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# Is Tomorrow Another Day? The Uncertain Implications of Scarlett's Life Decisions in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*

Elizabeth A. Young  
*Georgia State University*

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IS TOMORROW ANOTHER DAY? THE UNCERTAIN IMPLICATIONS OF  
SCARLETT'S LIFE DECISIONS IN MARGARET MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND*

by

ELIZABETH YOUNG

Under the Direction of Dr. Pearl McHaney

ABSTRACT

Anyone who is familiar with Margaret Mitchell's life and her novel, *Gone with the Wind*, should notice that Mitchell's work in some fashion parallels events from her life. Exactly how and why these parallels function, however, has been the subject for much scholarly debate. In my thesis, I examine Mitchell's biography to get closer to the truth of the events in her life up to the publication of her novel. I then synthesize this information with a side-by-side analysis of some important figures in Mitchell's life and characters from her novel; from there, I provide a feminist critique of selected characters, relationships between those characters, and scenes from the novel. In particular, I focus upon Mitchell's relationship with her mother, Maybelle, and how this relationship compares with Scarlett O'Hara's relationship with her mother, Ellen.

INDEX WORDS: Ellen O' Hara, *Gone with the Wind*, Margaret Mitchell, Maybelle Stephens Mitchell, Melanie Wilkes, Scarlett O'Hara

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ELIZABETH YOUNG

Committee Chair: Dr. Pearl McHaney

Committee: Dr. Nancy Chase

Dr. LeeAnne Richardson

Electronic Version Approved: 7/12/13

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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*Table of Contents*

<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	<i>iv</i>
<i>Introduction: An Overview of Previous Mitchell Scholarship</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter One: Mitchell and Her Mother</i> .....	<i>19</i>
<i>Chapter Two: Mitchells and Stephenses, O’Haras and Robillards</i> .....	<i>44</i>
<i>Chapter Three: The Two Mothers of Scarlett O’Hara</i> .....	<i>60</i>
<i>Conclusion: From Scarlett O’Hara Back to Margaret Mitchell</i> .....	<i>115</i>
<i>Works Cited</i> .....	<i>120</i>

*Introduction: An Overview of Previous Mitchell Scholarship*

Although in most respects Margaret Mitchell attempted to keep her true interests and opinions hidden from public scrutiny, there can be little doubt that Mitchell was captivated by history—Southern history in general and especially that of her family. In a letter to Julia Collier Harris written in 1936, one that is typical of the correspondence that Mitchell exchanged with friends and fans following the publication of her novel, Mitchell shares details of her childhood, describing her parents and their love of history and fond memories of listening to family and friends recount Civil War stories, including an episode in which her paternal grandfather “walked nearly fifty miles after the battle of Sharpsburg with his skull cracked in two places from a bullet” (*Margaret Mitchell’s* 4). Mitchell’s love of history led in part to the creation of her epic novel of the Civil War era South, *Gone with the Wind*.<sup>1</sup>

Although Mitchell was intimately familiar with scores of colorful tales of her ancestors from the Civil War era, Mitchell repeatedly denounced any theory that her characters were based on real people, family members or otherwise. However, protests from friends, family, and even Mitchell herself have not stopped nearly every literary scholar who has written about Mitchell and her novel from searching for the origins of Mitchell’s creative inspiration by noting at least some similarity between, on the one hand, Mitchell’s ancestors, contemporaries, and even Mitchell herself and, on the other, the characters Mitchell created in the only fiction she published in her lifetime. These scholars seek to utilize biographical details in order to explain the characterization and thematic choices Mitchell makes in *GWTW*; while some scholars see the details of Mitchell’s life as providing only partial answers to questions raised by her novel, others interpret *GWTW* as a virtual autobiography that Mitchell displaced into a historical setting.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specifically noted, the terms *Gone with the Wind* and *GWTW* refer to Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 novel, not to the 1939 film adaptation.



Still other scholars, however, attempt to perform such an analysis in reverse. They take Mitchell's fictional characters and map them onto her biography, often distorting the details of events in Mitchell's life in attempts to force direct one-to-one correspondences between Mitchell herself and real people in her life and the characters in Mitchell's novel. These scholars also sometimes speculate about Mitchell's true opinions, for example, on women's rights, by arguing that one character or another serves as a mouthpiece for Mitchell's views.

Rita Felski, in *Literature after Feminism*, notes that "When we read a book and create in our mind an image of its author, we are working backward from sketchy and unreliable evidence" (62). That is to say, while it might be tempting to create a portrait of an author from a close reading of her work, readers must remember that, in doing so, they are both interpreting the words of narrators and/or characters as those of the author and projecting their own biases and perspectives onto this portrait, thus *creating* a fictional version of an author instead of an accurate description of a person who lived. Hence, such scholarly works that utilize aspects of Mitchell's novel in attempts to discover Mitchell's viewpoints, from Felski's point of view, are vain efforts that lead nowhere.

Regarding the reverse of such analyses (specifically, the aforementioned tactics of many Mitchell scholars who utilize the information from Mitchell's biography in order to interpret her work), Felski notes that "we can factor the author into our readings of literary works without reducing literature to autobiography or assuming that such links determine the meaning of the work once and for all." Felski adds that "Authorship is one strand in the weave of the text rather than a magic key to unlocking its mysteries" (91). Hence, while it is valid to include details of Mitchell's biography in an analysis of *GWTW*, critics should beware the dangers of overreliance

on such details, which can lead to reading the novel as an autobiography in the guise of a historical novel.

In my analysis of *Gone with the Wind*, I examine Mitchell's novel from a hybrid biographical and feminist perspective: I will begin with my own examination of certain aspects of Mitchell's life that will include a more comprehensive examination than may have been done by previous scholars. From there, I will map that biographical information onto a feminist analysis that involves a close reading of selected aspects of the novel's plot and characters. Through this layered process, I will articulate a well-rounded feminist analysis of Mitchell's epic novel.

Felski also points out that even supposedly objective nonfiction biographies of authors are "by no means free of projections and myths about authorship" (63). In the past forty-eight years, six biographies on Margaret Mitchell have been published, and a seventh biographical work, a PBS documentary, recently debuted on television; additionally, two collections of her correspondence have been published, along with two collections of her writing, one a sample of creative writing and journal entries from her young adulthood and another that is a sampling of her published work as a young journalist. Many monographs and scholarly articles on the subject of Mitchell's novel devote varying amounts of space to the inclusion of biographical details of Mitchell's life. The implications of this proliferation of biographical information should by now be obvious. Because each biographer has included "projections and myths" to some degree, there are as many versions of Mitchell's life as there are biographies—that is to say, each of these biographers has, to some extent, created his or her own version of Mitchell's life.

Why, one might ask, are there so many biographies of Margaret Mitchell? In the Preface to his 1991 biography on Margaret Mitchell, *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell*, Darden Asbury Pyron writes that “Mitchell was a perfect subject for biography” because of her family’s extensive genealogy, the times in which she lived, and her strong ties to the South and Southern values, to name but a few reasons (x).<sup>2</sup> In her preface to her 1983 biography, *Road to Tara: The Life of Margaret Mitchell*, Anne Edwards notes that “when Margaret Mitchell engaged anyone in conversation, she was a real spellbinder” (ix). In the Preface to his compilation *Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind Letters: 1935-1949*, Richard Harwell states that “Flames blazed in the personality of Margaret Mitchell, flames from fires of energy. She was a remarkable woman” (xxiii). In other words, the details of Mitchell’s life make for a story almost as compelling as that of her famous novel.

Many scholars, too, have been motivated to write biographies on Mitchell for somewhat less idealistic purposes. Many of them feel that their predecessors have presented incomplete and/or inaccurate representations of the true Margaret Mitchell. These subsequent biographers have felt the need to point out and “fix” the errors and omissions of their predecessors and to make claims that, based on the discovery of new sources and/or their superior interpretations of old ones, they have provided the most prescient details of Mitchell’s life in order to capture the essence of the “true” Margaret Mitchell. Most of the biographers also, to some extent, warp Mitchell’s biographical details in order to later “prove” their arguments regarding interpretations of her novel or to “prove” points about Mitchell and her contemporaries based on comparisons with her novel. These discrepancies mean that Mitchell scholars must be especially careful in their research in order to determine fact from personal agenda; in my subsequent discussion of

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<sup>2</sup> With regard to citations of works by Darden Asbury Pyron, unless otherwise noted, all page citations correspond to *Southern Daughter*.

the publication history of these biographies, I will also offer a general analysis of the various biographers' personal agendas.

As I have already intimated above, any biographical details that biographers and scholars include in their works are additionally complicated by the fact that Margaret Mitchell was a notoriously private person. In his biography, Pyron states that Mitchell “had a fetish about privacy” that dated back to her childhood and continued throughout the process of writing her novel, further noting that her novel’s “contemporary popularity is matched only by the obscurity in which the author herself conceived and executed the novel and the mystery with which she later surrounded its origins” (223). In a chapter titled “The Reluctant Celebrity” in their 2011 biography *Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind: A Bestseller's Odyssey from Atlanta to Hollywood* that relates accounts of Mitchell’s life following the fame of her novel, Ellen F. Brown and John Wiley, Jr., relate that an exhausted Mitchell and her husband decided to “present [Mitchell] in a sympathetic light” to the public and proceeded to convince Lamar Q. Ball, a friend and Atlanta newspaper editor, to write articles in which “the portrait they paint of the author as a simple housewife bewildered by the attention surrounding her” would help to deliberately “create an appealing persona for Mitchell, while also excusing her reluctance to appear in the public eye” (131). Elizabeth Hanson, in her biography, *Margaret Mitchell*, notes that Mitchell, in response to public demand, “chose to have only as much physical contact—and private vulnerability—as she could control, and as much intellectual contact—through correspondence—as she could manage” (68). Harwell also notes in the Preface of his compilation of Mitchell’s letters that, “Because of her well-realized fear that her letters would find their way into print shortly after her correspondents received them, many of them are more restrained than she might have wished. Of necessity, there was created in her letters, her

interviews, and her other public contacts a Margaret Mitchell who was very different from the ebullient, effervescent Peggy Marsh her friends knew” (xxiv). In an article entitled “Little Woman, Big Book: The Mysterious Margaret Mitchell” and originally published in 1962 (reprinted in Richard Harwell’s 1983 anthology *Gone with the Wind as Book and Film*), Ralph McGill, who was a friend and colleague of Mitchell’s during and after her time at the *Atlanta Journal*, asserts that Mitchell “hid herself completely, inwardly, and in many things, from her best friends” (75), implying that even the “harum-scarum and rebellious, but intensely feminist” woman that her close friends thought they knew to be the “real” Peggy Marsh instead of the public persona of the naïve housewife might have merely been another layer of “the armor of reticence and reserve with which Peggy Mitchell covered herself” (69, 75).

Through wishes expressed to her husband and to her brother in the years shortly before her death, Mitchell deliberately further complicated matters for biographers by placing controls on her literary estate in an attempt to perpetuate the censorship of her biographical details even after she would die and thus lose direct control over her legacy. Edwards also notes in her Preface that “The destruction by fire of all of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* papers, unpublished manuscripts, and personal letters had been so well publicized that I feared an in-depth biography might be difficult” (ix). In a will “which was handwritten by her just nine months before her death” in 1949, Mitchell left “the manuscript, all rights and royalties, all of her papers, letters, childhood writings, and, with a few minor exceptions, all of her possessions to [her husband] John” Marsh (Edwards ix). According to biographer Marianne Walker in her 1993 work *Margaret Mitchell and John Marsh: The Love Story Behind Gone with the Wind*, in prior discussions with her husband John and brother Stephens, Mitchell clarified “that she wanted her manuscripts, her notes related to them, and her personal papers destroyed [and] was also adamant

about not wanting sequels, comic strips, and abridgments” (5) and therefore “she wrote nothing in her will about wanting anything destroyed because she did not need to do so” (5), trusting that her husband and brother would respect her wishes without any need for her to specifically write them down. Shortly following Mitchell’s death, as she and Marsh had no children, John Marsh wrote his will, in which he “left portions of the manuscript that he had decided to keep, the copyrights, royalties, and all the other materials related to *Gone with the Wind* to Stephens Mitchell” (Walker 5), which Stephens inherited “after the death of . . . John R. Marsh in 1952” (Harwell xxxii), three years after Mitchell’s death.

Stephens decided that he would “authorize a biography to establish the record of [Mitchell’s] life and that of her literary progeny,” and for a time “ultimately decided to tackle the job himself,” a task at which he labored off-and-on throughout the remainder of the 1950s (Brown and Wiley 281). Later, however, Stephens decided “to bring in an outside writer to turn the manuscript into a publishable book. . . . Finis Farr was selected and became the first non-family member granted access to the *GWTW* files. He was not given a free hand, though. [Stephens] Mitchell . . . vetted every word of Farr’s manuscript, parsing details large and small” (Brown and Wiley 290). Thus, Finis Farr’s 1965 *Margaret Mitchell of Atlanta* became the first, if the most restricted, of the many Margaret Mitchell biographies.

While Farr was restrained by Stephens in his depiction of Mitchell, Marianne Walker points out that the material in Farr’s book is “valuable but highly selected” and “presents an accurate but narrow account of some of the major events in Mitchell’s life” (523). Farr himself notes that “the foundation of this book is in the papers of the Margaret Mitchell Marsh Estate and in an unpublished memoir by Stephens Mitchell” (Author’s Note); hence, as it was no great secret that Stephens had a liberal hand in the writing of Farr’s biography, Elizabeth Hanson

refers to Farr's work as a "collaborative family biography" (103), making a point of attributing quotes from Farr's biography to both Farr and Stephens Mitchell in her notes. Lest readers suspect that these other biographers were quick to detract from Farr's biography in order to promote their own works, Jane Bonner Peacock, the editor of one of the collections of Mitchell's letters (which was published in 1985), also notes that "A definitive study of Margaret Mitchell's life has not been published, although Mr. [Stephens] Mitchell granted access to her papers to Finis Farr, who wrote a biography in 1965" (7). A discerning Mitchell scholar can safely conclude that, while Farr's biography contains significant omissions, owing to Stephens's decision to perpetuate his sister's post-*GWTW* persona and the subsequent control he exerted over the writing of the book, Farr's biography is yet important for Mitchell scholars, if for no other reason than that it was the only one accessible to scholars who wrote about Mitchell until at least 1983,<sup>3</sup> and hence slanted the viewpoint of Mitchell upon which those scholars based their arguments.

For his next move as executor of Mitchell's estate, Stephens "donated the bulk of the documents [Mitchell's extant papers] to his alma mater, the University of Georgia. . . . In tacit acknowledgment that his decision contradicted the author's instructions, he imposed tight restrictions on the ability of researchers to copy and quote from the papers" (Brown and Wiley 291). At some point over the intervening six years, Richard Harwell, "a friend of the Mitchells and curator of rare books and Georgiana at the University of Georgia Libraries, was given permission to publish" his aforementioned selected compilation of some of Mitchell's letters in

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<sup>3</sup> I say "at least" 1983 because, as I will note in a subsequent section, some Mitchell scholars, while aware of the limitations of Farr's biography, were even less willing to seriously consider the contents of Anne Edwards's 1983 biography; if one sides with those who feel that Edwards's biography is not serious enough to be at all useful for scholars, the next "true" biography available for scholars did not appear until Pyron published his biography in 1991. The problems with Edwards's biography, however, did not stop other literary scholars from making substantial use of it, particularly in the years before Pyron's biography was published.

1976 (Peacock 7); in Harwell's Preface, he remarks that "I think my gratitude to Mr. Mitchell even exceeds his reluctance to have these letters of his sister appear in print" (xxv). However, since Mitchell probably wrote these letters with the intent of maintaining her public persona, scholars must beware of taking her words at face value in an examination of the "true" Margaret Mitchell.

Later in the 1970s, when Stephens considered authorizing a film sequel to *GWTW*, the film producers with whom Stephens was working eventually "chose Vivien Leigh biographer Anne Edwards to develop the story on which their movie would be based. After two years of research and writing, Edwards produced a manuscript called "Tara: The Continuation of *Gone with the Wind*" " (Brown and Wiley 300). Due to complications between Stephens and the studio heads, the movie deal to which Stephens had originally agreed was canceled (Brown and Wiley 300-301); however, Stephens eventually granted Edwards "the right to quote from letters in the Margaret Mitchell Archives, University of Georgia" (Edwards x). Edwards also gained access to other source material previously unavailable to Margaret Mitchell biographers, including some of Macmillan's files on *Gone with the Wind*, which were "previously thought to be lost," and personal meetings with friends and other family of Margaret Mitchell who granted interviews and access to other letters of Mitchell's that were not part of Stephens's carefully guarded archives (Edwards x). The content printed in Edwards's biography presents a bit of a conundrum for the contemporary Mitchell scholar. Since her book was published in the same year that Stephens died, in 1983, Stephens, as the executor of Mitchell's estate, should still have been able to limit the content of Edwards's work. However, Edwards's biography is the first of the biographies to represent a "fuller" version of Mitchell's life, revealing details that it seems



likely Stephens would never have allowed to be included had he overseen Edwards's work in the same manner in which he oversaw that of Farr.<sup>4</sup>

Edwards's biography, while the first to provide an (evidently) unfettered (by Stephens) account of Mitchell's life, has received mixed critical and scholarly reviews. Blanche Gelfant, in her review, finds it "as anecdotal and interesting as a novel, an easy and almost chatty narrative." Gelfant goes on to note that the book "adds to what is already known of Mitchell's life from Finis Farr's earlier biography, but some of its added details . . . seem supererogatory" ("The Mysteries" 128). Darden Asbury Pyron, who would go on to write his own Mitchell biography in 1991, writes in his "Review of *Road to Tara: The Life of Margaret Mitchell* by Anne Edwards" that Edwards "Correctly . . . centers Mitchell's psychological life" but also notes that Edwards "is reluctant to take *Gone with the Wind* as art" and that Edwards does not do enough work to probe at the problem of Mitchell's persona in order to uncover the real person underneath (503). Later, in the notes to his biography, Pyron is more dismissive of Edwards's work, stating that Edwards's book "has little merit as a factual account of Margaret Mitchell's life" (470) and noting on several occasions what he believes to be errors by Edwards, at one point calling a portion of Edwards's work a "fictional history" (488). Robert Durden points out in his review of *Road to Tara* that, while Edwards's biography makes for "compelling reading" (659), Edwards does not include footnotes, "and the references by page number and opening phrases at the back of the book are incomplete and sketchy" (660). Durden further admonishes

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<sup>4</sup> If, as I will mention in my subsequent discussion of the publication history of the Mitchell letters that were edited by Jane Bonner Peacock, Stephens was so shocked by a small parcel of Mitchell's youthful letters, which do not contain any material that is remotely as scandalous as some of the (often dubiously credible) details that Edwards presents, it seems unlikely that Stephens personally reviewed, much less granted final authorization to, the contents of Edwards's biography prior to its publication. However, I could not find any definitive information on whether, for instance, Edwards's biography was released before or after Stephens's death in 1983; it is only possible to speculate that, perhaps, if the biography's publication fell after (or was held until after) Stephens's death, certain details that Stephens may have forbidden might have been (re)inserted following his death. It is also possible that, in his old age, Stephens (who was 87 when he died) relaxed his tight hold on his control of his sister's public image. At any rate, the biography was published, with or without Stephens Mitchell's blessing.

Edwards for “enter[ing] her subject’s mind with no apparent evidential basis,” although he declares that “On the whole, however, the facts and interpretations appear to be sound” (660). Elizabeth Hanson argues that “Edwards’s treatment of Mitchell’s life is a popularized version” (117). Marianne Walker, too, claims that Edwards’s book “is a popularized biography that makes for good reading but contains some errors that, taken together, portray Margaret Mitchell and John Marsh in a manner in which neither of them existed” (523). Perhaps most dismissive is Jane Bonner Peacock: in the same section in which Peacock evaluates Farr’s biography, she merely notes the existence of Edwards’s book, completely refraining from comment (8). Put into context, Peacock’s silence is perhaps more damning than anyone else’s direct commentary.

Edwards’s biography has two major problems. First of all, it skirts a fine line between scholarly and popular biography in style, often recounting scenes from Mitchell’s life in novelistic form. Edwards’s attributions and notes are, indeed, quite sketchy, making it difficult for subsequent scholars to determine what she has based on fact and what she has invented. This last assertion leads to the second problem, which is that it does seem as though Edwards, when finding a gap in documented facts on Mitchell’s life, was all too willing to make up her own stories as filler. She also often wildly speculates with little to no evidence to back her assertions; for just one example of many, she goes so far as to state, as if it were proven fact, that “Margaret suffered a great confusion as to her own sexuality” (54).<sup>5</sup> However, as Edwards’s biography, alongside that by Farr (which has its own problems), was the only biography available for

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<sup>5</sup> While I, unlike Pyron, am not defensive when it comes to Mitchell, I object to Edwards’s supposition because it is one of several speculations that Edwards presents as unadulterated fact with absolutely no apparent documentation. (She appears to be basing this argument, for instance, upon the fact that Mitchell was an athletic, tomboyish child; such a basis is no more than a reversion to base stereotypes of “typical” lesbian behavior.) This “fact” is also particularly useful to support a theory (which I, unlike Edwards, will willingly note is speculation) that Edwards may have invented such details in order to prompt critical reviews that might characterize her biography as scandalous with the end goal of potentially selling more copies.

scholars until 1991, it is still useful for contemporary Mitchell scholars, if in a more limited sense.

When Stephens's sons, Eugene and Joseph, took control of Mitchell's estate, subsequent biographers and compilers of letters were far less restricted than they were while Stephens lived. While Stephens was still alive, Jane Bonner Peacock had come across a large collection of letters that Mitchell had written to a friend, Allen Edee, from her short-lived college career. Because these letters were written between 1919 and 1921, when Mitchell was a flapper, the content of these letters "shocked" Stephens and, when Peacock approached him for permission to publish the letters, Stephens "was polite" but declined. However, "After his death, his sons, Eugene and Joseph Mitchell . . . consented to publication" and, in 1985, Peacock published *A Dynamo Going to Waste: Letters to Allen Edee, 1919-1921* (8). These letters are especially valuable to Mitchell scholars who seek to discern the "true" Mitchell from the version that she presented in her persona era, as these letters were written more than a decade before Mitchell truly considered that she might actually become famous.

Soon thereafter (1991), Elizabeth I. Hanson published her aforementioned biography. Hanson's biography represents by far the slimmest of the biographies, totaling a mere 122 pages, and, while the short volume appears to be a factual biography, Hanson acknowledges that "this study is more than a biography" (xii): in fact, only the first four chapters actually provide a brief chronicle of Mitchell's life, which themselves include a side-by-side analysis of *GWTW*, while the final two chapters place the novel into the context of the literary scene of Mitchell's day and perform a critical analysis of the transition of novel into film. However, Hanson does produce a well-researched version of Mitchell's life that provides a portrait of Mitchell that is more balanced than those of Farr and Edwards, although readers should carefully note that Hanson's

biography has a strong tendency to warp the facts of Mitchell's life to fit her literary interpretation of *GWTW*.

Shortly following Hanson's biography came Dardon Asbury Pyron's biography, *Southern Daughter*, which is the closest of the Mitchell biographies to the "definitive" biography Peacock longed for. In his review, Bertram Wyatt-Brown declares that Pyron writes his biography "with consummate skill" (388), going on to note that Pyron's biography "is a fully rounded and sensitive study of a complex and surprisingly exasperating figure—neurotic yet fascinating" (389). Nina Silber reviews Pyron's work as "impressive" and "meticulously researched"; she further notes that "Pyron's analysis brings fresh insight to Mitchell and her book." However, Silber also warns that "Pyron, it seems, may have been seduced by the Mitchell mystique. At times, his book assumes a rather defensive tone in his efforts to praise Mitchell and her work" (411). Marianne Walker also regards Pyron's biography with ambivalence: while ostensibly praising Pyron's biography by noting that it "contains far more information than its two predecessors do,"<sup>6</sup> she goes on to explain why her own biography is better and does not mention Pyron's biography again other than to argue that "Pyron gives his readers a false impression of John" Marsh (531). I have found that Pyron's biography is by far the best of the six as it is indeed well researched and does an excellent job in many respects of delving below Mitchell's persona and uncovering a more realistic version of her; however, Silber does raise an important point regarding Pyron's defensiveness in tone, which may, as Walker indirectly asserts, have contributed to the few important omissions that Pyron makes.

Two years later, Marianne Walker published her biography of Margaret Mitchell, although, as her title, *Margaret Mitchell and John Marsh: The Love Story Behind Gone with the*

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<sup>6</sup> Walker was evidently unaware of Hanson's biography; the "other two" that she notes are those of Farr and Edwards.

Wind, implies, she places her main focus on the relationship between John Marsh and Margaret Mitchell, asserting that she “could see clearly that John Marsh had not only been an exceptionally devoted husband but had also played a vital role in the making of his wife’s great novel” (xii). Walker acknowledges that she read Pyron’s biography after her manuscript was finished; she asserts that certain “exclusive access” to letters that belonged to some of Marsh’s living relatives “enable me to provide new and important insight into a marriage that has never before been accurately described” (xv). While Walker’s biography, like that of Pyron, is well researched, Walker, in her attempt to place her focus on Marsh as well as Mitchell, sometimes tends to give John Marsh too much credit for his wife’s success as a reaction to her feeling that earlier biographers had not given Marsh enough credit.

Nearly twenty years later, the most recent Mitchell biography, that by Ellen F. Brown and John Wiley, Jr., was published. Like Walker, Brown and Wiley assert that their biography will take on a unique focus; unlike Walker, however, Brown and Wiley note that their biography “is not a biography of the author but rather the life story of her book, from its origins in Mitchell’s childhood to its status today as a controversial cultural phenomenon” (1). Unlike any of the previous Mitchell biographies, Brown and Wiley explore how the novel, through Mitchell and the many other people involved in its publication, “was developed, marketed, and groomed for success in a bygone era of typewriters and telegrams” (1).

