

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

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Level II Honors Award

Dear Ms. Margaret Mitchell,

There are books that hide your problems and books that make them more clear to you. The latter are usually harder to uncover – they hide behind the cover of simpler, more innocent stories, with the sole intention of leaving you entertained. You don't notice them at first glance, but look a little deeper and you'll see...

That was the lesson I learned after reading your book, *Gone with the Wind*. My older sister handed me this book in the summer after fifth grade, and at that point in my learning career, I wasn't remotely interested in reading a 1,024 page story, much less, a *love* story. I was going through a 'phase', the phase where I thought everything was someone else's problem. I had nothing to do with the problem, why should I be part of the solution? It's not my world, it's theirs, and I don't want any part of it. These were things I told myself when faced with a problem. And this book was the same thing; I'll read it, but I will do it just because you tell me to.

I very reluctantly turned to the first page of *Gone with the Wind*, and the very first words I saw were the main character's name: Scarlett O'Hara, a name that I would soon recognize as that of my new heroine. Your book really changed the way I choose a piece of literature, and mostly in its perspective.

This was the first time that I had read a book that was based on the Southern view of the Civil War, and I thought that was really interesting. I got a look into a new cultural perspective and way of thinking that almost made me question who should have won the war, who was right in their thinking. When choosing a book, I now look for the narration, who or what tells the story, whether the characters are ones that I would respect in their thoughts and actions. Scarlett was never the kindest of characters, but she knew what was right, and generally, her motives had some sense in them. She definitely set a template for future characters that I would come to love. I also look for evidence that the book is different from others that I've read. The story of the Southern belle during the "War of Northern Aggression" really forced me to think about our society – during the 19th and 21st centuries, the way we act, and how we think of everyone around us, and their needs.

Scarlett O'Hara also helped to introduce me to the idea of a strong female character; she amazed me with the way that she lived. At a time when women were supposed to disappear into the framework when their husbands died, she didn't. In fact, she married two more times, each time to get something she wanted, whether it be money or her sister's jealousy. A woman was supposed to stay at home and mind the house and children. God forbid she actually had a backbone; she was there to *please* the man, not question his word. But under her sweet, innocent expression, Scarlett was a girl of temper, who didn't plan on living the way someone else wanted her to.

In this mass of cultural 'do's and don'ts', Scarlett stood out. I found myself drawn into her race for life, holding my breath as she put one of her daring plans for identity into action and laughing when she dismissed a problem with her famous "Fiddle-Dee-Dee". She didn't care what other people thought of her – society was wrong, in her eyes. Someone was needed to stand up to it, and she never hesitated to make herself heard. Scarlett gave me a model of someone who could and did fight back.

Behind the simple, innocent cover of a love story, I found the story of a young woman coming of age. I found the story that all people can relate to, one of courage, survival, and the will to live through the greatest hardships. The theme was hidden, behind the flirty little girl, who was devastated throughout the entire story that her 'true love' had married another. Scarlett is an archetype for the southern belle, and then veers away from it completely, becoming the female superhero who puts her life on the line to help those she holds most dear.

This epic helped me see the things in me that, before, I had never noticed. I have a passion for living in the way that I choose, the way I think is most wonderful. Instead of avoiding problems, where I could help, I find myself drawn to them. This story set a template for me, Scarlett has a spirit that no adversity could dampen, and before reading *Gone with the Wind*, I never really saw that in myself. The urge to never give up, and never surrender to the rules of our modern day society, the rules that dictate how you should live your life in the *proper* way, the *right* way, following society's unspoken rules that are sometimes more powerful than written ones. To me, the way Scarlett stood up for herself and her dignity, even in times of great stress and fear, was so inspiring.

My problem before I read this book, was that I was waiting – waiting for someone or something to start giving me the meaning in my life. I didn't know where to start. Now I recognize the feelings I was waiting for. I want to defend those who can't stand up for themselves. I want to protect the ones I love from all fear and hurt. Most of all, I want to live with the never-ending fire that burned so brightly, in that green-eyed brunette.

All the best,

Miya

Miya
Salem
Grade 7