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Introduction. *Gone With the Wind* after *Gone With the Wind*: An Open- Ended Debate

Emmeline Gros

- 1 *Gone With the Wind*'s supporting actress Olivia de Havilland (1916-) once explained that she had "wanted to be part of *Gone With The Wind* as [she] sensed that the film would have a much longer life than others—perhaps as long as five years!" ("New Centenarian"). On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the film adaptation, the actress confirmed that if she had sensed that *Gone With the Wind* "would live much longer than any other film to date," she had "never dared to imagine that it would last for sixty years and still be going on strong" (qtd. in Truehart).
- 2 Scarlett O'Hara's famous words "Tomorrow is another day" certainly had a premonitory character. Both film and novel have indeed had incredible futures: Mitchell's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel has never gone out of print in the United States; the almost countless foreign editions keep selling too.¹ In 2014, the novel was voted the second-favorite book of Americans (Haq). The film? While calculating exact dollar earnings over an 80-year period may be utterly impossible, no film has earned more money if the figure is adjusted for inflation. Globally, Guinness World Records puts the film's revenues variously between \$3.3 billion and \$5.3 billion, topping even blockbusters like *Titanic* and *Avatar*.
- 3 Nothing, however, seemed to justify such a popularity. To understand what may explain *Gone With the Wind*'s appeal and its continued presence on the literary scene is to enter vexed territory. In his *New Approaches to Gone With the Wind* (2017), James Crank explains that the film has often been "devalued as exploitative entertainment," while the novel "has always inhabited an awkward space within the academy" (2). This academic attitude towards *Gone With the Wind* (and Civil War literature as a whole) is probably best exemplified by Floyd C. Watkins in his now infamous article "*Gone With the Wind* as Vulgar Literature":

Southern readers—and foolish romantic readers everywhere—dream of an impossible past, expect more of the present that can be realized, ignore an authentic culture while praising a false culture that never existed, foolishly defend themselves against attacks from the North, use false defenses of illogic and rhetoric, become vulnerable to attacks that could be avoided, fall victim to false and pretentious characters and dreamers and political demagogues, ignore and condemn the yeomanry and the peasantry. (95-96)

- 4 Claudia Roth Pierpont supports Watkins's argument, recognizing that "in the history of American literature—in all the published histories—[Mitchell's] place, when she has one, is in a corner part, as a vulgar aside having to do with numbers rather than words. She doesn't even make it onto the list of the Best Civil War Novels in either of the studies devoted exclusively to the genre." Surprisingly, Pierpont continues, for a book that has sold as many copies as it has, "*Gone With the Wind* hasn't a place in anyone's canon; it remains a book that nobody wants except its readers" (130).
- 5 This project started with the realization that the public may not have had enough of such Civil War tales. Sequels continue to be published, revealing the strong after life of *Gone With the Wind*. To quote Bastin on this subject, "the extent to which *Gone With the Wind* has seeped into American culture is massive. It has been endlessly parodied, homaged, copied, and plucked clean for inspiration" (1).² As of late, in 2015, that is, more than 75 years after the publication of the epic novel by Margaret Mitchell, a prequel with Mammy at its center, was released. Donald McCaig's *Ruth's Journey* (2014) has placed Mammy at the center of his narrative, thus hoping to provide, according to Peter Borland, his editorial director, "a necessary correction to what is one of the more troubling aspects of [*Gone With the Wind*], which is how the black characters are portrayed" (qtd. in Bosman).
- 6 Twitter has also become a more "modern" stage for *Gone With the Wind*. Artist Vanessa Place, starting in 2011, decided she would tweet the entire novel line by line with fans tweeting all day about the movie's memorabilia or the film screenings, each tweet entrenching/imposing and preserving *Gone With the Wind*'s legacy in the collective memory, 140 characters at a time.
- 7 And yet, the eightieth anniversary of *Gone With the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) continues to create controversy. With Confederate monuments coming down all over the South (Ha Van; Rossignol), pressure has mounted against the film adaptation itself. In 2015, *New York Post* film critic Lou Lumenick wrote that the film "buys heavily into the idea that the Civil War was a noble Lost Cause and casts Yankees and Yankee sympathizers as the villains, both during the war and during Reconstruction." The film, he claimed, goes to "great lengths to enshrine the myth that the Civil War wasn't fought over slavery, an institution the film unabashedly romanticizes." And because it is so—Lumenick concluded—the movie should be banned from cinemas or, at best, should be treated as a relic that should be walled off in museums (qtd. in Bastin).
- 8 As if sensing Lumenick's attacks against the movie, in 2009, Molly Haskell had demanded Mitchell's readers and film lovers to get to the truth beneath the legend, since "*Gone With the Wind*'s portrait of a noble South, martyred to a Lost Cause, gave the region a kind of moral ascendancy that allowed it to hold the rest of the country hostage as the 'Dixification' virus spread west of the Mississippi and north of the Mason-Dixon line." For Haskell and Lumenick (among others), *Gone With the Wind* is not an innocent piece of brilliant cinema. It has survived as a neo-Confederate political symbol, one working toward the glamorization of the Confederacy and the

