

Gone With The Wind: The Manifestation of the Producer's Courage and Determination In its Making

by
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Introduction

Generally, a movie would be thought worth seeing if everybody else seemed to have done so. This was reflected by the recent windfall at the box-office. The mere news of its mounting ticket sales shot its gross takings to an unusually high level. It should not be a motivating factor in one's moviegoing plan. Such a simplistic rationalization can easily be avoided by adequately familiarising oneself through information about the film in question.

The mass media, print and electronic, provide features and critiques on particular films. Producers and distributors should use these channels to 'sell' films or to hear opinions from critics and the public. Members of the viewing audience in return would benefit from this exchange. Clearly, we should not overlook other significant factors in our judgment. Although it is inappropriate to compare the locally-made with the Hollywood product, nevertheless in the interest of motion picture advancement, the writer wishes to cite an example of a movie which had established a criteria of excellence. It is unsurpassed in its production craftsmanship due, mainly, to the dedication of its producer, the various professionals, technicians and talents involved.

Much of a movie's success is attributed to its producer's organizational ability. As huge sums are involved in its realization, it is logical that he should be concerned with good returns. However, fine businessmanship is not enough, he must also excel in its art. He should exhibit mastery and skill in the production endeavor. His job not only requires him to know a potentially attractive property, but also to seek the most creative cast and the best professionals available. He may not be able to get every single talented person suitable in the collaborative creation of his art, but there is bound to be alternatives which may yet be of better quality than the ones traded in. More often than not, human ingenuity always prevails, needed in overcoming various difficulties in the pursuit of excellence.

The fallacy is that when a movie clicks, it is tagged with the 'must see' label. This stereotypical thinking is further enhanced by the media blitz professing the desirability of seeing the movie. Therefore, it is emphasized that ticket receipts are but only one of several criteria in deciding whether to go or not to go to the movie house. Fairly extensive knowledge about a particular film is a wise thing. This leads us to the complexities of the processes involved in producing a movie. And the movie which rightly deserved study is none other than GONE WITH THE WIND (GWTW).

Material sources

This article is inspired by a renewed interest in GWTW which was re-released in 1991, i.e. after half a century of its existence. And, recently, GWTW was shown on Malaysian TV for two consecutive prime times. Various books on the film, its stars, writers, technical crew, etc., were referred. Fortunately also, the producer David O. Selznick made it a practice of carbon-copying his memos, thus leaving to the film researcher a set of useful primary source documents. These were then selected and edited by Rudy Behlmer in 1981.

Besides that, a great deal of fresh information are obtained from Jeffrey L. Selznick's *THE MAKING OF A LEGEND, GONE WITH THE WIND* (1988). It is a documentary reflecting its producer's attempt to fulfill his parent's wish, as in one of his memos, Selznick Sr. indicated his hope that the remake of GWTW would be considered by his sons, Jeffrey or Danny (Behlmer, 1981 p. 246).

At this juncture, it would be inadequate without mentioning the most important work which sparked all this everlasting love for a particular film culture: the one and only masterpiece by Margaret Mitchell, *GONE WITH THE WIND*. Published in 1936, the movie of the same name was made and released in 1939. As of November 13 to 16, 1994 its sequel, *SCARLETT*, was simultaneously televised throughout the world, including the 'Golden Channel' of Malaysia. As to whether the latter meets the classical and ever-green greatness of the former is reserved for future discussion.

Producer extraordinaire

At the helm in any production venture is the producer:

"The producer's role is chiefly financial and organizational. He is responsible in unearthing film projects and convincing production companies or distributors to finance the film. The producer may work for a studio and seek to discover ideas for films. He may even be hired by a studio to put together a film project."

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David O. Selznick was the producer extraordinaire, who undertook to film *GWTW* in the summer of 1936, at which time the novel original had already been read by half of America. It was just as well for no one else dared to contemplate the possibility of adapting it into a movie. How could a 1037-page book be reduced to a manageable movie? Most important people in the business opined that no independent company could hope to achieve what Selznick was after. But the determined and resourceful man, loyal to his art, thought otherwise and went ahead to make it according to his own liking. His independent company, Selznick International, produced it with considerable support from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, i.e. artistically as well as financially.

Regarding the property, Margaret Mitchell described the following:

“It’s a novel that does have a theme, the theme of survival, what makes some people able to go through catastrophe, and others, just as able, strong and brave, go under. I only know that the survivors used to call that quality ‘goshen,’ so I wrote about people who had ‘goshen’ and the people who didn’t.”

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As to its production potential, Mayer, M. F. (1973, p. 32) regards *GWTW* as having the necessary ingredients for a terrific feature: the story is romantic and sentimental against the stirring background of the Civil War. The wounded and dying in the Station Plaza at Atlanta truly made an unforgettable scene. It focuses on the vixenish Southern belle Scarlett O’Hara - the most wilful, the most determined and the highly spirited (Thomas, 1983 p. 141).

