

The Mammy Stereotype in *Gone With The Wind* and *To Kill A Mocking Bird*

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Abstract

This paper examines the emergence and evolution of the Mammy stereotype primarily in the American culture in connection with two of the most influential novels which deal with the problem of slavery and social inequality based on race, namely "Gone with the Wind" by Margaret Mitchell and "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee. The Mammy, seen as a somewhat comic character and remembered as the most faithful domestic slave who would always sacrifice herself and her own family for her master's, is presented as indispensable for a white family, a mother-like figure, and the one responsible for passing down the Southern values and racial inequalities. The paper aims to demonstrate that the Mammy figure was created and popularized through literature, cinema, and household items to conceal the harsh realities that African American slaves had to face and to come in opposition to the slave narratives and the abolitionists' claims. With every generation of readers after the Civil War, the Plantation Myth has been renewed and reinforced, making the Old Plantation South full of captivating stereotypes one of the most adored antebellum products. These stereotypes blurred the line between what was imaginative and accurate, culpability and justice, and a free human being or mere property.

Keywords: Mammy, stereotype, slave, the Plantation Myth, tradition

Introduction

This paper focuses on one of the most prominent figures in Southern literature, namely the Mammy– the domestic slave who occupied the highest place in the slave hierarchy, reminding the readers about an ideal of coexistence of the two races, an ideal destroyed by the Civil War. Nonetheless, this stereotypical character with hyperbolized traits is nothing more but a means of manipulation and rewriting history, as it has been used to embellish facts. Along with the Southerners' fear of being criticized by the rest of the world for what they did, another reason for creating the myth of perfect harmony and faithful slaves was that Americans hoped that there could be a reconciliation with former slaves and their race, living together in a world in which racism, injustices, the past events and, more importantly, the whites' mistakes could be forgotten. Thus, the reasons underlying this topic are the complexity of the racial issue together with the image of the African American woman on the plantation, these two giving the reader new perspectives on the 19th century plantation life and leaving room for interpretation and further research. Both Margaret Mitchell and Harper Lee succeeded in creating emblematic Mammy figures that are representative for two distinct segments of the American history, namely the Civil War and the Great Depression.

1. *The Plantation Myth* in American Literature

In the history of mankind and, particularly, in the history of the United States of America, one chapter will always come back to the surface, reminding of the shameful deeds that the white man committed in his run for power and fortune – slavery. After it was abolished in the Northern states at the beginning of the 19th century, the tensions between the North and the South increased as the latter refused to free the enslaved, claiming that having this type of workers was beneficial for the economic growth of the country and that, in fact, slaves were content in their situation, being cared for by the owners. In the attempt to defend themselves and the plantation tradition, Southerners started to idealize their organization and the relationships established between the master and his slaves even before the Civil War, creating the so-called *Plantation Myth*. As the name suggests, they were trying to embellish the image of slavery in the South, creating an appealing picture of an agrarian region governed by traditional and chivalric values where everyone knew his or her place in society and was gratified by it. As Patrick Gerster and Nicholas Cords argue, “Though America long has been a haven for myth, it is the American South more than any other region of the country which has taken command of the nation’s mythic imagination” (567). Created to serve as a means of validation of regional identity and to give meaning to the disturbing events, the plantation myth is strongly associated with the nostalgia for the old times, the lost innocence yearned for, and the heroic past of the Confederates.

The period between 1828 and 1832 is characterized by a series of critical events like slave rebellions and Northern antislavery movements which made the planters and intellectuals of the South defend their institution by different means, especially in written forms such as “political speeches, editorials, newspaper articles, pamphlets, court decisions, Sunday sermons, and novels” (Tracy 5). In this way, they hoped to make Northerners and Europeans understand the necessity of slavery and this stratification of society for their progress. Consequently, a handful of antebellum writers initiated a new literary genre, the proslavery literature, which came to the planters’ help, presenting them as benevolent father figures interested in the well-being of their slaves (Gray and Robinson 59). Thus, the antebellum literature aimed to present the Southern society as civilized, caring, orderly, opposed to the Northern society, which was seen as capitalist and in a continuous toil for industrialization and development. Refusing to see the negative impact that the institution of slavery had upon African Americans, the antebellum writers focused on presenting slavery as a way of civilizing pagan populations through patriarchy, changing them from irrational beings, thieves, liars, naked savages into respected, God-fearing workers, thus reverberating the legitimating discourse of colonialist mentality.