Five of the six biographies provide overlapping perspectives on Mitchell’s life: those of Farr, Edwards, Hanson, Pyron, and Walker.<sup>7</sup> As I have already established, however, these biographers’ overlapping and sometimes contradictory versions of Mitchell’s life make it

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<sup>7</sup> Because Brown and Wiley have written a biography of *GWTW* and not of Margaret Mitchell, they only provide one short chapter that covers Mitchell’s life from birth to her initial submission of the *GWTW* manuscript to Macmillan—precisely the period of her life upon which I intend to primarily focus. Brown and Wiley’s chapter does not contain any information that is not repeated many times over in the other biographies.

difficult for scholars to determine the “truth” of Mitchell’s life and views from the biographers’ agendas. Additionally, the above-mentioned biographical discrepancies often lead scholars who write criticism about Mitchell’s novel to pick and choose which version of Mitchell they would like to quote in order to “prove” certain points about her perspectives on social issues and how those perspectives influenced the underlying themes of her novel. For instance, two scholars in particular have examined *GWTW* through the lens of feminism while to some extent relying on quotations from Margaret Mitchell and/or her various biographies to back up their arguments; however, in both of the articles that I examine later in detail, each scholar has quoted selectively in order to support arguments that come to quite different conclusions about *GWTW*. This is not to say that no other monograph or article exists that both draws from Mitchell’s life and offers a feminist interpretation;<sup>8</sup> Anne Goodwyn-Jones and Betina Entzminger, in particular, exemplify how two scholars can selectively quote from Margaret Mitchell while ostensibly analyzing her novel through the same theoretical lens in order to come up with markedly divergent interpretations of her work.

Anne Goodwyn-Jones, in her chapter “Margaret Mitchell: The Bad Little Girl of the Good Old Days” from her monograph *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, concludes that Scarlett O’Hara’s rebellious behavior is eventually her undoing and leads to her return to Tara and tradition because, in her own life, Mitchell rejected her earlier, flamboyant flapper ways and settled down with John Marsh (313-350).<sup>9</sup> Betina Entzminger, however, in her section on Margaret Mitchell in her 2002 monograph *The Belle Gone Bad*, concludes that Scarlett survives

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<sup>8</sup> Examples include Molly Haskell’s monograph *Frankly My Dear: Gone with the Wind Revisited*; “*Gone with the Wind*: ‘And the Cupboard Was Bare,’” a chapter in Madonne M. Miner’s monograph *Insatiable Appetites: Twentieth-Century American Women’s Bestsellers*; and the article “‘Good Breeding’: Margaret Mitchell’s Multi-Ethnic South” by Lauren S. Cardon.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that Goodwyn-Jones, who published her book in 1981, only had access to Farr’s biography, the Mitchell papers at UGA, and the collection of letters edited by Harwell.

because she adapts to the changing times and that Melanie dies because she clings to the traditional past; Entzminger, in part, reaches separate conclusions because she asserts that Mitchell continued to rebel against the traditional gender roles of the South by becoming a novelist even after she had settled down to a seemingly quiet marriage to John Marsh.

Both of these arguments are insightful, well-organized, and convincing, but both are based on such different versions of Mitchell that one would hardly recognize her as the same woman were her name and the title of her novel removed from the biographical information given in each text.

From the above-mentioned clear discrepancy, just one of many that exist in Mitchell criticism, a scholar could easily determine that all biographical information about Mitchell is rendered completely useless for scholarly work, both because Mitchell was so deliberately arcane and because scholars can subsequently devise a wide range of interpretations of her life and words. However, I would like to examine all available information on certain aspects of Mitchell's biography and see what conclusions may be drawn from that material. Obviously, I cannot analyze each biographical account of Mitchell's life in its entirety, or this thesis would quickly turn into a lengthy, possibly multivolume work; keeping this problem in mind, I decided to narrow my feminist focus on Mitchell's biography to an examination of two matriarchal figures in Mitchell's family who were especially influential over Mitchell throughout her entire life, even after both of them died. Hence, I plan to examine Mitchell's complex relationship with her mother, Maybelle, who left Mitchell with a great deal of contradictory advice regarding women's roles before dying when Mitchell was a young woman, and Mitchell's turbulent relationship with her maternal grandmother, Annie Stephens, who played a significant role in Mitchell's life following Maybelle's death. I will then give a brief overview of how these

women shaped Mitchell's later life decisions and viewpoints on women's roles in society. Because I plan to later synthesize these details of Mitchell's biography with a close reading of key scenes and select characters from her novel, I will initially examine Mitchell's biography only up to the publication of the novel, as her later biographical details are irrelevant to an examination of the choices that she made in creating the characters in her novel. Keeping Felski's words in mind regarding the subjective nature of biographies, I will attempt to assemble a more cohesive, fact-based, version of Mitchell and her relationships with her mother and grandmother with which to perform this analysis, as I intend to include all available information about these selected episodes, even when all the information I have gathered (inevitably) comes into conflict, and to explain, backed primarily by source material from Mitchell's early life, why I believe my version of Mitchell's life to be valid, if not definitively correct.<sup>10</sup> My version of selected episodes from Mitchell's life will comprise the first chapter of my thesis.

I will examine the parallels that many scholars and critics have found between Mitchell and her female ancestors and her fictional characters in my second chapter. Many scholars have argued that Scarlett was based either on Mitchell herself or on Annie Stephens, and these same scholars have also argued that Ellen O'Hara, Scarlett's mother, was based on either Maybelle Mitchell or on Eleanor McGhan, Annie's mother. I will argue that it seems obvious through thorough research on the subject that Mitchell partially based both of these characters on both of the real-life figures with which scholars have found their respective parallels, although I ultimately conclude that Scarlett and Ellen are not only hybrids of their real-life counterparts but that they also evolved in part from Mitchell's imagination.

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<sup>10</sup> Between Mitchell's conscious creation of a public persona that may well have been nothing like the person she actually was and notable gaps in substantial documentation of certain eras in her life, I must acknowledge that it is impossible to create a definitively "true" version of Margaret Mitchell in every sense that accurately captures the essence of the woman who actually lived. I merely seek to approach such "truth" as closely as possible through the methods outlined above.



In my third chapter, I will, for the most part, set aside the information I have gleaned in the first two chapters and instead utilize Felski's prescribed methods for a feminist critique to analyze Scarlett's relationship with her mother and other mother figures in *GWTW*. Although it would be ideal to choose specific key scenes involving Ellen upon which to focus, it is not a simple task to pinpoint specific episodes in a discussion of Ellen, as she rarely appears in person, and even then only toward the very beginning of the novel, and has died by the time Scarlett returns to Tara from Atlanta. However, Ellen haunts Scarlett throughout the novel, notably appearing in Scarlett's thoughts when Scarlett experiences crises of conscience regarding her behavior. I also plan to examine certain scholars' theories that, following Ellen's death, Scarlett unconsciously replaces her dead mother with another woman, Melanie Wilkes.<sup>11</sup> I will also examine Scarlett's views on motherhood and how those views shape her relationships with her children, noting that Melanie also serves as a foil to Scarlett in their respective views on motherhood.

To conclude, in the fourth chapter, I will attempt to relate the biographical information I have gleaned in Chapters One and Two with the conclusions I have drawn about the novel in Chapter Three; although it will not be possible to determine Mitchell's true intentions with absolute certainty, I will nevertheless provide some theories as to what her intentions may have been in the creation and shaping of her novel.

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<sup>11</sup> Although some scholars have also argued that Mammy serves as a substitute mother for Scarlett both while Ellen lives and following Ellen's death, I believe that it is evident, based the context of the novel, that Mammy's literary purpose is to serve as a living reminder of Ellen's views and as an enforcer of these views, both during Ellen's lifetime and after her death. Unfortunately, while Mitchell may have been an early feminist in regard to her views on white women's roles in society, she did not extend these views to include the rights of African-American women, at least within the context of her novel; a thorough examination of Mammy's role in *GWTW*, as well as the roles of the other African-American female characters, deserves its own consideration, which does not fit within the confines of this thesis.

*Chapter One: Mitchell and Her Mother*

Mary Isabel Stephens Mitchell, who went by the name Maybelle,<sup>12</sup> gave birth to her second child, Margaret Munnerlyn, on November 8, 1900. Fewer than two decades later, Maybelle died shortly after her daughter's eighteenth birthday, on January 25, 1919, from influenza. No biographer has failed to note Maybelle's significance in her daughter's life; however, aside from a few incontrovertible facts, the five major Mitchell biographies have produced portraits of Maybelle that differ almost as much as their portraits of Mitchell herself. We know that Maybelle was a housewife and that she was deeply involved in her community: she was a leader in the Atlanta suffragist movement, a devout Catholic who was very involved in a lay Catholic organization, a compassionate woman who devoted much of her time to charitable work with the poor, and an intellectual who advocated higher education, particularly for her children. Aside from these facts, the biographers have produced four competing versions of Maybelle: Farr and Walker present a loving and warm version of Maybelle, Edwards a cold and wrathful version, while Hanson and Pyron delve into the complexities of Maybelle's character, although each produces a somewhat different version of this complex woman.

Marianne Walker gives a rather brief account of Mitchell's life prior to her first acquaintance with John Marsh. Walker has little interest in devoting more than a perfunctory discussion to any influence over Mitchell that was not John Marsh; however, she does note (if briefly) Maybelle's importance in her daughter's life. In addition to pointing out Maybelle's

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<sup>12</sup> In all of the biographies but that of Pyron, the given spelling of Mitchell's mother's lifelong nickname is "Maybelle"; however, Pyron spells it "May Belle." Pyron gives no reason for his different choice of spelling; although in many ways I do find Pyron's biography to be the most definitive of the biographies, I will use the former spelling unless quoting directly from Pyron's work for three reasons. The former spelling is the version authorized by Stephens in Farr's biography; it is the spelling used in the Margaret Mitchell Memorial Issue of the *Atlanta Historical Bulletin*, which was published by the Atlanta Historical Society to commemorate Mitchell's death; and, most importantly, it is the spelling Mitchell herself used when she referred to her mother by name in her correspondence.

various involvements in the community, Walker notes that Maybelle spent a great deal of time reading to her children and that she not only encouraged Mitchell's youthful attempts at creative writing, which all biographers agree were prolific and began from a very early age, but carefully saved all of Mitchell's young efforts in breadboxes (31-32).

Farr, too, with Stephens's careful guidance, depicts Maybelle as a loving mother: He notes, for instance, that Maybelle was a benevolent hostess (23) and that she encouraged her children as young adults to enjoy themselves (36). Although he also notes Maybelle's involvement in her community and her passion for women's suffrage, he tempers this image of Maybelle with Stephens's statement that "She dressed quietly and was soft-spoken" (23); it seems likely, given what we know about Stephens's tendency to censor his sister's public image, that Stephens was probably just as eager to maintain a certain decorous image of his feminist mother as he was to maintain Mitchell's housewife persona.

However, while Farr does little editorializing on the information he provides, Stephens does (perhaps inadvertently) allow Farr to give clues as to Maybelle's sterner side. Farr recounts that Mitchell was shy as a small child and that Maybelle, while sympathetic, would not tolerate Mitchell's "reticence at the expense of courtesy"; he notes that "Mrs. Mitchell insisted that [Mitchell] conquer all symptoms of shyness and timidity at an early age" and that "the lessons in behavior were emphasized by a smack with a slipper" (13-14). Farr further relates Stephens's recollections of Maybelle's endeavors to instill her own personal moral code into her children: Maybelle felt that drinking was acceptable but only in strict moderation and opposed the total prohibition of alcohol, advised early marriage as a solution to controlling youthful sexual impulses, and had no tolerance for gambling, either literally or in one's personal affairs (23). Stephens also notes that Maybelle championed assertiveness and bravery in her children: "She

insisted that we fight for our rights, even though we were bested. Time and again she said that courage was the only virtue worth worrying about, for it comprehended all the others.”

Ultimately, Stephens recalls that “Her influence over both of us was very strong” (24).

Although she does not provide lengthy biographical information in her collection of Mitchell’s youthful correspondence, Jane Bonner Peacock notes that Maybelle was a loving mother. Peacock quotes a close friend of Mitchell’s, Courtenay Ross, as recalling that “Margaret’s mother was so warm . . . She was the pivot of the household. You could always go to her with your problems” (Mitchell, Peacock 21).

While Walker, Farr, and Peacock all imply that Maybelle was a kind and loving mother, Anne Edwards contends that Maybelle’s “unyielding nature was difficult for [Mitchell] to understand” and that “nothing [Mitchell] did appeared to please Maybelle” (19). Edwards also presents an image of Maybelle’s suffragist work that clashes violently with Stephens’s recollections of his mother as quiet and diminutive: she describes Maybelle’s suffragist organization as “militant” and Maybelle’s style of speaking at her suffragist meetings as “in a style of oratory that had its roots in preachers’ fiery sermons on hell and damnation” (17). Unlike Farr, Edwards argues that Maybelle disliked Mitchell’s early interest in creative writing and discouraged it, favoring a future career in science (specifically, a profession in the medical field) for her daughter (32). Edwards depicts a young Mitchell as alienated from her mother; she contends that “Margaret never felt quite a true child of Maybelle’s—whom she considered to be all the things she was not” (23), that Mitchell was “well aware of her mother’s hopes for her and desperate to gain Maybelle’s approval” (32), that “there was a certain remoteness between mother and daughter” (33), and that Mitchell “confided little in her mother and never showed her the stories she wrote. No doubt she feared Maybelle’s disapproval of her efforts” (41).

Elizabeth Hanson integrates these clashing visions of Maybelle, noting that Maybelle “sought to frighten and impress, alternately to stifle and encourage” her daughter (12). Hanson goes on to resolve other biographers’ competing accounts of Maybelle by contending that Maybelle lived a double life, playing the role of a fiery feminist in the company of other women (including her daughter) and behaving with traditional ladylike conduct when men were present. Hanson further contends that “To Margaret, her mother appeared divided between her two roles and distanced through her contributions to community welfare” (14), implying that, contrary to the implications of Walker, Farr, and Peacock, Maybelle devoted far more time to her community than to her daughter; Hanson repeatedly characterizes Mitchell’s early childhood as a series of attempts to gain the attention of her family and, in particular, that of her aloof mother.

Darden Asbury Pyron concedes that Maybelle was a woman full of “grace, kindness, and forbearance” but also confirms Edwards’s assertions that Maybelle was a militant feminist, elaborating that even her children “reverted often to military figures to describe their parent” (41). At one point, Pyron points out that Maybelle, in a letter to her husband Eugene in response to his qualms regarding one of Mitchell’s suitors, “allows no distinctions between the romantic liaisons of her son and of her daughter” (80); in other words, Maybelle viewed her children as equals and made few distinctions between the two based on gender. Perhaps Maybelle even had higher expectations for her daughter than for her son, for Pyron describes Mitchell’s relationship with her mother as one fraught with the burden of Maybelle’s feminist expectations: he quotes Mitchell as relating that while she wanted to play house and fantasize about motherhood, she was “weighed down by [her] future responsibilities” (43). Pyron repeatedly asserts that “Education for a woman was everything, and the mother was determined to force this lesson on the child”

(44). In all, according to Pyron, “May Belle Mitchell dominated her household and her children’s lives” (38).

What did Mitchell herself have to say about this complex and formative figure in her life? In one letter, quoted in full in Farr’s biography, Mitchell recounts an early memory of Maybelle bringing her along to a suffragist rally: Mitchell describes Maybelle as “small and gentle” but that “nothing infuriated her as much as the complacent attitude of ladies who felt that they should let the gentlemen do the voting.” Mitchell also mentions that her family “was fortunate in that the menfolks were heartily in favor of women’s suffrage.” She elaborates that her mother “hiss[ed] bloodcurdling threats if I did not behave” and “made an impassioned speech.” Mitchell then mentions her own behavior at the rally: “I was so enchanted at my eminence that I behaved perfectly, even blowing kisses to gentlemen in the front row.” Mitchell concludes this episode by noting that “I was intolerable for days afterwards” and was “spanked” for this behavior (23).

Pyron is the only biographer to devote any analysis to this event. He notes that, although Mitchell overtly describes her mother as diminutive, “the figure that develops is closer to a harpy.” Pyron argues that “the story’s little girl gets her vengeance: she upstages her mother” by blowing kisses, which “contrast with the mother’s ‘impassioned speech,’” but that the young Mitchell’s “moment of glory ends in punishment” (44).

Another, more famous legend of Maybelle’s influence over Mitchell’s childhood is recounted in another letter of Mitchell’s. In recalling an assertion that she disliked school (which would prove to be the subject of an ongoing battle between mother and daughter), Mitchell related the following story (which took place circa 1906, when Mitchell was six years old):

Mother took me out on the hottest September day I ever saw and drove me down the road toward Jonesboro . . . and showed me the old ruins of houses where fine and wealthy people had once lived. Some of the ruins dated from Sherman’s visit, some had fallen to pieces when the families in them fell to pieces. And she showed me plenty of houses still

standing staunchly.

And she talked about the world those people had lived in, such a secure world, and how it had exploded beneath them. And she told me that my own world was going to explode under me, some day, and God help me if I didn't have some weapon to meet the new world. She was talking about the necessity of having an education, both classical and practical. For she said that all that would be left after a world ended would be what you could do with your hands and what you had in your head. 'So for God's sake, go to school and learn something that will stay with you. The strength of women's hands isn't worth anything but what they've got in their heads will carry them as far as they need to go.' Well, I never could learn the multiplication table above the sevens but I was frightened and impressed enough by her words to learn enough rhetoric to land a job on a newspaper some years later! (*Margaret Mitchell's* 38)

Several of the biographers have their opinions on the implications of this story; all of them, noting its significance, at the very least reprint the recollection. Even Farr notes that Maybelle's overarching message was that "One's obligation to life was to turn in a good performance; that was the hard path, and the only path, by which one attained validity and self-respect" (30). Elizabeth Hanson notes that "History became a moral imperative. Mitchell's mother transformed her memories of insecurity and anxiety into a didactic message of effort and self-worth" (59). Pyron describes the drive as "the earliest crisis of [Mitchell's] life—an indelible matriarchal rebuke." He states that "the jeremiad left a permanent mark" upon Mitchell's life; she took from it that "If only strength and cunning count when worlds explode, women's lack of physical power forces them to rely exclusively on their mother wit. In order to survive, then, women have no alternative but to cultivate their intelligence" (45). Pyron notes that, considering that Maybelle was prompted to this action because her daughter had complained about her schoolwork, "This sequence underlined a critical aspect of the Mitchell mother-daughter relations in any circumstance" because Maybelle and Mitchell constantly tussled for control over Mitchell's life decisions (46).

Readers should note that Mitchell wrote these two letters (regarding the suffragist meeting and the drive to Jonesboro) after *GWTW* was published, when she was in the full throes

of her public persona. Hence, she might not have been as forthcoming with her full range of feelings about her mother as she might have been had she not been self-conscious about the content of her letters, perhaps on some level realizing that future readers might connect her relationship with Maybelle with that between Scarlett and Ellen. However, one example of an extremely un-self-conscious piece written by a much younger Mitchell has survived. In a journal entry dated January 7, 1915, a fourteen-year-old Mitchell writes:

They don't understand me! This is the cry of every boy and girl when there's a dilemma or a scrape. Mother doesn't understand me. Mother never shows her feelings, hardly ever. She brought me up that way, too. I hate public shows of emotion—crying, anger, love, loud laughing, great joy or sorrow. I don't like these in public, but I don't mind them in the privacy of your home.

I love Mother and I suppose she loves me, but I might be her ward for all she says or does to me, and so I generally keep my mouth shut.

She never asks anything for love's sake. It's nothing for her. She yells 'duty' at me all the time. I don't look it, but I do want some show of something except anger and mirth. Pride. That's sarcasm, for I don't suppose there's anything about me to be proud of. I'm not pretty, that's certain. I'm lazy. I can't study. I can't do mathematics. I guess my morals are mighty low and I don't give a damn for anything that happens.

Mother doesn't often give people 2 chances—and I'm not the person to beg. I would like to put my head in Mother's lap and say 'I'm sorry, give me more chances and I'll try hard,' but I won't. I'd just about rather cut off my hand than say it. I failed in my mathematics and Mother says I may have to go back to public school. But I won't go. *That's all.* I feel like I want to cry, but I'll be durned if I do.

I know I'm as smart as the other girls, but the trouble is that I am lazy. I never learned to study. I mean real study—unless something happens or someone makes me—I will flunk the year and there is not doubt to the matter. I am one of the people who never do anything well unless they are made to do it. I'm human.

I want to be famous in some way—a speaker, artist, writer, soldier, fighter, stateswoman, or anything nearly. If I were a boy, I would try for West Point, if I could make it, or well I'd be a *prize fighter*—anything for the thrills. I think there is a piece in the Bible that says 'knock and it shall be opened unto you—ask and thou shalt receive.' Of course, I'm sensible enough to know that I've got to try as well as ask and I have tried, *in my way*, to do my best, and heaven knows that I have asked enough to be the smartest person on earth—*only I'm not.* Quite a difference.

Well, here's to one more try for 1915. I know I flunked every midyear exam and I would not care if it were not for Mother. Father can't worry me—Mother can for she makes me mad and when I'm mad I'm stubborn as a mule. She thinks I have no ambition I suppose—but I have. Perhaps it's very small but it's there all right.

When I go back to school I *will* work hard and heaven help me, make 1915 the best year I ever had. (*Before Scarlett* 141-42)



If nothing else, this journal entry clearly supports the arguments of biographers who contend that Mitchell's relationship with Maybelle was not idyllic—at least, not all the time.

With all this information compiled, what can be determined about the “true” Maybelle Mitchell? Although some biographers (as well as Mitchell herself in her girlhood journal entry) might imply that Maybelle was not particularly affectionate with her daughter, there can be no doubt that Maybelle loved her, even if she may have had trouble showing it. It should by now be obvious that Maybelle placed great value upon higher education for women; if she cared little for her daughter, she would not have been so ardently invested in her education. Regarding Edwards's assertion that Maybelle disliked her daughter's early attempts at creative writing and specifically wanted Mitchell to go to medical school, this assertion is likely false; for one thing, no other biographer, even the ones who agree that Maybelle might have been stern and aloof, confirms such an assertion. Walker, who so blatantly disagrees with Edwards's statement as to outrightly claim that Maybelle was extremely proud of Mitchell's writing, cites Stephens's unpublished memoir as the source of her information; if Stephens had thought that his mother disliked Mitchell's writing, it is illogical that he would have recorded that Maybelle took care to save all of Mitchell's work. Further, Pyron argues that Mitchell's later claims (in her persona era) that she had initially intended to become a doctor were “fabricated,” noting that, during her year at Smith, Mitchell “signed up for standard courses and, like most freshmen, she had no higher goal than finishing—if that” (83). Given all this information, it seems more likely that Maybelle's aspirations for her daughter were not specific (although, as a feminist, seeing her daughter succeed in such a male-dominated sphere as the medical field would have given her great pride and satisfaction); she wanted Mitchell to be a success in some way, there can be little doubt, but there are no indications to suggest that, had she lived long enough to see how her

daughter's life turned out, Maybelle would have been dissatisfied with Mitchell's future careers as first journalist and then novelist.

Was Maybelle an overtly affectionate mother? It is hard to say for certain. Considering the number of community organizations in which Maybelle played a very active role, it would follow that she was probably often away from the house, which would have left her relatively little time to spend with her children in comparison to a more typical housewife whose primary activities were housekeeping and child rearing. Frequent absences from home, however, certainly do not necessarily mean that a mother does not show affection toward her children. Stephens (through Farr) affirms that Maybelle was warm and nurturing, but then again Stephens did not want anything shocking published about his family, and it certainly would have been shocking to admit that his mother might not have been as warm as she could have been. Plus, as Hanson implies, Maybelle may well have been more placid in the company of male family members, her son included, than with her daughter; on the other hand, as Mitchell herself implies in her letter on the subject of accompanying Maybelle to the suffragist rally, Maybelle may only have been calm in the company of male family members because they did not contest her suffragist aspirations. Also, Courtenay Ross, who made a point to emphasize Maybelle's warmth in her interview with Peacock, has no ostensible reason to be untruthful, for in the same interview, she characterizes Eugene Mitchell, Mitchell's father, as "always stiff and proper" (Mitchell, Peacock 21), which implies that Ross had no qualms about making statements about members of the Mitchell family that were less than flattering. However, the warmth that Courtenay describes may have dissipated at least somewhat when Mitchell found herself alone with her mother. It is obvious that the two quarreled often, particularly about Mitchell's commitment to her studies: Mitchell was willing to admit this point even in her public persona

phase, as part of the point of her story about her country drive with her mother was to illustrate Maybelle's stern reaction to her daughter's objections to her schoolwork. The entire journal entry quoted above was clearly inspired by an altercation with Maybelle over a failing grade in Mitchell's mathematics class, probably an argument that had occurred that very day.

It would be easy to take Mitchell's youthful journal entry at face value and assume that Mitchell's characterization of Maybelle, unfettered by concern about a persona, is entirely truthful and accurate. However, one should keep three things in mind. First, it is clear from the context of the entry and the language that she uses that Mitchell was angry with Maybelle when she wrote it, circumstances which certainly would have biased an adolescent girl's characterization of her mother. Second, Mitchell herself opens the entry with a precociously self-aware admission that her feelings are typical of all young people coming fresh from such a quarrel with an adult. Third, even if Mitchell correctly assesses Maybelle's general character as detached and (mostly) emotionless and if Maybelle truly and consistently emphasized duty over love, perhaps Maybelle, perennial feminist that she was, showed her love for her daughter through constant emphasis of Mitchell's duty to her studies because education was so important to Maybelle that she felt that it was the best service she could do for her daughter to constantly prod her to keep at her studies, even if that meant being stern when she would have privately preferred to be kind.

