

GONE WITH THE WIND

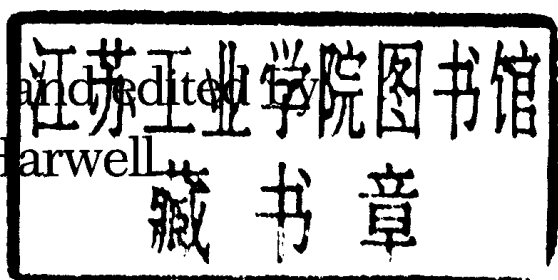
as Book and Film

Edited by Richard Harwell



Gone With the Wind *as Book and Film*

Compiled and edited by
Richard Harwell



University of South Carolina Press



Paperback Edition, 1992

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Published in Columbia, South Carolina, by the
University of South Carolina Press

Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Main entry under title

Gone with the wind as book and film

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Mitchell, Margaret, 1900–1949. *Gone with the wind*
—Addresses, essays, lectures. 2. *Gone with the wind*
(Motion picture)—Addresses, essays, lectures 3. Novel-
ists, American—20th century—Biography—Addresses,
essays, lectures. I. Harwell, Richard Barksdale.

PS3525 I972G683 1983 813' 52 83-3633

ISBN 0-87249-420-9

BOOKS BY RICHARD HARWELL

Confederate Belles-Letters (1941)
Confederate Music (1950)
Songs of the Confederacy (1951)
The Confederate Reader (1957)
The Union Reader (1958)
The Confederate Hundred (1964)
Brief Candle The Confederate Theatre (1972)
The Mint Julep (1975)
In Tall Cotton (1978)

BOOKS EDITED BY RICHARD HARWELL

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Cities and Camps of the Confederate States
by FitzGerald Ross (1958)
Kate The Journal of a Confederate Nurse
by Kate Cumming (1959)
Lee, by Douglas S. Freeman
(1961, one-volume abridgment)
Washington, by Douglas S. Freeman
(1968, one-volume abridgment)
Tiger Lilies, by Sidney Lanier (1969)
Georgia Scenes, by A. B. Longstreet (1975)
Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind" Letters
1936-1949 (1976)
GWTW The Screenplay, by Sidney Howard (1980)
White Columns in Hollywood, by Susan Myrick (1982)

Preface

"It is no exaggeration to say that if all the stories and articles on Margaret Mitchell and the book (factual, fantastic and false) were published," wrote Ralph McGill in 1962, "they would make a half a dozen or more volumes as thick as the novel itself." When that was written scholars had scarcely begun serious consideration of *Gone With the Wind*. Decades later the book is the object of continuing popular enthusiasm and widening scholarly interest. The bibliography of books and articles about *Gone With the Wind* as book and film and about its author still grows and confirms for the present what Mr. McGill wrote some thirty years ago: "That the deluge of interest and curiosity in her and it has never halted is eloquent evidence of the book's healthy longevity."

Gone With the Wind as Book and Film is not an attempt to collect "all the stories and articles on Margaret Mitchell and the book." They would indeed fill several volumes. It is instead a sampler of the many kinds of things that have been written about the novelist and her book—avoiding, however, the fantastic and the false and giving its readers as full a quota as practicable of the factual.

The factual is not always limited strictly to the facts. It includes the responses of different people at different times and in different ways to the facts. The compiler of this anthology does not, therefore, vouch for every fact as given in the recollections and interpretations that fill this volume. That the various authors believed what they said is truth enough in matters of opinion. Articles "fantastic" or patently "false" have not been included. In a few cases, falsities have crept into pieces accurate in general. Where necessary, such deviations from fact have been corrected in editorial notes.

The first section of *Gone With the Wind as Book and Film* is primarily a record of the background of the class of novels into which GWTW strode as a giant in 1936 and of its publication and its reception into the book world. Its second section is about Margaret Mitchell and how her novel changed her life. Section III describes the social background against which *Gone With the Wind* made its appearance—the South as a historical and psychological region in the 1930s—and some specialized aspects of the novel and novelist—theological, political, and psychiatric.

