



# The Wind Done Gone or Rewriting Gone Wrong: Retelling Southern Social, Racial, and Gender Norms through Parody.

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Emmeline Gros. The Wind Done Gone or Rewriting Gone Wrong: Retelling Southern Social, Racial, and Gender Norms through Parody.. South Atlantic Review, 2016, 80 (3-4), pp.136-160. hal-01671950

**HAL Id: hal-01671950**

**<https://univ-tln.hal.science/hal-01671950>**

Submitted on 3 Jan 2018

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*“Re-vision, the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.”*

(Adrienne Rich 18).

*The Wind Done Gone* or Rewriting *Gone Wrong*: Retelling Southern Social, Racial, and Gender Norms through Parody.

Dr. Emmeline GROS

“Any good plot would stand retelling” and “style does not matter so long as you know what the characters are doing” (Farr 14). It is with these words that Margaret Mitchell justified her love for boys’ stories, *The Rover Boys*, which her brother criticized for their lack of style and their repetitive structure. If at the time, the young Mitchell had probably not anticipated the many retellings that her own novel would undergo, Mitchell was already demonstrating considerable insight into the means through which best sellers are produced and imposed on readers; an insight which might well explain why those who have attempted to retell or rewrite (or simply criticize) *Gone with the Wind* still wrestle inconclusively with the popularity and the endurance of the original, “one of the most extraordinary phenomena of bestseller history” (Nestvold “Civil War”).

To understand what may justify *Gone with the Wind*’s appeal and its continued presence on the literary scene is to enter vexed territory and whether one agrees (or not) with *Gone with the Wind* being a good plot is indeed an entirely different story. The academic attitude towards

*Gone with the Wind* (and Civil War literature as a whole) is probably best exemplified by Floyd C. Watkins in his article ‘*Gone with the Wind* as Vulgar Literature’:

Southern readers—and foolish romantic readers everywhere—dream of an impossible past, expect more of the present that can be realized, ignore an authentic culture while praising a false culture that never existed, foolishly defend themselves against attacks from the North, use false defenses of illogic and rhetoric, become vulnerable to attacks that could be avoided, fall victim to false and pretentious characters and dreamers and political demagogues, ignore and condemn the yeomanry and the peasantry (205).

Claudia Roth Pierpont supports Watkins’ argument, by recognizing that “in the history of American literature—in all the published histories—[Mitchell’s] place, when she has one, is in a corner part, as a vulgar aside having to do with numbers rather than words. She doesn’t even make it onto the list of the Best Civil War Novels in either of the studies devoted exclusively to the genre”. Surprisingly, Pierpont continues, for a book that has sold as many copies as it has, “*Gone with the Wind* hasn’t a place in anyone’s canon; it remains a book that nobody wants except its readers” (130).

And yet, it seems that the public has not had enough of these Civil War tales, and even as late as 2014, that is “more than 75 years after the publication of the epic novel by Margaret Mitchell, a prequel with Mammy at its center is set for release in October” (*N.Y Times*). In *Ruth’s Journey*, Donald Craig will place Mammy at the center of his narrative, thus hoping to provide, according to Peter Borland, his editorial director, “a necessary correction to what is one of the more troubling aspects of [*Gone With the Wind*], which is how the black characters are portrayed” (*New York Times*). It is the same revisionist impulse that seems to have motivated Alice Randall’s parody, *The Wind Done Gone*, published in 2001.

The incredible endurance of *Gone with the Wind* as one of the most-beloved and most-enduring motifs of Southern culture commands admiration: estimates, indeed, contend that there would be no less than 185 editions of the novel. Since its initial publication in 1936, the novel has

never been out of print, received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1937, and has since outsold many current best sellers. As Carmen Gomez-Galisteo explains, there are indeed, “very few works in the history of literature that have generated the enthusiasm and popularity worldwide as *Gone with the Wind*” (3).

Beyond its success, the novel has also sustained what Erica Hateley would name “a varied afterlife” with numerous sequels, theater plays, art exhibits, postage stamps (and Christmas ornaments), and of course literary criticism (1002).<sup>1</sup> Because of its popularity—and with seven decades of (re)interpreting and (re)reading Mitchell’s masterpiece—it is not surprising that *Gone with the Wind* has also fallen prey to “a great variety of parodies of all sorts—TV sketches, show episodes, gags, jokes, cartoons and songs” (Galisteo 79).

Cataloguing the afterlife of *Gone with the wind* would be a daunting—and for sure highly interesting—exercise. After all, “the more well-known a text, the more likely it is to generate a number of imitations,” parodies, and retellings of all kind (Galisteo 79). Yet, it is not my objective here. This article, however, seeks to interrogate the end to which retelling is used. Of primary interest are indeed the doubled discourses that have surrounded (and probably attempted to justify) the afterlife of *Gone with the Wind*: when considering the endurance of *Gone with the Wind*’s appeal, do we privilege Mitchell’s own words that good plots always endure retellings of all sorts? Do we recognize instead, and despite the continued fame of Mitchell’s novel, that the South may now be losing the propaganda war for an impossible past precisely because numerous sequels, revisions, and parodies of *Gone with the Wind* (that is, retellings) encourage the “correction” (to use Craig’s own editor) or the “transforming or remodeling (of) previous texts” (Hutcheon *Parody* xiv).

To address these questions, I will be treating a popular and unauthorized parody of *Gone with the Wind*, Alice Randall’s *The Wind Done Gone* (2001). If Mitchell’s estate tried to halt its

publication, claiming that Randall's work was but "a blatant and wholesale theft" of Mitchell's "characters, settings, plot lines, and other copyrighted elements" (Brown 315), the success however was immediate: scholars and critics praised the story for voicing the return of a repressed South that "shrewdly dismantl[ed] the mythic structure behind *Gone with the Wind*" (back cover). Journals welcomed the "revisionist version of [the] history" it offered (front cover).

