

SHADES OF SCARLETT: CULTURAL IMAGES OF HISTORICAL
SOUTHERN WOMEN

by

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ABSTRACT

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The white antebellum/Civil War-era woman occupies an evolving archetypal status in American cultural consciousness throughout the twentieth century. In 1936, extending a one-hundred year tradition of featuring Southern belles in novels, Margaret Mitchell published *Gone with the Wind*; in 1996, Charles Frazier published *Cold Mountain*. Both of these novels offer striking images of the belle as well as the “poor white” woman. My paper will compare the images and interactions of these female characters, considering the earlier stereotypical characteristics given to each group, the homosocial relationships between the two groups, and the revision of both, and will show that the strict social and cultural boundaries separating these two groups are reworked in the later novel. The 1967 novel *Christy* serves as a midpoint text and offers a modification of the *GWTW* belle/poor white female interaction that somewhat foreshadows the major revision given in *Cold Mountain*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope and context of the study

In *David O. Selznick's Gone with the Wind*, a “coffee-table,” collector’s book about “The Most Popular Motion Picture Ever Made,” there are several photographs taken on the set while MGM filmed the movie—“candid” shots of the cast, crew, and extras. One captures an image of Vivien Leigh, the actress who portrays Scarlett O’Hara, in period dress and snood, leaning back in a chair while fellow actress Isabel Jewell solicitously rubs her temples. The caption interprets the picture as an example of the “tremendous pressure” endured by Leigh in shooting the movie, but fails to point out the irony in the image. Jewell, who is also in full costume, portrays Emmie Slattery, Scarlett’s neighbor and peer in age. While the picture depicts a comfortable and relaxed relationship between a leading and supporting actress, the relationship between the fictional characters they portray was such that Emmie would never dare, just as Scarlett would never deign, to strike such a pose. Between Scarlett, daughter of a rich planter and spoiled Southern belle supreme and Emmie, daughter of “poor white trash” and the neighborhood “bad girl,” there exists a high and unyielding wall of social class construction. The very idea of a Southern belle and a poor white girl forming anything resembling a friendship is simply unthinkable.....or is it? To answer that question, we must look closely at the ideas and images we possess of these two groups.

The white antebellum/Civil War-era woman has occupied an evolving archetypal status in American cultural consciousness throughout the twentieth century, sashaying through fictional fantasies in gently swaying hoopskirts, reinforcing and recreating cultural images that have romanticized an entire era. In 1936, extending a one-hundred year tradition of featuring Southern belles in novels, Margaret Mitchell published her first and only book, *Gone with the Wind*. The Civil War-era novel and its fascinating, self-centered, avaricious, *femme fatale*, Scarlett O'Hara, became household names in a matter of months in American culture, and their fame spread quickly throughout the rest of the world. The popular film version of the novel expanded this visibility. For many, the epithet "Southern belle" and the name "Scarlett O'Hara" are synonymous. For those who are more serious fans of the novel and/or film, the characters of Melanie Wilkes and Ellen O'Hara also become sturdy branches in the tree of mythology regarding aristocratic Southern womanhood. Marginal characters, such as Emmie Slattery and Belle Watling add branches representing lower-class varieties of Southern women. Their interactions with the upper-class characters of Scarlett, Melanie and Ellen allow us to draw conclusions regarding the early twentieth-century images of these two groups.

In 1996, Charles Frazier published *Cold Mountain*, also a Civil War-era novel. Although its publication was not accompanied by the kind of crazed, fanatical public reception afforded *Gone with the Wind*, it is nevertheless statistically rivaling *GWTW* as the most popular Civil War novel ever written. This novel features an aristocratic, Southern, female character, Ada Monroe, as well as a lower-class, or "poor white,"

female character, Ruby Thewes. My paper will compare the images and interactions of the female characters in these two novels and will show that the strict social and cultural boundaries separating these two groups are reworked in the later novel. I will also look at the 1967 novel *Christy* as a midpoint text; this work offers a modification of the *GWTW* belle/poor white female interaction that somewhat foreshadows the major revision given in *Cold Mountain*. I will consider the earlier stereotypical characteristics given to each group, the homosocial relationships between the two groups, and the revision of both.

The novels I have chosen for textual analysis have the unifying characteristics of significant cultural popularity, particularly among a young female readership, and combine historical fiction with elements of the bildungsroman. The evolution of these representations of women is worthy of study in its own right; however, my specific focus in this paper is to look at female images in novels popular with young female readers which might influence the formation of female identity among readers whose social class distinctions connect with those of the characters analyzed. The characters of Scarlett, Melanie, Emmie and Christy, for example, were significant to myself and my generation as adolescent female readers.

1.2 Personal connection and background with narratives

I was twelve years old in 1975, and an avid reader, particularly of the bildungsroman—*Jane Eyre*, *Little Women*, the works of Jane Austen. The film version of *Gone with the Wind* was making a sweep through theaters before its monumental NBC television premiere in November 1976. My mother and I waited outside the local

theatre in a line respectably long for a movie originally released almost forty years before. I knew nothing about *Gone with the Wind*, except that my mother was a fan of both the screen version and the novel, published in the year of her birth, and that Clark Gable was reputed to exude enough sex appeal to possibly rival that of David Cassidy or Desi Arnaz Jr. (although I could not really imagine this claim to be possible).

I fell quickly to the charm of the movie. Vivien Leigh in her spreading white skirts captured my fascination from the moment she opened her mouth to mesmerize the Tarleton twins on the front steps of Tara. After all, any woman who could so completely captivate the opposite sex (particularly Gable's Rhett Butler, who did not disappoint) spoke a message to my impressionable, adolescent self. Whatever Scarlett O'Hara had, I knew I needed in on it.

Then, there was Olivia de Havilland's Melanie Wilkes. Since I could not help with my teen-aged, concrete, "black-and-white" thinking to feel some discomfort with Scarlett's selfishness and domination of others, Melanie was an important character for me. After all, she wore the charming and feminine hoopskirts, married a handsome soldier, and lived in exciting times in the same way that Scarlett did, and the other characters actually seemed to like *her*. Was it possible, I wondered, to combine Melanie's sterling inner qualities with Scarlett's positive strengths?

In the two weeks following my viewing of the film, I devoured the book. The enriching details and subplots cut for the benefit of keeping the movie to its mere four-hour run engrossed me; I lost myself completely for long stretches of time in the skillfully written confrontational dialogue between characters, the narrative

commentary that created vivid images of the “Old South.” In the immediate years following my discovery of *Gone with the Wind*, hoopskirts were popular for young female formal wear and this fed my fantasies. I wore “Southern belle” attire to banquets, proms, weddings, Tennessee walking horse shows as a “ribbon girl.” Obviously, my identification with these fictional characters was strong. In Tennessee State History class (of which coverage of the Civil War took approximately half the school year), I was practically the only student who could volunteer a reasonably accurate timeline of the War, and certainly the only one who could so confidently offer comments regarding the strategic importance of Sherman’s March to the Sea. Although my passion for the novel and its historical context did not always spread to my non-bookworm friends, there was hardly a young woman of my acquaintance who was not aware of and influenced by the far-reaching personas of Scarlett and Melanie.

However, like most ventures in vicarious living, there were some problematic areas for me. As much as I admired Melanie, and Scarlett’s mother Ellen, for example, I had no desire to follow their pattern of early, albeit virtuous, deaths. Certainly a charming, handsome husband was desirable, but I was too much a child of the ‘70s to abandon my own identity and live only for said husband, acquiescing to all his opinions and preferences, as these women appeared to do. These musings led me back to the independent Scarlett, who certainly had her own issues. And, then, there was the question of class.

The fictional Scarlett and Melanie were wealthy men’s daughters. My father, a “land-poor,” hard-working, blue-collar man who farmed on the side, did not descend

from gentry. In fact, the first of my Nash ancestors to arrive in America came to Georgia as one of Oglethorpe's debtors, and did not, as did the fictional Gerald O'Hara, work his way from poverty to planter class. I was, in reality, a Cracker; had I been born a hundred years before, my lifestyle would not have resembled those Mitchell outlined for Melanie and Scarlett, nor did it seem that I would have enjoyed even a speaking acquaintance with women of their ilk. Unfortunately for me, the images that Mitchell and movie producer David O. Selznick presented of lower-class Southern women were as depressing to my young perspective as Rhett's final line in the novel and movie: they did not seem to offer much hope.

A few years later, as a high school student, I read another bildungsroman which captured my fancy: *Christy* by Catherine Marshall. A novel which has sold more than ten million copies to date, it was an instant success in its year of publication in hardback form, and won "Paperback of the Year Award" from *Bestsellers* magazine in 1969, as well as topping the best-seller list as number one. There were two copies of this novel in our high school library and a waiting list of young women anxious to read it. Perhaps in some ways it offered a similar appeal to my friends and me as *GWTW*. We were maturing in the 70s, a time of extreme social and sexual change; *Christy* is set in the Appalachian mountains in the years before the first World War and offers a picture of a simpler, more straightforward time, when the roles of males and females were clearer, safer, and more defined. Its protagonist was feminine and conventional, yet simultaneously assertive and adventurous, leaving a privileged upper-class life to teach school to poor mountain children. Christy wore lovely shirtwaists and full skirts, attracted several worthy suitors and, unlike Scarlett, pursued no ambiguous line of

conduct. True, she lacked Scarlett's extremes of vitality and sex appeal, but she nevertheless seemed an intriguing and safe character for my teen-aged voyeurism. She was Southern upper-class, no doubt, but found lower-class women as worthy of her friendship and notice, and this was gratifying to those of us in the "small farmer" category.

Supporting my images of Southern class and self was my history education, which in junior high and high school included a clear and unvarying teaching on the significance of social classes in the Old South: there were rich planters and poor whites—and never the twain should meet. To quote my own college Honors thesis, a fairly broad survey of historical and fictional images of the Old South in the twentieth century,

An integral part of the Old South society, according to twentieth-century representations, was the social class structure. For years, American ideas about antebellum social class divisions were clear-cut and dry. Early romanticists recognized two: rich planters and "poor whites"...Every rich Southerner was a born gentleman; his womenfolk were true ladies...according to early imagery...the poor whites...were...ignorant and lacking ambition; they owned no or very few slaves and were referred to by planters and even their slaves as "po'white trash" (Nash 12).

This paper goes on to observe that the latter half of the twentieth century saw some revisionist historical writing, which recognized a middle class in the South and reconsidered the harsh images of the "shiftless" poor whites. However, the strong images in fiction and film which circulated with an assumption of lower-class white

people as lazy and unambitious would take longer to rework, and until pop culture recognized these revisions, little would change in the minds of the general populace.

CHAPTER 2

PERVASIVE IMAGES IN *GONE WITH THE WIND*

2.1 The upper-class virtue of the belle

Literary scholar Helen Taylor, in her comprehensive work on the influence of *GWTW* as book and film on female reader-viewers entitled *Scarlett's Women: Gone with the Wind and its Female Fans*, notes that as a group, women tend to draw their historical images from fiction:

Since women have always been avid consumers of historical fiction and costume-drama films and television series, for us this is clearly a major source of historical knowledge and pleasurable understanding—and for many, a more accessible means of approaching the past than war diaries, accounts, novels and films which are popular with a male market (204).

It seems particularly appropriate, then, to consider female characters in *Gone with the Wind*, written by a woman and having a tremendous impact on women. Certainly, the women in the novel are the centerpiece. Mark Winchell asserts that “Margaret Mitchell’s image of the old South as a matriarchal Eden...captured the public imagination” and that, in the novel, “women ruled the home while men fought duels and argued over secession. These same men mortgaged the matriarchal paradise by leading the South into a war it could not win” (165). This is clearly a “woman’s novel” and the

images of women that it circulates in our cultural consciousness are strong and longlasting. Taylor asserts that “*GWTW* is the ultimate expression of the hopes, dreams and fears of Southern womanhood” (13) and further comments on Mitchell’s associations with social class and females:

On the surface, it seems that Margaret Mitchell wrote *GWTW* from an assurance-even arrogance-about her own class, race and sex. The novel recounts the sufferings, defeats and triumphs of a white, upper-middle-class elite...it is easy to read *GWTW* as a kind of celebratory autobiographical family class chronicle...The book has a defensive air which indicates Mitchell’s lack of security and need to work out questions and dilemmas specific to her and special to her class and race (51).

Certainly, class is an important factor in Mitchell’s characterization of her females. I would further assert that, in *GWTW*, Southern social class is a defining factor in the worth and virtue of white Southern women.

2.1.1 *Scarlett O’Hara*

Reinforcing the aristocratic Southern values of “good breeding” and “gentility,” the value of Mitchell’s women in their fictional society is directly proportional to their social rank, with Melanie Hamilton Wilkes, a highly “overbred” upper-class young woman the essential moral equivalent of the Virgin Mary. Scarlett O’Hara, equally upper-class and taught the same values as Melanie, is infamously lacking in depth and virtue. This is explained by Mitchell as a direct result of the mixing of her mother’s French aristocratic blood with her father’s Irish peasant ancestry. The not-so-subtle

inference by Mitchell is that Scarlett's failure to live up the standards of true gentility is a direct result of the conflict born of such a mesalliance. Her sisters similarly suffer from this disadvantage of their birth: Suellen is whiney, unappealing and selfish; Carreen dreamy, ingenuous and ineffective.