For those people who believed that African Americans were intellectually and morally inferior to whites by birth, in their eyes, a society based on slavery could cause no harm, but promote harmony and the recognition of the differences between people and races, differences that could lead to a well-shaped hierarchy and create a sense of civilization (Tracy 8). Having as a main institution the patriarchal family, which gave the white men complete power, the Southerners claimed that the enslaved were protected by whites through being given work, thus a meaning in life, without having to compete with the superior Americans for a place in society. Thus, attacking the institution of slavery by calling its practices unchristian and un-

American, the antislavery activists assailed not only the Southern labor system, but also the master's integrity and his image of a capable leader (Tracy 15). The abolitionists went even further and wrote papers in which they tried to signal the implications of slavery and the inequalities within the American society, enhancing the ideological oppositions upon slavery. Among these, one may mention Thomas Paine's *Slavery in America* (1775), William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper *The Liberator* (1831-1865), David Walker's *Appeal...to the Colored Citizens of the World...* (1829), *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853). Representative for this period and extremely influential is Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which encouraged other abolitionists who believed in the power of literature to inform, educate and change mentalities to stand up and talk about their disapproval concerning how their society was structured. Several slave narratives started to circulate, creating a more vivid image about slaves' life. Consequently, the defenders of slavery from the Southern United States responded to these authors by generating the so-called *Anti-Tom literature* or *plantation literature*, publishing books that would save their image and accuse abolitionist writers of exaggerating realities: "by 1856 more than thirty anti-Tom novels had been written and published in an effort to reverse the nation's negative attitudes toward the South and slaveholding. None of the *anti-Tom novels* could rival the sales of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but they were influential among slavery apologists" (Wallace-Sanders 42).

Analysing the themes tackled by authors, one may say that the novel of the 19th century can be divided into two main groups: the abolitionist one and the pro-slavery one, the latter containing two subdivisions, namely the plantation novel and the historical romance – "authors produced two kinds of novels: the plantation or *Virginia* novel, which was derived from the sentimental tradition established by Richardson; and the *historical romance* established by Sir Walter Scott" (Tracy 32). Even though they tried to avoid conflicts generated using slaves' labour by means of idealizing facts and creating charming stories, the Civil War could not be avoided. After this milestone in the evolution of the United States, the Southerners, defeated and facing harsh realities, continued to tell nostalgic stories and commemorate the old times.

2. The Mammy-Figure

To respond to and deny the accusations of brutality, torture, violent punishments and rape, slaveholders and the intellectuals who were against the abolitionists made popular stories of faithful slaves, making the readers dream about a time when old uncles, aunts and mammies would be part of a white family, being held dear. About the Mammy-Figure wrote extensively authors and scholars such as Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, Susan J. Tracy, Micki McElya, and Francis Pendleton Gaines, revealing more facets of the South and making considerable contributions to nowadays understanding of the concept of the domestic slave.

The Mammy, remembered as a faithful slave who gladly cooked and cared for the master's children, is nothing more but an illusion, a bridge between the Old and the New South. Part of the antebellum myth, which has been passed down from one generation to another, her aura is made of the white Southerner's wishes to reassure the readers that the patriarchal benevolence typical for the South was real and that utterly-gone period of

time was filled with harmony and abundance. This cultural image of an enslaved woman loved by her white family was used in an attempt to find justification for the institution of slavery. As Bercaw and Ownby note, portrayed as an obese, middle-aged, intellectually inferior, dark-skinned domestic servant, always grinning with a smile that would make, by contrast, her skin seem even darker, the reverse of the American standards of femininity and grace, wearing drab calico dresses and a bandana around her head, this woman “is viewed as humorous and comedic”(226),but indispensable for a white family. Moreover, to stress the interdependence between the white family and their domestic servant, the Mammy is often described as a devoted slave whose main interest is to ensure that the needs of her master’s family are continuously met, ignoring her own demands and wishes. Docile in relation to whites, the Mammy is rather judgmental and aggressive when it comes to her own community, feeling that she is an extension of the white family. She accepts her fate and her inferiority in the American world, without trying to challenge the social order. Content with her condition and thankful for what living in a Christian white family means, the Mammy does not sacrifice only her needs, but also those of her own family, neglecting her children while providing comfort and emotional support for the planter’s family.

