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- [About](#)
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[Home](#) » [criticism](#), [Fiction](#), [second glance](#)

## Against the Wind

By [Rohan Maitzen](#) (October 1, 2010) September 29, 1980. I'm reading *Gone with the Wind* again. 20th time. I use that book as a stress reliever. When in doubt, read *GWTW*. [39 Comments](#)



I read *Gone with the Wind* for the first time when I was ten years old. It was my first experience of transcendence through reading: with its melodramatic characters and grand historical sweep, it carried me away.

It became my favorite book, and also my comfort book: leafing through my old diaries, I am reminded how often I turned to it when I needed support or distraction—and as I was a plain, introspective, bookish girl, there were many such occasions. Frustrated at my own inhibitions, I found in Scarlett O'Hara an inspiring model of defiant independence. Convinced by Dorothy Parker that I was unfit for the role of romantic heroine ("men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses"), I thrilled vicariously to Scarlett's unruly passions. The novel was a portal to a time and place full of all the drama and intensity missing from my own life, with its predictable oscillation between home and school. I reread it regularly two or three times a year until I was about eighteen, when it got crowded out by the nineteenth-century novels it self-consciously evokes. But as the magic of the book itself wore off, it retained the charm of familiarity, and as I moved from my childhood home into my first apartment and then across the country for graduate

school, it sat on all my various bookshelves like a talisman, a promise of continuity between my old life and my new.

As my transformation from bookworm to Ph.D. candidate progressed, my critical apparatus became more self-conscious and sophisticated and my reading practices became correspondingly more rigorous and less personal—at least, for the reading I did for work. I always made allowances, however, for the other kind of reading: the kind where you just let the book be itself, where you don't scrutinize or question either its form or its presuppositions, where you don't expect too much of it anyway.

Even in that zone, however, my standards went up as I spent more and more time with writers from whom I demanded a great deal, and who demanded just as much from me. You get spoiled, a bit, as a literary academic: you learn the satisfactions of reading with total commitment, of bringing everything you know to bear and seeing how the words on the page hold up under the weight—of bringing, also, the list of everything you want, from beauty to justice to illumination, to your reading, and learning what books meet your challenges, or teach you to rethink them. During this time I became impatient with the shoddiness of many books that had satisfied me before. I knew better; I couldn't read with my old eyes any more.

Against the encroachment of these new critical habits and tastes, I still put up some bulwarks, particularly around books I'd loved since childhood. I didn't want to complicate my relationship with them or to undo the ties they made to my past, which felt increasingly precious as I shaped a new life far from the people and places that had always meant 'home' to me. I read them to reconnect: I didn't want to risk puncturing them with my freshly sharpened scrutiny. *Gone with the Wind* in particular I treated with indulgence, my nostalgia softening my new critical vision like tinted glasses.

When I took *Gone with the Wind* off the shelf this summer, I hadn't read it at all since 1994. That was my thirty-first reading; I know this for certain because I used to note each reading on the inside cover. I've been reading my current battered paperback, which starts up at reading twenty-four, since around 1982. It's in pretty good shape, considering. The edges are worn and the cover has been reinforced with packing tape. Towards the back there are some pages that weren't bound properly to begin with – one more reading might pull them out altogether. Most of the pages near the end are wrinkled from the tears I shed over them in fits of self-conscious pathos. This is the kind of metadata an e-book can never accumulate—but then, an e-book would also not leave me with quite the dilemma I now face, whether to keep the book on my shelf or to hide it away, to own or disown it.

My reading of *Gone with the Wind* this summer, my thirty-second, was my first really honest one, the first one during which I unequivocally named what I had always seen. Even at ten, after all, I didn't imagine that slavery was OK, and as a teenager I certainly knew better than to wish the Confederacy had won the Civil War. Back then, however, the novel's own politics seemed as remote as its setting—weren't the 1930s also ancient history, after all?—and thus it was easy to read past them and focus on the elements that still make *Gone with the Wind* compelling: the brazen, unflagging momentum of Margaret Mitchell's storytelling, the richness of her descriptive details, the historical context and characterization, and above all, Scarlett. From the first sentence

to the last, Scarlett owns her novel, and her reader too, or at least this reader. Her will to power drives the novel forward, and, even on this reading, carried me along as well.

