

YOU CAN'T BE A LADY WITHOUT MONEY: AMERICAN MODERNISM IN
MARGARET MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND*

by

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I dedicate this research to Isabella and Rowan — too small to understand what a thesis is, they have been very patient with late night writing nonetheless.

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ABSTRACT

Scarlett O'Hara is not remembered as a symbol of American modernism. Since its publication in 1936, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* has been dismissed as historical romance with little literary value. This perception may be a testament to Mitchell's private nature and her desire to remain in the good graces of Southern society. Yet beneath Mitchell's melodramatic depiction of the South's collapse lies the story of a woman caught between two ages and forced to reckon with modern, chaotic circumstances that include rapacious consumerism and gender role reversals. Mitchell employs her own mythical method to align her narrative with Norse mythology, including Ragnarök, and to link her contemporary experience of the Great Depression with the collapse of the antebellum South and the destruction of an ancient world. Scarlett O'Hara emerges as a capitalist force with dynastic ambitions that mirror those of another hallmark modernist character: Thomas Sutpen of William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, which was also published in 1936. Through Scarlett, Mitchell explores her region's rigidly guarded yet evolving gender roles and presents a modern woman as heir to a new South.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO A BESTSELLER WRITTEN BY A HACK FEMALE NOVELIST | 1 |
| CHAPTER TWO: ALIENATION AND GENDER ROLES (UNSEXED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN) | 10 |
| CHAPTER THREE: A SOUTHERNER’S MYTHICAL METHOD | 25 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: SCARLETT O’HARA’S DYNASTY | 42 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: MARGARET MITCHELL’S PROPER PLACE | 55 |
| WORKS CITED | 65 |

CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to a Bestseller Written by a Hack Female Novelist

Since its original publication in 1936, *Gone with the Wind* has been almost entirely written off as popular, vulgar, or “low” fiction. Due, in part, to the monumental production and release of the motion picture — and ill founded remarks such as Malcolm Cowley’s assessment of the novel, which is the basis of this chapter’s title, in a September 1936 issue of *The New Republic* — the actual content of the book stood little chance of being held in high regard by the scholarly reader (161). Compounding this unlikelihood of a positive critical reception is the shadow cast by William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* which was published in the same year and remains a, if not *the*, hallmark of modernist literature from the American South. Both novels are set in the same region during the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction era, each work examining the lives and dealings of once prominent Southern families. However, the narrative style of these novels is substantially different, their treatment of history and slavery varies greatly, and one novel deals primarily with women while the other portrays this gender in a typical Faulknerian manner — as “other.” Furthermore, it would seem that each author had his or her own personal motives for retelling the South’s greatest tale. The difference that is perhaps the most telling, if not the most interesting to consider, is that Mitchell’s novel was written over the course of ten years with no apparent effort to publish prior to its completion. She began writing the novel as a hobby while she healed from an injury that kept her bedridden. *Absalom, Absalom!* was published well into Faulkner’s career, and he conceived, wrote, and revised the novel with the intention to publish. His story was written from a vantage point in that he was able to consider his

audiences' interpretations and craft his novel accordingly. Prior to her fateful meeting with Harold Latham, Macmillian's editor-in-chief, Mitchell had let only her husband, John Marsh, read the manuscript. One could argue that *Gone with the Wind* underwent a strenuous revision process spearheaded by a woman named Susan Prink, but Mitchell's correspondences document the adverse relationship she developed over her refusal to change many of the copy-editor's objections to style and grammar (Jones 186). While *Absalom, Absalom!* certainly deserves its critical acclaim, it is altogether inappropriate to measure *Gone with the Wind*'s significance in the shadow of Sutpen's Hundred, regardless of their proximity in publication date: *Gone with the Wind* merits its own literary discussion as a novel worthy of sustained scholarly analysis.

Academics commonly dismiss "pop culture" as shallow art that does little to challenge or improve the existing culture, and as an historical romance, *Gone with the Wind* initially received this label. In his critical review of the novel for *The Southern Literary Journal*, Floyd C. Watkins helped to bestow this reputation on the novel when he categorized Mitchell's book as "a bad novel" that romanticizes the Southern myth and "fails to grasp the depths and complexities of human evil and the significances of those who prevail" (89). His analysis, such as it is, fails to consider *Gone with the Wind* in reference to modernism. As a woman struggling between the superficial feminism of the Jazz Age and the traditional values still projected by the Southern woman, Mitchell was very much aware of the cultural mood that surrounded her while writing in the 1930s. The plight of individuals facing the end of their way of life is the driving force behind *Gone with the Wind*'s plot. The characters' navigation of their new society is an ordeal set amidst political corruption, feminism, growing consumerism, gender role reversals,

and alienation. Mitchell's presentation of complex social forces challenges Floyd C. Watkins' dated, yet still influential, summation of the novel as "vulgar literature." My aim is to reexamine this perception of the book and in order to establish the credibility of Mitchell and her novel as a previously under acknowledged component of American modernism.

Mitchell despised fame and so took great strides to protect her privacy. At her request, most of her letters and papers concerning *Gone with the Wind* were burned after her death. Fortunately, a few companions refused to comply with her wishes, and some of her letters still exist for review. With information from these letters and Darden Asbury Pyron's biography, entitled *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell*, it would not be remiss — nor would it be far fetched — to consider the personal details of Mitchell's upbringing, lifestyle, work ethic, and personal beliefs in reference to the style and content of *Gone with the Wind*. Mitchell embodied a combination of Southern etiquette with modern ideologies that allowed her to craft the novel in such a way that the true implications of the book are not readily seen without close analysis. The Civil War stories of her childhood entangled themselves in the psyche of a modern woman and enabled her to create a historical romance steeped in Southern mythology, yet bursting with twentieth century ideas and themes.

While modernism is a considerably slippery term that can encompass all branches of culture and society in the early twentieth century, Daniel Singal's summation of the modernist era offers a useful rubric for gauging Margaret Mitchell's standing as a modernist writer: "They [modernists] launched their rebellion with the express intention of countering what they felt was an unnatural repression of human vitality ordained by

Victorian culture” (7). *Gone with the Wind* is over one thousand pages of writing that describes the life events of Scarlett O’Hara, a woman who continually eschews Victorian, or antebellum, codes of conduct. Mitchell’s subtlety in her rebellion is due to her chronological positioning within the modern period. She was simply too close to the myths of the past to completely dismiss the old dichotomy. Her connection to the past was still too strong, the nostalgic stories still too fresh, for her to completely cast aside her personal foundation in lieu of a new world order. She sensed the cultural shift and understood that a new perspective on humanity would be necessary in order to navigate the transition; however, the ghosts of the Southern myth lingered in her psyche and prohibited her from rejecting tradition outright. Her approach suggests that reconciliation between the old and the new is ideal in the modern individual. Mitchell recognizes that “moral standards inevitably fluctuate with historical experience and must always be considered tentative” and this understanding is reflected in the characters, events, and setting of her novel (Singal 11). *Gone with the Wind* provides her perception of the cultural tensions in the 1930s American South through a combination of social analysis and literary technique.

Gone with the Wind offers an array of characters that contend with the chaotic forces of a failing society. The book examines the double standard of gender and the sense of alienation felt by those characters that are unable to occupy their assigned gender role. During the Civil War and the Reconstruction era, gender roles and the traits assigned to the sexes were clearly defined. *Gone with the Wind* centers on characters that refuse to inhabit these roles. In contrast, they are romantically paired with a partner who embodies the ideal gender traits. What emerges is a continuous commentary on the

Southern opinion of what makes a “woman” or a “man.” Mitchell establishes this commentary by exploring different modes of alienation that characters experience depending on the degree of their separation from their gender. The characters who are able to maintain the perception that they are the ideal man or woman are readily embraced by the community. For example, Mitchell contrasts Ashley Wilkes, his relationship with Melanie, and his social separation from other males in the novel. This pairing serves as a counterpoint for Scarlett’s alienation from society and her relationship with Rhett Butler, a man who also experiences estrangement. Ultimately, Mitchell positions Scarlett as the modern lady and Melanie as a traditional woman and uses this tension to explore the merits and detriments of each social construction of gender. The writer conveys her preference for the modern individual with a careful balance of tradition in order to mitigate the effects of isolation.

Typically, *Gone with the Wind* is described as a novel of the Southern myth; however, the story of the old South is not the only myth that Mitchell includes in her novel. Like other modernists, including Faulkner, Eliot, Woolfe, and Joyce, the author uses allusions and parallels from several mythologies in her plot describing the fall of the American Confederacy. Both Ashley Wilkes and Rhett Butler specifically reference *Götterdämmerung*, or the “Twilight of the Gods.” Ashley is frequently described as having Greek godlike qualities, and Scarlett considers the Wilkes’ family plantation, Twelve Oaks, as reminiscent of a Greek temple. Mitchell establishes early on that Ashley is the perfect illustration of a Southern gentleman, and in consistently equating him to a god, the author directly links him to the *Götterdämmerung* myth. This legend is also known as Ragnarök and refers to the apocalyptic battle where the Gods are defeated in

Norse mythology (O'Donoghue 74). The use of this comparison clarifies Mitchell's interpretation of the Civil War. This cataclysmic event in Southern history echoes the sentiment felt by modern individuals as they struggled to navigate a consumerist driven economy in the aftermath of World War I. In addition to layering her narrative with Norse and Greek mythology, Mitchell incorporates Irish mythology with Scarlett's physical description and familial pedigree and her decision to name the O'Hara plantation after the hill in Ireland from which many Irish kings descend: Tara Hill. Scarlett's connection to the land likens her to the Irish kings who ruled Tara Hill. This connection is crucial in understanding Mitchell's perspective during the modern era.

In seeking an answer to "Who will rule the new American South?", Mitchell selects a female who, while rejecting a traditional gender role and pursuing consumerism, is still strongly linked to Mother Earth. Scarlett is seduced and enormously successful in the capitalist atmosphere that engrosses the South during Reconstruction, but she is unwilling to compromise her connection to the earth, which represents organic humanity. Once again, Mitchell disregards the restrictive prescriptions of the past, but she does not allow her heroine to completely lose touch with her authentic self. Mitchell reconciles Victorian values with modernism — and by extension, Scarlett — by realigning the center of culture for the novel. The author's use of myth from multiple cultures is a key component of modernism, as evident in T.S. Eliot's description of the "mythical method" of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The joining of ancient myth with modern hardship illuminates the characters' nostalgia for the past while underscoring their determination to endure the present regardless of discomfort or confusion. A close examination of Mitchell's

“mythical method” reveals numerous connections between *Gone with the Wind* and the twentieth century struggle of the individual against reality.

Scarlett O’Hara embodies this struggle. A contradictory character, Mitchell allows her readers into the mind of Scarlett in an effort to illustrate the conflicted nature of a modern woman. Her emotions, morals, and behaviors fluctuate depending on her need or desire in the immediate situation. Readers and critics are unable to categorize Scarlett as occupying one specific polarity: good or evil. Her character forces readers to accept the presence of a “gray area.” Scarlett’s despicable traits are balanced by the financial responsibility for her family that she welcomes — in fact, it is seemingly unthinkable to Scarlett that anyone else would accept the position as “head of household” — and brief moments of sentiment that quickly remind readers that she is very much a complex being who not only excels at business, but also experiences typical human vulnerabilities. Mitchell positions Scarlett as the individual who would rise from the friction created as one era collapsed and another sprang into its place.