Pyron points out that Maybelle's "education stopped when she finished high school" (38); although no biographer goes into explicit detail regarding the opportunities available to a woman of Maybelle's generation, it seems likely that, considering the high premium Maybelle placed upon education, something (her family or her gender or both) prevented her from attaining higher education, as it seems decidedly unlikely that Maybelle would have declined the

chance to further her education were she given the choice. Even if she did have the choice, Maybelle married Eugene when she was twenty years old; once married, in 1892, it is unlikely that Maybelle would have been able to change her mind and go back to school. It is also uncertain whether Maybelle would have had the opportunity for a career, but, for the same reasons listed above regarding her opportunities for education, that, too, seems unlikely. She probably would have liked to work after having continued her education, however; the fact that she spent so much time involved in her various community organizations exemplifies Maybelle's desire for a life that included more than the demands of running a household and raising children. Although she was involved in several organizations, Maybelle evidently found her suffragist work most fulfilling, and she knew that the work she was doing was even more for the benefit of her daughter's generation than for that of her own. This chain of logic suggests that Maybelle may also have been so passionate about Mitchell's higher education because she understood that a girl of Mitchell's generation would have the opportunities that she did not. Denied an opportunity for higher education and a career, Maybelle determined that Mitchell would not miss out on such opportunities if she could help it.

Thus, the "true" Maybelle who emerges from all this information is a complex woman, both a devoted mother and a feminist activist who (at least sometimes) sacrificed motherly affection for what she felt to be the more important purpose of pushing her daughter to live up to her potential.

After reviewing such a thorough discussion of Mitchell's mother's character, one might contend that I have almost entirely overlooked Mitchell herself. My initial focus on Maybelle is no oversight, for Maybelle held dominion over her daughter's childhood and teenage years. In their accounts of Mitchell's early life, most of the biographers tend to place almost as much, if

not just as much, emphasis on Maybelle as they do upon Mitchell herself for this very reason. However, Mitchell will not be overshadowed entirely. By all accounts, Mitchell was shy with strangers but outgoing in play with the neighborhood children; she was tomboyish as a child and enjoyed outdoor activity, although such activities often went hand in hand with a proneness to injury that would prove to be lifelong. She took immense pleasure from her many opportunities to listen to her relatives tell and retell stories from the past; she particularly enjoyed stories that involved her relatives' exploits during the Civil War era. She loved to read, but, by her own admission (in a letter that comes from her public persona period), she only read the classics when bribed to do so by Maybelle; even when Maybelle bribed her with the promise of a quarter per book and threatened a spanking were she to refuse, Mitchell contended that she still refused to read such authors as Tolstoy, Hardy, and Thackeray (*Margaret Mitchell's* 28). Instead, Mitchell preferred "romances and adventures, dime novels, and cheap thrillers. By her own confession, she consumed pulp culture with a passion for the rest of her life" (Pyron 61). If they perhaps never quite agree on much else, all of the biographers also concur that, from an extremely early age, Mitchell loved to write. Many of the biographers devote a great deal of space to chronicling example after example of Mitchell's youthful writings; these examples, they argue, portend Mitchell's adult talent as a novelist.

Regarding Mitchell's educational career, most biographers highlight Mitchell's accomplishments while tactfully omitting any mention of her failings. Farr, Hanson, and Walker all note that Mitchell excelled in her literature and composition courses. Edwards makes little comment upon Mitchell's schoolgirl days, concerning herself more with the question of how popular Mitchell may have been with her fellow students than with how well she may have done in her studies. Pyron, on the other hand, points out that Mitchell's grades generally ranged from

poor to average in any subject that did not involve the written word; although he acknowledges that Mitchell “loved the liberty of reading, writing, and literature,” he points out that, even in her English classes, “she loathed the discipline of grammar, syntax, and spelling” (63). Mitchell’s teenage journal entry supports Pyron’s claims; clearly, if nothing else, Mitchell did not excel in the study of mathematics.

Of course, readers cannot forget about Maybelle and her strong influence over her daughter’s life. We have already established Maybelle’s side of the equation, that she pushed her daughter to excel at school so that she might live up to her mother’s great expectations; what we have not yet examined in detail is how Mitchell felt about Maybelle and Maybelle’s demanding academic regime. From Mitchell’s girlhood journal, we can note that, at least in times of conflict, Mitchell acutely felt that Maybelle was not especially warm and loving. (Again, however, we must note that Mitchell wrote this entry fresh from an argument with Maybelle; it is entirely possible that when the two were in accord Maybelle was more affectionate toward her daughter, and vice versa.) However, we can also see that Mitchell did not so much feel that she could not go to her mother with her problems because she felt that Maybelle would not be receptive to her daughter’s supplications but because Mitchell stubbornly rejected Maybelle as either a source of comfort or an ally. While she might have loved to write, Mitchell clearly disliked studying for school, particularly her mathematics studies. However, Mitchell seemed to feel simultaneously inadequate to the task of living up to Maybelle’s expectations and yet determined to aspire to greatness, whether that determination sprang from a desire to please her demanding mother or to succeed in her own way on her own terms in spite of Maybelle’s expectations (or, more likely, both). What emerges is a portrait of a young woman who would perhaps have preferred to be less “weighed down” by the “future responsibilities”

(Pyron 43) so stridently imposed on her by her mother but who nevertheless aspired not only to make a success of herself but actually to eventually become famous for her successes, whatever those might turn out to be.

In another youthful journal entry, however, Maybelle's feminist influence on her daughter emerges. Although the entry ostensibly chronicles a quarrel between Mitchell and a girlhood friend over boys, one part of the exchange emphasizes Maybelle's influence over her daughter. The friend challenges Mitchell with the question "You say a woman's better than a man?" Mitchell's response was terse and emphatic: "'Yes, I do,' I yelled" (*Before Scarlett* 154). This entry subtly suggests that for all her complaints about the pressure her mother placed upon her, Mitchell concurred with her mother on the subject of gender equality.

When Mitchell finished high school, all the biographers agree that Maybelle took it upon herself to select Smith College for Mitchell's post-secondary education. In the last days the two would ever spend together, Mitchell and Maybelle toured the campus in Northampton and spent some time in New York. By all accounts, both mother and daughter thoroughly enjoyed the trip; even Pyron notes that "the two experienced a final bonding" (81). Mitchell remained in Massachusetts when the vacation ended, and Maybelle returned to Atlanta. Farr points out that when Mitchell saw Maybelle off at the train station, it would be "the last time she would ever see her mother alive" (40).

Less than a year after Mitchell began her studies at Smith, Maybelle died in an influenza plague that swept Atlanta in early 1919. Farr points out that Maybelle caught the disease because she was "Worn and weak from nursing others," including Eugene (43). Eugene and Stephens, realizing the seriousness of Maybelle's illness, telegraphed Mitchell to come home posthaste. Although Mitchell rushed to Atlanta, she arrived too late: Maybelle had died the

previous day. However, at some point during her visit home, Stephens presented Mitchell with a letter; ever conscious of her perceived duty to shape her daughter's life, from her deathbed Maybelle had dictated a letter to Stephens for Mitchell. In her final message to her daughter, Maybelle writes:

Dear Margaret,

I have been thinking of you all day long. Yesterday you received a letter saying I am sick. I expect your father drew the situation with a strong hand and dark colors and I hope I am not as sick as he thought. I have pneumonia in one lung and were it not for flu complications, would have more than a fair chance of recovery. But Mrs. Riley had pneumonia in both lungs and is now well and strong. We shall hope for the best but remember, dear, that if I go now it is the best time for me to go.

I should have liked a few more years of life, but if I had had those it may have been that I should have lived too long. Waste no sympathy on me. However little it seems to you I got out of life, I have held in my hands all that the world can give. I have had a happy childhood and married the man I wanted. I had children who loved me, and, as I loved them, I have been able to give them what will put them on the high road to mental, moral, and perhaps financial success, were I to give them nothing else.

I expect to see you again, but if I do not I must warn you of one mistake that a woman of your temperament might fall into. Give of yourself with both hands and overflowing heart, but give only the excess after you have lived your own life. This is badly put. What I mean is that your life and energies belong first to yourself, your husband and your children. Anything left over after you have served these, give and give generously, but be sure there is no stinting of love and attention at home. Your father loves you dearly, but do not let the thought of being with him keep you from marrying if you wish to do so. He has lived his life; live yours as best you can. Both of my children have loved me so much that there is no need to dwell on it. You have done all you can for me and have given me the greatest love that children can give to parents. Care for your father when he is old, as I cared for my mother. But never let his or anyone else's life interfere with your real life. Goodbye, darling, and if you see me no more it may be best that you remember me as I was in New York.

Your loving Mother (Farr 44)

Farr, typically, does not analyze this deathbed letter; Walker does not even mention it, and Edwards, too, merely reprints its contents. Hanson notes that Maybelle "as in all her earlier guiding, protecting admonitions . . . invoked her belief in Margaret's potential for a 'real life,' which belongs 'first' to her own self and then to family, and finally, to the world outside" (24). Pyron describes the letter as demonstrative of Maybelle's character and her relationship with her



daughter; “To the last,” he writes, Maybelle “remained cool, rational, and admonitory” (90). Later, in an interview given for the PBS documentary on Mitchell, Pyron further notes that the letter “is devoid of affection,” “very objective,” and “intensely rational.” In his biography, Pyron also notes that Maybelle imparted a “divided legacy” to Mitchell in her final words to her daughter, noting that in her final moments, Maybelle found it especially important to express her “special sense of obligation to her woman-child and . . . her lifelong concerns with women’s issues.” Pyron also notes that Maybelle simultaneously advised Mitchell and “was also speaking to the mirror.” Pyron asserts that Maybelle “confronted the question of her own success or failure” and was divided to the last as to whether her roles as mother and wife and community leader were truly satisfying enough; he notes that Maybelle “admitted that she had wanted something more for her own child” than her own life of domesticity. Pyron states that “Give and give, the parent advised, in deference to traditional roles for women; but acknowledging new notions of self and achievement, she also insisted” that Mitchell should only give to others after she had given herself the chance to live her own life (91). However, Pyron also states that Maybelle “smudged the clear advice to follow one’s own ambitions” by amending her advice to Mitchell by subsequently urging her daughter not to solely privilege herself but to put both self and family first, perhaps in part because Maybelle, also evaluating her own life decisions, in particular the commitment to so many community causes that had often kept her away from home, came to the realization “that selfless generosity might be actually at the expense of those within the family circle” (92).

While I do concur with much of Pyron’s analysis, I disagree that Maybelle’s letter is “devoid of affection”; on the contrary, Maybelle stresses over and over again how much she loves her children and, specifically, her daughter. Perhaps Maybelle was an overtly loving

mother all along, provided that there was peace between herself and her willful daughter; if not, perhaps Maybelle sought, in her final moments, to say what had been previously left unsaid, to make sure, at the last, despite all her stern talk of duty, that her daughter would also be left with no doubt that her mother loved her. She also notes that it might be better if Mitchell remembers her as she was in New York; perhaps Maybelle added this line merely because she did not want her daughter to remember her at the last as weak and sickly, but perhaps also because Pyron is correct in noting that Maybelle's visit to the North with Mitchell represented a rare accord between the two and that Maybelle wanted Mitchell to have at least one pleasant memory of an otherwise stern mother.

With regard to the rest of the letter, it is clear that Maybelle determined, were she to succumb to her illness, that she should compress the motherly and womanly advice she would have liked to have been spaced out for many years to come into one final message for Mitchell. Pyron correctly notes that Maybelle is ambivalent, in that she first advises Mitchell to live her own life and then goes back to add that Mitchell should privilege self *and family*. However, even when Maybelle seemingly promotes domesticity by stating that "your life and energies belong first to yourself, your husband and your children" (44), she still places the self ahead of family in her list of how Mitchell should prioritize her life while ostensibly advising Mitchell not to neglect her future family. I would further argue that, given the amount of time Maybelle spent out of the home in her various community activities, that the statement to "be sure there is no stinting of love and attention at home" is probably more exemplary of Maybelle's tacit acknowledgment of what she feels to have been her own mistakes in raising her daughter than anything else; while, above all else, it seems clear that Maybelle wished her daughter to go on to do great things, Maybelle may well have been endeavoring to warn her daughter not to repeat her

mother's mistakes and instead to show more affection to her children than, perhaps, Maybelle herself did. I would further like to point out that Maybelle may have somewhat self-censored for another reason; after all, too ill to write the letter herself, she dictated it to Stephens, and may have doubled back to include an emphasis on family because of the male presence.

At any rate, following Maybelle's death, Mitchell returned to Smith but only finished her first year, returning to Atlanta and moving back into the family home with Eugene and Stephens. While Walker asserts that Mitchell came home because Eugene asked her to return (37), all the other biographers point out that Mitchell finished her first year at Eugene's urging, likely because he knew that Mitchell's return to school would honor her mother's wishes; hence, it seems more likely that, as Edwards, Hanson, and Pyron all note, Mitchell came home of her own accord. Hanson argues that "Without the guiding hand of her mother," Mitchell decided to come home because she felt that one year at a prestigious college was enough of a feather in her cap and there was no necessity to continue. Pyron and Edwards both argue that Mitchell, in a sense liberated by Maybelle's death, decided to return to Atlanta because Maybelle was no longer around to insist that she stay and because, according to Edwards, Mitchell decided to put herself first and make her own decisions, just as Maybelle advised her to do in her deathbed mandate (60). Pyron further argues that Mitchell came home to perversely violate Maybelle's wish that Mitchell should not sacrifice herself to take care of Eugene because Mitchell, by coming home, stood to usurp Maybelle's former role as female head of the household (99-100).

At any rate, most descriptions of Mitchell's brief college career within the various biographies focus far more on her social activities than upon her studies, which indicates that Mitchell was still not the most devoted student (although the biographers quibble about exact figures, they do also concur that Mitchell's overall grades were average at best). In one letter to

Alan Edee dated months after her return to Atlanta, Mitchell describes her return home as “about the only unselfish thing I can remember having done in my life,” further asserting that this unselfish act involved “Giving up college . . . to come home and keep house and keep my family and home intact and take Mother’s place” (42). However, nearly two years later, Mitchell admits to Edee that she “was too young to have gone off to college,” going on to assert that she is “about old enough to appreciate college now, I dare say!” (121). This later letter implies that, although Mitchell surely mourned the loss of her mother, now that she was no longer under Maybelle’s dominion Mitchell did likely decide to come home because she felt that she was now free to do what she wanted, and what she wanted was create her own identity (as opposed to living up to Maybelle’s expectations of who she should be) and figure out what she wanted to do with the rest of her life.

Maybelle’s death, however, did not mean that Mitchell would face no further obstacles in her quest for self-discovery. Upon her return home, one problem in particular almost immediately surfaced that would impede Mitchell’s progress: the arrival of her maternal grandmother, Annie Fitzgerald Stephens, who decided to move in with the Mitchell family around the same time that Mitchell returned home.

The four biographers who devote space to a discussion of Annie Stephens concur regarding her general character.<sup>13</sup> One of several daughters (there were no sons) born to Irish immigrant and self-made plantation owner Phillip Fitzgerald and his wife Eleanor (née McGhann), Annie grew up on a plantation called Rural Home in Clayton County. Edwards notes Annie’s strength, asserting that Annie could “push through legislation even without the clout of a vote” by assembling groups of women to petition and even harass elected officials (17). Farr heavily implies that one would literally require the patience of a “saint” to put up with

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<sup>13</sup> In her brief chronicle, Hanson omits any mention of Annie Fitzgerald Stephens.

Annie on a regular basis (52). Walker asserts that Annie was “known for speaking her mind, particularly when some moral issue conflicted with her principles—which was often” and that, as “the self-appointed head of the Mitchell-Fitzgerald clan, she meddled in everyone’s business and she was, at times, mean” (56). Pyron provides the most vivid descriptions of Annie; according to his evaluation, she “was a hellion from birth” and remained “contentious, aggressive, domineering, and outspoken” for life. Her “energy, ego, and determination matched or even exceeded” those of the men in her life (which would go a long way toward explaining Maybelle’s feminism), and she was “obsessed” by property (in particular, her stake in Rural Home), acquiring as much Atlanta real estate as she could and “relishing hitching the horse” to drive around town collecting rents, and “thrived on litigation,” at one point suing the federal government for damages incurred to her property during the siege of Atlanta in the Civil War (which she largely spent in Atlanta, staying through much of Sherman’s siege before returning to Rural Home, where she proceeded to demand—and win—protection from the invading Northern army) and at another successfully breaking her father’s will to claim a larger share of his estate than that to which she was fairly entitled (22-24), dispossessing some of her less fortunate family members in the process. Pyron contends that, as a “natural capitalist,” Annie “was estranged from the polite Atlanta of her day”; however, he does provide a balanced portrait, upholding Walker’s claims that Annie was a moralist by noting that she “remained fiercely within the bosom of the church, kept one husband all her life, and avoided . . . sexual and social peccadillos” (252).

Three of the four biographers also agree regarding Mitchell’s relationship with her grandmother, although all concur that Annie did move out at some point after she moved in due

to a quarrel with Mitchell.<sup>14</sup> Edwards claims that, although Annie and Mitchell did not always get along, they maintained a relationship that lasted throughout the rest of Annie's life. She further contends that the dispute between Annie and Mitchell that inspired Annie to move out surrounded a mere difference of opinion regarding Mitchell's wardrobe decisions (67).<sup>15</sup> Marianne Walker notes that Mitchell's quarrel with Annie was so "violent" that Annie felt compelled to call a cab and storm out of the Mitchell home in the middle of the night (59-60). Farr confirms the occurrence (and timing) of the argument and, contrary to Edwards, asserts that the argument began because of Annie's "usual criticism" of Mitchell's friends (53). Pyron further notes that Annie's departure was a blow to the Mitchells' financial situation,<sup>16</sup> for some of Maybelle's siblings had been contributing to the Mitchell household in order to maintain Annie's lifestyle and, now that Annie was gone, not only cut off these contributions but petitioned the Mitchells to chip in to support Annie in her new residence at the Georgian Terrace Hotel. All three of these biographers note that this initial argument between Mitchell and her grandmother led to an increasingly greater rift between the Mitchell family and the rest of Maybelle's surviving relatives. All note that Mitchell and Stephens were forced to forego any claim on a trust that Maybelle had previously held over some of Annie's property. Pyron states that the family squabble included "legal harassment, threats, and diatribes flying back and forth; and finally, graveyard disinterments" well into the 1930s (253); based on a letter of Mitchell's,

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<sup>14</sup> None of the biographers, however, seem to be able to agree how long Annie stayed in the Mitchell house before she moved out (or, for that matter, exactly when she moved in). However, the exact timing of her stay is irrelevant and does not warrant further discussion.

<sup>15</sup> Edwards goes on to assert that the two continued to see one another sporadically for the remainder of Annie's life, even going so far as to claim that Annie included Mitchell in her will (159); however, these claims are ludicrous, given the considerable and substantial evidence that Farr, Pyron, and Walker provide regarding the true nature of the rift between Mitchell and her grandmother. Edwards's biography is by far the most unreliable of the five Mitchell biographies; I only continue to mention Edwards's contentions because some scholars, particularly those who wrote about Mitchell and/or *GWTW* between the publication of Edwards's biography in 1983 and that of Pyron's in 1991, utilized information from Edwards's biography.

<sup>16</sup> I will soon note that the Mitchells' financial situation may have been rather unstable, which of course would explain why they would have taken particular exception to their change in situation following Annie's departure.

Walker speculates as to the veracity of Mitchell's claim that there were actually "attempts made on her and her father's life," although she notes that this extreme claim was undocumented by Stephens (60).

Speaking of Stephens, perhaps the strongest evidence that we have that Annie did indeed spark such a nasty family feud lies in the pages of the Farr biography; while Stephens generally took great care to maintain a positive image of his immediate family, Annie represents the sole exception. Farr amusingly notes that Annie's arrival "was to bring on trouble as surely as acid turns litmus paper red" (51); he even goes on to confirm some of the tawdry details of the dispute between the Mitchells and the rest of Maybelle's family, including "wrangling at the graveside" (53). That Stephens was willing to allow such information to be printed confirms the nature of the rift between Annie and Mitchell (and the Mitchell family), as well as Annie's general character.

When Mitchell came home, all the biographers agree that the next few years of her life were taken up by activities related to her father and brother's insistence that she become a debutante. As Pyron and Walker both point out, the desired end result of a young woman's debut was successful marriage to a young man, preferably a young man with at least moderate wealth and good standing in society (Pyron 103; Walker 55), an outcome that would have ended Eugene and Stephens's obligations to continue to financially support Mitchell. Mitchell did debut, but she ultimately failed. All of the biographers agree that two actions led to her rejection from the Junior League, which was the next step up for a successful debutante. First, Mitchell performed a very risqué dance at a debutante event that sparked a great deal of controversy; second, she argued with the established members of the Junior League over how the money raised at the event should be spent— Mitchell contended that the young ladies who actually

worked to coordinate the event should be allowed to decide which charity should receive the proceeds, and the ladies who were members of the Junior League disagreed.

Although Mitchell contended that marriage was not part of her agenda, she would ultimately marry twice in her lifetime. Her first husband was Berrien “Red” Upshaw, a rebellious young man who may have been involved in bootlegging. Most of the biographers agree that Mitchell’s decision to marry him was based on misguided youthful impulse, as it failed in less than a year. Following Mitchell’s divorce from Upshaw, she eventually decided to marry John Marsh, a marriage that would last for the rest of her life; the two seem to have gotten along well and made one another happy.

Although she married twice, Mitchell had no children. Farr and Hanson make no comment on Mitchell’s views on motherhood; Edwards asserts that Marsh, because of his health problems, was responsible for the couple’s lack of children (116). However, Pyron and Walker both note that Mitchell actively did not want children. Both provide multiple examples of her correspondence, in which Mitchell expresses horror at the thought of childbirth, an interest in contraceptive methods, and an intense dislike of children who did not belong to immediate family or close friends; she also constantly implies that she both believed herself to be a poor candidate for motherhood and resented any suggestions that she should start a family of her own (Pyron 204-207; Walker 154-155).

Mitchell, of course, did more than just marry twice: she built two successful careers, the first as a journalist and the second as a best-selling novelist. Although Pyron and Walker, in particular, come into conflict regarding John Marsh’s role in both the beginning and ending of Mitchell’s journalistic career,<sup>17</sup> it is obvious that Mitchell achieved her success on her own.

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<sup>17</sup> Pyron contends that Mitchell got the job on her own and that she quit because she was no longer satisfied with journalistic work (145-147, 211); Walker argues that Marsh got Mitchell an interview at the newspaper and that she



Even if Marsh pulled strings to get her an interview, Mitchell would not have been hired if she had not impressed the editorial staff at the *Atlanta Journal*. And even if Mitchell quit because (as she herself claimed) of illness (whether that illness was real or psychosomatic), because her husband made enough money to support her without the further necessity of work, or because she wanted to move on to a more ambitious project, she still did it on her own terms, with no pressure from outside forces.

In his review of *Road to Tara*, Pyron points out that “Lacunae loom everywhere in [Mitchell’s] life” (503); it is obvious that Pyron refers not only to literal lacunae (unfinished and/or lost manuscripts) but to gaps in documentation of Mitchell’s real life. Perhaps the most sketchily documented period of Mitchell’s life is one during which she actually wrote *Gone with the Wind*. The biographers’ speculations range from how long it took Mitchell to complete the manuscript to how involved John Marsh was in her writing and editing processes, but they all agree that Mitchell was very secretive about her process and that she discussed her novel only, if at all, with her husband. All we know for certain is that, somewhere between 1926 (around when she quit her job at the *Atlanta Journal*) and 1936 (when she submitted her manuscript to John Latham from Macmillan), Mitchell wrote her masterpiece.

In the years following Maybelle’s death, Mitchell strove for self-discovery. It is hard to say with any certitude exactly how Maybelle’s advice may have impacted Mitchell’s subsequent life decisions, for, as Courtenay Ross pointed out, following Maybelle’s death, “she was shy in expressing condolences to her best friend; she said that she never mentioned the loss of Mitchell’s mother, and that Mitchell never spoke of it either” (Mitchell, Peacock 21). Mitchell’s correspondence with Alan Edee reflects this reluctance to discuss her mother; in all of her letters

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quit her job because of illnesses that, as Walker contends, may have been either psychosomatic or outrightly faked (95-96, 145-152).

to Edee, Mitchell only refers to her mother's death once, and this reference appears as one item in a long list of events, most of which negatively impacted her life, that occurred during her early acquaintance with Edee (*A Dynamo* 57). However, since we do know a great deal about how Maybelle advised her daughter to live her life, in particular from the deathbed mandate she wrote to Mitchell, some educated guesses can be made as to how Maybelle's legacy influenced her daughter in the years after her death.

It is hard to say whether Mitchell gave much thought to her mother's advice either time that she decided to marry, although Edwards points out that Mitchell may have married Upshaw because she was following Maybelle's advice to solve the problem of youthful sexual impulses with early marriage (84). Also, although Maybelle did advise Mitchell to be a good mother in her deathbed letter, we know that Maybelle concerned herself far more with her daughter's education (with the implicit end goal of an illustrious career) than with Mitchell's future as a wife and mother. It is also possible that Maybelle, a product of her generation in spite of herself, could not conceive of a world in which a woman could decide not to have children. At any rate, although it is still certainly possible that Mitchell could have arrived at the decision to remain childless on her own, her decision was in keeping with Maybelle's feminist assertions that a woman should remain firmly in control of her destiny.

Maybelle's impact on Mitchell's life choices manifests itself more in Mitchell's career. We know from Mitchell's girlhood journal entry that Mitchell wished from an early age to become a successful career woman, perhaps both because of and in spite of her mother's expectations. In a letter to Edee, Mitchell mentions a persistent ambition to become a journalist, despite her father's wishes that she might marry young and settle down, implying that she preferred her mother's plan for her future to that of her father. Unlike Maybelle, Mitchell was

never outspoken about any feminist beliefs she may have held; she never belonged to any women's societies that were akin to her mother's militant suffragist organization. However, in the articles Mitchell wrote for the *Atlanta Journal*, Mitchell's beliefs regarding women's rights, while never overtly stated, do shine through—from an article on whether young girls should be allowed to wear cosmetics to school to several articles about issues facing young career women to a series of articles on strong female historical figures from Georgia, Mitchell championed a feminist point of view, in both the topics that she chose and the way she would end her articles, always closing with statements from someone who believed that women should be granted more rights. Clearly, she still believed that women were just as good as men, if not better than them, and just as deserving of equal treatment. Several of the biographers have noted that Mitchell's newspaper articles demonstrate subtle feminism; I would like to add that her motivation for injecting feminist messages into her articles probably derived at least in part from a desire to write pieces that would have made Maybelle proud. As I will investigate in more depth in the next two chapters, Mitchell may well have had the same goals in mind when she wrote *Gone with the Wind*.

