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Marriage in *Gone with the Wind*: The Struggle for Social Agency*

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Chung, Ewha. "Marriage in *Gone with the Wind*: The Struggle for Social Agency." *Studies in English Language & Literature* 45.4 (2019): 109-132. This paper addresses Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), with a focus on how the heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, redefines agency for women within her three marriages that overlap with the Civil War and Reconstruction era of the South in American history. The heroine, I argue, begins as a victim within the paradigm between subject and conduit that Gayle Rubin illuminates in her essay, "Traffic in Women," but reverses her passive role within the kinship system of marriage that initially restricts her social agency and independence. Scarlett uses femininity but does not follow conventional gender roles. In the novel's ending, she returns to Tara not in defeat but with a will to survive and a refusal to sacrifice her life in the postbellum society of the South. Within the radically changing society depicted in the novel, my paper analyzes Scarlett's goals and what choices she is forced to make in each marriage in order to pursue what she values and desires most. (Sungshin Women's University)

Key Words: Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara, marriage, traffic in women

I. Introduction

The continuing popularity and commercial success of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, Margaret Mitchell, and her legendary *Gone with the Wind* (1936) extend

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beyond being “one of the all-time best-selling novels in the world” with its epic movie, failed sequel, and infinite parodies (Faust 12). What is puzzling, however, is that much of the fascination with Mitchell’s heroine, Scarlett O’Hara, focuses on evaluating or labeling Scarlett as feminist, pro- or anti-Irish, entrepreneurial, hypocritical, and even as “the belle gone bad,” thereby neglecting why she chooses to marry not once but thrice and how each of her marriages challenge norms and shape the novel’s plot (Entzminger 29). The obsession to judge and categorize Scarlett evades the central issue of ‘why’ the heroine chooses to marry and ‘what’ she does with each of her newly acquired marital statuses. Whereas Scarlett’s mother, Ellen, and her two sisters, Suellen and Careen, all retreat from society when they lose their first loves, Scarlett alone prevails. Scarlett chooses to use her three marriages to engage in creating her own social agency; she survives war and poverty, rebuilds her family home of Tara, and looks to the future with her iconic phrase, “Tomorrow is another day” (1037).

Scarlett, married three times, widowed twice, begins her social roles as wife within different kinship systems of marriage, which portray the heroine as a victim who struggles to change the power structure between husband and wife, and between men and women. The heroine’s progression from one marriage to the next reveals how Scarlett reverses the power structure within each of her separate relationships, thereby subversively using men (as a means of social climbing, as social agency to conduct business, and “for the fun of it”) and the legal system of marriage to meet her own needs (774). Upon closer examination, however, the novel presents a rather subdued and ambiguous ending in the sense that Scarlett, though she is able to actively modify her life rather than succumb to being used in a system of exchange, is abruptly abandoned in the end by the man—her husband—whom she finally realizes she loves and also needs as a business partner and social companion.

What echoes in the background of the novel’s ending, then, is Scarlett’s transformation in identity from passive victim, which includes her roles as the

rejected lover, victim of postbellum poverty, and social outcast, to that of active protagonist. This transformation, however, is double-edged because upon gaining social status, wealth, and power she can no longer return to the designated roles for women in society nor can she follow its norms. Scarlett's cyclical transformation from 'marriage to widowhood to marriage' entails a process of challenges and maturation in the form of unwanted pregnancies and motherhood, threat of losing her home－Tara, being subject to ostracism, and a humbling realization of her decade-long mistaken desire for the wrong man. Arguably, this painful awakening ultimately undermines Scarlett's personal achievements and hard-fought independence, but it is nevertheless a process that enables the heroine to choose and work for what she values most. My paper therefore does not focus on whether Scarlett's relationships are successful or romantic and historical, rather I seek to analyze how Scarlett breaks free from gender restrictions and how she independently responds, thinks, and acts in one of the most difficult periods in American history.

II. Marriage as Social Entitlement

Scarlett, the eldest daughter of a social-climbing Irish immigrant, Gerald O'Hara, begins initially as a victim within the patriarchal system of the antebellum and postbellum South, which was not only "a man's world, and [women] accepted it as such" (75) but also a society built upon the belief in the aristocracy of the "north Georgia county of Clayton" (26). Rejected by her lover, Ashley Wilkes, who chooses to marry his aristocratic cousin Melanie Hamilton, Scarlett is left with little choice other than to accept Charles Hamilton's, Melanie's brother's, proposal of marriage to gain, if not the man she loves, at least access to Clayton county's first families (69). At the sudden news of the engagement, Scarlett's mother is dismayed as she "wrung her hands and counseled delay" so that her young daughter "might think the matter over at greater length" (139). Her father, however, is seen "flushed

with brandy and pride" because his daughter "was marrying both money, a fine name and an old one" that would link the O'Haras-"foreigners"-to a lineage name and revered Clayton ancestry (140).

