

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC

170

TOPICS VOLUME



# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the Works of Various Topics  
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary  
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and  
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys  
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## Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 170

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## Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

### Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

### Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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# *Gone with the Wind* as Cultural Phenomenon

## INTRODUCTION

Published in 1936, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* has been an immensely popular novel with readers. It has also evoked a huge amount of critical attention since its publication, and its impact is evident in the myriad ways the work and its author continue to be celebrated. The U.S. Post Office released a Margaret Mitchell stamp in 1986, for example; and a decade later the house in which Mitchell wrote *Gone with the Wind* was preserved as the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum. The fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Gone with the Wind* was also a significant literary event, resulting in the publication of numerous articles and books offering assessments about the cultural and literary significance of Mitchell's novel. Scholar Helen Taylor has written that, in her view, the anniversary celebrations of Mitchell and her novel are evidence of the impact this novel has had in the cultural and social arena.

Although it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1937—chosen over William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*—*Gone with the Wind* has never gained canonical status. Reviews at the time of the book's publication were generally respectful, though Faulkner, perhaps smarting from the Pulitzer committee's decision, dismissed Mitchell's novel as literature for the "Kotex Age." A reviewer in the *New Republic* noted that, despite the book's "triteness and sentimentality," it possessed "a simple-minded courage that suggests the great novelists of the past." Critical commentary about the novel often focuses on Mitchell's characters, especially Scarlett O'Hara. Additionally, commentators have focused on the novel in the context of the Southern Literary Renaissance after World War I; have identified it as part of a noncanonical tradition of "women's literature"; and have discussed the cultural significance of the novel's continuing popularity, as represented by *Gone with the Wind* fans, clubs, and memorabilia collectors. Critics have also spent considerable time reviewing Mitchell's depiction of race-identity and race relations in the novel, noting that part of the enduring fascination with this work reflects ambivalent feelings about race and social change in the novel's readers, both in the United States and throughout the world. As Taylor has written, "*Gone with the Wind* still speaks. . . . Its continuing power should not be underestimated."



Despite critiques of Mitchell's depiction of African Americans in the novel, her nostalgic representation of the antebellum slave-holding South, and her positive portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan, the 1,037-page *Gone with the Wind* became an instant best-seller and a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, selling over two million copies in just twenty-one months during the Great Depression. Since then, the book has been translated into 27 languages, and, according to the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum, has sold more than 30 million copies, more than any other book except the Bible. Over sixty years after its initial publication, *Gone with the Wind* continues to sell approximately 300,000 copies a year, witness to its continuing impact on contemporary culture.

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## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Works by Margaret Mitchell  
*Gone with the Wind* (novel) 1936

- Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind Letters* [edited by Richard Harwell] (letters) 1976
- A Dynamo Going to Waste: Letters to Allen Edee, 1919-1921* [edited by Jane Bonner Peacock] (letters) 1985
- Lost Laysen* [edited by Debra Freer] (novella and juvenilia) 1985
- Before Scarlett: Girlhood Writings of Margaret Mitchell* [edited by Jane Eskridge] (juvenilia) 2000
- Margaret Mitchell: Reporter* [edited by Patrick Allen] (journalism) 2000

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## OVERVIEWS

### Darden Asbury Pyron (essay date autumn 1986)

SOURCE: Pyron, Darden Asbury. "Gone with the Wind and the Southern Cultural Awakening." *Virginia Quarterly Review* 64, no. 4 (autumn 1986): 565-87.

[In the following essay, Pyron suggests that *Gone with the Wind* should be considered, like the novels of William Faulkner, Ellen Glasgow, and Erskine Caldwell, a product of the Southern cultural renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. The critic reads Mitchell's novel within the framework of Southern intellectual history and examines the ways in which Mitchell, as a writer of the Young South, challenges the sentimental myths of the aristocratic Old South.]

This year marks the semi-centennial of the publication of *Gone with the Wind*. That occasion merits celebration, for to the most remarkable degree Margaret Mitchell's epic remains a central icon of 20th-century American civilization. After 50 years, it retains a permanent place in popular culture, and any contemporary novelist might envy the size of Mitchell's continuing readership. Beyond these obvious facts, however, scholars and critics still wrestle inconclusively with the sources and implications of the novel's popularity, the meaning and significance of the work itself, and its place in literary or intellectual history. Curiously, with the singular exception of Louis Rubin, the preeminent scholar of Southern letters, critics have not examined the novel in the specific context of its time. This becomes all the more curious given the enormous scholarly interest in that very context—the regional renaissance after World War I. Ten years ago Rubin compared *Gone with the Wind* and *Absalom, Absalom!*; no one followed his lead. The aversion to connect Mitchell's epic and the renaissance might tell its own tale, but the very connection

allows a new understanding of both an extraordinarily influential book and one of the remarkable affairs in American cultural history.