Scarlett's shortcomings are magnified against the background of her sister-in-law Melanie's and her mother Ellen's virtues. Both of these women are the result of the "gentle breeding" of several generations. Mitchell devotes the entire third chapter of the book to explaining the backgrounds of Gerald and Ellen O'Hara. Ellen's parents, of the Prudhomme and Robillard families, were French aristocrats transplanted to Savannah, Georgia, and had the reputation of being as "proud as Lucifer" (49). Among Southern gentry, the "tidewater" areas of Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia held particularly prestige and an aura of refinement, while up-country Georgia or backwoods Tennessee were considered more primitive and less genteel. The self-made planter Gerald, an Irish immigrant, has little chance of marrying Ellen until the tragic death of her one true love, her cousin Philippe, sent away from Ellen by his family because Ellen's father opposed the match.

Mitchell clearly indicates that Philippe, despite his wild ways, is the appropriate match and soulmate for the lovely young Ellen, and that his death robs her of any hope of happiness in marriage. A marriage between Philippe and Ellen would serve to concentrate their sterling qualities of gentility for posterity. Much later in the novel, a childhood friend of Ellen deplores the fact that, because her father had not allowed a marriage with Philippe, "Ellen must run off and marry old man O'Hara and have a

daughter like Scarlett” (718). Throughout the novel, Scarlett fails in her attempt to live up to the standard of womanhood and ladylike deportment and character set by her mother, for Scarlett, despite her genteel appearance, is intrinsically the child of her opportunistic, peasant father with “nothing except the thinnest veneer of her mother’s unselfish and forbearing nature” (40). Scarlett’s idealized image of Ellen, which is consequently transmitted to the reader, is summed up well in this passage:

Ellen O’Hara was different, and Scarlett regarded her as something holy and apart from all the rest of humankind. When Scarlett was a child, she had confused her mother with the Virgin Mary, and now that she was older she saw no reason for changing her opinion. To her, Ellen represented the utter security that only Heaven or a mother can give. She knew that her mother was the embodiment of justice, truth, loving tenderness and profound wisdom—a great lady (55).

The image of Ellen as an untouchable, sainted figure is awe-inspiring to Scarlett, but causes her much confusion since her own instincts and preferences run contrary to Ellen’s lofty predilections. Ellen is the “great lady” Scarlett longs to be, someday, “when she [has] time” (56); Mitchell and the reader share the ironic knowledge that Scarlett will never realize this goal.

Scarlett does inherit her mother’s pleasing physical traits, such as Ellen’s straight, black hair, and white skin. Scarlett’s eyes are “tip-tilted” like Ellen’s, although their green color is a unique property of Scarlett’s; Ellen’s eyes are described as “dark” and Gerald’s are famously blue. In admiring her figure on the morning of the Wilkes’ barbecue, Scarlett “was glad she had inherited Ellen’s slender white hands and tiny

feet” (68). Her womanly figure and “deceptive sweetness of face” are also copies of her mother. Because of these outward characteristics, her social position, vivacity and charm, Scarlett is awarded popularity and acclaim, especially in the male sector of the upper-class County society. The men who admire her, with the exception of Rhett Butler, are oblivious to the fact that her character does not mirror the attractiveness of her outward demeanor. In this way, Mitchell combines the classic belle image with a “new” kind of woman, a character whom many scholars note is a clear reflection of the liberated, 1920s “flapper” girl of Margaret Mitchell’s own young adult years.

2.1.2 *Melanie Hamilton Wilkes*

Ironically, it is Melanie Hamilton Wilkes, not Scarlett, who serves as the double in character for Ellen; it is Melanie who marries the man Scarlett loves, Ashley Wilkes. Like Ellen, Melanie is a true tidewater aristocrat, born of genteel family connections in Virginia. The novel’s exposition makes much of her “inbred and overbred” qualities as the County’s populace debate the advantages and disadvantages of a marriage between Melanie and her first cousin Ashley. Gerald and his neighbor, the earthy Mrs. Tarleton, disagree on the issue and, interestingly, it is the plebeian Gerald who defends the alliance: “Can you name me better people than the Wilkes? And they’ve been intermarrying since Brian Boru was a boy.” While Mrs. Tarleton thinks the Wilkes “strain” would benefit from the introduction of some “vigorous blood,” Gerald adheres to the traditional belief that such gentle breeding produces excellent progeny (80). Melanie lacks Scarlett’s “vigorous blood,” and is therefore a “safe” choice for the gentlemanly Ashley. Their marriage is an arranged one, designed to extend the

assumed superiority of the aristocratic bloodlines of the family. Mitchell has an Irish peasant defend this philosophy; there is a subtle power of influence at work on the reader here. If even those who will fall short of a standard defend it as right, this makes it seem more credible. Critics and scholars have long pointed to the “happy slave” archetypal presentations of Mammy and Pork as enforcements in the ideology of white superiority; we can see the same dynamic at work here in presentations of class.

In addition to her jealousy of Melanie, Scarlett is also initially repulsed by her quiet, scholarly, timid personality. Mitchell presents Melanie as tiny and plain, “as simple as earth, as good as bread, as transparent as spring water” (89). Like Ellen O’Hara, she has large dark eyes (her one physically beautiful feature), but she does not possess Scarlett’s sex appeal or magnetic personality. Ashley admires her for her mind and strong character, neither of which is initially apparent to the reader. As the novel progresses, Melanie emerges as a paragon of virtue equal to Ellen. She is kind, gentle, compassionate and fiercely loyal. She loves and admires Scarlett, and refuses to believe what is apparent to most female characters in the novel: that Scarlett is selfish and unable to see other women, particularly Melanie, as anything but competition for male attention. Mitchell does not stop, however, at merely making Melanie passively good. Melanie shows courage and strength by tirelessly nursing wounded soldiers, rushing to defend Scarlett against a would-be rapist with her dead brother’s sword, learning to do menial chores such as picking cotton and raising chickens, and riding wildly away on a horse to help save Tara from Yankee invaders. Later in the novel, it is the genteel Melanie who continues the role of “Lady Bountiful” that Scarlett admires in her mother

but cannot emulate. Melanie takes in “country women and orphans” in her basement while Scarlett busies herself with running a sawmill and choosing red velvet portieres for her vulgar new house. Although Scarlett is clearly the protagonist of *Gone with the Wind*, one might argue that Melanie is the true heroine; in fact, Mitchell herself referred to Melanie as “my heroine” (Taylor 75). She dies a tragic death from a failed pregnancy, loyal to the last to Scarlett, Ashley and the values she has been taught.

2.1.3 *GWTW's lasting contribution to the belle*

Despite Melanie’s sterling traits, it is Scarlett who lingers most in the public imagination as the aristocratic Southern belle, both from the novel and the movie. Not only does Scarlett the character’s class matter in the minds of the public, but Taylor suggests that also important is the class of the actress who so unforgettably portrays her:

Leigh’s particular contribution was a kind of English ‘class’, derived both from her own background and from the aristocratic, quasi-royal associations of herself and Olivier [her lover and later husband]...These connections and the couple’s regal aura became important [in]... her...casting as Selnick’s Southern aristocrat...(86).

Calling Vivien Leigh an “inspired choice” on a number of levels, Taylor asserts that the upper-class attributes of Leigh were a factor, if a small one, in the overwhelming success of the movie.

Therefore, Scarlett’s fictional persona as aristocratic belle is a strong and lasting one. In an essay written for the 1975 anniversary edition of *GWTW*, James Michener compares *GWTW* to other epic novels featuring female protagonists such as *Vanity Fair*

and *Anna Karenina*, and insists that Mitchell's fiery belle is the female character "who lives most vividly and with the greatest contemporary application" (70). Obviously, Scarlett's importance as a literary character and a cultural statement cannot easily be hyperbolized. Michener's estimation of Scarlett's lasting influence is significant in this study and in this same essay, he makes an almost offhand observation that is the inspiration for this paper: "*Vanity Fair*, *Anna Karenina* and *Gone with the Wind* deal essentially with the upper classes of their societies, often with compassionate side glances at the state of the peasantry" (69). Close readings of *GWTW* may challenge how "compassionate" Mitchell's portrayal of lower-class white women is, or at least, what is encompassed in this writer's compassion. Mitchell acknowledges the lower classes, the "poor whites" and menial slaves, but, individually and corporately, they are limited in importance in her narrative to the degree that they enter or do not enter the consciousness of her narcissistic protagonist.

2.2 The lower-class failings of the poor white girl

For many years before Mitchell wrote her novel, female readers had come expect lower-class female characters to exhibit more weaknesses and less virtue than the upper-class female characters. Mitchell adheres to this traditional presentation when she offers a contrast to Melanie and Scarlett's version of young Southern womanhood in Emmie Slattery.

2.2.1 *Emmie Slattery*

Scarlett and Melanie are the pampered daughters of privilege, Emmie Slattery the unfortunate offspring of cruel generational poverty. Even considering the bias of Scarlett's perspective in Mitchell's third person limited narration, Emmie comes across

harshly as lazy, promiscuous and inconsiderate. Significantly, Emmie is a marginal figure in Mitchell's epic, mentioned only a handful of times and appearing physically only once in the action of the story. However, the Slatterys' "miserable few acres" serve as a backdrop for the O'Haras' adjoining empire of Tara; they are ever-present if virtually invisible. The non-slave-holding Tom Slattery, his "snarly-haired" wife and their "brood" of children are described as "shiftless and whining," working "spasmodically," and "begging" necessities of their more prosperous neighbors (46). Emmie and her family are absolutely presented as inferior to the O'Haras, in both wealth and character. Scarlett, self-centered and limited in her understanding of others, notices Emmie no more than she does the field hands who pick her father's cotton; they are accepted but insignificant pieces of the scenery of Tara.

Yet, ironically, Emmie's marginal existence obtrudes painfully into Scarlett's reality on at least two memorable occasions in the novel. In the exposition, Scarlett's life is temporarily inconvenienced by Emmie when she must preside over the supper table in the absence of Ellen, who is on a charitable mission to the Slattery home for Emmie's benefit. Scarlett thinks petulantly, "What right had the Slatterys and their everlasting sickness to take Ellen away when she, Scarlett, needed her so much? (56)." Ellen is, in fact, assisting in the delivery of Emmie's illegitimate and stillborn child, which immediately establishes the young Emmie as a "fallen woman." It is interesting that the reader's first impression of the lower-class Emmie coincides with evidence of her lapsed virtue, and sets the scene for the emergence of Mitchell's stereotyping of lower-class women as lacking "virtue" in the conventional sense.

This scene, together with the later segment involving Emmie, echoes a subplot in another book popular with young female readers: *Little Women*, written fifty years prior, and set during the Civil War. The four March girls rise on Christmas morning to the absence of their beloved mother, “Marmee,” who is ministering to a “ ‘poor woman with a little new-born baby [with] six children huddled into one bed to keep from freezing’ ” (23). According to the servant Hannah, she is “ ‘some poor creeter come a-beggin,’ ” (22). Unlike Scarlett, the March daughters do not resent their mother’s charity and even join her by taking the less fortunate family their special Christmas breakfast. When Beth, one of the March girls, continues Marmee’s charity to this family during Marmee’s absence from home, Beth contracts scarlet fever and becomes dangerously ill. The ensuing scene in which Marmee travels by train to arrive in darkness at Beth’s bedside foreshadows Scarlett’s determined journey from Atlanta later in *GWTW* to reach the sick Ellen’s bedside. Ellen has contracted typhoid while nursing Emmie through the illness. In both instances, dangerous illness is brought into the families by charity shown to a lower-class woman.

Mitchell almost certainly would have been aware of this famous segment of Alcott’s plot, reminiscent itself of the illness of Marianne in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, where her mother travels through the night to reach her bedside as she is nursed out of a danger point by her sister Elinor. This turnover of Alcott’s archetypal situation of aristocratic women sacrificing for the less fortunate in Christian charity is typical of how Mitchell often reworks stock elements. Scarlett, unlike Beth March and her sisters, feels no compassion for Emmie and is bitterly resentful of her taking Ellen

away, both as a temporary inconvenience at the supper table and as a devastating permanent loss when Ellen dies of typhoid.

GWTW's second chapter reveals that Emmie's stillborn child has been fathered by Jonas Wilkerson, Yankee overseer at Tara. Their main attraction to one another may well be their mutual status as social outcasts at Tara and her surrounding society. Even the shallow young Scarlett recognizes the pathetic quality of this relationship, that "... it was natural that Mr. Wilkerson might not want to marry Emmie, not matter how often he might walk with her at twilight" (59). Carelessly, Scarlett holds a superior and seemingly secure advantage of situation over Emmie, but, unimaginably for her, the ravages of war will alter that position.

Emmie, therefore, is young and attractive enough to interest Wilkerson and other men, but will not be sought as a wife. Scarlett's suitors, the Tarleton twins, comment that they require a "good girl to court, and a bad girl to have fun with" (18-19). Spoiled belle Scarlett qualifies as the "good girl," but the poor white Emmie is relegated to "bad girl" status. The contrasting images are poignant. Emmie picks cotton while Scarlett chooses a dress for the morning barbecue. Emmie relies on Ellen's charity to deliver a stillborn child while Scarlett demands that Mammy bring her shawl for the night air. Emmie is denounced by the father of her child, who claims that the "baby might have been fathered by any one of a dozen men" (72), while Scarlett juggles multiple marriage proposals.

Whether or not such was her conscious intent, Mitchell creates "lower" characters who are dependent because of their actual inferiority to the gentry.