Certainly, Story Editor Katharine Brown’s persistence in purchasing the property pays. She had successfully negotiated the price of US\$50,000 with McMillan’s representative on July 6, a week after its publication. That ceiling was ingeniously set by Selznick himself. Now knowing its cumulative box-office receipts of about US\$2 billion, that is a paltry sum by comparison.

Directorship and playwright

Having successfully secured the property, Selznick immediately selected George Cukor as the director. The two had previously collaborated in the production of five films, including *BILL OF DIVORCEMENT*, *DINNER AT EIGHT*, and *DAVID COPPERFIELD*. It would, therefore, be assumed that the film would be directed by Cukor until the end, but this was not to be the case. The collaboration ended when Victor Fleming took over as director. Selznick spared no effort or even emotional attachments in seeing that

the production went on smoothly. When Fleming collapsed under work pressure, Sam Wood was brought in as a completion strategy to direct some of the sequences and remained thereafter as the second unit director (Thomas, 1983 p. 138).

Then came the question of writing the script. Sidney Howard, regarded as the best dramatist of that particular period was picked for the task. According to Brown, it was a very difficult assignment and really took time to accomplish. However, Howard managed to deliver the first draft of the script by the end of February 1937. Yet, it was still one for a five-and-a-half-hour movie. Despite a reworking by Selznick together with Howard and Cukor, the new draft instead became lengthier. Obviously, it dawned on Selznick that this was not an ordinary movie and called for further revision and greater supervision.

Casting

At the stage of assembling a perfect cast, Selznick mobilized his publicity skill and engineered the search for Scarlett into a national obsession. He knew it would be grand entertainment and a way of keeping public interest in the film. WHO IS GOING TO BE SCARLETT O'HARA? read the headline of the Los Angeles Examiner. The Reno Courier invited appointments for a second audition (Kanin, 1979 p. 327). The casting team searched the South, to Charleston, to Atlanta; they auditioned literally every Miss Atlanta for twenty years back. In Hollywood the screentests seemed endless!

In addition to that, a public polling of 121 famous actresses in Hollywood was held:

"Sixty thousand letters, wires, communications of all sorts, sent direct or forwarded by critics, columnists and radio commentators have poured in and keep pouring to sweep the excitement higher and higher. "

(Baskette in Griffith, 1971 p. 263)

From the final list, no one gave any serious notice to a New Zealand fan's proposal of a particular name which in a few months would be common household words: Vivien Leigh. At another instant, talent scout Charles Morrison even recommended Leigh for the role and invited Selznick to see her in FIRE OVER ENGLAND, but he "couldn't see the fire under the Elizabethan costume," so to speak. The search lingered on until that fateful first day of shooting - the burning of Atlanta! According to assistant cameraman Harry Wolf, actor's agent Myron Selznick visited the fiery set and introduced Vivien Leigh to him and then everything seemed to click! Legend has it that:

"Having circled her, he faced her again. The noisy evening felt silent. He saw her now made up, wigged, and dressed in one of Scarlett's costumes. Another. And still another. He saw her with Clark Gable, as they embraced, kissed."
(Kanin, 1979 p. 350)

The producer was absolutely convinced that he had the right person this time. To the general audience, Leigh was not yet known popularly. The question tended to be asked was regarding the suitability of a British actress for the part? Why were the Hollywood stars voted - Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Miriam Hopkins, Margaret Sullavan, Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyck - cast aside?

In a backlash, Hollywood columnist, Hedda Hopper suggested to viewers "to stay away from the picture in a gesture of protest!" However, the millions failed to respond to this outburst. In fact, the South accepted the choice. "Better an English girl than a Yankee!" was the attitude. Evidently, the producer had made a wise and tactful decision, based on years of experience in the field. If he had succumbed to pressure, then GWTW would have charted a different history.

As for the other most important role, fans and people in and out of the movie business were unanimous in their choice of Clark Gable as Rhett Butler. Photoplay also entered the great casting battle and presented the portrait of the hero with the following caption:

"So sure were we of our choice that we had painted the portrait of Clark as we see him in the role: cool, impertinent, utterly charming. We like all the other handsome actors mentioned as Rhett - only we don't want them as Rhett. We want Gable and we're going to stick to that regardless."

(Griffith, 1971 p. 266)

But, Gable belonged to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Selznick negotiated hard with studio chief Louis B. Mayer before the latter loaned their most valuable star in exchange for distribution rights to GWTW. Olivia de Havilland, on loan from Warner Brothers, took the role of Melanie; and to Leslie Howard, an English matinee idol, the role of Ashley.

Among the other notables of filmland that secured supporting roles were Hattie McDaniel (Mammy), Thomas Mitchell (Gerald O'Hara), Barbara O'Neil (Ellen O'Hara), Evelyn Keyes (Suellen O'Hara), Ann Rutherford (Carreen O'Hara), Butterfly McQueen (Prissy), Victor Jory (Jonas Wilkerson), etc. (Edwards, 1977 p. 302).

