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## **The masquerade of masculinity in *Gone With the Wind*:**

### **Per/re-forming men through emotions and privacy**

**Emmeline GROS**

*“I’m tired of everlastingly being unnatural and never doing anything I want to do....I’m tired of pretending I don’t know anything, so [they] can tell me things and feel important while they’re doing it....Someday I’m going to do and say everything I want to do and say and if people don’t like it I don’t care”(94)*

Almost 80 years after the publication of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with The Wind*, any consideration of Scarlett’s lines regarding the forced fakery of femininity in the plantation South may take place within a changed environment: the South is no longer that of plantation belles asked to be unnatural and to “eat like a bird” at picnic parties under magnolia trees; Southerners are no longer compelled to dress as Confederate soldiers in order to wage a war against the Yankees—this “hypermasculine” war that would ironically enough “enervate white masculinity—and patriarchy with it” (Berry xiii). Yet, we know it well: things are often slow to change and in the South maybe more than anywhere else, so much that the tension between the real and the ideal, between the public and the private, that is central to Scarlett’s performance of femininity and to the narrative of *Gone with the Wind* as a whole, remains a dominant framework for understanding the South and Southern manners.

Such at least is the argument offered by Scott Romine who argues that “the South is full of fakes—Civil war reenactments and plantation tourism—to name only two” (introduction). Angela Bank, a journalist/blogger from Charlotte, N.C., sides with Romine and stresses the manufactured aspect of the well-rehearsed performance of Southerners who, she asserts, “aren’t any more hospitable than people all over the country [. . .] [they] just pretend to be nice”. Shirley Abbott, commenting on the aura of tranquility in the South, suggests just the same, namely that “southern hospitality is a performance, a masquerade, an agreed-on social fiction, albeit a powerful one with material effects.” The “natural theatricality” of Southerners, she adds, requires «a talent for taking on a special role in a comedy of manners that will apparently run forever» (106).<sup>1</sup> And so maybe, whether Southerners like it or not, one must envision the South as a (timeless) counterfeit, “an essentially masquerade culture” (63), as Kenneth Greenberg calls it, in which appearances are everything and in which a genteel

mise-en-scene of southernness is constructed via a carefully manipulated stage set of moonlight, magnolias, and manners” (McPherson 150).

The terms used by historians and critics alike have in fact gained currency recently, with numerous publications about the American South reflecting the imitative, often hypocritical or inauthentic nature of a culture that appears to have relied on deceit and pretense for survival and myth-making. On the shelves of libraries, one can indeed find a vast array of writings that promise access to the intimacy of the “real” Southerners. At stake in works like *The Southern Belle Gone Bad*, *The Counterfeit Gentlemen* or *The Dandy in Irish and American Southern Fiction: Aristocratic Drag* (to name but a few) is the exponential growth of terms like imitation, counterfeit, dandy in the intellectual and literary discourse which suggests the increasing relevance, but also the elusive quality of terms like authenticity, truth, genuine, real; terms that stress how deceptively transparent the portrayal of the South has been and how these terms, in the light of these publications, should take on a significant new—if not double—meaning. The phenomenon these historians describe might be thought to have at least one important manifestation in *Gone with the Wind*: through the value placed on privacy—and as this paper will demonstrate—Mitchell’s readers will certainly recognize the text’s (gendered) anxiety about the reality of the distinction between appearance and reality, masquerade and truth, between a truth-oriented discourse and a rhetoric of pure performativity.

Mitchell was not, of course, the first person to address the issue: consider for example the debate which animates John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn* (1832). The novel—often considered by scholars like Hubbell as the “best picture of Virginia life in the 19th Century” (192)—writes Ned Hazard’s authenticity and the patriarch’s dress as evidence of a particular brand of masculinity that epitomizes heterosexuality, whiteness, ancestry and power (over slaves, plantation, and within the Southern antebellum community), while the usurpers and performers of Southern masculinity are seen attempting to “pass” as gentlemen, causing southern belles to misrecognize the real from the fake and to be confused by the non-authentic (in this case the dandy Swansdown) who is now regarded “so much like the hero of a novel”. Singleton Swansdown appears to the women, “an elegant, refined, sweet-spoken, grave and dignified gentleman” (113). Yet, to men like Ned, Swansdown is also “the most preposterous ass—the most enormous humbug—the most remarkable coxcomb in Virginia” and “[i]t is hard,” admits the narrator, “to tell the counterfeit from the real in these things” (113). If, in the end, Southern relations, manners, and characters remain largely uncomplicated, Kennedy

however leaves off where other Southern authors would pick up: at stake is the attention given to the Southern imposters, to the generic instability of gender roles and to the question of performance, a question that Mitchell's readers will be asked to contemplate: in a wholly commodified world that has now emptied, it seems, social, cultural, and political life of any "real" content, what is left of the "authentic" South? For a plantation ruling-class for whom "society, dress and decorum at social events [were] among the symbols of caste and class" (Aiken 155), what is left of these symbols? Not much, it seems.