### *Chapter Two: Mitchells and Stephenses, O'Haras and Robillards*

Margaret Mitchell hotly contested any claims that her characters may have been based on real people. In one letter, she states that "I did not take the character of 'Scarlett' from anyone, living or dead" (*Margaret Mitchell's* 68). In another, this time regarding the character Rhett Butler, Mitchell states that "I didn't model him after any human being I'd ever heard of" (*Margaret Mitchell's* 21). In a later letter, Mitchell further denies any correlations between her

characters and real people and goes on to editorialize regarding the practice of directly basing characters on family members: “No, none of the characters were taken from life, for I haven’t much use for writers who use their own relatives for copy” (*Margaret Mitchell’s* 105).

However, Mitchell mentions in another letter that “I thank you for saying the characters weren’t real. Honestly, they weren’t! But all of us have seen types like foolish Miss Pittypat and Melanie . . . My characters were just composites” (*Margaret Mitchell’s* 24). In still another letter, Mitchell goes even further: “You asked if Tara and the characters really existed. No, they all came out of my head . . . But I picked them all because they were pretty representative of the type of people I’ve heard about who lived in Atlanta in the Sixties. Practically all the incidents in the book are true.” She goes on to clarify that “Of course, they didn’t all happen to the same person and a few of them didn’t happen in Atlanta.” (*Margaret Mitchell’s* 43). From these letters, some readers might be satisfied to conclude that, while Mitchell did base some of the events in her novel on truth, her characters (at least, according to Mitchell) were original creations inspired by, but not based specifically on, the sort of people who lived in the Civil War era South that Mitchell depicts in her novel.

Other people who have written about Mitchell have also insisted that Mitchell’s characters were not drawn from real-life sources. Ralph McGill, a former coworker of Mitchell’s at the *Atlanta Journal*, asserts that “Scarlett O’Hara was emphatically not a biographical character” (69). Edwin Granberry, another journalist (although not at the *Atlanta Journal*) and longtime friend and correspondent of Mitchell’s, states that “Miss Mitchell has not drawn her characters from life. Believing it impossible to know completely another’s mind, she filled the pages of her book with people of her own creation” (51). In an interview with Mitchell’s brother Stephens, Keith Runyon reports that Stephens “recalled that some people have

tried to place historical ties to his sister's story which really never existed" (80). Runyon quotes Stephens as stating that "Margaret just made [her characters] up, and people have attributed all sorts of stories to her. Nobody in the book except the historic characters (like Civil War generals) are taken from life. Margaret had imagination enough to make greater characters than life could have provided" (80-81).

However, these protests have not deterred scholars from noting parallels between real people in Mitchell's life, including herself, and the characters in *Gone with the Wind*. Although scores of parallels have been found between a wide variety of real people and most of Mitchell's characters, the parallels that are most important to this thesis involve those that scholars have found between Scarlett O'Hara, the protagonist of *GWTW*, and Scarlett's mother, Ellen, on the one hand, and Mitchell herself, her mother, her maternal grandmother, and her great-grandmother, on the other. Most scholars note one of two groupings of parallels: they either note that Scarlett resembles Annie Stephens and that Ellen resembles Eleanor Fitzgerald or that Scarlett resembles Mitchell and that Ellen resembles Maybelle. In a few cases, some scholars have also sought to compare Melanie Wilkes with either Mitchell or Maybelle.

Regarding comparisons between Mitchell's grandmother and her most important fictional character, Farr points out that Annie attended the Fayetteville Female Academy, "as did Scarlett O'Hara" (26). Edwards claims that Scarlett was based so closely on Annie Stephens that "there were enough similarities between the two women that Peggy was reluctant to expose the book to her grandmother's sharp eye" (138) and notes further parallels between the life of Annie Stephens and the plot of *GWTW*. Edwards also asserts that, not unlike Scarlett, "Annie was just a few years younger than the city of Atlanta, and she did indeed think of it as 'of her own

generation,' and was proud of the way it had outgrown its crudeness as she was of her own achievements" (139).

Molly Haskell, too, states outrightly that Annie Stephens was "the real-life progenitor of Scarlett" (86), adding that "Scarlett's model was the no less awesome and frequently appalling Annie. The maternal grandmother was a tough, conniving busybody who survived the war along with her property and made a fortune in real estate afterward" (87), not unlike Scarlett's rise as a businesswoman with her lumber mills. Although she does not go into pointing out specific similarities between Annie and Scarlett and those between their respective mothers, Helen Taylor notes that "It is interesting that Mitchell celebrated the strength and moral fibre of her great-grandmother and grandmother rather than her mother" (*Scarlett's* 75).

Pyron also notes Annie's similarities to Scarlett but also points out the problems with such attempts at attempting to fix static one-to-one correspondences between the real people in Mitchell's life and her characters. Specifically, Pyron notes that the parallels "between the historical harridan Annie . . . and the fictional Scarlett O'Hara are more remarkable still" than those between the two women's parents, noting not only the historical parallels (including Annie's survival of the siege of Atlanta) and parallels between Scarlett and Annie's treatment of their children—according to Pyron, Annie often brought in a pair of spinster sisters to care for her children while she was busy with her real estate affairs and also sent her children to Rural Home for long visits with the same sisters (23), not unlike Scarlett, who generally leaves the raising of her children to Melanie and the house servants and often ships them off to Tara when they annoy her—but similarities between the two women's personalities, as well. However, Pyron also points out that Annie, decidedly unlike Scarlett, "remained fiercely within the bosom of the church, kept one husband all her life, and avoided the sexual and social peccadillos of the

fictional heroine” (252). Pyron resolves these tangles by asserting that Mitchell “took her own ancestors, roughed them up considerably, and projected them, thus transformed, into her epic” (249). I would add that Mitchell took some aspects of Annie’s personal history<sup>18</sup> and personality and integrated them, in combination with other elements, into the creation of Scarlett O’Hara.

However, Pyron also notes that “Mitchell’s relationship with her grandmother raises a puzzle. If she hated Annie Fitzgerald Stephens—and she surely did—that character still exerted the most potent appeal for her, for at the very time their estrangement had become irrevocable, Mitchell was creating the vital, violent, and compelling figure based on this character.” Pyron finds the answer for this “puzzle” in Mitchell’s later “ambivalence about her creation” (253); in her later letters and the few interviews she granted, Mitchell either outrightly denounced Scarlett or only gave her a partial defense. However, Pyron, in this case, fails on two counts. First, he does not note the fact that Mitchell’s post-*GWTW* persona renders much of what she said in that period suspect. Second, although Pyron is one of the few scholars to acknowledge parallels between Scarlett and both Margaret Mitchell and Annie Stephen, neither he nor any of the few other scholars who make note of both parallels attempts to resolve the implications of these dual parallels. Making such a resolution is the key to discovering the ultimate significance of Mitchell’s usage of the biographical details of multiple people to create single (or, in some cases, multiple) characters.

Nearly every scholar who has commented upon some biographical similarity between any character in *GWTW* and real people in Mitchell’s life has noted some similarity between Mitchell and Scarlett. Keith Runyon, in his interview with Stephens, notes that “Like her heroine Scarlett O’Hara, parties and beaux weren’t enough to satisfy Margaret Mitchell,” going

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<sup>18</sup> Mitchell even alludes to such borrowing in one letter, although she does not admit to taking such histories from her immediate family.

on to implicitly compare the two as career women (79). Although McGill ostensibly denies any authorial intention to write *Scarlett* as a double for her creator, he also feels compelled to acknowledge that “Peggy Mitchell was a part of *Scarlett*. She was harum-scarum but intensely feminist” (69).

Betina Entzminger notes that “As was her heroine’s, Mitchell’s fit with her society was uneasy from the start,” further asserting that “Also like *Scarlett*, the young Mitchell, though quite successful with men, was disapproved of by the women of her community for her unconventional behavior” (104). Edwards notes that “both were mavericks, constantly flouting convention and society, and both suffered identity problems caused by strong, righteous, Catholic mothers. Both had to care for their fathers after their mothers’ deaths.” Edwards then asserts that “Both were flirts and teases” and that “Both were women who drank in a society that frowned upon such ‘unladylike’ behavior, and both had set society against them” (138).<sup>19</sup>

In reference to Mitchell’s letters to Alan Edee, Walker notes that “they leave no doubt as to where *Scarlett O’Hara* came from, for the similarities between Peggy and her heroine are too numerous and obvious to ignore” (60), and describes the young Mitchell’s acumen at securing and maintaining tenuous relationships with her suitors. In commenting upon Mitchell’s failure as a debutante, Walker notes that “Later, she drew from her own painful experiences when she wrote about *Scarlett*, who created a mess for herself too” (78). However, Walker dismisses the idea that any particular character was based upon one specific real person, arguing that Mitchell

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<sup>19</sup> Regarding Mitchell’s drinking habits, all of the biographers agree that Mitchell did drink, but they do differ somewhat as to what degree she drank; a resolution of this debate would be tangential to the goals of this thesis. It is merely important to note Mitchell’s drinking for three reasons. First, it gives another indication that Mitchell may have been following Maybelle’s advice after her death, for Maybelle was in favor of drinking (in moderation); second, it gives another indication of Mitchell’s feminist tendencies, as it follows that she believed that women had as much of a right to drink as did men; third, it highlights a specific parallel between Mitchell and *Scarlett*. I omit the parallels that Edwards finds that are based on Mitchell and *Scarlett*’s romantic relationships, which have no place in this thesis.



“scrambled appearances and personalities, taking bits and pieces from various real people to draw her characters” (83).<sup>20</sup>

Pyron also acknowledges some similarities between Mitchell and Scarlett; he first notes that, as a young woman, Mitchell began calling herself Peggy instead of Margaret in an early rebellion against her family; Pyron notes that “No one had ever called her this before. Her family, especially her mother, eschewed such intimacies; her father and brother never surrendered to the fancy.”<sup>21</sup> Pyron then argues that “She made [the nickname Peggy] synonymous with herself, especially her writing self” (93). Pyron also chronicles Mitchell’s use of the name Peggy for the protagonist in an early fictional work, a character that seems by both name and shared characteristics to have been based on Mitchell herself (67-69); he notes that Mitchell eventually changed Peggy to Pansy, continuing to use the name in at least one Jazz Age story for a self-based character (214). Pyron then notes that Mitchell had originally given Scarlett the name Pansy O’Hara, which shortly becomes Pansy Hamilton when Pansy/Scarlett marries the brother of Melanie Hamilton Wilkes; according to Pyron’s logic, the “Pansy” part of the name represents “rebellion, insouciance, and change” and the “Hamilton” part (for both Pansy/Scarlett and Melanie, although it is only a “nominal” title for the former) represents “virtue” and tradition. Pyron subsequently argues that “the heroines [Pansy/Scarlett and Melanie] together represent the halves of [Mitchell’s] own ego and alter ego. By this measure, if she is neither Pansy/Scarlett nor Melanie alone, she is both together, and they represent the fragmented impulses of her own character” (261-262).

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<sup>20</sup> Walker elaborates on this assertion in her subsequent discussion of Mitchell’s real-life models for Rhett Butler; such a discussion, as I have already noted, provides information that does not have any bearing on this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> This assertion can be confirmed in the Farr biography, as Stephens seems to only have allowed Farr to refer to his sister as Peggy when directly quoting friends who used the nickname in favor of the formal given name.

Hanson reports that Mitchell, in her days as a single and flirtatious young woman, made a game of involving herself with multiple suitors; Hanson notes that “What made this game especially appealing for Mitchell—and so similar to the manipulative pursuits of Scarlett, who was called Pansy, a cognate of Peggy, Mitchell’s nickname, in the original draft of *Gone with the Wind*—was the enraptured audience of another suitor” (32). Hanson then argues that “women without mothers, like [Mitchell] herself and like the young O’Hara girls . . . were almost certain to be undirected and unchanneled in their energies and unprotected from and undermined by their own wills” (34) but that Mitchell and Scarlett, in pursuing careers, “would be unafraid to use others and to work hard” for themselves, although Mitchell’s “success was to be won in the practice of art, not seduction” (36), unlike Scarlett, who seduces Frank Kennedy for his money and subsequently uses that money to fund her own business pursuits. Hanson even argues that, in writing *GWTW*, Mitchell’s “creative life would be devoted to seeking to comprehend one woman’s effort, Scarlett O’Hara’s, to pursue her own needs and desires while being controlled and thwarted by contradictory impulses within and overwhelming pressures without” (46) and that “in the possibilities of fiction . . . Mitchell would find a means whereby she might explore her own divided and ambiguous experience with . . . Atlanta society women” (55).

Helen Taylor, regarding Mitchell’s similarities to her characters, argues that “if she became in later years an uneasy version of Melanie Wilkes, she certainly lived through experiences characteristic of Scarlett O’Hara” (*Scarlett’s* 46), noting Mitchell’s youthful flirtations and her rejection from debutante society as examples. Taylor goes on to argue that “Pansy/Scarlett was, like Peggy Mitchell, torn between very different definitions of Southern womanhood, and felt herself uncomfortable with the attitudes of her time to femininity” (*Scarlett’s* 48).

Anne Goodwyn-Jones asserts that “It may be that [Mitchell’s] novel was her ultimate strategy, her way of being both free and acceptable,” and argues that Scarlett represents Mitchell’s Jazz Age sensibilities and Maybelle’s feminist influence, on the one hand, and that Melanie represents the Southern ideal of the young lady that society wanted Mitchell to become, on the other. Goodwyn-Jones goes on to assert that “Scarlett and Melanie show that Margaret Mitchell found it imaginatively impossible to unify her conception of woman” (333).

What can one make from all these analyses of the Mitchell/Scarlett parallels? All of the biographers agree that Mitchell had a vivid social life that was filled with escapades with her various suitors, in the period of her life that roughly extends from her return home from Smith to her first marriage; even the conservative Farr acknowledges that Mitchell was “in demand” with the young men of Atlanta society (51). Mitchell’s letters to Alan Edee, as Walker implies, are filled with descriptions of her various suitors and of adventures (and misadventures) involving these young men. Mitchell also strings Edee himself along in these letters, at one point teasingly closing a letter by asking him “Would it have worried you if I had said I was going to marry?” (40). These descriptions of Mitchell’s early “career” as a flirtatious young woman facilitate the conclusion that Mitchell’s youthful experiences in society and as a flirt would have informed not only her decision to create a character who goes through similar experiences but also her ability to understand and thus realistically depict the inner thoughts and motivations of such a character.

Also, as Hanson and Goodwyn-Jones imply, Mitchell’s feminist tendencies likely inspired her to add to Scarlett’s coquettish ways her dislike of the societal constrictions placed on young women; if Mitchell herself chafed against the loosening restrictions of her era, she certainly would have disliked the constraints of that in which her grandmother spent her youth. Mitchell also identifies with Scarlett (and, perhaps unconsciously, with her grandmother) as a

career woman; in Mitchell's day, it was just becoming somewhat acceptable for a woman to work outside the home, and she could thus also identify with Scarlett's inner struggles regarding her emerging right to choose to pursue a career versus societal pressures to fulfill traditional women's roles. Additionally, although none of the biographers overtly note any parallels, Mitchell's choice not to have children reflects Scarlett's distaste at her societally enforced role as a mother. Hence, Mitchell reimagines her debutante and career days and even her role as a wife in a historical setting in order to more safely inveigh against such restrictions without directly criticizing those restrictions that still existed in her time, in keeping with the subtlety of her journalistic pieces.

How can these comparisons between Scarlett and Mitchell be resolved with those between Scarlett and Annie? Mitchell seems to have drawn from the details of events in Annie's life to shape certain aspects of the main plot of *GWTW* that surrounds her central character; additionally, Scarlett and Annie are both self-interested, sometimes nasty, women who often neglect their children and flout societal conventions to succeed in business. Pyron does make an important note of the "puzzle" surrounding Mitchell's choice to model her central character on a relative who she so disliked. Also, Mitchell often denounced Scarlett during her post-*GWTW* persona era. In one letter, she asserts that Melanie, "is really my heroine, not 'Scarlett'" (*Margaret Mitchell's* 15); in another, in response to a question as to whether Scarlett is based on a real person, she states that "Certainly that is no compliment to any girl, for 'Scarlett' was not a very nice person" (*Margaret Mitchell's* 68). However, Mitchell also reserves some praise for Scarlett: "Personally, I cannot help feeling that Scarlett had good traits. Surely courage is commendable, and she had it. The sense of responsibility for the weak and helpless is a rare trait, and she had this, for she took care of her own even at great cost to herself. She was able to

appreciate what was beautiful in her mother, even if she could not emulate her. . . . She had perseverance in the face of defeat.” Although Mitchell closes by adding “Of course those qualities are balanced by her bad qualities” (*Margaret Mitchell's* 112), these lines clearly indicate that even in her persona phase Mitchell did not altogether dismiss Scarlett as an entirely bad character. One could argue, based on this correspondence, on Pyron’s argument, and on all the other scholars’ comparisons between Annie Stephens and Scarlett, that Mitchell did perhaps admire certain aspects of Annie’s character, including her grandmother’s entrepreneurial spirit and her indomitable courage, in spite of her distaste for other negative aspects of Annie’s character. Mitchell merged some of her youthful characteristics and a fictional version of her “sexual peccadillos” with her grandmother’s steely survivalist (and at times ruthless) tendencies in order to create a formidable and complicated central character, a woman who uses her sexuality as a weapon with which she forces her way into the male sphere in order to regain her family fortune and survive a tumultuous time, a protagonist who, if not exactly a heroine, becomes something of an antiheroine, a deeply flawed individual who nevertheless appeals to feminist readers.

Comparisons between Mitchell and Melanie, on the other hand, are flawed. Goodwyn-Jones had only a fraction of the biographical material available to the contemporary Mitchell scholar, and much of her material sought to perpetuate the image of Mitchell in her post-*GWTW* persona. Taylor also implies that Mitchell’s later-in-life transition into that “uneasy version of Melanie” happened after the publication of the novel. However, Pyron also notes that Mitchell seems to have split herself into two halves in the composition of her novel, so the comparisons between Mitchell and Melanie should be given some consideration.

In his discussion of Mitchell's youthful years as a socialite, Pyron notes that Mitchell "had worn a halo and personified saintliness, selflessness, and pure ladyhood. But she had acted like the devil, just the same, in her most cynical, sardonic mode" (125). This description not only parallels Scarlett's desire to do what she wants (in both her romantic affairs and her business pursuits) but still retain the option to eventually become the great lady her mother had always wanted her to be, but it also underscores Mitchell's division of these two sides of herself into Scarlett and Melanie. As all of the biographies prove, although in Mitchell's youth and young adulthood she may have resembled Scarlett in some aspects, she also was a much nicer and more complex person than readers and others have perceived regarding Scarlett. Mitchell pursued lofty and intellectual journalistic and literary goals, in contrast to Scarlett's baser desire for money with few to no qualms about the methods she uses to procure it.<sup>22</sup> Mitchell may have gotten off to a rocky start in her various love affairs, including her first marriage, but like Melanie (although Melanie lacks the tumultuous past), Mitchell eventually settled down with a man for whom she cared and from whom she never strayed. It does seem, then, that there may have been some Melanie in Mitchell (and vice versa) all along.

One also finds parallels among Ellen and Eleanor and Maybelle. With regard to Eleanor McGhan Fitzgerald, Annie's mother and Mitchell's great-grandmother, the biographers provide very little information about her, much of which pertains to Eleanor's marriage to Phillip Fitzgerald; one assumes that little concrete information about Eleanor has survived.

Edwards notes that "The O'Hara family had much in common with the Fitzgeralds," elaborating that the Fitzgeralds came to Clayton County around the same time that Gerald

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<sup>22</sup> Scarlett and Mitchell both struggled against the confines of society even in their career pursuits. Mitchell had to work very hard to prove herself as a writer in order to be allowed to write more "hard-boiled" news stories, being at first relegated to the composition of society columns and lighthearted features at the *Atlanta Journal*, just as Scarlett must fight to win business away from her male competitors.

brought Ellen to Tara (139). Pyron notes that Phillip Fitzgerald, like Gerald O’Hara, came to Georgia from Ireland (although Phillip’s childhood years, unlike those of Gerald, were spent in France) and that Phillip, like Gerald, owned a plantation in Clayton County that spanned more than 3000 acres (17-18). Pyron even notes that “The kinship [between Mitchell’s family and her characters] begins with the Gerald/Fitzgerald name” (249), later pointing out that “it bears noting that Phillip Fitzgerald . . . had [like Gerald O’Hara] married an Eleanor, too” (316).<sup>23</sup> Pyron also points out that Eleanor was twenty years younger than Phillip (18); in *GWTW*, Ellen is twenty-eight years younger than Gerald. Also similarly to the O’Haras, Phillip and Eleanor Fitzgerald “produced an extraordinary progeny of seven girls without a single son surviving infancy” (18); the difference here is in number as Scarlett has only two sisters rather than six.

However, Pyron also notes that “the real-life Fitzgeralds . . . bore little resemblance to the fictional O’Haras except in religion [Mitchell’s family, like Scarlett’s, was Catholic], place of birth, and economic status” (250). For instance, Phillip Fitzgerald was, unlike Gerald, an aristocrat from birth and a great appreciator of higher education. While Pyron does not make note of any specific differences between Eleanor and Ellen, Mitchell, in the same letter in which she denounces writers “who use their own relatives for copy,” denounces a comparison that one of her correspondents had made between the two. She claims that “I’d always heard my great-grandmother described as being a bright blonde with large blue eyes, pale gold hair—a vivacious woman with a sense of humor who laughed all the time. Ellen in the book was very dark, completely without humor and with no vivacity” (*Margaret Mitchell’s* 105). Nevertheless, Farr (with Stephens’s guidance) produces the one description of Eleanor Fitzgerald that does liken her to Ellen: Farr asserts that Eleanor “found it her duty to exercise unbounded care and attention”

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<sup>23</sup> Pyron makes note of this similarity in the way that he does because Ellen’s original name in Mitchell’s manuscript was Eleanor D’Antignac O’Hara, not Ellen Robillard O’Hara; there is no indication in *GWTW* that Ellen’s name is a derivative of Eleanor.

with the less fortunate, further noting that “this was to be somewhat the attitude of Scarlett O’Hara’s mother” (26).

Although Mitchell’s description of Eleanor may be accurate, Eleanor’s background is quite similar to Ellen’s, at least following Ellen’s marriage to Gerald, and she certainly could have been both “vivacious” and charitable (after all, Maybelle possessed both those traits).<sup>24</sup> Just as Annie Stephens’s life experiences provided a basis for Scarlett’s adventures, Eleanor Fitzgerald’s life circumstances, in a general sense, have much in common with those of Ellen O’Hara.

The argument that Maybelle might have been inspirational to her daughter’s creation of Ellen poses far more problems for scholars; however, many scholars do attempt to note (or even force) similarities between the two. Betina Entzminger points out the most glaring similarity in noting that “Just as the sainted Ellen O’Hara dies of typhoid while Scarlett struggles to return to Tara and her mother’s protection, . . . Mitchell’s mother, whom she admired for her strength and goodness, died of influenza during World War I while her daughter was away at Smith College” (104).<sup>25</sup> Helen Taylor also notes that “Ellen is a transparent tribute to [Mitchell’s] dead mother” (*Scarlett’s* 48), evidently discerning this likeness because of their similar circumstances of death. Molly Haskell asserts that “Awesome May Belle, high-minded, an intellectual, is the activist out of whom Ellen O’Hara was born” (88), later noting the similarities between the circumstances of Maybelle and Ellen’s deaths and also pointing out that “As a woman dedicated to helping others, the unstintingly noble May Belle Mitchell, like Ellen O’Hara, went out at all hours, but also like

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<sup>24</sup> Also, Mitchell and Pyron both fail to note that Ellen was actually quite vivacious as a very young woman, until she learned of the death of the great love of her life, her cousin Pierre, who her father forbade her to marry; Ellen becomes “completely without humor” only after this event, when she agrees to marry Gerald instead and move away from her Savannah home to join him at Tara.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that Entzminger largely relies on Hanson for biographical information; while Hanson notes the challenges Maybelle faced as a feminist in her time, she does not portray Maybelle and Mitchell’s relationship as fraught with tension.



Ellen, she neglected home and family” (110).<sup>26</sup> Walker also notes that because of Maybelle’s charitable nature, “Fans of *Gone with the Wind* may see the resemblance between Maybelle and Scarlett’s mother Ellen, and even between Maybelle and Melanie” (34).

Hanson, too, compares Maybelle to both Ellen and Melanie, noting that “Both reflect Maybelle Stephens Mitchell’s own belief, as expressed by her daughter [in the letter describing her childhood ride down the old Jonesboro road], that ‘the strength of women’s hands isn’t worth anything but what they’ve got in their heads will carry them as far as they need to go.’ What Ellen and Melanie have ‘in their heads’ is the will to endure and the willingness to risk any danger to protect those in their care.” Hanson further notes that “Both Ellen and Melanie die in service to others—Ellen cares for her pathetic neighbors and Melanie seeks to bear another child—and in their sacrificial deaths they also reflect Maybelle Mitchell’s insistence on caring for her desperately sick husband to the point where she herself became ill and died.” Hanson adds that “Like Ellen O’Hara, Maybelle refused to have her daughter nurse her and so, even then, protected Margaret from infection and anxiety” (65).