After the whole casting exercises were over, an impressive list of credits, including that of the creative and technical personnel, was established,

and this can be seen as in Appendix A.

Of significance here is the cooperation shown by the studio moguls just to see that their colleague in the industry achieved success. It is also a fine example of how a producer worked his way through the most difficult and time consuming process in order to have a perfect line up of stars which had the public's endorsement.

The budget

David Selznick found a wealthy partner in John Hay Whitney (or "Jock") from the east. He brought him not only the courage to make GWTW but, most importantly, the syndicate of investors that an independent required. The movie was initially budgeted for US\$1.5 million, and Selznick wished that he could make it without any financial help from MGM. But by June 4, 1938 he had spent US\$400,000 on rights, on writers, tests and preparations.

Warner Bros. were willing to put in more than the US\$1.25 million maximum set by MGM. Tied to it were their own stars, Eroll Flynn and Bette Davis. But MGM provided an easier string to detach which would unfold the coveted prize - Clark Gable, the one whom the public demanded.

GWTW also brought winds of trouble. When Cukor was replaced, Fleming needed fresh creative momentum which cost the studio US\$10,000 a day. Thus, the picture was going way over budget and it was anyone's guess what the final cost might be. MGM declined to put in more than what was originally promised. Jock Whitney tried but was unsuccessful to persuade the east coast partners to come to the rescue. In the end Jock and his sister provided the million needed, plus a personal guarantee to secure a further loan of US\$1.25 million from a financial organization. The final bill reached the three million mark. A critic commented negatively on what he thought was an exorbitant amount for just a single motion picture and that GWTW would have to be exhibited in every city and town throughout the world to recoup this prohibitive cost.

Production design and cinematography

A professional with great talent and enormous experience on motion picture sets became the Production Designer. His name was William Cameron Menzies. He was responsible for every detail almost to the last camera angle before shooting started. Such thorough preparation was to save hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A camera crew went to the South, to photograph, to scout and bring back the knowledge, the look and the flavor to California. Wilbur Kurts, a Georgia historian was hired and set to work with Menzies and art director Lyle Wheeler, on the design and construction of an Old South which would meet the demand of historical accuracy and Hollywood magic, and according to him,

"Twelve Oaks was pure fiction. There never was a place in Blake's County. However, the story writers demanded at least one glimpse of the traditional roomlight and magnolia atmosphere of the Old South. Hence, those gorgeous interiors and an atmosphere of opulence which would make a Blake County farmer rub his eyes. As for Tara, they listened closely to any explanation on rural architecture in North Georgia. But since Tara was also a fictional sight, they indicated that the house should be warmed up."

(Selznick, 1988)

The whole look of the picture was pretty well dictated by Menzies' storyboard, i.e. a complete script in sketch form which, according to Selznick, had only been done a few times in motion picture history. And according to Arthur Fellows, assistant director, the sets, the people, made you absolutely feel what the finished picture was going to look like.

When the first filming was planned, i.e. the burning of Atlanta, "the grand old Hollywood rule was applied, film it on the back lot." Menzies and production manager Ray Klune had the idea of burning the old to make way for the new. So, Forty Acres, the back lot of Selznick International, was cleared to make room for a set construction. Epics had been made at this lot, KING OF KINGS, KING KONG, etc.

Special effects, innovative and advanced for its time, were applied in GWTW to derive architectural authenticity and for realism. Jack Cosgrove and Lee Zavitz were the brains behind them. Using trick shots and matte shots, technically termed special effects photography, enabled the whole picture to be done right at the studio.

Tara was built on the back lot, but its unwanted background was matted out to fill in the trees which were actually painted on glass. The exterior of the Atlanta mansion was all painting. Such innovative techniques were also done to Twelve Oaks which was never constructed either. The scene of the guests' arrival was shot against the outer wall of Stage Eleven. Cosgrove painted the doorway and ceiling and then rephotographed the two together, thus seemingly allowing Scarlett to walk right into the Twelve Oaks' entrance hall. The grandeur of Southern social scene was effectively captured with a saving of time and money.

As for the burning of Atlanta, the shot of the fire was skilfully multiplied to get the enormity of the situation, and then the extras, supposedly that of Rhett and Scarlett, were placed close to it. As for the blazing inferno itself, it was superb wizardry. The production used all of the seven technicolor cameras available at the time. Assistant cameraman Harry Wolf explains:

"Lee Zavitz devised an elaborate system of pipes, pumped oil and water to the old set, so that the blaze could be

raised or lowered at will. Timers were tested and cameras carefully choreographed in endless rehearsals as this was the scene on which there could be no retakes."

