

## “Gone With the Wind” Discussion Questions

January 31, 2015

1. In her youth, Margaret Mitchell played with gender roles; for much of her early life, she dressed in boys clothing and went by the name “Jimmy.” She also rebelled against her mother, who was an active suffragette and leading citizen of Atlanta, committing various outrageous acts as a flapper. How do these biographical elements manifest in the book?
2. Although “GWTW” is set between just before the Civil War through Reconstruction, how much do the novel and its characters actually represent the Jazz Age (following WW1 and the 1918 flu pandemic that killed her mother) during which the novel was written?
3. In *Gone with the Wind*, Mitchell depicts several Southern female stereotypes—especially that of the helpless, passive, and sometimes silly woman, such as Scarlett’s sisters, Aunt Pittypat, and Ashley’s sister, India Wilkes—and then undermines them by delimiting their roles. Some critics argue that Scarlett is a traditional heroine who escapes the limits of her role and is forced to expand her horizons. Do you agree with this viewpoint? Who is/are the heroines in “GWTW?” Do you find it interesting that men generally aren’t depicted as heroes in this book?
4. Gloria Steinem proposed that Scarlett O’Hara was a victim, not a feminist. Given historical context, each character’s innate traits, and their relationship with their husband(s), do you consider not only Scarlett O’Hara, but also Ellen O’Hara and Melanie Wilkes feminists?
5. Some critics believe that Scarlett represents the South, both “Old” and “New;” Scarlett changes throughout the novel, which parallel the changes that take place in the South. Do you agree with this proposition?
6. As a child, Margaret Mitchell “sat on the bony knees of veterans and the fat slippery laps of great aunts and heard them talk” about the Civil War. What do you think of how Mitchell, a Southerner from a family that fought and survived the Civil War, depicted the war?
7. Many readers and critics argue that “GWTW” depicts a racist and patriarchal attitude towards slaves. Margaret Mitchell’s attitude was actually different in real life. Why might she have decided to depict slavery in this manner?
8. Mammy, for example, looks down upon field slaves early in the novel and later upon “trashy free issue” blacks. What do you think of the class demarcations and how they change throughout the course of the novel?
9. As Scarlett is approaching Ashley for advice on how to raise money for the additional taxes on Tara, she describes him as follows: “God intended him to sit in a great house, talking with pleasant people, playing the piano and writing things which sounded beautiful and made no sense whatsoever.” However, it isn’t until the end of the novel that she sees her love for Ashley as a fantasy.

So was her love for him ever real? Does she transfer her love to Rhett, or did she actually love Rhett all along? Alternately, is Scarlett what Rhett describes as a typical Southerner: “But it’s in one’s blood. Southerners can never resist a losing cause.” Has Rhett taken on Ashley’s place as a typical Southern male?

10. Were you surprised at how closely the movie adaptation mirrors the book (some dialogue is word-for-word and costumes match Mitchell’s descriptions) and how the movie departed from the book in other cases?