The American Civil War and Historical Fiction: A Historical Analysis of Gone with the Wind

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ABSTRACT

Indeed, variant representations of the American South and the Civil War exist, Margaret Mitchell's historical fiction, Gone with the Wind (GWTW)(1936) carries heavy weight. Juxtaposing the literary and non-literary texts, the study investigates the prevalent Southern discourses in GWTW during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Drawing on Stephen Greenblatt's text co-text tenants of New Historicism, the study analyses both literary and non-literary texts to explore the key historical factors behind the Civil War. The study also probes into the contemporary (1860-1870) popular discourses and causes that gave birth to the established discourses. Qualitative as well as interpretive in nature, the study chooses nominal scale measurement to systematically analyze the select text with close reading and literary exegesis. Signifying the magnitude of historical fiction, the findings and the broader impact of the study lay emphasis on revisiting and validating significant historical accounts like the American Civil War and Reconstruction to unequivocally contribute to the humanity's socio-historical sustainable growth.

Keywords: Civil War, Reconstruction, history, historical fiction, New Historicism
1. Introduction

Past fascinates us in many ways. For some it brings exotic feelings, for others, it dispenses learning. History tells history but historical fiction does it with glorification; therefore the latter is aesthetically preferred over the former. Historical fiction lends us an aesthetic insight into the socio-economic and political issues of the past without hurting the essence of our interest/s. For its fictive properties, it often faces criticism/difficulties, and fails to establish itself as a core discipline. On the other hand, proper history demands facts and figures with precise fixture, and is considered a valid and scholastic consideration. However, both of them are prone to errors.

Both get affected by the socio-economic discourses; both record history with valid evidences. But historical fiction uses the technique of narration while history employs historiography. Contemporary scholars—from both history proper and historical fiction—desire to forward their ideological perspectives in writings to bridge the difference in style, content, and methodology. In contrast to the traditional approach, the New Historicist approach follows a logical sequence of questioning for generating the historical account: why these events occurred, what forces were behind them or what stimulated them, and what it affected. Valid answers to such questions are beyond the realm of history proper which only takes history as a linear event of cause and effect ignoring human feelings and emotions.

So far, among the numerous tales of the Old South and the Civil War, GWTW is considered the most authentic one. The story is set in Clayton County, Georgia, Atlanta during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Depicting the experiences of a highborn beauty, Scarlett O'Hara, the tale defies the popular Southern norms about the Civil War and Reconstruction. In sum, the study aims to characterize GWTW as a Southern social documentary, and focuses—how the events are portrayed in the novel, and the contemporary non-literary texts.

The Civil War is taken for a political situation whose social causes are often disregarded. Probing into master/mini facts (narratives) and key social causes, GWTW delves deep into the milieu of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and establishes a cause and effect relationship between these mini and major facts. These mini narratives or facts will allow us to develop an understanding about the prevalent contemporary social patterns. The study will also permit the modern readers to revisit the Civil War and Reconstruction from a new and inclusive perspective balancing the elements of bias between history and historical fiction. In short, the research impacts the concerned research community, educational institutes, and the disciplines of social sciences and humanities in terms of broadening their understanding about the role of history and historical fiction in building history from a more comprehensive perception.

2. Research Questions

1. How instrumental is historical fiction in validating history?
2. How are the accounts of the American Civil War and Reconstruction portrayed in GWTW and non-literary texts?
3. How does the literary theory of New Historicism define a literary text with the weight of non-literary texts?

4. How does the text's revisiting from the select perspective (of historical fiction and history proper) edify or impact the modern understanding of history, historical fiction, the American Civil War and the Reconstruction?

3. Methodology

Constructing its own research model, the study goes qualitative as well as interpretive in nature. With nominal scale measurement, the study systematically analyzes the select text with tools of close reading and literary exegesis. Originating with its key question, the study carefully articulates clear objectives and goals, and breaks the main question into manageable chunks. After collecting the concerned data from books, articles, journals, periodicals, reviews, historical accounts, and web sources, the study systematically proceeds to meticulously review, evaluate and interpret the assembled data to answer the question that initiated the research.

