

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF MARGARET MITCHELL'S NOVEL "GONE WITH THE WIND"

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Abstract: The novel "Gone With the Wind" has been running for more than a century, even more nowadays, piling up records and building its own history and legends. The main woman character achieved enormous popularity, readability, and embodiment with women who saw themselves as such, who experienced or are experiencing now the aftermath of that period of time in American History. Simply because of its multi theme of discussion, issues primarily of women "Gone With the Wind" is defined as a woman's literary achievement. The woman distinction of the past and present, issues of woman, tradition and change as a necessity to survive challenges, reconstruction, class, and other social differences imposed on them in order to obtain the real picture of the Old and New South.

Among many critical approaches in examining the portrait of the young woman, a modest approach is presented the psychological study of the writer's main character (Scarlet O'Hara). This examination raised the dilemma of critics that according to their point of view the weather in fact this is an autobiography of the author. I chose to present the psychological study among the other historical and social studies to assist in categorizing the main character as such. The type of development according to the psychological diagnosis her as a "hysterical personality" result if the aftermath of war and life. It took courage, challenge, gumption with the remarkable popularity a combination of tradition and change. Definitely a female development issue. The author's social and psychological ambiguities found expression in her creation. The portrait of the southern female experience, mirroring the southern woman in transition, in search for survival by poor nearly defeated woman was universal. Of course, but that concern was with the myth of the south and particularly the tensions between consequences of that tension for women who had no control or capacity to understand either of them. Mitchell's own contemporary situation and life experience was to be linked to her interest in history and tradition of the south, examining and acknowledging the death of the traditional way to the new world of transition into industrialism and advanced capitalism.

Keywords: woman, change, transition, survival and courage.

Margaret Mitchell's novel "Gone With the Wind" is considered a monumental epic of the South won a Pulitzer Prize, gave rise to the most popular motion picture of our time, and inspired a sequel that became the fastest selling novel of the century. It is one of the most popular books ever written, more than 28 million copies of the book have been sold in more than 37 countries and translated into 27-30 languages.

Today more than 70 years of its initial publication, its achievements are unparalleled, and it remains the most revered American saga and the most beloved work by an American writer. GWTW has been running for more than a century, even more nowadays, piling records and building its own history and legends. The main woman character achieved enormous popularity, readability, embodiment of her with many other women characters by using very well the woman device, woman characters: white and black, rich and poor, traditional and anti-traditional ones, the ones with every positive value that the true Southern lady should possess as well as the ones with negative values. The ones with manners and no manners. Manners is the first impression in the first chapter of the book, where critics say or in fact ask: Is there more importance given to manner than matter? These are the manners of the Southern ladies of the past that some persistently and jealously tried to preserve from the Old South to carry and inherit in the New South. Issues and experiences of a woman defined the book as a literary artistic achievement. The woman distinction of the past and present, issues of woman, tradition, change as necessity in order to survive challenges, Reconstruction, class, social, racial and political turmoils of the time, imposed in order to obtain the real picture of the Old and New South. Challenge, courage, gumption was the remarkable popularity along with a combination of tradition and change. Definitely a female development.

The writer's social and psychological ambiguities found expression in her greatest creation. The critical history of GWTW is contradictory as might be expected from the writer's conflicted biography. Thus, criticism was attested at the levels of basic appreciation, often in the opposite poles of love and hate, the evaluation again often in bipolar terms of praise and scorn. Seen in feminist terms an unbiased history of the war from the Southern point of view. The abiding merit of her character has defined not a portrait of a headstrong young woman, but, that it has depicted with remarkable felicity the spiritual history of the region. Apart from the sociological, historical method or approach, I chose to present the psychological method that assisted to categorise the character of Scarlet O'Hara and what affected her to become such a character or portrait. With that type of development, which according to the psychological diagnosis, naming or defining her and the women of

that period of time as a person or individual with “hysterical personality” as a result of the war and its aftermath and its repercussions imposed on the woman. The portrait of Southern female experience mirroring southern women in transition. It was the search for survival by poor and nearly defeated young women was a universal one, of course but her concern was with the history and the myth of the South and particularly the tension between the two consequences of that tension for woman who had no control or capacity to understand either of them.

The Psychological Study on how well Miss Margaret Mitchell understood the basis of Scarlett’s personality is discussed in an illuminating article by: Dr. Charles E. Wells of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. Mitchell welcomed and praised this kind of study since she thought that she had knowledge of psychiatry because she wanted to become a psychiatrist herself.

Dr. Charles E. Wells begins his study that Hysteria and hysterical have for many years been words in search of a meaning, at least within the discipline of psychiatry. The spectrum of definitions has ranged from the notion that the meaning is so specific that the “hysteric” patient can be recognized at a glance to the opinion that the words are nothing more than that term of opprobrium designating particularly trying patients.

For slightly over two decades and more, however has been a more toward refining the meaning of these words on their psychiatric use. Hysterical conversion type (1) hysterical neurosis, dissociative type, (1) and hysterical psychosis (2) have been separated from the mass of conditions called hysterical and have been defined with considerable precision. The former two have attained the status of specific diagnostic entities on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disease. (1).

