my kingdom lost?" But, for all their renown, the works of Walter Scott, and the gospel truths to be found therein, were cherished nowhere else so long or so well as in the American South.

With Scott's "Ivanhoe," issued among the Waverleys for a variation in setting, if not in theme, an idyll of sentimental feudalism was taken up in the antebellum South as a blueprint and a benediction for a civilization already divided into landed fiefdoms and fully regulated by caste. Out of the novel's high-colored Arthurian cloth was fashioned, in and for the states of the future Confederacy, a self-conscious and elaborately archaizing cult of courtliness (the leading planters even dubbing themselves "The Chivalry"), complete with tournaments and duels and, above all, a prodigiously exaggerated attachment to the chastity and honor of women, who were reared and cultivated accordingly. The adoption of this fantastic, mass-scale impersonation—and had there been no Scott, his defenders have pointed out, Malory would have done as well—served to transform the surface appearance of a brutal and retarded economic system into a fancy-dress theatrical. It also provided a much needed cultural ambience—based, of necessity, on the fullest amplification of social ceremony—in a region that, as visitors both European and Yankee noted, was conspicuously lacking in other signs of contemporary

enlightenment, from orchestras and opera houses to publishing firms and libraries and debating societies, and in which censorship had severed access to all intellectual engagement with the larger issues of the political order.

By the time Mark Twain had steamed down the Mississippi as far as the neo-Gothic, turreted statehouse of Baton Rouge and the Mardi Gras in New Orleans, he felt able to pinpoint the source of all the errors and woes of the deluded and darkened—indeed, the anti-Enlightenment South:

Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might checks this wave of progress, and even turns it back; sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms . . . with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. . . . It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in the South a Major or a Colonel, or a General or a Judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value these bogus decorations. . . . Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.

It is plainly no accident that Huck and Jim are nearly done in by a gang of murderers aboard a wrecked steamboat called the Walter Scott.

"Say, is my kingdom lost?" would be an appropriate epigraph for "Gone with the Wind," too, as it would for the half century of "plantation novels" that preceded it. The type emerged full-bodied and heavy-scented in the eighteen-eighties, drenched in nostalgia for the way of life the war had taken, although, as the historian William R. Taylor pointed out more than two decades after the apotheosis of "Gone with the Wind," the nostalgia actually predated the war. Before the "antebellum" was ante anything, it was merely an aftermath, from which Southerners who were so inclined yearned for the brighter paradise before the Revolution. Southern novelists from the eighteen-thirties on harked back to the ancien régime of Colonial Virginia with stricken delight, as in John Esten Cooke's "The Virginia

Comedians," of 1854, quoted in Edmund Wilson's "Patriotic Gore": "Where are they now, those stalwart cavaliers and lovely dames who filled that former time with so much light, and merriment, and joyous laughter? . . . What do we care if the laces are moth-eaten—the cocked hats hung up in the halls of Lethe—the silk stockings laid away in the drawer of oblivion?" Of course, yearning for a lost golden age may be less a response to a real historical place and circumstance than a chronic human inclination, and perhaps a precondition of the literary impulse; even Homer had to look back centuries to find heroes worthy of his praise.

In the eighteen-eighties, the South's premier plantation novelist, Thomas Nelson Page, invented or codified every cliché of worthy master and loyal slave, and his works were popular not only in his home region but in the repentant and conciliatory North. After the war, it became as safe for Northerners to vent a retrospective sigh for the age of Massa and Mammy as it had been for Walter Scott to exalt the ancient glamour of the Stuarts from a position securely founded on Whiggish prosperity.

Its image enhanced by the ineffable charm of loss—of having lost, of being lost—the South assumed its role in the romance of America as the festooned and feminine counterpart of the relentlessly masculine West. So appealing did this image of languid Southern gentility come to seem in an age of unstoppable industrial momentum that even W. E. B. Du Bois could write with lyrical regret of the passing of "the old ideal of the Southern gentleman,—that new-world heir of the grace and courtliness of patrician, knight, and noble." In his eulogizing essay "Of the Wings of Atalanta," collected in "The Souls of Black Folk," in 1903, Du Bois lamented the South's accession to a greedy new mercantile culture, and compared his adopted Atlanta, symbol of all that the South might be, to the legendary Greek girl ("If Atlanta be not named for Atalanta, she ought to have been") who outraced all men but lost her freedom when tricked by gold.

Margaret Mitchell, an Atlantan of six generations' standing, claimed as one of her novel's first aims the creation of a heroine who would embody the vital contradictions of the South's



most ambitious city—a city “crude with the crudities of youth and as headstrong and impetuous as herself.” The fact that she even attempted this was a part of her larger claim to have broken with the old plantation tradition. Northern critics like Cowley might see her book as “an encyclopedia of the plantation legend,” and Louis Kronenberger, writing in this magazine, could imagine Mitchell waking in the night to groan “I left out a lynching! I left out a fox hunt!”; but Southerners like Stephen Vincent Benét registered the book’s differences from its predecessors and praised its author’s “more realistic treatment.”

Mitchell believed in the daring of her realism. On the verge of the book’s publication, her husband instructed the Macmillan Company to prepare for “a ‘public relations’ problem” that “Gone with the Wind” might arouse “in these parts”—quite reasonably, in his view, since “it deals with the South with considerable frankness.” What he evidently had in mind was the fact that Mitchell’s up-country Georgians are not old landed gentry but a socially mixed and rambunctious lot, many of them so newly settled that even an Irish immigrant—Gerald O’Hara, who had won his plantation, Tara, in a card game—could gain a place among them. Mitchell’s horse-breeding and slave-owning Tarletons have “less grammar than most of their poor Cracker neighbors”; the book’s first use of the word “aristocrat” refers to their dog. The patrician Wilkes family, of nearby Twelve Oaks—that “beautiful white-columned house that crowned the hill like a Greek temple,” without which a Southern tale would have been like a mystery without a crime—are thought by their upstart neighbors to be “born queer,” partly because of inbreeding but mostly, as Ma Tarleton tells her boys, “because their grandfather came from Virginia.”

The historian Henry Steele Commager observed, in an early and highly favorable review, that “Gone with the Wind” was indeed about the opposition of two civilizations, but that these were not the North and the South but the Old South and the New. The momentous giving way of one era to the next is traced by Mitchell over a span of twelve years, from the eve of the Civil War to the middle of Reconstruction, but the discord and instability of the time are dramatized, above

all, in the person of a girl, introduced on page 1 at the age of sixteen, whose very face betrays the contrast, too sharp, of “the delicate features of her mother, a Coast aristocrat of French descent, and the heavy ones of her florid Irish father”—a fast and greedy young Atalanta named Scarlett O’Hara.

MARGARET MITCHELL professed annoyance when asked, as she often was—and at least once for good money, by *Vogue*—to discuss the character of Scarlett O’Hara in terms of her “modernity.” “Good God,” she remarked in a letter that first hectic September—while rejecting all such public offers—“do they think hardheaded women only came to life in the 1930s? Why don’t they read the Old Testament?” But the character was confounding even to the author. Shortly before publication, Mitchell had requested that the name of Scarlett’s kindhearted foil, Melanie, not be removed from the advertising copy—she is still there, described on the current dust jacket as “a loyal friend and true gentlewoman”—because, Mitchell avowed, “after all, she’s the heroine of the book.” (Thackeray had affixed the same label to the “gentle and uncomplaining little martyr” Amelia Sedley midway through “Vanity Fair,” in pointed distinction from another such green-eyed baggage as Mitchell’s Scarlett.)

Scarlett O’Hara was enough of a public obsession and enough of a credible personality to be psychoanalyzed in learned journals, and to a psychiatrist who concluded that America’s new princess was a “partial psychopath” and a person of “inward hollowness” Mitchell responded with excited approval; at last, someone had got her point. “I set out to depict a far-from-admirable woman,” she wrote, in one of the long letters that consumed her time in the book’s aftermath, and which have been collected and edited by Richard Harwell. “I have found it wryly amusing when Miss O’Hara became somewhat of a national heroine and I have thought it looked bad for the moral and mental attitude of a nation.” True, Mitchell could also, on occasion, defend her character’s finer qualities of courage and perseverance and appetite for life. One popular diagnosis of just why “Gone with the

Wind” had conquered America—it appeared in the *Reader’s Digest*, in 1939—found that the story’s primary appeal lay in Scarlett O’Hara’s position as “the master of her world rather than its victim,” her exemplification of “personal triumph over social insecurity.” It may indicate something about changing times that in 1957 a survey of a class of American high-school girls, noted by Helen Taylor in the book “Scarlett’s Women,” found that all but one of the girls identified with docile Melanie, or claimed to; and that in a similar survey of 1970, also mentioned by Taylor, three-quarters of the girls firmly aligned themselves with Scarlett.