romanticizing of the institution of slavery (Kilgore). Such attacks on the movie are significant because they call for a faithful representation, or rather an interrogation of how the history of the South has been (mis)represented by *Gone With the Wind*. Such criticisms point to the need to redress 80 years of heritage left by *Gone With the Wind*.

- 9 Not only Southern heritage, but American artistic legacy as a whole are affected by what Vanessa Place calls this desire to find “art that’s sanitized, art that’s precious, art that’s playing safe, art for the market” (Helmore). The truth is that there is more than the removal of Confederate statues; throughout the US, there are also calls to remove American classics like Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* or Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from American schools’ required reading lists. In June 2018, “[a] division of the American Library Association has voted to remove the name of the *Little House on the Prairie*’s author from an award because of the way she referred to Native Americans and black people” (Alexander). Because almost everyone, it seems, appears to be seized by “panic attached to all art works with historically uncomfortable connotations” (Kilgore), one may certainly wonder if *Gone With the Wind* is going to suffer the same fate.³
- 10 Who would have believed that one of Hollywood’s greatest achievements⁴ would, one day, be banned from a theater like the Orpheum Theatre in Memphis, Mississippi; a theater which had shown the 1939 film each of the past 34 years, as part of its classics series (Chow)? Brett Batterson, President of the Orpheum Theatre Group, claimed that “[a]s an organization whose stated mission is to ‘entertain, educate and enlighten the communities it serves,’ the Orpheum cannot show a film that is insensitive to a large segment of its local population” (qtd. in Deitert). Who would have imagined that Vanessa Place—the artist tweeting extracts from the novel—would be uninvited from a series of literary events (O’Flynn) and face accusations of racism, on the grounds that “any repetition of the racist stereotyping in Margaret Mitchell’s famous civil war romance renews [African American protest groups’] sense of injustice” (Helmore)?
- 11 By suggesting that Mitchell’s text is offensive to the point of causing what Batterson terms a “social media storm,” opponents to the screening of *Gone With the Wind* suggest that the movie may no longer hold any useful artistic or historical perspective (Deitert). In the light of such events, should we conclude that “despite the continued fame of Margaret Mitchell’s novel, the South seems to be finally losing the propaganda war as well,” confirming in turn that “the Southern partisan grip on historical myth is loosening” (Nestvold)?⁵
- 12 The heated debate over Confederate monuments is, of course, directly linked to the question of how to remember the Civil War. The call for removal is supposed to set the record straight by marking the symbolic ending of an era of oppression. If one is to believe historian Jacques Le Goff, everything—even *Gone With the Wind*—will indeed be forgotten sooner or later, since “memory only seeks to rescue the past in order to serve the present and the future” (qtd. in Rieff, 2016 22). Should one conclude that *Gone With the Wind* is no longer considered valuable to society as a whole, that it has merely become an instrument of the propaganda that seeks to euphemize the “peculiar institution” and promote the insidious “Lost Cause” rhetoric (Martin-Breteau)? Should one regard *Gone With the Wind* as an artifact whose time is over, rather than a product of its time (a defense angle used by Mitchell’s most ardent supporters)?⁶
- 13 Some critics suggest that if the debate has gone viral, with Confederate monuments being removed, it is “because people have realized [that] these are not innocent objects

