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MAMMY'S TRUE STORY: THE CHARACTERIZATION OF MAMMY
IN *RUTH'S JOURNEY* BY DONALD MCCAIG

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ABSTRACT: The immense popularity of *Gone with the Wind*, over eighty years after being published, is now often tarnished by accusations of rampant racism. The character of Mammy, especially, has been criticized as stereotypical and perpetuating historically inaccurate ideas of the role of black Mammies. With the double-fold intention of giving a voice to black characters mostly silent in *Gone with the Wind* and counteracting these accusations of a negative portrayal of African-Americans, the Margaret Mitchell Trust commissioned an authorized sequel recounting Mammy's story, *Ruth's Journey*, by Donald McCaig. This article analyzes the image of Mammy *Ruth's Journey* presents, and considers whether it has successfully fulfilled these goals.

Keywords: *Gone with the Wind*, *Ruth's Journey*, Donald McCaig, slavery, African-American characters, *The Wind is Never Gone*.

RESUMO: A imensa popularidade de *Gone with the Wind*, mais de oitenta anos após a sua publicação, é com frequência manchada por acusações de racismo flagrante. A personagem Mammy, de modo especial, tem sido alvo de críticas pelo seu carácter de estereótipo e por perpetuar ideias acerca do papel das amas negras que são historicamente erradas. Com a dupla intenção de dar voz a personagens negras que permanecem largamente silenciosas em *Gone with the Wind* e de fazer face às acusações relativas ao retrato negativo dos afro-americanos, a Fundação Margaret Mitchell encomendou uma continuação autorizada da história de Mammy, *Ruth's Journey*, de Donald McCaig. Este artigo analisa a imagem de Mammy apresentada em *Ruth's Journey* e avalia até que ponto a obra foi bem-sucedida no cumprimento dos seus objectivos.

Palavras-chave: *Gone with the Wind*, *Ruth's Journey*, Donald McCaig, escravatura, personagens afro-americanas, *The Wind is Never Gone*.

Few books can claim, over eighty years after their publication, to remain widely popular, the subject matter of newspaper and research articles, to grace the lists of favorite books of countless readers and, moreover, to be the subject of huge controversies.¹ The immense popularity of *Gone with the Wind* (1936) persists, despite being more often than not tarnished by accusations of racism and an idealized picture of the South, including happy slaves and glorifications of the Ku Klux Klan.² For such an old novel, it continues to generate passionate arguments. The most recent controversy was in the summer of 2020, when the U.S.A. was torn by racial protests and the question whether to remove Confederate symbols (such as the flag of the state of Mississippi). Streaming platform HBO was forced to temporarily remove the cinematographic adaptation of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) from its catalogue – now a brief commentary on the historical moment precedes it.

The presentation of African-American characters in *Gone with the Wind* drew attention from the moment it was first published, but these issues gained new currency in 2001 with news of the imminent publication of *The Wind Done Gone* by African-American writer Alice Randall. Randall conceived her novel as an alternative version, one in which Mammy is the true love of Gerald O'Hara and the mother of a half-sister of Scarlett's, Cynara. Concerns that Randall's version may modify readers' views on *Gone with the Wind* arose along fears that it would become the "black *Gone with the Wind*". After a lengthy legal battle, an agreement between the Margaret Mitchell Trust and Randall allowed the publication of the novel (although "an unauthorized parody" was to be printed in the cover).

With the double intention of giving a voice to black characters mostly silent in *Gone with the Wind* and counteracting these accusations of a negative

¹ *Gone with the Wind* can boast of sales of more than 30,000,000 copies, including translations into thirty-two languages (Edmondson 119).

² Mitchell, who prided herself in her painstaking historical research, relied on sources then available: "the Lost Cause myth was also embraced and elaborated on by notable New South historians, imbuing its revision history with a high degree of institutional credibility" (Thompson / Tian 599-600). Much of the scholarship that denounced the brutality of the South was published years after Mitchell had written her only novel (Gomez-Galisteo 69). For instance, Herbert Aptheker's *American Negro Slave Revolts* came out in 1943. While W.E.B. Dubois' *Black Reconstruction* had been published in 1935, Mitchell had done most of her research and writing for *Gone with the Wind* in the late twenties. It was only in the 1940s that there was "a flood of fiction and poetry by both blacks and whites dealing with African American life and white racism" (Hutchinson 202).

portrayal of African-Americans, the Trust commissioned Donald McCaig to write *Ruth's Journey*. The novel acknowledged the centrality of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* by having her as the main character, narrating her life before she became Scarlett O'Hara's Mammy. This was the third authorized sequel after Alexandra Ripley's *Scarlett* (1991) and *Rhett Butler's People* (2007), also by the pen of McCaig, whose credentials included a well-regarded Civil War novel, *Jacob's Ladder*. This article analyzes the image of Mammy presented in *Ruth's Journey*, especially in the light of Randall's portrayal of Mammy. Finally, this article will assess whether *Ruth's Journey* successfully gives a credible voice to the African-American characters in *Gone with the Wind* and presents them in a more positive manner than the original.

Stereotypes describing African-Americans were cemented early in American history. These stereotypes are still pervasive, and have influenced the literary representations of African-Americans. Among the most fruitful stereotypes we can find the Sambo, the pickaninny and the Mammy. The Sambo is "a simple-minded, docile black man [which] dates back at least as far as the colonization of America" (Green n.p.). A salient characteristic is his happiness, showing his contentedness with his lot (and therefore denoting the benefits of slavery). Through this stereotype, African-American males were reduced to "a jolly, overgrown child who was happy to serve his master" (*idem*).

