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Kinship: Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind* and the Irish Big House Genre

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KINSHIP: MARGARET MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND* AND THE
IRISH BIG HOUSE GENRE

by

PATRICIA HOMER

(Under the Direction of Howard Keeley)

ABSTRACT

Critics have largely dismissed Margaret Mitchell's best-selling novel *Gone with the Wind* as a serious work of literature. Although various references to Irish culture permeate *Gone with the Wind*, the novel has not been compared to any Irish literature or mythology. This thesis compares *Gone with the Wind* with Irish Big House literature and mythology through the lens of biography and history. The works of William Butler Yeats, Maria Edgeworth, and Edith Somerville and Martin Ross are also employed to show evidence of the connection of *Gone with the Wind* to Irish Big House literature. This comparison results in a new approach to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* that affords a new reading of the novel.

INDEX WORDS: Margaret Mitchell, Irish Big House literature, Irish Big House Genre, William Butler Yeats, Maria Edgeworth, Edith Somerville, Martin Ross, Ireland, Georgia

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandmother Mollie Usry.

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I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Howard Keeley for his help in understanding the complicated politics and history of Ireland and for his support of this project from its beginning. Many thanks also go to Dr. Douglass H. Thomson, my advisor and cheerleader, for help and encouragement as I made my way through graduate school with a full-time job. I would also like to thank Dr. Joe Pellegrino not only for his formatting expertise but also for his advice, guidance, and encouragement. Finally, I thank Dr. David Dudley for his generosity in volunteering to serve on my committee and his expertise in editing. Without any one of these professional individuals, this thesis would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	6
CHAPTER	
1 PREFACE	8
2 WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND THE BIG HOUSE.....	13
3 MARGARET MITCHELL AND THE BIG HOUSE	25
4 THE BIG HOUSE.....	42
Miscegenation.....	44
Servants, Tenants, and Slaves.....	52
The Rise of the Middle Class.....	69
The Irish Mythology in <i>Gone with the Wind</i>	72
5 EPILOGUE	76
WORKS CITED	79

A house is one place trapped in another.

~ Vona Groarke, "Patronage"

CHAPTER 1

PREFACE

Since its publication in 1936, Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* has resisted categorization. Some critics have likened it to other Old South novels. In his essay, "Scarlett O'Hara and the Two Quentin Compsons" (1984), Louis Rubin, Jr., accuses Mitchell of being "as whole-souled a perpetuator of the plantation myth as Thomas Nelson Page or Stark Young" (94). Others have compared *Gone with the Wind* to European novels and a Russian novel. In his essay "The Company of Giants" (1984), James Michener compares *Gone with the Wind* to such literary greats as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. So far, critics have been unable to agree on exactly where Mitchell's novel fits in the literary canon, if at all.

Members of the public, with whom the novel is still widely popular, give little thought to whether the novel is considered to have any great literary value. They like it. They identify with its universal theme of survival and its protagonist who ruthlessly fights to save her home. In *Recasting: Gone With the Wind in American Culture*, Darden Asbury Pyron points to Malcolm Cowley a reviewer whose "disdain was the book's popularity" (7) and whose opinion held sway over critical thought for years, most likely hindering the novel's evaluation as an important work of literature.

Initially, the novel was well-received by critics. But, the many positive reviews were soon answered by mixed and even harsh reviews. Few academics have shown interest in the novel. Thus far, critics have been unable to reach a consensus on the novel's literary value or

even to which genre the novel might belong. The difficulty in categorizing *Gone with the Wind* most likely stems from its hybrid nature. While the novel is set in the American South, the protagonist is decidedly Irish, and Scarlett's Irishness flavors every action she undertakes.

Margaret Mitchell was Irish-American. Most readers and critics view the novel as purely an American work, ignoring or barely noticing its Irish elements and the Irish Big House literature it greatly resembles. But the author *was* Irish, though her Irishness has been unrecognized by most. Indeed, only David O'Connell's book-length study *The Irish Roots of Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind* (1996) and a chapter from Kieran Quinlan's *Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South* (2005) give more than a passing reference to the novel's Irishness; and neither compares it to any Irish Big House literature. This lapse is curious, to say the least. Identifying and analyzing the Irishness of *Gone with the Wind*, this thesis attempts to unite the novel with the genre it most resembles.

Synchronously, Ireland and the Southern United States produced authors who felt a need to explore the Big House. As his career matured, Yeats increasingly composed poetry and plays dealing with the topic, while Maria Edgeworth and, after her, the cousins Edith Somerville and Martin Ross wrote seminal texts that have become iconic of the genre called the Big House novel. While Edgeworth opened the discourse with *Castle Rackrent* (1800), Somerville and Ross, among others, closed a major phase of it roughly one hundred and thirty years later, chronicling how late-Victorian and early-twentieth-century land reform brought about the demise of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, primary creators and sustainers of Big Houses. While these Big Houses have been gone from the landscape since the early twentieth century, their presence is still felt as Big Houses still occupy the imaginations of many authors. For example, Nuala O'Faolain's 2001 novel *My Dream of You* was a great success. Yeats and Mitchell were middle

class and shared many similar experiences; and for that reason, this thesis will pay particular attention to their respective biographies. Their aspirational class identity stands in contrast to the lived experiences of Edgeworth and Somerville and Ross, who were brought up behind what—in his Irish Civil War poem “Ancestral Houses”—Yeats calls the escutcheoned doors of the Anglo-Irish landed aristocracy.

Culturally, Ireland and the American South have much in common. T. R. Henn’s *The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (1950) describes an Irish aristocratic society in which “the Big House, with its estates surrounding it, was a centre of hospitality, of country life and society, apt to breed a passionate attachment, so that the attempt to save it from burning or bankruptcy became an obsession (in the nineteen twenties and onwards) when that civilization was passing” (3). A large number of Irish Big House novels focus on the domestic effects of that passing; and many of those end with the mansions that have been neglected, dismantled, or burned. A conflagration destroys the focal edifice in Somerville and Ross’s *The Big House of Inver* (1925),¹ and IRA arson reduces to nothingness three Big Houses as Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* (1929) concludes. Very similarly the American South had its own Big Houses, around which aristocratic planters centered their social lives. To a significant degree, Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* marks the passing of that civilization marked by noting houses burnt by Union troops—houses whose remnant chimneystacks were often referred to as “Sherman’s sentinels.”

¹ While *The Big House of Inver* (1925) is often regarded as Somerville and Ross’s finest achievement, even the greatest Big House novel, Somerville wrote it after Ross’s 1915 death. Referring to the pair as the “firm,” Somerville claimed that she maintained contact with the deceased Ross, who assisted with the writing of the novel. She insisted that publishers name Ross as the co-author, a desire this thesis also honors.

The South's history parallels that of Ireland in some remarkable ways. Like Yeats, Mitchell lived with an acute familial and national consciousness of traumatic events. The American Civil War marked the end of the old Southern planter aristocracy, and both the Irish Potato Famine (1845-1849) and the land reform that followed it precipitated the near-terminal decline of the largely Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Famine reverberates in *Gone with the Wind*, perhaps an echo of Ireland's infamous tragedy, which brought thousands of desperate Irish emigrants to Savannah, Atlanta, and other Georgia communities, particularly in the 1860s, the decade of the Civil War. Arguably, Scarlett's assertion, "I'm going to live through this, and when it's over, I'm never going to be hungry again" (428), is the frustrated cry of Ireland—specifically, of an Irish-American woman—whose racial memory is informed by the failure of the potato crop: a hunger that indelibly scarred the Irish psyche. Any mention of the word *hunger* by someone of Irish heritage automatically brings the Great Famine to mind.

Just as Yeats was greatly influenced by the aftermath of the catastrophic effects of the Famine in Ireland, Mitchell was influenced by the aftermath of the American Civil War, which ended in 1865, the year of Yeats's birth. The war was a source of instability, disruption, and animosity among families, neighbors, and states for years after its official end. During Reconstruction, Southerners experienced great uncertainty about their futures. Much as Ireland was occupied and ruled by England, the South was occupied and ruled by the Federal government. Yeats watched a segment of society disappear and lived to see a War for Independence and a Civil War fought for Ireland's independence from England much as Mitchell heard the stories and witnessed the effects of the war on the South long after the War was over. The battles fought in both Ireland and the American South created blood-soaked, sacred ground.

Privileging biographical and historical analyses, this thesis will attempt to connect *Gone with the Wind* to Ireland and its literature, particularly the seminal Big House novels *Castle Rackrent* and *The Big House of Inver*. Excerpts from Yeats's drama and poetry also inform the argument. No other Southern novels will be invoked in detail, for the purpose here is to establish a link between *Gone with the Wind* and a central component of the Irish canon. A larger study should include other Southern texts, especially any written by Irish-Americans. Because William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) was published the same year as Mitchell's novel, it must be included in a further study. A close look at the biographical similarities of Yeats and Mitchell will illuminate some reasons why writers focused on the Big House at this particular time. Where excerpts from the biographies of Edgeworth and Somerville and Ross lend light to the argument, they are employed, as well. Specific topics for analysis include the ways the authors treat miscegenation, the landlord-servant and landlord-tenant relationships, the master-slave relationship, and the encroachment into aristocratic territory of the middle class. Additionally, *Gone with the Wind* will be explored for its relationship to Irish mythology. The discovery of Yeats's and Mitchell's shared cultural and historical anxieties, along with the connections revealed through the comparison of Mitchell's novel to Irish Big House novels, results in a new way to read Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. Additionally, this new approach to the nuanced Southern novel may reveal greater depth and understanding of texts by other Irish-American authors.

CHAPTER TWO

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND THE BIG HOUSE

As fact and symbol, the Big House embodied many things for W. B. Yeats. His lifelong interactions with denizens of Irish and English country mansions exposed the Dublin-born, middle-class author to the elite social status and pronounced material comfort of the aristocracy, to say nothing of a place-based sense of belonging. In childhood, the chronically peripatetic Yeats experienced Merville, on the outskirts of Sligo town: a substantial residence that the mercantile Pollexfens, his maternal grandparents, moved into as their shipping and milling businesses grew after the Famine. In *The Apprentice Mage* (1997), the first volume of his two-book Yeats biography, R. F. Foster describes the Pollexfen home as boasting “extensive outbuildings and a fine view of Ben Bulbin [the mountain that dominates much of Co. Sligo]”; in short, the building “signified an advance in status” (10). Also on the Atlantic periphery, but around 100 miles south (near Gort, Co. Galway), Yeats, in his early thirties, first encountered Coole Park. His mentor, Lady Augusta Gregory, married into the family that counted that three-story ancestral edifice as its ancestral seat. Built in the late eighteenth century, Coole under the widowed Lady Gregory became a central site of artistic activity during the Irish cultural revival. This chapter will elaborate on how Merville and Coole in particular—and the Big House in general—helped shape Yeats’s domestic imagination and poetry. In addition to revealing the shared similarities and anxieties of Yeats and Mitchell, this chapter shows the middle-class Yeats writing about the Irish Big House. Because previous authors of Big House literature were from the aristocracy, Yeats, writing as a member of the middle class, opens a space that, in a sense, allows a middle-class Mitchell to write about the Southern Big House.

From a utilitarian standpoint, a house is any structure that provides shelter for its inhabitants; and certainly Yeats never lacked a roof over his head, although, in his first volume of autobiography, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* (first published as *Memory Harbour* in 1916), he does recall how his bed was “soak[ed]...at night” by sea-spray. Yeats explains that, while living as a teenager in a rented house at Howth, a Dublin suburb, he “[took] the glass out of [his bedroom] window, sash and all”: “A literary passion for the open air was to last me for a few years” (*Autobiographies* 77). In his highly influential, posthumously published *Aesthetics* (1975), the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel defines a house as “an entirely purposeful structure, produced by men for human purposes” (664). Here, Hegel would seem to be most concerned about shelter (“entirely purposeful”); however, the phrase “human purposes” perhaps suggests something more. Human purposes vary considerably. Yeats spent much of his life shaping and reshaping his purposes. A partial list would include nationalist polemicist, poet, playwright, theater director, occultist, senator, and press manager. Very likely the breadth of his passions and his workmanlike engagement with them are relatable to Yeats’s dividing his time between Ireland and England, not to mention financial anxieties rooted in childhood. Yeats’s father, John Butler Yeats, managed money badly and moved the family from house to house—and back and forth between Sligo, Dublin, and London—as he sought to build a career as a portrait painter. It is easy to understand that, for W. B. Yeats, the Big House represented security, a hedge against deficient areas in his life, with Lady Gregory especially making up for the affection largely absent from his sickly mother.

It is useful to clarify details of aspirational narratives within the Pollexfen and Yeats families. The Pollexfen family’s claim to a golden past was expressed in the form of a picture that Yeats refers to in *Reveries* as “an engraving of some old family place my grandfather

thought should have been his” (3:44). An editorial footnote in the Scribner edition of *Reveries* explains that “William Pollexfen kept a picture of Kitley Manor, Yealmpton, Devon, on his bedroom wall all his life, regarding himself as the rightful heir to the estate” (3:419). Rightful heirs or not, the Pollexfens never inherited the manor. Offering a real-world example of the rise of the middle class, the Pollexfen’s business interests rendered them much more financially stable than the Yeatses. Their successive moves to more spacious homes with more surrounding acreage parallels the acquisition of land by Jason Quirk in Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*, as well as the Weldons in the Somerville and Ross novel *The Big House of Inver*. Regardless, the Pollexfens never escaped the bounds of the middle class. Both families, Foster confirms, were and remained members of the “Irish Protestant middle class” (1:1).

In 1773, W. B. Yeats’s great-great-grandfather Benjamin William Yeats wed Mary Butler, who, confirms William M. Murphy in *Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats* (1978), brought into the marriage lands at Thomastown, Co. Kildare: “346 acres, two roods, and twenty-five perches, Irish measure (equal to about 560 English or American measure), which were divided into seventeen farm tenancies” (33-4). The closeness of this woman to the Earls of Ormonde—since the twelfth century, one of the great Cambro-Norse landowning dynasties of Eastern Ireland, remains debatable. According to Frank Tuohy’s *Yeats: An Illustrated Biography* (1976), only an “ancient silver cup engraved with a family crest seem[s] to prove [a] connection with those Butlers who were Earls” (20). Particularly in the early teens of the twentieth century, when he attacked the Dublin bourgeoisie for not contributing funds for the proposed Hugh Lane gallery of art, Yeats received a good deal of ribbing about his aristocratic Butler pretensions. By the 1930s, the last decade of his life, however, he seems to have become reconciled to a relatively modest account, at least with respect to the Yeatses, writing in a footnote—part of an

appendix to his play *The Words Upon the Window Pane*—“The family of Yeats, never more than small gentry arrived [in Ireland], if I can trust the only man among us who may have seen the family tree before it was burnt by Canadian Indians, ‘about the time of Henry VII’”(2:709). Even here, however, he questions the trustworthiness of the source, which perhaps leaves open the possibility of the Yeatses being the large gentry or even the nobility. In 1888, Yeats saw his father sell the Thomastown properties in an effort to bolster his shaky finances. However, he received less than he hoped. Murphy confirms that “[a]fter provision for debts, the remainder was £1.004-4-8 ... a sum that was eaten up by other debts” (*Prodigal Father* 159).