Scarlett’s genealogy underscores her capability to straddle two clashing worlds and still prevail. Born from the union between the Robillards, a Southern aristocratic dynasty, and a short, Irish upstart who had a knack for poker and drinking, Scarlett is the synthesis of the manners and mentality required in order to flourish in her changing society. In this sense, the Robillards represent the Victorian ideals that were still prevalent in the American South during Mitchell’s childhood, and Gerald O’Hara signifies the “human animal” that many modernists were anxious to connect with. While some critics, including Anne Goodwyn Jones and Amanda Adams, suggest that the Civil War “forces” Scarlett to respond with overwhelming capitalist desire, I would argue that

the war liberates Scarlett and allows her to behave in such a way that she shares similarities with Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen. However, Mitchell cushions this masculine characterization of Scarlett with the understanding that extreme situations call for extreme measures. Scarlett's journey as an individual who embraces modernity while maintaining a semblance, at the very least, of the traditional values in which she was raised provides considerable insight into the minds of Depression-era Southern women, a group about whom Goodwyn Jones posits: "It is conceivable that Mitchell and other Southern women saw in the changed mores of the twenties the possibility that qualities they admired in an earlier generation could be resuscitated and reincorporated into their culture" (330).

Recent decades have seen new life breathed into "closed" texts at the urging of literary critic Umberto Eco, who asserts that art consumed by the masses (i.e. pop culture) is well worth scholarly endeavor or discussion. Eco's opinion of critics who are similar to Watkins in his disapproval of pop culture is scathing: "Not only does the [critic] reduce the consumer to that undifferentiated fetish that is mass man ... he himself reduces the mass-produced object to a fetish. Rather than analyze these products individually in order to render their structural characteristics visible, the [critic] negates them *en bloc*" (Eco 25). There is no question that *Gone with the Wind* has been dismissed *en bloc*; however, the purpose of this thesis is to begin an excavation of the novel that will challenge the book's reception as solely a historical romance and aide in elevating Mitchell's reputation as a modernist author worthy of critical discourse. This thesis will dissect the ways in which *Gone with the Wind* exhibits themes and images consistent with modern American literature. While *Gone with the Wind* does not achieve the historical or

narrative depth of Faulkner's masterpiece, *Absalom, Absalom!* However, the novel and its author merit inclusion in the modern American literary canon. The conventional notions surrounding the novel are archaic and outdated.

CHAPTER TWO

Alienation and Gender Roles (Unsexed Ladies and Gentlemen)

Above all else, Margaret Mitchell considered herself to be a southerner, but that cultural identity had become increasingly complex as the 1920s advanced. The economic and social upheaval of the 1920s instigated many progressive changes for women of the time. Even so, certain regions, such as the American south, attempted to uphold the cultural traditions of the past. As a young girl, Mitchell received contradictory definitions of womanhood. Her southern roots still valued the submissive, dependent, and gentle ideal of femininity while her peers embraced the Jazz Age and the freedom of the flapper. Mitchell's mother, Maybelle Stephens, bestowed southern manner and tradition onto her children but believed that in order to best equip them for adulthood, she must also instill a value for self-reliance, independence, and a fortitude of spirit should they meet with hard times. As a result, Mitchell partook in many pastimes of southern girls, such as the Debutante Club, only to be later excluded from the Junior League for failing to completely acquiesce to the social guidelines set during her days as a debutante (Goodwyn Jones 330). Additionally, the sororities of Washington Seminary did not see fit to extend any invitations to Mitchell. She had clearly set herself apart from what was deemed proper for young women in 1920s Atlanta. No doubt the alienation Mitchell felt is mirrored in Scarlett's own separation from her female peers. Nor is it surprising that Mitchell refrained from forming very many close friendships with other women during her lifetime. The culmination of her upbringing and the region in which she was raised

produced conflicting definitions of southern womanhood and a feeling of alienation due to Mitchell's inability to adhere to proper standards of conduct.

While many of the characters in *Gone with the Wind* endure a separation from society, Scarlett's experiences merit close examination in light of the plight of modern women such as Mitchell. In a succinct summary of Mitchell's personal experience and how it relates to her writing, Anne Goodwyn Jones comments that "what does seem clear is that the confusions of being an Atlanta woman growing up in the 1920s, with the conflicting definitions of family heritage, traditional ladyhood, and contemporary mores...surfaced from time to time throughout her life and affected her imagining of the South during the middle nineteenth century in *Gone with the Wind*" (332). This chapter provides an analysis of Mitchell's use of alienation in *Gone with the Wind* and its relationship to gender in order to understand how the author expressed her own struggles as a conflicted woman in the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, the analysis will provide an in-depth exploration of Scarlett and Melanie's relationship and attempt to comprehend how Mitchell uses these characters to gauge the merits of both traditional ladies and modern women.

In the face of social and political upheaval, modernism sought to realign the center of the culture. The resulting feeling was one of general mistrust of authority and alienation from the values of the previous generation and the society that produced these values. The modernist writers and artists experienced alienation best described as a condition of permanent marginalization. Mitchell echoed this sentiment in her own life as well as the lives of her characters. As a tomboy who later became one of the first female reporters for the *Atlanta Journal*, Mitchell knew the realities of a marginalized existence

first hand. Isolation, and how it relates to assigned gender, is a central theme in the novel. It is a condition that is felt by multiple characters both before the onset of the Civil War and well into the aftermath of Reconstruction. In particular, Ashley Wilkes and Scarlett O'Hara are unable to fully reconcile themselves into any social group. The reason for their constant alienation is due to their misalignment with the gender roles they are supposed to embody. Ashley is an effeminized male while Scarlett exhibits characteristics that are unbecoming for a lady and, therefore, considered to be innately masculine. Scarlett and Ashley's lack of appropriate gender qualities creates an irony that ultimately alienates the two from their peers before and after the Civil War. The distinction of "before and after" is important because it signals a change, yet Scarlett's and Ashley's sense of alienation remains constant. This perpetual marginalization is key to understanding *Gone with the Wind* as a modernist text.

One of the central male figures of the novel, Ashley Wilkes spends his existence on the fringes of the social circles that he is accepted into based on his appearance and familial connections. Although Scarlett sees him as a "Perfect Knight," the other ladies and gentlemen continually comment on his "queerness" (16). Ashley is the ideal specimen of a southern gentleman; it is his passion for "music and books and scenery" that separates him from his male peers (16). Clayton County's distaste for a man with these interests is conveyed in Mrs. Tarleton's judgmental remarks to Gerald O'Hara about the Wilkes: "That family needs new blood, fine vigorous blood like my red heads or your Scarlett... They are over bred and inbred too, aren't they?" (89). Although Ashley sports pedigree, money, and manners of a gentleman, his masculinity is under scrutiny from his neighbors, and their suspicion creates a natural atmosphere of "us"

(fellow Clayton County residents) and “them” (the Wilkes family). While Mitchell does not state outright that Ashley is effeminized, she indicates as much in bestowing a feminine name on this character and by pairing Ashley to Melanie—a woman who is viewed as a traditional lady. On the evening before their wedding, Ashley describes why he believes their marriage will be a happy one: “We are alike, Melanie, loving the same quiet things, and I saw before us a long stretch of uneventful years in which to read, hear music and dream” (212).

In the opening pages of *Gone with the Wind*, Ashley immediately sets himself apart from his peers by verbalizing his apprehension of the upcoming war: “Let’s don’t be too hot headed and let’s don’t have any war. Most of the misery of the world has been caused by wars. And when the wars were over, no one ever knew what they were all about” (109). His preference for peace contrasts with the zeal of his fellow gentlemen and, by default, aligns Ashley with the traditionally female traits of pacifism, fear, and weakness. Ironically, Ashley’s voluntary participation in the war despite his issues with the endeavor is a submissive action that further undermines his fledgling image of masculinity. Out of the four predominant characters, Ashley spends a majority of the novel separated from his wife and the social circles of Georgia. His feelings of alienation are conveyed to Melanie in his letters from the front; Ashley is separated not only from his original society, but also from his brothers in arms and the cause they so strongly believe in: “Nothing is worth what is happening to us now and what may happen, for if the Yankees whip us the future will be one of incredible horror” (212).

The post-war south that Ashley returns to is one so foreign that he likens the cultural shift to the “Dusk of the Gods” (527). Already marginalized due to his

effeminate personality traits, the crevice between Ashley and functioning society is irrevocably enlarged once his power, money, and plantation are gone. The new world order requires endurance and the ability to physically work for one's survival.

Unfortunately, Ashley realizes his lack of value in the new society: "And I am fitted for nothing in this world, for the world I belonged in has gone... I can't help you, Scarlett, except by learning with as good grace as possible to be a clumsy farmer" (527). Ashley now occupies a role of dependency, and he is the worst kind of dependent for that time—a man who relies on a woman. Ashley's separation from his society is reinforced at the moment he dejectedly accepts Scarlett's offer to run one of her saw mills. After the war, Ashley has the chance to move to New York and obtain employment at a bank (725). This job is his first real prospect to financially support his wife and child since the fall of his aristocratic family. Mitchell places Ashley in this situation to underscore how truly weak he is in comparison to Scarlett's character. He succumbs to her manipulation and ultimately decides against this opportunity to fulfill the masculine role of a provider for his own family. Ironically, Ashley admits that he "cannot fight [Scarlett and Melanie] both" (729). As a male in the patriarchal south, he most definitely **could** fight them both; however, he crumbles under their weight and permanently severs his ties with acceptable masculine society.

Floyd Watkins asserts that Ashley's character is tragic due to his self-awareness (90). Ashley's self-knowledge is incorrect, because he believes it is his "old world spirit" that condemns him to failure. It is perhaps a more accurate analysis to note that Ashley's inability to occupy a space of masculine power is at the root of his lifelong alienation from society both before and after the cultural upheaval of the Civil War. He is content to

spend his days longing for the past in a reverie instead of rising to the challenges that confront the new south. It is Ashley's lack of initiative and his inability to take on a leadership position within his own family that is evidence of his tragic existence. Mitchell even allows Rhett to comment on Ashley's character, or lack thereof, including passively labeling him as "quite the little gentleman" (895). Rhett's sarcastic tone and belittling description of Ashley elucidates Ashley's overall uselessness and lack of substance for both Scarlett and the readers. Mitchell constructs Rhett and Ashley as mirror images. In Scarlett's view, Ashley is the ideal southern gentleman prior to the war, but her opinion of him slowly deteriorates until she realizes that he is nothing but a façade of manners: "I made a pretty suit of clothes and fell in love with it. And when Ashley came riding along, so handsome, so different, I put that suit on him...I kept on loving the pretty clothes—not him at all" (1016). In comparison, Rhett is considered a scoundrel and is not received in polite households, but he continually proves himself to be more reliable, more capable, and more masculine than Ashley. The crux of this change in perception regarding the two men is the Civil War, which signals the end of their old way of life and the birth of a new era. Ashley's diminishing worth illustrates the modern society's need for strong individuals who are equipped for survival, such as Rhett and Scarlett.

As a counterpoint for Ashley's "soft" male, Mitchell creates Scarlett's strong personality that enables her to occupy a traditionally masculine role. Scarlett is the personification of ambition, strength, endurance, and cunning; as a woman who possesses these traits, Scarlett is marginalized from the onset of *Gone with the Wind*. In preparation for the Wilkes' barbeque, Scarlett expresses her frustration at having to hide her intellect in order to obtain a husband: "I'm tired of saying, 'How wonderful you are!' to fool men

who haven't got one-half the sense I've got, and I'm tired of pretending I don't know anything, so men can tell me things and feel important while they're doing it" (79).

Scarlett's insight into gender relationships immediately places her in a position of contrast to her female peers. Furthering this separation is Scarlett's willingness to be direct in voicing her desires—a quality that earns her the reputation of being “a fast piece,” and prohibits her from maintaining any female friendships (122). The women of the county recognize that Scarlett's ladylike exterior is a performance, and this breeds mistrust and suspicion. Scarlett is a threat to the order of their social structure since she does not play by the proper rules of southern ladyhood; the result is a divide between Scarlett and the other women who cling together to form a coalition against her.

Mitchell's description of Scarlett paints a portrait of a modern woman who is ostracized from her gender because she does not subscribe to the assigned feminine role of the era.

