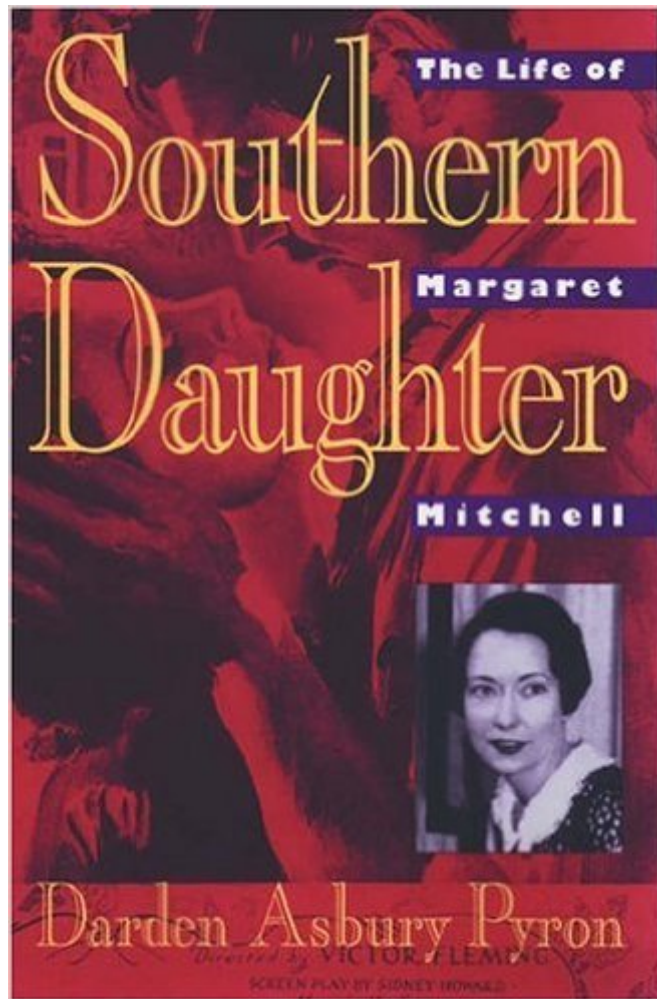


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Southern Daughter: The Life Of Margaret Mitchell



Synopsis

Gone With the Wind is an American phenomenon. Arguably the most popular American novel of all time, it sold over a million copies in its first six months (in the heart of the Depression), won a Pulitzer Prize for its author, and more remarkable still, returned to the New York Times Best Seller list fifty years after its first appearance. Crowning its glory, David O. Selznick transformed the novel into one of the great films of all time, lifting its characters--especially the unforgettable Scarlett O'Hara and her lover-antagonist Rhett Butler--to the pinnacle of American popular culture. Now, in *Southern Daughter*, Darden Pyron provides an absorbing biography of Margaret Mitchell, the author of this American classic. In a solidly researched, sprightly narrative informed by a deep knowledge of Southern culture, Pyron reveals a woman of unconventional beauty, born into one of Atlanta's most prominent families, and imbued from childhood with tales of the Civil War. Mitchell was a rebellious child, an independent woman who wanted a career and not a family (children made her wince), and a Catholic who defiantly left the Church, divorced her first husband, Red Upshaw (a ne'er-do-well and sometime bootlegger), and married John Marsh (who had been Upshaw's best man). Fans of *Gone With the Wind* will find several chapters in *Southern Daughter* that trace how these elements in Mitchell's biography made their way into her fiction, including the most surprising identity for the fictional Rhett Butler. As a further surprise to most Americans who know only the film version of *Gone With the Wind*, Pyron reveals how Mitchell intended her book as a repudiation of the then popular "moonlight on the magnolias" genre of Civil War romance. Equally interesting is his portrait of Mitchell after the novel's success: the incredible flood of letters (in the 13 years before her death, Mitchell wrote at least ten thousand letters, an astonishing number of which ran pages and pages); the filming of *Gone With the Wind*, whose script ultimately required seventeen writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ben Hecht; and the lavish film premier in Atlanta. Whether describing Mitchell's earliest writing (such as *The Cow Puncher* and *Phil Kelley, Detective*, in which she played Zara the female crook), or discussing her final years, which were marred by constant pain and illness, wrangles with agents and publisher, and her increasing affection for litigation, this perceptive, sympathetic, and engagingly written biography illuminates the life of a major writer and the book she created, a work peopled with characters who still loom large in the American imagination.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

By the fall of 1936, a million Americans had read *Gone with the Wind* although it had not been out much less than a year. Need I say more to demonstrate proof of one great American novel? David Selznick found that the public was so fiercely possessive of *Gone with the Wind* (think *Twilight* in today's lingo) that he had to tread very diplomatically over the casting trail. "Never in the moving picture business has there been such a deluge of letters on the casting of a picture, not even in advance of the casting of *David Copperfield*," wrote Selznick. Margaret Mitchell spent her life writing, yet she is known only for this one novel. It is enough. Silly rumors spread about her, after the fact, that she had been nothing but a bored housewife. That is nonsense. She was a journalist in her younger years and suffered from debilitating health problems. It took her ten years to write *Gone with the Wind* after tremendous research and those ten years were partly chalked up due to her illnesses--and her husband's. Sadly, she was struck down by a car at the age of 49 (1949) and died of brain damage five days later. Disputes over ambiguous contracts with publishers and foreign rights arguments tormented her final years.) There are many reasons to be attracted to this well written biography. Besides the fact that *Gone with the Wind* won a Pulitzer prize for its author and returned to the bestseller list 50 years later, besides the fact that it sold a million copies (in the middle of the Depression), Pyron unequivocally demonstrates that Margaret Mitchell was one of the most qualified people to ever write about the Old South, not just as a researcher but as a blueblood. Her family roots trace deep into Atlanta history.

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