In its fourth section this collection details how GWTW moved from book to film and samples its reception as a cinematic production. It concludes with E. D. C. Campbell, Jr.'s fine summary article, "Gone With the Wind: The Old South as National Epic." The final section is critical in nature. Its seven scholarly essays range in date of composition from Robert Y. Drake, Jr.'s pioneering "Tara Twenty Years After" (1958) to Harold Schefski's 1980 essay comparing GWTW with *War and Peace*.

Malcolm Cowley stated the touchstone of GWTW criticism when he wrote in *The New Republic* for September 16, 1936, that the novel was an encyclopedia of the plantation legend, "false in part and silly in part and vicious in its general effect on Southern life today." Not all the critical essays in this anthology are favorable; Floyd Watkins' and James Boatwright's are particularly unfavorable. But all can be interestingly judged in relation to McGill's triad—"Factual, fantastic and false"—and to Cowley's—"false . . . , silly . . . , and vicious." The reader is, after all, the final critic.

* * * * *

The pieces in this volume have been chosen to represent as widely as possible the scope of writings about *Gone With the Wind*. They have been selected to give the reader as accurate and as interesting information as possible. Unfortunately it has not been possible to obtain permission to include one selection originally picked for *Gone With the Wind as Book and Film*. Other items, such as Philip Jenkinson's "Gone With the Wind" (*Radio Times*, 19 December 1981); Robert E. May's "Gone With the Wind as Southern History" (*Southern Quarterly*, fall 1978), and Jerome Stern's "Gone With the Wind: The South as America" (*Southern Humanities Review*, winter 1972) were especially enticing candidates for inclusion but had to be ruled out because they are too like other articles that appear here.

I am indebted to a great many others in bringing this book about. My gratitude goes first to each contributor. In addition I record my debt to my former colleagues at the University of Georgia Libraries: Robert M. Willingham, Larry Gulley, Tom Dietz, Mrs. Dorothy Shackelford, Marvin Sexton, Mrs. Faye Dean, Mrs. Geneva Rice, Mrs. Mary Ellen Brooks, and James A. Taylor, Jr. Others who have helped include Mrs. Margaret L. Branson, Herbert Ross Brown, Kay Brown, Beverly M. DuBose, Jr., Anne Edwards, David E. Estes, Tom Fletcher, Mrs. Marion B. Harwell, Mrs. Annie Pye Kurtz, Mrs. Patty Leard, Susan Lindsley, Jed Mattes, Mrs. Linda Matthews, Joseph R. Mitchell, Stephens Mitchell, Richard Mohr, Diane Windham, and Mrs. Ann E. Woodall. I thank them all.

Richard Harwell

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Introduction

Book and film, *Gone With the Wind* has been running for more than half a century, piling up records and building its own history and legends. The book has sold more than 25 million copies—in at least 27 languages and 185 editions, and the film has been seen by more individuals than the total population of the United States.

James A Michener wrote of the novel as its fortieth anniversary approached that the essential fact about *Gone With the Wind* “is its extraordinary readability” Margaret Mitchell, he says, “is best considered, I think, a unique young woman who before the age of ten loved to tell stories and who at twenty-six began a long and powerful recollection of her home town That it was destined to become a titanic tale of human passions, loved around the world, was a mystery then and remains one now”¹

Three years later (in the year before the film reached its fortieth birthday) Rex Reed selected it as his choice for the all-time best motion picture “Although there have been more artistic triumphs,” he declared, “it is the film I’ve seen most and I have never been even slightly bored or disappointed Forty years later it is still fresh minted”²

Gone With the Wind burst upon the world a bestseller by its publication date, June 30, 1936 Macmillan printed a first edition of 10,000 copies for release April 21 Publication was deferred to May 5 and then to May 31 when the publishers realized the book was a potential moneymaker of unusual extent The author was asked to sign a large number of copies (she signed endpapers to be bound into 750 copies and then autographed an additional 500 books) for distribution as promotion copies amongst bookshops and to reviewers When it was made the Book-of-the-Month Club selection for July, its release was set for June 30 Despite the author’s public surprise at its reception, she and her publisher knew the day it was put on sale that they had a hit No one guessed the extent of that hit

