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Reassessing the Old South: Intertextuality, Neo-Slave Narratives, and *The Wind Done Gone*

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Abstract

Gone with the Wind is a title that most of us are familiar with, both as a novel and as a movie. The novel, written by Southern-born U.S. writer Margaret Mitchell, quickly became a bestseller after its publication in 1936, breaking all sales records and winning the hearts of millions of readers. Nevertheless, as is often the case with novels dealing with the Civil War and the institution of slavery, it presents important flaws.

This thesis aims to reassess many of the misconceptions embedded in *Gone with the Wind*, doing so by reading it alongside one of its retellings, an unauthorized parody titled *The Wind Done Gone*, written by African American author Alice Randall. Special attention will be paid to the role that rewritings (especially those that fall into the genre of "neo-slave narratives") play in shaping new representations and claiming the right to tell a story from a different point of view. Hopefully, this will spark a conversation on themes related to history, memory, identity, and healing. In particular, the objective is to acknowledge the slave and African American experience, seeking to see beyond the stereotypes and misrepresentations that have long defined and confined it.

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Introduction

Throughout my university years, I had the opportunity to discover a world that was unknown to me; a world I had only heard about but had never actually paid too much attention to. Namely, the experience of enslaved people in the United States and the contemporary reality of African Americans today: a rich and complicated world, marked by diverse elements such as displacement, discrimination, and alienation, but also resistance, fights for equality, community, and love. To fully understand the African American experience today, one must look deep into its connection to the past and consider the misconceptions, stereotypes, and forms of aggression that black people have endured since they first set foot on American soil. Historiography and literature played a crucial role in perpetuating false narratives about them, increasing the hostility and superiority that white people profoundly felt and that led them to view them as an "inferior race." However, enslaved people and African Americans have found ways to resist this and, over the years, have searched for methods to overthrow white supremacy.

It is therefore the aim of this thesis to challenge some of these misconceptions embedded in historiography and mostly literature by paying attention to the voice of the "other," and by looking at the counter-narratives that black people have created to reclaim their voice and a long-overdue space for themselves. This is achieved by examining the role that "neo-slave narratives" have in altering known and twisted truths of the past, and especially by considering forms of rewriting of literary classics that force readers to see the other side of history. The main case study of this thesis is Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind*, read along with its retelling, Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone*. The objective is to understand why and how Randall's novel reassesses and reshapes some of the misrepresentations concerning black people, slavery, and the Old South found in Mitchell's national bestseller.

The first chapter offers a concise overview of the history of slavery and enslaved people in literature and historiography. First, I begin by exploring how "race" has been misconstrued by pseudo-scientific research over the years, especially in the United States, to see how this was reflected in the way black people were perceived. I then elaborate on the stereotypes and misrepresentations that have long defined, and unfortunately still

define, their experience: from the black face in Minstrel Shows, to stereotypes such as the Jim Crow, the Sambo, and the Beastly Savage for men, and the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Matriarch for women. This is followed by a discussion on the role that literature played in the dissemination of these ideas, focusing on some authors and texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Along with this, the role of historiography is also addressed, and specifically how the slave experience was compiled in archives over the years: thus, from the earliest interpretations of slavery by historians such as Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Kenneth Stampp, and Stanley Elkins, to the contemporary approaches of the 1960s that began to look at the archive from a different viewpoint. The chapter concludes with an analysis of "neo-slave narratives," the important contemporary narratives that, also beginning in the '60s, began to question popular narratives and ideologies about black people. This discussion should prompt themes related to trauma, remembering the past, producing identity, and finding ways to heal the wounds of the past.

The second chapter presents a small but meaningful digression on rewritings of literary classics, not only by African American authors. I introduce the concept of "intertextuality," to reflect upon its importance in challenging and/or praising older texts, and then the theory of the "Signifying Monkey," developed by Henry Louis Gates Jr., to explore the ways in which African American writers challenge the literary canon. I then present some cases of rewritings, first of canonical texts and then concerning the legacy of slavery. Specifically, regarding the first section, I compare William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to Margaret Atwood's Hag-Seed, followed by Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As for the second area, I examine: *The Confessions of Nat Turner* as first recorded by Thomas R. Gray and later reimagined by William Styron, to then arrive to *Dessa Rose* by Sherley Anne Williams; *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain and *My Jim* by Nancy Rawles; and finally, *Benito Cereno* by Herman Melville and *Middle Passage* by Charles Johnson. These examples demonstrate why offering a new view of a well-known story is, in some cases, essential to subverting stereotypes, assumptions, and racist representations.

The third chapter introduces the two central works of this thesis, *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wind Done Gone*. I begin by offering a general overview of *Gone with the Wind*, going through its publication and reception (in particular for its role as a "women's

book"), and then consider its overwhelming success and influence. I pay particular attention to its significance as a national and international bestseller, seeing how its popularity contributed to the spread of certain images about the South and its subsequent glorification. Following this, I turn to its rewriting, *The Wind Done Gone*, and, in particular, the controversies surrounding its publication: from the legal battles over copyright, to its publication as an "unauthorized parody" of Mitchell's novel. Ultimately, I consider the role of intellectual property in cases of rewritings of novels and begin to suggest why *The Wind Done Gone* "writes back" to *Gone with the Wind* in ways far too important to ignore.

The fourth and final chapter, then, features the two texts placed side by side in order to comparatively analyze them and see everything that *The Wind Done Gone* alters and reassesses with respect to *Gone with the Wind*. Accordingly, I begin by examining how the two novels deal with the institution of slavery and the stereotypes bestowed upon slaves, seeing how Randall's narrative is able to place the black experience at the center of her novel. I then review the portrayals of the Old and New South, with particular reference to the glorification of the "Lost Cause" found in Mitchell's novel. Next, I focus on "miscegenation," or racial mixing, and the trope of the "tragic mulatto," important themes that *The Wind Done Gone* highlights to uncover issues such as sexual exploitation and systematic rape prevalent in the Old South. Another section is built on motherhood, to see the difference between white and black motherhood as perceived in the two novels. Finally, I analyze the role of language and the power of words to show how words and racial slurs are powerful tools to maintain power dynamics in *Gone with the Wind*, and how language instead becomes a tool of resistance and identity in *The Wind Done Gone*. All of this serves to consider the importance of storytelling as a means of recovering the largely forgotten experience of slavery and of reinterpreting the past in a different, and perhaps more focused and accurate, light.

Chapter One
Silencing and Reclaiming Voices: Slavery in Literature and Historiography

In this first chapter, I would like to introduce some concepts that will be useful in the later sections. I will attempt to offer a fairly comprehensive overview of the slave past and the African American experience as it has been represented in popular culture, literature, and historiography. To achieve this, I will seek to break down themes related to stereotypes and false or distorted representations, failed and successful attempts to recover and understand the past, and new narratives and what they enable us to infer about the conditions of slaves and the lives of African Americans today. Bearing in mind, however, that it is always challenging to fully analyze these phenomena, considering their multiplicity and overall complexity. Overall, I am interested in discussing, first, the ways in which slaves and their following generations were silenced and/or misrepresented and, subsequently, how the collective struggles to reclaim these voices have taken place.

1.1 Representing the Black Experience

The way we perceive and understand the world around us is not neutral. Everything we encounter, both animate and inanimate, is automatically interpreted by ourselves based on multiple forms of knowledge, including the connections, assumptions, and stereotypes we create. According to Stuart Hall (1997, p.15), meaning, language, and culture are connected through representation, which is what enables us to understand the world and communicate with each other. Representation is neither natural nor neutral and depends on a series of "discourses"[1] that surround and define it, that is, how one speaks and thinks about something (Hall, 1997, p.44-45). On this basis, it can be argued that the very idea that differences between black and white people exist depends heavily on this

[1] Paul-Michel Foucault (1926-1984) coined this notion and used it to refer to the specific expressions people use to talk about or represent something at a particular time. Foucault wanted to discover how people understand each other and how shared meanings change over time. Rather than the meanings themselves, he was interested in the power relations created by discourses (Hall, 1997, p.42-43).

construction of forms of representation and knowledge. In this short section, I will try to review some of the most important pseudoscientific arguments about the difference between blacks and whites and show the consequent spread of stereotypes about slaves and black people in general.

It is common to perceive "race" as a natural form of classification, something that exists because nature determined it. Very little is known concerning the fact that before the eighteenth century, "races" did not exist and, in the past, skin differences among men were almost irrelevant in defining their role in society (Gossett, 1997, p.3). In ancient history, people recognized the differences between each other, but hardly were these reasons for conflict; far more important was what religion dictated and how a person behaved (Gossett, 1997, p.7). The first anthropological steps in the creation of "race" were taken by François Bernier, a French physician, who in 1684 published an article[2] detailing what he thought were the four categories for classifying people. The Europeans, which he did not discuss extensively but says that overall they possess different features; the Far Easterners, with distinctive faces and eyes; the "blacks," with flat noses, large lips, and white teeth; and the Lapps, who are small in stature and have large feet and shoulders (Gossett, 1997, p.32). In the eighteenth century, George Louis Leclerc Buffon grounded his theory upon the idea that the white race was the norm, claiming that white was the natural color of people and that the other races were only variations, not different species.[3] Climate, according to his theory, was the leading determiner of race and explained men's different colors and features (Gossett, 1997, p.35-36). The most significant contribution was given by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in 1775 with his doctoral thesis titled "On the Natural Variety of Man." Blumenbach divided human beings into five different categories using his collection of human skeletons (which is why he was called the "father of craniology"): the Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay; or according to their colors, the whites, yellows, blacks, reds, and browns. Similarly to Buffon, Blumenbach also regarded these differences as being driven by the environment, especially its combination with other factors, such as climate,

[2] The article was published anonymously in a Paris journal, the *Journal des Sçavans*, and titled "New Division of the Earth by the Different Species or 'Races' of Man that Inhabit It" (Gossett, 1997).
[3] Buffon worked on his theory for over fifty-five years (1749-1804). His most influential collection is the *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (Gossett, 1997).

resources, and soil. In the United States, Reverend Samuel Stanhope Smith shared the same ideas about the influence of the environment on human diversity. He argued that black people's progress was achievable only through better environmental conditions (Gossett, 1997, p.39-40). With his influential *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (1787), Smith asserted that whites were the superior race and blacks could become their equals only if they stopped "being Negroes" and, fundamentally, accepted their new environment and became white (Fredrickson, 1987, p.72). To this followed a new scientific ethnology by Dr. Samuel George Morton, who in his 1839 book *Crania Americana* claimed that blacks were inferior by nature and destined to have a separate and subordinate role in society. According to him, Caucasians were the legitimate descendants of Adam, making blacks part of a completely different and incompatible species with whites (Fredrickson, 1987, p.74-75). Morton used the classification created by Blumenbach and, working from skeletons of different brains, eventually concluded that Caucasians were the most intelligent group, whereas Ethiopians constituted the "lowest grade of humanity" (Jabari, 2007, p.46).

American racial prejudice existed in various forms since the seventeenth century, slowly building its foundation upon these (and many more) "scientific" and cultural theories that emphasized the idea that blacks were inherently inferior, thus legitimizing their enslavement (Fredrickson, 1987, p.2). Racism was necessary for a country that had proclaimed itself to be founded on equality, in which every man potentially could be self-made and independent, and yet one that was economically grounded on slavery. During slavery, the white population learned to view slaves differently and to treat them as a separate species, incompatible with the white American man. Among the many reasons why American slavery persisted for such a long time was whites' fear of being tainted and overpowered. In his *Notes on Virginia* (1785), Thomas Jefferson famously stated that the inclusion of black people in society would result in more divisions and would oppose "the real distinctions nature has made" (Jefferson, 1785, as cited in Fredrickson, 1987, p.4). Jefferson, a man who did not endorse slavery, though he owned a few slaves, and asserted in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal," thought blacks were ugly, smelly, and simplistic (Gossett, 1997, p.42).

Thus, it is quite easy to understand how the different discourses about slaves originated and the consequent rapid development of stereotypes about them. Every social and cultural practice we enact has some meaning that ultimately shapes what we do and influences how we perceive the things around us. Essentially, what we do creates discourses that will become the basis for other future discourses and narratives (Hall, 1997, p.44). In this way, the Minstrel Show, a popular form of entertainment of the early nineteenth century, produced major stereotypes of blackness that still influences the perception of African Americans today. During these shows, white actors put burnt cork on their faces to make them pitch black and parodied what they believed to be the behavior of slaves. Frederick Douglass, in his famous antislavery newspaper *The North Star* (1847-1851), labeled these actors "the filthy scrum of white society," denouncing them for further dehumanizing slaves (Lott, 1991, p.223). The Minstrel Show was a major form of entertainment in the United States for a long time and, while it drew heavily on the traditions of slaves distorting them, it also fashioned in white people a sort of appreciation and an almost fetishist fascination with their culture. Stuart Hall (1988) describes racism as a "play of repulsion and attraction"; the Minstrel Show indeed evidences both a willingness on the part of white audiences to ridicule slaves and an interest in and envy for a culture that was vibrant and rich (Lott, 1991, p.227). Nonetheless, the performances caused many stereotypes regarding slaves to permeate American culture, most famously the "Jim Crow" character created by Thomas D. Rice. Slaves were thought to be ignorant, obtuse, lazy, or hopeless "dandies" who believed themselves to be better than white people (Lott, 1991, p.245). Concomitantly, other sets of stereotypes also emerged portraying slaves (especially male slaves) as savages by nature, uncontrollable and unpredictable unless properly domesticated. Many slavery apologists believed that slavery was beneficial to them as a means to "civilize" them, and opposed the "savage Negro of Africa" to a docile version of the American slave, also called the "Sambo." The figure of the "Sambo" became very popular, and, for a long time, it was used to justify slavery and show how it was the only way to control a population that was uncontrollable by nature (Fredrickson, 1987, p.53-54). The idea of slaves as Sambos also ensured that slave owners felt safe, particularly after the Santo Domingo revolt and the outcomes of

the bloody Haitian Revolution.[4] Slave owners often dreaded that slaves would revolt and reassured themselves by thinking they had sufficiently tamed them; meanwhile, most slaves often pretended to be Sambos in order to survive and, perhaps, later plan their escape (Takaki, 1993, p.114).

Slave women occupied a very peculiar place in the period of slavery. Although responsible for holding families together and supporting the survival of men and children, they were constantly portrayed unable to have feelings of affection for their partners and offspring, resulting in their vulnerability to rape and separation from the family, which produced cycle of oppression that ensured the persistence of slavery. When we think about enslaved women, we often think of the "Mammy," the obedient servant of the white family who embraced white values and disliked "black behavior." The mammy stereotype established the image of the black woman as caring and loving, yet only toward the white family and children, while being harsh and vicious to her own children, ultimately forging the stereotype of the "matriarch," the bad mother incapable of taking care of her family. A separate but similar stereotype was the "Jezebel," the hypersexualized woman whose body was everyone's possession but her own. As a result, the troubled temperament of black children was explained by their uncaring mothers, while the supposed natural hypersexuality of black women explained the rapes, sexual assaults, and increased fertility and children. This was intended to establish an endless cycle that had to destroy the dynamics of black families and reinforce the belief that blacks had to remain slaves because they were incapable of living independently (Collins, 2009, p.72-75).

During and after slavery, many white people fundamentally believed that clear differences existed between them and black people. Whether it was because of the environment, the existence of different species, or noticeable differences in appearance and behavior, blacks were systematically dehumanized and regarded as inferior to whites in almost every aspect of life (Fredrickson, 1987). It is almost tragically humorous how narratives about black people have portrayed them as unintelligent but manipulative;

[4] The Haitian Revolution, which lasted from 1791 to 1804, was a violent revolt led by a group of freed slaves against the French government in Saint Domingue (Haiti) in order to abolish slavery and colonialism in the country. Saint Domingue became the first nation in the Americas to abolish slavery. Although some historians still debate over the relevance of this revolution, it produced important consequences that led to transformations in the world of Atlantic slavery (for example, many American slaves were inspired by it) (Fredrickson, 1987).

docile but savage; unattractive but desirable; uncivilized but culturally rich enough to be imitated.[5]

1.1.1 Slaves in the American Literary Tradition

Unsurprisingly, the whole set of stereotypes about slaves was also reflected in literature, especially in the plantation tradition of American literature. Slave life became a source of inspiration for many authors, and literature became a propaganda medium to show the slave plantation as a peaceful and happy world where people worked hard for the sheer pleasure of it (Jabari, 2007, p.59). I will now attempt to review some of the most important phases in the literary representation of slaves and African Americans in the United States. As with most things, there would be much more to say; this should serve as an introduction to concepts that will be expanded upon later.

The same stereotypes that had been fabricated to legitimize the institution and perpetuation of slavery (the Sambo, the Beastly Savage, the Mammy, and so on) began to be used by early American writers to show how the society in which they lived was righteous, acceptable, and not to be changed (Van Deburg, 1982, p.54-55). Early novels began to describe a society in which white people were inevitably the heroes and heroines of the story and thus represented the superior and more intelligent "race." In contrast, black people, usually portrayed as slaves, were belittled as minor characters and framed to demonstrate their simplicity and inferiority (Gossett, 1997, p.198). Early writers and poets played a critical role in forging future representations of slavery, eventually influencing both the subsequent literature and the lives of the slaves themselves, especially the sons and daughters of the first generation of slaves. The literature of these authors, i.e., the first American settlers, was largely based on other foreign works of literature and was didactic, sentimental, and orthodox-based. Hence, readers easily came to believe what was written, considering the religious lens under which it was presented to them (Van Deburg, 1982, p.54-55). Gradually, several different narratives about slaves

[5] To quote W.E.B. Du Bois (1935), "Everything Negroes did was wrong. If they fought for freedom, they were beasts; if they did not fight, they were born slaves. If they cowered on the plantation, they loved slavery; if they ran away, they were loafers. If they sang, they were silly, if they scowled, they were impudent… And they were funny, funny — ridiculous baboons, aping men!" (as cited in Jabari, 2007, p.40).

began to emerge. Many authors based their stories upon the assumption that slaves were initially "Noble Savages" in their native land and lived in an African paradise where simplicity and harmony prevailed. However, by the time they arrived in the New World and were put under bondage, their lives unavoidably turned to misery, as they were simply incapable of living in a developed and ordered society. The story of the slaves therefore inevitably became tragic; under slavery, all they could do was either surrender to their new conditions and become weak and submissive (therefore "happy"), or die miserably while trying to return to their former life (Van Deburg, 1982, p.55). For example, in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), we can see an early depiction of the stereotypical behavior of slaves, as they are portrayed as joyful creatures having little rational thought and critical intelligence (Gossett, 1997, p.198). Cooper's novel *The Spy* (1821) is credited with being one of the first texts to describe in detail the life of the African American slave from the perspective of the time. Caesar Wharton, the protagonist, became a literary *type* that inspired many future writers. His personality and physical appearance made this character both a stereotypical description of a slave but also a fairly defined person; thus, mixing the literary *type* with the literary *character*. Caesar is a house servant who has come to identify with his masters and their values; he is loyal and helpful, a "faithful old black" (Jabari, 2007, p.56). Physically, he is described as a sturdy man with distant eyes, a large nose and mouth, and a disproportionate figure. Simultaneously, he is a sensitive man who takes offense when being referred to as a "nigger"[6] and is inexplicably afraid of ghosts (Van Deburg, 1982, p.64). Many other novelists later emulated Cooper's description, including Edgar Allan Poe in "Journal of Julius Rodman" (1840) and in the short story "The Gold-Bug" (1843), where respectively we see an old man named Toby and the servant Jupiter who visibly resemble Caesar (Jabari, 2007, p.58).

The subsequent plantation tradition in literature can be seen in the works of John Pendleton Kennedy, William Gilmore Simms, and Dion Boucicault, where slave life is romanticized and portrayed as joyful and pleasant. Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832) represents the beginning of the plantation tradition in American literature. The tale features a Northerner who is at first horrified by slavery but changes his mind after

[6] In this thesis, the n-word will be used solely for explanatory purposes.

visiting the South. He sees affectionate "creatures" dancing, singing, and whistling day and night and concludes that slavery must be good for such simple-minded individuals (Jabari, 2007, p.59-60). In Simms' *The Yemassee* (1835), a character named Hector refuses to be emancipated as he believes that, once free, he will get drunk and die in misery (Jabari, 2007, p.60). It is known that Simms firmly believed that slavery had given peace and order to a cannibal population that either lived with the purpose of eating their fellow humans or with the fear of being eaten by them (Fredrickson, 1987). Similarly, in Boucicault's *Octoroon* (1859) slaves are so satisfied with their condition that they will do anything to please their masters and put on a good face for them. Even as they are about to be sold, they want to look good and let the buyers see "dem's happy darkeys" (Jabari, 2007, p.60).

During the Antebellum period and with the rise of the antislavery movement, romantic racialism, a doctrine that believed in racial differences between men but rejected the existence of a defined hierarchy among them, began to develop. An example is found in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), initially titled *The Man That Was a Thing* and published in the abolitionist journal *National Era* in 1851. The novel is credited with fostering the advancement of the abolitionist movement and the belief in the need for a civil war. Yet, it simultaneously contributed to the further popularization of stereotypes and distorted representations of slaves. Uncle Tom is the perfect example of a docile and indulgent slave who, supposedly because of the influence of Christianity, shows childish kindness even to the people who abused him (Fredrickson, 1987, p.110). He functions as an individual who endures all sorts of mistreatment and humiliation and simply accepts it. In *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison himself questioned Stowe's use of religion to condone such masochistic behavior. As a consequence, not only has this depiction led to the creation of the "Uncle Tom" stereotype, that is, a black person who is obliging, accommodating, and willing to please white people, but it has also become the epitome of black self-loathing and unprotesting acceptance of racial discrimination (Jabari, 2007, p.118).[7]

[7] In 1853, Stowe published *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where she defended herself against some of the accusations she received. For example, she mentions former slave Josiah Henson and says she took inspiration from him to create Uncle Tom, as he was religious and devout (Jabari, 2007, p.111).

The plantation narrative did not cease to be the most popular genre even following the Civil War. Some writers indeed attempted to create more truthful depictions of slaves and the slave life, but these certainly did not enjoy the same success as the dehumanizing and stereotypical renderings. While in antebellum society "Uncle Tom" was the most popular stereotype, in postwar times he was joined by that of the freed slave, unable to live independently and forced to live a life of misery and misfortune (Jabari, 2007, p.100). In 1877, Joel Chandler Harris created "Uncle Remus," the updated version of the African American slave. He presented him in a newspaper column and later wrote a book entitled *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Saying*. This stereotypical description was intended to portray the postwar slave as nostalgic for a time past, especially the time of the Antebellum South, who held great admiration for white people and their ideals while bitterly despising black people. A similar character, "Uncle Ananias," was featured in Harris' *Balaam and His Master and Other Sketches and Stories* (1891). Both characters became hugely popular and contributed to spreading the idea that slaves were happy, simple souls who functioned better during slavery. Freedom stood as a suicide camp for them. This can also be seen in Thomas Nelson Page's *In Ole Virginia* (1887), where he portrayed former slaves recalling plantation life as idyllic while failing to live in a post-war world that left them lonely and unhappy (Jabari, 2007, p.100-02). Page firmly believed that the faithful and loyal "old-time darkie" belonged to the slaveholding past and had now ceased to exist except in narratives. The freed slave was the "new issue"; he was altogether lazy and incompetent and could only be recovered under the leadership of white power (Fredrickson, 1987, p.260).

Admittedly, we must remember how this period also witnessed the extreme popularity of figures such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Robert Smalls, who exposed real-life experiences and complicated the stereotypical portrayals of white authors. However, we shouldn't be naïve in believing that the majority of the American population was interested in authentic stories rather than narratives that recalled their glorious past and justified their power (Jabari, 2007, p.102). Even by the end of the eighteenth century, caricatures and exaggerations about African Americans were the chief attraction in novels, short stories, magazines, children's books, and music. The white population absolutely relished in seeing images of black people behaving in primitive

ways or displaying strange behaviors. Within this context, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, first published in 1884, gave both Americans and African Americans considerable food for thought. The plot revolves around the slave Jim and little boy Huck who form a unique friendship; one discovers he has been sold and decides to flee Missouri, while the other seeks escape from a rule-based life he does not understand and an abusive father. The relationship between the two creates an ambivalent novel, marked both by highly stereotypical passages, where Jim is portrayed as superstitious and an inveterate liar and episodes where he is described as a real person and not a caricature. In fact, while the text contains an extraordinary number of racial slurs (the n-word is used 215 times), it also features some dialogue that challenges various prejudices about black people. Huck, for example, is convinced that black people are incapable of holding family ties ("It don't seem natural"), yet he recants once he witnesses Jim's nostalgia for his family. Huck also believes that black people are overly superstitious, but he himself becomes frightened after spilling salt and seeing the new moon (Jabari, 2007, p.108). Satire is also evident in one of the novel's most quoted moments, namely when Tom Sawyer's aunt Sally talks to Huck, who fabricates an accident to explain his delay. Aunt Sally asks him if anyone was injured, Huck replies no, and says "Killed a nigger." Aunt Sally goes on to say, "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt" (Gossett, 1997, p.434). In 1905, Thomas Dixon Jr. published *The Clansman*, the famous novel that later inspired the hugely successful film *The Birth of a Nation*.[8] Briefly, this story focuses on hero Ben Cameron as he leads the Klu Klux Klan on a mission to reclaim the South as white people's land and defeat African Americans and the idea of Reconstruction. This novel stands as a love letter to the white, especially Aryan, "race" and depicts African Americans the same way they were described a century earlier, despite being published on the doorstep of the twentieth century. Stupid, ignorant, criminals, murderers, incompetent—these are just some of the ways blacks are described. The novel also became a source of inspiration for Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (Jabari, 2007, p.130-31).

[8] *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) is one of the most controversial films ever made in Hollywood. It immediately became instrumental in spreading stereotypes and racist behaviors toward black people in America (Jabari, 2007, p.131).

What happened during, and after, the creation of these representations by white authors is a significant discourse that deserves proper consideration. I have tried to highlight some narratives that, although conflicting even among themselves, create a univocal view of the experience of African Americans and fail to report lives that cannot be only black or white. The African American experience is far more complex and multifaceted than the stereotypes that have long defined it. Each person subjected to slavery had a particular experience based on different and interconnected factors, such as gender, geography, trauma, health, identity, and displacement. In addition, each person had a voice, and while it is true that many voices were silenced and erased, some endured and evidenced some of the most incredible stories and achievements. Therefore, the questions are: How much do we know about the authentic African American experience? Where did most of these voices come from and where did they go? What is the role of historiography in defining what should be remembered and what should not? What happens when we decide to change established narratives and reinterpret a nation's history?

1.2 A Partial Historiography

Just like African Americans have been misrepresented and erased from the American literary canon they have also faced a similar fate in historiography. For a long time, history forgot about the true life experiences of slaves, and the body of historical work produced by historians reflected this, resulting in serious holes in the history of the United States of America. Professional passivity, lack of in-depth study, or simple disinterest are among the reasons why this happened and why modern perspectives on the past are still heavily influenced by it (Gibbs, 2012, p.196). It is interesting to consider how a country that participated in and fostered the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which forced Africans to leave their native countries, also refused to recognize their presence once they arrived. A presence that, as Toni Morrison wrote, "has shaped the body politic, the Constitution, and the entire history of the [U.S.] culture" (Morrison, 1993, p.9). Throughout slavery, the experiences of slaves went unnoticed; most slaves lacked the opportunity to speak for themselves, while those who could needed to find mediation from white people. After

slavery, instead, the slavery past became a difficult subject to address. White people had difficulty in facing a complicated past for which they were personally responsible, while black people sought to find bright moments in their past to be proud of, therefore they disavowed slavery and looked back to Africa before it was tainted. However, while it may be challenging, digging into the past is necessary to understand a present where discrimination still exists and must be fought. I intend to try to explore how gaps in historiography and the archive have developed and how scholars and historians have sought to address and fill those over time.

We should find it easy to understand how the history of slavery in the United States of America has been subject to various interpretations. Regarding slaves, reiterating how they were unable to personally and directly document their experiences for a very long time is trivial. Simply put, if you are legally not recognized as a person, it is unlikely that you will be allowed to express your opinions and testify about your life. Scholars have different opinions regarding the recovery of the slaves' life experiences. Some consider the gaps too large to be filled, while others seek to convert the lack of archives into a methodological instrument. Many scholars believe that enslaved individuals were subjected to a "social death" process[9] that made their existence almost invisible and the struggle for freedom a daunting task. This idea helps explain two fundamental phenomena. First, it explains why the archives on American slavery present major holes, as many personal accounts of slaves, such as letters, diaries, pictures, and documents, are missing. Second, it helps clarify why the attempt to recover this history invariably has to deal with these deficiencies and, therefore, can never be completely successful (Helton *et al*., 2015, p.5). For a long time, the historiography on American slavery has been biased at best. Not only were there large gaps and a "silence" surrounding the lives of slaves, but the only available historical records presented a limited and distorted reality created by those in power. We should remember that the slavery period paralleled the stabilization period of a newly emerging society that lacked a defined identity but longed to have it. Therefore, the contributions of the white and legally recognized American population

[9] The concept of "social death" is used by Orlando Patterson to describe the process in which slaves were deprived of personhood. The idea can be applied to many other situations, for example, Jewish people during the Holocaust (Helton *et al*., 2015). Patterson's idea of social death should be seen as a theoretical abstraction that creates a cultural logic. As such, it does not shed light on the actual social and political experiences faced by slaves and the struggle for change (Brown, 2009, p.1233).

certainly appeared more significant than those of a population considered not only non-American and therefore irrelevant to the nation but also biologically inferior (Gikandi, 2015, p.85). Other scholars, instead, assume a more positive outlook. Lacking extensive written records, it is difficult to determine with certainty the way many slaves experienced their condition; however, sometimes the very absence of testimony can itself speak volumes and some information can be gathered from data such as demographics. Indeed, slaves experienced a social death that made their lives invisible, to the extent that much of their lives' stories were forgotten or never told. However, this does not imply that they themselves became impotent or culturally silent. Many slaves were in fact able to maintain some of the traditions they had in Africa; and, although we may not have many personal accounts in the archives of their lives, there was nonetheless a tradition and manner of living that continued over time. Moreover, the very idea of silence and resistance to the brutalities of slavery demonstrated their humanity and willingness to survive (Brown, 2009, p.1241-42). As Vincent Brown argues, "If studies of slavery would account for the outlooks and maneuvers of the enslaved as an important part of that history, scholars would do better to keep in view the struggle against alienation rather than alienation itself" (Brown, 2009, p.1248). Generally speaking, it can be claimed that slaves were invisible to most people and faced many barriers in sharing their experiences (in fact, much of their history has been lost). This led to scarce archives and historiography that forgot about them for a long time. Nevertheless, slaves have also been able to resist and fight against silence and alienation, maintaining their traditions and validating their presence in the country. The archive can be as small or as large depending on what we believe qualifies as testimony. Slaves may have been socially and culturally dead to most Americans, but their legacy and aspirations survived in different forms within their communities.