There is, it is true, a subversive vein in Randall's writing: *The Wind Done Gone* does not rewrite Mitchell's story as much as it retells it by filling in the blanks and the silences that Mitchell's text has left unsaid or that writing has sought to suppress. By subversive, I refer to Paul Christian Jones' definition of the term, as a "voice that runs counter to the conservative voice as it appears in the more well-known romances, those privileged in literary studies" (21). *The Wind Done Gone* participates in this category and it does so, by focusing on characters, issues, and voices previously neglected in the original *Gone with the Wind*—slaves in general and women in particular. Telling the story of Cynara, who is Planter and Mammy's illegitimate daughter, the parody reads as a recovered diary found among the possessions of a recently deceased African American woman who unsuccessfully attempted to have it published (Galisteo 80). In this revised version, and even if Mitchell's names are not mentioned, we may recognize Other, Cynara's half-sister, rather than Scarlett; Other's husband – "R" (and later, "Debt Chauffeur") instead of Rhett Butler. Other is in love with "Dreamy Gentleman" (Ashley Wilkes), who marries "Mealy Mouth" (Melanie Wilkes). Tara, is reduced to "Tata" or "Cotton Farm", and Twelve Oaks is renamed for its builders, "Twelve Slaves Strong as Trees".

*Gone with the Wind, a novel that is prone to appropriation.*

It is now commonly admitted that, once the war between North and South was over, “a full-scale refighting of the war of 1861-1865” was carried on “in books” (Harwell 4). Perpetuating the plantation legend of the antebellum South demanded that the past be retold and the South’s dark side (the source of all guilt) be evacuated from collective memory. Retelling the past in the service of the present (what a romance is precisely about), however, is never neutral for it always involves harnessing, distorting, and at times, monumentalizing the past, demanding that “[a]rt (. . .) produce(s) a momentary feeling of balance and wholeness, and so offer some sort of redress for the irredeemably unbalanced and incomplete world” that lurks on the horizon (Gray 123).

Needless to say, the fact that the Pulitzer Committee endorsed *Gone with the Wind* over Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* is a telling indication of the kind of society, the feeling of wholeness and balance that the readers at the time had chosen to privilege. Desperate times indeed called for desperate distortion, and thus, *Gone with the Wind* (the Hollywood version in particular) “took an active part in shaping [. . .] a rose-colored perception” of events and Southern reconstruction (Campbell 31-32), so much so that Mitchell herself often seemed to wonder if the novel that critics had read was not already a retelling of some sort. Writing to Hershel Brickell in the *New York Post* reviewer, Mitchell pondered on *Gone with the Wind*’s proneness to retelling, asking her friend if reviewers were not simply offering a revision of her original text: “reviews speak of the symbolism of the characters . . . Lord ! I never intended that [. . .] Psychiatrists speak of the ‘carefully done emotional patterns’ . . . Good heavens! Can this be I?” (in Gelfant 5). As Pyron remarks, if *Gone with the Wind* might still speak “to something in the human spirit, Mitchell herself did not set out with this aim in mind” (*VQR* 1). Mitchell, indeed, “consistently

expressed dismay at being categorized among those writers who picture the South as a land of white columned mansions whose wealthy owners had thousands of slaves and drank thousands of juleps”. Pyron remarks how she also ridiculed “the lavender-and-old-lace-moonlight-on-the-magnolia” romance and insisted that “North Georgia was certainly no such country—if it ever existed anywhere” (1).

The film adaptation, maybe more than the book, offered a media-made Dixie that substituted to the reality a dream of the plantation South that, in no way, represented accurately the views and lifestyle of the average Southerner during reconstruction. Critics could not ignore that Mitchell would “yelp [. . .] with laughter” on seeing David Selznick’s Hollywood Twelve Oaks, which she described whimsically as an impossible hybrid of Grand Central station and the State Capitol at Montgomery” (Pyron *VQR* 1). Mitchell however, finally resigned herself, observing that “people believe what they like to believe and the mythical Old South has too strong a hold on their imaginations to be altered by the mere reading of a 1,037 page book” (in Pyron *VQR* 1).

Critics and parodists however refused to resign themselves. They saw the danger of such misperception and stressed the need to retell, or rather untell, Southern romance. They agreed with Susan Donaldson when she stressed “the necessity (for a generation of post or anti-plantation tradition novels) of responding to and writing against the long shadow cast by *Gone with the Wind* on popular memories of slavery, the antebellum South, and the Civil War era” (268).<sup>2</sup> With *The Wind Done Gone*, Alice Randall joined forces and inscribed her work in the vein of those writers who (starting in the 1970s and 1980s) were “motivated by a desire to counter a tradition of silence and alleged misrepresentation” (Plate 394). These stressed the need to address what Mitchell had missed, what her critics had missed, and what the filmmakers themselves had missed. Randall quickly understood that she could follow those voices of dissent

that had surrounded the publication of *Gone with the Wind*: The *New Masses* journal, for instance, had depicted *Gone with the Wind* as a “primary symbol of capitalist Anglo-Saxon racism and of the influence of the reactionary South on American Life and Letters” (Pyron *Recasting* 206); even harsher was Watkins’ criticism against *Gone with the Wind*, which he judged a “bad novel”. Siding with Howells, he found that: “what is despicable, what is lamentable (in *Gone with the Wind*) is to have hit the popular fancy and not have done anything to change it, but everything to fix it, to flatter it with false dreams of splendor in the past, when life was mainly as simple and sad-colored as it is now” (Howells 943).

### *Revising the official narrative*

If the goal of revision is, as Adrienne Rich puts it, to open up the past and archived memories in order to dismantle what has been traditionally conceived and passed on as the truth, then *The Wind Done Gone* does the job: the parody turns *Gone with the Wind* upside down, by redirecting Mitchell’s narrative in the problematic (and much desired) directions pointed out by Watkins. Where *Gone with the Wind*, as Watkins argues, lacks these “depths of humanity [that] appear only in Faulkner” and “leaves evil out of the garden of Tara,” *The Wind Done Gone*, by contrast, shifts the perspective entirely and redresses the blindness conveyed by Mitchell’s disembodied treatment of her black characters (92).<sup>3</sup> In *The Wind Done Gone*, black spaces are redeemed and black presence reasserted. Cynara mentions the presence of “a new church for the colored, First Congressional.” There are also “a colored druggists, colored grocers, colored undertakers, colored schoolteachers down from Canada [. . .] There’s more than one University for colored people springing up” (8).

