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“Gone with the Wind and the Southern Way of Life:

the Civil War as described in Margaret Mitchell’s Novel”

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Abstract

This essay examines the American Civil War of 1861 – 1865, which is also known as the bloodiest war that the United States has ever experienced. The pretext for the war was the abolition of slavery in the South, and after many battles the Southern states lost: as a consequence, they experienced major changes in their economic and social life. This interesting piece from American history can be traced out throughout the characters' lives in the novel *Gone with the Wind* which has been thoroughly analyzed in order to draw nearer and to comprehend the changes in the Southern way of life before and after the war. The author, Margaret Mitchell, was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and grew up with the stories about the war. As a result, *Gone with the Wind* studies not only its causes, but also the years after its end – a period which is not generally a subject of history and receives little attention – and the effects that such reversals have on former planters and slaves. From the position of contemporaneity, the reader can see that such changes in a society do not end with the laying down of an act, or in this case the end of the war, but they continue during many years; thus, the modern world can draw conclusions and lessons for events that are happening at the moment.

Keywords: war, slavery, *Gone with the Wind*, survival, morality

Resumen

Este ensayo analiza la Guerra Civil Americana de 1861 – 1865 que también se conoce como la guerra más sangrienta que los Estados Unidos han sufrido nunca. La llama que encendió la guerra fue la abolición de la esclavitud en el Sur, y después de muchas batallas dichos estados perdieron: en consecuencia sufrieron grandes cambios en su vida económica y social. Esta interesante parte de la historia americana podría ser relatada a través de las vidas de los personajes en la novela *Lo que el viento se llevó*, que ha sido meticulosamente analizada para aproximarse y comprender los cambios en el modo de vida sureño antes y después de la guerra. La autora Margaret Mitchell nació en Atlanta, Georgia, y creció con las historias de la guerra. Debido a eso, *Lo que el viento se llevó* analiza no sólo las causas, pero también los años después de la guerra – un período que normalmente recibe poca atención histórica – y los efectos que tales cambios producen sobre la clase de los terratenientes y los esclavos. Desde la posición de la contemporaridad, el lector puede ver que tales cambios en una sociedad no terminan con la aplicación de una ley, o en este caso con el fin de la guerra, pero continúan durante muchos años; por consiguiente, el mundo moderno puede extraer conclusiones y lecciones morales para acontecimientos que están sucediendo hoy en día.

Palabras clave: guerra, esclavitud, *Lo que el viento se llevó*, supervivencia, moralidad

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1. Introduction

This essay examines the American Civil War as portrayed in *Gone with the Wind*, written by the American novelist Margaret Mitchell. The novel was first published in 1936, although the author started writing the book ten years before: after its publication, the novel sold millions of copies and became an absolute bestseller for two years. In 1939 it was adapted into a film which received ten Oscar academy awards – eight of which were competitive and two honorary. *Gone with the Wind* describes the war between the South and the North of the United States during the period between 1861 and 1865, while it also presents the consequences of this war over the different social classes and population sectors, mainly slaves and former planters.

Gone with the Wind has a different point of view as compared with other novels about the American Civil War: what I consider especially interesting is its description of the consequences of replacing the established system in the South with a new one. Moreover, the novel reflects upon the changes the war effected on society: some of the non-fiction books I have read about slavery contain historical data (e.g. *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* and *The Plantation Mistress*, which are based on real letters of women who lived during those times), but do not explain the consequences of the war. *Gone with the Wind* presents characters who share the same setting (e.g. planters – women and men, and slaves), but who belong to different social circles and have different personalities. This very fact makes the novel reliable because a society is composed of diverse people; therefore, the changes have distinctive influence over them. However justifiable a war can become after the years, it is not an easy period to endure for the people who lived through it.

This essay aims at analyzing the causes and consequences of the American Civil War as they are narrated in *Gone with the Wind*, in order to describe how these affected society and changed Southerners' lives. By reading the novel and complementing it with information from secondary sources, the essay tries to show how the war told different stories in different degrees by the diverse people who formed the American society at that time. The essay is divided into five parts: the first part is the Introduction where the main goals of the essay can be found. Secondly, the Historical Context contains a brief summary of the main events in the Civil War, making emphasis on its causes and consequences and the two opposed ways of life of Northerners and Southerners. The third part is entitled Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*: Biography and Plot and provides a brief description of Margaret Mitchell's life and work: this section summarizes the main plot of the novel and tries to establish some connections between the book and its author.

The main part of my essay, *Gone with the Wind* and the Southern way of life, examines the ways in which the war affects the characters in the novel. I have organized this part as it depicts different periods in the protagonists' lives: for this purpose, this section is subdivided into three parts. In Before the War, the reader goes back to the antebellum days through the memories of the characters, mainly planter families and their slaves. Throughout their recollections of the time before the war, the reader gets a notion of how life was at that period. However, other novels (e.g. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) and historical sources (e.g. *The Plantation Mistress*) are taken into account to provide a contrast with the events described in *Gone with the Wind*. The second sub-section, The War, examines two important elements: first, patriotism and perception of the war by the Southerners, where military tradition and allegiance to the values of chivalry and honor intervene. Secondly, the characters' struggle to survive the war looks at what actions they are capable of taking in order to keep their families and homes alive and safe. In After the War, I will comment on the consequences of the war as

described in the novel, as these imply social and economic changes: the restrictive policies that the North imposes on the South, as well as some of the characters' awareness of the fact that the war is a lost cause. In order to illustrate how different individuals adapt to the new system, some of them are compared and contrasted: these are Rhett and Scarlett, Ashley and Melanie, the slaves, the poor whites or "white trash" and the Northerners. Finally, the Conclusion compares the emotional shock and the psychological consequences of the war for society in the novel and extrapolates this situation to similar processes in contemporary history, which generally happen for the good but have an effect on individuals which is not accounted for in history books.

