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Kathryn Stelmach Artuso

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KATHRYN STELMACH ARTUSO
Westmont College

Irish Maternalism and Motherland in *Gone with the Wind*

*There was a land of
Cavaliers and Cotton Fields
Called the Old South. . .
Here in this pretty world
Gallantry took its last bow. . .
Here was the last ever to
Be seen of Knights and their
Ladies Fair, of Master and of Slave. . .
Look for it only in books,
For it is no more than a dream remembered.
A Civilization gone with the wind. . .*
—Prologue to *Gone with the Wind*, the film

MOST AFICIONADOS OF *GONE WITH THE WIND* ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE prologue to the film, which scrolls across the screen accompanied by soaring music and cotton-laden landscapes, espousing a feudal fantasy of the Old South, the plantation myth of medieval gallantry, courtly cavaliers, and beautiful belles. Fewer would know that Margaret Mitchell did not compose the alliterative prologue to the film and in fact denounced its incantatory romanticization of the antebellum era, having written her novel as a specific critique of this “moonlight and magnolias” myth, which had earlier been advocated by local color authors such as Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris.¹ Despite Mitchell’s attempt to make Ashley Wilkes the impotent mouthpiece for such paralyzing nostalgia, Hollywood’s romantic idealization of a golden age of abundance proved especially appealing during the Great Depression, and Scarlett O’Hara’s famous vow—as God is her witness—that she “will never be hungry again,” resonated with 1939 movie audiences in a manner perhaps inconceivable today. Such nostalgia for a lost era of prosperity and plenty manifests itself in a “historical” short film called

¹Though Sidney Howard wrote the screenplay, Ben Hecht wrote the prologue, with the original version reading as follows: “Here in this patrician world, the Age of Chivalry took its last bow” (Pyron 388-89). The term “patrician” proves far more evocative for my own research, connoting as it does the elements of aristocratic paternalism.

The Old South, directed by Fred Zinnemann and written by Herman Hoffman, which was shown by MGM in theatres prior to the release of *Gone with the Wind*.² Images of wealth appear in rapid succession as the camera closes in on gleaming silver trays loaded with fifty or more mint juleps, followed by countless cups of coffee, and finally culminating in a shot of an aristocratic ballroom dance. As these images emerge, the following voice-over is heard: “Vast plantations were soon to flower upon the rich Southern soil. There came to the South an era of wondrous beauty, of moonlight and magnolias and mint juleps, an era of chivalry and true hospitality, and gallantries of devil-may-care cavaliers and their lovely ladies fair.” All of this occurred, according to the short film, because of King Cotton, but perhaps such a well-known personification falls short, when the “documentary” in fact metonymically deifies Cotton in a manner that removes any agency from white slaveholders, even as it offers paratactic tautologies that sound laughably absurd today: “Cotton mothered and fathered the Old South. Cotton brought the slaves. Cotton fought a war. Cotton created a magnificent empire, then destroyed it. Cotton *was* the South. Cotton *is* the South.”

For the international release of *Gone with the Wind*, MGM added a different explanatory prologue, which scrolls across the screen in lieu of the “land of cavaliers” preface cited above: “A century ago there were two ways of life in the United States of America. The Northern way was that of growing cities and an *industrial tomorrow*; the Southern way, that of slave-worked cotton plantations and a *romantic yesterday*” (emphasis added). This prologue merges romantic nostalgia with a rural version of Southern identity established by the Agrarians in their 1930 manifesto, *I’ll Take my Stand*.³ Like their revivalist counterparts in

²Zinnemann perhaps sought to atone for the overt racism of “The Old South” when he later directed an endearing film adaptation of Carson McCullers’s *The Member of the Wedding* (1952).

³In *Inventing Southern Literature*, Michael Kreyling contends that the

Agrarian project was and must be seen as a willed campaign on the part of one elite to establish and control “the South” in a period of intense cultural maneuvering. The principal organizers of *I’ll Take My Stand* knew full well there were other “Souths” than the one they touted; they deliberately presented a fabricated South as the one and only real thing. On their left was the near-legendary scrutiny of the Sahara of the Bozart triggered by the Scopes trial in the mid-1920s. On the right was a movement to institutionalize nostalgia for the Old South. (xii)

Ireland who idolized the rural life as the most authentic repository of cultural distinctiveness, the Southern Agrarians also reclaimed the ideological battle for their region by seeking to reconsecrate the soil—in opposition to what they considered to be the industrial and acquisitive mentality of the North. Rarely considered in tandem with the Agrarians' manifesto or the Southern Literary Renaissance, Mitchell's work provides unexpected insights into the project of regional re-enchantment adopted by both Irish and Southern writers, as she locates such an act of reclamation in an Irish Catholic anti-heroine of the American South, an anti-heroine who conquers the town of Atlanta as easily as she dominates the rural realm of her father's plantation. Unlike the Agrarians and the Irish revivalists, however, Mitchell offers a more balanced economic vision when she privileges both a rural and an urban identity for the South through her protagonist who easily alternates between farm and factory management. In the second part of the novel, Scarlett will feel an affinity with Atlanta's brassiness and even draw analogies between her own childhood and the town's development, but this urban appeal is evenly counterbalanced by the magnetism of the land to which she must inevitably return.⁴ Rhett in fact declares that Scarlett is "like the giant Antæus who became stronger each time he touched Mother Earth," an image that draws attention to Scarlett's transgressive gender status and to her larger-than-life personality (968).

Although Mitchell's novel was not published until 1936, she wrote it between 1926 and 1929, thereby aligning her work more closely with high modernism and Flapper-age feminism than with Depression-era social realism, but the novel uneasily bridges the gap between the 1920s and the 1930s, defying both the experimental modernism of the 1920s and the documentary realism of the 1930s. During the Depression and the Second World War, *Gone with the Wind* remained an unprecedented bestseller in America and in Europe, offering Scarlett's fierce perseverance and shrewd courage in the face of external disaster as a model for survival—and a feminist one at that. To call this novel a work of "popular fiction" seems like a vast understatement when it

⁴On the reception history surrounding *Gone with the Wind*, as well as a discussion of Scarlett's affinity with Atlanta's New South industrialism, see Sarah Gardner.

remains one of the all-time best-selling novels in the world.⁵ Although Mitchell specifically requested that no sequels to her novel be published, the trustees of her estate disregarded this injunction and struck a lucrative deal with Alexandra Ripley after Mitchell's brother died. When *Gone with the Wind* later inspired an "unauthorized parody" by Alice Randall called *The Wind Done Gone* (2001), told from the point of view of Scarlett's mulatta half-sister, Mitchell's trustees filed an unsuccessful lawsuit to stop the publication. In contrast, the estate "authorized" Ripley's sequel, *Scarlett* (1991), which avoids race relations in the South and instead takes the titular protagonist to Ireland, where she becomes both Catholic peasant and Anglo-Irish landowner, ultimately run out of town by the same peasantry she sought to befriend.⁶ While most of Ripley's novel ranks low on any scale of artistic merit, the scene where Scarlett gives birth is well written and heavily indebted to medieval Irish and Welsh tales, especially to "Pwyll Penddeuc Dyuet" from the *Mabinogion*, where a visitor from the otherworld attempts to reach through the window and replace the child with a changeling.

Spawning not only sequels but endless collectibles, such staggering popularity thoroughly dumbfounds critics who have disparaged *Gone with the Wind* for its sanitized depiction of slavery and have pointed to novels such as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved* as more legitimate representations of the Civil War and its aftermath. Even though Mitchell considered her depiction of white Southerners to be iconoclastic and

⁵Approximately thirty million copies of *Gone with the Wind* have been sold in more than thirty-seven countries, and it continues to sell a quarter of a million copies per year (Ruppensburg 326). Published in 1936, one million copies sold in its first six months, a feat unprecedented in publishing history and later surpassed by Alexandra Ripley's sequel, *Scarlett*, one of the fastest-selling novels of the century—before *Harry Potter* took such measures to a new level (Ruppensburg 326; McPherson 65). Such popularity should give us pause when we recall that a novel called *Absalom, Absalom!*, now widely considered one of the South's masterpieces, was also published in 1936—with little or no fanfare.