1.2.1 Early Interpretations, 1900-1959

Black people have been talking about themselves in various ways (in Africa and America) since before the Civil War. A prime example is the huge collection of slave narratives, which chronicled the life experiences of many slaves and bore firsthand

witness to the effects and consequences of slavery. Other examples are private letters, personal diaries, wills, songs, church records, objects, and so on. However, for a long time, none of these mediums were considered reliable. Many historical and literary scholars have long questioned their validity and ability to testify to the effects of American slavery (Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p.2). At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, a new and increasing interest in the history of African Americans began to develop. More and more blacks called on scholars to address the experiences of African Americans, believing that the time had come for historiography to fully acknowledge and explain their presence in the country. Black intellectuals, on the other hand, recognized that popularizers rather than scholars had written history up to that point and that the only way to defeat racism was to directly confront the archives that had been produced out of violence and colonial ideology (Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p.2). One of the most prominent black thinkers of the period was certainly W.E.B. Du Bois,[10] who offered groundbreaking contributions to the history of African Americans. Notable among his many publications was the survey about the black past in Africa and America, entitled *The Negro* (1915). This work comprised the historical knowledge obtainable at the time and new anthropological studies, such as those of Franz Boas. Both Du Bois and Boas were strictly opposed to the pseudoscientific theories that claimed black people were biologically inferior to white people (Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p.6). Du Bois also openly discussed this in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and his autobiography *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), where he referred to "race" as a social construction with countless implications. Moreover, in 1909, Du Bois was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), one of the most influential associations for the welfare and civil rights of African Americans in the country. In the early years of its existence, Du Bois was the only black member; many others joined subsequently (Gossett, 1997, p.446). *The Crisis* was the official magazine of the association, notable for providing a starting point for many writers, poets, and artists of the Harlem Renaissance (Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p.47). Another notable figure was Carter

[10] William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, better known as W.E.B. Du Bois, was born in 1868 and died in 1963. In 1895, he became the first black person to receive a doctorate and Ph.D. from Harvard. His dissertation was titled *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p.5).

Godwin Woodson,[11] founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) and the *Journal of Negro History* (JNH) (Meier and Rudwick, 1986). The *JNH* was founded in 1916 to address the unending effects of slavery on African Americans. That is to say, the social, economic, and political consequences of the institution. The journal also contributed to the creation of "slavery studies." Woodson and his collaborators incorporated real testimonies and original documents of slavery (including from Woodson's own family), transforming the very idea of the archive and "counter reading it" (Helton *et al*., 2015, p.2), implementing it with letters, speeches, autobiographical stories, posters, wills, and more. They also prompted more people to collect materials within their families (Stevenson, 2015, p.700).

However, while the century marked an increased involvement of black intellectuals, like Du Bois, Woodson, and many others, it also paralleled a greater expansion of racist thought among white intellectuals. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips (U.B. Phillips) was a leading figure in the field of slavery historiography. His contributions quickly became both influential and controversial. For instance, according to Du Bois, he was able to "whitewash the whole institution of slavery" (as cited in Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p.29). In 1918, he published *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply and Employment of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, where his main focus was on what the institution of slavery had done for slaves. Essentially, according to Phillips, slavery had benefited slaves. His idea was that slavery had been good for slaves because it had given them civilization, for he viewed slaves as happy and loyal workers who both accepted and needed subordination (Stevenson, 2015, p.713). Nowadays we can easily discern how distorted this assumption is and how it could only reinforce stereotypes and misconceptions about black people as inferior and incompetent. At the time, Phillips' study became widely accepted by white intellectuals. After all, it conveniently explained the persistence of slavery and shifted the blame away from slaveholders, slavery advocates, and the country itself. A year after the publication of *American Negro Slavery*, the *JNH* reprimanded Phillips for not understanding the true experiences and mindsets of slaves, arguing that this failure contributed to the creation of a major flaw in the work

[11] Woodson was a child of former slaves and grew up in poverty. He started high school at the age of twenty, later attended the University of Chicago, and then managed to become the second black student to be awarded a doctorate from Harvard University (after Du Bois) (Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p.1).

(Stevenson, 2015, p.700). After nearly four decades of Phillips' arguments and school of thought being the most popular, historian Kenneth Stampp contrasted them. In 1956, he published his study on slavery entitled *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. Kenneth became interested in racial injustice in the '30s and developed his theory to shed new light on the experiences of slaves. While Phillips believed slavery had been a good institution for slaves, Kenneth strictly opposed this view, arguing that it had been demeaning at best. Slaves were certainly not content in their position but rather fought to survive. A few years later, historian Stanley Elkins focused on slave behavior as a consequence of the environment. In 1959, he published his work entitled *Slavery: A Problem of American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Fredrickson, 1987). He claimed that the (apparent) docility of slaves was the result of enslavement, fundamentally using similar arguments to those of Phillips, but from an environmental rather than a racial perspective (Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p.32).

Overall, it can be said that the historiography of slavery from the beginning until the mid-twentieth century was primarily guided by white intellectuals and their research. While black intellectuals made important contributions to the field, their work became recognized only later in the century. Phillips played a huge role in leading the way to a new interest in slavery, but he missed the mark insofar as he followed the perspective of masters rather than slaves. Stampp and Elkins, on the other hand, took a more psychological and environmental approach, which indeed focused more on the slaves themselves. In Elkins' case, however, it resulted in an oversimplification of the slaves' response to the conditions of enslavement. One thing all three of these historians did was increase the interest in the historiography of American slavery, eventually leading to new and more accurate interpretations at the end of the century (Meier and Rudwick, 1986).

1.2.2 Contemporary Approaches, 1960-present

With the Civil Rights Movement and, more specifically, the onset of the 1960s, history scholars began to work more actively and vigilantly to document the history of African Americans. As they started to gain more access to sources, resources, and open-mindedness, they began to investigate deeper into what slavery could tell them in subtle

ways (Gibbs, 2012, p.197). During these years, black activism made African American history "fashionable" and interesting for many people who knew little about it but cared about the rights of black people. Therefore, along with the beginning of a period of protest, came a quantitative jump in scholars contributing to the development of slavery historiography. Both young new scholars and the older generation who moved their emphasis to black studies began to take an interest in the topic (Meier and Rudwick, 1986).

Before the '60s, numerous historians had centered their theories upon the narrative of passive victimhood, namely, the proposition that slaves had accepted their subjugated condition and, indeed, internalized it. As the '60s came along, this idea was radically challenged. The focus shifted to the slaves' forms of resistance, consequently acknowledging the agency they showed in attempting to resist abuse and subjugation. This does not imply that scholars ceased seeing the institution of slavery as a source of oppressiveness and degradation, rather they sought to place more emphasis on the personhood of slaves and what they managed to accomplish in order to survive and be remembered (Gilbert, 2018, p.227-28). Several historians made notable contributions that affirmed the pivotal role of slavery in the American experience. Notable works include John Blassingame's *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972), Eugine Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974), Herbery Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (1977), and Thomas Webber's *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865* (1978) (Meier and Rudwick, 1986). They all focused on different aspects of the slave experience, employing new sources to uncover hidden aspects, such as slave narratives, diaries, bills, demographic data, and, overall, expressive culture. This unleashed a quantitative analysis that was hitherto considered unreliable (Gilbert, 2018). Slavery came to be seen as a social system, causing historians to focus both on the technical specifics of the institution of slavery and the records that displayed the lives and productions of slaves (Rushdy, 1999, p.26). For instance, these scholars and many others looked at the role of the black family as a site of resistance, as they dug into the archives and used bills, birth records, and plantation inventories. Blassingame underlined how, for

the slaves, family was a survival device. Gutman challenged the Moynihan Report[12] by publishing a study containing birth records and plantation inventories to illustrate how black family ties survived under slavery. Webber, instead, relied on slave narratives and songs as specimens to show the importance of family and community. At the same time, they addressed culture in slave communities. While many people, following popular beliefs, thought that slaves had lost a sense of culture and were therefore "uncivilized," new scholars focused instead on the dual nature of African and American culture. They came to believe that slaves were not simply subjects of a culture that was being forced on them but were co-developers. Webber described this phenomenon as "a deep river with great African headwaters," pointing out that slave resilience also occurred through an interweaving of cultures (Gilbert, 2018, p.234). Many scholars began to criticize Elkins' theory, which, as we have seen, claimed that slaves had become docile as a result of slavery. They showed how the character of "Sambo" was a mask, a way to survive, therefore it did not derive from slavery but rather was produced to defeat it. The very process by which slaves were able to create their own culture outside of bondage can be used as an illustration (Rushdy, 1999, p.31).

Therefore, by the end of the 1960s and in the following decades, the history of slavery fully came to be written "from the bottom up." While historians were studying and reanalyzing the past, activists were shaping a better present and future. The Black Power Movement played an important role in strengthening discourses about the black past and the need for a comprehensive historiography of slavery. Many historians of slavery acknowledged the importance of the movement; Genovese argued that Black Power enabled a "decisive turn in the understanding of our national experience and the black experience" (as cited in Rushdy, 1999, p.53). In his 1993 work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy argues that slavery is at the core of modernity. For economic reasons, slavery embodied "capitalism without clothes," thus a central process in the very construction of modern thought as it involved concepts such

[12] In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan published *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, a report on poverty in black communities in the United States. Among many things, Moynihan asserted that the current social conditions of blacks were a direct result of slavery. Many intellectuals highly criticized this report for racism, sexism, the use of stereotypes, and, overall, a failure to understand the role of racial discrimination in explaining the condition of black people (Rushdy, 1999, p.42).

as capitalism, national identity, and cultural integrity (Gilroy, 1993, p.15). Simultaneously, slavery represents a modern phenomenon because of cultural reasons having to do with the individual. Concepts such as dislocation, double consciousness, otherness, political racism, which are notions that we ordinarily assume as only part of the modern world, were well present in the diasporic condition produced by slavery (Gilroy, 1993, p.2). Moreover, according to Amin-Addo and Lima (2017, p.5), Gilroy stresses the importance of reexamining the history of slavery, both material and representational, as a way to understand both the continuity of slavery and the current African American experience.

If we consider slavery as a modern phenomenon, it means that it needs to remain relevant today. Knowing and understanding the past allows us to look at the present differently; in this case, it helps us realize why the experience of African Americans is unique, diverse, and constantly shaped by multiple factors. Changing our ideas of archives and historiography is necessary to see this multiplicity and reassess a past that misguided ideologies have distorted. While the black experience must be documented in more objective ways, it must also have a political purpose; in other words, it must be crafted to resonate in today's climate. As I have tried to illustrate, African American and Diaspora studies have become an increasingly valuable field of study over the years, but to be effective they must continue to work to positively impact the lives of black Americans today. Political inclusion, as we know, does not yet mean equality. This is why we must continue to reevaluate and dig into our past as a means to determine how we can address today's political contradictions and ultimately arrive at substantive equality (Helton *et al*., 2015, p.10-11).

1.3 The Rise of Neo-Slave Narratives

We have observed how slavery has occupied and still occupies a relevant role in the American landscape. In one way or another, it has been discussed in many fields. I have attempted to briefly describe the case of mainstream culture, literature, and historiography. In each of these instances, we have seen how the representation of slaves and their experience has been either inaccurate or one-sided; often based on false beliefs,

presuppositions about white superiority, and a univocal and static vision of history. While addressing the changes in the way we understand an archive, I have only briefly mentioned the topic of slave narratives as a genre that was reevaluated in the 1960s. Slave narratives were the autobiographies written by slaves during and after slavery and, despite offering a unique glimpse into the lives of slaves, for a long time they were not considered reliable sources. There are several reasons behind this. To begin with, it was quite difficult to imagine that slaves could write on their own and articulate their reflections, as they were deemed too ignorant for such an intellectual endeavor. Secondly, slave narratives were in fact propaganda mediums, created to show the harsh conditions of slavery and raise awareness among the white population. They were typically sentimental, picaresque, and spiritual,[13] perhaps with exaggerated descriptions, and produced under the patronage of white abolitionists, thus it was difficult to determine exactly when the slave was in control (Spaulding, 2005, p.10). Then, as we mentioned, the situation changed: slave narratives began to be studied as possibly flawed but nevertheless precious documents, whose authors told important truths in indirect ways, and so they were used by historians to determine what slave life was really like. And, just as importantly, during the '60s, this recovery coincided with a redefinition of the narrative methods used to understand the slave experience (Spaulding, 2005, p.4).

Along with a redefinition of the experience of slavery, a new form of slave narrative arose in the late 1960s. The neo-slave narrative,[14] that is, a contemporary narrative about the slave past that borrows heavily from antebellum slave narratives, began to gain ground among literary genres. We can argue that these years, shaped by the civil rights struggles, bore similarities to the Civil War years, at least concerning the determination to transform and redefine the black experience. A postmodern approach to slavery fit precisely into this context of significant structural changes and became critical to open up new perspectives on both the past and the present (Rushdy, 1999, p.7). Much like during the Civil War and the abolitionist movement, this process involved forming a "political act

[13] Slave narratives borrowed from the sentimental novel the idea of giving dramatic descriptions to trigger emotional responses; from the picaresque novel the episodic construction and the hero's journey; and from the conversion narrative the suggestion that religion is what ultimately leads to freedom (Spaulding, 2005, p.10).

[14] The term "Neo-slave narrative" comes from Bernard Bell. He coined the term "neoslave narrative" (without a hyphen) in 1987 in his book *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (Rushdy, 1999).

of narration," hence something that was supposed to alter popular narrations and reshape ideologies (Spaulding, 2005, p.4).

A. Timothy Spaulding (2005, p.4) observes that neo-slave narratives are "designed to intrude upon history as a means to re-form it," meaning that contemporary authors create them to uncover aspects of the slave experience that were absent from historical slave narratives and accounts. Similarly, Ashraf H. A. Rushdy claims that "the present is always written against a background where the past is erased but still legible," thus emphasizing the significance of the past, and its understanding, as a means of confronting present situations (as cited in Anim-Addo and Lima, 2017, p.4). These new authors, in other words, seek to create new stories about slaves that, in various ways, can connect with black people in the present. The goal is to provide the new reader with more clarity towards the past while also helping the social changes of the present (Spaulding, 2005, p.5). Moreover, the purpose is to reform slave narratives and historical representations, not simply by empowering slaves with a voice but also by challenging historiography itself. This requires authors to completely re-set their perspectives. Neo-slave narratives are meant to challenge historians' claim to objectivity by showing how an archive can be composed of different types of records, thus not only those written documents that appear rational and reliable. To understand all the nuances of the past and present, narratives must be subjective, alternative, and perhaps even fantastic and unrealistic (Spaulding, 2005, p.2-3). Within this context, it is interesting to remark that the first text to be considered a contemporary slave narrative (at least by white scholars) was William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967), a retelling of Nat Turner's *The Confessions of Nat Turner: The Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Virginia* (1831), written by Thomas Grey, a Southern lawyer who interviewed Turner before his execution. Indeed, the novel appeared to be written from the slave's point of view and featured the typical conventions of antebellum slave narratives. We will elaborate more on this later; as of now, what is interesting is that this text opened up new discourses on what contemporary slave narratives should and should not be (Rushdy, 1999, p.4-5). Many authors responded to this text by defining the neo-slave narrative genre in a narrower sense. This means that neo-slave narratives aimed, firstly, at preventing white appropriation of the black experience, such as in the case of Styron, a white man using a

slave's voice, and secondly, at making art resonate with society, ensuring that the current era of Black Power could have a rightful impact in artistic expressions as well, and vice versa (Rushdy, 1999, p.6). These narratives, then, have the possibility of becoming a hybrid space; crafted between the creativity of the new author and past narratives, between history and imagination, and between the freedom of the slave and that of today's man (Spaulding, 2005, p.11). Examples of such texts are Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982) and *Middle Passage* (1990), Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose* (1986), David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* (1975), and many more (Spaulding, 2005). Each of these texts, and many others (we will see the case of the rewritings of canonical texts), reform the past differently. Some aim to portray the black individual and all its facets, somewhere between the good and the bad; others focus on the role of women; and others seek to mark the ability of the past to intrude into the present, sometimes with negative consequences. Briefly, each text possesses its own characteristics, but ultimately they all share the goal of presenting different narratives beyond the established ones (Spaulding, 2005).

In the two following sections, I will attempt to explore some of the ways in which neo-slave narratives work both to reevaluate the past of slavery and to study the multifaceted aspects of the current black experience. I will break down themes of trauma, memory, identity, and healing and seek to illustrate the intertwining of past and present.

1.3.1 Processing Trauma and Remembering

Unquestionably, slavery was a traumatic experience. Enslaved people experienced feelings of alienation, physical and physiological breakdown, terror, isolation, exploitation, and more (Anim-Addo and Lima, 2017, p.9). The Reconstruction era contributed to their traumatic experience: it gave them hope of finally being integrated into American society, but that hope was quickly erased by new forms of racial segregation. The very term "African American" was coined after the failure to be recognized as full citizens. African Americans have to live with a "double consciousness," as outlined by Du Bois, a condition of identity fragmentation, as they

have one perception of themselves but also have to deal with others from the people who see them and judge them solely based on their skin color. This condition may make them live with the constant perception of being regarded as outsiders (Eyerman, 2002, p.4-5). Neo-slave narratives urge us to reconsider this trauma and look at its manifestations in the present-day world. As readers, we are challenged to recognize the trauma and violence on which the group's identity is based, being made legible to us, and to reflect and act on their implications (Anim-Addo and Lima, 2017, p.4).

The thing about trauma is that it can be individual, as seen in the case of slaves, but it can also develop into a cultural process. It can become both a collective trauma and a collective memory. Over the years, scholars and authors have come to realize that not only did slavery have a crushing impact on the people who personally experienced it, but it also transcended time, making slavery a traumatic experience in retrospect. One reason why slavery has become such a prominent topic in recent years is because revisiting and remembering the past has been used as a way to explore a trauma that still affects many people (Eyerman, 2002, p.6). Scholars refer to this process as "postmemory;" a memory from the past that resonates with the present, acting as a "haunting condition" that torments the person with past images and stories (Keizer, 2008, p.1650). Marianne Hirsch, who coined the term, uses it referring to the generations of Jews that have not experienced the Holocaust yet have received its memory from the survivors' stories and silences, and says that "Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through projection, investment, and creation" (as cited in Keizer, 2008, p.1650). As such, trauma and collective memory must be understood and reflected upon, or else they become oppressive and eventually affect group identity (Eyerman, 2002, p.8). Collective memory enables the group to understand its past and envision its future, hence establishing an identity. Literary works become instrumental in this memory process, most notably in terms of intertextuality (which we will discuss later), because they take the individual memory process and turn it into a collective experience, where everyone from the past to the present is called upon (Eyerman, 2002, p.2-3). Neo-slave narratives, untethered by time and space and disrupting conceptions of fiction and reality, hold the potential to reshape history and compel readers to enter a world of imagination and liberation. Slavery

and its memory, in this way, become sites of discovery and continuous questioning (Spaulding, 2005). Each time we remember, we process and reprocess information; we reshape and give new meaning to what we know; we transform what is unclear into something coherent (Lowenthal, 1985, p.319).

Added to this is the concept of "rememory," used by Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved* (1993). This novel is a contemporary slave narrative that borrows extensively from the gothic novel genre and employs it as a way of rethinking the slavery past. The gothic novel fits into this context since it allows the author to develop themes such as "the repressed individual unconscious, the cultural anxieties of an increasingly complex social world, and the abstract nature of evil" (Spaulding, 2005, p.62). Moreover, this genre allows Morrison to approach slavery as a concrete phenomenon, suggesting how slavery is the true frightening element of the novel rather than the supernatural elements featured in it. *Beloved* follows the lives of Sethe and Denver, mother and daughter, who, after the Civil War and slavery, live in a house haunted by the spirit of Sethe's eldest daughter. Throughout the story, Beloved, the daughter, makes an appearance and forces Sethe to confront her past, including how she killed her in order to save her from enslavement, and all the abuses she suffered during slavery (Spaulding, 2005, p.67-68). In this sense, rememory represents this ability of the past to permeate the present; it stands for its everlasting re-emergence that allows us to vivify past experiences, regardless of whether we were a part of them.[15] Rememorying the past involves concretizing something that appears abstract to us. In *Beloved*, rememory obliges readers to confront the history of slavery by endowing the past with a physical presence, and, just as Sethe is obliged to confront her past, so are we (Spaulding, 2005, p.72). In the case of neo-slave narratives, I would argue, the notion can be applied insofar as these texts succeed in presenting slavery as a concrete yet also visionary event. Morrison (1990) mentions an interesting aspect regarding slave narratives. Although they consist of personal records of lives, they hardly ever detail the inner lives of the slaves. For Morrison, writing means using her memories and those of others, but it becomes challenging when others, in this case, slaves,

[15] Quoting from the novel, Sethe tells her daughter Denver, "Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and blade of grass of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who was never there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you" (as cited in Spaulding, 2005, p.73).

left little evidence of their psyche. She argues that imagination is the key to filling this gap. To this, she adds, "If writing is thinking and discovery and selection and order and meaning, it is also awe and reverence and mystery and magic" (Morrison, 1990, p.111). To be clear, this is not to suggest that the authors of neo-slave narratives have the right to entirely reimagine the history of slavery or fabricate the life stories of people who existed. Rather, it emphasizes the distinction between facts and truth: the facts of slavery, which exist by evidence, and the truth, which requires introspection and imagination. By examining images left behind, searching for truth in small details, in rhetorical speeches, and in everyday actions, we can start then to reconstruct the lives of slaves and arrive at a kind of truth about their experience (Morrison, 1990).

Based on what I have written so far, we can say that neo-slave narratives serve as a bridge between remembering and forgetting. Both acts (to remember and to forget) are crucial in the history of slavery and emancipation. Thinking about the Holocaust, efforts are being made right now to leave as much testimony as possible on the events before the last survivors pass away. This means leaving interviews, books, diaries, photography, hence everything that ensures Jewish history is remembered (Keizer, 2008, p.1650). When it comes to American slavery, the issue is more complex. For a long time, instead of remembering it, people tried to forget the atrocities of the institution; to put it aside as a violent and unhappy chapter that benefited neither white nor black people. This is something many slaves did, who, after freedom, looked towards the future voluntarily wanting to forget the past, but it was also done by black people who came later. Many of Du Bois' contemporaries, for example, refused to remember slavery and to look at the cultural expressions of slaves (Eyerman, 2002, p.75). Narratives, in this sense, are channels that force us to remember. For a long time, people have sought to forge a new identity by forgetting the violence underlying the American experience as a whole. Nowadays, through new forms of storytelling, we are given the opportunity to face the past head-on and the past trauma is unearthed to understand who the black person is today (Rushdy, 1999). Historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi says that "all true knowledge is anamnesis, all true learning an effort to recall what has been forgotten," which means that every attempt to recover the distant past by anyone who identifies with it and wishes to

rediscover it carries with it a retrieval of some new knowledge and makes what seems arcane come alive (as cited in Lowenthal, 1985, p.319).

1.3.3 Producing Identity and Healing

According to Stuart Hall (1990, p.233-34), there are two ways of understanding cultural identity. The first considers identity as an essence, the existence of a single culture that is shared by people with the same history. It is stable and immutable, with its meaning remaining unchanged over time and space. The second, on the other hand, recognizes that within a community there may exist points of similarity but also differences. It does not involve having a stable identity, but rather considering the discontinuities that exist within the group, while projecting towards the future, hence not only looking at what the group is now but also at what it will become. Under this second notion, identity is a process. It changes according to time—through conflicts, defeats, and political changes—and according to place—due to migration, diaspora, and urbanization (Anim-Addo and Lima, 2017, p.12). Memory and trauma play a significant role in this process of establishing a collective identity. Trauma represents a juncture of identity loss or distortion; something that affects the group and prompts doubt about established certainties. Simultaneously, through collective memory, traumatic experiences can become a site for the creation of a new cultural identity. As such, memory, trauma, and new representations, such as contemporary slave narratives, enable a group to mutate and, following Hall's second definition, to project itself into the future (Eyerman, 2002, p.1-2).

As we have seen, between the 1970s and 1980s, we witnessed a desire to redefine the history of American slavery while taking into account the contemporary identity of African Americans. This meant asking the question: How does the history of slavery affect the identity of people today? Neo-slave narratives, which emerged along with the Black Power movement, which dismantled the idea of a stable American identity, are intended to highlight precisely this conflict. The slavery past is reexamined and the damage it caused is confronted to face the identity debate (Rushdy, 1999). This "imaginative rediscovery" is necessary to yield an "imaginary coherence" to the past, thus

to diasporic movements and slavery, and make it possible for current identities to mutate with it (Hall, 1990, p.224). Cultural identity, naturally, is still based on history, but it must also see all its nuances; hence, it must be forged with memory, imagination and narrative, something that contemporary slave narratives allow (Hall, 1990, p.226). Identity is thus achieved through "retrospect and perspective, memory and anticipation"; by looking into oneself and others, into the past and the present (Lowenthal, 1985, p.324). To some extent, antebellum slave narratives aimed to do the same: create a new identity for the slave. Not only did they aspire to demonstrate the slaves' humanity and their fight for freedom, but they also wanted to portray slaves as individuals with a voice, thus with an identity prepared to emerge and change. Neo-slave narratives operate in the same way insofar as they take the histories of slaves as the source for the notion of personhood and slavery as the past to be reconsidered in light of current circumstances (Spaulding, 2005).

Therefore, cultural trauma can be successfully addressed thanks to collective memory and the creation of a collective identity. Neo-slave narratives become instrumental in helping new generations to come to terms with a difficult past that still affects them (Eyerman, 2002). Throughout the years, scholars have commonly agreed and understood the major damages done by the slave trade, yet there are still doubts on how to offer justice to the people involved and those who came after. Slavery seems to represent a great open wound that is striving to heal but is far too deep to be cured (Anim-Addo and Lima, 2017, p.11). Perhaps, neo-slave narratives are part of what allows us to not necessarily heal this wound, but rather to understand why it is there. If the past is seen as jumbled fragments, these texts help reassemble the pieces, restoring a fullness, even if it is imaginary, of both the past and the present (Hall, 1990).

Chapter Two
Rethinking Modern Narratives: Intertextual Case Studies

In this chapter, my intention is to employ what I have discussed above—namely, the stereotypes and misrepresentations of slaves and African Americans, and the struggle for the vindication of a truthful narrative (via neo-slave narratives)—to present some examples of how the black experience (and not only) has been re-told in contemporary literature by African Americans. I will begin by introducing the term "intertextuality" within literary studies, then discuss the theory of the "Signifying Monkey," which is more specific to the African American narrative. These terms will reveal their connection to neo-slave narratives and the already mentioned movements of the 1960s onwards. Subsequently, using these interpretative lenses, I will specifically analyze a number of texts: both texts that are accepted as canonical and texts that relate to the history of slavery, and that, through intertextual readings, have been rewritten or re-adapted by later authors. The aim will be to demonstrate how new narratives are necessary for an advancement of awareness with regard to a number of important issues.

2.1 Intertextuality and the Signifying Monkey Theory

As human beings, we are most likely the only species on earth capable of articulating our thoughts and sharing them. And indeed, we verbalize them every day, whether it be to say simple things or to discuss great matters. Authors of major books are deemed as the epitome of this phenomenon, as their words can strike the most engaging and intimate feelings. However, more often than not, what is written and what we read are reflections coming from higher authorities born from years of direct and indirect transmission. Therefore, what we find is often the result of the intersection of different voices (Snyman, 1996).

The term "intertextuality" originates with French scholar Julia Kristeva in two of her essays published between 1966 and 1967, "World, Dialogue and Novel" and "The Bounded Text." Her main source of inspiration was Mikhail Bakhtin and his language theory, referred to as everyday dialogism. According to Bakhtin, the "self" has continuous

relations with what is "other," creating a threefold interplay between "a center (I-for-itself), a not-center (the-not-I-in-me), and the relation between them" (Alfaro, 1996, p.272). Kristeva's definition parallels Bakhtin's idea, as well as what has been said so far about neo-slave narratives; intertextuality, in fact, consists in viewing the text as a dynamic and continuously influenced space (Alfaro, 1996, p.268). To be more specific, intertextuality implies the influence of one text over another, which can mean expanding ideas and concepts from a text or creating new ones to replace what may be considered outdated (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, p.18). According to this theory, a text cannot exist in a vacuum, but necessarily interacts with others, whether more or less explicitly and voluntarily (Alfaro, 1996, p.271). The history of literature has certainly always proceeded in a similar way and, in the last centuries, has spent much time arriving at a definition of influence and, later, intertextuality. In the Middle Ages, for example, authors almost never created original stories, but rather picked up and expanded on those already known to make them more understandable to their audience. They certainly questioned whether to use only the principles of authority or also rely on their own experiences, but it would take a few more centuries to decide to correct and revisit the great authors of the past; in fact, it will happen especially with Galileo Galilei and the scientific discoveries in the seventeenth century. By the middle of the eighteenth century, more and more authors increasingly felt the need to create new stories to find their place in the literary context (Alfaro, 1996, p.270). Originality, in fact, was the fundamental element to pursue in order to prove one's genius. One may think of Shakespeare himself, who was described as a "natural genius" for drawing inspiration from nature rather than art (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, p.5). Therefore, what happened in this period was a definition of what "influence" was, that is to say, authors wanted to be original but also understood that, first, texts are always defined in relation to their predecessors and, second, new texts can likewise redefine old ones and give them new meanings (Alfaro, 1996, p.270). In the late twentieth century, the influence of the past also came to be understood as a way of disrupting our ideas about the past itself. Historian Robert Darnton states that "the present has something hard and rigid about it; but as to the past, we are changing it all the time" (as cited in Alfaro, 1996, p.271). This idea suggests that looking at past narratives should not have the purpose of identifying a univocal progression between texts, that is,

searching for elements in common between them, but instead should be done to discover unexpected relationships between authors and texts, as well as to have a glimpse of the different and contrasting reflections on the world (Alfaro, 1996, p.271). With *The Anxiety of Influence*, written in 1973, Harold Bloom explored issues related to both influence and intertextuality. Three aspects make this theory more concerned with influence than intertextuality. First, according to Bloom, influence has much to do with the author and his struggle to be better than earlier authors. Second, his theory is non referential insofar as it views texts as always having the act of writing as their object, while the events that take place in a text are only the background to the larger question, which is where the influence of that text comes from. Third, he limits influence to major authors, thus he views it as something that happens only between one major author and another, and what lies in between is not considered worthy of theorizing upon (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, p.9-10).

Therefore, intertextuality represents the expansion of the definition of influence as well as all attempts to define the relationships between authors and texts. Influence was considered to be highly dependent on agency, since authors, eager to show their genius, aimed at creating a new text that could outgrow previous ones. In this way, the term influence implies a great degree of hierarchy. In contrast, intertextuality strictly concerns the intersection of texts, which occurs between the new author, the third-party texts, and the reader. Intertextuality refers to a continuous production of meaning that begins with authors and their knowledge from reading and continues with readers and what they understand from reading the author (Snyman, 1996, p.432-33).