African-American children were not free from being stereotyped, and thus the pickaninny emerged. The common image of pickaninnies showed them with "bulging eyes, unkempt hair, red lips, and wide mouths into which they stuffed huge slices of watermelon" (Pilgrim n.p.). Even kind Melanie Wilkes dreads the possibility of her son socializing with pickaninnies: "if we went North, we couldn't let him go to school and associate with Yankee children and have pickaninnies in his class!" (chapter XLI; Mitchell n.p.). Topsy, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was the first pickaninny. Even though Stowe created her to exemplify the evils of child slavery, Topsy soon became a stock figure of laughter and mockery. In *Gone with the Wind*, Prissy functions as one (Pilgrim n.p.).

If the Sambo was the stereotypical male African-American, the dominant view of female African-Americans was the Mammy. The Mammy wielded incommensurable power and authority over her white charges, but at her core there was a streak of docility, for she adhered to the status quo.³ In the words of Alice Randall, "to rape someone and then to entrust that person with the care of your child, you must believe, or imagine, that black people are inherently docile" (qtd in Kenan 232).

³ The very strength of the Mammy helped further emasculate African-American males and denote their inferiority to white males (Green n.p.).

The dominant image of the Mammy was as follows:

a large, independent woman with pitch-black skin and shining white teeth. She wore a drab calico dress and head scarf and lived to serve her master and mistress. The Mammy understood the value of the white lifestyle. The stereotype suggests that she raised the “massa’s” children and loved them dearly, even more than her own. Her tendency to give advice to her mistress was seen as harmless and humorous. Although she treated whites with respect, the Mammy was a tyrant in her own family. She dominated her children and husband, the Sambo, with her temper. (Green n.p.)

Because house slaves tended to be mulattoes, the idea of the Mammy as very black (and therefore, unlikely to stir sexual interest) is a fiction, as is her big size, for food portions were sparsely distributed and slaves were unlikely to be overweight. Mammies really were a composite figure to make the unpleasantness of slavery palatable. For Carr, the Mammy is “a purely white supremacist imagining developed to sate white nostalgia for the Old South in the wake of the devastating Civil War loss” (6).

All these stereotypes were encompassed by the prevalent idea that, in plantations, slaves received a fair and humane treatment. Their childlike status merited a paternalistic protection from their masters.⁴ This was a fallacy: “perhaps some former slaves lived on plantations where they were relatively well treated but even for these slaves there always lurked the possibility of violence. Slavery was in large part, but not in total, a system of power relations where whites used violence, and more often the threat of violence, to impel blacks to obey their wishes” (Carter *et al.* 137).

Just as violence was denied, so was the hard toil of slaves. Instead, a picture of happy darkies who enjoy working in the fields while they sing was conveyed. *Gone with the Wind* so obscures slavery that the war is presented as an issue over land property, not about the preservation of slavery (*idem* 8). This can still be seen in touristic plantations, which “consistently avoid, disregard or sideline mention of slavery and the experiences of the enslaved” (Moody / Small 8). Despite the vital role that slavery played, cotton is usually credited as the source of the success of Southern economy, not the slave labor that made the growth of cotton possible and, more importantly, sustainable. Present-day plantation tourism participates of the same discourse as *Gone with the Wind* in that “slavery is typically described in passive, general and abstract ways, and black people are typically not described in detail, personalized or humanized. [...] If the enslaved are mentioned it is often in highly stereotypical

⁴ Both fiction and non-fiction shared this benevolent view of slavery. Among others, Caroline Lee Hentz in her novel *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) or historian George Fitzhugh in *Southern Thought* (1857) (Silva 136).

ways, for example, generic roles, nameless individuals and enslaved women in kitchens" (*idem* 8-9).

Gone with the Wind displays and perpetuates "a once hegemonic discourse about slavery and race in American culture" (Ryan 243) that renders "a beatific image of Old South as a divinely sanctioned society of aristocratic planters and contented slaves" (Thompson / Tian 599-600).⁵ Much of the criticism against the novel in the 1930s had to do with the image of the happy darkies. Black poet Melvin B. Tolson pointed it out:

The North was wrong in fighting to free the black man [...] Negroes didn't want to be free anyway. Slaves were happy. The greatest pleasure of the slave was to serve massa. [...] All slaves were black; no white men had any mulatto children. There were no slave markets. Yankee soldiers went through Georgia raping white virgins. Negroes loved (with an undying love) the white masters, and hated the poor whites because they didn't own Negroes. Dixie was a heaven on earth until the damned Yankees and carpetbaggers came [...] The Negroes were so dumb that they hated the very Yankees who wanted to free them. All masters were gentlemen - without high-yellow mistresses. (qtd in Edmondson, 2018: 101)

Going further, William L. Patterson, an African-American Communist, felt that this affable and benevolent picture of slavery directly attacked democracy and ultimately sought to have slavery reinstated:

Gone with the Wind has martyred the southern plantation owner. In martyring this relic of barbarism *Gone with the Wind* not only "morally justifies" the slave breeding pen and the degradation of Negro womanhood and manhood, it has scorned upon and desecrated the love that democratic white America has for freedom and truth. [...] The return of slave conditions is the objective. (qtd in Edmondson 102-103)

Both the novel and the movie could avert criticisms of racism in that slavery is presented as not having to do with race but with one's capacities and skills.⁶ In Ryan's words, "Mitchell's book even argues that slavery operated as a fair and just meritocracy for African Americans, by providing a system in which the talented, responsible, and industrious earned liberal rewards" (246).⁷

⁵ Historical research debunking this myth such as C. Van Woodward's work (1951) was published after *Gone with the Wind* came out.