⁶Ripley's sequel mentions African Americans only once—at the opening of the novel, when Mammy promptly dies. Tara McPherson argues persuasively that *Scarlett* maintains a lenticular logic of covert racism that displaces interracial relations in the South in favor of "securing the meaning of whiteness in an era of multiculturalism" (70). For a compelling analysis of Randall's revisionist counter-narrative, see Patricia Yaeger. In contrast to my claims, Helen Taylor's discussion of *Gone with the Wind* and *Scarlett* presents a less sympathetic depiction of transatlantic relations between Ireland and the South and between British and American cinema.

inclusive of all classes, her representation of slavery and Reconstruction appears particularly objectionable today, indebted as it is to Thomas Dixon and D. W. Griffith's vision in *The Birth of a Nation*. As Mitchell's biographer notes, "American historiography was on the brink of a monumental shift in its approach to Reconstruction, black history, slavery, and the South just as *Gone with the Wind* was going to press," and the revision of scholarship "made Mitchell's work appear especially reactionary," which "helps account for the academic revulsion against her novel after World War II" (Pyron 311). In their reviews, critics such as Malcolm Cowley and Bernard De Voto also equated the novel with the "feminization" of literature and the "amiable weakness" of the bourgeoisie, claiming that "The women's magazines, and the slicks in general, merely canalized the popular taste" (Pyron 335). At a time when Southern women such as Eudora Welty and Katherine Anne Porter excelled at the short story, male critics both mocked and lauded this "minor" form as an appropriate one for women, appearing hesitant to admit a woman into the pantheon of American novelists—and even more hesitant to admit one into the Southern Literary Renaissance. Assertions of faulty artistry in *Gone with the Wind* can be deflected through a close textual analysis of the sections on the burning of Atlanta and the flight to Tara, where the prose style sustains a powerful momentum. As for more substantive accusations, perhaps Mitchell sensed that something was amiss with her representation of Reconstruction—a profoundly racist representation—as the novel's pace slows considerably in that section.

While critics such as Tara McPherson, Anne Goodwyn Jones, and Helen Taylor have explored the novel's ambivalent representations of race, femininity, and Irishness, respectively, they all agree that the novel codifies a mythical, nostalgic portrayal of the Old South.⁷ Yet when Scarlett rises from the earth and vows "never to look back," she sets herself in severe counterpoint to the paralyzing effects of nostalgia, most clearly represented by Ashley and Twelve Oaks. This famous scene, in

⁷ Jones states that "If there is a winner in *Gone with the Wind*, it is the 'old days'" (349). Taylor decries the "mythic southern dynasty derived from an idealized version of Irishness" (39) in *Gone with the Wind* and *Scarlett*, while McPherson analyzes the plantation home as the "primary environment of memory and desire" that whitewashes racial truths (54). Gardner also claims that "In the postwar world, Tara inspires nostalgia, but nothing more" (250).

which Scarlett vows never to be hungry again, occurs behind the slave cabins of Twelve Oaks, where her reduction to poverty and hunger places her in a liminal space between races and classes, a place where she chooses not to be subservient to nostalgia:

When she arose at last and saw again the black ruins of Twelve Oaks, her head was raised high and something that was youth and beauty and potential tenderness had gone out of her face forever. What was past was past. Those who were dead were dead. The lazy luxury of the old days was gone, never to return. And, as Scarlett settled the heavy basket across her arm, she had settled her own mind and her own life.

There was no going back and she was going forward.

Throughout the South for fifty years there would be bitter-eyed women who looked backward, to dead times. . . . But Scarlett was never to look back. (428)

Critics of *Gone with the Wind*, even revisionist critics like Jones who have lauded Scarlett's proto-feminist behavior, often fail to take into account the truly volatile, anti-nostalgic, and revolutionary nature of the novel, in which an Irish anti-heroine, both magnetic and repulsive, disrupts colonizing dynamics and elevates subordinate terms.⁸ Paternalistic attitudes resonate throughout all relationships in the novel, replicated across the board in the dialectic between parent and child, master and slave, male and female, English and Irish. Revealing that the subordinate second term has the capacity to supersede the first, especially in the binaries that pit English against Irish and male against female, *Gone with the Wind* provokes a reconsideration of Genovesean representations of the South, instead rendering a maternalistic vision of Southern identity.⁹

⁸Jones, for instance, views Scarlett as a tragic figure in a novel that challenges but ultimately upholds conventional gender roles (349).

⁹In *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Eugene Genovese offered a class-based analysis of slavery, contending that Southern slaveowners functioned as benevolent paternalists, who offered protection for their child-like slaves, thereby uniting oppressor and oppressed in a complex web of "mutual obligations" that "implicitly recognized the slaves' humanity"—an argument espoused earlier by Thomas Jefferson and George Washington (5). Although Eric Foner has critiqued Genovese's claims on numerous occasions, James Oakes in *The Ruling Race* makes the strongest case against Genovese's vision of slaveowners as seigniorial paternalists, arguing that Southern slaveholders shared the same enterprising ethos championed by Northern capitalists. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel characterized the master as a dependent "consciousness" that can only define itself according to mutual interdependence with the slave's consciousness; both

Throughout the novel, the anti-paternalist, anti-nostalgic revolutions unravel in ceaseless cyclicity, upending, inverting, and restoring, as the novel throws nearly every conceivable trauma at the anti-heroine—war, famine, rape, miscarriage, deaths of parents, husbands, friends, and children. And yet—and herein lies the enduring appeal of the novel—only Scarlett will be left standing at the end, a “woman to whom nothing was left from the wreckage except the indestructible red earth on which she stood” (490). In its reevaluation of minor terms, the novel dismantles nostalgia and Anglo-Saxon paternalism while also drawing explicit parallels between Ireland and the American South, conflating Scarlett’s maturation and domestic discord not only with the catastrophic consequences of Civil War in America and in Ireland, but also with the Irish and Southern battles for autonomous self-government. Her body thus becomes the site for the traumatic violation and ultimate reclamation of the Irish and Southern soil, as she seeks to reconsecrate the ravaged land: “Tara stretched before her, negroes gone, acres desolate, barns ruined, like a body bleeding under her eyes, like her own body, slowly bleeding” (418). Like Molly Bloom or a modern-day Medb, a Cathleen who waits for no man’s kiss, Scarlett confronts and conquers the Waste Land.

Fatherland, Motherland

In the exposition to this five-act tragedy, a tragedy that will culminate in a catastrophe of multiple deaths followed by Rhett’s ruin, part one of the novel establishes the parallels between Scarlett’s maturation and that of the South, in which the pampered anti-heroine displays boundless confidence in her charms, imagining that nothing can ever disrupt her desires or her way of life. And yet this will be the last spring of Scarlett’s carefree adolescence as well as the last spring for the Old South, as Scarlett’s first defeat in love occurs concurrently with the opening theatre of war. As the action progresses via scenic contrasts of interior and exterior, Scarlett dominates the domestic and natural realms in a masculine fashion, controlling her father and the Tarleton twins,

master and slave therefore depend upon one another for the reciprocal sustenance of their identities (61). Yet Frantz Fanon contends in *Black Skin, White Masks* that Hegel’s sense of mutual symbiotic reciprocity in the master/slave dialectic misjudges the white master’s hegemony over his black slaves: “What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work” (220).

until the exposition climaxes in the library scene at Twelve Oaks, where she meets her match in the two men she cannot control—the Jamesian stake against which the rest of the novel’s action swirls.