Of course, no one needed to ask whether young American males identified with the book’s fair Ashley Wilkes or dark Rhett Butler, for it was reasonably certain that few had read it. Despite its wartime setting, “Gone with the Wind” is in no respect a “boy’s book”: the gallant soldiers leap onto their horses and ride off to battle as if over the edge of the earth, and they return or they don’t; the reader’s place is emphatically with those who stay behind. All is seen from a woman’s point of view—or, rather, from a girl’s. The tempting young men are nearly overmatched by the tempting dresses, the “rose organdie with long pink sash,” or the “green plaid taffeta, frothing with flounces and each flounce edged in green velvet ribbon,” or the “butter-yellow watered silks with garlands of rosebuds.” In the long period during which Mitchell’s audience of American “girls” could retain their status until late middle age, and then on through the years of tension between growing freedom and obdurate complicity, Scarlett O’Hara has remained a congenial paragon of contradiction: a prodigy of femininity in full rebellion, an expert in the disdained tactics of sex, a “master of her world” who is never less than wildly desirable—capability and authority with a seventeen-inch waist.

Mitchell’s favorite word for Scarlett is “unanalytical,” but from the start the girl is aware that even the most cultivated bloom of ingenuous charm cannot make her into the lady she aspires to be. Unlike Becky Sharp, Scarlett is troubled by her failure of gentility, and troubled, too, by her ability to see through the mechanisms



necessary to deliver her to her fate: "Don't you suppose men get surprised after they're married to find that their wives do have sense?" Moreover, the Southern belle was bred to conform to a subspecies of the nineteenth-century "lady" such as exceeded all other regional varieties in its veneration of a high artificiality, in its observance of the prescribed distance between ideal and flesh. "At no time, before or since, had so low a premium been placed on feminine naturalness," Mitchell writes, and in this historical judgment, at least, she has been confirmed. For Scarlett, the ideal is embodied in her adored mother, the saintly Ellen, whose back is never seen to rest against the back of any chair on which she sits, whose broken spirit is everywhere mistaken for righteous calm, and in whose chaste perceptions—despite her three daughters and three buried sons—"mares never foaled nor cows calved," and even "hens almost didn't lay eggs." Scarlett hopes that someday she will manage to be like her mother, only—rather like St. Augustine—not yet.

But why should so extreme an attitude toward women—"gyneolatry," as one historian has termed it—have prevailed in the American South? Is it to be understood simply as a fevered symptom of the Walter Scott disease? Or was it a deeper response—not to the neo-chivalric delusion but to the society's need to be deluded? Margaret Mitchell troubled her head with "why" no more than Scarlett does. But then this is a question to which Mitchell could not possibly attend, since the answer, like so many answers in the South, is tied to the facts of slavery and race, facts that the author cannot abide and that she spent considerable energy in dissembling.

The only antebellum chains glimpsed in "Gone with the Wind" are metaphorically attached to the hardworking ladies of the manor houses—"chained to supervision of cooking, nursing, sewing and laundering." It has become a commonplace observation that Harriet Beecher Stowe approached the unfamiliar oppression of slavery through an intimate knowledge of the oppression of her sex. Charlotte Brontë's comment that "Mrs. Stowe had felt the iron of slavery enter into her heart from childhood upwards" is roughly contemporary with the remark of Mary

Chestnut—no friend to Mrs. Stowe—that "there is no slave, after all, like a wife." It was through this kind of identification with enslavement that many middle-class white women came to the forefront of the abolitionist movement, and they went on to establish the cause of their own suffrage with a sense of natural progress and undeniable justice. The slave narrative of Harriet Jacobs approaches its conclusion with the perfect reversal of the Brontë romantic formula: "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage."



In the South, the connection between women and slaves, no less strong, came to be expressed not as an alliance but—particularly after the rise of abolitionism—as a necessary opposition. Slavery was represented, by its supporters, as a specific boon to women. An 1832 study, which included an account of the last great debates on slavery held in the Virginia legislature, argued that the institution served gloriously to lift "woman" to a new and fitting station: "We behold the marked effects of slavery on the conditions of woman—we find her at once elevated, clothed with all her charms, mingling with and directing the society to which she belongs, no longer the slave but the equal and the idol of man."

There is a more insidious element in this elevation of a new idol than can be explained by the transfer of labor from wife to slave, and it is an element that Margaret Mitchell delicately but quite certainly meant to address, or, rather, to dismiss, by her repeated epithets for the admirable slaves of Tara. Both Mammy, "shining black, pure African," and Pork, "shining black, dignified," are pointedly of unmixed blood (only Dilcey is said to be part Indian)—a characteristic that distinguishes them from the substantial number of mulattoes, who by the 1860 census accounted for a minimum of twelve per cent of the non-white Southern rural population. In the contemporary words, again, of Mary Chestnut, who was a frequent resident of her father-in-law's South Carolina plantation and a friend of the Jefferson Davis: "We live surrounded by prostitutes. . . . Our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines, and the mulattoes one sees in

every family exactly resemble the white children—and every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household, but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds, or pretends so to think." And, elsewhere, "Mrs. Stowe did not hit the sorest spot. She makes Legree a bachelor."

Looking at passages from Chestnut's diary and similar accounts, Edmund Wilson felt forced to conclude, as W. J. Cash had done two decades before him, that "the pedestalled purity which the Southerners assigned to their ladies, the shrinking of these ladies themselves from any suggestion of freedom, were partly a 'polarization' produced by the uninhibited ease with which their men could go to bed with the black girls." To set oneself off from the status of mere "chief slave of the harem," in the words of a planter's wife recorded by Harriet Martineau, in 1837, one would have to set oneself off from the flesh itself. To be above reproach was also, perhaps, to be above feeling reproach; to think no evil was to see none. Her moral virginity intact, her sanction granted, the Southern woman's status—"the South's Palladium," Cash called her—was her reward. There was far more to Ellen O'Hara's immaculate cows and hens than Margaret Mitchell would ever be willing to admit.

Mitchell's mother, Maybelle Mitchell, was a lady, and something more: around the time of her daughter's birth, in 1900, she became one of Atlanta's leading suffragists. This cause would seem to contradict the antebellum sentiment with which the family also lived (Margaret's older brother was named for the Vice-President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens), the natural residue of a culture still bitter over defeat and essentially unresigned; in those years, Atlanta displayed one United States flag, of necessity—at the post office. The twin dedications of the household were reconciled, apparently, in the conviction that women's strength was a foundation of the Old South. (Living proof was ever at hand in the dauntless person of Maybelle's own mother, Annie Fitzgerald Stephens, whose legendary trials and triumphs throughout the war were to serve as a model for those of Scarlett O'Hara.) And so the little girl who grew up singing "I'm

a Good Old Rebel" as a parlor trick was also carted off to suffrage rallies with a "Votes for Women" banner tied around her belly.

Maybelle Mitchell had forfeited hopes for a career in science or medicine when she married, and she was driven by the desire that her daughter should have an education. Margaret Mitchell later recounted payment schemes by which her mother coerced her into "classical" reading: "Mother used to give me a nickel for each of Shakespeare's plays . . . a dime for Dickens, fifteen cents for Nietzsche and Kant and Darwin." It had not been an easy way to augment her allowance: "Even when she raised the ante to twenty-five cents with a licking thrown in, I couldn't read Tolstoy, or Hardy or Thackeray either, for that matter." By the time she repeated this story, in letters to appreciative fans and reviewers, Mitchell was easing into her role of Good Ol' Girl of the best-seller lists, explaining why her Scarlett could not have been indebted to Becky Sharp: she hadn't read "Vanity Fair" until 1935. (This was, perhaps coincidentally, the year of the R.K.O. Technicolor "Becky Sharp," starring Miriam Hopkins, whom Mitchell privately touted for the role of Scarlett.)

Another of Maybelle's attempts to impress her principles on her daughter's mind resulted in an experience that Margaret Mitchell called "the genesis of my book"—her first unforgettable lesson in what she saw as the great theme of survival. Aged six, Margaret had returned from the new experience of school angry and discouraged, refusing to return. "And Mother took me out on the hottest September day I ever saw," she recounted in 1936, "and drove me down the road toward Jonesboro . . . and showed me the old ruins of houses where fine and wealthy people had once lived. . . . And she talked about the world those people had lived in, such a secure world, and how it had ex-

ploded beneath them. And she told me that my own world was going to explode under me, some day. . . . She said that all that would be left after a world ended would be what you could do with your hands and what you had in your head."

The Jonesboro road that mother and daughter took that day became, Mitchell attests, "the road to Tara," along which Scarlett O'Hara would flee from burning Atlanta in her rickety wagon, through the charred and empty countryside. "If she could only reach the kind arms of Tara and Ellen," Mitchell wrote, "and lay down her burdens, far too heavy for her young shoulders—the dying woman, the fading baby, her own hungry little boy, the frightened negro, all looking to her for strength, for guidance, all reading in her straight back courage she did not possess and strength which had long since failed." Scarlett arrives home, the house still standing but emptied of comfort or rest, on the day after her mother's death.