⁶ There was a conscious effort on the part of producer David O. Selznick to alleviate potential offense - references to the Ku Klux Klan and the word "nigger" were omitted. Still, Selznick decided not to have a black adviser (Haskell 202).

⁷ This ran alongside the Lost Cause myth presenting the war as a noble and divine cause. Actually, both novel and film show "a pre-Civil War idyllic, romanticized South, devoid of the

Scarlett displays a negative opinion of African-Americans' agency or autonomy, despite having lived all her life with resourceful Mammy: "How stupid negroes were! They never thought of anything unless they were told. And the Yankees wanted to free them" (chapter XXIV). She also sees slaves as childlike: "they did not know that negroes had to be handled gently, as though they were children, directed, praised, petted, scolded" (chapter XXXVIII). Still, they are trustworthy and have some outstanding qualities: "Scarlett trusted them far more than most white people, certainly more than she trusted any Yankee. There were qualities of loyalty and tirelessness and love in them that no strain could break, no money could buy" (chapter XXXVIII). Especially dreadful for Scarlett is that Yankee women fail to understand what slavery was like: "they never believed her when she told them she had only seen one bloodhound in all her life and it was a small mild dog and not a huge ferocious mastiff. They wanted to know about the dreadful branding irons which planters used to mark the faces of their slaves and the cat-o'-nine-tails with which they beat them to death" (chapter XXXVIII).

The description of Mammy, despite her strength and dignity, is at times racist too, presenting her as ape-like. For instance, Mammy's face is "sad with the uncomprehending sadness of a monkey's face" (chapter XXIV).⁸ The slaves' hands are described as paws: Scarlett "shook hands all around, her small white hand disappearing into their huge black paws" (chapter XVII). African-American characters in *Gone with the Wind* are in general terms "unacceptably passive" in spite of the prominence of the figure of Mammy, "the presiding genius, the soul of the family, its jealous guardian" (Haskell 209). There exists

a total void in *Gone with the Wind* of rounded, black portrayals. All the black characters [...] are stereotypical because they represented types rather than well-rounded characters – the noble servant that stays with his owner even after emancipation, the loving Mammy, the silly maid, the kind-hearted but infantile field slaves... Because even the seemingly beloved "Mammy" is merely loyal and docile and cannot think on her own. (Randall, "Declaration" 5-6)

pernicious effects of the "peculiar institution", subjected in first instance to the aggression of a great Northern invader and, upon its defeat, by a civilian army of Carpetbaggers" (Silva 135).

⁸ Hattie MacDaniel's outstanding performance, which would make her the first African-American recipient of an Academy Award, helped dilute Mitchell's more negative rendering. Randall has expressed how she was "shocked by Mitchell's depiction of Mammy as stupid and ugly. I had overwritten Hattie MacDaniel's performance of Mammy, a performance that included an intelligence and beauty, unto Mitchell[s] Mammy. Reading as an adult, Mitchell's Mammy stood unmasked and damaging" (qtd in Kenan 229).

For some, the novel presented a “harmful and offensive view of black people” (*idem* 5-6) that Randall sought to correct – causing a stir in the process.⁹ Even before *The Wind Done Gone* was finally published, leaked information about its plot had caused an earthquake. The novel is told from the point of view of Cynara and was scandalous in its portrayal of a Tara where homosexuality and miscegenation (two topics banned in the authorized sequels of *Gone with the Wind*) occurred.

Because of female slaves’ lack of power, Randall revised Mitchell’s work to show how African-American women found ways to subvert despite their slave status (Carr 54). Randall’s alternative power structure makes slavery more acceptable (Haddox 123) by portraying Garlic (Pork) and Pallas (Mammy) as the true masters of Cotton Farm (Tara), acting as puppeteers for their white “owners”. Pallas goes to such lengths that, to prevent Cotton Farm from eventually being inherited by a less compliable master, she murdered the three O’Hara male babies. These murders constitute “an act of personal vengeance and [...] a martial act in an unnamed war” (Randall qtd in Kenan 232). Still, the status quo is maintained, for Garlic and Pallas seek to preserve Cotton Farm, manipulating it to their own benefit, instead of trying to destroy the system (Haddox 130). Their devotion to Cotton Farm is similar to Mammy’s devotion to Tara.¹⁰

In contrast to Mitchell’s Mammy, who does not have a life of her own, devoted servant that she is to the O’Haras, in having Mammy as Planter (Mr O’Hara)’s mistress, Randall was running a risk. While this relationship humanizes her, it is problematical in that

portraying Mammy as seductress runs the risk of minimizing enslaved black women’s sexual exploitation and absolving white men of all culpability by pinning the blame on sexually deviant black women. [...] In attempting to dismantle the stereotypically fat and unattractive Mammy of white supremacist imaginings it seems that Randall inadvertently engraves another equally damaging pathology onto Mammy. (Carr 58)

Randall attempted to recreate Mammy’s life, but hers would not be the only attempt for long, for the Trust commissioned their own version of Mammy’s story. In interviews, McCaig has stated that this was his own idea

⁹ Mitchell was baffled by these views: “they referred to the book as an ‘incendiary and negro baiting’ book. Personally I do not know where they get such an idea for, as far as I can see, most of the negro characters were people of worth, dignity and rectitude – certainly Mammy and Peter and even the ignorant [meaning socially uneducated] Sam knew more of decorous behavior and honor than Scarlett did” (qtd in Rentz 18).