of contemplation of the past, but powerful ideological statements that many, many Americans find hateful” (Rieff, 2017). Read in this light, can we claim that *Gone With the Wind* still offers more than “a useful artistic perspective” (Crank 3)? And if so, which ideological statement does it make? Put differently, what is so powerful about *Gone With the Wind* that it needs to be removed from screens even as it endures as a monument in the American popular imagination?

- 14 2020 marks a very important milestone in the afterlife of *Gone With the Wind*: as I started this introduction, the French publisher Gallimard was preparing to re-issue *Autant en emporte le vent* for its “Folio” series in an enriched, two-volume version containing the correspondence between the author, Margaret Mitchell, and Pierre-François Caillé, who translated the novel into French in 1939. The reedition promised to shed light on the unbreakable bond between Mitchell and Caillé, Caillé’s admiration for the literary qualities of her work, and the novelist’s recognition of the translator’s meticulous work, of which she remarked that he had been the only one to show concern for the dialectal variations of the characters (De Sepsaury).
- 15 As I conclude this introduction, and despite the enormous significance of Margaret Mitchell’s best-seller and Victor Fleming’s blockbuster as an historical phenomenon, an HBO Max spokesperson just announced that “[t]he US civil war epic *Gone With the Wind* has been dropped from HBO Max [...] after protests over its depiction of slavery” (qtd. in Pulver). Somehow, on June 10, 2020, three years after a Memphis theater canceled the screening of *Gone With the Wind* over criticism of the film’s racial insensitivity and in the aftermath of the mass protests sweeping across the United States following the death of George Floyd, *Gone With the Wind* has been removed (again), at least momentarily, from screens. The HBO Max spokesperson said:
when we return the film to HBO Max, it will return with a discussion of its historical context and a denouncement of those very depictions [...]. If we are to create a more just, equitable and inclusive future, we must first acknowledge and understand our history. (qtd. in Pulver)
- 16 Who would have imagined that the social distancing depicted in the “*Gone With the Covid*” parody (released in May 2020) had itself a premonitory effect? June 10 not only marked the removal of the film from TV or theater screens; it also sealed a form of social, historical, and cultural distancing from models of resilient, strong, and courageous women like Hattie McDaniel who, about her role as Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*, said she had “tried to make her a living, breathing character . . . to glorify Negro womanhood; not the modern, streamline type of Negro woman who attends teas and concerts in ermine and mink, but the type of Negro of the period which gave us Harriet Tubman, The Sojourner Truth” (qtd. in Mapp 1).⁷
- 17 McDaniel won an Oscar for her role as Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*. Though she was barred from attending a whites-only reception for Academy Award winners, she wrote: “My own people were especially happy [...]. They felt that in honoring me, Hollywood had honored the entire race. That was the way I wanted it [...]. I wanted this occasion to prove an inspiration to Negro youth for many years to come” (*The Hollywood Reporter*). Like the movie—removed from the theater screens for its stereotypical depictions of African American servants—will women like Hattie McDaniel be removed from the historical record? What will happen to our conscience when Mammy—who, McDaniel argued, is Scarlett O’Hara’s conscience when Scarlett had none (qtd. in Mapp 1)—is removed from our cinematic landscape? 127 years ago, June 10 marked the birth of

Hattie McDaniel. June 10 might also be remembered as the day which relegated Hattie McDaniel to the archives of American cinema.