After the Yankees capture Atlanta, Scarlett unknowingly returns to Tara as its new mistress. The world has changed, and the hardships of war have partially liberated Scarlett from the antiquated social codes. The new social order allows, and requires, Scarlett to utilize her masculine traits to ensure the survival of her family, and Scarlett openly prefers this freedom (925). Whereas Ashley wallows in the death of the past, as Louis Rubin, Jr. states, Scarlett “believes in real life and not in playing a role in a game of charades. Historically, she represents the spirit of enterprise, of ambition, of practical achievement; she is what the South felt that it *had to be* after 1865” (97). She naturally assumes the role of “head of the house” without any question or protest from the family and servants at Tara; this appropriation of the patriarch's role is a testament to her innate masculinity that makes her the obvious choice for a leader. Her newfound freedom and

control enable the survival of those at Tara; however, Scarlett is repeatedly criticized for being mean, bossy, or too demanding (491). Essentially, she is reprimanded for being in charge, requiring other members of the family to work below their station, and inhabiting a man's role on the demolished plantation. Mitchell's belief in a capable, independent woman is conveyed through Scarlett's success as the "master" of Tara. During this time, Scarlett's drive to once again see Tara as a profitable plantation saves her family from perishing due to starvation or illness.

Furthermore, when the incredibly high taxes on Tara are due and the family risks losing the entire property to "trashy poor whites," Scarlett devises a way to secure the money needed to save her home (539). It is worth noting that Scarlett resorts to this plot only after appealing to Ashley for help. He offers no solution and essentially admits defeat at the hands of their new society (527-530). Again, Ashley has failed to embrace his masculine potential, and Scarlett must rely on herself to assume the role of the hero. While it is apparent that Scarlett reverts to her feminine masquerade in order to lure Frank Kennedy into marriage, she does so to secure the taxes for Tara. Scarlett is still seated in a position of power despite her regression into wifedom. The rescue of Tara from the tax collectors demonstrates Scarlett's ability to achieve her desires in any way necessary. Her strength and aptitude further "unsex" her and expand the distance between Scarlett and polite southern society. As *Gone with the Wind* progresses through the Reconstruction era, Scarlett continues to alienate herself in the name of survival. In evaluating the theme of survival in the novel, Goodwyn Jones notes that "carried to its extreme, self-reliance becomes isolation and solipsism" (339).

Scarlett's marginalization is a condition that she never truly escapes. She believes that she has found new friends in the northern women who move south during Reconstruction. She perceives these ladies to be more in tune with the masculine qualities that separate Scarlett from the other southern women. Unfortunately, she feels disconnected from these northern women, ironically, due to their lack of a unified cultural history similar to that experienced by southerners. This portion of the novel is steeped in a sense of alienation as Scarlett comes to realize that she has no friends or relatives with whom she may socialize. She begins to yearn for the company of her old companions but understands that this is not possible due to the enormous gulf between she and them: "They were veterans [of the old south]. She was a veteran too, but she had no cronies with whom she could refight old battles" (1003). Rhett accepts Scarlett and actually admires her sharp intellect and determination. He, too, is alienated from southern society, and they experience a close bond because of this shared ostracism.

Mitchell describes a balance between the feminine (the traditional) and masculine (the modern) through an extended evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Scarlett and Melanie as individual women. In his article, "Scarlett O'Hara and the Two Quentin Compsons," Louis Rubin suggests that Mitchell describes the traits of one flawed human being through the very different personalities of Scarlett and Melanie (102). Rubin is correct in the assertion that readers are given two opposing perspectives of the same events through Scarlett and Melanie; however, Mitchell's characterization of the two women should not be limited to two unreconciled halves of the same story. Melanie's importance as a central figure in *Gone with the Wind* is apparent. She is introduced, in name only, on the ninth page of the manuscript and is rarely absent from the narrative

until her earthly departure in the novel's final pages. Melanie embodies all of the characteristics that Scarlett should but does not possess as a woman of her station but does not. As discussed previously, Scarlett exhibits qualities required for survival during the tumultuous era but fails at behaving like a lady. Mitchell creates a balancing act between the two characters with Melanie representing the traditional aspects of a lady and Scarlett portraying the modern woman. This delicate equilibrium is indicative of the complex nature of Mitchell's own role as a southern woman in the 1930s: the relationship between Melanie and Scarlett is a personal exploration in which Mitchell attempts to put to rest the conflicting ideals that had dominated her life until that point.

In the pages of *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett almost always gets what she desires. A master of manipulating others to reach her goals, Scarlett very seldomly allows Rhett to rescue her beyond his excessive financial support. Interestingly, Melanie comes to the aid of Scarlett more than any other character. Although much to Scarlett's chagrin, she cannot help but recognize and value Melanie's reliability and resourcefulness. Mitchell carefully chooses each instance in which Melanie's involvement ensures success in order to illustrate the necessity for balance between tradition and modernity in the new era. Initially annoyed by Melanie's loyalty, Scarlett feels quite capable of handling her own business: "of all the people in the world, she didn't want Melly as a defender. She could defend herself, thank you, and if the old cats wanted to squall—well, she could get along without the old cats" (197). Melanie's defense of Scarlett comes after Rhett's "purchase" of Scarlett as a dance partner during an auction at a Confederate ball in Atlanta. The elders of the community, including Scarlett's parents, are scandalized due to Scarlett's current status as a widow. Melanie's insistence that Scarlett danced only for the

Confederate Cause preserves Scarlett's reputation as a decent and moral southern lady. Mitchell demonstrates the value of maintaining a positive reputation despite breaking with tradition. Theoretically, had it not been for Melanie's intervention, Scarlett's dances with Captain Butler would have ruined her name, barred her acceptance into polite southern society, and there would be no story. This potentially disastrous social faux pas bears a semblance to Mitchell's own exclusion from Atlanta's "upper crust."

As their hardships begin to mount, so does that severity of situations in which Scarlett needs Melanie's assistance. The two women return to Tara along with their children and Prissy. Technically in Yankee held territory, the house survives and serves as a refuge for the group. Scarlett frequently defies authority in *Gone with the Wind*, but the post-war events at Tara deal directly with Scarlett's distrust and hatred for the northern force that once again governs the recently crippled south. Rage fills Scarlett as she unflinchingly shoots and kills a Yankee soldier who intends to further pillage Tara. She does not waver in her decision to defend herself and her home from this Yankee; however, the consequences for murdering a representative of the Union Army are not absent from her thoughts. While Scarlett's tenacity enables her to kill the Yankee soldier, Melanie facilitates the cleaning of the scene with her nightgown and smoothly lies to the family to cover for the gunshot they heard. Melanie's aid and cool demeanor ensure a successful cover up of the murder and guarantee that Scarlett will not face consequences for the Yankee's death. Scarlett implies an emotional link between the two women, and, in doing so, she alludes to their reliance and necessity for one another: "Why—why—She's like me! She understands how I feel!...She'd have done the same thing" (441). Each woman served a role in this violent defiance against authority, and through their

specific actions Mitchell illustrates that the two women are their most powerful when their qualities are joined as one force.

The author reiterates this stance the second time Yankees visit Tara. A spiteful Yankee soldier is angered when Scarlett speaks out against his desire to confiscate her son's sword, a family heirloom and favored plaything of Wade Hampton. The Yankee retaliates by setting fire to the plantation's kitchen. This fire represents Scarlett's punishment for defying the northern soldier until Melanie steps in to help Scarlett extinguish the flames. Melanie ensures the plantation's safety as Scarlett's back had caught fire, and she would have been severely injured before successfully putting out the fire. At this point in the narrative, Mitchell allows Scarlett a moment of insight: "I'll say this for her ... She's always there when you need her" (470). Melanie's reliability echoes the stability of steadfast tradition. By underscoring Scarlett's appreciation of such a friend — a friend who represents the customary ideal of a woman — Mitchell furthers her support for both the traditional and the modern within the new world order.

Despite Melanie's capacity to assist when Scarlett cannot save herself, Mitchell provides instances in which Scarlett is beyond help, and in which Melanie must occupy a feminine role that Scarlett cannot. The domestic realm of Scarlett's life is riddled with moments of tragedy due to poor communication and missed opportunities. These circumstances are exasperated by Scarlett's lack of compassion for her children and Rhett. She seems utterly incapable of nurturing her children; however, Melanie adores children and develops a close relationship with each of Scarlett's children. Scarlett is bothered by this obvious preference for "Auntee" but makes no attempt to mend her strained relationships with her children (431). Furthermore, it is Melanie who

emotionally supports Rhett when he is distraught. After Scarlett's miscarriage of their second child, Melanie visits Rhett's bedroom and what follows is a scene of raw emotion as Rhett drunkenly confesses his insecurities and heartbreak over Scarlett (966). An exchange of this nature would be the height of impropriety between any man and woman other than husband and wife, yet Mitchell allows the incident to casually play out and conclude without scandal.

Again, Melanie offers Rhett support and understanding shortly after Bonnie's death. While Rhett refuses to see anyone, including Scarlett, he allows Melanie into his bedroom a second time, and she puts him to bed. The narrator is not privy to the conversation between Rhett and Melanie but does insinuate some state of undress on Rhett's behalf: "[Mammy] heard the creaking of the bed as a heavy body fell upon it and, soon after, the sounds of boots dropping to the floor" (998). Unquestionably, Melanie has witnessed an act that would only be appropriate for Rhett's wife to view. For readers, these moments are uncomfortable as they are evidence of the Butler's unraveling marriage. However, Scarlett's cold demeanor and Melanie's role as substitute wife and mother illustrate a lesson in how to handle oneself as a lady. Mitchell was wise enough to comprehend that despite the progress in the 1920s, one still needed to maintain some connection to the past's feminine ideal. Mitchell had experienced alienation due to her own inability to behave like a proper southern girl. The complex relationship between Scarlett and Melanie is the author's attempt to explore and reconcile the two conflicting definitions of womanhood that permeated Mitchell's youth.

In having Melanie interject at times when it seems like Scarlett may fail, Mitchell suggests that the modern individual needs to be balanced with the traditional ways or risk

losing everything to extreme selfishness, isolation, and financial greed. This comparison between the two women extends throughout *Gone with the Wind* and allows readers to assess the benefits and detriments of each characterization. According to traditional standards, Scarlett is perceived as cold, heartless, and undesirable; however, Melanie's effeminate character is perpetually described as weak and frail despite her kindness. While Mitchell may allow the evaluation of the traditional female versus the modern woman to play out for a majority of the novel, she makes her support for the modern woman inarguable. In simple terms, Melanie dies, and Scarlett prevails to live in the new society. The cause of Melanie's death is symbolic in solidifying this preference. Melanie dies due to a miscarriage of her second child. It is worth noting that the birth of Melanie's first child almost kills her, and multiple characters advise against the conception of a second child. Mitchell foreshadows the demise of the traditional lady in this way. Melanie's difficulty with procreation is in stark contrast to Scarlett who is pregnant a total of four times in the story and intends on having another child with Rhett at the novel's close (1002). Mitchell implies that only individuals such as Scarlett can carry the future of the society, literally the offspring. Yet, Mitchell underscores the value of a balance between the feminine and masculine (or the traditional and the modern) through Scarlett's mental repentance and vow to change the way she has treated Melanie: "“Oh, God,' she prayed rapidly, 'do, please, let her live! I'll make it up to her. I'll be so good to her'" (1010).

Mitchell furthers Scarlett's realization of necessity for this balance with Scarlett's nostalgic recollection that Melanie had always supported her and quietly fought alongside her (1012). The result is a glimpse into the plight of a modern individual who is

struggling to carve out his or her own identity in the southern culture of both the 1860s and the 1930s. Ultimately, the death of the archaic southern lady is cemented by Rhett's solemn observation that the "only completely kind person [he had] ever knew" had passed away (1025). The "very great lady" of the south has been laid to rest after failing to withstand the complexities of the modern era (1025). Upon Melanie's death, Scarlett transcends beyond her masculine qualities to inhabit a role that now includes the love, compassion, vulnerability, and understanding that Melanie once displayed. The final pages describe a Scarlett who comprehends the value of these traits, and she intends on correcting her past mistakes. The weaker of the two, Melanie, does not survive but finds a place within Scarlett to create a new ideal of womanhood. In this way, Mitchell endorses the modern woman with an emphasis on balancing the traditional in order to minimize the drawbacks associated with alienation as a result of assigned gender roles. This balance between the traditional lady and the modern woman allowed Mitchell the promised freedoms of the Jazz Age and the social acceptance of her beloved south. Maintaining a steadiness between the old and new was a compromise that Mitchell ultimately accepted. As she remarked in her personal letters: "There are more rules to be followed here than any place in the world if one is to live in any peace and happiness. Having always been a person who was perfectly willing to pay for anything I got, I am more than willing to pay for the happiness I get from my residence in Georgia" (Farr 165).