It can be argued that Yeats felt haunted by his family’s failure ever fully to enter the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, one significant intersection with that class notwithstanding. Having grown up hearing about his great-great-grandfather Yeats’s marriage into a branch of the Butlers, Dukes of Ormonde, Yeats was repeatedly confronted by the loss of what might have been. Butler Big Houses like Kilkenny Castle and Ormonde Castle (in Kilkenny city and Carrick-on-Suir, respectively) reflected the family’s prestige and stability. Foster underscores that their being a long-established “Protestant middle-class family” did, during Yeats’s boyhood, confer on the Yeatses “a sense of caste” (1:29), at least in Dublin. However, such a “sense of caste” could not provide the peace of mind derived from landed income, and neither did it have much meaning in London, a city prone to deeming the Irish barbarians or a contagion. Yeats was about two years old when his father first settled the family in London, and the imperial capital dominates the opening of *Reveries*. Specifically, Yeats relates that his “earliest memories” (*Autobiographies* 41) include “looking out of an Irish window” in London: 23 Fitzroy Road, near Regent’s Park (rented from July 1867 to July 1873). He speaks of viewing from the window a “wall covered with cracked and falling plaster,” as well as a “boy in uniform” rumored to be intent on

“blow[ing] the town up”—a matter that causes Yeats to “go to sleep in terror.” Five months after the Yeatses moved into Fitzroy Road, the Fenians, the main Irish republican paramilitary organization, bombed London’s Clerkenwell Prison in an attempt to free some of its members incarcerated there. The event was sensational, so it is little wonder that a contemporary Irish youth in London would feel terror. Deaths totaled 12 and injuries 30. Vinoth Ramachandra opines, “The Clerkenwell bombing ... prompted a wave of hysteria in London reminiscent of July 7, 2005” (38).

As a child of two countries, Yeats acquired a hyphenated identity, but his Anglo-Irishness was the product of living in straitened circumstances in England as a somewhat nomadic Irish immigrant, not from residence in Ireland as an English planter-landlord. Murphy elaborates on Yeats’s problematic dual identity: “In London he was an Irishman among Englishmen, in Sligo a Protestant among Catholics, [and] at Merville a Yeats among Pollexfens” (*Prodigal Father* 113). This conflicted sense of being informs Yeats’s complicated relationship with the Big House.

Additionally, Yeats’s childhood insecurities heightened his sensitivity. The Pollexfen and Yeats households were very different. The Yeatses were cheerful and easy going, while the Pollexfens were more serious and hard-working. However, both worried about young Willy’s abilities. Most likely, his shuffling between households with different expectations kept the young Yeats feeling off-balance, afraid of doing the wrong thing. Acknowledging his childhood awkwardness and shyness, the adult Yeats reflected in his *Autobiographies* that Merville was a “house [that] was so big that there was always a room to hide in, and I had a red pony and a garden where I could wander” (3:41). The references to “hiding” and “wandering” point to Yeats’s feelings of emotional discomfort around the people in the house. Even the “red pony” is a vehicle to remove him from the immediate vicinity of the Pollexfens. Murphy concludes that

the problem was that “[t]he Pollexfens were afraid the eldest grandson would grow up to be like his father; the father was afraid he would grow to be like them” (*Prodigal Father* 94).

Yeats most likely acquired his class consciousness from the Pollexfens. Yeats’s father John was concerned about the influence of the Pollexfen feeling of class superiority on his young family, especially Willy. Murphy expounds on the Pollexfen misplacement of values in his book *The Yeats Family and the Pollexfens of Sligo* (1971): “The Pollexfens had confused one thing for another and in reaching for the symbol had lost the truth” (27). In their pursuit of wealth, the Pollexfens had sought out bigger houses rather than education or social connections.

However, Yeats’s class consciousness focused on people more than symbolically potent Big Houses. For Yeats, the house was primarily an extension of the personality of its owner. This philosophy is manifest in Yeats’s account of Edward Martyn and Tillyra Castle. Revealing his belief in the link between miscegenation and the downfall of the house, Yeats explains Martyn’s family situation: “His father’s family was old and honoured; his mother but one generation from the peasant” (3:291). The family’s original house burned, except for the tower, and his mother had it rebuilt in the Gothic style. Although the Martyns own a big house, the peasant mother cannot discern quality art and furnishings in which to “dress” the house. She also tries to match her son with peasant brides, who know no more how to discern quality than she. Because Tillyra Castle is an aristocratic Big House, Yeats believes that the Martyn house should be furnished with tasteful art and furnishings. As an extension of its owner, the basic structure of the house is like Martyn’s writing, in which Yeats allows that Martyn “would find subjects, construct plots, [but] he would never learn to write; his mind was a fleshless skeleton.” Like his mother, Martyn cannot discern taste in writing. He cannot artfully “dress” or put flesh on the bones of his skeletal subjects and plots just as his mother cannot “dress” the house. Yeats expounds that he “used to

think that two traditions met and destroyed each other in his [Martyn's] blood, creating the sterility of a mule." Like a mule, Martyn cannot procreate by writing. Although Yeats claims he "used to think" in this manner when he wrote the *Dramatis Personae* section of his *Autobiographies* in 1934, he again demonstrates this line of thought in his play *Purgatory* in 1938.

Although Yeats received many Big House invitations because of his celebrity, the most important invitation came from Lady Isabella Augusta Persse Gregory. Unlike Edward Martyn, Lady Gregory came from solid Anglo-Irish stock. In his biography *Yeats* (1983), Douglas Archibald relates her history

the youngest daughter and thirteenth child of Dudley Persse, whose ancestors had come into Ireland during the seventeenth century, probably as part of the Cromwellian settlement of English families on Irish land. Family history represents class history. One ancestor, as Attorney General, prosecuted the patriot Robert Emmet; another gave birth to Standish Hayes O'Grady, one of the first native collectors of folklore.... The first Persse of whom there is written record, like Swift an Anglican Ascendancy Dean, built the family mansion, Roxborough....

In 1880, Augusta Persse married Sir William Gregory and so became a part of a different Anglo-Ireland—the public world of service, achievement, culture, and travel. (55)

Not only does this passage place Lady Gregory firmly in the Anglo-Irish society but it also highlights the differences among those belonging to the same social class, which explains their political divisions. Lady Gregory's pedigree is important because had she been anything less,

Yeats would have responded differently to her, and their alliance would most likely have never been formed.

Yeats admits in his *Autobiographies* that he came “to love that house [Coole] more than all other houses” (3:291). Evidence of his great feeling for Coole is also demonstrated by his display of paintings of Coole Park at his Woburn Buildings apartment in London. In the same way that a younger Yeats writes in *Reveries* that he wished “for a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hand” (3:58) to ward off homesickness, he kept his vision of Coole before him to make his apartment seem more like home.

More than just a *piet a terre* in Ireland, Lady Gregory provided the nurturing that Yeats had been deprived of as a child. Although some intimate that she may have been a lover rather than a surrogate parent, none of their correspondence, which was always very formal, reveals any sexual intimacy between them. In *Yeats: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1972), Brenda S. Webster further dispels this rumor by confirming Lady Gregory’s importance to Yeats’s psychological maturation as she “gave Yeats a chance to repeat or re-experience parts of his childhood in a more positive way ... Often counteract[ing] the influence of Yeats’s own mother” (98). In fine, Yeats received at Coole healing for emotional wounds left by his mother.

By extension, Coole came to represent the womb or mother. Most times when Yeats arrived for his summer visits, he arrived physically and mentally depleted. As a fetus is supplied with all its needs in the womb, Yeats has his needs supplied while in the Big House. The steady supply of basic needs like good nutrition, emotional support, and order restored Yeats’s productivity. Realizing the importance of Lady Gregory’s oversight, Yeats concedes in his *Autobiographies*: “I doubt if I should have done much with my life but for her firmness and her care” (3:283). Her unique mix of Pollexfen work ethic and the Yeats interest in art and literature

combined to supply Yeats with twenty summers of support in “the place where he could write poetry” (Foster 1:182).

When the unrest between landlords and tenants increased, Yeats specifically honored and defended Coole with a poem “Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation” published in 1910 in *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* collection. By this time, many Big Houses were already gone, including Lady Gregory’s own childhood home Roxborough. The impetus for the poem was the Coole tenants’ application to the Land Court for reduced rents. Because of Lady Gregory’s already stressed financial condition, Yeats knew a reduction in rents could cause the forced sale of Coole, bringing an end to his summers of solace and productivity.

“Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation” reveals much about Yeats’s thoughts about the value of the Anglo-Ascendancy and its contribution to Irish society. The poem poses three questions. In the first, Yeats accomplishes two aims. First, he establishes the house as the place where “passion and precision have been one” (2). Here, the house is a metaphor for the family. The word *passion*, sometimes used to mean imagination, can also mean strong feelings. Lady Gregory’s interest in literature and almost evangelical zeal for the Abbey Theatre represents the passionate side in the house. The word *precision* denotes an attention to detail. Sir Gregory’s family with its members serving as lofty heads of government represents the precision side of the house. Yeats also uses this first question to reveal that the family has been in Ireland for too many years to count—“time out of mind” (3). The phrase *time out of mind* also appears in Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* to describe the long history of the Rackrent family (65). Also, Yeats makes the destruction of the house a global event when he asks how the ruin of Coole would make the “world” (1) luckier. He most likely had in mind the plays and theatre that Lady Gregory had a major role in creating and producing. The plays had been performed in England

and the United States, so the destruction of Coole would have effects extending far beyond Gort, Dublin, or Ireland.

The second question reinforces concepts mentioned in the first question. The phrase, “Where wings have memory of wings” (6), refers again to the long history of the family in Ireland. Also, the wings belong to the eagle as does the “lidless eye” (4) mentioned in the first question. The eagle also represents “passion and precision” (2). Fearlessly living alone on remote mountain peaks, which parallels the remoteness of the Big House isolated on an estate, the eagle removes itself from the piteous clamor of the world, implying a higher level of nobility. Yet, because of its precision, the eagle can discern the smallest details of the surrounding countryside. Because of the eagle’s grandeur, proponents of different organizations choose it as their representative. For example, the eagle is the symbol of the United States, Mexico, the Kaisers, and the Romanovs. Understandably, the image of the eagle is found on many family crests, as well. The established Big Houses have physical images in the family crests and portraiture to remind the younger generations of the elders who established the house. The phrase “the best knit to the best” (7) indicates these families are concerned with making good marriages for their descendants.

The final question is concerned with the physical structure, as well as the family. Many Big Houses had been dismantled and reassembled into smaller, more maintainable dwellings for the new tenants-become-landowners. Although Yeats admits that “mean rooftrees” (8) might be stronger if the materials from Coole were used to build new houses for the new landowners, he questions the “luck” (9) or benefit that the materials would bring to the new houses. Without the qualities of the aristocratic families, the owners of the smaller houses will not attain the “gifts that govern men” (10) nor will they attain what Yeats refers to as “gradual Time’s last gift, a

written speech” (11). Because of the necessity of labor to sustain the owners of the smaller houses, they will not have the time necessary to accomplish “Time’s last gift” of “written speech” (11), which is “Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease” (12). The high laughter refers to the “sweet laughing eagle thoughts” (5) of the educated and mannered nobility; loveliness refers to the house itself with its fine art, portraiture and family crests; ease refers to the lack of required labor for the inhabitants of the Big House whose income comes from rents. Growing up with his artist father, Yeats learned firsthand that the development of art requires time and money, a benefit of the very wealthy.

Even though Yeats became a successful writer, he would never earn enough to buy a Big House for himself. As the eldest son, he was often called on to supply funds for his father and to cover the gaps in income from his sisters’ business. However, after much wrangling over price and a nearby road, Foster says that Yeats purchased Thoor Ballylee on March 27, 1917 for “£35” (2:85). The remarkably low price for the old Norman tower came about because it was virtually uninhabitable. The roof had rotted away, and its position in a valley with a river running nearby made it prone to flooding.

At the same time, Yeats’s tower was not really purchased as a permanent shelter. In fact, with its dampness and lack of electricity and running water, it was a very poor shelter even after it was refurbished. Instead, Thoor Ballylee functions best as a symbol of Yeats’s profession and as a monument to him. Yeats reveals to T. Sturge Moore, who was designing a cover for Yeats’s *Tower* poetry collection, “I like to think of that building as a permanent symbol of my work plainly visible to the passer-by” (qtd. in Pierce 215). T. R. Henn, a contemporary of Yeats’s, remarks that of all Yeats’s chosen symbols, the “Tower is perhaps the most widely and effectively used” (131). In addition to the towers that appear in Shelley, Milton, and Samuel

Palmer's illustration *The Lonely Tower*, Henn expounds, "Ireland is a land of towers, square and round; his own rebuilding of Thoor Ballylee was at once a practical gesture and the embodiment of a dream" (131). Also, since Ballylee dominated the landscape surrounding it, Henn adds that the tower was seen as "an emblem of aristocracy" (132). For Yeats, the tower was his symbol of accomplishment as a poet and as a landowner.

Although Yeats adopted a symbol for himself, Margaret Mitchell created a symbol for the South. Because of her novel's popularity, the names of Tara, Scarlett, Rhett, and others have entered into a shared cultural knowledge, evoking images of the South. However, both symbols grew out of similar ground. While Yeats and Mitchell authored their works about the Big House, they were both writing in middle-class structures—Yeats in his tower and Mitchell in her tiny basement apartment. Although these structures were situated an ocean apart, both authors experienced similar cultural, historical, and familial experiences. Prior to Yeats, Big House literature was the domain of the aristocratic owners of the Big Houses. By addressing the Big House in his drama and poetry, a middle-class Yeats freed a similarly middle-class Mitchell to write an Irish-American Big House novel.