Margaret Mitchell said that she wrote this part of the book, and only this part, in one long streak: twenty-four pages without revision. Critics generally found it to be the best of her work. This is a matter not of finer sentences or more elegant phrases—Mitchell's effects are not to be found in such separable elements—but of the broad, building

rhythms sustained over the journey, the discovery, and the final resolution. Her world overthrown, Scarlett takes up the new matter of hunger, her own and her family's, and when weariness and illness overcome her she makes her famous vow: "I'm going to live through this, and when it's over, I'm never going to be hungry again. No, nor any of my folks. If I have to steal or kill—as God is my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again." And yet, for all that Maybelle Mitchell's lesson struck deep, her real point was lost in the mounting violins and the lurid sky, even in the book. Her final plea, after all—the reason for the ride into the ruined past—was, as always, the importance of education. "So for God's sake, go to school and learn something that will stay with you" is what her daughter remembered her saying when their journey was over.

In fact, Margaret Mitchell not only resisted her mother's attempts to give her a literary education but mutinied completely around the age of twelve, tumbling free at last into pulp and adventure. Movie-crazed, she grew into a determined madcap, a four-foot-ten-inch "baby-faced li'l vamp"—an overheard description that delighted her—honing her skills on the soldiers of a nearby military camp. In the fall of 1918, she went off to Smith College, where she received mediocre grades

and an enviable quantity of mail from servicemen overseas. In what seems now the outstanding incident of her college career, Mitchell quit a history course, in anger, because a black student was also enrolled; in defiance of college rules, she managed to obtain a transfer to another class. A more apt metaphor for Margaret Mitchell's relationship to the subject of African-Americans in history could hardly have been invented.

In the middle of her freshman year, Mitchell was summoned back to Atlanta by news that her mother was ill. Maybelle Mitchell died of the flu in January,



Another Breakthrough from A. T. & T.



1919, on the day before her daughter reached home. Foreseeing the consequences of her death, she left Margaret a letter that fairly glows with maternal light, counselling her against the temptation to surrender her future in order to become her father's caretaker: "Give of yourself with both hands and overflowing heart, but give only the excess after you have lived your own life." Margaret returned to Smith to finish out the year, and then came home for good, to do exactly what her mother had warned her against. In later years, she made grandiose claims for the career she had sacrificed—"I started out to be a psychiatrist, but, unfortunately, was forced to leave college when my mother died"—but it seems clear that what she experienced at the time was a sense of relief.

Back in Atlanta, Mitchell became the classic jazz baby—by her own description, "one of those short-haired, short-skirted, hard-boiled young women who preachers said would go to hell or be hanged before they were thirty." She scandalized the Junior League by performing, at a charity ball, an Apache dance—complete with clinch—adapted from a Valentino movie. The men from nearby Camp Gordon met each other coming and going on her Peachtree Street veranda, and at one point she was engaged to five of them. "You can say all you please about my being an unscrupulous flirt," she wrote to a college friend in the North, "but I'm here to state that I haven't lied to those five men—nor have I misled them in any way."

In 1922, she made a disastrous marriage, to a handsome bootlegger who had been forced to resign—twice—from Annapolis. The marriage was undone in a matter of months. She got a job writing features for the Sunday magazine of the *Atlanta Journal*—reporter jobs were not open to women—and she sent off a group of stories to H. L. Mencken's *Smart Set*; all were rejected. (Mencken had recently published his notorious essay on the South, "The Sahara of the Bozart," in which he identified even the once reigning state of Virginia as "an intellectual Gobi or Lapland," and characterized the whole region as "a vast plain of mediocrity, stupidity, lethargy, almost of dead silence.")

In July of 1925, Mitchell was married again—to John Marsh, a suitor

who had lost out the first time and had stayed on to serve as best man at her previous wedding. Marsh was as mild and as conventional as her first husband had been wild. Having asked her father's consent and set the date, he became seriously ill and had to be hospitalized with severe hiccups, an ailment that persisted for forty-two days. Mitchell continued at her newspaper job for nearly a year after the marriage, until Marsh received a raise from the utilities company where he worked, and, bowing to his wishes, she agreed to stay home. But it was while she was still at the *Journal* that she began, with Marsh's encouragement, to work on what he would later refer to as a "jazz age novel." Marsh had given her a copy of "The Great Gatsby," newly published, for their first Christmas together. She was already an admirer of Fitzgerald's work, and she described him years later—in 1939—as a kind of hero, even as Fitzgerald himself was toiling away in Hollywood, helping to pare her dialogue into a screenplay.

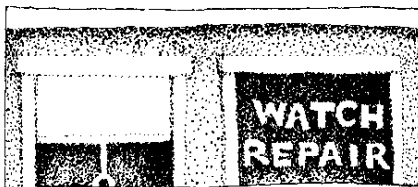
The best bits of "Gone with the Wind" do indeed reflect this literary taste and this initial ambition. They have a lightness and a barely transplanted "jazz age" fizziness that manage to lift the text briefly on little gusts of social comedy: the Tarleton twins' scheming to fall in love with the same girl so as to keep each other company; the crossed signals of Charles Hamilton's wain proposal of love and Scarlett's frosty response; some of the descriptions of Southern customs ("Frequently elderly aunts and uncles came to Sunday dinner and remained until they were buried years later"). The princely Ashley Wilkes speaks as though his mind were in a truss, but to Scarlett he is ever, quite simply, "the tall drowsy boy she loved."

Phrases that ring clear have most often to do with Scarlett's character—determined and gay, childlike and utterly selfish—as she finds herself, confused and resentful, in acts of necessary kindness: yielding her bonnet to shield Melanie from the beating

sun on the road to Tara, her only thought is the endearingly grumpy "I'll be as freckled as a guinea egg before this day is over." And, in what must be the sweetest line in the book, Scarlett ministers, unhappily, to the broken young Confederate soldiers as they retreat through Atlanta: "Why should she be standing here in Aunt Pitty's peaceful front yard, amid wavering lights, pouring water over dying beaux?" Those critics and readers who vexed Mitchell by insisting on her heroine's "modernity"—who recognized in Scarlett O'Hara traces of the "jazz age" girl—may have been on to something of her origins.

**S**UCH qualities of gaiety or sweetness as "Gone with the Wind" possesses are confined largely to the book's earlier sections, before the onset of Reconstruction or the felt consequences of Emancipation. ("It's just ruined the darkies," says Scarlett, innocent of irony, if of little else.) But even from the start these patches of light are heavily overshadowed, and are finally blotted out entirely, by the inescapable grimness of Mitchell's racial politics.

Approximately three-quarters of the way through the novel, Scarlett O'Hara is assaulted while riding alone in her carriage. The war is over. Her first husband, the calflike Charles Hamilton, whom she married for spite, left her a widow. Her second husband, the meek Frank Kennedy, whom she married for money, has been unable to prevent her, despite the breach of propriety and the danger, from pursuing her business interests in outlying parts of Atlanta. It is almost dark, and she is on the road bordering the new postwar Shantytown, when she is set upon by "a big ragged white man and a squat black negro with shoulders and chest like a gorilla." She refuses to give them money; the white man shouts that it must be hidden "in her bosom." Her gun is wrenched from her hand, and then: "The negro was beside her, so close that she could smell the rank odor of him as he tried to drag her over the buggy side. With her one free hand she fought madly, clawing at his face, and then she felt his big hand at her throat and, with a ripping noise, her basque was torn open from neck to waist. Then the black hand fumbled between her breasts, and terror and revulsion such as she had never known





came over her and she screamed like an insane woman."

Scarlett is saved at the last moment by the appearance of Big Sam, the onetime slave foreman of Tara. He beats both men off—perhaps kills them. ("Ah hope Ah done kill dat black baboon. But Ah din' wait ter fine out," he tells her afterward. "But ef he hahmed you, Miss Scarlett, Ah'll go back an' mek sho of it.") Sam drives her home and is thanked for his loyalty. And that night Scarlett becomes a widow again, when her husband is killed during a retaliatory raid on Shantytown carried out by the gallant white knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

Elements of this lengthy episode had been in common use for years when Mitchell came to write it. She had constructed it as an alternative version, deliberately eventful, after one in which Frank Kennedy died of illness seemed to her too dull. Scarlett's husband had to be got rid of somehow, and Mitchell submitted the alternative deaths with her manuscript. An outside reader hired by Macmillan to appraise the work—Charles Everett, a Columbia English professor, who was, over all, highly enthusiastic—advised that the author forgo the Klan episode, "because," he diplomatically suggested, "the KKK material has been worked pretty hard by others." Mitchell disclaimed any special political regard for this set of events; her preference was owed only to its greater liveliness. "As 'Alice' would have said," she explained, in what might well pass for her literary credo, there would otherwise have been "no conversation and absolutely no pictures" in that part of the book.