Yes: on this reading I still found *Gone with the Wind* compelling. I'd be more comfortable if I could say it has lost its impact, that its narrative power means nothing in the face of its glaring moral defects. But books, like people, have many often contradictory aspects; it's not easy to categorize them simply as good or bad, friend or foe, especially when, as in this case, our knowledge of them is bound up in our own memories. It's not just nostalgia, either—or self-protection—that makes me reluctant to dismiss the book too fast: my education as a reader, while it made me more self-conscious about the moral and political implications of literature, also taught me that it's risky to assume that a specific litmus test will tell me everything I need to know about a work of art, to think that artistic value can be measured by my other values alone.

And in literature as in life, love is a wayward emotion, not readily reined in by principle. My feelings for *Bleak House* are no less intense because I have learned skepticism about Dickens's paternalism, and though I now resist George Eliot's veneration of female self-sacrifice, I love *Middlemarch* with an ardor undimmed since I first discovered its beautiful complexities as a naïve nineteen-year-old backpacking across Europe, asking, like Dorothea Brooke, "what could I do, what ought I to do" with the rest of my life.

But reading engages our minds as well as our hearts, so it is no longer as easy or comfortable to love these books as it was. However I feel about them, I have to *think* about them differently, just as readers who find the central images and ideas of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* repugnant in their racism, or who conclude that the humor of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is misogynistic, can no longer unselfconsciously enjoy the other pleasures these classics offer. As the moral and textual complexities reveal themselves, we are left, not with the deceptively straightforward task of total acceptance or rejection, but with the much more significant and difficult work of weighing all the many factors that matter to our ethical as well as aesthetic judgments. "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book," Oscar Wilde pronounced; "books are well written or badly written—that is all." Easily said, but unless novels mean no more than humming does, I defy even Wilde to identify "well written or badly written" books without somehow considering what they use their form to communicate.

How, then, do I read *Gone with the Wind* today?

First of all, though I still find it a great read, I can't consider it a great novel. Formally, it's entirely conventional: it starts at the beginning and proceeds straight through to the end, with a few looks back to establish context or character. It relies on seemingly transparent third-person narration—though the omniscient voice proves anything but distanced or objective. The prose itself is literate, richly detailed, evocative and sometimes eloquent, if just barely (and not always) on the right side of melodrama. Here's a characteristic bit from the first chapter:

It was a savagely red land, blood-colored after rain, brick dust in droughts, the best cotton land in the world. It was a pleasant land of white houses, peaceful plowed fields and sluggish yellow rivers, but a land of contrasts, of brightest sun glare and densest shade. The plantation clearings and miles of cotton fields smiled up to a warm sun, placid, complacent. At their edges rose the virgin forests, dark and cool even in the

hottest noons, mysterious, a little sinister, the soughing pines seeming to wait with an age-old patience, to threaten with soft sighs: “Be careful! Be careful! We had you once. We can take you back again.”

As far as style alone takes us, I would hazard the opinion that *Gone with the Wind* is well written. But, *pace* Wilde, writing isn’t everything. So beyond that, what does the novel offer? It has plenty of history, but no philosophy at all; what ideas it has are mostly bad ones, including the idea that its history will be a revisionist one in favor of the antebellum South. It has story, though, and character, and its best idea is the convergence between its major historical plot line—the fall of the old South and the rise of a new world from its literal ashes—and the individual exploits of its heroine.



Margaret Mitchell

*Gone with the Wind* opens on the very brink of the Civil War, but its focus is not the national or political landscape but Tara, a Georgia plantation house owned by Gerald O’Hara, an Irish refugee from English justice, and his elegantly remote wife Ellen, from aristocratic Savannah. Our heroine Scarlett is their oldest daughter; from the beginning her hybrid parentage creates both the charm and the tension of her personality: her decorous surface barely conceals the temper and tenacity of her Irish ancestors. She wants the one man impervious to her charms: Ashley Wilkes, handsome, reserved, intellectual, and engaged to his like-minded cousin, gentle Melanie. Scarlett’s pursuit of Ashley is perverse and single-minded. It lasts through three marriages of her own, including the only one that really matters, to Rhett Butler. Rhett sees through Scarlett’s façade of gentility; he admires her feisty spirit and fierce determination to get her way. Though he never admits his love for her, knowing she would despise it as weakness, Rhett stands by Scarlett, lending both moral and financial support as she struggles to survive first the war and then the chaos of Reconstruction. Eventually, however, Scarlett’s indifference wears out Rhett’s patience. By the time she realizes her feelings for Ashley were foolish fantasies and that Rhett is the man she ought to have loved all along, he no longer gives a damn.