It is generally agreed that these three disorders are not dependant upon a substructure of a specific personality type. (3) What remains is a group called “hysterical personality” that has proved especially difficult to limit and define. In 1958 Chadoff and Lyons (4) published classic description of the hysterical personality, limiting their description entirely to observable behavior. According to them, “hysterical personality” is a term applicable to persons who are vain and egocentric, who display labile and excitable but shallow affectivity whose dramatic attention seeking and histrionic behavior may go to the extremes of lying. Placing total reliance on behavioral characteristics has nowhere proved unsatisfactory, and others have sought to add depth to our understanding by viewing the hysterical personality in different perspectives.

Psychoanalysis has tried to define personality types on terms of the ego defense mechanism habitually employed. Hysteria has traditionally been associated with over reliance on the defense of repression, and indeed the diagnosis has often rested upon the recognition of dependance on repression as a defense mechanism. Others taking account of the emotionalism prominent in most individuals called hysterical, have conceived emotionally as such to be a defense mechanism, (5) and one perhaps more characteristic of the hysterical personality than repression.

Psychoanalysts have sought to understand the hysterical personality beyond merely identification and elucidating defense mechanisms. Psycho dynamically it has been suggested that the genesis of the hysterical personality rests in a disturbed mother-daughter relationship. The girl child destined to be a hysteric suffers a deprivation of maternal love and nurturance. She, then turns to her father for such, but, not her father as father but as a substitute mother.....

More recently questioned is the extent to which social factors lead to the development of the hysterical personality and whether the hysterical personality can be separated from the “normal” character.

Some psychoanalysts like shaking Hollander suggested that the ideal climate for the production of hysterical personalities existed in the plantation society of the antebellum South, epitomized in Margaret Mitchell’s “Gone With the Wind”. More recently, Lerner, focusing on the previous work of Chadoff and Lyons observations that the hysterical personality is a caricature of femininity” has questioned whether it is possible to separate the hysterical character from the normal female character. She suggests that in American society “a girls” immediate social environment puts enormous pressure on her to develop a style of cognition and personality that will lend itself to this diagnosis (hysterical personality)

There seems to be general agreement that social forces play a major role in fostering the development of the feminine characteristics (as well as defining them). The importance of social forces in shaping the hysterical personality is much less certain and more difficult to establish. One approach to this problem is to study the fictional Southern female characters raised in this “ideal climate of the production of hysterical personalities”, to see if they enumerated above. Scarlett O’Hara as described by Margaret Mitchell in “Gone With the Wind” remains for decades after her creation a prototype of the Southern belle.

To study Scarlett that follows seeks to answer three questions:

- 1) To what extent was Scarlett’s behavior and personality consonant with our present concepts of hysterical personality?
- 2) To what extent was Scarlett’s behavior and personality a reflection of, or a result of the culture in which she was born and raised?

- 3) Does a study of Scarlett cast any light on the relationships between feminine character and the hysterical personality?

In appearance and behavior Scarlett O'Hara fulfilled almost exactly the criteria for the hysterical personality offered by Chadoff and Lyons (4). Sixteen year old at the beginning of the novel. She was "not beautiful but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm". Katie Scarlet was the oldest and clearly the favourite child of Gerald and Ellen O'Hara, two other daughters chafed in her shadow and three sons lay buried in the family graveyard. When she was first met "on the eve of the Civil War" she was a pampered child who has always had her own way of the asking. Born to ease of plantation life, waited on hand and foot since infancy, Scarlett appeared prepared for nothing more challenging than the next day's barbeque. Yet the novel closed twelve tumultuous years (and three husbands) later with Scarlett preparing to meet yet another crises.

Let us look at the individual criteria of Chadoff and Lyons (4) to weigh how precisely Scarlett fit each. Egoism, vanity, egocentricity, self-centeredness, self-indulgence, she had all these in abundance. Her whole life centered on her own wants, and what she wanted the foremost, was attention and adulation in a setting of security and comfort. She "was" in reality, self-willed vain and obstinate... she could never long endure any conversation of which she was not the chief subject.

Her dramatic attention-seeking and histrionic behavior indeed went to the extent of lying to achieve her aims. Seeking attention was a way of life to Scarlett and if she had to exaggerate, act or even lie, these were acts were merely tools used by her with an artisan's skill.

From this descriptive- diagnostic point (and also more intimate ones) Scarlett fulfilled almost perfectly the criteria of the diagnosis of the hysterical personality proposed by Chadoff and Lyons (4).

Repression and perhaps emotionality have been identified as the defences more reliably and consistently employed by the hysterical personality. Through this long novel, which centers on Scarlett's perceptions, feelings, thoughts and behavior, there is no suggestion that her ego utilized repression to an excessive or even to a significant degree. Similarly, although her emotions were frequently painful and intense, there is no suggestion that emotionally as such was serving a defense function. On the contrary, as will be considered later, Scarlett's perception of herself and her environment was usually precise despite the access and excess of her feelings. The two ego defense mechanisms mostly openly recorded in the novel are suppression and anticipation; both were rated high-level mature defenses of ego defence mechanisms.