Gone with the Wind depicts a compelling period in history and a vibrant and passionate love story, while at the same time recreates the historical events that led towards the abolition of slavery. However, *Gone with the Wind* is not only concerned with historical and social events: throughout the presentation of the events in the plot, the reader is able to go deep into the impact of political changes on society, together with the consequences for the winners and the losers. By so doing, I believe the so-called "civilized" contemporary society can draw important lessons.

2. Historical Context

Although other sources have been consulted, historical data for this section have been mostly gathered from James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1988)

The reasons for the American Civil War must be sought decades before it actually happened, so that we can trace their origins back to the development of the United States as a young nation. Until 1819, the US was composed of 11 free and 11 slave states. (Pierson 2009: 25)

The economy of the Southern slave states was based on agricultural production, mainly cotton and tobacco. For instance, in the state of Georgia, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census statistics of 1860, urban population was 7.1 %. Southern economy relied on a slave workforce: these slaves were Africans who were either captured or bought from African kings. (Thomas 1997: 42-58) The concerns of the Southerners as regards losing their slave labor affected not only in terms of economic losses, but also brought the fear of racial equality. On the other hand, the Northern free states developed a manufacturing industry: regarding the statistics cited before, in Massachusetts, for example, urban population reached 59.6 %. These states desired to widen the market for their own products; thus, they were unsatisfied with the fact that the South received cheaper goods from Europe in exchange for exporting its cotton.

The Government managed to maintain equilibrium between them, and consequently balance power between North and South. This parity found expression in a comparatively equal territory, the same number of Senate representatives, and the creation of laws which did not give superiority to either side. For instance, the joining of new states was also subordinate to what was previously mentioned: in 1819, when slave-holding Missouri applied for incorporation, the Government had its doubts, as this could lead to a disturbance of such

balance. The admission of Missouri was therefore postponed until another territory, Maine, requested to become a state. As a result, the Government decided that Missouri could remain a slave-holding state, while Maine would be a free state. (Pierson 2009: 25) All these actions were in the name of a conscious aim of the States to become a powerful and vigorous nation. Until the middle of the 19th century, the Government succeeded in sustaining this equilibrium through different political moves, in spite of the aspirations of both sides to impose laws favorable to them and achieve territorial supremacy.

The situation changed after the Mexican-American war (1846-1848), as a result of which the US annexed new territories: California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, parts of Arizona, Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Wyoming. Thus, the United States expanded towards the West Pacific Coast and the slave states gained a territorial majority. (see map 1)

With the Compromise of 1850, the Government determined the status of the new territories. However, it did not succeed in solving the slavery issue because of the controversial Fugitive Slave Act (1850). According to this act, the federal officers were obliged to arrest runaway slaves even in the free states. The statement of the Fugitive Act raised the tension and, as a reaction, Northerners bought the freedom of Afro-American slaves and helped them to escape through the Underground Railroad.



Map 1 (<http://www.mrlincolnanfreedom.org/map/1857.html>)

The clashes between North and South led to an escalation of tensions, which also resulted in several political decisions. In 1853, the Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas, who had forged the Compromise of 1850, offered Kansas and Nebraska to become free states because of their position in the North. As a result, this issue brought about the question of slavery to Congress again. Southerners did not want to accept the new states due to the advantage Northerners would gain in the Senate. Finally, Douglas proposed that the Compromise of 1850 should be abandoned and that each state should be able to decide whether it wanted to be a free or a slave state. Even though Southerners did not agree, the Kansas Nebraska Act was passed, leading to the creation of pro and antislavery organizations in Kansas. This separation between the citizens led to violence and ended up with higher hostility between North and South.

Moreover, in the presidential elections of 1860, the Republican Party led by Lincoln started a campaign against the spreading of slavery in other states, apart from those in which it already

existed. After the Republican victory and before Lincoln officially took office, seven states (South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas) declared their separation from the United States and formed the so-called Confederate States of America with Jefferson Davis as its President.

The first military actions were held on April 11, 1861 by occupying Fort Sumter, which was situated in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina. It was the most important fort at that time because of its strategic position in supplying goods. Davis ordered powerful attacks and managed to conquer the fort before the Union army could receive any help. As a result, Lincoln insisted on creating a volunteer army in each state, which led to the separation of four more states: Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

A week after these attacks, Winfield Scott, General-in-Chief of the Union army, developed the Anaconda Plan to block the main ports in the South and gain control over the Mississippi River, which would divide the South in two. These actions turned out to be a masterstroke. As a consequence, the merchant ships were prevented from reaching its destinations in the South, cotton could not be exported, and the South was not able to obtain supplies. British investors built small and fast ships, which sold weapons and goods in exchange for cotton, tobacco, etc., but they were often captured and this led to the collapse of the cotton market.

In 1862, the purpose of the American Civil War changed fundamentally, even for Europe, after the signing of the Proclamation of Independence: from this moment onwards the war was not considered to be led for the union of the states, but for the freedom of slaves. Although European countries did not feel satisfied with the blockade of the South ports, which led to paralyzing trade between them and the South, Lincoln managed to win European respect.

Despite that the South succeeded in winning a lot of important battles, in 1864 the course of the war changed since Ulysses Grant was elected to be the commander of the whole Northern army. Grant's beliefs that a complete destruction of the South would end the war had an expression in ruining homes, farms, roads, etc. His strategy turned out to be successful and he managed to push Lee's army back and conquer some Southern cities such as Atlanta, the victory that secured Lincoln's second election as a President of the United States.

Lee and his army surrendered on April 9, 1865 in Appomattox Court House. More than 4 million slaves were freed and more than a million people died in the war between the South and the North states of the United States of America, as this turned to be the bloodiest war the country has ever experienced. Almost every state in the South was destroyed and the Southern presence in the US government did not exist until the second half of the 20th century. (United States Senate)

3. Margaret Mitchell and *Gone With the Wind*: Biography and Plot

3.1 Biography

Although other sources have been consulted, historical data for this section have been mostly gathered from Darden Asbury Pyron's *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell and the Making of Gone with the Wind* (Georgia: Hill Street Press; 2005).

