New Approaches to Gone With the Wind

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Review

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Crank, James A. *New Approaches to Gone with the Wind*. Louisiana State University Press, \$42.50 ISBN 9780807161586

New Analyses of *Gone with the Wind*

One of the most popular American book and film combinations of all time, *Gone with the Wind*, is rarely taken seriously by scholars who are often quick to dismiss Margaret Mitchell's book and David O. Selznick's film as presenting a "simple and untroubled view of the plantation South" (2). This new collection features ten essays from scholars who "challenge and complicate traditional readings of *GWTW* through an emphasis on intertextuality and sexuality, as well as questions of audience and identity" with the objective of offering "scholars of American and southern literature fresh, compelling avenues of approach to one of the more entrenched and dogged novels in American cultural memory" (4). Edited by James A. Crank, an assistant professor of literature at the University of Alabama, this volume is a rare but welcome addition to scholarship on *Gone with the Wind*, a work that Crank notes is approached by scholars "as one might approach a roadside attraction—with curiosity, bemusement, and a healthy dose of condescension" (3).

While the few historians who engage with analysis of Mitchell's and Selznick's work usually focus on the historical inaccuracies and the Lost Cause mythology perpetuated by the book and film, the contributors to this book focus primarily on representations of racial and sexual identity in *Gone with the Wind*. Charlene Regester and Mark Jerng wrestle with issues of racial identity, while Jessica Sims explores the intersection of race and childbirth, concluding that Scarlett "maneuvers racial divisions as a woman secure and confident in the black/white womanhood she represents" (88). Crank explores the "sexual transgressions" and "heteronormative versions of masculinity and femininity" of the book and film in his essay, "Queer Winds," while Deborah Barker examines representations of "rape, transgression, and sexuality in the postplantation South"

as presented in *Gone with the Wind* and D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (5).

Perhaps the most interesting essay is Amy Clukey's contribution, "Pop Plantations: *Gone with the Wind* and the Southern Imaginary in Irish Culture." Focused on the reception and impact that the book had in Ireland, Clukey reveals a larger truth—that a work that looms so large in literary and cinematic history has helped create the "southern imaginary" that is "a transnational phenomenon influenced by foreign markets and imbricated in global events" (30). *Gone with the Wind* and its iconic characters have certainly shaped the world's view of the American Civil War and the American South. As Daniel Cross Turner and Keaghan Turner explain in their essay, "Why *Gone with the Wind* Isn't: The Contemporary Blowback," *Gone with the Wind*'s sustained transnational presence has kept alive a particular southern trope that trumps all others while sustaining a market for tourism and shaping architectural styles throughout the South. Tellingly, they begin their essay by repeating seven times the mantra "I don't hate it," noting that they chant this "every time before teaching or talking or writing about the film version of *Gone with the Wind*" (135). Such an attitude permeates all of the essays in the book as each author wrestles with the love-hate relationship that he or she has with this work. As Helen Taylor, professor emerita of English at the University of Exeter, writes in the final chapter, "However uncomfortable one may feel about its endurance in a multicultural, post-southern twenty-first century, *Gone with the Wind* is here to stay" (203).

The book offers new insights into *Gone with the Wind* and should be of great interest to scholars who wrestle with how to teach *Gone with the Wind* as a work of literature. The general public, especially fans of *Gone with the Wind*, will likely be less interested in such a granular look at this beloved novel. As noted by Taylor, however, such an in-depth analysis of this problematic work suggests that while the continuing popularity of *Gone with the Wind* makes it inherently interesting, "GWTW's opportunities for research and pedagogy are equally—if not more—compelling" (6).

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