Scarlett O'Hara as a turning point in the understanding of women

Dimšić, Mia

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Mia Dimšić

Scarlett O'Hara as a Turning Point in the Understanding of Women

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

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Abstract

This paper deals with how and why Scarlett O'Hara from Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* became one of the major examples of female independence in literature. The aim is to prove that this character represents a turning point in the understanding of women in literature by focusing on five different aspects of her personality and life circumstances that were decisive for shaping it as such. Firstly this paper analyzes Scarlett's interactions with both men and women who surrounded her and the ways they influenced her. Secondly, it highlights her two dominant identities, the French roots of her mother and the Irish roots of her father, and how these shaped and motivated her throughout the novel. Finally, it deals with her conflict with tradition. The investigation shows that all of the above mentioned aspects make Scarlett a turning point in the understanding of women in literature.

Keywords: Scarlett O'Hara, Southern belle, tradition, subordination, feminism

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Introduction

Scarlett O'Hara is the main protagonist of Margaret Mitchell's best seller *Gone with the Wind*. In many ways, she is an unusual female figure and this paper aims to shed light on the new aspects she introduces to the world of literature and how these make her a turning point in the understanding of women.

The focus of the first section will be on the crucial aspects that shaped Scarlett's identity and personality, particularly the way she grew up, her education, her heritage and the life circumstances that were decisive for the path she took. Emphasis will be placed on Scarlett throughout her teenage and early adult years preceding and following the Civil War, on her interactions with both the women and men she encountered and, perhaps most importantly, on the merging of the two identities she constantly failed to unite. The first was her mother's ladylike and elegant French appearance combined with the influence of Melanie Wilkes, who resembled Scarlett's mother and whose relationship with Scarlett will also be analyzed. The second and more dominant identity that directs Scarlett's life and decisions is her father's Irish impulsiveness and patriotic obsession. To sum up, this thesis will demonstrate which factors made Scarlett become a new independent woman in literature and a turning point in understanding of women in general.

1. Scarlett as Opposed to Other Female Characters from *Gone with the Wind*

From the very beginning of the novel, one can easily notice that Scarlett O'Hara has very little interest in other women and their way of life, except when trying to think of ways to attract the attention of other men. She could never get along with them because her way of thinking was so different from theirs, and the following paragraphs prove that this lack of friendship made Scarlett grow as an independent individual.

Other Southern belles certainly returned this feeling of irritation and malevolence, for Scarlett was usually the one who took all of their men for herself:

> She paused in the hall to speak to friends and to greet India who was emerging from the back of the house, her hair untidy and tiny beads of perspiration on her forehead. Poor India! It would be bad enough to have pale hair and eyelashes and a jutting chin that meant a stubborn disposition, without being twenty years old and an old maid in the bargain. She wondered if India resented very much her taking Stuart away from her. Lots of people said she was still in love with him, but then you could never tell what a Wilkes was thinking about. (Mitchell 81)

This alienation and contempt continues throughout Scarlett's adolescent years, and even later on, as the ladies of her society grow older, they still cannot forgive Scarlett for acting badly in the past, as was demonstrated by India at the night of Frank Kennedy's death:

> You make me sick, Scarlett O'Hara, talking about being protected! You don't care about being protected! If you did you'd never have exposed yourself as you have done all these months, prissing yourself about this town, showing yourself off to strange men, hoping they'll admire you! What happened to you this afternoon was just what you deserved and if there was any justice you'd have gotten worse. (Mitchell 673)

The fact that Scarlett could not get along well with her female companions is no wonder if one considers she was “a pretty, selfish, willful girl of sixteen with an irrepressible vitality and a disdain for certain feminine conventions” (Morton 53). Since the plot of *Gone with the Wind* revolves around the changes the Civil War brought to the South, Mitchell equipped her heroine with contempt towards other women for a reason: other young girls could not bear the hardships the war brought on, for they were used to accepting the things society gave them with no complaint. Scarlett, on the other hand, possesses a rare powerful attitude which made her misunderstood and different: “Ultimately, Scarlett does pay the price for her independent nature – loneliness. She feels different from other women and other Southerners” (Spanbauer 7).

Through this loneliness and alienation, Scarlett grew as a person because she was forced to find her inner strength and stay true to herself no matter what. In this sense, her disagreement and lack of interaction with other women serve to mark her as a unique personality and strong woman independent of other people and societal norms.

