

Chapter 4

Responsible reading and popular texts for grown-ups

Authorizing popular adult entertainment

In her study of romance enthusiasts from a middle class community in Illinois, Janice Radway discovered that, while most readers expressed a desire to escape from reality, to claim "free space" in their lives, their reading affected real-life decisions for some, and, for almost all, also their view of themselves. Although they acknowledged that influence, readers also expressed guilt about their choice of reading (1991, 105 ff.).

Concomitantly, then, in the taped interviews with these readers, Radway found all thirteen discussed the "facts" and "truths" they found in their novels in the same breath as they mentioned feeling guilty for reading these books at all. Radway sees this "guilt / value" ambivalence as culturally-induced. She traces it to societal ambivalence about desire and sexuality—culturally-promoted, psychological bases for self-doubt or "feeling guilty" about spending time reading "trash."

I suggest that, along with those factors, the common practice of subjective reading contributes to the contradictory "guilt / value" feelings many readers experience when they read for pleasure. Whereas Radway's readers were very clear about their likes and dislikes, their observations revealed no strategies for deciding where truth or facts were to be found in any given work. Radway infers that this discrepancy between judgments and objectivity exists because her readers separated plots from setting. They ignored ". . . the accuracy of the portrayal of the physical environment within which the idealized characters move" (109). I propose a slightly different assessment: that readers often have a grasp of information bundles in the text but have never been authorized (in school, in the media) to think about them as recoverable chains of facts. They know they learned something, but they haven't learned to recreate the process with which to articulate what they learned and how, or to value that process as learning. Often, they also "learned" that reading isn't supposed to be enjoyable.

What I want to do in this chapter is describe how readers of popular texts can learn to articulate and value their reading process as well as read for the fun of it. The goal here is twofold. First, to show how much romance (or Western or adventure story) readers learn, at least potentially, in their leisure reading. Second, to demonstrate that the kinds of sorting processes that can be applied by children to *The Lion King* or the *Harry Potter* series yield increasingly interesting insights with texts written explicitly for adults. For, indeed, any popular text of greater length and complexity offer readers of all ages facts and truths to cull and refine in culturally meaningful, as well as individual ways.

I am arguing here that cultural critics are right: fictions, especially the popular ones, inevitably say something about the real world in which they originated. Just as important for conversations about that world, readers who know how to go about recovering chains of facts in stories can also explain unapologetically what it is about that story that they find valuable. Readers who can do that have assumed the authority to look at what texts say. Reading romances, then, can be responsible and empowering as well as pleasurable reading.

Linking the reader world with the text world

My case study text for reading popular romance is *Gone with the Wind*, a book that is still read today, has approved imitators and controversial ones more than sixty years after it was written and which has been translated into a classic film, had sequels (one with its own mini-series), and acknowledged as a work that, at least in movie form, has had a male as well as a female readership.¹ Successfully commercialized works on this scale work at appealing to the widest possible audiences and often, in so doing, eliminate characteristic elements of the original text. The more important, then, for a reader who wants to identify a coherent chain of facts in that complex, to choose one of the same four focus options discussed in Chapter 3 for Harry Potter's wizarding world: people, events,

ideas, or institutions. Important absences or changes in reader and textual worlds on at least one level can be more readily identified.

When read without connectors between reader world and textual facts, *Gone with the Wind* readily becomes a generic story about a scheming hussy or star-crossed lovers. That reading won't do anyone any harm, but neither will it enable a reader to gain insights about Mitchell's South. Reading to find out about "what kind of woman Scarlett is" implies reading about a Scarlett who could be found any society—the universal hussy. Reading without attending to the particular setting and period of *Gone with the Wind* effectively reduces the novel to a soap opera about a stereotype. Scarlett becomes an anybody labeled *femme fatale*, a culturally sanitized "type."

Such a sanitized reading only turns into a more meaningful one when a reader consistently notes how Rhett's and Scarlett's relationship mirror social circumstances—the struggle of the old South to retain power switched from anti-bellum agricultural aristocracy to ruthless postwar capitalism in the name of survival.² Again, specific context puts flesh and blood on the bones (the template) of a skeletal story. Flesh and blood acquires a uniquely situated social status, in the case of *Gone with the Wind*, as capitalist entrepreneurs or exploited wage earners; they achieve relational status as figures who dominate overtly or manipulatively because they understand the unwritten rules of their particular time and place.

This novel, like most texts, can be read from any one of the four optional reading perspectives—as a book that can tell a reader about Southerners, the Civil War, the Confederate Cause, or the Confederacy as a political and social entity. Each perspective lends itself to a particular strategy for assembling textual facts.³ To say that *Gone with the Wind* is a book about the event called Civil War implies a focus on historical initiatives and their consequences, for example. To read for its ideas, on the other hand, is to pursue

a perspective suggested by the novel's title and genre: how a way of life disappeared during and after that war.

As emphasized in the two preceding chapters, for any text of over a few pages in length, acknowledging perspective empowers the responsible reader to focusing his or her attention on textual information. From the cognitive standpoint, perspective is the key to registering that information and retaining it in memory. To be retrievable, documentation must be manageably sorted and categorized. A good filing system not only provides access, it's also a memory booster. Culling a text for character ("how did the Civil War change Southerners?") or plot (what events prove major), ideas ("how did the Civil War change the South?") or institutions (the "South" versus the "North") reduces the reader's cognitive overload by focusing his or her attention. When s/he decides what s/he wants to find out, that particular data can more readily be bundled together in long-term memory. When people decide whether to read for a character study or to uncover the impact of an event, they attend to and start to assemble textual facts from that perspective. What they recall begins to take shape for that reader as an evolving set of coherent relations rather than random data.

To be sure, the person who registers *Gone with the Wind* as a romance (character or ideas) will reconstruct notably different dominant features than the reader of the novel as history (representative events or institutions). The reader of romance events remembers that Rhett leaves Scarlett after getting her out of burning Atlanta. The reader with an institutional focus (one who knows the organization of the confederacy) is more likely to recall that while Confederate Soldiers set fire to munitions and warehouse areas (the Atlanta Scarlett flees), Sherman's army actually burns the defeated Atlanta several months later as an act of retaliation.⁴ What I will try to show in the course of this chapter, however, is that a consistent focus will indeed connect "facts" to "truths" in story framing. Significantly, however, while the specific factual chains assembled will

differ with reader perspective, their linked implications will be remarkably consistent because they each will be speaking about the novel, not just about a reader's opinions.