Margaret Mitchell was born on November 8, 1900 in the heart of the American South – Atlanta, Georgia. Mitchell's father, Eugene Mitchell, was a lawyer with a gentle character. In compensation, her mother, Mary Isabelle Mitchell (born Stevens), was a suffragist of Irish Catholic origin. Margaret had a brother, Stephens, who was four years older than her.

In her childhood, Margaret attended public schools in Atlanta, and afterwards went to Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Actually, she did not want to continue with her studies, but her mother managed to impose her will and enrolled her in this prestigious college. There, finding herself free from her parents' supervision for the first time, Margaret became a real rebel and a fervent opponent of good ladylike manners: she neither liked her mother's Catholicism nor her father's Protestant faith. Her studies were interrupted by her mother's sudden death in 1919, when Mitchell went back to Atlanta in order to assume the role of a housekeeper.

At the age of 22, she married Red Upshaw, who was the heir of a prominent South Carolina family: their marriage lasted only a few months because he turned out to be a smuggler. Soon after the disclosure of his activities, she divorced him and became the first woman in her family to get divorced.

In the same year, she took a job as a reporter at *The Atlanta Journal Sunday Magazine* which, at this time, was an exclusively masculine profession and definitely not characteristic of a lady who belonged to an aristocratic family. There she wrote her articles under the pen-name of Peggy Mitchell. She worked at *The Atlanta Journal* for four years, from 1922 to 1926, when she was bedridden by a broken ankle and obliged to abandon her position.

A year before the injury, she married her second husband, John Marsh, who was a descendent of poor farmers from Pennsylvania and worked for the Georgia Railway and Power Company. During her convalescence, he gave her history books in order to help her pass the time, and

this was the moment when she started to write *Gone with the Wind*. Apart from her husband, nobody knew that she was devoting her time to writing a novel. She hid everything she composed in different places such as cupboards and wardrobes, which has led to speculations that characters' personalities were based on people she was familiar with. (The New Georgia Encyclopedia) While writing the novel, she was seized by anxiety and fear of death, an issue that is reflected in her writing: it was not by



Margaret Mitchell

(<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Multimedia.jsp?id=m-2598&adv=y>)

chance that she started the book with the dénouement, the last tragic chapter of the fatal misunderstanding between Scarlett and Rhett.

In 1935, nine years after she had started writing the novel, Mitchell sent the manuscripts to Harold Latham, who was editor for Macmillan. A year later, the book was published and earned phenomenal success. Mitchell received the National Book Award for the Most Distinguished Novel in the year of its publication. In 1937, she also won the Pulitzer Prize and her novel became the most prominent bestseller in the history of American literature. It

broke all the records when it sold 50,000 copies on a single day: by the end of the first year the novel had sold 1,5 million copies. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

After the great success of *Gone with the Wind*, Margaret Mitchell devoted herself to raising money for the American Red Cross during the Second World War. Moreover, she helped in hospitals and wrote letters to people who took part in the war in order to encourage them. She also sponsored two air-craft ships, USS Atlanta (CL-51) and USS Atlanta (CL-104), which were sunk in 1942 and 1970 respectively. (Kearns, P. and Morris, J. *Historical Dictionary of the United States Navy*, 2nd Ed., 2011: 35)

Margaret Mitchell died in 1949, when, together with her husband, she was going to attend a theater performance of *A Canterbury Tale*. Near the theater, a drunken taxi driver ran over her. She was quickly driven to the hospital, but she never recovered. Mitchell died on August 16, 1949; five days after the accident took place.

3.2 Plot

Gone with the Wind is divided into five parts. The first part, which includes chapters I to VII, begins in the spring of 1861, and narrates the story of Scarlett O'Hara and her family, who live at Tara, Northern Georgia. Her father Gerald O'Hara is of Irish origins and her mother Ellen comes from an aristocratic family in Savannah, Georgia. Although Gerald came from a lower class, Ellen married him to take revenge on her family, who had prevented her from marrying her first love.

Throughout the first chapters, the reader witnesses men's conversations about an approaching war between the North and the South. In contrast to them, women do not seem to be

interested in those issues: Scarlett, for example, prefers to think about her own problems such as how to marry Ashley Wilkes. The following day, her family is going to attend a ball at Twelve Oaks, Ashley's home, during which Ashley announces his engagement to his cousin Melanie. Furious and vindictive, Scarlett accepts Charlie's proposal of marriage. Charlie is Melanie's brother and Scarlett thinks this is the best way to hurt Ashley. In that party, Scarlett also gets to meet Rhett Butler, a man of ill-fame who did not marry the girl he was engaged to and later on killed her brother in a duel. The ball finishes with the news that the Civil War has begun: the last chapters recount Charlie's death on the front and Scarlett's childbirth.

The second part of the novel includes chapters VIII to XVI. It begins with Scarlett's arrival in Atlanta, where she stays with Melanie and her aunt Pittypat. The reader becomes acquainted with the fact that Scarlett does not understand the war and hates the life of a widow: she loathes mourning clothes and not being able to attend balls, and she does not like helping wounded men in the hospital either. As a result, a few months after Charlie's death and Rhett's constant visits, she decides to abandon her mourning.

These chapters give an account of how the war develops and of the hopes that Southerners have despite illness, death of soldiers and poverty. They strongly believe that the end is near, but after they lose the battle at Gettysburg, they realize that the war is going to last longer than they initially thought. It is already Christmas of 1863 and soldiers are visiting their families, so Ashley arrives in Atlanta and, as a consequence, Melanie gets pregnant.