¹⁰ This devotion plays a vital function, for, “if we could believe that [she] was content with her life, we could believe that slavery was a humane institution” (West qtd in Borreggine n.p.).

(Penrice n.p.) because “Mammy is one of the truly powerful figures in the book and movie and, oddly enough, one of the figures nobody tends to think much about. When people say what is *Gone with the Wind* about, they say it’s a love story between Rhett Butler and Scarlett O’Hara. But Mammy is almost a third party” (qtd in McClurg n.p.). Still, it is hard to believe that, hurt by the very negative portrayal of Mammy in *The Wind Done Gone*, the Trust was not desirous to correct this “false” image by replacing it with their own, sanitized version. That way, McCaig’s version could compete (and hopefully supersede, as it had the seal of “authorized sequel”) with *The Wind Done Gone* (an unauthorized parody). Certainly, the portrayal McCaig offered of Mammy was diametrically different from that of Randall’s work. For Carr, “*The Wind Done Gone*’s depiction of Mammy as a woman who fashions her sexuality into a tool for attaining a measure of agency infuses humanity into one of the most troubling and pathological images of black womanhood” (56). In contrast, *Ruth’s Journey* fleshes Mammy out by injecting her with a family of her own, portraying her as a young woman in love, a bride and a mother and, eventually, a widow and a childless mother before becoming Scarlett O’Hara’s loyal Mammy.

Ruth’s Journey is divided into three parts: Saint-Domingue, the Low Country and the Flint River. The first two parts are written in standard American English from the point of view of an omniscient narrator and the third is told in the first person in Mammy’s dialect. This in itself is striking in a novel that was supposed to document Ruth’s journey and that was to give a voice to Mammy to tell her own story. In *Gone with the Wind* Mammy had been born in the Robillards’ pink home and never left their service, thus saving her the trauma of the Atlantic passage to North America or the adjustment to her new condition as a slave. As a house slave born in the estate, she did not know any other life. In contrast, McCaig gives her a less comfortable past.¹¹ In choosing the setting, he emulated other sequel writers who set their novels in the Antilles – Maryse Condé had transplanted her recreation of *Wuthering Heights*, *Windward Heights*, to Guadeloupe and Cuba, and Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the prequel to *Jane Eyre*, had Mr Rochester meet his first wife in Dominica. *Ruth’s Journey* begins in Haiti, where a slave girl is found among her deceased family and taken home by Augustin Fornier, Scarlett’s grandmother’s first husband.¹²

¹¹ Some mistakes mar *Ruth’s Journey*. For example, the Robillards’ pink house is constructed well after Ruth is born. Ruth’s birth date is given as around 1804, when the textual evidence in *Gone with the Wind* places her birth around 1818 (Gutowski n.p.). Solange Robillard, née Prudhomme in *Gone with the Wind*, is given the maiden name Fornier.

¹² Ruth also has the gift of clairvoyance (McCaig 227, 304, 361).

Augustin's wife, Solange, is not too concerned about the girl's life before she became her property, which denies the validity of slaves' ancestry or roots. For Solange, "her Ruth was born, as if in her own bed, the day Solange named her" (McCaig 24), an acknowledgment of the power of naming. While Solange may wish to completely erase Ruth's past, in a novel that supposedly reveals Mammy's real, hidden story, Ruth is certainly "born" in the novel when she is found by Solange's husband and denied again her true parentage.

Solange has a peculiar relationship with Ruth – whereas she seems to love her, a strong economic component is present. Solange alternatively sees Ruth as a commodity that could be sold ("if Ruth disappointed, there were buyers" [idem 24]) or as a pet whose praise reflects well on Solange: "white admiration for Ruth flattered the child's owner as he who admires a Thoroughbred compliments the horse's owner" (idem 49). Despite her fondness for Ruth, Ruth is ultimately property, and Solange is able to appraise her monetary worth (idem 52). *Ruth's Journey* drops the depiction of slavery as a social class issue posed by *Gone with the Wind* and, instead, emphasizes the racial overtones. For all the love that Ruth professes to Solange, her mistress fails to see her as a daughter figure because of their different races, and never ceases to remind her that she is a prized possession but a possession nonetheless. In sharp contrast to Solange's keen financial eye, Ruth regards her mistress as family. She cries, when a slave trader is insistently interested in buying her, "I tries make you happy! You only family I gots" (idem 84).

Ruth's Journey shares with *Gone with the Wind* the same idealized, paternalistic vision of the benefits of slavery, identifying masters with paternal figures with their slaves' best interests at heart. Solange, willing to sell Ruth, is nevertheless glorified as "the woman who would become the child's owner and almost mother" (idem 4). Meanwhile, her husband "imagined himself instructing Negro children in the glories of French civilization. He anticipated their gratitude and joy" (idem 13). Solange and Augustin dream of being landowners of a benevolent, paternalistic slaveholding plantation – "they would be rich. They would be good. They would be loved" (ibidem). Still, they realize this is not an entirely realistic aspiration, for "the Negroes [...] They love us, but they hate us too. I shall never understand" (idem 37). Augustin's bafflement points to the slaves' ingratitude; despite their owners' care and good intentions, slaves still resent their status. As in *Gone with the Wind*, good slave owners are emphasized, and thus Jack Ravel buys his jockey's wife before she is sold further away (idem 187), similar to the way in which Gerald O'Hara buys Dilcey, Pork's wife, from his neighbor John Wilkes.

