



An Analysis on the Personalities of the Main Characters in *Gone with the Wind*

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Abstract: *Gone with the Wind* is a panoramic social novel with the American Civil War as the historical background and the social life in the south as the living environment. By showing the changes of fates of different characters in the chaotic world during and after the civil war, it reveals different characters with different personalities move forward in different directions. Aiming at analyzing the complicated social activities of the main characters in the novel, this essay tries to reveal that each character's fate is shaped by their personalities and social classes as well as the changes of social background under which the capitalist economy replaced the slave plantation economy. Every man, as to personality, is the creature of the age in which he lives (Voltaire). Different characters chose different ways to meet the challenges of their fates. Some bravely accepted their new identities and challenged the old norms as innovators of the age while some indulged in old identities and past memories and reluctant to face the changes of fates. This essay is trying to analyze the characters' fates combined with their personalities, social status, and social background in *Gone with the Wind*. This essay also helps readers better interpret the vividness and full dimensions of the characters in *Gone with the Wind*. As to the ethnic groups and African-American discrimination during the American Civil War in the novel, this essay doesn't make deep investigation and will make deep research in the future.

Keywords: personalities, characters, civil war, *Gone with the Wind*

I Introduction

History and culture have a very important influence on the formation of national character. The United States is a country of different ethnic groups which are not only the imprint left by different historical periods, but also the result of the fusion and collision of different cultures. This essay analyzes and summarizes the main characters in the novel combined with their immigration background, social status and social background, and probes into the reasons for the formation of their personalities.

Scarlett showed different personality traits at different stages of the civil war. Before the Civil War, she represented the planter class, with slaves in the family and large hectares of cotton fields. She demonstrated a daughter's personality of a plantation owner: being privileged, vain, pride and stubborn. After the Civil War, Scarlett's free and comfortable plantation life was destroyed, and there were a lot of hardships and obstacles in her life. It is such complicated and severe life experiences that made Scarlett gradually become a greedy, selfish and penny-pinching capitalist from a young girl who craved for comfort and enjoyable life in the past. Scarlett showed the brave fighting spirit against fate, which embodied the pioneering spirit of Irish immigrants to some extent. This essay also analyzes the fates of other characters in *Gone with the Wind* combined with their social

background, social status and the changes of their personalities. To a certain extent, this essay demonstrates that the fates of different characters have undergone profound changes before and after the American Civil War, which helps readers deeply interpret the vividness and full dimensions of the characters in *Gone with the Wind*.

II Brief Introduction of *Gone with the Wind*

Gone with the Wind is a panoramic social novel with the American Civil War as the historical background and the social life in the south as the living environment. It took Georgia as its story place. The setting is dwelt on two families--the Tara Plantation of the O'Hara's family and the Wilkes plantation of Twelve Oaks. The story vividly presents the lives of the two families, their slaves' and friends. It vividly demonstrates various characters how to face the great social changes because of the Civil War.

Using the unique observation perspective of women, the author subtly and profoundly describes the social activities with Scarlett as the central figure and Rhett, Melanie and Ashley as the main characters. Through their social activities, it shows numerous and complicated social pictures and their different destinies due to their personalities combined with their immigration background, social status as well as personalities.



The main plot is Scarlett O'Hara's showed passionate love to Ashley which is beyond the class. Scarlett belonged to the Irish immigrants who are full of courage and dare to challenge to secular restraints and norms. While Ashley represented the old noble class who fears to make new attempts to the changes of life especially the choosing of the partners whom he preferred the similar ones in thoughts and blood. Thus there was a giant gap between Scarlett and Ashley. However, Scarlett chose not to or was reluctant to admit it and she made convention to Ashley before Ashley's engagement and was refused. Scarlett was trying hard to gain Ashley's love until she finally noticed that her true love is Rhett while it was too late.

The social background is set in south before and after the Civil War. Everyone's life is torn apart by the war. Scarlett's first husband and childhood playmates were killed during the war. Scarlett's backbone --Elleen died of disease. Under the wheel of fate, each one has its own way to fight against it. This essay is guiding the readers to understand thoroughly why the main characters chose different ways to fight against their fates when the Civil War broke out.

III Scarlett' personality

1. Scarlett's personality before she got married

Scarlett was the eldest daughter of a plantation owner in Georgia who was half-Irish and half-French. She inherited more Irish traits of her father than the French features of her mother. Sometimes she was rash and bold and she behaved more like a son of her father. Since childhood, her playmates were neither her sisters nor the Wilkers' girls (well-educated girls), but the negro children on the plantation or the boys in the neighbourhood. She sometimes climbed a tree and threw a rock just as a naughty boy.

Though she didn't inherit the elegance of her mother, her mother and Mammy still made great efforts to transform Scarlett into an elegant and educated lady. Finally Scarlett did look sweet, charming and giddy and she danced the most gracefully dance in the county. But in essence, she was vain, self-willed and stubborn. She knew well how to behave charming in the crowds and how to grasp the hearts of those admirers. However, Ashley was the only exception. No matter what tricks she made or how she gave hint or made convention, Ashley never expressed love to her.

