

A Comparison of Margaret Mitchell's *GONE WITH THE WIND* and Sidney Sheldon's *RAGE OF ANGELS*

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I. Introduction

While reading *RAGE OF ANGELS* written by Sidney Sheldon, *GONE WITH THE WIND* by Margaret Mitchell kept coming to my mind. Was this because the protagonists of each of these novels are strong independent women or do the similarities between these books run deeper? In this paper I will explore these similarities. I will look briefly at the books themselves and then focus on the female protagonists—Scarlett of *GONE WITH THE WIND* and Jennifer of *RAGE OF ANGELS*—and their respective characters, situations, responses to those situations, and on their relationships with men.

II. The popularity of the books and the style of writing

Both books have been best-sellers. They both have enjoyed a worldwide readership and have been translated into many languages. Both have their places in American popular literature and both feature strong women protagonists in generally similar settings. In addition to these, the authors see themselves as storytellers rather than simply as writers.

GONE WITH THE WIND (*GWTW*) was published in 1936, made into an Academy Award winning movie in 1939 and has enjoyed great success for more than five decades. It broke records for advance sales. 333,000 copies of the novel were printed to fill the demand just two months after publication.¹ It won the Pulitzer Prize, has been translated in more than 30 countries and tens of millions of copies have sold worldwide.

RAGE OF ANGELS (ROA) was published forty-four years later in 1980 and was a Main Selection of the Literary Guild. This novel, along with Sheldon's other eleven novels, has been published in 36 countries and over 150 million of these books have been sold worldwide.

Both *GWTW* and *ROA* are a part of American popular literature—the former is a romantic historical novel, within the context of the Civil War, and the latter is a fast-paced thriller, set in a court of law. Although there is more than a span of one hundred years between the worlds of these novels, they both depict women bravely fighting in, and sometimes against, a man's world.

The popularity of both these books may relate to a common philosophy of writing held by each of the authors. Both Mitchell and Sheldon regard themselves as storytellers. They both have the knack of writing stories to touch the reader. Margaret Mitchell was often quoted as saying: "The story is all that matters. Any good plot can stand retelling and style doesn't matter."² Sidney Sheldon said, "I consider myself basically a story teller."³ Both were involved in other types of writing before they published their novels. Sheldon wrote many motion picture screenplays, Broadway plays and television scripts. Mitchell was a feature writer for the Atlanta Journal for six years.

III. Comparison of the protagonists themselves

1. Physical Characteristics

Both Scarlett of *GWTW* and Jennifer of *ROA* have green eyes, white skin and dark hair. They are both described as being attractive rather than beautiful.

a. Scarlett

"Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it ..." She had an "arresting" face, pale green eyes "without a touch of hazel," and the "magnolia-white skin" so prized and carefully guarded by Southern women.⁴

b. Jennifer

"Jennifer Parker was a slender, dark-haired girl of twenty-four with a pale skin, an intelligent, mobile face, and green, thoughtful eyes. It was a face that was attractive rather than beautiful, a face that reflected pride and courage and sensitivity, a face that would be hard to forget."⁵

2. Personalities

Both have strong personalities that seem to relate more to a man's world than a woman's. Both are independent and make their own choices. They are proud and stubborn, and suffer because of their pride. Their intelligence and shrewdness help them get what they want and they are willing to use others if needed. Both are passionate, dedicated women and are capable of strong loyalties.

a. Scarlett

She was a woman of high spirits and vivacity. She looked sweet and charming but in reality was self-willed and obstinate, with easily stirred passions.⁶ She possessed some of the same vitality and earthy coarseness of her father, in spite of sixteen years of effort on the part of Ellen and Mammy to obliterate these traits.⁷ In society she behaved just like a man and did so quite well. She was good at business. "She had the aggressiveness and she intended to use it, whether Frank liked it or not."⁸ She was passionately loyal to her home, Tara. She married Frank to save Tara. She made it the most important thing in her life—above relationships and the mandates

of society.

b. Jennifer

She was tenacious and never gave up in the courtroom. She also did well in a man's world. She did not go along with conventions unless they suited her purpose. "She was expected to dress like Jane Eyre and she refused, but she was careful to dress" so as not to antagonize men or make women jealous of her. Since she was working in a "man's world... she had to work twice as hard and be twice as good as the competition."⁹ Her pride and stubbornness are seen in her reaction to Adam's news of Mary's pregnancy. From that point on she cut him off from her life. She never told him she was also expecting his baby. She did not even ask for his help when her son was kidnapped.¹⁰ Her loyalties can be seen in her helping Mafioso Michael Moretti in return for his rescuing her son.