Chapters XVII to XXX constitute the third part of *Gone with the Wind*. The reader learns that the Union army is approaching Atlanta, leaving a lot of wounded Southern soldiers on its way. The impact of this is expressed in the obligation of old and very young men to enroll in the Confederate army. After thirty days of siege, Atlanta surrenders and people are forced to run away. However, Scarlett is compelled to stay because of Melanie's condition: she is too

weak to move and, although Scarlett's mother and sisters are ill with typhoid, she keeps her promise to Ashley and does not leave Melanie. When Melanie has the baby, Scarlett asks Rhett to drive them home. He helps them, but half way to Tara, he decides to join the army and leaves them. Despite that, Scarlett and Melanie manage to reach Tara, where Scarlett finds out that her mother had died the day before and her father has lost his mind. In view of that, she is forced to become the plantation mistress, taking the responsibility to feed and protect all the family members. For that reason, she begins to do things she had never done before, such as killing a Yankee in self-defense or picking cotton. The news that the war is over reaches Tara, so the O'Hara family begins to help soldiers who pass by Tara on their way home. One of them, Will Benteen, decides to stay in the plantation as an acknowledgment for their help. The last chapter of this part narrates Ashley's home-coming.

Part four, which includes chapters XXXI to XLVII, begins with bad news for Scarlett: taxes on Tara have been increased. For that reason, she decides to go back to Atlanta and marry Rhett Butler out of convenience. Once in Atlanta, she finds out that he is imprisoned. However, she also discovers that Frank Kennedy, her sister's fiancé, has a little fortune, so she lies to him by telling him that her sister is engaged to another man and succeeds in marrying him. A few days after the marriage, Scarlett takes control of his business and becomes the first businesswoman in Atlanta. While she is concentrated in earning money, she receives the bad news that her father has died: she goes to his funeral and seizes the opportunity to offer Ashley work in Atlanta.

In Part four of the novel the Ku Klux Klan is mentioned for the first time. It is an organization of white men who try to protect other whites from the freed blacks who have become impertinent. The situation in the South has become tenser when white people refuse to give blacks the right to vote. When Scarlett is coming home one evening, she is attacked by two poor men, a white and a black one, and her husband Frank is killed while trying to protect her.

After his death, however, she realizes that Frank was also in the Klan. Scarlett feels guilty for Frank's death, but this does not stop her from marrying Rhett a few months after his funeral.

The last part of the novel *Gone with the Wind* includes chapters from XLVIII to LXIII. It deals with Scarlett and Rhett's life together. As both of them have already gained bad reputation, Atlanta society tries to avoid them. The couple does not care about people's opinion and make friends among the Republicans. However, when Scarlett gets pregnant, Rhett decides to abandon his Republican friends in order that his baby will obtain a respectable position in society. He devotes his time to his daughter and fulfills all her wishes, and even teaches her to jump obstacles with her pony. Unfortunately, the little girl trips over one of the obstacles and dies. Moreover, Melanie gets pregnant again in spite of the doctor's warnings that this would kill her. Because of her weakness she does not survive. Before her death, she makes Scarlett promise to look after Ashley. Despite the fact she has always waited for this moment, Scarlett does not feel happy and realizes that she does not love him. She also becomes aware of her love to Rhett and decides to let him know about it. After her confession, Rhett shares that his love has already faded away. Scarlett refuses to believe him and although he leaves her, she feels determined to make him come back.

4. *Gone With the Wind* and the Southern Way of Life

4.1 *Before the War*

Regardless of the fact that the story in the novel *Gone with the Wind* begins only two days before the announcement of the war, the reader manages to form a clear view of an idyllic picture of the Southern way of life. Margaret Mitchell achieved to create this atmosphere through the constant memories, comparisons and valuation of the characters' deeds according to the values of the old South within the whole narrative.

In this society, women have an extraordinary role in the education of children, household, charity, and care of both family and slaves. As a matter of form, men have the authority and leading part, and yet the woman is the one in charge of the plantation and definitely, the one who "[...] held a family together" (Clinton 1984: 40) This statement is more delicately described in *Gone with the Wind*, whereas in *The Plantation Mistress*, Catherine Clinton is more extreme in her conclusions and claims that this patriarchy leads to "[...] women's subordinate status." (Clinton 1984: 6) An embodiment of the mistress of the Old South with all her qualities and merits is Scarlett's mother Ellen O'Hara. Her figure, although not essential and built mainly upon descriptions and memories by other characters, runs like a scarlet thread through the whole plot and is the perfect example of women's role in the South, which the other female characters in the novel imitate. She has an exceptional authority: she commands respect without raising her voice and without employing violence, and also accommodates the differences and negotiates conflicts – from her daughters' whims to the management of the land: "She was a thrifty and kind mistress, a good mother and a devoted wife." (Mitchell 2008: 78) Ellen not only takes care of the plantation's members, but also of the needy neighbors, being in risk of losing her own health and life: "Emmie Slattery! The dirty tow-headed slut whose illegitimate baby Ellen had baptized, Emmie who had given

typhoid to Ellen and killed her.” (Mitchell 2008: 747) These findings are consistent with those of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese who, throughout grounding upon the diary of Sarah Gayle who lived during the 19th century, synthesizes women’s duties: “[...] childbearing and childrearing, household responsibilities, supervision of slaves, worries about money, visits to friends, concerns with religion, and fears of death.” (Fox-Genovese 1941: 3) Ellen O’Hara is uncompromising as far as morality is concerned – from observing the etiquette of their social class to observing sovereign humane virtues. Her nature is noble and delicate; she arouses love and admiration while she simultaneously strikes with respect. Even after her death, she remains a moral pillar for her family: “She didn’t raise me to be mean. She was so kind to everybody, so good. She’d rather I’d have starved [...]” (Mitchell 2008: 1154) Whereas Margaret Mitchell’s female characters are not presented as sufferers, Clinton builds a figure of a martyr and even depicts Southern women as “slave of slaves” on account of their numerous duties. (Clinton 1984: 16)

“Cotton was King, white men ruled [...]” (Clinton 1984: 35) – as mentioned before, in this society men have the leading part. The male protagonists in *Gone with the Wind* are very different among themselves, but despite these characters’ distinctions, they all are men of honor and this is not being questioned in none of the five parts of the novel. On the one hand, they are fond of and devoted to their family; on the other hand, firm in defense of their motherland. These two portraits are not only non-incompatible, but also represent the Southern man in his complete many-sidedness, making the characters persuasive and effective.