Ruth's Journey, unfortunately, shares its predecessor's negative portrayals of African-Americans and has a character say that "I'm told Negro women are [...] primitive" (idem 9). This negative depiction is not limited to one character's view. The narrator seems to share it, for Ruth is described in rather negatively racial terms: "she was a small black African as mysterious as that

savage continent and just as assured as one of its queens" (*idem* 24). It is a serious flaw in a book supposed to expunge the appalling racist remarks that hurt the current reception of *Gone with the Wind*.

In *Gone with the Wind*, we never learn Mammy's real name, reflecting the practice of giving to the white children's caretaker the name of Mammy. This name was so closely bound to the person that her real name was completely forgotten (Wallace-Sanders 7), being ignored even by her beloved white charges. In *Ruth's Journey*, Mammy's birth name is forever lost in her childhood and she is named Ruth (after the biblical Book of Ruth). She admits that "I been Ruth long time. Don't remember who I been before" (McCaig 140). Eventually this given name will be replaced by Mammy. In slave narratives, the former slave marks his freedom by choosing a new name of his own, a recurrent event in neoslave narratives too – "not only to describe to the contemporary audience how important a name is for people who had to struggle to find their own identity, but also because it is still an effective symbol for a fresh start" (Namradja 83). Many a neoslave narrative seeks to present a different representation of Mammies from that in *Gone with the Wind*, by claiming their true identity and getting rid of the name of Mammy (Rich 50).

In *The Wind Done Gone* Mammy's real name is revealed to be Pallas. Cynara explains that

even Other [Scarlett O'Hara] called Mammy out of her name. Other, who loved my mother; Other, who ran to her Mammy like I never seen nobody run to anybody, or anything, for the more significant matter, ran to Mammy like she was couch and pillow, blanket and mattress, prayer and God. (Randall, *Wind* 7)

Cynara's own attitude towards the name of Mammy is ambivalent: "they called her Mammy. Always. Some ways I like that. Some days when it was kind of like we – she and me – had a secret against them, the planting people, I like it. Different days, when it feels she wasn't big enough to have a name, I hate it" (*idem* 6).¹³

But in *Ruth's Journey* Ruth casts away her previous identity as Ruth to fully embrace that of Mammy. This is a marked departure from neoslave narratives and rather conforms to the practices in Southern plantations. Solange sees Ruth as a substitute mother figure for her daughters (a transition that culminates when Solange dies) on the grounds that, in Solange's opinion, "Mammies provide the affection for which mothers haven't time or inclination" (McCaig 212). The novel thus joins the ranks of multiple books praising Mammies.

¹³ Cynara's name itself is also another instance of how slaves are deprived of their own names, for she is usually called Cinnamon or Chili, concealing her true name.

It has become commonplace to identify the lot of female slaves with that of Southern women in that the latter, for all the cult of Southern womanhood, were also subjected to white males. In this vein, Ruth claims that “most Mistress no more free do what they want than I is or Pork is or ary colored. They gots to wear they bustles and they gots to keep they pale face out the sun and they gots tell ary gentleman within hearin’ how he moistest gentleman ever strut the earth” (*idem* 314-315). This perceived similarity, however, denies the wide gap between slave women and their mistresses, with the latter complicit in the perpetuation of slavery and blind to the slave women’s plight (Carr 4). African women were especially deprived of power, as they were “black in a white society, slave in a free society, woman in a society ruled by men” (White qtd in Hine 15).

Ruth’s Journey does not go as far as Randall when it comes to slaves’ agency, but it does acknowledge how slaves skillfully maneuver their owners’ lives. In the antebellum South, tradition has it that Mammies’ functions encompassed child care but were gradually expanded as the children grew up and did not need constant supervision, up to the extent that the Mammy became “next to the mistress in authority and ‘bossed’ everyone and everything in the household” (Parkhurst 351). This is mostly a fabrication, in accordance with the prevalent, idealized picture of the Mammy that is historically inaccurate. Actually, “if the servility of blacks in *Gone with the Wind* strikes some as offensive, it is closer to the reality of the period than Mammy’s overweening strength and authority” (Haskell 211). But *Ruth’s Journey* keeps up with this fiction of the powerful Mammy and presents Ruth as the true master in the Robillard household (McCaig 235). Her position of power and trust makes her able to manipulate events without her master’s realization – Mrs Sevier’s criticizing Ruth results in that Mr Robillard is always reported to be absent whenever she visits (*idem* 232).

Yet, Ruth must subtly conceal her power. She dissembles, concealing her true self to her advantage: “fool pretend he know more ’n he do, Mammy pretend she know less” (*idem* 294). This is a lesson slave children learn from an early age, and Ruth’s daughter, Martine, aged five, tells her rag doll, named Silly: “Silly, be good! Bad niggers hanged!” (*idem* 172). The doll’s name itself indicates the pretended stupidity that African-Americans must show to their masters to survive.