CHAPTER TWO

MARGARET MITCHELL AND THE BIG HOUSE

Even though W. B. Yeats and Margaret Mitchell may have been an ocean apart, they encountered similar cultural and historical phenomena that resulted in a calling to document the histories surrounding the Big House. In *Recasting*, Pyron notes the South's association with the feminine characteristics of "emotionalism, irrationalism, and a kind of overripe fecundity" (7). Ireland is also associated with the feminine, having been named for the warrior goddess Eiru, and shares the same feminine qualities Pyron associates with the South. Also, both Ireland and the South are noted for their strong oral tradition and storytelling. Both experienced the destabilization of Civil Wars. In addition to these similarities, the landscape of both Ireland and the South was dotted with Big Houses, many of which were burned, deserted to ruin, or torn down to build smaller dwellings.

Additionally, Yeats and Mitchell share many similar personal experiences. Although their mothers were not cruel, both were distant and did not supply the nurturing that Yeats and Mitchell needed as children. Spending much time at their grandparents' homes, Yeats and Mitchell were exposed to an earlier generation's stories. As sensitive children, both Yeats and Mitchell became keenly observant of their surroundings and those around them—a quality important in a writer. Surprisingly, Yeats and Mitchell—middle-class citizens—chose to write in defense of the Big House, a topic formerly written about solely by the aristocrats. Just as Ireland offered up Yeats and others to tell its history, the American South fostered its own wordwright in Mitchell who, relying on her Irish and American heritage, forged a unique amalgam—*Gone With the Wind*.

Margaret Mitchell was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on November 8, 1900, to Eugene Muse and Mary Isabel (May Belle) Stephens Mitchell. Much like Yeats, Mitchell lived in the aftermath of a national tragedy. Just as the consequences of the Potato Famine would last long after the immigration and deaths of millions of Irish people, the effects of losing a civil war affected the people of the allied states of the Confederate States of America long after the last shot was fired or the last house was burned.

One of the consequences of the Potato Famine and the American Civil War was the eventual demise of the landed gentry. Although the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class and its Big Houses were disappearing from the landscape all around Yeats, the Southern Planter class died even before the U. S. Civil War ended in April 1865 and long before Mitchell's birth in 1900. However, her family and community kept the stories vitally alive as Mitchell relates in a letter, dated April 28, 1939, to Mrs. Julia Collier Harris, "I was about ten years old before I learned the war hadn't ended shortly before I was born" (2). Through retelling, the stories retained a freshness even as the storytellers themselves grew old.

One of the most obvious connections between Yeats and Mitchell is their Irish heritage. Mitchell's earliest recorded family history recalls the story of the McGhans² on her mother's side of the family. Pyron relates the American beginnings of the McGhan family in his biography *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell* as a quest for religious freedom since it was their "Catholicism [that] had brought them to Calvert's Maryland in the seventeenth century" (17). Pyron goes on to refer to the McGhans as "Anglo-American" (17). However, Margaret Mitchell had begun a family genealogy that her brother Stephens later finished and appears in

² While the name McGhan is sometimes spelled McGhann, the spelling McGhan will be employed throughout this paper except in direct quotations from other sources because it is the chosen spelling of the descendants and for consistency's sake.

The History of Clayton County, Georgia, 1821-1983 in which the Mitchells clearly reveal the Irish heritage of the McGhans as “The McGhan and O’Reilly families had lived in County Longford, Ireland, before coming to America” (242). Pyron shows a lack of sensitivity to Mitchell’s Irish heritage by referring to families with an Irish heritage as Anglo. Additionally in his book *The Irish Roots of Margaret Mitchell’s Gone With the Wind*, David O’Connell quotes from an unpublished letter written by Margaret Mitchell to a relative that reaffirms their heritage: “The McGhans were not Scotch Presbyterians. The name is the most Irish of all Irish names, and has been a Catholic name as long as the record runs” (42). While migrating south to the cotton lands of Taliaferro County, Georgia, the McGhans retained their faith, intermarrying with other Catholics, and maintaining separate communities as they moved south.

One of these marriages was between Phillip Fitzgerald and Eleanor McGhan. When they married in 1837, Fitzgerald was almost forty while McGhan was half his age. Fitzgerald had been “born in Tipperary in 1798,” continues Pyron, “[and] his family fled the island in the wake of the aborted uprising of 1798” (17). From Ireland, the family moved to France where he lived until he reached his early twenties. He sailed to America, landing in Charleston, South Carolina. On his way from Charleston to Jonesboro, he became familiar with the Catholic settlement in Taliaferro County where he met the woman he eventually married. He and his young bride settled permanently in the backcountry town of Jonesboro and prospered there before and after the Civil War.

As most Irish Catholics lived in the Coastal areas of Georgia, Fitzgerald’s choice to live in North Georgia was unusual. At this time, Clayton County was still on the edge of the western frontier. *The History of Clayton County Georgia* (1983) verifies that the last of the Cherokee Indians “were removed from the state in 1838” (5), a year after the Fitzgerald-McGhan marriage.

Also noted in this history is that most of the Irish in this part of Georgia were “usually of English and Scottish background. The term *Scottish* is intended to include the Ulster Scots, or Scotch-Irish, who migrated from the Lowlands of Scotland into Northern Ireland after 1600” (11) and continued on to America in the 1700s. They were also Protestant.

However, Mitchell’s Catholic McGhan ancestors arrived in America with Calvert long before the waves of Scotch-Irish would arrive one hundred years later. Calvert was a Protestant who converted to Catholicism but was not alienated from the Crown for doing so. He was granted land in County Longford, Ireland, where the McGhans could have been his tenants before immigrating with him to Baltimore, Maryland, and founding a privileged space for Catholics. Calvert’s Catholic settlement in America was very much like the plantation projects begun in Ireland by the Catholic Queen Mary Tudor.³ Queen Mary established King’s County, as well as others, to install English Catholics in Ireland as Big House Catholics. However, Mary died and was followed by Elizabeth I, a Protestant who overturned her sister’s projects. Few Big Houses were owned by Catholics. The majority belonged to Protestants surrounded by the small cottages of their Catholic neighbors. In *Gone with the Wind*, Mitchell creates a mirror image of the Irish countryside by privileging the Irish Catholic O’Haras, placing them in the Big House surrounded by the smaller farms of Protestant Scotch-Irish like the MacIntoshes.

One of seven daughters of the McGhan-Fitzgerald union married an Irishman very much like her father. In 1863, Annie Fitzgerald married John Stephens, who grew up in King’s County Ireland and who may have been one of the English Big House Catholics. Stephens, who was born to Catholic gentry, according to Pyron, immigrated to Augusta, Georgia, as a young man. Before joining the Ninth Georgia Infantry, he attended Hiawasse College where he earned his

³ Mary Tudor’s reign 1553-1558

bachelor's degree. Stephens spent most of his military career in Atlanta, where he would remain after the war ended. The Stephenses invested their money in land around the city, building many rental units. Annie particularly bears a dominant trait of her Irish forebears in her desire to acquire land. "Property obsessed her" (21), reports Pyron. In 1872, Annie and John would give birth to Mary Isabel (May Belle) Stephens, Margaret Mitchell's mother.

Mitchell's three distinct Irish strains, each connected to three significant events in Irish history, show the great variety an Irish background can entail. Because of her understanding of the complicated ways one can be Irish, she is sensitive to the nuances of the various Irish characters in *Gone with the Wind*, and as Quinlan observes, "there are several Irishes here" (129). Probably one of the least popular Irish characters in the novel is Johnnie Gallegher, whom Scarlett hires to run one of her mills with convict labor. Even though Johnnie is a detestable character, he is just a rougher form of Gerald before he made enough money to buy Tara. Scarlett appreciates the same qualities in Johnnie that helped Gerald to acquire his wealth because "an Irishman with a determination to get somewhere was a valuable man to have, regardless of what his personal characteristics might be" (760). Scarlett understands him because she grew up with Gerald. She knows his motivations, which are also her own.

Another character who is most likely Irish, but who is not identified as such, is Rhett Butler. As already mentioned, the Butlers were Irish gentry to whom Yeats's family proudly claimed a relation. Mitchell knew that anyone familiar with Irish history would recognize the significance of the Butler name. Nicholas Canny explains in "Early Modern Ireland c. 1500-1700" (1989) that under the Crown, the Butlers were one of the principal Old English lords and "enjoyed palatinate jurisdiction over a portion of the lordships over which they ruled" (107). A key to understanding Rhett as Irish is that he recognizes the Irish peasant in Scarlett and

repeatedly confronts her with it. Rhett also represents the imposition of the Protestant will on the Catholics by taking his stepson Wade to the Episcopal Church even though “the little boy was supposed to be Catholic” (906). In a particularly revealing scene, Rhett tells Scarlet he likes her “for the elasticity of [her] conscience, for the selfishness which [she] seldom trouble[s] to hide, and for the shrewd practicality in [her] which, I fear, [she] get[s] from some not too remote Irish-peasant ancestor.... I like [her] because I have those same qualities in me and like begets liking” (340). Having come to Ireland during the Norman invasion in the twelfth century, the Butlers, the earls of Ormonde, who were also known as the “Old English” became more Irish than the Irish themselves.⁴ While Rhett accuses Gerald of being a “smart Mick on the make” (902), he is very much a “Mick on the make” himself in taking advantage of the opportunity to make millions as a blockade runner during the Civil War.

Additionally, Mitchell reveals another lesser known quality that betrays Rhett’s Irishness. While many Irish are associated with a need to own land like Gerald and Scarlett, some are not. David T. Gleeson reveals a different side of the Irish in his book *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (2001): “Most Irish immigrants in America were escaping from the land. The rural life from which they had fled had provided nothing but heartache. They had firsthand knowledge of how precarious life there could be” (23). Evidence of this feeling comes from Rhett who accuses the Irish of being “the damnedest race. They put so much emphasis on so many wrong things. Land, for instance. And every bit of earth is just like every other bit” (583). Because Rhett is estranged from his family, and his family’s land in Charleston, his heartache causes him to revolt against the land that most Irish and Southerners hold so dear. While the Irish share many similar

⁴ Mitchell also uses a form of this common phrase in a letter to Mr. Michael MacWhite dated January 27, 1937, to describe the Irish who had come to America and had become “more Southern than the Southerners” (114).

traits, not all Irish are the same, and Mitchell uses Rhett to show additional nuances of the Irish. Under the tutelage of her grandparents, aunts and mother, Mitchell develops an educated awareness of her own strains of Irishness, and she ably displays a variety of nuances of different Irishnesses in her text.

Even though Mitchell's Stephens grandparents had done well financially, they were still middle class. However, the following description of the marriage of Mary Isabel Stephens and Eugene Muse Mitchell at her parents' home on November 8, 1892 would make it appear otherwise. Pyron describes the scene:

High on the hill, the big house glittered in the brisk November night. In their silver candelabra, innumerable candles glowed and flickered through the windows. Excitement hung in the air as the rich carriages of Atlanta's élite deposited the guests at the Stephenses' door to be greeted by the Captain and his small, round wife. (9)

From this description, the Stephens house would appear to be the finest house in Atlanta, but this house was located on Jackson Hill on Jackson Street. Pyron locates Jackson Hill as a "long, high prominence that ran exactly parallel to Peachtree Street ridge only a half-mile to the west" (3). The finest homes in Atlanta at this time were situated on Peachtree Street. In his biography entitled *Margaret Mitchell of Atlanta* (1965), Finis Farr compares Peachtree Street to "the streets of magnates' homes in other flourishing provincial cities, such as Euclid Avenue in Cleveland and Summit Avenue in St. Paul" (29). Because the Stephenses and Mitchells lived on Jackson Street⁵ instead of Peachtree, they were clearly identified as middle-class Atlantans. Herein lies

⁵ Another ironic twist comes from both Yeats's and Mitchell's having lived in a tower or in a house with a tower. Pyron notes that the Mitchell house on Jackson Street "stood three stories tall with a steep, gabled roof surmounted with a still higher square tower" (29).

another similarity between Yeats and Mitchell. Whatever his past, Yeats's own circumstances placed him definitely among the middle class. The Pollexfens of Sligo, Yeats's mother's side of the family, bear the most resemblance to the Mitchells of Atlanta in that both were upwardly mobile financially. However, no matter the amount of wealth the Pollexfens might accumulate, they could never progress beyond middle class because of their occupations as business people. Conversely, the Stephenses and later the Mitchells were able to progress to upper middle-class and beyond due to the mobility in society following the Civil War and Reconstruction. Twenty years after their marriage, Eugene would build May Belle her fine home on Peachtree Street. Elizabeth I. Hanson's description of the home in her biography *Margaret Mitchell* (1991) categorized the new home as a "classical revival style" that was "actually designed as a mansion, for the ground floor of 1149 Peachtree Street covered seventy feet, complete with extensive carving, grand staircase, and high ceilings" (12). Even so, Mitchell would choose to live in a very different style once she reached maturity.

Just as Yeats was well-versed in his own Irish heritage, Mitchell was very aware of her own complicated Irish past through stories and songs passed down to her during her youth. May Belle must have loved sharing stories and songs from her Irish ancestors with her children as much as she loved sharing the stories and songs from her Southern forbears. Even when May Belle was away at school at the Villa Maria Seminary in Bellevue, Quebec, "she especially delighted in the Irish balladeers like Thomas More." Pyron quotes from a letter from May Belle to her father dated October 28, 1885:

Considering herself thoroughly Irish, May Belle repeated how she shared 'the story of Robert Emmet, of Tara and the Bards with her schoolmates. She feared she might have bored her friends with her renditions of Irish literature and history,

but she could not control her enthusiasm over ‘my Father’s and my Grandfather’s country—the country of a Burke, a Curran, and of an Emmet.’” (24)

That May Belle’s children were familiar with their history is no surprise. Stephens Mitchell is quoted by Farr: “We know a good deal about our forebears, and when I stop and think about them, and think about Margaret, I believe I can see how each of the personalities behind us made its own contribution to her sum-total” (20). Ironically, the Protestant Yeats and the Catholic May Belle draw from the same well to tell the stories of their Irishness. Burke and Emmet appear repeatedly in Yeats’s poetry.

Just as Mitchell heard stories about her Irish ancestors, Scarlett also hears her Irish ancestors’ stories, which are so fresh that she does not realize they are two centuries old. When Scarlett relates to Rhett the story of “The siege at Drogheda when Cromwell had the Irish, and they didn’t have anything to eat and Pa said they starved and died in the streets ...” (309), Rhett accuses her of being the “most barbarously ignorant young person [he] ever saw. Drogheda was in sixteen hundred and something and Mr. O’Hara couldn’t possibly have been alive then” (309). However, Scarlett is not necessarily ignorant, but because of the way the stories are told, she most likely thinks they happened during her father’s lifetime as Mitchell once thought the Civil War occurred during her parents’ lifetime.

