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Southern Literary Tradition in M. Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*

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Abstract

This paper studies Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* (1936) in the context of Southern literary tradition. After analyzing the settings, Southern images and the theme it concludes that this novel conforms to the features of the Southern literary tradition.

Key words: Margaret Mitchell; *Gone with the Wind*; American southern literary tradition

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INTRODUCTION

Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* (1936) has the status of a world-famous bestseller and a huge readership, and yet there are aspects in this novel, which are still insufficiently investigated.

In the United States, since the release of *Gone with the Wind*, opinions about the novel were polar: it was evaluated as an outstanding example of realistic prose, which truthfully and accurately reflects the events of the Civil War of 1861-1865 and the period of Reconstruction (Benet, Brickell, Williams, Adams, and Young), and as

a continuation of the "plantator" legend, distorting the history of the South (Cowley and Scott).

In this paper, *Gone with the Wind* is analyzed in the context of the "southern" novels about the Civil War (1861-1865) published in the 1930s. Much attention is paid to the artistic techniques that allowed M. Mitchell to create her own version of the history of the South.

Despite the obvious closeness of M. Mitchell's views on the historical fate of the American South and the position of "southern intellectuals-agrarians" (Ransom, Davidson, & Owsley, 1962, p.241) on this issue, the last ones, with the exception of S. Young, ignored the emergence of *Gone with the Wind*. It is surprising, because "agrarians", as a rule, were very attentive to each other and always responded to the publication of the most minor works of their colleagues. Dutch literary critic A. J. Leenhouts suggested that the excessive popularity of Mitchell's novel was the very reason it was silenced by southern intellectuals, mostly writers themselves (117). After all, neither A. Tate, nor A. Lytle, nor D. Ransom managed to create a work of art about the war of the North and South, which would have such a resonance as *Gone with the Wind*, both in the US and in other countries of the world.

The main sources in the studying of M. Mitchell's oeuvre are her epistolary heritage, monographs written by A. Edwards, E. Brown, J. Wiley, F. Farr, S. T. Reins and A. G. Jones. All these researchers focus more on the process of writing the novel and the reliability of the events described in it. They leave for Mitchell right on her version of war of the North and the South, although they admit that the history of the region in her novel is presented solely from the "South" position.

Interpretation of the theme of the American South in *Gone with the Wind* remains a key issue on which many American critics still argue. R. Gray and O. Robinson consider *Gone with the Wind* artistic work that had a great influence on the perception of the history of the American South both in America and abroad (Gray and Robinson,

2007, p.319). This theme remains one of the keys in the analysis of the novel not only for American literary criticism. Belarusian researcher Y. V. Stulov believes that *Gone with the Wind* impregnated with "racist ideology" distort American history (143).

Russian critics refer the novel to the literature of the "second row", but considering it in the context of the "southern" literary tradition they unanimously admit that Mitchell managed to give the history of the South a universal sound (Semenova, Stecenko, and Galinskaya). In the 2000s, there was a growing interest of Russian critics in Mitchell's novel. The famous Russian literary critic, the author of the Preface to the Russian edition of *Gone with the Wind* P. V. Palievskij believes that the novel is comparable in importance with W. Faulkner's novels (213), but most researchers consider it as a phenomenon of mass literature (Kaspeh), a kind of "women's novel" (Porshneva and Boronenko, 2011, p.141).

M. A. Litovskaya, on the contrary, calls the novel "popular" and notes a pronounced motive of survival in it, which, in her opinion, gives the history of the defeated South a new sound, when "the loss of all does not mean the loss of each, but victory and defeat are inseparable." (12).

1. SOUTHERN LITERARY TRADITION

The "southern tradition" as a special branch of American culture grew out of the conflict between the agrarian South and the industrial North and was formed in the conditions of constant confrontation of these two opposing forces with different political and social systems as well as lifestyles and values.

The economy of the South, which was based entirely on the production and sale of cotton and vegetable oil, contributed to the creation of a unique agricultural culture, which later appeared in the "South literature", romantic nostalgia for the past, the patriarchal way of life in the Old South and a sense of clan system. "Southerners" believed that life should be centered on the interests of the local community; a greater role should be played by the family, not the individual interests. The writers-"agrarians" considered "Old South" to be a harmonious society in which the relations between people were simple and natural. The past was seen as a critique of the present, trying to assess by its example "those losses and those moral gains that people have received in return for deprivation in the past" (Warren, 1988, p.353).