Regardless of the point of view assumed by a reader, consistency results when that reader takes charge. Any of the four focuses (text focused around ideas, people, events, or institutions) will put actual readers in charge of reading, will authorize them as readers, because the readers themselves (not teachers or experts) will have decided what details to note and what categories to use to store them in memory. To promote responsible reading, the coalescing or "chunking" process must reflect the point of view of individual readers, not that of textbooks or teachers or critics. Readers must decide what point of view represents the text and their own interests in it. Readers who practice such strategies would also be able to reproduce a sufficient set of "facts" from a longer story or work. Their examples would vary more, but the logic and processes they use would be similar to those undertaken for tests of short passages (500 words or less). And this "being in charge" will also enhance their pleasure: they will be reading for stimulation and communication of ideas, not just for confirmation of pre-existing expectations.⁵

Managing perspective and recall

To be sure, for most readers, picking one version to attend to may result in less recall of detail extraneous to that perspective. A child might not, as illustrated in Chapter 2, inventory the magical aspects of Harry Potter's world if s/he is working on institutional features of Hogwarts, the school. Research on memory and cognition suggests that features not germane to reader focus tend to get lost; big pictures get remembered, but the "slant" on details will chain facts relevant to the perspective the reader has chosen. •• Nonetheless, coalescing information in a longer text around a focus has several overwhelming advantages. The first of these is the recall advantage. The

random collection translates in the brain (just as in closets or file cabinets) as memory lotto. Reading focus yields accessible memory banking (a sorting and access system).

As *The 60-Second Manager* suggests, our brains function more efficiently when new data are sorted and filed consistently. The mind processes and accesses organized information more successfully than it does disorganized data. When details overwhelm the big picture, when they can't see the desk top for the mess, readers literally lose it. The links in chains of facts break down. Connected answers to the question "how did the Civil War change people in the South" default to more general opinions about Southerners ("they were unrealistic" or "they were self-centered bigots") or a blur of perhaps interesting (as trivia) non-informative impressions ("Scarlett says 'y'all' and has a seventeen-inch waistline"). They'll not see that Rhett, Ashley, Melanie, and Scarlett all have considerably more differentiated functions as business people, parents, and pillars of the community in the story than just that of a generic group of "Southerners."

A second advantage when cognitive focus guides reading is that it offers a challenge to reader preconceptions. Subjective readers lack the perspectival neutrality to read unfettered by their preconceptions, e.g., their preconceived opinion about the negative or positive class "Southerner." For more neutral, non-reactive readers, not unlike the Pokémon or Harry Potter fans, Southerners are not stereotypically good guys or bad guys. They are situationally plot-structured as good or bad guys who function in particular ways or are contrasted with others types of Southerners.

Rhett, as the Southern "rogue," plays the social outsider, yet loves the South, and joins the defeated Confederate army with the same élan with which he flouted public opinion as a blockade runner. Put the two together as a reader, and a more significant pattern of attributes for "charming rogue" commences to emerge. But if readers come to *Gone with the Wind* with preconceived, generic categories ("Rhett's so different from the others") rather than a text's demonstrable reality ("Rhett's a variant of the other men in

the story"), the argumentative power of what the novel says is lost to them. They register information in their own, not the text's system, which arguably places Rhett Butler squarely in one tradition of Southern (Charleston) aristocracy.

Yet because often schools have taught literacy in ways that implicitly separate pleasure from information in reading and rewarding recall rather than the sorting that facilitates analysis, the preconceived opinion frequently reigns supreme. If a reader made a patently inaccurate statement about a short text, it would be demonstrably countered by a particular assertion in the passage ("the accused *does* have an alibi"). Yet people who read longer texts with weak focal attention (even ones considerably shorter than *Gone with the Wind*), the way they read short (one page or less) ones, rely on isolated textual assertions the same way ("Scarlett says Rhett is so different. Everyone in society rejects him."). Neither national testing services nor our schools have devised measures for assessing the reading of longer texts because no models exist for deciding what readers should learn from the experience. Articles, chapters, and novels can't be recalled word for word. Without a system that accounts for recall of longer texts, we cannot teach strategies that yield meaningful, responsible reading of those texts.

Expanding reader roles with longer texts

Readers who fail to sort and connect assertions in any text of over two or three pages simply do not remember or register what contradicts what. As noted above, in the 900 page *Gone with the Wind*, Rhett often disparages the war effort as misguided and short-sighted, but after Atlanta burns, he joins the army with a flourish of rhetoric about honor, sentimentality, and being ashamed of himself. Readers looking to confirm or disconfirm such ostensibly contradictory textual statements can only do so by building constellations of facts based on characteristic moments in the longer narrative – noting those moments when Rhett's value system is on display.

Most of us don't remember more than a small percentage of what we read.⁶ With article and book-length texts, readers often direct that small percentage in idiosyncratic or reader-motivated ways. Thus long and short texts differ not just in length but according to what length implies for a completely different reading potential: short texts necessarily offer clear-cut positions and information. Long texts necessarily offer greater complexity. They play with foreground and background information that may seem initially less memorable for the reader.

Any longer text such as *The Lion King*, the *Harry Potter* series or *Gone with the Wind* necessarily offers more dimensions for the reader to organize. Whether sung for entertainment or edification, a three note melody quickly loses its charm. Yet harmony, counterpoint, themes and variations, stave off such boredom. Just as the reader of music registers regular shifts in tone quality or key as meaningful in other ways when harmony supplants melody, the reader of textual patterns starts to uncover what is meaningful in longer texts. In this sense, only longer readings can engage readers in rethinking textual issues – because only readers of longer texts have the option of laying out complex and nuanced variants of their topics, variants that stimulate rethinking about their own views.

Only longer works can offer the reader multiple patterns and diverse structures. Only longer works have time and space enough for a rich data base of sub-topics to emerge on which a reader can build larger themes ("Southerners," "Civil War," "adventure/romance," "North versus South"). The short text makes claims or describes something that the reader must register as such. Readers agree or disagree cleanly, often based on their own real-world experience. Only the longer text juxtaposes multiple claims and descriptions for readers to agree or disagree with based on their experience interacting with this work: long texts can build their own contexts in a way that short texts do not. They imply worlds rather than create verbally textured worlds. It's no accident that children remember details in cartoon movies, most of which are scrupulously color coded

(zebras dancing against bright blue skies, hyenas slinking amid murky, grayed hues). That coding builds because these child readers create their own sense of it, one these same children would not have registered in that fine detail had they been lectured about it.

Aside, then, from their proven value in enhancing vocabulary and improving automatic reading skills (speed, word recognition),⁷ longer texts can, potentially, offer readers a place to practice critical thinking and to develop substantiated, non-subjective points of view—to give them the pleasures of pretending to be other, to enter other spheres. Some people figure this out on their own. The majority in schools and colleges, I suggest, do not do so. The short-text reading model predominates (in textbooks and tests alike). Students perceive their choices as underlining and memorizing data in textbooks or assigned reading on the one hand or giving up on the other. In most English classes they are taught to give book reports. That means they rarely practice verbalizing chains of logic that reveal what plots do. Instead, they summarize plots. The idea that all longer texts must be approached strategically (logically, through organization) has not registered as a central pedagogy in American schools. We don't often teach our students that half of literacy.