Part of the lack of humanity that Watkins traces in *Gone with the Wind* also stems from what he names “the social amenities and formalities” (97), the flourish and manners depicted in



*Gone with the Wind*, which “reflect a society untroubled by most human frailties before it is destroyed by depraved Yankees” (97). For instance, Scarlett, Watkins complains, is able to endure all human struggles by remaining immune “to the great drama of the forces of history” (93). These struggles “pass over her without touching any deep chord within her” (219). The problem with this picture, Watkins continues, is that these “formal manners and dress in *Gone with the Wind* give a false picture of the Old South, idealize its flaws, and suggest that people who are perfect in the social proprieties are also perfect or nearly so in their human relations. The problem is [ . . . ] that these concentrations of formalities in Miss Mitchell’s novel are propaganda instead of history” (96). For Watkins, also, and besides the mention of the “shrill careless laughter of Negro voices” in the background, Mitchell eludes sweat, exhaustion, the arduousness of fieldwork (8). *Gone with the Wind* is, he concludes, a “world without sweat except for that caused by the Yankees” (97). Sweat, fever, deaths, the swamps as testing grounds for survival, plague Randall’s parody. The materiality of these spaces (the swamps, the cemetery, the cabin) for instance become legible via an emphasis on “the slave market down near the battery in Charleston” where people strip “the clothes off [Cynara’s] flesh” (2), and such realism bears with it the possibility of reifying what only remained implicit in Mitchell’s narrative. Readers become full witnesses to “Mammy work[ing] from can’t see in the morning to can’t see at night, in that great whitewashed wide-columned house surrounded by curvy furrowed fields” (16). They become acquainted with “the work-hard-work-long exertion, a slave’s exertion” (48).

Strikingly, the anxieties of hearing, reading, and seeing the formerly hidden ‘dark side’ of the genteel tradition depicted in Mitchell’s original text can be mapped throughout Randall’s novel and informs her revisionist motive. Cynara deploys a narration in which seeing and touching have now become the predominant senses through which to apprehend the Southern world, with Cynara repeating on numerous occasions how much she sees of slave life, how much

of slavery is made visible through her pages: “I see black smoke from a cabin chimney. I see into the cabin itself. I see a baby gently rocked in the arms of her mother” (11).<sup>4</sup> Thus doing, Cynara chooses here to make visible what the original text has tried to keep invisible or separate. Cynara’s discussion of the scars carried onto the dark bodies offers an additional opportunity for critique through visibility. There is, she says, no hiding from “the smallpox moving through the house, leaving scars and death, and you’re scared to see it coming” (43).

With *The Wind Done Gone*, Randall embarks on the ambitious project of challenging Mitchell’s lack of perception—or ill perception—particularly through a concern for memory. If Tomorrow might be another day for Scarlett, Yesterday however recurs throughout Cynara’s narrative and remains uncertain for most of the characters in the novel. The pressure exerted by the past is symptomatic of what Watkins would define as “meditation”: “the best critical mediation in our time demands that (a good) novel contain (rather than elude) meditation,” adding that “even if a writer like Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!* does claim that it is impossible to deduce the past, everyman—and novelist or reader—must try for himself” (86). The way in which the (changing) South, the past, and family ties are portrayed in *The Wind Done Gone* signals a radical departure from the original: it is the discovery and meditation on loss and change that sets Cynara’s narrative going: as Cynara reflects, back in 1855 “everything and everyone had a place and rested deep in it, and so it seemed that day to would-be-knights and 10-year-olds [. . .] something had changed” (3). Change however impacts Cynara’s ability to move forward. Hers is a world filled with doubts rather than certitudes, with the fear rather than the desire to forget and embrace possible tomorrows. Throughout the parody, the abundance of if-clauses combined with the fear to lose memory suggests a distancing from the absoluteness of Southern (and one own’s) history and thus, points to the provisional status of Cynara’s narrative: “if I forget what happened to me in Charleston and you [the reader/diary] don’t know it to remind

me, it's gone [. . .] gone like termites eating out the middle of a wood board, vanished into a mouth and flown away" (58).

Cynara's memory—or fear of losing memory—also problematizes her status as a diarist. Emerging from Cynara's pages is a cacophony of voices, influences, and a multitude of stories. Hugg Ruppersburg, in *The New Georgia Encyclopedia Companion to Georgia Literature*, puts it best:

Randall leaves too many plot lines undeveloped or incomplete, and most of the characters, including Planter, Other, and Cynara, are hazily indistinct. Randall's own intentions seem unclear—is she writing a parody, as she seems to be doing in the book's first half, or is she writing about a young woman's discovery of her life's purpose? The novel shows the mark of numerous influences, including Alice Walker, Margaret Walker, Frederick Douglass, Toni Morrison, and even William Faulkner, and it never develops its own style and identity (460).

The fact that Randall employs a 'note on the text' section (with a narrator different from Cynara), 'a postscript section' (with yet another narrator), inserts a poem by Downson in the preface, then transcribes the diary (itself appearing under two different versions), and includes the external correspondence between Lady and her cousin Feleepe reveals how the parody resists and complicates any definite representation of the South: we have here an example of what Linda Hutcheon reads as a type of "historiographic metafiction", a historical fiction that "plays with the truth and lies of the historical record" (114) and by doing so, "espouses a postmodern ideology of plurality and recognition of difference". There is, in the end, "no sense of cultural universality" (*Poetics* 114).

The parody here not only revises the content but also the form of the historical record. If "History is," as Liedeke Plate defines it, "a story that is told in the interest of a particular group of people," there is, she continues, "another side to every story" (390). This "other side" is suggested in the letters Randall has placed within the text. These serve a distancing function: If

Ashley's letters in *Gone with the Wind* could only be partially read and most importantly, if their content (revealing an ongoing anxiety about the place that the Southern beau should hold in the conflict and the Reconstruction period) could remain entirely misunderstood (and thus kept within the confines of a conservative South), Lady and Felepe's correspondence in *The Wind Done Gone* is brought to the readers' eyes, and passed on easily. Their secrets are revealed: their great grand-mother was "a negress" (124). Lady and Felepe thus become "the first to be white not black with a secret [and] [h]ad they not fallen in love, they "might never have discovered [their] darkness" (125).