The 1930s in the United States were known to be a period of economic depression, but for the culture of the South it was a period of Renaissance marked by the intellectual rise and creative activity of the writers of the region. A distinctive feature of the "Renaissance" is its historical orientation, the heyday of the genre of historical novel. First of all, this is due to the need to find solutions to modern problems in the past as well as the tradition of

constant rethinking of the region history in the literature of the American South in the 19th century.

All this formed the "Southern" literary tradition. Therefore, common features can be found in the works of the American South writers of the 1930s, it can be found a lot of common. Action in many of their novels, stories and poems unfolds, as a rule, in one of the southern States during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Another distinctive feature is the system of images, which is represented by the images of "southern beauty", "noble southern gentleman", followers of the "code of honor", "poor white trash", "Yankee scoundrels" who bring evil to the South, "faithful obedient slave", ready to give his life for his master. Such images can be found in the novels and short stories of southern writers of the 19th Century (W. G. Simms, J. E. Cook, J. P. Kennedy) and the 20th Century (E. Glasgow, S. Young, A. Tate, C. Gordon, R. P. Warren, W. Faulkner, E. Welty). It also can be noted that the heroes of "southern novels" in the literature of the 19th Century are shown as part of a traditional society, members of a large family. In the literature of the 20th Century, a new, "unconventional" hero appears, who, entering into conflict with society and violating its laws, seeks, nevertheless, not to break with it. An example of this type of hero is Thomas Sutpen in W. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, George Posey from A. Tate's novel *Fathers and Rhett* Butler from *Gone with the Wind* (Galinskaya, 1996, p.23).

In many works of "southern literature", readers can see the main character, whose fate is always not easy. It always falls on them to have a lot of ordeals which they have to cope with, because they have no other choices. Their goal is to survive at all costs. Of course, sometimes relatives or friends help them, but mostly only when their beloved ones die they can realize that life is precious, that is vividly shown in *Gone with the Wind* by example of the heroine (Stecenko, 1991, p.219).

The last feature of Southern literary tradition is that many southern writers tried to create a work of art that would draw attention to the tragic history of the region, in spite of the fact that "most Southern men of letters, like A. Tate, and W. Faulkner, understood that downfall of the Old South was inevitable, because they felt it was important to defend the regional culture and values" (Arkhangelskaya, 2018, p.306). Starting to write the novel *Gone with the Wind*, M. Mitchell also set such tasks for herself.

2. SETTINGS

The action of the novel takes place in one of the most difficult periods in the history of the United States and covers the years of the Civil war (1861-1865) and the subsequent Reconstruction. It begins in 1861 in Georgia, a state located in the southeastern region of the USA, that is revealed from the first several paragraphs of the novel: "... that skin so prized by Southern women and so carefully guarded with bonnets, veils and mittens against hot

Georgia suns.”, “...that bright April afternoon of 1861...” (Mitchell, 2014, p.1). These phrases make clear the background of the events: due to the history on the night of April 12 of that year, southern guns opened fire on Fort Sumter in South Carolina, and this was the beginning of a four-year war.

At the beginning, the authoress depicts the happy life of the pre-war South, which is interrupted by the Civil War. In describing the events of the war years she paints mainly scenes of life in Tara and Atlanta, away from (but further near) the foxholes and trenches. The action in *Gone with the Wind* does not end in 1865 with the defeat of the Confederation. It also covers the subsequent Reconstruction period, not less severe for southerners. At the beginning of *Gone with the Wind* Scarlett was 16 years old and by the end she was 28, so the action of the novel lasts about 12 years.

Action in this novel is in Atlanta and its suburb, which is in the South of USA, during the Civil War and Reconstruction period, so it can be concluded that settings of the novel correspond to the Southern literary tradition.