IV. Comparison of the protagonists' social situations

1. Family Relationships

Neither had brothers. Scarlett was the oldest of three girls while Jennifer was an only child. Both had strong relationships with their fathers. Each of their destinies seemed to be tied up in their relationship to their fathers. With Scarlett it was the bond to Tara and with Jennifer it was the bond to law.

a. Scarlett

Scarlett was Gerald's oldest child. As there were no sons, he was in the habit of treating her in "a man-to-man manner which she found most pleasant." Of the three sisters, she was most like her father and she felt that she could be herself with her father and felt at ease.¹¹ Gerald told her that Tara is "the only thing worth working

for, worth fighting for, worth dying for.”¹² Although Scarlett didn’t understand him at first, later Tara became her mainstay, which she was to protect it at all costs. “I can’t let Tara go. It’s home. I won’t let it go. Not while I’ve got a breath left in me!”¹³

b. Jennifer

Jennifer’s father was an attorney. He, not her mother, always had time for Jennifer and she would watch her father at work in the courtroom and at his office. At the age of fifteen, she began working for her father during summers. As far as Jennifer was concerned, her father always stood by the weak, believed in justice and fought for it. She was greatly influenced by this. Their dream was to go into partnership together. The first step for her was to get a law degree, but when she was in the last term at law school, her father died. Even so, she followed their dream and became a lawyer.¹⁴

2. Social Situations

Although the books are set in different eras, both Scarlett and Jennifer were women who lived and worked in a man’s world. They went against the tide by not fitting their society’s mold of the typical woman. Scarlett’s main antagonist was her society, while Jennifer’s was Robert Di Silver.

a. Scarlett

GWTW was written in the twentieth century. The world depicted there was that of the Civil War period (1861~1865). The ideal woman, as defined by the men of that time, was one who had not her own opinion, a brain, or any interest in politics or war and who took care of nothing but her home and her family. She was not a woman who made great effort to make men feel at ease and

pleased themselves. The following extracts further exemplify this “ideal” woman.

‘You must be more gentle, dear, more sedate,’ Ellen told her daughter. ‘You must not interrupt gentlemen when they are speaking, even if you do think you know more about matters than they do. Gentlemen do not like forward girls.’¹⁵

Frank, in common with all men he knew, felt that a wife should be guided by her husband’s superior knowledge, accept his opinion in full and have none of her own. ... Go into business for herself! It was unthinkable. There were no women in business in Atlanta.¹⁶

Scarlett often went against society and its views of women. She did not let it ultimately stop her from doing as she pleased.

b. Jennifer

Although Jennifer lived in the time of Equal Employment Opportunity, the average income of American women was still only seventy percent of men’s. Women, such as doctors and lawyers, were the minority in the professional fields.¹⁷ Jennifer was part of the judicial world. Her main antagonist was District Attorney Robert De Silva who held a grudge against Jennifer and was going to “make her pay for what she had done to him.”¹⁸ The society she was a part of and the obstacles she had to overcome can be seen in the following quotes from the book.

Jennifer discovered that being a woman was a disadvantage when it came to practicing criminal law. She was in macho territory. There were still very few women criminal attorneys

and some of the male lawyers resented Jennifer.¹⁹

Most juries started out by being prejudiced against Jennifer, for many of the cases she handled were sordid, and there was a tendency to make an association between her and her client.²⁰

V. Responses to situations and strength of character

Both Scarlett and Jennifer had very determined, strong characters. They distinguished themselves in spite of being in a man's world. They lived in different times and the situations they faced were different, but both acted with courage and strength. Scarlett's strength showed itself most in the strong-headedness she needed to break the unwritten rules of society. Jennifer's strength was her sharp mind that was constantly being honed in court. Scarlett and Jennifer lived their lives in their own ways and were innovative in dealing with problems.