Obviously, Ellen O'Hara's resources such as medicines and other supplies could help fill a gap that the indigent Slatterys could not fill themselves. However, Mitchell extends the importance of Ellen's charity to include superior knowledge, religious guidance and emotional stability. It is the Madonna-like Ellen, not the "snarly-haired Mrs. Slattery," who delivers and baptizes Emmie's baby. Ellen's nursing skill is required to save Emmie from typhoid. Although Emmie's mother is alive, she depends upon Scarlett's mother for succor and sustenance. The implication is that the lower-class mother is not capable or concerned enough to nurse her own child, and that the lower classes in general lack the wherewithal to adequately care for their own. This stereotype is well-rooted in feminine literature. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, for example, the title character, who is "of first consequence" in her hometown, undertakes a charitable mission to some impoverished and ill neighbors. The author narrates that

Emma was very compassionate; and the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse. She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those, for whom education had done so little; entered into their troubles with ready sympathy and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good-will. It was sickness and poverty together which she came to visit...(81)

Although Austen suggests the mitigating cause of lack of education as explanation for the ignorance and vice of the lower-class subjects of Emma Woodhouse's charity, the

impression remains the same: the reader must not expect those of the lower classes to possess the sense and virtue of the upper-class Emma and her protégés. It falls to the sense of “noblesse oblige” of the aristocracy to lead the way. Throughout Mitchell’s “compassionate side glances” at the lower classes, she does not break through the Jane Austen/Louisa May Alcott stereotype of poorer women as victims, unable to care for and protect themselves and their own, unable or unwilling to creatively rise above disadvantages and obstacles. Instead, these women grab on to the petticoats of the wiser, more competent upper-class women, becoming a drain on the energy, health, time and resources of the already overburdened aristocratic mistresses and matriarchs. As we consider images of interactions between upper and lower class women, Emmie’s only face-to-face encounter with Scarlett in the novel deserves close attention.

Scarlett’s return to Tara occurs in September of 1864; the day that Emmie visits Tara is in January 1866. Learning from Will Benteen that taxes have been run up “sky high” on Tara because “somebody wants to buy Tara cheap at the sheriff’s sale if you can’t pay the extra taxes” (433), Scarlett walks out to the orchard to consult with Ashley, who is splitting rails for fencing. The scene is memorable to both readers and movie-viewers because it is the third of four romantic exchanges in the narrative between Scarlett and Ashley. Identified as the “paddock scene” during filming of the movie because the action was relocated from the orchard to a horse paddock, the scene was used as a screen test for potential Scarletts. Discouraged and desperate, Scarlett begs Ashley to run away with her and take her away from the overwhelming responsibilities of the family and Tara. Ashley admits his love and attraction for

Scarlett, but tells Scarlett that “honor” must motivate them to persevere in their present condition. Scarlett says there is “nothing left” for her to fight for, and Ashley presses a “ball of red clay” in her hand and reminds her that “You’ve still got Tara.” This appeal reaches through Scarlett’s apathy, and “she said over and over, parrot-like: ‘I’ve still got this. Yes, I’ve still got this’” (444).

Emotionally drained and distraught, Scarlett returns to the house to hear buggy wheels coming up the driveway. She is taken aback by the appearance of “a new carriage, shiny with varnish, and the harness was new too, with bits of polished brass here and there.” Scarlett assumes the visitors are strangers, since “No one she knew had the money for such a grand new turn-out” (445). Scarlett quickly recognizes Jonas Wilkerson, her father’s former overseer; he is expensively dressed and she recalls Will’s reports that Wilkerson has made “a lot of money...swindling the niggers or the government, one or the other...” He hands down a woman whom Scarlett does not immediately recognize, “...a woman dressed within an inch of her life...the dress was bright in color to the point of vulgarity but...stylish...[including a] red plaid gown...black velvet paletot...[and a] cunning hat.” Scarlett also observes that woman has “a massive bunch of curls which fell from the rear of the hat...which...did not match the woman’s hair in either color or texture.” This description is important, for it shows the earnest imitation Emmie has attempted of the stylish, upper-class women she admires, but also shows that she falls short of gentility with her the “vulgar” color and fake curls. Then, as Emmie steps toward the house, Scarlett recalls “something familiar

about the rabbity face, caked with powder” (446). The unusual adjective “rabbity” employed by Mitchell merits further analysis.

This is the second time that the term “rabbity” has been applied to Emmie. In the novel’s exposition, the children of the Slattery parents are described as a “rabbity-looking...brood which was increased regularly every year” (46). While the analogy in this quote might intend to offer the connotation of a common family “breeding like rabbits,” Mitchell also seems to use the term to denote an appearance which is common and nondescript, consisting of insignificant features. Honey Wilkes, Ashley’s younger sister, is denigrated by the vigorous and attractive Mrs. Tarleton as “washed-out-looking” (80), and Scarlett agrees that “perhaps there was something in what Mrs. Tarleton said, after all,” since “Honey had the odd lashless look of a rabbit...” (84). Mitchell’s comparison of these women’s physical appearance to the small brown rabbit, a common sight in rural Georgia, suggests that, unlike Scarlett of the unusual “tip-tilted” green eyes, Emmie and Honey are ordinary-looking and forgettable. The combination of Emmie’s loudly stylish clothing and her insignificant features suggests that she cannot truly accomplish the appearance of a lady. It might be a small victory for Emmie that Scarlett certainly envies her new clothes, a jealousy which increases the resentment she shows her former neighbor in this scene.

At this point, Scarlett recognizes Emmie and speaks her name out loud; Emmie responds in a pleased manner and steps forward, as if expecting to be received as welcome company. Scarlett, still numbly clutching the red clay of Tara, becomes

infuriated at the presence of the “poor white” girl to whom she attributes the blame of her mother’s death:

Emmie Slattery! The dirty towheaded slut whose illegitimate baby Ellen had baptized. Emmie who had given typhoid to Ellen and killed her. This overdressed, common, nasty piece of poor white trash was coming up the steps of Tara, bristling and grinning as if she belonged here. Scarlett thought of Ellen and, in a rush, feeling came back into the emptiness of her mind, a murderous rage so strong it shook her like the ague (446).

Scarlett orders Emmie off the steps, calls her a “trashy wench,” and ridicules both Emmie and Wilkerson when he demands that Scarlett not speak this way to his wife:

“High time you made her your wife. Who baptized your other brats, after you killed my mother?”

Emmie said, “Oh!” and retreated hastily down the steps...

Wilkerson claims that their intent was to make a “friendly call,” to “talk a little business with old friends”—Scarlett refuses to believe this explanation of their appearance, and Wilkerson claims he will retract his “right good offer” of buying Tara and merely wait for the inevitable sale when Scarlett cannot pay her taxes because “Emmie had a hankering to live here” (446). This explanation, while it might be partially motivated by Wilkerson’s desire to mask his own interest in Tara, offers an insight into Emmie’s character. Emmie, along with Scarlett, probably idealizes Ellen, the mistress of Tara who offered Emmie possibly the only instances of kindness and compassion she ever received from the privileged upper-class women who were her neighbors. Perhaps, like

Scarlett, she has dreamed of being a “great lady” like Ellen; occupying Tara would seem to be a first step in that direction.

Interestingly, Mitchell has set up the reader to share Scarlett’s anger at the Wilkersons by having Will bring the news of the taxes before Wilkerson can offer to buy Tara. The reader, along with Scarlett, is smarting at Wilkerson’s assumed role in skyrocketing the taxes, and feels some justification in Scarlett’s treatment of him. The movie script adds the sensational element of Scarlett throwing the ball of red clay at their carriage as they drive away, crying out, “That’s all of Tara you’ll ever get!” But even considering these circumstances and Scarlett’s emotional strain from her disappointing scene with Ashley, Mitchell structures Scarlett’s response to Emmie’s appearance at Tara as remarkably harsh and uncharitable. She mentions the death of Emmie’s baby by calling the stillborn infant a “brat” and claiming that the “Slatterys lived off our charity and paid it back by killing Mother...” (446). By this midpoint in the long novel, readers are perhaps past feeling shock or surprise at Scarlett’s didoes, but the significant question is what the readers’ interpretation of this interaction reveals about the culture which embraced *Gone with the Wind*. Did the majority of readers/viewers feel that Scarlett’s condemnation of common “white trash” was a justified response? If so, does this reveal that twentieth-century readers/viewers feel that the perspective of the belle/upper-class woman was intrinsically more valid than that of the lower-class woman? Or would it merely be explained by the traditional role of the reader/viewer as supporting the protagonist?

Scarlett explains the couple's appearance to herself differently from Wilkerson: "So it was Jonas Wilkerson who wanted Tara-Jonas and Emmie, who in some twisted way thought to even past slights by living in the house where they had been slighted (447)." Wilkerson's "slights" are apparent to the reader from earlier in the novel. Ellen, who shows kindness to Emmie, fires Wilkerson for siring Emmie's child out of wedlock. Wilkerson would naturally resent the loss of this job. Emmie "slights" could merely be those involving lack of recognition; cut off from the high society enjoyed by the O'Hara girls, she is viewed as almost a non-person by them, someone not even important enough to notice. The fact that Scarlett thinks of Emmie as having slights to resent reveals that Scarlett realizes she has slighted her. Viewed in this light, Emmie's thwarted visit to Tara takes on a pathetic quality.

Scarlett announces to Jonas that she will "tear this house down, stone by stone, and burn it and sow every acre with salt before I see either of you put foot over this threshold." After Wilkerson and Emmie drive away, Scarlett makes the "common, childish gesture" of spitting after them, and retreats into the house to angrily consider the possible repercussions of this visit from a "dirty Scallaway" and his "lousy trashy poor white" wife:

Then, sudden terror struck her and her rage melted. God's nightgown! They will come and live here! There was nothing she could do to keep them from buying Tara....I won't let them do it, thought Scarlett vehemently. No, not if I've got to burn the place down! Emmie Slattery will never set her foot on a single bit of flooring Mother ever walked on!....this was worse [than Sherman's

march]-these low common creatures living in this house, bragging to their low common friends how they had turned the proud O'Haras out. Perhaps they'd even bring negroes here to dine and sleep...When she thought of the possibility of this final insult to Tara, her heart pounded so hard she could scarcely breathe...(447)

This scene is, of course, very revealing about the relationship depicted between Scarlett and her "poor white" neighbors, but a look at Mitchell's background deepens the significance.

Biographer of Margaret Mitchell note many parallels between Mitchell's life and the characters and plot of *GWTW*. Mitchell almost certainly did not pattern the character of Scarlett after herself in the complete manner of, for example, Scout Finch after Harper Lee or Jo March after Louisa Alcott, but she does imbue Scarlett with some of her own characteristics and feelings. This description of Scarlett's reaction to "white trash" living at Tara may be one of those examples. Margaret Mitchell's final arrangements with her attorney and brother, Stephens Mitchell, included a fascinating understanding regarding the destiny of the Mitchell family home in Atlanta. Margaret Mitchell requested that, if at any time in the future, the Mitchell home-originally shared by Margaret, her parents and her brother-could not be occupied by members or descendents of the Mitchell family, the house was to be destroyed. Multiple biographers deduce that Mitchell could not bear the idea of "strangers" living in her beloved family home. Consequently, after her death, according to Margaret Mitchell's

instructions, the Mitchell family home, still in very livable condition, was completely torn down (Farr 235).

Scholars who have studied the racist undertones and influence of *GWTW* have considered how much of Mitchell's true feelings toward African-Americans were reflected in her narration of Scarlett's impressions and thoughts of her slaves, and the freed Negroes after the war. We may apply the same question to Scarlett's and Mitchell's feelings about lower-class whites, such as Wilkerson and Emmie. Was Mitchell horrified at the idea of any type of "strangers" living in her family home, or was her fear that the "unworthy" might occupy a sacred space? Did she, like Scarlett, fear the presence of "poor whites" and Negroes in the same rooms once occupied by the Mitchell family? Another parallel to Mitchell's/Scarlett's lives involves the deaths of their mothers. At age nineteen, Mitchell was called home from college at the death of her beloved mother, a true event mimicked by nineteen-year-old Scarlett's desperate journey home from Atlanta to reach Ellen, who has already died upon her arrival. Scarlett's fears about Emmie taking Ellen's place at Tara may well reflect Mitchell's fears of "common" white or black women taking her mother's place in her family home. If so, then perhaps Scarlett's feelings toward Emmie reflect an author's view of the lower classes that is less "compassionate" than James Michener may have thought. The fact that Mitchell successfully presents this viewpoint to an enthusiastic readership suggests that the public which made *GWTW* a runaway bestseller accepted these underlying presumptions regarding the superiority of the upper class.

Interestingly, Mitchell once faced a potential lawsuit because of her portrayal of the Slattery family as “white trash.” On October 3, 1936, she responded in letter form to Harry Slattery of Washington, D.C. She apologized for “taking the Slattery name in vain,” and explains that she had taken “infinite pains” to check county and historical records to make sure that none of the names in her book were names of actual persons who lived in the Clayton County area during the time covered by the novel. With characteristic diplomacy, charm and rhetorical skill, she deflects his argument, concluding with the statement that “I was very relieved when [I learned] that your family came from South Carolina instead of Georgia” (*Letters* 69), which implies that Slattery had no right or basis to feel insulted. Slattery dropped his threat of a suit after corresponding with Mitchell, but his outraged reaction reinforces the already evident: whatever her reasons for such a presentation, there is nothing flattering about Mitchell’s portrayal of the Slattery family.

2.2.2 *Belle Watling*

Another lower-class female character in *GWTW* of note is Belle Watling. Belle’s country dialect implies a humble birth. Belle is a prostitute, an occupation completely foreign to aristocratic women; she is more than likely a poor white girl who left or was turned from home to make her way in the world by whatever means she can find. Mitchell addressed Belle’s possible background in a letter involving the directing of the actress playing the part in the film:

[Belle’s] accent would have varied [from Scarlett’s and Melanie’s] as it always does between the educated and the illiterate...most of the prostitutes of the day

were recruited from freshly landed immigrants or (here in the South) the daughters of small farmers who had been led astray, cracker families and poor white mountaineers (*Letters* 175).