CHAPTER THREE

A Southerner's Mythical Method

Much can be said about the characteristics of the modern American literary movement, but assigning an exact definition is difficult. While there are a number of devices that undoubtedly signal a modernist classification — stream of consciousness, atypical form, the expatriate setting — the methods of modernism are often in opposition when comparing several pieces of work. Some authors were more flamboyant in their flaunting of conventional standards: James Joyce, Virginia Wolfe, and William Faulkner. Others, such as T.S. Eliot and Robert Frost chose to employ traditional elements in order to discuss nontraditional ideas in a way that sought to realign the center of their culture. Margaret Mitchell belongs in this latter group. In *Gone with the Wind*, she relies on one element throughout the entirety of her novel: the myth.

Originally described by Eliot in reference to Joyce's "Ulysses," the mythical method is the author's way of, "controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot 177). The use of the mythical method would be entirely appropriate in both a Civil War/Reconstruction era and a modern American time period. *Gone with the Wind* abounds with symbols, allusions and themes from ancient myth. Many central events and figures in European mythology overlap to some degree, and Mitchell's incorporation of mythologies found in Greek, Irish, and Norse cultures is readily seen and embodied by numerous characters and events in Scarlett's story. Mitchell wraps her mythical references in the most relevant apocalyptic event in American history: the Civil War and the myth of the Old South. The vehicle of the Southern myth is as effective for

the 1930s American populace as the myths of antiquity are for the characters in *Gone with the Wind*. In layering her story of an individual's triumph against the previous cultural authority (the antebellum South) with various mythical references, Mitchell is able to realign the center of what she perceives to be the new culture of America — survival in the face of capitalist consumerism, prescribed social norms, and an industrialized landscape. At times, Mitchell's use of the "mythical method" echoes T.S. Eliot's own technique and allusion in "The Wasteland," a style that, Franco Moretti asserts, functions to "tame polyphony. To give it a form and meaning" (Moretti 227). Mitchell creates a lineage, a connection, between multiple points in history, and in doing so, she not only validates the feelings of Depression-era individuals but also gives them hope, courage and answers by harkening back to the great societies that came before them to face similar hardships. In the pages of the novel, ancient archetypes are employed to illuminate modern circumstance, but they aren't used to reinforce existing hierarchies. Rather, the connection between myth and modernity, in relation to the events of *Gone with the Wind*, gives strength to those attempting to redefine American culture during the modern era. This is key as to why Mitchell's novel should be reevaluated for its contribution to modern American literature. As Richard Harwell notes, "*Gone with the Wind* was in effect that mythical desideratum of Southerners, an 'unbiased history of the war from the Confederate point of view'" (47-48).

Published during a time when most Americans had faced tremendous loss or complete devastation, the novel became a symbol. Many felt that in describing Scarlett's history, Mitchell was putting words to their own personal stories (Michener 73). The mythic dimension bestowed on Mitchell's own emotions and their literary representations

create this effect. Readers feel connected to the archetypal themes that Mitchell uses to illustrate circumstance and sentiment through her novel; they identify with the book on multiple levels: an individual's struggle against overwhelming authority, the realization that one's "world" is unstable and malleable, a society attempting to grapple with the aftermath of war and trying to navigate a new economy, and the dissolution of social and gender-based norms. In "'Ulysses,' Order and Myth," Eliot asserts, "in creation you are responsible for what you can do with material you must simply accept. And in this material I include the emotions and feelings of the writer himself, which, for that writer, are simply material which he must accept" (177). Unable to escape the cultural upheaval of the 1920s-1930s, Mitchell paralleled her experience to mythical stories from her childhood. The novel urges its audience to stand in the face of authority, reject total conformity and warns against becoming overly attracted to the "cult of acquisition." Mitchell's redrawing of social norms is presented in a subtle manner due to her use of mythology, specifically the myth of the old South. Because of the multiple layers of mythology that evoke a sense of traditional romance, Mitchell subtly suggests such ideas without being discredited as eccentric or disruptive. This romance makes the novel much more tolerable according to the social norms of Mitchell's time while allowing the subtext and themes of *Gone with the Wind* to take root in readers' minds.

Mitchell redefined the role of women as a heroic individual in the new American myth. Frankly, the events of Scarlett's life, given the historical period in which Mitchell places her, are wholly unrealistic. The idea that any person could successfully manipulate a host of people for decades is quite far-fetched, even more so for an aristocratic woman of the Civil War South. In actuality, Scarlett would have encountered a force at some point

— presumably patriarchal in nature — that prohibited her from successfully executing her dynastic and emotionally catastrophic desires. In creating the fictional world of *Gone with the Wind*, Mitchell hoped to inspire women of the modern period to see the decay of their current culture, recognize their own value and strength, and seek a way to travel their own paths in the shift of modern America. Mitchell passed this idea into the hands of roughly 1,383,000 readers within a year of publication due to her mythical method. She uses tradition for her benefit by relying on the American society's comfort with mythology and employs these stories, images, and themes as a vehicle to progress her own modern ideals for the individual. Mitchell "tames the polyphony" with her technique, but it is not her personal polyphony; it is the raucous clashing of prevalent ideologies that emerged as America's hierarchies crumbled. *Gone with the Wind* demonstrates how modernism springs from the frictions between myth and reality, counterpoint and polyphony, tradition and modernity.

Out of the layers of mythology that Mitchell writes into her novel, the most apparent is the connection to Greek gods, goddesses, and culture. Mitchell's decision to place the references to ancient Greece in such a straightforward manner may be due to the setting of her story. Greek revival architecture was very common among Southern plantations in the antebellum era, and in describing the houses of the style, Mitchell immediately depicts an ideal world suitable for deities. This surface layer of mythology is furthered in her characters' dialogue. Through allowing her characters to liken themselves to gods, Mitchell indirectly encourages readers to also connect themselves with the myths of the past. This technique creates a sense of nostalgia for a past to which

1930s readers could relate. Mitchell uses tradition to realign the center of culture through creating a link between myth and reality.

Ashley Wilkes is repeatedly described as having Greek god-like qualities. When Scarlett notes, “the sun gleamed on [his] gold hair,” she suggests a connection between Ashley and the Greek sun god, Apollo (108). After the war, Scarlett again equates Ashley to Apollo when, upon leaving an embrace with him, she feels as if “...it was like the warm sun going down” (530). Considering Ashley’s status as a Southern gentleman who belongs to a prominent family in the area, his relation to a god indicates the same connection for the entire Southern aristocratic class. In addition to his golden, sun-like hair, Ashley wears “the head of a Medusa in a cameo on his cravat pin” at a picnic where it is announced that war has been declared (25). He resides in “the beautiful white-columned house that crowned the hill like a Greek temple,” Twelve Oaks, the house that serves as a gathering point for his fellow aristocratic peers. Mitchell correlates the Southerner’s sense of pride to the hubris of Greek mythology.

Once Ashley returns from the war, he is faced with a world overwhelmingly foreign to him. In managing the manual labor now required for survival, Ashley finds himself utterly useless and only marginally better at running a business. Well equipped for the role of a highborn gentleman, Ashley is incapable of excelling at any skill needed in the Reconstruction era. He reflects that the Southern upper class was foolish in their way of life, “we Southerners did think we were gods” (527). Their ideal way of life was shattered and no longer had “a perfection and a completeness and a symmetry to it like Grecian art” (529). What he still fails to realize is that their way of life was sustained by the work of slaves much like it was in Grecian times as well. In this sense, Ashley and his

peers are pure consumers. Many Depression-era readers found themselves in a situation similar to that of Ashley. Thousands of men and women were unable to work or provide for a family after the Stock Market Crash of 1929. The gravity of their situation was amplified by the booming economy of the preceding decade, and this created an overwhelming sense of hopelessness in those who felt their world had collapsed. Mitchell depends on this sentiment to strengthen the emotional connection between her readers and the characters in *Gone with the Wind*. After they have firmly identified with Ashley's misfortune, Mitchell begins to build her readers' resentment towards his character as he becomes more and more ineffectual. Rhett, whose perspective is considered by Mitchell biographer Darden Asbury Pyron to be the most similar to Mitchell herself, describes the man as "the godlike and wooden headed, Mr. Wilkes" (340).

Ashley relied on and trusted in a consumerist institution that unequivocally failed him. This over reliance prohibits Ashley from surviving in the modern world: "Scarlett, before the war, life was beautiful. There was a glamor to it, a perfection and a completeness and a symmetry to it like Grecian art. Maybe it wasn't so for everyone... I belonged in that life. I was a part of it. And now it is gone and I am out of place in this new life, and I am afraid" (529). The slave system of the American South mirrors the 1930s corporate capitalism in that they both form an authoritative force that has little regard for humanity, wastes resources, and generally has little to no concern for any matter other than their own motives or desires. Mitchell creates a clear picture of those who become too absorbed in the "cult of acquisition" to know how to survive once that society collapses. In this sense, Mitchell provides a commentary on what she had witnessed in her own life and indicates the problem she perceives to be at the center of

her society: the worship of excessive materialism and a reverence for corporate capitalism. She will reiterate this position through Scarlett's experience in Reconstruction-era Atlanta.

Deepening the mythical dimension of *Gone with the Wind* is the presence of Irish mythology, especially in reference to Scarlett and the O'Hara home, Tara. Ancient Irish manuscripts are very clear in stating the belief that, above all else, the land is sacred (Hicks n.p.). This belief is instilled to Scarlett from a very young age by her father, who repeatedly emphasizes the importance of their family's land: "'Tis the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for—worth dying for...to anyone with a drop of Irish blood in them the land they live on is like their mother" (36). At the onset of the novel, Mitchell introduces this concept of the land as a sacred figure and extends it throughout Scarlett's life. Gerald's assertions about the importance of land echo the beliefs of Irish mythology, and his connection to the ancient myths is solidified when he names his plantation "Tara." In pre-Christian Ireland, Tara Hill was one of four royal sites that represented the provinces of the area (Hicks n.p.). Tara served as the metaphorical birthplace of the "king" or "chieftain" of that particular province. After the king had been elected from within a restricted kinship group, typically those individuals in the 120 square miles surrounding the province, the site was home to the inaugural ceremony for the king, where he was required to symbolically marry the goddess of the land he now represented. According to Hicks, Tara Hill was named after Tea, wife of King Eremon, who once saw a rampart in Spain and demanded one be built on a hill of her choice. The original Tara Hill included wells, mounds, and gravesites of notable royal figures. Mitchell aligns the O'Hara plantation with this description: the family's well where Mammy hides silver

from the Yankees, numerous hills for riding and jumping Gerald's horses, the processional avenue leading to the home, and eventually, the graves of Gerald and Ellen O'Hara. The Tara plantation shares a direct relationship with the ancient seat of Irish kings and not only places Scarlett in the role of a king but also a pre-Christian goddess.