Theoretical Framework: The select theoretical framework is New Historicism which addresses a range of theoretical practices through linear and non-linear approaches. According to it, a literary text cannot be understood in isolation from the historical context. Unlike traditional forms of historicism — where history was viewed as stable, linear and factual narration —, New Historicism considers history inherently subjective and inclusive of many socio-political factors. New Historicism will look for the political and the ideological agendas behind the war. It also investigates that how this war was presented in the documents, newspapers, magazines, narratives, speeches, drawings, and photographs by the winners and losers. How the war shaped the society and how the society shaped the war? (Tyson, 2006, pp. 282-295).

Stephan Greenblatt renders its best possible understanding through his text and co-text idea under the umbrella of New Historicism in his book, Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (1980). Exploring "the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society", the book is considered as an important foundation for understanding the discourses on the role of human autonomy in any given period (p. 256). Greenblatt further defines it as "an intensified willingness” to read everything recorded about history whether in literary or non-literary form. Thus New Historicism is an approach to study literature where the privileged text is not literary but is weighed in the background of a non-literary text (quoted by Peter Barry, p. 116). Peter Barry furthers the argument, “…it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts—a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other” (2002, p. 116).

New Historicist critique emphasizes the textuality of history, which means that history is only available as a collection of discourses: “New Historians, in the wake of Foucault, see the historical study as textual, i.e. to create a new relationship between the historical and the literary text.” According to these New Historicist critics “history is not some unmediated reality out there, but some stable background that the literary text reflects or refers to; it is not
a context. Rather, it is like the literary text itself - of a different genre, granted, but no less a discourse”. (Julie Rivkin, 2004, p. 506)

4. Literature Review

Slavery seems to cause the American Civil War which cleaved the nation into two. Politically speaking, sectional conflicts in the constitution led to this brutal war. The 13th Amendment ended the legal practice of slavery at the war’s end but there were other social, economic and racial disparities which continued to dominate the American sphere till 1960s. Unlike the apparent phenomena, a plethora of significant and insignificant socio-economic conditions played a significant role in erupting and ending this civil war.

The American Civil war is the deadliest in the American history killing almost 600,000 people—the two percent of the contemporary population. Randal Fuller's lecture ‘American writing on Civil War’, draws example from Drew Gilpin Faust's book, This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War (2009). The damage of the Civil war was socossal, and the loss of human lives was immense. Nearly every person from the areas of Kansas was either wounded or maimed.

Talking about historical fiction, Jonathan Nield in his Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Talesattests, “a novelis rendered historical by the introduction of dates, personages, or events, to which identification can be readily given” (qtd. in Williams, 2014, p. 360). The superstitions prevalent at any given time and place are as important as verifiable facts although these facts are definitely the manifestations of undeniable solid structures/discourses that serve as foundations.

In order to distinguish between truth and fact, Peter Munz in his essay, “Historical Narrative” (2006), comments there is no ultimate objective truth. The documenting of facts are based on the governing generalizations in a society. It’s all a matter of interpretations which vary with changing of time, place and situation. The inward modes of generalization make these facts more important than the outward presentations of physical facts (pp. 833-854).

Ursula Brumm in her essay, “Thoughts on History and the Novel” (1969), answers the question of how a historical narrative mingles with these truths and traditions to absorb their influence picturing them as key fictional provinces. History is also a product of human mind and is related to the same imagination that creates fiction (p. 317). She does not elevate the genre of historical fiction but appreciates its services to relive history. She quotes, Gregory Lukacs on the importance of historical novel as a truthful representation of “objective reality” (p. 320).

Lukacs defines objective reality in the sense of control imposed by the tension that exists between “the restraint imposed by historical veracity and the author's privileges of fictional invention” (p. 322). Modern historical novels do not follow the neat linear line of events: they just work within the given historic reference; the whole plot is woven; the characters play within the framework and express something more than the historical text documents (p. 323).
Similarly, Patricia Cianciolo (1981) and Kent Den Heyer (2007) in their essays also argue in favor of historical fiction and its ability to make readers connect with history intellectually and emotionally. Besides recording the events, historical inquiry evolves critical thinking. The mentioned notions about historical fiction reveal their role and importance in disclosing a course of events in history.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1981) in her article “Scarlett O’Hara: The Southern Lady as New Woman”, takes Atlanta as an embodiment of change. Atlanta is represented as a symbolic monument of change from the Old to the New South. The gradual change of the agrarian ideals to the industrial materialism is shown in the shift of events from Tara to Atlanta where the latter provided sources for raising money to pay taxes on the former. As she rightly points out that “in Mitchell’s rendition, the Civil War becomes a national turning point in the transition from rural to urban civilization”. She also exposes the hypocrisy of being a lady in a Southern world through Scarlett’s character, which depicts how Southerners carried the burden of certain societal values unwillingly. Talking about the gender roles against the collapse of the old South, Mitchell presents Scarlett as a character whose coming of age experience shakes the very norms and values of Southern Womanhood. (Fox-Genovese, 1981, p. 398).

