

# Magarate Mitchell's 'Gone with the Wind': A Saga of Lost Love and Unhappy Marriages

## Abstract

'Gone with the wind' is a romantic epic by Margaret Mitchell. The novel depicts the story of the America in the years of 1861-1864, the crucial years of American civil war and the end of slavery system when Abraham Lincoln was the president. The clash was not between the whites and blacks only but rather prominently it was between the South and North America. The novel relates the glory and beauty of life in the days before the abolition of slavery system in the semi feudal society in Georgia County that produced cotton for business purpose and for sale. The influence of power, position and most prominently of war can be perceived clearly in the conjugal relations and matrimony. However the universal theme of love has been depicted in many hues and colors in the novel. Almost all the characters lose their loved ones. They miss so many things that they will have to learn to live without. But the biggest loss for them is that of their most beloved good old days when life was charming with its slow beauty, sense of security, gallantry and grace.

**Keywords :** Passion, Supreme, Andering, Culminates

## Introduction

Love is thought to be the master passion and supreme bliss on this earth. Shakespeare called it the guiding star for every wandering bark. But Margaret Mitchell's 'Gone with the Wind' is a saga of broken hearts and unsuccessful marriages. Though they say that everything is fair in love and war but both love and war prove unfair and destructive for the characters in the novel. It is well known that tragic and melancholic love is the basis of all the romantic epics and 'Gone with the Wind' is always referred to as one. Even in the cases where love is granted and culminates into marriage in most marital relations the love is one sided though the marriage takes place with mutual consent. In the novel the first and foremost duty of mothers seems to be to teach their daughters how to impress the young men and get a suitable husband. The governesses fuss upon their young mistresses about the propriety of behavior, manners and way of talking while the gentlemen are around. They would advise them to eat less than their appetite because a girl who eats to her fill is supposed to be unladylike and doesn't catch a husband. The girls are taught to pamper the vanity of men and behave like timid, ignorant creatures totally bereft of any ability for the understanding of business, politics, warfare or anything serious. In the very starting pages of the novel we find ample evidence of this husband catching when Ellen O' Hara teaches her daughter Scarlett:

"You must not interrupt gentlemen when they are speaking, even if you do think that you know more about matters than they do. Gentlemen do not like forward girls".<sup>1</sup> P\_47 The novel is full of courtship, marriage proposals and love affairs. However the love triangle between Scarlet O'Hara, Ashley Wilkes and Rhett Butler is the sheet anchor of the plot, the whole plot revolves around it. It is in this very love triangle that we feel the poignancy and exuberance of love at its extreme. To win Ashley, Scarlet is ready to go any length. She is a vivacious, lively and full blooded girl with an aggressive and dominating nature. At the barbeque party she lets lose her charms and flaunts in such a way that all the unmarried man present there are swept off their feet. All the boys hover around her like moths over a flaming light. The Tarletan twins Brent and Stuart beaus of Careen and India Wilkes respectively; Frank Kennedy the beau of her own sister Sullen; Charles Hamilton, the dream boy of Honey Wilkes, sister of Ashley Wilkes himself; Fontaine boys Tony and Alex the sweet hearts of Munroe girls, all dance attendance upon her. They are ready to die and murder for her sake, at the slightest encouragement from her. Her only aim in all this flamboyance, in all this glamorous behavior is to attract Ashley's attention. Unfamiliar with her sentiments and intentions Ashley takes all this very



**Sonu Devi**

Assistant Professor  
Deptt. of English  
BPS University,  
Sonapat, Haryana

casually and her aim is defeated. But Scarlett is too headstrong and too self confident a girl to resign so easily. She corners him in the library and makes a clean breast of her love for him. She is dead sure that Ashley too is in love with her but he is marrying Melanie under a moral obligation or because their family tradition of marrying the cousins. Ashley quite intelligently tries to reason with her that he is not as passionate in his feelings as she is and that they are so unlike each other and will not make a perfect match. Moreover he gives to know that he has only respect and liking for her but Scarlett is not ready to believe him. When further forced for a runaway marriage literary and sensitive Ashley expresses his ideas:

“Love is not enough to make a successful marriage when two people are as different as we are. You would want all of a man, Scarlett, his body, his heart, his soul, and his thoughts. And if you did not have them you would be miserable. And I couldn’t give you all of me. I couldn’t give all of me to anyone. And I wouldn’t want all of your mind and your soul. And then you would be hurt, and then you would come to hate me \_ how bitterly! You would hate the books I read and the music I loved, because they took me away from you even for a moment.” 2 P\_91

On the other hand he is quite sure of his happiness in his alliance with Melanie, his cousin, who he thinks is quite like him. He philosophizes and justifies his marrying her saying:

“She is like me, part of my blood, and we understand each other. Scarlett! Scarlett! Can’t I make you see that a marriage can’t go on in any sort of peace unless the two people are alike? 3” Ibid

Hearing all this Scarlett was beside herself with anger and starts berating Ashley and then quite out of control she slaps him right in the face with all her strength. Sharp and go getter Rhett butler who too is resting their unwittingly witnesses the whole incident and falls victim to the elemental personality of Scarlett though he does not let her or anybody else know about it. The seeds of liking are sown in his mind which will later sprout in form of love. The more he argues with her about Ashley not being a suitable match for her the more head strongly she reacts. Rhett butler in his heart becomes aware of her strong passion for possession and stubbornness which responds to his own dominating self. Thus the foundation of love triangle is laid down.