I now recognize Scarlett as the cousin of numerous other rebellious literary women who will not take their assigned marriage plot and go quietly into the happily-ever-after. Her most obvious predecessor is Becky Sharp, the ruthlessly materialistic social-climbing heroine of Thackeray's [\*Vanity Fair\*](#), though on this reading I was also struck by her kinship with Gwendolen Harleth in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. Like Becky and Gwendolen, Scarlett seeks dominance and assumes, because that's what she's been taught, that she can win it through her sexual magnetism. Where Gwendolen is ultimately disappointed, however, learning the painful lesson of her own impotence against both patriarchy and history, Scarlett rides the tide of historical change into a future that rewards her courage, intelligence, and ruthlessness—the very qualities that make her a misfit as a Southern “lady”—with that holy grail of Victorian heroines: economic independence. Though the South is defeated, Scarlett never is.

Right from the novel's opening sequence on the porch of Tara, it's clear that Scarlett performs, rather than inhabits, the role of Southern belle:

The green eyes in the carefully sweet face were turbulent, willful, lusty with life, distinctly at variance with her decorous demeanor. Her manners had been imposed upon her by her mother's gentle admonitions and the sterner discipline of her mammy; her eyes were her own.

Her proficiency in the part gives her power, as do those eyes and her famous seventeen-inch waist, “the smallest in three counties.” Scarlett's egotism—fed by her success in the highly competitive sport of beaux-catching—makes her impatient with anything outside her immediate personal concerns. “I've never gotten so tired of any one word in my life as ‘war,’ unless it's ‘secession,’ she declares to her smitten suitors on the porch that day; “If you say ‘war’ again, I'll go in the house.” When she hears the rebel yell for the first time, at the Wilkes's barbecue, her only response is annoyance at yet another intrusion of politics into her private drama, the battle she's been fighting for Ashley's heart. “Mr Lincoln again! Didn't men ever think about anything that really mattered?”

Scarlett's priorities reflect not only her self-absorption, but also her years of training, according to which “the first duty of a girl was to get married.” The war changes everything, of course, and leaves Scarlett reflecting bitterly that “nothing her mother had taught her was of any value whatsoever.” Far from leading an elegantly ordered life under masculine protection, Scarlett must now fight for her survival using the same unladylike qualities Ellen and Scarlett's Mammy had tried so hard to obliterate. Her famous vow (“As God is my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again”) measures how far she has travelled since the day when Ashley's rejection seemed like the worst that could ever happen. “And all this was happening to her, Scarlett O'Hara,” she marvels, “who had never raised her hand even to pick up her discarded stockings from the floor or to tie the laces of her slippers—Scarlett, whose little headaches and tempers had been coddled and catered to all her life.”

The infantilizing model of femininity against which she has always chafed is finally exposed as dangerously inadequate, and she leaves it behind, along with her literal girlhood, in the ruins of the civilization that is “gone with the wind which had swept through Georgia”:



In the dull twilight of the winter afternoon she came to the end of the long road which had begun the night Atlanta fell. She had set her feet upon that road a spoiled, selfish and untried girl, full of youth, warm of emotion, easily bewildered by life. Now, at the end of the road, there was nothing left of that girl.

Scarlett's rejection of her mother's ideals, her determination "never to look back" but always to press forward, pits her against her family, friends and neighbors, and thus by implication against the whole of the old South. In my earlier readings, I always considered Scarlett not just a heroine but truly heroic, because her conflict is with a society based on iniquity and inequality. I applauded her fight to replace that old world with something at once more energetic and more modern.

From early on, for instance, Scarlett identifies strongly with the brash young city of Atlanta: "Like herself, the town was a mixture of the old and new in Georgia, in which the old often came off second-best in its conflicts with the self-willed and vigorous new." Both are devastated by the war but fight back. "They burned you," Scarlett reflects when she returns to Atlanta during Reconstruction, "and they laid you flat. But they didn't lick you. They couldn't lick you. You'll grow back just as big and sassy as you used to be!" Her prosperous lumber business not only literalizes that connection but also epitomizes her total break from the ideal of the helpless little lady. "Reared in the tradition that men were omniscient and women none too bright," Scarlett realizes with pride that she has already "done a man's work and done it well":

With the idea that she was as capable as a man came a sudden rush of pride and a violent longing to prove it, to make money for herself as men made money. Money which would be her own, which she would neither have to ask for nor account for to any man.