3. SOUTHERN THEME

The theme of the South is about the irretrievably gone time of the Old South, the world of Atlanta's wealthy homesteads that thrived thanks to slavery, the inevitable course of history that interferes with the lives of the country and individuals. The theme includes a description of the lives of people, mostly plantators, their suffering during the Civil War or the recovery after it, as well as longing for the Old South, often acknowledging that its fall could not fail to happen. In the 20th century works, writers of the southern tradition address the history of the South with a sense of realism; unlike their predecessors, these writers did not romanticize the past, but instead exposed the harsh realities of slavery, the Reconstruction, and coping with military defeat (Glaser 1). In the 1930s there were many significant works of writers-southerners who sought to tell their version of the region history, the death of a beautiful civilization destroyed by “barbarians-northerners” including Allen Tate's *The Fathers* (1938), S. Young's *So Red the Rose* (1934), K. Gordon's *None Shall Look Back* (1937), W. Faulkner's novels *Absalom!* (1936) and *The Unvanquished* (1938). Most of the works published during this period are a further development of Allen Tate's ideas, expressed in his essay “Professional writer on the South” (1935). It gives the main features of southern reality and the main themes of southern literature, namely: Southern landscape and its people, life and manners, historical memory, the code of honor, the importance of family ties, the agrarian nature of society and the political protection of religious principles.

Gone with the Wind reinterprets the theme of the Civil war. Pictures of during-war and post-war Georgia are presented in the first chapters of the novel, telling

about the life, order and customs of the “old South” on the example of the life of two families of plantators – O'Hara and Wilkes. It correlates with the southern literary tradition. Mitchell manages to notice some of the details that remain unnoticed by other southern novelists, to create, despite the presence in her novels of certain stereotypes, a special world of “happy good past”. All the inhabitants of the manor in the novel (from masters to slaves) have surprisingly warm relationships, with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities.

Concerning the life of the “old South”, Mitchell emphasizes on its conservatism and closeness. It was not easy for strangers like Scarlett's father Gerald O'Hara to become a part of this society, much less to take the highest step in its hierarchy. A life-loving Irishman from lower class, he amassed a fortune due to a good luck (won a piece of land in North Georgia in a poker), energy, enterprise and hard work. Arriving at the South, Gerald immediately adopted the views and customs of its inhabitants, which the author mentions not without a slight irony: “poker and horse racing, red-hot politics and the code duello, States' Rights and damnation to all Yankees, slavery and King Cotton, contempt for white trash and exaggerated courtesy to women”. (Mitchell, 2014, p.40). To be a part of southern society, Gerald “... even learned to chew tobacco. There was no need for him to acquire a good head for whisky, he had been born with one” (Mitchell, 2014, pp.40-41).

It should be admitted that not all writers-“southerners” managed to create such vivid images. Seeking to heroize the past, they often deduced monumental heroes in their works, such as plantators from *So Red the Rose* written by S. Young and C. Gordon's *None Shall Look Back*.

The author, as a realist writer, truthfully, in vivid convincing artistic images recreated the history of the old South of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Mitchell shows how a new world, a world of bourgeois attitudes and values, emerges from the ruins of the old world, a world of plantations, slavery and refined aristocrats. Those who cannot adapt to it go to the bottom, their lot-poverty, proud life in the past and lack of prospects. The most viable, not burdened with the fetters of moral dogmas, adapt to the new world. This objective historical process is reflected in the book through the images of Scarlett and Rhett Butler. The “proud southern beauty” of the southern myth, as Scarlett can be considered throughout the first third of the book, turns into a woman of a new era, ready to fight for her survival and for Tara. As a writer of the “southern school”, Mitchell could not, showing the objective victory of the new economic forms of life, not to make its moral verdict, not to show its moral doom-the story of the collapse of love between Scarlett and Rhett.

The action of the novel begins a few days before the Civil war and ends years after it, but the war between the industrial North and the agrarian slave-owning South is the boundary that divided the lives of the characters

into two parts “before” and “after”. Mitchell tells readers about the death of an entire civilization, which did not happen gradually, but suddenly and immediately. The post-war years were a prolonged agony. Their civilization died, but people survived and they absolutely do not understand what to do now. Most of the characters are spalls, fragments of that legendary South with its beauties in crinolines, its balls, the richest cotton plantations, its traditions, morals and code of conduct. The defeat of the South is not only an economic disaster for many of its inhabitants, but also the end of a whole worldview. And the people-spalls try to live in the “world after”, but they are not all good at it.