1. Scarlett

Her way of life was an unprecedented one for a woman at that time. First, with the help of Rhett, she managed to take a dying woman and her baby, her own hungry little boy Wade, and a frightened Negro girl from Atlanta to Tara, in the middle of the war. All of them totally depended on her strength, guidance and courage. Next, back at Tara, Ellen had died and her father Gerald was not himself and her two younger sisters were not healthy. She herself had to hunt for food for them and work in the cotton field. She became the person responsible for Tara and for all people living under her roof. Then, with the end of the Civil War, Scarlett had to pay three hundred dollars more in taxes for Tara. She did not have much time to raise this amount. Rhett was in jail and could not be any help. At this time she happened

to meet Frank Kennedy, who was her younger sister's fiancé. She found out he was rich enough, so she married him for the money to save Tara, her home. Lastly, she began to run the sawmill herself. She was a courageous woman who did the best she could with her life.

2. Jennifer

Jennifer's father died when she was in her last term at law school. She was recommended, as the school's brightest graduate, to the Manhattan District Attorney's office. She moved from Kelso, Washington to Manhattan, New York. But in her first few hours of work for District Attorney Di Silva, she nearly finished her career because of a misunderstanding. This misunderstanding made an enemy of the District Attorney and lost her her newly won position. Nobody would hire Jennifer after this incident. With the help of Kenneth Bailey, she was able to open her own office. She then, gained the reputation of a highly competent lawyer by winning one hard case after another. She fought for the justice, but even so, she became involved with the Mafia. Her first involvement was when she represented one of Moretti's *soldati* as a token of her gratitude to Michael Moretti, who rescued her son from being killed. Gradually, she became totally involved in the Mafia for a while before breaking free at the end.

VI. Comparison of the protagonists' relationships with men

Scarlett and Jennifer were both involved with more than one man. Neither one's love life went smoothly. They each had at least one child. Pride dictated some of their relationships. Both were involved with a man who really loved them, but whose love they did not return in the same way. They loved married men. Scarlett seemed to use men more than Jennifer while Jennifer seemed to be used by men more.

There are a few other differences, but the similarities are many. We will focus on the characters of Ashley and Rhett in *GWTW* and on Adam, Ken, and Michael in *ROA*. Ashley seems similar in many ways to Adam, and Rhett can be seen in a combination of Ken and Michael.

1. Ashley Wilkes and Adam Warner

Ashley and Adam were men who Scarlett and Jennifer loved completely. Both men were married and neither could be depended on in time of need.

a. Scarlett and Ashley Wilkes

Scarlett knew she loved Ashley when she was sixteen. He was engaged to someone else. On the very day of the announcement of his betrothal to Melanie, he was careless enough to say that he cared for Scarlett. He flirted with her and desired her, but he never understood her or cared about her mind. After the war, Ashley could not adapt himself to the real world and as a result of this not only Ashley himself, but his family as well, had to be taken care of by Scarlett. When she was in desperate need of money to save Tara, she, at a loss, went to Ashley. Ashley was not of any help at all. Finally, she realized that "he can't look forward any more. He can't see the present, he fears the future, and so he looks back."²¹ So she left him.

b. Jennifer and Adam

Ashley corresponds with Adam in that he was married and Jennifer loved him to the end. He was supposed to divorce his wife and marry her, but he did not. His wife became pregnant and he had to stay married to further his career. He could not be of any help to Jennifer after Mary got pregnant. Jennifer was also expecting his baby at this time, but after learning of Mary's pregnancy, she

refused to tell Adam and left him for good. Since Adam did not know about the child, he could not help Jennifer rescue their son nor comfort her after the child's death.