2. Scarlett and Men

From the earliest days of Scarlett's life, she got used to being around men and demonstrating her power over them. It largely reflected on her character and preferences later on. The beginning of the novel, situated in the prewar, quiet and elegant South, is thus focused on the description and upbringing of Scarlett's ladylike behavior which was decisive for her role of the most desirable Southern belle. Mitchell starts the novel with a very appropriate description of her: "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it once they were caught up in her charm" (Mitchell 2).

Furthermore, at the very beginning of the plot the reader can find out just how stubborn and vivacious Scarlett is when observing how she behaves towards the Tarleton twins, her greatest admirers. She joyfully accepts all of their adventurous stories which are not at all appropriate for a young lady, and encourages them in doing the things they like. Unlike any well-educated lady, she recoils from books or any kind of cultural knowledge:

> They had just been expelled from the university of Georgia, the fourth university that had thrown them out in two years: and their older brothers, Tom and Boyd, had come home with them, because they refused to remain at an institution that where the twins were not welcome. Stuart and Brent considered their latest expulsion a fine joke, and Scarlett, who had not willingly opened a book since leaving the Fayetteville Female Academy the year before, thought it just as amusing as they did. (Mitchell 3)

It is very interesting to note that parents in the prewar Southern world in which Scarlett grew up paid a lot of attention to raising their girls properly and providing them with numerous information about how to behave: "A young lady's preparation for womanhood began as she was a child. Under the tutelage of her mother and a collection of aunts, older sisters, neighbors, and friends, girls were educated on their place within the family and the

complex web of social relations" (Roberts 20). This is visible in numerous situations throughout the novel, the most ridiculous one being the moment when Scarlett was made to eat at home before going to the barbecue at Twelve Oaks, since her eating too much at the barbecue will be seen as inappropriate for a young lady:

> Scarlett obediently sat down before the tray, wondering if she would be able to get any food into her stomache and still have the room to breathe. Mammy plucked a large towel from the washstand and carefully tied it around Scarlett's neck, spreading the white folds over her lap. Scarlett began on her ham, because she liked ham, and forced it down. (Mitchell 66)

All of these rules and restrictions imposed on young Southern girls were there to get them married, and to make them respect their husbands and fathers and look up to them while embracing their subordinated position: "They were bound to respect the head of household, whose position as master, husband and father reinforced his power and authority …. Ideally, wives, children and slaves sacrificed their independence and obeyed the head of household. For this, they received protection" (Roberts 20).

As a result of this treatment, Scarlett openly shows her dissatisfaction and thinks that marriage is just an easy way out, a solution to all of the norms she must conform to as a young girl in need of a husband. This is why she becomes a woman who only pursues useful or rich men, apart from Ashley Wilkes, who was her only true romantic interest. Namely, Scarlett is described as a girl who can manipulate almost any man she wants. More precisely, any man apart from Ashley Wilkes who remains her priority till the last chapter. By denying his love for her, Ashley became something different in Scarlett's life, the one thing she couldn't possess right away. As soon as her father guesses her feelings, he advises her not to daydream about men who are so different from her:

> I said nothing against the lad, for I like him. And when I say queer, it's not crazy I'm meaning. He's not queer like the Calverts who'd gamble everything they have on a horse, or the Tarletons who turn out a drunkard or two in every litter, or the Fontaines who are hot-headed little brutes … But he's queer in other ways and there's no understanding him at all. I like him, but it's neither heads nor tails I can make of most he says. Now, Puss, tell me true, do you understand his folderol about books and poetry and music and oil paintings and such foolishness? (Mitchell 30)

In order to make Ashley jealous and hurt him because he chose Melanie Wilkes over her, Scarlett seduces Charles Hamilton, a gullible and shy young man with whom she has her first child, Wade Hamilton. Charles dies shortly after going to war, leaving Scarlett furious and unhappy about having to be in mourning. One can notice her continual resistance and contempt towards tradition and its rules. Unlike other women in the old South who sincerely mourned their husbands and found piece in silence and solitude, Scarlett admits to herself that she is not at all sad. Her feelings are so centered upon herself and her own life conditions that she hardly notices her orphan child or commiserates with Charles' family:

> Marriage was bad enough, but to be widowed – oh, then life was over forever! How stupid people were when they talked about what a comfort little Wade must be to her now that Charles was gone. How stupid of them to say that now she had something to live for! Everyone talked about how sweet it was that she had this posthumous token of her love and she naturally did not disabuse their minds. But that thought was farthest from her mind. She had very little interest in Wade and sometimes it was very difficult to remember that he was actually hers. (Mitchell 112)

The marriage with Charles Hamilton is not the only encounter with a man in which Scarlett demonstrated just how self-centered and determined she is. For her, marriage always meant a step towards stability and something that needs to be done. Her second husband, Frank

Kennedy, was an old, unattractive but a warm-hearted man who was initially engaged to Scarlett's sister Suellen. By seducing him, Scarlett showed the lack of basic moral values and acted in order to get his wealth and put her plantation Tara back on its feet: "That he was Suellen's fiancé caused her no qualm of conscience. After the complete moral collapse which had sent her to Atlanta and to Rhett, the appropriation of her sister's betrothed seemed a minor affair and one not to be bothered with at this time" (Mitchell 501).