Getting to know this other side to the story is what political scientist James C. Scott understands as the "hidden transcript," the underside of the "public transcript." These public transcripts, Scott argues, plot out "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (2), that is, the rules for "hegemonic conduct" (xii)—or hegemonic truth—but those transcripts alone don't tell the whole story: "every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represent a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (xii). Such critiques, Scott continues, are often expressed "in "rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theater of the powerless as vehicles for insinuating subordination" (xiii, in Donaldson 275). Rumors, gossips, eavesdropping abound in Cynara's narrative: not surprisingly maybe, the hidden transcript also manifests itself through the "walls [that] have ears" and through the "dark eyes [that] see everything on a place like this" (65). On the plantation, Cynara admits, "there's an eye for every hand and more ears than fingers round most houses. How the white people live surrounded by spies, I don't know" (26).

It is important to remember that in Mitchell's work, lower-class characters (non-slaveholders) who wish to ascend into the upper-ranks of society are seen as villains or imposters. Ultimately however (and despite the many contradictions characterizing it), white masculinity in

Mitchell remains the hegemonic model, affirming itself against “other-ed” groups, particularly women and ethnic men/submasculine others. It is often believed that the standard of white hegemonic masculinity in the South has sustained its identity and dominance by excluding ‘other’ positions. Because those ‘others’ threatened the Southern framework with contamination, miscegenation, and corruption, it was thus necessary to cast black identity as childlike and dependent. Theirs was an identity based on lack.

Rather than lacking, the slaves in Randall’s novel conceal or compensate for their masters’ lack by means of accommodation and fictional constructions of white power and domination. These indeed reveal themselves to be savvy manipulators: planter, in Randall’s rewriting of *Gone with the Wind*, is “a man without position or land who Garlic manipulated with his black hands into winning out land from another white man in a card game” (64). What makes Randall’s rewriting rewarding here is that the black characters—traditionally other-ed, marginalized, and in-visible—push and even coalesce with the center of power. This “hidden transcript” stages encounters between the powerful and the powerless, the imposters and the legitimate: identities are turned upside down and rather than argue that the survival of the aristocratic South depends on maintaining clear hierarchies of classes and races, Randall suggests that the value and the endurance of the system hinge upon the performance of slaves who appear foolishly naïve. Planter, we realize, can only be sure of his own domination as long as the reality of his domination rests on the unreality of that (and those) which and whom he masters (Donaldson 279).

And it is precisely because these are both faithful and unfaithful to the tradition (of slavery), because they act both within and against the tradition (not simply rebelling outside or trying to flee the confines of slavery) that it is necessary, Randall suggests, to place the slaves’ (re)negotiations of mastery and power within the very confines of the plantation, that is, within

the confines of power, and not solely outside or at the margins of the plantation. With this hidden script of Southern identity, Randall's parody offers a vantage point from which to examine the complicated relationships between masters and slaves, as well as the black efforts to both support and subvert the system within the only spheres of power they had access to: slavery. In revising mastery from a racialized and slave-ed perspective, Randall here questions traditional and essentialist conceptions of patriarchy and white masculine hegemony, by revealing the discontinuities, tensions, and contradictions which characterize them.

Not surprisingly, what is envisioned as the 'normative' in *Gone with the Wind* shifts: Scarlett has now become, as her name suggests, 'other' and is thus pushed to the margins of the social, political, or cultural spheres. It is the manipulative Mammy who contributes to this shift. "Other," we are told, is indeed "Mammy's revenge on a world of white men who would not marry her dark self and who had not loved her Lady" (54). The belle's subjectivity (just like masculine subjectivity) thus becomes the hybrid result of interrelated and interracial factors and constructions. "I wonder," Cynara says, "what she [Other] would feel now if she knew [. . .] if she ever come to understand that Mammy used her, used her to torment white men" (54). More disturbing perhaps, is the reader's realization that Lady (Ellen Robillard in the official version) herself (and despite her name and appearance) is nothing but a fiction: she is "a negresse" who takes pleasure in risking "the damage of an unveiling," a negresse who was ready "to take so much risk with her daughters' lives" (129), with the life of Other in particular who "was black [even though] she didn't seem it" (158). If, as it seems, both Lady and Other manage to pass off as invisible and thus preserve the verisimilitude of Southern perfect and untouched womanhood, the 'fictional' construction of the white belle ideal, however, is brought to light by ethnic and sexual heritage: there is no identity that is either stable, monolithic, or coherent.

Of course, the mixed-blood heritage that is revealed here serves to unveil another hidden transcript, the fact that Georgia is, as Cynara describes it, “laundry what needs washing” (18). Whereas *Gone with the Wind* removes Southern interracial sex relations from the novel, “whitewash(ing) [these] to nonexistence in the ‘mere pastoral’ plot of *Gone with The Wind*” (Zawadka 206), Randall chooses to revise the Southern pastoral, this time filling in the gaps left by *Gone with the Wind*. As Galisteo justly remarks, “both miscegenation and homosexuality [. . .] left out from Mitchell’s novel” come at the center of Cynara’s narrative: for example, Dreamy Gentleman, a modern version of Mitchell’s Ashley, turns out to be homosexual and to have had an affair with a slave. Moreover, because the story is told from the point of view of Cynara, who is “an apparently non-existent product of the mentioned ‘whitewashing’ who by the end of the book manages to further ‘reproduce’ herself”, *The Wind Done Gone* might be read as an attempt at propounding miscegenation as an ‘unwashable’ (i.e. indelible) Southern ‘stain’” (Zawadka 206). In short, and because they are simultaneously powerful and powerless, white and black, invisible and stained, gentleman and other, heterosexual and gay, husband and lover, ladies and mulattos, neither, we understand, can exist as separate categories or as separate selves.<sup>5</sup>

If miscegenation plots out the encounter and open interaction across color divides/lines, it also carries within it a critique of power that threatens and problematizes not only the racial, but also the gendered hierarchies in the plantation South. “This is my book,” asserts Cynara and such a creative act is made possible through Cynara’s (sexual) relations with Rhett who “taught [her] to read in bed”. “I praised him for it,” Cynara recognizes. “His stomach was my first paper, lip rouge was my pencil and the cleaning rag was my tongue [. . .] R. gave me the tools. I learned to write, right on his belly” (12). Cynara’s acquisition of writing skills provides a useful lens through which to consider the appropriation of generic conventions of traditional Southern fiction. Miscegenation is here creating contexts for learning and self-authorship. Yet, as

Catherine Kerrison reminds us, writing, like access to the handwriting tools, were gendered activities in the American South and suggested “not merely that women do not usually write but that women in the profoundest sense cannot write” (17). For Tamara P. Thornton, “character formation (which she defined as masculine self-mastery) was an inherently male process”. As a result, “and if writing meant forming characters, then only men were truly capable of writing” (in Kerrison 17). In its depiction of a woman who is “too smart for her own good” (19), of a black woman-slave moving from black market, to independent house owner to author claiming the pen, the novel subverts the tenets of traditional advice that prescribes female submission to superior male intellectual guidance and offers an alternative reading on a woman’s life other than that dished up by traditional romance or advice literature.