Triumphantly leading his daughter down the aisle on her wedding day, Gerald O'Hara, according to Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" serves as "the beneficiary of exchange" in which women are "transacted" by men "as a gift" within the "kinship system of marriage" (173) for access to "genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights and people－men, women, and children－in concrete systems of social relationships" (177). Scarlett might be seen as a victim within the "kinship system of marriage"－an exchange between men, which redefines family as "an imposition of cultural organization upon the facts of biological procreation" (170). In her essay, Rubin reiterates Lévi-Strauss's "mechanism of kinship systems" as "an exchange of women between men . . . and an implicit theory of sex oppression" (171). Building upon Lévi-Strauss's "concept of exchange of women," Rubin explicates "If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take [the women] who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it. . . . And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage" (174).

Scarlett's marriage to Charles Hamilton undoubtedly enables Gerald O'Hara's access to the Hamilton lineage and enhances the O'Hara family's social status, but what remains questionable is whether Scarlett is reduced to serving as a conduit within this kinship system of exchange. Scarlett is seen accepting Charles Hamilton's proposal into a loveless marriage, but she deliberately proceeds to set the wedding date one day before her lover's as a vengeful gesture of "spite" (774). More significantly, Scarlett suddenly decides to marry Charles just when she recalls how her father claimed that "he wouldn't be having the County laughing at his daughter" for making a "spectacle" of herself and "running after a man [Ashley] who's not in love" with her (52). Although trapped within a system of patriarchy and the legal

binds of marriage, Scarlett does not succumb to the passive role of conduit in which "men are the [sole] beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges" (194). Rather Scarlett reverses the power structure of exchange and takes on the role of beneficiary by not only refusing to be rejected by her lover for class differences but also gaining equal social status within the bounds of her new social circle, thereby redefining the legal marital relationship between husband and wife. Additionally, Scarlett unmans her father by defiantly continuing to pursue a lover who rejects her yet granting her father the social status he was unable to acquire on his own merits.

Although the novel painstakingly narrates Scarlett's three marriages and her unprecedented business success, the narrator, at the end, concludes that Scarlett never stopped longing for the "lost world of the antebellum South" and "had never understood either of the men she loved and as a result she had lost both of them" (958). Focusing on Scarlett's unhappy ending, Danielle Barkley explains how Mitchell's "fictional portrayal of history" outlines "the transformation of nostalgia into failed romantic desire" not only in the narrative but also within the title of the novel itself, *Gone with the Wind* (57). Barkley argues that "Scarlett's two failed relationships" serve to prove how "historical fiction" uses "erotic desire as a strategy to explore the desired, but inaccessible, past" (58). What is unsettling and even misleading about analyzing Mitchell's novel as "historical fiction" with a heroine who desires the past is that Scarlett does not believe in nor attempts to abide by what Barkley describes as the "particular historical circumstances" that restrained and even confined women in her society. Rather Scarlett acknowledges the patriarchal restrictions that force women into passivity and struggles to reverse the power structure through the only means of social agency available to her—the agency of marriage. It is within the legal structure of marriage that Scarlett reverses her role as victim to that of an active protagonist. Early in the novel, Scarlett criticizes the social norms concerning gender roles of courtship and marriage, "I wish to Heaven I was married . . . I'm tired of everlastingly being unnatural and never doing anything I want to do . . . Why is it a girl has to be so silly to catch a husband?"

(94-5). She even declares that "Some day I'm going to do and say everything I want to do and say, and if people don't like it I don't care" (95). The traditional and confining social contract of marriage then ironically serves to provide Scarlett with a legal status and identity that enables the heroine to participate on her own terms, which would otherwise have been impossible for women in the old South.

Scarlett, unlike her mother, Ellen O'Hara, does not adhere to the tragic feminine traits of renunciation and enter a loveless marriage, which entails a life of pious charity and frugality. Scarlett refuses to follow the norm of historical fiction and continues to chase the man of her dreams even after being rejected by her lover who chooses to marry another woman. She later deliberately marries her sister's sweetheart and, as Kathryn Artuso explains, "alternates between farm and factory management" to save her plantation home from being confiscated by post-war taxes; she serves as the head of the household during her father's mental incapacity and takes on the responsibility of supporting her family and their plantation (201). Scarlett does not feel remorse or guilt from the accusations of her being responsible for her second husband's untimely death during a KKK riot; and, she escapes the socially designated martyr life of widowhood by marrying yet again for the third time. Unlike any other woman in the novel, Scarlett reverses her designated historical role as a passive victim to that of an active aggressor within the patriarchal system. Scarlett is unique in that although she is trapped within the "double standard" and historical circumstances of the Civil War era, she continuously refutes the limitations that forced women to accept their given roles as rejected lover, defeated poor southerner, financial familial dependent, vulgar capitalist, and disgraced widow (Bauer 19). The question then of what serves as Scarlett's motivation and what choices she is forced to make in each marriage requires an analysis of the heroine's identity.

