Selznick memos concerning *Gone with the Wind*—a selection

MEMO FROM DAVID O. SELZNICK

To: Mr. Wm. Wright
January 5, 1937

cc: Mr. M. C. Cooper

... Even more extensive than the second-unit work on Zenda is the work on Gone With the Wind, which requires a man really capable, literate, and with a respect for research to re-create, in combination with Cukor, the evacuation of Atlanta and other episodes of the war and Reconstruction Period. I have even thought about [silent-film director] D. W. Griffith for this job.

Mr. Sidney Howard
January 6, 1937

157 East 82nd Street
New York City, N.Y.

Dear Sidney:

As I wired you, I had the opportunity to spend some time with George [Cukor] going over my general feelings about the adaptation, but I'll send them along to you anyway, in case George has forgotten them.

To begin with, I'd like to say that I am very happy indeed over your approach to the story, rough as it is. Since it is so rough, I won't go in for many detailed comments.

I recognize, perhaps even more than you, the problem of length. I am prepared for a picture that will be extremely long in any case, perhaps as much as 14,000 feet,7 which I believe the subject might stand. But even getting down to this length is going to be tough. We must prepare to make drastic cuts and these drastic cuts, I think, must include some of the characters because my feeling, based on experience in adapting well-known and well-loved books, is that it is much better to chop out whole sequences than it is to make small deletions in individual scenes or sequences. We had this problem in David Copperfield and we got away with it very successfully indeed. It was astonishing even to me how successful we were in cutting out such chunks as the whole school sequence in which we met Steerforth as a boy, and the whole Steerforth love story, as well as his mother. Dr. Strong and his wife also went by the boards. Yet we had no criticism of any kind and were universally congratulated upon giving them the book they knew so well and loved so well, and I feel that this is not merely because of the care that we exercised in creating the

7Two hours and thirty-five minutes.

atmosphere, or because of the splendid performances, or because of George's masterful job of direction; but also because such cuts as we made in individual scenes defied discernment.

We have an even greater problem in Gone With the Wind, because it is so fresh in people's minds. In the case of ninety-nine people out of a hundred who read and saw Copperfield, there were many years between the reading and the seeing. In the case of Gone With the Wind there will be only a matter of months, and people seem to be simply passionate about the details of the book.

All of this is a prologue to saying that I urge you very strongly indeed against making minor changes, a few of which you have indicated in your adaptation, and which I will note fully.

These minor changes may give us slight improvements, but there will be five or ten million readers on our heads for them; where, for the most part, they will recognize the obvious necessity of our making drastic cuts.

I feel, too, that we should not attempt to correct seeming faults of construction. I have learned to avoid trying to improve on success. One never knows what chemicals have gone to make up something that has appealed to millions of people, and how many seeming faults of construction have been part of the whole, and how much the balance would be offset by making changes that we in our innocence, or even in our ability, consider wrong.

I am embarrassed to say this to you who have been so outstandingly successful in your adaptations, but I find myself a producer charged with re-creating the best-beloved book of our time, and I don't think any of us have ever tackled anything that is really comparable in the love that people have for it.8

I agree with your very sound conclusion, which, frankly, had not occurred to me before, that Miss Mitchell does everything "at least twice." An outstanding case of this is the repetition of what you might describe as "nights of love." Certainly, I think one scene of husbandly rape is enough. How the hell we can even use one is going to be a problem ...

I don't think that George agrees with me, but I should share your regret if we omitted (p. 6 of your treatment) the passage dealing with Mammy's devices about Scarlett's clothes, appetite, etc. I think it is

8Gone With the Wind, shortly after publication, became an unprecedented best seller. It has sold over seven million hardcover and paperback copies in the United States to date (over eleven million throughout the world).
superb indication of Scarlett's life in the first part of the story and is original and charming. I recognize that it holds up the story at this point and suggest that perhaps you might be able to work it in right at the start of the picture. (I don't think there is much harm in rearranging sequences so long as the sequences are as the readers remember them and so long as cuts in these sequences are made so carefully that the losses are not discernible.)

