Introduction to Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With The Wind"

When I was young, I fell in love with the beautiful dresses the Southern belles wore and the parties they went to and their various dances. I fell in love with Scarlett O'Hara: men wanted her and women wanted to be her. Nothing stood in her way: not Yankees, not Carpetbaggers, and certainly not that "scallywag" Rhett Butler. As I grew older, I began to appreciate Margaret Mitchell's writing style and the way that the book made me feel on an emotional level. My heart began to break for Scarlett because of all the challenges that she was forced to overcome at such a young age.



Yet, I also began to think beyond the character of Scarlett O'Hara and the people around her who weren't given nearly as much of a voice: her slaves. The book clearly presents a romantic view of the Old South and also unfortunately glorifies slavery. One can hardly think about Gone with the Wind without thinking of the old south and all that goes with it—slavery included. Although the major plantation owners in the book all own slaves, the issue of slavery is hardly even addressed. Gone with the Wind follows the notoriously vain Scarlett O'Hara and her adventures in the south during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. Slaves are present throughout the pages, but don't play a major role in the story. In fact, even though the novel is well over a thousand pages, the word "slave(s)" only appears 82 times. It seems to me that a book that takes place in the Deep South during the 1860s would focus largely on slavery, but this isn't the case. The purpose of Gone with the Wind is to follow the life of a young girl who grows up during this time period.

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"Mammy was black, but her code of conduct and her sense of pride were as high as or higher than those of her owners. (2.5)"

"I do not know what the future will bring, but it cannot be as beautiful or as satisfying as the past." (11.16)

"Ah," said Melanie sadly, "what will the South be like without all our fine boys? What would the South have been if they had lived? We could use their courage and their energy and their brains. [...]"

"There will never again be men like them," said Carreen softly. "No one can take their places." (29.70-71)

The old days had gone but these people would go their ways as if the old days still existed, charming, leisurely, determined not to rush and scramble for pennies as the Yankees did, determined to part with none of their old ways. Scarlett knew that she, too, was greatly changed. [...]

She could not ignore life. She had to live it [...]. (35.177-179)

"Slaves were neither miserable nor unfortunate. The negroes were far better off under slavery than they were now under freedom, and if she didn't believe it, just look about her!" (42.124)