The study of Southern culture between the two world wars presents numerous problems. Faulkner and the New Critics have cast long shadows. They have, for example, crowded out the examination of lesser figures of the movement. Their prominence has also dictated, in effect, the exploration of the period in literary terms and from a literary perspective. Their accounts, too, still govern the general understanding of the age. In his 1935 essay in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, "The Profession of Letters in the South," Allen Tate argued that the social and economic transformation of the region precipitated the creative downpour. After 50 years, that mostly unexamined view still dominates, especially among literary critics concerned with history, like Richard Gray or Louis Rubin. The true offspring of the New Criticism, however, most literary critics of the awakening ignore historical context to focus upon the individual creator or the individual art object. The common sources of creativity go aglimmering. At the same time, historians have generally neglected the literary and intellectual record. Recently, however, this pattern has begun to change. George Brown Tindall finds a place for literary as well as political figures in his encyclopedic *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, and Fred Hobson's study of Mencken in the South combines social, intellectual, and literary history. Like Hobson, the historians Daniel Singal, Richard King, and Michael O'Brien change the context of the awakening by analyzing sociologists, historians, and editors and by treating the biographies of less famous novelists and poets of the region. While little consensus emerges from their work, their breadth provides new bases for understanding the intellectual ferment of the region in the interwar period. Among these, generational values loom significantly.

To a remarkable degree, figures in the movement come from a common age group, those born around 1900 and in the closing years of the 19th century. Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, born in 1905 and 1906 respectively, represent the very youngest participants, while very few of the activists were born before 1893. Those born earlier frequently remain exceptional on other grounds as well. Born in the late 1870's, James Branch Cabell and Ellen Glasgow, along with H. L. Mencken, exercised authority at a distance and inspired the movement as godparents, midwives, or Dutch uncles. Howard Odum and John Crowe Ransom, born in 1884 and 1888 respectively, also played progenitor as much as participant. While Odum shifted his focus, he also began his career investigating blacks, yet this constituted generally a relatively minor concern of the

movement. Also born in 1888, the Atlanta novelist Frances Newman shared many values of the awakening while she remained still profoundly eccentric.

Youth manned the battlements of the cultural renaissance. Figures in the movement accomplished their greatest work in the twenties and thirties, generally well before reaching 40. Indeed, by 1935 the movement had exhausted itself or significantly changed its character. In this regard, the short span between 1926 and 1929 or '30 witnessed the most extraordinary burst of all of the awakening's cultural energies. Faulkner published *Soldier's Pay* in 1926 followed rapidly by *Mosquitos* and then *Satoris* and *The Sound and the Fury*, both in '29. *Look Homeward, Angel* appeared the same year, so did the Kentuckian Evelyn Scott's experimental Civil War novel, *The Wave*. Two years before, Paul Green, the self-styled North Carolina country boy, won the Pulitzer Prize for his play, *In Abraham's Bosom*. Tate completed *Ode to the Confederate Dead* in first form in 1927, too. Revisionist historical works appeared at the same time. Although born in 1890, Frank Owsley published *States Rights in the Confederacy* in 1925, and John Donald Wade initiated the flurry of regional biographies with his *Augustus Baldwin Longstreet* in 1926, followed by Tate's *Stonewall Jackson* in 1928 and his *Jefferson Davis* the next year. Robert Penn Warren and Andrew Lytle published their biographies of John Brown and Nathan Bedford Forrest almost simultaneously. While he did not complete his work for more than a decade, W. J. Cash began his monumental *Mind of the South* during this period, and the Agrarians ventured their own brand of social criticism in 1930 with *I'll Take My Stand*. She, too, would wait a decade for publication, but Margaret Mitchell also started *Gone with the Wind* in 1926 and completed it before the Great Depression.