2. Scarlett and Rhett; Jennifer and Ken and Michael

Both Rhett and Ken love and support Scarlett and Jennifer unselfishly in various ways. Both Rhett, the blockade runner, and Michael, the Mafioso, have a dark shady side that is not accepted by society and both love Scarlett and Jennifer as they have never loved another. (There is also a similarity in Rhett and Adam in that they father a child with Scarlett and Jennifer, but that similarity basically ends there.)

a. Scarlett and Rhett Butler

Rhett, a tall man with bulky shoulders, jet black hair and black mustache, and a 'twinkle of malice in his bold eyes,' can be said to have two characters—a man whose job as a blockade runner makes him an object of hatred in the society, and a man who loved Scarlett with a selfless devotion and married her to make her happy.

When he happened to overhear the conversation between Scarlett and Ashley, Rhett thought he found a girl who knew what she wanted and did not mind speaking out. At that time all other girls blindly believed what their mothers told them and acted on it. After that he watched her and what she did carefully. He helped her to do what she wanted to, guarded her from dangers, and gave her advice if it was necessary, without letting her know what he was doing. He covered his actions with his peculiar, sardonic way of expression. When there was a bazaar held to raise a fund for the army at the Armory, she had to stay at home in the mourning for Charles, her first husband who was killed in battle. She had knitted various

small articles for the bazaar such as socks, baby caps, afghans, mufflers, and so on. She really wanted to go to the Armory. Fortunately for her, there was an abrupt shortage of hands and she was asked to help. At the bazaar, men were bargaining for dances with the girl of their choice. Scarlett was a good dancer and wanted to dance, but couldn't because she was in mourning. Rhett bid one hundred and fifty dollars in cash to dance with her. He gave her the chance to dance and enjoy herself, because he knew she wanted to. He also thought that the system of mourning, of immuring women in black and forbidding them enjoyment of life, was barbarous.

Scarlett and Melanie were with Aunt Pittypat in Atlanta in 1864. Rhett often visited Aunt Pitty's house, though he sometimes went out of town on his mysterious business trips. He was always around Scarlett whenever he was in town. Intentionally he stayed in the town to rescue her when the siege did come, saying in his peculiar way, "I've never rescued a maiden in distress. That would be a new experience, ..." ²² When Yankees were actually coming into the town, and "the world became an inferno of noise and flame and trembling earth as explosion followed another in ear-splitting succession" ²³ she asked Rhett to take them out of Atlanta to Tara. He answered her implore for help. When the war ended and she was at a loss for the huge amount of taxes she owed, she went to see Rhett to borrow money. But he was caught in jail and could not be of any help. But as soon as he was released, he hurried to her to "make sure she had gotten the money, without the slightest appearance of hurry, to lend her the money if she still needed it." ²⁴ He continued to protect her when she was hiding her pregnancy. Although she was filled with anxiety, she kept on going to her sawmills driving her wagon through the dangerous places crowded with freed darkies and crackers. Rhett told her to be pregnant was "a normal state" and

that women should be proud of it. Rhett was a feminist in the true sense of the word. At that time he persuaded her to think that her conduct might invite the death of the town's men, for if she were attacked by darkies, they would take revenge for her by killing them. In spite of his persuasion, he knew she would not stop driving around for her sawmill business, so he had her stubborn horse swapped for a gentle one that she could easily control.

After Frank's death Rhett asked her to marry him and she said 'yes.' Rhett was eager to have her happy and he liked to see her in high spirits and so was she whenever she had her own way. That is why they built the mansion, the establishment which Scarlett was satisfied with, but which was a nightmare for Rhett. He loved her from the bottom of his heart but he could not let her know his deep love for her, as he was afraid of her realizing that even his deep devotion to her might not cut her yearning for Ashley. When she noticed that she really loved Rhett, not Ashley, it was too late and Rhett, who lost his beloved daughter Bonnie and became obsessed with the thought his love could not change Scarlett, left her.

- b. Jennifer and Kenneth Bailey and Jennifer and Michael Moretti. Kenneth Bailey was Jennifer's friend and her selfless supporter and Michael Moretti was Jennifer's lover and the son-in-law of a big Mafia Family.