The reader “hears” Belle speak in only one scene; after the ill-fated Klan raid, Melanie visits with Belle in her carriage to thank her for her part in saving the lives of Ashley and the other men. Mitchell gives Belle a heavy dialect: “Miz Kennedy, well, she just ain’t in the same class with you, Miz Wilkes...If it had been that Miz Kennedy’s husband hisself, I wouldn’t of lifted a finger...” (683). Belle’s ignorance is as striking in this scene as Melanie’s refinement.

Mitchell is not unsympathetic or unadmiring of Belle; in fact, the contrary could be deduced. Scarlett’s beau and eventual husband, Rhett Butler, has a long-running affair with Belle and financially supports her brothel. The text strongly implies that Belle and Rhett also have a son together, a child who lives in New Orleans. Another stock character, Belle is presented as a “madam with a heart of gold,” the woman who truly loves Rhett in the face of Scarlett’s neglect of him; he appreciates her love although he deprecates her at the end of the story as an “illiterate whore” (857). Belle manages her business well and makes a success of it. She donates money to the Confederate cause and gives dangerous false testimony to save the lives of the men charged in the Klan raid. She is Scarlett’s alter ego, the woman whose outward identity and scandalously dyed red hair mirror Scarlett’s flouting of Southern convention. Scarlett is a lady on the outside; Belle is a lady on the inside. She is not the dependent, helpless creature that Emmie Slattery is. However, she is a socially marginal character

reduced to prostitution. Supported by Rhett, she is not publicly acknowledged by him as the mother of his child, and he certainly does not marry her. Although Melanie extends Belle the hand of friendship in gratitude for her part in saving the life of Ashley, this again presents the upper-class woman as the benefactress, generously reaching down toward the lowly, and Melanie's quiet gesture does nothing to bring Belle into the mainstream of Atlanta society. It is Belle herself, in fact, who dismisses Melanie's idea of an official acquaintance with the assertion that " 'It wouldn't be fittin'" (684). Thus, the lower-class woman banishes herself to the nether regions of society, where she belongs and deserves to be. This is another acknowledgment of a "victim" of a system that the system is correct in its placement of her, an echo of Gerald O'Hara's upholding of the intrinsic value of the aristocracy.

2.3 The permanence of class for Mitchell's women

None of Mitchell's lower-class female characters is allowed to move up in social class, unless Emmie's marriage to Jonas Wilkerson, himself a Yankee outcast in Southern society, could be counted. This is not true of male characters. Gerald O'Hara arrives in the Southern states a penniless peasant, wins Tara and his first slave in a poker game and manages to "arrive" in Clayton County society, thanks to the auspicious elements of *chutzpah*, hard work, and the addition of an extremely genteel wife. Will Benteen is a "Cracker" Confederate soldier walking home when a serious illness lands him on the front steps of Tara, where he is nursed back to health by the O'Hara girls and Melanie. His knowledge of farming and general common sense prove helpful to Scarlett in running Tara, and she eventually authorizes his marriage to her

sister Suellen. When neighbors point out to Scarlett that Will is not “quality,” Scarlett defends the match between him and Suellen, perhaps associating Will’s “true worth” with that of her father.

Women, on the contrary, only move down in social class in *GWTW*. Since Mitchell has a clearly feminist tone, I believe we can interpret this as a nod toward Mitchell’s sensitivity of the plight of women, particularly in a postwar society in which men were scarce. Scarlett’s prewar friend, Cathleen Calvert, illustrates this dilemma. Before the war, Cathleen was “emptyheaded” and flirtatious, a lovely blonde with “cornflower blue” eyes and a closet full of ball dresses, a quintessential belle. Her family were of the aristocratic set in the county, the owners of the plantation known as “Pine Bloom.” The war takes the life of her father, one of her brothers, and ruins the health of a second brother, Cade. With Cade’s death imminent, in desperation, Cathleen marries the family’s Yankee overseer, Mr. Hilton. She informs Scarlett and Melanie of her decision to marry him without allowing them to offer alternatives or options for her. Her decision is hard and practical, and earns Scarlett’s grudging respect, since “girls have to marry someone.” Melanie responds differently, lamenting, “Oh, I’d rather see Cathleen dead!...It’s the end of the Calverts. Just think what her-what their children will be” (415). Scarlett does not see Cathleen again until approximately a year later, at the funeral of Gerald:

Cathleen Calvert Hilton stood alone...her faded sunbonnet hiding her bowed face. Scarlett saw with amazement that her percale dress had grease spots on it and her hands were freckled and unclean. There were even black crescents

under her fingernails. There was nothing of quality folks about Cathleen now. She looked Cracker, even worse. She looked poor white, shiftless, slovenly, trifling.

“She’ll be dipping snuff soon, if she isn’t doing it already,” thought Scarlett in horror. “Good Lord! What a comedown!”

She shuddered, turning her eyes from Cathleen as she realized how narrow was the chasm between quality folk and poor whites (589-590).

It is interesting that Scarlett’s “horror” stems from Cathleen’s outward appearance, and that she assumes “dipping snuff” will be the next logical step in Cathleen’s downward spiral into the “poor white” side of the chasm. Even though Melanie has been tending the chickens, and Scarlett has plowed and picked cotton, they have apparently kept the outward forms of pride and cleanliness which to them would signal “quality.” Scarlett’s “shudder” is caused by the closing of a gap between the upper and lower classes in women, an unthinkable event. Certainly Scarlett does not (nor do any of the other aristocratic women in the scene) attempt to reach out to Cathleen, even for the sake of her former position which she abandoned by her marriage. Just a few pages later, however, Scarlett defends the value of Will Benteen to her neighbor ladies who disapprove her decision to allow a “Cracker” in the O’Hara family. When it comes to women, the belle must draw clear and unmovable lines of distinction. Scarlett must not have a friendship with the social-climbing Emmie or the class-abandoning Cathleen. There is nothing Emmie can do to earn a position among her aristocratic sisters, but

Cathleen can lose her position irrevocably by marrying outside her class. The ice on which the belle sashayed was certainly slippery.

As Scarlett struggles with her own rapidly changing life, she does consider what it means to be a “lady,” particularly with “her own bitterness that everything her mother had told her about life was wrong” (361). Scarlett’s training encompasses the typical accomplishments considered necessary for a belle: how to dress and conduct oneself in company, needlework, piano and singing, and two years of conventional studies at the Fayette Female Academy. In the crisis of having to run Tara after her mother’s death, Scarlett “thought in despair: ‘Nothing, no, nothing, she taught me is of any help to me!...Better that I’d learned to plow or chop cotton like a darky. Oh, Mother, you were wrong!’” (362). When neighbor Grandma Fontaine suggests that Scarlett and her sisters try to harvest what is left of the cotton crop themselves, Scarlett responds in horror, “...as if Grandma had been suggesting some repulsive crime. ‘Like a field hand? Like white trash? Like the Slattery women?’” (375). Later, as she struggles with how to handle this situation, she is still conflicted:

Scarlett had not intended to do any cotton-picking herself, even after Grandma Fontaine’s tart remark. It was unthinkable that she, an O’Hara lady, now the mistress of Tara, should work in the fields. It put her on the same level as the snarly-haired Mrs. Slattery and Emmie (378).

Despite these misgivings, Scarlett does, of course, work in the fields as well as carry out a variety of menial tasks. Later, during the crisis involving the taxes on Tara, she journeys to Atlanta and attends the wedding of another belle, Fanny Elsing. During the

wedding, Scarlett considers the gathered Atlanta gentry, and resents her impression that they are somehow intrinsically different from her:

The women bore themselves like ladies and knew they were ladies, though menial tasks were their daily lot and they didn't know where their next dress was coming from. Ladies all! But she could not feel herself a lady, for all her velvet dress and scented hair, for all the pride of birth that stood behind her and the pride of wealth that had once been hers.... 'That's the difference! Even though they're poor, they still feel like ladies and I don't. The silly fools don't seem to realize that you can't be a lady without money!'...She knew she should feel as these people felt, but she could not. She knew she should believe devoutly, as they did, that a born lady remained a lady, even if reduced to poverty, but she could not make herself believe it now" (506).

Scarlett seems to feel that the condition of "ladyhood" is a situational one, an understandable perspective for the child of an Irish peasant. However, the "Old Guard" of Georgia gentry seem to feel that the condition of being a lady is the result of gentle breeding, an intrinsic, inborn quality that can never be taken from a woman as long as one adheres to the "rules" of aristocracy. Cathleen Calvert Hilton defies the "rules" by marrying beneath her station as a Southern woman and allowing herself to have dirty fingernails. Those of Ellen O'Hara's ilk would adhere to upper-class rules until death, and, therefore, retain their feeling of superiority and privilege.

2.4 The limits of Mitchell's feminism

So what does the text of this novel suggest about class distinctions in its women? The answer is complex rather than straightforward, and Mitchell seems to offer “layers” of interpretation. *Gone with the Wind* is set in the years 1861-1873, but was written and published in the 1930s. Many scholars and critics have noted the influence of the early twentieth-century women's movement and the social rebellion of the “flapper” era mirrored in the character of Scarlett. Obviously, a fictional text reveals much about the attitudes of the time in which it was written, and this novel has a strong feminist tone. I assert that Mitchell, despite her own possible discomfort with some elements of the lower classes, consciously represented the dilemma of women caught in the social traps provided for them by rigid class distinctions and expectations. I believe she is “compassionate” to the lower classes, in a sense, but writes within what she saw as the established Southern social framework rather than offering a “break-through” in these representations. While she cleverly reworks the belle stereotype to offer a “new woman” in the self-liberated Scarlett, she relies on “poor white” and “prostitute” stereotypes to present the lower-class women. In other words, there is nothing revolutionary in her presentation of women such as Emmie Slattery and Belle Watling, or in the reactions of her aristocratic female characters toward them, perhaps because Mitchell is suggesting that the barriers between them still strongly stand. However, the character of Scarlett does offer one small chink in the social and psychological wall built between women of upper and lower classes.

Helen Taylor suggests that

The reversals of national, racial, class and gender history are embodied in Scarlett as both representative of and rebel against her specific historical, social and personal position. For many women reader-viewers, the epic heroism demanded of Scarlett at a historical moment when all certainties and fixed social relations are dramatically disturbed, and thus called into question, not only gives weight and dignity to one woman's experience but also affords us opportunities of seeing our own lives as part of a wider class, race and generational historical struggle (108).

Thus, Taylor views "Scarlett's life story [as] that of Everywoman" (108), and the social class piece of this perspective fits well into the puzzle of Scarlett's cultural influence. In *Scarlett*, both Mitchell and Selznick depict a woman who is caught up in outside forces, plummeting from the license and luxury of upper-class life to the desperation and drudgery of a life of poverty. In the "Tara-war" months, Scarlett and Melanie carry out menial labor they would formerly have associated only with slaves or poor whites: hoeing and picking cotton, mending fences, plowing fields, penning and feeding pigs, harvesting and preparing food, washing clothes. In the film version, Scarlett wears the same worn calico dress throughout this entire segment, only getting out of it when she dons the famous "curtain" dress. She worries about food, money and basic supplies. In essence, her life has transformed, almost overnight, with the advance of Sherman into Georgia, from riches to rags. When Emmie makes her one appearance at Tara after a lifetime of being shut out from the plantation life, appearances suggest that the tables

have been turned. Emmie arrives in style, in new fashionable clothing with a male escort in a shiny new buggy, and encounters Scarlett in her ragged dress stained with the red dirt of Tara. Mitchell is adhering to the “reversal of fortune” motif associated with traditional early twentieth-century portrayals of the Civil War/Reconstruction period in which the “decent white” people suffered while Carpetbaggers, Scalawags and freed Negroes lived opulently, but the images of Scarlett living Emmie’s lifestyle can also be seen as a slight move toward the loosening of the barriers between them. Of course, Scarlett eventually regains her fortunes and then some, and there is no suggestion that the experiences of poverty have increased her sensitivity to human suffering in general, but the image of spoiled Scarlett living the life of a poor white girl allows for the reader/viewer to see the barriers between upper and lower class women as slightly less impenetrable than before.

CHAPTER 3

PROGRESSIVE CONTRIBUTIONS IN *CHRISTY*

Moving forward another thirty years allows a reader to encounter more progress and change in these representations in a bildungsroman. A 1967 novel marketed for and extremely popular with adolescent girls which offers an interesting upper-class belle/lower-class woman homosocial relationship is Catherine Marshall's *Christy*. The book has retained its popularity in the years since its initial publication, spawning two television movies in the years 1994 and 2001, and a brief television series that originally aired in 1994 and 1995, continuing to the present in syndication on cable channels such as Pax and Hallmark. In 1969, MGM had secured rights to put the story on the big screen, but Marshall would not approve the ending written by Isobel Lennart and the attempt was thwarted. The 2001 miniseries came as a response to viewer write-ins demanding a resolution to the original series; the three segments resumed the story interrupted by the cancellation of the original series, retaining the same characters and setting but employing different actors in most of the key positions. Despite their popularity, neither of the two versions of *Christy* captured the strength of narrative, thematic depth or vibrance of character of the original text. Similar in tone, format and scope to "family-friendly"-billed series such as the *Little House on the Prairie* or *The Waltons* series of the 1970-80s, both serve effectively as such, but do not extend the cultural work of the novel in the same ways that the *Cold Mountain* or *Gone with the*

Wind film versions do. However, they are notable as an enhancement to the considerable popularity of the original text. Since 1998, an annual three-day event called “ChristyFest” has been held in the Smoky Mountain area of Townsend, Tennessee to “celebrate” the movies, television series and novel. Participants can meet cast members and other guests associated with the film versions as well as “nationally known experts” in the areas of mountain crafts, herbal medicines and the history and lifestyles of early mountain settlements and music (“ChristyFest”). More than a few websites are devoted to Catherine Marshall’s novel and/or the films. The text and images of *Christy* have, therefore, garnered a devoted following of readers and viewers over the years since the novel’s original publication in 1967. I found it an influential text for my age group in the mid-70s and, unlike some other popular texts of the time, it seems to have retained that influence.