Scarlett is the oppositional epitome of her mother, Ellen O'Hara, whom she undeniably loves, respects, and endeavors to follow and emulate. Tall in height and calm in character, Ellen is from an upper-class, wealthy family of French descent

with distinct ancestral origins, whereas Scarlett is described as a blend of her aristocratic French mother and "her florid Irish father" (25) who was "vital and earthy and coarse" (50). Except for an unhappy ending to a romantic first love affair, Ellen and Scarlett share almost nothing in common as mother and daughter. Both Scarlett and her mother are unsuccessful in marrying their romantic first lovers, which then leads the two women to completely different paths in life. A young Ellen Robillard falls in love with her cousin, Philippe, who is sent away to the West and dies during the journey just after he is deemed unworthy and rejected by Ellen's father. Having lost the love of her life, Ellen, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explains, became "distant and preoccupied" and "never recovered from an early passion" (404). Ellen shuns her "staunchly Presbyterian" (45) wealthy aristocratic family and further retaliates by threatening to join a convent or by marrying someone her family abhors—"a vulgar, social-climbing, nameless, middle-aged Irishman," Gerald O'Hara (56).

Unlike Ellen, who renounces romantic love for a life of ascetic piety and complete melancholy separation from her privileged family, Scarlett willfully trades in romantic love for a loveless marriage to acquire upper-class social status that not only enhances the O'Hara family's social identity but also ensures her continual access to Ashley Wilkes, the man who rejects her confession of love. By choosing to marry Ashley's brother-in-law, Charles Hamilton, Scarlett gains legitimate familial access to her lover's pedigree, and her marital title enables the O'Haras to join forces with the two most prestigious families in the county. While Gerald triumphantly celebrates his daughter's marriage into the Hamilton clan, Scarlett refuses to acknowledge Ashley's marriage as one based on romantic love and chooses to define his marriage to Melanie Hamilton as a socially advantageous decision that joins the two most respected families—the Wilkeses and Hamiltons. In response to Ashley's and Melanie's engagement, Scarlett immediately accepts Charles' proposal of marriage assuming that she is doing the same as Ashley, entering a loveless marriage for enhanced social status and legal permission to

exercise her social title as Mrs. Charles Hamilton. Charles is also seen marrying the beautiful and eldest of three daughters of a wealthy, social-climbing, Irish immigrant, who has no son to inherit his flourishing estate. Whereas Ellen deliberately marries Gerald O'Hara to demean and horrify her family both socially and psychologically, Scarlett—much like her "bull-headed" father (61)—is seen as taking "the first step upward toward" being included amongst the plantation families of a "landed gentleman" (63).

As Mrs. Charles Hamilton, Scarlett legally enjoins Tara and herself to the prestige of the Wilkes's Twelve Oaks and the Hamilton's Atlanta society, while Ashley can be seen as securing his title in society as one of the leading families, by choosing for his bride a Hamilton and not an O'Hara—the daughter of the "new man" (69). Though charming and well-to-do, Scarlett is from a family of obscure Irish origins, "about whose grandfather nothing was known" (69), and hence is not considered as one of the "entrenched aristocracy" of the South (63). As Gerald O'Hara once did when marrying Ellen Robillard, Scarlett utilizes the agency of marriage to climb the social ladder and attach herself more intricately to Ashley and his social network of people. Under the guise of Mrs. Charles Hamilton, Scarlett continues to secretly and ardently love Ashley, while she enables the O'Haras to be—if not accepted—at least able to socialize with the aristocracy of the South through her agency of marriage. Far from withdrawing herself from the social center after she is widowed within two months, Scarlett participates in society, travels to visit relatives flaunting a baby she does not care for, and shockingly dances with men at charity balls, even though young widows refrained from such social participation.

Even when Scarlett is newly widowed, she secretly continues to desire and fantasize about a possible future with Ashley because although Scarlett has legally become a Hamilton family member, her title as a young widow ostracizes her from any prestige or social leverage within the patriarchal system. After her first marriage and sudden widowhood, Scarlett repeatedly returns to Tara, but not in a passive retreat from life as did her mother upon marriage. Scarlett, "in a man-to-man

manner," comes home to take on the role of head of the household after her father suffers a crucial fall from his horse and later dies heartbroken, leaving the sole financial responsibility of maintaining Tara to Scarlett (49-50). At home in Tara, before her father's death, Scarlett begins to carry out her role as household head soon after her mother dies, which creates hostility and conflict between Scarlett and her two sisters, Suellen and Carreen, who do not believe in their father's obsessive need to protect Tara and ultimately see Scarlett as a recurring threat and rival, even as a widow, for the attentions of their men. When Suellen and Carreen fail to marry the men of their dreams, they begin to resemble their mother in that Carreen shuns society and chooses a reclusive religious life in a convent, while Suellen—having lost her only lover to Scarlett—lives in bitter resentment and passively recedes into the shadows of society.