In fact Scarlett's reliance on suppression has become almost an American cliché: "I won't think of it now" she said desperately, burying her face in the pillow. I won't think of it now. I'll think of it later when I can stand it". Equally important to her anticipation, her awareness of the future, Scarlett was never to look back". Even at the book's end deserted by Rhett Butler, the only husband for whom she had cared, Scarlett said to herself: I'll think of somehow to get him back", After all tomorrow is another day".

Nor does Scarlett satisfy the dynamic constellation proposed for the hysterical personality. She was equally the favorite child and equally favorite of her mother and of her father. The relationship with her parents was intense, meaningful and lasting in fact through the story, her relationships to Ellen and Gerald were the only ones that really seemed to count in her life. Even her relationship to Rhett lacked meaning and permanence. Through Ellen's life and even after her death, Scarlett's thoughts were haunted by her desire to return to the state of perfect love and security under the mother's care. She wanted the very comfort of her mother's presence.... She always felt secure when Ellen was by her". Though Scarlett saw all women as natural enemies it was always "all women with one exception of her mother". And she knew with absolute certainty: "No woman ever really liked me", except mother. The relationship with her father although different, was no less warm and genuine. Gerald treated her in a man-to-man manner which she found most pleasant, She and her father were united in their mutual dependence on her mother. With Ellen's death, Gerald disintegrated and Scarlett never depended on anyone again.

To what extent was Scarlett's style of function consonant with hysterical cognition and dominance of emotions? Her cognition was in fact never impressionistic. With a sharp eye for detail, she saw the features of her world with striking clarity. She had an intense curiosity and a hidden sharp intelligence beneath a face as sweet and blank as a baby's".

With a particularly good head for figures, she computed probable profits and losses with a swiftness and precision that defeated her competition. Though admittedly remarkably deficient on general knowledge, it was a deficiency based on disinterest not on inability.

She experienced affects vividly and at times gave her vents to her feeling in a seemingly unbridled fashion, but, her actions were not dictated by her emotions nor in their display their lack of control.

To what extent did social forces mold her behavior and her character? There can be no question that social forces fashioned the hysterical carapace regarded as femininity in that age (and perhaps not greatly modified on our own). The subject of the role- playing to attract a man to marriage was a major requirement in each girl's curriculum. Before marriage, young girls had to be sweet, beautiful, gentle, ornamental, helpless and clinging.

The hysterical personality has been studied and defined in terms of behavior, characteristic defenses, psychodynamic structure and cognitive style. Recently the identity of the hysterical personality type has been questioned, and it has been suggested that social forces bend the female child into feminine character style that is indistinguishable from the hysterical personality. Further, it has been suggested that the plantation society of the antebellum South might have been the most fertile climate for the growth of such personalities.

Scarlett O'Hara is the prototype product of this environment has been studied to evaluate (1) to what extent she represents the hysterical personality as generally understood today and (2) to what extent she represents the typical feminine character resulting from the social forces of her age and culture. While by appearance and behavior Scarlett fulfills almost perfectly our requirement for being labeled a hysterical personality. She does not at all fit our understanding of the hysterical personality in terms of favored defense mechanisms, psychodynamic forces and cognitive style. Scarlett's appearance and outward behavior (her hysterical carapace, which is) are clearly presented as the product of social forces than extent. Social forces, however, failed to mold in her other features typical of the hysterical personality. Indeed, they failed to mold Scarlett even the expected features of femininity below those apparent on the surface. In fact, the study of Scarlett suggests in answer to the third question posed at the outset, that while social forces may produce the appearance of a feminine character of a hysterical personality (which might be confused), appearance is the sole result, not the right underpinning of character structure.

While the conclusions that can be safely drawn from a study of fictional characters are limited, fictional characters often have psychological and social validity reflecting the genius of their authors. That Scarlett has such validity is attested to, by her having become almost a figure of folklore in the decades since her creation. A study of Scarlett suggests that although social forces may produce characteristic appearance and behavior that might be termed typical of the hysterical personality of normal feminine character as judged by different observers, the same social forces do not necessarily create the characteristic defenses, psychodynamic forces and the cognitive styles generally found in hysterical personalities. Lack of attention to these other features leads to confusion of the feminine character with the hysterical personality.

The opinions of critics and readers depending on their age, gender, social status or others will vary. There will be pro and con opinions, praise and scorn, some will continue to consider it Art some will consider it false, a presentation of literary genres- historical novel, the family chronicle, a reliable document or other.

Mitchell's own contemporary situation and life experience was to be linked to her interest in the history and tradition in the South. Examining and acknowledging the death of its traditional way to the new world of transition, into industrialism and advanced capitalism. And finally through the eye of the American woman with courage, gumption enduring the upheavals of time.

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