For the readers of *Gone with the Wind*, it is easy to realize how deceptive the "real" reveals itself across the pages, for indeed the majority of both the comic and the dramatic actions in Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* is driven either by mistaken or masked identities. Scarlett's extreme-yet-masqueraded femininity, for instance, causes the laughter (and eventually the departure) of the not-so-easily mistaken Rhett Butler. Ashley's costume as the abiding and patriotic soldier of the Confederacy causes Scarlett's mistaken love until she realizes that she "made him wear [pretty clothes] whether it fitted him or not. And [she] wouldn't see what he really was" (940). Rhett's own dandyism, his love for laces, and his wearing "clothes which were always the height of style and tailoring" (225) cause misreadings of all kinds, especially when that masquerade, Mitchell tells us, "no longer amused him" (227). Knowing the real Butler seems indeed a complicated enterprise: even the all-knowing narrator must admit that, "had [Rhett] been less obviously masculine, his ability to recall details of dresses, bonnets, and coiffures would have been put down as the rankest effeminacy" (226).

### **Exposing the fictionality of the Feminine**

Admittedly, such confused/confusing readings reflect a long-standing opposition between sincere expression of self/individuality and debased/calculated performance/deceit. It is telling for instance that the novel would choose the falsity of the female self as its point of its departure. By stressing for instance that "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful," the narrator, from the very first line of *Gone with the Wind*, alludes to this duplicity of the self in the novel, confessing that Scarlett's performance, her extreme femininity, hides the real self, the one that "men seldom realized" (25).<sup>ii</sup>

Along the lines set out by Rivière's famous case study "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929), the act of narration—while promising the readers an access into the intimacy of the

(badly) performing Southern belle—emerges as a powerful and pernicious invader of the privacy that Scarlett is seen wanting in so many occasions.<sup>iii</sup> As Shamir reminds us, “true” women were indeed “expected to use [spaces of female privacy and sanctuary] for the perfecting of their performed identity, not as a means of escape from it” (42). Mitchell’s novel in this regard certainly thematizes the contemporary suspicions engendered by a deep-seated skepticism about the very rhetoric of sincerity. Obviously, the (gendered) rhetoric of fictionality vs. authenticity was overlaid on a landscape that was, already binarized in terms of Southern vs. Northern, Planter vs. imposter: such a debate resonated with particular force throughout 19<sup>th</sup> Century America, a society which lacked “the fixed social hierarchies of a rigid class system and in which there is at least the theoretical possibility of social mobility”. “It is in this period especially,” Orwell continues, “that the problem of authenticity, of naming ‘the real thing’ begins to take on a truly significant proportion”. Following Orwell’s argument, “one might imagine that the concept of authenticity begins in any society when the possibility of fraud arises [. . .] especially when the society becomes so large that one usually deals with strangers, not neighbors” (xvii).<sup>iv</sup>

As if playing with such anxiety, the narrator remarks that, in her attempts to secure Ashley’s attention, “[Scarlett] would use different [tactics], the right ones. She wanted [Ashley] and she had only a few hours in which to get him. If fainting, or pretending to faint, would do the trick, then she would faint” (96). In this instance, the tale reveals the imitative structure of gender itself: femininity becomes indeed, in the words of Judith Butler, “an exterior force that affects and limits a fully, human, and natural interior”. It is “the choice to assume a certain kind of body, to live and wear one’s body a certain way, [which] implies a world of already established corporeal styles” in which the natural (understand authentic) body is (always) increasingly suspect (Salih 26).

Through intimate access to the natural Scarlett, Mitchell in this very instance however cleverly turns the tables on her readers for she reveals that the lie of sentiments is especially necessary for the Southern Belle, as the bias against the “naturalness” has been attached to the feminine with particular strength. As the narrator comments, “[t]here was no one, to tell Scarlett that her own personality, frighteningly vital though it was, was more attractive than any masquerade she might adopt. Had she been told, she would have been pleased but unbelieving. And the civilization of which she was a part would have been unbelieving too, for at no time, before or since, had so low a premium been placed on feminine naturalness”

(96). For this female dandy, Oscar Wilde's remark in *Dorian Gray* would certainly apply: "being natural is simply a pose and the most irritating pose I know" (in Rosenbaum 4).

If the narrator employs the masquerade as a means by which to urge the spectator of femininity to realize to what extent "Scarlett's true self was poorly concealed," that is to perceive the gap existing between woman and images of femininity and so highlight the artificiality of gender, something more is obviously intended here than what Butler would identify as the performativity of Gender. In line with the tradition to examine sincerity and theatricality in resolutely oppositional terms, the narrator's multiple asides also highlight the recalcitrant societal belief in the inauthenticity of femininity, an authenticity that equates in this case to an absence of beauty. To a reader familiar with the Cult of True Womanhood, the novel, in its dramatization of a female belle/dandy who must perform tricks and plays of all kinds to attain feminine success (that is the securing of her beau's affections), may seem to question the virtues attributed to the true woman of the South. Here "the ability to nurture intimacy and display propriety—virtues on which the sanctity and status of the home rely" are those in Scarlett's case, who are imagined to endanger privacy and authenticity (Shamir 26).