The most striking difference between the three sisters outlines what is characteristic of Scarlett and how she refuses the social norm of the period. For Scarlett, marriage serves as a means of agency that allows her legal proximity to Ashley and accessibility to social circles, while it also enhances the status of Tara. Scarlett reminisces upon entering widowhood that she was "done with marriage but not with love, for her love for Ashley was something different, having nothing to do with passion or marriage" (215). Romantic first love is not terminated or frustrated by ensuing marriages because marriage is a path of social mobility and not the ultimate goal itself. Scarlett learns that she is able to pursue her interest and goals only through the agency of marriage, which was the socially accepted means—if not the only—for women to actively participate in society.

Unmarried women or widows with offspring were commodities on the marriage market, passively waiting and hoping to be chosen by a man, regardless of whether he was the man of her dreams. In contrast to her mother and two sisters, Scarlett chooses to utilize the agency of marriage for specific interests and advancement rather than romantic love. Hence, when threatened by Ashley's rejection and on the verge of being excluded not only from his familial network but also by being

ostracized as a "spectacle," Scarlett suddenly decides to marry Ashley's brother-in-law (52). It is necessary, however, to note that Scarlett accepts Charles' proposal only after Ashley rejects her love and offer of marriage. In other words, rather than consent to her role as the rejected daughter from a social-climbing "foreign" family, Scarlett chooses to enter the upper echelons of society and, upon her marriage, the O'Haras are received into the inner circle of society (69).

Scarlett's abrupt yet decisive turn to marry Charles has been criticized not only as "manipulative" and "shallow" but also as "amoral" (Spanbauer 45). Scarlett, however, continues to maximize marriage as an agency to pursue social status, control a former lover, and utilize newly acquired legal identity in a society that painfully limits women's participation and expression of choice. Under the legal status of Mrs. Hamilton, Scarlett continues to love and pursue whom she romantically desires, use her title to support what she values, and thrive in a social system that forces women to passively accept and eventually recede into the patriarchal background of the old South. A widow and young mother, Scarlett agrees to take her baby to visit relatives in Atlanta, not only because there is the possibility of being closer to Ashley but also because she liked the town, which was "a mixture of the old and new in Georgia, in which the old often came off second best in its conflicts with the self-willed and vigorous new" and because Atlanta was so much "like herself" (150). Though Scarlett is regretful of having married Charles, she is not reduced to repentance, expelled from society, or even punished for dashing into a loveless marriage. Scarlett comes out bolder than before in that she wholeheartedly dislikes and challenges the laws of widowhood, by dancing with and continuing to accept the company of Rhett Butler, a man who dismisses the sincerity of her widowhood knowing that she married for "spite" and not love (774).

III. Marriage as Socioeconomic Identity

Scarlett's second marriage is rooted in her father's request to secure Tara at all costs, but she is unable to carry out her promise due to her utter lack of means to acquire funds. Motivation without means was inevitable given the fact that women could not independently own or inherit property nor could they apply themselves to business. As a young Confederate widow of "land-owners in the American South during Reconstruction," Scarlett learns that the Hamilton family estate and stocks have become worthless and comes to "constitute a shared trauma of usurped sovereignty" that is devastating (Sheley 1). Scarlett cannot legally borrow money from the bank as a Confederate client nor can she start a business to pay Tara's accruing taxes. Strapped for cash and pressed by impending tax deadlines, Scarlett latches onto Frank Kennedy, her sister Suellen's long-time lover, who has acquired wealth with his warehouse store business.

What would seem a logical and merciful means of gaining access to Frank's money would be for Suellen to marry Frank quickly and offer to help cover Tara's taxes. But Scarlett does not consider this possibility because she knows that Suellen does not possess their father's passion to hold on to and save Tara above all costs. More realistically, Scarlett is also aware that Suellen does not have the motivation or determination necessary to maneuver and control a future husband, his business or his money. What follows is simply an execution of plans to make payments for taxes and fulfill a promise to a father who has lost touch with the post-war reality. Regardless of her own prospects of another loveless marriage and Suellen's broken heart, Scarlett strategically lies to Frank about Suellen's plans to marry another man and proceeds to seduce and marry Frank in two weeks to complete a financial mission, which neither alters nor threatens her secret love for Ashley. In fact, the title of Mrs. Kennedy enables Scarlett to legitimately invite Ashley and his family to come and live in Atlanta and even work with her under the protective guise of Frank's fading health, her pregnancy, and the ever-expanding warehouse store and

her newly acquired lumber business.

"Bewildered" by Scarlett's "sweet urgency" of three hundred dollars for Tara's taxes, Frank immediately pays the bill and felt "that the money had been well spent" because he "had never before had a woman 'take on' over him" for his generosity (575). Although Scarlett's pragmatic second marriage secures Tara's future, it inevitably destroys Suellen's one hope of marriage to the only man who ever courted her—Frank Kennedy. With no other goal in life to pursue, as a woman in her historical period, Suellen fades into the background of the novel appearing occasionally to plot against her father and accuse Scarlett of lying to Frank about her being engaged, thereby sealing off any hope for her happiness. Suellen is left with the option of living the rest of her life as an old maid but eventually resorts to a compromising marriage to Tara's plantation manager, Will Benteen, "a fine man" but "beneath her" (668). Scarlett dismisses the criticism that folks will talk about her sister marrying "a Cracker," and declares, "I've never bothered about what people said" (668).