This particular line of conversation and these particular pictures—the fragile white woman clawed at by the black savage and avenged by the knights in white sheets—had been in circulation ever since the Klan itself was organized and began to grow, just after the war. The opposition the South had asserted between the position of its slaves and that of its women as the balancing forces of Confederate theology—Devil and Virgin, sin and forgiveness, the damned and the exalted—turned the spectre of rape into a compelling blasphemy; in a society long quietly familiar with illicit sex based on ownership, the possibility of revenge was so tensely awaited as to

become a fixation. Scarlett O'Hara's unlucky carriage ride is carefully dated to a windy March day during "military" Reconstruction, soon after "the legislature refused to ratify the amendment"—the Fourteenth—and during a period when, the author informs us, "it was the large number of outrages on women and the ever-present fear for the safety of their wives and daughters that drove Southern men to cold and trembling fury and caused the Ku Klux Klan to spring up overnight."

In reality, the cry of rape as a political weapon was only beginning to be heard in the years after the war. It took its place on a long list of crimes to be avenged by the vigilantes of the Klan, or by the Knights of the White Camellia or any of the other more fleetingly established fraternities of ter-

ror—crimes like voting (either for the wrong party or at all), renting the wrong land, working at the wrong job, and, in general, being seen to behave in a manner suggesting the serious nature of Emancipation (a manner known in common parlance, and in Mitchell's, as being "uppity," as in Aunt Pitty's "the Yankees are very upset because so many uppity darkies have been killed recently"). It was with the calamitous agrarian depression of the eighteen-nineties, when the Northern pressure for Negro rights had abated and the South had begun to hope for disenfranchisement and to gather evidence for its necessity, that rape suddenly became an obsession everywhere, the overwhelming threat of the historical moment projected with equal conviction into the future and onto the past. By the time Margaret Mitchell was old enough to read, the history through which her heroine would ride had been largely rewritten.

"I was practically raised on your books, and love them very much," Mitchell wrote in answer to a fan letter from the novelist Thomas Dixon in 1936. This gracious and rather effusive tone was to be found in almost all of Mitchell's replies to congratulations from other writers, but in the case of Dixon, the neo-Confederate successor to Thomas Nelson Page, she was telling an important truth. Dixon, a North Carolina lawyer turned Baptist minister and itinerant lecturer, had been struck with furious indignation on seeing a stage production of "Uncle



## Cocktail

Two hundred years ago, a young French apothecary opened a pharmacy at 437 Royal and dispensed a tonic compounded of brandy and a secret family recipe of herbs, known as bitters. Antoine Amadee Psychoud poured his cure-all into the large end of an egg cup, known in French as coquetier. The Americans couldn't pronounce coquetier, so they called it a "cocktail."

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Tom's Cabin" in 1901, and within a year he had published a refutation of Stowe's charges against his homeland. "The Leopard's Spots," subtitled "A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865-1900" and dedicated to his wife, "Harriet, Sweet-Voiced Daughter of the Old-Fashioned South," reemployed several "Uncle Tom" characters in a story that involved a hideous rape ("Scarcely a day passed in the South without the record of such an atrocity," the author informs us) and a consequent lynching—the rape unseen but the lynching, actually more a burning at the stake, described in vivid detail. The book reached its climax in the hero's all-persuasive speech to the North Carolina Democratic Convention: "Resolved, that the hour has now come in our history to eliminate the Negro from our life and reestablish for all time the government of our fathers."

"The Clansman," Dixon's next novel, appeared in 1905. The second volume in what the author called his Race Conflict trilogy, it was published as a tribute to the heroic Ku Klux fraternity of the South's mythic past—a fraternity that had been disbanded decades before. Here Dixon remixed his brew of honey and poison into a story of how "civilization" was saved from Reconstruction's attempt "to Africanize ten great States of the American Union" only through the heroic efforts of "the reincarnated souls of the Clansmen of Old Scotland." Emboldened by his earlier success, Dixon now brought the obligatory rape—of the secondary (and expendable) heroine—out of the bushes and onto the page, where "the black claws of the beast sank into the soft white throat and she was still." The girl, in shame, chooses to leap off a cliff, hand in hand with her mother. The Clansmen's revenge is swift.

In a touring stage version of "The Clansman" that followed immediately upon the novel's success—Dixon had learned to fight "Uncle Tom" with its own weapons—real horses bearing the girl's avengers charged across the stage as counterparts of Stowe's snapping bloodhounds (which in fact were not Stowe's but an invention of the theatre). In Atlanta, Dixon himself came onstage at the end of the show to lecture a responsive audience on his work's historical merit. That same year,

in Georgia, separate public parks for whites and blacks were designated, in what was still a novel gesture for a state legislature.

The next summer, again in Georgia, a fierce gubernatorial primary campaign fought on a platform of black disenfranchisement was followed by an outbreak in Atlanta newspapers of an "epidemic of rape," a series of stories played out in rabid headlines and special editions (the winning candidate was also editor of the *Journal*). These newspaper reports led to a five-day wave of white riots, during which mobs of avengers estimated to number ten thousand "killed or tried to kill every negro they saw."

"It will not do to express opinions too freely about the action of the mob in falling on inoffending negroes, for every man you meet justifies it and is enraged": these words, and those just above, are from a letter written by Margaret Mitchell's father—one of a series of letters in which Eugene Mitchell informed his wife, then visiting in New York, about the events of that terrible week. (They are quoted in an article published only four years ago by Joel Williamson.) Mitchell weathered the major upheavals by remaining locked in his house with his children—Margaret was nearly six years old—all of them terrified by "a thousand rumors" that "negro mobs had been poised to burn the town, cut the water pipes," and fretting because they had no gun. He reported how "Margaret suggested that Mr Daleys sword," apparently a family relic, "would be a good thing."

At the start of the violence, Mitchell had tallied Atlanta's immediate losses, recording that "sixteen negroes had been killed and a multitude had been injured," and at its end he surveyed some of the broader social effects: "Negroes are taking off their hats who never knew they had hats before."

Among the many stagings of the final book in Thomas Dixon's trilogy—"The Traitor," subtitled "A Story of the Fall of the Invisible Empire"—was one that took place just a few years later in the Mitchell sitting room, with eleven-year-old Margaret as producer and director. Her report of the event to Dixon some twenty-five years afterward details with chilling adorableness how "the clansmen were recruited from the small-fry of the neighborhood, their

ages ranging from five to eight," how they wore their fathers' shirts with the "tails bobbed off," and how she herself had to take a male role, because none of the little boys would play a part "where they had to 'kiss any little ol' girl.'"

The children's games of Southern history became big games, and far more chilling ones, for grownups when, in 1915, Dixon's "The Clansman" was adapted and transformed by D. W. Griffith into the first masterpiece of American film. In "The Birth of a Nation," Griffith made something mystic and drivingly apocalyptic out of Dixon's kitchen-garden racism. The film had a traumatizing impact everywhere in the country, but nowhere, perhaps, so much as in Atlanta. There, in yet another example of the interplay of history and fiction which has formed the South, the anticipation of the film's arrival inspired a band of Klan legend-keepers to climb nearby Stone Mountain and, in an elaborate ceremony, set fire to a large cross they placed on its summit. The burning cross was not, in fact, among the trappings of the original Klan but a poetic addition of Dixon's ("Issue your orders and despatch your courier to-night with the old Scottish rite of the Fiery Cross. It will send a thrill of inspiration to every clansman in the hills"), and was derived from Walter Scott's "The Lady of the Lake." In 1915, this fictitious symbol was used to mark the founding of a new Klan, based in Atlanta, which would live longer and cut deeper into the flesh of the nation than its predecessor had ever done. In the local papers, ads for the new organization and the new movie ran side by side.

"The Birth of a Nation" was surely Margaret Mitchell's model in epic form (a bulletin from one of her informants in Hollywood boasted that Selznick's street scenes were so fine as to approach even Griffith's), and her incendiary vision of Reconstruction demonstrates the film's direct visual imprint, as in her confident description of "these negroes" elected to the state legislature, "where they spent most of their time eating goobers and easing their unaccustomed feet into and out of new shoes." In the public mind such descriptions persisted, unquestioned as history, well after the work of scholars like John Hope Franklin and C. Vann Woodward, in the forties and fifties, revealed them as the distortion and propaganda of the Jim Crow years.