Amanda Adams in her essay, “Painfully Southern: Gone with the Wind, the Agrarians, and the Battle for the New South”, finds another strain for progress which is contrasted with the intellectualism embedded in Ashley. His love for music and reading is associated with his laziness and retrogressive approach which he later admits his false ideal. His intellectual side shows a contrast to Scarlett’s pragmatic approach which demonstrates binary strains responsible for bringing a change in the Southern social life. (Adams, 2007, pp. 58-75).

The heterogeneity of the class system is quite evident in the South’s class system which constitutes its culture. This aspect is often ignored by the historians, which is rightly highlighted by Irina M. Suponitskaya (1992) in her essay “The American South As Depicted in Gone With the Wind: A Russian Historian's Observations”. As noted by Suponitskaya “the farmer class in the South was itself heterogeneous. It included those who lived in isolated regions of Appalachia, who were engaged in subsistence agriculture; farmers of the upper South, the so-called border states, that were close to the economic structure of the North and the West”(p. 886). Such a variety in economic life served as the basis for differentiation in the system of values and psychology of Southern farmers—“This symbiosis was recreated in the novel with a level of living verisimilitude that not every historical or economic study can achieve.”(p. 888).

Ben Railton adequately highlights variation in historical approaches to the Reconstruction presented by Dixon, Griffith, and Bowers in 1930s. Previously it was only presented from the Northern point of view. Vernon Whanton notes that 1930s gave the first alternative historical interpretation of the Reconstruction era after W.E.B. Dubois provided revisionist account of history in Black Reconstruction. But the historians like John Lynch, Alrutheus, Taylor, Francis
Simkins, Robert Woody and Paul Lowinson published histories between 1930s and 1935 which argued for “more complex, rational interpretation and ultimately unbiased understanding of era” (qtd.in Railton, 2003,pp. 54-56).

To write about the war is to write about a human experience: from soldiers to civilians, men to women, and rich to poor and so on. It is easy to record the number of lives lost and the property damaged but it is way challenging to communicate about the real effect of war on people’s lives and socio-psychological order. War literature is not just to valorize a nation or its heroes but it also evaluates the war absurdities. Being the products of their age, New Historicists believe, they help us reflect, introspect and interpret literary and non-literary discourses. In this spectrum, historical fiction appears much instrumental to disseminate the historical understanding to a large number of readers.

It is clearly outlined that researchers have explored GWTW through traditional historical approaches but its exploration from New Historicist approach is still missing—which reviews the text through both linear and non-linear approaches. So this study picks on the outlined gap which is still uncharted and open for future's research.

5. Analysis

Pre- and post American Civil War Writings were as innumerable as the facets of human life. Some documented the plain facts, others dealt with the deep social, economic, political and psychological influence. Magazines, newspapers, novels, autobiographies, historical papers, and public speeches—all served as a medium to propagate the desired messages to the target audience. They added specific political, economic, racial undertones to the interpretation of the war (Finseth, 2013, p. 6)The course to war was not as simple as it appears. There lied a complex web of interconnected factors which led to the bigger event. The westward expansion, economic disparity, bad journalism, southern values—all collectively incited people’s emotions which later found its expression in political speeches trickling down to common man’s reaction.

The philosophical debate of race and slavery reached bitter consequences which surfaced in the form of major political decisions. Jefferson Davis (one of the big slaveholders of the South) was actually against the secession but sensing oppression at the hands of the North, he accepted the idea of sovereignty. In his farewell address to the Senate in 1861, he saw secession as an antagonistic act but advocated the idea owing to the fear of deprivation equating the idea of secession with the independence movement (Finseth, 2013, p. 23).