Even after her second husband dies trying to revenge her, Scarlett does not feel a substantial amount of remorse or guilt. She nevertheless evolves as a person up to this point, but this process is yet to be emphasized as she marries for the third time. In this sense, Rhett Butler is the character created by Mitchell so as to mark a significant change in Scarlett's life and way of thinking. He was the one person in her life who did not expect her to lie and pretend:

> She raised tormented eyes to his face and somehow found comfort in the blank inscrutability she saw there. She did not know why this should be, for he was such an unpredictable, callous person. Perhaps it was because, as he often said, they were so much alike. Sometimes she thought that all the people she had ever known were strangers except Rhett. (Mitchell 701)

Even though he knew she was in love with Ashley Wilkes since his first encounter with Scarlett when he overheard her declaring her love and devotion, Rhett never gave up on the idea of them loving each other passionately. He liked Scarlett because, unlike all other women he knew, she was never afraid to be true to herself and ignore what everyone else was thinking. On numerous occasions throughout her life path Rhett proved to be there for her unconditionally. By agreeing to marry him, Scarlett breaks yet another traditional rule:

> Until Rhett was back in Atlanta and the ring on her finger she told no one, not even her family, or her intentions, and when she did announce her engagement a storm of bitter

> gossip broke out. Since the Klan affair Rhett and Scarlett had been, with the exception of the Yankees and Carpetbaggers, the town's most unpopular citizens. (Mitchell 714)

Although most of the moments between Rhett and Scarlett served to refine her character and emotions, some of them also reinforced Scarlett as a sexual human being. The specific thing about Scarlett's relationship with men was the fact she never enjoyed having sexual intercourse with them: she thought of sex as being a tiresome process in which women participate merely in order to please men, bringing them a bunch of children and problems.

By not allowing Scarlett to experience real and pure pleasure during sexual intercourse, Mitchell put her in a typical pattern of female subordination in order to express critique towards it. Nevertheless, after Rhett and Scarlett fight over Ashley, Rhett exerts power over her and Scarlett feels magnificent for the first time:

> He was muttering things she did not hear, his lips were evoking feelings never felt before. She was darkness and he was darkness and there had never been anything before this time, only darkness and his lips upon her. She tried to speak and his mouth was over hers again. Suddenly she had a wild thrill such as she had never known: joy, fear, madness, excitement, surrender to arms that were too strong, lips too bruising, fate that moved too fast. For the first time in her life she met someone, something stronger than she, someone she could neither bully nor break, someone who was bullying and breaking her. (Mitchell 800)

This scene became quite controversial, for it serves as direct proof that Scarlett did find pleasure in sexual intercourse after all. It goes to show that Rhett was something special in her life, the only man who could seduce her and make her feel passionate and alive. Since this idea doesn't get along with the Southern image of women holding things in and not experiencing pleasure, "Scarlett struggles against the cultural expectation that a lady must not

express passion or intelligence, and instead should allow men to feel superior" (Spanbauer 10).

By allowing Scarlett to experience pure physical pleasure, Mitchell made her stand out once more. She was not to satisfy herself with the average, plain life her female friends were leading, for all about her was real and passionate. In this sense, Rhett served as an important factor and inspiration that moved her and made her take risks, instead of oppressing and dominating her.

3. Scarlett as Influenced by Her Mother and Melanie Wilkes

One of the first things we find out about Scarlett, after seeing her on the porch of Tara as a sixteen-year-old, is the fact her mother has French roots, and is responsible for most of the ladylike influence Scarlett got in her youth. The following paragraphs will shed some light on two women that influenced Scarlett the most. These are the two true Southern ladies, Ellen O'Hara and Melanie Wilkes.