To teach that other half, the responsible reading of longer texts, we have to change our concepts of what adult readers do. In a very real sense, we have to recognize that competent readings of the *Harry Potter* and *Gone with the Wind* represent a central step toward any reading of longer texts.⁸ We must encourage young learners to monitor topics in longer passages the way they monitor a movie like *The Lion King*. Learners must read for more than the facts of a text, they must read for classes or chains of information about people, events, ideas or institutions. Points of information, in and of themselves, yield no coherencies. Only with longer chains of data, and hence with longer texts, can readers proceed from initial paragraphs of those texts that express a dominant theme to be grasped more fully only in subsequently elaborated nuances. For the reader, *Gone with the*

Wind's South changes from the party at the start to a much more finely drawn picture when that reader realizes that the cast of characters' personalities work at war as well as parties.

To learn to read strategically, then, reading of longer texts has to be a regular classroom activity, and not just surrendered to "pleasure" reading outside of the purported scope of learning. In classroom reading, the most effective framing for readers is not to have students begin by looking for "truth" or "facts" about the text but to have them establish a focus of attention that gets them looking at texts over and over again--looking for their categories of information, their repeated themes, their nuanced messages. The classroom creates a forum for learning to monitor how to read chains of facts (Melanie's strength or weakness of character) rather than to succumb to prior opinion or to overread other facts by framing ones that happen to appeal to the reader (Melanie described physically as sickly and frail) rather than the book's overriding themes (weaknesses counterbalanced with effective strategies). When genuine disagreement emerges about a main topic ("slavery," "the Civil War") readers can be assigned to confirm or disconfirm their view by looking at sets of information (four descriptions of Melanie, four events in which she participates, all of which build a particular set or package of facts in the novel). And this process gets them into the texture of the reading as well—mixing business and pleasure.

Blueprinting a text's initial pages

If the first chapter of a novel like *Gone with the Wind* presents the main characters, readers should realize that introductions to books and movies code major characters—in terms of events, the ideas they express, the institutions they represent, what they do and how they do it. Reading even the first page of *Gone with the Wind* reveals key characteristics about the people to be read about in the next 900 pages,

provides initial suggestions about their personality types (Scarlett as the self-centered flirt, the Tarleton boys as ingenuous as they are impetuous), their social status (Georgia aristocracy), and the future problems readers can predict for them (Scarlett a user of the Southern system, the Tarleton twins as its victims).

As we have seen, the first step strategy for reading more in more advanced ways involves looking at what the text says, not what readers presuppose it says. The focus options noted above are suggestive only. The possibilities for variation are as numerous as are prospective readers. In a classroom setting, that strategy for implementing the focus selected can be illustrated with beginning pages or scenes of any work. Each confrontation with an enemy, for example, reveals a nuance of Pokémon-style predictable strengths and weaknesses. Each of Scarlett O'Hara's male admirers and female detractors provides the reader with additional nuances about the old South as the terrain on which these qualities are tested.

Thus a strategy allowing for a responsible choice of textual focus (using the first paragraph, the Web page, or the first scene of the movie), has readers identify the "who, what, where, when"—the initial clues to the categories of information the reader wants to build as a focus that represents what the text has so often. That strategy suspends for a while the "how and why" which, at this stage, can yield only opinion, prejudice or speculation since the readers don't know the text world yet. Answers to "how and why," unless rooted in real facts, lead students into subjective tangents rather than inferences based on textual statements. Attention at this point is on text topics that yield redundant or related meanings (chains of facts): to read responsibly, readers have to learn to pick out and assemble the relevant patterns in information before trying to answer "how and why," before reducing their personal uncertainties to more coherent, textbased logics and explanations.

Armed with chains of facts sorted out from the text, readers will be able to communicate the basis for differences in perception, rather than revert to intransigent opinions. When their strategies narrow options for what is being read about (e.g., not all the facts in chapter 1, but just the facts about representative people such as Scarlett's admirers and detractors), peers can confirm or disconfirm one another's coding. This focusing and category-ordering strategy, whether conducted orally or in writing, also enables readers to locate the textual language that articulates topics and expands their perspectives. It helps them practice doing their own assembling of data from the more complex textual world.⁹

They are then poised for the second strategy: comparing how the text speaks with the language *they*, the readers, would use to articulate the same information, joining their worlds to someone else's. Readers can set up a matrix that might use only the language of the text, explicitly referring to where it occurs (for later cross-reference in discussion). Although different versions of the "categories of facts" taken from *Gone with the Wind* will be drawn from different segments in the narrative, almost any matrix (two sets of data that correlate), if accurately and consistently sampled, will reveal the same underlying tendencies that are developing in the world of the text. The first movie scene, the first pages in most novels, set the stage. The first pages of *Gone with the Wind* are no exception:¹⁰

| External—what Scarlett's admirers react to | Internal (Scarlett's reality—what she feels) |
|---|--|
| "was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm" (p. 5, 1st line) | they talk about war, Scarlett bored, pouts (pp. 7-8) "she could never endure any conversation of which she was not the chief subject" (p. 8) |

| | |
|--|--|
| jubilant that Scarlett agrees immediately to dance and eat with them at the barbecue (p. 12) | unaware that Scarlett has received "a stunning blow" when they tell her of Ashley's impending marriage to Melanie (p.12) |
| wonder why Scarlett didn't ask them to stay for dinner – are mystified (p. 12) | groom tells them when they told Scarlett about the engagement "she quiet down lak a bird w'en de hawk fly ober" (p. 14) |

Many more such contrasting features could be chosen – the fearless twins' "wholesome fear" of their mother's wrath, Stuart courting Ashley's sister before being lured away by Scarlett, the twins' drinking and shooting forays, their disdain for formal education – but no additional examples do more than recreate or flesh out the pattern evident in the three examples above. In her carefully-executed romance, Margaret Mitchell has provided the reader with dimensions less dominant in *The Lion King* and the *Harry Potter* series. Her portrayal of back county aristocracy reveals which behaviors characterize factors such as gender, age, and social class: they have one set of social behaviors on the surface, and another set of reactions they'll keep inside.

A reading of fewer than ten pages yields a matrix that sets the patterns for the novel as a whole. In the society Mitchell depicts, men and women do not talk frankly with one another; a strict code for behavior dictates what can (dances) and cannot (invitations to dinner) be asked for; within that code, charm and self-control prove powerful weapons. As outsiders to the system, slaves often have more insight than do its participants who are constrained *not* to talk or consciously reflect about certain things.

The expertise of looking for difference as significance

As a case study in an extremely long, well-wrought popular novel, *Gone with the Wind* poses a wealth of information for readers to either react to and reduce to preconceived ideas on the one hand or to sort and analyze on the other. The choice between these options will depend on whether readers separate information from drawing conclusions about it. Put in slightly different terms, they must valorize the two different worlds that articulate readers have to acknowledge: the world of the implied readers (the readers for whom the text was written) and the real world of the actual reader. The difference between what the text says (not just its facts, but the statements it makes with those facts) and what an individual says (an opinion) becomes the difference between two systems of language use that must be consciously related – how the text says something, and what the individual reader says.