Kenneth Bailey was a private investigator. He had Jennifer share his office for cheap rent when she was forced to open her own business in New York, with no job offer in spite of her strenuous efforts, after her blunder in the court. No clients appeared in her tenth floor office in a dilapidated old building on lower Broadway. She could

not pay the rent, and on the last day to leave that office Ken gave her a helping hand, saying, "Before you leave, would you do me a little favor?"²⁵ The job was to serve some subpoenas for Ken's lawyer friend. His way of approaching Jennifer to help her seemed the same as that of Rhett. Both Rhett and Ken tried not to hurt the women's pride. She began to get clients. She won one case after another. She, then, could move to larger offices in the five hundred block on Fifth Avenue and then to a larger suite of offices on Park Avenue. Ken, who was bright and dependable, was now her best friend. Ken closed his own office and joined Jennifer's to work for her. Her office staff increased to two bright attorneys, three secretaries and Ken. In addition to this, she was admitted into the exclusive American College of Trial Lawyers which only one percent of the lawyers in America can get in.

Ken supported her when Jennifer found out she was pregnant with Adam's child. "Ken was the only person Jennifer could trust to help her"²⁶ Jennifer never let anybody know who was the father of her child, but "Ken hated the man who put her in such agony."²⁷ When she took a 5-month-leave of absence from her office to give birth, Ken was the only person who knew where she lived and was always around to do anything he could do for her. She delivered a baby-boy, Joshua. Ken played with him for hours. Ken was in a sense a surrogate father.

Jennifer was going to be the defense attorney for Michael Moretti's hit man, mainly because as a token of her gratitude for Mike, as he rescued her son from the kidnapper, who threatened her to kill her son because she had refused to be his attorney. Ken's reaction was disbelief and advised her not to handle the case. "She promised herself that this was the last time she would work for Michael."²⁸

It was gradual at first, but eventually she was totally involved with Michael Moretti, Mafioso until she was said to be his girl. Ken left her, accusing her of bringing the sewer into the office and having them work for hoodlums. She felt she was in a kind of jungle that she could never escape from. When she was shot by Mike, who thought she betrayed him, and was in Intensive Care in the hospital, Ken came to see her. The receptionist said it could be a long time, but he didn't care. He had left her office against his will, and he wanted to be around her, to care for her. He loved the girl who was bright and very proud and who fought against the evil in the world. Like Rhett with Scarlett, Ken knew Jennifer thoroughly from her good points to bad points. Rhett was able to accept Scarlett as she was until the end of the story when he left her. Ken could not accept it when Jennifer began to get involved in Mafia. He left her then, but he came back in her time of need.

2. Pregnancy and children : Bonnie and Joshua

Bonnie was Rhett and Scarlett's daughter and Joshua was Adam and Jennifer's son. Their common points were fear of the dark, good coordination and a love of sports, and death by accident at a young age. Also, the impact both their deaths had on their parents was profound and triggered a drastic change in their lives. The following are excerpts from *ROA* and *GWTW*. They describe the above-mentioned common points shared by young Bonnie and Joshua who each played very important roles in the stories.

a. Bonnie

"Rhett spoiled Bonnie. ... for in all things she pleased him, except one. And that was her fear of the dark."²⁹ At the age of four Bonnie got a small brown and white Shetland pony. Bonnie learned how to ride on a side-saddle rapidly. She had a good seat and good

hands and progressed to the point where she could make the low jumps. She wanted the jumps made higher, but Rhett wanted her to wait until she was six years old. Finally, he gave in to her pleas and moved the bar. 'Mother, watch me take this one!' ... Bonnie came on with a rush, her crisp black curls jerking, her blue eyes blazing. Scarlett had an ominous presentiment... there was a fearful sound of splintering wood, a hoarse cry from Rhett, a melee of blue velvet and flying hooves on the ground."³⁰ Bonnie died at the age of five. Rhett put Bonnie's body in her bed. Rhett would not let anyone bury Bonnie, because Bonnie was afraid of the dark. He would not let Scarlett hold her funeral. "An' he say he kill her ef she do dat."³¹ Rhett said to Scarlett. "I liked to think that Bonnie was you, a little girl again,.... It was a blessing that I could take the love you didn't want and give it to her....When she went, she took everything."³² He told her that he could no longer care about Scarlett and he left.