(Selznick, 1988)

Overseeing the whole wondrous, but dangerous spectacle were teams of firemen from Los Angeles, Culver City and Santa Monica. The lightning and the low hanging clouds disturbed the populace for miles around, and the telephone company was in for a bad 60 minutes that day! Ray Klune with his 8mm camera, probably among the few available, to film the scene was used as a clip for *THE MAKING OF A LEGEND* fifty years later.

The scale of GWTW's production necessitated work to be divided between six units, e.g. Fleming – directing the cotton field scene; Menzies – the destruction of Atlanta and the battlefield; Sam Wood – the lumber office; Breezy Eason - the shanty town sequence.

Editing

The editing process was equally enormous. First Jack Cosgrove had to complete all the process shots which numbered in the hundreds. The next task was to reduce or cut the nearly half a million feet of film to a 20,000-foot picture. Selznick, associate editor James Newcom, editor Barbara Kern and supervising editor Hal Kern spent many hours in the projection room trying to eliminate 'unwanted' footage as well as to establish accuracy and continuity. Editing problems, however complex, had to be resolved satisfactorily. One session called for 50 hours of solid work, and in the approaching months of its completion, Hal Kern worked 23 hours a day, so much that he had to seek medical advice to get back the drive to carry on. As soon as he resumed work, he used the same number of hours per day supervising the color balance in accordance with the standard set by the production designer.

From that first round of editing, the film and soundtrack totaled five reels. Then a preview was held at the Riverside Fox Theater, Los Angeles. It was selected because of the expected good crowd inside, since *BEAUCHAMPEL*, starring Gary Cooper, was showing. In order to get the maximum impact from the audience, the unscheduled screening was announced as a preview. According to Newcom who assisted Selznick that day that when Margaret Mitchell's name was projected on the screen, a sound never before heard filled the cinema hall, and when 'GONE WITH THE WIND' appeared, it was just thunderous! The audience rose, some stood on their seats. Their yelling drowned the musical accompaniment that was at its loudest.

Positive and encouraging comments poured from the privileged audience. An individual said he could not find any fault with the picture; a

other thought it was the best picture ever or would be produced; other acknowledged its length and well worth seeing; no cuts necessary; should compulsory for everyone to see; so on and so forth.

The final touch

After the successful preview, certain improvements and retakes were done. Max Steiner composed the musical background and the unmistakable Tara Theme. Still, Selznick's task was not yet over. He had to be mindful of Black sensitivities and their protest toward discriminatory portrayals as *THE BIRTH OF A NATION*. In addition, he had to contend with the Hollywood Censor Will Hays. He had to be on the lookout for scenes, actions or dialogues which were likely to give offence. The supposedly offending line was:

“the punch line of GWTW, the one bit of dialogue which forever establishes the future relationship between Scarlett and Rhett, i.e. ‘Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.’ ”
(Behlmer, 1972 p. 221)

The producer tried ‘I don’t care’ and several other alternatives, but nothing matched the original line of the book: ‘I don’t give a damn.’ So he had to mobilize the support of most of the big guns of Hollywood, and after a long and bitter struggle he was granted permission to use it. It was a professional victory for Selznick and a significant one too, for it provided the starting storyline of *SCARLETT*, produced in 1939. In this sequel, Butler shows that he does indeed give a damn to Scarlett’s predicament. He sails from Atlanta to save her from a murder charge in an English court. Needless to say, Butler is successful in freeing her from the accusation found to be false.

The Movie, Premieres, and Awards

GWTW costs US\$3 million and took three years to finish. Without a doubt it was produced on a grand scale.

“It is a movie of movies, taking it at the highest moment in the career of Hollywood. It is a picture that goes beyond mere quality, a huge thing, famous for its excesses - melodrama, action, sentiment, history - printed in glorious technicolor.”

(Selznick, 1988)

Originally, *GWTW* was released for four-and-a-half-hour screening at the theaters. When it came on TV recently, home viewers were only given

the three-hour edited presentation, sparing time for commercials. Even then the film was bled at selected points of heightening interest for the greedy accumulation of the advertising dollar, thus affecting the visual continuity of its narrative magnificence. Some sequences were missed as a result. An example was the battlefield scene mentioned in the documentary.

GWTW premiered in December 15, 1939 in Atlanta. The city folks were proud of the privilege and very excited. According to Evelyn Keyes, the supporting star, they felt it was their movie, the subject was the South and it meant everything to them. They had lived through those years and that they were still suffering from the Civil War. Therefore, they felt very possessive about the picture.

After dark they turned out for the big parade that started three exciting days of celebration. The few remaining boys of grey were made guests of honor. Margaret Mitchell, who never wrote another bestseller (she died hit by a car while crossing the street in Atlanta in 1949), was also happy and excited beyond words to see her brainchild materialized on the screen. And when it was over, she paid a fitting tribute to the man behind it all:

"I think all of you can't stand it. This picture was a great emotional experience to me. I think it was heart-breaking and I know that I'm not the only person who got dripping wet handkerchief. But, I want to speak just a minute about Mr David Selznick. He's the man that everyone of you all cracked that joke about 'Oh, well, we'll wait till Shirley Temple grows up, she'll play Scarlett for him!' I want to commend Mr Selznick's courage and obstinacy and determination in just keeping his mouth shut with regard to the exact cast he wanted, in spite of everything said by the press. And I think you'll all agree with me he had absolutely the perfect cast."