Regional journalists constitute a special category. They reflected the very essence of the Young South spirit. They had left their mark earlier; in the late 1920's, however, they often won national reputations, the Raleigh columnist Nell Battle Lewis personifying the breed. So did her fellow Tarheels, Gerald Johnson, W. J. Cash, and Jonathan Daniels; the Richmond editor Virginius Dabney; and the Alabama-Georgian Mark Ethridge, who won the editorship of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*—and a Pulitzer Prize—in this period. Other figures in the awakening first claimed public reputations in journalism. Margaret Mitchell took her first job with the Atlanta *Journal* in 1923. Erskine Caldwell worked in the same newsroom; so did the screenwriter Lamar Trotti. Clarence Cason, who made a national mark with *90° in the Shade*, practiced the trade in Alabama. All over the South from crossroad weeklies to the great metropolitan dailies, newsrooms buzzed with talk of Mencken and Don Marquis, of *The Smart Set*,

*The American Mercury*, and *The New Yorker*. With cocked hats and skeptical eyes, young reporters modeled themselves on these national institutions and set out to write about their region like no one had ever done before.

The insouciance of young journalists typified a critical aspect of the awakening and introduced a whole range of generational values that governed the movement. In varying degrees, generational themes appear in the most diverse products of the period, from poetry, fiction, and criticism to sociology, history, and journalism. These concerns overlap and often shade into one another, but it is useful to isolate a series of these motives: the rejection of tradition, sociological realism, negativity or violation of norms, marginality, and the redefinition of virtue and authority. Such values drew on both national and international currents of the 20th century and helped define the South's place in modernism. The regional movement, however, remains distinctive. In the South, tradition and the old way maintained a monolithic power. Even as young rebels and intellectuals sought to break with tradition and break tradition itself, the past still exerted tremendous influence in their lives and in their fundamental definitions of themselves. In this regard, the concept of the "the Young South" helps define the cultural awakening and illuminates some of its contradictions. Thus it was that the generation of 1900 still defined itself as Southern yet sought to forge some separate identity. This created tremendous difficulties, especially for those who remained in the old Confederate states, constantly subject to the old way's power. For such reasons, the examination of renaissance ideas toward the past appropriately initiates a reexamination of Southern intellectual history of the interwar years.

## II

In rejecting tradition, the Young South repudiated a very specific vision of the Southern past. W. J. Cash's only half hyperbolic sketch captures its main outlines:

It was a sort of stage piece out of the eighteenth century, wherein gesturing gentlemen moved soft-spokenly against a background of rose gardens and dueling grounds, through always gallant deeds, and lovely ladies, in farthingales, never for a moment lost that exquisite remoteness which has been the dream of all men and the possession of none. Its social pattern was manorial, its civilization that of the Cavalier, its ruling class an aristocracy coexistent with the planter group—men often entitled to quarter the royal arms of St. George and St. Andrew on their shields, and in every case descended from the old gentlefolk who for many generations had made up the ruling classes of Europe.

They dwelt in large and stately mansions, preferably white and with columns and Grecian entablature. Their



estates were feudal baronies, their slaves quite too numerous ever to be counted. . . .

The rejection of this Cavalier ideal manifested itself in numerous ways. Cash's comic inflation named only one. There were others. On the first page of the first issue of the Vanderbilt poetry group's magazine, John Crowe Ransom declared, "'The Fugitive' flees from nothing faster than the high caste brahmins of the Old South." In the second volume, Donald Davidson similarly repudiated "a tradition that may be called a tradition only when looked at through the haze of generous imagination." In New Orleans the first issue of the *Double Dealer* scorned "the storied realm of dreams, lassitude, pleasure, chivalry and the Nigger." In the general spirit of the age, the Young South also debunked the legendary regional aristocracy itself. Instead of the sad, tragic grandeur of the Lee-inspired mythology, their aristocrats are often hollow, sickly, or diseased in some fundamental way, like Faulkner's Satorises and Comptons or Allen Tate's Buchans of the *The Fathers*. Smelling of the sickroom or asylum, they often lack even a dark romantic appeal.