In addition to family stories, the Mitchell children were familiar with Irish literature and history. In a letter dated January 27, 1937, to Mr. Michael MacWhite of the Irish Legation in Washington, D.C., Mitchell writes: “Loving the poems and the songs and the history of Ireland as I do, there was really no excuse for my ignorance of ‘Gone In the Wind’” (113). MacWhite had sent her a copy of James Clarence Mangan’s poems, which contains the poem “Gone In the Wind.” Many thought that she took her novel’s title from the title of Mangan’s poem rather from

Ernest Dowson's poem "Cynara," which she credits as the source of the title. Mitchell was aware of the Irish contribution to the South during the American Civil War, as well as to the Union as evidenced by Gerald who rails against "the blackguardery of the Irish who were being enticed into the Yankee army by bounty money" (202).

Additionally in her biography *Margaret Mitchell and John Marsh: The Love Story Behind Gone With The Wind* (1993), Marianne Walker quotes from a letter written by Mitchell to John's sister Frances concerning the Irish novel *Destiny Bay* by Donn Byrne she had just read:

As we are a family of long lived and long memored folk, the battle of the Boyne seems no further in the past than Gettysburg and just as vivid. So naturally my ire rose occasionally at the casual references to the walloping my ancestors got for their genius at always picking the losing side. (154)

This reference confirms Mitchell read Irish literature. Also, Mitchell worked at the *Atlanta Journal* when Yeats won the Nobel Prize in 1923, so she would have been aware of him. He and the Abbey Theatre also made several tours in the United States. Yeats published "Upon a House Shaken by Land Agitation" in 1910 and "Ancestral Houses" in 1928, before and during the decade beginning in 1926 when Mitchell was working on *Gone with the Wind*. Whether she read these poems or any of the Big House literature is not mentioned in her biographies or her published letters.

The sense of loss Yeats and Mitchell lived with as retold through family histories found its expression in their art. In "Ancestral Houses," published in 1928 as the first section poem in the series "Meditations in Time of Civil War" in *The Tower* collection, Yeats looks at the Big Houses and the generations who built them and the generations who will inherit them. Much as Yeats's poem relates the precarious nature of the Big Houses of Ireland, Mitchell relates the

South's experience with a similar situation. Almost magically, both WB and Mitchell⁶ were writing at almost the same time—Yeats publishes *The Tower* in 1928, and Mitchell writes *Gone With the Wind* between the years of 1926 and 1936. However, they are not writing at the same points in their respective histories—Yeats is experiencing the destruction of the Big Houses along with Ireland's own Civil War firsthand as he writes, while Mitchell is writing from her oral history, approximately sixty years after the end of the American Civil War.

Another similarity between Yeats and Mitchell is their time spent at their grandparents' homes. During his childhood, Yeats spent almost every summer and sometimes stayed for longer periods with his Pollexfen grandparents, especially if the family finances were in peril. Following a tradition started with May Belle, Mitchell and her older brother Stephens spent summers at Rural Home, the modest plantation home of her Fitzpatrick grandparents. May Belle was a sickly child and had been sent there by Annie whom Pyron recounts as having a “legendary reputation as a wretched parent” (23). The grandparents and maiden aunts became surrogate parents for May Belle much as Yeats's grandparents, aunts and uncles became stand-ins for his own frequently absent father and distant mother. Although Mitchell's great aunts were much older when she spent her time at Rural Home, she benefited from their attention as her mother May Belle had. For Yeats and Mitchell, the time spent at their grandparents' homes afforded them opportunities to hear their family's stories and learn about their family's pasts.

Yet other similarities between Yeats and Mitchell are their emotionally distant mothers and their sensitivity. Though May Belle was not withdrawn or sickly as Yeats's mother Susan, she had lived with an emotionally distant mother herself, which most likely influenced her

⁶ Somerville and Ross and another Big House author—Elizabeth Bowen, who wrote *The Last September*, were also writing at this time. Edgeworth foresaw the end coming in the last years of the eighteenth century, publishing *Castle Rackrent* in 1800.

interactions with her own children. The Mitchell household was comprised of people with strong personalities. Mitchell's biographers report her as being accident prone. In her early days, she most likely attempted feats beyond her skill to gain attention for herself in a family of competing personalities or to keep up with her brother Stephens who was five years older. Nevertheless, Mitchell did experience some accidents severe enough to require periods of bed rest and physical inactivity. During these periods, she read and spent much time creating stories and plays. Just as Yeats developed his poetic imagination while he quietly wandered the countryside around Sligo, Mitchell's times of physical stillness allowed her imagination to run wild. Losing herself in these alternative realities helped her to work out her own traumas at home. In fact, Anne Edwards notes in her biography *Road to Tara: The Life of Margaret Mitchell* (1983) that "she [Mitchell] felt she did everything wrong; she doubted her mother's love and was fearful of losing her father's" (28). Just as Yeats's unstable childhood increased his sensitivity, Mitchell, traumatized by her emotional insecurity, acquired a sensitivity that lasted her lifetime.

Because Mitchell was such a sensitive child, May Belle's strong reactions to even small infractions left their emotional scars. Though May Belle was not the shrew that her mother Annie was, she was not especially nurturing. She would bribe Mitchell to read classic books for a few cents each and then swat her with her slipper if she chose not to read them. Hanson explains May Belle's actions as a way to "frighten and to impress, alternately to stifle and to encourage" (12). An example of May Belle's attempts to frighten and impress occurred when Mitchell was only beginning the first grade. Mitchell was not fond of school, but May Belle realized the value of an education and sought to relay its importance to her six-year-old daughter. Mitchell says in a letter dated July 10, 1936, that her mother took her for a drive out in the country where the old plantation houses lay in ruins or in charred remains. Mitchell said May Belle "talked about the

world those people had lived in, such a secure world, and how it had exploded beneath them. And she told me that my own world was going to explode under me, some day, and God help me if I didn't have some weapon to meet the new world" (38). Much as the Clerkenwell bombing would haunt Yeats long after he became a man, the trip to the country and the dire warning from May Belle haunted Mitchell for the rest of her life.

Mitchell's education also reveals one of May Belle's attempts to stifle and encourage. As already evidenced, May Belle greatly valued education. She wanted her daughter to be as well-educated as her brother Stephens, who obtained his law degree from Harvard. In her way, May Belle did encourage Mitchell. However, Pyron relates that May Belle's decision to send Mitchell to Smith College was based on its founder Sophia Smith of Hatfield, Massachusetts. Smith believed in equal opportunities for women, an important consideration for a suffragette like May Belle, who was very active in the women's movement of her day, sometimes taking the young Mitchell girl with her to the meetings when necessary rather than miss a meeting. May Belle encouraged Mitchell to acquire an education, but she stifled her choices of colleges. Pyron says May Belle's decision was so firm in her belief in Smith College that "She required no campus visit" (81). So, Mitchell was packed off to college. Her mother settled her into her apartment house with the other Smith students and left, leaving Mitchell alone without family for the first time in her life. Neither realized that this would be the last time Mitchell would see her mother alive. Mitchell's world suffered an explosion when May Belle died from influenza during the epidemic on January 25, 1919. Pyron confirms that "Mitchell always imagined herself as something of an emotional orphan, but her mother's death guaranteed this state; she froze, by her own reckoning, into something like permanent childhood" (93). The trauma of May Belle's death finds its way into one of the most heart-wrenching scenes in the novel. Just as Mitchell's

mother died before she could make it home from college, Scarlett's mother Ellen also dies before she can get back to Tara.

Just as Yeats found a mother in Lady Gregory whose care and patronage allowed him to relive his childhood, Mitchell also found such a person in John Marsh, whom she married on July 4, 1925. Mitchell's marriage to Marsh follows a disastrous, short-lived marriage to Berrien "Red" Upshaw, another explosion. After completing her freshman year at Smith, Mitchell returned home to be the keeper of the large house on Peachtree Street for her father and Stephens. However, her hopes of becoming as special in her father's eyes as her mother had been were never realized. She fulfilled her duties as housekeeper, but she never relished the position. The house personified May Belle and was as demanding and cold. Pyron describes Mitchell's relationship to her mother's house:

The big white house on Peachtree Street conspired against her. It was her mother's in almost every way. May Belle Mitchell had been the one to insist upon the cool, neoclassical exterior. The furniture was hers; its placement, too. She filled the place with her own family heirlooms, like the huge Empire sideboard that had graced the Fitzgerald dining room at Rural Home. But it was hers, of course, in other ways. She commanded the table. She filled the larders. She oversaw the servants. More, as woman, wife, and mother, she dominated and defined this house as Home. Now she was gone. Yet her spirit remained almost as powerful as her presence had been. It lurked in the corners and filled the air. (100)

As Pyron demonstrates, the physical structure, arrangement, and even the atmosphere of the house took on May Belle's qualities. Everywhere Mitchell looked, she saw her mother.

Inadvertently, her father added to the discomfort Mitchell experienced in the house because he

kept the temperature very low to save on heating bills. The coolness of the air was a constant reminder of the distance between Mitchell and her mother even after her death.

Strikingly different, Mitchell and John's apartment was much smaller than the Big House Mitchell had once lived in. Here, no overriding presence of May Belle haunted her. The walls of the tiny apartment held her in their tight embrace. Because the apartment was so small, she could afford to keep it as toasty as she pleased. Adding to its warmth was John's loving presence, making it a nurturing womb-like space from which she could produce her novel. Mitchell's experience with John and "The Dump" as the tiny apartment was affectionately named parallels Yeats's need for his nurturing environment provided by Lady Gregory and Coole Park. With John, Pyron confirms that Mitchell found that "She could do no wrong for him. His wife, in turn, found in the kindly copy editor an endless source of tenderness, attention, nurture, and encouragement. He was the self-effacing, selfless mother whom May Belle Mitchell could never completely be, at least to her only daughter" (202). Mitchell found complete acceptance with John. For the remainder of their lives together, they lived only in apartments. Although they were financially challenged when they first married, obviously they could have lived much as they pleased with the returns from book sales and the movie rights. Unlike Yeats, who came to view the Big House as the source of comfort, Mitchell came to view the Big House as a representation of her mother and the troubles she experienced in her mother's house.

For Yeats and Mitchell, the Big House becomes the mother in different ways. WB finds nurturing in the Big House, while Mitchell finds great emptiness and coldness. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard writes in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1958), "the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (6). Indeed, Yeats finds Coole Park to be that place.

However, Mitchell's *Big House* does not offer peace. In the terms of Bachelard's discourse on the phenomenology of the house, Mitchell "reads" her mother's house differently. To create, Mitchell needs a place that is warm and safe—a refuge. Bachelard claims that "Being starts with well-being" (104) and that "well-being takes us back to the primitiveness of the refuge. Physically, the creature endowed with a sense of refuge, huddles up to itself, takes to cover, hides away, lies snug, concealed" (92). Bachelard's description of the refuge offered by a nest aptly describes the way Mitchell dwells in her tiny warm dark basement apartment. While recovering from a leg injury there, she develops the sense of well-being necessary for her novel to come to fruition.

Ironically, Yeats wrote his poetic series "Meditations in Time of Civil War," which includes the poem "Ancestral Houses," from a small space in Thoor Ballylee just as Mitchell wrote her *Big House* novel from a tiny apartment. Yeats' tower was his refuge during the Irish Civil War. In fact, the Yeats family was stranded with no news from the outside for about six months as the war raged over the countryside. Unlike Edgeworth and Somerville and Ross, who wrote about the house from the inside, Yeats and Mitchell write from outside the *Big House*. Both found Bachelard's "nest" necessary to write about the larger space—the *Big House*.

Both middle-class citizens—Yeats and Mitchell—and aristocrats—Edgeworth and Somerville and Ross—write about the demise of the *Big Houses*. However, as we shall see, their motivations for writing about the *Big House* come from different places. Understandably, the aristocrats wrote their stories from firsthand experience of the unrest directed at them, the decline in their rental incomes, and the struggle to survive.

Neither Yeats nor Mitchell ever owned a *Big House*, yet both chose to chronicle the story of *Big Houses* and their occupants. Life experiences attuned Yeats and Mitchell to the

complexities of dwelling in the Big House. Family stories of a lost golden past along with the quest for love and affection from their mothers also inspired them to write. The attempts by both the aristocrats and the middle class most likely represent attempts at healing through writing. For the aristocrats, the loss was more immediate; for Yeats and Mitchell, the loss occurred to someone else or somewhere in the past. For Yeats, Coole represents what might have been. For Mitchell, Tara represents what she had hoped her mother's Big House would become—a place of refuge.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BIG HOUSE

Mitchell fully intended to write *Gone with the Wind* with an Irish undercurrent. In a letter dated July 8, 1939, Mitchell writes to Gilbert Govan, who reviewed *Gone with the Wind* in the July 5, 1936, *Chattanooga Times*, in response to his comment about Gerald O'Hara's need to own land to feel secure, "No one else picked that up; no one seemed to think of it or to notice it. And that depressed me for while I didn't hammer on it I meant it for an undercurrent" (23). Actually, the Irish undercurrent is more like a riptide. Because the novel's Irishness flows along so smoothly with the story, it operates practically unnoticed below the surface. But the novel's Irishness is what prevents it from fitting neatly into a genre. Because Scarlett is Irish, she runs across the prevailing Southern current. She treats slaves a little differently from most Southerners, and she becomes a larger than life man-woman warrior who fights for and saves Tara. One reason Mitchell may have downplayed the novel's Irishness by calling it an undercurrent is because she liked to be first, or the best. Since so few people mentioned the novel's Irishness, she may have thought she had not executed that aspect of the novel to its fullest. One reason that the novel's Irishness may have been overlooked is because the Irish were white and assimilated easier than blacks into the Southern culture. However, the novel's Irishness cannot be ignored to fully appreciate it as a work of literature.

Surprisingly, despite *Gone with the Wind's* strong Irish undercurrent, it has not been compared to any of the Irish Big House literature or Irish mythology. Since Mitchell claims to have been familiar with Irish literature, she may have been influenced by Irish literature and mythology. Many of the Big House works were published in the decade preceding the publication of *Gone with the Wind*. Also, translations of *The Tain*, an ancient Irish epic, were

available at that time. Mentioned previously, Yeats won the Nobel Prize just before Mitchell began writing her novel. Also, he writes and publishes his *Tower* poems while Mitchell is writing her novel.