... I shall comment about your suggestion concerning the series-of-dissolves technique. There are times when I think these can be used to great advantage, but there are other times when I think that everything possible should be done to avoid them. I feel that where they tell one thing, such as the walk of David Copperfield from London to Dover, they are not only acceptable but are absolutely necessary. But I do not feel they should ever be used to tell a great many things; when the technique is utilized purely to solve a problem of footage, using ten or fifteen feet to tell each of many scenes, I think it becomes obvious and is a distraction to audiences, who immediately become aware of movie tricks instead of being immersed in the story and forgetting that they are watching a picture.

I certainly urge most strongly against including any sequence in which Rhett is shown "doing his stuff" as a blockade runner. We will be forgiven for cuts if we do not invent sequences. Quite possibly we will have to invent a few sequences as we did in Copperfield, including in these new sequences material from those we had cut, so that the illusion was complete as to including only material from the book. ([Hugh] Walpole did a fine job in re-creating even the actual Dickensian type of phrasing.)

It is true that there is a "lack both of variety and of invention in what Rhett does," but here again I urge that we abide by Miss Mitchell's failures as well as her successes, because I am frankly nervous about anybody's ability—even Miss Mitchell's—to figure out which is which. I think that she herself might very well rewrite the book into a failure.

P. 15: I urge against any change in Rhett's character that might be indicated by the suggested apology. I think his boorishness and bad manners, if that's what they are, are as much a part of Rhett as his charm, and I don't think we should attempt to white-wash him in the least. The balance of Rhett's behavior and Scarlett's behavior has come off brilliantly and I am afraid to tamper with it. ...

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8This material ultimately was retained.
10This was not included.

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P. 28: I have had a little discussion with George, who shares your lack of belief in Rhett's sudden decision to enlist in the army, on whether to make any change here. I personally think that this can be made completely believable if what we see of the plight of his fellow Southerners immediately before this is sufficiently heart-wringing to make everyone in your audience want to get out and fight with them. If we can do this, and I don't see why we should have any inordinate trouble about it, I think Rhett will be behaving exactly as your audience will be wanting him to behave, regardless of his previous attitude.

P. 30: I think we must definitely keep the killing of the Yankee cavalryman. I feel that this is one of the most exciting and dramatic scenes in the book and that we simply cannot do without it. I feel quite the opposite, however, about the Yankee's attempt to burn Tara. As far as I am concerned, this can be lost.

P. 37: Here we come to a very touching point and I am hopeful that you share my feelings on it. I have already discussed it with George and he agrees—but then, our feelings are prejudiced. I refer to the Ku Klux Klan. I personally feel quite strongly that we should cut out the Klan entirely. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to clarify for audiences the difference between the old Klan and the Klan of our times. (A year or so ago I refused to consider remaking The Birth of a Nation, largely for this reason. Of course we might have shown a couple of Catholic Klansmen, but it would be rather comic to have a Jewish Kleagle; I, for one, have no desire to produce any anti-Negro film either. In our picture I think we have to be awfully careful that the Negroes come out decidedly on the right side of the ledger, which I do not think should be difficult.) Furthermore, there is nothing in the story that necessarily needs the Klan. The revenge for the attempted attack can very easily be identical with what it is without their being members of the Klan. A group of men can go out to "get" the perpetrators of an attempted rape without having long white sheets over them and without having their membership in a society as a motive.

I do hope that you will agree with me on this omission of what might come out as an unintentional advertisement for intolerant societies in these fascist-ridden times.