Intertextuality is an element that defines both postmodern literature, which disrupts the coherence and unity of the traditional narrative, and postcolonial literature, which in turn is marked by its strong political value and looks to the past with the purpose of opposing a master text and telling another story (Albertazzi, 2021, p.90-91). We are particularly interested in the idea of postcolonial literature intertwined with intertextuality, especially because we see how, in the case of rewritings by postcolonial authors, the intertextual element plays a crucial role in promoting social critique. Postcolonial rewriting, in fact, can be described as an act of resistance and reinterpretation, capable of transcending geographical, literary, and metaphorical

boundaries, thereby reframing the past in order to confront the present and the future in a different way (Albertazzi, 2021, p.88-89). If the past has been formed by the classics of the literary canon that reflected the values of the ruling classes and at times helped to erase colonial subjects, then the present and future must be shaped by writers from former colonies or marginalized contexts who "write back" and claim their place in literature. This kind of rewriting challenges, deconstructs, and adapts canonical texts, offering new and alternative readings that reveal the role master texts have often played in cultural oppression (Albertazzi, 2021, p.91-92). Neo-slave narratives and forms of rewriting by African Americans, in this sense, not only respond to or revisit earlier texts but also serve to challenge the specific social conditions under which those texts were written. It is no coincidence that this happened in the 1960s: in the United States, this was a period of great tension and change, marked by social movements and a revisiting of historiography. As we saw, this period saw the emergence of new voices, eager to reclaim their identity and challenge established narratives. In order to do so, it was necessary to look at the past, as we saw in the case of historiography and the archive on slavery, and also to observe how literature and texts had long conditioned people's beliefs. Literary texts thus no longer find their meaning within a canon, but rather aim to build connections between each other to provide meaning for both the past and the present (Rushdy, 1999, p.6-7). As Rushdy (1999, p.7) puts it, "the sixties, then, constitute the formation of the political subjectivity of minorities, the reformation of the cultural sphere, and the transformation of the concept of the text within the project of intertextuality." Furthermore, as Silvia Albertazzi (2021, p.99-100) argues, one can refer to both "writing back" and "writing forth." On the one hand, the idea of rewriting as a process that counteracts cultural domination, highlighting the inadequacy of Western writers to write about realities that are not their own; and, on the other hand, the idea of a process that borrows from the past in order to develop its own autonomous voice, creating new, independent, and purposeful narratives. Whether through changes of perspective, secondary characters brought into prominence, additions, or subtractions, an intertextual approach to a text can give it a new meaning that is consistent with new (so to speak) political and social concerns (Albertazzi, 2021, p.90).

To get even deeper into issues of intertextuality in the case of the slave and African American tradition, we can refer to Henry Louis Gates' theory. Gates Jr. (1988) argues that intertextuality and formal revision are necessary components in the African American literary tradition. His theory, called "the Signifying Monkey,"[16] explores the relationship between the black vernacular and the African American literary tradition; how these intertwine and create meanings, achieving forms of revision and critique. The term "Signifying Monkey" comes from two trickster figures respectively from the Yoruba religion and the African American folkloric tradition, Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey. Esu is the go-between between people and the gods, whereas the Signifying Monkey is its derivative applied to the black tradition and its part of the culture that Africans brought with them to the Americans during the Middle Passage. Both of them are interesting in our context as they carry with them a tradition of analyzing language and interpretations (Gates, 1988, p.10-11). Gates (1983, p.687) explains how those figures "are primarily mediators: as tricksters they are mediators and their mediations are tricks." The Signifying Monkey is the trope Gates uses to refer to rhetorical strategies employed in African American vernacular literature. "Signifyin(g)" is intentionally spelled without a *g*, following the vernacular, and with a capital *s*, to distinguish it from its standard meaning. We might be familiar with Ferdinand de Saussure's standard definitions of the two components of a sign, "signified" and "signifier," the former being what the sign represents and the latter being its material form. Instead, in Gates' theory, "signified" is replaced by "Signifyin(g)," indicating the rhetorical constructions used in African American literature. To be clearer, Signifyin(g) means using language to engage in rhetorical games, employing devices such as irony, parody, pastiche, humor, metaphor, and allusion (Gates, 1988, p.45-46). It happens within literature, but also in everyday acts specific to the African American community. It can occur when people make fun of a person or situation, for instance, when making fun of someone by parodying them behind their back. It is very particular to Black English, as it allows speakers to create and understand meanings that are not contemplated in standard English. Within these instances, it is possible to say phrases such as "stop signifyin'" or "he is signifyin',"

[16] Gates' theory of the Signifying Monkey is central in his major work, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, published in 1988.

precisely referring to a language mode related to comical, codified, or critical elements, depending on the context (Gates, 1983, p.689).

This strategy is widely adopted in African American literature. Interestingly, traces of it can be found as early as the fourteenth century with the poet Juan Latino, who used irony to defend himself as a black person, arguing that if a black face displeased whites in Austria, a white face would receive the same reaction from black people in Ethiopia. In the 1850s, Ethiop, a black writer, used Signifyin' to challenge a series of essays that went by the name "What Shall We Do with the Negro?", creating some entitled "What Shall We Do with the White People?". Frederick Douglass also made extensive use of Signifyin' and apparently addressed it by discussing slave songs and how they may have seemed meaningless to white people, but were actually full of meaning for slaves. The twentieth century, then, certainly saw an explosion in the use of Signifyin', with authors such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker, Ishmael Reed, and many others. Langston Hughes, for example, used Signifyn' in his interesting poem *Ask Your Mama*, in which he revisited African American history by juxtaposing the lyrics of the poem with jazz music ("Hesitation Blues") and saying "ask your mama" as a way of inviting readers to confront racism (Gates, 1988).

Moreover, within Gates' theory, we can see an interesting distinction that is closely related to intertextuality. We have said that African American literature is characterized by this idea of revision—taking antecedent texts and giving them a new interpretive light. In fact, Gates highlights how "repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms, from painting to sculpture to music and language use" (Gates, 1988, p.25). According to this, Signifyin' upon another text can be motivated or unmotivated. Unmotivated Signification means revisiting a previous text without having any negative critique. Meaning, I enjoyed reading a text and believe it is worth remembering it, hence I create a new text that is inspired by it and pays homage to it. Many neo-slave narratives work precisely this way: they expand on previous works as a way of appreciating them and, possibly, providing them with a new light. Motivated Signification, instead, works in reverse. In this case, rewriting is done as a means of challenging and criticizing another text, for whatever reason. Typically, according to Gates, if an unmotivated revision corresponds to pastiche, a motivated revision corresponds to irony. An author may find

major problems within a text and decide to respond by using irony or other forms of revision so as to reverse the narrative of the previous text (Gates, 1988, p.16-17). This second mode of revision is precisely what we will see in the case of *Gone with the Wind* and its motivated counterpart, *The Wind Done Gone*.

Given all this, neo-slave narratives and rewritings of texts are closely related to the concepts of intertextuality and signification. By continuously reconsidering the past and its legacy, such as in the case of literary texts, we are able to activate different readings, therefore vindicating the right to tell other stories. Whether it involves adapting, expanding on, or completely debunking a past narrative, I think it is interesting how in the last years of the twentieth century and even today, people, through literature, are striving to engage in a revisionist battle that is meant to expose significant issues that have been far too overlooked.

2.2 Revisiting Canonical Texts

After discussing neo-slave narratives, intertextuality and forms of revision, I would like to present some examples of reinterpretations of literary texts. I will begin by examining how canonical texts can be approached with a different perspective, employing a comparative analysis, and how such reinterpretations can help us challenge dominant narratives or simply give voice to different characters. We know that political forces invariably influence the development of a literary canon: history and literature tend to focus on the interests of particular groups of people, excluding the voices of minority groups. We should consider it necessary and enriching to be able to counter-read popular texts. Rewriting a text is an act that allows new authors to play with another work and explore its limits, as well as critique parts of literature and culture that remain ambiguous. Hence, it is usually done by scholars of feminist, postcolonial, race, queer, and cultural studies, with the intent to search for the truth for people who have long been marginalized and exploited (Plate, 2008, p.390-94). Revisions of literary texts clearly rely on intertextuality, as they work in conversation with previous texts, taking up bits and pieces and altering them when deemed necessary. Following Gates' idea, they can also be unmotivated or motivated, as reasons for rewriting vary from simply wanting to add

something to the previous text to wanting to highlight problematic elements. In the second case, according to Suzy Woltmann (2022, p.3), they "(re)construe the meanings of gender, sexuality, and race to intertextually communicate with past texts, thus creating a dialogic, intertextual web of decentralized knowledge and awakening the canon."

Stepping away for a moment from the slave and African American experience (which I will return to later), there are several rewritings of what are considered canonical texts. The short story "The House of Asterion" (1947), written by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, and *Grendel* (1971), written by the American John Gardner, are both rewritings of the epic poem *Beowulf* (mid-eighth century), both written from the point of view of the monster. The novel *Ash* (2009), written by Malinda Lo, revisits the *Cinderella* story, casting as the main character a lesbian teenager (Woltmann, 2022). The famous novel *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov was reinterpreted in 1995 by the Italian writer Pia Pera with her novel *Lo's Diary*. Similarly, *Albertine* (2001) by Jacqueline Rose retold the story of Albertine from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927) (Plate, 2008).

In this section, I will analyze William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, along with their respective retellings, Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Important elements of each text will be discussed, hoping to shed light on themes related to marginalization, colonial oppression and gender dynamics.

2.2.1 *Hag-Seed*: Retelling *The Tempest*

The first textual case study on intertextuality that I would like to discuss concerns the relationship between William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and one of its retellings, Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*. The link between the two texts is interesting in order to observe how new narratives can be forged by borrowing from established ones and, more specifically in this case, how it is possible to activate new perspectives already present in the original text. Under these circumstances, it is not anyone's intention to repudiate Shakespeare's work, rather we wish to see what we can further discern from his text four centuries after its publishing. As Atwood herself states: "All writers learn from the dead.

As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you; you are also judged and held to account by them" (as cited in Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2017, p.125).

Hag-Seed: The Tempest Retold (2016) is a postmodern take on *The Tempest*, written as part of a larger project of retellings of Shakespeare. The project started by Hogarth Press in 2013 to commemorate four hundred years after Shakespeare's death, with a total of eight writers participating[17] (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2017, p.106-07).

For a clearer understanding, it is useful to devote a few words to the plots of the two texts. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was first performed in 1611. The story revolves around Prospero, a magician and Duke of Milan. Due to the ambitions and jealousies of his brother Antonio and the King of Naples, Alonso, Prospero and his daughter Miranda are exiled to an island, inhabited by the monster Caliban and the spirit Ariel. Ariel, because of Caliban's mother, is imprisoned in a pine tree and is freed by Prospero in exchange for a year at his service. Caliban, on the other hand, tries to rape Miranda and is enslaved through magic by Prospero. Twelve years later, Prospero causes a storm in the sea once he discovers that his brother and his other enemies are coming to the island. However, they all survive, despite suffering confusion and being separated from each other. Prospero re-plans his revenge against Antonio, Alonso, Alonso's son Ferdinand and his brother Sebastian, and other members of the court. After tormenting them all, even leading Ferdinand and Miranda to fall in love, Prospero ultimately forgives his enemies. He frees Ariel and consents to the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda, while he returns to his title of Duke of Milan renouncing his magic (Carney, 2022, p.58-59). Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* is instead set in Canada, where the artistic director Felix (Prospero) lapses due to Tony (Antonio) persuading Sal (Alonso) and Sebert (Sebastian) to let him replace Felix. Felix, already weakened by the deaths of his wife and daughter, enters a state of deep sorrow, increased by the fact that he will not be able to produce *The Tempest*. After a few years, he begins teaching in a prison, where he is finally able to produce the

[17] The other revised Shakespeare plays included in the collection are: Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* (2015), a rewriting of *The Winter's Tale*; Howard Jacobson's *Shylock is My Name* (2016), a rewriting of *The Merchant of Venice*; Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl* (2016), a rewriting of *The Taming of the Shrew*; Tracy Chevalier's *New Boy* (2017), a rewriting of *Othello*; Jo Nesbø's *Macbeth* (2018), a rewriting of *Macbeth*; Edward St Aubyn's *Dunbar* (2017), a rewriting of *King Lear*. The last text, on *Hamlet*, has not yet been published by Gillian Flynn (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2017, p.108).

play. The play has great significance for him, since he is haunted by the spirit of his daughter and wishes to make amends for having been a negligent parent. He also develops feelings of revenge when he learns that Tony and Sal are responsible for the founding of cultural programming and thus, they go to the prison to review his program. Felix collaborates with the inmates on a revenge plan. Ultimately, during the staging of the play, Sal and Tony are punished, while Felix is reinstated to his previous position and manages to free himself from the ghost of his daughter, who also is Ariel's counterpart (Carney, 2022, p.59).

Over the course of the years, critical interpretations of *The Tempest* have been rather mixed. The initial impression after reading it would be that the play is about forgiveness and reconciliation, yet there is much more to it than that. For instance, postcolonial scholars have found in it an example of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Feminist scholars, instead, have focused on the absence of female voices and the prominence of the ideas of chastity and fertility in the play. Other scholars have highlighted the presence of power relations and the abuse of magic (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2017, p.114). All these elements are included in *Hag-Seed*, some more prominently than others.

If we are to look at Atwood's text from a postcolonial perspective, the Shakespearean character to look for would be Caliban. Much postcolonial criticism has focused on Prospero's exploitation of the island for his own purposes, with Caliban as the embodiment of the colonized subject. Although the title "Hag-seed" refers to Caliban himself (the word is an insult from Prospero), we do not find a specific character dedicated to him in the novel. Instead, his voice is echoed in the prison inmates Felix teaches (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2017, p.114-15). In fact, Atwood's interest is not in colonialism as the exploitation of people, but rather in the marginalization of people in our society, which, by logic, reflects colonial oppression. At the start of his relationship with the inmates, Felix feels he is on a higher level than them, much like Prospero with Caliban (Carney, 2022, p.79). An example of colonial exploitation and superiority can be found in *The Tempest*:

> Caliban: I must eat my dinner.
> This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
> Which thou takest from me [...].
>
> Prospero: Thou most lying slave,
> Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee, Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee
> In mine own cell [...] (Shakespeare, 1987, l.484-503)

Similar is Felix's self-perceived superiority in *Hag-Seed*:

> After a stellar career like his, what a descent—doing Shakespeare in the clink with a bunch of thieves, drug dealers, embezzlers, man-slaughterers, fraudsters, con men. Was that how he would end his days, petering out in a backwater? (Atwood, 2016, p.80)

As Atwood's novel progresses, however, we see a change in Felix's perspective towards the prisoners. If Caliban's fate is imprisonment, Felix pursues a form of liberation for the inmates. His intention is to give them a chance to learn and grow, showing the human part in them that most people forget. If society and its power structures have not been good to them, learning Shakespeare and identifying with the characters in *The Tempest* restores their power (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2017, p.122).

If we then look at *Hag-Seed* from a feminist perspective, we might be surprised to see that Atwood seems to have made the text even more male centered by erasing important female characters: Miranda's mother dies at childbirth and Miranda, the only physical presence in *The Tempest*, dies at three years of age (Carney, 2022, p.67). What Atwood does with the female characters is certainly more subtle than merely making them part of the plot, but nonetheless very important. Felix's daughter becomes his ghost, his hunting presence from the past; first she shows up in his consciousness making him question his life choices and then she becomes the actress Anne-Marie who plays Miranda in the production of *The Tempest*. It is through these two images that we gain agency for Miranda (Carney, 2022, p.67-68). In *The Tempest*, Miranda is the obedient daughter under the authority of her father who teaches her everything she knows. In *Hag-Seed*, Miranda's ghost becomes the active force that pushes Felix to reimagine his life. At first, she is the element that makes him feel most guilty and "lost at sea, drifting here, drifting there. In a rotten carcass the very rats have quit" (Atwood, 2016, p.199). Yet she is also the person that prompts him to continue with his dream of staging a play:

> Right after the funeral with its pathetically small coffin he'd plunged himself into *The Tempest*. It was an evasion, he knew that much about himself even then, but it was also to be a kind of reincarnation. (Atwood, 2016, p.26)

She is the only one that remains with him throughout the entire process, all the while growing, in his mind, into a beautiful teenager (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2017, 117-19). Anne-Marie, the actress who plays Miranda, gives Miranda additional authority. She herself is a strong and passionate woman and is able to project her confidence onto the character, breaking away from the narrative of the obedient and dependent Miranda (Carney, 2022, p.68). She states:

> First off, she's a strong girl. She hasn't been tied up in corsets and stuffed into glass slippers and such at court. She's a tomboy; she's been clambering all over that island since she was three... She's got some muscles too—look at the way she was heaving those logs around so Ferdinand didn't have to. (Atwood, 2016, p.312)

Miranda, acting through the ghost and Anne-Marie, is part of what ultimately releases Felix from his pain and his desire for revenge. As such, even though the female component may seem minor and scarce, it still has great relevance and allows us to give the text a different meaning.

Both readings, proceeding from a postcolonial and feminist perspective, are remarkable insofar as they enable us to give voice to characters who carry a different significance in *The Tempest*. We can distance ourselves from the usual narrative of power and see a multiplicity of interpretations. Reading Shakespeare is not always easy, but a text like *Hag-Seed* can assist by highlighting elements that would otherwise go unnoticed.

2.2.2 *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Retelling *Jane Eyre*

Another great classic that we all surely know is *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. Written in 1847, the novel follows the story of Jane, a young woman with a difficult past who ends up working at Thornfield Hall, home of the wealthy Rochester family. To summarize the plot for a better understanding of Rhys' retelling, it suffices to know that Jane becomes the teacher of Adele, Mr. Edward Rochester's daughter. Eventually Jane and Mr. Rochester fall in love, but their marriage is prevented by the fact that the man is already married to Bertha Mason, a woman described as crazy who lives in the attic of

the house. After some events, Bertha causes a fire and dies, prompting Jane to return to Thornfield Hall and secure her happy ending with Mr. Rochester. In 1966, Jean Rhys published *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a postmodern rewriting of *Jane Eyre*. *Jane Eyre*'s madwoman Bertha becomes the creole Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and protagonist of the novel, as we chronicle her difficult childhood in Jamaica after the Emancipation Act of 1833, her marriage to the violent Mr. Rochester, and her confinement in the attic of the house when she is labelled insane (Cappello, 2009, p.48-49). Rhys reinverts Brontë's narrative, giving voice to the novel's most marginalized character and prompting us to look at the story from a different perspective, one marked by racial and gender oppression. Just as with neo-slave narratives, the aim of this revision is the same: to subvert established narratives and give voice to those who have been silenced (Cappello, 2009, p.47).

The first part of the novel takes us to Jamaica after the abolition of slavery, creating in the reader the discomfort of witnessing Antoinette, a child, longing to return to life as it was before emancipation. Antoinette's family, once wealthy plantation owners, is now poor and helpless (Gilchrist, 2012, p.468). They belong to the small white creolized community, and Antoinette somehow feels white, black and neither, being part of the community but also being seen as an outsider, more similar to the colonial oppressors because of her skin color. A first major theme the novel asks us to consider is the dichotomy between black and white, first between the Creoles and then between Antoinette and the British. The relationship between Antoinette and her childhood friend Tia, a black girl, shows us moments that call into question white supremacy and ideological matters (Cappello, 2009, p.49). The two are good friends who identify with each other, especially when Antoinette has to leave Coulibri (the plantation in Jamaica):

> We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river [...] I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (Rhys, 1966, p.27-28)

As Silvia Cappello (2009, p.49-50) states, the passage highlights the great difference between them: the two might seem similar like mirror images, but, as a mirror reflects an inverted image, their lives are shaped by ideological differences that underpin a colonial discourse. Rhys here shows how Antoinette and Tia cannot belong to the same

community, as their environments and histories are too conflicting, and "society constructs subjects' identity and the individual reflects the identity society contributed to create" (Gilchrist, 2012, p.476). A similar thing happens between Antoinette and the nameless Rochester when they get married. The man feels strange about Antoinette's Caribbean origins and sees both her and her land as "virgin territory" (Gilchrist, 2012, p.476). He says:

> It was a beautiful place—wild, untouched, above all untouched with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secrets. I'd find myself thinking, 'What I see is nothing —I want what it *hides*— that is not nothing.' (Rhys, 1966, p.64)

Moreover, after acquainting himself with her traditions and culture, he inevitably leans on his prejudices as a white European man. He looks at her eyes and thinks they are too big; even though she is of English origin, hers are "alien" eyes to him, which makes her completely separate from him. He finds her and Jamaica beautiful, but also "different" from everything he knows and thus he cannot understand either of them, nor does he try. His sense of superiority is too ingrained in him for him to appreciate his wife's origins (Cappello, 2009, p.51). Here is an example of Rochester's thoughts:

> I watched her critically. She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting. She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark, alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either. And when did I begin to notice all this about my wife Antoinette? (Rhys, 1966, p.46)

It is interesting to see how Rhys, with the character of Antoinette, shows us the deep feeling of displacement that can affect a person. Antoinette is forced to continue wondering who she is, where she comes from, and where she belongs. In this process, she is forced to accept different identities created by other people. She sometimes is too white and not white enough, too privileged and too wild, all at once. This accounts for her subsequent destruction and loss of identity and self (Cappello, 2009, p.50).

As a wife, Antoinette thus suffers an intersection of oppression due to her nationality and also to the fact that she is a woman. Rochester represents the conquering man who ultimately leaves his victim in disgrace. His hostility towards Antoinette begins when he finds himself in a context he does not know or understand, and increases when he sees that the place seems to have a matriarchal inclination. His European male-centered mind

cannot understand how it is possible for women to have control and responsibility over men. As such, he has no intention of being assimilated into this way of life. Rather, he seeks for control, which means taking it from the women around him, therefore Antoinette (Fayad, 1988, p.443-44). As Coral Ann Howells states (as cited in Cappello, 2009, p.51), Rochester represents that "patriarchal world where women are luxury items to be brought, enjoyed and discarded." What Rhys accomplishes in the unfolding of the marriage between the two is very interesting and shows the extent of Rochester's male power over Antoinette, which also resembles the type of male projection on women in history. At first, Antoinette is a woman he fails to understand, with gloomy and dark eyes; subsequently she becomes the epitome of temptation, a dangerous woman who would do anything to fulfil her desires. As in many texts written by men, she becomes powerful and dangerous because of her promiscuous sexuality (Fayad, 1988, p.445). Therefore:

> She thirsts for *anyone*—not for me…
> She'll loosen her black hair, and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl. She'll not care who she's loving.) She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would—or *could*. Then lie so still, still as this cloudy day. A lunatic who always knows the time. But never does. (Rhys, 1966, p.130)

Later, she becomes a witch, and he becomes the slave to her feminine power, as she possesses a kind of secret knowledge that he cannot have. This thus becomes another reason behind his need to control her and confine her to a closed and secured space, both metaphorically and literally. To confirm his power over her, he transforms her into Bertha and then into Marionette:

> 'No. And what do I care if he does? He hates me now. I hear him every night walking up and down the veranda. "Goodnight, Bertha." He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother's name. "I hope you will sleep well, Bertha"—it cannot be worse,' I said. 'That one night he came I might sleep afterwards. I sleep so badly now. And I dream.' (Rhys, 1966, p.86)

> 'She tell me in the middle of all this you start calling her names. Marionette. Some word so.'
> 'Yes, I remember. I did.'
> *(Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta)*
> 'That word mean doll, eh? Because she don't speak. You want to force her to cry and to speak.' (Rhys, 1966, p.121)

He denies her any possibility of action: her words become meaningless, and her beauty is no longer a source of power for her. She becomes a ghost, a victim of subjugation and manipulation (Fayad, 1988, p.447-48).

> I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight. Nothing left by hopelessness.
> *Say die and I will die. Say die and watch me die.* (Rhys, 1966, p.135)

Once Antoinette is locked up in Thornfield's attic and everyone believes she has gone mad, she attempts to fight one last time and ultimately burns down the thing that constitutes Rochester's most English element, his house, and thus his English heritage. This last act is crucial: she is not simply burning down a place that oppresses her, she is also proving that patriarchy and subjugation in marriage are inherently self-destructive; eventually "repression and suppression will burn it [patriarchy] down from within," as fire can easily escape control and destroy everything (Fayad, 1988, p.450).

Wide Sargasso Sea takes us into an alternative reality and gives a story (hence agency) to a highly misunderstood character. If one only reads Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, one is limited to a single story that denies different possibilities. Rhys, on the other hand, allows us not only to thoroughly understand Antoinette, but also to reflect on important themes that are rather faint or simply absent in *Jane Eyre* (Fayad, 1988, p.451). It opens up a rich world concerning the reality of the colonized individual, the dislocation and despair that can come along with enslavement and emancipation, the problems that cause the individual to lose a sense of self and be forced to live with a double (or triple) consciousness, the issues of patriarchal marriage and male fragility that lead to the destruction of women, and the power of taking charge of one's own narrative and thus writing for oneself.

2.3 Revisiting the Legacy of Slavery

Moving more specifically into the slave and African American experience, I will now attempt to analyze some relevant texts widely recognized for their treatment of slavery, along with their intertextual rendering in neo-slave narratives. In these rewritings by African Americans, we will see how the authors sought, in the words of Tim A. Ryan (2008, p.2-3), to "resist or present alternatives to white-authored versions of slavery" and "enter into dynamic dialogue with them." Since, as we have seen in various ways, slavery and enslaved people have been represented and misrepresented in all sorts of ways, and historians' perspectives have also often been very diverse and conflicting, the postmodern

intertextual approach exposes the fictionality of dominant narratives which claim truthfulness and offers us new insights about the past and the possibility to discover its hidden aspects. There are numerous examples of neo-slave narratives that aim to rewrite literary texts from a different perspective, or texts that aim at Signifyin' upon old narratives. For African American writers, it has become necessary to be in a position to continue the process of remembering the past by approaching it with a clearer and more responsible consciousness, possibly in order to speak to new generations as well.

In this section, I will discuss three different case studies. The first has to do with the recounting of Nat Turner's life, told in different ways by Thomas R. Gray and William Styron, and later subtly re-examined by Sherley Anne Williams with her novel *Dessa Rose*. The second concerns Mark Twain's great American classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry*, and the different story told by Nancy Rawles in *My Jim*. The third, and last, will focus on *Middle Passage*, a critical reinterpretation, but which also stands on its own, of Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*. This will provide us with the opportunity to explore the various themes highlighted by these retellings, including the importance of a truthful narrative voice, the subjectivity that secondary characters can have, and how power dynamics can be overturned.

2.3.1 *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and *Dessa Rose:* Retelling Nat Turner's life

The revisitations of Nat Turner's life and actions are an interesting illustration of intertextuality between different authors, demonstrating how easy it is to completely alter a narrative to the point where the truth becomes unrecognizable. Nat Turner was born a slave in 1800 in the county of Southampton, in Virginia. From a very young age, as a result of his religious and spiritual convictions, he knew he was destined for great things. After experiencing visions of "white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle," in 1831, he gathered a group of fellow slaves and began his mission: to enter the homes of white slaveholders, kill them and free the slaves. A total of sixty-one white people were killed, of whom only one was slain by Turner himself. To this followed Turner's attempt to escape the armed militia, becoming a fugitive for two months, as the whole country became frightened of possible slave insurrections (Fabricant, 1993).

After the trial and execution of Turner in 1831, the lawyer Thomas R. Gray published *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the leader of the late insurrection in Southampton, Va., as fully and voluntarily made to Thomas R. Gray*. The brief pamphlet, requested by Gray before Turner's trial, begins with an introduction made by the lawyer followed by a narration presumably dictated by Turner, detailing his life and actions. This text became the only available source on the insurrection and, for some time, was considered an accurate depiction of the events. Over the years, scholars have debated its reliability: some deemed it accurate, others felt that Gray was too defensive over Turner's actions (Fabricant, 1993, p.332-33). As time went on, many began to question whether the text could be treated as the absolute truth, as it is impossible to know what Turner actually said to Gray. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Gray was known to be a slave apologist who viewed slavery similarly to U.B. Phillips. And indeed, there are dubious elements in *The Confessions*, such as the incomplete list of slaves linked to the revolt, exaggerations in Turner's speeches and motives, or the fact that Gray's intention may have been to depict Turner as a fanatic or a madman to limit further slave insurrections. In fact, Gray stated:

> It will thus appear, that whilst every thing upon the surface of society wore a calm and peaceful aspect; whilst not one note of preparation was heard to warn the devoted inhabitants of woe and death, a gloomy fanatic was revolving in the recesses of his own dark, bewildered, and overwrought mind, schemes of indiscriminate massacre to the whites. Schemes too fearfully executed as far as his fiendish band proceeded in their desolating march. No cry for mercy penetrated their flinty bosoms. No acts of remembered kindness made the least impression upon these remorseless murderers. Men, women and children, from hoary age to helpless infancy were involved in the same cruel fate. Never did a band of savages do their work of death more unsparingly. Apprehension for their own personal safety seems to have been the only principle of restraint in the whole course of their bloody proceedings. (Gray and Turner, 1831, p.4)

All this is important because the text was subsequently used by authors to retell Turner's story, thus relying on the words of a white Southerner, possibly even sympathetic to slavery (Fabricant, 1993, p.334-35).

In the previous chapter, we mentioned how William Styron, in 1967, published *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, his account of Turner's actions written in first person as if Turner himself were speaking. We also noted how some white scholars classified the text as a neo-slave narrative, as it presented the conventions of slave narratives and was written from the slave's point of view, but also how black scholars immediately rejected

this idea and questioned Styron's intentions (Rushdy, 1999, p.4). The text has been subjected to many objections over the years: criticism has been levelled at Styron for being commercially motivated,[18] for appropriating the voice of a black man, being himself a white man, and for belittling Turner's experience and aligning himself with the mocking portrayals of African Americans already prevalent in many texts in American literature. Moreover, scholars have criticized Styron for reproducing in the text ideas similar to those of the already-mentioned Stanley Elkins, according to whom the institution of slavery had turned the majority of slaves into "Sambos." Turner, in this respect, represented an exceptional man because he had been able to resist this "Sambo" personality, while everyone else around him had not (Ryan, 2008, p.63-64). Styron offered an intertextual rendering of Gray's *Confessions*, choosing, however, to further emphasize, downplay, and ignore elements of the original text, an already limited one. In doing so, he ended up addressing his own beliefs and convictions rather than something more similar to the truth. There are, in fact, some major intertextual absences, arguably due to Styron's poor reading of Gray's text as well as misinformation about Turner's life and intentions. No importance is given to the possibility that Turner had a wife, on the basis that he did not discuss it with Gray (possibly due to concerns for his wife's safety). Furthermore, Styron disregards the fact that Turner's statements to Gray were undoubtedly influenced by the various circumstances surrounding him, such as the judicial process and the fear triggered by the slave massacres that were taking place (Rushdy, 1999, p.59-61). Consequently, Styron's *Confessions* is a flawed novel based on another flawed text. Even if Styron himself described the text as a work of fiction, if we consider its popularity at the time of publication and the racist ideas it presents, it should be impossible to wholly defend it. According to Tim A. Ryan (2008, p.65) "Styron's novel is the culmination—and, indeed,

[18] Interestingly, one of the reasons why Styron's *Confessions* became so popular was because of some strategies aimed at establishing it as a canonical text. Rushdy (1999, p.18) states that "*Harper*'s paid 'more to Styron ($7,500) than to any other author in its 117-year history' for permission to print a 50,000-word excerpt from the forthcoming novel. The Book-of-the-Month Club set a 'house record for a novel' by paying Styron $150,000. Three years before the novel appeared, New American Library paid Styron $100,000 for the paperback rights. When the paperback edition did appear, it boasted on its cover the 'Pulitzer Prize Winner of the Year' and 'An All-Time Best Seller,' a novel that was not only a 'triumph,' in the words of the New York Times reviewer, but also the 'most profound fictional treatment of slavery in our literature,' according to the quoted excerpt from C. Vann Woodward's *NewRepublic* review."

last significant gasp—of a long-dominant, historically false, and intrinsically racist while-authored representation of the slave experience."

