

eager for freedom, but that was when he was conquering the poor barbarians and plotting to enslave Rome. Liberty is something you have to be willing to die for. No one can give it to you: It must be earned, day by day, by hard work and self-discipline.

"I have been reading over some of your liberal books and occasionally discuss the arguments with my old friend Cato and with some of the Greeks—though they are sometimes too clever for my poor head, made out of the hard oak of Arpinum. A Roman who came after me—decent fellow named Pliny, who served his prince well, though he was a bit hard on you Christians—pointed out that the kind of liberty described by people like Lord Acton and the Mills and Fitzjames Stephen has much in common with the ideals of a Roman or Athenian gentleman. It may be the worthiest idea you people—who have rejected your religion and your traditions—can entertain. But what you do not seem to understand is that liberty is an ideal that has to be striven for. It can never be taken for granted or given to the masses, because only the man who is morally free can ever enjoy political freedom. And, unless he is a Christian saint or a true Stoic, no one can be morally free unless he is possessed of sufficient wealth that he fears not the loss of a job or a plunge in the value of his investments. Yes, it is true, I am setting the bar a bit too high, but that is the only way I have of explaining to you barbarians—please forgive the slip—what we meant by liberty.

"You Americans, who boast so much of being free, what do you do the first time your pension funds take a tumble or your neighbor is thrown out of work? You elect an inexperienced numbskull and put your faith in him as a god,

much as the Roman rabble were to put their faith in Caesar, though small good it did them. At least Caesar was a real Roman from ancient stock, a man of the highest intellect with a cultivated prose style, to say nothing of being a master politician and military genius, while your president . . . I will say no more. You have your god-emperor, and you had all better be praying that he be an Augustus, though I fear he will turn out to be more a Romulus Augustulus, the pawn of ruthless and unscrupulous foreigners.

"Advice? No, I have no advice for you, except perhaps this one thing. Do not deceive yourselves, as many Roman conservatives were wont to do in my day and in the early empire. You do not live in your old republic, and neither you nor your descendants ever will. If you are hardheaded and pragmatic, like my old pupil—Caesar's adopted son, Augustus—and his advisors, you may be able to preserve and even strengthen some of the institutions that shaped the republic. You might even rebuild a decent public-spirited aristocracy of men who put their country's interest almost on a level with their own—a type of man that has almost disappeared from your country. But do not throw your lives away on futile crusades against the tyranny you and your fathers have long since accepted. Helvidius Priscus came after my time, but what did he accomplish by attacking a decent emperor like Vespasian? Nothing but his own destruction. What I said of my friend Cato, I would also say of many of you conservatives. He acted as if he lived in Plato's Republic and not among the dregs of Romulus or should I say of Barry Obama. Please do not take this the wrong way, but you people make me happy to be a dead Roman and not a live American." ◊

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## Two Chapters From a History of the Mind

*by David Middleton*

### 1. Milton Chooses a Cosmos

Though moved by all that Galileo saw  
Through that elongate tube's distorting glass  
Where reason left its rightful place and law  
To wander with the wandering stars that pass  
Into the dark they chart, I chose instead  
Lights fixed in the arching heavens overhead.

For just as Satan raged above his place  
And Adam asked the angel in his bower  
For knowledge unrequired by love and grace,  
Each ruled by pride and folly in its hour,  
So now the mind, abstracted from its source  
And wedded flesh, begins the long divorce.

Yet still, since I will never see the end  
When blind by its own light pure mind will turn  
Away from nightmare worlds its dreams portend,  
I praise this centered earth men will discern  
When mind with heart and soul once more is one  
In this dark temple lit by moon and sun.