Hurt and wounded Scarlett marries Charles Hamilton not because she loves him nor has any warm feelings for him but just out of sheer vengeance and to hurt everybody around her including Ashley, Melanie and India Wilkes. Her rashness costs her heavy when on the marriage bed she realizes that marriage is not only a romantic affair of being led to altar but also means sharing bed. She starts weeping and Charles thinks it to be the modesty and delicacy of his bride. Scarlett can’t understand that she has married a man for whom not only she has no love but has an active contempt. But this is only the beginning of her troubles as she soon becomes a widow and later discovers that she is pregnant. Nevertheless she goes to Atlanta. There too her only consolation is not her son or any sense of patriotism but the possibility of nearness to her beloved Ashley who has gone to

the warfront. Stealthily she reads Ashley’s letters. Rhett Butler keeps visiting her there under one pretence or the other. Wherever is Ashley, Scarlett’s heart pains for him and wherever maybe Rhett butler his heart aches for Scarlett. We can understand the vehemence of her longing for Ashley with the statement she makes when he comes back from the front on a leave. When Ashley was going back she says that she would go with him to Virginia and that she is ready to cook for him and to polish his boots just to be near him. She would live on just the word of his mouth if he said that he loved her. She keeps imploring but Ashley stands his ground and nothing would budge him. All her entreaties, all her tears and all her shows are in vain. Nevertheless her heart pulsates only for Ashley.

When Yankee armies storm Atlanta and put it in virtual flames it is Scarlett who stands by Melanie as latter is in the throes of child birth. She even removes her from the town amidst the shelling and blasting bombs. Only Rhett butler is available to help her in that juncture though for a very short while. He even arranges a horse and a cart for her when there could be found none. Scarlett is always feared if she would be able to see the apple of her eyes Ashley again. Even decent, upright and patriotic Melanie is worried about her beloved husband Ashley. Scarlett supports Ashley’s family and Ashley himself when he is back from the front. At last Ashley’s decency and modesty wears out against the force of her passion. He is swept of his feet not by her charms but by the intensity of her love and he accepts it:

I love you, your courage and your stubbornness and your fire and your utter ruthlessness. How much do I love you? So much that a moment ago I would have outraged the hospitality of the house which has sheltered me and my family, forgotten the best wife any man ever had enough to take you here in the mud like a..” 4p\_402

In the past too the war had wrecked havocs on the loving heart of Ellen O’ Hara, Scarlett’s mother, when she was in her prime, a charming girl just fifteen year old. Her sweetheart Philippe Robillard went to the war front in New Orleans and died there in a bar room brawl. She never forgot him and never did she forgive those who had encouraged him to enlist and to go to the front. She accepted marriage proposal of Gerald O’ Hara, old enough to be her father, not out of love or joy of marriage but simply because she must get married or she would go to convent and be a nun. Rest of her life she cradled a broken heart in her bosom. The brightness of life and the sheen of her eyes went with Philippe. She lived a life of austerity and self mortification. Gerald had thought that she was too young and fifteen was not an age to know much about love. But he was mistaken because even after giving birth to his six children her first love never left her till the deathbed. So deep was the shock of the lost first love on her psyche that even at the last moment, ill and lay down with typhoid, she broke out in to a delirium and the diamond of love lying deep at the bottom of the sea of her heart rises to the surface and she called out his name: “Philippe! Philippe!” Nobody except Mammy ever knew who this Philippe was.

Mammy stood as though turned to stone glaring at Dilcey but Scarlett dropped her head into her hands. Philippe\_who was he and what had he been to mother that she died calling him?"5p\_ 315

Scarlet ventures into marriage a second time after the war is over and things have changed. The glory of the past is gone and the world around them has shaken itself into anew shape. She needs money to save her beloved lands. She enters into a loveless marriage with Frank Kennedy here too ulterior motif being his money. She stoops to lying and breaks Kennedy's heart saying that his beloved Sullen has married Tony Fontaine. After marriage she makes Kennedy's life miserable by being very professional and doing things fit only for a man. Kennedy dies in a Ku Klux Klan mission. She is widowed again.