- 18 In a very enlightening article entitled “The Power of Perception: Why You Can’t Unsee These Images,” columnist Alexis Madrigal explains how once we are invited to impose a particular reading on an image, it becomes difficult to see that image as anything else, to “unsee” it with fresh eyes: “Someone points out something and suddenly a secondary interpretation of an image appears. There’s something a little scary about this process, even when the images are harmless. We have a flash of insight and a new pattern is revealed hiding within the world we thought we knew.”⁸
- 19 At the same time, and as Loofbourow justly remarks, we often forget that directions can blind. Discussing the pernicious effects of “The Invisible Gorilla,” one of the most famous psychology experiments into selective attention and blinding direction, Loofbourow explains that our intuitions can certainly deceive us: the experiment reveals that when shown a group of six people (three in black shirts, three in white) with two basketballs and when instructed to count the number of times the players in white pass the basketball, approximately half the viewers completely miss the gorilla that dances through the circle of players, beats its chest, and walks away.
- 20 These scientific findings suggest there might be a cost to the directions we receive: influenced by 80 years of commentary on the movie and, now, instructed to denounce *Gone With the Wind* for its undeniably racist undertones, we might be missing a lot of what goes on around us. If indeed “Lost Cause”-centric plots are the players in white shirts and we are told that the bouncing balls are the only plots worth following, how many dancing gorillas will we have missed while we were counting?⁹
- 21 Those are some of the questions that this issue of *Transatlantica* addresses. In *Not Even Past: The Stories We Keep Telling about the Civil War*, Cody Marrs admits that the film and the 1936 novel on which it is based continue to dominate American memory of the Civil War (120). But why so? How can we explain *Gone With the Wind*’s ability to stand the test of time; how do we account for the public’s love/hate affair with Mitchell’s work, which has carried on well into the twentieth century (see, for example, Barber)? The work of six scholars is presented in this volume that delves into the rich past of both novel and film, while looking to the unforeseen tomorrows of *Gone With the Wind*.
- 22 It is our hope that these essays and interviews will contribute to the discussion, if only by offering alternative readings of both novel and film. This issue argues that it is important to acknowledge and try to understand what makes us uncomfortable with Mitchell’s and Fleming’s representation of the Civil War South. The historical or political stance (if not the reality) has evolved over the past 80 years and the exercise demands exploring new strategies for interpreting a film and novel that continue to crystallize so many tensions. Crank reminds us that, too often,
scholars continue to approach *Gone With the Wind* as one might approach a roadside attraction—with curiosity, bemusement, and a healthy dose of condescension; many are intent on untangling the mystery of global obsession with what, on the surface, appears to be an anachronistic and potentially dangerous novel. A serious discussion of the novel and film’s place with southern and American studies is rare.
(3)
- 23 We hope that these essays will bring some *serious* answers to the above questions, deploying critical approaches and a framework for re-evaluating Mitchell’s work as they dare challenge the often passionate critical procedures of both novel and film.

***Gone With the Wind* parodied**

- 24 *Gone With the Wind* lives on in the United States' collective imagination like few other narratives. The story, as a matter of fact, has generated a number of imitations, parodies, and retellings of all kinds. In her article in this issue, Taina Tuhkunen analyzes the aesthetics of distortion in *Went With the Wind* (episode 10.8) of *The Carol Burnett Show*, a TV parody which alternately reorganizes stage directions, rearranges costumes, reshuffles and hybridizes characters, and feeds upon intertextual connections. *Went With the Wind*, Tuhkunen proposes, is "a carnivalesque, dialogic and showy network where incongruous elements clash." In its parodic restaging of the clichéd white Southern aristocracy and its playing with the readers/viewers' knowledge of the well-known story, *The Carol Burnett Show* reveals the enduring allure of the already-seen *Gone With the Wind* which persists, Tuhkunen shows, not merely as a cultural touchstone, but as a dynamic narrative through which Americans continue to define themselves.
- 25 More recently, the Hollywood classic has been turned into a parody about Covid-19. Actress and producer Sarah E. Combs's "Gone with the Covid. Scarlet in Quarantine" follows the trace formula of other parodies like the 1976 *Went With the Wind*, believing that "there is a power in art to provide respite from our worries" (Combs). The project, which started as a family quarantine project, is a spoof of the classic film *Gone With The Wind*. Combs's short video has reached close to 70,000 views since its original upload in May 2020. The performance metrics not only prove the popularity of Mitchell's story, but also the usefulness of such parodic modes of critique in times of crisis. We are grateful to Sarah Combs for accepting an interview for *Transatlantica*.