Her unladylike success shocks everyone, especially her feeble second husband, who never expected her to "bother her sweet pretty little head about business matters." "It was bad enough that she had intruded herself among strange rough workmen," he reflects unhappily, "but it was still worse for a woman to show publicly that she could do mathematics . . . no man could feel right about a wife who succeeded in so unwomanly an activity." Rhett Butler, her only sympathizer, predicts that her accomplishments will eventually be celebrated: "your grandchildren will sigh enviously and say: 'What an old rip Grandma must have been!' and they'll try to be like you." Generations later, I certainly found Scarlett's quest for autonomy and economic independence inspiring. In her own time, however, she endures only isolation and disapproval.

Scarlett's affiliation with the future is reinforced by the association of Ashley and Melanie with a fast-fading past. Melanie in particular is clearly a foil character for Scarlett, which is probably why, following Scarlett's lead, I found her limp and tedious, even as I grudgingly acknowledged (as Scarlett finally does) the beauty of her quiet virtues. After the war, Melanie "refused to change, refused even to admit that there was any reason to change in a changing world." She becomes a beacon of loyalty to the old ways; "people rallied around her as round a worn and loved standard"—and it takes no great mental effort to recognize that the standard in question is the Confederate flag.

While Scarlett flourishes after the Confederacy's defeat, Melanie's decline begins with her notoriously painful and protracted labor, which coincides with the fall of Atlanta, symbolically the beginning of the end of the war. Like the South, Melanie never regains her strength. While her

wishful attempt to have another baby is the literal cause of her death, it's obvious by then that she isn't suited to survive in the world that has replaced the one in which she and Ashley imagined living out their marriage. "There was a glamor to it," Ashley recalls sadly, "a perfection and a completeness and a symmetry to it like Grecian art. Maybe it wasn't so to everyone. I know that now. But to me, living at Twelve Oaks, there was a real beauty to living." Melanie's death completes the passing of that remembered era, in the person of "a legend—the gentle, self-effacing but steel-spined women on whom the South had builded its house in war and to whose proud and loving arms it had returned in defeat."

Scarlett's belated realization that "Melanie had been her sword and her shield, her comfort and her strength" exposes the fatal flaw in my youthful enthusiasm for Scarlett as a proto-feminist heroine for a new era. Though Scarlett does pit herself against the values of the old South, I now see that in doing so she also pitted herself against the underlying ethos of *Gone with the Wind*. By this point in the novel, we've known for some time what Scarlett is only now acknowledging: that her choices were, on the novel's terms, the wrong ones, that she has "cast her lot in with the enemy" and become "a traitor, a Republican—and a Scallawag." It's Melanie, with her "inflexible loyalty to the old days," who is idealized as a "great lady." It's not just Ashley who's nostalgic: the novel itself is a lament for the fall of the civilization he loved. By the end of the novel, Scarlett's long rebellion against Southern society has been thoroughly undermined, shown up as a terrible mistake that ultimately costs her everyone she loves. As Rhett bluntly remarks, Scarlett has flourished at the cost of "pride and honor and truth and virtue and kindliness." The price Scarlett finally pays is regret:

Oh, to be with her own kind of people again, those people who had been through the same things and knew how they hurt—and yet how great a part of you they were! But, somehow, these people had slipped away. She realized that it was her own fault.

Why is her long overdue remorse so regrettable? Not for the reasons Scarlett thinks it is, but because the "kind of people" with whom Scarlett identifies so strongly here are, at best, apologists for slavery, and at worst members or supporters of the Ku Klux Klan.

Racism, in fact, is the one Southern value Scarlett never abandoned. In post-war Atlanta, Scarlett is horrified by the freed slaves who mock her mud-spattered progress through the streets: "How dared they laugh, the black apes! How dared they grin at her, Scarlett O'Hara of Tara! She'd like to have them all whipped until the blood ran down their backs. What devils the Yankees were to set them free, free to jeer at white people!" Her attempts at advocacy are just as offensive: when ignorant Yankees insult Uncle Peter, one of the family's faithful retainers, she reflects on "what damnably queer people Yankees are! . . . They did not know that negroes had to be handled gently, as though they were children, directed, praised, petted, scolded." She thinks proudly and lovingly of "the faithful few who remained at Tara in the face of the Yankee invasion," "the servants of her neighbors who had stood loyally beside their white owners, protecting their mistresses while the men were at the front . . . even now, with the Freedman's Bureau promising all manner of wonders, they still stuck with their white folks."