The novel begins with Turner awaiting his execution, as he is interrogated by Gray. He starts recalling some key moments of his life: he evokes his childhood, the moment he learnt to read and write, when he met a white girl named Margaret Whitehead and began to have strange sexual feelings for her, the way he planned and executed the rebellion while having continuous doubts, how he killed Margaret, and how he was eventually caught and "forgiven" by God for his murder (Ryan, 2008, p.88-89). Styron's use of Turner's voice is seen by many as an attempt to steal the value of his life, as well as the deeper meaning of African American culture and experience. Styron, being a white man, is seen as having no authoritative voice on Turner and other black people's experiences. The use of the same arguments of twentieth-century white historiographers on slavery (such as Phillips and Elkins), moreover, is seen as an attempt to give even more relevance to their distorted theories which perpetuate stereotypes about the slave experience (Ryan, 2008, p.67). Turner is supposed to represent "slave's exceptionalism," someone out of the ordinary as compared to the other slaves, whom Styron/Turner calls "my black shit-eating people" and "God's mindless outcasts" (as cited in Ryan, 2008, p.82). According to Styron, Turner supposedly represented "one of the few slaves in history who achieved an identity" (as cited in Rushdy, 1999, p.76). Nevertheless, he also attributes other stereotypes about black men to Turner, such as that which portrays them as rapists and solely driven by sexual instincts. In the novel, Turner has an unusual relationship with Margaret Whitehead, the woman he kills during the insurrection: she is described as the inspiration for his revolutionary instincts and ultimately it is her image that allows him to find redemption. Before being condemned, Turner imagines Margaret desiring him sexually, just as he desires her, and his final redemption is equated with an orgasm (Rushdy, 1999, p.63). However much one might try to defend Styron's intentions of creating a novel and not writing a history book, Turner was a real historical character who organized a rebellion to achieve freedom and imagining he was only motivated by his desire for a white woman once again reduces black men to beings acting on instinct without any wish for autonomy.

In 1986, a response to Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* came from Sherley Anne Williams with her novel *Dessa Rose*. In the novel, a writer named Adam Nehemiah interviews a pregnant woman named Dessa as she has just been captured after participating in a slave rebellion, and he wants to write about slave uprisings. Because she is pregnant, Dessa's death sentence is postponed until she gives birth. Dessa is freed by other members of the uprising and ends up staying on the plantation of a woman named Rufel, who, abandoned by her dissolute husband, starts sheltering fugitive slaves. Eventually Rufel starts an affair with one of the slaves, Nathan, who convinces her to participate in a money-making scheme: Rufel will pretend to sell the "slaves" to new masters, then she will take them back overnight, and continue with different buyers until they make enough money to start a new life. And so, they do, as the friendship between Dessa and Rufel is ultimately what helps Dessa free herself from Adam Nehemiah's grasp who is trying to recapture her (Ryan, 2008, p.157). The novel is a good example of Signifyin' upon another text. Williams subtly questions and critiques Styron insofar as she reflects on the power of institutional structures, such as racism, sexism, and classism in influencing narration, and the power of narration in influencing people's lives and beliefs (Rushdy, 1999, p.134). She was interested in the way slavery had been portrayed in literature, not so much in reality, and thus she created a story which denounced the flaws in Styron's novel by imagining a different narrative of the past. The leader of the rebellion is no longer a man, but a young black woman, and pregnant at that; the white woman is not the submissive wife or the angel of the house, she is a complex character, capable of transformation; the relationship between the white woman and the black woman is not one of fear, obligation, dependency or cruelty, but it becomes a genuine relationship of equal respect (Ryan, 2008, p.165-166). In doing so, Williams gave space to the black community, building on the new discourses on slavery of the post-1960s and assuring to give voice and agency to the slaves so as to show their heritage beyond the historiographical documents. She contested Gray's and Styron's ability to comprehend how the leaders of slave uprisings, such as Turner, were seen and perceived by the community around them and how their actions influenced subsequent behavior that ultimately effected social change (Rushdy, 1999, p.138).

Therefore, we could say that while Gray and Styron molded Turner's life using their own biases, Williams reclaimed the narrative by centering black voices. This intertextual framework of Nat Turner's story once again demonstrates the struggle it takes to change established perspectives, as well as the importance of reshaping collective memory.

2.3.2 *My Jim*: Retelling *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

In the first chapter, we mentioned Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, an ambiguous novel that has divided critics, yet is also considered one of the greatest works of American literature. Given its popularity and contrasting elements, many black writers have naturally responded to this text, or Signified upon it, often wishing to give voice to Jim's character and lend more relevance to the experience of slaves and African Americans. An insightful novel that reimagines *Huckleberry Finn*, by means of an intertextual reading, is Nancy Rawles' *My Jim*.

Before turning to the subject of *My Jim*, it is worth briefly mentioning a more recent reworking of Twain's classic: *James*, written by Percival Everett in 2024. Everett, in a recent interview with the television show "Amanpour and Company," stated that Mark Twain, being interested in portraying young Huck as representative of American youth, "was not equipped to write Jim's story," and so he did. He stated that he "did not write *James* to express some kind of dissatisfaction with *Huckleberry Finn*," but actually he was interested in being "in conversation with Twain" (Amanpour and company, 2024). This conversation indeed raises many relevant points that lend us a new perspective on the character of Jim, who becomes James in the novel. For instance, his name becomes a symbol of subjectivity and power. His name is the one he was born with, James, and hence, according to Everett, it becomes "a marker of his agency." Moreover, James is made into a literate character, an avid reader, who understands the power of words. The novel thus highlights the problem of the control of education during slavery, seen as a way to deny participation in society and mitigate any form of critical thinking. James in fact has to pretend to be unable to read and write in front of Huck, and, as a result, he is very upset, but then he comes to understand the real power of words: if he can read and understand the words, nothing and no one can take them away from him. James is a complex character, an adult who feels he must protect Huck; he is not extraordinarily

capable, nor is he an uneducated beast (Amanpour and company, 2024). Percival Everett's *James* is thus a different and illuminating interpretation of Twain's stereotyped and contradictory character.

Along the same lines is *My Jim*, written in 2006 by the American novelist Nancy Rawles. The focus here is also on Jim, but the narrator's voice is that of his wife, Sadie Watson, as she recounts to her granddaughter the circumstances of Jim's escape, her life without him and their unconditional love (Yoon, 2008, p.124). It is evident that many authors, including Everett and Rawles, are interested in Jim because they believe there is significantly more to tell about him than what is contained in Twain's narrative. Some scholars, over the years, have made some criticisms about the inability of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to portray Jim as a real person, and have also been quite negative towards Twain himself for the unnecessary use of racial slurs. Other scholars have instead seen greater depth in the novel and argued that Twain's intention was not to belittle Jim, but rather to show the realization of an unlikely friendship (Jabari, 2007, p.109). Either way, a re-examination of Jim is hardly superfluous or unprovoked. Rawles, in *My Jim*, borrows fragments of Twain's narrative and creates a past for Jim, while simultaneously establishing a broader framework that critiques aspects of the institution of slavery. Jim is not simply a runaway slave who accidentally meets a child, he is a man with a family he has left behind and whom he misses terribly. He does not embody the stereotypical behavior of a slave, that associated with the minstrel tradition, but he is "candid in love, weak in pain and sorrow, determined to survive, and conflicted between his desire for freedom and anguish for his family" (Yoon, 2008, p.126-27). Let us now examine some interesting elements of the novel.

First of all, we have said that *My Jim* is narrated by Jim's wife, Sadie, whereas *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is narrated by Huck, a thirteen-year-old boy, who is interested in telling his story from his own point of view. Sadie is instead the person who knows Jim best: she was there when he was born, she had become his friend and then his wife. This background promises a more intimate narration as well as the inclusion of a female voice. The novel begins with the voice of Sadie's granddaughter, Marienne, who is about to get married and is undecided whether to move or stay in Louisiana. Then Sadie's narrative begins. Using a few objects (such as a knife, a hat, a bowl) as a medium,

she creates a personal and sentimental account that chronicles various events that happened to her and Jim, allowing the creation of an identity and backstory for Jim. She thus narrates her and Jim's life under slavery, first serving the same master and then being separated; then she recalls Jim's escape; the struggle for her and her children's survival; the repeated physical abuse she suffers; her meeting Andrew, with whom she has four children; seeing Jim again and being obliged to part from him for the sake of her children; and finally, her life after emancipation, including the quest for survival and the arrival of stability (Yoon, 2008, p.129-30). With a different narrative voice, *My Jim* shows how painful life under slavery is and how many challenges one must overcome to achieve freedom.

Getting more specifically into the novels' treatment of slavery, it is interesting to observe the way in which power relations are discussed. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck, despite his friendship with Jim, often adopts a language that seems to legitimize slavery (Yoon, 2008, p. 133). Jim is constantly shown as belonging to someone: "Miss Watson's big nigger" (Twain, 1884, p.5); "Miss Watson's nigger, Jim" (Twain, 1884, p.17); "Miss Watson, your runaway nigger Jim" (Twain, 1884, p.216). After his escape, Jim does believe in his right to be a free man, as he states, "I owns myself, en I's wuth eight hund'd dollars" (Twain, 1884, p.49), however, his language suggests that he perceives his value in terms related to slavery. His worth is expressed in dollars, which form part of everyday conversations about property in slavery: slaves are property and as such are worth money (Howe, 2009, p.10). In *My Jim*, instead, the whole premise is different, as the novel locates African American identity beyond the institution of slavery. The title itself seems to suggest the intention to dislocate the experience of slavery from the concept of ownership, proposing human connections as stretching far beyond oppression and subjugation. In Rawles' narrative, Sadie remembers herself and her fellow slaves as independent people placed in a cruel and unfair situation. She often refers to Jim as "her," but only to show the emotional link between the two, and thus not to associate him with some kind of ownership as in slavery (Yoon, 2008, p.134-35). Therefore, for example, Sadie states:

> My Jim she whisper. My Lizbeth. My Jonnie. Been years since I calls they names. (Rawles, 2006, p.15)

> Jim aint with us much these days. Young Miss Wants want him with her all the time. He my Jim she tell everybody. He my nigger. (Rawles, 2006, p.34-35)
> From then on I belongs to him. He the one love me so he the one own me. His love good like my mamas. I aint miss her so much now I gots my Jim. (Rawles, 2006, p.68)

My Jim presents a clear vision on the emotions of the enslaved, emphasizing the significance of personal bonds and dismantling the beliefs that reduced slaves to powerless and incapable individuals.

Jim's ultimate escape brings us to another important aspect of the narratives. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Jim finally achieves true freedom when he is freed by Miss Watson as her last wish before dying. However, Jim's escape is, firstly, seen as important only because it leads Huck to recognize that, after all, Jim is a human being and deserves to be free; and secondly, it quickly turns into something ridiculous when Tom Sawyer arrives and treats the situation as a game. The novel seems to want to only quickly address Jim's freedom, without giving it any real meaning. Instead of dealing with the difficult and moral issues that this situation raises, the story favors an easy and unproblematic ending. Moreover, at the very end, Jim is shown as being completely happy, without making any reference to his family, which seems very unlikely (Yoon, 2008, p.130-31). Instead, he thinks about money, again:

> Jim was pleased most to death, and busted out, and says:
> "Dah, now, Huck, what I tell you?—what I tell you up dah on Jackson islan'? I tole you I got a hairy breas', en what's de sign un it; en I tole you I ben rich wunst, en gwineter to be rich agin; en it's come true; en heah she is! dah, now! doan' talk to me—signs is signs, mine I tell you; en I knowed jis' 's well 'at I 'uz gwineter be rich agin as I's a-stannin' heah dis minute!" (Twain, 1884, p.294-95)

In *My Jim*, the whole situation is discussed differently: Jim is released the same way, yet the story is not over. Receiving freedom does not imply that everything is solved: many people are still victims of the institution of slavery and continue to suffer deeply, including Sadie. Moreover, for Jim, freedom has meant losing everything he loved (Yoon, 2008, p.132). Here, in fact, is a conversation between Sadie and Jim:

> You free now. [...] Why you come to the pen. Aint you worry they snatch you.
> I needs you to see me Sadie. I needs you to see how sorry I be. Gots my freedom but I loss my family. What kind of man I be.
> He cry good then. I aint mad at him. I aint happy for him. I mostly just jealous and shame for myself. To still be a slave and he free. (Rawles, 2006, p.130)

Therefore, the story of slavery cannot exclusively be resolved through the liberation of one person; it certainly means much, but it is not the end of the story. Rawles is right in emphasizing the deeper connotations that are involved, including the feeling of regret for leaving other people behind. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is justifiably interested in its protagonist and his moral awakening, but perhaps it fails to include the liberation of a slave without giving it a proper ending, using it purely as a backdrop for other purposes, and nearly making a joke of it. *My Jim*, instead, through Sadie's memories, shows us all the emotions and consequences that a single man's story implies: leaving the people you love the most is hard, and what happens to them when you are gone is a whole different story. Ultimately, it is collective memory that can ensure the survival of those lives (Yoon, 2008, p.133).

2.3.3 *Middle Passage*: Retelling *Benito Cereno*

Benito Cereno is a novella written by Herman Melville and first published in 1855. Inspired by the *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (1818) by Amasa Delano, the novella is set aboard a Spanish slave ship called the *San Dominick*, captained by Benito Cereno. The ship is discovered adrift off the coast of Chile by an American vessel, the *Bachelor's Delight*, captained by Amasa Delano himself. Delano offers assistance, goes on board, and, through his naïve perspective, he witnesses some of the events happening on board. He initially perceives Cereno as a kind but overwhelmed captain, having a strange relationship with Babo, one of the slaves, though he eventually discovers the truth. The slaves have rebelled and are in control of the ship, using Cereno as a puppet to maintain an appearance of normality. The novella concludes with an explanation of the story through the legal depositions made in Lima and a final conversation between Delano and Cereno (Melville, 1855). In 1990, Charles Johnson wrote *Middle Passage*, a neo-slave narrative and intertextual recounting of *Benito Cereno*, albeit in much less direct ways compared to other examples of

intertextuality.[19] The novel is narrated by the protagonist, Rutherford Calhoun, who, newly released from slavery, arrives in New Orleans in the 1830s to seek entertainment. He meets Isadora Bailey, and, despite their differences, they are attracted to each other. Rutherford, however, has no intention of getting married, therefore Isadora makes a deal with a local gangster to pay Rutherford's debts in exchange for marriage. Horrified, Rutherford meets a man named Squibb in a bar, who tells him the next day he will embark as a cook on a ship, the *Republic*, bound for Africa. Rutherford decides to steal his papers and sneaks onto the ship, later followed by Squibb himself. Here, amidst a crew led by the enigmatic Captain Ebeneezer Falcon, Rutherford faces the unpleasant reality: on the ship, an illegal slave-trading operation is underway with the aim of capturing the Allmuseri tribe, along with the search for a mysterious and threatening cargo. When the ship arrives on the African coast, forty Allmuseri tribesmen come on board as slaves and are treated harshly by the captain and crew. The ship is attacked by the tribe, who want to return to Africa, ultimately leaving Rutherford and Squibb and some children as the only survivors. They face difficult conditions until a storm destroys the ship. Rescued by another ship, the Juno, Rutherford discovers that Isadora is on board, engaged to the gangster. Rutherford blackmails the gangster and gets back with Isadora (Johnson, 1990).

Over time, critical interpretations of *Benito Cereno* have changed considerably. At the time of its first publication, the novella was labelled a morality tale. Delano symbolized the good-natured and clueless American navigating the evil embodied by Babo and the slaves. Above all, this reading emphasized the innocence of a benevolent person as a contributor to his own survival. Gradually, deeper political implications started to be ascribed to the novella, particularly with regard to imperialism and slavery, as well as issues related to power dynamics, race, and interactions between different cultural and racial groups. The question of whether Herman Melville's intention was to condemn or condone slave rebellions and the use of violence is still debated (Palencia, 1994, p.3-4). Considering the extreme ambiguity of the narrative and the different and conflicting permissible readings, we may consider the co-reading of Middle Passage valuable, as it

[19] For a more specific revision, I suggest looking into *La Fragata de Las Màscaras*, written in 1996 by Uruguayan writer Tomás de Mattos. The text does not yet have an English or Italian translation. For a good overview of the main elements, see: Alessandro Portelli (2012). "*La fragata de las màscaras*: una riscrittura sudamericana di 'Benito Cereno.'" *Glocal Melville*, no. 2, pp. 127-135.

presents us with an unambiguous and irrefutable view of the above-mentioned issues. In fact, *Middle Passage* revisits *Benito Cereno* insofar as it deconstructs the myths embodied in the novella and tells the story from a different perspective. If Melville established a social order, Johnson destroys it by criticizing the institution of slavery and the Middle Passage (Palencia, 1994, p.4).

A first meaningful contrast between *Middle Passage* and *Benito Cereno* is found in the representation of the characters and the level of subjectivity attributed to them. In Melville's novella, Babo, the leader of the slaves, is portrayed as a threatening devil-like figure, characterized solely by violence and brutality (Thaden, 1997, p.97). This portrayal is evident in various moments, most notably in the cited legal dispositions, where we can see stated that, "The Negro Babo was the plotter from first to last; he ordered every murder, and was the helm and keel of the revolt" (Melville, 1855, p.97). In *Benito Cereno*, none of the slaves, including Babo, have the opportunity to explain why they revolted and which were the conditions that led them to such acts. In *Middle Passage*, Johnson clearly shows the harsh conditions that drove slaves to revolt, as most of them openly share their reasons (Thaden, 1997, p.760). This distinction is perhaps best illustrated by Rutherford's heartfelt explanation of their condition:

> And they had reason, good reason, for seeing the last of the Republic's officers dead. […] Each man had his atrocity to tell. If not brutality to them then beadroll of humiliations the midshipmen had inflicted upon the women, two of whom had been raped, or on their children, and to this list Diamelo added the small but nonetheless violent assault on their spirit—parading them naked for bathing before their own children, forcing them to eat by ramming fingers down their throats, answering their wild clawing from the hold of gales of laughter. (Johnson, 1990, p.160)

Johnson dismantles the popular idea that we explored in chapter one and which Melville does not openly denounce, that is, that slaves were violent and found contentment in slavery due to their inability to take care of themselves. In the novel, instead, it becomes clear that it is not only physical brutality that inflicts damage, but also the emotional and psychological abuse suffered (Palencia, 1994, p.23).

Racial stereotypes are plentiful in *Benito Cereno*, portraying black people as intellectually inferior and inherently savage. Babo embodies the stereotype of the beastly savage when he strategically manipulates Delano's perceptions in order to maintain control. Delano, on the other hand, subscribes to the notion of black inferiority, viewing

slaves as "stupid" by nature and contrasting them with the perceived intellectual superiority of the white race (Palencia, 1994, p.23-25). For instance, he thinks:

> But if the whites had dark secrets concerning Don Benito, could then Don Benito be any way in complicity with the blacks? But they were too stupid. Besides, who ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguing in against it with Negroes? (Melville, 1855, p. 63)

Moreover, when Delano finds out the truth about the slave revolt, his view of the world changes, but instead of challenging the prejudices, he reinforces his beliefs having to do with the natural order of racial hierarchy. He concludes that the "savagery" of the black man can be contained as long as he remains a slave, under the civilizing influence of the white race. In *Middle Passage*, Johnson shows that black people, being human beings, are complex individuals, and any presumed ignorance is rooted in the oppression of slavery and the desire to survive. An example is Rutherford himself, a man characterized by both positive and negative aspects. At the beginning of the novel, he may be perceived as a simple and quite ignorant man, just like the characters in *Benito Cereno*. He is an insubordinate cheater who fills his days with gambling and alcohol. However, once aboard the *Republic* and after the Middle Passage, he evolves from that state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. He creates his own identity and a new view of the world, which enables him to become a better man. This is in great contrast to Delano's idea, which at the end calls for the re-establishment of world order (Palencia, 1994, p.27-28). To demonstrate this concept, we can observe how, at the beginning of the novel, Rutherford confesses: "In plain English, I was a petty thief" (Johnson, 1990, p.8). Once he experiences this great adventure, however, his view changes:

> The voyage had irreversibly changed my seeing, made of me a cultural mongrel, and transformed the world into a fleeting shadow play I felt no need to possess or dominate, only appreciate in the ever extended present. (Johnson, 1990, p.222)

Beyond character portraits, *Benito Cereno* and *Middle Passage* are contrasted by bigger narrative themes. In *Benito Cereno*, there is the subtle suggestion that evilness resides in humanity and that, throughout history, there is a perpetual cycle of oppression, in which the power dynamics can change but the cycle remains. That is to say, the master-slave relationship cannot but exist. Amasa Delano, the naïve American, struggles to

conceive of a dynamic between Benito Cereno and Babo that goes beyond that of master and slave. This is evident when he first talks about their relationship:

> As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other. (Melville, 1855, p.45)

Delano cannot fathom the idea that slaves could have orchestrated such a complex plan, firmly believing, therefore, in the inevitability of oppression. By contrast, in *Middle Passage*, there is an early moment when even Rutherford is convinced of the inevitability of oppression and therefore strives to survive, but towards the end he realizes that this idea of survival exists only in his imagination and not in reality. Johnson seems to suggest that there is a way out of the master-slave cycle, and it is achieved by reinventing the perception of ourselves and others. *Middle Passage* aims to convey the idea that our identities are shaped by our choices, emphasizing the importance of being committed to be neither victims nor executioners (Thaden, 1997, p.764). This, of course, does not mean that slaves should have simply imagined themselves as free and they would have been free. Rather, it is a universal statement that has to do with the differences we still perceive among ourselves; the "races" we think distinguish us, but which are actually fabrications.

The conclusions of both works further emphasize their different perspectives. If Melville's narration takes a path that goes from apparent goodness to genuine evil, Johnson's progresses from apparent immorality and avarice towards selfless acts. The concluding passages of *Benito Cereno* offer a reflection of the American mind of the time: the tendency to forget about history. The events that unfold fail to produce a change in the characters, especially in Delano, who believes that "The past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it" (Melville, 1855, p.101). In contrast, in *Middle Passage*, Rutherford gathers much wisdom and comes back ready to impart new insights. Johnson, with his novel, intends to imply that the story ends well the moment people change, that is, the moment they recognize the atrocities of the world (Palencia, 1994, p.36).

Therefore, it can be argued that Johnson was able to address a number of misrepresentations of black people which are prevalent in *Benito Cereno*. Again, whether Melville actually supported or condemned them is up to debate, and it is exactly this ambiguity that calls for the clarifications given by *Middle Passage*.

Chapter Three

The Wind Done Gone: Retelling *Gone with the Wind*

In this chapter, the purpose is to introduce what will be the main intertextual case study of this thesis, which concerns the relationship between Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone*. I will introduce both novels along with details of their publication and reception, in an attempt to lay the groundwork for the next chapter. We will see how and why *The Wind Done Gone* was written as a response to *Gone with the Wind*, and we will be able to appreciate its relevance in shedding new light on the slave and African American experience. Overall, I would like to examine how a story like *Gone with the Wind* gets rewritten and reimagined by looking at how *The Wind Done Gone* uses intertextual lenses and draws on the theoretical principles of Signifying Monkey theory.

3.1 *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell

Gone with the Wind is a title most of us will recognize and one that often evokes vivid images. It usually conjures up visions of a mythical antebellum U.S. South, an intense and unexpected love story, and a resilient heroine determined to reclaim what she believes to be rightfully hers. It is the novel that has taught many that "tomorrow is another day," that if a problem arises, one can always "think about it tomorrow," and that men can love but eventually can also not "give a damn." Personally, the first time I read the novel, I loved it. Rhett's mysterious charm won me over, while I tolerated Scarlett for her resilience but, mostly, because Rhett understood her, thus how could I not? I read *GWTW* as a beautiful love story that ended tragically—for no reason at all—and what made me wonder the most was: why couldn't Rhett and Scarlett just end up together? I was sixteen years old at the time, and while I noticed the presence of some problematic elements, I simply blamed it on the time it was written: a long time ago, so those issues were solved by now. Now that I am twenty-three and a little bit more experienced, I understand that *GWTW* is much more than a love story or a heroine's journey. It is much more than the

story of a woman and her struggles alone. What *GWTW* hides behind its layered narrative is a world waiting to be uncovered and to be challenged by us.

GWTW was published in 1936, a time when many Southern novelists were publishing what we can classify as Civil War novels, in other words, novels that either sought to reestablish the good image of the Old South or that reflected on contemporary aspects of the New South (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.15-16). The public, in general, was becoming more interested in the history of the South and the nation as a whole, more so considering the era of Depression it was experiencing. Many people were fascinated by the idea of culture, and were striving for a new social sensibility that would allow them to regain a sense of order and justice (Fox-Genovese, 1981, p.392).

Margaret Mitchell, born in 1900 in Georgia,[20] took an interest in the history of her homeland after spending countless Sunday afternoons listening to her family discuss the Civil war when she was young. Mitchell recalled how she had "heard so much about the fighting and the hard times after the war," which, to her surprise, had ended shortly before she was born (as cited in Brown and Witley, 2011, p.5). This interest prompted her to start writing about those Georgian citizens who had lived through the 1860s and 1870s, thus the years of the war and the Reconstruction. She was less focused on the war itself and more interested in its great impact on the women and men who had lived through it and had seen their lives completely disrupted, and above all was interested her was the life of the young, rich and spoilt protagonist of the novel, who was initially called Pansy O'Hara.[21] Interestingly, Mitchell began writing *GWTW* from its end, working backwards and not following a structured plan, but weaving in elements that she found interesting as she went along (Brown and Witley, 2011, p.8-9).

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[20] Mitchell was born into a wealthy family. Her mother, Maybelle, was an educated woman who advocated for women's suffrage, while her father, Eugene, was a sophisticated man, a lawyer and one of the founders of the Atlanta Historical Society. Mitchell attended high school in Atlanta and later went to Smith College in Northampton (Massachusetts), all the while she fell in love with a man named Henry, who later died from injuries suffered as a soldier in World War I. Shortly after this loss, her mother died of Spanish influenza. Mitchell then spent her adulthood in Atlanta and in 1922 married Berrien Kinnard "Red" Upshaw, although their marriage was troubled and he left the city a few months later. In 1922, she became a reporter for the *Atlanta Journal Sunday Magazine*. After her divorce, she married John Robert Marsh, Upshaw's former roommate and friend, and later gave up her job due to an ankle injury and arthritis. Out of boredom and lack of money, she began writing what would become *Gone with the Wind*, her only novel, which she finished in 1929 and to which she added a few more details until its publication seven years later (Brown and Witley, 2011, p.5-12).

[21] Interestingly, the name "Pansy" was discarded due to it being a term used to describe homosexuals (Brown and Witley, 2011, p.28).

The final version of *GWTW* follows the story of Scarlett O'Hara, who in 1861, just before the Civil War, is sixteen years old and lives at Tara, her family's cotton plantation in Georgia. Scarlett is "not beautiful," yet every man is "caught by her charm" (Mitchell, 1936, p.5). Her father is Gerald O'Hara, a wealthy Irish immigrant who owns a few slaves, while her mother, Ellen, is of French ancestry. Scarlett has two sisters, Suellen and Carreen, and is carefully served by Mammy, an old enslaved woman, described as "black, but her code of conduct and her sense of pride were as high or higher than those of her owners" (Mitchell, 1936, p.21). Foolishly in love with Ashley Wilkes, her neighbor, Scarlett declares her love to him but is rejected as he is about to marry Melanie Hamilton, his cousin. While she struggles with this impossible love, the world around her is in turmoil. In fact, providing the backdrop to the spoiled, headstrong, and flirtatious protagonist of the novel are conversations about a possible upcoming war, which has everyone excited, as the novel states repeatedly: "The South was intoxicated with enthusiasm and excitement" (Mitchell, 1936, p.107). And the war does soon begin, as Scarlett impulsively marries Melanie's brother Charles, who dies shortly after leaving for war while she gives birth to their son, Wade Hampton Hamilton, for whom, it is said, "she felt little affection" (Mitchell, 1936, p.109). Sick of the boring life of a widow, Scarlett moves to Atlanta and starts living with Melanie and her aunt Sarah Jane (Pittypat). Atlanta gives her a new life: she is enthusiastic about the big city and starts working at the hospital to help the Confederate army. However, as we read, "she did not care if the war lasted forever. In fact, she could endure the hospital with equanimity now because it was a perfect happy hunting ground" (Mitchell, 1936, p.177). Secretly, she is still madly in love with Ashley and cares little about Melanie's friendship. Simultaneously, she becomes closer to Rhett Butler, whom she had already met at Tara. She is drawn to him because of his wealth and charm, while he seems to be the only one who truly understands her. In the meanwhile, the war continues, and Atlanta is besieged by the Union, while Melanie, with the sole help of Scarlett and the young slave Prissy, gives birth to her and Ashley's son, Beau. Ellen O'Hara dies of typhoid fever and Scarlett is determined to return to Tara: she gathers Melanie, Prissy, Wade and Beau and, aided initially by Rhett, who later joins the army at last, returns to her now desolate home. "Tara was her fate, her fight, and she must conquer it" (Mitchell, 1936, p.421), we read in the book: Scarlett takes over the plantation, determined to persevere through hardship and

restore everything she can. She puts everyone to work, including Mammy, Pork (an enslaved valet) and Dilcey (Pork's wife), while her father, Gerald, gradually loses his grip on reality and later dies. After a while, however, taxes get increasingly higher to the point where Scarlett decides to ask Rhett for the money, attempting to charm him while he is in a jailhouse in Atlanta, but she fails when he discovers her plan. Therefore, she decides to marry a middle-aged man named Frank Kennedy, a shop owner, and returns to Atlanta, followed by Melanie and Ashley. She takes control of her husband's business and becomes pregnant with a baby girl, Ella Lorena. One day, Scarlett goes to a dangerous part of the city and is attacked by a group of criminals, former slaves, as she laments, "What devils the Yankees were to set them free, free to jeer at white people!" (Mitchell, 1936, p.471). Frank decides to take revenge along with other members of the Ku Klux Klan, including Ashley, by carrying out a raid, but he is killed. A year later, Scarlett marries Rhett and moves into a large house on Peachtree Street, where the two have a daughter, Eugenie Victoria, called Bonnie. However, their marriage does not go well, mainly due to Ashley's presence in their lives, which makes Scarlett reluctant to show affection and keeps Rhett constantly jealous. Despite this, Scarlett becomes pregnant again, but during an argument with Rhett, she falls down the stairs and loses the baby. Later, when Bonnie is four years old, she falls from a horse and dies, devastating Rhett. In the end, Scarlett realizes that she no longer loves Ashley, and perhaps never truly did, as she really loves Rhett. However, Rhett has decided to leave her after all the years of suffering she caused him. Scarlett is left alone, but she tells herself she will always have Tara: "I'll think about it tomorrow, at Tara. I can stand it then. Tomorrow, I'll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day" (Mitchell, 1936, p.831).