3.1 Upper-class women in an Appalachian setting

Although set in the poverty-stricken Appalachian mountain area of Tennessee, *Christy* offers two striking and memorable portrayals of upper-class women, derivatives of the belle and plantation mistress. Both characters are present in Appalachia for altruistic reasons, and the belle character provides the title this bildungsroman.

3.1.1. *Christy Huddleston*

The title character, Christy Rudd Huddleston, is nineteen years old when she leaves home to teach school in the Appalachian Mountains in the year 1912. Christy is the only daughter of well-to-do Asheville parents who agree reluctantly that she may leave college to embark upon this adventure. The story of Christy’s first year of

teaching is an arresting narrative, based on the true story of Marshall's mother, Leonora, and as such, may be used as an interesting study of Appalachian natives, their dialect and traditions, all of which Marshall self-consciously details within the narrative.

Marshall, like Margaret Mitchell before her, answered critics regarding her historical and social detailing in the novel. She records in pictures and journals the evidence of two trips, in 1958 and 1959, to Morgan's Gap, Tennessee, where her parents worked "to show how her novel is not about colorful characters created in her imagination or embellished in her parents' memory" (*Collectors Edition* 234). It is clear that Marshall intended to present a realistic depiction of people living in the Appalachian region, as well as the influence of the "outsiders" like Christy who strive to improve the lives of these people.

Christy is an archetypal belle character, pampered and spoiled by loving parents, expected to achieve no more than a perfunctory education, an acceptable marriage and an inherited Christian faith. The original of this character, Marshall's mother Leonora, was in reality a poor, lower-class girl; Marshall records in her autobiography that her mother spent her girlhood in poverty on North Carolina farms (*Meeting God...*35). However, in novelizing her mother's experiences as a young school teacher, Marshall rewrites the protagonist as upper-class. Perhaps this is an acknowledgement of the aristocratic benefactress stereotype. By setting Christy up as a wealthy Southern belle, Marshall draws upon this stereotype to make her title character more interesting to the young female reader and enhance the scope of the sacrifice that Christy makes in coming to the mountains. Christy's upper-class status infuses her with more agency,

more influence, more significance. The real-life Leonora, in leaving an impoverished home where she cared for a number of younger siblings, might seem to have made somewhat of a lateral move, well-intentioned though her decision may have been. Marshall is a skillful fiction writer and seems to understand how to endear her protagonist to readers. Christy is bright, attractive, assertive and feminine; the gentrification of her character only adds to its appeal.

The novel spans the eleven months of Christy's teaching experience in the fictional Cutter Gap, Tennessee. Most of the information to be gleaned about Christy's background comes from her thoughts of home and the reactions of other characters to her aristocratic appearance. Christy's family, the Huddlestones, are solid Presbyterians with only two children; while in the midst of the squalor of Cutter Gap (alternately called "the Cove"), she often thinks back to the large, spacious house and life of surplus and luxury she has left behind. When her father offers her extra funds as he takes her to the train ride into the Appalachians, she responds, "Probably for the first time in my life, there won't be any temptation to spend money" (20). Questioned by mission leader Alice Henderson regarding her motivation to come to an impoverished area, Christy muses about "Teas and receptions and ladies' genteel talk...Shoppings and dress fittings...Dance-parties and picnics in the summer...There must be more to life than that...Or is there—for a woman?"(61) Later in the novel, Christy is not tempted to return home on holiday, although her mother writes of "receptions, luncheons, teas and clothes-shopping to lure me" (179). On her first day of teaching, Christy is made "painfully self-conscious" by the bare feet of the children, "...in ludicrous contrast to

the dainty heels and pointed toes of my kid and patent leather shoes” (68). The embarrassment of Christy as she realizes how blithely she exhibits evidence of her own financial security points out the contrast between her lifestyle and that of the children and their families.

Her upper-class lifestyle is much in evidence as the Appalachian natives meet her for the first time. Mrs. Tatum, a middle-aged woman who owns the boarding house Christy occupies just before walking the seven miles to Cutter Gap from nearby El Pano, comments, “ You come from a highfalutin’home...easy to tell that. Your clothes, pretty fancy do-dads...The way you talk...,” and doubts Christy’s ability to “stick it out” (31). The schoolchildren are fascinated by her elegant clothing, and one child named Little Burl “slipped up to my desk to reach out admiring grimy fingers and touch the embroidery on my shirtwaist. ‘Teacher, hit’s a wondrous sight to behold’” (79) Although the highlanders’ extreme poverty would make even an average wardrobe seem ostentatious, it is clear through these details that Marshall is painting Christy as a child of privilege.

Christy also extends the influence of Scarlett O’Hara in her position as an upper-class girl temporarily living a lower-class lifestyle. Christy has chosen to enter the mountain world of poverty, as opposed to the indigence inflicted on Scarlett by wartime repercussions, but we see Christy undertaking a lifestyle involving some hard manual labor unknown to her before. Mrs. Tatum of the boarding house in nearby El Pano warns her of the difficulties involved in her newly-adopted life in the Cove: “Have you ever had to wash your clothes by beatin’ ‘em on a battlin’block? Or did you ever have

to sleep in a bed with the quilts held down by rocks to keep the wind from blowing the covers off?” (32) Her first act as new schoolteacher is to walk a grueling seven miles through the snow into Cutter Gap. Although Christy does not suffer the hunger, mental desperation and fears of Scarlett’s war and Reconstruction years, she does present an image of an aristocratic belle living the life of a lower-class mountain woman—another large step away from the Jane Austen heroine in this respect.

Also like Scarlett, Christy is not oblivious to her feminine appeal as the belle character. One chapter of the story is devoted to her foray to the city to solicit funds for the mission. Christy undertakes this endeavor on her own volition, inspired by the story of Queen Esther in the Old Testament. She notes that Esther, in plotting to influence the direction of King Ahasuerus, “turned her woman’s mind toward an overall strategy which included what to wear, and which of all the perfumes of Arabia would pique His Majesty’s nose best and how to use her rouge-pot and her kohl to best advantage” (169). Christy, following Esther’s example, focuses on “the wealthiest man in Knoxville...Hazen L. Smith.” Although he is a personal friend of her father’s, Christy decides against using this connection, and arms herself with her own zeal and personal charms. Arriving in Knoxville in her best suit, she finds a hairdresser, emerging with “my long hair...elaborately arranged in curls on top of my head, caught up at the nape of the neck in a figure eight.” Next, she finds a millinery, and purchases a “beautiful black hat,” which costs her twenty-five dollars, “My entire salary for one month” (174). Christy attracts attention as she enters Mr. Smith’s office, but is not embarrassed, because “my female instinct told me that these were looks of admiration.” Nor is the

effect lost on Mr. Smith, who exclaims “Why didn’t someone think of sending out missionaries like you before!” Christy is not offended, because “Masculine interest and attention were always fun” (175). She successfully wins Mr. Smith’s interest in financially backing the mission church and school, and as she leaves, he offers her a final compliment: “Here’s one man who thinks you have the most beautiful eyes God ever put in a woman’s face” (179). Although her motivations are different, Christy’s awareness of her sex appeal and feminine charms as the belle is reflective of Scarlett O’Hara’s very self-conscious endeavors to manipulate men, believing, as Mitchell phrases it, that “a pretty dress and a clear complexion are weapons to vanquish fate” (65). Marshall is unapologetic and uncondemning of Christy’s use of sex appeal to gain her end, and seems to offer the Old Testament story as justification for those actions. Christy’s motives are altruistic, but her actions show an attachment to the belle-temptress archetype in a novel marketed for young female readers. The entire incident is reminiscent of Scarlett O’Hara’s trip to Atlanta in a dress made of her mother’s velvet curtains, and rouge and perfume bought from her last remaining gold pieces to tempt Rhett Butler into financial support of her and Tara.

3.1.2 Alice Henderson

Another reworked stereotype of the upper-class woman is found in the character of Alice Henderson, or “Miss Alice.” Miss Alice is the founder of the mission school, a middle-aged woman who serves as a mentor to the young Christy. Like Christy, Miss Alice’s appearance suggests a somewhat aristocratic background. She is described as “patrician” (16) by the older Christy character in the novel’s Prologue, which sets up

the flashback plot. Mrs. Tatum of the boarding house, in describing Cutter Gap to Christy, comments that Miss Alice “likes fine-wearin’ clothes, dresses like quality folks” (35). Mr. Pentland, the mailman who journeys with Christy into the Cove, describes Miss Alice as a woman who “sits like a queen...wears her hair in braids that she folds round and round her head like a crown” (39). When Christy meets Miss Alice the morning after her own arrival in the Cove, she notices her “clear, beautifully cut features,” the “beauty and order” of her cabin, her well-made and “immaculate” clothing, and “a handsome brooch-watch with what looked like a family crest at the top.” All of these details add to the image of the upper-class woman, and Christy further muses that “There was something queenlike about her” (60). Again Marshall endows a significant and leading female character with the traits of aristocracy and the image of royalty. This serves to reinforce the aristocratic benefactress archetype, as well as emphasize the contrast between the upper-class Christy and Miss Alice with the lower-class, “poor white” women of Cutter Gap.

Miss Alice serves a similar role in *Christy* to that of Ellen O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. When her background is revealed to Christy later in the novel, the similarities are even more striking. Ellen leaves her aristocratic home in Savannah at age fifteen after the tragic death of her young lover Philippe, marries Gerald O’Hara in, what for her, is a loveless arrangement, and selflessly devotes her entire existence “to the service of her child[ren], her household and the man who had taken her out of Savannah and its memories and had never asked any questions”(52). Miss Alice, raped by a trusted family friend, gives birth to a daughter, Margaret, at the age of fifteen.

Margaret grows up to marry a Cutter Gap doctor; Miss Alice moves into Appalachia to be near her and begins her mission work. After the tragic death of this daughter, Miss Alice selflessly devotes her life to the mission church and three schools in the area. Both characters fulfill the role of mentor to the belle characters; both exhibit a larger-than-life role of virtue and wisdom. Christy turns to the guidance and example of Miss Alice in every crisis, in much the same way that Scarlett longed for the approval and guidance of her mother, even (or especially) after her death. Unlike Ellen, Miss Alice does not die sacrificially in the novel, but nevertheless exhibits the self-sacrifice and venerableness of this character type.

Both Christy and Miss Alice struggle with accepting the members of the poor white community in which they work. In their first conference, Miss Alice tells Christy that, upon first coming to Cutter Gap, she “couldn’t see anything but the dirt and the poverty, either.” However, her turning point in changing this mindset occurred, she reveals, when she one day “came upon a mountain girl playing a dulcimer.” Because this girl sang old English and Scottish ballads, Miss Alice begins to view the inhabitants of the Cove differently: “Sitting on a cabin porch, I’d see an English manor house with clipped lawns and lords and ladies strolling arm-in-arm.” Viewing the poor white occupants as descendents of English aristocracy helps Miss Alice accept and value them, a perspective which Christy adopts and reiterates throughout the novel. Miss Alice suggests to Christy that the key to helping these mountain people strive for self-improvement is to “remind [them]...over and over...[of their] fine heritage” (65). Thus, the intrinsic value of the poor white highlanders of the Cove is determined by

their connection to ancestors of an upper-class status. Without this enriching background, it is impossible for the aristocratic benefactresses to see past “the dirt and the poverty” engulfing the highlanders. Their worth, ultimately, is determined by the potential for re-capturing some elements of a gentrified existence.

3.2 Lower-class women in an Appalachian setting

Although Christy’s primary purpose in the Gap is to teach the schoolchildren, as an aristocratic benefactress, her attention is soon focused as well on helping improve the lot of the women. Marshall through Christy’s viewpoint carefully informs the reader of the predicament of these poverty-stricken mountain women, who bear a number of children, work hard and grow old before their time. The fictional Cutter Gap is a backwards community, virtually untouched by contemporary social and technological advancements; hence, the residents resemble people of the antebellum era more than those of the early twentieth century. The women beat their wash upon a rock, cook over an open flame, can, quilt, rely on homemade medicines and cures, and speak in a dialect strongly resembling the illiterate mountaineer Archie or the prostitute Belle Watling from *Gone with the Wind*. Christy is distressed by the lack of position that the women occupy in their homes and society, and the expectations that they will forego education for early marriage and submit passively to the will of dominant fathers and husbands.