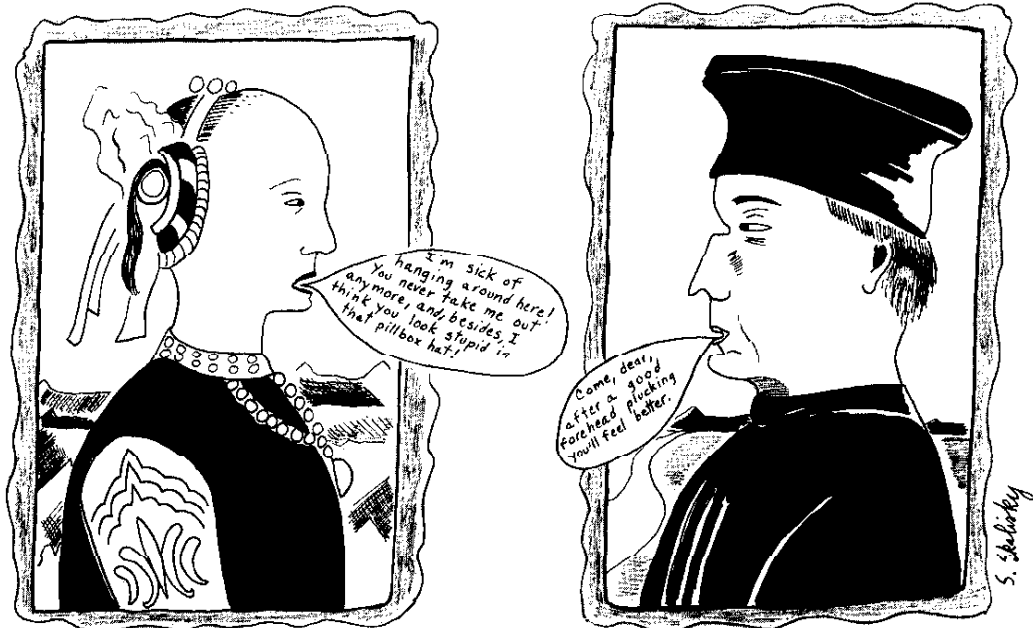


Knowledge and common knowledge are two different things, and no historian ever had anything like the audiences of Dixon or Griffith or Mitchell. Always proud of the range of study that went into her work, Mitchell was the kind of writer who was able to provide three historical references from her notes for the use of a toothbrush in 1868. But she also attested: "As I had not written anything about the Klan which is not common knowledge to every Southerner, I had done no research upon it."

Some claim has been made for Mitchell as socially progressive, in her context, because her racial portraits and politics are generally devoid of the blood lust and the terror that animate Dixon and Griffith. (Indeed, it isn't certain that the aborted crime at Shantytown was to be a rape, rather than a robbery.) Hers is the mildness of complacency, of a work written in and for a time when the dirtiest job had been done—when the Southern situation had been so nearly returned to its antebellum state that the Klan, with a national membership of more than four million by the early twenties, had to turn its attention to the dangers presented by Catholics and Jews. But it was still necessary that the former slaves, if they were no longer to be portrayed as dangerous brutes, be seen as childish clowns in need of protection: how else maintain the glory of the Old Ways? The heroic Big Sam, who rescues Scarlett from the clutches of Shantytown, is made ridiculous through Mitchell's physical descriptions, all rolling eyes and flashing teeth and "watermelon-pink tongue." This is the bargain Mitchell had to strike in order to give up the virulence of Dixon (whose Sam would have been the rapist) and yet keep her racial and historical righteousness intact.

Charles Everett, Macmillan's outside reader, had added to his useless protest against the Klan episode the suggestion that "the author should keep

## At home with the Storzias, the Renaissance's favorite family.



out her own feelings in one or two places where she talks about negro rule" and the delicate observation that "to refer to Mammy's 'ape face' and her 'black paws' seems unnecessary." Mitchell, ever the lady, thanked her publisher for calling her attention to these matters—"I have tried to keep out venom, bias, bitterness as much as possible"—and, having "meant no disrespect," vowed to make the necessary changes. Clearest among these is the simian substitution in the description of Mammy that follows Ellen O'Hara's death, her "kind black face sad with the uncomprehending sadness of a monkey's face."

Bias and bitterness, though, characterize Mitchell's entire account of Reconstruction. To question this attitude is not to deny the privation, the ruin, the real suffering of Southern gentry—Edmund Wilson compared the crushing of the South during and after the war to the crushing of Hungary in 1956—but, rather, to underline Mitchell's inability to see that time and place from any but one point of view, or to admit the complexity of the situation or of the truth. W. E. B. Du Bois, writing in 1935, set forth the matter simply: "One fact and one alone explains the attitude of most recent writers toward Reconstruction; they can-

not conceive of Negroes as men."

Big Sam, when he encounters Scarlett, is wearing a Union jacket and has just returned from the North, where "dem Yankee folks, fust time dey meet me, dey call me 'Mist' O'Hara,'" and where he resented and vehemently rebuffed all the questions "bout de blood houn's dat chase me an' de beatin's Ah got." All he wants, he says, is to go back to Tara the way it was: "Ah done had nuff freedom." There is a literary tradition for Sam's homesickness—even a black one, as in Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "You kin jes' tell Mistah Lincoln fo' to tek his freedom back"—but it does not seem to be supported by the reality. Among the thousands of aged former slaves who were interviewed in the W.P.A. Federal Writers' Project of the thirties and early forties, when the South was the nation's foremost economic problem and their living conditions were generally abysmal, the question of Emancipation was answered as in a single voice. In the plain statement of a man who went by the name of Moses Mitchell, "Here's the idea: freedom is worth it all."

MARGARET MITCHELL's all-American best-seller is not, in fact, fundamentally concerned with politics,

or, for all its exertions, with race, except insofar as these issues set its scenes and affect its characters. It seems unimaginable that the pleasure so many readers have found in the book bears any profound relation to these public subjects. What "Gone with the Wind" is ultimately about is romance and sex—these subjects, rather than a female point of view, are what made it a "woman's book"—and there is no surer demonstration of the fact than the false alarm of the scene outside Shantytown. Rape is not a matter of politics in Mitchell's reconstructed South. When it occurs, in one of the most carefully prepared and climactic scenes of the book, the rapist is not black but white, and not a monster but a handsome hero, and the heroine is neither murdered nor avenged but awakened to pleasure and a taste of victory.

Rhett Butler is a pure projection of idealized male sexuality, an ever-potent cliché. Although the author at no time presumes to enter his head—leaving him free of doubt, error, foolishness—his physical properties are subject to endless description and evaluation. He first appears at the big eve-of-war barbecue, tall, older, and "powerfully built": "Scarlett thought she had never seen a man with such wide shoulders, so heavy with muscles, almost too heavy for gentility." There is "a look of good blood in his dark face," and both the quality of the blood and, especially, the darkness are frequently rediscovered and remarked.

"Swarthy as a pirate," his "animal-white teeth" flashing, Rhett Butler is clearly a descendant of Don Juan and of Heathcliff, but, above all, he is the son of the Sheik: Margaret Mitchell had seen Rudolf Valentino's first starring film, "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," often enough to derive her scandalous charity-ball Apache dance from it, and in 1924 she had interviewed the Latin actor for the *Atlanta Journal*. "He seemed older—just a bit tired," Mitchell informed her Sunday-supplement readers. "His face was swarthy, so brown that his white teeth flashed in startling contrast to his skin, his eyes tired, bored but courteous." Valentino had by then become, via "The Sheik," the biggest male sex star of the movies, having deposed at a stroke all the good-Joe national heart-throbs already on the scene by means of a newly dangerous, predatory—not

to say swarthy—glamour. No wonder that Rhett Butler seems a natural star, born to celluloid. The adjectives that Mitchell supplies are the basic few: Rhett is a "pagan prince," and his movements suggest a "pagan freedom and leashed power." There is about him something "almost sinister," a "suave brutality." His body is measured and appraised as closely as Scarlett's, and the descriptions incorporate its effects, as when he joins Scarlett for a carriage ride: "The muscles of his big body rippled against his well-tailored clothes, as he got in beside her, and, as always, the sense of his great physical power struck her like a blow."

By the time that Scarlett O'Hara becomes Mrs. Butler, she has already been married twice, all the while chastely adoring the golden, honorable, and married Ashley Wilkes. But the pirate (grandson of a pirate, actually) has aroused something in her, something incomprehensible to her, beginning with an insulting glance that makes her feel "that her dress was too low in the bosom" and annoys her most "because she did not feel insulted"; continuing with the first seductive move—his lips to her palm—which brings up a "treacherous warm tide of feeling"; and going on through the elaborate spirals of a woman's sexual choreography to the poster moment where, above the flames of Atlanta, "he bent her body backward and his lips traveled down her throat to where the cameo fastened her basque."

The "Road to Tara," that thematically surging episode in which Scarlett is abandoned by Rhett to lead her helpless charges on alone toward home, is emphatically counterbalanced in the book by the later scene in which she is swept into Rhett's arms and carried, in fear and protest, up a grand and looming staircase toward their bed.



The "Road" scene marks our heroine's discovery of her strength and the making of her resolve; the "Rape" (as Selznick, for one, frankly termed it) is her glad surrender of strength to a force greater than her own—"to arms that were too strong, lips too bruising, fate that moved too fast."