By alluding that Scarlett "had learned only the outward signs of gentility [. . .] [since] [a]pppearances were enough" (76), Mitchell's narrator obviously also challenges her readers to consider their own role and that of their culture in drawing faulty lines between sincerity and performance, confession and secret, woman and persona, so much so that one could argue that the narrator forces a culture to confront new forms of thinking about what Patricia Yaeger, in her analysis of the grotesque feminine bodies of the South, names the "unthought known" of Southern femininity (219). Displaying a body and a mind that both refuse to be average provides a screen onto which one can trace the "cultural fantasies, desires, fears, anxieties, hopes, and utopias" (Yaeger 220) of a culture for which as McPherson reminds us, the Southern belle "functioned as the pivot around which th[e] mythical mise-en-scène, or th[e] sham of Southernness, unfolded."<sup>v</sup>

By probing into the fictionality of femininity, the text lends itself to what could be seen as a Foucauldian enactment of surveillance: what *Gone with the Wind* embraces here—in its focus on the fraud of femininity—is precisely "a mode of power founded on the exposure of privacy" (Shamir 8). Yet, and as Shamir recognizes, the danger inherent in such a strategy of exposure is that "it reduces the [feminine] self to sheer alienability [and masquerade] and, in refusing to recognize the existence of inalienable private aspects, also mistakes the normative narratives of gendered and racial identity—those narratives that can be publicized,

shared, traded in—for the entire scope of the self” (104). Another danger in what Shamir names “the translating [of] the contents of the private into normalizing narratives” (8) is also, I believe, that the fraud of manhood may disappear from observability.

Manhood, it seems, appears (in theory at least) as a space immune from public observation, so much that there remains a strong tradition to reinforce the belief, rather than the truth, that an implicit attribute of masculinity (and Southern masculinity in particular) is its distancing from artifice and play-acting. As Harry Brod explains, “the masquerade self has traditionally been held to be inherently opposed to the kind of deceit and dissembling characteristic of the masculine. Like the American cowboy, “real” men embody the primitive, unadorned, self-evident, natural truths of the world, not the effete pretenses of urban dandies twirling about at a masquerade ball” (13). Thus, for example, theorist Steve Neale ironically expels male disguise/pretense and fakeness/invention, commenting in relation to this, that it is “women [who] are (or should be) [considered] a problem, a source of anxiety, of obsessive inquiry. Men are not (or should not be) [. . .] Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known. Femininity, by contrast, a mystery” and the masquerade of femininity, the “province of the female” (15-16).

According to this reasoning, masculinity in *Gone with the Wind*, if only by contrast, would possess an authenticity (a beauty maybe?) that is denied to Scarlett; a fact that India herself asserts when implying and trusting that “Yankees don’t know that you aren’t one of us [. . .] Yankees haven’t sense enough to know that you haven’t gentility” (528). As an ardent defender of masculine authenticity, Melanie Wilkes who “in all her sheltered life had never seen evil” expels the suspicion of pretense on Rhett’s side, when believing instead “what she fancied was a gross injustice done to him” (222). Rhett himself, while obviously behaving like one of the “urban dandies twirling about at a masquerade ball” insists on claiming that he will not accept to “masquerade in a cloak of romance and patriotism, no matter how convenient it might be” (237). If Scarlett thus embodies ambiguity, deceit, pretense, and instability, Southern men, like Northern men—either because they cannot perceive the deceptive nature of Scarlett, or precisely because, in Rhett’s case, they refuse Scarlett’s pretense—should/would be cast in a positive light.

If, as the narrator intimates, a woman performs gender every time she acts the feminine, one could ask—and to quote MacKinnon’s own terms here—“how far, though, should the masquerade be confined to women’s performance of femininity?” (67). After all, the works written by Joan Rivière, Jacques Lacan, M. A. Doanne, Judith Butler, and Homi

Bhabha have now clearly helped to dismantle heterosexuality-as-the-real thing and with it, the confidence that (heterosexual) masculinity possesses an authenticity denied to femininity” (MacKinnon 66). Theorists themselves (and Queer theorists) have stressed that gender cannot and should not be solely seen as the problematic domain exclusive to female subjectivity.<sup>vi</sup>

In the American South notably, “a boy seeking such a reputation needed to vigilantly attend to his dress, speech and physical comportment as well as to the elements of his conversation, his leisure pursuits, and his social network” (Friend 29). It was thus necessary, Lord Chesterfield warns, “to rigorously groom the self for presentation in society. Only through careful and constant control could men act out proper behaviors, suppress inappropriate actions, and thereby acquire a reputation of refined manhood” (in Friend 29). The issue, of course, has received significant attention, with historians arguing that Southern masculinity—overseen by confederate veterans and aging grandfathers—was indeed performed, produced, and often strikingly polished.