The opening scenes set in motion the motifs that will recur, fusing the “motherland” of Ireland with that of the South, even as it underscores the inverted paternalism that will disrupt several power dynamics in the novel. In imagery evocative not only of wombs but of war, prefiguring both bloodshed and birth, the “bloody glory of the sunset” drenches the “savagely red land” of the rolling red clay fields, as the “moist hungry earth, waiting upturned for the cotton seeds, showed pinkish on the sandy tops of furrows, vermilion and scarlet and maroon where shadows lay along the sides of the *trenches*” (7-8, emphasis added). In the midst of this violently fertile landscape, the house of Tara expands in concentric connotations, from home to plantation to land, standing as a metaphor not only for the actual Irish hill of Tara—the seat of the ancient high kings—but also for the island of Ireland itself, even as the “Big Houses” of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy often stood as a synecdoche for the island “nation”: “The whitewashed brick plantation house seemed an *island* set in a wild red sea, a sea of spiraling, curving, crescent billows petrified suddenly at the moment when the pink-tipped waves were breaking into surf” (7, emphasis added). Later in the novel, the plantation will experience its own version of the Irish Famine and rent arrears, as it remains completely isolated from the outside world while its starving inhabitants struggle to wrest a meager existence from the land and deflect rising taxes: “a thousand miles of tumbling waves might have stretched between Tara and Jonesboro and Fayetteville and Lovejoy, even between Tara and the neighbors’ plantations” (428). Reversing the terms of nineteenth-century Ireland, in which the minority Protestant Ascendancy owned the estates and dominated the Catholic majority, the “Big House” of this Southern plantation is owned by none other than an Irish Catholic, in a region where Catholics constitute the minority.

The Scots-Irish, so important for historian Grady McWhiney’s “Celtic” vision of the South, are here dismissed as an inassimilable minority, the least friendly and least generous family in the

county—unpardonable sins in a region known for its hospitality.¹⁰ Gerald O’Hara’s dislike of his neighboring Orangemen can be traced to the rash behavior of his youth, when he fled Ireland after murdering a landlord’s rent agent, who had the audacity to whistle the opening bars of “The Boyne Water” in Gerald’s presence. Before his death, Gerald experiences one last moment of Irish revolutionary fervor, when he refuses to sign the Ironclad Oath and follow in the footsteps of his Scots-Irish neighbors, who had signed the document in order to receive compensation from the Union for their loss of property. Replicating in miniature the battle between North and South, the conflict between an Ulster Orangeman and an Irish Catholic dramatizes the difficulty inherent in repairing national rifts and fraternal discord. Mitchell thus re-creates and re-imagines nineteenth-century Ireland in the American South, but her comprehensive inversion of terms elevates Irish Catholics from tenants to landowners, downgrades the Scots-Irish and the Anglo-Irish, and intimates that others will also participate in this transformative process. Aligning Irish Catholics with the American South, Mitchell deliberately draws affinities between the oppressive tactics of the Northerners and those of the English, even as she affirms the vitality of the subordinate character, who “had learned early that little people must be hardy to survive among large ones. And Gerald was hardy” (43).

Fusing two stereotypes in his being, the boisterous Gerald O’Hara embodies the blustering bravado of the classic stage Irishman, tempered by the typology of the master as benevolent paternalist. The wild and childish Irishman thus becomes the empathetic protector of slaves and children, one who conflates the categories of slave and child in the same manner that the English imagined the Irish as petulant children:

¹⁰ In a controversial thesis, which has led to charges of xenophobia, Grady McWhiney argues in *Cracker Culture* that the Celtic pastoral tradition of the South privileged the oral over the written tradition and emphasized hunting and open-range herding over large-scale farming, while the love of leisure, tobacco, food, and “moonshine” ultimately proved contrary to the Puritan work ethic of the North, creating cultural divisions that led to the Civil War and to the ultimate defeat—once again—of the Celts by the Anglo-Saxons (McWhiney 38, 269). Several scholars, including Dennis Clark, Rowland Berthoff, and Donald Akenson, have disputed McWhiney’s reductionist reasons for the Civil War and his notion of an all-encompassing Celtic Southern ethnic identity, which McWhiney envisions as unmitigated by interactions with other cultural or ethnic factors, failing to account for various intermarriages and cultural contacts with American Indians and African Americans.

He could not bear to see a slave pouting under a reprimand . . . or hear a kitten mewling or a child crying; but he had a horror of having this weakness discovered. That everyone who met him did discover his kindly heart within five minutes was unknown to him . . . for he liked to think that when he bawled orders at the top of his voice everyone trembled and obeyed. (30)

Gerald's kindly paternalism falls prey to the manipulative moves of an adolescent Scarlett, who controls her father in the same way Bonnie will later manage Rhett. Inverting the parent/child dynamic, Scarlett looks at her father "with the affectionate contempt that mothers feel for small swaggering sons" and "knew that he would be very drunk by sundown" (82). Later in the novel, Mitchell mocks the stage-Irish stereotype as mere performance, even as she underscores the dangers of all Southern codes of conduct, which force men and women—black and white—into roles they may not want to assume. Growing increasingly senile, Gerald is bereft of any authentic identity at the end of his life; his "impudence and his restless vitality" dissipate after Ellen's death because she "was the audience before which the blustering drama of Gerald O'Hara had been played. Now the curtain had been rung down forever, the footlights dimmed and the audience suddenly vanished, while the stunned old actor remained on his empty stage, waiting for his cues" (436).

In elevating the subordinate character to major status, Mitchell transmutes Gerald from Irish slave to master paternalist, but her ostensibly innovative revolution immediately unravels upon itself as she undermines both typological constructs in a comedic manner, ultimately revealing the true master of the household: "It had never occurred to him that only one voice was obeyed on the plantation—the soft voice of his wife Ellen" (30). From Ellen and Grandma Fontaine to Mrs. Tarleton and Mrs. Merriwether, the maternalists stand at the helm of this novel, wielding power over all of the men except Rhett—the quintessential Southern paternalist who will finally be dethroned by the novel's end. Mammy's apparent authority over Scarlett also complicates conventional binaries, even as it naturalizes and obscures the actual lines of power in the service of maintaining the master/slave dialectic at the time of the novel's setting—and in the service of justifying the inequities of Jim Crow laws at the time of the novel's production. When Scarlett seeks to escape from the omniscient Mammy, who will quickly discern her dissembling tactics, she races off to meet her father but does not travel far before she encounters another maternal guardian along the way.

Gazing over the landscape as she waits for her father to return home, Scarlett remains spellbound by the “unearthly stillness of rural twilight,” which reminds her of the placid face of her mother at prayer, an image that foregrounds, for the first time in the text, the soil personified as sacred motherland, prefiguring the Marian imagery that Scarlett will later associate with Ellen: “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*” (27-28, emphasis added). Later in the novel, when Scarlett returns to Tara after a harrowing experience with Melanie’s labor, Atlanta’s destruction, and Rhett’s desertion, her thoughts directly echo the language and imagery from this scene, literally and symbolically conflating the violation of the land with the death of the mother:

In the rays of the late afternoon sun, every well-remembered field and forest grove was green and still, with an unearthly quiet that struck terror to Scarlett’s heart. . . . The countryside lay as under some dread enchantment. Or worse still, thought Scarlett with a chill, *like the familiar and dear face of a mother, beautiful and quiet at last, after death agonies.* (398, emphasis added)

For now, a heartbroken Scarlett scoffs at her father’s placating offer of Tara, causing an indignant Gerald O’Hara to invoke the metaphor of the motherland, which not only nurtures its offspring but also calls them into battle and heroic self-sacrifice—much like the Cathleen ní Houlihan conjured by Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Patrick Pearse: “Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything. . . . ’Tis the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for—worth dying for. . . . And to anyone with a drop of Irish blood in them *the land they live on is like their mother*” (36, emphasis added).