(Selznick 1988)

After another premiere in New York that same year, at the Coconut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel January 29, 1940, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded the coveted Oscars to the following:

David O. Selznick	-	Best Picture
Victor Fleming	-	Best Direction
Vivien Leigh	-	Best Actress
Hattie McDaniel	-	Best Supporting Actress
Sidney Howard	-	Best Screen Adaptation
Ernest Haller & Ray Rennahan	-	Best Color Cinematography
Hal Kern & James Newcom	-	Best Film Editing
William C. Menzies	-	Outstanding Use of Color
Lyle Wheeler	-	Best Art Direction

These nine Oscars symbolized the producer's worth as a filmmaker. But for his courage and unswerving determination to be the achiever, the most fitting was the Irving Thalberg Award. This award was a crowning achievement in his career.

Through the years, the movie earned US\$840 million. In terms of ticket sales, it had taken in at the box-office over US\$2 billion. By far it had the largest audience of any film ever made. Leonard Maltin (1984 p. 337), historian and critic, regarded *GONE WITH THE WIND* the greatest movie ever made and certainly one of the greatest examples of storytelling on film, maintaining interest throughout the duration of its screening.

Concluding remarks

Filmmakers should strive to achieve such a level of creativity and special business acumen. Selznick had set that standard fifty five years ago. It has made the Hollywood and subsequently USA motion picture activity a thriving industry in the true sense of the word. Our local TV channels screen at least three of their product each day. Soon, we will be watching more of it when the authority opens its door to direct satellite telecasting. Unless and until the country's film producers are able to emulate the artistic and technical know-how of those most experienced in the field, the public would remain to like the varied genres of the foreign product.

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Having successfully secured the property, Selznick immediately selected George Cukor as the director. The two had previously collaborated in the production of five films, including *BILL OF DIVORCEMENT*, *DINNER AT EIGHT*, and *DAVID COPPERFIELD*. It would, therefore, be assumed that the film would be directed by Cukor until the end, but this was not to be the case. The collaboration ended when Victor Fleming took over as director. Selznick spared no effort or even emotional attachments in seeing that

the production went on smoothly. When Fleming collapsed under work pressure, Sam Wood was brought in as a completion strategy to direct some of the sequences and remained thereafter as the second unit director (Thomas, 1983 p. 138).

Then came the question of writing the script. Sidney Howard, regarded as the best dramatist of that particular period was picked for the task. According to Brown, it was a very difficult assignment and really took time to accomplish. However, Howard managed to deliver the first draft of the script by the end of February 1937. Yet, it was still one for a five-and-a-half-hour movie. Despite a reworking by Selznick together with Howard and Cukor, the new draft instead became lengthier. Obviously, it dawned on Selznick that this was not an ordinary movie and called for further revision and greater supervision.

Casting

At the stage of assembling a perfect cast, Selznick mobilized his publicity skill and engineered the search for Scarlett into a national obsession. He knew it would be grand entertainment and a way of keeping public interest in the film. WHO IS GOING TO BE SCARLETT O'HARA? read the headline of the Los Angeles Examiner. The Reno Courier invited appointments for a second audition (Kanin, 1979 p. 327). The casting team searched the South, to Charleston, to Atlanta; they auditioned literally every Miss Atlanta for twenty years back. In Hollywood the screentests seemed endless!

In addition to that, a public polling of 121 famous actresses in Hollywood was held:

"Sixty thousand letters, wires, communications of all sorts, sent direct or forwarded by critics, columnists and radio commentators have poured in and keep pouring to sweep the excitement higher and higher."

(Baskette in Griffith, 1971 p. 263)

From the final list, no one gave any serious notice to a New Zealand fan's proposal of a particular name which in a few months would be common household words: Vivien Leigh. At another instant, talent scout Charles Morrison even recommended Leigh for the role and invited Selznick to see her in FIRE OVER ENGLAND, but he "couldn't see the fire under the Elizabethan costume," so to speak. The search lingered on until that fateful first day of shooting - the burning of Atlanta! According to assistant cameraman Harry Wolf, actor's agent Myron Selznick visited the fiery set and introduced Vivien Leigh to him and then everything seemed to click! Legend has it that:

"Having circled her, he faced her again. The noisy evening felt silent. He saw her now made up, wigged, and dressed in one of Scarlett's costumes. Another. And still another. He saw her with Clark Gable, as they embraced, kissed."
(Kanin, 1979 p. 350)

The producer was absolutely convinced that he had the right person this time. To the general audience, Leigh was not yet known popularly. The question tended to be asked was regarding the suitability of a British actress for the part? Why were the Hollywood stars voted - Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Miriam Hopkins, Margaret Sullavan, Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyck - cast aside?