A strong need to tell the true story of the domestic disruption caused by the ruin of the Big House underlies all the works. Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, published in 1800, is the first of the Big House novels and documents the beginning of the end of the Irish Big House. The Potato Famine and various Land Acts put into place to appease the Irish after the rising in 1798 threw the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy into serious decline. Kate Cochran notes in her essay "The Plain Round Tale of Faithful Thady": *Castle Rackrent* as Slave Narrative" that "it seems clear from biographical accounts that Edgeworth considered *Castle Rackrent* an historical work" (70). Also, Edith Somerville and Martin Ross leave no doubt that *The Big House of Inver*, published in 1925, is an historiography because of the specific mention of Parliamentary acts with their dates in the text, along with accounts of the effects of those acts. Their concern with relating the domestic history results from the way history books record combat battles, but not the domestic battles. Likewise, Mitchell is especially concerned with historical accuracy. In a letter dated July 10, 1936, thanking historian Henry Steele Commager for his fine review, Mitchell writes, "I knew the history in my tale was as water proof [sic] and air tight as ten years of study and a lifetime of listening to participants would make it" (39). Her letter collection includes other missives responding to readers' questions about specific historical sites in the novel by directing them to the sources for her information. Also, Yeats's *Tower* collection includes a poetic series entitled "Meditations in Time of Civil War," published in 1928, which he writes while marooned at Thoor Ballylee during the Irish Civil War. The Big House and its downfall are still on Yeats's mind in 1939 when he publishes the play *Purgatory*. In their quest

to document the domestic history of the Big House, the authors discuss several topics that threaten to topple the Big House. This chapter will focus on the instability from within caused by miscegenation, as well as the exterior threats of landlord-tenant, landlord-servant and master-slave relationships, and the rise of the middle class as found in the literature, as well as its links to Irish mythology.

What follows in this chapter is an almost catalog-like documentation of miscegenation, an in depth exploration of Irish landlord-servant and/or landlord-tenant relationships compared to Mitchell's master-slave relationship, the threat of the middle class as it appears in each work, and the Irish mythology found in *Gone with the Wind*. Although mythology is present in the Irish works, because it would be expected to be found there, it is not explored as it is in *Gone with the Wind* because Irish mythology would not necessarily be expected to appear in an American novel. Some may question why mythology is included in the house section. It is included there because it bears importantly on Mitchell's novel about Scarlett and her efforts to save the Southern Big House. It should be mentioned that this presentation of themes in catalog fashion is not extremely different from the novels themselves as they present their multiple themes and stories alongside each other. Additionally, this side-by-side comparison lines up the themes, promoting a clearer reading of Mitchell's novel as a close relation to the Irish novels. Below, each theme is cordoned by a section heading beginning with miscegenation and ending with Irish mythology.

Miscegenation

A prevailing theme throughout the Irish Big House literature, as well as *Gone with the Wind*, is miscegenation. While the word *miscegenation* is most often used in reference to marriages between races, especially blacks and whites, it should be remembered that the English

considered the Irish to be of a different and inferior race. Like blacks, the Irish were often portrayed with simian features. All of the authors are concerned with the effect of the mixing of blood between aristocrats and peasants and the effect it has upon the aristocracy and the threat it poses to the Big House. Already mentioned, the term *house* is often used as a metaphor for the term *family*, so a reasonable argument is that the authors were ultimately concerned about the effect of miscegenation upon the family. None of the authors portray miscegenation in a positive light. Some may suggest that Mitchell's *Scarlett*, the offspring of an Irish peasant and a French aristocrat, is a positive presentation because Scarlett saves the Big House. However at the end of the novel, Scarlett is alone in her Big House, having lost or alienated everyone she loved.

Although published later than most other works concerned with miscegenation, Yeats's play *Purgatory* is presented first because it demonstrates so clearly the threat of miscegenation in its most basic form. Unlike some of the other works in which the authors present miscegenation in more concealed terms, Yeats's play is a very straightforward treatment of a family's experience with a marriage between an aristocrat and a peasant. In the notes on the play, Yeats's comments to Rev. Terence L. Connolly, head of the English department at Boston College, explain his thoughts when writing the play:

In my play, a spirit suffers because of its share, when alive, in the destruction of an honoured house; that destruction is taking place all over Ireland to-day.

Sometimes it is the result of poverty, but more often because a new individualistic generation has lost interest in the ancient sanctities.... In some few cases a house has been destroyed by a mesalliance. (2: 918)

While Yeats claims that miscegenation causes the downfall of "some few cases," his claim does not explain the prevalence of the theme in the literature of the Big House.

In addition to Yeats's comments in his *Autobiographies* about some observations that he attributes to miscegenation in response to seeing Edward Martyn's home Tillyra Castle, his *Memoirs* also take up the topic of miscegenation in regard to Martyn. Yeats believes that "Edward Martyn's clumsy body, where one already saw that likeness to a parish priest now so plain, the sign of his mother's peasant blood" (100) is a direct result of his birth. Furthermore, Yeats attributes the physical appearance of the house to the peasant element and describes it as lacking in taste, something that Martyn's mother would not be able to discern because of her peasant background. Yeats reasons that because peasants lack taste, which demonstrates their absence of shared knowledge with the aristocracy, they are not capable of dwelling in the aristocratic house—they are not worthy of the house. The middle-class Yeats's elitist ideas about miscegenation most likely begin at his Pollexfen grandparents' home and receive further reinforcement from his experiences at Coole Park, where "the best [was] knit to the best" ("Upon a House shaken by the Land Agitation" 7).

Yeats's *Purgatory* demonstrates his personal belief concerning the effect of miscegenation. Written and first performed in 1938, the play presents a striking demonstration of the consequences of miscegenation on the house. The play consists of two actors, a father called Old Man and a son called Boy, who travel in a manner that the son considers aimless wandering. However, the Old Man intentionally leads his son back to the house of his youth so that he can witness the anniversary of the event that he thinks caused the demise of the house. In the fourth line of the play, the son is commanded to "Study that house." Two different visions of the house present themselves in this scene. The Old Man sees the house as it looks before its destruction. The house the boy sees is ruined, and he asks, "The big old house that was burnt down?"(45). The two visions of the house allow the Old Man to explain the events that lead to its demise:

My mother that was your grand-dam owned it,
 This scenery and this countryside,
 Kennel and stable, horse and hound—
 She had a horse at the Curragh, and there met
 My father, a groom in a training stable;
 Looked at him and married him.

.....

And he squandered everything she had. (2: 46-56)

Because the Old Man's mother marries beneath her, she causes the downfall of the house. She also suffers her own downfall as she dies giving birth to the misfit child now the Old Man. Yeats accuses the peasant husband with a more serious offense than merely squandering the house away: "But he killed the house; to kill a house / Where great men grew up, married, died / I here declare a capital offence" (73-5). The peasant father kills the Old Man's mother by impregnating her with his peasant seed, causing her death because she cannot survive the birth of a peasant child, and later kills the house by fire when the Old Man is sixteen. As the house burns, Old Man stabs his father and throws his body in the flames, but this sacrifice is not enough to atone for the evil and stop the downward fall of the family. As if doomed to repeat the sins of his father, the Old Man begets his son "Upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch" (89).

The Old Man needs to stop the pattern of miscegenation—the pattern of destruction. Believing that souls in Purgatory return to the scene of their transgressions to relive them time after time, the Old Man thinks that if he can stop the pattern his mother put in motion, he can bring an end to the re-enactment of the scene of the wedding night that begins the downfall of the house. To stop the pattern, Old Man kills his son because "He would have struck a woman's

fancy/Begot, and passed pollution on.” (205-6). By bringing an end to the line of descendants, the Old Man hopes to release his mother’s soul from Purgatory and put her at rest.

In a fashion very different from Yeats’s strikingly bold play, Edgeworth demonstrates a more subtle approach to the problem of miscegenation and the Big House. The end of the Big House in *Castle Rackrent* begins when the house is inherited by the O’Shaughlins after the former owner Sir Tallyhoo Rackrent is killed in an accident during a hunt. The O’Shaughlins are the next in line to inherit; however, they must change their name first, “which Sir Patrick O’Shaughlin at the time took sadly to heart, they say, but thought better of it afterwards, seeing how large a stake depended upon it, that he should by the act of parliament, take and bear the surname and arms of Rackrent” (66). Edgeworth includes an explanation in her notes that explains “Sir Patrick’s change of surname may have been accompanied by or represent a change of religion. By the harsh penal laws enacted against Irish Catholics in 1690, a Catholic could not inherit land from a Protestant unless he conformed to the Church of Ireland” (348). Since Thady also brags that the O’Shaughlins were “related to the kings of Ireland” (66), they most likely were Catholic and native Irish. Also, for the O’Shaughlins to be next in line to inherit from the Rackrents indicates a familial connection and a misalliance somewhere in the Rackrent family tree.

Throughout the course of events, Thady witnesses the property pass through the hands of three Rackrents. Sir Patrick, the O’Shaughlin turned Rackrent, lived before Thady’s time and died from drink. Sir Murtaugh, the first Rackrent Thady remembers, has a temper and dies of a stroke in a fit of anger. Sir Kit dies from a gunshot over a gambling dispute. The last Rackrent dies from drink after he had lost the estate to Jason Quirk. All the Rackrents’ efforts to be aristocrats come to no good end. Like the Rackrent men, the Rackrent marriages bear no fruit.

No children are born in Castle Rackrent after Sir Murtaugh, who is the only son to inherit the house from his father, Sir Patrick. As evidenced by the outcomes of the Rackrents, Edgeworth believed that aristocracy comes by blood and cannot be acquired through wealth alone.

Like Edgeworth, Somerville and Ross were landed gentry and experienced the destabilization of Irish politics from within the Big House. Because of warring factions, the Edgeworths had been forced to flee their home on at least one occasion. The instability for the Anglo-Irish continued with waves of violence. Maurice Collis writes in his biography *Somerville and Ross* that in 1880 “the carriage was stoned when she [Somerville] and her mother were returning home” (33). Collis quotes a passage from Martin Ross’s June 1888 diary, in which she mentions a difference in the tenants, describing them as “really devoted, but there is a change and I can feel it” (55). Although the Land Acts of the early twentieth century decimated the Big House class by greatly reducing rental income, Somerville and Ross also blame miscegenation as a cause of the decline. Collis describes the family of the St. Georges, who were once an aristocratic family and most likely the model for *The Big House of Inver*:

In the early days the St. Georges were very grand, but in the late eighteenth century they abandoned their aristocratic tradition and let the semi-barbarism of their remote situation engulf them. They made alliances with the village girls, dispensed with legitimacy and lived in squalor, crowded into the big house. (163)

By the time Somerville and Ross write *The Big House of Inver*, Tyrone House—the Big House of the St. Georges—lay in ruins, long deserted.

Much like the St. Georges, the Predevilles of *The Big House of Inver* became too much like the native Irish. The Big House of Inver belongs to the Predevilles who have been in Ireland since the Normans invaded in the year 1166. The problem begins when Beauty Kit is

struck down by smallpox at the age of twenty-eight. Following his death, his aristocratic wife Lady Isabella shuts herself away with her grief and pride in the Big House. As a result, the children do not have access to the social life of normal aristocratic children. Lady Isabella's punishment for not cultivating aristocratic sensibilities in her children and making them available to marry into other aristocratic families is to live long enough to see "her only son, Nicholas, marry the daughter of one of the Inver gamekeepers, and her two daughters, Isabella and Nesta, go off with two of her own grooms" (4). Neither the son's marriage nor the daughters' relationships with the grooms are alliances that increase the family's wealth or position in society and result in the endangerment of the estate. More seriously, these misalliances begin a downward spiral of decline. The downfall continues for "Five successive generations of mainly half-bred and wholly profligate Predevilles [who] rioted out their short lives in the Big House, living with country women, fighting, drinking, gambling" (4). Born in 1824, Shibby's father Jasper Christopher is the "seventh in descent from Robert the Builder" (4), who built the Big House in the "last years of the reign of Queen Anne"⁷ (1). One generation of Predeville misalliances began the loss of wealth and the estate, and resulted in over one hundred years of mixing the blood of aristocracy with commoners so that the aristocratic blood becomes diluted. The Big House reflects this mixing of blood as Jasper's mother patches the roof with "a makeshift patching of thatch" (9). This is a telling description because Big Houses usually have roofs of slate, while thatch usually covers the poorest cottage or cabin of the peasant.

Mitchell's Scarlett is also the result of miscegenation. Scarlett's mother Ellen Robillard comes from an aristocratic Savannah family. She marries Gerald O'Hara, an Irishman who flees Ireland after killing his landlord's agent. Mitchell divulges that the marriage came about after

⁷ Queen Anne reigned from 1702 to 1714.

Ellen's cousin Philippe left Savannah, taking Ellen's love and youth with him. Obviously, the marriage is no love match, and Gerald "knew that it was no less than a miracle that he, an Irishman with nothing of family and wealth to recommend him, should win the daughter of one of the wealthiest and proudest families on the Coast" (42). Mitchell emphasizes the fact that "Gerald was a self-made man" (42). Like Gerald, Scarlett becomes an unusual self-made woman. Throughout the novel, Mitchell repeats the message that Scarlett is the way she is because of her Irish peasant father. Ellen's girlhood friend Kitty Bonnell from Savannah accuses, "But Ellen must run off and marry old man O'Hara and have a daughter like Scarlett" (862). Scarlett knows that her mother's sister "thought she was a child of a *mésalliance* ... [and] apologized for her behind her back" (136). Perhaps the most colorful accusation is made to Scarlett by Mammy:

But Ah ain' never thought ter say it ter none of Miss Ellen's blood. But, Miss Scarlett, lissen ter me. You ain't nuthin' but a mule in hawse harness. You kin polish a mule's feets an' shine his hide an' put brass all over his harness an' hitch him ter a fine cah'ige. But he a mule jes' de same. He doan fool nobody. An' you is jes' de same. You got silk dresses an' de mills an' de sto' and de money, an' you give yo'seff airs lak a fine hawse, but you a mule jes' de same. (845)

Although Scarlett is not barren like a mule, she is still powerless to bear a male heir to carry on the O'Hara name. Gerald is also punished for marrying out of his class as all his sons die, leaving him the last O'Hara. Even Belle Watling, a prominent Atlanta madam, levies judgment against Scarlett in a conversation with Melanie, in which she tells her, "But Miz Kennedy—well she just ain't in the same class with you, Miz Wilkes" (820). All of the people around Scarlett know that she is not true planter aristocracy because her father Gerald is an Irish peasant.