### **Exposing the fictionality of masculinity**

Rehearsing an old-age analogy between language and clothing, Mitchell’s narrator frequently underlines the deceptive quality of the masculine dress, and this focus on clothing and the exterior encapsulates well what we could name Mitchell’s problematizing of the idealized image of the perfect romantic Southern hero that dominated the novels of her predecessors.<sup>vii</sup> If in Bakhtin’s view indeed, the epic hero of Southern romance can be envisioned as “a fully and completed being,” one who “coincides with himself [and who] is absolutely equal to himself”, as a man who values “honesty in business and politics, courage in combat, and personal integrity” (Tracy 215), *Gone with the Wind*, however, simply refuses such a simplistic portrayal of Southern masculinity.<sup>viii</sup> The performance of masculinity may certainly be sincere or forced upon by economic or social necessities, yet what masculinity and femininity have in common, Mitchell suggests, is their being performed and their being highly problematic.

Particularly interesting in *Gone with the Wind* is the critical work that clothes perform on the cultural unconscious of the South. If clothes are valued as active agents of change, if “laces and silks and braids, and ribbons [...are] flaunted with an added pride as an external affront to the Yankees” (174), clothes also reveal the contradictions, the violence, or the utopian longings of a culture in the construction of male identity. When presenting Rhett



Butler for the first time, the narrator for instance points to the obvious gap between Rhett's "severe black suit, with fine ruffled shirt and trousers smartly strapped beneath high insteps" and "his physique and face, for he was foppishly groomed, the clothes of a dandy on a body that was powerful and latently dangerous in its lazy grace" (183). Particularly suggestive also is Rhett's use of what Silverman would call the "vestimentary package" (145) when moving from the rascal, rebel, and pirate to the culturally visible and acceptable/accepted Southern gentleman. Rhett thus moves through different performances and poses, from the rogue to "the most popular and romantic figure the town knew, despite his previous reputation" (226). From someone defending that "a man may be a rascal if he chooses," Rhett eventually accepts to wear the uniform and admits: "I was in the war. I was in the army for eight months. I fought all the way from Lovejoy up to Franklin, Tennessee" (272). In this case, Rhett's admitting to wearing the uniform concretizes the desires of a community, as a movement away from his seclusion to acceptance as a Southern gentleman.

The oddest thing about Ashley is that, in his case, the soldier in uniform is hardly a "male" according to the plantation South gendering standards: Ashley—defined as Queer by the Tarleton Twins in the early chapters of the novel—writes letters to Melanie in which he confesses that this Southerner "whom God never intended to be other than a studious country Gentleman," is not, as he claims, "a soldier and [has] no desire to seek bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth". Nor does he go to war seeking maleness, even less "honor or glory" (212).<sup>ix</sup> Here, Mitchell complicates masculinity by complicating many foundational narratives of the South—the Chivalric code, the ideal of the antebellum South, the War. Honor and gentility are obsolete, even for those who supposedly embody Southern gallantry: Ashley recognizes (too willingly maybe) that the naturalized notion of hegemonic masculinity is untrustworthy and unreliable. According to Ashley, Southerners have been "betrayed, betrayed by our arrogant Southern selves [. . .] Betrayed, too, by words and catch phrases, prejudices and hatreds coming from the mouths of those highly placed, those men whom we respected and revered" (212). Yet, and because Ashley chooses to wear the uniform of the Confederacy, it follows that passing as the abiding and patriotic soldier of the Confederacy causes Scarlett's blindness to Ashley's "unmanliness": the doubts he expresses in the letters to his wife are eventually summarized as "twaddle-twaddle" (214) and Ashley's gentility is "enshrined" (235) as a woman's defense of imagination and beauty.

If the unstable fluidity of masculinity allows Mitchell to reject the popular myth that men can be reduced to what she knows to be failing and unreliable exteriors, even the old

lineage of family honor is held up to Rhett's, but also to the community's skeptical gaze. Rhett reminds Scarlett that her dad "was nothing but a smart mick on the make". And certainly, it is through the vestimentary package that Gerald O'Hara, the Irish immigrant, has become "culturally acceptable": no matter how hard it is to "attain elegance" (63) and despite "the neighbors that had eyed him askance at first" (68), Gerald learnt how "to adopt [the South] ideas and customs" (62). Not surprisingly maybe, Gerald O'Hara is referred to a "stunned old actor [who] remained on his empty stage" now that his "audience suddenly vanished" (415). The attention paid to the display, the audience, but also the readers of these men's performances, foregrounds the importance of clothes and dress, not only as an outward indication of gender, but also as constitutive enactments of authentic Southern gentility. Seen in this light, the "public" reverence—through clothing—for the Southern order has become evidence of sincerity which substitutes, in this case, for the real political or cultural engagement—or even in Gerard's case—for social and familial inheritance.

