Gone with the Wind

YOUR NAME HERE

English 101

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DATE

In reading the novel Gone with the Wind, one is swept away into a long-lost and beautiful world—a world swetly and carefully painted—and then observes the destrction and loss of that world, never to return. Published in 1936 by Margaret Mitchell, the book was an instant runaway success, which lead to one of the greatest and highest grossing movies of all time. There is no question that this historic romance, dubbed “the greatest love story of all time,” holds a place in classic literature, as well as in the hearts of those who have read and cherished it.

The book begins in April of 1861, the day before the Civil War is declared. In just a few short chapters, Mitchell paints an ethereal picture of the South before the war tore it to shreds—of “lazy days and wrm still country twilights! The high soft laughter from the quarters! The golden warmth life had then and the comforting knowledge of all the tomorrows would bring!” (pg. 856) The reader is taken on the journey of Scarlett O’Hara—a selfish, willful, obstinate, fascinating belle of the South who goes from the high rank of a wealthy planter’s daughter, to abject poverty, and then back to extreme wealth—all over the course of only ten years. We go with Scarlett through three marriages—once for spite, once for money, and one—as Rhett Butler put it himself, “for the fun of it”(p.774). We watch with frustration as she “throws away happiness with both hands,” so obessed is she with her childhood friend, Ashley Wilkes, who is married and completely out of grasp—both physically and mentally.

Gone with the Wind is a timeless classic with everything—love, war, death, devastation, desire, and loss It’s a study of a lost society—the strong, who are willing to change come through alright, and the weak, which refuse to change and are eventually “winnowed out.” As Rhett explains, “Whenever the world up-ends, his [Ashley’s] kind is the first to perish. They don’t deserve to survive because they won’t fight—don’t know how to fight…Everyone loses everything and everyone is equal. And then they all start again at taw, with…nothing except the cunning of their brains and the strength of their hands…but there are always a hardy few who come through and given time, they are right back where they were before the world turned over.” (p.719)

Scarlett bears three children, starts her own business, and breaks down moral walls one by one. She suffers through the siege of Atlanta, the hell of war, the devastasion of her childhood home, and the frustration of Reconstruction. Many of the “quality folks” of the South cling to their poverty, their dignity, and their old ways—unwilling to change, to bend, to accept. But Scarlett, unhampered by respect and honor for “the Cause” refuses to live in poverty. She cannot help but change. Ruthlessly she takes what she wants, stepping on whomever she needs to get it. She is cruel, selfish, manipulating and merciless. And yet—despite her dark qualities, she is also determined, strong, capable, and terrified. She is a woman born to frankness in a world where women are expected to be soft and docile. “The green eyes in the carefully sweet face were turbulent, willful, lusty with life, distinctly at variance with her decorous demeanor.” (p.25). You cannot help but admire her spirit, her absolute refusal to be beaten, her courage and her complete confusion as to why society cannot accept her behavior or appreciate her success.

Scarlett’s willful blindness overcomes her in the end—she loses everything, just after a life-altering realization that helps her really see what she wants and loves for the first time. Just when it comes into focus and what truly is important is suddenly clear, it is snatched from her. This, to most people, would be devastating and debilhitating. And Scarlett is overwhelmed with the loss—but her spirit, as always, comes through as she looks with tear-filled eyes and tells herself, “Tomorrow is another day,” telling the reader—in this, she will not be beaten. This too, she will overcome. And, for those who love and understand her character, there is great confidence that she will.