Scarlett's mother, Ellen O'Hara, represents the very virtues Scarlett continuously lacks: she is the archetype of dignity and moral, and the influence she has on Scarlett is very powerful. Secretly, Scarlett longs to be like her mother, to be able to act altruistically and conform to the needs of others. She thinks of her mother highly, equating her with prayers and holly acts:

> As always since childhood, this was, for Scarlett, a moment of adoration of Ellen, rather than the virgin. Sacrilegious though it might be, Scarlett always saw, through her closed eyes, the upturned face of Ellen and not the Blessed Virgin, as the ancient phrases were repeated. "Health of the Sick," "Seat of Wisdom," "Refuge of Sinners," "Mystical Rose" – they were beautiful because they were the attributes of Ellen. (Mitchell 59)

Ellen O'Hara was not the only female character in the literature focusing on the Antebellum South that was portrayed as a symbol of holiness. Lots of authors of that time stuck to the Victorian ideals, creating a stereotypical Southern woman by stating that "early in the century she was portrayed as a force against materialism, especially the marriage for money" (Seidel 98). Apart from that she was also to be educated, "so that her seclusion in the home would not make her a naïve victim of worldly men. And she was to be charming but virtuous, lovely but modest, for vanity could interfere with her first duty; to inspire men"

(Seidel 98). As a result, Southern women had a hard role to conform to, and Ellen was the ideal example of it.

As the result of all of the expectations her mother's greatness demanded, Scarlett learned how to be a good actress at a very early age. She conformed to the etiquettes of society she never understood, but she knew they were inevitable for her if she wanted to be admired and praised in society. She not once felt a natural need for following Ellen's footsteps, being too similar to her father and his temperament. Still, Ellen managed to shape her personality in her early years:

> At sixteen, thanks to Mammy and Ellen, she looked sweet, charming and giddy, but she was, in reality, self-willed, vain and obstinate. She had the easily stirred passions of her Irish father and nothing except the thinnest veneer of her mother's unselfish and forbearing nature. Ellen never fully realized that it was only 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. (Mitchell 49)

It is no coincidence that the only woman apart from Ellen who could make Scarlett care and judge her own acts was Melanie Wilkes. She was described as a very plain and average-looking young lady, and this was the type of woman Scarlett despised the most:

> She was a tiny, frailly built girl, who gave the appearance of a child masquerading in her mother's enormous hoop skirts – and illusion that was heightened by the shy, almost frightened look in her too large brown eyes. She had a cloud of curly dark hair which was so sternly repressed beneath its net that no vagrant tendrils escaped, and this dark mass, with its long widow's peak, accentuated the heart shape of her face. (Mitchell 84)

It seems that Melanie was another character in the novel whose outside appearance only served to conceal her true courage. Later on, her features proved to be everything but plain and boring, for she showed the kind of spirit even Scarlett would learn to appreciate. Although she did not change as directly as Scarlett, breaking all of the society's norms, Melanie also proved to be very skillful in adapting. After the Civil War, she was the most influential lady in the society, using her natural empathy and love towards people to make things better and brighter for shattered friends and relatives. Spanbauer even states that "Margaret Mitchell, who did not much care for the character she created, often made disparaging remarks about Scarlett, and claimed that she set out to write about Melanie and that Scarlett just took over the story" (3).

Bearing all of this in mind, it is no wonder that Ellen and Melanie are presented as the tokens of women's great strength and consistency. With their numerous virtues they made Scarlett realize she is bereft of many important qualities. It is also no coincidence that the two greatest epiphanies in Scarlett's life occur when Ellen and Melanie die. Without them, she realizes just how fragile she is and how much she needs their strength, but this short moment of weakness only serves to evoke even more strength in Scarlett. When she comes home from Atlanta and finds Tara robbed, Scarlett is crushed, but her only remaining strength lies in seeing Ellen and seeking comfort from her. Once she finds out about Ellen's death, she seems to be utterly lost:

> As she lay prostrate, too weak to fight off memories and worries, they rushed at her like buzzards waiting for death. No longer had she the strength to say: "I'll think of Mother and Pa and Ashley and all this ruin later – yes, later when I can stand it." She could not stand it now, but she was thinking of them whether she willed it or not. The thoughts circled and swooped above her, dived down and drove tearing claws and sharp breaks into her mind. For a timeless time, she lay still, her face in the dirt, the sun beating hotly

> upon her, remembering things and people who were dead, remembering a way of living that was gone forever – and looking upon the harsh vista of the dark future. (Mitchell 356).

Similar thoughts occur to Scarlett when Melanie dies – she realizes her love for Ashley was just a shadow of insecurity and egoism.