All of the Irish writers are concerned about the role of miscegenation upon the downfall of the aristocracy. From Edgeworth's subtle presentation in 1800 to Yeats's assertive demonstration of miscegenation in 1938, all pursue the theme of polluted blood as a cause of the destruction of the Big House. The Irish-American Mitchell also takes up the theme and demonstrates the effects of miscegenation on the Southern Big House. Scarlett's Irishness determines her motivations to save the plantation. Although Scarlett saves Tara, her unusual behavior, a result of her misfit nature caused by her mixed birth, allows her to fit neither with the slaves, other whites, nor with the Southern aristocrats, leaving her alone at the end of the novel. To understand Scarlett and her role in the novel, it is necessary to see her in light of the Irish peasant rather than the Southern belle that she initially appears to be.

Although Scarlett is unlike any other character in *Gone with the Wind*, she finds compatriots in women from the Irish Big House novels. Charlotte from the Somerville and Ross novel *The Real Charlotte* and Shibby from *The Big House of Inver*, also a Somerville and Ross novel, are very forceful women. These Irish women also talk politics and business with men just as the Irish-American Scarlett does. Charlotte is involved in real estate, bent on acquiring land. Shibby is a businesswoman in her own right, selling the pigs and fowl she produces on the rundown estate, all the while trying to restore her family to their former glory in their Big House. While space will not allow a full exploration of these women here, a future study should explore Irish women and the Irish-American Scarlett in light of Irish mythology, especially Maeve, an Irish warrior goddess.

Servants, Tenants, and Slaves

Mitchell has been criticized for her unrealistic treatment of the slaves in *Gone with the Wind*. For this reason, the Irish tenants/servants, as well as the African slaves, will be examined

closely to discern any possible connections. Many have accused Mitchell of portraying the Southern planters as unusually fond of and kind to their slaves. Since most of the novel's interactions between masters and slaves occur between Scarlett and the slaves, the fact that Scarlett is the daughter of an Irish peasant is significant. Scarlett cannot impose the master-slave discourse as her mother Ellen does and must resort to physical violence with Prissy, who still does not yield to Scarlett. In the scene with Prissy and the cow, Scarlett is the one who finally ties the cow to the wagon. Mammy and Uncle Peter also refuse to yield to all of Scarlett's demands. Because of Scarlett's peasant qualities, she is a strange combination of family daughter and servant-slave, a familial combination—implied or in fact—very much like Irish servants.

Because the Irish servants and tenants are not normally considered in the same light as slaves, an in-depth look at these characters is necessary. While the works of Yeats do not involve servants, the aristocrats Edgeworth and Somerville and Ross both portray their servants as slave-like. Somerville and Ross even go as far as labeling them as slaves in the text.

Prior to investigating the servants and tenants of *Castle Rackrent*, an examination of the Edgeworth family will be performed so as to appreciate their Protestant Ascendancy perspective toward tenants and servants. Upon permanently moving his family to their Irish estate in Edgeworthstown in 1782, Elizabeth's father Richard Lovell Edgeworth immediately began to reform his relationship with his tenants. He realized that life for Irish Catholic tenants was hard but felt that they must be controlled or chaos would result, causing the collapse of the aristocratic society. In an effort to make life better for the tenants, he dismissed the overseer and collected rents himself. However, his ideas about governing the estate, as well as governing the country, carried little weight with other landlords who had no other concern than how they could extract more profit from their tenants. While some Irish Catholics had made small gains in economic

progress during this time, in his *A History of Ireland* Mike Cronin affirms that the majority had nothing to “produce or sell on a large scale; for those who lived hand to mouth, nothing changed” (101). Poor and non-land owning Catholics were still without a vote, leaving them powerless to make any real changes. To combat their sense of futility, they formed small militia groups and attacked other militia groups. Influenced by the French Revolution, many Irish took part in the rising in 1798 that resulted in the loss of many lives, the destruction of homes and crops, the loss of the Irish Parliament, and a forced union with England. For all Edgeworth’s ideas about landlord-tenant reform, he still believed that Union with England would be best for Ireland, and, writes Michael Hurst in *Maria Edgeworth and the Public Scene*, “Maria too accepted this as both valid and desirable” (33). Mistakenly, Maria felt confident that her father’s paternalistic approach would offer greater control over the tenants, while also appeasing them and making them less likely to cause another uprising. Even if Edgeworth’s reforms had been adopted by other landlords, they would have done little to change the basic circumstances for Irish Catholics, who would still be poor with no means to self-determination and, therefore, very much like slaves.

A useful exercise at this point would be to look at the terms *tenant*, *servant*, and *slave*. The term *tenant* refers to a self-sufficient renter who pays to rent property, while the term *servant* refers to a person who receives a wage for performing a service. Slaves are the property of another person and receive no payment for their labor. Lacking all forms of freedom, they must submit to the demands of the owner. When compared with Mitchell’s novel and its slavery, the Irish novels tend to blur the lines between the terms since the authors often refer to the Irish as slaves. If instituted, the reforms advocated by the Edgeworths would have tightened the English landlords’ control over the tenants, making the relationship more like that of a master-

slave than landlord-tenant relationship. Although the later novels sometimes reference the slave-like nature of the Irish servants or tenants, they show a different relationship between landlords and tenants, most likely resulting from changes in Irish politics and the fact that Edgeworth wrote her novel prior to the Potato Famine that essentially eliminated the peasant population.

Edgeworth's foundational Big House novel treats the landlord-tenant (or landlord-servant relationship since we are not sure which Thady really is) in a paternalistic fashion and portrays Thady as being very dependent and childlike. For example, Sir Murtaugh is very litigious, and Thady claims that he "used to boast that he had a lawsuit for every letter of the alphabet" (70). However, the family never gains enough money from these lawsuits to continue without selling some of the land from the estate, and Thady confides that he "could not help grieving when he [Sir Murtaugh] sent me to post up notices of the sale of the fee-simple of the lands and appurtenances" (70). Like a father comforting a grieving child, Sir Murtaugh explains to Thady, "I know, honest Thady," says he, to comfort me, 'what I'm about better than you do.'" Sir Murtaugh treats Thady as an innocent, but Thady is no innocent. While his landlords practically ignore Thady, who is as much a part of the house as the walls, Thady observes and learns the legal language as does his son Jason. Thady claims to be loyal to the family, but his actions betray him as he and Jason manipulate and share information that enables Jason to acquire the estate through small parcels.

Although Thady claims to be telling the story of the Rackrents out of loyalty to the family, his first statement calls his loyalty into question. Thady begins his tale with a long statement where he delineates his purpose for telling the story:

Having, out of friendship for the family, upon whose estate, praised be Heaven! I and mine have lived rent-free, time out of mind, voluntarily undertaken to publish

the Memoirs of the Rackrent family, I think it my duty to say a few words, in the first place, concerning myself. (65)

Some critics question whose story he is really telling. Some take “honest Thady” at his word, while others think he is subverting the tale of the Rackrents to tell his own story. Also, the mention of living “rent-free” implies either a family or slave relationship, as usually only the family and the slaves are able to live on an estate free of rent—all others must pay.

To the English, the fundamental message of the rising in 1798 was that the Irish were disloyal and not to be trusted. Edgeworth demonstrates the threat to the aristocracy from the peasants by using Thady’s subversive voice. Susan Glover does not think Thady is so trustworthy. In her essay “Glossing the Unvarnished Tale: Contra-dicting Possession in *Castle Rackrent*,” she explicates Thady’s first sentence:

The first phrase, “out of friendship for the family” has helped to establish the received view of Thady’s devotion to the Rackrent family. However, if his opening sentence is unraveled and syntactically re-ordered, beginning with the principal clause, it reads, “I think it my duty to say a few words, in the first place, concerning myself ... having ... voluntarily undertaken to publish the Memoirs of the Rackrent Family.” We see that the subject of the sentence, as it will be of the subsequent narrative, is “I,” and the subject of his discourse is “myself.” (301)

After the English wrested control from the Irish Parliament, Thady should not have been allowed to speak. Edgeworth demonstrates the error in allowing Thady to speak by showing that, given the opportunity, Thady usurps the control of the story, and the story of the Rackrents becomes the story of how the Quirks take land from the Rackrents.

Edgeworth believes a key element to controlling the Irish is the control of the language. Cochran believes that readers should read *CRR* as a slave narrative with Thady as the narrator because

[t]hinking of *Castle Rackrent* as an Irish slave narrative helps illuminate Edgeworth's motivations as a writer and historian: she records Thady's tale as instructive for an English readership just as American editors of slave narratives did for their northern readership, she mediates the narrative with an editorial presence, she establishes complex characterizations of both the peasantry and the Ascendancy class in the figures of Thady and Sir Condy, and she advocates a revised treatment of the English-ruled tenant system in Ireland. (57)

Thady's manipulations reveal the inability of the landlords or Irish squires to stop the subversive activities of the Irish. Consciously directing her novel to an English readership, Edgeworth instructs that if they are to control the future then they must control peasants like Thady by imposing the master/slave discourse.

Comparing Thady's tale to slave narratives also reveals other similarities between Thady and slaves. Regardless of what they think, slaves, especially house slaves, must maintain a certain sense of decorum around their masters. In all the novels, the tenant/servant/slave decorum is a subterfuge to cover true motives or feelings. Edgeworth shows Thady maintaining a sense of decorum after the death of his landlord Sir Murtaugh, who had married a woman from the family of Skinflints. She lives up to her name and is not a favorite of Thady's or the tenants. Sir Murtaugh leaves his widow a good inheritance, but Lady Murtaugh decides not to remain at Castle Rackrent. To maintain the necessary decorum, Thady arises at 3 a.m. to see her off. She gave him a perfunctory good-bye and "into the carriage she stept, without a word more, good or

bad, or even half a crown; but I made my bow and stood to see her safe out of sight for the sake of the family” (72). In this simple example, Thady’s decorum, like his claimed loyalty to the family, covers his real motive, which is to receive money from Lady Murtaugh.

Another characteristic Thady exhibits is the belief in superstition, which functions in the novels very much like decorum. If tenants/servants/slaves claim to be afraid of performing some task because it will bring bad luck, most likely they will be relieved from performing the task. Some would say that the Irish are just naturally superstitious. Regardless, Thady’s superstition becomes evident as he blames Sir Murtaugh’s early death on his having dug up a “fairy-mount against my advice” (71). In a note, Edgeworth explains that fairy-mounts are “held in high reverence by the common people of Ireland ... [who believe] vengeance of the fairies would fall upon the head of the presumptuous mortal, who first disturbed them in their retreat” (71). Although the text does not report why the landlord Sir Murtaugh is digging up the fairy mount instead of the servant Thady, most likely Sir Murtaugh asked Thady to dig it up, and Thady claimed to be afraid to do so because of his superstitious belief in fairies and bad luck.

By the time *The Big House of Inver* is published in 1925, the Irish landscape has undergone many changes—one of which is the almost total disappearance of the Big House. Also, a War of Independence and a Civil War have taken place, resulting in a divided Ireland with one part still allied to the Union and the other part as the independent Republic of Ireland.

As in *Castle Rackrent*, different groups in *The Big House of Inver* are vying for ownership of the Big House. However, the terms of ownership are more complicated than in *Castle Rackrent*. The novel details the history of the Predevilles, “who built the Big House during the last years of the reign of Queen Anne” (1) and focuses particularly on an illegitimate female child—Shibby, whose birth is the result of the misalliance of her aristocratic father and

servant mother. Rather than two families competing for the house as in *Castle Rackrent*, four entities—the Predevilles, Shibby, the Weldons, and Sir Harold Burgrave, an Englishman—are competing for Inver House. By the time Shibby comes along, much of the estate has already been acquired from the Predevilles by the Weldons.

Like Thady, Shibby is presented in terms of the slave. Even though Shibby is a daughter in the house and tries to fulfill the role of daughter, she cannot because of her illegitimacy. Although Shibby also bears the name Isabella Predeville, the same name as the last grand dame of the house, she goes by the diminutive *Shibby Pindy*, which indicates her status as a lesser Predeville. Also, she is not paid as a servant would be. Somerville and Ross observe that “Shibby Pindy, Isabella Predeville, went through life, silently, without complaint, the servant of her father, making no claim on him, her single protest a proud refusal to take wages” (28). Because Shibby occupies a space somewhere between a daughter and a servant, her role represents the increasing complications of the Irish Big House. While Thady has no responsibility for managing the household money, Jasper gives Shibby the impoverished household purse with which to manage the household, and she performs her duty as an eldest daughter should. For the fact of her relationship was never forgotten, but for the old Captain [Jasper] it had passed into oblivion. For him Shibby had become quite simply, one of the basic facts of life, whose origin is neither questioned nor considered; like his house, his bed, his meals, the stick that he leaned on. (47-8)

Like Thady, Shibby is as much a part of the house as the walls. Because of the intermingling of blood between the aristocracy and the native Irish, Shibby’s place in the household is more complicated than Thady’s. Even though she is given more responsibility than Thady, she is given

no more notice for it. Shibby's only income comes from the pigs and chickens she keeps around the estate. Although Shibby's slave-like status may seem unusual since she lives with her father, her status is very much like other children of masters and slaves.

For example, the mention of eye color suggests Shibby's slave status. The particular shade of blue of the Predevilles eyes "were the blue eyes that heredity dealt out alike to Pindys and Predevilles" (45). Children of Negro slaves and their white masters often carried the eye color of their lighter skinned fathers. In a scene from Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's grandmother Nanny serves as a sexual partner for her master before she is freed. After the master leaves for the American Civil War, the mistress of the house comes to Nanny's cabin to see if the child Nanny recently bore shows any evidence of her husband's parentage. The mistress commands Nanny to remove the cover from the child so that she can see her. When Nanny removes the cover, the mistress shouts, "Nigger, whut's yo' baby doin' wid gray eyes and yaller hair?" (17). Like Nanny's child, Shibby has her father's eyes but not his privilege.

Slaves often serve as surrogate mothers for the children of their masters. Because the heirs of *Castle Rackrent* bear no children, Thady cannot be examined in this light. However, Shibby fulfills this role and is discovered to have "a passion for babies that had not before found an outlet. She took her half-brother in her arms with rapture that for all her self-control she could not hide, and became thenceforward his slave and his mother's most faithful ally and supporter" (29). The importance of this passage is the use of the word *slave* in context with the Irish. The use of this word is intentional because of the care Somerville and Ross took in choosing their words. Also, this passage connects Shibby to Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* because Mammy is Scarlett's slave and Ellen's "most faithful ally and supporter."