Many women who are passionate fans of "Gone with the Wind"—and of both these scenes—have claimed that the word "rape" is not an adequate description of the events in the Butler bedroom. The preferred term, not only in this instance but in the thousands of such scenes that fill women's popular fiction, is something along the lines of "forceful persuasion." This is not Sade and it is not Faulkner—not painful, not punishing. Its roots are as old and noble as Richardson's "Clarissa"—the modern novel born in an excruciatingly prolonged contemplation of rape. Margaret Mitchell herself had a variety of models to choose from in the years when she was growing into her vocation; in 1920, Mencken noted that among the few types of books that almost never lost money in the United States were "novels in which the heroine is forcibly overcome by the hero"—a category that placed second only to murder stories.

But the "baby-faced li'l vamp" didn't require fiction to introduce her to the attractions of forceful persuasion, except, perhaps, as it may have nourished her natural propensities and accomplishments. The giddy "It-girl" letters that Mitchell sent North after leaving college, collected by Jane Bonner Peacock under the title "A Dynamo Going to Waste," retail what she called her "'cutie' career" and brim with the thrills of sexual brinksmanship: "Promised to marry a youthful cave man—just to see what would happen (I found out quite speedily and had a helluva time getting him off the scene for keeps)"; and "I used to have an elegant time in my early youth . . . by giving a life like imitation of a modern young woman whose blistering passions were only held in check by an iron control. . . . Thoughts of seduction were tabled and rape became more to the point." She even encounters or creates the occasional Rhett: "Ever know a man who makes you acutely conscious that your dress is too low? That's A.B. I suddenly began to loathe him. I took sidelong glances at him, noting his sensual mouth and closely

cropped moustache and meeting his assured, faintly sneering eyes." The specimen escorts her home and won't leave, "and then," she wails, "the fun began! . . . When you've liked and trusted a man, it is no pleasant sight to see him lose his head and go wild. It was the evening dress, I guess, and the fact that both straps slipped down at this inopportune time."

It wasn't the mysterious A.B. whom Mitchell married soon after this but another in the same line. Anne Edwards, in her biography of the author, "Road to Tara," identifies Mitchell's first husband, Red Upshaw, with Rhett Butler, pointing out that even the unexplained middle initial "K" that Scarlett espies on Rhett's handkerchief belongs properly to Berrien Kinnard Upshaw, and could be seen as a kind of personal signal. At the time she was writing her book, Mitchell still slept with a pistol by her bed in case the signal ever again took living shape in her vicinity. Their last meeting is memorialized in nonfictional form in Mitchell's sworn deposition, cited by Edwards, that served as evidence in the Upshaws' divorce proceedings. Married in September, 1922, the bride and groom separated within months, and the next July he suddenly reappeared at her home. "Mr. Upshaw demanded his connubial rights," Mitchell testified, "after striking me with his fist upon my left arm about the elbow." Her counsel added that he had "jerked her against a bed, causing her to be bruised all over her body." The maid had come running, and as Upshaw left he had delivered a final punch to the eye; Mitchell was hospitalized for two weeks.

Nothing of the kind happens to Scarlett O'Hara, of course. Fiction is different. And romantic fiction is not only not reality but very nearly its antidote. In Mitchell's latter-day fairy tale, the darkly beautiful pagan prince, drunk and angry, is desperately in love with the delicately beautiful woman who has wronged him cruelly through years of marriage and now stands trembling before him; his cravat and shirt are open, her wrapper is pulled tightly closed. She runs from him, but loses a slipper in her flight, and he is suddenly beside her: "He swung her off her feet into his arms and started up the stairs. Her head was crushed

against his chest and she heard the hard hammering of his heart. . . . Up the stairs, he went in the utter darkness, up, up, and she was wild with fear." It is a long way up, and a long paragraph. Arriving at last at the landing, he "bent over her and kissed her with a savagery and a completeness that wiped out everything from her mind but the dark into which she was sinking and the lips on hers." The writing is Mitchell at her fanciest: "She was darkness and he was darkness and there had never been anything before this time." And then—they are still on the stairs—"she had a wild thrill such as she had never known. . . . For the first time in her life she had met someone, something stronger than she, someone she could neither bully nor break, someone who was bullying and breaking her."



This neo-Victorian ravishment concludes in accord with the more historically appropriate wisdom of Anita Loos: "In those days," the sibyl of the twenties proclaimed, "a girl could wake up smiling." Scarlett O'Hara wakes up—it's the next thing we know—blushing, and filled with "the ecstasy of surrender." (In the movie, she warbles a little morning-after song; Mitchell's friend Susan Myrick, responsible for period authenticity, had first suggested "It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.") She worries about whether she can ever again even imagine herself to be a lady, but most of all she feels newly secure in love. What the "wild, mad night" has meant to her, finally, and what the old-fashioned "forceful persuasion" scene seems to mean generally to heroines and to readers, is proof resplendent of her own desirability. This is her satisfaction, and this is, ironically, her power ("Now she knew the weakness of his armor")—the only power she has ever thought to have. When "The Clansman" was reprinted in the early nineteen-forties, on the coattails of "Gone with the Wind," the book's new front cover identified it as a "world-famous love story"; the back cover advertised a line of "Love Stories" in cheap editions, with titles that ranged from "Pride and Prejudice" and "Wuthering Heights" to "Grand Hotel," "Prodigal Nurse," and "Impatient Virgin." Quite a slope. By the nineteen-fifties, the genre of

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romance fiction—settled into a kind of pinkies-up semi-pornography—was out-selling even mysteries, and by the nineteen-seventies it had become an assembly-line product far outselling all other categories of paperbacks, whether because of a reaction against feminism or the ingenuities of marketing or expanding leisure and cultural vacuity it is hard to say.

From national best-sellers to unnamable checkout-counter Harlequins, the “romantic” pattern was largely fixed. An academic study of the proliferating species—a study in the “ethnographies of reading”—by a Duke professor, Janice A. Radway, provides a precisely charted analysis of thirteen standard narrative events, or “functions,” that make up the fully evolved contemporary romance novel. Using Kathleen Woodiwiss’s particularly popular “The Flame and the Flower” as her main demonstration model—hero Brandon, heroine Heather—Radway outlines the rules of the game: function 1, the heroine’s social identity is destroyed; function 2, the heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male; and so on. In this way, Radway arrives at the ideal romance’s midpoint: “Although he continues to believe Heather is an opportunist and she herself remains angry with him over the rape (function 7), their emotional separation does not stop him from surprising her with especially thoughtful gifts (function 8).” No wonder Scarlett assumed she had something to smile about.

But the big upset in Margaret Mitchell’s story is her break with the very formula that she both exploited and exemplified: Scarlett O’Hara’s brush with sensual bliss is not the start of a long road disappearing into marital contentment. Probably the most rigorous aspect of “Gone with the Wind” is Mitchell’s unyielding detachment from her heroine. The author never falls for her creature’s charms, and she neither relents toward her faults nor forgives them. Scarlett’s halting moral and emotional development occurs in barely measurable increments: on page 947, she experiences “one of the few adult emotions” she has ever had, and it is not until page 1,031, almost the last in the book, that her husband’s unwonted show of grief over the death of their child elevates her to the point where for “the first time in

her life she had ever been sorry for anyone without feeling contemptuous as well, because it was the first time she had ever approached understanding any other human being.” It is, of course, too late.

Rhett Butler’s departure and his line “My dear, I don’t give a damn” have vexed many a sentimental heart. (The rhythmic upbeat of “Frankly” was added to the movie, and Scelznick, famously, had to fight for the right to “damn.”) Mitchell freely told everyone that she had written the ending first; she knew exactly what she was after. Considering the contrast between the author’s reckless first marriage and the resigned respectability of her second, and looking at the photographs in which she hardens and dries so conspicuously through her twenties and her thirties—as though Clara Bow were turning into Norma Shearer—one might imagine the revenge of a premature dowager on her own all too audacious youth. Yet even in the middle of that youth Mitchell seems to have had such an idea, such an ending, in mind. In letters written just after her time at Smith, she complains of her inability to complete a story she is working on, which is to conclude with a kiss at a wedding—a kiss by which a man deliberately lets a woman know that by marrying someone else she has just ruined her life. The fledgling author was having no end of trouble describing that all meaning kiss, but she did know that “when the insistent demand of his lips on hers makes her admit that she always would be his, then he’d leave.” (To which she appended, “I do see vast possibilities for ‘hot stuff’ in that passage!”)



When Macmillan’s reader suggested that Mitchell reduce the sense of finality in Rhett’s departure, she replied, “I’ll change it any way you want, except to make a happy ending.” Her intention, she firmly stated, was “to leave the ending open to the reader.” And so it has come to pass that Americans for more than half a century have divided into those who fully expect Rhett Butler to return to Scarlett O’Hara and those who know that he never will.