The space between text statement and reader perception of text statement is opened and becomes available for objective consideration—why Scarlett may well have been less effective than Melanie in her world, not just the individual reader's opinion about who is more likeable today. Mitchell, although drawing on extensive personal knowledge and documentary sources about the nineteenth century experience, is still an author writing for audiences in the twentieth century. Clearing mental space for objective culling of information is essential if readers are going to learn to reconstruct the thinking processes of an early twentieth century Southern woman rather than to subjectively identify with or reject the content of what an early twentieth century Southern woman wrote about.

This strategy of sorting and assembling facts into categories is an essential precondition for the next stage in a responsible reading, that of establishing a reader's goal as something more than pleasure. Only readers who grasp how much distance exists between what the text says and what the reader thinks it says can decide how to read a text instead of just having opinions about it. They can decide to have reading pleasures in

new guises. In other words, they must be able to share the mind-set of the reader implied by the text, the person the author intended to address, and the text's world.

As I have already suggested in my discussion of Harry Potter, sharing a mind-set differs from preconceived or default readings. Default readers tend to look for only what they expect to find. As such, they are prime candidates for misreading. In contrast, sharing the author's perspectives implies only shared prior knowledge, but not knowledge that dictates a reader's reconstruction of the text. Sharing a mind-set just means a reader realizes without being told explicitly by Margaret Mitchell that the cavalry played a major role in Southern military strategy during the Civil War, or that Atlanta society applied slightly different rules for dress and polite behavior than those acceptable at Tara (the O'Hare plantation).

All specialist readers share the conventions of their field. Typically, engineers or scientists know how algorithms or formulae will be presented in their academic publications. The non-specialist reads *Scientific American* (the layperson's science) not a specialist's journal (whose implied reader is only the scientist or engineer) precisely because authors try to bridge gaps for non-scientists with explicit explanations. Few readers are "insiders" for all the texts they read.

To fill in their own gaps, it follows that readers need to be aware of whether they belong to the text's intended audience (the implied reader) or not.¹¹ Dickens wrote for an English audience experiencing the effects of the industrial revolution, not post-industrial Americans. Any reader living outside the world for whom Dickens wrote lacks insider information. Such "outsider readers," ignorant about the implied reader's special knowledge, need to be on the lookout for the way the text critiques or illuminates the world, revealing its unwritten as well as its explicitly stated rules. Similarly, Mitchell's twentieth-century readers lack the background knowledge that would have enabled her to

leave "unsaid" descriptions of motives for actions or features of a setting that would have been automatically understood had her implied audience been people from the 1870s.

For instance, experts tend to tell their outsider readers (in a footnote or a classroom lecture) that nineteenth century ladies wore constricting clothing. That knowledge is interesting but will not teach those readers to identify what makes that attire significant. That's the reason that teaching a strategy for discovering meaningfulness enables a literacy totally different from the one in which significances are taught as additional facts to be learned.

Consider the following example: Scarlett has to dress up to go see Rhett in jail as an indication of prosperity and competence, not just for sex appeal. And when she becomes enraged at Rhett and faints, it may not just be just a ruse or excitement—even the ladies at the barbecues and parties have to go up and loosen their stays for an hour so they'll be able to continue dancing. If they look for clues based on behavioral oddities (things women rarely do today), readers might be able to infer that nineteenth-century women sometimes fainted because they couldn't breathe and not necessarily from emotional shock. Moreover, if responsible readers are to be trained in picking up such clues, the "facts" in footnotes or explained in class will not suffice, since using them is a bow to authority rather than a process of learning to learn. If such notes are the main props to "understanding" a work, they implicitly teach readers they can't read for meaning without footnotes or classroom instruction, inhibiting their authorized and self-authorizing reading.

Alternatively, actual readers (whether the implied audience of a text or not) can learn to identify what probabilities exist for an implied reader to learn new things, based precisely on those textual references that appear strange, odd, or oblique to them. When oddities in the text combine (chain) into patterns, these patterns can become categories which suggest their own coherence. In *Gone with the Wind*, a minor figure such as Mrs.

Tarleton who, when she falls off one of her beloved horses, "breaks a collar bone like a man. . .no fainting, no fussing. . . ." (p. 87) can potentially be overlooked, because her mode of behavior contrasts with that of other older women in the text. Her statement after the war that "I don't know what to do with myself now that my darlings are gone" (486) may not even register as a reference to her brood horses rather than her four dead sons. Yet in her brave, heroic impracticality, Mrs. Tarleton can be read as embodying the flaws of a code preoccupied with trappings rather than substance: she, too, is covering up certain of her real thoughts with references to the relatively insignificant.

Ordinarily, readers who suborn texts to their own mind-sets find it easiest to take such pieces of unfamiliar information and either distort them ("Mrs. Tarleton didn't really love her sons") or fail to note them at all.¹² But if learners are to overcome this alienation and be open to new "facts," they must learn to identify the unfamiliar or uncomfortable moments in the text as part of that text-world's system of meaning. The two worlds (the text's and reader's) and their different focuses are juxtaposed precisely at moments of discomfort. Moments of alienation or unfamiliarity must first be acknowledged before new information can register as such. Once readers figure out that "old South" preserves appearances at all costs, they see how stressed Mrs. Tarleton really is: she's not "allowed" to speak of her reactions to the dead, so she complains about her life by referring to her horses.

Changing focus to change significance

Such a moment of insight can occur when the reader changes attention from one focus to another as well. A romance reader who shifts attention from characters ("how the Civil War changed Southerners") to ideas ("how the Civil War changed life in the South") or institutions (the "South" versus the "North") probably will rely more heavily on what the novel says than would have been true for the reading focusing on character that seems

most typical for readers of a romance novel. The experienced romance reader, anticipating a mysterious, unpredictable hero and a strong-willed, but ultimately capitulating female, will, when starting to read, be looking for precisely those character qualities in Rhett and Scarlett.

To expand their coding ability, readers must first acknowledge systematic discrepancies between the social setting of their world and the world of the text as systems they discover instead of just considering these differences as isolated facts that they don't (and may not want to) know. As interliterate readers, however, they can read the communication as links in a factual chain that they can construct, even if the links in that chain are not entirely clear to them at the outset. They can also even assume the task of identifying different perspectives: to see, for example, how a Civil War buff, potentially closer to the implied reader of the 1930s than a romance readers of the 1990s, might respond to *Gone with the Wind*. Works with complex messages and diverse audiences yield multiple meanings with different payoffs for different readers.