The slaves’ attitude towards slavery is commented upon on *Ruth’s Journey*, where there are several references to the slaves’ gratitude owed to their owners (or lack of it). When in *Gone with the Wind* Mammy snubbed former slaves who had run wild after emancipation, in *Ruth’s Journey* the rebel slaves in Saint-Domingue are referred to as “ungrateful slaves on that rich small island [who] had revolted against their legitimate owners” (*idem* 6).

To enrich Ruth’s background, *Ruth’s Journey* shows her as a wife and mother and takes her temporarily away from New Orleans, where Solange

and her first husband had settled after leaving Saint-Domingue. Ruth falls in love with a free colored, Jehu Glen, a staircase builder, who decides to buy her and properly marry her in church, rather than jump the broomstick. Still, Jehu fails to emancipate Ruth (*idem* 153).¹⁴ Jehu is a skillful craftsman, which is consonant with practices at the time, as “[t]he slaveholder’s increasingly selective liberation of favored bondsmen and the difficulties slaves had running away or purchasing their liberty meant that free Negroes were generally more skilled, literate, and well connected with whites than the mass of slaves” (Berlin qtd in Gates n.p.).

In Charleston, where the couple moves, Jehu is swayed by the teachings of historical figure Denmark Vesey, who rejected coloreds’ passivity and, instead, called for their boldly acknowledging that they were as good as white people. This is a new development in regards to Mitchell’s book, where her black characters are happy enough with the status quo before the war and, afterwards, Mammy is uninterested in registering for voting.¹⁵

The former slaves were now the lords of creation and, with the aid of the Yankees, the lowest and most ignorant ones were on top. The better class of them, scorning freedom, were suffering as severely as their white masters. Thousands of house servants, the highest caste in the slave population, remained with their white folks, doing manual labor which had been beneath them in the old days. Many loyal field hands also refused to avail themselves of the new freedom, but the hordes of “trashy free issue niggers”, who were causing most of the trouble, were drawn largely from the field-hand class. (chapter XXVII)

In contrast to her husband’s enthusiasm for Vesey’s teachings, Ruth is wary of his tactics and fears the consequences. Her fears are proved true when the insurrection that was being planned is discovered and the participants are executed, including Jehu (McCaig 165-175). This is compounded by a legal system in which “coloreds couldn’t testify for other coloreds, only against them” (*idem* 172). Jehu’s properties are confiscated, including his wife and five-year-old daughter, who are auctioned and sold separately, only for Ruth to later learn that Martine has died (*idem* 176-177, 186). By the time of John Brown’s revolt, which *Ruth’s Journey* briefly mentions, Mammy is very much against slave revolts, fearing the potential reprisals (*idem* 343-345). It is significant that McCaig chose a failed revolt to showcase that the contentedness of slaves in *Gone with the Wind* was not so pervasive. After having made the point of the

¹⁴ The passing of a law in December 1820 by the South Carolina legislature made emancipation virtually impossible, as it could only be achieved by an act of legislature (McCaig 153).

¹⁵ At other times, Ruth is shown as a keen political analyst, who assesses the Mexican-American War as follows: “America got ‘Manifest Destiny’, which mean takin’ everything what ain’t nailed down” (McCaig 289).

existence of discontented African-Americans, the suppression of this revolt strengthens the status quo.

For Holland, “quintessentially, to be African American is really to be a conglomeration of selves and experiences” (334). This is what happens to Ruth – from being a girl of the Antilles she becomes a slave in the South, then the wife of a free colored and eventually Mammy. Unfortunately, her thoughts until she moves to Tara are unrecorded, as the first two parts of the novel (before she becomes Mammy as we know her) are narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator and it is only in the third part that we hear her voice. In this third part, McCaig drops standard American English to convey Mammy’s thoughts as if she were speaking. While writing *Gone with the Wind*, Mitchell had to face the difficulty of how to transcribe African-American speech accurately. While she claimed that she had been respectful and was painstaking in trying to reproduce African-American speech accurately on paper, this did not curtail criticisms. Furthermore, the language she ascribes to the slaves has been regarded as yet another marker of her stereotypical and negative portrayal of African-Americans. Pointedly,

it would seem that Mammy should have had better grammar considering her upbringing. But this is fitting to the way that Mitchell perceives her simple black characters. All of the slaves in her book speak in this manner. They speak the ignorant language of the field hands, living segregated in slave cabins, only coming into contact with other field hands. (Egilsdóttir 10)

For Earl Conrad, African-American dialect was used by Mitchell (as well as by contemporary Southern writers) to convey the inferiority of blacks (Carson n.p.). Actually, “Mitchell uses nonstandard spellings for the speech of blacks while using standard spelling for whites even though the speech of both groups is phonetically very similar” (*ibidem*).

It is a common trope to depict *antebellum* African-American families as almost non-existent, characterized by an absent father, and shattered by slavery. Alex Haley’s *Roots*, which presented Kunta Kinte’s family as exceptional, further contributed to perpetuate this view. However, African-American slave families were not as uncommon as *Roots* had it (Meritt 212), for “in all parts of the United States, during the last years of slavery, black children [...] were just as likely as lower-class white children to grow up in two-parent households. [...] black Americans emerged from slavery with the two-parent, patriarchal household as the norm of family life” (Levin 132-133). Still, along with *Roots*, *Ruth’s Journey* and *The Wind Done Gone* continue to present African-American families as an oddity.