Such interrogation of Southern "codes" but also the conflicted portrayal of Southern manhood confirm Mitchell's suggestion that, built into the ideal of masculinity and the Southern codes, appears artifice, theatricality, and flexibility as men, for instance, are often caught in the uncertain position of the in-between and must fulfill different expectations or roles, deploying different selves according to the audience judging them: Ashley oscillates between the image of the queer and that of the gentleman; Rhett is both black and white; a pirate and one of these "scoundrels who masquerade under the cloak of the blockader for their own selfish gains" (235). Yet, even his most ardent critic, Mrs. Elsing, eventually comes to think that "somehow [Rhett] isn't so bad. A man who fought for the Confederacy can't be all bad" before adding that "[i]t's Scarlett who is the bad one" and that Rhett is "ashamed of Scarlett but is too much of a gentleman to let on". Gerald O'Hara combines the Irishman, the Southern planter, and the self-made man figure. Reminding here readers of the often self-interested performances of masculinity in the novel, Mitchell thus explores the problematic conflict of Southern masculinity: the simultaneous involvement and ingrained belief in masculine transparency—facilitating a taken-for-granted, good versus evil moral judgment—and the deep suspicion of masculine authenticity.

The generic instability of manhood is matched at the level of the narrative: rather than being presented with one single, coherent position ("monoglossia") and men being either fundamentally good or bad, the reader is indeed faced here with what Bakhtin sees as "heteroglossia," as "[o]ne point of view opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to

another, one accent to another” (314). This performative aspect of masculinity is well brought out in the numerous discussions “about” men, discussions often conducted by the women in the narrative. Discussions “about” Rhett and Ashley, for instance, often seek to mediate the doubts about the “truthfulness” of Southern men and the authenticity of men’s emotions in particular. Accounts of Ashley or Rhett attempt to trace a congruence between outer expression and inner feelings/motivations. For Mrs. Meriwether, it is the congruence between the Rhett she utterly distrusts and Rhett’s “tears that came into his eyes” as he confesses that he is “prouder of [his] services to the Confederacy than anything ever done” (220). Only when Mrs. Meriwether receives a letter from Colonel Carlton “praising Rhett's services in no uncertain terms” that she can accept that Rhett is indeed “a born artilleryman, a brave soldier and an uncomplaining gentleman, a modest man who wouldn't even take a commission when it was offered him”. For Melanie, discussions of/about Ashley seek assurance that Ashley would rather die than betray his own confederacy. For Scarlett who sneaks into Melanie’s room and opens “the square rosewood writing box” containing the letters addressed by Ashley to his wife, secret reading seeks a congruence between the twaddle-twaddle she reads and the feeling of smug satisfaction” that “Ashley still loved her” (214).

What makes such passages interesting is that it is not so much the masculinity “on-stage” or the “public” performance of gender that are referred to in these numerous discussions, but rather the “earnest” performance of the masculine “off-stage”—of the masculine in “private”. Fueling what appears as a reassuring discourse of/about masculinity is the discussion of the men’s earnest performance of their gentility “off-stage”, as if this discourse not only sought to verify and ascertain the truthfulness of manhood (with women like Mrs. Meriwether, Scarlett or Melanie needing “to get at the truth” of it all), but also wanted to aesthetically distance Rhett from too obvious a blackness, too threatening a dandyism and too public disregard for the war. Such a discourse also attempts to distance Ashley from too obvious a femininity and passivity in the novel. Rather than remove masculinity from scrutiny, the narrator poses masculine privacy at its vanishing point: masculinity, we understand, is not simply a sheltered, reassuring, and idealizing refuge from the problems posed by the Civil War and Reconstruction, but is also essentially another stage on which the moral expectations of a culture and of the feminine have been performed, interrogated, and possibly reassured. Because the Southern male now threatened to tip the balance in the direction of falsity, it apparently became necessary to authenticate him!<sup>x</sup>

When addressing the question of a performing manhood in *Gone with the Wind*, the crucial issue therefore is not whether there is a male masquerade that would compare with the female masquerade, for the answer would obviously entail a “yes”! Images of fictionality vs. authenticity, as we have seen, are slippery notions taking on multiple embodiments and involving both the feminine and the masculine. If true masculinity is thought to proceed from men’s bodies (Cornell), Mitchell’s novel here is interested in the challenge such bodies pose to the act of authenticating the real from the fake. What the performances of masculinity and femininity have in common are indeed the efforts at dislocation: after all, one should remember that what matters most in *Gone with the Wind* is not so much authenticating who is who, who is the fraud, and which usurper is which for, as Rhett Butler freely admits, he is no gentleman (and does not wish to be one); To Scarlett’s harsh judgment “you’re not fit to wipe [Ashley’s] boots,” Rhett willingly admits being a rascal, a rebel... whatever is needed not to imitate the gentleman, but to further distance oneself from the model. In a similar endeavor, Ashley is less interested in serving as a moral exemplar than in claiming what is “real” about him.