In my thirty-one previous readings, had I never recoiled from these views? Of course I had: you don't need a Ph.D. to see how deeply offensive they are. But I had too easily set Scarlett's racism aside as an accident of timing, granting her a historical exemption for her bigotry as if being white

and Southern in the 1860s was excuse enough. I had also not thought hard enough about the extent to which *Gone with the Wind* as a whole takes Scarlett's side on this issue. After all, acknowledging that Scarlett, like all "her own kind of people," is a white supremacist does not settle the question of whether *Gone with the Wind* is itself a racist novel. To fight racism, it is also necessary to represent it; it may be embodied in particular characters so that the novel can expose and condemn them.

How can we tell if a novel is *about* racism rather than just racist? As the long history of critical debate over *Huckleberry Finn* demonstrates, it's inadequate to point to an individual character, or the use of any particular vocabulary, as evidence one way or the other. At issue is something at once deeper and potentially more elusive or contentious: our interpretation of what literary critic Wayne Booth, in his work on the ethics of fiction, aptly explains as "the total pattern of desires and rewards that the author commits us to ... the total pattern of desire and fulfillment that we enjoy" while reading the novel. Judging a novel at this level requires focusing not on its plot, or on specific characters, as my earlier readings of *Gone with the Wind* had done, but on the overall ethos of the novel, especially as communicated through the narrator.

As soon as I examine *Gone with the Wind* from that angle, my faint nostalgic hope that it portrays but does not partake of its characters' hateful views collapses. Yes, the novel's plot is extensively historicized, but the revisionist history it offers is not just sympathetic to but aggressively advocates for a particular point of view. Putatively objective sections of narrative exposition present what it seems wholly appropriate to call white-washed versions of history, such as this account of the founding of the Ku Klux Klan:

It was the large number of outrages on women and the ever-present fear for the safety of their wives and daughters that drove Southern men to cold and trembling fury and caused the Ku Klux Klan to spring up overnight. And it was against this nocturnal organization that the newspapers of the North cried out most loudly, never realizing the tragic necessity that brought it into being. The North wanted every member of the Ku Klux hunted down and hanged, because they had dared take the punishment of crime into their own hands at a time when ordinary processes of law and order had been overthrown by the invaders.

You'd think that lynchings were no more than citizen's arrests, and that race had nothing to do with anything. Here is the narrator again, in a passage that cannot be blamed on any particular individual but is simply a small part of a lengthy analysis of the South during Reconstruction:

Aided by the unscrupulous adventurers who operated the Freedmen's Bureau and urged on by a fervor of Northern hatred almost religious in its fanaticism, the former field hands found themselves suddenly elevated to the seats of the mighty. There they conducted themselves as creatures of small intelligence might naturally be expected to do. Like monkeys or small children turned loose among treasured objects whose value is beyond their comprehension, they ran wild—either from perverse pleasure in destruction or simply because of their ignorance.

This and the many other such passages are neither direct nor indirect representations of any point of view but the narrator's—and, unforgivably, the resemblance to Scarlett's attitudes and epithets



clearly identifies the narrator as one of Scarlett's "own kind of people."

Also like Scarlett, the novel gives no credibility to Abolitionism, which is represented only through the satirical treatment of foolish Yankee women who take *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "as revelation second only to the Bible" and show what Scarlett considers "a very nasty and ill-bred interest in slave concubinage." No sympathetic character endorses emancipation; the only hint of second thoughts by any slave owner is Ashley's remark that he would have freed all of his family's slaves "when Father died if the war hadn't already freed them"—but he doesn't give his reasons, and he also argues that owning them was preferable to Scarlett's use of convict labor because "they weren't miserable." Thus is the central moral issue of the Civil War set aside as a trifling concern rather than an evil—a cruel wrong committed on a historic scale—that degrades everyone it touches.



Vivien Leigh as Scarlett in the 1939 production. When adjusted for inflation, it is the highest-grossing movie of all time

Reading *Gone with the Wind* today, then, I realize that it rejects precisely the qualities I had always celebrated in its heroine, while embracing her most loathsome values. Punishing Scarlett for rebelling against her identity as a "lady," it endorses racism and romanticizes slavery. For all its undeniable narrative power, its passion, drama, and pathos, it is, morally, an appalling book.