Trying to deny the accusations of brutality and inhuman practice towards African Americans,the Mammy’s cultural image transmitted the idea that the institution of slavery was benevolent and caring, coming to the aid of “uncivilized” populations and making them part of the American society – “To the English convinced of the superiority of their own civilization and cultural attainments, the Africans appeared uncivilized, heathen, even savage” (Cooper and Terrill 56). Attempting to deny the accusations of rape and sexual harassment, the Mammy image is shaped as a sexually undesirable woman, a mother-like figure which embodies the supreme parental affective relationships. This image is opposed to the “Jezebel” stereotype, which implies that African American women, in antithesis with the white model of self-respect, purity and modesty, are innately promiscuous, sexually alluring and lewd. Presenting the mammy as a desexualized woman only accentuates the duality of these women’s nature; whereas the young one seduced wealthy white plantation owners to satisfy her carnal and animalistic needs, the old one was a religious woman, with no desires that would force her to sin, a confidant and a moral mentor for those who were in her care. Her body represents the tendon that keeps the two races united: “the muscle of African American slave labor with the skeletal power structure of white southern aristocracy” (Wallace-Sanders 21). With her body, she nurtured her own children and their soon-to-be owners, being a symbol of maternity of the Old South. Also, often portraying her with a white baby in her arms can be perceived as a reminder that the Southern states became prosperous on slave labor, their wealth being the merit of African Americans.

Having both physical and behavior exaggerated treats, the Mammy remains the most recognizable character of the American Southern literature, marked by excess and seen as an overweight tall woman, who sings and tells stories while working, being, at the same time, a disciplinarian. Always depicted in the presence of white children, her attachment towards them is emphasized, in contrast to the carelessness with which she deals with her own children. Characterized by impatience, sometimes showing even abuse and violence towards her dirty and bad-mannered children, the Mammy

shows a deep interest in the well-being of her charges, showering them with an abundance of affection and care. Her devotion towards the master's family places her in a position of racial inferiority, this woman losing her own identity when becoming a Mammy, as she remains known under this name for the rest of her life. Thus, becoming a Mammy means receiving a title and, at the same time, a new identity. With this position within the white family's household, besides raising her charges, she may also have the role of a cook or a maid for her mistress whom she treats as a child. Mammy's sense of humor and lack of education is accentuated by the fact that she speaks in the so-called "plantation dialect", even though she does not identify herself with the rest of the workers from the slave quarters. Feeling that she is part of the culture that oppresses her, mammy is often seen by the rest of the slaves as unreliable and untrustworthy, despite her major authority within her owner's household.

Described by Southerners as "the most influential force in their childhood" (Wallace-Sanders 25), she represents the ultimate symbol of maternity and, through her, pro-slavery writers tried to demonstrate and mislead the readers into believing that slaves were content with their life, as this woman devoted herself to her owners, putting their interests above hers – "In addition to cotton, the myth of the plantation South proved to be one of the most cherished and enduring antebellum Southern products. The dashing planter heroes, captivating belles, and contented and industrious slaves are stereotypes that have been reworked in each generation since the Civil War" (Tracy 49). With a dual role of both a surrogate and biological mother, her maternal instincts are accentuated in order to show the image of a docile and caring slave. Thus, like a Southern fabric, she is shaped by a collective consciousness that wants to promote, through texts, visual images and objects, the figure of the perfect slave, enduring, strong and loyal, resulting in the symbol of racial harmony. This propaganda of African American motherhood idealized a woman who was inferior to white American citizens because of both her race and economic background, breastfeeding and raising a child who will own her and her family. Claiming that the domestic intimacy established between a Mammy-Figure and her white family was unique and misunderstood by the rest of the world, Southerners defended themselves by comparing the fulfillment that a mother experiences with the necessity of slavery in a society based upon racial structures (Wallace-Sanders 37). Thus, the Mammy-character shows slavery as a supportive institution that cherished its laborers and the special relationship established between them and their masters.

3. The Representation Of The Mammy-Figure in the Novel

When studying the Mammy-archetype in American literature, one cannot ignore the African American house slave from *Gone with the Wind*, as she represents the emblem of servility, displaying all the characteristic features that enable the reader to have a clear understanding of the dynamics between slaves and their masters. Mammy, deprived of a name and called by an appellation which suggests her main function in the household, is the bridge between the white family and the slaves, showing affection and unquestionable gratitude towards her master, being the confident of her mistress and playing the role of a surrogate mother for their white children. Seen as "the last link with the old days" (Mitchell 1983), Mammy cannot be separated from the Southern memory, representing a comforting reality for

those who found themselves in the tumultuous events of the 1860s and 1870s and who longed for their happy early years surrounded by devoted slaves. Thus, Mammy is the symbol of stability and reassurance for Scarlett, enhancing the idea that slaves and whites needed each other: "Suddenly she wanted Mammy desperately, as she had wanted her when she was a little girl, wanted the broad bosom on which to lay her head, the gnarled black hand on her hair" (Mitchell 1983).