What is more, and since “through centuries, theories of authorship have been at pains to establish parallels between artistic creation and biology (. . .) to give the male author a physical as well as mental edge” (Nestvold “Pen and Writing”), Cynara’s seizing the pen suggests that for once the parallel between biology and artistic creation may be deconstructed. Symbolically, Cynara’s belly remains childless because “most every other time [R.] pull[s] out, making a mess on [Cynara’s] belly [. . .] he didn’t want any bastard, beige or white” (17). R.’s belly, however, does ‘bear fruit’ if only figuratively: lip rouge (the feminine pen) is here mapping the contours of new and alternative configurations of what is usually understood and accepted as the patriarchal and master narrative. Read in this light, *The Wind Done Gone* is thus concerned with the displacement of white cultural (and male) authority and the displacement of the locale of womanhood (the belly/the womb) onto the masculine body.

The adroit manipulation of sexuality by the mulatto daughter, born from incestuous white planter and black mammy’s intercourse is reinforced in the unknowing look that Cynara often directs at R., as well as in the mask of helplessness to which she periodically resorts. She realizes



that “strength always seemed to rob the girl out of [her] and so “always take[s] care to keep it hid” (57). And so, at a personal level also, Cynara unveils another hidden transcript (and a gendered one), what James Scott would call “the repository of refusal, rebellion, and indignation [. . .] which often takes the form of a public breaking of an established ritual of public subordination” (215). What Cynara does is to tell what “appeals” to her about the time she spends in the North. In Washington, “there’s a world of colored people” (92); In Washington, there is a man from Japan who believes R. and Cynara, despite their skin differences, are “from the same place: a plantation in the South” (94). In Washington, she “like[s] moving among these Capital City Negroes” (104). And in Washington, a city that is “built for tomorrow” (107), Cynara makes clear her new openly voiced expectations to be treated not as a subordinate but as a subject in her own right: there, she says, she “might attempt possession” (111), for as she reflects, “why couldn’t she who couldn’t own [. . .] could I not own a planter’s heart?” (111).

A similar public revelation of a hidden transcript repudiating the public transcript of enforced obedience—and of mastery itself—marks the end of the novel. There, Cynara rewrites the beauty and the iconization of the traditional Southern Belle figure, by aligning Other’s beauty (Scarlett in the original version) with her own beauty. Yet, while looking like Other—and in aging better than Other—Cynara however openly refuses the performance of womanhood assigned to the outside look and eventually “rejects R.’s proposal (Rhett in the original version) of marrying him and passing as white in Europe.” Instead, she chooses to live in an African-American neighborhood (Galisteo 84), chooses to “possess a man” (111) and to “possess the Congressman” she has met in Washington (111).

If through rebellion, Cynara steps up because she throws off the constraints imposed by her gender or skin color, the Southern white gentleman of Scarlett’s dream, by contrast, steps down and off the pedestal of Southern chivalry by being rewritten into the lover of someone “he

could [not] marry or that any[one] could talk about” (46). Dreamy Gentleman (Ashley in the official version) is described as a “particular friend of Mealy Mouth’s brother” who “disdain[s] feminine hunger and passion” (45). The aspects of alternative non-hegemonic masculinity, however, are quickly recuperated in a commodified version of manhood: “Dreamy Gentleman made up his mind to marry his cousin Mealy Mouth [. . .because] he saw a fine line of children springing from his loins [. . .] golden children that would resemble his beautiful cousin” (45). Dreamy Gentleman’s ambivalent position here suggests an alternative to the construction of masculinity within the patriarchal discourse, where “everything that is not [. . .] in line with traditional masculinity is automatically considered other, that is feminine” (Flannigan 239).

For Rhett also, the materiality and disability R.’s highly sexualized and embodied masculinity contributes to “dismantling the myth carried on by *Gone with the Wind*, a novel which should be blamed (among other things and still, according to Watkins) for its lack of humanity, “its lack of obscenity,” for being “too far prudish a novel”. *The Wind Done Gone*, by contrast, foregrounds men’s bodies and explores the way female characters look at these bodies. For Cynara, indeed, years have “carved a leanness into the bones of my man [R.]” (72), adding on seeing “the skin of his neck looked yellow, cross-hatched like a dusty yard [. . .] [and when] he smiled, [. . .] there were more lines” (30). On other occasions, Cynara evokes the humanity of R. who now “looks a thousand years old. His hair is turning white, and he has let it grow” (116). If vision—as Peter Brooks—explains is a “typically male prerogative” whose object of fascination is the “woman’s body” (88), the gendered visual relations in *The Wind Done Gone* invoke male visibility and female vision. Such relations are portrayed in terms that force the visualization of the male body away from the norm, away from the “gentleman” (182) and into the “man” (182). The “good-looking Congressman” (118) reminds Cynara that he is “a strong man, a statesman, a colored man,” and proudly so, “no gentleman” (182). Here the marking of

“men as men” (through the depiction of men’s bodies) as a particular and gendered subject challenges the “power men accrue as universal subjects” (Bode 189). The focus on female characters’ gazes at male bodies suggests alternatives to imagining male corporeality and sustains the disruptive potential of depictions of men’s bodies when it is women who are looking: hence Lucia Bozzola identifies “a man for woman’s eyes” as a “gender category breaker” (229, in Bode 194).

### *Shaking the Foundations*

It is of course compelling to consider the opportunities contained in Randall’s retelling: by pointing to these hidden scripts, voices, and disruptive gazes, Randall produces what Michael Kreyling describes as metanarratives that touch “on crucial moments where the official narrative is made or problematically redirected” (ix, in. Yaeger 34). Undoubtedly, this redirection is a narrative strategy, a “the tool for generating stories, a rewriting machine” (Plate 394). Randall does certainly admit that the time has come for a rewriting machine, a “provocative literary parody [to] explode the mythology perpetrated by a Southern classic” (front cover). To what end and to what effect should the parodist problematize the ideals and icons of a Southern classic, however, remains another matter.

