

Victor Fleming's *GONE WITH THE WIND* (1939)

### **73, and Still Incredibly Beautiful**

When Scarlett O'Hara rises from the dirt and swears to God that she "will never be hungry again" the skies are covered by a velvety dark red shroud. Scarlett's silhouette, projected on these bruised heavens, envelops the viewers and throws them into an emotional vortex animated by two contrary forces: an acute sense of loss and a senseless loss of despair.

Tragedy and hope are knitted together into Victor Fleming's vast canvass of 1938. "Gone With the Wind" still stands today as a vibrant visual poem of war and peace, corruption, greed, passion, and bravery. Paraphrasing legendary director F. W. Murnau, this story of the ole South is a "Symphony of Hope" - despite the tragedy of war and in spite of some serious despicable characters. But "Gone with the Wind" is also something else. It is a whirl of strikingly beautiful images, a mosaic of clashing characters, a kaleidoscope of incredibly incandescent colours that, together with a memorable music score, literally blow the viewers into the hot-hot winds and passions of the South.

The movie is also a very interesting socio-historic case study. Not only because it portrays the 'innocent' and almost paradisiacal South 'savagely' attacked by the North but also because the portrayal of characters shows very interesting social trends of the late 1930s in North America.

And then... well, then we have Vivien. And Clark. And Olivia. Boy, are they perfect, these three, in their respective roles! Despite the fact that their acting might seem a little outmoded and melodramatic for some of our 21<sup>st</sup> century fellow viewers, "Gone with the Wind" is one of those movies which is impossible to remake. Indeed, any attempt would be futile. Clark Gable *is* Rhett Butler; Vivien Leigh *is* Scarlett O'Hara; Olivia de Havilland *is* Melanie Hamilton. To those who would still like to stick to the inherent anachronisms and inadequacies of the film I would reply that maybe this production is much closer to the spirit of mid-nineteenth century America than other, more recent, that touch on the same period. If not because of its creators' mastery, then simply because it is chronologically closer to the spirit of that time – melodramatic, exalted, hyperbolized and, in a word, Victorian.

There is another interesting aspect I would like to point out in this Margaret Mitchell's Pulitzer Prize winning novel on which the film is adapted from - an aspect we tend to ignore because it is assumed, implied: its 'politically incorrect' historical perspective. Paradoxically, it is exactly this aspect that makes this well-known drama more credible. Today, most of us think of the American Secession War in terms of a simple dichotomy - "North - good; South - bad". Undoubtedly, there are many serious reasons to think in these terms. The most evident and compelling one is that slavery was a shameful dark cloud over all humanity and those who protected this idea are to be blamed forever. However, by over-simplifying the dynamics of the American Civil War - and of any other conflagration, for that matter - we tend to neglect the fact that there are good people who suffer greatly during these armed conflicts, regardless of their fortunate or unfortunate place of birth. From this perspective, Margaret Mitchell's novel - and the subsequently created film - may be a good example used to point out that war does not have boundaries, that suffering afflicts both camps in the same ways.

Even though sometimes it borders melodrama, "Gone with the Wind" is a complex movie and successfully avoids - if closely, sometimes - the soap-operatic sauce. Despite all these complexities and although Rhett Butler's famous good-bye sticks with every generation of viewers ("Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn") I still think that the core message of this movie lays in Scarlett's passionate and desperate will to endure:

"I'm going to live through this and when it's all over, I'll never be hungry again. No, nor any of my folk. If I have to lie, steal, cheat or kill. As God is my witness, I'll never be hungry again!"

This is perhaps one of the most optimistic messages about humanity's will to overcome the most disastrous circumstances, to endure beyond all adversities. Yes, we may be down from time to time, we may even be on the brink of destruction, but we will eventually prevail. We always did and we always will. We can start all over, again and again, because "after all... tomorrow is another day."

It is a refreshing message of hope, one desperately needed by all of us, we disenchanting people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is an acutely necessary message for the younger generations which seem

more and more often to succumb to urban spleens, academic depressions, or mere numbing disinterest.

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