As Mrs. Kennedy, Scarlett takes over the management of the business—during one of Frank's illnesses—with professional finesse that leads to increased profits from the warehouse and even a new venture, the purchase of a sawmill. She pursues financial investments, by convincing Rhett Butler to trust her about future prospects of the lumber industry and to back her with a business loan. In contrast to Rhett, Frank was susceptible to the "usual masculine disillusionment in discovering" that women had brains, which made him feel the "usual masculine indignation at the duplicity of women," nevertheless he was helpless about "the fact that his wife had entrapped him with a lie" (577). As usurper, Scarlett brazenly overtakes and expands the warehouse front to a different scale of business profit, while "Frank learned early in his marriage that so long as [Scarlett] had her own way, life could be very pleasant" (578). Learning and conducting business through her second marriage, Scarlett realizes that "she was as capable as a man" and develops a "pride and a violent longing to prove" herself so that "she would neither have to ask for nor

account for to any man" (580). Scarlett and Frank and those surrounding them realize—most shockingly—that although Scarlett "was being unwomanly" by managing both the warehouse and sawmill, "Frank wanted rest and quiet" because the war "had wrecked his health, cost him his fortune and made him an old man" (600). But the peace that Frank gains is "hollow" because he purchases it "at the cost of everything he held to be right in married life" (600).

For Scarlett, who had been reared in the tradition that men were omniscient and women none too bright, the concept that a woman could handle business matters as well as, or better than, a man was not only revolutionary but also nonexistent. Society's condemnation and sexist discrimination create difficulty for Scarlett in that she cannot hire a man from her class to run her mill because qualified men were ashamed to work under the supervision of a woman. In contrast, Rhett is the only man who treats Scarlett as an equal within the financial sector and lends her the investment money she needs to buy a sawmill "in a man-to-man manner" that defines his respect and support for Scarlett and her self-created new role in society (50). Rhett acknowledges an equal in Scarlett and goes beyond defying the restraints and norms of society, by freely giving both his business advice and support to Scarlett, who struggles even through her pregnancy to become a full-fledged businesswoman. What results from her role as Mrs. Kennedy then is a marital partnership based upon circumstances that redefine the power structure between husband and wife and even serve to undermine social and legal norms that subordinate women. Frank, cautiously and unwillingly, trusts and endorses Scarlett's business-related decisions in investments and management, while the legal title of Mrs. Frank Kennedy enables Scarlett the social agency that was not historically allowed to women both then and for a long time to come.

During the changes and adjustment of her second marriage, Scarlett never loses focus of Ashley and even reaches out to bring him and his family closer to her and back to Atlanta, by incorporating him—during her last month of pregnancy—as manager of one of her sawmills. Although Ashley is seen as a defeated and washed

out Confederate army captain, in Rhett's words a "poor-spirited wretch," Scarlett continues to keep her secret love for Ashley alive (131). As Mrs. Frank Kennedy, Scarlett never once falters in her desire and devotion to Ashley, which is seen not so much as duplicitous but as marriage separate from romantic love and as the only legal agency available to Scarlett. Scarlett marries Frank to pay for Tara's taxes, while Frank marries a shrewd business partner who expands and increases his business but also remains dependent upon their marital status for social and legal agency. Frank, an older yet successful Irish immigrant warehouse store manager, marries the Hamilton widow to solidify his status in the postwar capitalistic world of Atlanta—"the new metropolis" (Clum 192). Scarlett's mind for business and her financial success buys Frank time and social status to participate in Democratic political meetings of the KKK in opposition to the Republican Union government. This mutually beneficial and interdependent social contract of marriage is necessary for Scarlett to continue her businesses, while it provides Frank both time and energy to participate in the struggle for government control in Georgia during the Reconstruction era.

In contrast to her first husband, Charles, the naive, young Hamilton aristocrat, Frank is an awkward, nameless, middle-aged Irish businessman who serves as a gentler version of the agrarian Gerald O'Hara. Frank's original dream of having a happy Irish family takes a detour when he marries Scarlett and, in return, his business flourishes under her management. Although Frank's initial criteria for a wife was a passive dependent woman who would happily bear him children, he comes to realize and regret that "he had caught a tropic bird, when a wren would have served him just as well . . . even better" (601). With this realization of his marriage, Frank changes and adapts to become deeply involved in the dangerous political struggle to secure voting rights so that Atlanta could vote for a "Southerner and Democrat" government (607). As Mrs. Kennedy, Scarlett does not succumb to being a child-bearing, passive wife but continues to struggle as a business partner who, unlike her husband, avoids politics and deals only with the capitalistic world of

dollars and cents. The marital roles of husband and wife have fundamentally changed when Frank, in an attempt to preserve and defend—rather than blame and condemn—Scarlett's injured dignity as a businesswoman, participates in a dangerous KKK riot on the labor camp of Shantytown.

