Gone with the Wind

Director: Victor Fleming
Clark Gable: Rhett Butler
Vivien Leigh: Scarlett O’Hara

Plot Synopsis

Gone with the Wind is a film adaptation from a novel by Margaret Mitchell by the same name (Dirks 1). It begins with a young Scarlett O’Hara and her family on their plantation, Tara, speaking with young men who want to dance with her at an upcoming party at nearby plantation, Twelve Oaks (“Gone with the Wind”). At this party is where young Scarlett’s life is turned around. This is where she learns that her crush and supposed love of her life Ashley Wilkes is engaged to his cousin Melanie Hamilton. When she confronts Ashley about her true love for him he rejects her advances. After Ashley’s dismissal we meet our ruggedly handsome antihero Rhett Butler. They exchange a tête-à-tête and their whirlwind romance begins.

Throughout the party there are rumblings and conversations of an impending war with the North. The Southerners boast about how they will defeat the North if a war really does come. As the party comes to a close it is announced that the Civil War has begun and the young men rush off to enlist. Ashley marries Melanie, and out of spite
Scarlett marries Melanie’s brother, Charles. Charles dies shortly thereafter and Scarlett goes to Atlanta with Aunt Pittypat to fake grieve and wait for Ashley. She runs into Rhett again and they share another promising moment.

The war is waging on and the South is being badly beaten and many of the men that were introduced earlier in the movie have died. While still in Atlanta Melanie becomes pregnant and very sick. Scarlett then seeks the help of Rhett to help her, Melanie, and Prissy go back to Tara. Once back in Tara Scarlett realizes her mother has passed and her father has gone crazy. As she sees her beloved Tara in ruins she vows to never have to beg for food or live this lowly again, and she’ll do anything to never have to feel this way (Dirks 4).

The war ends, the South loses and Scarlett follows through with her vow by marrying her sisters betrothed, Mr. Kennedy, after learning he has come up on some money. She marries him and takes over his business and brings wealth back to Tara. When there is a secret political meeting; Mr. Kennedy is killed and Scarlet is free to marry again. This time she agrees to marry her true love Rhett and they travel to New Orleans. After being there too long she decides she wants to come back to Tara where she becomes pregnant.

After the birth of their child, Rhett finds a picture of Ashley in Scarlett’s room and leaves Scarlett taking their daughter with him. Once he realizes that a daughter needs her mother he comes back from London. Still mad at Scarlett he shuns her, in their petty back and forth she doesn’t outright tell him she loves him and is in love with him. Their daughter passes away and Scarlett and Rhett are wrought with grief. Rhett begs for a hint from Scarlett that she loves him and she gives it to him, but the lines are crossed and he
misses the message. While this is happening Melanie falls ill, and is on her deathbed. Melanie asks Scarlett to promise to look after Ashley and Scarlett obliges. Now knowing she can finally have Ashley, she realizes that she doesn’t want him and her love for Rhett is real. Finally at the end of the film Scarlett declares her love for Rhett and by this time Rhett just doesn’t believe her. She cries, but then vows to worry about it another day. She knows what she has to do to win him back, and that is to return home to Tara (Dirks 6).

**Theme**

*“With true love you can survive, rebuild, and come back stronger than ever.”*

While Scarlett and Rhett’s love story is the primary focus of the film the true love in the story is that of Scarlett and Tara. Scarlett loves Tara more than she originally knew and despite everything that happened she was always drawn back to it. Through her deep love for her plantation she brought it back to its former glory despite the death and devastation that befell it through the war. Then while rebuilding it back to its former glory, she realizes it is not the same as it was before, but that is okay because it is stronger and more stable and that is more important because now it will last for more generations.

**Symbol**

*Tara, the land and plantation, is a symbol of Southern values.*
At the beginning of the movie Tara is a plantation that shows the O’Hara’s status in Georgia. It shows that the family had a certain amount of familial wealth. It shows what the South stood for, what they were fighting for. During the Civil War as Tara was deteriorating, the plantation still tried to hold on. Then after the South lost the war, Scarlett worked to return Tara to its former glory.

**Camera Choices: Shot Length and Camera Angle**

**Long Shot**

*Long shots provide general information but keep the audience at an emotional distance* (Ruiz-Esparza 37)

The director uses this shot to establish the party at Twelve Oaks and the vastness of the land there (“Gone with the Wind”). Even though it is faint, you can see how many people were lined up to attend this party. By showing the many trees and acreage of the Twelve Oaks plantation it shows the Wilkes’ status within their community and their popularity.
among the people. Even though we do not have an emotional connection with the people in the shot we are curious as to how the party will turn out.

**Medium Shot**

Medium shots from the waist up allow the audience to feel like we are a part of the scene (Ruiz-Esparza 39)

The director chose this medium shot because he wanted the audience to feel as though we too were being told Scarlett is still in love with us (“Gone with the Wind”). The director wanted us to see all the emotions of the two characters face while also seeming like a spy being privy to personal information. This angle lets the audience decide if we want to care about these two characters. As an audience we are deciding whether we want to encourage this relationship.
A Close-up forces the audience to care about the character whether to like them or to dislike them (Ruiz Esparza 39).