This conclusion may not strike anyone as particularly surprising. *Gone with the Wind* was published in 1936. Like Walter Scott's *Waverley* or George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, it is a novel of the recent, rather than the remote, past; its events were still, then, within living memory. Mitchell

herself was a white Southerner, born and raised in Atlanta; in writing the novel, she drew on stories she had heard in person from Confederate veterans. For years, I too shrugged off the novel's embarrassing idealization of plantation life and its hostility to abolition as byproducts of these contexts, as indeed they are. But explaining is not excusing—it was perfectly possible in 1936 (as it was, in fact, in 1836) to recognize the iniquity of slavery.

And even if we extend more leniency than I think we should to *Gone with the Wind* as a historical artifact—allowing that it is a predictable, though not an inevitable, product of a particular time and place—we have to remember that a book is not an inert object: as soon as someone reads it, it becomes a living experience. *Gone with the Wind* was and is a hugely successful novel, a popular classic. It has sold over 30 million copies and remains in print in numerous editions, including a recent one featuring a preface by Southern novelist Pat Conroy:

To Southerners like my mother, *Gone With the Wind* was not just a book, it was an answer, a clenched fist raised to the North, an anthem of defiance. If you could not defeat the Yankees on the battlefield, then by God, one of your women could rise from the ashes of humiliation to write more powerfully than the enemy and all the historians and novelists who sang the praises of the Union. The novel was published in 1936, and it still stands as the last great posthumous victory of the Confederacy.

Conroy's shift into the present tense here neatly illustrates why the "ancient history" defense cannot stand: I am reading *Gone with the Wind* not in 1936 but in 2010. While I read it, in the present, I am invited to share its point of view; I enter, today, into its particular pattern of "desire and fulfillment." The desire it urges on me is a desire for the South to prevail. Of course, this wish cannot be fulfilled, which is why the dominant mood of the novel—one to which even Scarlett finally succumbs—is nostalgia. But it's a retrograde nostalgia, one that requires me, if I play along, to compromise my commitment to a just and equal world. It does so even in the way it imagines "me," its reader: to read *Gone with the Wind* sympathetically, at a minimum you have to be white. The resulting segregation is not a historical phenomenon but something I consent to *in the present* if I keep reading.

Does this conclusion mean that I should not read *Gone with the Wind* again? Even if it stays on my literal shelf (where, to be honest, I could use the extra space), has it lost its place in my reader's heart? Surely thirty-two times is enough: surely, in fact, thirty-two times is far too many. At some point even tolerance becomes intolerable if it means repeatedly suppressing my best self. I would never give so many second chances to a friend in my real life who crossed a line of such consequence so brazenly and without apology.

Or would I? Although, again, a simpler answer would be more comfortable, I think the only possible answer is 'it depends'—on the depth and quality of our relationship overall, on all the contexts and complications of history and personality. Don't we all have an elderly relative who holds fast to some absurd belief, some intractable prejudice? While hating their sins against our own cherished principles, we still manage, most of the time, to love the sinner, ideological warts and all. Of course, while we don't choose our families, we do choose our books. Still, I think the situation is analogous. Rather than shunning, or censoring, we can be aware and critical, allowing for the good while not excusing the bad. We are capable, after all, of complexity, and often both life and reading demand it. There's no doubt that intimacy and trust are undermined by such moral

compromises, but other factors may compensate, or at least make the relationship worth preserving in its diminished form.

Having said that, I'm not sure that my relationship with *Gone with the Wind* is worth preserving. For now, though, despite everything, I'll keep it on my shelf. There are a lot of my own memories bound up in that tattered volume, after all. It's good to be reminded, too, of who I have been, even if that's no longer who I am, and my library is a [crucial reflection of my history and identity](#). And there are significant continuities between my past and my present: I'm still more or less plain, bookish, and introspective; I still sometimes seek comfort or distraction in books that complement my own experience of being a woman in the world with stories of courage, power, and passion. I now know books that meet this need while requiring far fewer compromises: books that are better written, that tell their stories with more wisdom and self-criticism, that have a richer philosophical sense, that offer less fantasy and more realism, above all that do not espouse such odious ideas.

Why, then, would I go back to *Gone with the Wind*? Seeing it as I now do, without the protective haze of nostalgia, I know I could never surrender myself to it emotionally: I would have to approach it as a resisting reader. But just because I can't and shouldn't read *Gone with the Wind* indulgently any more doesn't necessarily mean I won't read it at all. I probably won't...but I'll have to wait and see. After all, tomorrow is another day.

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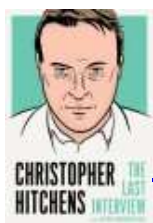
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