Pyron stands alone in rejecting a comparison between Maybelle and Ellen. Although he does not outrightly contrast Ellen with Maybelle, Pyron clearly dismisses Ellen’s importance in *GWTW*. He asserts that “For all her good works and rustling crinolines, the Savannah-born Ellen Robillard lacks color, passion, and life itself . . . She is distant and aloof, restrained and repressed” (248);<sup>27</sup> this argument is made to back up Pyron’s assertion that Mitchell’s high-born aristocratic characters (including the Wilkeses and the Hamiltons) are all weak and listless.

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<sup>26</sup> Haskell largely relies on Pyron for her biographical information, which explains her astute observation about Maybelle’s neglect of her home as well as her unconventional spelling of Maybelle’s name.

<sup>27</sup> Pyron does, however, discern parallels between Maybelle and two figures in *GWTW*: Rhett Butler and Tara. Although Pyron’s arguments with regard to Rhett have their merits, such an argument is tangential to my thesis. With regard to the comparison between Maybelle and Tara, I intend to come back to Pyron’s argument in Chapter Three.

Aside from their charitable natures and the circumstances surrounding their deaths, Maybelle and Ellen have little in common. Hanson seems to have somewhat missed the point of Maybelle's speech to Mitchell; she seems to be attempting to warp Mitchell's biographical details onto *GWTW*. After all, Ellen does not "endure"; in fact, she dies about one-third of the way through the novel.<sup>28</sup> Haskell's assertion that Maybelle is "the activist out of whom Ellen O'Hara," too, is odd; although Ellen is charitable and both she and Maybelle are devout Catholics, Ellen could hardly be called an activist, particularly a feminist activist. The arguments that liken Maybelle to Melanie are slightly more intriguing. Although Hanson does not mention this similarity, Maybelle and Melanie are both intellectuals who value education. However, although Melanie defends Scarlett's business enterprises, she says that Scarlett "only did—did what she felt she had to do" (*GWTW* 798); Melanie's hesitation implies that, as Hanson notes, "Melanie might value Scarlett's pragmatic bravery, [but she does] not emulate her other attributes" (66). Also, like Ellen, Melanie is hardly a feminist advocate.

These dissimilarities between Ellen (and Melanie) and Maybelle might lead scholars to declare Pyron correct in his refusal to engage with the scholarly conjectures of others that Ellen might have been based on Maybelle. However, Pyron, as well as all the other scholars, fails to note that while Ellen and Maybelle might differ strongly in personality, their relationships with their daughters bear further examination. Haskell comes the closest to pinpointing this issue by noting that both Maybelle and Ellen are frequently absent from home (and hence from their daughters' lives). Although Mitchell and Scarlett have two very different mother figures that they desire to emulate, both share such a desire, to some degree; additionally, both find it difficult to live up to their mothers' expectations for them, even if those expectations might be

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<sup>28</sup> Also, I do not know where Hanson got the idea that Maybelle "refused to have her daughter nurse her" or that Ellen refused Scarlett's ministrations, because both daughters arrive one day too late to say a final goodbye to their mothers, let alone battle with their dying mothers over the issue of who should tend to them.

quite different, and both find it difficult to develop close relationships with remote mothers who are frequently absent, often aloof even when present, and more concerned with impressing their notions of duty upon their daughters than with overtly displaying motherly affection. In short, although Ellen and Maybelle are for the most part very different people, they both relate to their daughters in a similar fashion. Hence, I conclude that Mitchell based Ellen's general circumstances on her great-grandmother but that she paralleled the nature of Ellen's relationship with Scarlett with her own relationship with Maybelle.

However, Mitchell combined multiple family members in the creation of her characters but also invented aspects of these characters, both in personality and for narrative actions. As Blanche Gelfant points out, "parallels between Mitchell's personal life and elements in her novel . . . are interesting to note, but they should not be considered explanations of how or why Mitchell could conceive an imaginary world" ("The Mysteries" 126-127). Pyron similarly argues that "Pansy/Scarlett and Melanie represent both much more and rather less than the author's own divided sense of self. They define the circumstances of women's lives. And this leads to the larger purpose of her novel. She wanted to write *women's history*" (262). With these words in mind, I analyze the Ellen/Scarlett relationship in *Gone with the Wind*.

### *Chapter Three: The Two Mothers of Scarlett O'Hara*

Margaret Mitchell felt very ambivalent about Scarlett, at times defending her survivalist tendencies and at others decrying her more unsavory qualities. One could easily argue, then, that Mitchell wrote a novel in which she narratively punishes a successful, manipulative version of her nasty grandmother—and herself—and in doing so decries feminine ambition. Several critics

so argue. Elizabeth Harrison writes that “Mitchell’s protagonist remains a static character, her drive for power less a conscious desire to assume a new role in society than an attempt to recreate the old order she rebels from”; she adds that “Scarlett’s success is based upon a callous disregard for the lives of others around her” (292). Haskell asserts that “It seems more probable that she actually started out to write a story of Melanie, and Scarlett simply pushed her way to the forefront with an animal vitality that would not be denied” (95), implying that she agrees with Mitchell’s claims that she intended to privilege the good, well-behaved female character over the selfish, badly behaved one and that Mitchell was somehow unconsciously overpowered by the “animal vitality” of Scarlett O’Hara instead of having gone into the composition of the novel with the deliberate intention of foregrounding Scarlett as the central character.

However, Mitchell was a feminist; she may not have been as vocal as was her mother, but a tendency toward the encouragement and celebration of female empowerment shows in her journalistic work and in her later masterpiece. Helen Taylor notes that Scarlett “has stood for a quality of female strength, power, and bloody-mindedness that is rare in twentieth-century fiction” (“*Gone*” 266). Regarding a line from *GWTW*, in which Mitchell’s narrator notes that “at no time, before or since, had so low a premium been placed on feminine naturalness” (80), Adams comments that “It is the only time Mitchell acknowledges the narrator as writing from a future moment in history. That she chooses to make the complaint of female oppression the occasion for her immediacy is telling” (72)—telling, that is, because Adams implies that this comment, disparaging the era’s “low premium” on women’s rights, represents Mitchell’s sole direct insertion of her own values and opinions into her novel. Lauren Cardon points out that “Mitchell offered a feminist perspective . . . by expressing clear disapproval of gender-based injustice” (70).

What, then, can one make of Mitchell's casting of an antiheroine—one could even potentially call her an outright villainess—as the lead in her novel? Entzminger proposes a balanced view. She notes that Mitchell casts a version of herself in the novel in order to examine the issues surrounding feminine ambition, remarking specifically that regarding Scarlett “Mitchell sees both good and bad in the bad belle, and . . . she sees that the bad belle's worst qualities—her deceitfulness, shrewdness, manipulateness, and superficiality—are the very traits that enable her to survive in the fallen South” (104-106). As Rita Felski asserts, it is no crime against one's gender to create a female character who is less than perfect in every possible way. Felski argues that “if women want to read about female characters who are active, purposeful, and make things happen, then some of those things will turn out to be inept, mistaken, or malicious. We cannot have female agency without the possibility of female error and cruelty” (125).

Accepting that Scarlett O'Hara's bad qualities do not add up to antifeminism, we can examine the type of plot in which Mitchell's central character acts. Mitchell commented,

If the novel has a theme, the theme is that of survival. What makes some people able to come through catastrophes and others, apparently just as able, strong, and brave, go under? We've seen it in the present depression. It happens in every upheaval. Some people survive; others don't. What qualities are in those who fight their way through triumphantly that are lacking in those who go under? What was it that made some of our Southern people able to come through a War, a Reconstruction, and a complete wrecking of the social and economic system? I don't know. I only know that the survivors used to call that quality 'gumption'. So I wrote about people who had gumption and the people who didn't. (“Margaret” 38)

According to Mitchell, the novel is a case study of survival. Her self-evaluation is not inaccurate, however; Scarlett's methods for survival are some of the very aspects of her character that have led many feminist scholars to celebrate her agency. In a 1037-page novel, one finds a great deal more complexity than its author's blurb implies.

Felski notes that some early feminists have argued that the only traditional plot reserved for women—the only one in which a writer is not “simply placing a female character in a traditional male role”—is the romance plot (99-100). One can certainly make the claim that *GWTW* is primarily a romance novel, for it preoccupies itself with Scarlett’s obsessive quest to possess Ashley for her own and parallels this folly with her obstinate refusal to acknowledge her true feelings for Rhett Butler until it is too late. However, even a superficial probe into Scarlett’s romantic entanglements problematizes such a simple classification. Her first two marriages are calculated gambits that have nothing to do with romantic attachment; Scarlett (and the narrator) makes Charles Hamilton and Frank Kennedy into silly, emasculated figures, and Mitchell dispatches of them as soon as they have outgrown their usefulness to Scarlett. Although Scarlett’s love triangle with Ashley and Rhett may be typical of the type of plot in which the bad woman does not realize what she has until it is too late and receives her just punishment, the label of romance does not rest easily upon *GWTW* that is simply too complex to be given such a simplistic label. Plus, the female relationships in *GWTW* are as central to the story as are the relationships between Scarlett and the male characters; they are also just as complicated.

Felski also discusses a different type of love story: the mother-daughter plot. Some might argue that *GWTW* could not possibly be a mother-daughter plot, for Scarlett’s mother dies about one-third of the way through the novel. However, while both alive and dead, Ellen O’Hara haunts Scarlett’s thoughts, although Scarlett mostly disregards her imaginary perceptions of Ellen’s opinions, and Mammy remains after Ellen’s death to act as a living reminder of Ellen’s teachings and codes of conduct. Also, Melanie Wilkes steps into Ellen’s shoes to act as a surrogate mother figure for Scarlett once Ellen has died. Although Mitchell loved to claim that her novel’s plot hinged upon an examination of survival, she also noted in one letter that “the

genesis of my book . . . lies years back when I was six years old and [the following] words . . . were said to me,” and there followed the description of the journey to Jonesboro with her mother, during which Maybelle Mitchell, that ardent feminist mother, lectured her daughter about survival, specifically about *women’s* survival (*Margaret Mitchell’s* 38).

Felski notes that early feminists have asserted that “The love between mothers and daughters is the great unwritten story: unwritten in part because it diminishes men’s importance by relegating them to the sidelines” (117). However, in *GWTW*, in defiance of this assertion, the relationships between the female characters are at least as important as (if not more so than) those between Scarlett and the male characters. Felski catalogues several typical characteristics of a mother-daughter plot: She notes that “Motherhood . . . conjures up nostalgic, fuzzy-edged memories of a long-lost time when one was bathed in the bliss of constant love, security, and attentiveness.” Felski adds that “The mother is the source, the origin, the home that we must all leave in order to become fully fledged human beings” but also notes that “she is nevertheless oddly invisible.” Felski acknowledges different types of mothers: “the radiant Madonna; . . . the mother of nightmare who neglects or hurts her children.”

Relating these images of mothers to their daughters, Felski asserts that “no one asks about her dreams, her desires, her yearnings: no one sees that part of her soul that is not encompassed by the relentless demands of her progeny” (119); she later asks, “how can the daughter learn to see the mother? How can she come to see her mother as separate from herself, with her own history, memories, secret passions, no longer the all-powerful, godlike dispenser of reward and punishment but merely an ordinary yet mysterious human being?” (121).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Felski does not, however, discuss what happens when this journey is interrupted, say, by the mother’s untimely death. I will address this concern, based on Felski’s overall ideas about the mother-daughter plot, later in the text.

Felski contemplates two answers to this question. She notes that earlier feminist scholars have asserted that “daughters develop a sense of self-in-relation that is based on continuity with the mother. Female identity, in this account, does not require a dramatic break or separation from the point of origin. The story of female self-development does not follow a purposeful path away from the mother, but constantly circles back to her in an avowal of affiliation and indebtedness” (118). However, Felski herself notes that, in practice, in novels with mother-daughter plots, “the mother-daughter bond is fractured by differing histories and generational misperceptions, . . . by differences of education and class. There is no stable sense of security or sameness to be found in the shared bond of gender. Even as the mother is embraced, she remains irreducibly other, familiar yet foreign, a figure that inspires profound ambivalence” (124).

All of Felski’s suppositions regarding mother-daughter plots can be applied to *GWTW*. Madonne Miner points out that “Certainly, Mitchell makes use of hero/heroine romance in *Gone with the Wind*, but, as the first four chapters intimate and the remainder of the novel substantiates, a more fundamental romance—hence, more carefully hidden and more powerfully frustrated—occurs between Scarlett and her mother” (19). Hanson echoes this assertion, noting that “The focus of Scarlett might well be on power over men, but the fundamental connections she forms are derived from her vision of women, especially Melanie and Ellen” (65). Blanche Gelfant points out that “The fantasy underlying *Gone with the Wind* can be traced back to early feelings of helplessness and omnipotence, strong but irreconcilable feelings which every child experiences and later usually forgets—or, more precisely, remembers in the most disguised ways” (“*Gone*” 8).

Scarlett’s relationships with men do not add up to the whole of Mitchell’s novel; nor do her relationships with other women. Harrison’s evaluation of Scarlett as “static” is reductive, at



the very least (292).<sup>30</sup> In her evaluation of Mitchell's life and novel, Goodwyn-Jones asserts that Mitchell (and, subsequently, Scarlett) had a "probably less than conscious but certainly quite pronounced obsession with gender roles" (334). She further contends that "even the barest summary [of *GWTW*] reveals a central concern with the definition and role of women, men, and community. It is the mores and biology of being female that shape Scarlett's life: incompatible cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity as well as her three unwanted children help to make Scarlett the tragic figure she in some sense becomes" (338). In essence, Goodwyn-Jones argues that Scarlett cannot succeed because she cannot resolve her desire to be more like a man with societal expectations for her gender. I disagree with Goodwyn-Jones's assertion that Scarlett becomes a "tragic figure" because she wishes to live her life according to values that her society deems "masculine"; although Mitchell does devote some space in *GWTW* to discussion of gender roles, these discussions do not mean that Mitchell saw the world in such black-and-white binary terms as either/or, masculine *versus* feminine. In contrast, I argue that Mitchell viewed Scarlett's plight with empathy because she, like Scarlett, lived in a world in which she was plagued with artificial constructs of gender and instead wished to determine how a woman could succeed in a traditionally "masculine" sphere by transcending such binary societal gender constructions instead of "unsexing" herself. Just as Goodwyn-Jones asserts that Mitchell's struggle with gender roles may have been unconscious, it is possible that Mitchell desired to transcend gender roles. This may not have been a consciously realized thought that Mitchell deliberately kept in the forefront of her mind as she wrote her novel—a revolutionary thought for a woman in Mitchell's day—however, Mitchell's mother, of an even earlier generation, did not believe in treating her male and female children differently based on their respective genders. At

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<sup>30</sup> Many scholars do concur that Scarlett ultimately does not develop as an adult; however, Harrison's argument is brief and does not consider the complexities of Mitchell's long novel before coming to such a conclusion.

any rate, it does not matter if these thoughts were part of Mitchell's conscious efforts in writing her novel; what does matter is that an engagement with this struggle, conscious or not, leaps off the page in Scarlett's every thought regarding her lot in life as a woman and in the culmination of the first of Scarlett's two stages of development, her transformation from sheltered belle (with liberated opinions about women's rights, granted, but who did not have to lift a finger for herself) to successful businesswoman. Hence, the bildungsroman plot, which in this case chronicles Scarlett's development from child to adult, represents another important component of the plot of *GWTW*.

Felski notes that early feminist scholars argued that "plots are essentially rather than contingently male; we cannot get around the problem simply by placing a female character in a traditional male role" (99). She goes on to assert that "popular feminist fiction drew heavily on older forms such as the *Bildungsroman* . . . chopping and changing them to fit the needs of contemporary women" (108). In other words, Felski argues that feminist authors may utilize old, traditionally male forms, adapt them to fit women's "needs," and thus transform these old forms into ones that work well to support a woman's story. Mitchell scholars support these assertions. O'Brien notes that "For Mitchell, the traditional Southern tale of Reconstruction became the vehicle for telling Scarlett O'Hara's story, specifically the struggle of one individual against the confines of Southern womanhood" (163). Schefski asserts that "Mitchell's characters . . . live, mature, and change under the watchful eye of the reader" and that Mitchell gives Scarlett a "significant educational development"; he outrightly asserts that an important aspect of *GWTW*'s plot is the bildungsroman (233-234).

Although it is important to note that the romance angle of the plot of *GWTW* does merit scholarly study, I examine *GWTW* through other lenses, so as to remain in keeping with the

overall focus of my thesis. Namely, I examine Scarlett's relationships with Ellen and Melanie (and hence the mother-daughter plot) and her growth and development from child into adult woman, partially as a result of these mothering influences (and hence the bildungsroman plot).

Although Mitchell gives hints of information about Scarlett's relationship with her mother in the opening scenes of *GWTW*, I begin my discussion of Ellen with an examination of Chapter III in which Mitchell gives important background information on Ellen. In her opening descriptions of Ellen, Mitchell notes that not only is Ellen quite a bit taller than her petite Irish husband Gerald but that "she moved with such quiet grace in her swaying hoops that her height attracted no attention to itself" (40). We learn in addition to Ellen's height that she deliberately effaces her own attributes so as both to prevent any attention from being drawn to herself and to avoid any unfavorable comparisons between herself and her husband that might result in his emasculation. We further learn that "only from life could Ellen's face have acquired its look of pride that had no haughtiness, its graciousness, its melancholy and its utter lack of humor" (40). That is to say, whatever has happened to Ellen has formed these facial features, which include graceful aristocratic pride with a hint of sadness and no room for frivolity or lightness; Ellen's trials in life, including (what we will discover to be) her failed youthful romantic aspirations and her subsequent trials as a child bride to the much older Gerald, plus her upbringing, have formed a person who has become resigned to her lot in life and, while not actively unhappy, is not particularly happy either, a person who "would have been a strikingly beautiful woman had there been any glow in her eyes, any responsive warmth in her smile or any spontaneity in her voice" (40).

We subsequently learn that Scarlett cannot fully conceive of Ellen as a young woman; Scarlett "wondered if [Ellen's mouth] had ever curved in silly girlish giggling or whispered

secrets through long nights to intimate girl friends” (42); Scarlett immediately decides “But no, that wasn’t possible. Mother had always been just as she was” (42). Even in these opening chapters, we glimpse Scarlett’s inability to see her mother as a person separate from her identity as Mother, just as Felski notes happens in a mother-daughter plot. And, as it turns out, “But Scarlett was wrong, for, years before, Ellen Robillard of Savannah had giggled as inexplicably as any fifteen-year-old in that charming coastal city and whispered the long nights through with friends, exchanging confidences, telling all secrets but one” (42)—that one secret, it is implied, involves Ellen’s cousin, Philippe Robillard, with “his snapping eyes and his wild ways,” who “took with him the glow that was in Ellen’s heart” when he left Savannah and “left . . . only a gentle shell” (42). Mitchell goes off at length to devote space to Gerald’s backstory, but when she returns to Ellen in noting Gerald’s desire to marry her, she points out that Gerald is “charmed” by Ellen “[d]espite a mystifying listlessness of manner, so strange in a girl of fifteen” and “a haunting look of despair about her” (53). In explaining Ellen’s choice to marry Gerald, Mitchell notes that “Gerald himself never quite knew how it all came about,” underscoring Ellen’s loneliness in being the only one who really knows her story (54).<sup>31</sup> We subsequently learn that “only Ellen and her mammy ever knew the whole story of the night when the girl sobbed till dawn like a broken-hearted child and rose up in the morning a woman with her mind made up” (54): Ellen has just discovered that Philippe has died in New Orleans, and she determines to marry Gerald in order to get as far away as possible from the family that forbade her to marry her beloved cousin. In this process, as Mitchell overtly notes, Ellen has transformed

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<sup>31</sup> Although Mammy, too, knows what happened to Ellen, Mitchell does not treat her African-American characters as fully fledged human beings with their own senses of agency who are truly mentally equal to their white counterparts; hence, although Mammy does share Ellen’s knowledge, in Mitchell’s story Ellen is lonely because she has no white counterpart who shares this knowledge. Again, I will also note that this lack of development with regard to the African-American characters is rich enough to be the subject for its own lengthy paper and leave the matter where it stands without devoting further discussion to it.

from child into woman. In Scarlett's upcoming transformations, we will see parallels between mother and child, although Scarlett will never know that her mother went through similar heartbreak and hardship. Once Ellen has married Gerald, Mitchell points out that "If Ellen had ever regretted her sudden decision to marry him, no one ever knew it," further noting that Ellen "had put Savannah and its memories behind her" (55)—although Mitchell does seem to imply that, in her rare moments of privacy, Ellen may or may not be as successful at masking her despair and possible regret as she is in public. However, Ellen's moments of privacy are few and far between: Mitchell asserts that she arrives at Tara at fifteen "ready for the responsibilities of the mistress of a plantation," further noting that "Before marriage, young girls must be, above all other things, sweet, gentle, beautiful and ornamental, but, after marriage, they were expected to manage households that numbered a hundred people or more, and they were trained with that in view" (57). This type of training, Scarlett, too, has received; it will manifest itself later in the novel, when Scarlett returns to Tara to find her mother dead and herself the head of the plantation.

Two scholars, in particular, have commented upon Ellen's character. Pyron labels Ellen as "distant and aloof, restrained and repressed" (248). He further argues that "Despite all Scarlett's adulation of her mother, Ellen Robillard nurses out of duty, not affection" and that furthermore she "fades into the novel's shadows and shrinks beside her husband's and her daughter's ebullience and energy," hardly speaking when she is present (which is rare) (276). These notes, particularly those that involve Ellen's feelings of duty before actual affection (implied by Ellen's lack of "responsive warmth in her smile") and those that involve her lack of actual presence in the novel, are particularly astute (*GWTW* 40); after all, regarding the latter point, in Ellen's first appearance in the novel, on page eight, she is heard but not seen, fulfilling

her duties as plantation mistress by passing out food to the slaves, and she is not given any dialogue until nearly the end of the following chapter.

Cardon also points out that Ellen's "devotion to Gerald for taking her from a household she had grown to equate with a prison engenders in Ellen a sense of gratitude, and her breeding has prepared her to thank him by being an ideal wife and mother, cloaking any trace of individual desire"; the important distinction here is that Cardon notes that Ellen feels "gratitude" for Gerald instead of being totally cold and aloof and that she responds by repressing her feelings and endeavoring to being dutiful (68). Pyron's characterization of Ellen is problematic because it implies that Ellen possesses no true affection for anyone, including her own daughters, which I believe is false. Cardon further notes that "Mitchell utilizes the character of Ellen O'Hara to establish a paragon for the southern lady, to clarify exactly what Scarlett rebels against" and that "[t]hrough Ellen, Mitchell establishes a feminist agenda early in the novel. While Ellen is sanctified as a Great Lady, a perfect mother and mistress of the plantation, she does not necessarily find such a role fulfilling" (68); this agenda is feminist because Ellen's daughter, as Cardon and others argue, protests these societal roles. Cardon goes on to assert that Ellen's "attitude is resigned, almost fatalistic" and that she "never considers how to make herself happy," finally noting that Ellen "surrenders to this preordained identity" of the Southern ideal of femininity and that she "loses her own narrative and becomes an empty vessel for the restrictions of white womanhood" (68-69). These last bits of information should not surprise readers, who will already know that

Ellen's life was not easy, nor was it happy, but she did not expect life to be easy, and, if it was not happy, that was woman's lot. It was a man's world, and she accepted it as such. The man owned the property, and the woman managed it. The man took the credit for the management, and the woman praised his cleverness. The man roared like a bull when a splinter was in his finger, and the woman muffled the moans of childbirth, lest she

disturb him. . . . Men were rude and outspoken, women were always kind, gracious and forgiving (58).

Thus, Ellen perceives the world as one that is guaranteed to be neither easy nor happy for women, accepts it because she cannot conceive of an alternative, and tries to take satisfaction in playing her role of wife, mother, and plantation mistress to perfection. Her daughter, however, almost immediately begins to question such a worldview, even as the idea of going against her mother's teachings horrifies her as blasphemy greater than actual sins against God.

As both Pyron and Cardon suggest, most of what readers learn about Ellen comes filtered through the eyes of her eldest daughter, Scarlett, and goes hand in hand with Scarlett's relationship with her mother. Between Mitchell's first mention of Ellen's presence, when she is heard but not seen, and Ellen's actual first appearance, thoughts of Ellen are filtered through Scarlett's thoughts about Ellen's living extension, Mammy, who Scarlett ultimately fears because Mammy might tell Ellen on her about her less than ladylike behavior (22-23). It is important to note that Mitchell points out that "Whom Mammy loved, she chastened" (23)—although this comment on the surface appears to be characterization of Mammy, as I have pointed out Mammy's greatest literary function is as an extension of Ellen's will, and Ellen attempts to instill Southern traditional values in her daughters because she loves them and because she believes that if one is to survive in Southern aristocratic society, one must abide by these strict rules to perfection, even at the subjugation of one's own will, for this method is how Ellen herself has survived, so far. It is not until the end of Chapter II that Ellen actually appears in person, briefly, to inform Scarlett and Gerald that she will not be at dinner because she is going to the Slatterys' farm to help nurse the Slattery girl Emmie's dying infant. Mitchell establishes here Ellen's cool demeanor in nursing, which is perhaps, as Pyron notes, more out of duty than out of true affection; we also see Ellen's briefest of encounters with her daughter in

which she pats Scarlett's cheek, detachedly asks her eldest daughter to preside over the dinner table in her place, and vanishes. Scarlett "thrilled to the never-failing magic of her mother's touch, to the faint fragrance of lemon verbena sachet," but she also has to deal with "choked-back tears" because she wants her mother's comforting presence while she broods about her Ashley problem, and (we can assume not for the first time) her mother, instead of staying to comfort her, hastily retreats into the sunset (38).