1 James A Michener, “Introduction’ to Margaret Mitchell *Gone With the Wind* (New York 1975 anniversary edition), pp x, xii

2 “Academy Awards of All Time’ *The Saturday Evening Post*, CCL no 5 (Jy/Aug 1978) 40

Three weeks into July 176,000 copies had been sold. Sale of the screen rights was reported July 16 and announced July 23 and the contract with Selznick International Pictures was signed July 30. By mid-November there were 750,000 copies in print and in early December the publishers produced the millionth *Gone With the Wind*. It was eagerly gobbled up by a depression audience equally hungry for success and for entertainment. For along with its other merits, GWTW was a bargain; 1,037 pages for \$3.00.

Critical reception of *Gone With the Wind* was almost as enthusiastic as the public's. Scoffers denigrated the success of such a plain, straightforward yarn. But sober judges of good books acclaimed it. Richmond's Ellen Glasgow, herself the author of a fine Civil War novel, *The Battle-Ground*, wrote "*Gone With the Wind* is a fearless portrayal, romantic yet not sentimental, of a lost tradition and a way of life." Another author of a distinguished novel about the Confederacy, Charleston's DuBose Heyward, judged it "as fine a novel as has come out of our generation." In Chicago Sterling North called it "one of the great novels of our time." Paul Jordan Smith described GWTW for Los Angeles as "the most satisfactory, the most convincing, the most powerful presentation of that tragic period that has ever been put into fiction." And Henry Steele Commager, then an up-and-coming young historian at New York University, rhapsodized in the *New York Herald Tribune Books*. "The story told with such sincerity and passion, illuminated by such understanding, woven of the stuff of history and of disciplined imagination is endlessly interesting. It is a dramatic recreation of life itself."³

The years have seen Miss Mitchell's work discounted but never torn down, nor yet bettered. Scholarly papers have been undertaken to attack it—and completed to praise it. Amateur and professional historians have combed it for flaws of fact—and have found none of consequence. One honors paper at Amherst College went to great length to explain how Scarlett could not have known to leave Atlanta when she did because she could not have heard by then of the Confederate defeat at Jonesboro. Miss Mitchell proudly produced the record of a Confederate telegrapher showing at what time the news reached Atlanta. So with item after item.

There is surprisingly little of textbook history in *Gone With the Wind*. The reader fills in the background of military history from the author's deft references to the facts of the Civil War. But an illusion of exact and detailed history is produced by her exact and detailed descriptions of day-to-day life in the period of the Civil War and Reconstruction. As Michener declares: "The abiding merit of this novel is not that it has given us the portrait of a headstrong young woman, but that it has depicted with remarkable felicity the spiritual history of a region."⁴

3 These reviews are quoted in The Macmillan Company, *Margaret Mitchell and Her Novel Gone With the Wind* (New York 1936), pp 9, 10, 22.

4 Michener, p. xi.

Concerning her use of history, Miss Mitchell told Lamar Q. Ball of the *Atlanta Constitution* in a long interview in 1936:

After I had sold the book, I knew I would have hundreds of well-informed persons ready to leap at any inaccuracy. As a matter of fact, I had done no actual studying for the writing of the book. Of course, in years past, I had read a lot of history and, of course, I had listened to lots of stories told me by the old folks who had lived through this period. But, when I was reading history or listening to stories, I never thought I would use them in a book. When I sat down to write the book, I wrote out memories of long ago. I never thought I'd sell the book, so I didn't see any reason why I should bother with looking up the incidents in history books. After I really had sold the book, I realized I'd have to check every detail and I did. It took about eight months and the job was awful.⁵

Attesting the qualities that Michener says mark it as "the spiritual history of a region" Mildred Seydell, a veteran Atlanta newspaperwoman even in 1936, wrote of the younger woman's book the week it was published: "I don't know whether *Gone With the Wind* is a true picture of the South of those days. But I do know that it is a true picture of the picture of those days that I had gotten when a child from listening to ageing, graying relations and friends of their youth."⁶ If it does not fit the history of the Civil War as revisionists since her time have seen it, Margaret Mitchell's view does fit the view that was the Southern view for many years and itself has a validity as history. To put it another way, it is that great desideratum of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, an unbiased history of the war from the Southern point of view.