With the theme of longing for the old South with its moonlight and magnolias romanticisation of antebellum Southern society, the novel also describes the collapse of the American South. However Mitchell, unlike many writers-southerners, is not limited by description of collapse and she proves regularity of this phenomenon and argues, that such events will not happen.

The life of plantation society just before the Civil war Mitchell portrayed is far from an attractive one: balls, picnics, social conventions. Men’s interests are wine, cards, horses; women’s are family, outfits, local news. This is the picture of “upperclass society” familiar from European literature. Many plantators are ignorant people, like Gerald O’Hara, the Tarleton twins, expelled from different universities for four times, and Scarlett, whose education lasted only two years. They fit the definition said by the novel’s protagonist Rhett Butler, “The breed is purely ornamental” (Mitchell, 2014, p.583). They are not fit for any work, leading a lordly, idle life — a direct consequence of slavery. Slavery paralyzed the vitality of the masters by nurturing their aversion to work. The slaveholders also recognized the corrupting influence of slavery on themselves and thinking southerners saw it as a serious problem for the region. The novel shows with artistic objectivity the historical inevitability of the demise of the slave-owning South. Rhett Butler noticed: “Scarlett, our Southern way of living is as antiquated as the feudal system of the Middle Ages. The wonder is that it’s lasted as long as it has. It had to go...” (Mitchell, 2014, p.220).

It should be noted that the novel focuses on the life of southerners and basically all events are perceived through the thoughts and feelings of Scarlett, who cared only about her own problems. At the same time, her life correlates with the main events of the Civil War – the historical time is combined with the biographical. Therefore she is a vivid example of the life and suffering of people of that period, an example of the destructive impact of war on the person and his life.

Focusing on the lives of southern women, who were in the rear during the war, Mitchell in her novel does not analyze the features of the political struggle between the Confederation and the Union, the course of military action, strategy and tactics of the armies of the North and

South. The southerners’ capture of Fort Sumter, the battle of Shilow, Bull Run, and Gettysburg – the key battles of the Civil War – remained outside the text, although the names of these places and the battles that occurred there flashed on the pages of *Gone with the Wind*, giving the events and people specific outlines.

The besiegement of Atlanta and its capture by General Sherman’s troops are the only battle scenes in the novel and give the impression not a military conflict between the two warring parties, but a catastrophe that cannot be prevented.

Scarlett’s flight from the burning of Atlanta with a sick Melanie and two children was the culminating scene in the novel. Mitchell managed, using documentary materials since the Civil War, eyewitness accounts and diaries of the southerners to recreate the tragedy of the “fall” of Atlanta – an event that marked the final defeat of the Confederation.

Dark trees interlaced above their heads, dark silent houses loomed up on either side and the white palings of fences gleamed faintly like a row of tombstones. The narrow street was a dim tunnel, but faintly through the thick leafy ceiling the hideous red glow of the sky penetrated and shadows chased one another down the dark way like mad ghosts. The smell of smoke came stronger and stronger, and on the wings of the hot breeze came a pandemonium of sound from the center of town, yells, the dull rumbling of heavy army wagons and the steady tramp of marching feet. (Mitchell, 2014, p.352)

In this picture of the besieged city, which is ready to give up, it sounds the theme of death, the motives peculiar to infernal literature are heard that is expressed in the constant repetition of phrases “dark silent houses”, “dark trees”, “a dim tunnel”, “mad ghosts”, “the smell of smoke”, “a pandemonium sound”, “a monstrous skyrocket of flame” (Mitchell, 2014, p.352). This gradation creates a feeling of approaching something dreadful, terrible and inevitable. And the most terrible thing in this scene is that the all-powerful enemy-destroyer is not visible. It, like an evil Ghost, hovers somewhere and suddenly makes itself felt with deafening explosions and fires. The man appears to be powerless over this war. Burned, ruined homesteads, famine, devastation – all of that Scarlett meets on her way. She has to think about survival, and now this problem becomes the main one in the life of the heroine.