b. Joshua

"Joshua was still afraid of the dark, so Jennifer always left a night light on for him."³³ When they were in Mexico Joshua took water-skiing lessons. "He spent the first five minutes falling down, and after that, performed as though born to water-skiing.....Mrs. Mackey said proudly, 'He's a natural athlete, isn't he?'"³⁴ Joshua turned to wave at Jennifer, lost his balance, and fell among the pilings. He seemed to be okay except for an egg-sized bump at the back of his head. A local Mexican doctor put some ice on the bump and said he would be fine. But he turned out to be suffering from a subdural hematoma and a prompt operation was needed. The operation was unsuccessful. Dr. Morris was saying, "... necessary to perform an autopsy." Jennifer said quietly, "If you touch my son again, I'll kill you." ... A nurse was trying to persuade Jennifer to leave the

room, but she shook her head. "I can't leave him alone. Someone might turn out the lights. Joshua is afraid of the dark."³⁵ Jennifer didn't let the mortician dress Joshua and she did it by herself in the mortuary's slumber room. After Joshua's funeral she lay on Joshua's bed, 'eating nothing and drinking nothing, lost in her own private world with Joshua. She had no sense of time, no idea how long she lay there."³⁶ Jennifer was rescued from this state ironically by Michael Moretti. She decided to say good-bye and return to her hometown in Washington. "It was finished. Something died in her forever, and she was left with only the guilt and the loneliness."³⁷

IV. Conclusion

The female protagonists in *Gone with the Wind* and *Rage of Angels* are similar in many aspects. Both Scarlett and Jennifer lived dramatic lives filled with life-and-death struggles. They lived life with all their strength. They experienced love, disappointment, death, and loneliness. Both are true to themselves. They were courageous women who maintained their integrity as women in a man's world. Both were their father's daughters to the end. They were both involved in destinies linked to their fathers. In Scarlett's case it was her home, Tara, and in Jennifer's it was practicing law. Both reached these goals and were still following them in the end. Both loved men they couldn't have and who weren't really good for them anyway. Both are helped by special men in their lives. Both have children who die. Both end up alone. At the end of the story, Scarlett is left alone grieving over Rhett's having left her. But she draws on strength from Tara and begins to plan how to get Rhett back. In Jennifer's case, the story ends with her alone back in her hometown and not able to see the future. But, even so, she is still a lawyer and she is still searching for the elusive thing called justice.

NOTES

1. "Books in Review : *Going with the Wind*." *The New Republic*, September 16, 1936. p. 161
2. "*Gone With The Wind* As Vulgar Literature." *Southern Literary Journal* 2, 1970. p. 90.
3. Mitgang, Herbert. "Behind the Best Sellers : Sidney Sheldon." *New York Times Book Review*, 26 Feb. 1978. p. 40
4. Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone with the Wind*. London : Macmillan London LTD, 1936. p. 5.
5. Sheldon, Sidney. *Rage of Angels*. New York : Warner Books, 1980. p. 18.
6. Mitchell, p. 61.
7. *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
8. *ibid.*, p. 626.
9. Sheldon. p. 164.
10. *ibid.*, p. 306.
11. Mitchell, p. 32.
12. *ibid.*, p. 38.
13. *ibid.*, p. 568.
14. Sheldon, pp. 34-36.
15. Mitchell, p. 60.
16. *ibid.*, p. 621.
17. 猿谷 要 編「アメリカの社会—変貌する巨人」東京：弘文堂, 1992. p. 77.
18. Sheldon, p. 30.
19. *ibid.*, pp. 163-164.
20. *ibid.*, p. 164.
21. Mitchell, p. 903.
22. *ibid.*, p. 302.
23. *ibid.*, p. 367.
24. *ibid.*, p. 611.
25. Sheldon, p. 46.
26. *ibid.*, p. 252.
27. *ibid.*, p. 260.
28. *ibid.*, p. 341.
29. Mitchell, p. 889.
30. *ibid.*, pp. 966-967.

31. This is Mammy's words. *ibid.*, p. 972.

32. *ibid.*, p. 1005.

33. Sheldon, p. 290.

34. *ibid.*, p. 400.

35. *ibid.*, p. 422.

36. *ibid.*, p. 427.

37. *ibid.*, p. 439.