It is a commonplace in the history of *Gone With the Wind* that Miss Mitchell wrote her last chapter first and then wrote portions of her narrative leading up to that climactic chapter in no particular order. In Ball's interview with her, she discussed her methods of writing at considerable length. She told him how difficult writing the story of Scarlett's flight from Atlanta to Tara had been:

This part of the story worried me. I struggled with it in my mind. I prowled around it mentally for a long time, looking at it from all angles and not getting anywhere. I could never write a line of it and never made a try at it, on paper.

I didn't seem able to capture the smell of the cedars, the smell of the swamp, the barnyard odors, and pack them into those chapters. I was in the Ritz Hotel at Atlantic City when it all came to me. I can't explain why. The Ritz is nothing like Tara.

I can only tell you this. I was not even thinking about the story when all this came to me very simply and very clearly. It was a cold, wet winter when we were at Atlantic City and yet I could see clearly how dusty and stifling a red clay road in Georgia looks and feels in September, how the leaves on the trees are dry and there isn't any wind to move them, and how utterly still the deep country woods are. And there is the queerest smell in the swampy bottom lands at twilight. And I suddenly saw how very haunted such a section

⁵ *Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1936.

⁶ *Atlanta Georgian*, June 19, 1936.

would look the day after a big battle, after two armies had moved on. So I came home and wrote it.

Writing is a hard job for me. I don't have that facility for just dashing along. Those three chapters that I wrote as soon as I returned home from Atlantic City are about the only ones in the book that I did not rewrite at least twenty times. As they appear in the book, they are substantially as they were first written.

Persons who have read the book have told me it must be marvelous to be able to sit down and dash off sentences that read so smoothly. I have a hard time convincing them that the sentences I consider the easiest to read in the book are the ones that I labored over and rewrote and rewrote before I was satisfied I had made my meaning clear.⁷

Margaret Mitchell has been repeatedly upbraided for *Gone With the Wind's* lack of a distinguished style. She told Herschel Brickell of the *New York Post* that she had "deliberately chosen to write as clearly and as simply and as unobtrusively as possible, and that she had also studiously given the style as much of a colloquial flavor as she could."⁸ In talking to Ball, she expanded on this point:

I tried to make my story more or less colloquial and easy to read. I determined when I first sat down to the writing of this book that I would try to write as a native north Georgian speaks. I would rewrite sentences that sounded a trifle purist and try to get down to earth by rewriting and rewriting until I felt I had captured the conversation of the north Georgian in my descriptive paragraphs.⁹

Gone With the Wind was apprenticed in Margaret Mitchell's years on the *Atlanta Journal's Sunday Magazine*. It was begun in 1926 and virtually completed in 1929. She did a little work on it in 1930 and in 1931. It was then laid aside till Macmillan's H.S. Latham came to Atlanta on a manuscript hunt in the spring of 1935. She hastily recast the beginning of the book and wrote a new first chapter before letting Latham have the manuscript. After Macmillan accepted it very nearly the rest of her life was in one way or another spent working on *GWTW*.

She wrote an old acquaintance in the late summer of 1936:

I started "Gone With the Wind" when I had a broken ankle and couldn't walk. I finished it several years ago and never even tried to sell it. Therefore you can imagine my complete consternation when an editor came along, dug it up, published it and made a bestseller of it.¹⁰

It was not the publisher who made a bestseller of *Gone With the Wind*. It was the story and the characters and the hard work that Margaret Mitchell put

7 *Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1936.

8 *New York Post*, August 27, 1936.

9 *Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1936.