From symbolic motherland to Marian purity, Ellen O’Hara contrasts sharply with Scarlett’s gender-bending iconoclasm and stands as a hollow totemic figure, disembodied in Scarlett’s memory as a “whisper and a fragrance” (925), a “gentle shell” (42) or *tabula rasa* around which idealizing images of womanhood coalesce—the great Southern Lady, the Lady of Sorrows, the sacred motherland. During the family’s evening prayers and especially during the Litany of the Virgin, the maternalist cult at the heart of the novel appears when Scarlett thinks of this as “a moment for adoration of Ellen, rather than the Virgin. Sacrilegious though it might be, Scarlett always saw, through her closed eyes, the

upturned face of Ellen and not the Blessed Virgin, as the ancient phrases were repeated" (70).¹¹ In *The Mind of the South*, which followed closely upon the heels of *Gone with the Wind*, W. J. Cash alluded to the novel and also offered an exuberant parody of the veneration of Southern women, which sounds similar to the hyperbole surrounding Ellen: "She was the South's Palladium, this Southern woman—the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds . . . the mystic symbol of its nationality in the face of the foe. . . . And—she was the pitiful Mother of God. Merely to mention her was to send strong men into tears—or shouts" (86).

Although Mitchell fashioned Ellen as a coastal aristocrat of French descent, the author's knowledge of Irish history reveals that she deliberately paired the Irish and French nationalities in an emblematic union, welding together anti-Northern and anti-English antagonisms. Mitchell originally planned to name Tara "Fontenoy Hall," invoking the site of a French victory over England in 1745 made possible by a brigade of Irish mercenaries known as the "wild geese" (O'Connell 25). Later in the novel, the Ellen-like Melanie will read from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*; that Confederate troops called it Lee's *Miserables* highlights the intersections between French, American, and Irish revolutionary fervor.

Adapting Grady McWhiney's "Celtic South" thesis, James Cantrell explores the English/Irish antitheses in order to contrast the "Celtic" Scarlett with the "Anglo-Saxon" Ashley, but he neglects to note the Anglo-Irish aristocratic descent revealed in Rhett Butler's surname. The spiraling hostilities between Rhett and Scarlett in fact reproduce the sociohistorical conflicts embedded within their names, pitting an aristocratic Anglo-Irish paternalist against a rebellious Irish Catholic.¹²

¹¹ Contemporary Southern novelists, including Sue Monk Kidd and Rebecca Wells, have continued the themes of Marian feminist spirituality as an alternative to paternalist racism, privileging the potential for ecumenical and interracial sisterhood. See, for example, *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002) and *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (1996). The latter novel offers a tragicomic depiction of Atlanta's gala premiere of *Gone with the Wind*, shown from the divergent perspectives of a young white girl and an African American maid.

¹² The most prominent Butler family in Ireland is descended from Theobald Fitzwalter, whom Henry II named Chief Butler of Ireland and whose descendants became the Dukes of Ormond, distant relatives of William Butler Yeats—or so he claimed. Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," written during the Civil

Drawing upon her maternal Fitzgerald ancestry, Mitchell deliberately sought to incorporate various Irish rivalries into her text, such as the longstanding family feud between the Butlers and the Fitzgeralds, who shared control of Ireland until the seventeenth century.¹³ Despite Scarlett's ancestral and behavioral associations with rebellious renegades, such as the "Scarletts who had fought with the Irish Volunteers for a free Ireland . . . and the O'Haras who died at the Boyne" (420-21), she sometimes seems closer in spirit to an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy heiress like Elizabeth Bowen, who also struggled to maintain a decaying estate.¹⁴ In language that mirrors Bowen's own fears, Scarlett rejoices when the war ends because "Tara was safe! Now her worst nightmare would never come true. Now she would never have to stand on the lawn and see smoke billowing from the beloved house and hear the roar of flames as the roof fell in" (489). To prepare herself for the worst outcome during the Irish Troubles of the 1920s, Bowen said that she often trained herself "to imagine Bowen's Court in flames. Perhaps that moment disinfected the future: realities of war I have seen since have been frightful; none of them have taken me by surprise" (Bowen 440). Much like the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, which shriveled away until its eventual fossilization in film and tourism, the collapse of the Southern plantation aristocracy finally calcified in the enduring popularity and endless paraphernalia of *Gone with the Wind*.

Civil War, civil war: Scarlett's battle for autonomy

As Scarlett enters a new phase of identity formation in which the child must parent herself, she gains a new appreciation of her Irish ancestors and a deeper love of the land, ultimately culminating in a

War, inspired the "Battle Hymn of the Butlers," which is sung to the same tune as Howe's piece and contains the line, "The clan goes marching on" (Seaver).

¹³ Rather than rehearse how Mitchell reinvented and reconfigured her Irish ancestry in *Gone with the Wind*, I will instead defer to Darden Pyron's *Southern Daughter*, Kieran Quinlan's *Strange Kin*, and Anne Edwards's *Road to Tara*, which all offer a thorough appraisal of these biographical issues. James Cantrell and Eliza McGraw render rare discussions of Scarlett's ethnic identity; McGraw, for instance, claims that Scarlett is a "tragic mulatta" trying to "pass" in white society (128-29).

¹⁴ The intimate friendship between Eudora Welty and Elizabeth Bowen also elucidates transatlantic intersections between Ireland and the American South (see Artuso, "Transatlantic Rites").

symbolic fusion in which the red clay in her hand merges with the clay of her body. Before this occurs, however, Scarlett must endure the condescending paternalism of both Ashley and Rhett and specifically fight to throw off the belittling attitudes of Rhett, who associates Irish vitality with childish temper. As a tomboyish child, Scarlett preferred boys and slaves as playmates (58); as she grows older, she sustains her subversive schemes in such a manner that the town of Atlanta will eventually claim that she has “unsexed herself” like Lady Macbeth (641).¹⁵ In contrast to the gracious and selfless dignity of her mother, Scarlett manipulates the “vener” of “belle” and Southern “ladyhood,” barely disguising the fact that she has more in common with her “headstrong and impetuous” father (59-60), scarcely concealing the conflict between refinement and floridity that “frequently raged” in her bosom, “where the blood of a soft-voiced, overbred Coast aristocrat mingled with the shrewd, earthy blood of an Irish peasant” (87).

When she first declares her love to Ashley and he responds with gentle paternalist admonitions, “like a father speaking to a hurt child” (116), she reacts in an impassioned manner that foregrounds the childish Irish vitality that will so enamor Rhett, but which also contains seeds of murderous frenzy. Reflecting on Ashley’s rejection, Scarlett recognizes that she behaved like a “spoiled child thwarted of a toy” (264): “suddenly all the years of Ellen’s teachings fell away, and the forthright Irish blood of Gerald spoke from his daughter’s lips”; “And then her rage broke, the same rage that drove Gerald to murder and other Irish ancestors to misdeeds that cost them their necks” (115, 117). Whenever Rhett seeks to taunt Scarlett and elicit her temper, he mocks her “Irish-peasant” heritage, calls her an “ignorant child,” and reminds her of this scene, declaring that it is one of his “priceless memories—a delicately nurtured Southern belle with her Irish up” (340, 304, 195). In a scene which pairs Ashley and Rhett as opposite sides of the same patrician coin—one an effete idealist, one a Borgia-like Machiavel—both characters emerge as highly-educated leaders of a rebellious throng of children, both

¹⁵Scarlett’s ambiguous gender identity has prompted commentary from Anne Goodwyn Jones, Anne Edwards, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who have delineated connections with Margaret Mitchell’s own “play with transsexual identifications,” a confusion they attribute to the phenomenon of the New Woman (Fox-Genovese 408; Jones 321-32, 338-39; Edwards 54, 72-73). Eve Sedgwick also notes that Scarlett’s ability to manipulate her sexuality and her traditional gender role “from behind a screen as objects of pure signifiers . . . is the numbing but effective lesson of her life” (8).

discouraging war from their own divergent viewpoints of idealism and pragmatism. Watching Rhett lounge against a tree, Scarlett notices that “there was a glint of amused contempt in his black eyes—contempt, as if he listened to the braggings of children” (110).