In the novel, the figure of the loving and attentive father is represented by two basic couples: on the one hand, there is a special propinquity between Scarlett and Gerald O’Hara, the trust and the little secrets between themselves: “Scarlett had no awe of her father and felt him more contemporary than her sisters, for jumping fences and keeping it a secret [...]” (Mitchell

2008: 38). Similarly, Rhett is completely devoted to his daughter; he feels concern and responsibility for her welfare and good name: “Rhett’s great love for his child had gone far toward reinstating him in public opinion.” (Mitchell 2008: 1356) Men’s treatment of women is extraordinarily respectful and gallant and, complemented by their high concept of dignity, makes them defenders of the honor of the family, in particular defenders of their ladies. As a culmination of this is a very intense scene from the novel – when Scarlett is a victim of an attempted rape, a group of men is gathered to dispense punishment: though guilty to a certain degree of this incident, none of the men upbraids Scarlett or refuse to defend her honor. And her husband pays with his life: “[...] I killed him. Yes, I did! I didn’t know he was in the Klan.” (Mitchell 2008: 1154) This scene is a reason for Margaret Mitchell to treat the topic of Ku Klux Klan and to explain and defend the position of the participants in the Klan.

Patriotism, idealism, courage and selflessness find their manifestation with the announcement of the war: “The South was intoxicated with enthusiasm and excitement. Everyone knew that one battle would end the war [...]” (Mitchell 2008: 180) To this collective image, Margaret Mitchell opposes Rhett Butler’s personality with his real judgement of the situation and the condemnation of the cause. Torn between her undisguised fondness for the characters and her analytical judgement from the position of an already past historical moment, the author uses this counterpoint to show the clash between desire and reality, naïve flame and pessimism. By this means, she explains and excuses her characters and does not allow their weaknesses to undervalue the Southerners’ dignity. This suggestion is most powerful at the end of the war, when the battles are already fought and the dreams lost. Rhett joins the thinning ranks, and with this desperate action, Margaret Mitchell seems to show the reader that not even after a lost war, patriotism and honor are misplaced concepts: “[...] our fair Southland needs every man. [...] I could not love thee, Dear, so much, loved I not Honour more.” (Mitchell 2008: 540)

Another stratum of the Southern states are the slaves negroes¹, who do the physical work in the plantations. There exists a hierarchy within this stratum, as the highest position belongs to those who take care of the house and the masters, and the lowest to the field hands. From the beginning, blacks are taught different trades so that the best position for them can be found and the clumsiest become land hands. Extremely vivid is Mammy's figure – a maid-servant, cook and educator. “Although “mammies” may not have been surrounded with the romantic aura that the whites promoted during the political crises of the late antebellum, and especially of the postwar, periods, they indisputably existed [...]” (Fox-Genovese 1941: 137) However, Catherine Clinton argues that “mammies” are rather fictitious characters created in the wartime to demonstrate the “[...] familial relations between black and white” (Clinton 1984: 202), which seem so strong that planters even leave their children's education in the hands of negroes. Nevertheless, basing on the fact that this character exists also in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was written before the American Civil War, it can be concluded that such a person did exist. As for *Gone with the Wind*, Mammy, with her constant grumble, sees to the order and the girls' good behavior – something that Ellen O'Hara herself inspires with her authority. Mammy has accepted her role to such a degree and is so enthusiastic about it that she very often takes the liberty to give orders to the rest of the staff, to remark upon neglectful behavior to the ones who are in a lower-standing, and even to give severe and caustic reproaches to Scarlett and her sisters, the raising and education of whom she feels personally responsible for: “No you ain' [...] Not while Ah got breaf. You eat dem cakes. Sop dem in de gravy, honey.” (Mitchell 2008: 111) There are similarities in the attitude expressed by Margaret Mitchell and those described by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who affirms that “[a] mammy could enjoy the devotion of her charges and the confidence of her master and

¹ The word is consistent with the lexis of *Gone with the Wind*, and it carries only the meaning given to its origin for denoting individuals of black appearance (from Spanish “negro”)

mistress.” (Fox-Genovese 1941: 162) However, in *The Plantation Mistress*, Clinton stands her ground that “[...] white mothers did not regularly turn their infants over to black women as often as southern folklore suggests.” (Clinton 1984: 47) In *Gone with the Wind*, the reader can encounter other characters from this group who are part of the household among which there are Prissy, Pork and Dilcey. The agricultural workers are not personified, and yet, as Fox-Genovese claims, they also “[...] embod[y] the larger meaning of “our family white and black”.” (Fox-Genovese 1941: 133) According to Catherine Clinton (1984) and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1995) this good treatment of negroes is a component of masters’ education: the latter is even more extreme in a scene of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* when a white mistress stands that she would sell one of her children before selling a slave. Notwithstanding that, there are also examples of bad treatment illustrated by the same authors; they refer to plantations where the relationship master-slave is even cruel, but this is conditioned by the individuality of each master.

There are two main issues in the novel that impress regarding the relationships master – slave. First, Margaret Mitchell’s black characters do not have a personal life, and second, her attitude towards them looks as if they were little children in the family. The former can be also explained by the fact that negroes did not have a civil statute, and even marriages between themselves were not institutionally regulated, but were just a sign of their masters’ good will. Stowe (1995) considers this topic openly: “Don’t you know a slave can’t be married? There is no law in this country for that [...]”, while in *Gone with the Wind*, it is scarcely treated at the beginning when the masters decide to buy one of their slave’s wife in order not to separate the family. Namely, it is not so much about social status nor equality, lack of freedom and rights, but about the treatment of blacks as another category of human beings. Helpless and not cunning, they need someone to take care of them – to provide them accommodation, food and care, to monitor and control them. By no means there is

malevolence and hatred, just the contrary – the treatment is warm and patronizing: “Be firm but be gentle with inferiors, especially darkies” (Mitchell 2008: 599)