A similar expression of opposition to the antagonistic intentions of the North is represented in Alexander Stephen’s cornerstone speech which strongly defended the ideology of slavery (Finseth, 2013, pp. 40-43). Lincoln’s reaction to the slavery was well expressed in his address to the Indianapolis legislature on his way to Washington to take oath as a president. He questions their right to secede and shows his firmness to deal with the secessionists (Finseth, 2013, pp. 27-28).
However, these apparent documented facts had some underlying trends which predicted the causes of these events. Lincoln and Alexander Stephen’s speeches give us a tone of popular political discourses which reflected on people’s initial enthusiasm for war. The Southern morale turns to be more vital because the war was fought on its territory and received greater damage/causalities. The initial advancements boosted their morale and added to their enthusiasm (Sheehan-Dean, 2012). The spirit of patriotism spread to the every section of the society. Men and women wore the national colors and composed patriotic songs (Billings, 2011). The patriotic feelings stirred by the political speeches combined with the threat of losing slaves—who were taken for the pillars of Southern economy—led to a zealous response to the war.

The talk of war in the beginning of the novel, the hope of reaching an amicable agreement with Mr. Lincoln and the boast of Southern chivalry show Southern obsession with the idea of war. This preoccupation is quite evident in Scarlett’s disdain and reaction; “Pa talks war morning, noon and night, and all the gentlemen who came to see him shout about Fort Sumter and States rights and Abe Lincoln till I get so bored I could scream!” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 7) Scarlett is happy that Georgia seceded after the Christmas, if before, it would have ruined the Christmas parties.

The war preparations confirm the small farmers and big planters equally participated while the young were excited for their war drills. Mitchell delineates the whole process of recruitment for the war in the troops. She defies that only the poor whites participated in the war. The wealthy planters decided to “pay for equipping” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 21). The small farmers accepted horses and uniforms from the wealthy Southerners (Mitchell, 1936, p. 21). Whether poor or rich, the idea of honor, pride and values was deeply ingrained in Southern blood. The arrangements for the war continued despite the lack of optimum number of horses and weapons, "The troop met twice a week in Jonesboro to drill and to pray for the war to begin” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 21).

During the beginning years of war “the ladies Hospital committee” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 159) held a bazaar to raise funds for the soldiers. It was not an easy task. The hall was decorated with the national colors and “bright stars of the Confederacy on their background of red and blue” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 164). The boys of the Home Guard militia regularly attended the bazaar (Mitchell, 1936, p. 167). Dr. Meade asked them to donate money for the medical supplies. (Mitchell, 1936, p. 182). The song “Bonnie Blue Flag” was sung by some hundred voices. Everyone shared their pride with the soldiers (Mitchell, 1936, p. 168). In Mitchell’s words, “the South was intoxicated with enthusiasm and excitement and everyone knew that one battle would end the war and every young man hastened to enlist before the war should end” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 129). The Southerners generally expected an easy victory in a month (Mitchell, 1936, p. 126).

The enthusiasm shown for the war is also mixed. Ashley as a character, on one hand, embodies the true values of the South while, on the other, he speaks against the idea of war. Talking to the Tarleton boys he hopes there would be peace, “most of the misery of the world
has been caused by wars” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 109). He does t like war but shows his willingness to fight for Georgia. The binary opposition is visible when Ashley nullifies the glorification of war in his speech. Being a veteran of the Seminole war, he knows the crude facts and hardships of the war. In the same meeting, Rhett Butler truly exposes the condition of the South and deflates their shallow claims. He believes why in the absence of many factories or tanneries the South thinks it would easily win the war. “Have you thought that we would not have a single warship and that the Yankee fleet could bottle up our harbors in a week, so that we could not sell our cotton abroad?” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 111). “All we have is cotton and slaves and arrogance” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 112).

Scarlett also didn’t share the glory and pride in the cause, “The Cause didn’t seem sacred to her” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 170). Nothing at the bazaar impressed her. She felt a disdain for everything. She thought other women were hysterical (Mitchell, 1936, p. 170). A lot of people made money from the war business. Rhett shared the feelings of bitterness for the cause with Scarlett. (Mitchell, 1936, p. 186).