In general, when Scarlett thinks of Ellen in these early chapters, her thoughts are tinged with awe; indeed, Mitchell informs us, Scarlett confused Ellen with the Virgin Mary as a child and "now that she was older she saw no reason for changing her opinion" (60). Just as Felski noted, this daughter has literally conflated her mother with a virtuous Madonna figure. Mitchell first delineates the nature of Ellen and Scarlett's relationship (and what will prove to be their major point of contention) toward the end of Chapter III, shortly after she has finished giving readers Ellen's backstory: Mitchell tells us that Ellen "had been reared in the tradition of great ladies, which had taught her how to carry her burden and still retain her charm, and she intended that her three daughters should be great ladies also." However, Mitchell darkly informs us, "Scarlett . . . found the road to ladyhood hard" (58). Nevertheless, Ellen, "by soft-voiced admonition . . . labored to inculcate in her the qualities that would make her truly desirable as a wife" (59). Of Scarlett, we learn that while she very much desires to be more like Ellen, she also knows that "The only difficulty was that by being just and truthful and tender and unselfish, one missed most of the joys of life, and certainly many beaux" (60).

On the first page of the novel, readers learn that Scarlett may have the outward appearance of a great lady in the making but that her eyes, those windows into the soul, are "turbulent, willful, lusty with life, distinctly at variance with her decorous demeanor" and that



while her manners might have been the product of Ellen's tireless work to make her a lady, "her eyes were her own" (1). In this tale of bildungsroman, Scarlett gradually progresses toward a woman whose outward demeanor matches the wildness that has been in her eyes from the beginning. In the same pages that we learn of her relationship with Ellen, we also learn that Scarlett has become good at parroting "the outward signs of gentility" but that "The inner grace from which these signs should spring, she never learned nor did she see any reason for learning it" (59). While Scarlett plans to be like Ellen "some day when she had time for it" (60), we learn that Ellen "never fully realized it was a veneer, for Scarlett always showed her best face to her mother, concealing her escapades, curbing her temper and appearing as sweet-natured as she could in Ellen's presence, for her mother could shame her to tears with a reproachful glance" (59).

Cardon notes that "The rules of femininity [Ellen] attempts to pass onto Scarlett uncover the patriarchy undergirding the Old South (and the role of southern mothers as enablers in the vicious cycle of patriarchy)—not merely the self-sacrificing and repressed roles of the women, but the atmosphere of honor and shame which trapped them permanently in those roles" (69). In other words, Ellen is not only trapped in this patriarchal society but enables the society to continue by refusing to protest its strict code of rules for feminine behavior. Pyron further argues that "If Ellen O'Hara represses her own will, in the same way, her idea of motherhood is to break her daughters' wills and impose her own rigid model on them. This is what her mother did; this is what she would do. This is Mammy's function, too. The model is of mothers as dutiful soldiers or even martinets. If they failed in their objective, it was not for want of effort" (276). Pyron actually makes Ellen seem like a vengeful figure who actively wants to "break her daughters' wills" in her attempt to mold them in her image. As I mentioned before, I believe that

Ellen merely wishes to bring Scarlett up as a lady because she cannot conceive of another path for her daughter to take and because she genuinely believes that she is giving Scarlett her best chance at survival.

Goodwyn-Jones implies that Scarlett is complicit in this relationship, instead of totally rebelling from it: “Yet there is another side to Scarlett, the stereotypically feminine side that does not simply endure but enjoys dependence and a sense of an outer force that provides stability. It is evident most consistently in her memories of Ellen, particularly of Ellen’s office, the calm functional center of order at Tara” (343). At this point, since Scarlett has not grown up in the least, I concur with Goodwyn-Jones’s views that Scarlett still needs a mother figure upon whom she can depend. For most of the novel, Scarlett relies on mother figures, first Ellen and then Melanie; however, as I will eventually note, while Goodwyn-Jones will ultimately argue that Scarlett never grows out of her need for dependence, I will argue that Scarlett does grow in the end.

Madonne Miner examines the first few chapters of *GWTW* through the viewpoint that Mitchell equates mothers with food, and that the mothers in *GWTW* often fail at their attempts to provide sustenance: She notes that while Ellen does provide food in the first chapter (passing out food to the homecoming slaves), in the next sections, while she does make sure there is physical food on the table, she cannot provide Scarlett with “emotional sustenance” because she leaves on her nursing errand. Miner also points out that Mitchell links motherhood with death, noting that Emmie Slattery’s dying baby, for whom Ellen leaves her own daughters to nurse, is an early example of “female inadequacy,” further noting that “So closely linked to birth, this baby’s death serves as warning: once a mother thrusts her child from the all-provident womb, death is around

the corner” (17-18). Miner further notes that these “image clusters,” in which Mitchell associates mothers with food/lack of food and birth/death, repeat throughout the rest of *GWTW*.

In the beginning of Chapter IV, Mitchell introduces another type of scene that often resurfaces in the novel: Ellen is absent, but Scarlett thinks of her mother—how wonderful she is, how much Scarlett wishes she could be more like her (some day), how Ellen calms Scarlett and makes her feel more at ease, and yet how Scarlett knows that Ellen would disapprove of her were she to know what Scarlett is really thinking, wishing she could do, planning to do, or doing. In the first scene, Scarlett sits at the dinner table and mulls over her problems, the rumor that her beloved Ashley is engaged and her despair at this idea. Scarlett yearns for her mother’s presence, so much that she keeps starting from her chair every time she hears a noise outside, just in case it might be Ellen returning home. However, Scarlett does not actually wish to unburden her problems to Ellen because she knows that Ellen “would be shocked and grieved to know that a daughter of hers wanted a man who was engaged to another girl” (61); instead, Scarlett merely desires Ellen’s physical proximity, for she “always felt secure when Ellen was by her, for there was nothing so bad that Ellen could not better it, simply by being there” (61). When Ellen returns, however, Scarlett receives little consolation, for Ellen immediately goes for her rosary beads to lead the family in prayer; as Haskell points out, “Religion, like the mother, is cold comfort” (94), for although Scarlett initially feels calmed by Ellen’s intonations, she immediately returns to her thoughts of Ashley and is then only comforted by her own agency—she determines that she will declare her love to Ashley, and that such a declaration will solve everything. Even in this early scene, a pattern develops: Scarlett thinks of Ellen because she believes that Ellen equals comfort and good advice that tempers Scarlett’s natural tendencies, but instead Scarlett can only soothe herself by devising her own solution to her problems, a solution

that almost inevitably deviates entirely from Ellen's teachings because Scarlett is destined to become a woman who is thoroughly unlike her "great lady" mother.

In the next portion of the novel, leading up to the siege of Atlanta and Scarlett's discovery of Ellen's death, Scarlett thinks often of Ellen but continues to deviate from her teachings. Scarlett raises her voice to Mammy "with impunity" because Ellen is at the other end of the plantation (76); later, she feels glad (albeit guiltily) because neither Ellen nor Mammy will be attending the barbeque to hinder her plans to ensnare Ashley. She overrides her feelings of guilt by thinking that surely the family would be too excited by her elopement, which would "more than overbalance their displeasure" (80-81); in the end, she is pleased that Ellen must stay home because Ellen (or her extension, Mammy) will not be around to shame her into giving up on her plans to reveal her feelings of love to a man who is engaged to another woman. A little later, Ellen does creep back into her mind, but Scarlett quashes this thought even more speedily than the last, thinking first that Ellen would be "white with mortification" at the thought of her elopement but sweeping this thought away with the consolation that Ellen would surely "forgive her when she saw her happiness" (83).

In the same series of scenes, by contrast, Scarlett openly speaks blasphemy and does not even quite seem to realize it. Although she does not outrightly blame Ellen for her complicity in Scarlett's plight, to participate in such an artificial system of codes and flattery of males, she does rant against the system to Mammy. Scarlett declares that she wishes she were married because "I'm tired of everlastingly being unnatural and never doing anything I want to do. . . . I'm tired of saying, 'How wonderful you are!' to fool men who haven't got one-half the sense I've got, and I'm tired of pretending I don't know anything, so men can tell me things and feel important while they're doing it" (79). Although she still might wish to be like Ellen, some day,

Scarlett demonstrates for the first time in this scene that, like her eyes, her mind is already her own; it also demonstrates that Scarlett has not given very much thought to the fact that marriage will not free her from having to behave so unnaturally.

On the way to the barbeque, Scarlett (accompanied by her sisters and father) meets the Tarleton women, including Mrs. Tarleton, a boisterous woman who teases her daughters, who in turn tease her right back, even in front of the O'Haras; Scarlett notes that "the freedom with which the Tarletons treated their mother came as a shock" and that "the very idea of saying such things to her own mother was almost sacrilegious" (86). Scarlett goes so far as to circle the notion that there is something "very pleasant" about this relationship, but she "loyally hastened to tell herself" that she certainly would not "prefer a mother like Mrs. Tarleton to Ellen." Scarlett does think, however, that "still it would be fun to romp with a mother" and immediately feels ashamed that "even that thought was disrespectful to Ellen" (86); at this point, it is as if Scarlett has confused Ellen so much with the Virgin Mary that she actually almost believes that Ellen can hear her thoughts and reprimand her from afar. Scarlett cannot resolve this problem, but she does recognize that she "wanted to respect and adore her mother like an idol and to rumple her hair and tease her too. And she knew she should be altogether one way or the other" (87). Tellingly, Scarlett likens this inner conflict to the one that "made her desire to appear a delicate and high-bred lady with boys and to be, as well, a hoyden who was not above a few kisses" (87); yet again, Mitchell underscores Scarlett's inner conflict between her desire to be the woman Ellen wants her to be versus her more immediate desire to satisfy her own impulses.

Once at the barbeque, as Scarlett begins to see the holes in her plot to trap Ashley for her own, Charles Hamilton approaches and nervously talks at Scarlett, who pays him little attention until he declares that he wants to marry her; Scarlett starts at the word "marry," and Ellen's

teachings come to her “automatically” and “from force of long habit” as she politely brushes Charles’s ardor aside (107). Later, however, when Scarlett forthrightly declares her love to Ashley, Mitchell notes that “suddenly all the years of Ellen’s teachings fell away” (115). After Ashley refuses Scarlett and she subsequently overhears his sister Honey telling all the other girls how she noticed Scarlett throwing herself at Ashley at the barbeque, Scarlett’s first impulse is to fly to Ellen, “just to see her, just to hold onto her skirt, to cry and pour out the whole story in her heart” (123); however, Scarlett quickly realizes that “[t]o run away would only give [the other girls] more ammunition” and instead she plots revenge. Her opportunity arrives quickly in the form of Charles, who has returned to declare his love for Scarlett once again; this time, Scarlett accepts him, but not, as Ellen accepted Gerald, to give up and settle and hope for the best with a nice enough man, but because he is wealthy, has no parents to “bother” her, and it will exact revenge on Ashley (to prove she did not mean what she just said to him), on Melanie (because Charles is Melanie’s brother and, for reasons Scarlett does not specify, she thinks the match will upset Melanie), and on Honey (who has an understanding with Charles but not an official engagement and will, in Scarlett’s estimation, be unlikely to have another opportunity to marry) (125). This series of scenes leads to Scarlett’s first true disillusionment, that neither Ellen’s artificial methods nor those that come naturally to her have gotten her what she wants, for the first method is too polite and hers is too shocking, and she is subsequently forced to contemplate fleeing home, to realize she cannot, and instead, regroup and settles upon a compromise. Entzminger points out that “Scarlett survives, like her contemporaries, by manipulating the men who would control her. From the novel’s beginning, Mitchell shows that Scarlett is aware of the limiting nature of her role but that she is nonetheless willing to push those limits” (110). This scene marks the first of many in which Scarlett does not get what she wants but survives; this

time, she survives by falling back on Ellen's teachings after testing the notion of using her own methods.

Scarlett now finds herself trapped in a marriage to a man whose presence she cannot abide. Before the wedding, we learn, Ellen "had wrung her hands and counseled delay, in order that Scarlett might think the matter over at greater length" (128); here is the only place in the novel where Ellen betrays any regret at having entered into a hasty marriage of her own by urging her daughter not to repeat her past mistakes. In that line lies the strongest indication that Ellen cares for her children. Although she probably does not know the full story behind Scarlett's sudden decision to marry Charles, Ellen recognizes enough of her past trauma in Scarlett's present demeanor to grow concerned that Scarlett is marrying Charles for the wrong reasons. If Ellen cared nothing for Scarlett, she would applaud a good match with a nice young man of wealth and good social standing and allow the marriage to proceed unhindered; however, Ellen is clearly so horrified at the thought of her daughter going down the same path she traveled so hastily so many years ago that she puts on the one overt display of emotion that Mitchell indicates that she has ever expressed in front of her child in an attempt to save her daughter from a life of loneliness and repression.

Although Scarlett initially rebuffs Ellen's advice and marries Charles anyway, she soon regrets her decision and realizes that "she had only herself to blame." Furthermore, she realizes that Ellen was right: "Ellen had tried to stop her and she would not listen" (131). Although Scarlett might very well have been trapped forever in wedlock with Charles, Mitchell swoops in and saves her from a long, dreary life with him by conveniently killing him off fewer than three months after their wedding. However, Scarlett must face new challenges as a result of her brief union: She is now a widow and has a child. If Scarlett hated being a belle and behaving in an

artificial manner for the pleasure of men, she despises widowhood and motherhood. Even before she gives birth, Scarlett “had wept with despair at the knowledge she was pregnant and wished that she were dead”; after Wade is born, she “felt little affection for the child” and “had not wanted him and she resented his coming and, now that he was here, it did not seem possible that he was hers, a part of her” (132). Even in childbirth, Scarlett fails to behave like a proper lady; as Cardon points out, “Scarlett’s childbirth marks the first example of her survival skills and strength; she is chided by Mammy for not suffering enough. Femininity (specifically white aristocratic femininity) should be fragile and so require protection” (72). Later, when Scarlett goes visiting with little Wade in tow, Scarlett thinks “How stupid people were when they talked about what a comfort little Wade Hampton must be to her now that Charles was gone” (134); not only does she hate being a mother, but she also finds others idiotic for seeing worth in having a child. Scarlett never develops as a mother and ends up not only ignoring her children but outrightly frightening them: She becomes the “mother of nightmare” about whom Felski warns (117).

Scarlett deplores her condition as a widow even more than her new motherhood. She quickly realizes that “widows might as well be dead,” for she discovers that she must wear all black, with no adornments, and that she may no longer enjoy the relative freedom of being unmarried and flirting with men—Ellen makes sure of that. She hastily informs Scarlett that she must be “grave and aloof” and furthermore, because a widow might “easily . . . get herself talked about,” a widow’s “conduct . . . must be twice as circumspect as that of a matron” (133); in other words, Scarlett discovers that not only is she forbade flirtation, but she must “freeze” any man who might show an interest in her “with a dignified but well-chosen reference to her dead husband,” and, if she behaves by the dictates of Southern aristocratic society, she can eventually



remarry, but only when she is much older and society has agreed that she has spent enough time mourning her first husband (134). Goodwyn-Jones points out that “Mitchell created a woman whose ladyhood was only a veneer and then observed what happened to her. As one might expect, Scarlett successively finds bellehood a trap, marriage a trap, and widowhood a trap; there is no female role in which she is happy”; however, Goodwyn-Jones insists that Scarlett “adopts the male role” (341) as her only alternative. Instead, I assert that Scarlett endeavors to expand the parameters of a woman’s role in society. Her first move is to gradually break free from the confines of mourning much earlier than her society allows.

Scarlett eventually decides that she could use a change of scenery and agrees to go to Atlanta for an extended stay with Melanie and her Aunt Pittypat. While there, she broods some more about her condition as a widow and thinks about how much she still loves Ashley (and, subsequently, of how much she despises Melanie for now being married to Ashley). However, she can find no alternative to her plight but to bear it in silence (as Ellen would), until the night of the fundraising bazaar in Atlanta for the Confederate Army. Scarlett manages to get herself into the event by feigning patriotism, but she finds herself still confined to a corner booth in mourning garb without permission to dance or even smile at all the handsome soldiers. However, Rhett Butler makes an appearance and bids for Scarlett in the charity auction to lead the first dance; although one could argue that Scarlett only dances because Rhett gives her the opportunity, she could certainly have declined—after all, everyone surrounding her is horrified at the thought of a woman so recently widowed dancing in public—but instead she gives in to her impulse to enjoy her life and decides she does not care what people say, and so she defies societal standards for widowhood by publicly dancing with Rhett.

During the first dance, however, Scarlett almost immediately invokes Ellen's name, but Rhett cuts her off and she thinks no more of Ellen until the night has ended; she is having too much impulsive fun and initially troubles herself little with the consequences of her actions (192). In the morning, Scarlett is still smug in defense of her behavior until Aunt Pitty invokes Ellen's name, and then "A cold qualm of guilt assailed Scarlett at the thought of Ellen's consternation, should she ever learn of her daughter's scandalous conduct." But Scarlett quickly brushes this first frightened thought away by realizing that Ellen might very well never hear about the events of the previous evening (196-197); Scarlett, having gained some distance from Ellen's maternal lessons, already worries far less about having defied Ellen's teachings than about the thought of being caught by Ellen.

Of course, Scarlett does not get off so easily; almost immediately she reads a letter from Ellen that begins "I was greatly disturbed to hear of your recent conduct"; although she initially chafes at the thought of one of the old matrons of Atlanta having the nerve to write her mother and tattle on her, she becomes so "thoroughly frightened" that she cannot finish the letter after she reads past the first line, discovering Ellen's severe reproach and the information that Ellen has sent Gerald to Atlanta to bring Scarlett home in disgrace (198-199). However, Rhett comes to Scarlett's rescue; he gets Gerald so drunk that he misbehaves publicly, which gives Scarlett the leverage she needs to blackmail her father into lying to Ellen. Scarlett thoroughly enjoys this moment, for she realizes that not only will Gerald lie to Ellen about this incident, but that if anymore letters arrive at Tara for Ellen regarding Scarlett's behavior Ellen would continue to be "soothed with lies"; she hence discovers that she can not only stay in Atlanta but could "do almost as she pleased" (207). Again, Scarlett does not mind going against Ellen's teachings one bit as long as she can rest secure in the knowledge that Ellen will not be told; now that she knows

for certain that Ellen will never learn the truth of her escapades, Scarlett plots further misbehavior and eventually resumes her old habits of flirtation, almost as if she had never married Charles. Entzminger points out that “Clearly, Mitchell indicates that Scarlett’s behavior . . . is the result of an intelligent and spirited woman’s attempt to adapt and prosper in a society that does not value her intelligence or spirit. Throughout the rest of the novel, Scarlett struggles to negotiate this system in a way that will allow her to satisfy her desires while remaining in the society’s good graces” (110). I would even go so far as to contend that Scarlett largely does not care about “society’s good graces,” as long as Ellen herself does not sit in judgment upon her daughter; after all, Scarlett remarks to herself “I don’t care what they say!” the moment that she goes to Rhett on the dance floor (192) and maintains this attitude both before and after she learns that Ellen has been informed of her misconduct.

After this series of events, Scarlett begins to deviate further and further from Ellen’s teachings. When she sneaks into Melanie’s room to read Ashley’s letters, Ellen’s shame comes into her mind briefly, but Scarlett puts it out of her mind with a thought that will become a catchphrase of hers: “I’ll think about it tomorrow,” noting that “Generally when tomorrow came, the thought either did not come at all or was so attenuated by the delay it was not very troublesome” (210). The last time Scarlett actually does something because she is worried about what Ellen would say is when Mrs. Merriwether goes on a rant about Rhett: Scarlett wants to defend him, but she worries that Mrs. Merriwether might write Ellen again and tell on her, so she remains silent. Scarlett reaps no reward for abiding by Ellen’s rules, however, because Melanie defends Rhett instead, and Scarlett wishes she had had the nerve to say something first (232-233). When Rhett tempts her with a green bonnet in an endeavor to convince her to quit dressing in her black mourning garb, Scarlett worries momentarily about how she would explain wearing

colorful clothes again to Ellen, but “vanity was stronger” and she accepts the bonnet (242-243). Mitchell remarks soon after that Scarlett has “come a long way from Ellen’s teachings” under Rhett’s influence; although Mitchell gives Rhett partial credit for Scarlett’s gradual changes, she notes approvingly that Rhett “had pried open the prison of [Scarlett’s] widowhood and set her free” (247).

Scarlett does visit Tara occasionally, but she finds the trips dull because Ellen, who has grown “thin and preoccupied,” is so busy providing aid to the Confederate Army that she continues to have little time for Scarlett; Scarlett feels guilty because she has been keeping secrets from Ellen, including that she really longs to return quickly to Atlanta because of beaux and parties instead of familial ties to Melanie and Aunt Pitty and service to the Confederacy, while Ellen is “saddened” at the thought of Scarlett leaving her again so soon (219-220). When Melanie receives word that Ashley will be coming to Atlanta on furlough for Christmas, Scarlett decides to stay in Atlanta to be near him in spite of “a direct command from the disappointed Ellen” (265); had she gone to Tara, she would have seen her mother alive one last time.

Soon after Ashley’s visit comes the siege of Atlanta; at first, Ellen sends Scarlett letters “pleading with her to come home,” but Scarlett refuses, ostensibly because she has promised Ashley that she will take care of his now very pregnant wife (329).<sup>32</sup> Soon after, Scarlett receives word from Tara that her sister Carreen has fallen ill, and Scarlett says rosaries out of guilt at Ellen’s request (335); later on, when she finds out that Ellen herself is sick, she prays in earnest and fears that Ellen might die. Scarlett has difficulty conceiving of the reality of Ellen’s potential death, but she does go so far as to promise God that she will be good if he spares Ellen; however, she ultimately feels so bound by her promise to Ashley that she does not give into her

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<sup>32</sup> I say “ostensibly” because Scarlett has already begun to care a little bit about Melanie, although at this point she has not admitted it to herself.

impulse to rush home to her mother's bedside (345-347). Scarlett reluctantly acts as midwife during the birth of Melanie's child, and although she fears that Melanie and her child may die (even as Scarlett secretly wishes Melanie might die so that she can finally have Ashley for her own), both survive. Pyron points out that "If mothering is fatal, children are the agents of death. . . . Children kill mothers. Beau almost killed Melanie" (274). Miner, too, notes that Mitchell begins a cycle that associates mothers and birth with death in Melanie's birthing scene (20). Both also point out that Mitchell further links birth with death in the juxtaposition of the birth of Melanie's child with the Battle of Atlanta (Pyron 268; Miner 20). All these linkages with motherhood and death presage the death that is shortly to come.

Following the birth of Melanie and Ashley's child, the city of Atlanta begins to burn and Scarlett returns to Tara with Melanie, her baby, Wade, and Prissy in tow. When she arrives, Scarlett discovers that Ellen has died the day before and that her death has permanently broken Gerald's spirit to the point that he is no longer capable of running the plantation; although the main house at Tara still stands, Scarlett discovers that their entire store of cotton has been burned by the invading Northern army and that most of the slaves have escaped. She ultimately discovers that if the plantation and its inhabitants are to survive, she must lead them. This epoch in Scarlett's life involves the first of the two transformations that I mentioned earlier: from dependent child (albeit a spirited young woman with a mind of her own) into an adult who runs the plantation and ensures the survival of herself and her dependents, no matter the cost.

Pyron and Miner both make similar arguments regarding this portion of the novel. Pyron points out that "The association of motherhood, birth, and death permeates" this section and that Ellen's "almost suicidal disregard for her own health" in nursing others (first Emmie Slattery and later Scarlett's sisters) brings about her own demise (274). Both Pyron and Miner note that

Mammy, too, fails as a mother figure to Scarlett; in the novel, when Scarlett first learns of Ellen's death, she still hopes that Mammy will continue to stand as "something of stability, . . . something of the old life that was unchanging" (415). However, "Mammy fails Scarlett just as thoroughly" as Ellen has in her death (Pyron 274), for Mammy "dispelled this illusion" by immediately fretting to Scarlett about her feelings of helplessness in the wake of Ellen's death (GWTW 415); following Ellen's death, "Mammy is more of a child than Scarlett" (Miner 24).

When Scarlett questions Mammy and Dilcey about Ellen's final days and words, Dilcey informs Scarlett that in her last moments Ellen sat upright in bed and called for Philippe (Mammy, meanwhile, tries to stifle Dilcey from informing Scarlett of these events) (418). Scarlett's reaction is to "[drop] her head into her hands" and wonder "who was he and what had he been to Mother that she died calling him?" (418). Pyron argues that Scarlett "hears the mysterious answer with fitting despair and deprivation" (276)—fitting in the sense that Ellen, Pyron has argued, has deprived Scarlett of true affection and understanding all along. Miner asserts that this discovery represents a "further push toward adulthood" for Scarlett because "Scarlett sadly perceives the limitation of her perception of Ellen: rents appear in a formerly whole (if imaginary) fabric" (24). As I already noted, Felski mentions that daughters must learn to see their mothers as human beings with their own desires and pasts; however, since Ellen dies before Scarlett can truly discover Ellen's feminine humanity as separate from her role as a mother (by, for instance, discussing Philippe with a living Ellen), this discovery is only partial and leaves Scarlett with an unsolvable mystery in the wake of the loss of her mother.

Perhaps it is this very discovery and subsequent disillusionment that leads Scarlett to her first outright disavowal of Ellen's teachings; certainly, Scarlett finds Ellen's teachings inadequate for dealing with her new world of poverty and hardship. Scarlett soon determines

angrily that “Nothing her mother had taught her was of any value whatsoever now” and despairingly thinks “What good will kindness do me now? What value is gentleness? Better that I’d learned to plow or chop cotton like a darky. Oh, Mother, you were wrong!” (434). Although Mitchell points out that “She did not stop to think that Ellen’s ordered world was gone and a brutal world had taken its place, a world wherein every standard, every value had changed” (434), this realization does not dawn on Scarlett, who “only saw, or thought she saw, that her mother had been wrong, and she changed swiftly to meet this new world for which she was not prepared” (434). Pyron points out again that “home and mothers fail their offspring” (273); by rejecting Ellen’s example, “Scarlett’s character assumes its full meaning only in the rebellion against and rejection of matriarchal authority” (275). Amanda Adams notes that “It is the knowledge that Mitchell’s mother talked about—born of experiential, not formal, education in this case—which Scarlett most exploits” (72); in other words, Scarlett succeeds and survives because she has rejected Ellen’s “formal” education and instead uses her own experiences to pave the way toward future survival.