4.2 The War

In the light of the existing society, in which traditions and values had been formed for more than two centuries, it entirely stands to reason why the South embarked on defending them without any hesitations. Faithful to their honor and patriotism, Margaret Mitchell’s characters receive the declaration of war with tremendous enthusiasm. Their unrealistic judgement on the situation inspires them with naïve optimism. This purposefulness and devotedness to the Cause give superiority to the Confederacy at the beginning of the war: “One Confederate is worth a dozen Yankees.” (Mitchell 2008: 408) Thus, euphoria seizes the soldiers and the rest of society. They do not lose this faith even when the Confederacy starts to lose battles and to endure heavy losses (see map 2), because no matter how strong these qualities are, they are not the only condition for victory. After a few battles, a non-industrialized South without provisions because of the blockade imposed by the North has only a thinned army – as opposed to the enemy, who adds new members, such as immigrants and runaway slaves. The outcome already seems to be predetermined, but the South continues to fight because “[b]elieving [is] a sacred duty.” (Mitchell 2008: 410)

Like the soldiers, the belligerents’ families suffer privations and adversities, too: although they live in constant flusters about their relatives, they are proud of them, give their last valuable objects in order to raise funds, and help in the hospitals that are “[...] filled with dirty, bewhiskered, verminous men who [have] on their bodies wounds hideous enough [...]”. (Mitchell 2008: 220)

In the last battle for Atlanta and one of the last in the war, and although they are already weakened by the large amount of casualties, Southerners do not even think of surrendering. On the contrary, “[...] old men and little boys [are] being called out [...]” (Mitchell 2008: 434) to join the military operations. In the summer of 1864, the losses for the Confederacy are enormous: the army of the North advances towards Atlanta and the Confederacy cannot resist so many destitutions and sacrificed soldiers. The lists that arrive from the front and contain the names of perished soldiers come daily, and the South pays the highest price: about every family loses at least one relative.

The few who dare to tell the truth aloud are Ashley and Rhett. For the former, the question about the participation in the military developments is absolutely clear; he takes part in the war from the first day, and even though the letters that he writes from the front express despair of the outcome, he goes on fighting. However, after each lost battle, he loses his world little by little: “The end of the war – and the end of the world.” (Mitchell 2008: 380) On the other hand, Rhett, who from the beginning foresees and warns of the outcome of the developments, is not initially dashed by patriotism and manages to make use of all the opportunities that the situation gives him. He does not take part in the military actions, but organizes the delivery of goods, overcoming the blockade. However, not the lack of realism, but this adventurous spirit and the feeling of honor and patriotism prevail even in front of the powerful opponent and he joins an almost lost war.

By leaving a town reduced to ashes, Scarlett looks for salvation in Tara: she hopes Tara will still be standing and she will be able to drive up the long avenue of trees and go into the house. Scarlett longs to see her mother’s kind, tender face and feel once more the soft, capable hands that drove out fear, cling to her skirts and bury her face in them: “Mother would know what to do [...] She would drive away all ghosts and fears with her quiet “Hush,hush.” (Mitchell 2008: 551) But things are no longer the same, as these lands have already been

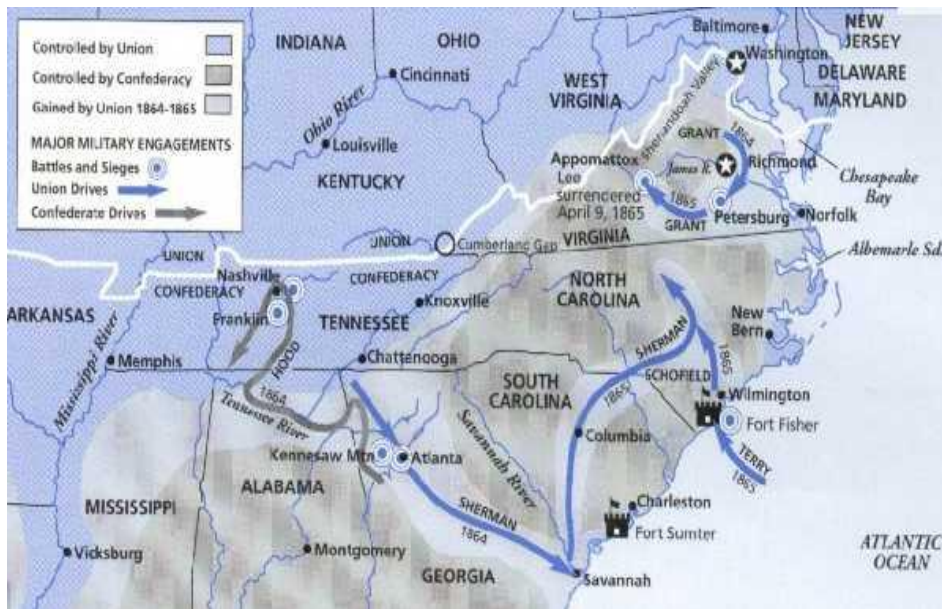
visited by the Yankees. The majority of the plantations are burnt and slaves are scattered; destruction and poverty have taken hold of the plantations that had been until recently throbbing with vitality.

The O'Hara home is saved, but Ellen is dead, Gerald has lost his mind, Scarlett's sisters have typhoid, only a few slaves remain, and the crops are destroyed. Looking for salvation, Scarlett is forced to become austere. The clash with reality transforms the spoiled and capricious girl into the only hope for her relatives' survival: "She was a woman now and youth was gone." (Mitchell 2008: 581) The only one who supports her morally is Melanie, but she is not able to perform any physical work at all. Scarlett takes care of her sisters, milks the cow, mines the land for scraps and works in the fields, sometimes doing work that even the house slaves reject to do: "Tears trembled in Pork's hurt eyes. Oh, if only Miss Ellen were here! She understood such niceties and realized the wide gap between the duties of a field hand and those of a house nigger." (Mitchell 2008: 586)

Precisely at this moment Scarlett realizes that the land is "[...] the only thing worth working for, fighting for, dying for." (Mitchell 2008: 603). She fights with desperation and her typical Irish stubbornness, even killing a Yankee in order to defend the little that she has managed to earn. Shocked by the collapse of her world and hardened by the suffering she has endured, Scarlett stands before the unknown tomorrow:

As God is my witness, as God is my witness, the Yankee aren't going to lick me. 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. (Mitchell 2008: 593)

The South surrenders on April 9, 1865.