In one of the final scenes of *Gone with Wind*, we see a saddened Scarlett after Rhett has dismissed her and left. This close up is different than all the other ones of Scarlett because we finally see how Scarlett feels about Rhett. We see the tears brimming on her eyes and the pain of him leaving is written all over her face. Throughout the film, the audience has had to question (along with Rhett) how she feels, but in their final moments you see that she has loved him all along. The director blurred the background and made her face sharp to show that audience that everything around Scarlett was fading and didn’t matter as long as Rhett was not in her life. This angle forces the audience to care about what Scarlett is feeling. Despite her previous behavior the audience is forced to care about her tears and pain over losing Rhett.
Low Angle

“A Low Angle is used to give a character or object power.”
(Ruiz-Esparza 41)

Scarlett is watching Melanie and Ashley go up and the stairs and retire for the night longing to be in Melanie’s shoes. This angle shows the power that Ashley still has over Scarlett, and by Melanie also being shot in this angle directly lined up with Ashley shows her importance to him (Ruiz Esparza 41). He sees her as his equal, where as he sees Scarlett simply as a lowly girl who will always pine for him.

Eye Level Angle

Eye Level angle like a medium shot length brings the audience into the scene to allow us to feel like we are there. (Ruiz-Esparza 41)
This is the second time Scarlett and Rhett meet and the director wants the audience to see the chemistry the two characters have. By using an eye level shot we are drawn into the two character’s conversation and feel almost as if we are interrupting a conversation between two young lovers. This angle allows the audience to see that these characters might have more feelings for each other than they had originally led the audience to believe.

**High Angle**

*A High Angle is shot looking down on a character or object making them appear weak or vulnerable* (Ruiz Esparza 42).

In the beginning of the film when the slaves are talking about it being quitting time they are being shot in a high angle (Ruiz Esparza 42). For the most part, aside from Mammy, anytime the slaves are in a scene they are shot in high angle to show that they are inferior to their owners and are looked down upon. The slaves were always looking up to their masters so it would only be natural to shoot the slaves in high angle only. They were always vulnerable to whatever their Master wanted, and they had to follow through with whatever their Master’s wanted or needed.
Dolly or Crane

“The Dolly and Crane move the camera and therefore the audience’s viewpoint allowing us to go on the journey with the character.”
(Ruiz-Esparza 42)

This powerful crane shot originally focused on Scarlett going to find the doctor and receive help for Melanie’s baby (“Gone with the Wind”). What started off as a simple focus on Scarlett panned out to show that this was about more than Scarlett, more than the baby, and more than the simple ideas of the past (“IMDB”). This war caused destruction and pain to not just to one family, but to the entire south. As the camera pans further back you lose Scarlett in the midst of all the other hurt and dead bodies until it pans out to show what is really important – the flag. That although we may be dying, hurting, and in unimaginable pain we are still here, much like our raggedy and tattered flag, still flying high (Ruiz Esparza 45).

Visual Elements

Scenery

Scenery is the walls, floors etc. in the scene to show the physical environment.
(Ruiz-Esparza 179)
Twelve Oaks showed the beauty of Southern culture. In this scene there are many prominent lines and the rhythm of this scene has a shorter flow because we are trying to take in all the different lines (Ruiz Esparza 198). This scene shows how the South viewed themselves. By painting the majority of their home white, they believed they were the epitome of goodness and virtue. The first pillar that catches your eye is vertical to show the power that the South has, and then you see curved lines, which make up the ceiling (Ruiz Esparza 186). This invoked a soft feeling to contrast with the strong nature of the vertical lines. Also, note that there is only one prominent horizontal line, this indicates that the South was not as strong and stable as they thought they were, hence why there is only stable line in the scene.
The first thing one sees in this scene is the multiple colors of brown. Mostly everyone in the shot has on brown or tan, which blends in with brown sand, the brown marble stair, and the tan storefront. The people are literally blending in with their land. Normally earth tones would symbolize warmth and love, but in this scene it adds to the chaotic, confusion that is happening. The director also made the rhythm in this shot very short so as your eye continues to jump from thing to thing you feel the business and confusion like the characters in the scene (Ruiz Esparza 198).

Costumes

Costumes are the clothes worn by the characters which reveal a lot about the characters’ personality. (Ruiz-Esparza 180)

Ashley Wilkes outfits change dramatically throughout the film. In the beginning of the film Ashley is dressed in tans, dark browns, and white. These colors show how he is the symbol of neutrality, with a tinge of goodness in him (Ruiz Esparza 196). His suit is well tailored for his party and creates strong lines with show his strength. His pants form long horizontal lines showing his level of power and status, while his vest, jacket, and shirt have predominately diagonal lines which show that although he is powerful he has another more interesting side to him, which the audience finds out later is due to his penchant for Scarlett O’Hara. In a later scene after the South has fallen and Ashley has
lost his status and must live and work at Tara his colors are of an off blue and rich brown. He is wearing colors of the earth, not rich vibrant colors of his past. He is wearing clothes with a rough texture. The fabric seems as if it is made from a low grade of cotton and they are worn haphazardly on his body. They’re not tailored to his body, because his clothes much like the work he is doing is not tailored to his preferred lifestyle. Now that he is no longer the gentleman who would throw parties in his mansion, he has come to be a man who must work the field like a common slave.

