

# Southern 'hospitality'

Business



In both *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *Gone With the Wind*, the homes serve as integral symbols. However different the two perspectives may be, the homes depicted within each are not dissimilar. In both stories, the houses serve to confine and to amplify problems just as often, if not more often than to protect. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Linda experiences the harsh realities of how confining a home can be, though right up to the end owning a home is still her ultimate dream.

Linda is confined by the home she lives in constantly after she moves into the Flints' house. In *Gone With the Wind*, the symbol of the home fosters a longing in Scarlett's heart for the times of the past, for the 'good ole' days'. During her tenure at Tara, she was happy because her character has a dominating obsession with property, which was satisfied by her visits to Twelve Oaks and her sweetheart Ashley Wilkes. She represents the 'Old South' in this manner, and Twelve Oaks is the culmination of the 'Old South'. After the Civil War, Scarlett must do many a dishonorable act in order to keep Tara and make do for herself. While their background stories are almost complete opposites, with Scarlett growing up in a well-off plantation-owning family, and Linda growing up a slave, through the symbol of the home which serves to confine them both, they show that their situations are not as dissimilar as they may at first seem.

This is exemplified in both by their longings for the past in regard specifically to a fixation with property (Scarlett for twelve oaks, and Linda for her parents and their first home), and in their emotions seemingly being amplified by their domains when times are taking a turn for the worst. With the home being such a center for both stories, and in both stories commonly

coming up as a symbol of power, it is no surprise that the two main characters of the stories would be constantly doting on what they once had when they think about their early lives. After the Civil War, Scarlett is stuck with attempting to make ends meet alone on her family's plantation having been widowed by the war, and her father dead in his horseback riding incident. At first she does try to pay off the taxes due on Tara herself, but soon gives up on this in favor of marrying once again, this time to Mr. Kennedy, without love. She marries Mr.

Kennedy rather because he has a successful store in Atlanta, and he is shot in a midnight raid leaving Scarlett a rich widow. Even though Scarlett is now rich from Mr. Kennedy's store, she still is not really happy because she does not have her big houses to run back to. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese qualifies this argument when she states " Gerald O'Hara confidently points to the land as the only reliable source of wealth. Even during the war, Scarlett recalls and echoes this view," (397 Fox-Genovese) in her article, Scarlett O'Hara, the Southern Lady as New Woman.

It is truly Scarlett's symbolism personally of the ideals of the ' old south' which aids legitimacy to this statement, because the old south was all about land owning, and social complacency and stability in the middle and upper classes, which is what she is relating to because her father was a very old south type of man. Linda's situation, while not quite as monetarily ambitious, is not dissimilar because she too longs for the past and the luxuries she enjoyed as a child. Linda's longings for the past are a result of much more sinister occurrences than Scarlett's, however. Linda talks repeatedly of having been abused mentally by Dr. Flint, as well as physically on occasion.

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These two serve separately from his many attempts at furthering a sexual relationship with Linda, which she desperately avoids.

She says at once (in reference to sexual tensions with Flint), “ I replied to some of his abuse, and he struck me,” (175 Jacobs). Here, Linda is speaking of her second pregnancy. Dr. Flint is enraged by the fact that she again has become pregnant with another man, and his sexual frustration drives him to lash out at her by cutting off all the hair on her head (which was one of the few things she had to be proud of) in a fit. Martha Cutter also makes reference to this type of abuse in her article, “ Dismantling “ The Master’s House”: Critical Literacy in Harriet Jacobs’ ‘ Incidents...’”, when she states that “ Slaves—but in particular female slaves—are subjected to both verbal and sexual abuse condoned by a system of legal discourse,” (216 Cutter). Martha Cutter also refers to the legal system, which allowed this abuse to go unnoticed, as ‘ The Master’s House’.