While Mammies devoted their lives to the care of the white children, the Mammies’ relationship with their own, biological children was often fraught with conflicts and more distant. In order to be permanently available for the

white children, Mammies had to neglect their own children up to the extent that “some [black] babies died from neglect as a result of lack of nutrition from no feeding or not enough” (Fox-Genovese qtd in Rich 63). But Ruth can be a doting mother, something that Mammies rarely could do, as African-American women could not be full-time mothers to their infants. Yet, in *Ruth’s Journey*, Ruth’s roles as a biological mother and as Mammy do not overlap. Her devoted mother phase occurs during her brief marriage to Jehu in Charleston, where, away from Solange and her brood, she can be a wife and mother in her own terms. In *Ruth’s Journey*, providentially, the death of Ruth’s husband and her being sold away from her daughter prevent her from having to choose between her loyalty to Solange or to her own child.

Common myths present “black mothers as matriarchal figures, superbly strong and protective, and at the same time, selfless, all embracing, demanding nothing or little, and totally self-sacrificing creatures whose identities are inseparable from their nurturing services” (Ghasemi / Hajizadeh 477). Motherhood for Ruth is a source of conflicts, and she cannot protect her daughter from being sold. The possibility that Ruth may later on decide to go on a search for her lost daughter is curtailed by the death of Martine while in slavery (and, as a result, Ruth can contentedly devote herself to be a maternal figure for the Robillards and the O’Haras). After all, she is *Gone with the Wind’s* Mammy and she has to return to the *Gone with the Wind* narrative.

In *Gone with the Wind* “nowhere do we find the young and pretty blacks and mulattoes whose enforced relations with their masters humiliated both slaves and mistresses, the concubines who presented the planters’ children with half-brothers and –sisters” (Haskell 212). Randall decided to write *The Wind Done Gone* because she wondered where the mulatto children of Tara were. Her protagonist, Cynara, is her answer – the daughter of Mr O’Hara and Mammy, hurt by a life of neglect, as her mother took better care of Scarlett than of her. *The Wind Done Gone* shows Cynara as the tragic mulatto (Gomez-Galisteo 83-84) to denounce the evils of slavery. The benevolent notion of slavery as a paternalistic institution is dismantled. Despite her father’s promises that she would be sold to a good planter family, eventually Cynara is put on the auction block in the slave market in Charleston (Randall, *Wind* 2).

While *Ruth’s Journey* does not intend to be a neoslave narrative, such as Toni Morrison’s novels *Beloved* (1987) and *A Mercy* (2008), or *Kindred* (1979) by Octavia Butler, it has some points in common with neoslave narratives, such as the recreation of the moment in which the slave is put on the auction block or the acknowledgment of the fact that there existed free blacks who owned slaves (legally, Jehu is Ruth’s owner, not her husband). A shortcoming of the novel is that McCaig does not dare to portray a rebellion in an actual plantation, just an attempt on the part of the slaves which is brutally quashed.

Ruth’s Journey borrows the idea of slavery being a meritocracy from *Gone with the Wind* – even free coloreds own slaves, perpetuating the system and

presenting it as a case of skilled free people against unskilled slaves. However, Aptheker has showed that Mitchell's reading of the South as a class-based system (instead of one divided along color lines) is inaccurate and misleading, as racial identification was stronger than class distinctions (Ryan 253).¹⁶ In the antebellum period,

black people in the South dealt with one another in their yards, on the roads and rivers between plantations, at church services, and at weddings. These social interactions nourished their hearts and minds and fostered a sense of community. They also helped make it possible for slaves to own property. The informal economy was built on a foundation of shared understandings about what property was and how people owned it. It nurtured a whole range of different practices, from conjure to churches. Those practices also tied free blacks and slaves into networks of "colored people", networks whose character was neither wholly social nor completely business-oriented. (Penningroth qtd in Hine 20)

In *Ruth's Journey*, there certainly is a network of freed Africans, but this turns out to be the reason for the death of Ruth's husband. Also, while her husband spends time within this network, Ruth stays on the sidelines, thereby diminishing the value of such a vital network.

Gone with the Wind, written between 1926 and 1936, reflects "anxieties about race, gender and genetics proliferating in the South in the 1920s and 30s around issues of morality and legitimacy" (Rose n.p.).¹⁷ *Ruth's Journey* can be inscribed in a wave of popularity for cultural representations of race issues in film and print in recent years. As time has gone by, one of the most common accusations hurled against *Gone with the Wind* is its racial politics. Certainly, a revision of *Gone with the Wind* in racial terms would be welcome, but McCaig's novel does not meet the requirements.

McCaig's attempt to present Mammy's true story was, at best, considered to be inconsistent with the version presented by *Gone with the Wind*. *Ruth's Journey's* Mammy has been accused of being docile and even ingratiating and obsequious, in contrast to the power *Gone with the Wind's* Mammy exerted,

¹⁶ "Aptheker, furthermore, implicitly rejects Mitchell's assertion that elite blacks and the white planter class had common interests. He shows that members of the slave elite actually led many slave insurrections, including the artisan blacksmith Gabriel, the literate Nat Turner, and the onetime house-slave Denmark Vesey. Aptheker's emphasis on class and interracial alliances in the antebellum South serves not only to dismantle the dominant historiography of the early twentieth century but also persuasively refutes *Gone with the Wind's* portrait of the class structure of Old Dixie" (Ryan 253).