The Young South, however, dealt still more typically with the aristocratic traditions. It delighted to strip the regional notables of aristocratic trappings to reveal nothing more than crackers made good, yokel *arivistes*. Thus, for example, Faulkner depicts the great planter Sutpen as a hillbilly who succeeds like some robber baron to make an estate. Even the "good families" in Jefferson prove no more than solid, stolid, bourgeois Methodists like the Coldfields. In *Mind of the South*, Cash uses a "concrete example" to debunk the storied Cavaliers. Described at his death as "'a gentleman of the old school' and 'a noble specimen of the chivalry at its best,'" Cash's Great Planter is only "a stout young Irishman" abetted by luck who struck it rich in the cotton boom. Cash mocks the "aristocratic" wife just so. Still more telling than this debunking, Cash collapses even his pseudo-aristocracy into the first 20 pages of a 430-page text, and he manages to encapsulate the entire antebellum and Civil War South into only about 80 additional pages. In all this, blacks and slavery figure negligibly. Reflecting the real focus of his book, Cash devotes 400 pages to post-Reconstruction history, and he deals almost exclusively with yeomen, poor whites, and workers—the "men in the middle," the "real Southerners" of his own time and generation.

Cash's emphasis upon nonplanter whites introduces the second major characteristic of the Young South movement: sociological realism obsessed the generation of 1900. Like Cash, they used it to pervert the Cavalier tradition. Accordingly, they emphasized the yeoman origins of the planter class and exaggerated the importance

of a leveling frontier and egalitarian democracy in regional history. The professional historians William Dodd and Frank Owlsley reflected this bias as early as 1919. Their work celebrated the yeomen, an egalitarian *white Volksgeist*, and democracy at the expense of planters, their black minions, and oligarchy. Donald Davidson's coonskin-clad poetic heroes speak to the bias. Wade's *Longstreet* did too. For all his interest in black lore, Paul Green's historical dramas did much the same, while his outdoor productions were democratic and folkish of their very nature. Even so, the crusading Raleigh journalist Nell Battle Lewis condemned this as "hoopskirt history." Continuing the clothing figure, she insisted that "the 1924 calico wrapper of the mill hand in her hours of ease (?) frankly interests us more. . . . Give us the masters and slaves of the present," she demanded, "before you reproduce the plantation owner and the black bondsmen of the [1850's]." Lewis argued that regional mythology and planter romance corrupted all history in the South, however realistic. This prompted her, like Cash, to deemphasize the past altogether and encouraged a burning interest in contemporary social conditions, especially among poor whites. Many young intellectuals in the region shared her view. The bias defined the fundamental motive behind the regionalist school of sociology at the University of North Carolina in these years. Although Howard Odum had concerned himself centrally with blacks in his "Ulysses" series early in his career, the Chapel Hill regionalists committed themselves to investigating small white proprietors, tenant farmers, sandlappers, crackers, and hillbillies. Erskine Caldwell does the same in fiction, and Faulkner draws on similar values, if more ambiguously. While the Snopes exist best in counterpoint to old planters, his Bundrens affirm the integrity of the once and ever yeomen.

If Faulkner's Flem Snopes and Caldwell's Jeter Lester originated in the Young South's desire for sociological realism, such images go much further. They introduce the third general characteristic of the movement: a negative concern with violating norms and rebellion for itself. In his 1935 *Virginia Quarterly* essay, Allen Tate had written that real literature in the region "would require the speaking of unpleasant words and the violation of good literary manners." Tate spoke softly. Many did not. More the norm, Faulkner, Cash, and Caldwell left dead cats, as H. L. Mencken urged, as calling cards in the stuffy parlor of Sunday Culture in the region. The power, authority, and rigidity of the Southern tradition prompted the young rebels to opposite extremes. Hence the Gothic, the weird, the bizarre, the eccentric or simply the odd or literally offbeat became the means and sometimes the ends of the Young South's creativity. Literary productivity itself became only one medium to

shock and scandalize, too. If the rape in *Sanctuary* might have horrified polite society in the South, Faulkner carried through the impulse in his own life, as did many within the movement. For example, the dramatist Paul Green recalled an arcane, boozy Faulkner at the Virginia Writers Conference in 1931. Making small talk, the North Carolinian inquired of the Mississippian which of his characters he most admired. "The corn-cob," the future Nobel laureate drawled.