The absence of a materialized enemy in the scene of the fall of Atlanta reduces the level of negative emotions and allows the reader not to see in this tragedy the “death of the South” as a result of the invasion of “barbarians-northerners”, but to think about the imperfection of human nature that generates such cataclysms. The weakness and imperfection of human nature, which being a ghostly, not materialized enemy of civilized society, leads to terrible consequences and makes the main character think about survival, and the reader see in the theme of “South” a tragedy of universal scale and understand the interaction of human destiny and the whole era.

However, the writer also shows the suffering due to the invasion of northerners: the heroine will meet with the Yankees face to face in the walls of her own house. Killing a Yankee, who broke into the house to find some valuable, brings her satisfaction. On the example of the fate of the main character, the writer convinces the reader of the unlimited possibilities of man in the struggling for his place in life, for personal happiness and well-being. With the image of Scarlett, complex and ambiguous, embodying the “new South”, the writer associates hope for the prosperity of her land.

Also the central scene that shows people’s suffering during the war “is an image of domestic conflagration, in which the cannons and torches of invading soldiers are turned against women alone and about to give birth” (Gray and Robinson, 2007, p.97). Indeed, the focus on domestic travails as a means of exploring the Civil War and its impact was a feature of several Southern novels of the 1930s, including Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished*, Allen Tate’s *The Fathers* (1938), Caroline Gordon’s *None Shall Look Back* (1937), and T. S. Stripling’s *The Forge* (1931) (Grant 97).

With the example of Scarlett and other women, the novel shows the tragic history of the South, how terrible life was during the war and what people should do to survive; it reveals that the normal way of life was destroyed and how people suffered from that, which is the main theme of the Southern literature.

The book is written in the manner of romanticizing the life of the old South which is traditional for the southern literature of the 19th Century. However, along with the characteristic features of the southern novel, there are motifs of the “new tradition” of the 20th Century, represented by the works of W. Faulkner, T. Wolfe, R. P. Warren and some others. Following in many ways the canons of the “southern” historical novel, the author of *Gone with the Wind* parodies its stereotypes, lays the foundations of a new tradition in the genre of the American historical novel devoted to the theme of the Civil war. This is primarily the writer’s awareness of the degeneration of the way of the slave-owning South and yet a hint or hope that “tomorrow” can be cheerful, even after the tragic life experience of the southerners.

4. SOUTHERN IMAGES

Classical Southern images are considered historical characters from the Civil War, “southern beauty”; “noble southern gentleman”, followers of the “code of honor”; “poor white trash”; “Yankee scoundrels” who bring evil to the South; “faithful obedient slave”, ready to give his life for his master.

Among numerous characters of *Gone with the Wind* there are no historical figures. However, the names of the Confederation leaders: President J. Davis, generals R.

Lee, D. Johnston, A. Hill, N. B. Forest, D. Longstreet, T. Jackson, as well as the northerners: President A. Lincoln, generals W. T. Sherman, W. Grant and some other famous American political and military figures of the Civil War – mentioned in the dialogues between the characters and author’s remarks, but like passing, being part of the historical context.

Image of “southern beauty” can be found in a character of Ellen O’Hara, the mother of Scarlett. She is described as a tall and graceful woman with slanting dark eyes, inky lashes, black hair and “look of pride that had no haughtiness, its graciousness, its melancholy and its utter lack of humor” (Mitchell, 2014, p.36). At the same time, Ellen is a true example of perfect lady with excellent manners. She is a pillar of family as she not only takes responsibility for the management of the house and plantation, but also supports status of her husband as head of the family and house. Despite the fact that Gerald O’Hara, father of Scarlett and husband of Ellen, pretends to be a strict and brutal man, thinking that slaves and members of household are afraid of him and respect him, but in reality “only one voice was obeyed on the plantation--the soft voice of his wife Ellen. It was a secret he would never learn, for everyone from Ellen down to the stupidest field hand was in a tacit and kindly conspiracy to keep him believing that his word was law” (Mitchell, 2014, p.27). Ellen also demonstrates stamina and ability to maintain composure, which is reflected in her way of communication with other people as “her voice never raised in command to a servant or reproof to a child but a voice that was obeyed instantly at Tara” (Mitchell, 2014, p.37). In addition to worries about household chores and plantation management, she herself is not sitting idle, but is busy with sewing or helping families of neighboring planters or their slaves by providing medical assistance, neglecting financial and social status of those people in need. Being a lady, Ellen also never loses sight of herself and looks tidy as “her swift toilets in times of emergency were amazing” (Mitchell, 2014, p.37). In such way she is the embodiment of feminine beauty and tenderness and inner strength at the same time.