The previous passage from *The Big House of Inver* also makes reference to Shibby's self-control, which also links her to Thady and to slaves in general through the pretense of decorum to cover real intent. Perhaps the best example in *The Big House of Inver* is Shibby's composure after she hears the news that Maggie's body has been found. Having been the only one to witness Maggie's fall from the rock in the storm, Shibby feels some guilt as to whether her hands lost their grip on Maggie or whether she released her hold on her. Although Shibby most likely does not mean to kill Maggie, she does want her out of the way so Kit can marry the Weldons' daughter and restore the Big House to its demesne once again. She is tempted to tell her secret to one of her best friends, but "Then the long habit of secrecy mastered what she felt to be weakness. She told herself that there was no good in talking now" (257). Like Thady, Shibby manipulates and withholds her speech to accomplish her goals. Having rid the family of the threat from Maggie, nothing more need be said lest implications of wrong doing should complicate her plans.

Through Nesta, Shibby's half-sister, Somerville and Ross reveal more slave-like qualities. With the exception that Jasper married Nesta's mother, Shibby and Nesta are of similar parentage as both of their mothers had worked as servers in public houses. Also, Nesta's status is indicated as her name also becomes the diminutive Nessie. Like Shibby, Nessie has the Prendeville blue eyes, does housekeeping, and is compared to a slave as "She was of those whose inveterate unselfishness can only be explained by the theory of a heredity of slave ancestresses" (43). Here again, Somerville and Ross are using the word *slave* to describe the Irish. Additionally, Nessie is superstitious as are Shibby and Thady. Just before Kit is to compete in the horserace, Nessie reveals that "Shibby tossed Kit's cup for him last night and she said she

saw luck for a horse!” (95). Consulting tea leaves reveals both Shibby’s and Nessie’s belief in superstition, a belief that again links them to Thady.

Maggie Connor deserves a quick look because of her relationship to Kit, the half-brother of Shibby and the brother of Nessie. Though Foxy Mag, as Maggie is called, does not have an aristocratic father, her mother is very similar to Shibby and Nessie as she was “a product of the most degraded of Cloon’s many public houses” (79). Rather than dying in childbirth or soon after as Shibby’s and Nessie and Kit’s mothers did, Maggie’s mother is committed to an insane asylum prior to her death. Shibby wants to restore the family to its former aristocratic status, but she fears that Kit will repeat the family’s pattern of miscegenation with Maggie. However, the deed is done, and Maggie is pregnant with Kit’s child. In an action that parallels Shibby’s response to her father’s offer of pay, Maggie refuses to take the racing winnings from Kit screaming, “I’m not your negro slave! I’ll say what I like!” (115). Using the word *negro* in conjunction with the word *slave*, Somerville and Ross leave no doubt about the status of the Irish peasants. Kit attempts to exert the landlord-servant discourse as he expects Maggie to yield to him and take the money just as she yielded to him sexually. As in *Castle Rackrent*, the problem of controlling the native Irish speech arises in this scene, which reveals the many complications surrounding the Big House. Because of all the misalliances in Kit’s family prior to his birth, his aristocratic blood has been so diluted that he lacks the ability to impose the landlord/servant discourse. By using the term *slave* with Shibby, Nessie, and Maggie, Somerville and Ross point out their similarities to slaves. However through Maggie, Somerville and Ross show the futility of the Irish to throw off the cloak of the slave and to possess the Big House through Maggie’s death. In some ways Shibby shows the capability to impose the master-slave discourse, but she cannot because of her own native Irish blood.

Like Edgeworth, Mitchell also portrays slaves with a dual nature. However, even though Mitchell demonstrates a paternal protectiveness of the slaves, she disabuses the notion that slaves are untrustworthy. She demonstrates a prejudice and immediately refutes it. Just as Thady is no innocent, Uncle Peter is no “old pet” (672). Where Thady cannot be trusted, Uncle Peter is worthy of the utmost trust. Helen Deiss Irvin concurs in her essay “Gea in Georgia: A Mythic Dimension in *Gone with the Wind*” that “Despite the racist reputation of *Gone with the Wind* almost all of the slaves and former slaves in the novel are attractive, natural characters” (67). When Scarlett presents Pork, her father’s valet, with Gerald’s watch following his death, Pork says to Scarlett, “Ef you wuz jes’ half as nice ter w’ite folks as you is ter niggers, Ah spec de worl’ would treat you better” (722). Scarlett treats the slaves with more respect than most other slave owners showed them. Mitchell’s portrayal and treatment of slaves in the novel is most likely due to the influence of her Irish background and her awareness of the prejudice suffered by the Irish.

In a scene involving Scarlett’s and Uncle Peter’s abuse at the hands of some Northern women, Mitchell exposes the prejudices of Northerners against the Irish, Southerners, and blacks. O’Connell argues that “those who take offense at this or that passing remark in *Gone with the Wind* about a black character or black folks in general, should recall that the Irish also take their lumps in precisely the same way in *Gone with the Wind*” (15). Mitchell also uses this scene to expose the damage that many Southerners felt was caused the South by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in portraying all Southern whites as the types of people who kept “bloodhounds ... to track down runaway slaves” (670). In a letter written by Mitchell to Mr. Alexander L. May of Berlin, Germany, dated July 22, 1938, she writes, “It makes me very happy

to know that ‘Gone With the Wind’ is helping refute the impression of the South which people abroad gained from Mrs. Stowe’s book” (217).

In the aforementioned scene, Aunt Pittypat’s former slave Uncle Peter stays on to work for her after the end of the Civil War. Torn between his unhappiness with Scarlett’s masculine activity and his concern for her safety, he drives Scarlett around Atlanta as she conducts business for her sawmill,⁸ an inappropriate activity for women at that time and frowned upon by whites and blacks alike. In the course of her business, Scarlett is often bombarded with questions about Southerners from the Yankee women, who accept “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as revelation second only to the Bible” (670). A Yankee woman, referring to her Irish nurse maid as Bridget—the racial slur often used for female Irish servants—relates that “My nurse, my Bridget, has gone back North” (671), and she wants to know where she can find another. In response to this slur and with “coolness in her voice,” Scarlett informs her that there are “no Irish servants in Atlanta.” Here Mitchell is exposing the stereotypical view of Irish as servant and then refutes the prejudice. Instead, Scarlett recommends a black servant to which the Yankee woman responds, “Goodness, no! I wouldn’t have one in my house.” Later in the encounter, a woman from Maine confesses, “They give me the creeps. I wouldn’t trust one of them ...” (672) and goes on to call Uncle Peter an “old pet.” Uncle Peter sits beside an already fuming Scarlett and listens to all the comments but never utters a word. As a tear rolls down Uncle Peter’s face, Scarlett is overcome with feeling for the old man and “[i]nstantly 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” (673). For Scarlett, whose brutality to her own children is repeatedly noted in the novel,

⁸ Scarlett bears a strong resemblance to the assertive Charlotte in the Somerville and Ross novel *The Real Charlotte*. Like Charlotte, Scarlett enters into business deals and political discussions with men.

this display of emotion is indicative of something deeper. Empathy does not come naturally for Scarlett; however, because of her Irish peasant blood, she is instantly empathetic for Uncle Peter, as she has just experienced a biting racial slur herself. Like most readers who focus only on the white prejudice toward blacks in the novel, Uncle Peter is unaware of the prejudice toward the Irish in the racial slur that Scarlett has just experienced. Just as she immediately refutes the Irish ethnic slur, Scarlett refutes the prejudice of the child-like slave associated with Uncle Peter. She shows Uncle Peter to be as responsible as any man “who had held his master in his arms when he died, who had raised Melly and Charles and looked after the feckless, foolish Pittypat, ‘per-tecked’ her when she refugeed,” (673) and she allows Uncle Peter to speak in his own defense. Scarlett responds to Uncle Peter with the claim that “Nobody but the Angel Gabriel could have done better,” which is high praise coming from Scarlett.

As in *Castle Rackrent* and *The Big House of Inver*, *Gone with the Wind* demonstrates the need for decorum in the house slaves of the South. Mammy holds the reigns on the O’Hara girls, especially Scarlett. Mitchell’s description of Mammy explains how this sense of decorum is cultivated:

[Mammy] was shining black, pure African, devoted to her last drop of blood to the O’Haras, Ellen’s mainstay, the despair of her three daughters, the terror of the other house servants. Mammy was black, but her code of conduct and her sense of pride were as high as or higher than that of her owners. She had been raised in the bedroom of Solange Robillard, Ellen O’Hara’s mother, a dainty, cold, high-nosed Frenchwoman, who spared neither her children nor her servants their just punishment for any infringement of decorum. (23).

Mammy has been trained in the lessons of decorum from birth, and her rules are laced as tight as the strings she uses to cinch Scarlett's waist. Numerous examples exist throughout the novel where Mammy asserts herself when the name of the family is threatened due to a lack of attention to, or a blatant disregard for, the numerous societal rules in the plantation South. In just one of many examples, Scarlett refuses to eat the traditional meal at home before attending the Wilkes' barbecue because she had not been able to eat even a spoonful of ice cream "brought all the way from Savannah" (76) at a previous party. Proper decorum for unmarried ladies at this time required that they eat very small meals at social events, so young ladies always ate a meal before they left home. Mammy could see that her authority was in question, and

[a]t this defiant heresy, Mammy's brow lowered with indignation. What a young miss could do and what she could not do were as different as black and white in Mammy's mind....

"Ef you doan care'bout how folks talks 'bout dis fambly, Ah does," she rumbled. "Ah ain' gwine stand by an' have eve'ybody at de pahty sayin' how you ain' fotched up right. Ah has tole you an' tole you dat you kin allus tell a lady by dat she eat lak a bird. An' Ah ain' aimin' ter have you go ter Mist' Wilkes' an eat lak a fe'el han' an' gobble lak a hawg." (76-7)

Not only does Mammy keep the corset strings tight on the O'Hara household; she also subscribes to an elevated level of decorum for herself. Even when she disagrees with her mistress, she never belabors the point. In the scene where Ellen returns from the Slatterys' house where she helps deliver and baptize a dead baby, Ellen claims not to be hungry even though it is far past the normal dinner hour. Mammy insists that she eat and leaves the room. The family can hear her grumbling as she goes to the kitchen about Miss Ellen's "weahin' herseff out waitin' on folks dat

did dey be wuth shootin' dey'd have niggers ter wait on dem" (65). However, she is not being disrespectful as Mammy knows the proper decorum for the slaves, as well as the whites, and

Mammy had her own method of letting her owners know exactly where she stood on all matters. She knew it was beneath the dignity of quality white folks to pay the slightest attention to what a darky said when she was just grumbling to herself. She knew that to uphold this dignity, they must ignore what she said, even if she stood in the next room and almost shouted. (65)

Like Thady and Shibby, Southern slaves resort to subterfuge to make their feelings known while also maintaining a level of decorum that allows them to live in harmony with their masters.

Interestingly, Scarlett, Gerald and Prissy are the only characters to demonstrate a belief in superstition. Old Mr. Wilkes tells Scarlett that Gerald accused his wife Ellen of speaking "“a wee word in the beast's ear”" (316) when Gerald's horse refused to jump a fence, preventing him from joining the defense of Atlanta. During the flight from Atlanta to Tara during the Siege of Atlanta, Prissy sees a cow and thinks it is a ghost (400). Scarlett's superstition is exposed when Ashley speaks of his possible death in the war as she experienced a moment when

[g]oose bumps came out all over her and fear swamped her, a superstitious fear she could not combat with reason. She was Irish enough to believe in second sight, especially where death premonitions were concerned, and in his wide gray eyes she saw some deep sadness which she could only interpret as that of a man who has felt the cold finger on his shoulder, has heard the wail of the Banshee. (274)

The belief in superstition by Gerald and Scarlett associates them with the lower classes—Prissy in *Gone with the Wind*, Shibby and Nessie in *The Big House of Inver*, as well as Thady in *Castle*

Rackrent. In relating Gerald and Scarlett to the lower classes through their belief in superstition, Mitchell also reinforces her ideas concerning the effect of miscegenation.

Although Mitchell never owned a slave, her great-grandparents, the Fitzgeralds, did. Most likely, she heard stories about the slaves from her relatives and other slave owners and developed her ideas about slavery from those stories. If she read the Irish Big House literature, she may also have taken some ideas from there. Because slaves figure so prominently in *Gone with the Wind* and because servants and tenants figure so prominently in the Irish Big House novel, a comparison of Irish servants and tenants and Southern slaves is required.

Although this catalogue of some major incidents from all the novels is very brief, it makes viable connections between the servant characters in the novels. This comparison reveals that Irish servants lived under slave-like conditions. Because Shibby as the daughter of the house in *The Big House of Inver* is also the servant of the house, Shibby informs the character of Scarlett in *Gone with the Wind*. Like Shibby, Scarlett is of mixed birth, she serves others in the house, she is superstitious, and she also tries to save the house. Because Scarlett is the main character dealing with slaves in *Gone with the Wind* and because her motivations are so related to her Irishness, she treats the slaves with more respect than would be expected of most master-slave relationships. An exception would be the Irishman Johnnie Gallegher. However, it must be remembered that Gallegher's charges were convicts, men accused of wrongdoing, and not slaves. Even here, Scarlett's Irish racial memory of hunger and the Potato Famine prompts her to defy Gallegher and feed the men. However when Gallegher threatens to quit running the mill, Scarlett backs away because Gallegher's quitting means a loss of money and ultimately threatens Tara. Mitchell's treatment of the slaves has caused her to be dismissed as a serious chronicler of plantation life in Georgia. However, Mitchell's treatment of slaves is complex. Finding so much

common ground when comparing slaves in *Gone with the Wind* to servants and tenants in Irish Big House novels indicates that Mitchell's approach to the treatment of slaves bears Irish influence and also offers a new reading of the master-slave relationship in *Gone with the Wind*.

The Rise of the Middle Class

As forecast by Edgeworth, the rise of the middle class represents a serious threat to the Anglo-Irish. As demonstrated in *Castle Rackrent*, Thady's son Jason Quirk quickly rises in status—a rise that parallels the decline of the Rackrents. Jason's last name indicates that he does not represent the normal economic progress of most in that he is a quirk—an anomaly—in rising in status faster than most, but he allows Edgeworth to show what is possible.

Like Daniel O'Connell, the “son of a Catholic landowner ...[who] was admitted to the bar in 1798” (Coohill 40), Jason becomes a lawyer, and because he understands the complicated landlord-tenant contracts, as well as the complicated process of transferring land ownership, he is able to take advantage of the Rackrents. As the years go by, Jason acquires all the land from the estate except for the jointure left by Sir Condy to his wife who left him to return to her family. Ruthlessly, after learning of Lady Rackrent's accident on her way home, Jason arrives so early that he awakens Sir Condy to tempt him with ready cash in the sum of three hundred golden guineas for the land that Lady Rackrent will not be able to inherit. Thady admits “the sight of the ready cash upon the bed worked with his honour...and [he] signed some paper Jason brought with him as usual” (117). The phrase *as usual* indicates that the practice of selling Rackrent property is a common practice between Sir Condy and Jason. From his humble beginnings as a clerk for the land agent left in charge by Sir Kit, who inherited the estate from his older brother Sir Murtaugh, to becoming the owner of the Rackrent estate, Jason progresses to the level of a

“high gentleman ... and having better than fifteen hundred a year, landed estate” (66) as Thady reports.