The violation of norms worked another subtler way as well. Again given the omnipotence of the tradition in the region, even minor violations in the code suggested larger breaches. Within the very constricted limits of Southern life, the very presentation of rednecks and yahoos in fiction or in sociology implied major breaks in the Southern discipline. The Young South played ambiguously around the edges of the system at the margin of social acceptability. Hence the rebels often made use of the very conventions of the social order for parody or caricature. They would concede that a planter class existed—but define it slyly as a self-deluding, self-made class of capitalists. Like Cash and even Faulkner, they often employed their elders' inflated, traditional rhetoric. Or like Cabell, they mocked the heroic posturing of the aristocratic mode. Inspired by the Virginian's double and triple entendre, Frances Newman's two novels had much the same effect. With both writers, if manners served conventional repression of creativity, the gross exaggeration of manners and form hinted at a greater hidden horror, corruption, or perversion. In this way, the most mannered and obscure writing of the Southern renaissance often carried the same suggestive messages as the more obviously Gothic and bizarre.

The Young South was self-consciously skeptical of regional mores and alienated from tradition, but the continuing power of traditional culture prohibited alternative systems. This prompts a fourth characteristic of the movement, the sense of marginality, indeterminacy, and uncertainty. Like Wolfe's George Webber, young Southerners walked out "into a kind of sunlight of another century. . . . They heard wheels coming and the world was in, yet they were not yet wholly of that world." Figures of the renaissance responded variously to this circumstance. Alienation from tradition influenced both form and content of art and criticism in particular. Tate's *Ode to the Confederate Dead* summarized these. At the outset, the poet-persona is marginal—at but not through the cemetery gate. Even so, this figure is only half alive in the chilling presence of the past, but in the same way the past is only half dead: "these memories grow / From the inexhaustible bodies that are not / Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row." It is contemplation of this deadly past that drains the life from the figure at the gate; Medusa-like it turns him into stone or heaves him

"turning like the blind crab." The autumnal, twilight setting underscores this half-life ambiguity as does the repeated image of the endlessly swirling leaves. Vague and obscure if portentous, the poem's very language affirms ambiguity. Quentin Compson's depiction in *Absalom, Absalom!* conveys the same sense, with "the two separate Quentins now talking to another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage." By title Faulkner sets up a similar mood in *The Sound and the Fury*, while the same values govern that novel's structure. Appearing the same year as *The Sound and the Fury*, Evelyn Scott's novel, *The Wave*, achieves the same end. She shatters the Civil War into scores of narrative shards. From another direction, John Crowe Ransom's essay, "Poets without Laurels," emphasizes alienation and marginality. "Apostate, illaureate, and doomed to outlawry," the artist must be estranged of his nature, he insists. Yet his idea of outlawry describes the fundamental condition of the regional young against the Southern social tradition, too.

Such estrangement reflected both the cause and effect of morality in the renaissance and prompted the redefinition of virtue and authority, the fifth characteristic of Young South values. The rejection of traditional pieties and the absence of alternative loyalties fragmented meaning. Antinomianism resulted, with reality or virtue coming to reside in the object itself. From this assumption in "Poet without Laurels," Ransom justifies the amorality of the work of art even as he defends its complete autonomy. By the same process, the poem itself reflects the innermost subjective sense of the poet at a unique moment. This radical privatization of values denies access to content. Prohibited true knowledge of the artist's intentions, the critic, it follows, must judge purely on matters of form—hence the New Critics' formalism. The style, mode, or appearances of things came to substitute for their unknowable essences. If such values shaped the New Formalism, they affected the Young South's modes and expression in many other ways. They prompted, on the one hand, a fascination with disguise and costume or of tricks and hide-and-seek. They possessed, on the other hand, more serious and fatal implications. Thus, in the absence of other significance, the physical processes of things became ends in themselves, creation and procreation the ultimate moral activity. In this fatal frame, man's virtue is no different from the crab's, as suggested in Tate's *Confederate Dead*. Ellen Glasgow captured the idea neatly as she ruminated on her heroine in *The Sheltered Life*:

In the end she would triumph through that deep instinct for survival, which had ceased to be a negative quality and had strengthened into a dynamic force. She would be hardened by adversity, but hard things, as she said, are the last things to decay. The only thing that mattered was her triumph over circumstances.

Within this system, irony became the dominant voice and mode. The ironic voice, in turn, reinforced other values of the movement, most implied elsewhere, such as indeterminacy, ambiguity, paradox, oxymora, disguise, and indirection. Faulkner gets it one way with the idea of talking "in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage," Frances Newman quite another with her doubly layered mockery of irony itself, while finally the New Criticism demanded irony as the only legitimate voice of the modern age.

### III

Two initial problems hinder the appreciation of Margaret Mitchell's epic within this framework of Southern intellectual history, the first more esthetic and formal, the second more practical and immediate.