3.1.1 The *GWTW* Phenomenon

The title "Gone with the Wind" refers to a poem called "Cynara" written by the English poet Ernest Dowson, and more specifically to a line in the poem that reads: "I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind" (Harwell, 1992, p.12). Mitchell was drawn to this line because it perfectly represented Scarlett's feelings towards Tara: would Tara be able to overcome the difficulties or would it be gone with the wind like everything else? (Brown and Witley, 2011, p.28). When she submitted the novel to her publisher,

Harold Lathman, it did not yet have a name. She received a $250 cheque and continued editing it, as it presented problems in structure, grammar, punctuation and references, given that she mostly wrote historical facts from memory (Brown and Witley, 2011, p.27-28). When it was finally published on June 30, 1936, Mitchell declared: "My heart began to bump and I stopped feeling numb and suddenly, I felt like an author" (as cited in Brown and Witley, 2011, p.49). And she had every reason to feel an author, for the novel swiftly became a national and international bestseller. Everyone was reading it: young girls, older women, men, and even schoolchildren drawn to its more provocative passages. Its appeal went from Northerners to Southerners, and quickly reached readers outside the United States, who saw the novel as a universal tale of survival (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.4). Its popularity was so immeasurable that it led some skeptics to believe that Mitchell had not in fact written it; it was rumored that it had been ghostwritten by either her husband John, her father, her brother, or the writer Sinclair Lewis (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.16). However, within a few months, the novel had sold one million copies and won the Pulitzer Prize; a few years later, *GWTW* had become the number-one U.S. bestseller of all time, surpassing Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Today, the novel continues to sell copies, often more than current bestsellers (Meindl, 1981, p.414).

After its publication, critics responded to the novel with mixed opinions, but most reviews were positive.[22] Journalist J. Donald Adams described the novel as "the best Civil War novel that has yet been written." Similarly, historian Henry Steele Commager claimed that while some people might not consider it a true work of art, it could stand as "a dramatic recreation of life itself" (as cited in Harwell, 1992, p.15). Critic Edwin Granberry, in the *New York Sun*, stated that the novel could be equated with the works of international authors such as "Tolstoi, Hardy, Dickens, and the modern Undset," and that it could be seen as "the finest historical novel ever written by an American" (as cited in Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.18). In the *Atlanta Journal*, Samuel Tupper Jr. stated that Mitchell,

[22] The negative reviews, which I will discuss later, mainly concerned the fact that the novel was considered too simple, too detached from reality and lacking in realism, and an expression of capitalist values within a racist perspective. Due to its large publicity project, many also criticized the corrupting impact of capitalism on literature (Scacchi, 1999, p.152).

> by anecdote, by glowing scenes, by pleasantly ironic comments, shows the Old South hating, loving, making interminable visits, dying, living again, scrambling back to power and integrity. She sees its beauty, its weakness, the doomed strength of its young manhood, its slaves who are despots and as the war drums beat with a deeper note, neither the weak nor the strong escape her scrutiny [...]. This is not poetry or philosophy or fine writing—it is life. (As cited in Harwell, 1992, p.17)

Or again, poet and writer Stephen Vincent Benét remarked how "in *Gone with the Wind*, Miss Mitchell has written a solid and vividly interesting story of war and reconstruction, realistic in detail and told from an original point of view" (as cited in Harwell, 1992, p.21). The public certainly also relished it right from the start. Being a story with elements of adventure, love, and war, it managed to quickly enter the hearts of many different people. It was a novel that contained everything a reader could wish for: it encompassed disciplines such as history, medicine, psychology and sociology, as well as a diversity of emotions, such as love, passion, hatred, avarice, hunger, loneliness, despair. It is no surprise that many Americans and outsiders, for instance, learnt about details of the Civil War precisely because of this novel and, more significantly, became familiar with the history of slavery through this novel alone (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.5). Its great success was additionally enhanced by the fact that readers, although the novel was set in a different period, found many shared traits with the era they were living in. As Scacchi (1999, p.154) notes, many readers easily identified with some of the characters, especially Scarlett, who demonstrated how it was necessary to adapt to change or one would succumb. This idea matched Franklin D. Roosevelt's call for individual efforts to survive contemporary reality.

Mitchell, confronted with this great and unexpected success, stated how "the public interest centered around *Gone with the Wind* is a force of such magnitude that it is not to be trifled with" (as cited in Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.155). Every bookshop wanted copies of the book; library readers faced waiting lists of weeks, longer than ever before; more and more readers bought it to share, or gave it as a gift as it had become the most desired book by so many. Some shops even decided to reduce the price of the novel, fully aware that they would not make any profit from it, only to attract more customers (Brown and Witley, 2011, p.105). Literary critic Malcolm Cowley, in *The New Republic*, went so far as to affirm that if the pages of the novel purchased by the readers were combined, they "would encircle the world at the Equator two and two-thirds times" (as cited in Adams, 2007, p.58).

It does not come as a surprise that negotiations for a movie began almost immediately after the novel's release. Film producer David O. Selznick seized the opportunity and acquired the movie rights for fifty thousand dollars, refusing to sell them to competition even when offered twice the price he paid for. With the purpose of creating further enthusiasm for the release of the film, which required a few years to happen because he was busy with another project, he even hired the famous actors Robert Montgomery and Constance Bennett to perform in a scene from the book that was to be released in advance. In fact, everyone eagerly wanted the film to be released as soon as possible and most actors wished to be part of it, insomuch that it is said that Selznick received around seventy-five thousand letters regarding his project on *GWTW* (Brown and Witley, 2011, p.110-11). Regarding the movie's production, Mitchell commented:

> I sold the moving picture rights to Mr. Selznick. Rhett and Scarlett are his to have and to hold and to cast as he sees fit. If he should botch the job that will be his worry. I have made up my mind very definitely about the movie version—I'll have nothing to do with it. (As cited in Harwell, p.129)

Mitchell had therefore little part in the making of the movie, as the task of retelling the story was left to Selznick, the screenwriter Sidney Howard, and fifteen other writers (including Francis Scott Fitzgerald). The film was released on December 15, 1939, starring Vivien Leigh[23] and Clark Gable as Scarlett and Rhett. Predictably, it was a huge success: running for almost four hours, it won eight Academy Awards and boxed 390 million dollars (which corresponds to approximately six billion dollars today). The movie was successful in rebranding the genre of Hollywood Civil War-themed movies after the huge success of *The Birth of a Nation* (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.21).

However, needless to say, just like the novel, the movie version of *GWTW* presents major problems in the portrayal of certain characters, regardless of what Selznick declared before they began drafting it. Apparently, according to him, they had to be "extremely careful that the Negroes come out decidedly on the right side of the ledger" (Leff, 1984, p.147), but in the end, the movie arguably amplified some of the most problematic aspects of the book.

[23] Leigh, being English, was met with much disappointment after being cast in the role of Scarlett. In particular, Southern fans opposed such casting, even if some of them maintained that an English woman was better than a Northerner (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.20).

If the public had already gone crazy for the novel, the movie made Scarlett's story skyrocket to success. However, both the novel and the movie helped audiences become familiar with a world consisting of feelings of romantic nostalgia mixed with distorted views of the Civil War and the Reconstruction era, as well as an underestimation of the "peculiar institution" (Silva, 2014, p.135). Because of *GWTW*, momentous events in American history (slavery, the war, and the Reconstruction period) came to be remembered by many not because of the atrocities that occurred or because of the effort to build a more united nation, but rather as a dramatic backdrop that underscored America's supposed greatness. To be more clear, what many took from the novel and the film was a reminder of how America and Americans could rise again after difficult times (Silva, 2014, p.149). Scarlett's suffering and her desire to survive adversity became a reminder that if the South was able to recover after the disaster of the Civil War, so could any contemporary American cope with the difficult circumstances of their time (Chess, 1999, p.154). Instead, the major problems present in the novel and the film were completely pushed aside, such as the representation of the slaves and the myth of the "Lost Cause," the idolization of the culture of the Old South, and the erasure of the brutality and resistance that defined slavery and Reconstruction.

Nowadays, the movie remains a classic, and one that most people have seen at least once. In fact, it is quite difficult to find someone who has never seen it or is not familiar with it, at least by name. The book continues to be sold in large quantities: more than 30 million copies have been sold throughout the world in thirty-two different languages. Reportedly, the book is the second most popular book in the United States, ranking second only to the Bible (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.23). Despite its immense popularity, however, we should also consider that the novel has been relatively neglected by the academic community: having been written by a woman and having had enormous success, many have been reluctant to consider it comparable to other novels within the American canon. As a result, most mentions of the book are either about its public success, its female component, or the various issues it contains (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.176).

3.1.2 A "Women's Book"

As previously mentioned, *GWTW* was immediately favored by the general public for its ability to explore a variety of themes, well suited to all types of audiences. Specifically, the novel reached extreme popularity in the U.S. because it seemed to embrace what we can consider some of the typically American values: individualism, determination, survival; but also family values, tradition and the pursuit of wealth (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.24). While this wide appeal is undeniable, ever since its publication, scholarly and cultural attention has often focused on its resonance with a particular reading audience: women. The novel, in spite of the range of topics it dealt with, was nevertheless written by a woman, had a female protagonist, and was primarily purchased by women (Adams, 2007, p.59). For this reason, it has often been described as a "women's book," and over the years, interpretations of the novel have largely focused on its portrayal of a resilient female hero, while dismissing other parts of the text that demanded more attention. Mitchell was certainly concerned with the role of women in history and understood their specific place in a patriarchal society, especially in the antebellum period and her time. In the novel, she appears to explore themes such as female identity, female desires, and the power and strength of women. Above all, what many read in the novel is a preoccupation with the struggle many women undertook to resist the specific roles that men assigned to them (Fox-Genovese, 1981, p.393-94). Scarlett seems to embody the ideal of a southern belle, yet underneath the surface she is scheming, obstinate, calculating, and outspoken. Some critics suggest that her name alone, having a connotation of redness, suggests that she is a "devil-like" character (Zawadka, 2015, p.199). She is, in fact, extremely manipulative and uses her charm to seduce men to her advantage. Despite society's expectations, she rejects the idea of acting like a fool just to conform to absurd standards. Scarlett "does every thing that a lady of the old school should not do," according to Mitchell (as cited in Faust, 1999, p.8). She is the parody of true womanhood, since there is nothing "angelic" about her, in comparison to Melanie, who represents it perfectly.[24] Moreover, when the war strikes Atlanta, Scarlett is forced

[24] We should remember that in the nineteenth century, within the Cult of Domesticity, the American value system of the middle and upper classes perceived women as pure and angelic creatures, expected to devote

to abandon conventional femininity in order to survive. She assumes the role of a man, taking responsibility not only for herself, but also for those around her. She becomes a leader, and shows how a woman can be as powerful and resolute as a man, and actually more than most of the male characters of the novel (Faust, 1999, p.8-10). For this reason, *GWTW* has often been interpreted as a liberating narrative for women, so much so that critics have even described it as a "representation of a white Southern femininity gone bad" (Gros, 2019, p.2).

However, interpretations of Scarlett's character have extended beyond Mitchell's original intentions. While she certainly supported women's independence, she supposedly considered Melanie to be the true "heroine of the book," as she told her friend and publisher Lois Dwight Cole, and sought to distance herself from interpretations that searched for similarities between her and Scarlett (Scacchi, 1999, p.158). Indeed, Mitchell envisioned Scarlett as a representative of no specific set of values, whether patriotic, feminist, racist—it is said that she was genuinely surprised to learn that her protagonist was so loved and admired around the world (in fact, just as she was surprised to learn that the novel was rebuked by many African Americans) (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.156). Despite this, parallels between her and Scarlett have often been sought, especially if centered on women's independence. For instance, it has been speculated that Mitchell's relationship with her second husband, John, was the inspiration for Scarlett and Rhett's romance, with Scarlett representing Mitchell as a woman unable to appreciate the man that was courting her. Additionally, many saw in the novel a greater interest in and a more truthful portrayal of the generation of women living in the 1920s, rather than those during the Civil War (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.19). Critics pointed out similarities between Scarlett and the flapper generation, which included Mitchell,[25] that is to say, women who began rejecting feminine conventions in the 1920s. In many ways, Scarlett epitomized the modern woman: not only an independent and determined woman, but also one who does not aspire to be a wife and finds no desire or interest in being a mother (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.157). Despite Mitchell's intentions, Scarlett had an enormous influence

their lives to their family by educating their children on American values and running the household while their husbands were at work. At the turn of the century, women began to claim their independence, as the feminist idea of the "New Woman" took hold (Zawadka, 2015, p.199).

[25] In the 1920s, Mitchell actually wrote a novel on a flapper, but she reportedly burned it before finishing it (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.19).

on twentieth-century women, to the extent that in the 1950s and 1960s she became a symbol of "new age women" who wanted to adopt a progressive identity (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.20). As a whole, women of every generation found something in a character that reminded them of empowerment and liberation.

3.2 *The Wind Done Gone* by Alice Randall

Over the years, *GWTW* has been a source of inspiration for numerous rewritings. Being a very long novel with many themes to be explored, it is not difficult to imagine the multitude of other stories that can be told. Some critics have described it as a novel with an "amorphous quality," meaning one that resonates with everyone precisely because of its lack of a specific configuration. Authorized sequels of *GWTW* include *Scarlett*, written by Alexandra Ripley in 1991, and Donald McCaig's *Rhett Butler's People* (2007) and *Ruth's Journey* (2014). *Scarlett* follows the story of Scarlett and Rhett after their breakup, but it mostly focuses on Scarlett's journey to find her parental heritage, which takes her to Charleston and Savannah in search of her French side and to Ireland to discover her Irish legacy. The ending of the novel reflects on the idea of unifying people of different backgrounds, standing as a type of reflection on multiculturalism, seen as not truly effective unless there is interaction and exchange between different cultures (Zawadka, 2013, p.201). Despite having been explicitly requested by Mitchell's heirs as a sequel, the novel did not live up to expectations, as it was considered too romanticized and, despite its length, lacking in content (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.7). *Rhett Butler's People* was also requested by Mitchell's heirs as a second sequel, although it may be considered more of a prequel/sequel centered on Rhett's life from childhood, spanning between 1843 to 1874. McCaig, being a Civil War novelist, aimed at giving a different emphasis to the Civil War, as he found it lacking and naïve in *GWTW*. *Ruth's Journey*, instead, tells the story of Mammy, called Ruth, from the love and marriage of her youth to the trauma and loss of her life as a slave. Born on the island of Saint-Domingue, Ruth is brought to the U.S. by Captain Henri Fournier and his wife, Solange, and becomes their slave. Solange gives birth to Ellen, who later becomes Ellen O'Hara after marrying Gerald, forcing Ruth to move to a cotton plantation called Tara (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.6-7).

Interestingly, there are also works that subtly reimagine *GWTW* in different ways. For example, Alex Haley's novel *Roots* (1976) emphasizes how the history of the American South is not only that of white people, but also of those who have historically been considered as "other." Many have called *Roots* "a contemporary *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" and "the black *Gone with the Wind*," the latter precisely because of its themes related to resilience and the ability to rise up again (Ryan, 2007, p.122). The story is about finding one's origins as well as about the progress of black Americans from slavery to full citizenship: Haley describes how his family descended from Kunta Kinte, a Gambian man who, in 1767, was taken from his family and brought to the South as a slave. There, he survived slavery and created his family, more than two centuries later leading to Haley, who now acknowledges his double identity and seeks to reshape the narrative of African Americans by documenting and vindicating their past (Zawadka, 2015, p.205).

Many African American writers have found fertile ground to work on with *GWTW*, and it is hardly surprising. It does not require much inspection to see how the novel portrays the institution of slavery in a far too biased and justifying way; it narrates a patriarchal institution, fair and natural, with slaves limited to racial stereotypes presenting them as happy with their condition and in need of subjugation (Ryan, 2008, p.16). *The Wind Done Gone*, written in 2001, is perhaps the best example of a rewriting of *GWTW* that dismantles its structure and mythical ideals, shaping a new story, a neo-slave narrative, that places relevance on the silenced voices from Mitchell's novel and provides a new reading for the novel (Kenan, 2018, p.227). Its author, Alice Randall,[26] when asked why she decided to write her novel, recalled being asked to give a speech on the costumes of the movie version of *GWTW* at Belle Meade Plantation, which led her to reread the book. She stated how she was:

> Shocked by so much in the book. Shocked by its praise of the Klan. Shocked by its attack on black politicians. Shocked by Mitchell's depiction of Mammy as stupid and ugly [...]. Reading as an adult,

[26] Randall was born in Detroit in 1959 and spent her life in Washington, D.C. In 1977, she attended Harvard University where she majored in English and American literature, earning her degree in 1981. She then moved to Nashville and started her music career, founding a music production company and writing some country songs, such as "Girls Ride Horses Too" and "XXX's and OOO's: An American Girl." Eventually, she started writing journal articles and found interest in writing novels. To this day, she has published six novels, while continuing her music career. The novels include: *The Wind Done Gone* (2001), *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades* (2004), *Rebel Yell* (2009), *Ada's Rules: A Sexy Skinny Novel* (2012), *The Diary of B.B. Bright, Possible Princess* (2013), and *Black Bottom Saints* (2020). Currently, Randall is Writer-in-Residence at Vanderbilt University (Kenan, 2018, p.227-28).

> Mitchell's Mammy stood unmasked and damaging [...]. I was living in a world where *Gone With the Wind* was still being read. But more significantly my young daughter was growing up in a world where many of the other mothers had treasured volumes of *Gone With the Wind* on their bookshelves. I decided that I could not allow that book to sit unrebuked and unscorned on a bookshelf with my daughter coming of age as a reader. I determined to create the literary equivalent of Prissy slapping Scarlett back. That was the beginning of *The Wind Done Gone*. That was the very beginning of how I started writing a novel "centered" on characters Mitchell placed on the, I love your word, "sidelines." (As cited in Kenan, 2018, p.229)

She wanted to "create a call to conscience" and to give a "*Wide Sargasso Sea* experience," an experience that, just like the one she had while reading Rhys' novel, could grant her the awareness she needed to question stories presented as absolute truths by easing other voices only because presented in a captivating way (as cited in Kenan, 2018, p.233). The goal of *TWDG*, she said, was:

> To give voice to people who had no voice, to tell the undocumented stories of enslaved Africans, the stories that had been handed down to me by grandmothers and great-grandmothers who lived the embodied truth of their plantation experience in their pale skins and blue and green and sometimes brown eyes. (As cited in Kenan, 2018, p.233).

Hence, she wanted to give a voice to those enslaved people who were deprived of it by telling the personal and generational stories that official history often ignored. She was interested in bringing up important dimensions existing in the South during slavery but often forgotten: the intimate relationships between whites and blacks, miscegenation, and the presence of biracial children.

This shock and need for clarifications led her to write her own novel, a parody of Mitchell's fiction that signifies on many of her themes, characters, and events. The title "The Wind Done Gone" is an African American English variation of "gone with the wind," used by Randall to immediately situate the black experience at the forefront of the novel (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.61). Upon reading the novel, it is clear that the slave experience, and particularly that of a mulatto woman, is the center of the narration, and the themes it unleashes are unexpected, variegated, and provocative. Personally, reading the book transported me into a world that, although familiar in many ways, allowed me to reevaluate many concepts overlooked or seen as unimportant in *GWTW*. Randall's writing style is tenacious and sharp, at times raw and uncomfortable, and what she says, even by implication, is truly enlightening.

The Wind Done Gone is narrated from the perspective of Cynara, a young black

woman born in 1845. Moving between past and present, the novel gives us a new perspective on certain events also present in *GWTW*. Cynara reflects on her life, stating, "I spent most of my life looking toward the front room of my life, toward escape or change," but now finds herself "always looking backward, trying to rearrange my memories" (Randall, 2001, p.129). Cynara's father is Planter (Gerald O'Hara), and her mother is Mammy. She has a half-sister, Other (Scarlett), who is the same age as her. Cynara recalls her father telling her that she was "his cinnamon and Mammy was his coffee" (Randall, 2001, p.3) and that "a man can do without his cinnamon, but he can't do without his coffee" (Randall, 2001, p.4). For this reason, at thirteen, she is sent away from Tata (Tara), the plantation where she lives. She recalls how Mammy used to be gentle with Other but strict with her. She was very jealous of their relationship, and so was Lady (Ellen O'Hara), Other's mother. Now, Cynara lives in Atlanta and is in a relationship with R. (Rhett), who was once married to Other, but they broke up after the loss of their daughter. She remembers how, on the day of his daughter's death, R. tried to get her pregnant. Cynara writes because she is afraid of forgetting, but also because something significant has just happened: she has received a letter saying that Mammy is dying and wishes for her to return to Cotton Farm (another name for Tara). She does not know whether to go home or not. On one hand, she does not want to meet Other; on the other, she says, "I don't know how to forgive her [Mammy] and love myself" (Randall, 2001, p.31). Despite her worries, Cynara returns home, only to discover that Mammy died two weeks before her arrival. As this unfolds, she recalls memories and people: how Other was in love with Dreamy Gentleman (Ashley), who had married Mealy Mouth (Melanie), but was actually attracted to men. She meets Garlic (Pork) again, who tells her that Mammy was actually sad when she was sent away from Tata. Cynara returns to Atlanta to R., who has invited a black congressman to dinner. Cynara and R. then travel to Washington, where "there's a world of colored people here who were free before the war" (Randall, 2001, p.92), but their journey is soon interrupted by the news of Other's death. R. returns to Cotton Farm to care for Other's children, who are now his by law, while Cynara meets Frederick Douglass. In her mind, she continues to think about her childhood, noticing things she did not see back then. She recalls again the love Lady felt for her and that Mammy felt for Other, and the jealousy the two girls felt for the love they did not receive. R. comes back from Tata and rejoins Cynara in Atlanta, bringing with

him a pack of letters. Those were love exchanges between Lady and her cousin, Feleepe, who were together before she married Planter. Cynara finds out that the two had a great-grandmother who was black. This reminds her once again of her relationship with Lady, and how, one day, she recalls, "I told her that I hated the color of my skin. She made a list of everything that was brown and beautiful in the world" (Randall, 2001, p.136). In the meanwhile, she says that R. (who now she calls Debt Chauffeur) wants to marry her, as this was Mammy's last wish left in a letter. Cynara reads the letter and learns that Mammy actually loved her deeply, and this leaves her with a desire to appreciate her legacy and skin color. She marries R., but her feelings for him are gone, and instead she is attracted to the Congressman, and eventually ends up sleeping with him. However, she knows nothing can ever happen with the Congressman because of her affiliation with R. Therefore, she convinces him to marry another woman and gives him the child she had from their brief relationship. In the end, Cynara is left alone and intends to get a job at a black newspaper, stating: "Now, I learned to share in peculiar circumstances. Now, the wind done gone, the wind done gone, the wind done gone and blown my bones away" (Randall, 2001, p.206).

3.2.1 Copyright and Intellectual Property

Reportedly, Mitchell frowned upon the illicit use of her characters for creating new stories that stretched far beyond *GWTW*. After the novel was published, in fact, she supposedly spent a lot of time fighting against pirated editions and other types of unlicensed works (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.176). In the course of her life, she saw her novel being used without permission by the cartoonist Al Capp, who illicitly took her characters for his own purposes; in 1982, the French writer Régine Deforges published a novel called *The Blue Bicycle*, which was sued for having plagiarized *GWTW*'s plot and main characters; in 1996, Jocelyn Mims and Melanie Pearson published *My Beloved Tara*, an unauthorized sequel that was immediately forced out of print (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.55-56).

The company that held the copyright to Mitchell's novel was The Stephens Mitchell Trust ("The Trust"), and under the U.S. copyright law, a novel is only protected during the author's lifetime plus seventy years. Hence, because Mitchell died in 1949, her work

was copyrighted until 2019. *The Wind Done Gone* was published in 2001, and The Trust was not happy to learn that it was a rewriting of *GWTW*. A story that retells *GWTW* from the perspective of a black woman? Containing topics such as homosexuality and miscegenation? And furthermore, Scarlett having black ancestors because of her great-great-grandmother? Absolutely not in line with Mitchell's novel, according to the company (Jarrett, 2009, p.437). Despite Houghton Mifflin defining *TWDW* as a novel that adds to a story that "more than any other has defined our image of the antebellum South," the Trust immediately sued the publishing company in federal court (Harvard Law Review, 2002, p.1194). Given this scenario, some critics not only called Randall's novel a copyright violation, but also an outright theft of fifteen characters created by Mitchell, and an attempt to divert interest from the novel, which continued to sell in large numbers, and to its two sequels (*Scarlett* and *Rhett Butler's People*) (Williams, 2004, p.310-11).

The "SunTrust Bank vs. Houghton Mifflin" lawsuit thus took place between March and October 2001, with The Trust prosecuting for copyright and trademark infringement, requesting ten million dollars in damages and the disposal of all material relating to the new novel. Judge Charles A. Pannell Jr. described *TWDG* as an "unabated piracy," an attempt on the part of Randall to "provide social commentary on the antebellum South" (Harvard Law Review, 2002, p.1194-95), and asked whether Randall was entitled to "permeate most of her new critical work with the copyrighted characters, plot, and scene from *Gone with the Wind*" (Ryan, 2007, p.20). Writers such as Toni Morrison and Harper Lee, and critics such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., shared their endorsement of Randall's cause, appreciating her advocacy for the African American community (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.67). On April 25, 2001, Houghton Mifflin asked the federal court to suspend the process initiated by The Trust, but the court denied the request. A month later, the two parties to the trial presented their arguments, and the court issued an order that reversed the previous injunction, allowing *TWDG* to be published (Harvard Law Review, 2002, p.1195).

The debate over "intellectual property" is heated within American studies. How can we reconcile the rights of the author, the publisher, and the public? Who has the authority to write and rewrite a story or, for that matter, history itself? If we assume that *TWDG* is

a parody, can it be considered a fair use[27] of *GWTW*? In many ways, it seems fair to say that an author is entitled to protect their intellectual property from any kind of misuse or theft. At the same time, new authors should also be able to respond to any text with which they disagree, or for any other reason. If we consider that the question of the existence of an American national identity is debated, and we might rather think of the existence of multiple identities working in more complex ways, we need to question which stories, myths, and narratives help us understand the U.S. and to whom these stories belong. The problem is that stories cannot be universally shared: what we might consider the "American imagination," just as in the case of identity, is composed of different stories and points of view, of multiple public spheres rather than one big canvas to work with. For this reason, we could think of the traditional concept of intellectual property as that which values and protects a person's creation, but there is something else we may want to consider: new stories, reworkings, or counter-narratives focus instead on people, or readers, how they interpret certain texts, and what they mean to them and their cultural identity. I have already dealt with the importance of reclaiming power over discourses and regaining the right to tell one's own story (see chapter two), hence vindicating wrong and harmful narratives (Shur, 2003, p.14). In the case of *TWDG*, we may consider it a valuable and appropriate counter-narrative because it challenges a text that portrays a single and one-dimensional story. *GWTW*, one could argue, needed to be retold because it completely disregarded the perspective of a group of people who are intimately involved in the novel but without being allowed to express their opinions. In fact, one could challenge the very concept of authors from hegemonic groups using the experience of minorities for their own purposes, without really acknowledging all the implications that come with this (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.63). Randall herself argued that "part of literacy is responding to literature" and, concerning *GWTW*, she deemed a retelling necessary because the novel is "a limited version of American history," which has "hurt generations of African Americans" (as cited in Williams, 2004, p.312). Whether one is willing to consider *TWDG* a fair use of *GWTW* is debatable, but its purpose remains relevant for the identity and collective memory of African Americans. Hence the need to

[27] Fair use allows one to legally use materials protected by copyright without obtaining a license, as long as the purpose is "criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, or research" (Harvard Law Review, 2022, p.1197).

counter the univocal view of American cultural identity in favor of a vision of identities that, as Stuart Hall (1990, p.225) points out, "are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power."

3.2.2 Parody as a Literary Technique

TWDG was published under the premise of being a parody of *GWTW*, thus a work intending to highlight some elements or issues present in the original work. Through a humorous interpretation, a parody is meant to bring attention to issues largely ignored in another work. The U.S. Supreme Court defines parody as "the use of some elements of a prior author's composition to create a new one that, at least in part, comments on that author's work" (as cited in Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.62-63). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. himself considered *TWDG* a parody, and, in court, defined it as "work, belonging to a long literary tradition, which imitates another work and in doing so comments on that work, usually in order to ridicule or to suggest its limitations" (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.67).

In his theory of "the Signifying Monkey," as we have already partially seen, Gates places parody under the category of "motivated signification," which was a conclusion he reached after reading Ishmael Reed's texts (particularly *Mumbo Jumbo*) in which Reed revised the African American literary tradition and uses revisionary techniques of parody (Gates, 1988, p.xxvi). According to Gates, parody allows African American authors to criticize harmful narratives by altering their meaning and recontextualizing certain aspects they present. It does not simply imply imitation or mimicking, but it is a way to show how ridiculous certain narratives are, especially those that seek to reduce the history of African Americans to commonplaces and stereotypes (Gates, 1988). Gates argues that the African American literary canon is largely constituted of texts that are interconnected because of certain patterns of revision and repetition, hence parody and pastiche. Bakhtin's definition of parody, according to him, fits into this framework: an author borrows the word of another and adds his or her own voice, which conflicts with the original because it has an opposite purpose, and as a result, "speech becomes a battlefield for opposing intentions" (Gates, 1988, p.110). An author may parody another work by using the same structure as the original work, creating a repetition of the rhetorical pattern

that so attempts to challenge it. A black author, in particular, may use African American English to Signify upon another work using codes that only the African American community fully understands. Or, instead of directly copying the structure or form of something, an author may allude to the structure by intentionally not conforming to it (Gates, 1983, p.693-94).

Moreover, parody is a literary technique which not only reflects on other works, but is also capable of critically reflecting upon itself. In other words, it can simultaneously present the author's critical interpretation and provide a model for interpreting the new text itself. Thus, instead of creating a narrative confined within itself and fixed in its own assumptions, parody facilitates the creation of a dialogue with the previous text and any subsequent texts, creating a continuing intertextual and dynamic discourse (Hannoosh, 1989, p.113-14). It is an open form, one that opens up multiple interpretations and possibilities, and therefore it does not and cannot exist in a vacuum. Notwithstanding the old idea that parody's sole purpose is to undermine and degrade an original work, becoming destructive for both individual works and literature, a parody, along with other forms of revision, revitalizes literary works that have become stale, outdated, and problematic. Therefore, instead of disrupting a dialogue, it plays an important role in the evolution of literature and the advancement of important discourses (Hannoosh, 1989, p.116).