Having tired of waiting for so many years Rhett Butler proposes her within the mourning period, with a smoldering heart underneath a calm and composed appearance. But she rejects him again and again as she has had enough of marriages. Scarlett says that she does not love him and there is no fun in being married.

"It is fun for men \_though god knows why. I never could understand it. But all a woman gets out of it is something to eat and a lot of work and having to put up with a man's foolishness\_ and a baby every year"6 P\_ 629

Rhett very much self confident of himself and his abilities to understand women and win their hearts brings her round for marriage. He gives Scarlet all that life could give: pleasures of life, foreign tours, fine dresses, big parties, a lot of shopping; and to cap it all a palatial, exquisite house in Atlanta. Actually he wants to arouse love in Scarlett's heart for him, the same passionate love as she has for Ashley Wilkes. Alas! For all his sacrifices, good intentions, and money he is unable to see that flicker in her eyes. And he is aware that she still has love for Ashley. Another unhappy married life starts. They quarrel frequently and he takes to drinking with the worm of jealousy for Ashley eating into his heart. Scarlett is again pregnant. But now she wants to abort the child. He is shocked and for the first time we see Rhett unnerved and beside himself with shock and fear thinking that the abortion might take her life. A beautiful daughter is born to them who is named Bonnie Butler. Rhett Butler turns all his attention and care to Bonnie and he limits all his bad habits. She is so much pampered and loved that she actually gets spoiled. Bonnie even sleeps in his bed. This is the fiercest type of phillial love. Scarlett too loves her more than her other two children. But the fact remains that the fire of love for Ashley is still smoldering in her heart. In the scene when she is alone with Ashley in the lumber mill office they miss the good old days and embrace each overcome with the shared nostalgia, though very innocently and without the vaguest thought of adultery. They are seen in this position by India Wilkes, and one eyed ex-convict Archie. Soon the news spreads everywhere. Scarlett thinks miserably:

"If we had been caught that Christmas of his furlough when I kissed him goodbye\_ if we had been caught in the orchard at Tara when I begged him to run away with me\_ oh, if I had been caught any of the times when we were really guilty, it wouldn't be so

bad! But now! Now! When I went to his arms as a friend..."7 P\_701

However Melanie loves Scarlett too much to believe anybody and is too much grateful to her to think against her. Scarlett is embarrassed and miserable thinking of the entire world and most of her husband. But Rhett stands with her though Archie tells him everything. It is he who takes her out to the world confident in his heart of her innocence. He knows she is faithful to him. Here he gives expression to his long suppressed emotions and lays bare his heart to her. He observes with vehemence:

"Oh, yes, you've been faithful to me because Ashley wouldn't have you. But, hell, I wouldn't have grudged him your body. I know how little bodies mean\_ especially women's bodies. But I do grudge him your heart and, your dear, hard, unscrupulous, stubborn mind. He doesn't want your heart the fool, and I don't want your body. I can buy women cheap but I do want your mind, and your heart and I'll never have them, anymore than you'll have Ashley's mind. And that's why I'm sorry for you."8 P\_710

He tells her about the futility of her mooning after Ashley for he would never understand her and he loves poetry and arts that have no meaning for Scarlet as she is simply money minded and down to the earth creature and then for the first time he makes love with her with the real passion and Scarlett conceives again. There is a fierce quarrel between the husband and wife and accidentally she falls off and rolls down the staircase and has a miscarriage. Now their love and comfort rests in Bonnie only. As the fate would have it Bonnie dies leaving their lives blank; their emotional world shattered; their hearts torn and Rhett Butler is at the brink of lunacy. In the end Scarlett realizes how much she has wronged Rhett by riding a rough shod over his emotions. But it is too late Rhett goes out away from her saying that even the most deathless dies out with time. The reality dawns upon her:

She had never understood either of the men she had loved and so she had lost them both. Now she had a fumbling knowledge that had she ever understood Ashley, she would never have loved him; had she ever understood Rhett she would never have lost him"9\_P\_783

The above discussion shows amply that the novel 'Gone with the Wind' is a saga of broken hearts and unhappy marriages. Apart from the love triangle of Scarlett, Ashley and Rhett Butler the other pairs of lovers also draw a blank suffer miserably in lives and live a forlorn life. Careen's beau Brent Tarletan is killed in the war and with her cleft heart she wants to be a nun; India Wilkes is living an unhappy meaningless life after the death of Stuart; Munroe girls' after the death of Fontaine brothers' are deprived of any joy in life; Archie the one eyed ex-convict murdered his wife for adultery. Even aunt Pittypat and her brother Henry Hamilton live a lonely life without setting up their families.

#### References

1. all the references in the paper have been taken from the 'Vishv Books' edition of the book. ISBN: 81-7987-138-x. publisher and printer: Vishv Vijay Pte. Ltd.