To increase lumber profits, Scarlett buys out her competitors, steals contracts, sells poor-quality lumber for full price, and finally decides to hire prisoner laborers rather than pay wages to former slaves who were now free and therefore too expensive. The cheap, slave-like labor of prisoners increased profit but also created a dangerous setting not only for Scarlett but also for anyone who had to supervise and monitor the sawmill as a daily routine. Being the owner and supervisor of a burgeoning lumber business, for any man or woman, was both a challenging and yet lucrative non-agrarian venture in which only a selected few succeeded. Having achieved and transgressed so far beyond the norms of gender, Scarlett no longer fits in a world in which people believed that "It was a man's world, and [women] accepted it as such" (75). Even when social creed exercised such beliefs as "You must not interrupt gentlemen when they are speaking, even if you do think you know more about matters than they do," Scarlett never once hesitates to challenge and bully her husband, her hired sawmill manager, and her neighbors to meet her end (75-6).

When Scarlett is attacked during one of her overseeing rounds near the sawmill site, she is not ashamed or embarrassed but rather indignant about not being acknowledged as the labor prisoners' supervisor and becomes hysterical about her husband's lack of moral support. In response, Frank does not reprimand Scarlett for venturing into a man's world nor does he place the blame for the attack on his wife. Rather Frank participates in a KKK raid on the prisoners' camp where Scarlett was attacked, in an attempt to discipline 'male' laborers, both black and white, and reinforce the authority of their factory owners, regardless of gender, thereby vindicating Scarlett as a legitimate businesswoman. Tragically, Frank is brutally killed during the raid, which has been set up as a trap by the Union army in an

attempt to stamp out the KKK's illegal activities. Although Frank and Scarlett, as husband and wife, seek to change their surrounding society to see their point-of-view concerning the legitimacy of Scarlett's businesswoman identity and the necessity to uphold her dignity as rightful owner and supervisor, Frank dies and Scarlett is reduced to widowhood again.

To support her family and Tara, Scarlett redefines her marital status to that of businesswoman, whereas Frank redefines his role as a retired businessman who strives to gain political ground during the Reconstruction era. Marriage provides Scarlett with the social and legal agency to conduct business, provide for her family, and actively pursue and protect the man she secretly loves, while also enabling her husband to retire from business to see after his health conditions and pursue his personal political interests. Scarlett exemplifies what society and the economy at large are missing, but the question of whether Scarlett's financial gains justify the means of her gaining control over her husband's business through marriage is complex. It is necessary to examine Frank and evaluate his business success before and after his marriage to Scarlett. By reassessing Frank and his warehouse business, it becomes apparent that although "he had been a successful business in the easy days," he "utterly" lacked in the "aggressiveness needed in these new bitter times" (600). Although Frank criticizes Scarlett for "being unwomanly" with her "unwomanly sawmill," it is apparent that his business has grown and developed under Scarlett's investments and management, and that the same results would not have happened had he married Suellen instead.

The socioeconomic outcome of Frank's and Scarlett's marriage goes beyond social definitions of husband and wife in that it portrays "a more balanced economic vision" that "privileges both a rural and an urban identity for the South through" Scarlett's management of agrarian and entrepreneurial businesses (Artuso 201). Frank's initial courtship with Suellen and his final marriage to Scarlett represent a transition in the economy that jolted not only daily businesses but also how people interacted with one another and more importantly why people began to change. It

was the war, poverty, and, as Carolyn Porter writes, "the reality of the capitalist entrepreneurial spirit" that actually drove Scarlett to painstakingly mature into a businesswoman (707). Sarah Gardner claims that Scarlett adapts to "changing times, becoming part of the enterprising southern bourgeoisie" (239). Whereas Scarlett uses her femininity to marry thrice, she deliberately refuses to follow conventional gender roles and chooses to sell lumber to the burgeoning New South. It is then not so much a question of whether Scarlett's decision to marry Frank is immoral or not but rather 'how' her marriage changes the relationship between husband and wife and 'why' such changes are being introduced through the agency of marriage, ironically one of the most traditional social contracts of the postbellum South.

IV. Marriage as Defiant Social Challenge

Legally, Frank's death leaves Scarlett widowed and subject to limited agency, while socially, Scarlett is ostracized and blamed for her husband's death. What would have been daring ambition in a businessman is devalued and scrutinized as overzealous greed in a woman who should not but continues to conduct "unwomanly" business. Scarlett's efforts to increase the production of lumber is villainized to the extent of her being reduced to a social outcast and seen as the punished, immoral wife who is reduced to paying the price through eternal widowhood. Again reduced to the status of widow and subject to its restrictions in legal matters, business management, and even in daily routines of mourning attire and public conduct, Scarlett retreats from society and resorts to drinking alone. Once again stripped of the agency of marital status, although financially secure, Scarlett is confined to live the life of a penitent with no recourse to the ambitions and robustness of her previous lifestyle. This retreat from society does not suit Scarlett. Like Scarlett, her mother married for spite, but then retreated from society. Like Scarlett, Suellen ultimately married for Tara, but then also retreated. Even Carreen,

who did not marry but who's financé died in the war, ultimately retreated to a convent to cope with her grief. More depressed than grieved, Scarlett sits alone with the shades pulled down and drowns her misery with whiskey. When Scarlett is on the verge of being forced to recede into the background of society, her longtime acquaintance and business partner, Rhett Butler, comes around to greet the grieving widow with a proposal of marriage and means of escape. Scarlett quickly accepts and the newlyweds leave for an extended honeymoon of luxury in New Orleans, which is meant to serve as a defiant refusal of society's rules of widowhood.