In a backlash, Hollywood columnist, Hedda Hopper suggested to viewers "to stay away from the picture in a gesture of protest!" However, the millions failed to respond to this outburst. In fact, the South accepted the choice. "Better an English girl than a Yankee!" was the attitude. Evidently, the producer had made a wise and tactful decision, based on years of experience in the field. If he had succumbed to pressure, then GWTW would have charted a different history.

As for the other most important role, fans and people in and out of the movie business were unanimous in their choice of Clark Gable as Rhett Butler. Photoplay also entered the great casting battle and presented the portrait of the hero with the following caption:

"So sure were we of our choice that we had painted the portrait of Clark as we see him in the role: cool, impertinent, utterly charming. We like all the other handsome actors mentioned as Rhett - only we don't want them as Rhett. We want Gable and we're going to stick to that regardless."

(Griffith, 1971 p. 266)

But, Gable belonged to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Selznick negotiated hard with studio chief Louis B. Mayer before the latter loaned their most valuable star in exchange for distribution rights to GWTW. Olivia de Havilland, on loan from Warner Brothers, took the role of Melanie; and to Leslie Howard, an English matinee idol, the role of Ashley.

Among the other notables of filmland that secured supporting roles were Hattie McDaniel (Mammy), Thomas Mitchell (Gerald O'Hara), Barbara O'Neil (Ellen O'Hara), Evelyn Keyes (Suellen O'Hara), Ann Rutherford (Carreen O'Hara), Butterfly McQueen (Prissy), Victor Jory (Jonas Wilkerson), etc. (Edwards, 1977 p. 302).

After the whole casting exercises were over, an impressive list of credits, including that of the creative and technical personnel, was established,

and this can be seen as in Appendix A.

Of significance here is the cooperation shown by the studio moguls just to see that their colleague in the industry achieved success. It is also a fine example of how a producer worked his way through the most difficult and time consuming process in order to have a perfect line up of stars which had the public's endorsement.

The budget

David Selznick found a wealthy partner in John Hay Whitney (or "Jock") from the east. He brought him not only the courage to make GWTW but, most importantly, the syndicate of investors that an independent required. The movie was initially budgeted for US\$1.5 million, and Selznick wished that he could make it without any financial help from MGM. But by June 4, 1938 he had spent US\$400,000 on rights, on writers, tests and preparations.

Warner Bros. were willing to put in more than the US\$1.25 million maximum set by MGM. Tied to it were their own stars, Eroll Flynn and Bette Davis. But MGM provided an easier string to detach which would unfold the coveted prize - Clark Gable, the one whom the public demanded.

GWTW also brought winds of trouble. When Cukor was replaced, Fleming needed fresh creative momentum which cost the studio US\$10,000 a day. Thus, the picture was going way over budget and it was anyone's guess what the final cost might be. MGM declined to put in more than what was originally promised. Jock Whitney tried but was unsuccessful to persuade the east coast partners to come to the rescue. In the end Jock and his sister provided the million needed, plus a personal guarantee to secure a further loan of US\$1.25 million from a financial organization. The final bill reached the three million mark. A critic commented negatively on what he thought was an exorbitant amount for just a single motion picture and that GWTW would have to be exhibited in every city and town throughout the world to recoup this prohibitive cost.

Production design and cinematography

A professional with great talent and enormous experience on motion picture sets became the Production Designer. His name was William Cameron Menzies. He was responsible for every detail almost to the last camera angle before shooting started. Such thorough preparation was to save hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A camera crew went to the South, to photograph, to scout and bring back the knowledge, the look and the flavor to California. Wilbur Kurts, a Georgia historian was hired and set to work with Menzies and art director Lyle Wheeler, on the design and construction of an Old South which would meet the demand of historical accuracy and Hollywood magic, and according to him,

"Twelve Oaks was pure fiction. There never was a place in Blake's County. However, the story writers demanded at least one glimpse of the traditional roomlight and magnolia atmosphere of the Old South. Hence, those gorgeous interiors and an atmosphere of opulence which would make a Blake County farmer rub his eyes. As for Tara, they listened closely to any explanation on rural architecture in North Georgia. But since Tara was also a fictional sight, they indicated that the house should be warmed up."

(Selznick, 1988)

The whole look of the picture was pretty well dictated by Menzies' storyboard, i.e. a complete script in sketch form which, according to Selznick, had only been done a few times in motion picture history. And according to Arthur Fellows, assistant director, the sets, the people, made you absolutely feel what the finished picture was going to look like.