This connection is intriguing because it makes reference to the idea that Linda has a fixation with owning her own property; as well as her attempts to put herself above her master through language, which Cutter alludes to with the notion of dismantling the master’s house. This symbol of property again appears in both character’s stories as a catalyst for amplified emotion as the home can serve to protect one from the outside world, but it can also take on a much more sinister role in isolating one from the world. In *Gone With the Wind*, the symbol of the home is humanized at the point where Rhett leaves Scarlett alone in their Atlanta mansion in favor of traveling to London with young Bonnie. Scarlett is left alone and finally has time to consider her situation with Rhett without the bias resulting from their typical skirmishes at <https://assignbuster.com/southern-hospitality/>

this point in the story. She begins to realize that for want of being looked at as a lady, she has overlooked acting like one. Her desire to be seen as a lady leads her to do dishonorable things, which would never be done by the ladies of the day.

Her want of property and isolation within it at this point brings her to the realization that she has been acting unlike any lady should the whole time. Once she has a while to clear her head, she finally begins to realize she does care for Rhett and she attempts to inform him of this upon his return. Being alone in her house for a while would inspire anyone to care for those whom they love more, but it works especially in Scarlett's case because she knows that without Rhett she would not be living in the house so she must additionally consider this fact. This is one singular redeeming moment for Scarlett, because often " Mitchell makes scant effort to redeem Scarlett from the stark self-interest and greed of her chronicled behavior" (400 Fox-Genovese). Scarlett's referenced behavior is a manifestation of her longings for a real home and her compounded feelings from her separation from the world alone in her mansion.

Linda experiences similar effects when she is alone in the attic of Aunt Martha's house. In an effort to free her children, she fakes her own escape to fool Dr. Flint into selling her children, but while her plan does work she must suffer intensely to the tune of accruing physical deformities with every passing day that she hides herself in Aunt Martha's attic. Cutter extends Linda's losses into the metaphor of her battle with language in regards to dismantling the master's house when she says, " Masters abuse, slaves are silent: this seems to be the game's unbroken rule" (216 Cutter). The game <https://assignbuster.com/southern-hospitality/>

refers to slavery in general but also more specifically to Linda's battles with Dr. Flint and with slavery in general in using language to level the playing field.

In her attempt at rebellion here, she actually plays right into the established 'rules' because she is silent, in hiding for 7 years in order to free her children. While in hiding, Linda cites one of the most particularly cruel and unusual punishments brought on by her captivity when she says, "One day the screams of a child nerved me to crawl to my peeping-hole, and I saw my son covered with blood," (276 Jacobs). This is particularly cruel for her because she is a good mother and to see her son in such pain but know she cannot help him is taking its toll on her. This isolation she must suffer through only serves to compound her guilt in this case, and this again creates a link between Linda and Scarlett through their trials with their respective homes. There is no denying that the characters of Scarlett and Linda are inextricably intertwined with the symbolism of property ownership and confinement by this desire for tangible objects. The difference between Scarlett and Linda is a matter of perspective.

Scarlett has been rich all her life, so she wants to own houses out of greed, and a desire to appear a lady to everyone else, even though she demonstrates none of the personality traits of the typical southern lady.

Linda differs from Scarlett because she wants a home so she can provide a good life for her children, and her perspective is one of rising up from nothing, which lends a critical reading of both characters much more sympathy towards Linda's position. However, their situations are really not as different as their perspectives are because they both suffer from a longing

for what they once possessed, and they also both suffer from the limits set out by society to limit their power for Scarlett as a woman, and for Linda as a slave. Scarlett's time alone brings her to the realization that by trying to look like a lady by being rich and powerful, she has only effectively worked towards actually being less of a lady due to the way she acts and the way she gains her wealth after the war. Linda's time alone only serves to show that the more she tries to use her master's tools against him, the greater the penalty on her it will bring until she rises above the games with slavery and the master-slave relationship.

Once she breaks these connections she finally can be truly free, because while she does earn her freedom in the last chapter she seems to still find it a bit of a bittersweet conclusion as she remarks, " I was sold at last! A human being sold in the free city of New York," (443 Jacobs). Linda's idealistic desires limit her happiness here, but she is right in her thinking that it was silly to be sold in a free state, even if it meant freedom, just as Scarlett finally realizes at the end of her story that it is silly to want only property when it means acting unethically towards other people.