The intellectual side of Ashley’s character also raised some philosophical questions on the cause. His love for the old ways of the South is lost. This fact is evident in his letter to Melanie “nothing is worth it—States’ Rights, nor slaves, nor cotton” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 209). He questions his own patriotism: why was he fighting? He answered his own question—he was not fighting for any “glory” or “love of death or misery” but for his duty to his nation. He thought that the cause “was lost the minute the first shot was fired, for our cause is really our own way of living and that is gone already” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 208).

The Civil War was fought in eighteen states, in ten territories, and on hundreds battle fields. The horrors of war was not only experienced by the soldiers but it also reached the common man through the newly invented media. The doctors and nurses wrote about their firsthand experiences; contemporary writers contemplated about the consequences of the war in their writing (Finseth, 2013, pp. 61-62).

It is called a modern war because it was fought after the Industrial Revolution. The innovations in the military techniques and traditional medical facilities added to the miseries of war. Louisa May Alcott worked as a volunteer nurse at the Union Hospital in Georgetown from December 1862 to January 1863. She wrote a series of letters to her family which were later collected and published in little fictionalized form as Hospital Sketches(1863). She quitted because she contracted pneumonia, and typhoid. This sketch describes her experience after the Battle of Fredericksburg. Her experience at the hospital tells that every day scores of soldiers were brought. They were washed, dressed, fed and nursed. The hospital was full of patients suffering from diphtheria, typhoid, and pneumonia. At one moment, the dreaded situation brought a surge of unpatriotic feelings in her to be safe at home but at other moment she is all praise for her fellow soldiers fighting for a cause. She talks about the deadly amputations which tested the patience of woman.(Finseth, 2013, pp. 70-77)
Silas Weir Mitchell, who was an army surgeon in Philadelphia, narrates similar accounts. His story can be taken as a first hand testimony of the Civil War's dreadful medical conditions. He was deployed as a medical officer in the fifteenth Indiana Cavalry. The scarcity of food, water and the deadly diseases in the camps was appalling. He had to go through multiple amputations and got many wounds in his thighs (Finseth, 2013, pp. 99-109).

The novel shows similar feelings expressed by the different characters who participated on the front or felt the effects behind the lines. The novel as set in the center of the conflict shows the very changes that the war brought in the roles of men and women. Scarlett after coming to Atlanta also worked as a nurse as “the Confederacy needed every pair of hands for sewing, knitting, bandage rolling and nursing the wounded” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 152). Scarlett did not like the job of being a nurse as it was difficult to stand the “moaning” of wounded soldiers, “death”, “flies”, “mosquitoes and gnats (that) hovered” in the hospital. The hustle and bustle of Atlanta city shows how war mobilized and vandalized the whole city (Mitchell, 1936, p. 158).

The confederate victories at Tennessee and the Second Battle of Bull Run brought a sense of temporary triumph to the Southerners but with a heavy cost, the “Oakland Cemetery stretched longer every day” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 213). The value of Confederate money dropped drastically, the white flour went scarce; as a result, corn bread became their main staple food. The repercussions of war could be easily felt in the scarcity of common commodities as the blockade tightened in 1864. Luxuries like tea, coffee, silk, colognes got scarce. The prices skyrocketed (Mitchell, 1936, p. 21274; 16). Instead of the luxurious silk, both the wealthy and the poor had to wear homespun. Hospitals faced the scarcity of quinine, opium chloroform and iodine. “Linen and cotton bandages were too precious” and were washed and re-used. Nurses brought these bandages home and washed them to be reused (Mitchell, 1936, p. 213).

The war severed all communication ties. Family members would wait in front of harried headquarters to get the news, “There was hardly a house in the town that had not sent away a son, a brother, a father, a lover, a husband to this battle” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 251). Scarlett and Melanie also sat in front of the Daily Examiner office waiting for the news. The telegram brought the sad news of the Tarleton boys' death (Mitchell, 1936, p. 255). The same moment brought the evil tidings of the Southern defeat at Gettysburg and Vicksburg (Mitchell, 1936, p. 250).