More troubling than the possibility of Scarlett’s judgment being wrong is that the category of real, authentic, and genteel manhood may be inherently exclusive: both Rhett and Ashley show that they are keenly aware that the glorification of the gentleman Confederate soldier is a product of the imagination, the invention of a tradition. In these instances, both Rhett and Ashley are here claiming the right to selfhood, the right to “open [one’s] heart” and to “keep nothing”, the right to an “authentic self”. It is the same desire for authenticity that Rhett is defending for Ashley, as he demands that Scarlett sees Ashley “as he really is, see him straight”.<sup>xi</sup> For Rhett, authenticity means “veritism”: it calls for recognizing the interiority, the private, unheard, and possibly unwelcome (yet authentic) voices which haunt these dandyish, soldier-ish or gentleman-ish Southerners.

In placing masculine confession at the center of the debate, Mitchell reintegrates masculine “privacy” as an essential part of the narrative, with men openly suffering and feeling also intense compassion for the suffering of others. Nor do men fully repress the expression of these emotions. *Gone with the Wind* authorizes these in unexpected ways: In Rhett’s case, the confession scene which occurs as a climax in the novel reveals how Rhett focuses on his own emotional and physical injury: “I wanted to take care of you, to pet you, to give you everything you wanted. I wanted to marry you and protect you and give you a free rein in anything that would make you happy”. His sentiments here are indicative of the

novel's preoccupation with emotional well-being, especially in marital relations. As Rhett admits: "I'm too old to shoulder the burden of constant lies that go with living in polite disillusionment. I couldn't live with you and lie to you and I certainly couldn't lie to myself. I can't even lie to you now." If, as Jennifer Travis argues in *Wounded Hearts*, "literary interest in male emotions until quite recently has tended to remain eclipsed both by a critical tradition that has been inclined to take gender as the dividing measure of America's emotional economy" (58), Mitchell here writes against the sentimental novel, a novel which "played to the passions and seemed to its detractors to excessively imagine women, children, and slaves as its objects of sympathy" (Travis 65).

In Rhett's case, by placing confession and the expression of men's feelings into the private space of the bedroom (and displacing Scarlett's love confession to Ashley in the masculine space of the library), Mitchell speaks across the boundaries of history, race, class, and gender. In this instance, Rhett's confession not only aligns privacy with authenticity, but also shows that the value of privacy exceeds the prescription of the separate spheres ideology which allies the feminine with the private and the masquerade and the public and authentic with the masculine. The confession bears witness to a trauma of manhood, with Rhett "speaking rapidly, hoarsely, babbling as though to a grave which would never give up its secrets, babbling the truth for the first time in his life, baring himself mercilessly to Melanie who was at first, utterly uncomprehending, utterly maternal" ( ). Through Melanie's eyes and ears, the reader in this instance becomes the recipient of a testimony that places the masculine "I" at the center of attention: "I wanted to--and I did--[. . .] Do you know why I did it? I was mad, crazy with jealousy [. . .] 'I'm a cad,' he muttered, dropping his head tiredly back into her lap". Masculine confession translates here as the attempt at (re)claiming a voice of one's own: the assertion of the "I" promises access to the authenticity of manhood, which suggest in turn new ways of reading the masculine, for the novel extends the scope of sufferers to include fathers and husbands and thus, goes against what Judith Lorber has defined as "boys [being] taught 'to play through pain', [. . .] to deny or ignore symptoms of illness [. . .] with little encouragement to talk about their feelings" (524).

For Ashley also, who chooses to confess to Scarlett that "the seeds of greatness were never in [him]" (854), confession means opening up to what lies inside. Again, it is the "I" that is valued in assertions like "I never wanted to get anywhere at all. I've only wanted to be myself" (856). In doing so, Mitchell, we could say, reforms Southern manhood through the exposure of masculine privacy; a mode that can be deployed here to counter the privileges

accorded traditionally to the white, heterosexual individual and denied, as we have seen, to women, slaves, etc.

Certainly, the confession of men's troubled minds and bodies disturbs the reader's and the recipient's passivity by creating a set of emotions that are largely explored in these specific scenes. Masculine authenticity becomes a site of disturbance and uneasiness: pity, anger, disgust, fear, mimetic pain, all are experienced by the recipient of trauma. The narrator notes that "Melanie suddenly went white and her eyes widened with horror as she looked down at the black tormented head writhing in her lap" (894). On hearing Rhett's confession, Scarlett also realizes that "she listened desperately, her eyes on his brown face, hoping to hear words that would dissipate her fears". And when Ashley confesses the dreadful reality of a world that is gone, Scarlett admits that "it was not that she did not know what he meant. The very tones of his voice called up other days as nothing else could, made her heart hurt suddenly" (856). In these instances, as Shoshana Felman suggests and through masculine confession, the text not only "open[s] up ... the imaginative capability of perceiving history", but also enables both Scarlett and Melanie to fully experience "what is happening to [male] others—in one's own body, with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement" (108). Authenticity, the narrator suggests, is thus needed to reconstruct masculinity and femininity along new lines: both recipients and participants in the trauma of the reconstructing South offer a disturbing and more egalitarian way of bearing witness or giving testimony, and thus reconfiguring the way we think about the South's gender history. Suddenly the masculine body—its imagined wholeness [. . .] and hoped for impenetrability (Yaeger 244)—are not so absolute and taken for granted, but relational, theatrical, and vulnerable.