10 Margaret Mitchell to Morris H. Williams, Atlanta, Ga., 3 September 1936, quoted in Richard Barksdale Harwell, "'A Striking Resemblance to a Masterpiece—Gone With the Wind in 1936,'" *Atlanta Historical Journal*, XXV, no. 2 (summer 1981), 25.

into writing it. It became a part of the America of the 1930's, and—book and film—GWTW continues to be a very large slice of Americana

The sale of GWTW's screen rights in July 1936 should have solved some problems for its author. Instead it created new ones. Miss Mitchell was adamant in her decision to have as little to do with the making of the film as possible. She was, however, inevitably drawn into the hullabaloo that surrounded Selznick's public search for a "new girl" to play Scarlett and was called upon by the producer's staff for advice on more than one occasion

The book spawned legends. GWTW the film had even less chance to escape the kinds of stories—gossip, myth, whatever—that are part of the ambience of Hollywood. The most persistent myth about the filming of *Gone With the Wind* is that Vivien Leigh walked into the part of Scarlett O'Hara when she accompanied Myron Selznick, the agent brother of producer David O. Selznick, to the studio lot where the burning of Atlanta was being filmed December 10, 1938. Legend has it that Myron introduced her to D. O. S. saying "Here is your Scarlett."¹¹

The truth is that Miss Leigh had coveted the role for more than a year. She had been Selznick's ace-in-the-hole during much of the long talent search, and her arrival in Hollywood had been carefully timed. David Selznick, it is true, had not previously met her, possibly so she would qualify as new when he did eventually meet her. But they had been in touch through intermediaries and Selznick had kept for months in his private screening room a print of her performance in *A Yank at Oxford*.

Atlantan Wilbur G. Kurtz was on the lot for the fire scene. He was a friend of Margaret Mitchell who had been hired by Selznick as historian for the film. In his diary he wrote of the "charming young lady" who appeared just before the filming of the fire sequences began. "I watched her a while," he recorded, "suspecting she might be a personage. After the shooting ceased, I accosted Marcella [Marcella Rabwin, Selznick's principal secretary] with the question as to who she might be. Marcella whispered—'Vivien Leigh. Mr. Selznick is seriously considering her. I think she is the most ravishing thing I ever saw and she fulfills my idea of what Scarlett looked like.' Later, when Selznick walked off the set, going toward his car, he had Miss Leigh by the arm."¹²

Leigh was still no cinch for the part. The producer wrote his wife December

¹¹ This persistent legend is based on Howard Dietz's paragraph in the souvenir program prepared for the initial run of *Gone With the Wind*. Dietz wrote "The burning of the military supplies of Atlanta, one of the major spectacular scenes in the picture, was filmed on the night of December 15 [i.e., 10], 1938, at which time David O. Selznick met Vivien Leigh, a spectator, who had accompanied his brother Myron, the well known talent representative, to the studio. Struck by her physical resemblance to the Scarlett described by Miss Mitchell, in that she has the green eyes, narrow waist and pert features, he suggested a test. It was made and on January 16 [i.e., 13], 1939, he signed her for the role." Howard Dietz, ed., *Gone With the Wind* [souvenir program] ([New York: 1939]), p. 8.

¹² Wilbur G. Kurtz, "Technical Adviser: The Making of 'Gone With the Wind,' the Hollywood Journals of Wilbur G. Kurtz," edited by Richard Barksdale Harwell, *Atlanta Historical Journal*, XXII, no. 2 (summer 1978), 99.

12 "She's the Scarlett dark horse, and looks damn good. (Not for anybody's ears but your own: it's narrowed down to Paulette, Jean Arthur, Joan Bennett, and Vivien Leigh . . .)"¹³ By Christmas the finalists were Paulette Goddard and Leigh. By the first week of January, studio gossip had shifted from Goddard as the favorite and had Leigh in the part. She signed her contract on January 13, 1939

Shooting on *Gone With the Wind* began January 26. It continued with the full company to the end of June and was not actually completed till November 11. By then 449,512 feet of film had been shot. From this, 160,000 feet were printed. Editing reduced the film used in the picture to 20,300 feet

Shortly after Selznick purchased the film rights for \$50,000, a record price for a first novel, he engaged Sidney Howard to write *GWTW*'s screenplay. Howard wrote a fine screenplay, but its presumed running time far exceeded the two hours then regarded as the maximum for a film. (As shown *GWTW* runs three hours and forty minutes. Publicist Howard Dietz estimated that to film the whole book would produce a picture taking a week to show with the projector running twenty-four hours a day.)