Melanie is presented as a goody-goody character before you even see her on the screen. Then when the infamous Melanie is presented on the screen, the costume designer placed her in a white frock with a tinge of grey mixed in. To show her purity, despite everyone else in rich greens and pinks attending the party. You feel detached from her just like Scarlett does, because she almost seems too good. Scarlett even mentions how serious Melanie is seen and her outfit portrays just that. When looking at Melanie’s outfit all you see are curves. The curve of the top of her dress, the curve of her bonnet, the curve of the bow, and the curve of the bow around her neck. The constant curvature of Melanie’s
costume shows her overt femininity (Ruiz Esparza 192). Also, while people such as Scarlett and the other women of the party have their hair partially down or at least more of it showing, Melanie, on the other hand does not show much of her hair at all which shows her conservative nature.

**Lighting**

*Lighting is used to show different feelings, moods, and expressions, on the characters’ face in different contexts.* (Ruiz-Esparza 182)

Preceding this scene Scarlett tells Ashley she loves him, he turns her down, and then Rhett mocks her (“Gone with the Wind”). This current scene mirrors the emotions and the secrecy that was previously taken place. Scarlett is placed in the shadows in a corner, much like her emotions just were. While surrounding Scarlett is darkness, the front light is directly above her showing her clear emotions and how open and honest she was about her feelings even amidst the darkness that is surrounding her, whether that be the upcoming imminent war or the fact that Ashley does not care for her (or will not admit to) in the same way that she feels about him. The front lighting on Scarlet is in a vertical line showing that even while she is being talked about and shunned from her want to be lover she still holds the power in the situation.
There is a soft curved lighting in this shot to show the overt femininity in the scene (Ruiz Esparza 196). The director wants to show how inviting Melanie is to the patient she is helping. She wants the patient not to feel like a burden and to show she is there to help. The lighting even shines a light onto the characters of Scarlett and Melanie in the scene. Melanie matches the pureness of the original curved light, by her shadow being curved, from her head down to her body. Also near Melanie’s head there are vertical shadows from a bedpost to show how spiritually connected Melanie is. Scarlett on the other hand is not as feminine and fragile as Melanie, her shadow casts multiple diagonal shadows among the head and body. These differences in the shadows show the vast contrast to the two women in not only their personality and character, but also in their posture and true motives for helping the patient. These shadows on the wall also later establish when the doctor must amputate a soldier’s leg without any anesthetic.

Props

*Props are the objects that the artist holds to show to express the character, or mood of the scene.* (Ruiz-Esparza 181)
Rhett provides Scarlett with this hat to show he has growing affections for her. The warm and inviting texture of the velvet fabric on the hat further pushes the growing warmth and affection the two have for each other. The way she playfully puts it on wrong when she first tries it on shows how she enjoys when Rhett corrects her and scolds her. This hat pushes the plot forward because when Ashley comes home for Christmas she wears it as a symbol of her affections towards him, hoping he will compliment her on her newest, finest hat. He doesn’t and the curves of the top of the headdress seem to wilt a little bit. Just like her affections for Ashley.
When Scarlett shoots an invading Yankee and kills him, Melanie and Scarlett must decide how they are going to get the body to field so they can bury him. In trying to do so, they realize his head will drag blood across the floor not leaving a very subtle trail. Scarlett decides to use Melanie’s nightgown to wrap his head to prevent the blood trail. The pure white color of the nightgown shows the goodness of Melanie for offering her nightgown and the goodness this man’s death has brought to Tara. There are no prominent lines showing when the gown is being used as prop because the crumpled gown shows the confusion and complexity of the situation (Ruiz Esparza 181).

**Goethe’s Three Questions**

**What was the artist trying to do?**

Victor Fleming was trying to show what the people felt when they were going through war. He wanted to show his audience the devastation of war, but with love you can survive, rebuild, and be strong again. Even if you aren’t the same level of strength as you were previously, that does not take away the new strength you are now.

**How well did he do it?**

Victor Fleming did a beautiful job. Through the multiple camera angles and costume changes you see the rise, fall, and new rise of the South in this beautifully directed film. As an audience you go on the journey of love and redemption with Scarlett and Rhett. You see their growth as characters in the film and in the end you get to decide how you feel about them because you honestly feel like you know them.
Was it worth doing?
I believe so. I enjoyed being caught up in the rapture of this epic. Not only did I appreciate the artistic direction the director went with this film, I appreciate the plot and storyline itself. In the end and in my heart, I just know that Scarlett and Rhett ended up together, because they are perfect for each other. They know what each other needs and they know they are the only ones who can provide that for each other. It is a film that while being almost 4 hours long doesn’t even feel like it. Definitely a film I would recommend to others and plan on watching again and again. *Gone with the Wind* is not just a romance of epic proportions, but also a historic story that has lasted the test of time.
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