Influenced by the stereotypical image of the African American nurse that was circulating, Mitchell's Mammy follows the same patterns, displaying the same characteristics: "Mammy emerged from the hall, a huge old woman with the small, shrewd eyes of an elephant. She was shining black, pure African" (Mitchell 46). Having her traits hyperbolized until she becomes a comical caricature, Mammy is portrayed as old, obese and domineering, a faithful slave who internalized the whites' system of belief, without caring about her inferiority. Being in the O'Hara family for three generations, as she was Ellen's nurse as well, and having no family of her own, this woman belongs completely to her white family. Early in the novel the reader finds out that she was deprived of any contact with the other slaves, the result of this being evident in her behaviour, values and mannerism. Having no African American background to affect her and being kept apart from her community, she is the perfect Mammy – entirely devoted to her owners. Furthermore, the author stresses the reciprocity of this ownership by introducing Mammy as obsessed with taking care of the O'Haras, running their lives and making sure that Scarlett obeys the Southern moral codes and etiquette, stating that "Mammy felt that she owned the O'Haras, body and soul" and that she was "devoted to her last drop of blood to the O'Haras" (Mitchell 46). The fact that her ancestry was erased can be observed in her vocabulary choices, as she categorizes people into three groups, following the Southern values and conventions and adopting them as her own: "quality white folks" (Mitchell 131), white trash and "wuthless niggus" (Mitchell 48). Utterly losing the tie with her community and her African cultural identity, she adopts the point of view of the dominant group of planters regarding her people, looking down on them as to uneducated and inferior beings and denying any spiritual identification with them.

By shaping a mother-like figure that contributes to the development and flourishing of the slave system, Mitchell perpetuates that idea that a mammy was not a simple slave, but she was of a special kind, promoting and passing down the Southern racial inequalities. Different from the other slaves who, though loyal, are ignorant and indifferent to their masters' affairs and private lives, Mammy raises her white charges with deep love and care:

Mammy nearly nurtures Scarlett to death. She chases her with a shawl so she doesn't catch a cold, orders her to stay out of the sun to protect her fragile white skin, and forces her to eat privately so that she can keep up the public appearance of being dainty. (Wallace-Sanders 126)

She embodies the plantation owners' belief that the institution of slavery was beneficial for both sides by eagerly accepting her position within the American society and trying to imitate her persecutors: "Mammy was black, but her code of conduct and her sense of pride were as high as or higher than those of her owners" (Mitchell 46). Even though she has no children of her own and does not breastfeed her white employers' children like the typical domestic slave woman, Mammy represents another clear example that the

Southern states became prosperous on slave labor and sacrifices, as she continuously tries to force-feed Scarlett and Ellen. Well-versed in the Southern codes and mannerism, she keeps Scarlett in line – “Whom Mammy loved, she chastened. And, as her love for Scarlett and her pride in her were enormous, the chastening process was practically continuous” (Mitchell 47) – appearing comical and pathetic at the same time, as she is an African American domestic slave who believes she is part of her aristocratic white family and gives her young mistress lessons about how to behave like an authentic Southern belle.

In contrast to Ellen’s nature, which is too holy and refined to assume the mother role and its responsibilities, Mammy’s position in the household as a surrogate mother is accentuated; she is the one who keeps her young mistress in line, worrying about her well-being and behaviour in society, her manners and choices in life, the one who uses words of endearment when talking with her and the one who scolds her to be a lady, possessing all the facets of a mother-like figure for a young girl – loving, caring and involved at the same time, knowing Scarlett’s true self better than anyone else. Mammy keeps the role of an emotional support for Scarlett until the end of the novel when her mistress yearns to be caressed by her again. Mammy is her life-long confidant, a pillar in her unsteady life, her refuge, the one who helps her regain the family’s fortune. Feeling that she is part of the O’Hara family, she does not consider leaving Tara or Scarlett, even after all the African Americans are freed as a result of the Civil War, staying loyal to the only family she ever knew – “He knew her shortcomings but, after all, she was a family darky” (Mitchell 1704).