To help convert Howard's screenplay into a shooting script Selznick called in O. H. P. Garrett. It was with a Howard-Garrett script that production began. Selznick had to get the picture under way, but he was far from satisfied with the shot-by-shot script. As late as March 12 Susan Myrick, another close friend of Margaret Mitchell who was working on the film, wrote her: "We have 60 pages marked 'completed script,' but every few days we get some pink pages marked 'substitute script' and we tear out some yellow pages and set in the new pink ones. We expect blue or orange pages any day now"¹⁴

Blue pages were not long in coming and the shooting script became a rainbow script. Seventeen writers and tinkers worked on it before the film was done: John Balderston, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Michael Foster, Garrett, Ben Hecht, Howard, Barbara Keon, Kurtz, Val Lewton, Charles MacArthur, John Lee Mahin, Edwin Justus Mayer, Winston Miller, Selznick, Donald Ogden Stewart, Jo Swerling, and John Van Druten.

It is impossible to identify in the screenplay the work of each writer. Selznick credited a few scenes to Hecht, a little of the work to Garrett, and a little to Van Druten. Fitzgerald wrote a scene or so that never made it to the screen and condensed and tightened several that did. Foster was largely responsible for the scenes at Tara in 1864 and 1865. Howard deserves credit for about 85 percent of the screenplay, but no one should forget that Selznick's mark is on every frame of the picture. The film is as indelibly his creation as the novel is Margaret Mitchell's. Since its premier at Atlanta's Loew's Grand Theatre December 15, 1939, it has belonged to the world.

13 David O. Selznick, *Memo from David O. Selznick*, selected and edited by Rudy Behlmer (New York 1972), p 180

14 Sidney Howard, *GWTW The Screenplay*, edited by Richard Harwell ([New York 1980]), p

Would Margaret Mitchell have written another novel? As long as the pace into which book and film thrust her life lasted she had no time for writing, but I am convinced that ink was in her blood and that she would eventually have produced another book except for her untimely death August 16, 1949

I knew her from before the publication of *Gone With the Wind* and had the pleasure of a long dinner conversation with her only a little while before her death. She talked of a possible book about Thomas Holley Chivers, an eccentric Georgia poet of the mid-nineteenth century who was, successively, friend and rival of Edgar Allan Poe, or one about the Confederate medical service during General Johnston's attempts to defeat Sherman in the Dalton area of north Georgia before he reached Atlanta, or a play about her own experiences as the author of a planetary bestseller, or a novel of Atlanta in the 1920's. She was full of ideas. Perhaps she would never have time to make any of them into books, but time was at last beginning to open for her.

She had made notes for work on a book about the Confederates who migrated to Brazil after the Civil War but had put them aside. Before *Gone With the Wind* was published she had begun and then destroyed a novel about Atlanta in the Jazz Age. And she had written a novella, "Ropa Carmagin," which had been inadvertently sent to Macmillan along with the manuscript of GWTW. Macmillan's editors found it awkwardly brief, and they did not want to contract for two books from the same unknown author at one time. By the time they and other publishers were clamoring for it, it was too late. Its author declined to permit its publication and it too was eventually destroyed.

My best guess is that her fertile mind would sooner or later have settled on one of her ideas and produced another book. And this much can be certain. She had no intention of publishing any new book until she was satisfied that it was as well done as *Gone With the Wind*. Neither had she any intention of writing a sequel to GWTW. For her the story ended when Rhett left Scarlett. For what happened after that she, like Rhett, did not give a damn.

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