2. Scarlett's personality during the Civil War

Soon after Scarlett made a confession to Ashley but was refused, Scarlett married Charles who was Ashley's brother-in-law immediately seeking revenge and became a widow soon after. However, she appeared to bear grief in front of people but actually there wasn't a little mourning at the bottom of her heart. What she felt regret was she couldn't

dance at the parties any more. She was still vain, however, she began to challenge the secular norms and restraints of the society in her own way. She accepted Rhett's one hundred and fifty dollars gold bid for her dancing at the fundraising auction bazaar though she was in mourning.

Scarlett became maturer and stronger during the war. She wasn't the girl who was only into dancing and flirting. She abandoned her selfishness and vanity. She became the backbone of the Tara Plantation and she was tied tightly to the big family's fate. First, she attended to Melanie's birth then she became the master of Tara plantation after her mother's death. She even killed a Yankee marauder with a single shot from Charles's pistol for the safety of herself. For a time, the shortage of food and clothing and rebuilding Tara became Scarlett's priority for survival, which stimulated her Irish character of boldness. Scarlett learned to cook, milk the cow and pick cottons as the slaves used to do. She showed the tough, diligent and unbeatable character once her mother presented in managing the plantation. However, she acted more like a man, unlike her mother who was always polite and considerate to the slaves, she was decisive and calm when dealing with plantation issues. She spared no effort to make money and she knew how to make good use of the available existences to make both ends meet. She was the real master of Tara and wanted to make everyone in the plantation live a better life although there were many obstacles waiting for her.

The war defeated the old civilization system. Morality, ethics and values changed thoroughly after the war. Scarlett put aside the camouflage of a lady, became brave and fearless like her Irish ancestors, and began her "Tara Defense War".

3. Scarlett's personality in defending the Plantation

Defending and rebuilding Tara reflects not only Scarlett's desire to rebuild her homeland, but also her love for Tara and the land. The love of land is distinctive feature of the Irish national character. She finally understood her father's deep love of the land.

In order to pay the tax of Tara, Scarlett attracted Suellen's fiancé by her feminine charms and married him within two weeks, from whom she gained the tax of Tara and gradually took control of his business. Then with a loan from Rhett she bought a sawmill and run the lumber business herself. She started a new journey which made new challenges to the male-dominant society at that time.

She became cunning and pursuing more profit by showing shocking behaviors. She was on her own will to make a better life though she astonished the people and society at her age. She finally made a compromise with herself and agreed to acknowledge the fact that Ashley is only her imagined ideal type, her true love is Rhett. They had so much in common that both of them were cunning, independent and rebellious of traditional society. However, it was too late. Rhett got

disappointed after so many hurts and finally left Ashley. Ashley returned to Tara to make a new start again.

II Rhett's personalities in the novel

Rhett, who was an aristocratic son of a distinguished family and once studied at the West point Academy, should have been had a better of reputation. However, he was notorious for his notorious scoundrel. He was tired of traditional rules of etiquette and tired of the shackles of aristocratic life.

Rhett is a typical round character in the novel. He has a unique charm, mature, funny and deep insight into life. He is bold and trustworthy in some degree. He did business with northerners and brought many necessities to the south. This showed that there was some "mixed" qualities with his personality. On the one hand ,He would rather be shot than marry a girl he thought was a fool. Finally he killed the girl's brother thus he got the bad reputation of a "rebellious son" and was driven out of the family. He was even expelled from school. On the other hand, because he deeply sympathized with Bell who was a prostitute and sincerely treated her as his best friend. He secretly helped her so many times which seriously damaged the image of the whole family. However, he did not care since he never cared about the opinions of people around him.

He, who was not fettered by his noble origin, like Scarlett, did great rebellious acts to the society and did not want to be a victim of the southern traditional society. He did not follow the etiquette of the southern society like riding horse, shooting and other exciting activities respected by the southern upper-class society. He only lived for himself and loyal to himself. Without the affectation and hypocrisy of the traditional upper-class society, he lived freely, truly, freely and rebelliously.

He was fond of Scarlett, whom he thought of the same type with him. So he pursued her desperately, which highlighted Scarlett's uniqueness in her contemporaries. Rhett is also the soul in the novel. Without him, Scarlett can not be so glittered in the novel. Without his bid for Scarlett to dance, Scarlett might have lived in purgatory all her life with the black veil of widows. Rhett also constantly provided financial support to Scarlett, helping her buy the sawmill, imparting experience to her, and encouraging Scarlett to enter the society bravely to engage in trade activities and fight for her career. Finally, step by step, Scarlett abandoned the old life of the former landowners and accepted the new capitalist commercial civilization. We can imagine, without Rhett's help to Scarlett, she couldn't break through the moral shackles and embark on the road of rebelling against the traditional southern society. He seemed to be every girl's heart-throb except Scarlett. Scarlett indulged in her own dream of Ashley and never noticed Rhett's distinguished charming personality. Though Scarlett finally awoke to realize that Rhett was her Mr. Right, it was too late. Rhett

was heart-broken by constant ignorance and disappointments and finally left Scarlett.