The war which took half a decade, people had expected its end in a month. In its third year, the enthusiasm declined. Ashley wrote from a camp to Melanie questioning the purpose of war. The mental turmoil that soldiers encountered is evident from his letter. He called war a “dirty business”. He scorned the misjudgment of the South and admitted the facts stated by Rhett Butler which they all denied in the beginning. He discloses his heart to Melanie, we were “betrayed by our arrogant southern selves, believing that one of us could whip a dozen Yankees, believing that King Cotton rule the world” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 207). The letter clearly indicated the impending defeat (Mitchell, 1936, p. 209).
Federico Cavada, a Union officer, was caught as a war prisoner. He was sent to Libby Prison situated in Richmond, Virginia. His memoirs, “Libby Life: experience of a Prisoner of War” tells about his experience in prison. The bitter conditions of the Civil War prisons compelled the prisoners to escape. He detail show 109 union officers escaped (Finseth, 2013, pp. 89-94). The prison was heavily cramped with prisoners that they had to “reduce (themselves) to the narrowest possible limits of anatomical contraction” (85).

The Confederate soldiers on returning home presented a dreadful picture. Mentally or physically wounded, they returned with mixed feeling of loss and happiness. (Mitchell, 1936, p. 489), “Four years of starvation, four years of rations which were coarse or green or half-putrefied, had done its work with them” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 489). After the defeat at Gettysburg Ashley came back home after two years. His clothes were tattered; his uniform had blue Yankee patches; he was wearing the boots of two Yankees who he had killed (Mitchell, 1936, pp. 259-260; ).

Ashley was taken captive and placed at Rock Island, a prison camp at Illinois. Rock Island prison was a synonym for hell. The conditions were worse, “food was scanty, one blanket did for three men, and the ravages of small pox, pneumonia, and typhoid gave the place the name of a pest house” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 280). Ashley was given an offer to take an Oath of Allegiance and to fight against Indians which he refused. Southern values were deeply embedded in his personality which were clearly testified by his refusal. (Mitchell, 1936, p. 281). Scarlett reacted to Ashley’s declining the offer, while Melanie liked it and leveled her anger at Scarlett’s remarks (Mitchell, 1936, p. 281).

The term Reconstruction is applied to a period after the war which involved the rehabilitation of the war stricken Confederate states. The contemporary Southern conditions badly affected the course of Reconstruction. The economic and social disorder was quite evident. People were starving. Many died, many got wounded and many got psychologically affected. Poverty was rising. Banking, agriculture, capital, mills, factories, cotton gins, public buildings, roads, railways, private houses, furniture—all were destroyed or badly affected.

Robert Somers, an English traveler recounts his observations on his visit to Charleston. He draws a dreadful picture of the destruction in the South, “planters were reduced from affluence to poverty—her merchants were scattered to the four winds of heaven—her shopkeepers closed their doors or contrived to support a precarious existence on contraband of war” (Fleming, 1966, p. 9). The Charleston blockade had made people's lives miserable. The houses had lost their paint, in Somers words, “seldom has there been more hopeless chaos out of which to construct a new order of things than Charleston presented in those days” (Fleming, 1966, p. 9).

The Report of Joint Committee on Reconstruction 1865 (pp 92, 109) reveals some deep seated hatred in there bels' hearts for the Unionists and the freed Negroes. The hatred was further intensified by their humiliating experiences in prison. The union man was the least welcomed in
social spheres. The old rebels were gaining strength in the public and were running “five well sustained” newspapers in Memphis, four in Nashville and a weekly in every important village. The report accepted the reality that although some fought the war reluctantly for the South and some were forced into it but the collective hatred was a common phenomena for the Yankees(Fleming, 1966, p. 36-38).

B C Truman, a New Englander, who served during the war as a staff officer and after the war as a secretary, was sent to investigate the situations in the South. In his report to the president, he defied the Northerners' persecution stories. He concluded: they might judge the Northerners with contempt but they did not take them for dead enemies though in some districts they were not marked safe.