3.2.1 *Ruby Mae Morrison*

The “mission house” in which Christy resides is shared by a young mountain woman named Ruby Mae Morrison, who is also one of Christy’s older students. Ruby Mae, temporarily homeless, is a challenge to Christy because she eschews the simplest

practices of basic hygiene such as bathing and combing her hair and because of her annoying habit of talking incessantly. Later in the novel, Ruby Mae's early marriage at age fifteen to a sixteen-year-old boy is a frustration for Christy, who considers the lack of opportunity afforded the mountain women:

...it seemed to me that these child marriages were no good, that the girls caught in them never had a chance. They were worn out with having babies and drudgery by their middle twenties; usually they were grandmothers by their early thirties. (347)

As Ruby Mae's wedding progresses to a night of dancing and celebrating in the mountain cabin, Christy further observes the women at the gathering and considers their existence:

I had never known such courageous and hard-working women as many of these. Literally and symbolically, they never let the fires go out on their hearths. I wondered how city wives back in Asheville would react to having to spin wool or flax into yarn or thread, then weave the cloth, then make all the family's clothing. They not only did all the washing and ironing (without tap water, too), but even made the soap. They baked all the bread and cakes, milked the cows and churned the butter, or there would not be any butter...often while their men were spending whole days roaming the wood with their favorite hounds, hunting. Or else the womenfolk stood by helplessly in misery and heartbreak over the feuding (351)

Christy's acknowledgement of the skill and strength of the poor white women in the novel is a progressive departure from Mitchell's depiction of the Slattery women as dependent and slovenly, and a slight foreshadowing of the respect afforded by Frazier to the skills of the poor white woman, but, as we will see later, the archetype of the aristocratic benefactress and the poor white victim is adhered to later in the story.

3.2.2 *Opal McHone*

Another poor mountain woman with whom Christy interacts is Opal McHone. Christy and the reader are first introduced to Opal early in the novel, when she asks for Christy's help in preparing her newborn baby girl for burial. Christy gathers ribbons and sewing material and journeys with Ruby Mae to the McHone cabin, only to find that the baby was inadvertently killed by Opal. Believing in a superstition involving a non-existent condition described as "livergrowed," Opal has spent hours desperately attempting to force her baby's heel and opposite hand to "tetch." After a night of such mistreatment, the baby has died, presumably of inflicted internal injuries. Christy is horrified by this irony and this death caused by "love mired by her ignorance and by the superstition handed down to her" (109). Christy vows to help Opal, to guide her out of her cruel ignorance. Opal remains a key character in the novel, and a dynamic one, who does grow and mature. However, the overwhelming image given by the character of Opal is one of the victim and the dependent. She and Christy develop a form of friendship, but nothing close to a friendship built on equality; the characterization of Opal reinforces, rather than challenges, the poor white stereotype.

3.2.3 *Fairlight Spencer*

A significant amount of text is dedicated to Christy's unique relationship with one of the mountain women, the young wife and mother, Fairlight Spencer. Christy is taken aback by Fairlight at first meeting, for this physically beautiful and appealing young woman possesses an unconscious aristocratic air and bearing as well as an imaginative and creative mind. Through Marshall's first person narration, Christy reveals that she "could scarcely take [her] eyes off [Fairlight], for she was beautiful in her plain, artless way." This beauty is enhanced for Christy by Fairlight's voice, which was "low-toned and pitched in a musical minor key" (44). As Christy shares a meal with the Spencer family, she has more time to observe her hostess

My eyes kept going back to the barefooted woman who moved so quietly and with such grace to and from the kitchen...Her features were delicate: nose turned up at the end ever so slightly, which gave her a piquant look. Delicately shaped lips. Hair parted in the middle, drawn back into a bun, much like that woman in the rococo frame [which held an ancestral photograph] (46).

A few chapters later, Christy and the young minister David visit in the Spencer home and she continues her description of Fairlight, with one particularly significant phrase:

The grace of the gesture [of gently caressing flower petals] and the long tapering fingers (even though they were red and rough with chipped and broken nails) caught my attention. I stood there thinking that these should be the hand *of an aristocrat* [emphasis mine], and here they were on a mountain woman, buried at the back of beyond (148).

At a women's sewing circle, Christy echoes her impression of Fairlight as someone more suited to the upper-class life:

I noticed Fairlight's hands as she handled the beautiful china cup, putting it carefully to her lips, and I had the curious feeling that they were the hands of a great lady, that the red, work-worn skin was only a disguise which would drop away when some evil enchantment broke (158).

So, although Marshall's characterization of Fairlight seems at first glance to break stereotypes of the lower-class woman, "white trash" in a mountain setting, and is a significant departure from a Scarlett/Emmie-type relationship, it is not without qualifications. One of the reasons Christy, the belle character, can view Fairlight as a desirable friend is that she possesses qualities "of an aristocrat" or a "great lady."

The reference to "evil enchantment" conjures images of Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, princesses who were disguised as peasant girls, but were only presented as heroines in the story because they were in actuality royal, aristocratic girls. We will also see that, although Christy and Fairlight certainly become friends on a basis of near equality, Christy as the upper-class woman is still presented as more benefactress than recipient.

Fairlight shares features with the other mountain women, but Christy finds in her a refreshing quality. Even Fairlight's unusual name seems to suggest uniqueness, a person set apart from her peers. Most of the novel's mountain women are described as steeped in a crippling ignorance and passive acceptance of their lot which Christy finds somewhat repugnant. For the most part, Christy sees other women as "projects," such

as the superstitious young mother, Opal, who inadvertently causes the death of a beloved baby girl by adhering to a therapy prescribed by an “old wives’ tale.” With women like Opal and the ignorant girl-bride Ruby Mae, Christy’s objectives are to influence and instruct; she views herself as their patroness. In contrast, Christy feels true admiration and friendship for Fairlight. When Fairlight shyly offers to help Christy with her workload in exchange for reading lessons, Christy feels that “at that moment [she] wanted to teach this woman to read more than [she] had ever wanted to do anything before” (152). Fairlight learns to read eagerly and easily: “She scarcely needed instruction, only the chance to let the light come” (155). Their friendship grows naturally, as they meet at church services, women’s circles and “workings.” By the time Christy’s school takes a summer break, Fairlight is firmly established as her closest companion in Cutter Gap, a position Fairlight accepts joyfully but modestly: “...Fairlight had difficulty believing that I enjoyed her for herself and not because I thought it my duty to help her or from some other motive”(308). Christy’s personal time with Fairlight is revealing as a time of self-discovery and learning from this unique person: “I might never have discovered who I really was...without those quiet hours spent with Fairlight in the mountains” (309). Fairlight “...had so much to teach me” (309), and is therefore a friend on more equal footing with Christy than the pitiable Opal or the annoying, chattery Ruby Mae. Anticipating the Ruby/Ada relationship in *Cold Mountain*, Christy and Fairlight exchange useful knowledge as well as develop a close friendship. Thus, the social class gap between them is somewhat closed by a true mutual regard and respect.

Fairlight, however, does play a “victim” role as the novel works toward its climax involving a typhoid outbreak. One of Fairlight’s children comes for Christy to help her mother; the father of the family has been away on a hunting trip, and so no adult has been aware of Fairlight’s illness. With the typical mountain mentality of reticence in seeking medical help, Fairlight has self-treated her symptoms for ten days and neglected herself to a point of danger. Although Christy responds promptly and sends immediately for the doctor, Fairlight dies in Christy’s arms within hours of her friend’s arrival. In a few weeks, Christy also breaks with the serious infection, presumably caught from Fairlight, repeating the stock situation of the lower-class woman infecting the upper-class woman who nurses her.

The death of the lovely, intelligent, virtuous Fairlight is a poignant moment in a novel targeted for young women, reminiscent of the death of Louisa May Alcott’s Beth in *Little Women*. As in death of Beth, Fairlight’s demise serves mainly as a teaching tool for the female protagonist, a touchstone moment in which to re-evaluate life and its purpose. After this emotional crisis, Christy’s bout with typhoid leads to a near-death experience in which she sees Fairlight as a presence in a heavenly land and calls out to her. Although she obeys the “pull” to return to earth, Christy calls out to Fairlight to wait for her, that they will someday be reunited. Thus, Marshall portrays the friendship bond between Christy and Fairlight as real and stronger than life, a friendship carried into eternity.

In contrasting the Christy/Fairlight relationship with the Scarlett/Emmie presentation, we see that the passage of one-third of a century allows for the breakdown

of some of the barriers between the belle/poor white. Christy and Fairlight have a sincere friendship, despite its inequalities. Marshall manages a notably unique and important quality by creating a friendship between young women of similar intelligence and capability which, at least to some extent, spans the gulf of social class. However, Christy and Fairlight, like Scarlett and Emmie, occupy clear and distinct positions as upper and lower class women. Their identities are unyieldingly separate as upper and lower class; there is no blurring of these lines; the stereotypes, though slightly altered, remain intact. To find a more definitive reworking of these established class distinctions and fuller reclamation of the poor white girl in a similar fiction, we move forward another thirty years to *Cold Mountain*.

CHAPTER 4

POSITIVE REVISIONS IN *COLD MOUNTAIN*

Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* extends the revision of the belle/poor white relationship found in Marshall's *Christy*. Kathryn Seidel, writing in 1985, seems to anticipate Frazier:

The best authors after 1940 have a double self-consciousness when dealing with the belle; they are reacting still to the same myths as the writers of the 1920s and 1930s, but they have also read Faulkner, Glasgow, Tate and Mitchell. The milieu in which they write has been drastically changed, as much by the core writers of the Southern Renaissance as by World War II. The very self-consciousness of these writers necessitates a different treatment of their works... (166). As a literary phenomenon, the southern belle is a fascinating vehicle for cultural and psychological motifs. In the hands of an unskilled author, she is merely a stereotype... however, she can be both a poignant, complex individual, and a multifaceted symbol of an entire society... As one of the most complex images of woman in literature, her day is certainly not over (169).

Writing in 1996, Charles Frazier proves that a fresh version of the belle is still possible.

4.1 A reworking of the belle: Ada Monroe

His Ada Monroe is a tidewater, genteel young Southern woman, approximately twenty years old at the novel's opening, relocated to the Carolina Appalachian Mountains because of her father's ill health. She resembles Melanie Hamilton more than Scarlett O'Hara. Like Melanie, she is idealistic and bookish, artsy and cultured. She has neither Scarlett's vibrancy nor her drive to succeed. Like Melanie, she is faithful to the love of one man, Inman, and waits for him to return from the war as Melanie waits for Ashley, without knowing until she sees him that he is still alive. She is like Marshall's Christy in her close association with the church and the world of academia. However, Melanie, Scarlett and Christy all prove to be more practical and capable in crisis than Ada.

Ada and her minister father relocate to the Cold Mountain area a few years before the outbreak of the war; they purchase the Black Cove farm from a family who have moved to Texas. Monroe builds a home of his own design, leaving the Blacks' log cabin for hired help, an action reminiscent of Gerald O'Hara's construction of Tara. The house Monroe constructs is a planter-style house, with a deep porch across the front and an attached kitchen (46). Monroe, like O'Hara, becomes deeply attached to his new home, including the land and mountain area itself; he quotes Wordsworth and other poets as a result of the inspiring natural beauty around him (41). Ada, like Scarlett, loves and is strongly committed to her father, only attaching to the land he owns after his death.

Neither Ada nor her father regret leaving Charleston and its class-consciousness, although warned by tidewater friends that they would regret the move. These friends “expressed the opinion that the mountain region was a heathenish part of creation outlandish its many affronts to sensibility.” Ada is advised that she will find those of her sex to be particularly offensive, since “women of every station suckled their young, leaving the civilized trade of wet nurse unknown” (42). The inclusion of the phrase “of every station” suggests that the Charleston aristocracy find a lack of class distinctions among women to be deplorable. In fact, Ada does not easily get to know the women of the community; as she and Monroe begin visiting homes, they are entertained solely by the men, although she hears “hidden people in the houses” (43), among whom she suspects are women. Eventually, she does become friends with Sally Swanger, a middleaged woman who seems to fill to some extent the mother-mentor role of Ellen O’Hara or Alice Henderson.

Despite this isolation, Ada has no desire to return to Charleston and reflects on her “belle” years there with no sentimentality. In fact, her Charleston family and acquaintance “had found her relative disinterest in the process [of courtship] puzzling” (49). While in Charleston, Ada had declined two marriage proposals and “felt that she ought to have a sign fashioned to read Gentlemen Prohibited hanging from her porch gate” (50). So, Frazier’s Ada is no typical Southern belle, living to flirt and manipulate men into falling in love with her. In fact, one of her clear departures from the pattern of her fictional predecessors is a lack of consciousness, or at least a decision not to utilize, her own sex appeal.

Frazier, like Mitchell, details the background of the marriage which produced his protagonist and Ada's parents bear striking similarities to Scarlett's. Ada's mother Claire dies giving birth to her. Like Ellen Robillard, she is the daughter of a Frenchman and her family live in the tidewater area when Monroe meets her; also like Ellen, she is beautiful, with black hair and pale skin. Claire is seventeen years old when Monroe falls in love with her. He has decided to propose when he accidentally sees her passionately kissing another man, leaving without confronting them. She marries this man, also a Frenchman and they return to France to live. Like Ellen's love for her cousin Philippe Robillard, this youthful liaison is ill-fated, and Claire's husband dies; she returns to Charleston, eventually reconnecting with Monroe and marrying him. Monroe, then, shares another connection with Gerald O'Hara in marrying a woman who has lost her first, passionate love. Ada, like Scarlett, is partially of French descent; also like Scarlett, she faces the hardest of the war years without parental support and guidance.