Considering this association between Tara Hill and the Tara plantation, Mitchell (and therefore, Gerald) intended for Scarlett to become "king" of her land, "She loved this land so much, without even knowing she loved it, loved it as she loved her mother's face under the lamp at prayer time" (28). In this sentence alone, Mitchell has linked the land to the role of a mother and a religious figure. Although ignorant of the sacred nature of her family's land at this point in the novel, Mitchell frequently links Scarlett to the land through the color green. Scarlett's eyes are described as "green as the hills of Ireland" (81). She gravitates towards green clothing, partially because it matches her eyes so well. She wears green muslin and an apple-green ball gown while at Tara. Rhett Butler gifts her a green silk dress and hat, which foreshadows Scarlett's attempt to seduce him into marriage while wearing a dress made of the "moss green velvet curtains from Tara" (545). Her appearance reinforces her relationship to the lands of Tara and by extension, ancient Ireland. Scarlett and her father enjoy singing "The Wearin' of the Green" together, which at once is a reference to her predominant appearance and a nod to their Irish ancestors.

Mitchell ensures that Scarlett is continually interconnected with the land, and in this way, Scarlett mirrors the kings of ancient Ireland who symbolically married their land. The strength of Scarlett's bond with Tara relies on the land's ability to give her what others cannot: comfort, security, and hope. Despite her efforts, Scarlett never

experiences complete fulfillment while in Atlanta. She finds a new freedom and sense of excitement when she first arrives in Atlanta, yet Sherman's army soon crushes this.

Scarlett rises to financial success with her lumber business and marriage to Rhett but still yearns for more. At the moment when she may be capable of true happiness — when she realizes that she truly loves Rhett — she loses his companionship and he walks out, ending their relationship. In all three instances, Scarlett returns to Tara as a source of strength and new beginnings. Even her heartbreaking realization that Ashley will never leave Melanie is soothed by the thought of Tara's land:

The clay was cold in her hand and she looked at it again. "Yes," she said, "I've still got this." At first, the words meant nothing and the clay was only red clay. But unbidden came the thought of the sea of red dirt which surrounded Tara and how very dear it was and how hard she had fought to keep it — how hard she was going to have to fight if she wished to keep it hereafter. She looked at him [Ashley] again and wondered where the hot flood of feeling had gone. (535)

This reliance on Tara elevates the plantation to the status of a religious figure, or savior, for Scarlett. Her relationship to Tara is the embodiment of the mythologies' assertion that the land is sacred. Mitchell exposes the fickle and superficial nature of commercialization, money, and social status; each one of these fails Scarlett. For the entirety of the novel, Tara stands as solid foundation upon which Scarlett can rely.

Mitchell's illustration is similar to her point concerning Ashley Wilkes. However, she uses Scarlett and Ashley as a counterpoint in order to define her perception of the modern individual. Scarlett does not wish for the past society in the way that Ashley longs for his

life before the war. Scarlett is seduced by the possibilities brought on by the Civil War, and she is intelligent enough to take advantage of the social and economic changes that are required in the aftermath of the war; however, she recognizes the shortcomings of a consumerist society and returns to the land — her mythological *savoir* — in order to endure. The symbolism is evident as Scarlett takes a fistful of Tara's dirt and proclaims, "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 as my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again" (428). Scarlett has claimed her role as the mythological king of Tara and fully embraces the characteristics necessary for survival in her modern circumstances.

The geographical features of Tara Hill are described as long, parallel earthen banks that led to the center of the sacred site. While medieval historians believed these earthworks were the remnants of a banquet hall, modern archeologists believe that these parallel banks were more likely the boundaries of a ceremonial walkway used during ritual processions (Hicks n.p.). The road to the Tara plantation is no different and often serves as the walkway to many ceremonial gatherings and numerous homecomings, "The avenue of cedars leading from the main road to the house — that avenue of cedars without which no Georgia planter's home could be complete" (57). The Tara plantation is a symbol of salvation that lies at the end of this ceremonial walkway of cedars. Like the mythical Tara Hill, the home is the center from which the king derives his strength and purpose. This symbolism is echoed when Scarlett returns to Tara after sneaking through the Yankee lines north of Atlanta:

She turned the horse's head into the driveway, and the cedars, meeting over their heads, cast them into midnight blackness. Peering up the long tunnel of darkness, straining her eyes, she saw ahead...the white bricks of Tara blurred and indistinct...The avenue seemed miles long and the horse, pulling stubbornly at her hand, plopped slower and slower. Eagerly her eyes searched the darkness...The white walls did show there through the darkness. And untarnished by smoke. Tara had escaped! Home! (404)

In terms of the novel's plot and themes, perhaps the most influential homecoming is that of Ashley after the Civil War has ended. As Scarlett sees "a bearded man coming slowly up the avenue under the cedars," she recognizes Ashley, who is returning home to his wife and child. Scarlett views this as the homecoming of the man she loves in addition to a man whom she can rely on to share the burden of running the plantation. However, Mitchell underscores her disdain for the useless consumer through Scarlett's repeated disappointment at Ashley's weakness and inability to work Tara's land.

The Irish manuscripts have two alternative names for Tara Hill: the House of the Women and the Great House of a Thousand Soldiers (Hicks n.p.). This is particularly interesting when considering the proportion of males versus females housed at Tara both before and after the war and when considering the perspective Mitchell had while writing her novel. Post World War I, young Americans were either literal soldiers or figurative soldiers attempting to battle their way through the recent influx of consumerism and a changing social environment. Mitchell fought her own battle as a woman in the newsroom of the *Atlanta Journal* from 1922 until 1926. In reference to her time at the *Journal*, a co-worker and friend, William Howland, said, "Women reporters were

tolerated and not sought. Those were entirely masculine days for the city news staff” (Howland 53). Mitchell was able to flourish in this macho environment through her charm and hard work. In a manner that mirrors Scarlett’s own behavior, Mitchell earned the tolerance of her male counterpoints even if they begrudged her role as a female journalist: “She won the respect and admiration of her colleagues, men and women, for the way she made good in a hard, masculine business, asking no favors and giving none” (Howland 55). Tara and the surrounding plantations are homes to several women who embody this same steeliness in their determination, “No one was going to get Tara away from her...She would hold Tara, if she had to break the banks of every person on it” (435). While Carreen and Suellen can easily be discounted, Scarlett, Melanie, Mammy, Dilcey, and the Fontaine women, including Grandma Fontaine or “Old Miss,” are clearly the source of Clayton County’s survival after Sherman’s March to the Sea. After Gerald O’Hara’s burial, Grandma Fontaine puts words to the unbreakable determination found in these women, “When trouble comes we bow to the inevitable without any mouthing, and we work and we smile and we bid our time...And when we’re strong enough, we kick the folks whose necks we’ve climbed over. That, my child, is the secret of the survival” (717). Their refusal to break or surrender likens their characters to not only buckwheat but also that of a soldier — a female soldier. In essence, these women exemplify Tara’s role as the House of Women and the Great House of a Thousand Soldiers.

The celebration of the end of harvest, or Samhain, is closely associated with the ancient Tara, strengthening the evidence that Mitchell is specifically referencing this site in the name of Scarlett’s home. The farming and harvesting of Tara’s land is key to the survival of Scarlett and her family for the entirety of the book and particularly during the

Reconstruction era. The women of Tara are almost solely responsible for this undertaking; furthermore, they are responsible for feeding themselves and the mouths of other invalids or travelers. Scarlett's dependence and love for the plantation reflect the pagan worship of land from ancient Ireland and directly link her to her mythological home base of Tara Hill. Scarlett's role as the true king of Tara is solidified when she buries her father and realizes that there is no one but her who can carry the plantation through the chaos: "She was thinking with a leaden heart that in burying Gerald she was burying one of the last links that joined her to the old days of happiness and irresponsibility" (706).

A crucial portion of the novel follows a particularly dark mythology. The mythic event is mentioned by name after the end of the war, but characteristics of the event had already begun to be incorporated into the novel prior to the naming: *Götterdämmerung*. The term *Götterdämmerung* is the German word for Ragnarök in ancient Norse mythology and describes a "final, cataclysmic battle between gods and giants, a battle which proves fatal for both sides" (O'Donoghue 74). In a self-identifying piece of dialogue, Ashley Wilkes compares his and Scarlett's current plight to the Twilight of the Gods: "At least, it has been interesting, if not comfortable, to witness a *Götterdämmerung* ... A dusk of the gods. Unfortunately, we Southerners did think we were gods" (527). Mitchell has equated her characters to gods throughout the first portion of the novel, and Ragnarök is an appropriate myth to use in describing the fall of the South. The literal destruction of the Norse world mirrors the metaphorical (and literal in some ways) destruction of the South and the post-World War I landscape.

According to Norse mythology, laid forth in the *Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson circa 1220, Ragnarök would be preceded by a terrible winter that was difficult to endure and lasted longer than normal. The winter, fimbulvetr, will be characterized by the deterioration of moral, social, and geographical norms, “Brothers will fight / And kill each other, / sisters’ children / will defile kinship / No man will have mercy on another” (131-135). Prior to Sherman’s March to the Sea, the war has catapulted surrounding areas into the chaos depicted in the *Völupsa* prophecy of fimbulvetr while Scarlett enjoys safety and comfort in Atlanta. However, as Sherman’s army moves closer, in the winter of 1863, the people of Atlanta begin to experience the consequences of the South’s *Götterdämmerung*. During his Christmas furlough, Ashley describes the horrible scenes that he is witness to while away: “The snow is deep in Virginia. And when I see their poor frozen feet ... and see the blood prints they leave in the snow ...” (275). The following two months are depicted as being full of cold rains, wild winds, pervasive gloom, and depression (278-279). As a precursor to the apocalyptic battle of Norse mythology, Mitchell aligns fimbulvetr with the final months of the Civil War to underscore the significance of the South’s defeat. In either scenario, a dark, new era that is foreign to those who are forced to navigate such a time replaces their previous way of life. Mitchell’s use of the Norse myth imitates T.S. Eliot’s use of the mythical method in “The Wasteland.” In his poem, Eliot also draws on Norse mythology through incorporating references to Wagnerian operas that were also inspired by this mythical base. Eliot’s “unreal city” experiences a fimbulvetr wrapped in the “fog of a winter dawn” (60-61). Characterized as no longer having a sense of place or tradition, the city mirrors the society of 1922. Experiencing similar social and economic conditions in her

own life, Mitchell also found the mythical method as an adequate literary device that could lend itself to the events in her writing.

The conclusion of *fimbulvetr* signals the beginning of Ragnarök and the final disintegration of any moral or social code. The people of Atlanta are aware that the Yankees will descend upon the city very soon and react in panic. Just as the Southerners are aligned with gods and goddesses, Mitchell portrays the Yankees as the giants and monsters of Ragnarök. During the Union's campaign in Georgia, the Yankees destroyed a majority of the countryside, stole goods and money, and often times did unspeakable acts to women, children, and slaves (330). Atlanta dissolves into a wild frenzy of fear as the city attempts to evacuate prior to the Yankees' arrival. Scarlett witnesses the chaos as she attempts to find a doctor to deliver Melanie's baby: "Five Points was crowded with people who rushed here and there with unseeing eyes, jammed with wagons, ambulances, ox carts, carriages loaded with wounded. A roaring sound like the break of surf rose from the crowd" (360). Mitchell correlates the South's apocalypse to the final battle in Norse mythology by employing an image of pandemonium. Once the final battle of Ragnarök has begun, the giants and monsters wreak havoc and a fire-giant, named Surtr, engulfs his surroundings in flames. The name Surtr shares a similar sound with that of "Sherman," a name that Scarlett begins to hear more and more during her *fimbulvter* in Atlanta (279).