Hélène Cixous justifies the need to retell mythic narratives in order to demystify “the myths that sustain the patriarchal order” since “all the stories would (then) have to be told differently, the future would be incalculable, the historical forces would, will, change hands, bodies; another thinking as yet not thinkable will transform the functioning of all society” (93). If one may well accept Randall’s argument that she “sought to dismantle *Gone with the Wind*, not freeload off it,” one, however, may wonder to what extent Cynara’s narrative may, to use Kreyling’s expression here, “dynamite the trails” on which the original narrative runs.<sup>6</sup> Though

focused on Cynara and the unwelcome/unheard voices of the slave quarters, and despite the criticism of romantic/idealized views of the antebellum South, it could well be argued that *The Wind Done Gone* often engages into depictions that are not so very divorced from the original/official narrative.

Men in *The Wind Done Gone* may appear as counterfeit gentlemen; the ladies may appear as counterfeit Southern Belles; the culture of the South certainly appears as a masquerade culture, and there is, for sure, in this depiction of Southern life, a counter-current of intended satire: as we have seen, Randall takes the Southern gentleman—the manliest of men—and tames him, domesticates him so much to the point of feminization, and Cynara’s narrative also hints at the intrusion of a far more complicated world into the insular world of the domestic patriarchy. Yet, in the parodied version, each performer abides to its script: Mammy is still a black servant and even though, “she was as big as an elephant with tiny dark round eyes [. . .] she wasn’t big enough to own a name” (6). She dies, celebrated as “the last of a vanished species and culture, the loyal old servant who, Christ-like, sacrificed herself for others” (53). Planter—although deviant and “impotent” (64) and although “like all Irish [. . .] [a] shiftless, lazy cracker” (4)—is still recognized as the master of the plantation; Other—even though she is getting old—is still recognized as the “Belle of the five counties”; she is still R.’s wife, and still a beauty, even though she is “not beautiful but men seldom recognize this, caught up in the cloud of commotion and scent in which she moved” (1); R. is still the “prize” to be captured once the fog dissipates; Dreamy Gentleman—although openly homosexual—is still the gentleman of the South, inhabiting Other’s dreams, and marrying Mealy Mouth. As the spectator of her own life, Cynara however remains dependent on R. for her living and although she takes the pen, “most days, she “cook[s]” because “it gives [her] something to do” (26). Ultimately, if readers do share the intimacy of a first-person narrator, not R. [nor anyone on the plantation] can “see [her] thoughts,”

because “they are made too small by his own” (27). While encouraging self-assertion, the diary also keeps her in the shadows: “my name is Cynara” (2), she asserts, “but nobody here knows” (7). Eventually, and even though stressing the dynamics of female vision and visibility, she is herself removed from view: “when guests came to call,” she would be sent “away from the house, away from prying eyes [. . .] out with a long list” and would “stay away until [she] had assembled all the specimens [on the list]” (135).

So what does it change, we could ask, if those in positions of mastery still remain powerful in the parody? Of course, the mutual dependency of canonical work (*Gone with the Wind*) and rewriting (*The Wind Done Gone*)—what Génette names the influence of hypotext on hypertext—is a complex relationship that operates on several levels—the use of the shifting point of view, being but one of them. Regardless of how reinterpreted they may be, the fact that Mammy, Other, Planter, Melly-Mouth, Dreamy Gentleman continue to be recognizable in light of the original work evokes Connor’s concept of “fidelity-in-betrayal” (167, in Plate 397) and points to what Hutcheon sees as “the differential but also mutual dependence of parody and parodied texts” (xiv). Seen from these perspectives, a rewriting (however much it may compromise the authority of the hypotext) can never simply deny it, for “the rewritten text must always submit to the authority of an imperative that is at once ethical and historical” (Connor 167, in Plate 397). And so when we speak of parody, we do not only mean that two texts interrelate but we “also imply an intention to parody another work (or set of conventions) and both a recognition of that intent and an ability to find and interpret the backgrounded text in its relation to parody” (Hutcheon 22).

Seen in the light of revision, the practice of what Génette calls “hypertextuality” cannot just be a matter of formal borrowing (Hutcheon 30). If it is so, the risk is that novels which rewrite canonic text may but “offer themselves not as challenges to the canon, but as canonic—as

already canonized, one might say [because] they appear to locate themselves within an established literary culture, rather than presenting themselves as an assault to that culture” (Attridge 169, in Sanders 2006). From the perspective of publishers, in particular, it is often, as Plate remarks, “the interdependency of canonical text and rewrite (. . .) that makes rewritings particularly interesting” (397), because “re-vision [becomes] a means of selling books with low risks and low marketing costs” (399). Randall’s publishers would confirm: the appeal to the court decision transformed *The Wind Done Gone* in an overnight bestseller. Booksellers “placed large orders, displayed it prominently and offered promotional discounts [. . .] The book quickly landed on bestseller lists” (Brown 316). The parody became so canonized that, in the *New York Times*, Megan Harlan argued that the lawsuit over the book was more interesting than the book itself. Other critics questioned Randall’s motives, “suggesting that she had written the book as a publicity stunt rather than as a thoughtful political commentary” (Brown 316).<sup>7</sup>

If we cannot ignore the political agenda set by Randall, one that is best expressed in the salient reference to an “unauthorized parody,” we might ask if the retelling—in a post slavery or post Southern tradition—truly enables us to critique and escape earlier ways of “dreaming” the South. More problematic than the “logic of consumer society that turns the publishing of feminist re-visions of classic texts into the apparent happy marriage of feminism and commercialism” (Plate 400) is the fact that Southern world offered by Randall—instead of becoming subject to interpreting, transforming, and overturning—becomes, just as Zygmunt Bauman’s perspective “an infinite collection of possibilities, a container filled to the brim with a countless multitude of opportunities” (61, in Plate 400). For Bauman indeed, our culture is one in which “whatever we do . . . is a kind of shopping” (73, in Plate 400). Plate argues that the retelling of well-known stories from alternative points of view cannot escape this culture of shopping, in which readers privilege “the scanning the assortment of possibilities, examining, touching,

feeling, handling the goods on display... putting some of them in the trolley and others back on the shelf” (Bauman 73, in Plate 400).