ON the seventy-third anniversary of the Battle of Atlanta, in July of 1937, a Confederate flag was flown

over the old city center at Five Points for the first time in general memory; it was the beginning of a new—or renewed—tradition. In a letter written that November, Mitchell reported to her publisher that “the book is on the required collateral reading lists of many high schools in the South, and even a number of junior high schools and grammar schools are using it.” She noted that “the sex angle” seemed to pass easily over the youngest heads, or had proved amenable to such interpretation as that of one “bright child”—aged eleven—whose school book report referred to Belle Watling’s brothel, in the scene where the heroic Klan members are sheltered there, as “the swankiest night club in Atlanta.” This happy example, she wrote, had given her a sense of relief: “After that I had no fears that I was polluting the youthful mind.”

What kind of moral responsibility does she bear, after all? The United States is a young country, and there have been many to accuse her of polluting the national mind—or, at least, of stirring up and adding cheap perfume to what has always lurked at the bottom of it. Accusations from the Northern and leftist press that her book amounted to “negro baiting” drew her most indignant, fluttering responses: “Personally I do not know where they get such an idea. . . . The negroes in this section have read it in large herds and while I have not heard as many comments as I would like to hear, my friends are continually telling me what colored elevator operators, garage attendants, etc., tell them and these colored people seem well pleased.”

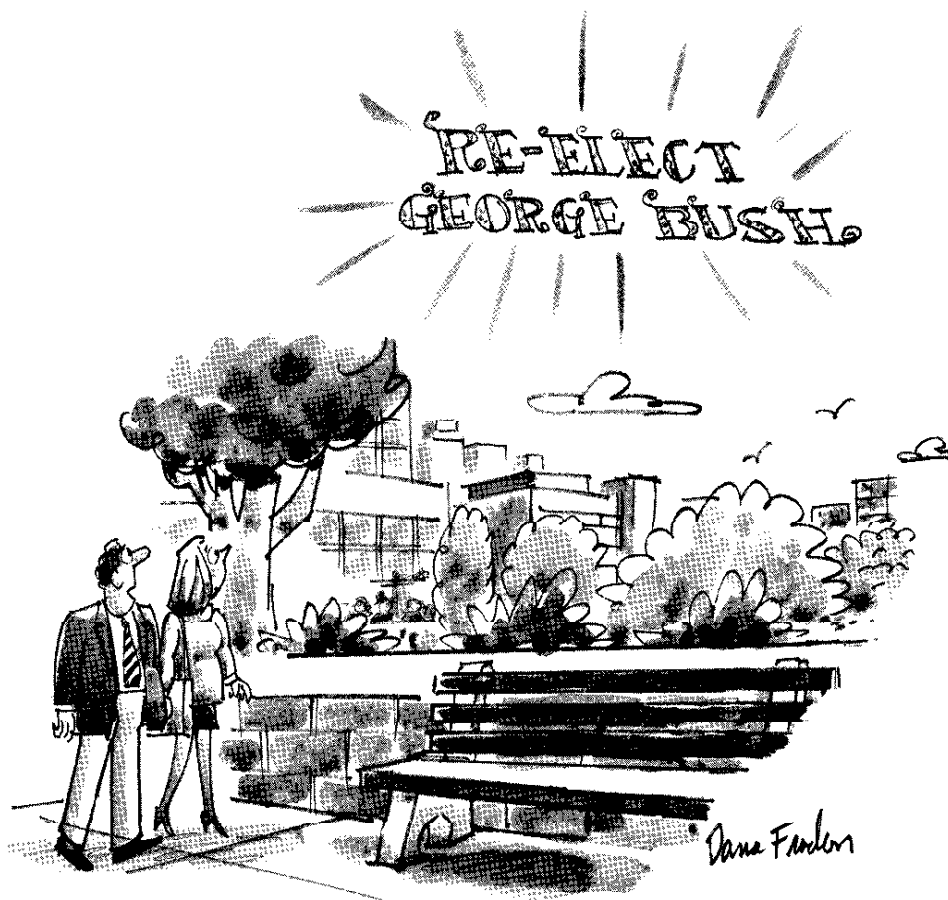
What seems clear is that Margaret Mitchell represented her time and place as accurately as she had intended Scarlett O’Hara to do: she was outraged innocence, she was a society more staunchly and unquestioningly segregated than any since slavery, she was her own Atlanta. In 1926, the year she began writing “Gone with the Wind,” a new city ordinance prohibited Negro barbers from serving white women or children; in 1940, the year after the movie’s release, another ordinance divided the city’s taxis according to the permitted race of passengers. And in the years between she wrote a love story that made such restrictions seem as natural and as warmly familial as weddings and jealousy.

It has been said that, while the

North won the war, Margaret Mitchell won the peace, and certainly Appomattox was no match for the big guns of Hollywood. The movie was carefully designed to soften many of the book's direct racial blows, except in the case of the dizzyingly imbecilic Prissy. ("I did everything they asked me to," Butterfly McQueen said, "except I wouldn't let them slap me and I wouldn't eat the watermelon. . . . I hated the part then.") David Selznick expanded Mammy's role (McQueen was counterbalanced by the august Hattie MacDaniel), and insisted that, in sum, "the Negroes come out decidedly on the right side of the ledger." But the seductiveness of the film swept all before it: by force of color and music, by the dynamics of movement and incident, and by the beauty of movie stars, "Gone with the Wind"—Selznick and Vivien Leigh's "Gone with the Wind"—became a glorification of the Old South such as had never been seen before.

On the eve of the Atlanta première, in December, 1939, a celebratory Junior League costume ball, for six thousand, managed to recapture, in the words of a local paper, "the days at Tara Hall, when every man was a master and every man had a slave." The entertainment that night alternated between the "hot music" of Kay Kyser's swing band and the spirituals of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr.'s Ebenezer Baptist Church choir, which performed in slave attire before a plantation backdrop, and included among the on-stage "pickaninnies" the minister's ten-year-old son, Martin, Jr. Mitchell did not attend the ball, but she was present, in full glory, at the next night's opening. And, give or take a few architectural details, the world of the movie was just as she had envisioned it: an Eden that knew no serpent until the Yankees came.

Selznick had from the start ruled out any presentation of the Klan, voicing fear that its appearance "might come out as an unintentional advertisement for intolerant societies in these fascist-ridden times." Even before his cameras were rolling, the book was on its way to becoming one of Germany's biggest sellers. At the time of the American Civil War, the German government, in the person of Bismarck, had identified with the triumphant North and the struggle to remain unified, but after 1918 Germany was no



*"I detect the fine hand of James Baker behind that."*

longer identifying with victors. One applicant for the job of translating "Gone with the Wind" into German stated in a letter to Macmillan that "it does not contain any ideas which could displease the Hitler government" (unlike the once popular works of Upton Sinclair, John Dos Passos, and Sinclair Lewis, which had been thrown onto the bonfires of 1933). "Vom Winde Verweht" had sold over three hundred and sixty thousand copies by 1941, at which time its message was revealed to the Nazi government as so mercurial, its value as propaganda so unreliable, that it was suddenly banned. The Germans, after allowing the book to appear in occupied countries, had discovered that they were not the only ones to identify with the rebels in gray who would not accept defeat. Mitchell received reports that her book was serving as "a great morale builder" in those countries, and that, as she wrote to her publisher, "occupied nations identified themselves with the South during Reconstruction, identified the Ku Klux Klan with the forces of the

Resistance, and were heartened by the thought that the South eventually got back its own state governments." In 1944, the *New York Journal-American* reported that bootlegged copies of the book were selling for sixty dollars in France and for nearly as much in Holland, Norway, and Belgium. According to the report, orders to seize all such copies had gone out, and people caught with the book in their possession were being shot.

A MORE current (and more credible) proof of the force of Mitchell's creation has been its ability to keep the recent sequel, Alexandra Ripley's "Scarlett," on the best-seller list for the better part of a year; indeed, this fact betokens a near-savage interest in finding out, after fifty-five years, what happened. Sequels or plans for sequels have abounded since 1936, and Mitchell was forever squelching "last chapter" contests, as well as whole manuscripts with titles like "Return of the Gentle Wind" or "Whispering Winds." She stated flatly and often that she would



never attempt a sequel herself, and her husband stood constant legal guard over the issue. "Not only would such a sequel be an 'unfair appropriation' of her skill," he wrote to Macmillan in 1938, "but it would also damage her through being an 'inferior imitation' (if we may judge by the sequels already written)."