Responsible readers, those who construct textually-anchored systems of meaning, will do so in the two closely-related steps illustrated in the Harry Potter matrices in Chapter 3. First they have to sort. After the reader has identified the text topic, sorting will merge that focus with the reader's context and objectives. Both the romance reader and the Civil War buff may start sorting the text's information, but the categories will differ. The romance reader, inclined toward thinking about people (how they develop) or ideas (their codes or "what makes them tick"), most likely sorts what characters see and do (the external) from what they think and feel (the internal), or what characters do and how they think about what they have done. The Civil War buff, on the other hand, with an interest in history, will tend to categorize events or institutional practice: categories such as a contrast between the domestic scene and the war references, or features of the winners and the losers.

Step two: what the readers do with their reading experience, how they relate or systematize their culling of facts, authorizes their reader perspective.¹³ No longer just reading for what they expect, authorized readers weigh the evidence for dominant facts. How much space is devoted to Rhett's statements about the vulnerability of the South; how many different characters reflect about those views in different contexts and at different moments in the novel; how often does supporting evidence indirectly verify or disconfirm the views he expresses at the outset of the novel? Readers who have relied on introductory passages or scenes as slots of information to be filled out in subsequent pages with new inserts (stage one of responsible reading), can now turn those meanings into a meaningful relationship of contrasts, comparisons, or issues and implications—the second stage that enables the reader to substantiate a textual syntax and, in so doing, to synchronize a particular reader and text perspective with meaningful reading.

Thus the reader assuming the perspective of a Civil War buff looking for institutional features of the South may recall Mrs. Tarleton in a different context (the war effort, the Southern cavalry) than that same individual culling a romance perspective (Mrs. Tarleton as the mother of Scarlett's beaux). They'll remember what she did and under what external circumstances, rather than what others saw and what she thought (the romance perspective yielding female stereotypes as exemplified earlier in a reading focusing on Scarlett).

Unlike the perspective of a romance reader, the Civil War buff looking for institutional features may well register that Mitchell refers to horses (and shortages of horses) throughout her descriptions of the war, thereby suggesting their institutional importance in the South's military successes and their weight for Southerners. Horses as well as sons are conscripted from Tarleton, since their intelligent deployment was as crucial to the war as were its soldiers. That awareness, once established by reader initiative, fosters receptivity to related historical data about the role of horses in Civil War

battles (Picket's charge). At the same time, it links human dimensions to the "fact" that the sons of Mrs. Tarletons from all over the deep South rode with Stonewall Jackson or Jeb Stewart, and that their horsemanship exhibited on some superbly bred and trained horses extracted disproportionately heavy losses from Northern armies.

A textually-synchronized shift in reading focus, then, not only yields a shift in information pattern, it also opens up possibilities for discovery. Beyond the underdetermined and very simply-coded *Pokémon* or *Lion King* creatures, adult popular fiction that yields new insights with a different perspective (whether works by Margaret Mitchell, Tom Clancy, or Stephen King) can be the basis for uncovering the complex value systems, the ethical premises they put on the readers' table. The good read can also be the reading that yields insights about our culture. But neither adult fiction nor *Pokémon* nor *The Lion King* nor the *Harry Potter* series can be read as more than escapist literature unless readers have been authorized to read popular texts reflectively in their book and film forms—as practice in more extended reading between the lines.

Teaching the strategies of reading between the lines

The strategies I'm illustrating here apply in classrooms as well as to individual readers. With those strategies, popular culture can be read for the big four that lead to payoffs in independent thinking: 1) as information about what motivates individuals within a given social system (reading the characters), 2) as the ethical implications of abstract concepts (reading the ideas), 3) as managerial operations that yield specific ends (reading the institutions), and 4) as tangible actions that lead to subsequent reactions (reading the events). Kids who can read past the surface of the culture that bombards them daily can begin to enjoy the high culture versions that offer dimensions not available even in more complex popular art. The curricular strategy implied by this insight is that a

high school class reads *Gone with the Wind* first and then *Jane Eyre*. First *Pet Sematary*. Then *Frankenstein*. First *West Side Story*. Then *Romeo and Juliet*.

The point in arguing for the “popular text / classical text” genre sequence goes back to the case for using the more familiar (and hence more accessible) models for sorting information before tackling the less familiar ones to sort their data using the same strategies. Youngsters may have the Pokémon creatures down cold when they move on to high school, but these skills in collecting and assembling information are rarely tapped subsequently as the basis for thinking or writing about extensive reading of longer works or linking longer popular works to their counterpart “classics.”

Returning to the question of “entertainment fiction” with which I began this chapter, I chose *Gone with the Wind* to illustrate how the four focuses and sample assembly systems might apply to a popular text simply because most adult readers will be familiar with the plot, characters, story background from the classic and perennially shown Selznick movie. This original film, mini-series in length, recreates details in the novel with some accuracy, quoting many key passages and keeping most personality types. I needed a longer work whose outlines are familiar to most people because my objective is to demonstrate the difference between a reader assuming what the text says through random recall (or actually controlling all the details in a 500-word text), and a reader using strategies that register and chain its information in terms of each of the four suggested reader perspectives.

In a free recall situation, images and events would probably not differ too much between readers and movie fans of *Gone with the Wind*. Typically, readers' memory will hone in on particular personalities or striking images: Scarlett O'Hara marrying a man to spite his brother, Scarlett as midwife to Melanie while Atlanta burns, Scarlett defending Tara and beating the carpetbaggers at their own game, or Rhett Butler as the dashing blockade runner who rescues Scarlett and Melanie only to desert them midway and join

the retreating Confederate Army. While colorful, those images speak for themselves as archetypical human moments rather than explaining why these things happened and what they imply to the reader or the fictive people in the novel—as about the South.

Reader memory can, however, be massaged, prodded into reflective recall by using a framework (a focus based on reader context) prompting that reader to uncover "what [else] that was all about." Applying the institutional perspective of "North versus the South" to the remembered story culls additional images from the pages of the novel that. When assembled and viewed together, these images begin to answer those questions in consistent ways that, joined, reveal much more about Mitchell's South than they do as isolated vignettes. The key sets of differences about North and South, the way they ran their systems (management features), and their objectives, contrast in relatively clear chains of facts that can be easily assembled from the novel.¹⁴ A matrix version might set up the opposing categories along the following lines:

| Southern management of economy | Northern management of economy |
|---|--|
| "South has no cannon factories, woolen mills, cotton factories, warships to defend harbors from blockade" (Rhett to men at the barbecue gathering, 113) | "we are fighting the Yankees' new rifles with Revolutionary War muskets" (Ashley in a letter to Melanie, 210) |
| has to keep some militia at home to "keep darkies from rising" (177), "plough furloughs" not seen as desertion (289), sends in men of sixty and older to fight when no one else is left (309) | thousands of immigrants glad to fight for a few dollars, factories, shipyards, iron and coal mines, foundries (Rhett, p. 113), replaces soldiers with foreigners (Ashley to Scarlett before returning to his regiment, 272), |

| | |
|---|---|
| repeated references to lack of medical supplies (275), shoes and clothing (264), food, rising inflation (276) | railroad brings Sherman fresh troops and supplies daily (312) |
|---|---|

From the point of view highlighting an economic system and its management, the novel shows how the multiple industrial bases of the North are hurled against a South which, in Butler's words, has only "cotton and slaves and arrogance" (113). But the South does not lose in a month, as Rhett predicts. The South's arrogance, writes Ashley in the letter to Melanie which Scarlett surreptitiously reads, is what he calls matchless courage. Yet in this same letter, Ashley's own matchless courage quails at the prospect of winning as much as it does at losing. "If we win this war and have the Cotton Kingdom of our dreams, we still have lost, for we will become a different people . . ."