Ambiguous and complex at the same time, Mitchell’s Mammy is valued and held dear by her family – “Scarlett felt that Rhett should be firm with Mammy, as became the head of the house, but Rhett only laughed and said that Mammy was the real head of the house” (Mitchell 1662) – being, at the same time, together with the magnolias and the fields, an integrated part of the O’Hara plantation. Scarlett is the one who states that Mammy belongs to Tara in the last part of the novel: “the avenue of dark cedars leading to Tara, the banks of cape jessamine bushes, vivid green against the white walls, the fluttering white curtains. And Mammy would be there [...] Mammy, the last link with the old days.” (Mitchell 1989)

For her, no matter what time brings, Mammy remains unchanged and permanent like a stoic statue, a familiar and comforting image in a reality subject to an irrevocable shift from the Old to the New South, where the relationships between African American slaves and their masters are demolished.

4. Calpurnia, an Atypical Mammy

Almost 30 years after *Gone with the Wind* and its brilliant success, another novel that would touch upon the issue of racism would emerge and shatter the public opinion. Harper Lee’s 1960 novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is a plea for humanity, equality and social progress, challenging the still persisting opinion that African Americans are a danger for the society and they should be excluded from the social circles of whites. Told from the innocent point of view of a six-year-old girl named Scout, the coming-of-age story depicts the most relevant events that happened over the course of three years in Maycomb, during the Great Depression, the main characters being the narrator and her family members, together with Dill and Calpurnia, the house

servant. Calpurnia, or Cal, the housekeeper, is the best well-defined African American character in the novel, being, at the same time, different from the typical mammy stereotype known in literature. Lee challenges the perpetuated image of the fat willingly subservient slave who would do anything for her white family, like an “Uncle Tom” type of character, in creating Calpurnia. Opposed in appearance to the well-known Mammy— “She was all angles and bones; she was nearsighted; she squinted; her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard” (Lee 4) – but a trustworthy person who is content with her life, she represents the mother figure for both Jem and Scout, being truly part of the white family and indispensable in their education and upbringing.

Not only a hired worker for the family, Calpurnia is valued by Atticus who defends her in front of Aunt Alexandra who would like to fire her: „Calpurnia’s not leaving this house until she wants to. You may think otherwise, but I couldn’t have got along without her all these years. She’s a faithful member of this family and you’ll simply have to accept things the way they are” (Lee 123).

Thus, challenging the racial stereotypes, he enforces the necessity of having Calpurnia in their house: “in his wife’s absence, Calpurnia is more than just a cook--she is the closest approximation to a maternal force that exists in Jem’s and Scout’s lives; although not a substitute for their mother, she is pivotal to their successful upbringing” (Halpern 43).

However, Lee’s narrative comes with a twist; she presents Calpurnia as one of the only people in her community with potential to elevate herself, against her poor backgrounds, and one of the only African Americans in Maycomb who can read and write, passing down her knowledge to her eldest son, Zeebo. A fact to be taken into consideration is that Calpurnia is not a live-in maid, her life outside the Finch property becoming an interest for her white employer’s children. When Scout becomes aware of the fact that there is more to Calpurnia than she would imagine, she asks to be part of her unknown life: “Cal, can I come to see you sometimes? [...] Out to your house,” I said. “Sometimes after work? Atticus can get me” (Lee 114). The woman’s first response, “See me, honey? You see me every day” (Lee 114), implies the layers of personal distance that intervene between an African American worker, be it a slave or not, and the white family for whom he or she works, the latter getting to know and understand only a small part of the worker’s life.

As Atticus himself admits, Calpurnia is the only one, besides him, who is to be thanked for the children’s education, this woman being his advisor and confident during difficult times and for delicate tasks. She successfully fulfills the role of a mother for Jem and Scout, teaching them primarily about morality and not misjudging other people on their backgrounds, as they are all equal – “Naw Jem, I think there’s just one kind of folks. Folks” (Lee 207). Presented in contradiction to Aunt Alexandra, who has a system of values characteristic for the Old South, Calpurnia is a mother-substitute who equally combines affection with the rational methods in the upbringing of the children of her employer:

If anything, she’s been harder on them in some ways than a mother would have been... she’s never let them get away with anything, she’s never indulged them the way most colored nurses do. She tried to bring them up according to her lights, and Cal’s lights are pretty good – and another thing, the children love her. (Lee 123)

Opposed to Aunt Alexandra who tells the children not to mix with Walter Cunningham and others like him, Calpurnia breaks the boundaries between races and social ranks by bringing the children to her church and scolding Scout for making an impolite remark when Walter, the boy of a poor but decent family, comes to them for dinner. Protesting that the boy is not her “comp’ny”, the girl is kept in line by Calpurnia who reminds her that they are all equal, even though some are more fortunate than the others. Thus, while Aunt Alexandra lives by the social norms and conventions of the South, Calpurnia lives according to the human values, displaying common sense and sensitivity and treating everyone equally.