The *Prose Edda* states that once Odin (the High One) is defeated, Surtr sets the world on fire and effectively destroys all life: "Fume rages against fire/fosterers of life/the heat soars high against heaven itself" (142-145). Mitchell strengthens the connection between Surtr and Sherman through the burning of Atlanta as Rhett and Scarlett leave: "A glare brighter than a dozen suns dazzled their eyes, scorching heat

seared their skins and the roaring, crackling and crashing beat upon their ears in painful waves ... they were in the midst of flaming torment” (386). The burning of the city leaves no doubt that this is the metaphorical end of the South, and more evidence of Sherman, or Surtr’s, destruction lines Scarlett’s long road home to Jonesboro. The fields and houses have been burned to the ground and yards and roads have been cut to pieces by horse hooves and military wagons. Many times, burned foundations are all that remain: “She looked toward the house ... she saw there only a long rectangle of blackened granite foundation stones and two tall chimneys rearing smoke-stained bricks into the charred leaves of still trees” (394). The literal destruction of Georgia represents the fall of the South, the end of a civilization, and the closing of an era. The city was built on the back of slave labor that ceased to exist after Sherman’s March to the Sea. Although Mitchell’s South of the 1920s and 1930s did not experience a fire, the way in which a fire destroys so completely mirrors the destruction and loss of life felt as a result of World War I.

In attempting to evaluate the center of her own culture, Mitchell explores the story of destruction and survival in the American South. Norse mythology provides an excellent template for such an exploration, but it is Rhett Butler who vocalizes Mitchell’s perspective in reference to the possibilities created in the fall of a civilization: “This empire we’re living in ... it’s breaking up right under our feet. Only most fools won’t see it and take advantage of the situation created by the collapse. I’m making my fortune out of the wreckage” (193). Snorri’s account of Ragnarök concludes with an idyllic passage that scholars believe to have been an attempt to merge the pagan Norse beliefs with the emerging Christian mythologies. The emphasis on the regenerative nature of land

underscores its ability to save humanity and ensure the survival of those left behind: “Without sowing / cornfields will grow — / all harm will be healed, / Baldr will come” (57-60). These lines align with Mitchell’s elevation of Tara to that of a religious figure, or savior, for Scarlett. As king of Tara, Scarlett recognizes that the land holds salvation after her Götterdämmerung lies in the land. She now understands the statements her father made when she was a child, and she begins to see the sacred nature of land and her role in reference to the new Tara, the new South. She will take advantage of the opportunities created by the collapse: “Tomorrow — oh, tomorrow! Tomorrow she would fit the yoke about her neck ... Tara was her fate, her fight, and she must conquer it” (420-421).

Ultimately, *Gone with the Wind* is the story of an individual’s experience in navigating a modern world; through layering her story with mythological references, Mitchell is able to identify the new center of culture — survival despite false security in capitalism consumerism, war, and industrialization. Mitchell examines modernism’s reliance on the tension between myth and reality, tradition and modernity, the chaos and the ordered. Symbols, allusions, and themes from ancient mythology are prevalent in Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*. The author draws from Greek, Irish, and Norse mythologies in order to analyze the center of her own culture. She effectively disguises this exploration in her story of the American South during the Civil War and Reconstruction era.

CHAPTER FOUR

Scarlett O'Hara's Dynasty

In *Gone with the Wind*, Margaret Mitchell's focuses on the events in the South as seen through the life experiences of her protagonist, Scarlett O'Hara. It is difficult for readers to wholly admire Scarlett, yet they cannot completely dismiss her as "evil" due to some of her more honorable traits. Mitchell allows readers into the mind of her contracting heroine in an effort to illustrate the conflicted nature of a modern individual. Her emotions, morals, and behaviors fluctuate depending on her need or desire in the immediate situation. Despite battling feelings of jealousy and hatred, Scarlett undeniable loyalty lies with Melanie. Scarlett regularly threatens and verbally abuses her house slaves only to defend them as family members in the face of the Yankees. Mitchell thus balances Scarlett's temper and selfishness with a determination for herself and her loved ones to survive. Scarlett's resulting poise represents that of an individual who is conflicted between the old South and the fallen South while being forced to navigate the double standard of gender roles, her own self-interests, and the responsibilities of caring for her family. Scarlett recognizes that protocol must be broken in order to achieve success and that this would not have been possible in the days before the war: "I like these days better,' she said ... Behind those doors lay the beauty of the old days, and a sad hunger for them welled up within her. But she knew that no matter what beauty lay behind, it must remain there" (924). Ultimately, Mitchell presents readers with a portrait of a modern, complex individual who understands the shortcomings of the past yet embraces the new mode in which life must be conducted. Scarlett prevails in the novel because she is willing to look to tomorrow as an additional opportunity to adapt to the

ever-changing circumstances of her modern world, and she manages to reestablish a connection with her emotional self before it is too late. Through these characteristics, Mitchell creates a connection between Scarlett and the readers, especially women, of the American 1930s. The audience understands that to do what “it takes” is not always an action that would be considered honorable in reference to social acceptance, no matter how honorable in origin that action may have been.

The journey with Scarlett through twelve years of her life serves as a type of guide for readers. They relate to Scarlett’s trials and hardships, and they understand her changing world and the rapid growth of her surrounding economy, yet they are shown which traditional morals still retain value. With Scarlett’s implied redemption at the close of the novel, Mitchell demonstrates her idea for an individual who will inherit the new South and successfully navigate the modern era by maintaining a balance between the old and the new. The author’s point is similar to the one she makes by casting Melanie as a counterpoint to Scarlett. In order to succeed and avoid self-destruction, one must achieve this balance. Scarlett must be ruthless in order to harness the new capitalist landscape, but she must not become completely devoid of human compassion. Mitchell’s portrait of Scarlett oscillates between a selfish, spoiled monster of a woman and a person who is willing to manipulate, or break, the traditions for her benefit and the survival of her family. She is shrewd, yes, but she is also hardworking, intelligent, determined and ambitious — particularly when it concerns monetarily providing for her family.

Upon reading *Gone with the Wind*, Dr. Hervey Cleckley, who had previously gained international acclaim with the publication of his psychological profile, *The Three Faces of Eve*, characterized Scarlett as a “partial psychopath” in his second novel, *The*

Mask of Sanity. An admirer of Cleckley's work, Mitchell was very pleased to find her character among the psychological profiles of fictitious characters in the psychiatrist's book. Cleckley attributed Scarlett's partial psychosis to the environmentally impoverished setting of Mitchell's novel and concluded that Scarlett:

seems to be without means of understanding the strong emotions in those about her or of having adequate awareness of what makes them act when they act in accord with principles they value. Unlike the complete psychopath, she successfully pursues ends that lead to her material well-being, and she avoids putting herself in positions of obvious folly and shame. In her, however, we sense an inward hollowness and serious lack of insight. (320-321)

Indeed, while this diagnosis may be accurate, it would seem that, ironically, the classification of Scarlett as a "partial psychopath" is only partially true. The modern era required a specific blend of self-serving preoccupation in addition to the capability of being humane when necessary in order to achieve success. Scarlett occupies both of these realms in varying degrees, which at once makes her relatable and offensive to readers and critics. Scarlett displays a keen mind for business and profit, which disrupts gender stereotypes, and she uses her skills to amass a fortune. By doing such, Scarlett fends off starvation and ruin for her family and close friends, but averting disaster comes at a price. Unchecked, Scarlett's capitalistic urges and greed ultimately cause her to alienate the friends and family she once desperately worked to save. While Scarlett fits the definition of a psychopath as "a person who is highly irresponsible and antisocial and also violent and aggressive," (OED) her psychosis is perhaps best understood as a reflection of her

historical circumstance. If readers were to wholly accept Scarlett as a mentally ill character, they would be forced to recognize her historical era — as well as their own — as impoverished and capable of inducing a psychotic state. This setting illustrates Mitchell's assessment of the American South during the Civil War and Reconstruction and her perception of her own changing American South of the 1930s. In response to Cleckley's assessment of Scarlett, she said: "I thought it would be obvious to anyone that Scarlett was a frigid woman, loving attention and adulation for their own sake but having little to no comprehension of actual deep feelings and no reactions to the love and attention of others" (Farr 192-193). While using her intellect, bravery, wit, business sense, and ruthless ambition to survive the modern era, Scarlett moves away from humane characteristics and transforms into the embodiment of the capitalist fervor that swept the country in the 1930s, much like it did during the Reconstruction era.

Mitchell employs a traditional narrative device to signal the beginning of Scarlett's transformation. Prior to the Civil War, and even during the early months of courage, hope, and wartime excitement, Scarlett behaves in the manner of a spoiled, rich girl who doesn't truly understand the world and sees little to no value in the traditions and sentiment of the restrictive antebellum South. The Scarlett that begins her refuge to Tara, after the Yankee's siege, is a girl who hasn't endured true hardship or responsibility. Her impression of the war centers on her boredom and how the war deprives her of beaux with whom to socialize: "I do get awfully bored when they talk about the Cause, morning, noon and night. But goodness, Rhett Butler, if I admitted it nobody would speak to me and none of the boys would dance with me" (239). Scarlett's journey from Atlanta to Tara signifies the end of "Scarlett, the Southern Belle" and marks the beginning of

“Scarlett, the opportunist.” Any fantasy of her plantation life quickly evaporates when she arrives at her family’s home to find it pillaged, hollow, and dark. The desiccated state in which she discovers the Clayton County countryside can be seen as representative of the cultural atmosphere that Mitchell and her contemporaries experienced in the 1930s. Defeated, disappointed, desperate, and disillusioned, the populace of the Great Depression found that their reality mirrored Scarlett’s bleak discovery upon her return to Tara.

Unfortunately for Scarlett, Melanie, Prissy, and the children, there is no great relief to be found once they arrive at Tara; however, the house is still standing, and this alone invigorates Scarlett. The death of Scarlett’s mother, Ellen, and the subsequent insanity of Gerald, her father, creates an opportunity for Scarlett to ascend to the head of the O’Hara household. The old way of life is rendered outdated and useless through the O’Hara parents’ deaths. In the span of seven pages, Mitchell neatly eradicates the figureheads of the O’Hara plantation and replaces them with an unlikely leader: their eldest daughter, who has been coddled and cared for since birth. Although Scarlett assumes this responsibility without hesitation, she initially maintains her privileged, entitled viewpoint in response to the work needed for survival: “Why was Scarlett O’Hara, the belle of the County, the sheltered pride of Tara, tramping down this rough road almost barefoot? She was born to be pampered and waited upon, and here she was, sick and ragged, driven by hunger to hunt for food in the gardens of her neighbors” (425). In the immediate days following her arrival at Tara, Scarlett experiences a sense of longing and nostalgia as she calculates how far the plantation has fallen since the onset of the war. Her yearning for the past parallels the emotional link created for readers who

recall the economic and social explosion of the 1920s. Mitchell veils this nostalgic nod to the golden days by employing a 70-year difference between the historical setting of her novel and her current time period, but a dissatisfaction with current circumstances resonates regardless of the generation: “What was past was past. Those who were dead were dead. The lazy luxury of the old days was gone, never to return” (428).

Despite the readers’ potential distaste for Scarlett in the pages leading up to her return to Tara, they are confronted with a character grappling with familiar emotions that resonate with the modern era. A general sense of loss, hopelessness, and confusion pervaded the country during the 1930s. Scarlett’s ambition, work ethic, and ability to seize opportunity inspired hope in an audience that was in short supply of the emotion. Mitchell maximizes this emotional bond between Scarlett and her readers through Scarlett’s gradual emotional growth as she pulls Tara from the depths of failure. At this point in the novel, Scarlett begins to display more commendable qualities as she recognizes the value of one’s home. After learning that the Yankees were en route to raid Tara once again, Scarlett proclaims to the house: “I can’t leave you. Pa wouldn’t leave you ... Then, they’ll burn you over my head for I can’t leave you either. You’re all I’ve got left” (463). Rather than fleeing to the safety of the swamp, Scarlett decides to remain loyal to her family’s home in the face of the violent Yankees. Cleckley’s assessment of Scarlett begins to falter here; the hollowness that was previously noted has become secondary to the priority of protecting her home.