Ashley recognizes that the industrial machine the North can hurl against the South to defeat it is the real enemy of his way of life because life in an industrially competitive South will destroy the class system to which he belongs. The war merely exposes the illusory nature of Southern values, because it reveals how dependent they are on a cheap (slave) labor pool that stands ready to revolt, a system that relies on oppression and intimidation. Even without the war, in twenty years the Southern way of life would inevitably have changed because of that labor situation.¹⁵ Even in a postwar victory, the leisured, cultivated planter class would have been conquered by the Northern economic (and ultimately social) infrastructure, the same mercantile forces that defeated it in war.

A variant of that theme emerges even when the reader puts on another lens, for example, the idea (or "ideal") of the South, and its gentility. Throughout the novel, readers confront assaults on Southern norms – the class system and code of honor. The paradigmatic Southern aristocracy, the Wilkes' family, suffers from inbreeding (suggesting

why Ashley is too weak to support his family or to extricate himself entirely from Scarlett's thrall). Yankee foremen and Crackers of considerably lesser pedigree prove the more competent survivors in the postwar period, but when they marry Southern belles, these women lose their entitlement and are marginalized both in the novel and real life. Unable to reconceive her role as Southern aristocrat, for example, Cathleen Calvert's grace and dignity fade precipitously after marriage to her Yankee foreman; Scarlett's sister marries a Cracker, a person considered "beneath" her in the Southern hierarchy.

The gentlemen's double standard (venerating their women while producing "yellow babies" in the slave quarters, shielding their women from politics and economics before marriage, while often putting them in charge of plantation management afterwards) dictates a reactive, manipulative style of human interaction between men and women, masters and their slaves (who, like Scarlett's Mammy or the Tarleton twins' groom, always see further and deeper than their owners). Once the chains of facts stack up, the relationship between contrasting categories reveals dissimulation and coercion as part of the Southern ideal—rendering it possible to read the ballroom scene at the start of the novel a much more chilling, less sentimentally-read scene.¹⁶

Reading for meaningfulness as a gauge for quality

The foregoing "readings" all illustrate how the strategy of reading to sort information about people, events, ideas, or institutions focus attention in a way that enable a reader to make inferences verifiable in the text and reasonable in view of the particular reading perspective applied. While offering very different conclusions about what the text implied, all of these readings make sense as aspects of a richly textured novel. Not all popular works will yield so many options, but the more carefully crafted ones will tend to do so.

Systems that different readers can find in a text will be intelligible to any focused reader who reads and sorts systematically. Such readers will be sensitive to any changes in that system in sequels or imitations. They will quickly note, for example, that Mitchell's depiction of a paternalistic system, painfully evident in the novel and the 1939 movie version, had to be discarded in Alexandra Ripley's politically correct *Scarlett* and its mini-series in 1994. By transporting Scarlett's subsequent travails to Ireland, Ripley has the master / slave relationships assume kinder, gentler guises as that between downtrodden Irish (of which Scarlett is one) and aristocratic English (who oppress *her*) or between The O'Hara (Scarlett as newly emerged local authority and clan chief) and her (sharecropper) clan. Relations between slave owner and slaves have been transformed into landowner and farmers.¹⁷

Still other double standards eluded this late transposition of *Scarlett's* South (along with so much else that necessarily could not be recreated): notably, the class differences among slaves themselves. Mitchell depicts the African-Americans in *Gone with the Wind* as mirroring the codes of their Anglo masters, living out the distinction between the prestige of house servants (who don't do manual labor in the sun) and the field hands (who do). These references bestow a special status on house slaves, insuring their loyalty (they don't "run away" after emancipation) as "members of the family." Ripley, in her sequel, describes only former slaves whose untrammelled entrepreneurial enterprise enriches them, even in genteelly impoverished Charleston. Similarly, in Ireland, all villagers gather together in the pub, with class differences in the underclass largely effaced. Some systems depicted in the original novel had, three-quarters of a century later, become unacceptable to today's mass media reader.¹⁸

The original novel, in this sense, presents considerably more complexity, and hence is interesting in more complex ways—reading it may offer some politically incorrect insights offered by Mitchell, but none that need make a fan feel embarrassed

about reading. Dual management systems (the institutional contrast) or dual ways of life (the contrast in ideas), referred to throughout the novel, actually represent two ways which the book uses to describe how Southern society behaved and what it valued. Both systems share overlapping implications. The institutional contrast reveals the anachronistic thinking of a civilization that styled lives according to the principles of feudalism. Like knights of yore, honor and lineage meant more to Southerners than survival. What Mitchell ultimately shows that the Wilkes, O'Hara's, Tarletons, and Calverts believed, actually parallels medieval notions of divine right. The reader can then watch these people retain their honor, yet condemn themselves to death—a much more complex and dramatic mix than a simple love story.

Products of their system, these family members don't question their "right" to live as they do as long as each one adheres to their shared code. The second half of the novel (less so the movie) even documents their struggle to maintain the myth of that code in changing political and economic terrain during Reconstruction. But whether selling pies or yard goods, their communitarian ethic remains firmly planted in a sense of their Southern superiority. While only Melanie's loyalty protects Scarlett from exclusion by society when she consorts with Yankees in ante-bellum Atlanta, even the most straight-laced dowagers don't believe that Scarlett *likes* or is like them. From this perspective they can be read as Southerners who are defeated, but proud—and still "right." The reader who realizes how deeply ingrained this sentimental ethic runs in Mitchell's South, has learned something about a community and about "Southern womanhood" and steel magnolias.

To say it yet again: no two readers will sort the text information into identical categories. A character or event pattern, for instance, might take totally different sets of information to make these points about the South. Yet, inevitably, such different reader interactions with the novel will ultimately yield very similar implications about Mitchell's South. The major events in Scarlett's life—her marriages, the burning of Atlanta, her

interventions to save Tara and rebuilt her life—all can be viewed as revealing a similar reaction to the Southern code, just as the brief analysis of her in the first scene of the novel already hints. Read with such a focus, Scarlett's *noblesse oblige*, getting what she wants, emerges as her personal *raison d'être*, her absolute privilege for which she repeatedly dissembles. Probably such a reading will lead to the conclusion, however, that none of Scarlett's choices can be styled worthy means to an end and that she is incapable of initiating new courses of action outside the Southern system depicted in the novel.