¹⁷ While the novel owes much to the prevalent values at the time it was written (1920s-1930s), the film, made in 1936, is "a barometer of American race relations in the 1930s and 1940s" (Leff n.p.).

having her true opinion known by everybody (even if not acknowledged) and never letting Scarlett bully her (Maturro n.p.).

Mammy's journey is not a journey into freedom, contrary to slave (or neoslave) narratives. The limitations imposed by *Gone with the Wind* inevitably annul this possibility. In her case, she does attain a freedom of sorts; living with her free husband, although she remains a slave legally, she grows into autonomy and adulthood. Nevertheless, this semblance of freedom is cut short by her husband's death, when she returns to be the affable Mammy of *Gone with the Wind*.

The Wind Done Gone and *Ruth's Journey* have in common their presenting Mammy as sexual, in stark contrast to traditional depictions of the Mammy as a desexualized being, mostly on the grounds on her barrenness and her large body (Del Gaudio n.p.). While Mitchell certainly subscribed to this view of Mammy, in *The Wind Done Gone* she had been Mr O'Hara's lover (and true love) and in *Ruth's Journey* she had been married and born a child, as well as having to prevent her master's sexual advances (which denies her lack of sex appeal).

At 372 pages, *Ruth's Journey* is notably shorter than *Gone with the Wind* and its two other authorized novels, although longer than *The Wind Is Done Gone*. The very brevity of the third part, told by Ruth in non-standard English, in contrast to the first two parts, narrated by an omniscient narrator in standard English, diminishes the worth of Mammy's true voice, as she is given scarce space even though this is supposed to be her story. That brief interlude of Ruth's life in Charleston totals out at 55 pages, less than 20 per cent of the novel, so that even in her own book Mammy is denied an existence of her own apart from the O'Haras (or the Robillards). Because of Mammy's lack of predominance in her own novel, reviewer Claire Maturro suggested that the novel should have been more properly called *Scarlett O'Hara's People* (n.p.).¹⁸ It certainly would have been more effective if the entire novel had been told from Mammy's point of view, not just the last and shortest section.

Writers (especially African-American writers) revisiting the Civil War not only work against the backdrop of stereotypes, myths, and legends of the Lost Cause, but also against the far-reaching influence of *Gone with the Wind*. Randall can be seen as one in a long line of African-American women writers who "have replied to Mitchell's tribal mythology with a tribal mythology of their own" (Condé 208). With her novel, she offered "an important counter-narrative to the Lost Cause's most powerful purveyor" (Edmondson 246).¹⁹ *The Wind Done Gone* is also an example of counter-memories, which can be

¹⁸ McCaig's previous sequel had been *Rhett Butler's People*.

¹⁹ Whether she succeeded or not is another matter – "for all the furor it generated, many reviewers considered Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* a failure in its efforts to dismantle the power of Mitchell's enduring tale" (Ryan 266).

defined as “intentional efforts to create tension between historical reality and oppressive mythologies by illuminating the harsh conditions suffered in the past” (*idem* 247). But although Randall finally managed to have her work published, the Trust still retains the power on authorized sequels to decide the fate of Rhett, Scarlett, Mammy and any other character. By rewriting Mammy’s story after Randall had, McCaig was denying the validity of Randall’s work. We have to note that “narratives work by enabling certain ways of thinking while disabling alternatives. Prevailing narratives (master narratives, metanarratives) disabled nonconforming narratives by making them appear implausible and unnatural” (Carter *et al.* 6). If we have the official, Trust-sanctioned story of Mammy, Randall’s work reads as a far-fetched parody.

With Ruth’s refusal to engage in rebellious activities and her return to service to the Robillards, Ruth’s story unfortunately ends up conforming more to a white point of view than to African-American experiences as recounted in slave or neoslave narratives. Thus, Ruth shares “the [white] Southerner’s view of the past [which] aroused the bittersweet feelings of nostalgia for a past of military glory, of secure values, of a rich and harmonious social order” (Seidel *qtd in* Barkley 57).

In McCaig’s previous *Gone with the Wind* novel, *Rhett Butler’s People*, as a sign of the changing times since 1936, Rhett Butler is fashioned as “proto-Civil Rights-minded” (Gomez-Galisteo 111), but *Ruth’s Journey* is more conservative and ultimately fails to present a credible version of Ruth’s life. On the one hand, factual mistakes with *Gone with the Wind* make it hard to reconcile both versions. On the other, it continues to present a picture of slavery which is very much consonant with ideas that have long been historically rebated. As a result, McCaig’s novel can be seen as a continuator of the trend to vindicate a more positive image of the South, especially needed in the light of “the 1960s Civil Rights movement and the graphic media images of the racially segregated South that have been indelibly brandished into popular memory” (Thompson / Tian 602). His African-American characters embrace (seemingly contentedly) a life of servitude, given the perils of life as freed people. In the words of Cash, “if it can be said there are many Souths, the fact remains that there is also one South” (*qtd in* Thompson / Tian 597). Similarly, we may well say that there is only one *Gone with the Wind*, and, told by African-American characters or not, the political stance and the views continue being strikingly similar to 1936, despite the change in sensibilities, a different writer and the time gap.²⁰ Tomorrow will be another day, and there may be another parody, or a new sequel recounting Mammy’s first-hand account.

²⁰ The suitability of a white male in his seventies to give a voice to an African-American woman was also an issue with the publication of *Ruth’s Journey* (Penrice n.p.).

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