The physical devastation is well expressed in Mitchell’s account which leaves the reader with a peculiar psychological effect. Before the siege of Atlanta, Scarlett managed to escape Tara with the help of Rhett Butler, who provided them with an old horse. The deadly run tired her but she arrived safe. She found Tara standing but in shabby conditions. She was informed about her mother's death and the cotton burning. Tara was no longer a “haven or a security”. Her father was weak and old, her sisters were ill, “Melanie frail and week, … negroes looking up to her with childlike faith … acres desolate, barns ruined, …. sickness, hungry mouths, helpless hands plucking at her skirts” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 410). After coming back, Scarlett took the responsibility of Tara and its residents. Food was scare, “was too tired even to feel pleasure at the sight of turnips and cabbages” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 418).

Sherman was marching through Georgia from Atlanta to the sea. The Yankees looted and burnt the property, “There were hundreds of homes in flames” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 455). The marching army came to Tara as well. Scarlett had put the hard yielded cotton in the negro headquarters. They searched for valuables but could only find the hidden cotton in the nigger quarters which they set on fire. And along with that “went the tax money and part of the money which was to see them through this bitter winter” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 457).

Scarlett embodies the struggle that most of the Southern families had to go through. She rebuilt Tara with her efforts but the rising Confederate Taxes made it difficult for her to sustain it. John Wilkerson, (their previous overseer and present Freedmen’s Bureau official) threatened her to buy Tara for his wife, if she failed to pay Taxes. At this crucial moment, she decided to go to Atlanta to ask Rhett Butler for help, who had made a lot of money from the war.

The Yankee army had control over Georgia and Atlanta. They oversaw every walk of life, “No one could get a letter out of the post office without taking the Iron -Clad oath.” Even the marriage licenses were not issued without taking the loyalty oath. Most of the prominent citizens were in jail. The civil courts functioned but “at the pleasure of military” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 637) Nobody could vote who held office in the Confederacy.
By the end of the Civil war, there were some 3.5 million African American slaves in the United States. The 13th Amendment banned the slavery in all forms, and the Emancipation Proclamation (January 1, 1863) set all slaves free. The civil War ended legalized slavery but the deep rooted racism continued. The freed slaves ran to the Union lines. The immediate difficulty was how to employ them. The problem was sought in the Congressional militia act of July 1862 which allowed the “first official black regiment and ‘the First South Carolina Volunteers’ was formed”. The recruitment greatly increased but the racist attitude continued. They were paid less and given sub-standard medical care (Finseth, 2013, p. 131).

The Reconstruction saw its biggest opposition in the shape of Ku Klux Klan. The Military Reconstruction Acts and the prospects of enfranchising the blacks, the white supremacy was in danger. The formation of Klan was the result of these insecurities to keep in control the newly freed blacks. Keeping a control on the newly freed blacks, the aim was to defeat the Republicans and guard the interests of the Southern Whites. The strong action taken by the government in 1871 and 1872 broke the Klan’s backbone. Anyway their presence still continues (Jonathan M, 2014).

Though the Civil War brought devastation, it paved way for change. The Southern cities saw remarkable growth in expansion of railroad which enabled merchants to directly access the Northern markets and cities giving birth to a new burgeoning class of traders, railroad promoters, and bankers. The postwar society also witnessed new emerging social classes of landowners, black and white share croppers, black laborers and urban entrepreneurs (Foner, 2011, p. 600).

As the postwar era saw a great change in the Southern social structure, a new group of whites from the North—known as carpetbaggers by their opponents—started invading the Southern business spheres. They came to earn their fortune in politics and business. Besides, most of the union officers decided to stay to gain benefits as conquerors. They invested in lumber business and railroads. Scalawags, on the other hand, were southern whites, mainly republicans, who had been living in the South before the war. (Bragg, 2014)

Mitchell divides slavery into classes—with the house niggers on the top and the field hands at the bottom of hierarchy. She justifies slavery in the form of black subordination. The popular image of niggers as childlike in want of care is well expressed through the treatment that the slaves receive in the novel. Her depiction is the part of the discourse which says emancipation and black suffrage can do no good to this class.