Would the belief in the equal masquerade of masculinity and femininity achieves freedom from the constraints of gender? As Mackinnon ponders however: "[t]o what extent, though, does knowledge that men as well as women masquerade become an escape from gender? Is the dissolution of (intellectual) belief in the "reality"/sincerity of femininity and masculinity the end of them, producing a more androgynous world? [. . .] How far does this understanding of performance release the performer from gender, though?" (70- 72).

If masculine confession proposes to reconstruct masculinity along new lines, there is, however, ambivalence toward this reform-through-exposure remaking of manhood. There is, in the revealing of emotions, a desire to probe the mystery of manhood. Yet, revealingly, the narrator never truly unveils the man's true visage, nor does the reader discover what it is, if

anything, that Rhett is concealing from Melanie. Rhett falls short of his confession, concluding that Melanie could not understand. If the text indeed promises access to the authenticity of manhood and to the authenticity of the trauma of manhood, Mitchell does not bestow a voice to these men who claim a voice of their own, since the text—we realize—somewhat problematically re-enacts what it attempts to promote, namely the privacy of manhood. In this instance, the bedroom—a space usually destined to privacy—seems precisely where the most intrusive work of regulating the “private” Rhett is performed: not only is the entrance into the room incredibly easy, but by refusing to move beyond the em-dash or the interrupted “She...”, the text here, we could say, disciplines the very space it insists is sheltered and free.

If Rhett is literally shaped by his incapacity to tell: what is shocking in the aborted confession is indeed the brutal physicality of the male body that is at stake in these scenes, its propensity—like the grotesque described by Yaeger—“for somatic revulsion and rapture” (228). The more he wishes to confess, the more emphasis is given to his body: here, the focalization on Rhett freezes him in a state of otherness, with the narrator noting how, in this scene, “suddenly [Melanie] saw, as for the first time, how large and brown and strong his hands were and how thickly the black hairs grew along the backs of them. Involuntarily, she recoiled from them. They seemed so predatory, so ruthless” (894). Melanie in this scene can simply not render the materiality and the truthfulness of masculine naturalness and bestiality out of focus: “He raised his head violently and looked up at her with bloodshot eyes, fiercely throwing off her hands”. In doing so, and instead of recentring masculine emotions, Mitchell recenters the women’s gaze on the natural body. This uncanny recognition, experienced by Melanie, is here akin to what Yaeger traces as the grotesque’s power, that is, “a recognition that is always replete with denial” (248). In this way, Melanie and the narrator partake in what could be called a spectacle of “otherness”, as if Mitchell could not truly let go of the masculine exterior and refused, while promising access to it, to privilege the interior of these men.

That the first appearance of Rhett into the text refers to his unknowability and unamiability indicates that no “real” vision will indeed satisfy the reader. From our first introduction to Rhett, we are indeed barred from directly watching Rhett; the narrator rapidly discloses info: we learn that Rhett has the most horrible reputation, but we do not so much learn what Rhett did through his own mouth. The promise of an authentic access to manhood here could be read as a prototype of what Gordon Hunter has identified in Hawthorne’s

writing as “a dual process of promising and deferring closure” (in Shamir 164): the narrator begins to sketch the ambiguous hermeneutic borders of the text: with reluctance, the narrator—helped by Rhett’s own desire for privacy and to remain “*persona non grata*”—only seems to stand out at the threshold of the self, sometimes looking in through gossip, but to quote Butler, trusting that the natural body is indeed increasingly suspect.<sup>xii</sup>

Scarlett’s listening to Ashley’s confession follows the same pattern: while desiring to penetrate the privacy/authenticity of men, the focalization presents narrative blanks and carefully distances itself from such a penetration into masculine emotions. Soon the emphasis shifts and Scarlett notices “when she looked at Ashley [that] he was no longer young and shining. His head was bowed as he looked down absently at her hand which he still held and she saw that his once bright hair was very gray, silver gray as moonlight on still water. Somehow the bright beauty had gone from the April afternoon and from her heart as well” (413). These moments of listener/participant privacy are experienced and presented as what Yaeger calls “body-obsessed moments” (Yaeger 222). In such instances, the masculine is sent back to its mere corporeality, as if its crises (emphasized through the emotions) needed to “be censored, hushed up, condensed, and displaced as somatic symptoms” (Yaeger 248). In the end, neither reader nor writer is allowed to probe beyond [the masculine] apparent surface manifestation: Mitchell thus implicates reading and writing in the reification of privacy.