Map 2 (<http://www.harlingen.isd.tenet.edu/coakhist/cwar.html#EFFECTS>)

4.3 After the War

However, “[...] for the whole South, the war would never end. The bitterest fighting, the most brutal retaliations, were just beginning.” (Mitchell 2008: 754) The Yankees understood well that the conquered victory should be irreversible and the South would be truly subjugated only if its resistance forces were completely destroyed. This was achieved through divestment of the economic and the social power of the defeated; consequently, the Southern spirit was broken.

After the war years, the plantations, which are the basic mainstay of the economy, are ruined: they are short of sowing seeds, the land is ragged and overgrown, there is no cattle, and naturally, the slaves are scattered and many of the men dead. These difficult circumstances are not sufficient for the Yankees, though. As a result, the right to vote is disenfranchised to the men of means, the military men with a higher rank and the state officials of the

Confederate government: “Fact is, the way the Yankees have framed up that amnesty oath, can’t nobody who was somebody before the war vote at all. Not the smart folks nor the quality folks nor the rich folks.” (Mitchell 2008: 727) Moreover, a “Freedmen’s Bureau” is created, which allows the Yankee to be “[...] in complete command of everything and [to fix] the rules to suit themselves.” (Mitchell 2008: 724) Southern money is invalidated, while excessive taxations to pay upon the plantations are imposed and enforced upon their owners. With the new laws, the Bureau interferes and disposes of all transactions and bargains. It provides living for the thousands of freed slaves, promises them land, and makes them hostile by frightening them with accounts of violence. “[I]n a section long famed for the affectionate relations between slaves and slave owners, hate and suspicion began to grow.” (Mitchell 2008: 725) By so doing, a huge mass of black people find themselves in the street, inactive and without knowing what to do with their lives, since they had been until recently organized and arranged by their masters. They are like homeless children – honest and hard-working, but without any social experience and easy to manipulate. Allured by promises and punched by hatred, gathered in solid masses in towns, they become really dangerous and a tool for the Federal government. A small part of the slaves, although already free, remain loyal to their masters and continue serving them. For them, everything is as it was and life continues in the old way.

On the other hand, the Republicans also make use of another part of the low social classes – the white paupers or the so called “white trash”. The attitude towards them, in contrast to the blacks, is absolutely disdainful. They are the leas of society – landless and lazy. Regarded as immoral and ungrateful, they had until recently lived basically from charity. To these are joined the “Carpetbaggers” – called that way because the whole baggage they bring can be packed in one carpetbag. They are vagrants, coming from the North and embarking on the South with the hope of quick enrichment. Thereby, in these troubled times, with the Federal

government behind their backs, the Carpetbaggers and the white trash become the new masters of the South. They make their pile for a divisible time not through labor, but out of speculations that the new laws allow them, and start to aspire to the plantations, buying them up at a knock-out price. They are described as behaving like parvenues – impudent and aggressive, they display their wealth and splendor.

How does the former upper class survive under these circumstances? “At the end of every struggle it seemed that defeat was waiting to mock [them].” (Mitchell 2008: 728) These hard times are a catalyst for the characters. Until very recently, in the light of their former lives, their individualities rather complemented one another in order to build a complete picture of their social class, but the present situation incites them to take different paths and sets them at a distance from each other on their way to survival. In *Gone with the Wind*, Margaret Mitchell narrates the destiny of the defeated during the first few years after the war – something that remains outside the annals of history. The author questions whether it is worth to live “for the sake of honor” or if adaptation to the circumstances is a reasonable means for surviving and progressing, and to what extent the means to achieve these are admissible and excusable.

On the one hand, Ashley Wilkes represents this part of the society which is the most incapable of overcoming the difficulties. His limitations are determined not by his lack of qualities, but by the fact that he has surrendered from the start without even making an attempt to think about the new situation. His “shadow show” (Mitchell 2008: 733) – a well-arranged and convenient world which does not exact any efforts and allows him to devote to his intellectual pursuits – has collapsed. Ashley understands well that this feeling of condemnation and hopelessness has transformed him into a burden for his relatives, and yet this does not motivate him to change.

On the other hand, Melanie Wilkes, like her husband and the majority of society, realizes that the old system is irretrievably gone, but the will to live does not leave her. Although physically frail, Melanie possesses “[...] a thin flashing blade of unbreakable steel, felt too that there were banners and bugles of courage [...]” (Mitchell 2008: 612) The compromises that she makes are imposed by circumstances that endanger her and her relatives’ life: despite going through severe trials, Melanie retains her nobility and honor, and remains a lady, which, according to Fox-Genovese, “[...] dominate[s] southern ideals of womanhood.” (1941: 47) Similarly, many other Southern families manage to adapt to the new habits without losing their high reputation. After a few years, the Merriwether, Elsing, Bonnell and Fontaine families succeed in providing a respectable, although simple, existence for themselves by means of small business and honest work:

If women were so unfortunate as to be compelled to make a little money to assist their families in these hard times, they made it in quiet womanly ways – baking as Mrs. Merriwether was doing, or painting china and sewing and keeping boarders, like Mrs. Elsing [...], or teaching school like Mrs. Meade or giving music lessons like Mrs. Bonnell. (Mitchell 2008: 887)

However, this path is too slow and not productive enough for Scarlett O’Hara and Rhett Butler. A few years after the end of the war, they are again among the richest persons and their standard allows them to lead their luxury pre-war lives again. They descend from the same class and thus, they get married, but their lives during these most stormy years and the motives that move them are completely different.