Seventeen years older than Scarlett, Rhett plays both the overly indulgent father and brutal master to Scarlett’s Irish childishness, a theme emphasized by his Anglo-Irish aristocratic ancestry. In this role, Rhett does not hesitate to take advantage of Gerald’s stage-Irish drunkenness and embarrass him in public in order to give Scarlett an opportunity to blackmail her father and allow her to remain in Atlanta. Acting as surrogate father in Gerald’s absence, Rhett oscillates between stinging sarcasm and unexpected tenderness, calling her a “brave little girl” during the burning of Atlanta: “So gentle, so quiet, so devoid of mockery, it did not seem Rhett Butler’s voice at all but the voice of some kind strong stranger who smelled of brandy and tobacco and horses, comforting smells because they reminded her of Gerald” (380). In his mid-thirties, Rhett was

older than any beau she had ever had, and she was as helpless as a child to control and handle him as she had handled beaux nearer her own age. He always looked as if nothing had ever surprised him and much had amused him and, when he had gotten her into a speechless temper, she felt that she amused him more than anything in the world. (220-21)

In almost every conversation with Scarlett, Rhett never hesitates to ridicule her Irish heritage, but he vacillates between admiration of her shrewd courage and mockery of her lower class status, claiming that he likes Scarlett for the “elasticity” of her conscience, for the “selfishness” which she seldom bothers to disguise, and for the “shrewd practicality” derived from “some not too remote Irish-peasant ancestor” (340).

Usually associating Scarlett’s Irishness with her childish temper, Rhett at one point equates Scarlett’s courage not only with her ethnicity, but also with her transgressive gender status, which proves more masculine than feminine: “I’ve never known an Irishman to be a coward. Where’s your much-vaunted courage?”; “We are not gentlemen and we have no honor, have we?” (931, 938). Hoping that Scarlett will stand beside him in his battle against Southern hypocrisies, Rhett says, “I thought the Irish said what they thought and the Divvil take the hindermost. Tell me truthfully, don’t you sometimes almost burst from

keeping your mouth shut?" (239). Never allowing her to pretend to patriotic platitudes that contradict her "hard-headed Irish sense," Rhett appreciates her anti-nostalgic mind-set and sees through her subterfuge: "The Irish are the poorest liars in the world. Come now, be frank. You never gave a damn about the late lamented Confederacy and you care less about the starving Confederates" (173, 625). When Scarlett attempts to sell herself to Rhett as his mistress in order to pay the taxes on Tara, Rhett states that the Irish are the "damnedest race. They put so much emphasis on so many wrong things. Land, for instance. And every bit of earth is just like every other bit" (583). In one of his most insulting statements, Rhett declares that "The O'Haras might have been kings of Ireland once but your father was nothing but a smart Mick on the make. And you are no better" (902). Scarlett frequently "flared into open wrath under his expert baiting" (221), a lack of self-control that would dismay the Irish revivalists, who sought to prove the Irish people's aptitude for self-government, but this very incapacity secures Scarlett's survival, even as Rhett's excessive self-control guarantees misunderstanding and eventual defeat.

At Atlanta's bazaar, Scarlett realizes in astonishment that she does not support the "sacred" Cause of the South, that she considers the war a "nuisance that killed men senselessly," and that she "did not share with these women their fierce pride, their desire to sacrifice themselves and everything they had for the Cause" (172). She also believes that she completely dislikes Rhett, but "there was something stimulating about him, something warm and vital and electric. All that was Irish in her rose to the challenge of his black eyes" (186). This pivotal scene reveals a subtle interplay between Rhett's desires to set Scarlett free from the bondage of mourning and social convention while simultaneously buying her as a slave for himself. He appears to be colluding in the text's hierarchical inversions when he declares

that the system of mourning, of immuring women in crêpe for the rest of their lives and forbidding them normal enjoyment is just as barbarous as the Hindu suttee.

. . . A wife who didn't burn herself would be a social outcast. All the worthy Hindu matrons would talk about her for not behaving as a well-bred lady should—precisely as those worthy matrons in the corner would talk about you, should you appear tonight in a red dress and lead a reel. Personally, I think suttee much more merciful than our charming Southern custom of burying widows alive! (182-83)

Despite his anti-conventional stance, which seeks to disrupt most Southern and colonial codes of conduct for men and women, Rhett still dominates every conversation with Scarlett, constantly interrupting her, rarely allowing her to speak, and thoroughly enjoying her frustrated outbursts of temper. Perhaps this should come as no surprise when his first name is derived from the Latin *rhetor*—appropriate for one who speaks as eloquently as he does. Such acts of silencing prefigure Gayatri Spivak’s claims that the colonized subaltern in fact cannot speak, claims made in an article discussing widow sacrifice in India.¹⁶ Like the colonized Irish, Scarlett must find her voice in this relationship in order to gain a capacity for self-governance and self-representation. To dramatize the colonial dynamic at work in their relationship, the dance auction offers a direct parallel with a slave auction, as Melanie notes in scandalized tones. When Rhett calls out her name (“Mrs. Charles Hamilton—one hundred and fifty dollars—in gold”), Scarlett envisions this as a moment that frees her to re-enter the social world, when it in fact places her in subordination to Rhett and on the fringes of the Southern world of decorum (191). This motif of ownership, exploitation, and slavery repeats throughout their relationship, especially when Rhett asks Scarlett to be his mistress—a crucial scene not included in the movie—and when Scarlett later attempts to sell herself to him as a mistress in order to pay the taxes on Tara.¹⁷ During their marriage, Rhett often threatens to “give her a good lashing with a buggy whip,” but Scarlett attempts to reverse this master/slave dynamic when she realizes that “He loved her and so she had him at last. She had almost forgotten

¹⁶ In “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice,” Spivak answers her question with a negative response, claiming that even though the colonized subaltern cries out in various ways, no one truly listens or responds to her. Spivak then criticizes postcolonial scholars who remain embedded in imperialist domination, as they categorize the East in a way that mirrors oppressive ideologies. Spivak and Homi Bhabha denounce the assumption of a collective agency or cultural solidarity among heterogeneous peoples.

¹⁷In another significant scene not included in the movie, Scarlett again exhibits profound courage when she confronts the Yankees and saves her home from being burned to the ground—with quite a bit of help from Melanie (465-70). In the novel, Melanie displays far more vocal authority and “gumption”—Mitchell’s favorite word—than in the film. In *The Wind Done Gone*, Randall portrays Melanie as a serial killer and Ashley as a homosexual.

her early desire to entrap him into loving her, so she could hold the whip over his *insolent black head*" (945, 941, emphasis added).¹⁸

Rhett and Scarlett's perpetual badinage in their battle of the sexes enacts a microcosm of the outer battle between North and South, English and Irish, master and slave, parent and child, a discord reflected in the military rhetoric used to describe their antagonistic quarrels: "Always, it was a duel in which she was worsted" (310), and even though she imagines that she will be able to "tell him sweetly she could only be a sister to him and retire with the full honors of war" (339), "the sense of his great physical power struck her like a blow" (304), and her body usually betrays her into surrender, with a "treacherous warm tide of feeling that made her want to run her hands through his hair, to feel his lips upon her mouth" (339). The full array of hierarchical dynamics in their relationship appears in a scene where Scarlett learns of Atlanta's impending siege and then voices her favorite maternal oath. She tells Rhett that she has heard about

"The siege at Drogheda when Cromwell had the Irish, and they didn't have anything to eat and Pa said they starved and died in the streets. . . . And when Cromwell took the town all the women were—A siege! Mother of God!"