During the war, the sudden death of Ada's father leaves her alone in Black Cove. Hoping for Inman's return and disconnected from her Charleston family, she chooses to remain on the isolated farm, clumsily raiding the garden for the straggling vegetables and intermittently milking the cow. She is a misplaced belle, and unlike Scarlett when left to lead her family at Tara in a struggle for the basic necessities of life, she does not have the fortitude of close Irish peasant ancestry to drive her to the fields and woods to craft a desperate survival. She sinks into depression and denial, reading and drawing to beguile the time and her own deteriorating situation. Although she lacks Scarlett's

practical gumption in the art of survival, Ada echoes Scarlett in reflecting that her training has been less than satisfactory for the task at hand:

A certain amount of resentment came upon her when she thought that a measure of applied knowledge in the area of food production and preparation would stand her in better stead at that particular time than any fine understanding of the principles of perspective in painting. All her life, though, her father had kept her back from the hardness of work....She had...been free, as always, to occupy her time with reading and needlework, drawing and music (23).

Just as Scarlett realizes that her mother's instruction in "how to be a lady" is useless in the changing times, Ada reflects that her father's elitist upbringing of herself offers no practical application in the situation in which she finds herself.

Also like Scarlett, Ada presents a point of view on the war effort which contrasts with the seemingly popular and accepted view for Southern female aristocracy. During her time in Charleston, she does not view the young soldiers headed out to war with patriotic fervor, and a later conversation during the war confirms her lack of Confederate patriotism.

On the eve of the war, Ada meets a young man who plans to enlist as soon as the fighting begins. Ada's lack of response to his bravado and the drinks he has consumed cause him to break into a confession involving his fears about the war. Ada kindly strokes his hand as he cries, but does not offer verbal comfort:

She knew that the proper thing to say was that duty and honor demanded brave action in defense of homeland. Women had been uttering like phrases all through the party, but Ada found her throat closed against the words. Lacking them, she could have used a simple locution, telling him only, Don't worry, or, Be brave. But any such comforting formula seemed at that moment unutterably false to her (110).

Ada's refusal to send off a "brave boy in gray" with a speech about his courage and her gratitude for his defense of her and their country is a clear departure from the belle archetype.

During the war years, Ada visits a Mrs. McKennet in the town of Cold Mountain. (Incidentally, the closest "large" town mentioned is Asheville, the home town of the fictional Christy Huddleston.) She and Mrs. McKennet discuss the war and this "wealthy widow of middle age" exhibits "opinions in accord with every newspaper editorial Ada had read for four years, which is to say Mrs. McKennet found the fighting glorious and tragic and heroic. Noble beyond all her powers of expression" (140). As Ada listens to a highly sentimentally enhanced anecdote of the glorious deaths of a soldier and his beloved occurring at the same hour miles apart, she represses a laugh.

Ada might as well have been in Charleston. And she felt called upon to take up some of her old Charleston demeanor. She said, That is the most preposterous thing I have ever heard. She went further, adding that, contrary to the general view, she found the war to exhibit anything but the fine characteristics of

tragedy and nobility. She found it, even at a great distance, brutal and benighted on both sides about equally. Degrading to all (141).

Interestingly, Mrs. McKennet calls Ada's response "naïve." She does not elaborate on this term, and the reader is left to contrast Mrs. McKennet's more conventionally upper-class view of the war to Ada's without further explanation from Frazier. Whether Mrs. McKennet views Ada as naïve for not believing a story told as truth, or for not seeing the need to take sides when an enemy is trying to conquer one's "country," the incident highlights Ada's individualism and lack of desire to conform. Such "unpatriotic" views on the war are expressed by Scarlett O'Hara as well, although Scarlett feels a need to mask her dissenting perspective. At the Atlanta Bazaar, where the widowed Scarlett infamously dances with Rhett Butler, she silently rebels against the required patriotism of the Confederacy:

The other women were simply silly and hysterical with their talk of patriotism and the Cause...She, Scarlett O'Hara Hamilton, alone had good hard-headed Irish sense. She wasn't going to make a fool out of herself about the Cause, but neither was she going to make a fool out of herself by admitting her true feelings...How surprised everyone at the bazaar would be if they knew what she really was thinking! How shocked if she suddenly climbed on the bandstand and declared that she thought the war ought to stop, so everybody could go home and tend to their cotton and there could be parties and beaux again and plenty of pale green dresses (147).

Although Scarlett and Ada share a disdain for the Cause, Scarlett's point of view is obviously the more shallow one. Ada's individualistic viewpoint more closely resembles the disillusionment felt by Ashley Wilkes, shared and transmitted to his wife Melanie. However, Melanie does not keep silent about her and Ashley's opinions for the sake of public approbation as Scarlett does; she braves the formidable dowager Mrs. Merriwether.

“Ashley wrote me that we should not be fighting the Yankees. And that we have been betrayed into it by statesmen and orators mouthing catchwords and prejudices,” said Melly rapidly. “He said nothing in the world was worth what this war was going to do to us. He said there wasn't anything at all to glory—it was just misery and dirt” (197).

So, both Mitchell and Frazier create aristocratic belles who hold unconventional views on established social concerns such as the war. Ada's eccentricities of persona as a belle are less socially blaring in the Carolina mountain area than Scarlett's and Melanie's departures from the Atlanta Old Guard. Because of her individualism, Ada is less motivated to consider returning to Charleston, where she will be forced to some degree of conformity to survive. She realizes that her choices are limited to either becoming a parasitical female attached to whatever family she has left, or succumbing to a desperate marriage with an older gentleman too infirm for active surface in the war.

Urged by concerned neighbors, Ada's distress is lightened by the arrival of Ruby Thewes, a poor white girl who has grown up near Black Cove in a mountain shack and is skilled at self-preservation. Like Emmie and Scarlett, Ada and Ruby are neighbors

who have never interacted socially. Ruby arrives unannounced and meets Ada on the front porch of her home, which shadows the Emmie/Scarlett meeting. In contrast to Emmie, Ruby does not need a male presence to “front” for her as she presents herself to Ada. Ada and Ruby are connected only by Sally Swanger, who suggests that Ruby speak to Ada about working at Black Cove. This mediation resembles the connection of Ellen O’Hara between Emmie and Scarlett. Another similarity in the two meetings is that they both occur after emotional crises with Ada and Scarlett involving finances. Scarlett has learned of the unreasonable taxes she is to pay on Tara and experienced her draining encounter with Ashley; Ada has received a discouraging letter from her father’s Charleston solicitor and spent the night in the open air in the woods, processing the dismal news. Ruby agrees to help Ada run the farm in exchange for room, board and the understanding that “everybody empties their own night jar” (52). The situation creates a mutually beneficial relationship in more ways than one.

4.2 A redemption of the poor white girl: Ruby Thewes

The character of Ruby has outward manifestations of Emmie Slattery, but also traits of Scarlett O’Hara. The similar vibrancy of color suggested by their names is interesting; it becomes easy to view Ruby as a shade of Scarlett. Both have dark, coarse hair, petite but strong bodies. Ruby’s mother has died; she, like Scarlett, has many traits in common with her father. More significantly, Ruby has Scarlett’s will and drive to survive and prosper. When left with the farm, Ada retreats to her books and runs from the “flogging rooster”; Ruby begins industriously mapping out a plan to revive and cultivate Black Cove just as Scarlett learns to scrounge for vegetables, pick cotton,

barter and trade for needed items. Her first action is to decapitate and cook the rooster who has so plagued Ada. Ada and Ruby share their first of many meals from this rooster, a memorable scene which recalls Scarlett's "going forth to conquer the world in her mother's velvet curtains and the tail feathers of a rooster"(457), after her encounter with Emmie. Ruby proves resourceful, like Scarlett. She drives Ada to work in the same way that Scarlett drives her sisters, the house servants and everyone who spends more than a night under the Tara roof. Although Scarlett's domination is more complete since she actually owns the land she is working and urging others to work with her, Ruby's is more effective. Her calm assertiveness with Ada transforms Ada's aimlessness and lack of initiative into a willing purposefulness and action. Scarlett's subjects, however, with the exception of Melanie and Dilcey, work reluctantly and resentfully.

Scarlett and Ruby also share a love of the land. Scarlett cries out to Rhett when threatened by high taxes on the plantation, "You fool! I can't let Tara go! It's home. I won't let it go. Not while I've got a breath left in me" (386). Ruby's first reaction when Inman returns to Ada is an anxiety that she will be displaced at Black Cove: "I've got a vision in my mind of how that cove needs to be... You don't need him" (325). Ruby, unlike Emmie Slattery, moves from the marginal shack to the big house, but, also unlike Emmie, she earns her keep and establishes her own worth. Ruby becomes a friend, a partner for Ada on terms of equality. She is not dependent on Ada, or inferior to her, a point that both the novel and film self-consciously make.

Ruby, unlike the Slattery women, proves a competent nurse for members of her own family and society. Far from needing the superior guidance and instruction of a plantation mistress, Ruby is a wealth of knowledge herself in the art of herbs, natural medicines, treatments and cures. When her father, Stobrod, is shot, Ruby immediately searches the wilderness area of the mountain for possible helps:

When Ruby returned an hour later, she had her pickets full of any root she could find that might be remotely useful...But she had not found goldenseal, which was the thing she needed the most...She packed a mash of mullein and yarrow root and burdock into Stobrod's wounds and bound them with strips cut from a blanket. She brewed tea from the mullein and ginseng, and dribbled it into his mouth (304-305).

She nurses her father through a serious gunshot wound, including removing the bullet, dressing the wound with herbs and spider webs, and spoonfeeding him appropriate food. Although there are no detailed scenes of childbirth in the novel (both Ada's child and Ruby's children are born during a nine-year lapse in narration), Frazier leaves no doubt that Ruby, unlike Mrs. Slattery, would be able to handle this situation and others involving the care of her family without supervision from an aristocrat.

Another important consideration in the depiction of Ruby is how Ada responds to Ruby's "homespun" philosophies and perspectives. There is no real contrasting available in this area to Emmie and Scarlett, since their limited interaction allows Scarlett to react to nothing more than Emmie's fashion choices and attachment to her mother. Whatever a character like Emmie might have articulated in terms of

perspectives on life is unvoiced in Mitchell's text. However, Christy and Fairlight offer some background in this area.

From her first introduction in the novel, Fairlight is portrayed as a superstitious woman, especially regarding death. When, at the end of each day, the sun "dips" behind a mountain opposite the high ridge on which the Spencer cabin sits, a shadow falls over the ridge "like a dark hand" (54). Christy observes with concern that, when this happens, Fairlight cringes and goes rigid with fear. Later in the story, Fairlight explains that she believes the opposite mountain is "witched. Most every day it puts me in mind of the shadder o' death" (369). Christy tries unsuccessfully to redirect Fairlight's fears. As Fairlight lies dying from typhoid, the shadow again crosses the mountain. Fairlight sits up in her bed, crying out that "The shadder's after me." Desperately, Christy attempts to comfort her, quoting the twenty-third Psalm and embracing her, but then realizes that Fairlight has died. Christy agonizes, wondering "How great a part had this abnormal fear played in her death?" (376). Thus, in her death, Fairlight is not only depicted as a victim of illness and an ignorant resistance to medical treatment, but also of her own superstitions. Of course, Marshall's use of Fairlight's premonitional fears also serves as foreshadowing, but in other situations as well, Fairlight's views are depicted as limited and ignorant.

In an earlier segment, Christy inquires about the success of Jeb Spencer's honey production, one of the few "cash crops" (besides moonshine) that is easily transported down the mountain. Fairlight responds that, if he wanted, Jeb could expand the business. She explains that if "[we were] makin' tracks for fortunes...[we could set up]

more bee gums, but of course it ain't to be thought of... Don't need no more of this world's goods." Christy reasons with her that "you still need so many things, basic things..." (369), but Fairlight stubbornly insists that the Spencers must not aspire to such materialism. This fear of the outside world is a theme Marshall develops throughout the novel with a variety of mountain characters.

In *Cold Mountain*, Ruby's outlook and philosophies are respected by Ada, although she does not always accept or adopt them wholeheartedly. Early in the process of reviving the Black Cove farm, Ruby asserts that the crops are growing well

...because they had been planted, at her insistence, in strict accordance with the signs. In Ruby's mind, everything—setting fence posts, making sauerkraut, killing hogs—fell under the rule of the heavens...Next April when the poplar leaves are about the size of a squirrel's ear, we'll plant corn when the signs are in the feet; otherwise the corn will just shank and hang down...(104)

Ada realizes that her father "would have dismissed such beliefs as superstitious, folklore," but Ada's relationship with Ruby and her respect for Ruby's abilities in working and manipulating the land and the life that has been presented to them cause her to modify the outlook she has been taught. Although Ada does not accept the actual claims involved in Ruby's adherence to the positions and timings of the natural world, she "chose to view the signs as metaphoric...an expression of stewardship, a means of taking care, a discipline" (104). Because she respects Ruby as a person, she abstains from a superior, judgmental attitude toward Ruby's beliefs.

Ruby, like Fairlight, also expresses a reluctance to involve herself with “cash money,” but for different reasons. When Ada confides in Ruby that she has very little money to run the farm, Ruby responds that “they were about as well off without it” (73). Ruby is suspicious of paper money, and prefers to barter and trade solid goods. When a trip to town to buy some basic items causes the girls to be shocked at the inflated wartime prices, Ada begins to see logic in Ruby’s opinions. Later, when Ruby expresses contempt for a hat bought in France because hats can be bought for money or trade goods right on Cold Mountain, Ada does not “bother arguing, for she figured that her life was moving toward a place where travel and imported hats would figure small” (192). Frazier presents Ruby’s ideas and “mountain mindset” with the perspective that her opinions and beliefs correspond logically with the life she is leading, and with reality as she knows it. Ada is not presented as a teacher, spiritual leader or benefactress who desires to re-educate or guide Ruby. Her advantage in education and worldly experience has not enabled her to make a success of the wartime life she has found herself leading without Ruby’s knowledge and framework; to assume a position of superiority over Ruby would seem hypocritical. Therefore, Ada and Ruby are allowed to meet on level ground.