According to Linda Hutcheon (1988, p.124), parody creates an openness with history and the real world in a complicated and provocative way by not wanting to be innocent and unproblematic. That is, by not wanting to be merely a response to a text. It wants to question the way history was written, the way people perceived it, and the way it continues to shape behaviors. It wants to become uncomfortable enough to create a tension between literature and history, a tension that does not need to find a definite solution, but instead pursues a path of questioning truths seen as absolute. Hutcheon (1988, p.130) goes on to say that, this way, "that which is 'different' is valorized in opposition both to élitist, aligned 'otherness' and also to the uniforming impulse of mass culture," whereby parody can stand out as authentic and meaningful. Authors employ works from the canon, namely, those works that need significant change for different reasons (whether they concern problems with gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on) and, without needing to repudiate them, they "reveal their rebellion through

their ironic abuse of it." Not surprisingly, parody has been and is mostly employed by women writers and authors from racialized groups as a way to challenge existing beliefs created by a male or white tradition, and to use and abuse their works in order to show their problems (Hutcheon, 1988, p.134).

Beginning with the 1960s, in fact, a number of movements took place to reclaim the past and to rewrite African American history "from the bottom up." A process of redefining the black experience was enacted, and consequently, literature played a very important role as it provided the site for a "political act of narration," aimed at altering narratives and restoring a collective memory (Spaulding, 2005, p.4). Neo-slave narratives, within this context, emerged as a valuable way to give room to new voices. And many of them, including *TWDG*, use parody as a tool to dismantle the conventions of traditional literature. As Rushdy (1999, p.124) argues, the parodic and intertextual approach to past texts through neo-slave narratives "contests those works of art that constitute acts of cultural appropriation and also challenges the academic and social institutions sanctioning those acts." While not all neo-slave narratives employ parody and irony, and not all are rewritings, those that do provide powerful examples of how rewriting the slave experience often requires subverting history from within and confronting it with humor and mockery (Rushdy, 1999, p.124).

In light of this, *TWDG* could stand as a parody because, firstly, it appropriated distinctive elements of *GWTW*, such as characters, places and some events, and secondly, because the purpose was to provide commentary and criticism on them, hence looking at them from a different viewpoint. Being familiar with the plots of both novels, we can easily understand how this borrowing occurred. *TWDG*, despite being much more contained than *GWTW* (it is only one-fifth the length), appropriates many of its places, such as Atlanta, Charleston, Savannah, to which it adds Washington, D.C., Nashville, and European cities. It also clearly appropriates some of the characters, who are given extremely parodic names: Other, R., Planter, Beauty, Garlic, Lady, Dreamy Gentleman and so on (Williams, 2004, p.314). What it aims to parody, then, is the way slavery is represented in *GWTW*, and especially the way it is glorified and accepted. It does this without necessarily having to demonstrate that Mitchell's view of history is wrong, but rather trying to suggest how there is another version of history that takes into account other experiences, equally important and that can tell us something we may not know.

Therefore, in many ways, *TWDG* challenges the authoritative discourse itself, that idea that a text like *GWTW* can be universally valid, and instead asks the readers to consider its impact in the creation of ideologies (Woltmann, 2022, p.19-20).

3.3 *The Wind Done Gone:* Retelling *Gone with the Wind*

Having said all this, we are, in my opinion, confronted with a very important case of rewriting. I have not yet amply addressed the specific reasons that led *GWTW* to be severely criticized by the African American community. And indeed, we should remember that along with its tremendous commercial success, Mitchell's novel has been subjected to heavy criticism in terms of its depiction of slavery and the Civil War. A criticism that, as we have seen, led black authors to respond in various ways, including Randall's rewriting. Before diving into an intertextual comparison of the two texts, which will be the focus of the next chapter, it is useful to broadly delineate why *GWTW* was rewritten. Namely, why did Randall undertake significant legal battles to rewrite a text? Why, out of all novels, did she choose *GWTW* as a case study?

In my opinion, after reading extensively about *GWTW* and its various criticisms, it is hard to approach the novel with a clear mind. Ultimately, critics have far too many diverse opinions to be able to come to a final judgment on it. Of course, this is part of the experience when one is confronting literature. What stands out, however, is that while the novel has been widely praised for its portrayal of the Civil War and American values, it has faced significant criticism from the very beginning. In fact, the novel has attracted criticism for a range of perspectives. On one hand, many critics have condemned it for its racial politics. For instance, in 1940, the *Daily Worker* newspaper called the novel "vicious and reactionary," and "inciting to race hatred" (as cited in Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.59). The *Chicago Defender*, in January 1940, defined it a "weapon of terror against black America" (as cited in Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.59). On the other hand, some critics have dismissed the novel from a more elitist literary point of view, criticizing its popular appeal and sentimentality rather than its politics. Professor Floyd C. Watkins asserted that "much in the novel is bad, false to the facts of rural and Southern life particularly, false to history, and, worst of all, false to human nature" (Watkins, 1970, p.94). According to Watkins (1970, p.89), the novel could be defined as "vulgar

literature," which is the term William Dean Howells used in his essay "The New Historical Romances" (1900) to define that type of literature that resonates with people's emotions and feelings of nostalgia yet provides no real reflection on the past or present. Journalist Claudia Roth Pierpont was perhaps one of the most critical when she stated that "Mitchell's place, when she has one, is in a corner part, as a vulgar aside having to do with numbers rather than words" (as cited in Gros, 2015, p.137). Others have also accused the novel of being part of "escapist literature," that is, a novel that people turn to in order to escape problems of the real world, relying on a fictional reality that has no connection with real life (Scacchi, 1999, p.151). This viewpoint directly conflicts with the views of other critics discussed in the previous sections.

In many respects, *GWTW* can be perceived as very simplistic, especially in its depiction of slaves and the Old South. It appears to offer a reflection on these issues, but ultimately it does little more than prove the writer's individual viewpoints as well as conform to mainstream ideas. The institution of slavery seems to align with the views of historians such as U. B. Phillips: it is seen as benevolent to the slaves, who constantly behave as "Sambos" in need of authority. Enslaved subjects in the novel, such as Mammy, Pork, Prissy, Big Sam and so on, are depicted as children requiring nurturing, or loyal dogs always ready to serve their master (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.57-58). In general, Tara's slaves are there working because that is what they do best, because white people need them for their skills, and because they cannot have any other kind of occupation. It is something that has to do with their very nature: there are things they can do well, better than white people, namely having menial jobs that do not employ much intellect, and there are things they simply cannot do because white people do them better. The slave institution as depicted in the novel, as Ryan (2008, p.23) points out, seems to have little to do with race, but rather with class, meaning that black people are naturally more prone to inferior occupations and therefore have less ambition. So much so that once freed, most slaves are unable to live on their own and resort to violence and degradation to survive. They become the "others" who threaten Southern values and contaminate the society that white people have created in accordance with their interests (Gros, 2015, p.144).

Overall, one of the reasons why *GWTW* is unsettling is because it helped perpetuate these ideas. When it was published, it contributed to the ongoing cycle of oppression that blacks were experiencing, bringing old ideas into the 1930s and 1940s and confirming

the racist thoughts of people of Mitchell's time (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.58). Mitchell defended herself against the accusations made by many African Americans by maintaining that black characters are actually depicted as more worthy and as having greater dignity than some white characters in the novel, including Scarlett herself. In fact, it is true that most slaves are portrayed as good people with a strong sense of justice, but this does not detract from the fact that their representation is shaped by the distorted and racist ideals of white people. The truth is that Mitchell seems to treat slaves as a separate species that was civilized by their masters (see the first chapter for a discussion of the "savage Negro of Africa" as opposite to the "Sambo") and forgets how each experience under slavery was unique and based on different and interconnected factors (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.59).

Randall was interested in dismantling all these assumptions. She saw the danger that such misrepresentations and misconceptions had caused over the years and continue to cause, and she decided to take charge of the issue through a rewriting that could fill in some serious blanks. Mitchell, in her narrative, omitted a great deal and remained silent on too many issues to simply gloss over and blame it on the time in which she wrote the novel (Gros, 2015, p.140). For this reason, all the hidden plots and voices in *GWTW* have a way of coming to the surface in *TWDG* in a compelling narrative that redirects problematic elements and yields them deeper meaning and many more implications (Gros, 2015, p.148). Randall resented the way slaves were depicted in the novel and wanted to show that the reality of slavery was much more complicated and varied, and therefore did something similar to Haley in *Roots*: she used fiction to reflect on history. Of course, just as *GWTW* is not a novel about history, neither is *TWDG*, but its historical perceptions seem to be more in focus and its narrative seems at least to be designed to question certain assumptions and give personhood to those who are silenced (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.61). If *GWTW* was criticized for presenting a very trivial criticism of its time, *TWDG* does the opposite: its critique is thoughtful and unflinching, and its ideas are resolute and unapologetic. Through parody, Randall's novel reveals the limits of Mitchell's representations, offering an alternative view. In doing so, she steps into a conversation about the American literary tradition, challenging the way African Americans' accounts have been told over the years by white authors. Within the framework of neo-slave narratives, she uses tools such as irony, to highlight the absurdity

of the original representations; and documents found in slave narratives, to reinforce the authenticity of the voices and experiences. Overall, she sees racial discrimination and its consequences in a clear light, prompting us to consider their presence even today (Woltmann, 2022, p.161).

Chapter Four: A Comparative Analysis of the Two Texts

> I spent most of my life looking toward the front room of my life, toward escape or change, toward some new way to be, some new place to stand, some new person to stand with. And now, thirty years into my life, my life half over, I am always looking backward, trying to rearrange my memories, rearrange and dust, celebrate and protect, all those antique memories, sticks that came into the house of my mind without me paying them no mind at all, sticks that have become my treasure. (Randall, 2001, p.129)

In this final chapter, I would like to comparatively analyze the two texts, placing them in direct dialogue to observe specifically how *The Wind Done Gone* reassesses and destabilizes *Gone with the Wind*. To this end, I will focus on a few themes that I found particularly meaningful: the treatment of the institution of slavery and the use of stereotypes, the representation of the Old South and its ideals, the theme of miscegenation and the trope of the "tragic mulatto," the idea of motherhood, and finally, the use of language as a tool of resistance. Through the analysis of these themes and the way they are addressed in the two texts, I will try to emphasize the importance of *The Wind Done Gone* as a tool of denunciation and critical awareness.

4.1 Slavery and Stereotypes

> Slaves were neither miserable nor unfortunate. The negroes were far better off under slavery than they were now under freedom. (Mitchell, 1936, p.634)

"Slaves," "servants," "darkies," "Negroes," "niggers": these are some of the expressions Mitchell (1936) uses to refer to black people in her novel. The adjectives she uses to describe them include: "willing," "foolish," "poor," "uppity," "frightened." The verbs she associates have to do with "own," "sell," and "possess." The n-word, used an estimated ninety-five times, is placed in the mouths of most characters with such ease that its derogatory meaning quickly gets forgotten (Jabari, 2007, p.132). This is the way the enslaved people from the novel are remembered by millions of readers. More importantly, this is the way one of the most celebrated novels ever written in the U.S. (and the world) describes the people who were involuntarily brought to the land that labeled itself the land of freedom and opportunity. Jordan-Lake (2005, p.136) reminds us of a striking paradox: American literature, she says, has shaped the culture that produced it. One assumes that

it is culture that creates literature, however, American literature, to a large extent, has had an enormous role in influencing and changing it. Literature has not been and is not a mere reflection of culture, but rather something that helps mold it, especially if a culture is relatively new and trying to find its place in the world. It should be easy to see where the problem lies here.

GWTW accomplishes something awfully clever in causing us to forget how the institution of slavery is portrayed. Because of the endearing and complicated characters, as well as Scarlett's troubling love affairs, readers easily overcome the pro-slavery propaganda that permeates the novel. It is "a simple story," according to Mitchell, a story told from the perspective of a woman who sees her surroundings in her own way. As such, readers are easily led to sympathize with the characters depicted as "heroes" (Scarlett, Rhett, Melanie, and so on) to the point that they ultimately come to pity a family of slave owners and members of the Ku Klux Klan (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.70-71). The O'Hara family is steadily presented as a family of "good slaveholders." As they do not physically hurt their slaves, their owning and exploiting them is made seem excusable. In fact, no one at Tara seems to suffer because of slavery: black characters seem content in their role, as they believe it is the only life available to them, while white characters take pride in having established a social order that they believe ensures the survival of the slaves and maintains their own wealth. Slavery, instead of being the inhumane institution it was, is somewhat innocent and inconsequential. Therefore, the victimization of slaves only serves as a backdrop to the wealth of white families. There is no mention of how this wealth was obtained before the war, or what it meant for the slaves; there is no mention of all the implications that resulted from slavery, such as whippings, beatings, separation of families, rape, miscegenation; no slave wants to be free, and no one questions why, indeed, a war is actually breaking out (Churchwell, 2022, p.68). Gerald O'Hara, a slaveholder, is depicted as "a kind heart, a ready and sympathetic ear" (Mitchell, 1936, p.44), so much so that the slaves

> had all discovered that Gerald had a loud bark and no bite at all, and they took shameless advantage of him. The air was always thick with threats of selling slaves south and of direful whippings, but there never had been a slave sold from Tara and only one whipping, and that administered for not grooming down Gerald's pet horse after a long day's hunting. (Mitchell, 1936, p.45)

In many ways, I would argue that Mitchell intended to evade the issue that slavery posed, knowing that she needed to address it if she were to make a novel about the Civil War but not willing to be too confrontational. In doing so, she ended up defending slaveholders by conforming to the main stereotypes on slavery of her time, while missing the opportunity to address many other important issues. In a way, focusing on Scarlett's adventures could have given Mitchell the opportunity to explore more thoroughly the lives of the black characters around her. Mitchell was a woman of her time, that is for sure, especially in the era she lived in, when many people were beginning to recognize slavery just enough to seem aware of it, but not enough to fully reckon with its horrors. Narrative may have seemed to her like a field too far removed from reality and a way to avoid responsibility (Churchwell, 2022, p.70). This is also why, for example, other issues attached to slavery are only briefly mentioned, such as slave separations that merely act as an outline to the story. For instance, the decision to buy the young slave Prissy out of the wishes of her mother, Dilcey, is treated briefly in a few lines. Gerald, in fact, tells Scarlett: "Was there any use buying Dilcey if she was going to mope about the child? Well, never again will I let a darky on this place marry off it. It's too expensive" (Mitchell, 1936, p.29). This one sentence seems intended to place Gerald in the position of a benevolent slaveholder without, however, addressing the near possibility of a mother losing her daughter forever (Jordan-Lake, 2005, p.145). A mother's desire to be close to her daughter and a woman's will to get married have little to do with love and more to do with the inconvenience it causes for the white masters. What seems to matter more is, of course, the white family and its needs. Therefore, slavery is depicted as a domestic and benevolent institution, in the sense that the slaves become part of the white family, yet in a patronizing way: slaves are like children to be guided, slaveholders are the caring parents who kindly take care of them (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.82).

In *TWDG*, the n-word is used about seventeen times, eleven by Cynara alone. However, each time it is carefully placed to hold a specific meaning. In most cases, it stands as a positive expression to describe blackness as something to be proud of. In others, it is deliberately used to show how damaging it can be (Jabari, 2007, p.136-37). This alone shows us that Randall, in placing slavery and its aftermath at the center of her narrative, approached the issue in a different and more targeted way. By recognizing how the characters in *GWTW* captivated readers to such an extent that they were distracted

from the harsh reality vaguely described in the text, she decided to turn the story around and tell it from a new perspective, one that would force readers to confront every uncomfortable detail. It is somewhat difficult to precisely list the ways in which Randall handles the subject of slavery; in fact, if Mitchell gave a somewhat simplistic and naïve version of her reality, Randall offers a multiplicity of complications to explore. In the course of this chapter, we will have the opportunity to discover how this happens. In general, however, it is safe to assume that *TWDG*, by taking the form of a slave narrative written in the first person, explores what it meant to be a black person in the U.S. during and after slavery, something that had to do with much more than the color of one's skin (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.91). Cynara recognizes this, being at the basis of her difference with Other, and says: "It is not in the pigment of my skin that my Negressness lies. It is not the color of my skin. It is the color of my mind, and my mind is dark, dusky, like a beautiful night. And Other, my part-sister, had the dusky blood but not the mind, not the memory" (Randall, 2001, p.162). If, as we have already remarked with Ryan (2008, p.16), *GWTW* wishes to minimize the institution of slavery as an issue solely related to class differences, *TWDG* shows us throughout all its pages how the issue is much more intersectional than that. In fact, slavery cannot be purely class or race motivated, but it is also concerned with issues of gender and power.

This oversimplification undertaken by Mitchell is evident in the black characters and the stereotypes, or even caricatures, that seem to define them. In the first chapter, we saw how the circulation of false representations of black people has long defined their history and justified the mistreatments they suffered during slavery, the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras, and even in recent times. The assignment of rigid labels that limited them to the position of simple-minded, savage, and hypersexualized people contributed to making them seem, as many pseudoscientific theories intended, part of a different species. Consequently, a popular text like *GWTW* that deliberately set black people apart from white people to maintain white supremacy did not help. Mitchell was aware of the fact that certain landmark characters were part of Southern identity before the Civil War. They were found everywhere, from advertising, to books, to music, to movies: the coquettish belle, the mammy, the Southern gentleman, the plantation black, the uncle figure (Cox, 2013, p.7). In *GWTW*, we mostly see happy darkies, vengeful Klansmen, sophisticated

southern ladies, and good old southern boys, stereotypes that became popular throughout the whole nation also because of the novel (Wilson, Thomas, and Abadie, 2006, p.171).

The mammy perhaps best represented the Old South, especially in its relation to servitude, hospitality, and good cooking. However, while prior to *GWTW* the image of the mammy (along with that of Aunt Jemima) was known primarily through pancake mixes sold in stores, after Mitchell's novel and the movie she became the national symbol of black women seen as the servants wedded to white culture (Cox, 2013, p.43). In *GWTW*, Mammy "felt that she owned the O'Haras" and is described as "a huge old woman with the small, shrewd eyes of an elephant [...], shining black, pure African, devoted to her last drop of blood to the O'Haras" (Mitchell, 1936, p.21). Her physical features are often emphasized to show and exaggerate her indignation, authority, and blackness, as seen when "Mammy's lips were large and pendulous and, when indignant, she could push out her lower one to twice its normal length" (Mitchell, 1936, p.34). Her authority within the household is unquestionable: "Mammy's eyes were sharper than Ellen's, and Scarlett could never recall in all her life having fooled Mammy for long" (Mitchell, 1936, p.52). Because of the way she behaves with the white family, whose manners she has completely absorbed, she positions herself on a higher level compared to other slaves. She is somehow part of the "black upper class" because she identifies with the codes of the white Southern aristocracy and therefore, much like white characters do, she often criticizes those whom she regards as the blacks beneath her (Ryan, 2008, p.23). The relationship she has with Scarlett, which has been applauded by conservative critics for its intimacy, is what best shows us the patronizing way blacks have been treated. For Scarlett, according to Tara McPherson (as cited in Taylor, 2006, p.857-58), Mammy's blackness represents comfort and security: she is her emotional anchor and she relies on her in a way that is entirely distinct from her dependence on her own mother. Here we can observe how the literary embodiment of the stereotype of the mammy is created, and how she is forced into a life isolated from her community and family. Mammy has no relatives other than the O'Hara family, has no children of her own, and assumes the role of surrogate mother for the white children, so much so that she sticks with Scarlett until the very end. Her representation as loyal and devoted, consistently honored because of these attributes, is what contributes to a nostalgic memory of slavery

by suggesting that it created a harmonious and familiar environment (Churchwell, 2022, p.209-10).

In *TWDG*, Mammy maintains her name but not her stereotypical behavior. While she is still a Mammy in terms of her role and appearance, her actions and the hidden agenda she operates under make her a far more complex character than in *GWTW* or in popular culture. In fact, Randall creates a Mammy who is intelligent and calculating, aware of the brutal dynamics of slavery, and who, in her own way and within the limits of her power, attempts to change them. Though she, too, like Mammy in *GWTW*, seems to have internalized aspects of white domestic life, Randall's narrative often demonstrates how she is a much more complicated person. In fact, she is even a sexualized figure, blurring the lines created by stereotypes, as she seems more of a hybrid between the mammy and the Jezebel stereotypes. She is portrayed as passionate, so much so that Planter chooses to spend intimate nights with her rather than with Lady, whose sexual encounters with him resemble rape more than affection (Woltmann, 2022, p.23). As Cynara, in fact, states how: "Planter slept with Mammy in pleasure all their lives. In truth of body, I was the passion fruit, and Other was the bloom of civil rape" (Randall, 2001, p.48). Because of this, Planter, or Gerald, is also firmly re-situated in his role as a slave owner, with none of the benevolent gloss seen in Mitchell's novel. Moreover, Mammy is not inherently maternal, or at least not in the conventional sense. Her bond with both Other and Cynara is unique, and throughout the novel we witness a tension between the love she is expected to show for the white girl who ensures her place in the house, and the genuine maternal affection she feels for the black girl, her biological daughter (Woltmann, 2022, p.23). It is only after her death that Cynara understands this, as she states:

> I wonder what she [Other] would feel now if she knew, if I told her, if she ever came to understand that Mammy used her, used her to torment white men. Other was Mammy's revenge on a world of white men who would not marry her dark self and who had not loved her Lady. [...] Watching Other stand by the grave, I knew for sure that Mammy had stopped wearing the mask and the mask had worn her. By the time we were born, choosing between Other and me was like choosing between paper dolls, and Other had the prettier clothes. (Randall, 2001, p.54)

Much like many other enslaved people did during slavery in order to survive, Mammy is shown as having worn a mask that helped her survive and reacquire the dignity that white people had taken from her. Additionally, similarly to what happens in Toni Morrison's

Beloved, maternal love under slavery is taken to an extreme: Mammy kills the white children born on the plantation in order to protect the future enslaved children. This shows us that the way she experiences love and motherhood is inherently different from the way white people do, and it is so because of slavery: her love is harsh, brutal, uncomfortable, and takes a good inspection to see (Woltmann, 2022, p.23). At last, Cynara realizes everything her mother had done for her, as she states, "I recall it's not slavery and freedom that separate my now from my then; it's when I could read and when I could not, it's when Mammy loved me and I didn't know it; and when Mammy loved me and I did" (Randall, 2001, p.175).

The other black characters in *GWTW* are described in an equally simplistic style, drawing inspiration from Southern popular culture and black minstrel clichés. Simultaneously, they are intentionally shown as disconnected from the black community and completely washed up by whites. As such, although they behave stereotypically, they are more intelligent and perceptive than other slaves precisely because of their devotion to the whites: they represent a "black elite," as noted before. Thus, the relationship between masters and slaves is remarkably simple and easily explained: there is no conflict and everyone naturally remains in the place they are intended to be, allowing Mitchell to sidetrack the problem of slavery lying at the root of Southern society (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.88). Thus, for instance, Big Sam, Tara's slave foreman, is an intelligent man who helps Scarlett when she is in trouble, but he is also regarded as a happy dog, an oddly dependent Sambo figure to the white family (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.58). The passage below tellingly represents him as more like a loving pet than a human being:

> Sam galloped over to the buggy, his eyes rolling with joy and his white teeth flashing, and clutched her outstretched hand with two black hands as big as hams. His watermelon-pink tongue lapped out, his whole body wiggled and his joyful contortions were as ludicrous as the gambolings of a mastiff. (Mitchell, 1936, p.650-51)

Similarly, Uncle Peter, who for years has been a fierce protector of Aunt Pittypat and the white family, is seen as a helpless child when a Yankee woman insults him, as we notice from Scarlett's thoughts: "She glanced at Peter and saw that a tear was trickling down his nose. Instantly a passion of tenderness, of grief for his humiliation swamped her, made her eyes sting. It was as though someone had been senselessly brutal to a child" (Mitchell,

1936, p.561). The loyal servant of the O'Hara family, Pork, is unable to understand why any slave would want to be free, as he claims that it is only "dem trashy niggers" (Mitchell, 1936, p.339) who choose to follow the Yankees and be free instead of helping their masters who need them more (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.24). Moreover, the young slave Prissy is portrayed as so incompetent that, when Scarlett slaps her during Melanie's labor, the narrative implies this act is justifiable. Scarlett "had never struck a slave in her life, but now she slapped the black cheek with all the force in her tired arm" (Mitchell, 1936, p.303). This moment is presented by Mitchell without any criticism, justified because Prissy is merely a "worthless child" (Ryan, 2008, p.40-41).

The other black characters in *TWDG*, just like Mammy, are far from uncomplicated. Whereas *GWTW* makes enslaved people passive and powerless, Randall shows how one can challenge the traditional Southern hierarchy to such an extent that the lines between master and slave begin to blur. This way, she shows us how slaveholders may believe they are in control, when in fact they are often being subtly manipulated. Garlic, who "puts the flavor in Pork" (Kenan, 2017, p.230), is the best example of this: he is portrayed as the true force behind Tara, the one who actually built it and maintained it over the years. Planter, who takes credit for the plantation, is ultimately shown to have depended on the labor and thinking of the very people he claimed to dominate (Gros, 2019, p.144). As the novel states: "Planter was a man without position or land who Garlic manipulated with his black hands into winning our land from another white man in a card game. Garlic the poisoner" (Randall, 2001, p.64).

Therefore, while Mitchell claimed that Tara was not a pretty house precisely because it was built by the slaves, Randall shows how the very reason it exists are the slaves themselves (Kenan, 2017, p.231). Moreover, Garlic's agency and willpower are not limited to this, as he is also the one who participates in the extreme act of resistance initiated by Mammy, that is killing the white babies. This act, other than showing us the implications of motherhood, also should make us consider something else: if we recoil at the murder of innocent white children, we must also be willing to reckon with the normalized atrocities of slavery, including rape, whipping, starvation, and systemic murder (Kenan, 2018, p.232-33). Hence agency is given also to Prissy from *GWTW*, who becomes Miss Priss and helps Mammy and Garlic in their heinous, but done for prevention, act (Grossett, 2002, p.1126). The character of Jeems in *TWDG*, who is the

slave of the Tarleton twins in *GWTW*, proves to us how, in fact, the childhood of black children was destroyed. Jeems is given to the twins on their tenth birthday, as if he were a dog, demonstrating how slavery not only involved physical misfortune, but also the unpaid labor of children. In Randall's narrative, he is no longer trapped in the antebellum South, but lives in post-slavery Tennessee, where he is free to be whoever he wishes. Randall does maintain that simply granting literary freedom to a character is not enough, yet it seems that, simultaneously, she forces us to recognize the humanity of a figure who had previously been sidelined (Kenan, 2018, p.229-30).

In creating dense characters, Randall sought to expose a part of slavery that had been forgotten and disregarded by most white authors and historiography until the 1960s. We see slaves operating forms of resistance to their condition, working within the slave system and opposing it. Instead of focusing on rebellion or escape as the main vehicle for freedom, she shows how many slaves worked within the very structure of the plantation, manipulating it from the inside (Gros, 2019, p.144). For this reason, the representations of slaves that emerge from this narrative bear no resemblance to the myths that saw Africans and African Americans as savage, dull, and uncontrolled (Williams, 2004, p.322). Some critics called this a "racial vendetta," Randall declared she wrote her characters so that "whites and blacks could have a deep, hearty belly laugh together" (as cited in Grossett, 2002, p.1126). Personally, I can see a combination of the two, although it is worth saying that just as most of the white characters in *TWDG* end up looking foolish, so do the black characters in *GWTW*.

4.2 The Old South and the New South

Mitchell, according to her statements, had no intention of romanticizing the Old South and, if anything, was rather vexed by those who claimed she had done so in her novel. She intended to create what she believed would be a realistic version of the Old South, and blamed the creators of the movie for twisting her words (Churchwell, 2022, p.64). To Virginius Dabney, editor of the *Times-Dispatch*, she declared: "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" (as cited in Pyron, 1986, p.577). Nevertheless, the matter is more complicated than this. By writing an epic of the Lost

Cause, despite what may have been her initial intentions, Mitchell easily came to glorify that lost culture by focusing on etiquette and love, as well as presenting a distorted view on the war and the institution of slavery (Woltmann, 2022, p.20).

According to the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, the term "Lost Cause" refers to "white southerners' memory of the Civil War and the rituals that they created to perpetuate that memory" (Wilson *et al*., 2006, p.240). In other words, it refers to the way people began to celebrate the Confederacy (hence the group of Southern states that seceded during the Civil War) for its fight in a war that they considered to have had little to do with slavery and more with issues related to secession and states' rights (Wilson *et al*., 2006, p.240). This sort of mood seems to permeate *GWTW*.

Altogether, the Old South depicted in the novel is overwhelmingly white and perfectly hierarchical. It is a South "without," as Randall noted: without miscegenation, without violence, without family separations, without any slave desiring freedom (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.60). In reality, slavery was a huge part of Southern society and was actually at the root of the Old South's economy and prosperity. For instance, in 1735, a law was introduced in Georgia by the British Parliament to forbid the importation of black people to be used as free labor, but after only fifteen years it was aborted because it became clear that slavery was essential to support the export of cotton, hence the nation's main export (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.88). Instead, *GWTW* presents us with an Old South made up of large plantations (which, by the way, were quite rare in the 1860s) populated by charismatic and brave people who believe slavery was nothing but benevolent (McGuire, 2024, p.59). Owing to Scarlett's amorous adventures, the novel also presents a moonlight-and-magnolias version of the South, thus a "sentimental Cavalier-belle-plantation fiction" that echoes with other controversial works about the South, such as Thomas Nelson Page's *In Ole Virginia* (see chapter one) (Wilson *et al*., 2006, p.246). According to Jan Cronin (2007, p.397), Mitchell, even though she may not have deliberately intended to glorify the Old South, ended up deceiving both herself and her readers by the end of the novel. At first, Tara is portrayed as a mythically perfect place where harmony and prosperity reign, although it also represents a confining space for Scarlett. As Gerald puts it: "Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything. [...] 'This the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for—worth dying for" (Mitchell, 1936, p.33). As the story progresses, the plantation becomes a place of

suffering, illness, and war, hence an Eden that is no longer safe and is falling into ruin. Scarlett begins to draw closer to it and see it in a different light. For most of the narrative, then, the Old South is depicted as a place doomed to decline because a new society is emerging. Scarlett, after her long journey back home, thinks:

> Tara stretched before her, negroes gone, acres desolate, barns ruined, like a body bleeding under her eyes, like her own body, slowly bleeding. This was the end of the road, quivering old age, sickness, hungry mouths, helpless hands plucking at her skirts. And at the end of this road, there was nothing. (Mitchell, 1936, p.348)

However, the story closes just as it opens, binding its ideals in a circle: Tara, like all of Georgia, returns to being that mythical and idealized place that Scarlett needs. The glory lost to the war is restored, and the war and what it represented seem to vanish within the idea that the plantation can shine again as it once did. Scarlett, hence, still has Tara, because "tomorrow is another day" (Mitchell, 1936, p.868), but it feels as if tomorrow will be a good day if it mirrors the old ones.