Ashley Wilkes is the embodiment of noble southern gentleman as he tries to stay true to duty and honor. Despite the fact that he loves Scarlett, he does not want to break family tradition and marries his cousin Melanie. When Scarlett offers to leave his wife and children and run away, he refuses “Do you think I could go off and leave Melanie and the baby, even if I hated them both? Isn’t there any sense of loyalty in you? You couldn’t leave your father and the girls. They’re your responsibility, just as Melanie and Beau are mine, and whether you are tired or not, they are here and you’ve got to bear them” (Mitchell, 2014, p.491). In such way, he demonstrates high level of responsibility and keeps his word as he does not want to betray his family even though he does not

love it. When the war begins, Ashley goes to fight because of sense of duty, although he does not share goals of the war and is not interested in it like other men of the South as his "little inner world was gone, invaded by people whose thoughts were not my thoughts, whose actions were as alien as a Hottentot's." (Mitchell, 2014, p.489) Unfortunately, his habit of following social rules and so-called "honor" led him to the wrong way, as he became a member of Ku Klux Klan.

Mammy is a slave in O'Hara's house. She used to be Ellen's nanny and continued to raise her children after Ellen's marriage. She is described as "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." (Mitchell, 2014, p.20) She is strict with Ellen's daughters because she loves Scarlett and the other girls as her own daughters and loves O'Hara's family as her own one, that can be also concluded from the scene of barbecue at Twelve Oaks, during which Mammy scolds Scarlett: "Ef you doan care 'bout how folks talks 'bout dis fainbly, Ah does... Ah has tole you an' tole you dat you kin allus tell a lady by dat she eat lak a bird." (Mitchell, 2014, p.71) She not only teaches Scarlett how to behave in society, but also shows her concern about O'Hara's family and its reputation. Even after the war Mammy remained to be faithful to her previous owners and stayed with their family, demonstrating that she was not just a slave, but part of O'Hara's family.

Few of the southern novelists touched in their works the fate of the poor white in the plantation South. M. Mitchell in *Gone with the Wind* emphasizes on the casteism of the southern community and shows that the gap between the plantators-aristocrats and the poor white is no less than that between the white masters and their slaves.

The Slattery family, poor neighbors of O'Hara are presented as a caricature in the novel. Tom, the father of the Slattery family, is depicted in the novel as "shiftless and whining" man and his wife as "a snarly-haired woman, sickly and washed-out of appearance, the mother of a brood of sullen and rabbit-looking children" (Mitchell, 2014, p.45). Not only the rich southerners, but also their slaves feel contempt for Slattery, so Mr. Slattery "hated his neighbors with what little energy he possessed, sensing their contempt beneath their courtesy, and especially did he hate "rich folks' uppity niggers." (Mitchell, 2014, p.45). Representing the class of small farmers, the future backbone of the economy of the "new South" in this way, M. Mitchell openly admits her prejudice. Talking about Slattery family life, she reproaches them not only in, from the "southern code" point of view, unworthy behavior – "dawdling on his neighbors' porches" in difficult times, but also that the cotton "always failed, and the garden, due to Mrs. Slattery's constant childbearing, seldom furnished enough to feed her flock" (Mitchell, 2014, p.45). According to the

writer, such losers should sell their piece of land and leave Georgia. Although the story of the Slattery family is told on behalf of Scarlett O'Hara, it is felt that the position of the heroine in this matter is close to the author's, which reflects the southern consciousness not so much, as it is a part of the "American dream" in which lucky people are heroes, and "the loser cries".