Rhett sums up Scarlett's marriage life and adds a persuasive argument in his proposal of marriage, "you've never really been married. I'll admit you've had bad luck—[marrying] once for spite and once for money. Did you ever think of marrying just for the fun of it?" (774). Rhett is aware that Scarlett is not in love with him and that she does not need either an aristocratic name or money to provide for her family and Tara. However, Rhett knows that Scarlett needs not only marital status to regain her active social status but also his wealth to "do and say everything" she wants "to do and say, and if people don't like it" she claims she couldn't "care" less (95). Annoyingly aware that Scarlett is still in love with Ashley, Rhett goes as far as to ask "Did you ever come across the old situation of the disinterested wife falling in love with her own husband?" (778). When Rhett swears in frustration and takes leave, Scarlett retorts by commenting "Don't fly off the handle so, because I didn't lie [about loving you] and make you feel conceited" (778). Rhett and Scarlett's marriage then differs from her previous ones because her husband fully understands 'how' Scarlett utilizes the agency of marriage and 'why' she agrees to marry him—although she initially rejects his proposal in an attempt to save herself for Ashley.

Rhett is the only person who recognizes that Scarlett chooses to marry Charles Hamilton for "spite," and Frank Kennedy for "money." But Scarlett's two former marriages and offspring do not discourage Rhett from proposing to her. Rather Rhett not only acknowledges how Scarlett utilizes marriage as legal social status to

achieve "unwomanly" goals but also accepts her as a business partner and grants her request for a loan to buy a sawmill, which proves to be the crown of all her business endeavors. Although Scarlett is reluctant to acknowledge how much she and Rhett are very much alike, she nevertheless seeks his help during her most trying moments. Scarlett trusts Rhett and accepts his help when fleeing Atlanta, resorts to seducing him in jail for Tara's tax money, and then goes on to borrow money from him for business investments. At Twelve Oaks, even before Ashley rejects her proposal of marriage, Scarlett develops respect for the aloof and scandalous Rhett Butler, who frankly tells his Confederate comrades that they do not stand a chance of winning the war against the North because they are strategically unprepared and practically unequipped with the necessary artillery (122). Rhett and Scarlett, both defiant of social opinion, recognize an independent spirit within one another that eventually proves to be both attractive yet crippling in their marital relationship.

Whereas Scarlett's need to marry is quite obvious, Rhett's reason for marrying Scarlett is not and requires deeper analysis. Rhett, who believes that "only when like marries like can there be any happiness," does not seek to purchase a commodity off the marriage market. Rather Rhett recognizes Scarlett as a woman who can function as his equal and as an independent individual who does not succumb to social norms of husband and wife (53). Rhett provides Scarlett with legal status and social agency, while Scarlett unintentionally enables Rhett to be portrayed as the compassionate husband to a 'misfit' wife and a 'doting' father to their daughter. Scarlett's marriage to Rhett then is often seen as her big break but under closer scrutiny, in the Reconstruction period of postbellum America, Rhett stabilizes his future finances in Atlanta, the center of "commerce and industry," and secures his ambiguous pre- and post-Civil War position in society by marrying Mrs. Scarlett O'Hara Hamilton Kennedy (Clum 192).

The husband and wife relationship undergoes yet another transformation in that Scarlett pursues her secret love and businesses, while Rhett sheds his reputation as

a “Republican” “Scallawag” and ingeniously cultivates ties with “every female dragon of the Old Guard in town” (837). Rhett transforms into the perfect family man, who relishes his newly domestic roles and sides with the townspeople in being “ashamed of Scarlett” holding parties and associating with the “new people”—white trash—of Atlanta (842). As a newlywed back in Atlanta, Scarlett enjoys the company of the “mongrel society thrown together,” while she participates in “an orgy of spending such as Atlanta had never seen before” thereby deliberately disregarding the “Old Guard” society of Atlanta (814).

The ending of the novel poses several unanswered questions about Rhett and Scarlett and their dissolving marriage, which has been analyzed as Scarlett’s complete realization of how she has been in love with a fantasy of Ashley and why she has not been able to acknowledge her true feelings for the man she has been in love with and to whom she is married. Unlike her previous marriages, Scarlett has met her match and cannot control or bully Rhett, nor does she have to lie and cater to his needs. Rather it is Scarlett who must mature and break out of her illicit fantasy about Ashley and come to terms with her misuse of the legal contract of marriage and her husband.