Heeding Bauman’s caution and charting whatever happened to re-vision in recent translations, sequels, Disney adaptations and in the modern retelling of the myths of Atlas and Heracles, Plate justly worries that the past—rather than being a subject to (re)interpretation—may just be something we “conjure up for its own sake” (400).<sup>8</sup> Here, she might as well have been talking about *The Wind Done Gone*. Indeed, and when considering the revision offered by Cynara’s perspective, we may wonder if the past is “a means to liberation,” as Greene would have it. Can we “move away from the past from which we could learn and into a future that would be different?” (Gumbrecht 120, in Plate 401). Is the act of re-vision, a matter of “revisiting the past in order to project new futures?” (Plate 401). This is far from certain.

Randall’s publisher justified the need for a parody because, he argued, Mitchell’s book “had become such a seminal source of information about American plantation life that the public interest needed another perspective being brought forth” (Brown 315). Yet the parody, to say the least, suffers from a serious lack a perspective. Characteristic of this attitude, for instance, are Cynara’s own words when she admits: “I spent most of my life looking toward the front room of my life, towards escape or change, toward some new way to be, some new place to stand [. . .]. And now [. . .] I am always looking backward, trying to rearrange my memories, rearrange and dust, celebrate and protect, all those antique memories” (129). Instead of remembering the future, Cynara, who repeats on many occasions how she is “afraid of forgetting” (7), seems more concerned with “worry(ing) about the future of memory” (Plate 402). And because the glances are directed backwards more than forward, “the pull of the past and future is so strong that the present is crushed by it.” There is no breaking from what Winterson names “the gravitational pull of past and future” (64). Cynara expresses this desire clearly: “I want,” she says, “the past and the

future to fuse” (142). As a result, she remains “helpless” in the face of patterns inherited and patterns re-enacted: “When 1880 comes, I fear and [R.] hopes, it will not look so very different for so very many from 1860” (87).

As Rich defines it, “re-vision ... is an act of survival”, because it leads to autonomy and self-determination. It is “meant to retrieve an authentic sense of self that [is] not defined by patriarchal society (in Plate 392). Emancipation, however, seems undermined since even Cynara abides, it seems, by the script of Southern performance: “someone has written the play [. . .] I merely take my place on the stage,” she admits (164). Inevitably also and despite R.’s warning against “bring[ing] the past into this house,” Cynara’s past “is breaking in like a robber in the night” (27). Revising the past, of course, carries with it a myriad of possibilities. To rewrite the classics of world literature,” Plate continues, “to retell the biblical narratives, the myths of Greek and Roman antiquity, of the Grimm brothers’ fairy tales, is to tap into the huge reservoir of stories that is our cultural imaginary and to release their inherent capacity for yielding new narratives” (392-3).<sup>9</sup> In this perspective, retelling as demystification must not only de-construct the past but also reconstruct, open the future to new possibilities, and make us realize that the course of history could/should be changed (Plate 402). Cynara’s problem, we may argue, comes precisely from the fact that the possibilities she traces only “serve to enrich our present, not imagine *alternatives* to it” (Plate 405, my *emphasis*). Ultimately, what remains from Cynara’s narrative is an ever-lasting present and no horizon for expectations: “I turn back to look, remember, watch, mesmerized as the memories glide past” (44). In *The Wind Done Gone*, clocks tick but the hands of the pendulum—in a typically Faulknerian approach—have broken, so much that one could lament, on reading Cynara’s pages, about “the loss of historical time as a teleology moving away from a past from which we could learn and into a future that would be different” (Plate 406).<sup>10</sup> “The pendulum,” as Cynara explains, “seems to swing again, swinging away from



the promise of real change: the change from little boys and little girls picking cotton to children reading and writing and wearing shoes and eating every day and one day getting to vote or getting to influence their father's or brother's vote" (87).

More problematic maybe is the closure provided by Other's death. The demythologization it aspires to is indeed a sign of change and a severe assault on the "cultural heirloom" that *Gone with the Wind* has become; yet one may wonder whether it is possible for Cynara to "evade the stasis of doctrine" (Coupe 103), if looking back in order to move forward is even possible (Plate 406): Other is gone, R. will not go back to her, there is no tomorrow possible and yet, the myth—as Cynara recognizes—will remain: [R.] will never see her grow old [. . .] she will live forever, in some Charleston-in-late-Summer-on-the-Battery garden of his mind, blooming forever, shadowed by sweet wine" (97). By contrast, Cynara is to bear the weight of years and aging. Instead of decentering or compromising the authority of an iconic model like the Belle, Cynara's narrative, it seems, re-centers it; the narrative thus hints at the ways in which rewriting may well be "an inherently conservative genre" (Sanders 2006).

The same recentering of the traditional hegemonic models of masculinity is carried out in the depiction of the courtier, gallant, Southern beau (no matter how one might call it). If it becomes increasingly focused on exposing the masculine and thus provides a space for subverting and collapsing gender norms, Cynara's glance is thwarted: the depiction of Rhett in *Gone with the Wind* had already started to problematize the system of beliefs to which Southern gallantry belonged. Rhett indeed inhabits a no-man's land, a liminal space between pirate and soldier, dandy and gentleman, black savage and white gentleman from Charleston. In *The Wind Done Gone*, however, R. is recuperated with gallantry: as he grows old, R. "looked like what he was—a courtier from an age gone by" (128), and we realize that the anxieties around male visibility are quickly resolved through the presentation of a body that defuses Cynara's gaze and

mitigates “the troubling consequence of a female character looking at a male character’s body” (Frantz 190). R. is visible because he is aging, because of his “feebleness” (128), because he is “slow and unsteady” (128), because “gallantry is never so visible as when it is doomed” (128) and because he has turned into a ghostly figure. Thus, while the female gaze problematizes Laura Mulvey’s version of the patriarchal visual economy (having a woman look at a male body), it simultaneously denies R.’s position as an erotic object: R. is visible because he is suffering and needs attention, not for the purpose of display and eroticism. The ghostly remains of gallantry, of course, signal a distance and difference from *Gone with the Wind*. Yet, R., in his old age and fragility, is now made more likeable than when trespassing the boundaries of normative manhood. What the parody here dramatizes is the fact that the two texts do differ and that the parody seeks to speak across time and into new situations (R. is getting older, R. moves to Washington), but that Rhett is fundamentally the same.