This circular narrative framework, in which the myth of the Old South is, by the end, preserved, reveals to us how *GWTW* not only romanticizes the antebellum era, but also distorts the entire context in which, in reality, that world collapsed. The Civil War and the Reconstruction period are depicted as moments of chaos and great injustice perpetrated by the novel's most despised people, the Yankees. These important years in American history, spanning roughly from 1861 to 1877, despite having the potential to create a narrative tackling important issues such as the aftermath of slavery in the South and systemic violence, are used only as a backdrop to cast the "good" characters in a favorable light. In the novel, the war is a time of great suffering for those who had hoped in the South and its ideals; it is a time when old and new ideas clash, making everyone believe that something is changing in a very negative way. Characters like Melanie and Ashely, the Southern gentleman and the well-mannered lady, are the ones who suffer the most because they best exemplify the values and ways of life of the Old South. Scarlett and Rhett, on the other hand, seem to be able to make sense of this period because they represent the future and its possibilities (Wilson *et al*., 2006, p.88). In the period following the war, then, the center of the story becomes the supposed end of a civilization because of the terrible clash with the North. Scarlett is able to become an independent and brave

woman because she no longer feels the need to become like her mother, while Rhett is casually incarcerated for killing a former slave, something Scarlett cares very little about (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.91). In addition, the activities of the Ku Klux Klan come into the picture just as fortuitously, with Frank Kennedy and Ashley being associated with them. The KKK, or "the Knights of the White Camellia" or "the Redeemers," in their early period of existence, were the terrorist group that wanted to purge the South of the Republican Party by perpetuating violence against black people and their supporters. In *GWTW*, not only do Frank and Ashley storm into Shanty Town to punish those responsible for the attempted rape and mugging of Scarlett, but Jonas Wilkerson, a former overseer of Tara and later the director of a Freedmen's Bureau in Atlanta, is brutally murdered for wanting to collaborate with Northerners in the struggle for black and white equality (Silva, 2014, p.146-47). Consequently, while the period of the war may have hinted at a good and much needed change in society, the Reconstruction period, as portrayed in the novel, seems only to pull us back again to the old ideals of white Southern superiority. This is also evidenced by the fact that freed slaves are now regarded unfavorably, as they now live in their own pleasure, causing harm to white people, after having left their masters alone to suffer (Ryan, 2008, p.23-24).

TWDG opens in 1873, a few years after the war has ended and following the conclusion of the events in *GWTW*. But it does not take long to jump back to the time at Tara, or Tata, before the war. The idealized Old South of Mitchell's novel immediately crashes within the first few pages of Randall's narrative. By providing the point of view of a young slave girl born into that condition, as the rules of *partus sequitur ventrem* dictated, we see what life was like on the plantation from a more lucid perspective, although Cynara herself, in the course of the narrative, struggles to understand her difficult past there (Woltmann, 2022, p.20). As we read: "Everything and everyone had a place and rested deep in it, or so it seemed that day to would-be knights and ten-year-olds" (Randall, 2001, p.3). The absence of perception that Mitchell exhibited in writing *GWTW* is strongly problematized by showing how, while plantation life might have consisted of courtship and beautiful clothes for a rich young woman, for an enslaved woman the reality was quite different, and quite difficult to forget in adulthood (Gros, 2015, p.141).

Everything that is made invisible in *GWTW* takes concrete form in *TWDG* through Cynara's process of memory of her past: the genteel tradition of that society is shown in its full reality, while Cynara sees, reads, and hears the world of the South around her and the brutality of the slave life that long confined her and made her question her entire existence (Gros, 2015, p.141). Her childhood in Tata is, in fact, a mix of things that she struggles to understand. From the fight for survival that she saw most of the slaves go through, while being constantly made to feel small and useless, to her inner struggles because of the people around her, such as her father, the white man of the house who cared only about his land; her mother, who treated her harshly and showed her no affection, making her leave the plantation at thirteen; and her half-sister, who could live peacefully without any worries because everyone took care of her. This sort of emotional journey makes Cynara question many of the things she experienced, as she tells herself: "Why do I remember my world better than I remember myself? So much I know about what I saw; so little I know about my own eyes" (Randall, 2001, p.130).

Therefore, she recalls what happened to her before being sold to Beauty, Belle Watling in *GWTW*, and how "they stripped the clothes off my flesh in the slave market," showing the harsh reality of the moment when a child gets deprived of everything (Randall, 2001, p.130). She recalls how Tata was built by the slaves and their struggles, as Garlic reminds her when Mammy dies: "Every column fluted was a monument to the slaves and the whips our bodies had received. Every slave being beat looked at the column and knew his beating would be remembered" (Randall, 2001, p.52). In doing so, she reminds us that the South prospered also because of the working hands of many slaves, contrary to what supporters of the Lost Cause believed. She remembers how Planter only cared about "his money, his acres, and his slaves" (Randall, 2001, p.37), while Mammy always called her "Chile" and only called her "to do things, usually for Other" (Randall, 2001, p.5). She recalls how she was so ignored and left alone that the love she inevitably felt for her mother felt like "a smallpox moving through the house, leaving scars and death" (Randall, 2001, p.43).

As an adult, she realizes that not everything was as she thought, for indeed Mammy, in her own way, cared deeply about her and her future, which is why she sent her away from Tata, and Other had her own difficulties with Lady that shaped the woman she became. However, all this does not change the fact that it was slavery that made her feel

that way. Actually, it does not change the fact that, while she writes after everything has happened, she is still being haunted by her past as she believes it is never over, because that trauma will continue to exist in her (Woltmann, 2002, p.37-38). In many respects, *TWDG* exposes the idealized vision of the Old South as mere wishful thinking on the part of white people. For black people, especially after the war, the reality was different, as they were left with doubts about their identity and with a desire to forget rather than remember (Gros, 2015, p.142). Therefore, the image we gain of freed slaves is significantly different from Mitchell's, who believed that black people simply received their freedom because of the violence perpetrated by the Yankees (Ryan, 2008, p.43).

4.3 Miscegenation and The Tragic Mulatto Trope

I have already briefly mentioned the specific role that enslaved women had on plantations, especially in relation to how certain stereotypes about them became extremely mainstream (see chapter one). Black women had, in fact, a very unique place in slavery, and for at least two reasons. First, because systematic rape and sexual abuse carried out by white masters was extremely common in the Antebellum South; second, and consequently, because any child born into slavery would legally follow the condition of its mother, thus becoming a slave (Eaves, 2024, p.17). The Virginian rule of *partus sequitur ventrem* was enacted in 1662 precisely to ensure the natural progression of slavery, incentivizing slave owners to use their power to make female slaves bear "valuable" children (West and Shearer, 2017, p.2). This was so well known that when enslaved women were purchased in auctions, white men would often look at their bodies to try to determine their level of fertility, in order to ensure that they were capable of producing new generations of slaves (Eaves, 2024, p.31). Because of the intimacy factor that existed in slavery in the United States, and because masters knew that everything would take place under their roofs and in the privacy of their homes, this sort of abuse was possible. Not that it had to be a secret, because enslaved women had no rights before the law (Eaves, 2024, p.25).

According to Randall, a major problem that existed in the Old South that Mitchell completely ignored was miscegenation. "As a black reader," she said, she was stunned and confused by the "absence of mulatto children on Tara" (Kenan, 2018, p.230).

Miscegenation, or "race mixing," indicates the interbreeding of people of different "races," and is a term that is no longer used today as it is widely regarded as derogatory. In the U.S., racial mixing has always been a difficult and controversial topic; in fact, laws against it existed already in 1661 and were very common in many states as late as 1967. The U.S., despite for a long time referring to itself as a "melting pot," that is, a place where people of different backgrounds could mix into one nation, has always been very strict in terms of interracial relationships and marriages. Ultimately, the whole idea of the melting pot rested on the assumption that the standard to be followed was that of WASP citizens, meaning that of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant people, preferably middle-class. And indeed, because of pseudoscientific racism, as we have seen, Africans were among those considered an inferior race, hence the need for laws to keep the races separate in order to preserve the purity that whiteness represented (Cruz and Berson, 2001, p.80). However, during slavery, miscegenation became extremely widespread and well-known, as slave women were expected and forced to satisfy the sexual lusts of their masters. Interestingly, Southern writer Mary Boykin Chesnut, in her 1905 Civil War diary entitled "A Diary From Dixie," recognized the pervasive existence and simultaneous denial of miscegenation, as she declared how "any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the clouds" (as cited in Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.57). Reports show that in the years leading up to the war, while the population of black slaves grew by 20 percent, the number of mulatto slaves jumped by 67 percent. This happened in conjunction with the growing preoccupation of the ruin of the purity of the white race, in that, according to the "one drop rule" or the concept of hypodescent, even the slightest bit of "black blood" in the body meant that a person was black (this also justified the doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem*) (Cruz and Berson, 2001, p.81). Following the war, the situation changed again: the same people who had intimately shared their masters' homes were now free to live on their own, but as long as they maintained a distance from white people. The Black Codes, laws intended to restrict the freedom of black people, reinforced the distinction between whites and blacks, so much so that, for example, the Mississippi Black Code of 1865 legally allowed intermarriage between blacks and mulattos, but forbid it with white people (Eaves, 2024, p.63-64). By the 1920s, interracial marriage was illegal in thirty-

eight states, and by the 1950s, laws against miscegenation were enacted in approximately half the U.S. (Cruz and Berson, 2001, p.81).

This is all to say that miscegenation was not a small problem in U.S. history, especially in the South, despite the many Southern writers who portrayed slavery as a familiar and peaceful environment. For a number of reasons, it might seem that Mitchell had no reasons to talk about interracial relationships, as her novel was to be about Scarlett and her story. Although I may agree to a certain extent, I was intrigued to discover that she was actually concerned with the topic. Prior to *GWTW*, in fact, she had written a novella entitled '*Ropa Carmagin*, focused on the romance between a Southern woman and a mulatto man. The novella was never published, possibly due to the discouragement of her publishers and her husband, and was burned after her death, following her last wishes, but it is still interesting to note how she quite easily could have inserted the topic in *GWTW* (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.84). Nevertheless, the fact that Randall chose to include it and make it the focus of her novel is eye-opening in that it shows us a concealed part of Southern society. In *TWDG*, the issue is taken to a level that may seem extreme, but that was actually quite common: not only is Cynara a mulatto woman, but Other and Lady also carry black blood. Cynara is the product of the relationship between Mammy and Planter, a relationship that is described as passionate and long-lasting. Randall, however, also implies that this affair, while surely arising from Planter's sexual desires, had Mammy as the ultimate agent. In the narrative, as we have said, she is not the typical mammy, old and lustless, but neither is she the hypersexualized woman unable to resist the attentions of a white man, as many other narratives imply. She is intelligent and demonstrates how enslaved women often used their bodies as a means of resistance to their condition. By having a child with Planter, in a way she gains control over him and Lady, and thus over the entire plantation. Her relationship with Planter, according to Randall, is "necessary for her survival," and in fact the man she truly wants is Garlic (Kenan, 2018, p.231). Cynara takes a while to understand Mammy's role in this, but she eventually does. "She and me," she says, "had a secret against them, the planting people" (Randall, 2001, p.6). With this, and with Cynara being the powerful fruit of this relationship, Randall reveals how difficult it is to wash away all the abuse and sexual relationships that happened during slavery. She causes us to reflect upon the idea of the "color line" that existed in Southern society, which turns out to be a mere illusion, as she

eventually ascribes black ancestry to almost every character. In the end, we are reminded of how absurd sharply categorizing people is, as is suggested by *GWTW*, as the lines between blacks and whites, or between those in charge and those who are not, blur, reminding us once again how a person's identity cannot be stable and univocal (Zawadka, 2013, p.206-07). This recalls Du Bois' concept of double consciousness (see the first chapter), as Cynara's struggles to define her identity cause her to look at herself from two different and conflicting perspectives (is she black or is she white?), though not because she has a problem with her blackness, but because other people around her condition her to think that there is something wrong with her skin color. When reflecting upon R.'s assumptions, she says:

> He thinks like the others, the common tide. He thinks that the blackness is in the drop of blood, something of the body. I would have thought he knew enough women's bodies to know that that could not be true. (Randall, 2001, p.162)

More straightforwardly, she wonders: "What did I suck in on Mammy's tit that made me black, and why did it not darken Other's berry?" (Randall, 2001, p.162), implying, perhaps, that the problem of the color line does not lie in biology or bloodlines, but in social constructions and racist beliefs.

Along with the issue of miscegenation, we can also reflect upon the "tragic mulatto" trope, a very important stock figure in American culture and literature. Known as "the symbol of marginality," the tragic mulatto was the fate ascribed to the people born from interracial relations, especially women, as the condition was mostly a result of them being female and potentially becoming mothers. In most narratives from the early nineteenth century, while the mulatto slave man, if light-skinned, was praised for his intelligence derived from his white ancestry, the mulatto slave woman was a tragic symbol of the burden of being neither black nor white. She was a vulnerable character, particularly because of her sexuality, which implied that any future generation she birthed would jeopardize the purity of whiteness. Hence her fate was usually abandonment, desperation, and an early death (Raimon, 2004, p.5-7). In some narratives, the mulatto woman was allowed to survive only if close to a white partner and provided she passed as white, possibly outside the United States, such as in Europe (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.83). The tragic mulatto trope can be found in the works of Lydia Maria Child, Harriet Beecher

Stowe, Thomas Dixon Jr., Nella Larsen, and many more (Raimon, 2004, p.9). Mostly, it was used in abolitionist literature to show white readers the brutality of slavery by creating tragic characters that they could sympathize with because they looked white, but often relying on distorted facts to make them more appealing (Williams, 2004, p.318).

In *TWDG*, this concept is overturned: Cynara may initially be perceived as the tragic mulatto, but by the end she does not become one. Someone else does. From an early age, Cynara's fate may seem to be abandonment and isolation. Like many tragic mulattos, she was abandoned at an auction for sale and more than once was forced to question her identity. And, in fact, she also becomes the mistress of a white man, R., who lets her live the life of an upper-class white woman.

> When we moved into this house, he carried me in his arms through the door and up the stairs into the most beautiful bedroom I had ever seen. When he was making the bed mine, between kisses he said, "Forget everything before now." Over and over he said it. He kissed me so hard. It was the only time he ever begged me. He was on his knees, I was laying on the bed, and he said, "Don't bring your past into this house." (Randall, 2001, p.27)

Eventually, she almost moves to Europe with him, to London, as she says: "he wants us to live in London, and he wants me to live white" (Randall, 2001, p.158). Yet, the whole motif does not last long:

> I laughed so hard, and not a tear came. He couldn't understand it. I don't often think on how white I look; it's always been a question of how colored I feel, and I feel plenty colored. He said that no one in London will know that I'm supposed to be colored. And I said I am colored, colored black, the way I talk, the way I cook, the way I do most everything. (Randall, 2001, p.158)

In her heart, Cynara never had a problem with being black; she always felt it as a part of her identity, even though it sometimes hurt her. Unlike most tragic mulatto figures, she is not portrayed as someone striving to pass as white, nor as a beautiful but cursed woman. Instead, she is portrayed as realistic, with flaws both in appearance and behavior (Williams, 2004, p.318). Ultimately, she chooses to leave the white man and become the mistress of a black man, the Congressman, with whom she has a child. She gives the child to him and his wife, Corinne, thus ensuring him a good future as well as the continuation of a new generation of black people (Williams, 2004, p.318). In the end, of course, she does not die: she becomes the child's godmother and writes to him, as she says, "I did only one great thing: I bore a little black baby" (Randall, 2001, p.206).

As Randall herself pointed out, there are two tragic mulattos in the novel, and they are Other and Lady. Scarlett and Ellen, the protagonist of *GWTW* and the epitome of Southern womanhood, become the tragic characters destined for suffering in *TWDG*. Cynara, through some correspondence between Lady and her lover and cousin Filipe, discovers that the two shared a great-grandmother who was a "negresse" (Randall, 2001, p.124), making both Lady and Other black according to the one-drop rule. Lady's tragedy is owed to her impossibility to marry Filipe, the man she really loves, because of this drop of black blood and her father's fear that she might have a black child. Similarly, Other, despite being black only because of her mother's great-grandmother, must carry the burden of black heritage. For this reason, her story ends tragically, as she dies shortly after Mammy's death, thus following the fate of many tragic mulatto women. Overall, it is interesting to see how Randall creates this extreme to question the concept of the color line: she erases whiteness, and forces us to look at how the idea of race is an illusion. In an interview, she herself posed the question: "if you don't know you're black and you don't look black, are you black?" (Kenan, 2018, p.234-35).

4.4 Motherhood

Another topic I would like to address is motherhood. As I was reading the two novels, I came across a remarkably different portrayal of motherhood through Scarlett and Cynara's experiences both as daughters and mothers, and I thought it would be interesting to compare them.

As far as *GWTW* is concerned, its portrayal of motherhood seems to be both innovative and rooted in traditional gender roles. For many reasons, motherhood as depicted in Mitchell's novel is revolutionary. Children come into Scarlett's life by chance, as she never longed to be a mother and, as seen on many occasions, has no maternal instincts. For the most part, she cares about her business, and, for instance, only starts tolerating her son Wade once he becomes a bit older. In the novel, motherhood is not seen as a woman's central concern, and this in itself is remarkable, as the Antebellum society, and even Mitchell's time, had very strict rules in terms of what a woman was supposed to become (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.157). The cult of domesticity prevailing in the

nineteenth century wanted middle-class women to be the enforcers of domestic moral values; and thus, they were to be a good example for their children and a support for their working husbands (Wilson et al., 2006, p.115). Caring, protective, and gentle: Ellen O'Hara surely embodied this. Scarlett believed she was "something holy and apart from all the rest of humankind," so much so that when she was younger, she "had confused her mother with the Virgin Mary," an angelic figure just like women were supposed to be (Mitchell, 1936, p.53). Therefore, if Scarlett can be seen as a revolutionary figure for going against patriarchal structures, Ellen represents their consolidation. However, throughout the novel, Ellen is no more than a symbolic ideal of Southern womanhood, rather than an active mother figure, since it is Mammy who truly cares for Scarlett. Southern motherhood is represented in its two typical forms: the idealized Southern lady, with Scarlett being the only exception, and the ever-present mammy (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.94).

However, for enslaved black women, motherhood was a completely different experience. Popular culture at the time tended to portray slave women only as mammies or matriarchs, thus as caring mothers to white children and harsh toward their own, but the reality was much more complex than that. In fact, this narrative mostly referred to the women who worked in their enslavers' homes, while the majority actually worked in the fields and lived under very different circumstances (Wilson *et al*., 2006, p.117). For most enslaved women, motherhood meant both working in the fields and caring for their children. For many, becoming a mother meant gaining a sense of dignity and self-esteem, but it was also a frightening situation because they were aware of the kind of life they were giving their children. For this reason, many women tried to avoid pregnancy and some even committed infanticide to spare their children from slavery. And for those who did have children, their protection was a priority, particularly in regard to daughters who were more vulnerable to sexual violence by white men. As Harriet Jacobs argued in her autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), "slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women" (as cited in West and Shearer, p.3-4). Consequently, motherhood, in most cases, was challenging: it meant working under terrible conditions, caring for one's own children and even those of the masters, while at the same time trying to maintain a collectivity among the slaves by also protecting the children of other slave

women (through what is referred to as "othermothering") (as cited in West and Shearer, p.7-8).

TWDG, in my opinion, interestingly shows how the mother-daughter dynamic, as well as motherhood in general under slavery, was far more complicated than white culture could comprehend. The typical Southern representation of black and white motherhood seems to be found here as well, for if we reflect on the names of the two mothers "Mammy" and "Lady" we see them situated in their standard roles, but I would dare say there is a twist to it. In fact, by now we have understood how Mammy in *TWDG* is not the typical stereotyped figure. When reading the novel, however, it may take some time to understand it. Through Cynara's memories, we see how, growing up, she received little attention from Mammy, who actually had a strong bond with Other. Similar to *GWTW*, Scarlett's attachment to Mammy seems to be the stereotyped relationship between a Southern mammy and a young white rich woman. Randall's narration, for example, states regarding Other: "She was old enough to walk. She walked right past me, past Lady, she walked right past Lady and me, over to Mammy, reached for Mammy, and my Mama reached down to pull Other up onto her hip" (Randall, 2001, p.13).

Some critics, such as Gómez-Galisteo (2011, p.95), believe that because of this *TWDG* presents a negative portrayal of motherhood. Cynara herself states, "they always say we don't have family feelings. I hate proving them right" (Randall, 2001, p.146). Based on this, the representation of motherhood in the novel shows how slavery blurs the family relationships of African American families. No one considers Mammy to be Cynara's mother, and neither do they consider Planter to be her father (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.95). However, although Cynara suffers from the pain of maternal displacement, and motherhood is certainly not idealized, I would also like to consider how, in some ways, the stereotypical Southern ideal of motherhood is challenged, not only because Mammy is not the typical stereotype. Cynara's relationship with Lady exemplifies this. While Mammy, whether out of genuine affection or revenge against white men, has a strong attachment to Other, Lady also feels maternal affection for Cynara. Cynara recalls her memories with Lady and remembers how: "She pulled me onto her lap and I suckled at her breast till her warm milk filled me. [...] Later, when I slept beside her, she said, "You're my little girl, aren't you?" (Randall, 2001, p.16). Or again: "Once, even, holding me in her arms, she had laughed and cried, laughed and cried, rocking me back and forth,

kissing my head, whispering, “I wish you were my child, I wish you were my child” (Randall, 2001, p.120). By attributing this kind of relationship to a white woman and a black child, I get the impression that Randall was attempting to overturn the stereotype of the mammy; in fact, Lady seems to have no real attachment to Other, but grows closer to Cynara and cares for her as a mother would. “We were both envious” (Randall, 2001, p.15), Cynara declares, demonstrating how not only was Cynara hurting from her mother’s lack of affection, but so was Other. This may be overstating the case, but I can see here an effort to destabilize both the mammy stereotype, turning mammy into a complicated figure with dual purposes, and the Southern plantation lady, making her not only partially black, but also an active agent in the education of black children. I consider the close relationship between Cynara and Lady to be valuable because it proves, once again, how a situation cannot be exclusively black or white: distancing ourselves from popular beliefs of the South with respect to motherhood, we see how the experience of being a mother was much more heterogeneous.

However, one thing I did wonder is why, at the end of the novel, Cynara decides to give away the child she had with the congressman to him and his wife, who could not have children on their own. Throughout the novel, it is true that she resents her family situation and repeatedly questions the very idea of love and parental affection. For instance, she utters the painful truth of being deprived of her mother’s affection by saying, “The first time you stop loving somebody, you learn all love ends. And loving somebody is just the graceful practice of patience before the love dies” (Randall, 2001, p.43). However, as her story comes to an end, she also learns to be more reflective in viewing her past, reading her mother’s situation between the lines, and she even manages to find love for herself as she chooses a black man instead of the white man who gave her security. Thus, why decide to simply become the godmother of the child? The situation can be viewed in two different ways. Some critics argue that Cynara’s decision is quite simply the result of her past: since maternal love was never granted to her in a conventional way, she is unable to experience it herself. Therefore, just like her mother, she decides to give her son away, aware that she would never be able to love him like a real mother (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.96). Other critics see the situation in a different light, which I share. In fact, Cynara does not fail as a mother when she gives away the child, but does the exact opposite. Because her health is declining, she decides to perform

this selfless act as a way to give the child a chance to experience what she never could. She provides him with the opportunity to be part of an ideal family, one that the baby could not have by staying with her (Argall, 2003, p.241). For this reason, Nicole Argall (2003, p.234) argues that Cynara is both an antihero and an "Africana womanist," a term that differs from Alice Walker's use of "womanist." The term, coined by Clenora Hudson-Weems, refers to an alternative and more practical definition of feminism, one that aims to fight against racism, classism, and sexism in this order. Recognizing the difficulty of simultaneously fighting against both racism and sexism, it points out the importance of moving one step at a time, first by advancing as a community and then, but just as importantly, by claiming gender equality for black women. For this reason, Cynara's journey to motherhood and her final choice can be seen as an act of Africana womanism, insofar as it shows the realistic aspect of her experience. At the end of the novel, she does not become the heroine who has found independence and power, but rather a person who has done something to help her community, in her case by breaking a cycle and bestowing on her son what neither she nor her mother could have (Argall, 2003, p.242). As she writes to the Congressman, she asks him to remind her son what he can do and who he can become:

> Shield the child from the truth of shackles, and no shackle will hold the man [...]. Let respectability be his first position; then nothing on this earth can shame him. Tell him his mother bought that respectability with lonely blood, and it is his birthright [...]. Ask this to pray against his mother's blasphemy. Tell him if we are as a people to rise again, it will be him. (Randall, 2001, p.205-06)

This sentence alone leads me to believe that it is not that motherhood is not seen in a negative light in *TWDG*, but rather that a community of support is needed to help black children grow up more peacefully and bring about some social changes. The whole representation of motherhood, moreover, seems to be challenging the very idea of family as merely based on blood ties. In a way, we can refer back to the concept of "othermothering," this practice of communal mothering rooted in West African traditions and quite central during slavery. Mothers are not just the biological ones: at times, help is needed from multiple people; more women who understand the need to help each other to make sure the black community survives and is protected.

4.5 Language and the Power of the Word

In this last section, I wish to focus on the use of language in both novels, and then see how words can become a vehicle for empowerment, especially in relation to the creation of a rewriting. *GWTW* makes extensive use of racial slurs, as we have already noted, and Mitchell has black characters speak Black English. According to her, she wanted the language to be "not only phonetically accurate but also easy to read" (as cited in Gómez-Galisteo, 2011, p.99). As can easily be observed from the novel, black characters do not speak standard English, but a variety of what Mitchell assumed was Southern Black English. In fact, there is an intentional difference evident in the way Mitchell depicts the speech of the different groups in her novel: black characters and "white trash" speak with non-standard spelling and syntax, using a language that visually seems broken and less correct; white people, on the other hand, while they too would have had a Southern regional accent, do not exhibit a speech marked by non-standard spelling. In other words, black people and poor people are portrayed speaking a dialect to make them sound inferior, while white people speak perfect standard English, even though realistically they should have had Southern features in their pronunciation (Hiramoto, 2009, p.250). The way slaves speak seems to be "Mock Ebonics" (or Mock Black English/African American English), as their language is stereotyped and exaggerated rather than accurate. We can see, for example, a casual conversation between Scarlett and Mammy and the way their speech is presented to us:

> "Is de gempmum gone? Huccome you din' ast dem ter stay fer supper, Miss Scarlett? Ah done tole Poke ter lay two extry plates fer dem. Whar's yo' manners?"
> "Oh, I was so tired of hearing them talk about the war that I couldn't have endured it through supper, especially with Pa joining in and shouting about Mr. Lincoln." (Mitchell, 1936, p.23)

Although someone like Scarlett would have had a strong Southern accent, only Mammy's speech is "dialectalized" in Mitchell's writing (Hiramoto, 2009, p.251-52). Rather than seeking to be phonetically accurate, it seems that Mitchell let her own prejudices take over.

Moreover, as far as racial slurs are concerned, Mitchell claimed to have wanted to be historically accurate, as she believed that "nice people in the Antebellum south called them 'darkies'" and, during her times, black people called each other "nigger" very

frequently (as cited in Churchwell, 2022, p.78). Her excuse for resorting to racial slurs was based on historical authenticity: black people used them among themselves, and slaveholders referred to slaves as "darkies" in a benevolent way, therefore she was allowed to do so as well. However, it also seemed that Mitchell was aware that there was a difference when white people used these kinds of insults, since, for example, we saw how Uncle Peter was deeply offended when a Yankee woman referred to him as "nigger." However, the issue is not really addressed, but rather deflected: according to Churchwell (2022, p.78), it seems that although Mitchell knew that racial slurs were offensive, she ignored this issue because she believed that the struggle for racial equality was overplayed, thus that black people were too demanding and acted "entitled." It is interesting to note how Mitchell ends up using deeply offensive expressions, whether intentionally or not, to such an extent that the question arises as to what convinced her that she had the right to exasperate their use. In fact, in the first part of the novel, during what are described as the benevolent days of slavery, racial slurs are mostly used by black characters when talking to each other, or occasionally are used by poor whites. White people use "darkies," which is regarded simply as a way of calling them, almost affectionately. As the novel progresses through the Civil War and the Reconstruction period, however, racial slurs are increasingly used by everyone, especially Scarlett and Rhett. "You're a fool nigger" (Mitchell, 1936, p.334) Scarlett tells Prissy; "You look like a nigger" (Mitchell, 1936, p.390), she says to Melanie; "I did kill a nigger [...], what else could a Southern gentleman do?" (Mitchell, 1936, p.518), is what Rhett says to Scarlett when he is in prison. Whatever Mitchell's intention was, it cannot be denied that she started to use some of those words to further mark a difference, employed as weapons to point to the inability of black people to make good choices on their own and to live independently. She used language and words as a powerful tool for white supremacy and violence; a tool that she seemed to have underestimated (Churchwell, 2022, p.78-79). I find this rather unnerving, and not because I am trying to find more faults in *GWTW*, but simply because, if Mitchell's goal was to be historically accurate, she should have been acquainted with the power of the expressions she abused, especially in the period she chose to focus on. As Jabari (2007, p.96) reminds us, after the Civil War "racist language became the lingua franca of mainstream America," hence a frightening weapon used to prevent the advancement of black people.

In *TWDG*, language and the use of words occupy a special place. Cynara writes her own diary, out of necessity, in a fragmented and poetic way that defies the authority of *GWTW*. If Mitchell's black characters are stereotypically called with racial slurs to keep them in an enclosed space, it seems that Randall uses language to explore their interiority and subjectivity. In writing her story, Cynara does not speak Black English, or a whitewashed version of it, but nonetheless uses a style that reflects the African American folk tradition. Therefore, she marks her identity by using rhythms, metaphors, idioms, and emotions. For example, she uses expressions such as, "That's a sweet drink of cold water" (Randall, 2001, p.47), a metaphorical expression used to talk about Other; or "he braided what he could remember of the words from the Episcopal prayer book" (Randall, 2001, p.50), using religious language to talk about Garlic (Williams, 2004, p.315). Writing is ultimately what allows her to find herself: it is her story, her words, her thoughts; no one is speaking for her or telling her what to say. As such, writing is a very powerful component of her identity, as it allows her to create a stream of consciousness about her past to then find, through the words written in the diary, a solution to her circumstances. She learns to write because of R., as she herself states: "He taught me how to read and write, and it was as if he created me. I started writing and it was just like he took a rib from my chest and created a partner for me. Adam had Eve and I have pages" (Randall, 2001, p.146-47). However, she then becomes a writer not because of R., but because she herself wants it. "This is my book" (Randall, 2001, p.7), she says, taking ownership of her story, something enslaved women could not do. By writing from a marginalized perspective, she seems to be writing for all those women who could not. As Catherine Kerrison reminds us (cited in Gros, 2015, p.146), writing was a "gendered activity in the American South" because it was believed that women were incapable of writing for themselves. In *TWDG* this is questioned, especially as Cynara is portrayed as being "too smart for her own good" (Randall, 2001, p.19). In fact, she is as eloquent as R. or any other white character, if not more so, and her speech is always intelligent and reflective (Williams, 2004, p.315).