Regarding Scarlett’s transformation into someone who could “meet this new world,” Pyron notes that Scarlett “resists all the way” and that “she hits the road to Tara initially as a regression and an escape from womanhood and adult responsibility,” seeking not adulthood and responsibility but instead “to lose herself in the old, matriarchal shelter” (270). Miner echoes these statements, asserting that, on the way home, “The desire is one expressed by Scarlett over and over again, to return to the comfort of Ellen’s lap . . . to be enclosed within a protective maternal space” (21). However, while Pyron ultimately argues that “Scarlett remains the compulsively needy, eternally hungry child” (277)—meaning “needy” and “hungry” in both a literal and figurative (emotional) sense—Miner asserts that “The child returns home to discover

that there is no home, that the cord has been cut, that she is no longer a child” (23). I partially agree with both: Scarlett does not progress to full adulthood until her second transformation at the very end of the novel, so at this stage she does emotionally remain childish, as Pyron argues; however, Miner is also correct in that Scarlett has taken steps toward adulthood in her assumption of leadership at Tara and her transformation from belle into survivor.

However reluctant her transformation may be, even Pyron allows that “Scarlett is reborn anyway” (271) as she forgoes being a belle and becomes survivor. Pyron also argues that because Mitchell has set up a clear parallel between mothers and death, Scarlett survives because she rejects both good mother- and daughterhood (276), further noting that Scarlett may physically survive because she rejects Ellen’s teachings but that she does so at the expense of “tenderness, affection, sympathy, and the sense of human community—values linked with nurturing motherhood” (272). However, Louis Rubin points out that “Well before the wartime ordeal at the devastated plantation home, she has demonstrated that she is deeply out of sympathy with the social and familial status quo, abidingly unhappy with her lot, contemptuous of the patriotic feelings of the community, and unwilling to acquiesce in the traditional standards set for the Southern lady of her station and her time” (88). I agree with Rubin’s assessment and argue further that Scarlett was also never a particularly emotionally tender person, either, and hence that she does not actually undergo much of a transformation of personality in the specific regard that she does not lose “tenderness, affection, sympathy, and the sense of human community” if she never possessed it. Instead, Scarlett merely drops any pretense of being kind and gentle, unless that pretense will potentially ensure her future survival, and even her future flirtations are no longer for self-entertainment but are reserved for moments in which they can be utilized as a tool to further her survival.



In the immediate wake of Ellen's death, Scarlett discovers that if the inhabitants of Tara are to survive, she must lead them. She initially makes this reluctant discovery immediately after she returns home and discovers that no authority figures remain and she must assume control. On that first night, Scarlett notes that "No twisting and turning would avoid this dead end to which she had come," but her initial reaction is to drink whiskey and pass out in her old bed, to think about everything more tomorrow (418-420). The next morning, Scarlett struggles to deal with the realities that she must face, often deciding that she would think about the larger problems that the inhabitants of Tara will face later, but then she goes to the Wilkes family's abandoned slave quarters to forage for food that might not have already been either eaten or destroyed by the conquering army. There, she initially thinks about how "all this was happening to her, Scarlett O'Hara, who had never raised her hand even to pick up her discarded stockings from the floor or to tie the laces of her slippers—Scarlett, whose little headaches and tempers had been coddled and catered to all her life" (427). Later, as she lies on the ground fighting against the weakness of hunger, her transformation solidifies, and she rises up: "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" (428). She swears aloud, "I'm going to live through this, and when it's over, I'm never going to be hungry again. No, nor any of my folks. If I have to steal or kill—as God is my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again" (428).

Moving forward, Scarlett puts this new hard-nosed determination, coupled with her repudiation of Ellen's teachings, to work in order to ensure the survival of all at Tara. Mitchell points out that "no one talked back to Scarlett these days. They were all afraid of her sharp tongue, all afraid of the new person who walked in her body" (432). Pyron points out that "Those around her substituted for the real object of her wrath. She could get at them; she could

not attack her sainted mother” (278); Miner notes that “Acting as the bad mother, Scarlett avenges herself on the good mother who, finally, wasn’t good enough” (26). While Scarlett may not be kind and courteous to those around her, as Gelfant points out Scarlett “maintains an inviolate sense of family” (“*Gone*” 8). Indeed, all of Scarlett’s work is to ensure the survival of all, not merely her survival; she just cannot bring herself to utilize Ellen’s teachings to deal with others because she feels that abiding by such a code of behavior will not keep a roof over everyone’s heads—and indeed, it would not, for nearly everyone else at Tara who is strong enough to work protests Scarlett’s new commands until she frightens them into obedience because they all cling to their former stations in life that existed prior to the troubles they now face.

One of the few people who does not protest Scarlett’s new rule is Melanie. Melanie often offers to work outdoors, although her health will not permit her to do so, and she still takes on all child-rearing responsibilities even before she can leave her bed. As Mitchell herself points out several times, Melanie acts as a mother figure to many of the adults as well as the children, not just in these scenes at Tara but throughout the novel. Hanson asserts that “it is Melanie who mothers the motherless, even Scarlett’s own children when they can find no succor with Scarlett. It is Scarlett’s role in their fantasy family to act as a paternal figure” (62). I disagree, however, with the assertion that Scarlett assumes some sort of masculine role by taking over as a leader. Part of Scarlett’s training as a lady (and Ellen’s training when she was young) involved lessons on how to run a plantation one day; the only major difference between Scarlett and Ellen, other than lack of money on Scarlett’s part, is that Scarlett dispenses with all the courtesies and manners that Ellen trained her to utilize (and employed herself while still alive) in plantation maintenance.

Pyron asserts that Melanie functions as a “surrogate mother” to Scarlett following Ellen’s death (230); Miner echoes this argument. Scarlett and Melanie’s relationship until Ellen’s death is marred from the beginning by Scarlett’s intense dislike of Melanie because Melanie marries Ashley. Scarlett’s indignation at the thought of Ashley marrying Melanie mounts when she evaluates Melanie as “mousy little person” who has none of the allure that Scarlett herself possesses (22). After Scarlett marries Charles and he subsequently dies, when Scarlett goes to Atlanta she does so in spite of the fact that she continues to despise Melanie. Once in Atlanta with Melanie and Aunt Pitty, Scarlett thinks condescendingly of Melanie as spineless until Melanie first demonstrates her own form of bravery in Scarlett’s presence; when Mrs. Merriwether speaks sharply against Rhett, while Scarlett wants to defend him but stifles this impulse because she fears Ellen’s reaction, Melanie springs to Rhett’s defense, and for the first time Scarlett thinks of Melanie with “jealousy mixing with admiration” (233). Although it takes Scarlett until the very end of the novel to fully admit it, she grows more and more fond of Melanie from that moment on.

For her part, Melanie openly loves and admires Scarlett from her first appearance in the novel onward: At the Wilkes barbeque, Melanie smiles “with timid liking” when she first interacts with Scarlett, and later, just after Scarlett has declared her love to Ashley when she tries to sneak back upstairs to join the other ladies (who are supposed to be napping), when Honey Wilkes mocks Scarlett and accuses her of throwing herself at Ashley, Melanie is the sole detractor from Honey’s accusations, stating that “She’s just high spirited and vivacious. I thought her most charming” (122). When Honey subsequently mentions her “understanding” with Charles, Melanie merely “murmured something about how happy she was that Honey would be her sister” (122); in contrast, when Melanie learns that Scarlett is to marry Charles, she

happily whispers “Now, we’re really and truly sisters” to Scarlett (129), a bond that, despite Scarlett’s two subsequent marriages, Melanie honors as if it were blood—indeed, Melanie never once adds “in-law” to her many descriptions of Scarlett as her sister.

Although it is not until the conclusion of *GWTW* that Scarlett fully admits how she truly feels about Melanie, Mitchell takes great strides to elucidate the true nature of this relationship throughout the novel. Shortly following Scarlett’s initial admiration of Melanie’s courage, Melanie gives birth; Miner points out that even then, before Scarlett knows for sure that Ellen has died, Scarlett begins to link the two in her mind. She further notes that “Mitchell enforces this conjunction with a seemingly obvious parallelism in plot: Melanie gives birth on the day Ellen dies,” going on to point out that Melanie assumes Ellen’s prior role as caretaker once at Tara and that Scarlett “begins to call upon Melanie at those times she might have called upon Ellen, and Melanie answers, until she [Melanie], like Ellen, deserts her children” by dying. Miner ultimately asserts that Ellen’s death has not only affected a change in Scarlett but also in her relationship with Melanie (26-27), implying, like Pyron, that Melanie has become a substitute mother figure to Scarlett.

Following Ellen’s death, Scarlett certainly does grow closer with Melanie—in part because Scarlett believes Ashley to be dead and no longer feels such an enmity with Melanie once she thinks the cause of their rivalry is gone, but certainly also because Scarlett’s admiration for Melanie grows. When the Yankee deserter comes to Tara with the intention of looting (and possibly worse), Scarlett shoots him. The most startling part of Scarlett’s day, however, is that Melanie, who still hardly has the strength to leave her bed, comes running to her aid with Charles’s sword. In this moment, Scarlett not only grows to admire Melanie even more but also notes kinship between them, realizing “Why—why—she’s like me! She understands how I feel!

. . . She'd have done the same thing!" (441). Melanie not only helps Scarlett clean up after the dead Yankee but also lies to the others without a second thought to minimize the chances of Scarlett's deeds being discovered. Later, when the Northern army returns north through Georgia, Melanie demonstrates her calm courage a second time by mounting a horse and leading the others into the swamp behind the house to hide their goods from the marauders; when she returns from the swamp to discover that the Yankees have tried to set fire to Tara, Melanie saves Scarlett from catching fire, causing Scarlett to "grudgingly" admit Melanie's loyalty and courage once more (470).

At this phase, Scarlett thinks only rarely of Ellen. Once, when she bandages Pork after he has been injured stealing for the family, Scarlett thinks of how Ellen would have found this thievery to be "a serious matter" that would have called for a harsh reprimand; she finds that such matters are "no longer a matter for conscience" (472-473). Later, after Will Benteen has come to Tara, and Scarlett thinks on what Ellen would have thought of him marrying one of her daughters, she realizes that she "had been by necessity forced too far from Ellen's teachings to let that worry her" (513). For her part, Melanie continues to approve of all Scarlett's decisions and "hotly defended" Will's honor as a gentleman in spirit (513).

When Ashley returns to Tara, "all the jealous animosity which had slumbered during the months she had thought Ashley probably dead" resurfaces in Scarlett's mind with regard to Melanie (525). Soon thereafter, Scarlett goes off to Atlanta on a mission to save Tara and winds up married to Frank and living in Atlanta again while Melanie remains at Tara. The two do not meet again in the course of the novel until Gerald's funeral. In the meantime, while Scarlett is in Atlanta, she continues to think only rarely of Ellen. At one point, as Scarlett feels bewildered by the ladies of Atlanta and their pride in poverty, she realizes that "theirs was the right attitude.

Ellen would have thought so” but Scarlett cannot bring herself to agree (609). Later, when Scarlett has started up her sawmill business and begins engaging in shady business practices, she notes that Ellen would never have approved and ultimately determines never to think of Ellen “in connection with her business practices,” merely giving a little “sigh that she was not as Ellen would like her to be” before moving along in her business dealings (662-663). A little later on, Scarlett does imagine a future for herself in which she one day behaves charitably, as Ellen would have wished, but Mitchell notes that “Her pleasure in these thoughts of the future was undimmed by any realization that she had no real desire to be unselfish or charitable or kind. All she wanted was the reputation for possessing these qualities” (676).

When Gerald dies, Scarlett returns to Tara for the funeral. After the proceedings, when she discovers that Ashley plans to move his family north in search of a living, she panics. When Scarlett struggles to convince Ashley to work for her at the sawmills and move to Atlanta, Melanie rises to her defense, misconstruing Scarlett’s motives as a kind plan to bring Melanie back to her home of Atlanta. Mitchell notes that “As usual when confronted by Melanie’s habit of attributing worthy motives where no worth existed, Scarlett was ashamed and irritated” (729). This attitude characterizes Scarlett’s entire relationship with Melanie. For Scarlett’s part, she feels shame (because she secretly cares about Melanie) mingled with irritation (which is likely displaced irritation because Scarlett actually feels ashamed of herself for not having higher motives) every time Melanie misunderstands her selfish motives as good intentions. Melanie perpetually misconstrues Scarlett’s actions as being motivated by much purer impulses than Scarlett intends.

Throughout the rest of the novel, Scarlett continues to grow further and further from Ellen’s teachings, until she finally reaches the point that she becomes resigned to the fact that she

has “broken with Ellen’s standards too many times . . . and she did not often feel the bite of conscience now” (877). However, Melanie continues to heartily approve of Scarlett’s every action, even when others come to her claiming to have witnessed Scarlett’s attempts to seduce Ashley (and, although at that point Scarlett merely hugs Ashley as a friend, all readers of the novel know that Scarlett has harbored a jealous desire for Ashley from the beginning of the novel); if Scarlett does something that Melanie could ordinarily never countenance, Melanie, so committed to Scarlett as not only a sister but one of her dearest loved ones, refuses to believe anything negative about Scarlett and instead continues to misconstrue Scarlett’s motives as good. One must almost wonder if Melanie does not deliberately (and, on some level, almost consciously) sweep Scarlett’s misdeeds under the rug, so determined is she never to think ill of her beloved Scarlett.

Some scholars have noted parallels between Melanie and Ellen. Miner points out that “Mitchell links Ellen and Melanie as ‘great ladies’ in the Southern tradition” and goes on to note that “Scarlett refuses to see similarities between Melanie and Ellen; Rhett enumerates Melanie’s qualities to Scarlett, Scarlett enumerates Ellen’s qualities to Rhett, and Scarlett cannot hear the overlap. Mitchell will not allow us such deafness, however; she structures her story so as to insist on a coincidence of the two women and of Scarlett’s responses to them” (26-27). Cardon further points out that Melanie “carries out Ellen O’Hara’s legacy, the legacy which each O’Hara girl abandons (Careen by becoming a nun, Suellen by marrying below her class, and Scarlett by active rebellion)” (74), in that Melanie takes over the role of nurturer at Tara after Ellen’s death. Entzminger notes that Melanie “baffles Scarlett by continuing to be a lady after all her finery and elegance are gone” (113); as I have already noted, Scarlett herself perceives that such behavior is how Ellen would have acted had she survived the end of the war.

However, there are key differences between Ellen and Melanie. Goodwyn-Jones notes that, like Scarlett, Melanie “rebels against the conventional mores that define the lady. Yet, unlike Scarlett, her revolt takes the form not of defying but of transcending those mores” (346); she points out that Melanie defends Scarlett’s intelligence in an age when women were expected to disguise their intelligence if they possessed any, and that Melanie and Scarlett both work the fields (unladylike behavior that ruins their hands and skin) and are willing to kill the Yankee deserter, all actions that Ellen, the more stereotypical “great lady,” would probably not have taken. However, Goodwyn-Jones also notes that “Each time [Melanie] goes against her culture, though, she does it for a higher, more ‘Christian’ ideal, whereas Scarlett rebels for materialistic, ‘selfish’ reasons” (346). Hanson asserts that “Melanie assumes the role of utterly supportive maternity that had been held by Scarlett’s own mother” (62); however, as I have already pointed out, although Ellen did love her eldest daughter she was far from “utterly supportive” of Scarlett’s decisions while still alive and had she lived certainly would have disapproved heartily of many of Scarlett’s subsequent decisions. Hence, Melanie also differs from Ellen in that she unconditionally supports Scarlett no matter what she does. While Ellen must be “soothed with lies” to resume maternal approval of her daughter (*GWTW* 207), Melanie stubbornly insists upon believing that Scarlett is motivated to do whatever she does by the highest of intentions. Even when faced with eyewitness testimony from multiple sources to Scarlett’s attempted adultery with her husband (including accusations from Ashley’s sister, India, another sister by marriage as well as a cousin by blood), Melanie “firmly” informs Scarlett that “I don’t want any explanation from you and I won’t listen to one,” going on to decry the very idea of Scarlett’s attempted adultery as ludicrous (946).



With Melanie's full (if ignorant) support behind her, Scarlett not only survives but thrives. Following the murder of the Yankee deserter and the subsequent salvation of Tara from plunder and flames, Scarlett initially missteps when she goes to Atlanta in an attempt to prostitute herself to Rhett, a plan that implodes upon her when Rhett discovers the blisters on her hands from working in the fields, but she soon recovers by tricking Frank Kennedy into marrying her instead of her sister Suellen. Frank, who has financially recovered by opening a store in Atlanta, provides money to support Tara after he marries Scarlett. After this initial stay against further loss and deprivation, Scarlett decides to build up a nest egg by purchasing and running a sawmill. At her first opportunity, when Frank takes ill, Scarlett, seeing a great opportunity for moneymaking in supplying the rebuilding of Atlanta with lumber, secures a loan from Rhett and purchases first one and then a second sawmill, both of which she proceeds to personally oversee.

Once again, Goodwyn-Jones asserts that Scarlett's survival tactics are "masculine," arguing that "the dependence forced on her by her gender role is replaced by the opportunity to express the 'masculine' side of herself" when she forges ahead as a businesswoman (343). However, although when Mitchell first describes Scarlett's business endeavors she does use the words "unwomanly" and "masculine," she does so filtered through Frank's thoughts and opinions (638-639); Mitchell takes care to establish Frank Kennedy as old-fashioned, a man who values stereotypical femininity over the common sense and keen intelligence that Scarlett possesses. Later, when Mitchell turns to Scarlett's thoughts on her endeavors as a businesswoman, at first Scarlett thinks that "Frank was neither a good business man nor did he want her to be a good business man" (641), which might serve to suggest that Scarlett (and perhaps Mitchell, too) thinks of her activities as masculine. However, I believe Scarlett initially thinks of herself as a "business man" because in her era the vocabulary to describe a woman in

business simply does not exist. A little later, after Scarlett has established herself as a success in the lumber business, she thinks “with conscious pride in her own smartness that she was the equal of any” of her male competitors (662) and in fact proves herself to be *better* at business than they. This epoch suggests that Scarlett does not consider her behavior masculine but that in fact she has discovered that her own feminine manner of conducting business makes her better at it than many men. Mitchell notes that Scarlett falls back on the appearance of ladylike behavior in order to con potential customers into buying from her and that she even discovers that she can lie about the quality of her competitors’ lumber with impunity because “Southern chivalry protected her. A Southern lady could lie about a gentleman but a Southern gentleman could not lie about a lady or, worse still, call her a liar” (663). This theory is put into practice when a lower class man speaks out against Scarlett’s lies: Scarlett publicly “bore his remarks with silent dignity” but subtly goes on to target his customers until she not only drives him out of business but forces him to sell his mill to her “at her own price” (663). Although Mitchell implies (in her correspondence) that Scarlett goes into business in order to survive, not because she wants to do so (*Margaret Mitchell’s* 112), Rubin argues that “the debacle of the war and the breakdown of the old plantation society serve to liberate Scarlett” (89-90), further noting that these breakdowns “enable her to do what she never could have thought of doing in the antebellum plantation society: live a life of her own, own property, go into business, make money” (90). Although Rubin implies that Mitchell does not wish to privilege these impulses, Entzminger asserts that “Scarlett is the harbinger of a new era, Mitchell seems to say, in which a person’s worth is measured, not by character, but by capital” (112), further arguing that although the “emptiness and tawdriness of Scarlett’s obsession eventually drives away the one man who has always

accepted her true nature” (112), meaning Rhett, “Mitchell also lets us know that only Scarlett’s fierce desire for money and her ability to obtain it keep her and those she cares for alive” (112).

Regarding this last point, about Scarlett endeavoring to support “those she cares for,” many scholars, as has already been noted above, highly imply or outrightly state that Scarlett’s endeavors are for purely selfish ends; that is to say, they argue that Scarlett does what she does to ensure only her personal survival, with the implication that the survival of others is purely incidental. However, Mitchell emphasizes from the beginning of Scarlett’s first transformation that Scarlett acts to ensure not only her survival but also the survival of all who fall under her care. Although Scarlett determines that she will save Tara at any cost “if she had to break the back of every person on it,” she makes this determination because “No one was going to set her and her people adrift on the charity of relatives” (435). Mitchell peppers the novel with examples of Scarlett’s callous and even sometimes cruel behavior toward her family and other dependents, to be sure, but she also provides several examples of Scarlett’s passionate willingness to defend those same people against outside forces, even if she must endure criticism not only from said outside forces but from her dependents themselves. Even when Scarlett tricks Frank into marrying her when he has an “understanding” with her sister Suellen, Scarlett betrays her sister because she knows that Suellen, who is the most truly selfish character in the novel even at the expense of her own family (after all, she brings about Gerald’s death because of her selfish desire for wealth), will not convince Frank to save Tara and help the rest of the family while she, Scarlett, intends to marry him for that very purpose. Hence, in this one respect, Scarlett actually comes to resemble Ellen. Both find it to be most important to do what they feel is necessary for the greater good of those whom they protect, even if that means sacrificing

outward affection for coldness of demeanor, scolding, and, in Scarlett's case, even outright verbal (and even occasionally physical) abuse.

Shortly after Scarlett becomes a successful businesswoman, Frank is killed and she quickly marries Rhett soon afterward. At this point in the novel, between her success and Rhett's establishment of wealth and power, Scarlett reaches the pinnacle of wealth and security, but it is also at this stage that she slowly begins to realize that money alone has not made her as happy as she had thought; her life has been filled with only the "emptiness and tawdriness" of which Entzinger spoke. Scarlett alienates herself so much from polite upper-class Atlanta society that even she and Melanie have their sole quarrel, over the fact that Scarlett has invited the Yankee governor to her parties and that Melanie refuses to attend. Many scholars have seen this turn in the course of the novel as Mitchell's disapproval of Scarlett's entrepreneurial spirit and her endorsement of tradition and conservatism over progress and female empowerment: Goodwyn-Jones, for example, asserts that *GWTW* "articulates, challenges, and finally confirms the traditional view of the nature and roles of the sexes" (349). Rubin asserts that Scarlett should prefer "the active entrepreneurial existence she leads in postwar Atlanta" to the antebellum days, but he also suggests that Mitchell makes an artificial attempt to promote traditionalism that goes against the natural course that her novel has been set up to take (90). Adams, however, contends that "Mitchell's praise of progress and the pioneer spirit for its own sake is evident in the way she approves of human endeavors to build and expand" (65). Regarding the scene in which Scarlett and Ashley reminisce about the past, in which Scarlett first states "I like these days better" but Ashley teasingly calls her a liar and they both go off into a reverie about the "charm" and "glamour" of the old days (*GWTW* 924), Adams notes that "this is clearly Ashley speaking, or Ashley's power over Scarlett's perception" (68). Indeed, not too much later on in the novel,

after this immediate influence has waned, Scarlett becomes enraged when her aunts in Charleston write her to suggest that her behavior has been “unwomanly,” thinking “By God, if she hadn’t been unwomanly Aunt Pauline and Aunt Eulalie probably wouldn’t have a roof over their heads this very moment” (959). A little later still, when faced with Rhett and Melanie’s plot to convince her to give up her mills (not because they disapprove but because they are concerned for her health following her miscarriage), Scarlett thinks that her mills are “the tangible evidence of what she had done, unaided and against great odds, and she was proud of them and of herself” (975). It is only because Rhett goads and tricks her into selling the mills to Ashley to support himself and his family that Scarlett agrees to give them up, and immediately after she does so Mitchell notes that “Already she was regretting the hasty words” (976). All of these examples suggest that Scarlett’s pride in her mills not only prevails over nostalgia but is well deserved because she has achieved an important and empowering accomplishment.

There is one other segment of the novel that might suggest that Scarlett turns back toward tradition. After she has alienated herself seemingly unalterably from polite society, Scarlett regrets this state of things and imagines how nice it would be to spend time with the ladies with whom she had once associated to rehash the past. However, the types of things about which Scarlett wishes to reminisce are telling of her continuous privileging of survival and success over tradition. She notes the shared experience of having “rebuilt from ruin” and thinks primarily of such memories as Mrs. Elsing’s unladylike looting when Atlanta burned and Mrs. Merriwether’s business success at her bakery (1003). Scarlett further considers herself and the other ladies “veterans,” not genteel ladies. These thoughts serve more to suggest Scarlett’s frustration at her alienation than the fact that she deserves to be alienated; although Scarlett “realized that it was her own fault” that she is now an outcast, it is in large part only “her fault” in that she decided to

flout convention by engaging in the type of business practices that took her outside the home and were deemed unladylike by these same women who now reject her (1003). While the more unsavory aspects of her character (mistreatment of her children and use of convict labor, to the latter of which Scarlett turns a blind eye when she knows, deep down, that her foreman is abusing the convicts) certainly contribute to her societal downfall, I believe that Mitchell subtly separates those aspects of Scarlett's success that readers are encouraged to celebrate (her general business success, including even those shady practices in which Scarlett beats the men at their own game in the utilization of feminine wiles) from those that should be deplored (the ways in which she takes it too far, such as choosing to ignore the abuse of the convicts). Notably, Scarlett does not fantasize about rehashing the past with those women who have not triumphantly succeeded in some way, tellingly, even with Melanie. One could argue that Scarlett does not include Melanie in this list because Melanie is the only woman from polite society who still willingly speaks to Scarlett. However, I would contend that, despite the fact, as Goodwyn-Jones notes, that "It is only Melanie's perceptive but simultaneously ignorant support that lets Scarlett stay sane—as Scarlett realizes at the end of the novel—for it is only this support that keeps up even the façade of Scarlett's connection to others" (349), Melanie has not triumphantly succeeded at surviving in the postwar world, and while she may have emotionally sustained Scarlett, it is Scarlett who has ensured Melanie's physical survival, not Melanie's own agency. Indeed, as Goodwyn-Jones further notes, "Melanie's sort of goodness and strength, real though they are, are limited to a world that is neither virile nor evil" (346). I further contend that Scarlett's contrasting pragmatic survival instincts constitute part of what allows her to prevail in the end.