The parody, as a result, loses its “counter” value for “in its ironic ‘trans-contextualization’ and inversion, [the parody becomes] repetition within difference” (Huncheon 32). One such example of repetition within difference appears in the racial encounters portrayed by Randall. If the function of the parody is one of separation and contrast, then, we could ask what contrast is to be considered in the borrowed text, when miscegenation is rendered visible but returned to invisibility at the same time. As Cynara and R. walk side by side, the encounter is here staged in the evening and in a cemetery where only the dead (those who no longer have a say) can accept these racial encounters. Cynara reflects that: “Oakland Cemetery may well be the prettiest garden in Atlanta. And the dead don’t care who’s out walking with who and if their colors match. Plenty folks, black and white, pack picnics and make a make a feast of a visit” (12). As a matter of fact, each of these encounters seems impelled by a desire to maintain normative modes of placement and so, the same spaces of alienation and marginality. There are, we are reminded, “two

cemeteries on the place. Out back of where the cabins used to be, over a mile from the house, there is a slave cemetery [. . .] A blanket of wild grass and wild flowers covers this ground most of the year, protecting, concealing. Closer to the house—you can see it from the porch —is the family burial (25). The thematics of concealing and covering, as well as the distance from the plantation house, here underline that Randall's world, in the end, (and despite the impulse toward visibility) reveals itself to be as partitioned and fragmented as Mitchell's.

In the introduction to her study of Mitchell's *Odyssey*, Ellen Brown explains that "anyone writing about Margaret Mitchell's work stands on the shoulders of a vast body of work, including at least 5 biographies of the author, 3 collections of letters and numerous essays about the novel's place in the American literary canon" (1). While she forgets to mention the numerous sequels, parodies, and retellings that may be added to the list of works on and about *Gone With the Wind*, Brown, however, makes a point: after 70 years of interpreting and reinterpreting *Gone with the Wind*, the academic voices may well have "definitely immobilized it as a typical southern pastoral and thus an allegedly essentialist and populist generic phenomenon hardly worthy of serious academic attention" (Zawadka 198). Randall's parody proves the contrary: Randall does reject tradition, in rejecting a very specific (mis)perception of the Southern past. This rejection manifests itself in numerous ways: problematization of the Cavalier ideal, perversion of planter whites and focus on (non)planter blacks, concern with violating patriarchal norms and rebellion. To achieve this end, Randall gives her novel a sense of indeterminacy and uncertainty. If it indeed directs the readers' attention to what has been missing in *Gone with the Wind*, the parody, as we have seen, unfortunately also redirects us to what has been missing in the rewriting of one of the South's most powerful female authors, reasserting, in turn, a truth that Mitchell herself had perfectly understood, that "the Past is selling better than the future" (Huyssen 20).

“Notes”

<sup>1</sup> Among these are: *Scarlet, the Sequel to Margaret Mitchell's GWW*, by Alexandra Ripley (199) and *Rhett Butler's People*, by Donald Craig (2007).

<sup>2</sup> For Donaldson, such revisionist novels interrogate “mastery itself and by implication master narratives of history, by exposing the daily operations and limits of power and domination, excavating the counter narratives blocked by these operations, and ultimately revising both the content and the form of the historical record” (268).

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell's realism and humanity crops out in other ways. Pyron's excellent article, ‘Gone with the Wind and the Southern Cultural Awakening’ demonstrates that “if [Mitchell] ignored the oppression of slavery, she lost no occasion to show the restriction upon women.” If inhumanity colors the depiction of her aristocrats, whom she turns into “dogs, does, and rabbits,” Mitchell's inclusion of illnesses adds to the realism of her novel. As Pyron remarks, “she dispatches poor Charles Hamilton ignominiously to measles [. . .] Her hospital scenes represent a sordid slice of life with their lice, maggots, festering sores, and filth”.

<sup>4</sup> In *Gone the Wind*, however, the first line of the first page pointed to the blindness; incertitude, and ill-perception that pervaded the world depicted by Mitchell.

<sup>5</sup> As Plate recognizes, the “rewriting of canonical works from the standpoint of margins are not limited to voicing women's difference from men. Equally important are the intersections of gender with sexuality, social class, and ethnicity” (396).

<sup>6</sup> If “metanarratives,” to use Kreyling's expressions, point well to the discontinuities, fissures, and tensions which characterize the traditions, conventions, and heritage in contemporary culture, only “counter-narratives”, Kreyling continues, may become counter-productive because they seek to “dynamite the trails on which the official narrative runs” (ix).

<sup>7</sup> “The gains to the general public from satire, if anything, seem greater than in parody. There are profound benefits to be had when artists and writers can make use of recognized artifacts and icons to ridicule or criticize political institutions, cultural values, or media presentations. From an economic perspective, these gains from social or political criticism are public benefits that cannot be appropriated in two-party exchange and cannot be readily priced” Michael A. Einhorn, *Miss Scarlett’s License Done Gone!: Parody, Satire, and Markets*, 20 Cardozo Arts & Ent. L.J. 589, 603–04 (2002).

<sup>8</sup> Plate would probably have much to say about the Star Wars, X-Men, Superheroes Saga offering ever-lasting refreshing retellings of the same stories.

<sup>9</sup> Maitland sides with Plate, by arguing that the rewriting of old stories is necessary, since fairy-tales, for instance, do not match women’s actual experiences:

The old stories do not lie; that is their rule ... But although they do not lie, they omit. They tell us about the frog turned into a Prince, but they never tell us about the Prince turned into a frog; though the divorce statistics uphold the frequency of this version. They do not tell us about the women who prefer dragons to knights; nor about the ones who prefer cottages to palaces, honest independent work to silk gowns... And they never, never let on that there are those of us who prefer jam doughnuts to orgasms, an interesting day’s work to grand passion, a Sainsbury’s supermarket trolley to a pumpkin coach (72-73).

<sup>10</sup> See Gumbrecht 2004, 120; Jameson 2005.

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