Being a representation of Southern novels, *Gone with the Wind* demonstrates Southerners' point of view, in whose eyes Northerners are hated conquerors, scoundrels, who brought sorrow to many homes of South. The northerners in the novel have no faces. They are usually given in the mass. It is "an evil force that does something evil and meaningless", it is not people, but "the heavy boots trampling, ... the sound of "the crashing of china and mirrors" and rough abuse (Mitchell, 2014, pp.429-430). Hatred for "Yankees" is caused not only by the wounded Southern pride, but also because of real dangers to civil population caused by invading army. "In a swath eighty miles wide the Yankees were looting and burning. There were hundreds of homes in flames, hundreds of homes resounding with their footsteps" (Mitchell, 2014, p.428). Southern community was shocked by "ruined homes that dotted the countryside, all the stories of rape and torture and murder" committed by Northern soldiers (Mitchell, 2014, p.424). At the same time, weaknesses in planning the realization of emancipation of slaves, a main reason of the war, turned to terrible consequences as economy of Southern states became completely ruined. This led to starvation of all sectors of population and especially the poorest ones, including slaves, who had no other choice, just to find new ways to feed themselves, and in such way to arise the Shantytown, which is "rumored to be the refuge of negro and white criminals" (Mitchell, 2014, p.724). In addition, former slaves became a danger not only to plantation owners, but to every Southerner as "their new importance went to their heads, and, realizing that they had the Yankee Army behind them, their outrages increased. No one was safe from them." (Mitchell, 2014, p.724) In such way, North army is considered by Southerners as scoundrels and occupants who ruined quiet, peaceful life and brought misery and destructions.

It should be noted that the characters in Mitchell's novel often express mutually exclusive opinions on the same subject. Sometimes the same character refutes the words and actions he said earlier. The polyphony of the characters, a sudden change of their positions in those or other issues, the lack of a clear division of characters into "good" and "bad" (except the North), evidence complexity and ambiguity of the solution of the problems posed by the author. The contradictions between the characters in *Gone with the Wind* are limited by the "southern" canon, although the author manages to break away from tradition in some aspects, Mitchell with all the characters try to prove the correctness of the South

position. It is no accident that none of the northerners in the novel has a “right to vote”. All the representatives of the industrial North probably had to illustrate the widespread idea in the South that the Yankees had no right to conquer the southerners and establish their own orders in the South.

The principle of contradictions put by Mitchell in the novel finds its expression through the characters and is unconventional for the development of plot situations and solving the problems of the characters in the “southern” novel. Following in many ways the canons of the “southern” historical novel, the author of *Gone with the Wind* parodies its stereotypes, lays the foundations of a new tradition in the genre of the American historical novel devoted to the theme of the Civil War.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing *Gone with the Wind* in the context of Southern literary tradition it can be concluded that this novel is a significant part of it. The settings, Southern theme and characters conform to the novels of the Southern literary tradition.

The fate of the main heroine is intertwined with the historical time in the novel, revealing the author’s concept. Judging by the fact that Scarlett comes out as the winner from all situations, violating the laws of the southern community, Mitchell is on the side of the “new South” and does not approve the passive suffering of the southerners in the difficult post-war years. The heroine struggles with everyday difficulties with the perseverance, which probably, according to the author’s plan, should inspire Americans to outlive an economic crisis and depression, to console and assure them that “this wasn’t the worst that had ever happened”. The finale of *Gone with the Wind*, despite the uncertainty in the fate of the heroine, sounds life-affirming. If the history of the Civil War in other novels of most writers-“southerners” was presented apocalyptically – as destroyed by the northerners and “lost Paradise”, the *Gone with the Wind* history of the “southern” beauty Scarlett O’Hara – a struggle for survival.

Mitchell’s oeuvre is inseparable from the literary tradition of the American South and at the same time goes beyond regional literature, being a significant stage in the literary history of the United States. M. Mitchell did not seek to experiment, as W. Faulkner and A. Tate did, searching new artistic forms. She was unable to comprehend the history of her region on a global philosophical scale, but she managed to give the tragedy of the South a “universal” character. In order to understand the popularity of *Gone with the Wind*, it should be noted that the typical “southern” novel clichés (images of the noble “southern gentleman”, “southern beauty”, “devoted slaves”, “Yankee scoundrels” and “miserable poor white”, pictures of the happy life in the plantation

South, the horrors of the Civil War) here acquire a different meaning. Overcoming the stereotypes inherent in the “southern” novel, M. Mitchell managed to popularize the “southern” version of the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

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