The deep rooted ideology of slavery could not accept blacks as equal in the post war time. Furthermore, the growing blacks' insolence towards white added to the white’s hatred. Like some negroes passed insolent remarks at Scarlett while she was going back after meeting Rhett in jail. The rude remarks hurt her pride, “How dared they laugh, the black apes! How dared they grin at her, Scarlett O’ Hara of Tara!” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 573). Scarlett after taking the responsibility of Frank’s mill employed free darkies who bothered her enough, “free darkies are certainly worthless.” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 623). At the same time, Mitchell's depiction of blacksis
way positive. A Yankee woman asked Scarlett to find a good Irish girl for her as a servant. She advised her to have a black servant instead as they are trustworthy—if they hadn’t been “spoiled by the Freedmen’s Bureau” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 656).

Brushing aside their values and pride, the novel also implies people adapt to new demands. Mrs. Meriwether and May belle earned their livelihood by baking pies and selling them to Yankee officers (Mitchell, 1936, p. 544). Scarlett like other Southern women easily befriended the Yankees with her smiles as the Yankee officers were starving for such feminine associations. She knew well that she could easily make money with their help "the role she enacted was that of a refined sweet Southern lady in distress” (653; 38). She sold lumber to the scalawags and carpetbaggers who were building their homes. She also accepted invitation from the Yankee families and answered all their queries regarding South which they had picked form Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Mitchell, 1936, p. 654).

Men of good family out of poverty had accepted Republican positions. Ex-soldiers made money with carpetbaggers. Even the young girls from prominent families of Atlanta married Yankees officers without any guilt (because they had not seen the horrors of the war) (Mitchell, 1936, p. 717) Scarlett was of the opinion it was not the vote but money which invites change in life, “There was only one thing in the world that was a certain bulwark against any calamity which fate could bring, and that was money” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 635).

The analyzed and mentioned events from the history proper and the novel promote us to call in question the glorification of war. Abolishing its essence of glorification, the drawn investigation associates it with socio-economic and societal miseries. The binary opposition in the novel implies that the path to change is not as straight as it appears. The need for change and new values is challenged by those who are in love with the old ones. The novel helps us arrive at the negotiated discourse of progress and the old socio-political dominance that the Southern man once longed for.

6. Conclusion

GWTW probes into numerous questions regarding social history of the Civil War and Reconstruction: how the war incited patriotic feelings; how these feelings changed over the course of the war: what changed the very social fabric of the South; how this change affected the social relationships; how the changing social relationships influenced the role of women; how the ruined economy redefined the social classes; how a patriarchal patterns balanced themselves against the rising tenants of feminism; how the Southern agrarian values stood their weight against the industrial might of the North. Historical fiction and history proper bear the required faculty to answer these questions in logical, rational and comprehensive order.

The Civil War writings were dominated by the anti-slavery discourses. The recent historio graphical approach revisits the phenomenon with lens of comprehensive inquiry that underscores the anti-slavery sentiments, importance of slavery (in sustaining the economic and
social structure of the South), socio-economic elements, racial and gender issues, etc. Likewise, part of the larger discourse, GWTW comprehensively reconstructs the social history of the Civil War and Reconstruction. It underscores the typical Southern obsession with the ideals of war to preserve its institutions and customs. The novel also accentuates the antebellum change of Southern ideology which openly accepted the newly introduced federal policies and customs to compete with the developing North. The significance of the Civil War in American social and literary discourses is typified by its political, social and economic lessons that it taught to the American nation in particular and the whole world in general.

The novel also offers more complex discourses giving novel perspectives to recording history. Delineating a whole set of social, economic conditions in the decaying old South, the novel, with the weight of individual experiences, bestows a comprehensive insight into social economic structures of the Southern society during and after the Civil War. These individual experiences metaphorically evoke sturdy images of the Old and New South. Emphasizing the binary oppositions, the novel helps us build a balanced image of the South which enlists both the anti-and pro-slavery sentiments coupled with socio-economic, and political perspectives. Deeply rooted in the social and cultural context of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the novel does justice to the contemporary milieu and opens up new angles of comprehensiveness and inclusivity in history and historical fiction.

The novel reflects on the emotional responses to the Civil War. The emotional and psychological experience marks the novel a social-documentary which helps us understand the intricate response of a society to the concept of war. It enlightens us with the core social contemporary discourses through authentic individual, social, historical, economic, and political elements. The thematic significance of the characters' behaviors translates the novel into a comprehensive and authentic social discourse which educates us about the psychological traumas of war in a given society.

Works Cited:


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