Rhett Butler has always lived on the edge of law and decency. He has collaborated with the Yankees for many years, and as a result, the losses for him after the South collapses are not so big. He is an intelligent and resourceful man, a fellow player, who looks upon himself and

upon life in a frivolous and cynical way. The difficulties put him on his mettle while the risks excite him. Butler plays this game with pleasure without aspiring desperately to some final cause, but rather enjoying himself on his way towards it. For that reason, it seems that he achieves everything hands down. Whatever the outcome of the war was, Rhett would have coped with it.

Things look different for Scarlett. The hunger and misery, as well as the responsibility for her family lay on her, but they do not manage to crush her firm spirit and vitality. The land is the only not transitory thing in her broken life and through realizing that, Scarlett clings to it, ready to preserve it at any cost. The murder she committed under extreme circumstances works an excuse for all her further actions: “I’ve done murder and so I can surely do this.” (Mitchell 2008: 617) As Grandma Fontaine says to her, “[...] it’s a very bad thing for a woman to face the worst [...] because [...] she can’t ever really fear anything again. [...] [A]nd there’s something unnatural about a woman who isn’t afraid....” (Mitchell 2008: 627-628) By flinging away her last moral scruples and inhibitions, Scarlett undertakes a fight against her core enemies – hunger and poverty, which torment her for a long while as a nightmare in her dreams. “I’m never going to be hungry again” (Mitchell 2008: 593) becomes her motto because only physical survival is important to Scarlett. Politics for her is an abstract notion, which she does not understand as she does not see its practical outcomes. Scarlett does not waste time and energy in bemoaning of the old days and speculating about the new ones. With the entire cunning and creativity of her pragmatic mind and Irish nature, she concentrates and overcomes obstacles on her way one by one. “[...] I’ll think of it all tomorrow [...]” (Mitchell 2008: 1448) retrieves her from despair and hopelessness. Nothing can stop her – slave labor on the field, marriages of convenience, managing business, exploitation of prisoners, or social and business contacts with the recent enemies.

Margaret Mitchell does not blame any of her characters; on the contrary, she reveals their different individualities as they exist in every society, and the circumstances that have led to extreme class stratification after the collapse their world has experienced. To my mind, the most important question in the novel, that is, “Which is the correct way to survive: preserving moral values or material wealth?” – does not have an explicit answer. Perhaps progress needs both Ashley, a bearer of spiritual values, and Scarlett, clinging to life with the primary instinct of self-preservation and strength she gets from her connection to the land. This is still more reinforced by the exchanged roles of men and women, in opposition with the established social habits.

Even though Margaret Mitchell deals with only a short historical period, she manages to show that after the revolutionary changes and the more peaceful and untroubled period that came later, society self-regulates: because of his child, Ashley is forced to work to provide a living, and Scarlett and Rhett have to work on their bad reputation and bad name in order to be accepted back in good society for the sake of their daughter.

Unfortunately, the American Civil War – like most wars – generally do not solve the problems and represent a continuous process that involves changes for several generations and many broken human fates. As for the United States, and even though some important laws were passed not long after the war – among which are the 15th Amendment of 1870, giving the Afro-Americans the right to vote, and the laws passed between 1876 and 1965, providing equal status for negroes –, the violent actions did not bring equality until The Civil Rights Act of 1967 against segregation was passed.

5. CONCLUSION

Nowadays, history repeats itself – in other places, with different participants; books ordinarily finish with a final point, “Consequences”, where conquered territories, state system and constitutions are described. Very often political and economic appetites are hidden beyond humane causes, and through their satisfaction the fate of the people affected by the development of events becomes uninteresting for history. The long and hard period after a total reversal of history and the entangled lives of entire nations remain out of books.

In the contemporary history of Europe, an example of this are the post-communist countries, where twenty-three years ago the dictatorship was replaced by democracy, the one-party rule by pluralism, and planned economy by market economy. The major part of society in these countries was given wings with the achieved freedom and was loaded with optimism and hopes of a better future.

Gone with the Wind was not being mentioned, “Wind of Change”² was being listened to. Yes, we had freedom, but we did not know what to do with it in order to defend our rights; we prayed, but we did not know “Lord’s Prayer”; we received our land back, but our relation with it was already interrupted; we were against egalitarianism but we were afraid of the enterprise. The ex-communist ruling crust took advantage of these confused times for total plundering through dirt cheap privatization, pyramid schemes, vacuuming up the banking system throughout huge loans, and a subsequent forced devaluation. Criminal organizations which held the population in fear and obedience were created. The arranged and controlled system was replaced by surviving in conditions of lawlessness and right-less free market. People lost not only their relative financial stability, but also their values. Liberty became abuse of freedom, and the absolute negation of the old system led to a spiritual crisis. In

² A song of the German band “Scorpions” from the 1990s, which is related to the end of the Cold War

addition to the rejected communist standards, humane values were also neglected; thus, confused people were seeking the right path.

Nowadays, more than twenty years after the downfall of the Iron Curtain, the former accumulation of capital is near its end: the criminals are already honest businessmen – they give money for charity and insist on sending their children to study in prestigious colleges. On the other hand, ordinary people feel tired of the long process towards democracy and some suspicion and nostalgia for the old times is aroused, but the aim is outlined and we citizens, although still roaming, are coming nearer to it.

We are also contemporaries of the reversal of systems happening in the Arab World from December 2010. They started in Tunisia and in this short period until today they embrace more than twenty countries from North Africa and the Middle East. With acts of self-ignitions, mass demonstrations, civil uprisings, riots, etc. which developed into civil wars, as is the case of Libya and Syria, these nations fight against corruption, poverty, inequality, unemployment, authoritarianism, etc. Up to now, the victims of the so-called “Arab Spring” are more than 100,000 (BBC News: Arab Uprisings), and they will probably not be the last, because the long and excruciating passage is yet to begin.

In the past, Moses rescued his nation from slavery and led it towards Canaan. During this journey, he received the Ten Commandments which were meant to contain the basic moral criteria. Besides, Moses forced them to wander forty years more in the desert towards the Promised Land until the last person bearing the mark of slavery had died. Mercy on the souls gone with the wind...

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