Perhaps they should have just let it happen. What has been made of the job now seems almost inevitable, given the course of the woman's romance novel—Scarlett not as belle or vamp but as Cosmo girl, and suffering from painfully hardened prose implants. "I mustn't ever tell him again that I love him," she reproves herself. "That makes him feel pressured." This Scarlett hurries along thick carpets to embroidered bellpulls; she orders ice swans for her parties, and cases of champagne ("Scarlett did so like for things to be stylish"); she is a courageous shopper. But, writing aside, and critics aside, it is hard to believe that this "inferior imitation" has been satisfying to many readers, if only because no real connection is ever made with Mitchell's characters. Call them Rhett and Scarlett, call them Hamlet and Ophelia, these newcomers are not for a moment any other pair but Brandon and Heather. Of Mitchell's world the only recognizable sign is in the infamous injunction of her estate (a consortium of nephews and lawyers) against the presentation of explicit sex scenes, homosexuality, or miscegenation. F. Scott Fitzgerald said of "Gone with the Wind," "I felt no contempt for it but only a certain pity for those who considered it the supreme achievement of the human mind." In present company it may seem to its worshippers more supreme than ever.

A strenuous effort to throw off the stigma of decades of literary patronizing has been made in a recent biography of Margaret Mitchell, Darden Asbury Pyron's "Southern Daughter" (Oxford; \$26). As a historian, a Southerner by breeding and conviction, and a true "Gone with the Wind" believer, Pyron is well qualified for the task, but his attributes don't always cohere, and, at its extremes, his book veers between a bright-eyed folksiness—"Success slammed through the Mitchell-Marsh apartment on Seventeenth Street like

Huns and Tatars," he tells us—and a starkly conventional but tendentious academic voice, of which no sample is needed. He has emerged with a thorough and exacting but almost willfully earnest study that falters through the lack of any major new material to present—Mitchell's heirs destroyed everything within their reach—and a consequent falling back, for substance and novelty, on overstated theories about the psychological subtext of the novel.

Pyron has attempted what seems a counter-biography to the popular Anne Edwards account—popular both in its sales and in its tradition. Edwards, the author of yet another unpublished sequel (hers was part of a film project that failed) and also of biographies of Vivien Leigh and Judy Garland, wrote a clear and straightforward (dare one say "readable"?) story. Though it was generally well researched, and was the source of a number of the narrative incidents reported in the foregoing, Edwards' work suffered from errors based on misreadings of the newly available Macmillan Archive (she mistakenly suggests that Mitchell envisioned a happy ending) and an occasional stumble from a usually sensible tone into the likes of "Fury rose inside Peggy Mitchell's small-breasted chest." Still, her book seemed, over all, well suited to its subject.

Pyron's far weightier work suggests—almost seems to require—a darker figure at its center. He makes a great deal of a succession of illnesses and accidents that plagued Mitchell's life (her letters offer a barrage of boils and broken bones, of collisions with cars and with her furniture), and he takes her somewhat loose claim that she began writing her novel only because "I couldn't walk for a couple of years" as proof that, in his words, "she never failed to associate her fiction with disease and suffering." Mitchell's experience of physical pain was, according to Pyron, a determining element of what she finally wrote, and the writing itself thus becomes a story fulfilled only in "a chronicle of horrors—death, abandonment, rejection, alienation, smashed hopes, and fatal misunderstanding." Convinced that his heroine has been done wrong by a Northern

literary establishment that despised her politics and dismissed her art, Pyron is nothing if not zealous in supplying the required interpretative shadows—the "existential pessimism"—to prove to these critics that there was something to dismiss.

More persuasive shadows are brushed in with Pyron's portrait of Mitchell as an avid collector of pornography, a matter that was no great secret at the time among her friends; in a letter to her sister-in-law she refers easily to "a dog eared copy of 'Elsie Dinsmore' which, for appearances, I keep shelved between copies of 'Jurgen' and 'How Kate Lost Her Maiden Head' (a most informative volume)." Mitchell particularly doted on the case studies of Havelock Ellis, which she ordered from the "dirty book stores" in New York. A friend with whom she shared her treasures—at one time, she belonged to a kind of Atlanta hobby club—reported that her favorite Ellis history involved a case of male lust so extreme as to enforce disregard for its object's sex or species. As Pyron puts it, rather succinctly, "she dreamed of satyrs."

The point of Pyron's discussion is not to soil Mitchell's reputation but, on the contrary, to add dimension to it—to reveal her as a complex twentieth-century figure. (Perhaps he had in mind R. W. B. Lewis's revelations about Edith Wharton.) But Pyron stops at any exploration, or even acknowledgment, of the series of masks that Mitchell seems to have worn, of the elaborate playacting that characterizes her life—perhaps because this path would lead back, inevitably, to the treacherous issue of race. He bristles at the suggestion that an early story of hers turned upon miscegenation. (Apparently an attempt at Faulknerism, the story was destroyed after her death; the heroine, it might be noted, was named 'Ropa—short for Europa, of mythical godly ravishment.) It was Pyron who uncovered the episode of Mitchell's quitting the history course at Smith, but he minimizes its import with an observation on "her discomfort about living in the North."

In the end, though, and most curiously, Pyron crushes all the various modest possibilities of interpretation of Mitchell's book under a single monumental theory. After revealing the depths of the author's sexual preoccupations,



the biographer proposes a primary interpretation of "Gone with the Wind" as a search for The Mother—as a disquisition on the difficult relationship of mother and daughter. In this view, Rhett not only is not Mitchell's first husband (Pyron briskly dismisses Edwards' identification) but isn't even a man; rather, he is a stand-in for Maybelle Mitchell. And so, for good measure, is Tara: "the mythic mother. . . Maybelle Mitchell." Indeed, Pyron's "Gone with the Wind" is a romance

not between a hero and a heroine but between a woman and her mother, and the meaning of the novel is to be found, he reports, in Mitchell's sense of "the central, defining characteristic of women's lives—the birth experience." Aside from the reductionism of this notion, which seems almost purposefully at odds with the lessons that Maybelle Mitchell tried to teach her daughter, one can only wonder how it is to be reconciled with the life of the childless author herself.

If neither Edwards nor Pyron succeeds in bringing Mitchell quite to life, it must be acknowledged that they had little to work with, not only because so much material was destroyed but because of the absence in what abundantly remains of any sign that the woman developed her thoughts, that she reflected or reconsidered, or, indeed, that she had any interior life. This may be a result of deliberate secrecy and obfuscation, or perhaps there is some connection, after all, with the embrace of the accepted and the clichéd which marks her writing. Over the years, Mitchell came to seem increasingly mechanical in her responses, fierce about copyrights, and terrified of being forgotten. "I think the war, of course, had something to do with the cessation of public interest in me," she wrote in the fall of 1940, "and the election naturally diverted attention." Her death, in 1949—she was run over by an off-duty taxi-driver—was front-page news. Just a few months earlier, she had written a collegial note to William Faulkner—her first—saying that she thought he might like to see a reproduction of the Italian jacket cover of "Sanctuary" in a catalogue she had come across: "I showed it to a friend who is a great admirer of your books—Dear me—

how explicit the Italians are!" There is no record that he replied.

Margaret Mitchell is unlikely ever to join Faulkner or, for that matter, Harriet Beecher Stowe in the gleaming uniform rows of the classic Library of America editions. In the history of American literature—in all the published histories—her place, when she has one, is in a corner apart, as a vulgar aside having to do with numbers rather than words. She doesn't even make it onto the list of Best Civil



War Novels in either of the studies devoted exclusively to the genre. And, except for the sociologists of best-sellers, she has been as fully excluded from current reconsiderations of women's writing. "Gone with the Wind" hasn't a place in anyone's canon; it remains a book that nobody wants except its readers.

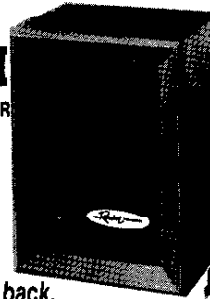
More than half a century after its publication, Mitchell's novel is an accepted American artifact, and still a symbol of the gaping cultural fissure that it once helped to define. As the great unnamed, "Gone with the Wind" hovers over a richly revealing 1962 essay on our national myths by Malcolm Cowley, Mitchell's longtime and most perceptive adversary. Cowley lists a succession of post-1920 literary legends: T. S. Eliot's spiritual wasteland, Fitzgerald's Jazz Age, Hemingway's Lost Generation, Erskine Caldwell's Tobacco Road, Steinbeck's Okies, and the "Southern cavalier legend," which, although more than a century old, "was raised to a new dimension by William Faulkner." Needless to say, the red earth of Tara—even from this myth-raising perspective—is not within Cowley's view, although he does go on to state that "it was during this period, too, that Troy was burned again in the shape of Atlanta." But in what book? Written by whom? The eminent critic concludes, "Hundreds of authors working in collaboration had given us another Iliad, of sorts." An American epic, then—of sorts. An American embarrassment, reflecting a society, an era, a nation: our Dunciad, our Scarlettiad. Blatant, commercial, disowned. There is, after all, some spark of justice in the fate of Margaret Mitchell's blundering colossus, condemned by posterity to live on triumphantly yet always separate and never, never equal.

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