The probable result from any kind of reading, then, is that Mitchell shows people locked into a system rather than people trying to change that system. Events motivate Scarlett rather than the reverse. With the men off to war, a bored Scarlett moves to Atlanta; promising Ashley that she will stay with Melanie, Scarlett remains for Sherman's siege; faced with high taxes on Tara, she must use herself as collateral to raise money, and so she marries her sister's beau, Frank Kennedy. Her ignorance of politics and culture outside the South (she mistakes "settee" for "suttee" and wonders who the Borgias are) limits her decision-making to short-term solutions viewed in traditional Southern contexts.

She plants cotton on Tara and is appalled by the pine trees that have started to reclaim the land rather than seeing a future in them (this error from a sawmill owner!). While Scarlett's style of reaction to events prove she can survive, thriving is another matter. She is a Southerner unable to conceive of any other kind of economy. Regardless of their perspective, then, readers who look at the larger cultural implications of Mitchell's novel will probably share a bottom line.

And here we return to the issue of romance novels and a host of "popular" texts as worthy of responsible reading. *Gone with the Wind* is undeniably a woman's book, appealing to that known reader's expectations. The center of character depiction, Scarlett, even more than the men in her world, finds herself imprisoned in a system that restricts her options as a human being (an inverse focus from looking outward at the economy).

Unlike Melanie, she can work and run a business, and also unlike Melanie, she is not maternal. In the novel, her children by Hamilton and Kennedy love Mellie and are raised by Scarlett's sister.¹⁹ Scarlett's economic capital (her ability to be a "good money risk" for Rhett) grows at the price of her social capital (her grudging acceptance by Atlanta society maintained only through Melanie). Scarlett is seductive, but Melanie is respected and loved.

It is Melanie to whom Rhett pours out his heart to when his daughter dies, and Melanie who sees to the burial. Depicting a woman lacking the deeper womanly virtues of the South that are epitomized in Melanie, Mitchell's Scarlett, with her selfishness, her insensitivity to others, and her "abysmal ignorance" (Rhett), epitomizes all that is right and all that is wrong with the Southern code—its matchless courage, its matchless arrogance, its matchless short-sightedness. Read from such a focus, Mitchell's messages about character and system ultimately converge.

What all this responsible reading might be good for

Readers who have explored just a few of the possible sets of meanings in this enduring popular film and novel are poised to consider its codes in terms of their own, once they realize how complicated and pervasive such systems are. In a nation that wonders how to teach its children values, how to maintain the right to bear arms but avoid drive-by shootings, how to respect politicians for courageous stands but not positions they happen to dislike, how to balance the budget but cut taxes and preserve government entitlements, how to protect the environment but not infringe on individual liberties or threaten jobs, it may well be time to stop focusing on talk-show rhetoric and teach people how to think about talk-show rhetoric: to match assumptions with their consequences, as *Gone with the Wind* can be read to illustrate.

I am arguing that the systems that convey what matters in a culture will essentially be the same for popular culture as for high culture, for talk shows as for Masterpiece Theater, no matter how complex they seem. Teaching people to think beyond the surface of what people say, to read the longer text and its subtext of assumptions (how facts link up and how their rubrics correlate) rather than just the sound bite, involves starting young and starting with the fun things kids do naturally – grouping colors (or other signs) around little plastic figures or big turtles to identify their personality, to sequence events, to trace their operation as a social unit, to sort the ethical implications of what they stand for.

The advantage of *The Lion King* or the *Harry Potter* series over the Power Rangers and the Pokémon creatures is that, like *Gone with the Wind*, these texts hammer home very particular social messages that apply to a wide range of human experience. In *Gone with the Wind*, the reader finds an array of social classes, cliques within those classes, fiscal and peer pressures, a sweep of events that most figures in the texts themselves fail to fully understand, shifts in how people are seen and how they see themselves, a wealth of characters struggling to valorize behaviors and principles they have been taught to believe in but which their changing world no longer rewards. It depicts the prices extracted when characters fail, as Grandma Fontaine tells Scarlett, to bend with the wind rather than be destroyed by it. It's not worth dying for a community that is trying to destroy itself.

Being able to read agendas in any text does two things for readers. 1) It puts them in charge of finding their own truths rather than taking somebody else's word for it. 2) It poises them to think about their codes, their values, their degree of identification with one or another chain of facts. Such readers can enjoy thinking rather than feeling guilty or angry about suppressed, unarticulated points of view. America, like the old South, could

benefit from a little dispassionate assessment about the high price of selfishness and short-term solutions.

An indifferent electorate, overwhelmed by life in a complex and contradictory society, will be ill served by continuing to postpone until tomorrow thinking about ethical bases for decisions about Medicare, Social Security, the environment, or discriminatory practices that need to be thought about today. Ours is a society that needs to get past black and white thinking (in metaphorical, environmental, global, and racial senses) and explore stereotypes in terms of their positive and negative aspects and implications for their users. Between textbook sound bites that neutralize stereotypes and talk shows that polarize them, exists the potential for listeners and readers to take a look at their features and the perspectives that can be applied to them: to see how assumptions yield patterns of behaviors and results for the fictional Scarlett as for themselves.

If that leap from authorized reader to authorized citizen appears untoward, consider the short step from culling systems in novels to applying that same thinking to longer newspaper or magazine articles. Rather than remembering all the details such as "Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House, possible presidential candidate, divorced father of two daughters, author of the Contract with America, Mr. Republican" and innumerable other designations mentioned in the course of an article, an authorized reader can chain facts according to a system that will yield some implications and stick in the memory bank for possible personal use: "the personal type Newt Gingrich" (political force or Republican liability?) or "the event called the first Republican Congress in forty years" (what does a "Republican Congress" mean?) or "the (Southern?) idea Gingrich represented in the 90s."

Our schools need to teach how to read such issues as evolving focuses in media texts (newspapers, TV, radio), a process more like reading *Gone with the Wind* than reading a textbook would be, even though it extends over a series of newscasts rather than

book chapters. A nugget statement in a real-world text, the sound bite, rarely tells anybody what it's all about but relies on this building context. For this reason, short passages for standardized tests contain a nugget sentence that expressly articulates the subject of the passage as a whole. In real-world experience, however, such clarity is often missing, an observation that researchers themselves acknowledge. Moreover, in longer texts, a category-building topic is less likely to be found in a single sentence. Indeed, one measure shared by fine literature and multi-media texts alike is the subtlety with which subject matter is gradually uncovered and enhanced.