4.3 A relationship of equality: Ada/Ruby

Frazier’s characterization of Ada and Ruby mixes the elements of the belle and the poor white girl. His presentation of Ruby allows a poor white girl to embody some of the strengths and positive attributes formerly reserved for the belle, and allows the belle figure to learn from and follow the guidance of the poor white girl. Not only does

Ada forgo the role of omniscient, omnipotent plantation mistress, but she learns from and follows the guidance of her “help.” Ada, in turn, offers Ruby the opportunity for improvement by teaching her classic literature and offering her a stable home, and a position of responsibility and significance within that home. Like Fairlight Spencer, Ruby can neither read nor write, but has an open mind and quick response to her new friend’s sharing of literature. Early in the arrangement, Ada and Ruby begin exchanging mutual strengths:

Ruby made appoint of refusing to tackle all the unpleasant work herself and made Ada hold a struggling chicken down on the chopping block and cleave off its head with a hatchet...The force that Ruby used to drive Ada on was this: somewhere Ada knew that anyone else she might hire would grow weary and walk away and let her fail. Ruby would not let her fail.

The only moments of rest were after the supper dishes had been washed and put away. Then Ada and Ruby sat on the porch and Ada would read aloud in the time remaining before dark. Books and their contents were a great novelty to Ruby, and so Ada had reckoned that the place to begin was near the beginning. After filing Ruby in on who the Greeks were, she had begun reading from Homer. They usually covered fifteen or twenty minutes of an evening. Then, when it became too dark to read and the air turned blue and started to congeal with mist, Ada would close the books and solicit stories from Ruby (81).

Ruby drives the practical, purposeful side of their lives, planning and arranging the success of the farm, and showing Ada how it will be achieved. Ada shows Ruby a side of life that has been completely denied her, the enrichment of education and a world before and beyond the mountain existence that Ruby has known. This exchange goes beyond polite respect, for both show a desire to internalize and take ownership of their new knowledge. In a letter to a cousin, Ada calls her feelings toward her new life “something akin to contentment,” and on one occasion after Ada’s reading aloud, Ruby is so taken with a line from Shakespeare that she memorizes it, quoting it back to herself for the pleasure it gives (258). This melding of position and class between the two leading female characters is mirrored symbolically in a small occurrence in the middle of the novel, the “scarecrow” segment.

Ruby and Ada, in the midst of rejuvenating and reorganizing their farm, become concerned with a flock of crows showing too much interest in their winter garden. Ruby leaves the farm to trade with the Swangers; Ada agrees to create a scarecrow while she is gone. Ada goes upstairs to choose some of her late father’s clothes, but becomes apprehensive as she looks through the possible garments, concerned with the idea of “every day walking out and seeing the effigy of Monroe standing in the field. From the porch at dusk it would be a dark figure watching. Her fear was that it would loom larger and more troubling in her mind than it would in the crows” (188). Rejecting the garments of her father as inappropriate, Ada turns to her own clothing and, after consideration, chooses a fancy mauve dress that she wore at the height of her life as a Charleston belle, on the occasion of a three-day party given by her cousin on a

riverbank plantation just prior to the war. The dress figures importantly in the story of this party which she has shared with Ruby earlier. We will look briefly at this recollection, since it will add depth to the significance of the scarecrow incident.

On the party's final night, Ada had worn a dress of mauve silk, trimmed in lace dyed to match. It was cut close in the waist to suit her slimness. Monroe had bought the entire bolt of cloth from which the dress was made so that no one else might wear that color. He remarked that it set off her dark hair perfectly and gave her an air of mystery among the more common pinks and pale blues and yellows (109).

Ada's father is proudly establishing her as a belle among belles, setting her up for success in an atmosphere of that epitomizes the gentry, an affair conducted for entertainment and courtship, about which Ruby "marvel[ed] at lives so useless that they required missing sleep and paddling about on a river for pleasure." At the last night of the event, Ada wears the dress and experiences an important moment of self-identity, in which she discovers her own feminine appeal. As she walks through the house, she is struck by the figure of a woman in a dress the color of "ashes of roses," and she feels a "sharp stitch of envy for the woman's dress and the fine shape of her back and her thick dark hair and the sense of assurance she seemed to evidence in her posture." The woman, is, of course, Ada herself, and she reflects on "how odd it had felt to win her own endorsement" (111). Although Ada has eschewed traditional courtship and some of the trappings of aristocratic womanhood, this incident reveals to her that there is power and influence in her position and image as an upper-class, well-dressed woman.

This is the dress that Ada chooses for the scarecrow. It is not the most logical choice for this purpose, and she realizes that “the material could be put to better use...[as] pillow covers, quilt tops, antimacassars for chairbacks, any number of useful things” (189). She stuffs the scarecrow and places it on the poles, adding an old French hat that Monroe had brought her from Europe, and a rusted pail filled with wildflowers. This completely feminine scarecrow, an image usually portrayed as male, symbolizes Ada’s position in filling a traditional male role in running her farm at Black Cove. The dress chosen by her father to proudly exhibit her as a female showpiece is now used to help her fulfill a “male” role. It also echoes Ada’s change in class position; the habiliments of the upper-class woman are put to use in a practical, menial task, much as Ada has abandoned her pursuits of traditional achievements for aristocratic females such as music, watercolors and social engagements. Another detail that supports the idea that Ada is consciously jettisoning the trappings of aristocracy is the sale of her piano; this is almost the first step she and Ruby take together in the pursuits of selling and trading to restock the farm with its needs. This reworking and recycling of physical possessions used for leisure symbolize Ada’s reworking and recycling of her life into something practical, something more akin to a plebeian life and purpose. Ada stands back to consider the scarecrow she has fashioned:

The figure stood staring off toward Cold Mountain, as if during a leisurely walk gathering flowers for a table arrangement she had been struck momentarily by the beauty of the scene before her. The full skirts of the lavender dress swayed in the breeze, and all Ada could think was that after a year of weather it would

become bleached to the color of an old shuck. Ada herself wore a fading print dress and a straw bonnet. She wondered if an observer standing off on Jonas Ridge and looking down into the cove would choose right if asked to pick the scarecrow from the two figures standing in the field (189).

Ada imagines the dress fading with time, just as her identity as the aristocratic daughter of Monroe will fade. She reflects on the fading of the dress and her resemblance to a scarecrow without any seeming regret; perhaps Ruby's earlier comment about the "useless" lives of Southern gentry appears credible when contrasting with the utility of the existence she and Ruby have created.

The mauve shade called "ashes of roses" is connected with the belle identity of Ada, a distinct color associated with her. The color green is associated in the same way with Scarlett O'Hara. Not only are her eyes green, but green is the dress color that distinguishes her as a belle. She wears green to the Wilkes barbeque where she is surrounded by dozens of suitors; Rhett buys her a green dress to tempt her out of a period of mourning for her first husband; she wears green velvet to Atlanta when she intends to tempt Rhett into marriage or a "live-in" arrangement to gain money to save Tara, and again when Rhett forces her to attend Ashley's birthday party after she has been accused of adultery with him. The green velvet "Atlanta" dress creates an interesting contrast between Scarlett and Ada. Ada recycles the mauve dress, a symbol of her belle years, as a utilitarian item, a scarecrow; Scarlett recycles a utilitarian item, a set of velvet parlor curtains, as a belle dress. Both are acting to preserve their land, their farms, but Scarlett's actions show that she still views her greatest identity and power as

that of the belle-temptress, while Ada's actions show that she no longer regards the role of belle as one of any use to her. Scarlett returns to the role of belle upon her marriage to Rhett, when she has the money and leisure to re-create this persona; her attachment to this identity is strong, but Ada, whose pre-war courtships and social life were enacted halfheartedly at best, exhibits no attachment to the image of the aristocratic belle, and seems to discard it with little reflection or effort.

The period of time in which Scarlett and Melanie, along with other members of their family, live at Tara and run the farm together in the absence of male leadership is the closest parallel to the narrative of Ruby and Ada working the Black Cove farm. The Tara segment in *GWTW* occurs during the later war years, like *Cold Mountain*. Scarlett and Melanie develop their closest ties during this time; Scarlett learns to rework some of her extreme jealousy of Melanie as she builds a grudging respect for her industry, self-sacrifice and loyalty. The bond they build is similar to the bond between Ruby and Ada, devoid of the artificial sentimentality often associated with girls of this time period. When Ada first meets Ruby, she "thought she saw in her a spark as bright and hard as one struck with steel and flint" (52). She accepts Ruby because of this perception, coupled with the belief that Ruby has "a willing heart" (51). Scarlett begins to appreciate Melanie when Melanie, still weakened from childbirth, comes to her rescue against a Yankee invader with Charles's war sword. Although Scarlett shoots the invader with a pistol hidden in the folds of her dress, Melanie's willingness to put herself in danger to save Scarlett and Tara causes Scarlett to reflect that Melanie had "steel-spun courage, like a shining silver blade...courage that [Scarlett] knew she

herself did not possess” (370). Mitchell uses this phrasing to describe Melanie on at least two other occasions in the book. The first is when Scarlett has been seen in the arms of Ashley; Melanie refuses to believe this accusation and pressures others to accept Scarlett’s innocence; Scarlett reflects that Melanie is “standing between [Scarlett] and social ruin... like a thin, shining blade” (788). The second is when Melanie dies and Scarlett realizes “that the sword which had flashed between her and the world was sheathed forever” (843). The image of the shining sword in Western culture is one of aristocracy, evoking associations with royal knights in armor pursuing noble quests and missions.

Frazier’s description of Ruby’s “spark of steel and flint” echoes this image and gives Ruby positive traits of Melanie as well as some of the strengths of Scarlett. Marshall also uses some similar wording in describing some of the lower-class characters of *Christy*. During the section where Christy has first met the Spencer family and is dining with them, a Cutter Gap man, Bob Allen, is carried in with a serious injury from a falling tree. His wife, Mary Allen, has to make the difficult decision of whether to allow the doctor to perform a risky operation on Bob. Christy observes Mary as “stolid, accustomed to hardship...grappling with the stark alternative...yet no whimper escaped her tight-set lips” (49-50). As Mary makes the decision to allow the operation, her voice has “the resolution of iron and granite in it” (50). Here, we see another lower-class woman sharing the aristocratic strength of iron, of the sword.

Southern women are often portrayed as women of strength. Perhaps the most famous metaphorical reference to the southern woman of “steel” was established by

playwright Robert Harling in his 1987 off-Broadway play *Steel Magnolias*, made into a blockbuster movie in 1989. In this modern Southern setting, six women interact with one another and show their strengths of character. When Harling was criticized for portraying male characters as weaker and more ineffective in crisis and life in general than his vibrant female characters, he defended his portrayals with the simple explanation that he patterned his characters, male and female, after the observations and experiences of his own life. He apparently saw women as possessing the quality of “steel,” of invincible strength.

Going back to our first text, Helen Taylor asserts that “Mitchell’s conscious purpose in writing *GWTW* was partly to celebrate the extraordinary mixture in Southern women of strength and gentleness” (75). One of Mitchell’s well-developed themes certainly involves the survival of the strongest, and it is significant that she describes no lower-class character with strengths in terms of “steel.” In contrast, Marshall shows both upper and lower class women having fortitude and endurance, and Frazier reworks this metaphor to share those formerly aristocratic strengths with his lower-class heroine. All three of these novels offer their own unique and timely pieces to the evolving puzzle picture of these period women; all three are important-in their time and today-as descriptions and depictions of these women from which readers, especially young female readers, may reflect and relate. But, the most significant images in terms of the revision of social class distinctions is supplied by Frazier.

Frazier skillfully reworks the belle/poor white stereotypes, melding them into fresh, inspiring characters who offer new scenery to the well-worked images of Civil

War-era Southern women. As we consider Ada and Ruby, it almost seems that Frazier mixes the stereotypical elements of the belle and the poor white girl, adding new traits until these two characters come together into one whole person. Ada and Ruby form a true partnership, each bringing to the table her own strengths and advantages of background. Neither shuts out or disregards the other on the basis of class or social barriers. Ada provides Ruby with the opportunity for a life of more dignity, where she establishes a lasting home; Ada also shares with Ruby some of her educational advantages, reading to her from classic literature. Ruby takes the advantages of possession and position that Ada has and shows her how to harness and harvest these into a purposeful life. Frazier blurs and mingles the social class lines separating the belle and the poor white girl until they seem to vanish. Ruby and Ada in essence become one person, a whole woman who is classless, neither needing nor desiring categorizing. The “person” of Ruby/Ada seems to be the answer to my adolescent question regarding the possibility of combining the strengths of Scarlett and Melanie, and simultaneously offers a reclamation of Emmie.

The epilogue of *Cold Mountain* depicts a utopian mini-society built by Ada and Ruby on terms of equality. Ruby is hoeing the potato field while Ada sets the table under the pear tree, “eight plates nearly lip to lip...” (355). The family consists of those gathered around the skirts of Ada and Ruby: their children, Ruby’s husband and her father. After supper, Ruby’s boys dance to her father’s fiddle music while Ada’s daughter sings, then Ada reads a story to the children from classic literature with the conclusion of “the old lovers after long years together in peace and harmony” (356).

Ruby is happily married and has not obligingly died in childbirth or birthed a stillborn child; Ada occupies a “widowed” state, but without pining to the grave, or desperately chasing after more male attention. Both contribute to the classless society they have created together as active, productive partners and friends: the “belle” and “poor white” girl rewritten to the advantage and wholeness of both.

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