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<sup>i</sup> In this view, this masquerade would aim at covering the deficiencies in southern culture, such as slavery, discrimination, and widespread poverty.

<sup>ii</sup> The vacuity of femininity in *Gone with the Wind* is probably best illustrated by the masquerade of excessive femininity to which Scarlett often approximates but also openly criticizes, when confessing for instance that “[she is] tired of everlastingly being unnatural and never doing anything [she] want[s] to do... [and that she is] tired of pretending [she doesn’t] know anything” (94). Mitchell perceives that Scarlett is indeed torn between the desire to display domestic propriety and to be granted individual privacy, or to be exonerated from self-display.

<sup>iii</sup> There is, we must understand, no feminine space immune from public scrutiny in this novel, so much that Scarlett mentions the constant threat that someone may read her thoughts and discover the truth about herself and her private thoughts. On many occasions indeed, Scarlett repeats to herself that “no one would ever know how she felt” and “neither was she going to make a fool out of herself by admitting her true feelings”. Even when Scarlett professes the genuine expression of her feelings, sincerity—it turns out—is being read as duplicity and Scarlett accused of ulterior designs.

<sup>iv</sup> In such a context, the portrayal of a petticoat-wearing Jefferson Davis would certainly highly confuse the semiotic system at large and problematize the antebellum system of value, which relied heavily on clothing as the visible manifestation of power and control (Finkelstein 16). In Southern vocabulary equally, the association between the terms Yankees and Dandies revealed not only that “clothes live in close symbiosis with their historical context” (Barthes, qtd in Carter 160), but also that the concern over the mundane details of fashion reflected deeper concerns over the rigidly (or so thought) hierarchical system.<sup>iv</sup> At a time when black dandies for instance came to vie in elegance with Southerners, Frederick Law Omlsted remarks that “encountering slaves and free blacks dressed in the latest fashions must have greatly disturbed masters whose own emphasis on high dress undoubtedly sprang from a desire to create class distinctions based on appearance [. . .] Northern dress and conspicuous display simply augured a deeper malady: the spread of Yankee ideas” (in Kimball 108). Of course, the black dandies/Jefferson Davis images can serve as an emblem of what transpires through Mitchell’s work, an example of the recurring dialectic between imitation and authenticity that informs the performances of gender in *Gone with the Wind*.

<sup>v</sup> As a matter of fact, and as if sensing the impossibility of such an ideal of authenticity, even the presentation of Melanie Wilkes confuses the Belle figure and the masquerading figure of a “tiny, frailly built girl, who gave the appearance of a child masquerading in her mother’s enormous hoop skirts” (114).

<sup>vi</sup> As Lorri Glover explains, masculinity itself (on par with femininity) is an exclusion procedure, demanding that “successful boys learn to adeptly perform the prescribed role, grooming their education, appearance, relationships, lifestyle, careers, and even emotion to [. . .] ‘act the part’ of men” (3). And because manhood is, to quote Ann Goodwyn Jones “a matter of constant creation and re-creation” (51), this “part” needed to be constantly demonstrated and approved.

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<sup>vii</sup> With reconstruction came a time when “what defined a man was no longer clear,” (1) and, to quote Thompson Friend, when “the definition of masculinity was [now] open to debate” (2).

<sup>viii</sup> For Tracy, the heroes of Southern romance are “ideal types who are never fraught with guilt or doubt about their social responsibilities or moral choices, who “never struggle as individuals with questions of good and evil, or confront a chaotic and unpredictable society” (Susan Tracy 215).

<sup>ix</sup> In doing this, Ashley is seen interrogating the military experience, which was considered « a bastion of masculine culture, [since] the militia provided the means to authenticate manhood through actions and images that dated from ancient Greece and Rome and continued to resonate among 19<sup>th</sup> Century Southerners” (Friend 2). Friend adds that “a militaristic appearance was part of the Cadets’ redefinition of manhood, rooted in an inner-directed sense of duty, discipline, and submission, and the status that these qualities gave young men” (184).

<sup>x</sup> Craig Thompson Friend explains that these were times which “tried men’s souls” and during which “sons and grandsons of the founding generations struggled to make sense of conflicting expectations that pitted their forebears’ community-oriented manhood against modern society’s seductive call to self-aggrandizement” (1). Such ambiguity, for Friend, “could threaten the white patriarchal order” (2).

<sup>xi</sup> Rhett, in his case, knows well that “[t]hough [Scarlett] was thoroughly aware of his insincerity, she much preferred him in the role of the romantic blockader.” ( ). No matter what he does, his sincerity will be regarded as inauthentic, because always judged by the romantic standards that have distorted the perception of Ashley Wilkes into a true, non-pretending, all-transparent and taken-for-granted Southern Gentleman.