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11This point was observed.
13The scene was retained.
15The incident did not appear.
17No reference to the Klan was kept.
Scarlett's first child. George feels we should eliminate it, as you do. I am nervous about this. I feel that everybody remembers that Scarlett had the two children, and that to rob her of one in such cavalier fashion would not be easily forgiven. I admit this first child is a nuisance, but I don't know as yet what to do about it. I also feel that we might be forgiven more easily if we cut out her marriage to Frank and therefore not have the first child. You might give some thought to the possibility of dropping out entirely this second marriage, because Frank is certainly not one of our best characters; if we cut out the child and keep the marriage, it becomes even more dull. Offhand, however, my advice is to attempt to retain both the marriage and the child.15

I know just what you are up against in portraying the Reconstruction tragedy accurately and vividly, but here again this will have to be forced into each scene in this section of the story instead of creating scenes or retaining scenes that give us nothing but his attitude. Throughout the picture our great problem is going to be to get the background in unobtrusively while we concentrate on the personal story . . . .

P. 46: I think we can, and must, definitely lose the miscarriage. These infallible pregnancies at single contacts are a bit thick, and in any event I don't think the miscarriage gets us anywhere.16

P. 47: I know your problem about Rhett's character and I agree thoroughly that we must retain every bit we can of Rhett in the last part of the book. The fact that the book and the picture may be somewhat out of balance in stressing Scarlett for two-thirds and Rhett through the last third doesn't worry me.

P. 50: I beg you not to consider further the omission of Bonnie.17 I feel that she is absolutely vital to the heartrending quality of the portrayal of Rhett in this section of the book and I know that you, too, would finally come to this conclusion, as indicated by the last paragraph of your treatment in which you quote the magnificent speech about Rhett's seeing in Bonnie the resemblance to Scarlett before things happen to change her.18

Please do not feel that anything I have said must of necessity be followed. But until we get a chance to have discussions this is the only way in which I can transmit to you my general feelings about the script. I am hopeful that the conferences in which we really

15The marriage was retained; the child was not.
16The miscarriage remained.
17Scarlett's child by Rhett.
18Bonnie was retained.
lanta... that must of necessity stay in, as well as the streets of Atlanta for the news of Gettysburg and the big evacuation scene which involve great physical problems and which will more than utilize all of Menzies's time until we can give him a complete script. When he gets the complete script, he can then do all the sets, set sketches, and plans during my absence, for presentation to me upon my return, and can start on what I want on this picture and what has only been done a few times in picture history (and these times mostly by Menzies)—a complete script in sketch form, showing actual camera setups, lighting, etc. This is a mammoth job that Menzies will have to work on very closely with Cukor. There is also the job of the montage sequences, which I plan on having Menzies not merely design and lay out but also, in large degree, actually direct. In short, it is my plan to have the whole physical side of this picture, with many phases that I have not dealt with in this paragraph (such as the handling of the process shots) personally handled by one man who has little or nothing else to do—and that man, Menzies. Menzies may turn out to be one of the most valuable factors in properly producing this picture. One of the minor problems in connection with this arrangement is the matter of Menzies's credit. Menzies is terribly anxious not to get back to art direction as such, and of course his work on this picture, as I see it, will be a lot greater in scope than is normally associated with the term "art direction." Accordingly, I would probably give him some such credit as "Production Designed by William Cameron Menzies" or "Assistant to the Producer." 26

DOS

TO: O’SHEA
OCTOBER 14, 1937

PLEASE OPEN NEGOTIATIONS WITH MIKE LEVEE27 FOR LESLIE HOWARD TO PLAY ASHLEY IN “GONE WITH THE WIND.” I SUPPOSE YOU DO NOT NEED ANY COACHING ON SALES TALKS OR ON ATTITUDE. . . . CAN YOU POINT OUT TO LEVEE WITH COMPLETE ACCURACY THAT HOWARD HAS BEEN A BOX-OFFICE FAILURE IN ALL OF HIS PICTURES IN RECENT YEARS WITHOUT EXCEPTION, AND YOU MIGHT START OUT BY DEMANDING OPTION FOR COUPLE OF PICTURES AT LEAST, EVENTUALLY RELINQUISHING THIS POINT IF TERMS ARE RIGHT. IF PERCHANCE HE SHOULD BRING UP ANYTHING ABOUT APPROVAL OF SCRIPT OR ROLE, YOU MAY BE AS

26Selznick eventually settled on the former.
27Leslie Howard’s manager.