### 2. Enlightenment Mind

Released from myth and symbol, dreams of pope and king,  
Set free at last to seize and break down everything  
Caught by its own reflection it would wake to find  
Itself apart in dark its broken lights defined.

by Joseph Sobran

## Scarlett and Michael

The other night, while watching *The Godfather* on television for roughly the 50th time, I was struck by a parallel that had never occurred to me before. The movie's sentimental musical score reminded me of "Tara's Theme" in *Gone With the Wind*. My mother used to whistle that melody all the time; she loved the book, the movie, and Scarlett O'Hara. I never quite grasped why *Gone With the Wind* had such a hold on her imagination until that moment. Then, in a flash, I saw.

Both films were enormously popular in their day and long afterward. Each embraced a somewhat disreputable side of American life with unexpected sympathy: the Sicilian mob, the slaveholding Southern Confederacy. And the two stories—comprising not only the films but also the novels they were based on—appeal strongly to the feeling that life was better in the old days, a lost era when heroic action was still possible and the individual was not yet dwarfed and crushed by the bureaucracy that goes by the name of Democracy.

Democracy? Face this simple fact: It is exceptional in modern times to deal with an elected official in person. You are far more likely to encounter, and to be visited at home by, an unelected official of the vast state bureaucracy whose mission is to enforce your compliance or collect your taxes, with no pretense of being your servant. Chattel slavery may be gone, but servitude to state bureaucracy seems to be an ineradicable feature of modern life. So we admire and envy those who don't have to truckle to it: Scarlett, Rhett, the Corleones.

The Princeton historian James McPherson ridicules *Gone With the Wind* for its nostalgic "moonlight and magnolias" picture of the Old South. He is dead wrong. Margaret Mitchell, author of the novel, belonged to a school of thought that rejected such an idealization of Dixie, and she projected

this attitude onto her headstrong hero and heroine. Both Rhett Butler and Scarlett are skeptical of the Confederacy and its cult; no, not only skeptical of it, but cynical about it. They want to get on with life, not dwell in a supposedly glorious past. This means meeting the future on its own terms. They accept the new order of things after the war—Rhett skirting the law in order to prosper, Scarlett making a ruthlessly mercenary marriage to another man. They are a clear-eyed couple, far from idealistic. For both of them, the defeat of the South is a given; Rhett never had any illusion that victory was possible. He realized a distasteful truth: The Northern industrial power would dictate the outcome, never mind both sides' alleged principles.

In one of the film's most shocking scenes, Scarlett kills a Yankee soldier—a would-be rapist—who has invaded the family mansion. She shoots him in the face. This is our notice of her resolute intention to do whatever may be necessary to protect Tara. She is no longer the flirtatious belle we met at the beginning of the story. She has become a very bold and resourceful woman, equal to any challenge that may arise. Beauty and charm are only two of the weapons in her arsenal.

The Yankee-shooting incident has an answering scene in *The Godfather*, of course: when Michael Corleone guns down the gangster Virgil Sollozzo and police captain McCluskey during dinner in a restaurant in order to protect and avenge his father. Like Scarlett, Michael accepts the pitiless logic of a new order, in which old norms and scruples no longer obtain,



and he adopts an audacity he thinks the times require. Killing a police officer is an extremely risky maneuver, but Michael judges it to be worth the gamble to destroy his family's enemies. He thereby proves he is not the effete Ivy League college boy his brother Santino assumes he is; and when Santino is murdered, Michael is ready to become head of the Corleone crime family, the new godfather. Just as Scarlett has repudiated the genteel code of the Old South, Michael abandons the vestiges of Vito Corleone's code of honor.

Santino, "Sonny," is an instinctual, reflexive fighter whose uncontrollable temper gets him baited into a trap and killed; but Michael is wiser, more cautious and deliberate. As the saying goes, he eats his revenge cold. After killing Sollozzo and McCluskey, he flees to Sicily, spending an idyllic year in his father's homeland and living by its ancient ways. Then, when his Sicilian bride is murdered, he is ready to come home and fight—to wage cold-blooded war on Vito's chief enemies. In a coup of Machiavellian cunning, he has most of them slain in a single day.

Both epics offer the exhilaration of showing us a world in which men are masters of their fates. This may be an illusion, but it remains an inspiring one. ◀

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