When the first filming was planned, i.e. the burning of Atlanta, "the grand old Hollywood rule was applied, film it on the back lot." Menzies and production manager Ray Klune had the idea of burning the old to make way for the new. So, Forty Acres, the back lot of Selznick International, was cleared to make room for a set construction. Epics had been made at this lot, KING OF KINGS, KING KONG, etc.

Special effects, innovative and advanced for its time, were applied in GWTW to derive architectural authenticity and for realism. Jack Cosgrove and Lee Zavitz were the brains behind them. Using trick shots and matte shots, technically termed special effects photography, enabled the whole picture to be done right at the studio.

Tara was built on the back lot, but its unwanted background was matted out to fill in the trees which were actually painted on glass. The exterior of the Atlanta mansion was all painting. Such innovative techniques were also done to Twelve Oaks which was never constructed either. The scene of the guests' arrival was shot against the outer wall of Stage Eleven. Cosgrove painted the doorway and ceiling and then rephotographed the two together, thus seemingly allowing Scarlett to walk right into the Twelve Oaks' entrance hall. The grandeur of Southern social scene was effectively captured with a saving of time and money.

As for the burning of Atlanta, the shot of the fire was skilfully multiplied to get the enormity of the situation, and then the extras, supposedly that of Rhett and Scarlett, were placed close to it. As for the blazing inferno itself, it was superb wizardry. The production used all of the seven technicolor cameras available at the time. Assistant cameraman Harry Wolf explains:

"Lee Zavitz devised an elaborate system of pipes, pumped oil and water to the old set, so that the blaze could be

raised or lowered at will. Timers were tested and cameras carefully choreographed in endless rehearsals as this was the scene on which there could be no retakes."

(Selznick, 1988)

Overseeing the whole wondrous, but dangerous spectacle were teams of firemen from Los Angeles, Culver City and Santa Monica. The lightning and the low hanging clouds disturbed the populace for miles around, and the telephone company was in for a bad 60 minutes that day! Ray Klune with his 8mm camera, probably among the few available, to film the scene was used as a clip for *THE MAKING OF A LEGEND* fifty years later.

The scale of GWTW's production necessitated work to be divided between six units, e.g. Fleming – directing the cotton field scene; Menzies – the destruction of Atlanta and the battlefield; Sam Wood – the lumber office; Breezy Eason - the shanty town sequence.

Editing

The editing process was equally enormous. First Jack Cosgrove had to complete all the process shots which numbered in the hundreds. The next task was to reduce or cut the nearly half a million feet of film to a 20,000-foot picture. Selznick, associate editor James Newcom, editor Barbara Kern and supervising editor Hal Kern spent many hours in the projection room trying to eliminate 'unwanted' footage as well as to establish accuracy and continuity. Editing problems, however complex, had to be resolved satisfactorily. One session called for 50 hours of solid work, and in the approaching months of its completion, Hal Kern worked 23 hours a day, so much that he had to seek medical advice to get back the drive to carry on. As soon as he resumed work, he used the same number of hours per day supervising the color balance in accordance with the standard set by the production designer.

From that first round of editing, the film and soundtrack totaled five cans. Then a preview was held at the Riverside Fox Theater, Los Angeles. It was selected because of the expected good crowd inside, since *BEAUGESTE*, starring Gary Cooper, was showing. In order to get the maximum impact from the audience, the unscheduled screening was announced as a title. According to Newcom who assisted Selznick that day that when Margaret Mitchell's name was projected on the screen, a sound never before heard filled the cinema hall, and when 'GONE WITH THE WIND' appeared, it was just thunderous! The audience rose, some stood on their seats. Their yelling drowned the musical accompaniment that was at its loudest.

Positive and encouraging comments poured from the privileged audience. An individual said he could not find any fault with the picture; a

other thought it was the best picture ever or would be produced; other acknowledged its length and well worth seeing; no cuts necessary; should compulsory for everyone to see; so on and so forth.

The final touch

After the successful preview, certain improvements and retakes were done. Max Steiner composed the musical background and the unmistakable Tara Theme. Still, Selznick's task was not yet over. He had to be mindful of Black sensitivities and their protest toward discriminatory portrayals as *THE BIRTH OF A NATION*. In addition, he had to contend with the Hollywood Censor Will Hays. He had to be on the lookout for scenes, actions or dialogues which were likely to give offence. The supposedly offending line was:

“the punch line of GWTW, the one bit of dialogue which forever establishes the future relationship between Scarlett and Rhett, i.e. ‘Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.’ ”
(Behlmer, 1972 p. 221)

The producer tried ‘I don’t care’ and several other alternatives, but nothing matched the original line of the book: ‘I don’t give a damn.’ So he had to mobilize the support of most of the big guns of Hollywood, and after a long and bitter struggle he was granted permission to use it. It was a professional victory for Selznick and a significant one too, for it provided the starting storyline of *SCARLETT*, produced in 1939. In this sequel, Butler shows that he does indeed give a damn to Scarlett’s predicament. He sails from Atlanta to save her from a murder charge in an English court. Needless to say, Butler is successful in freeing her from the accusation found to be false.