Surrounding Scarlett with women such as Melanie and Ellen, who are so different from her and so full of admirable qualities she can look up to, might serve two purposes: it can either make Scarlett a better woman, one capable of constantly growing and learning from others, or it can mark her as a special and unique character in the novel and praise her own virtues; her decisiveness, intelligence, and the ability to adapt and learn quickly, all of them being typical Darwinism traits. As a result, Scarlett is a strong woman ready to break the rules she doesn't find right and listen to her own morals in order to save the things and people she loves the most.

4. Scarlett and Her Father's Ethnic Identity

Apart from her mother's elegant influence, Scarlett was strongly influenced by her father Gerald who was Irish. He came from Ireland with nothing but hope of making a fortune and finding a decent wife, and his open Irish warm-heartedness and sincerity soon made him very popular in his Georgian county:

> With all the rest of the County, Gerald was on terms of amity and some intimacy. The Wilkeses, the Calverts, the Tarletons, the Fontaines, all smiled when the small figure on the big white horse galloped up their driveways, smiled and signaled for tall glasses in which a pony of Bourbon had been poured over a teaspoon of sugar and a prig of crushed mint. Gerald was likable, and the neighbors learned in time what the children, negroes and dogs discovered at first sight, that a kind heart, a ready and sympathetic ear and an open pocketbook lurked just behind his bawling voice and his truculent manner. (Mitchell 41)

Although this description might not imply a lot of mutual interests and virtues, Scarlett and her father were very alike when it comes to their openness and passionate character, and these particular aspects of Scarlett's personality were the ones that haunted her throughout her life. How close the two are can be seen at the mere beginning of the novel when Gerald advises Scarlett not to daydream about Ashley for they were so different. He did not care much for his daughter's knowledge about books and other unpractical things he deemed unimportant, which is not surprising if one has in mind that great plantation owners did not think their knowledge should be applied anywhere else but at home:

> In the South, with few exceptions, only the daughters of planters, prosperous farmers owning some slaves, prominent ministers, and well-to do urban business and professional men could afford to remain in school long enough to prepare for advanced

> seminary or college training. However, they and their parents never intended for them to work outside the home. (Farnham 3).

Like her father, Scarlett was very practical and her way of life was focused on getting the things she wants, and these were never without material value. The abstract notions such as love, respect, empathy or remorse remained completely unknown to her till the very end of the novel when she lost Rhett forever.

Nevertheless, the one unselfish thing that Gerald did teach Scarlett was the unconditional love toward the homeland. After hearing her confession about Ashley, Gerald told Scarlett she should never choose a man over the country: "'Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything', he shouted, his thick, short arms making wide gestures of indignation, 'for 'tis the only thing in this world that lasts, and don't you be forgetting it! 'Tis the only thing worth looking for, worth fighting for – worth dying for'" (Mitchell 31).

This love of land becomes even more evident later on, as Scarlett grows and matures as a person. The obvious emphasizing of Scarlett's ethnic identity might nevertheless not be necessarily done so as to demonstrate her feminine power, as some scholars believe, since some authors believed that "the Irishness in the novel simply reflects autobiography – for example, Mitchell supposedly based the character of Scarlett upon her grandmother" (McGraw 124).

On the other hand, numerous situations in the novel imply that Scarlett's self-awareness and strength are derived from her patriotic love towards Tara. Even after being refused by Ashley Wilkes who remained her greatest obsession, Scarlett is fully aware that none of these losses are as big as the potential loss of Tara:

> The clay was cold in her hands and she looked at it again. 'Yes', she said. 'I've still got this.' At first, the words meant nothing and the clay was only red clay. But unbidden came the thought of the sea of red dirt which surrounded Tara and how very dear it was

> and how hard she had fought to keep it hereafter. She looked at him again and wondered where the hot flood of feeling had gone. She could think but could not feel, not about him nor Tara either, for she was drained of all emotion. (Mitchell 448)

Because of her Irish ethnicity, Scarlett experiences both bad and good sides of life. Whereas being Irish might have helped her demonstrate her strength after terrible things had happened to the South, it also made it hard for her to conform to the code of behavior that was expected from a Southern belle. McGraw, for instance, states that "Irishness prevents Scarlett from entirely representing the Southern belle figure, as much as she may desire to fulfill this criteria" (126).

