



Rhett & Scarlett: The Lives and Legacies of Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures of important people, places, and events.

*Includes Leigh and Gable's quotes about their lives and careers. *Includes a bibliography for further reading.

The 1930s were, without a doubt, the height of the classical Hollywood era. The era was known for its lavish studio productions, with MGM, RKO, Warner Brothers, Paramount, and 20th Century Fox all operating at the height of their powers. Every major studio possessed a long roster of contract players, with films released at such a rapid pace that it made for an especially competitive environment within the industry. Even while America remained in the throes of the Great Depression, the film industry continued to flourish, and movies easily supplanted the theater as the main attraction for American entertainment.

Of course, what made 1939 the watershed year was the release of several critically acclaimed movies, including *The Wizard of Oz* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. But the most famous of the bunch, and perhaps the most famous movie of all, is *Gone With the Wind*. Leading man Clark Gable had a unique appeal that captivated Depression-era audiences; while Cary Grant offered a sophisticated charm and Fred Astaire was tied to the musical genre, Gable brought an air of sophistication that was less comical than that of Grant and appealed to both genders, unlike Astaire. At a time when so many Americans were financially destitute, Gable managed to appear classy without coming across as snobbish. At the same time, his virile masculinity was not overly macho or misogynist. For these reasons, Gable was able to captivate male and female viewers alike, and his mass appeal was a driving force behind the commercial success of *Gone With the Wind*, possibly the most beloved Hollywood film ever made. As iconic director John Huston once stated, "Clark Gable was the only real he-man I've ever known, of all the actors I've met."

One of the most remarkable aspects of the film is that the quintessential Southern belle was played by Vivien Leigh, a British actress still relatively unknown in Hollywood. Vivien was an accomplished stage actress and had already appeared in foreign films during the 1930s, but she was a complete dark horse to get the iconic role she's still associated with, and it only came about because of her persistence in getting cast for the role. 30 years after *Gone With the Wind* was released, one film critic credited Selznick's "inspired casting" of Vivien Leigh as Scarlett with the film's success. Another 30 years later, the same critic wrote that Leigh "still lives in our minds and memories as a dynamic force rather than as a static presence."

While *Gone With the Wind* made Leigh a big name practically overnight, she continued to buck the usual trend by doing Broadway and even appearing on stage in London during the 1940s, instead of focusing on movies. A lot of this was no doubt due to her famous marriage to Laurence Olivier, himself an accomplished stage and film actor. At the same time, Vivien became notorious for being difficult to work with and unusually temperamental, a byproduct of bipolar disorder that frequently affected her mood and occasionally left her incoherently hysterical.

Despite starring together just that one time, Gable and Leigh produced one of the most memorable movie couples, but they were also tied together by similar fates and premature deaths. *Rhett & Scarlett* examines the lives and careers of the two Hollywood icons. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh like never before.

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