The Movie, Premieres, and Awards

GWTW costs US\$3 million and took three years to finish. Without a doubt it was produced on a grand scale.

“It is a movie of movies, taking it at the highest moment in the career of Hollywood. It is a picture that goes beyond mere quality, a huge thing, famous for its excesses - melodrama, action, sentiment, history - printed in glorious technicolor.”

(Selznick, 1988)

Originally, *GWTW* was released for four-and-a-half-hour screening at the theaters. When it came on TV recently, home viewers were only given

the three-hour edited presentation, sparing time for commercials. Even then the film was bled at selected points of heightening interest for the greedy accumulation of the advertising dollar, thus affecting the visual continuity of its narrative magnificence. Some sequences were missed as a result. An example was the battlefield scene mentioned in the documentary.

GWTW premiered in December 15, 1939 in Atlanta. The city folks were proud of the privilege and very excited. According to Evelyn Keyes, the supporting star, they felt it was their movie, the subject was the South and it meant everything to them. They had lived through those years and that they were still suffering from the Civil War. Therefore, they felt very possessive about the picture.

After dark they turned out for the big parade that started three exciting days of celebration. The few remaining boys of grey were made guests of honor. Margaret Mitchell, who never wrote another bestseller (she died hit by a car while crossing the street in Atlanta in 1949), was also happy and excited beyond words to see her brainchild materialized on the screen. And when it was over, she paid a fitting tribute to the man behind it all:

"I think all of you can't stand it. This picture was a great emotional experience to me. I think it was heart-breaking and I know that I'm not the only person who got dripping wet handkerchief. But, I want to speak just a minute about Mr David Selznick. He's the man that everyone of you all cracked that joke about 'Oh, well, we'll wait till Shirley Temple grows up, she'll play Scarlett for him!' I want to commend Mr Selznick's courage and obstinacy and determination in just keeping his mouth shut with regard to the exact cast he wanted, in spite of everything said by the press. And I think you'll all agree with me he had absolutely the perfect cast."

(Selznick 1988)

After another premiere in New York that same year, at the Coconut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel January 29, 1940, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded the coveted Oscars to the following:

David O. Selznick	-	Best Picture
Victor Fleming	-	Best Direction
Vivien Leigh	-	Best Actress
Hattie McDaniel	-	Best Supporting Actress
Sidney Howard	-	Best Screen Adaptation
Ernest Haller & Ray Rennahan	-	Best Color Cinematography
Hal Kern & James Newcom	-	Best Film Editing
William C. Menzies	-	Outstanding Use of Color
Lyle Wheeler	-	Best Art Direction

These nine Oscars symbolized the producer's worth as a filmmaker. But for his courage and unswerving determination to be the achiever, the most fitting was the Irving Thalberg Award. This award was a crowning achievement in his career.

Through the years, the movie earned US\$840 million. In terms of ticket sales, it had taken in at the box-office over US\$2 billion. By far it had the largest audience of any film ever made. Leonard Maltin (1984 p. 337), historian and critic, regarded *GONE WITH THE WIND* the greatest movie ever made and certainly one of the greatest examples of storytelling on film, maintaining interest throughout the duration of its screening.

Concluding remarks

Filmmakers should strive to achieve such a level of creativity and special business acumen. Selznick had set that standard fifty five years ago. It has made the Hollywood and subsequently USA motion picture activity a thriving industry in the true sense of the word. Our local TV channels screen at least three of their product each day. Soon, we will be watching more of it when the authority opens its door to direct satellite telecasting. Unless and until the country's film producers are able to emulate the artistic and technical know-how of those most experienced in the field, the public would remain to like the varied genres of the foreign product.

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APPENDIX A

OSCAR AWARDS TO PERSONS INVOLVED IN THE MAKING OF GONE WITH THE WIND

Film: GONE WITH THE WIND
(in Technicolor, appx. 4 hours)

Production studio: Selznick International

Distributor: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Date of release: December 13 1939

Premieres: USA - Atlanta, Georgia, December 15 1939
New York, New York, 1939
UK - London, April 17 1940

Director: Victor Fleming (contributing directors: George Cukor,
Sam Wood, William C. Menzies, & Breezy Eason)

Screenplay: Sidney Howard (contributing writers: F. Scott Fitzgerald,
Oliver Garrett, Ben Hecht, John Van Druten, Jo
Swerling; based on Margaret Mitchell's GWTW)

Prod. Designer: William Cameron Menzies

Art Director: Lyle Wheeler

Cinematography: Ernest Haller & Ray Rennahan

Music: Max Steiner

Special Effects: Jack Cosgrove & Lee Zavitz

Costumes: Walter Plunkett

Film Editors: Hal C. Kern & James E. Newcom

Sound Editor: Frank Maher

Prod. Manager: Raymond A. Klune