Because she values education and learning, she is appreciated by Atticus who calls upon her in times of need. In fact, Scout points out that: “when she was furious Calpurnia’s grammar became erratic. When in tranquility, her grammar was as good as anybody’s in Maycomb. Atticus said Calpurnia had more education than most colored folks” (Lee 21), stressing Calpurnia’s elevation.

However, she lives a double life, perceived as the link between the two opposite worlds – the world of “white folks” and the world of the stigmatized African Americans– and speaking two languages – the language of the elevated people and the “nigger talk” – “moving with a sense of moral command in white and black worlds alike and having command of two languages” (Meyer 214). The children are astonished to notice a shift from the woman they have always known to the woman who is part of the African American community of Maycomb and knows how to integrate herself: “That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her having command of two languages.” (Lee 113)

As the children insist that she should not talk in dialect, but present herself as they know her, namely a literate and decent woman, Calpurnia stresses the importance of keeping the two distinctive sides of herself separated from each other, as they should never be switched.

Certainly, constantly switching from one language pattern to the other and crossing the line between the two worlds suggest wise thinking and adaptability. Through her words, Lee transmits the message that change comes from within and it should not be forced or imposed. Knowing her place in society while, at the same time, not restraining herself from speaking her mind, Calpurnia respects the formal boundaries that exist between her community and whites. However, as Atticus is out of town with business, she takes the children to the church where her son is the vocal leader, bypassing the rules concerning the interaction between the two sides of Maycomb. Being sharply criticized by Lula, a member of the church, for bringing the white children to the African American quarters, Calpurnia is unflinching in the face of the accusations and even amused, claiming that the Finch children are her “comp’ny”(Lee 107), while advocating for equality – “It’s the same God, ain’t it?” (Lee 107). Being nothing else but a mother for these children, she can easily defy the boundaries that exist in a Southern society concerning the physical spaces and limitation, refusing to violate, however, the rules of using the dialect: “Again I thought her voice strange: she was talking like the rest of them” (Lee 107). Thus, she is careful which social norms can be crossed and which must be respected. Being a model to her employer’s children, she teaches them indirectly that some racial and social boundaries can be ignored, the children easily moving from one group to the other, establishing relations between the two races.

In conclusion, Lee's novel deals with the treatment of humans, more precisely, the man's inhumanity to man, touching on the issue of double standards. Despite many years have passed since the abolition of slavery, in Maycomb, African Americans are seen as outcasts, constantly insulted by the white inhabitants of the town, considered immoral and prone to criminality. Calpurnia, the only fully depicted African American character in this novel, is an example of a worker who knows her place within a racist society, but who does not internalize the stratification based neither on skin colour nor class, treating everyone equally, showing respect and helping those in need with no prejudice.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to demonstrate that the Mammy-stereotype, promoted through literature, emerged as a way of embellishing the role of the institution of slavery, presenting the plantation owners as benevolent father figures interested in the well-being of their slaves. Living in harmony, the exponents of both two races benefited from the peculiar Southern institution, the slave owners providing African Americans with jobs, while keeping them apart from the white competitors, taking care of and holding them dear, while, in turn, the slaves decisively contributed to the economic growth of the South.

Regarding Margaret Mitchell's character, Mammy, respectively Harper Lee's, Calpurnia, one can conclude that there is a thin line between being a stereotype present in literature and a historic reality. However, the two characters are presented in different lights. Mammy seems to possess all the stereotypical characteristics of a traditional African American nurse, devoting her whole existence to her master's family, internalizing the white man's point of view and Southern conventions as her own, and deciding to cling to Scarlet and her inferiority even after the slaves' liberation. Overlooked and with her complexity reduced by the white writer, the Mammy is presented in relation with her white family, perpetuating the idea that this domestic slave was indispensable for the Southerners, but still inferior in a society dominated by racism and preconceptions. Calpurnia, on the other hand, even though she is aware of her place within a racist society, does not live by the social conventions of the South, but by her own, displaying a strong sense of justice and stoicism. Also, by having a family and a house for herself, Lee tries to put some distance between Calpurnia and her employers, showing that she is not dependent on them. The woman's good command of both language patterns and her ability to switch from the world of her people to the world of the whites enhance the fact that she learned how to maintain her independence, while being a bridge between the two sides of Maycomb and belonging to both of them.

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