First, even as the most flattering reviewers noted, *Gone with the Wind* lacks art. Thus, typically, Henry Steele Commager wrote, "if not a work of art," *Gone with the Wind* is "a dramatic recreation of life itself." This distinction involves rather more than stylistic infelicities or ineptitude. It relates to the absence of self-conscious, esthetic intention. The idea of "the dramatic recreation of life itself" might suggest something of the distinction between art and journalism. Mitchell was a good journalist. She practiced the craft of novel-writing in a similar way, basically of ordering concrete facts about a page. She never claimed a higher revelation. She specifically disclaimed more elevated purpose. If her novel might still speak to something in the human spirit, Mitchell herself did not set out with this aim in mind. Yet her novel's very lack of artfulness and coherent esthetic vision makes it useful; it reveals more clearly many of the intellectual and social currents that lay behind 20th-century civilization, still more, regional intellectual history after World War I. If her novel does not belong in the literary canon, it does, however, inform that canon. As a document, if not a text, it merits serious inquiry.

A more practical problem of fixing Mitchell's epic within the interwar world lies in the novel's very close identification with the Old South romance, that central target of her generation's sharpest barbs. That identification has its own history. David Selznick's memorable film sealed the interpretation upon the novel. With its exaggeration of aristocracy and slavery and its omissions of yeomanry, his version amused the author. She "yelped with laughter" on seeing the Hollywood Twelve Oaks, for example, which she described whimsically as an impossible hybrid of Grand Central Station and the State Capitol at Montgomery.

Evoking the Old South ideal lay very far indeed from her mind. She consistently expressed dismay at being categorized "among those writers who picture the South

as a land of white columned mansions whose wealthy owners had thousands of slaves and drank thousands of juleps," she wrote in almost paraphrase of Cash. "North Georgia was certainly no such country—if it ever existed anywhere, and I took great pains to describe North Georgia as it was." She ridiculed the "lavender-and-old-lace-moonlight-on-the-magnolia" romance and insisted that no one could ever confuse that form and her own who had actually read the "gentle Confederate novel of the Thomas Nelson Page-type." Sometimes the facile identification angered her, as with the *New Republic* review by Malcolm Cowley, who surely had never read a page of *In Ole Virginia*. Mitchell finally resigned herself, however. She observed plaintively to Virginius Dabney, the highly sympathetic editor of the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* and fellow-activist in the Young South:

. . . we Southerners could write the truth about the antebellum South, its few slaveholders, its yeomen farmers, its rambling, comfortable houses just fifty years away from log cabins, until Gabriel blows his trumpet—and everyone would go on believing in the Hollywood version . . . people believe what they like to believe and the mythical Old South has too strong a hold on their imaginations to be altered by the mere reading of a 1,037 page book.

Yet the issue did go deeper. To Dabney she specifically disavowed any intention of writing about Cavaliers, insisting that all her characters, "except for the Virginia Wilkes, were of sturdy yeoman stock." These same "Virginia Wilkes," however, provided the very opening for the other reading of her novel, for through them, she displays the full panoply of the plantation romance. Ashley in particular represents that myth, not least of all in his nostalgic profusions about moonlight, magnolias, mocking birds, and singing darkies. Mitchell certainly knew and used the conventions of the plantation South and the Lost Cause romance. To what end and effect, however, remains another matter.

Like others of her generation, Mitchell challenged the legend. She did so in various ways. Thus, while she presents the most sentimental notions about the Old South, she usually distances them from the auctorial voice. This is especially notable with Ashley Wilkes. She uses the device of letters within the text to isolate his most sentimental memories of the past's "golden glow." The two main characters in the novel, Rhett and Scarlett, served the same distancing function. At every puff of platitude or romantic convention, they deflate with words, deeds, or sometimes merely pointed gestures the pretensions of the myth. The famous barbecue and armory scenes demonstrate neatly these characters' purposes. Mitchell drew each scene to represent the traditional Southern world in microcosm. This makes her characters' debunking realism and commonsense skepticism

ticism all the more significant. With a few pointed questions, Rhett shatters the pretty harmony of the country picnic and reduces the Cavaliers to stammering rage. Scarlett's cynical reflections on the regional bellehood have similar effects.