"You are the most barbarously ignorant young person I ever saw. Drogheda was in sixteen hundred and something and. . . . Besides, Sherman isn't Cromwell." (309)

While Scarlett draws correspondences between Irish and Southern Lost Causes in the face of barbaric colonial cruelty, Rhett instead yokes Scarlett's "barbarous" childish ignorance with her Irishness. Throughout this scene, Rhett calls her a number of infantilizing names, including "ragpicker's child" and "ignorant child," ultimately declaring that he is waiting for her to grow up before he kisses her: "I never fancied kissing children" (303, 304, 311). When Scarlett says she would rather kiss a pig, Rhett responds that "There's no accounting for tastes and I've always heard the Irish were partial to pigs—kept them under their beds, in fact" (310). Such insulting stereotypes heighten the English/Irish, parent/child antitheses between the two characters, revealing Rhett's conflicting desires for dominance and equality as he awaits Scarlett's maturation. Mitchell's endless interplay of such dialectics allows her to dramatize whether the future of the South will be handed over to aristocratic

¹⁸See pages 580, 685, 830, 832, 860, 890, 911, and 935 for further examples of this whip motif.

paternalists or whether a disintegration of hierarchies will occur, perhaps extending to all races and classes in the South. Only after Scarlett runs a plantation and a business, completely independent in both the rural and the urban realms, does she enter marriage with Rhett and an ostensible state of equality. Despite his claims in this scene, Rhett prefers her behavior at the earlier stages of her development, before her heart is hardened by labor on the land.

During their marriage, he encourages her to return to a state of childlike playfulness and of total freedom without social boundaries—a freedom that involves enslavement to his paternalism:

I wanted to marry you and protect you and give you a free rein in anything that would make you happy—just as I did Bonnie. . . . No one knew better than I what you'd gone through and I wanted you to stop fighting and let me fight for you. I wanted you to play, like a child—for you were a child, a brave, frightened, bullheaded child. I think you are still a child. No one but a child could be so headstrong and so insensitive. (1030)

When Rhett assumes that he has failed to win Scarlett's love in the face of her obsession with Ashley, he transfers all of his affection to their child Bonnie, who looks and behaves like a reincarnated Gerald O'Hara, and who wields authority over her father with an "iron hand" (988):

I liked to think that Bonnie was you, a little girl again, before the war and poverty had done things to you. She was so like you, so willful, so brave and gay and full of high spirits, and I could pet her and spoil her—just as I wanted to pet you. But she wasn't like you—she loved me. It was a blessing that I could take the love you didn't want and give it to her. . . . When she went, she took everything. (1031)

What has war and poverty "done" to Scarlett that Rhett so dislikes? Not only does she mature into a fiercely independent woman, she also saves her home and family from destruction, becoming the new master and maternalist in the face of her father's senility and her mother's death. Scarlett's new birth of independence begins with the birth of Melanie's child, when she realizes that she will have to accomplish something unaided for the first time in her life—alone in a womb-like room with a mother in excruciating pain and a frightened slave who knows less about childbirth than she professes. Conflating the agony of war with the agony of childbirth, Mitchell draws explicit parallels between the two leveling experiences, which both break artificial

barriers between races and classes and individuals through the strangely empathetic experience of bodily pain.¹⁹ From every social stratum, the wounded arrive at Scarlett's door requesting water and aid (331). As she unites the violent separation of death with the traumatic sundering of birth, Mitchell dramatizes the manner in which birth and death minimize the bodily separation between individuals and call into question presumptions of autonomy. Searching frantically for Dr. Meade, Scarlett is horrified to witness the following scene of "stinking, bleeding bodies broiling under the glaring sun":

Lying in the pitiless sun, shoulder to shoulder, head to feet, were hundreds of wounded men, lining the tracks, the sidewalks, stretched out in endless rows under the car shed. Some lay stiff and still but many writhed under the hot sun, moaning. Everywhere, swarms of flies hovered over the men, crawling and buzzing in their faces, everywhere was blood, dirty bandages, groans, screamed curses of pain as stretcher bearers lifted men. . . .

If she did not find Dr. Meade soon, she would begin screaming with hysteria. (361-62)²⁰

Back in Melanie's womb-like room, the scene repeats on a smaller scale as the flies attack a writhing Melanie and the September heat beats down mercilessly, a scene which underscores Scarlett's own laborious identity formation through the repetition of "hysteria"—etymologically derived from the Greek word for "womb":

The room was an oven and Scarlett's sweat-drenched clothes never dried but became wetter and stickier as the hours went by. . . .

. . . She felt as if she had been in this steaming, dark, sweating place all her life. She wanted very much to scream every time Melanie did, and only by biting her lips so hard it infuriated her could she restrain herself and drive off hysteria. (367-68)

In an uncanny balancing of the scales, perhaps privileging a theory of limited good, Melanie's child arrives just after the young Phil Meade

¹⁹For an overview of this bodily theory, see Terry Eagleton's *After Theory*.

²⁰During this scene in the movie premiere of *Gone with the Wind*, when the camera panned over hundreds of wounded men in the street, Mitchell's husband John Marsh reportedly whispered, "Why, if we'd had that many soldiers, we would have won the war" (*Show* 188).

dies, and Scarlett shoulders the new responsibilities of protective maternalism just as her own mother succumbs to typhoid.²¹

Despite the previous scenes' elevation of maternal strength and solidarity, Scarlett reverts to a state of child-like passivity as Atlanta goes up in flames, a scene of "ear-splitting" "pandemonium" (383, 375) that weirdly recapitulates Melanie's screaming labor: "The world became an inferno of noise and flame and trembling earth. . . . Torrents of sparks shot to the sky and descended slowly, lazily, through blood-colored clouds of smoke. . . . She was a child and mad with fright and she wanted to bury her head in her mother's lap and shut out this sight" (375). Turning to Rhett for help, Scarlett requests his paternalist protection, and he calls her a "brave little girl" and a "good child" (380), as "His black eyes danced as though amused by the whole affair, as though the earth-splitting sounds and the horrid glare were merely things to frighten children" (378). Yet he also knows precisely what to say to set the paralyzed Scarlett in motion: "Can this be the heroic young woman who assured me she feared neither God nor man?" (381). As their Dantesque journey through the hellish, hyperreal atmosphere of Atlanta's destruction unfolds, Mitchell renders the collision of birth and death imagery in vivid prose—at once impressionistic and incantatory—as they travel through tunnels of fire, Gothic landscapes, and Miltonic pandemonium:

dark silent houses loomed up on either side and the white palings of fences gleamed faintly like a row of tombstones. The narrow street was a dim tunnel, but faintly through the thick leafy ceiling the hideous red glow of the sky penetrated and shadows chased one another down the dark way like mad ghosts. The smell of smoke came stronger and stronger, and on the wings of the hot breeze came a pandemonium of sound from the center of the town. . . .

. . . . In the unholy crimson glow that bathed them, [Rhett's] dark profile stood out as clearly as the head on an ancient coin, beautiful, cruel and decadent. . . .

. . . . Ahead of them was a tunnel of fire where buildings were blazing on either side of the short, narrow street that led down to the railroad tracks. They plunged

²¹In critical scenes in the novel, whether retching over a radish (427) or kissing Ashley in the orchard (533), Scarlett steps out of linearity and into a ritualized moment of "timeless time," a moment that occurs during this larger-than-life episode as well: "The clock on the mantel had stopped and she had no way of telling the time" (368). A favorite technique of Faulkner's, such frozen timelessness implies a cyclical spatiality that Mircea Eliade and Walter Benjamin would term "sacred time," made spatial through the recurrence of redemptive moments set apart in a symbolic fashion.

into it. . . . For an eternity, it seemed, they were in the midst of flaming torment and then abruptly they were in semidarkness again. (383-84, 386)

With the “springy stride of a savage” and a “carefully restrained ferocity in his dark face,” Rhett resembles a “pagan prince,” a man who may be any number of ethnicities other than Anglo-Saxon (378).²² As they emerge from this flaming tunnel, Rhett surfaces from his own rebirth experience, converted to the Southern codes of chivalry and heroic sacrifice that he had earlier ridiculed. Witnessing a ragged group of soldiers passing before him, Rhett sees the heroism of a young boy and an old man and realizes that he should be fighting with the men and not fleeing with the women and children. Unable to completely cast off the gentlemanly codes of conduct in which he remains ensnared, Rhett merely performs his insubordination to Southern mores before and after this moment, presenting a sharp contrast with the non-performing Scarlett, who radically breaks with Southern conventions in her quest for self-invention and autonomy.