In longer texts, more information (in the sense of raw data) is present, but its very subtlety is confounding for students who lack strategies for accessing and articulating it. Thus it is easy to overlook the fact that the same readers who remain silent or produce plot summaries when asked "what is *Henry the V* about?" have behind them extensive cultural practice in building categories and topicalizing them. They have, in the *Pokémon* world, already learned a great deal about interpreting the acts of a cast of characters much larger than Shakespeare's. Those processes are, however, rarely expanded on within their formal educational system – but they can and should be.

I am arguing for a necessary link between reading for pleasure and reading to learn. Reading systematically as the basis for thinking and talking about who we are and what matters to us during our short time on earth, needs to be a reflective process undertaken and practiced by the reader, not just authorized by the teacher or some expert critic. As aids to problem-solving, even the best such readings, like the best intentions, miss the mark when they don't show how a focus is established, how coding adds up from a particular perspective. Teaching readers to emulate somebody else's readings rather than teaching them to conduct their own dumb people down. For about one hundred pages now, I've been arguing against two interlocking assumptions about how adults read: 1)

that what the text actually says and opinions about what it says amount to the same thing, and 2) that readers who know how to read short texts know how to read long texts.

In the chapter that follows, I'm going to talk about how reading to interpret builds on the possibilities for expanding the reflective, pattern systems I've illustrated for reading popular films and novels. Underlying these illustrations is the claim that, while there is no absolute or ultimate reading, there is an absolute text and that some texts offer richer lodes for mining messages than do others. A story, novel, play, essay, or poem can be used for many things; but ultimately it is built from particular words, phrases, and episodes. And while it may be pleasant to respond exclusively to a story's emotional impact, if such a reactive reading is the sole approach to the text, that style of reader-response inevitably modifies and ultimately inhibits perception about what that text says. Texts are made, and constructed with points of view that need to be read from reader-constructed constellations of the information bites they contain.

The "absolute" text, however, should not inhibit systematic interpretation, only unfounded speculation. Just because readers should avoid reducing reading to speculation, does not imply that they must view interpretation (more reflective reading) as beyond them. Readers who conclude that text interpretation is a parlor game, which some play well and others do not, are disabled readers, incapable of reading to promote learning or to experience new challenges. For readers who can't interpret, texts, and especially high-culture literary texts, remain at best alien and off-putting, an entertainment that the elite espouse rather than a significant part of their lives. Yet, in order to interpret, readers must interrogate the absolute text with very much the same initial strategies they used when they approached training of Pokémon creatures.

In this chapter I have talked about how, for *Gone with the Wind* and its audiences, various internal systems of meaning, all identifiable in the text, are potentially at play. My goal was to show that such a realization is the key to different kinds of pleasure and

learning from the novel – how a reader's consistently executed perspective on the *internal* systems of a work yields particular meanings. As I will illustrate in Chapter 5, readers who, in addition, put a theoretical spin on their perspective can identify larger significances of what they read – what pieces of the work apply beyond their immediate world. That is, after sorting and chaining some of the text's internal messages, readers must learn to see that there is a gap between that information and their own knowledge, a breach that can have different implications for different readers. Only at this juncture, can readers interrogate texts. The next chapter will explore this process with a "high culture" text, arguing that, with minimal guidance by expert readers, the "classics" can be read meaningfully by amateurs as well.

¹ At the time of publication in 1938, the novel was on the best-seller list for 21 consecutive months, selling over two million copies. Fifty years after publication it still sells about 250,000 copies a year and 100,000 around the world in 37 countries and 27 languages [Wicker, 1986 #163].

² They can also be dismissed as irrelevant to the contemporary viewers world or too flawed to be comprehensible. Tony French thinks that while it is possible to read older films as representing discarded values or as ironic depictions of those values, *Gone with the Wind* is too incoherent to “consistently readable in any one way” [French, 1996 #116, p. 7] His own reading points to inconsistent themes and their treatment in the film: the Catholicism of the O’Hara family viewed only once, disparate generations of actors in cameo roles, exaggerated behaviors. He sees the origin of these flaws in the David O. Selznick effort to reach too many audiences. Using his own reading as the basis for his claims (no documentation other than his reading of the film’s various scenes is provided to support his views), French deconstructs the movie as “a jumble of fragments” (p. 12)—just bad art. Such a reading does not address the book and the film’s enduring popularity. Alvin Marhill reports that the initial tv screening of *Gone with the Wind* in 1976 achieved the highest rating for a single program in the history of the medium, despite ill-timed and frequent commercial interruptions. Ten years later the reissue of the film on video cassette had been released with and was praised for its “beautiful color face-lift” despite the fact that the spectacle was made for theater-size screens [Thompson, 1985 #161].

³ What it is difficult to read without supporting documentation or comparative works is the institution of slavery, glossed over by Mitchell. Some reviewers exonerate her on the basis of her background and the time in which she wrote.[Wicker, 1986 #163]. The reaction of African Americans to the movie was muted but strongly critical [Stevens, 1973 #114]. Alice Randall’s novel *The Wind Done Gone*, whether viewed as a parody or taken seriously as a literary effort, reflects contemporary rejection of the premises about slaves and their behaviors that characterize Mitchell’s book and the film [Kakutani, 2001 #94]. The courts keep reversing themselves in the appeals process and a final decision in abeyance [Kirkpatrick, 2001 #76].

⁴ Focus of attention studies substantiate this claim. See ••

⁵ Barthes quote re reading same text over and over ••

⁶ Footnote retention—longer texts••

⁷ substantiate claim that extensive reading increases reading skills

⁸ point out that Scholastic Press evidence that schools recognize the need for popularizing the reading of longer texts

⁹ Not all texts are necessarily more complex than their readers, but unless the reader is going to reiterate the text verbatim, that work's meaning is necessarily a reconstruction that alters the original (X/Z or Todorov comment on this ••)

¹⁰ For the reader's convenience these and all subsequent citations are taken from the Time Warner copyrighted edition that is paginated in the same way as the hardcover original of 1936 and the fiftieth anniversary editions of 1986 [Mitchell, 1964 #294]

¹¹ Iser, Eco cites ••

¹² failure to register info or misreading••

¹³ Rabinowitz—Authorizing Readers + summary••

¹⁴ While different points in the story discuss war management, once reader attention is drawn to the subject, they are easy to find both during reading and in retrospect. Moreover, as more books become available on line, the computer's "find" function can shortcut this process—successful if predicated on a reader's grasp of the key concepts to search.

¹⁵ I must find history works to support claims—point out that insights possible without such substantiation••

¹⁶ For a counter-example based on another coding, see [French, 1996 #116].Iser—Act of Reading ••?

¹⁷ [Yet the marketing of this book was overtly as "The Sequel to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, see the cover and title page of the paperback edition \Ripley, 1991 #295]

¹⁸ Get anniversary edition preface and check author of introduction—cite as example of rationale and acknowledgement that perspectives are dates •• (?)

¹⁹ The movie, of course, deletes these "extraneous" children, not only because they are minor characters, but because the fact that Scarlett virtually discards them to further her other interests would render her too unsympathetic to audiences even today.