As a means to stay connected to Ashley, Scarlett has begrudgingly endured Melanie’s presence, but the return to Tara creates a bond between the two women that will eventually outweigh Scarlett’s love for Melanie’s husband. Compliments and praise

are rarely found in Scarlett's inner dialogue, yet she begins to appreciate Melanie: "Even in her frenzy, Scarlett wished she had Melanie with her, Melly with her quiet voice, Melly who was so brave the day she shot the Yankee. Melly was worth three of the others" (461). This instance passes quickly and is replaced by Scarlett's ire as the Yankees destroy Tara, but her momentary desire to seek comfort in Melanie indicates that Scarlett does feel emotion and human connection. This flicker of humanity in Mitchell's heroine ties Scarlett to the modern individual. Scarlett's psyche is not partial or incomplete; instead, she struggles the tensions created by the chaos of the war and the subsequent loss of what she understood as reality. Ultimately, this disruption gives birth to a dynastic obsession within Scarlett that she is able to pursue in the boomtown of Atlanta.

These flashes of Scarlett's emotion are strategically placed in the narrative. Essentially, Mitchell prefaces Scarlett's transformation into a force of capitalism with moments that remind readers of Scarlett's humanity. Scarlett's constant stress of surviving the war and the Reconstruction era gradually mutates from the need to keep Tara out of Yankee hands into the desire to amass an enormous amount of wealth at the expense of anyone who may interfere with her goal. Through this ascension to wealth and power, Scarlett hopes to restore herself as a great lady. In a moment of self introspection, Scarlett admits to Rhett that she is operating from a center of fear and stress: "Rhett, sometimes I did try so hard to be nice to people and kind to Frank, but then the nightmare [of starving at Tara] would come back and scare me so bad I'd want to rush out and just grab money away from people, whether it was mine or not" (828). Scarlett is not a "partial psychopath"; Scarlett embodies the new spirit of the South — a spirit that seizes

the opportunity to advance its current position at any cost rather than returning to the days of death and hunger. Several cities in the American South, especially Atlanta, recognized that influx of commerce that would accompany Yankee occupation and seized the chance to remake their cities. A similar atmosphere of dissatisfaction was widespread in America after the Great Collapse of 1929. The loss of hope and trust for one's government during Reconstruction mirrored the mindset of readers in 1936. While Mitchell's experience during the Great Depression was quite mild compared to some, the author was well informed and aware of the general desperation and disillusionment of the time. The reformation that took place with the New Deal can be aligned with the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. Although the Reconstruction Acts were generally met with more disdain, both laws were designed to implement new political and economic standards to facilitate the recovery of America after considerable hardship.

Like *Gone with the Wind*, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* reflects the modernist movement by describing a Southerner's ruthless ascent to power. Thomas Sutpen shares Scarlett's dynastic aspirations. The significance of the novels in reference to the American 1930s is supported by an honor they both share: a Pulitzer Prize nomination. Even though Mitchell's "middle brow" novel ultimately trumped the "high literature" modern masterpiece that Faulkner wrote, the novels' recognition by the Pulitzer Prize Board indicates the relevance and impact of *Gone with the Wind* and *Absalom, Absalom!* While Mitchell's novel was an immediate commercial success, Faulkner's book was better received by the literary critics of the time; this would suggest that between the two texts, the story of a determined individual who pursues personal success at any price in the aftermath of a Götterdämmerung resonates with all social and

cultural levels in 1936 America — a year, which in many ways, marks the height of modernism. While the stories differ greatly in many ways, to study Sutpen while snubbing Scarlett as superficial is to shortchange discussions of a rich and diverse tradition of American modernism.

Scarlett shares many traits with her fellow fortune seeker, Sutpen. Once Scarlett leaves her plantation home with hopes of securing tax money for Tara, the consumerist economy of Atlanta devours her, and she begins her quest for enormous financial success and luxury. The need for survival transforms into Scarlett's desire for personal wealth. With qualities that mirror Sutpen's own, Scarlett becomes consumed with pursuing her own financial dynasty and forfeits any morality that may stand in the way of her ensuring her empire. Mitchell intended for Scarlett to be the offspring of a new historical era. Even Scarlett's familial origins indicate that she is the product of two clashing worlds and will ultimately prevail in the new society. The child of a unique union between a predominant Southern aristocratic family and an Irish upstart who won his plantation in a poker game, Scarlett gains the determination, skills, and mentality needed to survive, successfully function, and eventually flourish in her unstable era. After the war, a liberated Scarlett behaves in a traditionally masculine sense that aligns her with Sutpen. The transformation that Scarlett undergoes gives a unique insight into the American culture of the South during the Reconstruction era as well as the Great Depression.

While both Scarlett and Sutpen readily identify themselves as Southerners, it would seem that first and foremost, beyond any regional identification, their characters are opportunists. There should be no doubt that Ms. O'Hara and Mr. Sutpen are capable of achieving their dynasties regardless of the political situation in which they find

themselves. The implication of this statement is that both characters are removed enough from the human community that they are able to operate outside traditional social mores in order to follow their plans. The way the social climate impacts the route each character takes in striving for their goals creates an interesting aspect of their stories. The sudden flux of change brought on by the Civil War allows individuals with such single-minded ambition to take advantage of the situation to propel their own success. Although Sutpen and Scarlett are born into opposite social classes, they realize that monetary worth indicates an individual's worth. Neither is particularly concerned with being accepted by the social groups to which they belong — in fact, they aim to eclipse all social groups. After the near ruination of Sutpen's Hundred and Tara at the conclusion of the war, Sutpen and Scarlett disregard repairing the Southern culture's morale, and instead, focus on furthering their own desires. Sutpen rejects his family members, Eulalie and Charles Bon, upon discovering their mixed blood and realizing the conflict they represent in reference to his design. Similarly, Scarlett displays no remorse at casting aside the friends and family who stand in her way: Suellen, Melanie, Wade, Ella, Frank, and eventually Rhett. Because of their lack of adherence to traditional modes of conduct, Scarlett and Sutpen are ostracized. Just as Scarlett does not merit complete hatred, Faulkner describes Sutpen as a pitiful "other" who warrants analysis for his lack of human connection. In response to student questions at the University of Virginia in April 1957, Faulkner stated, in reference to Sutpen, that:

To me, he is to be pitied. He was not depraved — he was amoral, he was ruthless, completely self-centered ... as anyone who ignores man is to be pitied, who does believe that he belongs as a member of a human family,

of *the* human family, is to be pitied ... I think people like that are destroyed sooner or later, because one has got to belong to the human family, and to take a responsible part in the human family ..." ("Remarks on *Absalom, Absalom!*" 287)

The narratives of Scarlett and Sutpen do much more than mirror the destruction of the old South. Although the authors focused their texts on roughly the same subject matter, *Gone with the Wind* and *Absalom! Absalom!* provide more historical insight into the era that produced the two books than they do the decline of the antebellum South. The plots reflect the weaknesses of the human psyche during the modernist era and serve as a warning of society's collapse if these weaknesses — unchecked capitalist greed, a decreased connection with humanity, and a complete disregard for traditional values — are continually pursued and tolerated.

The early American free market knew no boundaries. Atlanta's "boom town" status after the war mirrored the country's economic success of the Roaring '20s. As Mitchell worked on her novel throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, Scarlett grew and morphed into a character that was not only of her own historical era, but of Mitchell's own time as well. Money clouds Scarlett's mental clarity and soon replaces the influence of Ashley Wilkes — her self-proclaimed true love. Prior to her refuge to Tara, Scarlett's *modus operandi* was the pursuit of Ashley; however, in Reconstruction Atlanta, Scarlett concentrates only on increasing her profit margins, even if it comes at the expense of others' lives. Several characters voice their reservations against Scarlett using convict labor in her sawmill. Considering Scarlett's familiarity with slave labor, the fact that she would exploit convict labor should not be surprising or questioned. If anything, Mitchell

highlights yet another double standard of Southern culture: “Everyone said it was wrong to take advantage of the miseries and misfortunes of others. ‘You didn’t have any objections to working slaves!’ Scarlett cried indignantly’ ... as usual, opposition had the effect of making Scarlett more determined on her course” (759). A symbol of the fallen South, Ashley speaks out against Scarlett’s convict labor. Typically, Scarlett would be inclined to acquiesce to anything that put her in Ashley’s favor, but instead she takes on the characteristics of consumerist capitalism. Quite literally, she aims to achieve more and more financial success regardless of pain (of the convict’s) and price (of her social reputation and moral standing within her community): “‘You tend to your business and I’ll tend to mine,’ she said indignantly. ‘Everybody’s been hateful about them. My gang is my own business—’” (764). She is unable to understand the emotional motivation of her peers, and she views their capability or leniency as weakness and stupidity.

Whereas Faulkner’s *Absalom! Absalom!* concludes with the burning of Sutpen’s Hundred and the ultimate destruction of Sutpen’s dynasty, at the end of Mitchell’s masterpiece, Tara is still standing and Mitchell’s protagonist seemingly recovers from her consumerist fever. Scarlett’s refusal to dwell on the past indirectly encourages Depression-era readers to act in a similar manner while creating a negative impression about those who do nothing but yearn for the past: “‘They don’t talk of anything else,’ thought Scarlett. ‘Nothing but the war. Always the war. And they’ll never talk of anything but the war. No, not until they die’” (739). Essentially, Scarlett acts like any upcoming economic class should, and typically does, behave during a time of social upheaval: she seizes the opportunity and conducts herself in such a way as to improve her position. She represents the spirit of the modern era. Scarlett knows exactly what entails

success and power in the Reconstruction era, and I am in agreement with Louis Rubin when he notes that “And however the reader of *Gone with the Wind*, and the author, may be appalled at times by the price that must be paid to achieve Success, there is no doubt that in a post-Eden world such a price is always going to be paid, regretfully perhaps but willingly” (96-97). A common interpretation of the novel’s end is that Scarlett is ultimately punished for her belief in materialism through her loss of Rhett Butler; however, Mitchell’s hope that such an individual may learn the dangers of material worship is conveyed in the novel’s final pages and the sense of optimism alluded to in Scarlett’s insistence that “tomorrow is another day” (1037).

CHAPTER FIVE

Margaret Mitchell's Proper Place

Many prominent American modernist authors created public personas for themselves. For writers like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, their masks served as a living PR service that promoted their books through sensationalizing their personal lives. While Mitchell also cultivated a persona, her intentions stemmed from a desire for privacy rather than fame. Despite Mitchell's outgoing approach to her work in the traditionally masculine field of journalism, the author still maintained an extremely private side in her life even before the publication of *Gone with the Wind*. One of her closest friends, Ralph McGill, noted that "She never, at any time or to anyone, revealed herself, not even to John Marsh [her second husband] ... She was always flesh and blood. But she could keep her counsel and be as reticent as ice" (72). Mitchell states that she began writing the novel in 1926, and while it was mostly complete by 1929, the manuscript experienced several revisions and additions throughout the following ten years — all written in secret. The fact that Mitchell was working on a novel, much less that it was actually finished, was withheld from everyone except her husband, John Marsh. The 1037-page manuscript spent its time hidden in closets and suitcases, filed in manila envelopes that were organized by chapters. The envelopes would be pulled from time to time as Mitchell felt inspired to work, and Marsh, who worked as a Public Relations writer, would read and edit drafts for his wife. That the novel was a complete secret for that length of time suggests that writing was an extremely personal endeavor for Mitchell and one in which she felt comfortable enough to include her private thoughts and emotions. Prior to Mitchell's creation of Scarlett and her surrounding universe, the writer had completed a

novel that she later admitted to preferring; unfortunately, the manuscript met its demise shortly after its birth: “You know, I always liked the book I wrote before *Gone with the Wind* better ... I burned it up when I was finished. I just wrote it for fun. I never thought of having it published” (Cole 7). Mitchell’s destruction of this preferred text furthers the idea that her writing contained an emotional depth that left the author feeling exposed at times. Writing without the intention to publish, perhaps, allows some writers the freedom to include and discuss any topic in a manner and setting of their choice.