This is Scarlett’s tale of heroism, after all, a tale that unites the woman, the slave, and the child, and so Rhett leaves her “on this dark road with a woman who might be dying, a new-born infant, a foolish black wench and a frightened child, leaving her to pilot them through miles of battle fields and stragglers and Yankees and fire and God knows what” (389). Throughout their journey across the war-torn wasteland, Scarlett imagines that once she reaches her home and her mother, she will be able to lay down her burdens and revert to a state of child-like dependence, but “There was death in the air,” and the day’s horrors only

²²Joel Williamson maintains that the dark imagery associated with Rhett suggests that he may be African American, but Mitchell goes to considerable lengths to associate Rhett with American Indians instead. He has a “peculiarly lithe Indian-like gait” (179), “a light Indian-like tread” (621), and runs “lightly as an Indian” (939), and his “face was dark as an Indian’s and his teeth were white in a jeer” (963). An early description of Dilcey reveals intriguing similarities to the first description of Rhett: “Indian blood was plain in her features. . . . The red color of her skin, narrow high forehead, prominent cheek bones and the hawk-bridged nose . . . all showed the mixture of two races” (62). When Scarlett first sees Rhett, she notes that “there was undeniably a look of good blood in his dark face. It showed in the thin hawk nose over the full red lips, the high forehead and the wide-set eyes” (96). The master/slave dialectic thus collapses in the figure of Rhett, who represents an even more uncanny *tabula rasa* than Ellen herself. One could argue that Scarlett and Rhett’s failed marriage is ahead of its time, perhaps representing a union between a white woman and an African American man, whom Mitchell encodes as American Indian.

foreshadow more horrors to come (398). Chapter XXIV, the portion of the novel that Mitchell saved to write until the very end (Pyron 278), embodies the crucial turning point in which the themes of Irishness, paternalism, and motherhood coalesce and hinge upon the choices Scarlett will be forced to make. Her quest for the elusive grail of maternalist comfort will end in futility, prefigured by a devastated landscape that merges the death of the mother with the violation of the land: “The countryside lay as under some dread enchantment. . . . like the familiar and dear face of a mother, beautiful and quiet at last, after death agonies” (398).²³ The conflation of the Marian-like mother with the beloved land renders a ravaged landscape of mythical proportions, in which the desecration of the sacred soil must ultimately be redeemed by the daughter, whose slaying of a Yankee officer provides a blood sacrifice necessary to replenish the motherland. When she shoots the Yankee who has invaded her home, Scarlett feels that “She had struck a blow of revenge for Tara—and for Ellen” (441). As she removes her nightgown to cover the bleeding head of the soldier, Melanie again draws attention to the leveling theme of common bodily recognition, which unites the women in childbirth and in death, as they bring men into the world and take them out of it, a balancing of the scales that mirrors the balanced duality shown in the two women’s personalities.

As she journeys wearily towards home, the personification of Tara as mother grows ever more explicit in Scarlett’s mind:

If she could only reach the kind arms of Tara and Ellen and lay down her burdens, far too heavy for her young shoulders—the dying woman, the fading baby, her own hungry little boy, the frightened negro, all looking to her for strength, for guidance, all reading in her straight back courage she did not possess and strength which had long since failed. (398)

In case we may have missed the magnitude of the accumulating maternalist imagery, a cow appears on the scene, ready to give birth to a calf, and Scarlett harnesses it to their wagon in the face of Prissy’s refusal—another leveling moment in which Scarlett willingly takes on

²³The “still, haunted desolation” of the countryside evokes not only T. S. Eliot’s *Waste Land*, in which the desiccation of the landscape mirrors spiritual and physical sterility, but also Robert Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came,” where the descriptions of the decrepit horse, the encompassing ghosts, and the ravaged soil sound eerily similar to Mitchell’s (397-98).

the role of a field hand. Growing increasingly aware of a new sense of mutual responsibility towards others, Scarlett realizes that Melanie and her child now “belonged to her, even as Wade and Prissy belonged to her, and she must struggle and fight for them as long as she had strength or breath” (400).

Miraculously, Tara has survived the onslaught of battle, but the Gothic imagery now associated with the house intimates that the sins of Southern history have come home to roost: “Then she saw a form, shadowy in the dimness, emerging from the blackness of the front veranda. . . . Tara stood intact, yet shrouded with the same eerie quiet that hung over the whole stricken countryside” (404). Ellen died the day before, and Gerald has become a broken old man, to whom Scarlett speaks in the same manner that she speaks to her own child, an infantilization that again inverts the hierarchy of paternalism. Yet before Ellen’s death, Gerald’s courage managed to save Tara from destruction, as he met the Yankees on the front porch and dared them to burn the house over the heads of three sick women—an act of courage overtly associated with the trauma of Irish history: “There were too many Irish ancestors crowding behind Gerald’s shoulders, men who had died on scant acres, fighting to the end rather than leave the homes where they had lived, plowed, loved, begotten sons” (411). Scarlett feels that the house, “sacred because Ellen had lived in it,” “had been defiled,” but Ellen in her delirium was spared the knowledge of the occupation and “never learned that *the land which was part of her heart* was under Yankee feet” (410, 412, emphasis added).

In the wake of Ellen’s absence, Scarlett turns to Mammy and Dilcey for maternal consolation, an act that underscores the unrealized potential for interracial sisterhood and leveling hybridity in the novel.²⁴

²⁴ Sisterhood develops mainly on Scarlett’s terms, and the narration does not allow equality or interiority for the African American women, a fact noted by Tara McPherson, Alice Walker, and Eve Sedgwick. For a discussion of the Mammy image, see Hazel Carby, bell hooks, Patricia Morton, Thomas Cripps, K. Sue Jewell, Helen Taylor, Diane Roberts, and Eve Sedgwick. On interracial sisterhood in the South, see Nell Irvin Painter; for a discussion of whiteness as a racial category, see Toni Morrison and Diane Negra. Geraldine Higgins claims that Mitchell’s representations of Irishness complicate traditional ethnic categories in the South (46). After several dismissals of *Gone with the Wind*, Leslie Fiedler proclaimed his secret devotion to the novel, spawning a trend where literary critics would confess to their love-hate relationship with the novel before engaging in textual analysis.

As Scarlett watches Dilcey nurse Melanie's baby, the bodies of the black mother and the white child blur together—an objective correlative for the internal conjunction of Dilcey's own dual ethnicities of African American and American Indian. Yet Mammy and Dilcey fail to provide the complete maternal security that Scarlett craves, and in the face of wholesale disillusionment, Scarlett realizes that she will have to become both mother and father if she and her family are to survive the cataclysm surrounding them: "The long road from Atlanta to Tara had ended, ended in a blank wall, the road that was to end in Ellen's arms. Never again could Scarlett lie down, as a child, secure beneath her father's roof with the protection of her mother's love wrapped about her like an eiderdown quilt" (418). At the pivotal turning point of the novel, Scarlett must decide whether to fight for her family and home, a decision in which she must accept not only the responsibilities of maternalism but also the metaphoric congruence that aligns the woman with the land. Such an analogy has already been actuated as the violation of the motherland descends upon the daughter: "Through the window, in the faint light of the rising moon, Tara stretched before her . . . like a body bleeding under her eyes, like her own body, slowly bleeding. . . . at the end of this road, there was nothing—nothing but Scarlett O'Hara Hamilton, nineteen years old, a widow with a little child" (418-19).²⁵ The earlier parallels between the blood of childbirth and the wounds of war coalesce here, even as the subtle suggestions of menstruation imply fertility and rebirth. As the clay of her body metaphorically merges with the clay of the land, Scarlett's maturation into maternalism occurs at last:

somewhere along the long road to Tara, she had left her girlhood behind her. She was no longer plastic clay, yielding imprint to each new experience. The clay had hardened, some time in this indeterminate day which had lasted a thousand years. Tonight was the last time she would ever be ministered to as a child. She was a woman now and youth was gone.