However, such a statement about Scarlett's ultimate fate cannot be so lightly made without some evidential support. After all, the novel ends on a very open and ambiguous note: As Melanie dies, Scarlett finally realizes that she has loved Melanie all along, and she subsequently realizes that her crush on Ashley has been based on a fantasy that does not exist in real life and that she truly loves Rhett instead. From there, Scarlett flies home to declare her feelings to Rhett only to find that Rhett no longer gives a damn about her. He leaves, with the promise that he will periodically return to keep up appearances, and Scarlett determines that she will go home to Tara to regroup. "After all, tomorrow is another day," Scarlett emphatically declares (1037), and the novel abruptly ends with only a partial resolution. Although only some scholars have examined Scarlett's relationships with Ellen and Melanie, and Scarlett's rise as a successful woman in a time when women generally did not succeed, all scholars who have examined this novel have formed some opinion about the novel's conclusion. Surprisingly enough, most of them ultimately contend that the ending, despite the optimism and confidence in Scarlett's delivery of her final line, portends Scarlett's ultimate doom.

Of those scholars who do predict a bright future for Scarlett, none of them address the arguments of other critics who predict Scarlett's demise, and most ignore certain aspects of the novel that might undermine their arguments. Helen Irvin suggests that Scarlett will triumph, noting that the novel "is open-ended, hinting at a last chance after bitter losses" (67), but her overall argument centers around a conception that Scarlett figuratively (and at times, almost literally) gains her strength from Tara because, Irvin perceives, of the elements of ancient earth goddess myths in Mitchell's novel. Although Adams first posits that Mitchell punishes Scarlett and gives her a "sad ending" for holding onto her nostalgic fantasy of Ashley (66), she goes on to suggest that even though the novel's title suggests nostalgia, the final line is more indicative of

the spirit of the novel and predictive of future hope for Scarlett in the wake of her initial tragedy (68). However, regarding the novel's conclusion, she does little more than restate Scarlett's final line and note that it implies that Scarlett is not doomed after all. Entzminger notes that because Scarlett ultimately survives, "Mitchell seems to say that . . . the old way of life has ended, and those who cling to it become the victims of those smart enough and unscrupulous enough to manipulate the codes of the past" (114), but she does not directly engage with the novel's conclusion or the significant portion between Scarlett's financial success and the end in which Scarlett finds her success hollow.

Of the many critics who view Scarlett's future as grim (or, at least, ambiguous), there are a variety of interpretations as to exactly how and why the ending portends ultimate failure for Scarlett. Robert Drake asserts that Scarlett "is now deliberately choosing to return to Tara and the life of tradition which she has loved all along, unconsciously, in Tara" (192). He adds that "In that context she will find solace and perhaps even some remedy for her griefs" (192), but such an implication, that Scarlett abandons her prosperous upward trajectory toward progress to return to a life in which she abides by the societal codes of aristocratic southerners, still portends doom to any feminist who admires Scarlett's entrepreneurial spirit. Henry Steele Commager, too, asserts that although Scarlett has "lost everything" except for Tara, which he describes as a "symbol of what she might have been and might still be" (16); this interpretation, too, implies that the end portends a future in which Scarlett returns to the veritable bondage of traditional southern womanhood by still having the potential for a future in which she finally becomes the "great lady" Ellen always wanted her to be. Also, Goodwyn-Jones finally asserts that Scarlett is "doomed to failure" because she eventually "return[s] to the 'old days' at Tara" (349); she further concludes that "If there is a winner in *Gone with the Wind*, it is the 'old days'" (349).



James Boatwright expresses frustration at the novel's conclusion, noting that it turns out that Scarlett is not "bad, irresponsible, selfish, free" (in a way that Boatwright clearly admires) but instead is "going through a *phase*" (216, emphasis his); he, too, contends that the conclusion implies Scarlett's return to tradition and decries this conclusion because at the end Mitchell's audience "is comforted, assured of the rightness of its ideas of safety and propriety, secure in a cozy domestic scene that has blanked out the potentialities of tragedy" (217). He does assert that Rhett and Scarlett will reunite, but the implication of Boatwright's argument is that this implied ending is indicative of Mitchell's failure to write a realistic ending in which those mavericks, Scarlett and Rhett, truly separate because they have grown apart and instead that she delivers an ostensibly open ending that implies a trite and unnatural happy reunion.

Rubin also dislikes Mitchell's ending, but for very different reasons. Building upon his argument, in which he asserts that Mitchell's injection of nostalgia into Scarlett's later scenes is artificial and goes against the grain of the novel's natural trajectory, Rubin asserts that "The result is that she gave us a novel with a very modern heroine in lace and crinoline, whom she felt she had to punish for her emancipated attitudes by taking her lover away" (102). Similarly, Schefski asserts that Scarlett's business success drives Rhett away, concluding that "The price of Scarlett's independence and full development . . . is the loss of her man" (234).

While Hanson does not foresee a return to tradition for Scarlett, she does not believe that Scarlett has or ever will truly develop. She asserts that Scarlett "*is* a hurt child who has never grown up" and that her "journey to self-respect leads to extraordinary loneliness, seemingly out of her own cruel badness" (61). Hanson further contends that although Scarlett does realize who she truly cares for in the end, "Whatever temporary self-reflection Scarlett has experienced, the novel clearly concludes focusing on her characteristic struggle for power rather than her

uncharacteristic desire for self-awareness” (65); in other words, the final pages of the novel imply that Scarlett’s final transformation is impermanent.

Gelfant contends that four potential endings rapidly succeed one another in the final chapters of the novel. The first and second endings are ostensibly happy, the first because Scarlett discovers she can finally have Ashley, the second because, although Scarlett has discovered she no longer wants Ashley, she subsequently realizes her love for Rhett and goes home to reconcile with him. The third, according to Gelfant, happens when Rhett rejects Scarlett and walks out on her; she notes that “This ending is modern and tough, recognizing that love will judge selfishness and insensitivity, and that time will wear away love.” The fourth and final ending, in which Scarlett decides to return to Tara to plot her reconciliation with Rhett, Gelfant argues, “gives an impression of decisiveness through Scarlett’s single-minded determination to get Rhett back, but actually, it is profoundly ambiguous, describing a child’s regressive longing for home and mother that resonates to longings for death” (“*Gone*” 12-14).

Pyron provides evidence that strongly suggests that Mitchell originally ended the novel not with Scarlett’s famous “After all, tomorrow is another day” (*GWTW* 1037) but with Rhett’s equally famous “My dear, I don’t give a damn” (*GWTW* 1035). He contends that the original ending was better because “that the heroine has finally grown, developed, and changed positively in the ultimate crisis.” The addition of “the coda,” as Pyron refers to the final page and a half of *GWTW* in its published form, Pyron argues, “undermines the otherwise powerful and dominant impression in the last chapter” because it “denies the growth” that Scarlett has just undergone; “Scarlett reverts to the old, failed tactics. She ‘summons up her old charm,’ now unnaturally, and avoids the present pain in her traditional way, by escaping to the future,” Pyron concludes,

ultimately predicting that once back at Tara, Scarlett “will plot as of old to catch her man, just as in yesteryear she schemed for Ashley” (313-314).

Haskell agrees with Pyron that the final page and a half marks Scarlett’s regression but, unlike Pyron, she celebrates this ending. She contends that the ending “is precisely what’s singular and uncompromising about Mitchell’s vision: there is no eleventh-hour epiphany, none of that conventional change of heart so beloved of second-rate dramaturgy. Scarlett, unchanged and unchanging, lives in an eternal present. Remorse and regret, anything connected to the past, is emotional baggage that must be shrugged off, as she invokes the denial that allows her to forge ahead” (140-141).

Fiedler concerns himself with what will happen to Scarlett once she arrives at Tara, concluding that although most of her prior supporters have died or abandoned her, Mammy will be there as her pillar of strength. Miner’s final arguments about the novel involve a partial rebuttal of Fiedler’s argument. Miner contends that Mitchell parallels the scenes surrounding Ellen’s death with the scenes surrounding that of Melanie, but “at an accelerated speed.” She notes that both scene clusters involve the final stages of pregnancy for Melanie, although while Melanie and her child narrowly survive the first round, they are not so fortunate in the second; she also points out that Scarlett wishes for Melanie to die during her first pregnancy and ironically prays that she might live through the second, and both times Scarlett’s wishes go ungranted. She also notes that Scarlett is away from the deathbed in both scenes and must hastily return in an attempt to see each mother figure one last time; in the final scenes of the novel, Scarlett does get to see Melanie before she dies, unlike the scenes surrounding Ellen’s death in which Scarlett arrives a day too late. Miner even notices that Scarlett calls upon two men for aid in both scene clusters (in the first cluster, she calls upon Dr. Meade and Rhett; in the

second, she calls upon Ashley and Rhett), and that both times both men fail Scarlett. Miner further contends that the sense of *déjà vu* is heightened when Scarlett lives out her recurring nightmare of running in terror through a thick fog as she hastens home to Rhett; the fact that Scarlett chooses to go home (this time to her home with Rhett in Atlanta instead of Tara) represents yet another parallel. Miner concludes that “While Scarlett must accept the fact of Rhett’s departure, she cannot accept the fact of disconnection: disappointed by Rhett, Scarlett will return, once again, to maternal origins,” discerning one last parallel in the final page and a half because Scarlett determines not merely to return to Tara but specifically to Mammy’s mothering embrace. Miner, unlike Fiedler, predicts that Scarlett’s union with Mammy will prove disappointing because, in that first scene cluster, Scarlett discovers Mammy to be incapable of providing comfort following Ellen’s death. Like several of the above scholars, Miner, too, denies that Scarlett has truly changed, instead describing her as an “ever-unsatisfied child” who experiences little more than a “childish feeling of guilt” at Melanie’s death and that instead of discovering adult feelings of romantic love for Rhett, Scarlett feels “Sure, as the small child is sure, that love is to be given on demand” and “insists that Rhett open his arms to her, offer a breast on which she may lay her head” (27-30).

For my part, I have two points that I wish to address regarding the novel’s close: First, I address the lack of resolution (at least, within the confines of the novel) in Scarlett’s relationships with her real mother and her substitute mother figure. Then, I address the various scholarly contentions regarding the implications of the open ending for Scarlett and provide my own arguments for those implications.

Although in Melanie’s final hour Scarlett does realize that “Melly is the only woman friend I ever had . . . the only woman except Mother who really loved me. She’s like mother,

too” (1012)—that is, Scarlett finally admits the similarities between Melanie and Ellen even as she admits to herself how much she loves Melanie—Scarlett does not return to her recurring thoughts about how she has never measured up to Ellen’s standards for ladyhood. I believe that such an omission is deliberate on Mitchell’s part because although Scarlett little resembles either of her mother figures, she has grown into a new and different type of woman, one who can succeed in the world of business and who has nobly saved her family and other various loved ones from poverty and ruin, even if her methods have not always been the most morally upright. Returning to Felski one final time, I note that the lack of resolution regarding Scarlett’s evaluation of herself in relation to her mother at the end of the novel reflects the fact Ellen has died before Scarlett can properly evaluate herself in comparison to her living actions. (Because Melanie is, after all, a substitute mother figure and a peer, Scarlett does not perceive the same necessity to define herself in comparison to Melanie.) Scarlett never has the chance to see Ellen as a woman independent of her identity as a mother (and hence to temper her view of Ellen as a Madonna-like figure with knowledge of her mother as an adult woman with foibles and thwarted desires). I also subsequently note that Scarlett does not live the feminist fantasy of self-in-relation with her mother (with the exception of privileging duty over affection in relating to those she protects) or with Melanie but instead lives what Felski describes as a more realistic alienation from these mother figures—because she lives through far different circumstances than had Ellen, she inevitably becomes a different type of woman, and it is only because of Scarlett’s endeavors to support Melanie that Melanie can survive (until the novel’s close) to carry on Ellen’s legacy without starving or potentially being forced to breach her code of ethics to ensure her and her family’s survival (although the latter hypothetical scenario admittedly seems

unthinkable for Melanie). This argument establishes that the novel's conclusion does not portend a return to tradition for Scarlett, even though she decides to go back to Tara to regroup.

As I also mentioned above, Felski argues that daughters grow up when they leave home to forge their own identities; although Scarlett intends to return home to Tara at the end of the novel (for now, at least; how long she plans to stay there is certainly never determined), I think it is safe at this point to emphatically state that Scarlett has grown up considerably when she twice left Tara for Atlanta at earlier points in the novel, particularly the second time when she marries Frank and subsequently establishes herself as a businesswoman, but also even the first time when she defies societal conventions by breaking out of the stifling confines prescribed for widows. In other words, Scarlett grows a little bit more from child to adult each time she leaves Ellen and Tara to go to Atlanta, and she actually undergoes a significant transformation out of necessity following Ellen's death. Her second transformation occurs following Melanie's death.

Although several scholars contend that in the end Scarlett either does not transform at all or that she immediately regresses from her transformation, I believe that the final chapters of *GWTW* mark the final stage of Scarlett's transformation from child to adult. In his attempt to prove that Mitchell did not intend the ending of *GWTW* to be happy—that, in fact, Mitchell intended to close with Rhett's departure and imply a future in which Scarlett must learn to live without him—Pyron cites an excerpt from a letter Mitchell sent to the editors at Macmillan in response to their request that she alter the ending. In it, she says that “My intention when I wrote it was to leave the ending open to the reader. . . . My idea was that, through several million chapters, the reader will have learned that Pansy and Rhett are tough characters, both accustomed to have their own way. And at the last, both are determined to have their own ways and those ways are very far apart. And the reader can either decide that she got him or she didn't. . . . I'll

change it any way you want, except to make a happy ending” (313). While Pyron claims that it is obvious that Mitchell definitively did not want the ending to be that of a romance (and, subsequently, that she rather intended the ending to be unsettled for Scarlett), I view this letter as Mitchell’s declaration that the original ending was open and that although she was willing to alter it (as, of course, she did) she intended to still leave it open. Hence, I do not believe that this letter definitively implies that Mitchell intended for the ending to be read as an unhappy one for Scarlett. Indeed, if one imagines that the novel in its final form does conclude at Rhett’s final words, it can be discovered that even this ending is still ambiguous and open, despite Pyron’s insistence at its finality: Rhett promises to return from time to time to keep up appearances, and although he states his intention to return to Charleston and attempt to live a life of “respectability,” he tempers this plan by adding that “I never intend to change my spots,” adding that he merely “want[s] the outer semblance” of a traditional life (1034). To me, these statements seem to imply that Rhett could potentially tire of such a life after some time and move on to new adventures, whether those adventures may include Scarlett or not. After all, Rhett has endured great losses, too, including not only Melanie and his child with Scarlett, but also Scarlett herself—like Scarlett, Rhett needs time to reassess his life before moving on to the next phase.

Also, I believe that while Miner does an excellent job in discerning parallels between the final scenes of the novel and those scenes surrounding Ellen’s death, she misses a couple of key points. First, both Ellen and Melanie’s deaths force Scarlett to grow. Mitchell habitually kills off characters throughout the novel when they have outgrown their usefulness to Scarlett. She dispatches Charles and Frank as soon as they have served their respective purposes for Scarlett, and she also kills Ellen and Melanie when Scarlett no longer needs them, that is, when Scarlett must leave the maternal havens they provide in order to develop stage by stage into an adult.

When Ellen dies, Scarlett becomes a survivor and learns to provide for not only herself but for her many dependents; when Melanie dies, Scarlett finally develops a nascent capacity for empathy. Throughout the novel Scarlett's greatest flaw is repeatedly described as her lack of capacity for understanding others; as Grandma Fontaine succinctly puts it, Scarlett is not "a speck smart about folks" (719). However, at the close of the novel Scarlett has three revelations in a row: She discovers her true feelings about Melanie, Ashley, and Rhett, finally sees them clearly, and understands all three for the first time.

Although Miner claims that Scarlett continues to need and seek out a mother figure, Scarlett almost immediately transcends such a need (again, at a much more rapid pace than in the scenes surrounding Ellen's death) after Melanie has died. Right after Scarlett leaves Melanie's deathbed, she thinks despairingly of how she needs Melanie and feels "her courage and self-confidence ooze from her" (1012). However, when she realizes that not only does she no longer care for Ashley but that Melanie's death will destroy him (just as Ellen's death destroyed Gerald), Scarlett almost instantaneously rallies, noting that she "can stand" Melanie's death, that she "can stand anything," in fact (1015). These statements imply that Scarlett, as she always has before, will recover. After all, Scarlett goes on to tell Ashley that "We shall manage—somehow" (1015).

The second parallel that Miner does not point out involves the nature of Scarlett's transformation: As I mentioned earlier, Scarlett initially transforms into a survivor the night that she arrives at Tara to discover that Ellen has died, but she backslides a little before the transformation takes full effect. Although several scholars have contended that the final page and a half of the novel imply Scarlett's regression, I believe that Scarlett must return to Tara and mull things over before her second transformation into a fully realized adult who is capable of



empathy can solidify. As Miner has pointed out, Scarlett does express a desire to seek the comfort of Mammy's presence at Tara; I also concur that Mammy will likely fail Scarlett as she failed her before after Ellen's death. Although Mammy eventually rallies somewhat as the shock of Ellen's death fades, Mammy has now endured a second significant death, that of Bonnie (in fact, Mitchell implies that Mammy has returned to Tara ahead of Scarlett, in the last scene before readers learn of Melanie's imminent demise, because of the impact of this death), and will likely be further stunned by the news of Melanie's death. However, further observing the parallels between the scenes surrounding Ellen's death and those that conclude the novel, it follows that just as Scarlett endured Mammy's failure to sustain her the first time she will be able to endure it a second time, just as she has already dimly realized that she will be able to endure Melanie's death. In fact, Mammy's failure to step forward as a pillar of strength in that first cluster of scenes helps solidify Scarlett's realization that she must take over as the head of the household at Tara with no one to lean on; I believe that the parallelism implies that Mammy's future failure to sustain Scarlett following the conclusion of the novel will actually help solidify Scarlett's second transformation into an empathetic woman.

Scarlett's transformation, I believe, will be a lasting one as the end of the novel portends her survival. I would further contend that, just as Scarlett initially survives and later thrives following Ellen's death, to extend the parallelism between Ellen's death scene and that of Melanie, the ending actually portends that Scarlett will again evolve from a mere survivalist into a woman who thrives in whatever new endeavors she decides to undertake. Although she determines to return to Tara in the immediate future, as I have implied already, this does not mean that she will stay there. After all, Martyn Bone argues that the ending actually suggests that "even now Scarlett will not remain at Tara—not only because she wants Rhett back, but also

because she must return to Atlanta to make the money that maintains Tara” (146). Although, through her marriage to Rhett, Scarlett is ostensibly now so wealthy that she does not technically have to work to make money to sustain Tara, Rhett never definitively states that he will financially maintain Scarlett; besides, now that Melanie’s death has destroyed Ashley (and again, in parallel, this destruction will likely be as permanent as Gerald’s destruction following Ellen’s death), it seems likely that Scarlett would return to Atlanta to help him run the mills, something that she would enjoy immensely at any rate. This will ensure that Scarlett will be in town for Rhett’s promised visits. Regarding her relationship with Rhett, it is possible that once Rhett realizes that Scarlett has truly changed, he might take her back. However, it is equally possible that once at Tara following the conclusion of the novel, Scarlett might come to the realization that she does not need Rhett, or any man, in her life to be happy. Either way, the ending of the novel does not suggest that Scarlett will forever languish in agony because Rhett is gone forever. Whatever happens, Scarlett will flourish once more.

*Conclusion: From Scarlett O’Hara Back to Margaret Mitchell*

It remains to be determined what Mitchell’s own intentions may have been and how *GWTW* reflects her life, or at least the portion of her life before the novel’s publication. While Hanson notes that “the creation of ‘Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*’” represents Mitchell’s efforts to redefine herself following the publication of her novel, there is evidence to suggest that Mitchell may have had her future persona in mind during the composition of her novel. After Goodwyn-Jones declares that Mitchell concludes her novel by allowing “the good old days” to prevail, she speculates that “Perhaps that is the price Mitchell felt she had to pay to

stay in the South” (349); while I disagree with Goodwyn-Jones’s evaluation of the conclusion of *GWTW*, I concur that Mitchell crafted certain aspects of her novel so that she could maintain the reputation she wanted if and when it was published.

First, with regard to the parallels between Mitchell and her female family members and the characters in Mitchell’s novel, it seems possible that Mitchell inserted the outward, more superficial, resemblances between Eleanor and Ellen and between Annie and Scarlett into the novel to serve as a smokescreen to shield the deeper resemblance between Scarlett and Mitchell’s relationships with their respective mothers. Mitchell first tried to work on a novel in a contemporary setting that featured a character with the same name as Scarlett’s original name and abandoned it for a period piece (Pyron 214); perhaps she did so in part because she did not wish for parallels between her characters and herself and her mother to be so obvious to future readers. This theory does make sense, for Mitchell could publicly deny the more obvious parallels between her grandmother and great-grandmother and two of her central characters, making it more difficult for anyone to suggest the less apparent parallels between those same characters and herself and her mother.

It is understandable why Mitchell would not want anyone to note those deeper parallels that reflected a deeply painful and personal memory by recreating it in her fictional world. Although it is impossible to determine with certainty why Mitchell chose to recreate a version of her relationship with her mother in her novel, it is clear that Mitchell was unwilling to openly criticize Maybelle. In fictional form, Mitchell could vent her lifelong frustration at the burden of living under her dead mother’s expectations without fearing censure. Pyron argues that Mitchell was inspired to write the novel in the first place because she felt that it was her special burden to “[fulfill] her mother’s wishes” (282) to become a success.

What, then, can be made of Melanie's function as a surrogate mother for Scarlett after Ellen's death? Although, as I have already noted, some scholars have noted parallels between Melanie and Mitchell herself, I still find such parallels uneasy at best. And no scholar has been able to identify another woman in Mitchell's life who even remotely resembles a real-life version of Melanie. As I noted in Chapter Three, one of the major differences between Melanie and Ellen is that Melanie unconditionally approves of everything Scarlett does, while Ellen often criticizes Scarlett's behavior when Scarlett deviates from her mother's code of ladyhood. Perhaps, in creating such an utterly supportive, loving female figure to function as a substitute mother to Scarlett after Ellen's death, Mitchell engaged in wish fulfillment through her fiction to satisfy her own longing for a mother figure who would appreciate her for who she was in contrast to the demands of her real and absent mother. Or, if we entertain for a moment the notion of Melanie and Scarlett representing the two sides of Mitchell, perhaps Melanie is a recreation of Mitchell's efforts to mother herself after Maybelle's death, to take care of herself and feel good about her life decisions in contrast to the guilt she may well have felt at feeling herself a failure at living up to Maybelle's expectations.

Of Mitchell's intentions regarding the ambiguous ending of the novel, Goodwyn-Jones asserts that "Mitchell was asked for years, by telephone, telegram, letter, and in person. She replied, consistently, that she did not know. The fact that she had ten years to decide—or to find out—indicates that Mitchell fully intended to leave the question moot" (334). Perhaps this contention is true, but I wonder if Mitchell rather knew exactly what she wanted the end of her novel to portend and merely intended never to reveal her true thoughts about its conclusion. My question is, if my interpretation is not only correct but actually reflects Mitchell's intentions, why did she determine to conclude the novel on such an ambiguous note?

Although, as I have noted many times already, Mitchell often publicly denounced Scarlett and was at best ambivalent toward her central character, I have also pointed out that nothing that Mitchell said in her persona phase should be taken at face value. In other words, Mitchell's public claims that she disliked Scarlett and had never intended for her to be the central character should not necessarily be believed as truth. As I have demonstrated, Mitchell was a subtle feminist, and to end her novel with a definitive conclusion in which her antiheroine triumphed would have been to take a stand akin to Maybelle's outspoken feminist stands; hence, perhaps Mitchell did not want to resolve the novel in a manner in which Scarlett definitively triumphed. This theory could serve as another potential explanation of her unwillingness to alter the novel's ending to make it definitively happy; instead of desiring to punish Scarlett, perhaps Mitchell merely did not wish to openly portend Scarlett's final triumph. As I pointed out above, Goodwyn-Jones asserts that Mitchell felt that she could not remain in the South if she concluded her novel in a manner that obviously suggested that someone like Scarlett deserved to win in the end; I would like to contend instead that she loaded the novel with suggestions, which I have delineated at the end of Chapter Three, that Scarlett would eventually prevail after the close of the novel. As Haskell points out, "the real wonder in that catalog of sins, which surely outnumber and outweigh the virtues, is how little Scarlett pays for her wickedness in the patented forms of punishment" (96-97); indeed, aside from Melanie's death and Rhett's initial leave-taking (which, of course, may very well not be permanent and, even if it is, probably will not prevent Scarlett from flourishing in the long run), Scarlett suffers relatively little. Perhaps Mitchell intended readers to discern that Scarlett does not deserve punishment and that she is such a strong person that she can survive those punishments she does incur; this theory dovetails

with my earlier contention that Mitchell deliberately planted parallels in the conclusion of *GWTW* to earlier scenes in the novel that suggest Scarlett's eventual triumph.

Of course, I could be wrong. Mitchell may have ended her novel so cryptically because she actually did want to leave it to her readers to individually determine Scarlett's fate. Helen Taylor contends that "Part of Margaret Mitchell's genius lay in writing an open, ambiguous ending to her novel that has appealed to a female reading and movie public ever since; no woman writer would wish to close down all future possibilities for the legendary Scarlett" (*"Gone"* 266); then again, Mitchell could not have foreseen her future once the composition of her novel was concluded, what new challenges would confront her, or what choices (including the composition of a sequel) she would make next. Compounding the trouble of divining Mitchell's intentions is the fact that her life itself was interrupted and went unfinished. Perhaps Mitchell herself truly did not wish to "close down" such "future possibilities"; perhaps she intentionally loaded the ending with clues that suggest a triumphant future for Scarlett. We will never know for sure, but we continue to read the novel for its mysteries and possibilities.

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