Bearing all of this in mind, the importance of Scarlett's Irishness becomes even more evident. It is obviously a dominant side of Scarlett's personality which could not be overpowered by the education her mother tried to introduce. Scarlett's major strength lies in her passion; she is always ready to fight for what she desires, and she does not hold back when something bothers her. In the world such as Scarlett experienced after the end of the Civil War, those were the most important traits needed for survival. The strong will Scarlett inherited from her father not only helped her in overcoming difficulties but also shaped her new found self. It turned Scarlett O'Hara into the archetype of female intelligence and power.

5. Scarlett in Conflict with Tradition

The novel *Gone with the Wind* teems with examples of Scarlett's constant conflict with tradition. In the world where tradition was seen as something sacred, this fact becomes even more significant.

One of the most scandalous events that marked Scarlett's reputation occurred after her first husband Charles died and left her a widow. Although Scarlett was very unhappy about having to be in mourning because of his death, she was good at hiding her disappointment until Rhett Butler asked her to dance at the ball aimed at collecting money for the Confederation:

> For a fleeting instance she saw Melanie's incredulous face, the look on the chaperons' faces, the petulant girls, the enthusiastic approval of the soldiers. Then she was on the floor and Rhett Butler was advancing toward her through the aisle of the crowd, that mocking smile on his face. But she didn't care – didn't care if he were Abe Lincoln himself. She was going to dance again. She was going to lead the reel. She swept him a low curtsy and a dazzling smile and he bowed, one hand on his frilled bosom. (Mitchell 156)

After coming back to Tara, Scarlett even kills a man because he threatened her plantation and family. By putting such a deadly weapon in the hands of a woman who was never supposed to be anything but silent and subordinated, Mitchell defined tradition as uncomfortable, and perhaps even potentially dangerous, and made her readers question its purpose.

Furthermore, one of the most scandalous moves Scarlett makes is definitely her buying the sawmill and running it in order to make a greater profit that would enable her to pay the taxes for Tara. She had to act because Frank Kennedy, her second husband, could not make much

money and was too careless about who he gave it to. Here we can see how Mitchell completely twists the familiar traditional roles in the family: for the first time, a woman is described as more capable and she openly takes things into her own hands and starts her own business. For the 1860's, this way of handling things was unimaginable. Scarlett shocks Atlanta's society even more after she considers employing a convict in her sawmill:

> And Scarlett wanted to lease convicts! Frank knew that if she did he could never hold up his head again. This was far worse than owning and operating the mills herself, or anything else she had done. His past objections had always been coupled with the question: "What will people say?" But this – this went deeper than the fear of public opinion. He felt that it was a traffic in human bodies on a par with prostitution, a sin that would be on his soul if he permitted her to do it. (Mitchell 626)

Apart from making Scarlett devoid of any traditional female occupation, Mitchell also made her devoid of any maternal instincts. After shocking the public world by appearing outside during her pregnancy, Scarlett finally has her second child and is determined that this will be the last one just so she could spend more time earning money and making a profit: "Frank wanted a big family, but she could manage Frank somehow. Her mind was made up. This was her last child. The mills were far more important" (Mitchell 628).

Throughout the novel, the attitudes about people having to conform to tradition seem lacking and even ridiculous. Mitchell suggests that people who were dependent on it lost everything once the world they knew changed, whereas personalities like Scarlett and Rhett, who are tireless in making the best for themselves, will survive anything. Although there are some instances in the novel where it looks like Scarlett is a bad person because of flouting tradition, the deeper analysis of the novel allows us to look at Scarlett from more than one perspective, seeing her not just as a woman from the South, but as a universal female figure bringing change and improvement.

Conclusion

When Margaret Mitchell created Scarlett, she was consciously creating something different and special, someone strong enough to survive the difficulties of a great war. After analyzing different aspects of Scarlett's life and personality, it is visible that she succeeded.

Firstly, she didn't get along with women who were supposed to be her friends, but this did not weaken her: it emphasized her uniqueness and individuality. Secondly, although her love relationships and marriages were selfish and even cruel; she learned a lot from them and she was always able to give strength and endurance to her men. She was definitely a woman from whom one could learn. Thirdly, the impact Ellen O'Hara and Melanie Wilkes had on Scarlett made her a better person, and she finally saw how many truly great qualities she lacks. Since the ending of the novel is open, the reader can assume she took some steps to improve herself even more later on. Finally, her unique Irish temperament and self-esteem that was necessary in order to oppose the whole society and stay true to herself is what leaves each and every reader astounded.

To sum up, Margaret Mitchell truly succeeded in creating a new and special woman in literature, which was to serve as a turning point in the understanding of women at the time and a huge step for feminism, and this is why so many women look up to Scarlett even today.

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