. . . . She could not desert Tara; she belonged to the red acres far more than they could ever belong to her. (420)

²⁵Some critics may claim that Scarlett literally fails to be a loving mother to her own children, but the umbrella concept of maternalism, deployed in an emblematic fashion, encompasses larger familial and feminist issues, as Scarlett protects her home, family, and extended family from destruction.

At the most important moment in the novel, as she chooses to reclaim the ravaged land, the strength and courage of Scarlett's Irish ancestors is conveyed to her:

There were the Scarletts who had fought with the Irish Volunteers for a free Ireland and been hanged for their pains and the O'Haras who died at the Boyne, battling to the end for what was theirs.

All had suffered crushing misfortunes and had not been crushed. They had not been broken by the crash of empires, the machetes of revolting slaves, war, rebellion, proscription, confiscation. Malign fate had broken their necks, perhaps, but never their hearts. . . . And Scarlett was not surprised to see them, these kinsmen who had taken the worst that fate could send and hammered it into the best. Tara was her fate, her fight, and she must conquer it. (420-21)

And conquer it she does. Managing both a plantation and a business after the war, Scarlett reconstructs her life in a fiercely independent fashion, shorn free from social and gendered boundaries, tackling and conquering each challenge set before her as she vows "never to look back" (428). The greatest danger to Scarlett's pledge appears in her interactions with Ashley, the weakest member of the relational quadrille, and the one with the least wherewithal to survive the cataclysm that has befallen his beloved way of life. In a wintry scene in the orchard at Tara, Scarlett and Ashley's relationship resonates with the Persephone/Hades myth, as Scarlett travels through a "thicket of pomegranate trees" to speak with him (525). When she throws herself at him,

spring was back again, that half-forgotten balmy spring of green rustlings and murmurings, a spring of ease and indolence, careless days when the desires of youth were warm in his body. The bitter years since then fell away and he saw that the lips turned up to his were red and trembling and he kissed her. (533)

But such a descent to the underworld of the past ultimately offers little appeal to the vigorous Scarlett, who

shivered and saw, as if coming back from a long journey, that it was winter and the fields were bare and harsh with stubble and she was very cold. She saw too that the old aloof face of Ashley, the one she knew so well, had come back and it was wintry too, and harsh with hurt and remorse. (534)

Ashley at least knows how to bring Scarlett back to earth as he presses the red clay of Tara into her hand, clay that has already metonymically merged with her own body:

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. . . . He had only to press the damp earth into her hand to bring her to her senses. (535-36)

Scarlett's major betrayal of her vow "never to look back" occurs when Ashley later traps her in a moment of moonlight and magnolias nostalgia—a moment which India Wilkes interprets as adultery, but which in fact dramatizes Scarlett's own treachery to her self-avowed progressiveness. Ashley again appears as a Hades figure who tempts Scarlett with his mirage-like evocation of seasonal sensuousness, replete with "cool autumn moons" and "dogwood trees," but even the magical moonlight on his hair fades to gray when Scarlett comprehends the paralyzing effects of nostalgia:

"Do you remember," he said—and a warning bell in her mind rang: Don't look back! Don't look back!

. . . . under the spell of his voice the bare walls of the little office faded and the years rolled aside and they were riding country bridle paths together in a long-gone spring. . . .

But when she looked at Ashley he was no longer young and shining. . . . and she saw that his once bright hair was very gray, silver gray as moonlight. . . . Somehow the bright beauty had gone from the April afternoon and from her heart as well and the sad sweetness of remembering was as bitter as gall. (924-25)

This scene underscores the dangers of fixation on an idealized vision that never truly existed, a vision as vacuous as Scarlett's obsession over Ashley, as empty as the moonlight and magnolias myth of the Old South.

One revelation after another follows closely on the heels of this scene when Scarlett finally experiences not only sexual fulfillment with Rhett but also a new sense of selflessness and self-redemption in the face of Melanie's blind love and sacrificial death: "With one of the few adult emotions Scarlett had ever had, she realized that to unburden her own tortured heart would be the purest selfishness"; "a flood of warm gratitude to God swept over her and, for the first time since her childhood, she said an humble, unselfish prayer" (947, 1010). Yet some of Scarlett's revelations arrive too late, and she returns home after

Melanie's death to find that Rhett has become a broken and drunken parody of the nostalgic Ashley, yearning for a lost era of "slow charm" and "genial grace" and no longer giving a damn about Scarlett (1034-35). "Heavy with fatigue," "Drink and dissipation," Rhett says that he longs for "the calm dignity life can have when it's lived by gentle folks, the genial grace of days that are gone" (1024, 1034):

His voice was calm and tired but there was something in the quality of it that raised a ghost of memory in Scarlett. She had heard a voice like this once before and at some other crisis of her life. Where had it been? The voice of a man facing himself and his world without feeling, without flinching, without hope.

Why—why—it had been Ashley in the wintry, windswept orchard at Tara, talking of life and shadow shows with a tired calmness that had more finality in its timbre than any desperate bitterness could have revealed. Even as Ashley's voice then had turned her cold with dread of things she could not understand, so now Rhett's voice made her heart sink. (1030)

In contrast, the film adaptation depicts a vigorous Rhett, who saunters off into the fog with the audience's sympathy in hand, a scene which completely ignores Mitchell's deliberate destruction of the quintessentially paternalistic Southern male.²⁶ His famous farewell in the novel in fact signifies immense apathy and immense despair—not a nonchalant flippancy—but the movie remains so dominant in the American imagination that few are aware of Rhett's debilitation in the final scenes of the novel. Unlike the conclusion of the film, which revels in Scarlett's prolific tears, the novel displays Scarlett's new capacity for maturity and self-governance when she refuses to throw a childish temper tantrum, a moment that garners Rhett's respect (1034). Finally unmasked before one another, Scarlett and Rhett converse as mature individuals: "It was the first time in her life she had ever been sorry for anyone without feeling contemptuous as well, because it was the first time she had ever approached understanding any other human being" (1031-32).

Rhett's exhausted and symbolic collapse in the face of multiple catastrophes contrasts sharply with Scarlett's limitless survival techniques, a point made by Mammy after Bonnie's death when she tells Melanie that what Scarlett "got ter stan', de good Lawd give her strent ter stan'. Disyere done broke her heart but she kin stan' it. It's Mist'

²⁶While Drew Gilpin Faust claims that "*Gone with the Wind's* portrait of the Old South's white patriarchs is an unrelieved indictment" (11), she focuses primarily on representations of Gerald, rather than Ashley or Rhett, as I am doing here.

Rhett Ah come 'bout. . . . Mist' Rhett done—done los' his mine" (992). Rhett's final incapacitation signals the destruction of aristocratic Southern paternalism and reveals the dominance of Scarlett as a rebellious Irish woman, even as it demonstrates the collapse of all binaries in their relationship, ushering in a glimmer of hope that such a disintegration of hierarchies can now extend to other races and classes in the South. Scarlett's ability to restore and reinvent herself with each day's dawning resurfaces when the novel concludes with her famous mantra of renewal ("Tomorrow is another day") and her longing to return to Tara for healing and rebirth. Scarlett's return to Tara does not represent a nostalgic desire for the Old South, as so many critics claim, but rather a return to the deepest level of her being, to the Irish heritage that gives her the strength and courage to face any and all of life's vicissitudes: "With the spirit of her people who would not know defeat, even when it stared them in the face, she raised her chin" (1037). Handing the future of the South over to the Scarlett O'Haras with an indefatigable will to survive and a refusal to sacrifice their lives in the service of any masculine martyrology or nostalgia, Margaret Mitchell shows us who has endured the wreckage of history, who has rebuilt the South, and who has lived to see another day.

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