TWDG is metafictional; a story that knows its limits but wants to "talk back" to another text, to fill in the gaps and provide a different perspective, in this case taking the form of a slave narrative that, as we have seen, highlights different situations of the slave experience. Because of this, I want to link Randall's project to Saidiya Hartman's

definition of "critical fabulation" in order to understand the power of narration and its relevance to the experiences of African Americans. Hartman's concept (2008, p.4) makes us reflect upon the idea of narration as an equivalent to recovery, in that while history has happened and much of it is gone, we can still uncover its hidden parts by narrating counter-stories of slavery, something that according to her is akin to "writing a history of present." Hartman raises the question of how to narrate impossible stories, meaning how to recover the accounts of slavery and the voices of those who lived it if the archive is both scarce and politically partial. And thus, she finds an answer in critical fabulation, that is, the use of storytelling and speculative fiction to recount those lost stories and reevaluate the narratives of the past (Hartman, 2008, p.10). Her agenda parallels that of Randall and other authors of rewritings precisely because the objective is to destabilize known truths, to search inside what is hidden, to give a different meaning to what is already known, and, in general, to imagine a possibility for enslaved people that transcends slavery. She describes critical fabulation thus:

> By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done (Hartman, 2008, p.11).

I particularly value this quote because it nicely summarizes everything that is required in a good rewriting: playing with and critiquing the master narrative, presenting a different or absent perspective, and creating a new story that includes everything that has been neglected. This is important, as, according to Hartman, history writing and, consequently, literature, have their limitations: we have seen how, for black people, history and literature have largely revolved around misrepresentations, violence, and social death, hence why new narrations become a valuable vehicle in order to recover what has been missed or disregarded. Not all can be recovered, naturally, and not all that is part of the past can be understood, as there are traumatic experiences that may seem too complex to be fathomed. However, Hartman suggests that this should not drive us to pessimism and despair, but should instead inform the way we know and understand our past in order to create a better future (Hartman, 2008, p.13).

In light of this, I like to think that forms of revision of texts written in the past, such as our case study, help us see what has happened in a different light and perhaps help retrieve some truth that was missing from the original text. In fact, hopefully, reading *TWDG* required us to look at *GWTW* with different eyes and ask questions such as: what was happening to enslaved people while the narrative focused on Scarlett? Was Southern society really as Mitchell portrayed it? What was actually occurring on plantations for women and children, and how different was the experience for women? But also questions such as: does a white author have the right to write their own twisted account of the black experience? Can a black author write back to them and give a voice to the people that were silenced? Does seeing the other side of the coin allow us to look at the past differently and remember historical events more consciously? By answering these questions in the course of this thesis, the aim was to create a bridge between the past and the present, between remembering and forgetting, between the ideals that some literary classics made popular and the other side of history that was pushed aside. Toni Morrison (1990, p.119) wrote that "the act of imagination is bound up with memory." Building on this, we could say that imagining or crafting a life for enslaved people is both a way to reassess and reinterpret their experience and a way to help improve the collective memory we have of them, hence to see them not only as victims, but as complete human beings who lived, struggled and acted with intention.

Conclusion

Overall, the aim of this thesis was to provide a different perspective on some aspects of the slave and African American experience. Where literature and historiography have often misrepresented their past, because of systematic racism and institutional biases, black people have always sought to reassess and reshape their narratives. As seen above, their struggles over representation have ranged from the forms of resistance developed during slavery, often overlooked by historiography because considered unreliable, to the contemporary battles they continue to face to claim their voice not only in society but also literature. We discussed the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the idea of giving voice to their ancestors through "neo-slave narratives," the project of intertextually revisiting past narratives, and the broader struggle to affirm the validity of their history.

More specifically, I examined the case of *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wind Done Gone*: the former, a popular narrative that contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes and misrepresentation of black people, slavery, and the Antebellum South; the latter, a reinterpretation aimed at giving a voice to the very people who had been silenced. As a result, we saw how Margaret Mitchell presented a distorted and glorified view of the institution of slavery, portrayed as benevolent, alongside stereotypical representations of black people. Alice Randall, by contrast, focused on the experience of a formerly enslaved girl, allowing us to see the other side of the story: one in which slavery is seen as a harsh reality, marked by isolation, violence, disconnection, and for the protagonist Cynara, an experience difficult to understand. With this, we saw how the Old South came to be idealized in *Gone with the Wind*, depicted as a place where no harm existed except that inflicted by the Yankees. *The Wind Done Gone*, instead, forced us to look at the realities of the South that were erased or ignored by Mitchell: realities that include miscegenation, family separations, isolation from the community, and the difficult experience of motherhood for black women.

What I aim to leave from this discussion is the idea that we need to look at the past more critically. Just because something has always been a certain way does not mean it is correct. Because of this, I aimed to examine the role of literature in the process of remembering the past, to show how narration and storytelling are part of what defines

people, and thus should mirror reality rather than misconceptions and stereotypes. Naturally, it is impossible to assume that everything can be restored, or that the violence of the institution of slavery can be healed simply through new narratives. However, I do believe that creating new stories that reveal the interior lives of enslaved individuals, or that critique the violence African Americans still face today, is a powerful and important tool for recovery and for better representation. Scarlett O'Hara's famous quote, "I'll think about it tomorrow," should stand as a reminder of what not to do: slavery is still a difficult topic in the U.S., both for white and black people, but it cannot be a problem to be cast aside simply because it happened in the past. The moment to think about it, as well as to consider the forms of discrimination, microaggressions, systematic violence, and racism black people experience, is today. With this, tomorrow should be a day when people continue fighting for equality and justice. At the end of *The Wind Done Gone*, Randall (2001, p.205) writes that "the bars that cannot be broken are behind the eyes": racism exists in the mind, and it shapes identity, limits freedom, inflicts wounds that may not be visible but are very deep, and influences how people see themselves and others. Yet change can only begin the moment people recognize the importance of awareness, education, empathy, and healing. Facing the truth can be difficult, especially if it involves facing the atrocities of the past, but it is a first step toward breaking the bars, and imagining a future where justice does not happen "tomorrow," but is a process that continues every day.

Italian Summary / Riassunto in italiano

Questo progetto di tesi nasce da un interesse maturato durante i miei anni universitari, nel corso dei quali ho avuto la possibilità di scoprire un mondo che mi era, fino ad allora, quasi del tutto sconosciuto. Mi riferisco all'esperienza delle persone ridotte in schiavitù negli Stati Uniti, e alla vita attuale degli afroamericani in una società che, sebbene non più fatta da prigionia fisica, è ancora profondamente segnata da ingiustizie, discriminazioni e razzismo strutturale. L'attuale condizione delle persone nere negli Stati Uniti non può infatti essere pienamente compresa senza dare uno sguardo al passato, e in particolare soffermarsi su come la loro immagine sia stata costruita nel tempo da nozioni di superiorità bianca e rappresentazioni razziste e distorte, diffuse nella società stessa, nella cultura, nella letteratura e nella storiografia. In sintesi, una serie di circostanze che hanno inciso radicalmente sulle vite, le esperienze e le memorie collettive del passato degli afroamericani ed afrodiscendenti del giorno d'oggi.

Pertanto, lo scopo di questo lavoro è quello di fare un tuffo nel passato e rivalutare le rappresentazioni e i falsi miti che la storiografia, ma soprattutto la letteratura, hanno costruito sulle persone nere. Dalle teorie pseudoscientifiche sulla superiorità della "razza" bianca, ad una storiografia della schiavitù parziale e politicamente controllata, alla letteratura americana dell'Ottocento e Novecento che ha contribuito alla circolazione di stereotipi e credenze scorrette e negative. In particolare, il caso di studio seguito ed approfondito riguarda la revisione o rilettura di uno dei romanzi più popolari ed influenti della storia della letteratura americana: *Via col Vento*, scritto dall'autrice statunitense originaria del Sud, Margaret Mitchell, nel 1936. Per rielaborare tante delle problematiche presenti nel testo, quali le rappresentazioni stereotipate delle persone nere, della schiavitù e della società del Sud prima della Guerra Civile americana, verrà affiancato ad una sua riscrittura, ovvero *The Wind Done Gone* (omonimo titolo espresso in *African American English*, o *AAE*), scritto dall'autrice afroamericana Alice Randall nel 2001.

Capitolo 1: Voci Soppresse e Recuperate: Schiavitù tra Letteratura e Storiografia

Il primo capitolo nasce con lo scopo di introdurre alcuni concetti importanti che saranno ripresi ed esemplificati nei capitoli successivi, soprattutto in relazione a come la

società, la storiografia e la letteratura hanno descritto l'esperienza della schiavitù negli Stati Uniti nel corso degli anni. Secondo lo studioso Stuart Hall (1997, p.15), il modo in cui interpretiamo il mondo che ci circonda dipende sempre da una serie di "discorsi," ovvero dalle credenze e convinzioni sviluppatesi in base al contesto storico, culturale e sociale in cui viviamo. In base a ciò, la presupposizione di una differenza biologica tra bianchi e neri nasce da teorie pseudoscientifiche che hanno contribuito a creare un'idea di "razza," un concetto tuttavia privo di qualsiasi base naturale. Nel caso degli Stati Uniti, l'idea di una differenza razziale, che concepiva le persone nere come intrinsecamente inferiori ai bianchi, divenne necessaria agli inizi della nazione per legittimare lo sfruttamento degli africani durante e dopo la tratta atlantica (Fredrickson, 1987). Una serie di "discorsi" sugli schiavi nacque dunque per rendere lecita l'istituzione della schiavitù in una nazione autoproclamatasi aperta, libera, e basata sull'autodeterminazione. Dunque, gli schiavi iniziarono ad essere ritratti come sciocchi e incapaci (secondo lo stereotipo *Jim Crow*), oppure selvaggi ed incontrollabili se non disciplinati sotto schiavitù (*Sambo*) (Fredrickson, 1987). Le donne schiave vennero gradualmente ritratte come *Mammies*, serve obbedienti della famiglia bianca; *Matriarchs* (donne matriarcali), madri incapaci di prendersi cura dei propri figli; o *Jezebels*, donne eccessivamente sessualizzate. Questi discorsi, da un lato, ritraevano l'uomo nero come incapace di vivere autonomamente; dall'altro, rappresentavano la donna nera come naturalmente predisposta a subire violenze sessuali e a partorire figli che a loro volta sarebbero diventati schiavi (secondo la dottrina *partus sequitur ventrem*) (Collins, 2009).

Analogamente a quanto avveniva nella società, le rappresentazioni della schiavitù nella letteratura dell'epoca divennero un mezzo di propaganda schiavista per illustrare la vita nelle piantagioni come un mondo pacifico e felice, in cui le persone nere lavoravano alacremente per il puro piacere di farlo. *Via col Vento*, da questo punto di vista, costituì forse l'emblema di questo tipo di narrazioni (Jabari, 2007). Successivamente, la storiografia e la costruzione degli archivi storici contribuirono ad ampliare queste convinzioni. Fino agli anni '60, la figura predominante negli studi sulla schiavitù fu U.B. Phillips, il quale sosteneva che l'istituzione fosse stata benefica per gli schiavi, poiché, a suo avviso, aveva insegnato loro la civiltà, in quanto naturalmente propensi alla subordinazione. Assieme a lui si aggiunsero le teorie di Kenneth Stampp e Stanley Elkins, i quali adottarono un approccio più psicologico e ambientale. Tuttavia, almeno nel caso

di Elkins, ciò condusse ad una semplificazione delle condizioni degli schiavi, visti puramente come vittime passive ed incapaci di reagire (Meier and Rudwick, 1986).

Come cambiare, dunque, queste narrazioni? Con l'avvio del Movimento per i Diritti Civili degli afroamericani e, più specificamente, con l'inizio degli anni '60, un lavoro più attivo e vigile si avviò per "riscrivere" la storia della schiavitù e degli afroamericani. Gli storici, se prima influenzati da credenze popolari e principalmente concentrati su fonti documentali oggettive e tangibili, iniziarono a cercare nuove fonti per scoprire la vita reale degli schiavi e le loro forme di resistenza. Tra queste rientravano narrazioni orali, diari, dati demografici e, più in generale, tutte le espressioni culturali lasciate dagli schiavi (Gilbert, 2018). Nei decenni successivi, la storia della schiavitù iniziò ad essere scritta *from the bottom up* (dal basso verso l'alto) e, mentre gli storici rianalizzarono il passato con occhi diversi, gli attivisti avviarono un processo di sensibilizzazione attraverso il Black Power Movement. Per quanto riguarda la letteratura, un importante mezzo per la rivalutazione del passato fu dato dal genere letterario noto come *neo-slave narrative*: narrazioni contemporanee che rievocano il passato degli schiavi, ispirandosi alle *slave narratives*, ossia i testi scritti dagli schiavi, talvolta con l'aiuto di abolizionisti, durante il periodo antebellico. Secondo A. Timothy Spaulding (2005, p.4), questo tipo di testi fu "progettato per intromettersi nella storia come mezzo per riformarla," motivo per cui molti autori afroamericani intrapresero la creazione di questo tipo di testimonianze sulle persone sottoposte a schiavitù; racconti che potessero fornire al lettore una maggiore chiarezza nei confronti del passato, aiutando al contempo i cambiamenti sociali del presente.

L'esperienza degli afroamericani e delle persone schiavizzate iniziò pertanto ad essere concepita in modo più critico, dando particolare attenzione ai processi di resistenza che gli schiavi attuarono durante la schiavitù (che comprendevano l'uso di "maschere" per sopravvivere, interpretate poi come stereotipi) e la loro soggettività. Allo stesso tempo, si iniziò a riflettere sulla condizione attuale delle persone nere, costrette a confrontarsi con una *double consciousness* (doppia coscienza), come descritto da W.E.B. Du Bois: una frammentazione dell'identità tra l'essere se stessi e il vedersi attraverso lo sguardo della società dominante (Eyerman, 2002). Gli effetti, sebbene ancora in evoluzione, di questo processo di sensibilizzazione dagli anni '60 sono stati importanti: una maggiore consapevolezza del trauma storico che la schiavitù ha rappresentato; un'idea di memoria

collettiva più lucida ed analitica; una concezione di identità come un processo dinamico e instabile; e, infine, un graduale avvicinamento alla possibilità di guarigione da questa profonda ferita.

Capitolo 2: Rivalutare Narrazioni Contemporanee: Casi di Studio

Il secondo capitolo ha come scopo quello di portare degli esempi concreti di riscritture, ovvero di rivalutazioni di opere letterarie che servono a fornire una prospettiva diversa rispetto a temi, personaggi, ed eventi da sempre letti in un modo specifico, talvolta scorretto o stereotipato. Sebbene potrebbe sembrare una digressione, poiché le opere descritte non fanno solo parte della sfera della schiavitù e degli afroamericani, questo capitolo è importante per dimostrare come, semplicemente cambiando il punto di vista, molti "discorsi" possono essere sovvertiti. Partendo dal concetto di "intertestualità," sviluppato dalla studiosa Julia Kristeva tra il 1966 e il 1967, è importante notare come l'influenza tra testi letterari ha sempre avuto un ruolo fondamentale nella letteratura. L'intertestualità presuppone infatti una relazione tra un testo ed un altro, che può significare l'espansione di idee e concetti o la creazione di nuovi per sostituire quelli considerati obsoleti (Clayton e Rothstein, 1991). Di conseguenza, è un elemento caratterizzante sia della letteratura postmoderna, in quanto rompe la coerenza e l'unità della narrazione tradizionale, sia della letteratura postcoloniale, la quale è improntata a una spiccata valenza politica e guarda al passato con l'obiettivo di opporsi a un testo originale e raccontare un'altra storia. Nel caso della letteratura afroamericana è altrettanto rilevante la teoria della *Signifyin' Monkey*, sviluppata da Henry Louis Gates Jr. nel 1988. Il termine *Signifyin'*, sostiene Gates, si riferisce all'uso del linguaggio per creare giochi retorici, impiegando dispositivi come l'ironia, la parodia, il pastiche, l'umorismo, la metafora e l'allusione, sia per creare nuovi testi, sia per commentare e criticare quelli del passato (Gates, 1988).

Inevitabilmente, le forze politiche influenzano lo sviluppo di un canone letterario: la storia e la letteratura, infatti, tendono a concentrarsi sugli interessi di particolari gruppi di persone, escludendo le voci delle minoranze. Pertanto, riscrivere un testo è un atto che permette ai nuovi autori di giocare con un'opera ed esplorarne i limiti, oltre che di criticare parti della letteratura e della cultura che rimangono ambigue. Per questo motivo ho deciso

di proporre alcuni esempi emblematici di riscritture, che verranno descritti molto brevemente qui di seguito.

Il primo riguarda *La Tempesta* di William Shakespeare, dramma scritto tra il 1610 e il 1611, e la sua riscrittura intitolata *Seme di Strega* (*Hag-Seed*), scritta da Margaret Atwood nel 2016. *Seme di Strega* mette in luce temi importanti, quali: lo sfruttamento delle persone e l'emarginazione dalla società (attraverso una rivalutazione del personaggio Calibano) e la soppressione delle voci femminili (dando volontà di azione al personaggio Miranda) (Carney, 2022; Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2017). Il secondo confronto riguarda il celebre romanzo *Jane Eyre*, pubblicato da Charlotte Brontë nel 1847 e *Il Grande Mare dei Sargassi* (*Wide Sargasso Sea*), scritto da Jean Rhys nel 1966. Focalizzando l'attenzione sulla moglie di Rochester, Bertha, descritta come pazza in *Jane Eyre*, la riscrittura di Rhys, in cui la donna prende il nome di Antoinette e la cui vita viene descritta prima e dopo l'incontro con l'uomo, permette di sviluppare temi significativi. Questi riguardano il dualismo bianco-nero, soprattutto in relazione alla presunta superiorità dell'uomo bianco europeo, e il mondo patriarcale che limita la donna e le impone un controllo fisico e mentale che talvolta la condanna alla rovina (Cappello, 2009; Fayad, 1988).

Passando all'esperienza afroamericana, il primo confronto analizzato riguarda la vita di Nat Turner, noto per aver condotto una rivoluzione degli schiavi nel 1831, e le diverse narrazioni che ne sono state date. Queste includono *Le Confessioni Di Nat Turner*, pubblicate da Thomas R. Gray nel 1831 dopo il suo processo; il romanzo omonimo di William Styron del 1967; e la riscrittura immaginaria dell'autrice Sherley Anne Williams nel suo romanzo *Dessa Rose* del 1986. Sia il testo di Gray che quello di Styron presentano importanti problematiche: Gray, da una parte, ritrae Turner come un fanatico, esagerandone le azioni, i discorsi e le motivazioni; Styron, dall'altra, si appropria della sua voce e aderisce a rappresentazioni stereotipate degli uomini neri. Con *Dessa Rose*, Williams invece ribalta queste rappresentazioni distorte, creando una storia che riflette sia sul potere che le strutture istituzionali, come il razzismo, il sessismo e il classismo, hanno nell'influenzare narrazioni, sia sul potere delle narrazioni nell'influenzare la vita e le convinzioni delle persone (Fabricant, 1993; Ryan, 2008). Il secondo caso, invece, si focalizza su un grande classico della letteratura americana, ovvero *Le Avventure di Huckleberry Finn*, scritto da Mark Twain nel 1884, e la sua rielaborazione del 2006 da

parte di Nancy Rawles, intitolata *My Jim*. Il personaggio di Jim nella narrazione di Twain, uno schiavo sempliciotto che viene visto e trattato come un bambino, diventa una persona intelligente e perspicace nella vicenda di Rawles, conferendo un passato e una profondità a un soggetto secondario ed emarginato (Yoon, 2008). Infine, il terzo ed ultimo caso riguarda la novella scritta da Herman Melville nel 1855, *Benito Cereno*, e la riscrittura di Charles Johnson del 1990, *Middle Passage*. Anche in questo caso, lo scopo della riscrittura è quello di dare soggettività e motivazione agli schiavi, riflettendo al contempo sull'importanza del cambiamento e del corretto ricordo del passato (Palencia, 1994).

Capitolo 3: *The Wind Done Gone*: Una Riscrittura di *Via col Vento*

Il terzo capitolo introduce finalmente il principale caso di studio di questa tesi, costituito da *Via col vento* e *The Wind Done Gone*. *Via col Vento*, pubblicato nel 1936, si rivelò subito un bestseller internazionale, e la storia di Rossella O'Hara (Scarlett nella versione originale) non tardò ad entrare nel cuore di milioni di lettori. Il romanzo conteneva tutto ciò che un lettore potesse desiderare: racchiudeva discipline come la storia, la medicina, la psicologia e la sociologia, oltre a una varietà di esperienze ed emozioni, come l'amore, la passione, l'odio, l'avarizia, la fame, la solitudine e la disperazione. Non sorprende che solo tre anni dopo la sua pubblicazione uscì il film, con Vivien Leigh e Clark Gable nei panni di Rossella e Rhett. Prevedibilmente, fu un immenso successo: vinse otto Premi Oscar e incassò 390 milioni di dollari (che corrispondono a circa sei miliardi di dollari di oggi) (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011). La critica dell'epoca, di fronte all'enorme successo del romanzo, non si soffermò tanto sulle sue problematiche interne, quanto sulla sua capacità di risuonare con un pubblico specifico: le donne. Pertanto, il romanzo è stato spesso descritto come un "libro di donne" e, nel corso degli anni, le sue interpretazioni si sono ampiamente concentrate sul ritratto di un'eroina femminile tenace, trascurando altre parti del testo che necessitavano di maggiore attenzione. Nel testo, Mitchell affronta temi come l'identità femminile, i desideri delle donne, il potere e la loro forza. In particolare, molti vi leggono una riflessione sulla lotta di tante donne per opporsi ai ruoli rigidi e predefiniti che la società patriarcale cercava di imporre loro (Fox-Genovese, 1981).

La comunità afroamericana, tuttavia, non tardò a far presente le problematiche individuate nel romanzo. Molti scrittori afroamericani, infatti, trovarono terreno fertile su

cui lavorare con *Via col Vento. The Wind Done Gone*, scritto nel 2001, rappresenta forse il principale esempio di una riscrittura di *Via col Vento* che ne smonta la struttura e gli ideali mitici, dando forma a una nuova storia; una *neo-slave narrative*, che conferisce dignità alle voci messe a tacere dal romanzo di Mitchell, fornendo una nuova lettura (Kenan, 2018). Ponendo al centro della vicenda la storia di una giovane donna mulatta, Cynara, nata dalla relazione tra Gerald O'Hara e Mammy, la narrazione è ben precisa: l'esperienza nera è collocata al centro per rivelare la complessità e il dolore nascosti dietro l'immagine idealizzata del mondo delle piantagioni.

Questa operazione letteraria sollevò, tuttavia, un acceso dibattito legale e culturale: infatti, la società che deteneva i diritti d'autore di *Via col Vento* intentò una causa contro l'uscita del romanzo, descrivendolo come una "pirateria senza limiti" e un tentativo di "fornire un commentario sociale sul Sud antebellico" (Harvard Law Review, 2002, p.1194-95). Nonostante l'opposizione, il libro venne pubblicato senza il consenso degli eredi di Mitchell, ufficialmente presentato come una parodia, ossia un'opera volta a mettere in luce i principi ideologici del testo originale. Come molte altre *neo-slave narratives*, *The Wind Done Gone* usa la parodia come strumento per smantellare le convenzioni della letteratura tradizionale e dare voce alle persone marginalizzate. Secondo Rushdy (1999, p.124), infatti, l'approccio parodico e intertestuale di questi testi "contesta quelle opere d'arte che costituiscono atti di appropriazione culturale e sfida anche le istituzioni accademiche e sociali che sanciscono tali atti."

Capitolo 4: Un'analisi Comparativa dei Due Testi

Il quarto e ultimo capitolo, infine, si propone di analizzare comparativamente i due testi, mettendoli a diretto confronto per osservare nello specifico come *The Wind Done Gone* rivaluta e destabilizza *Via col Vento*.

Un primo elemento importante messo in discussione è il modo in cui Mitchell ha raccontato l'istituzione della schiavitù e come ha sfruttato a suo favore gli stereotipi sulle persone nere dell'epoca. Leggendo il suo romanzo, infatti, è facile immergersi completamente nel mondo di Rossella e dimenticare le circostanze della schiavitù e della Guerra Civile che la circondano. La storia è avvincente, coinvolgente e mai noiosa, al punto che il lettore è portato ad identificarsi con i personaggi rappresentati come "eroi" (Rossella, Rhett, Melania e così via). Tuttavia, poiché la famiglia O'Hara è proprietaria

di schiavi, l'istituzione della schiavitù è presentata in modo edulcorato, come un sistema positivo sia per gli schiavi che per gli schiavisti, in linea con la visione dello storico U.B. Phillips menzionato in precedenza. In realtà, il Sud antebellico era basato su una struttura sociale ed economica fondata sulla schiavitù, dove lo sfruttamento fisico e psicologico degli schiavi era diffuso e completamente accettato e normalizzato (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011). Questa semplificazione operata da Mitchell, che chiaramente intendeva eludere il problema rappresentato dalla schiavitù a dispetto del periodo di svolgimento della trama del romanzo, è evidente anche nelle descrizioni dei personaggi neri. Se Rossella, Gerald, Ellen, Ashley, Rhett e Melania sono, nel bene o nel male, tutti individui intelligenti e dinamici, i personaggi neri (Mammy, Prissy, Pork, Big Sam) appaiono al contrario come delle caricature degli stereotipi diffusi nel Sud: leali, sottomessi, sciocchi e infantili. *The Wind Done Gone* ribalta completamente la prospettiva di *Via col Vento*, proponendoci una narrazione in cui l'esperienza della schiavitù diventa centrale per comprendere i personaggi neri. La loro interiorità è sviluppata, e da lettori riusciamo facilmente a cogliere le motivazioni dietro le loro azioni. I personaggi corrispondono a quelli del romanzo originale, ma con nomi leggermente modificati: Cynara (un personaggio nuovo), R. (Rhett), Other (Rossella), Planter (Gerald), Lady (Ellen), e presentano il Sud da un punto di vista radicalmente diverso. Le persone nere sono descritte come intelligenti, consapevoli e capaci di mettere in atto strategie di resistenza per sopravvivere. Al contrario, i personaggi bianchi vengono rappresentati attraverso gli stessi stereotipi semplicistici che Mitchell aveva riservato ai neri nel suo romanzo (Gros, 2019).

Un secondo elemento esaminato riguarda il modo in cui il Vecchio Sud, cioè il Sud prima della Guerra Civile, è rappresentato. Sebbene Mitchell avesse dichiarato di non avere voluto idealizzare il Sud schiavista, *Via col Vento* finisce comunque per glorificare la cultura di quella "causa persa." Infatti, non solo emerge una visione deformata della schiavitù, ma anche della stessa Guerra Civile, vista non come una lotta per l'emancipazione ma come un capriccio da parte del Nord. In aggiunta a ciò, il Sud viene presentato come romantico, gerarchico e mitico, dove le piantagioni sono simbolo di eleganza e moralità (Wilson et al., 2006). Al contrario, *The Wind Done Gone* smonta questa visione idealizzata. Raccontando la storia dal punto di vista di Cynara, entriamo nel suo mondo composto dai racconti dolorosi di quella società: il Sud glorificato si rivela una mera illusione costruita dalla memoria bianca. Per Cynara e per gli schiavi attorno a

lei, la vita nella piantagione è un miscuglio incomprensibile di elementi, tra cui una lotta per la sopravvivenza, le lotte interiori sulla propria identità, la mancanza di affetto, e gli abusi mentali sofferti (Gros, 2015; Woltmann, 2022).

Un terzo aspetto preso in esame riguarda alcune delle problematiche del Vecchio Sud, messe a tacere da Mitchell, forse per disinteresse, e invece portate alla luce da Randall per sottoporle a critica. Tra queste spicca il ruolo delle donne nella società schiavista: donne che, infatti, giocavano una parte centrale nel mantenimento della schiavitù. In primo luogo, perché lo stupro sistematico e gli abusi sessuali compiuti dai padroni bianchi erano estremamente comuni nel Sud antebellico; in secondo luogo, e di conseguenza, perché ogni bambino nato in schiavitù avrebbe seguito legalmente la condizione della madre, diventando così anch'esso schiavo (Eaves, 2024). In *The Wind Done Gone*, Randall mette in evidenza il problema della *miscegenation*, la mescolanza razziale, una realtà tanto comune nel Sud quanto occultata. Il personaggio di Cynara, nata da una relazione tra una donna nera e un uomo bianco, incarna proprio questa complessità e ci porta a riflettere sulle conseguenze della creazione di una rigida "linea del colore." In altre parole: se Cynara è allo stesso tempo bianca e nera, perché viene discriminata solo in quanto visibilmente nera? Ci viene ricordato, dunque, quanto sia assurdo categorizzare in modo netto le persone, come suggerito da *Via col Vento*, poiché le linee tra bianchi e neri, o tra chi comanda e chi non comanda, si confondono, evidenziando ancora una volta come l'identità individuale non sia mai fissa o univoca, e che non dovrebbe, per questo, determinare il destino di una persona (Kenan, 2018).

Un ultimo aspetto analizzato riguarda il concetto di maternità, descritto in modo molto diverso nei due romanzi. In *Via col Vento*, la maternità è presentata in modo contraddittorio: da un lato viene idealizzata attraverso la figura passiva di Ellen, che è simbolo dei valori domestici del Sud; dall'altro è rivoluzionata da Scarlett, la quale ha scarso istinto materno e preferisce la carriera alla cura dei figli. La maternità nera, invece, viene solo ridotta allo stereotipo della *mammy* (Gómez-Galisteo, 2011). In *The Wind Done Gone*, invece, la maternità viene vista in modo più complicato, come una frammentazione causata dalla schiavitù e una complessità emotiva e relazionale. Cynara prova un forte senso di abbandono, ma alla fine compie un atto di amore materno non convenzionale, dando suo figlio a chi può offrirgli un futuro migliore. Randall ridefinisce

così la maternità come un atto comunitario e non legato solo al sangue, opponendosi alla visione romantica e binaria del Sud tradizionale (Argall, 2003; Gómez-Galisteo, 2011).

In definitiva, lo scopo di *The Wind Done Gone*, così come di molte n*eo-slave narratives*, è quello di creare un ponte tra il passato e il presente, tra il ricordo e l'oblio, tra gli ideali che alcuni classici della letteratura hanno reso popolari e l'altra parte della storia che è stata messa da parte. Rossella O'Hara, nel romanzo, dice spesso che "ci penserà domani:" qualsiasi problema abbia, è un problema di domani. Questo dovrebbe ricordarci cosa non fare: la schiavitù è ancora un argomento difficile negli Stati Uniti, ma non può essere un problema da mettere da parte solo perché è accaduto nel passato. Il momento per pensarci, così come per considerare le forme di discriminazione, aggressioni, violenza sistematica e razzismo che le persone nere subiscono, è oggi. Affrontare la verità è difficile, soprattutto se si tratta di affrontare le atrocità del passato, ma è un primo passo per immaginare un futuro in cui la giustizia non avviene "domani," ma è un processo che continua ogni giorno. La letteratura è un importante strumento per farlo, poiché essa definisce e crea chi siamo e chi saremo per coloro che ci leggeranno in futuro.

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