Rhett, on the other hand, marries without romantic delusions and patiently waits for Scarlett to realize his sincerity, while Scarlett is left exposed and uncertain as how to proceed in her relationship with Rhett because she is on an equal level with her husband for the first time in three marriages. Scarlett describes that “for the first time in her life she had met someone, something stronger than she, someone she could neither bully nor break, someone who was bullying and breaking her” (871). The question again then is ‘how’ does this husband and wife relationship change and ‘why’ does her marriage to Rhett trigger her final and earth-shattering realization about Ashley.

Scarlett’s undying love for Ashley never wavers despite the fact that she is incapable of understanding him and has nothing to gain from marriage to him, especially after the war. Although her love for Ashley has “nothing to do with

passion or marriage," it begins as an infatuation "of the Perfect Knight and her dream asked no more than acknowledgement of [Ashley's] love" in return (215). However, as John M. Clum explains, when "Scarlett realizes that Ashley's love for her was sexual desire," she no longer wants his love because it puts her in the same group of "that [Belle] Watling woman"—prostitution (195). Whereas Scarlett has no qualms over marrying for "spite" or "money" (774), she blatantly rejects the "sexual desire Ashley has felt for her" (Clum 195). At the end of the novel, when Melanie dies, Scarlett's infatuation comes to a halting end and her feelings for Ashley ring empty "without fever or longing or passion" (939).

Rhett, however, is not impressed with Scarlett's sudden enlightenment about Ashley and her abrupt moral turnabout towards himself. Rather Rhett sees their former relationship as married equals dissolving when Scarlett repents for her past selfish mistakes, apologizes for not being able to see Rhett for who he really is, and finally begs Rhett to forgive and forget the past and start anew as loving husband and wife. Rhett however does not want to "pick up the broken fragments" of their marriage and live in conventional terms of a patched-up image of what their marriage used to be; and, he bluntly concludes "What is broken is broken" (957). He refuses to continue the marriage because he realizes that Scarlett will not be the same woman he fell in love with and married. Rhett believes that Scarlett will resume a more traditional role as a passive, doting wife and relinquish her identity as an equal marital partner whom Rhett loved and enjoyed being challenged by. Scarlett is reduced to tears and pleads with her husband who declares that he is leaving her and does not want to renew a relationship that does not have the equality of souls he once valued.

In the last conversation between husband and wife, Kathryn Artuso summarizes how "Scarlett and Rhett converse as mature individuals"—"unmasked before one another" (226). For Scarlett, this conversation was the "first time she had ever approached understanding any other human being" (1032). Rhett's "exhausted" response, on the other hand, is portrayed as a "symbolic collapse in the face of

multiple catastrophes" and his "final incapacitation" of surrender "reveals the dominance of Scarlett" and her emerging new society (Artuso 226-7). A heartbroken Scarlett closes the front door on her leaving husband but does not easily sink into the reclusive renunciation of her mother and sisters. Rather we are left with a Scarlett who promises to try and win back Rhett by returning to Tara to rejuvenate her courage and spirits and to challenge her future both with or without Rhett.

V. Conclusion

When Rhett packs up his bag and leaves, Scarlett should be devastated and crushed because the man she finally realizes she loves is leaving her in such a defeated state of hopelessness. As Barkley states, Scarlett never stopped longing for the "lost world of the antebellum South" and "had never understood either of the men she loved and as a result she had lost both of them" (958). And yet Scarlett is unlike Ellen, her mother who shuns her family forever, and her two sisters, who accept to live their lives in reclusive passivity after having lost their former romantic first loves. In contrast, Scarlett bounces back after three failed marriages only to reach out toward what she values most－Tara, her home, and her family－with confidence and hope for the future. Barkley's claim that "Scarlett's two failed relationships" serve to prove how "historical fiction" uses "erotic desire as a strategy to explore the desired, but inaccessible, past" should but does not ring loud and clear in the end (58). Scarlett's passion for land and Tara serve not to weaken the heroine with an inaccessible longing for the past but rather provide a place to return to with her mistakes and to rejuvenate to continue her struggle against the norms of society. Because Scarlett has never been one to believe in or attempt to abide by the "particular historical circumstances" that restrained and even confined women, readers are left with a newly improved heroine who has become wiser and more mature in both her marital relationships and business dealings. Scarlett is determined

to go on living out her dream, while she tries to win Rhett back. But whether or not Rhett concedes to "pick up broken fragments and glue them together" in a "mended" marriage and live with Scarlett is no longer the essential goal of the novel or for the heroine, who has never been limited by any of her failed romantic desires (957). Readers are left not with despair but hope and faith that Scarlett will earnestly try to win back Rhett and that even though she does not end up with him, her life will not follow the common path designated to women in Scarlett's historical period. Scarlett reassures herself that she can change her situation and reminds herself that "Tomorrow is another day," which indicates that she will continue to fight for what she wants and is to a certain degree confident that she can achieve what she sets out to do.

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