III Melanie's personalities in the novel

Like Rhett, Melanie was born in an aristocratic family. She did not have a bold and unrestrained Irish father, nor a mother who could take care of everything. She was born with a gentle and careful character. She is the most perfect southern traditional woman.

Melanie was not as beautiful and dazzling as Scarlett. She was a plain woman in the crowd, looking dull and ordinary and not a tall figure, but her noble qualities are very striking even Rhett admired Melanie a lot. In Rhett's heart, Melanie's noble and beautiful soul had deeply moved him. Because of Melanie, he felt calm and confident and got a spirit of dedication and tolerance. He never showed any disrespect to Melanie which he often intended to express to other ladies. Melanie once donated her wedding ring without hesitation at a party for front-line soldiers. Rhett redeemed it with ten times of the donating price.

Although Melanie was not beautiful, she had a fascinating temperament. There was an extraordinary beauty in her personalities. Her firmness to love, her sense of responsibility, her thoughtfulness and friendliness were all worthy of people's love. She was short and thin, but there was a lot of energy in her body. She yearned for freedom, optimism and had a strong spirit of sacrifice. In the face of the injured and sick, Melanie acted as considerate as an angel. Even in the face of rotten meat removed during the operation, she would secretly hid in the bathroom and vomit silently. She took good care of every patient and was selfless and dedicated.

Because she was Ashley's fiancée, Scarlett once hated her very much, but in their daily communication, Melanie gradually changed Scarlett's opinions towards her especially in the Tara days. Her sincerity and bravery deeply moved Scarlett and she finally became Scarlett's spiritual pillar in the Tara days. She helped Scarlett dispose of the Yankee body, helped put out the fire in the kitchen and calmly dealt with the search of Yankee soldiers. They worked as an alliance in fighting against the unknown fate.

To Ashley, she is the soulmate of Ashley. She knew Ashley very well . They were born of the same family background with good manners. She deeply loved Ashley and could share Ashley's unusual thoughts , sorrows and happiness. To Ashley, Melanie had never hesitated to support. But on her deathbed, Melanie asked Scarlett to take care of Ashley because she thought "Ashley was not practical". It turned out that Melanie had always been well aware of Ashley's shortcomings, she discovered it much earlier than the dull Scarlett. Because of deep love and responsibility, she had been hiding it in the bottom of her heart to maintain his dignity.

IV Ashley's personalities in the novel

Like Melanie, who was also born the Wilkes which was a noble family of the 12 Oak Trees. In the eyes of Scarlett's father, the Wilkes were different from any of their neighbors or different from any family he ever knew. They were considered as queer people, although Ashley could ride with the best horse and play poker with the best player. Gerald still thought he wasn't fit in. The reason was that his interest in reading, writing poetry and music was unique. Thus, Ashley is a person with deep cultural connotations and a complete gentleman. Ashley chose the equally educated Melanie as his soulmate because they had more common interests and topics and had the same persistent pursuit of life. Hence, he denied the passionate Scarlett's appreciation.

The relationship between Ashley and Scarlett runs through the whole novel. Scarlett tried to pursue Ashley nearly all her life until before Melanie died, though Ashley's escaped from it all the time. Because he knew well that he was an unrealistic person and was cowardly in face of life challenges, while Scarlett showed great enthusiasm for life and had the fearless spirit to struggle, which made them quite different. They belonged to two types. Although Ashley several times made unusual behavior towards Scarlett because of impulse, which led to the superficial phenomenon to Scarlett that Ashley had love for her. Besides, Ashley was a person who was always difficult to give up the connection with the past and tried his best to maintain the past that no longer exists.

Ashley's cultural upbringing made him have the same keen and accurate understanding of the war as Rhett, but his fantasy made his understanding often impractical. He believed whether winning or losing in the war, the life would be a failure or a disaster. Anyhow, he was a complete coward. He had no courage to face the future nor did he show any responsibilities in raising the family. He only buried himself in memorizing the good old days which he loved. The good

old days of Ashley were gone forever and that was the theme of the book.

V. Conclusion

The novel *Gone* highlights the people of the Civil War struggle for survival. Their struggle not only represents their strong will towards life but also shows the greatness and darkness of different characters in face of fates. Each personality has its own destination. Everyone is formed and shaped by the society and history of its own age. And the hints of past life and the bringing-up environment also have great impact on forming the personalities. This essay discusses the influences of social background, social status and the changes of their personalities of the main characters. And the courage of never giving up to fate and the love of others are also the key to get rid of future obstacles.

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