***Gone With the Wind*, a movie to be watched again and again?**

- 26 In "Retourner à Tara: revoir *Gone With the Wind*," Sarah Hatchuel explores the legacy/imprint that the film has left on American readership and popular culture from the perspective of her own experience as a viewer. What is it that pulls viewers to go back to the four-hour-long movie and watch it repeatedly? For Hatchuel, the answer is to be found in its specific format that generates its own viewing modes. This Hollywood classic is indeed what she calls a film to be watched again and again, i.e. a work that grows more complex as it is rediscovered. Giving details about the film's production and the filming of key scenes, pointing to the foreshadowing effects, multiple echoes, and repetitions, Hatchuel encourages us to watch the movie again and anew through multiple angles. Hatchuel contends that *Gone With the Wind* has been conceived as a narrative of remarriage and a narrative of re-reading. Logically, it is also one that entices one to view it again and possibly revisit or reconsider what they thought they had understood when watching the film for the first time.

When the Southern Belle in *Gone With the Wind* is not so *belle* after all

- 27 My own essay “Seeing Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* with Fresh Eyes” recognizes that Mitchell’s novel has offered compelling avenues for feminist criticism. *Gone With the Wind* may be read as the story of a Southern belle, Scarlett, who is “not beautiful”, yet manufactures a façade of Southern bellehood while consciously drawing the masculine (and feminine) gaze to the manufactured aspect of the Southern belle archetype. By examining the ways in which *Gone With the Wind* (and Scarlett specifically) contests heteronormative, patriarchal, masculine constructions of Southern (ideal) femininity, I argue that Scarlett’s “ugliness” forces us to widen our perspective on Southern white feminine beauty and purity, and challenges the tropes of Southern white masculinity and femininity. The presentation of Scarlett is worthy of note because of the way it demonstrates the terrains of feminine difference and ugliness as complex (and enduring) fields for discussion.

80 years of *Gone With the Wind* iconography

- 28 If Rhett Butler’s and Scarlett O’Hara’s final words may be the most quoted in film history, the movie posters of the star-studded, historical epic film of the Old South are unquestionably the most recognizable ones in American cinema. In “*Gone With the Wind*, 80 ans d’images,” Pierre Berthomieu—in the continuity of his work on American cinema (*Le cinéma hollywoodien. Le temps du renouveau*)—analyzes the making and reception of *Gone With the Wind*’s iconic painted artwork style from the 1930s onward. As Berthomieu explains, while the original poster for *Gone With the Wind* was a pleasant, conventional shot of Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh, it was the poster that accompanied the 1967 re-release (featuring Clark Gable—with his white shirt ripped open—holding Vivian Leigh against a backdrop of orange flames) that went down in cinematic history. It is the plasticity of the film’s images, Berthomieu argues, which makes it one of the best and most durable pieces of Hollywood popular entertainment.

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nor erase films, art or novels of the past. In order to move past we must understand the times in which art was made and those who made it. We are a nation that is constantly growing but to deny showing this as a victory of 'not-offending' in a 'free society' is absolutely irresponsible."

7. Sojourner Truth, named Isabella Baumfree by her parents (c. 1797-1883), and Harriet Tubman, named Araminta Ross by her parents (c. 1826-1913), were black slaves who gained their freedom, changed their names, and protested against slavery. Both are honored during Black History Month in the United States to celebrate the achievements of people typically excluded from the telling of US history.

8. Madrigal uses the example of the Brazil 2014 World Cup logo as a facepalm.

9. I am indebted to Loofbourow for this turn of phrase.

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