The armory ball is better still. Selznick's very memorable version emphasized the romantic play between the protagonists. In sharp contrast, Mitchell uses the scene to mount a quasi-political assault against every aspect of Southern traditional life. Rhett burlesques Dr. Meade's buncombe oratory, the sanctification of women, and even slavery. Scarlett challenges all this and more in both word and deed. She questions war profiteers, draft evasion, conscription's equity, romantic patriotism, and the deification of regional leaders and heroes. She protests a still wider set of Southern values relative to rigid gender roles and social mores. Making this critique more pointed still, Mitchell sketched her traditionalists especially negatively here: Melanie Wilkes is never more simpering and mindless; the foolish Old Guard never booms more dangerously.

Mitchell undermines the aristocratic idea in other ways. As opposed to the grace and easy harmony of the mythic social order, she depicts its conflicts and oppressions. If she ignored the oppression of slavery, she lost no occasion to show the restrictions upon women. Scarlett describes conventional society specifically as a prison, but the author shared these values, demonstrated, as Louis Rubin has argued, in the corset-lacing scene. Throughout the work, Mitchell bares the covert violence with which the social order compelled allegiance, as in Rhett's exclusion from polite society and rejection by his Charleston family. Whispers work effectively as whips in this regard.

Generational negativity colors her individual aristocrats as well as her aristocracy as a class. She denies them life and vitality. Ellen Robillard lacks any color or spontaneity. She is a ghost in the novel. Repressed herself, she becomes a prime agent in her daughter's repression. While Mitchell employs traditional language to describe the class—aloof, ineffectual, passionless, and weak, she also associates them with illness and physical disfiguration, like spindly-legged, knock-kneed spavins and the sallow look of malaria. Her animal analogues are telling, too: The Wilkes-Hamiltons are lap dogs, does, and rabbits, while the Butlers are lumbering dinosaurs. Natural selection does the South a favor to weed them out. Like Faulkner's planter class with Benjy's castration at the end of the Compson line, Mitchell's aristocrats are impotent too.

As she testified to Virginius Dabney, however, traditional aristocrats did not really interest her. She intended to strip the whole class of its pretensions. Like

Faulkner's self-made Sutpen or Cash's "stout young Irishman," her planters are nothing more than self-made men who hustle fortunes where they find them. As a poor, ungainly Irish Catholic immigrant who first made money in his Savannah brothers' store, Gerald O'Hara represents the very antithesis of the ideal, yet he typifies Mitchell's planter class. Luck and pluck built his estate. Mitchell's South is a melting pot of peoples; its rich soil and promise of wealth attract all manner and classes of folk. If it allows ignorant bogtrotters to rise, its bounty extends indiscriminately even to lethargic Virginian Cavaliers who drift to the frontier. And Mitchell purposefully set her tale in North Georgia on the frontier of plantation culture and far removed from the coasts and deltas, the storied realms of regional aristocracy. Further, she consistently draws the contrast between these hearty upcountry people, actually more concerned with farming than with planting, and the etiolated traditionalists of the Tidewater. She does not stop here either. She makes the hustling values of the farm compete with still more progressive values of the city. Like another regional contemporary, the Virginian Clifford Dowdy in *Bugles Blow No More* (1937), she sets a city on the center of her literary stage, and she makes urban, bourgeois, commercial values of that town a driving force within the entire novel. However natural this might seem in retrospect, little could have violated that plantation romance more.

#### IV

In this rewriting of antebellum history, Mitchell reflected the second characteristic of the Young South movement, sociological realism. She sketched a highly fluid social order that rewarded diligence but punished lassitude. If Mitchell's cosmos imposes Gerald as the norm in a self-made planter timocracy, she allows others to slip through the cracks at the bottom. She illustrates this decline in a character like Cathleen Calvert, whose degradation is witnessed in her dirty hands and fingernails that show half-moons of grime. Actual yeomen also figure in Mitchell's work. A veritable congeries of social types parades her pages: the shy merchant Frank Kennedy, the illiterate small farmer Abel Wynder, the two-slave cracker Will Benteen, the mountain man Archie. All actually represent some version of the non-aristocratic yahoos at the top of the social heap like the Tarletons, Fontaines, and O'Haras. High or low, however, they belong to the same tribe in which democracy and egalitarianism dominate. Like Dodd and Owlsley later, she affirms the South as a democratic meritocracy, expressly illustrated in her treatment of the local Confederate cavalry unit and in the graveside scene of Gerald's funeral.

In keeping with other biases of her generation, Mitchell's social realism stops short of blacks. Black actors