Over one hundred years later, Somerville and Ross document the end of one phase of the Anglo-Irish and the Big House as they succumb to the threat from the middle class. The threat to the Prendeilles comes from the Weldons. John Weldon, the overseer of the Prendeville estate, is reminiscent of Jason Quirk from *Castle Rackrent*. Like Jason, John is a lawyer and “had continued to ascend the social ladder in singularly direct relation to his employer’s descent” (24) and had rescued Jasper Prendeville financially on several occasions. The ways the middle class grab⁹ up property by making deals to their best advantage gained them the nickname of “the Grabbers” (43). John “grabs” the opportunity to make a lengthy lease agreement to his favor in price and duration on the estate demesne after Jasper encounters financial problems following the “Land League and the Famine of 1882” (24) and is able to purchase the demesne outright fifteen years later under the “Land Purchase Act of 1903” (53) also known as the Wyndham Act. As already mentioned, Yeats’s father John sold his land in 1888 under one of the earliest Land Acts—the Ashbourne Act. Interestingly, Somerville and Ross choose to use the word *revolutionized*, a term with military connotations, to describe the effects on the landscape of these far-reaching acts. Indeed, these acts do far more to change the physical landscape, as well as the domestic landscape, than any battle fought in Ireland. Coohill confirms that “between 1903 and 1922, eleven million acres of land had been sold to tenants under the provisions of the Land Acts” (113). An indication of just how far the affairs of the Prendeilles have fallen is demonstrated by Peggy Weldon, John’s daughter, who is sent to Paris to school while Jasper cannot afford to send Kit or Nessie away for education. Peggy also realizes the difference

⁹ Mitchell also uses the term *grab* in Scarlett’s thoughts as she considers buying the sawmill as “There’s still plenty of money to be made by anyone who isn’t afraid to work—or to grab” (611).

between her class and the Predevilles, whose motto “Je Prends” (65), meaning “to take,” differs from hers. As she passes the Big House one day, she acknowledges her sense of the “right of competence” and expresses it to the house, “You can take.... But you can’t hold, and I and my sort can!” (65). In a more complicated arrangement than Jason’s undertaking with the Rackrents, John Weldon—lawyer, real estate and insurance agent—arranges the sale of the Big House to Sir Harold Burgrave, Peggy’s suitor.

Like Edgeworth and Somerville and Ross, Mitchell recognizes the threat of the middle class to the Southern planter. In all these novels, the threat comes from the overseers of the estates and plantations. Jonas Wilkerson, the former Tara overseer, represents the middle class threat in *Gone with the Wind*. When Jonas approaches Scarlett with his wife, the former Emmie Slattery, whose typhoid fever infects and kills Ellen, he arrives in a new carriage, and they both are dressed in the latest fashion. Because so much wealth in Southern plantations was invested in the slaves and because the slaves were necessary to farm the vast acreages of these plantations, the Southern planter class could not survive once the slaves were freed after the war. To Scarlett’s repeated command for Jonas to leave, he slings a barbed reply:

“I know you can’t even pay your taxes. I came out here to offer to buy this place from you—to make you a right good offer. Emmie had a hankering to live here. But, by God, I won’t give you a cent now! You highflying, bogtrotting Irish will find out who’s running things around here when you get sold out for taxes. And I’ll buy this place, lock, stock and barrel—furniture and all and I’ll live in it.”

(538)

Jonas insults Scarlett on many levels in this passage. Like Jason in *Castle Rackrent*, Jonas’s offer would have been far less than it should have been. Because of the O’Haras’ financial devastation,

Jonas counts on a quick exchange of the plantation for ready cash. Even middle-class Jonas hurls insults at Scarlett because she is Irish. As he continues, his insults become greater. He proposes moving Emmie Slattery into Tara after she most likely caused the death of Scarlett's mother. However, the ultimate insult for Scarlett is to lose Tara. Also in this passage, Mitchell specifically mentions furniture, which figures prominently in the other novels as Jason has a locked room filled with furniture,¹⁰ while Shibby saves her money to refurnish Inver House.¹¹ This passage reinforces Scarlett's Irishness as her driving force. Her love for Tara drives her to make money so that she can secure it against threats from the middle class.

The Irish Mythology in *Gone With the Wind*

Both *Gone with the Wind* and Irish mythology reference the color red. In *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, or The Cattle Raid, translated by Standish Hayes O'Grady, the color red is found throughout the text from Cuchillín's "fair crimson tunic" (178) and "trustworthy special shield, in hue dark crimson" (179) to the "Red Hall" (220) to the bull's eyes, which "glow red" (224). Mitchell's novel also includes multiple references to the color red, including the "beautiful red earth that was blood colored, garnet, brick dust, vermilion" (434) to Mammy's "red taffeta petticoat (889) to Scarlett's "thick red carpeting which ran from wall to wall [and] red velvet portieres" (868). Obviously, one reference is Scarlett's name. Mitchell's many references to the color red connect the novel to Irish mythology.

Some choices of words and phrases found in *Gone with the Wind* are sure to resonate with readers familiar with Irish mythology. Several have to do with the warrior goddess Maeve, sometimes spelled Medb. Several translations of the Irish epic, *Táin Bó Cuailgne* were available by the time Mitchell wrote *Gone With the Wind*. Some, especially Lady Gregory's version, had

¹⁰ See page 112 in *Castle Rackrent*

¹¹ See page 40 in *The Big House of Inver*

been edited to exclude some of the scenes dealing with what were considered unappealing details, such as sexually explicit scenes or those including bodily secretions. Whether Mitchell read one of the translations or which one she might have read is thus far unknown. While Lady Gregory does not include Maeve's menstruation scene, Thomas Kinsella's later version of *The Tain* (1969), does: "Medb got her gush of blood.... It dug three great channels each big enough to take a household" (250). Throughout *Gone with the Wind*, the soil is described as red or the color of blood. In one scene Scarlett could see "Through the window, in the faint light of the rising moon, Tara stretched before her ... like a body bleeding under her eyes, like her own body, slowly bleeding" (418). Like Maeve's blood, Scarlett's blood is bound up in the soil. When Scarlett's power ebbs, she returns to Tara as "her roots went deep into the blood-colored soil and sucked up life" (420).

In one scene early in the novel, Mitchell demonstrates Scarlett's link to the soil through physical contact. After Scarlett expels fluid—a type of menstruation—from her own body by vomiting the old radishes she had just eaten, she "lay weakly on her face, the earth as soft and comfortable as a feather pillow ... When she arose at last ... her head was raised high and something that was youth and beauty and potential tenderness had gone out of her face forever" (428). This scene represents a turning point in Scarlett. Having drawn strength from the blood-colored earth, Scarlett becomes a warrior goddess in her own right and the enduring line "If I have to steal or kill—as God is my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again" (428) becomes her battle cry. As mentioned previously, the reference to hunger connects her to Ireland and the Potato Famine.

Later, when Scarlett struggles to bury the Union soldier she killed, her role as warrior goddess is reiterated as "She had changed more than she knew and the shell of hardness which

had begun to form about her heart when she lay in the slave garden at Twelve Oaks was slowly thickening” (445). The hardening shell around her heart will serve as her shield in the future as she fights to save Tara by any means possible.

Irvin also notes Scarlett’s connection with the Earth. Taking her cue from Rhett, who compared Scarlett to “the giant Antaeus” (968), who restored his strength by touching the earth, Irvin rightly observes that Scarlett draws strength from the earth and recognizes a “consistent mythic undergirding: that of the Great Mother, the archetypal feminine or Gea—the Earth Mother of classical antiquity” (57). However, because of Mitchell’s numerous references to the red—the blood-colored—earth, Scarlett more likely draws her strength from the Irish goddess Maeve.

Just as Mitchell ties Scarlett to Irish mythology, she also creates a scene in which Gerald’s physical description and actions liken him to “Finnbennach” the “White Horned” (55) Bull in Kinsella’s *The Tain*. In this scene, Suellen tries to trick Gerald into signing the Ironclad Oath, denying that he was a Confederate sympathizer during the Civil War. Suellen’s mistake in getting Gerald to sign the oath occurs when she lets it slip that the Slatterys and the MacIntoshes have signed the oath. Gerald with his “florid face” (29) and his “white curls” (29), which resemble white horns, lets out a “roar like a bull” (701) and shouts “And were ye afther thinking’ an O’Hara of Tara would be follyin’ in the dirty thracks of a God-damned Orangeman and a God-damned poor white?” (701). Just as the battle between the bulls represents the battle between Ulster and Ireland, Gerald represents the South and Suellen the North. She could not have hurt him more than if she had gored him, causing him to disown her bellowing, “Ye’re no daughther of mine!” (701). Just as the white-horned Bull dies from doing battle with the Brown Bull of Cuailnge, Gerald dies after a fall from his horse following this outburst. This scene also

brings out the animosity between the Catholics and the Protestants, which had not been so much of a problem in America, but still lived on in Gerald's consciousness.

Finally, the reference that is most telling occurs when Mitchell relates Scarlett to the mythological character Cuchulainn. Like a shape-shifter, Scarlett becomes more masculine in her activity as the story progresses. To parallel that change, Mitchell changes Scarlett's mythological reference, as well. Scarlett progresses from Maeve to Cuchulainn as she suffers a "depression [that] emerged to sit upon her shoulder like a carrion crow" (956). The statue of Cuchulainn stands today in the General Post Office in Dublin, Ireland, with the "carrion crow" on his shoulder. The comparison of Scarlett to Cuchulainn indicates that Scarlett will always be a warrior. As Cuchulainn insisted upon dying in an upright position, Scarlett will never retreat. Indeed, she fights against all the people who matter the most to her until they are gone. Even when Rhett leaves, she plans to fight to get him back.

Mitchell's themes of miscegenation, master-slave relations, and the threat of the middle class find common ground in the Irish Big House literature. Certain word choices and scenes reverberate with Irish mythology. However, Mitchell's published letters, biographies, and criticism fail to reveal the extent of her knowledge of these works. Even in those published her Irishness runs through them as an undercurrent much as Scarlett's Irishness runs through *Gone with the Wind* as an undercurrent. With the exception of O'Connell's short text and a chapter in Quinlan's book, most do not even include Ireland in the indices. The evidence presented in this thesis reveals numerous connections between Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and Irish Big House literature and mythology. A re-reading of Mitchell's novel is in order to reveal its previous unplumbed depths. Also, a re-reading of Mitchell's novel invites the re-reading of other Irish-American works.

CHAPTER FIVE

EPILOGUE

Margaret Mitchell's best-selling novel *Gone With the Wind* continues to be a favorite with the public. As early as May 7, 1938, Henry C. Link, writing in the *Saturday Evening Post*, had identified a universal theme that resonated with the novel's Depression-era audience: survival. In reference to *Gone with the Wind*, Link makes the claim that "the true concept of man, strange to say, has survived in the literature of fiction" (76). He explains that "Scarlett, though in many ways not an admirable person, was a woman who remained forever the master of her world rather than its victim" (76). However, so far, most academics have dismissed the novel as merely a work of popular fiction though its theme of survival is a prevalent universal theme found in literature.

In addition to the overriding theme of survival, this thesis demonstrates that *Gone with the Wind* shares many themes in common with Irish Big House literature. These themes include the threat from the rise of the middle class and devastation from miscegenation, as well as the authors' similar treatment of servants, tenants, and slaves. While much common ground is found between the Irish Big House literature and *Gone with the Wind*, much more common ground likely remains to be found.

Mitchell's novel also contains several references to Irish mythology. Scarlett is a female warrior like Maeve from the Irish epic who draws her strength from the soil that is "blood colored" (434). On several occasions, Scarlett returns to Tara to draw strength from the blood-colored soil and eventually becomes a lifelong warrior like Cuchulainn with the "carrion crow" (956) on her shoulder. A more in-depth comparison of *Gone with the Wind* to Irish mythology is likely to uncover more references to Irish mythology in the novel.

A close look at the lives of William Butler Yeats and Margaret Mitchell reveals many similarities, warranting the in-depth biographical chapter on each author. The authors's life experiences most likely influenced their decisions to choose to write about the Big House. Yeats's and Mitchell's heritages are defined by various strains of Irishness. The sense of loss inherent in an Irish or Southern heritage also informs their art. Culturally, Ireland and the South once had aristocracies with Big Houses that served as centers for aristocratic society. Historically, Yeats and Mitchell lived with the aftereffects of traumatic events—the Famine in Ireland and the Civil War in the South. As children, Yeats and Mitchell experienced distant mothers and spent much time with their grandparents. They also spent time alone as children—Yeats wandering the Irish countryside around Sligo, and Mitchell recovering from accidents. Both found nurturers to heal emotional scarring left over from childhood—Yeats in his patron Lady Augusta Gregory and Mitchell in her husband John Marsh. Perhaps the most important of all their similarities is their middle-class status. Yeats, already a successful poet and playwright and still a member of the middle class, won the Nobel Prize in 1923 while Mitchell was working for the *Atlanta Journal*. Undoubtedly, Mitchell was aware of Yeats. Even though most authors of Big House literature were aristocrats from the Big House, Yeats, a member of the middle class, also wrote poetry and later drama about the Big House. In effect, Yeats gave Mitchell, also a member of the middle class, permission to write about the Big House

Because of the novel's hybrid nature, *Gone with the Wind* is not simply another romantic, overly sentimental Southern novel about the American Civil War as has been accused. The novel's Irishness influences every action taken by Scarlett. By looking at only a few of the themes in *Gone With the Wind*, this thesis shows the novel's greater depth through a connection

to Irish Big House literature and Irish mythology. Enough similarities exist to warrant a deeper study, of which this thesis is only the beginning.

As demonstrated, to fully appreciate Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, the Irishness of the novel must be acknowledged and engaged. Most read *Gone with the Wind* as a purely Southern novel. However, the novel should be read with an eye toward how its Irishness affects and nuances its Southernness. The Irish influence promotes an enhanced understanding of the characters, especially Scarlett. The novel's unique Irish-American hyphenated identity explains the difficulty critics have encountered in their attempts to categorize the novel. Approaching *Gone with the Wind* through its Irishness offers a new reading of the novel.

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