Mitchell did not entertain the rumors that she had not written the novel, but she did exaggerate the superficiality of *Gone with the Wind* in an attempt to guide the media away from probing too deeply into the personal emotions behind her writing. The success of Mitchell’s novel made people doubt that she had actually written the book. It was most certainly upsetting when she began encountering doubt and disbelief that she had actually been capable of writing *Gone with the Wind*. Mitchell faced sexism similar to that experienced by her heroine, Scarlett: “‘Why lady,’ said one gas station attendant. ‘You’re not big enough to write a book. That’s a famous book — making a lot of money’” (Cranberry 6). Interactions such as this one became frequent for the author, in addition to rumors and sensationalized articles, which suggested that a blind Mitchell with a wooden leg and leukemia had written the novel while bedridden as an invalid. Additionally, the rumors proposed that her husband, her father, her brother, or even Sinclair Lewis had written the novel (Farr 154-155). This gossip reflects the cultural prejudices of the time; many did not believe that a woman could write such a successful novel, especially one that was earning as much money as *Gone with the Wind*. Rather than becoming outspoken in her defense, for she had more manners than that, Mitchell created a self-

deprecating persona that attempted to control the dialogue about her novel. Anne Goodwyn Jones cites the author's letters as further evidence of a formal persona. She notes that Mitchell uses identical sentence structures, anecdotes, and phraseology in letters written in response to the novel (316). When considering the volume of fan mail Mitchell received, this habit expedites the otherwise tedious process of writing to someone that she did not know very well. Even more, this approach controls and limits the information that is in circulation about the author and her writing process.

Mitchell's personal response to the immense popularity of the novel, indicates that the author sustained an emotional connection to her novel:

After giving the manuscript to [Harold] Latham [the Acquisitions Editor who initially read her manuscript], Mitchell sent him a famous telegram saying that she had changed her mind and asking him to send it back. He didn't and Mitchell spent the rest of her life trying to fend off the public world that so liked her private one. (Goodwyn Jones 333)

Mitchell has tricked many critics who have simply glossed over her novel for 80 years without considering the person, the culture, and the time in which it was written. She has managed this feat with comments such as: "If I ever did any thinking about writing, it was about a novel which I never wrote and never will write" ("Introduction" XXXIV). The common perception of *Gone with the Wind* is that of a historically inaccurate (a true statement) romance novel that deserves no in-depth analysis. If we accept the existence of a deliberately crafted persona, the novel no longer merits the description of a superficial romance that describes a spoiled brat, Scarlett, who simply cannot believe that the world does not bend towards her every whim. The story holds the truth of a woman stuck

between two ages, a woman desperately trying to bridge the gap between two very different worlds, and, ultimately, the story of an individual forced to reckon with modern, chaotic circumstances and who has no other choice but to survive. Mitchell's achievement in crafting such a story lies in her talent of subtly incorporating prevalent modernist themes under the guise of a novel set in the past, a past already steeped in local folklore and myth. Despite her efforts to cloak her modern story in an antebellum wardrobe, Mitchell's novel should be read as the story of an individual who transforms and responds to the needs of her historical era.

The importance of maintaining assigned gender roles is a matter of significance in any time period. However, Mitchell's use of gender roles provides insight into the social climate of the American South in the 1920s and 1930s rather than the era of the American Civil War. The author assigns traditionally feminine qualities to the ideal Southern gentleman, Ashley, while equipping her heroine, a true Southern Belle, with traits that classically align themselves with men of the time. Mitchell uses these characterizations to emphasize the alienation felt by each character as a result of his or her inability to accept a prescribed social role. The characterizations of Scarlett and Ashley highlight the marginalization of the "other" that was prevalent in the Victorian age and was still very present in the American South of Mitchell's life. Mitchell furthers her argument against gender norms by creating a foil for Scarlett in Rhett and one for Ashley in Melanie. Rhett's characterization underscores the masculine traits found in Scarlett; linking Ashley to Melanie accentuates his femininity. The misappropriated traits draw attention to the same cultural prejudices that keep the social boundaries in place. Ultimately, Mitchell conveys doubt of any individual unable to adapt and accept new gender roles, and,

instead, she expresses her preference for a person capable of growing and balancing the weight of both worlds (the traditional and the modern).

Mitchell's preference for such an individual is demonstrated through Scarlett and Melanie's relationship. The pair represents the psyche of a modern woman and a great lady of the South, respectively. Mitchell's writing suggests that a balance between the two is ideal in navigating modernity. Although Melanie dies while ushering in a new member of the Southern aristocracy (albeit fallen), she ultimately forces Scarlett to appreciate and long for the old days (1037). As a girl reared in both the "new" and "old" ways, Mitchell understood that neither Scarlett nor Melanie would truly be capable of surviving if she did not adopt a portion of the other's attributes. The author makes a particularly interesting case for her point with the triangle between Rhett, Scarlett, and Melanie. While it is not the typical "love triangle," Mitchell emphasizes her belief that the traditional has a place amidst the modern by allowing Melanie to comfort Rhett in ways that Scarlett cannot. By the closing of the novel, it has become very clear that Scarlett and Melanie represent the dueling sides of one individual. When Melanie passes, Scarlett assumes the role and characteristics of both women and moves forward into tomorrow stronger and without fear. In her portrait of Scarlett O'Hara, Mitchell has provided her own answer to the question of "who will rise and lead in this new era?"

Mitchell is not typically included in any list of prominent modernist figures — Daniel Singal fails to mention her at all in his exhaustive research of Southern modernism. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, Mitchell employs literary devices that are similar to those of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. Myth in its symbolic sense, as well as a vehicle for her plot, allows Mitchell a multitude of layers in which she can express

herself freely. By drawing on the foundational elements and events of ancient cultures — Germanic, Greek, and Irish — Mitchell takes her preferred portions of these myths and use them to redefine the center of her own culture. She establishes a bond between her readers and her characters (equated to deities) in order to provide an example, or a blueprint, for the individual struggling to find purpose in the American 1930s. This blueprint contains a basis for understanding nontraditional gender roles, capitalist desire, and social dynamics in a post-war atmosphere, justifying the shift in priorities that a majority of her audience was experiencing at the time. The inclusion of the Southern myth adds an additional dimension to the novel, a dimension that stresses nostalgia for the past over historical accuracy.

Furthermore, the setting of *Gone with the Wind* provides Mitchell with a certain degree of protection against the cultural prejudices of her own time. The novel's label of historical romance is a nonthreatening categorization that merited very little critical analysis, especially in the 1930s. It was socially acceptable for a woman to write a historical romance. After its publication, Mitchell would be able to return to polite Southern society. Had *Gone with the Wind* been openly seen as the history of a woman who flourishes in business and actually surpasses men in terms of commercial success, emotional fortitude, and leadership, the novel would not have enjoyed such pop culture success. Moreover, if critics had connected Mitchell's personal life to her writing, the amount of publicity and speculation surrounding the author would have grown beyond the book's already enormous fame. Considering the brief personal analysis at the beginning of this chapter, it is perfectly feasible that a private individual like Mitchell would attempt to mislead her audience into believing there was little value in examining

her novel beyond its surface. At this point in the author's life, her privacy outweighed her desire for critical discussion or mass popularity. She attempted to control the narrative about her novel much as Scarlett, at first, attempted at first to influence her reputation by playing the role of a Southern belle.

In many first-time novels, writers create their protagonist as a thinly veiled version of themselves. This may be an understandable device for the novice writer; however, *Scarlett* is incredibly interesting in that she symbolizes Mitchell as a member of a specific generation as well as an individual. At times, Mitchell clearly projects her own personal experience as a marginalized debutante in Atlanta onto Scarlett. In other instances, the conflicting sides of Scarlett's character create a depth and complexity that transforms the belle of Clayton County into the spirit of the new South. Admirable yet reprehensible, much of Scarlett's unbecoming behavior (except her persistent infatuation with Ashley) is justified, or at the very least excusable, due to the unimaginable turmoil caused by the Civil War. Her "love" for Ashley can be seen as youthful infatuation, and, in this sense, the description of Scarlett's longing for Ashley may be seen as a nod to the nostalgic atmosphere that permeated Mitchell's society after World War I. Although Scarlett is at times easy to dislike, Mitchell provides her readers with an emotional connection to each of Scarlett's motivations. Readers relate to Scarlett's flawed personality. The brilliance behind the novel's historical setting lies in the fact that post-war turmoil was not unimaginable to Mitchell's audience — it was their reality. Under normal circumstances, it would be deplorable for Scarlett to secretly marry Suellen's beau, Frank Kennedy. As it stands, the alternative to marrying Frank for money is that the family would lose Tara to tax collectors, become homeless, destitute, and potentially die.

From this perspective, Scarlett embodies the strength needed for survival — a strength that mirrors the mentality of the rising middle class during any social reorganization, particularly the American South during Reconstruction and the Depression. By using the mythical method to link the 1860s and the 1870s to *Gone with the Wind*'s readers, Mitchell creates a sphere of influence over those who recognize themselves in Scarlett's modern portrait. As the child of a self-made Irishman and a Southern aristocrat, Scarlett unites tradition with the modern reality. Her existence validates the presence of an ethical "gray area" that became more and more apparent as the Great Depression persisted. Mitchell's description of Scarlett may cause readers to scorn the character's decisions or schemes, but readers also relate to the upheaval (in society, culture, and the economy) that Scarlett experiences.

Mitchell uses Scarlett as both a warning and an instrument of influence. As Scarlett's financial success soars alongside her greed and general tendency to be ruthless, her reputation and the emotional quality of her life deteriorate. Scarlett's observation that "The silly fools don't seem to realize that you can't be a lady without money" serves her well from a business standpoint, but only furthers the distance between she and any companions (609). The lesson is clear: if one becomes so removed from human connection in society — specifically acquisition desire — then life will become a matter of isolation and loneliness. Scarlett is despised by nearly every other character besides Melanie, who ultimately represents the traditional aspects of Scarlett, and Rhett, her equivalent in the opposite sex. Scarlett's realization and implied redemption at the novel's close suggests Mitchell's solution to the modern plight. Quite suddenly, her lust for Ashley seems silly, burdensome, and a waste of time. Scarlett understands and

acknowledges how much she loved Melanie and how crucial she was to Scarlett's survival. These epiphanies trigger an emotion that Scarlett may not have experienced towards anyone who wasn't immediate family: love. This sudden rush of emotion causes Scarlett to realize that she has always been in love with Rhett. His willingness to accept Scarlett as she is aligns his character with modernity; however, no Scarlett's selfish, inconsiderate actions no longer interest Rhett.

Readers repeatedly asked Mitchell to interpret the end of *Gone with the Wind*. In particular, they wanted to know if Scarlett ever reconciled with Rhett. The author claimed not to know the couple's outcome. This response seems incongruent given Scarlett's experiences throughout the novel. Barring a few select events, which primarily function to heighten the melodrama of the story, Scarlett triumphs at any task to which she sets her mind. Typically, in these stressful situations, she reminds herself that "Tomorrow is another day." Considering the connection between Scarlett's personal victories and her use of this phrase after Rhett leaves her, the implication that Mitchell leaves her readers with is that Scarlett, an independent, modern woman at this point, will reconnect with Rhett ... if that is what she chooses to do.

This plight of the modern individual is a key component in Mitchell's writing and drives the narrative of *Gone with the Wind*. The label of a historical romance is no longer appropriate nor has it ever been a true description of the novel. Mitchell's early life was spent trying to reconcile the Victorian expectations of a Southern woman with the murmurs of feminism that began to rise during her adolescence. The tension created by this shift in culture was not lost on the author, and she absorbed the complexities created in trying to navigate a modern society. The story of a generation is set against a

background of war, political corruption, growing capitalism, prescribed gender roles, and alienation. A childhood spent amidst Civil War veterans and suffragettes haunted Mitchell and followed her into the cultural chaos of the modern era. Her inner struggle — a conflict experienced by many in the 1930s — is documented in the life stories of Georgians who found themselves caught in a similar struggle. Eighty years after publication, *Gone with the Wind* remains one of the top selling novels of all time. It is time to disregard Mitchell's self-deprecating remarks and take a closer look at the novel that's underneath all those hoopskirts.

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