DIFFICULT AS YOU PLEASE ABOUT THIS, AS CERTAINLY WE DO NOT HAVE TO CATER TO ANYBODY THAT WE WANT FOR ONE OF THE LEADS IN THIS PICTURE. CONCERNING BILLING, WE CAN AGREE THAT NO ONE WOULD RECEIVE LARGER OR MORE PROMINENT BILLING, BUT IN THE EVENT HE BROUGHT UP ANYTHING ABOUT SIZE OF TYPE OR THE WORD “STARRING” OR ANYTHING OF THIS KIND, YOU MUST REFUSE THIS BECAUSE WE WILL CERTAINLY STAR THE PICTURE AND ANY ACTORS’ NAMES WILL UNDOUBTEDLY FOLLOW THE TITLE, AND IF THEY SHOULD PRECEDE THE TITLE, THEY WILL BE IN MUCH SMALLER SIZE THAN THE TITLE. I WOULD NOT BE AVERSE TO DISCUSSING POSITION HOWARD SHOULD HAVE IN THE LIST, ALTHOUGH I THINK IT SHOULD BE THIRD WITH RHETT AND SCARLETT PRECEDING HIM IN THE SAME-SIZED TYPE, BUT I WOULD BE AGREEABLE TO MAKING THIS HIGHER IF IT SHOULD SUBSEQUENTLY DEVELOP THAT WHOEVER PLAYS RHETT IS NOT A BIGGER STAR THAN HOWARD. . . .

TO: Mr. O’Shea
November 26, 1937

cc: Mr. Cukor

. . . WILL YOU PLEASE TRY TO SET THE FOLLOWING CASTING IN CONNECTION WITH “GONE WITH THE WIND.”


DOS

Mr. Harry M. Warner, President
Warner Brothers Pictures, Inc.
Burbank, California

cc: Mr. Will H. Hays

Dear Mr. Warner:

I do not mean to prolong unnecessarily any discussions on the Jezabel [Warner Bros., 1938] matter, especially since in your relations with me you have always been so friendly and so fair. . . .

The article which you enclosed with your letter gives complete

28Harry Davenport later was cast as Dr. Meade, Laura Hope Crews as Aunt Pittypat, Ona Munson as Belle Watling, Jane Darwell as Mrs. Merriwether, Leona Roberts as Mrs. Meade, Ann Rutherford as Carreen, and Leslie Howard as Ashley.
confirmation to the warning I expressed to you some time back that your studio, if not cautioned by you, would stoop to publicizing its picture on the strength of *Gone With the Wind*. Certainly, there can no longer be any question on this fact since Jack is actually quoted, and since the publicity material from your studio goes so far as to say that around the studio Bette Davis is now known as "Scarlett."

May I remind you that the rights to *Jezebel* were repeatedly turned down by your studio, as by all other studios, until after the public's attention was directed to *Gone With the Wind*?

As to your inferences concerning the rumors on Bette Davis, and the source of these, if you are interested I will dig up and send to you the articles which started these rumors, including statements sent out by your Publicity Department quoting Bette Davis on a comparison of the two roles.

I do not know how far your organization intends to capitalize upon the work and investment of others, and since I think you will agree that the picture business has been happily free of such tactics for many years, I can only hope that your studio will not find itself in a position where it is "forced" to issue statements comparing your picture with that of another studio.

Cordially and sincerely yours,

David O. Selznick

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To: [Director Richard] Wallace, Mr. Wright
February 17, 1938

I saw *Yank at Oxford* last night, which, by the way, is a swell picture. While I think Vivien Leigh gave an excellent performance and was very well cast, I don't like her for the part in our picture as well as Margaret Lindsay, Pat Patterson, or Dorothy Hyson.

DOS

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To: Mr. George Cukor
February 25, 1938

Dear George:

Sidney and I have a terrific job on our hands, as is apparent from our work today when we spent the whole morning up to one-thirty on...
And I hope that the next picture that we do together will be something more nearly like *Holiday* than this one.

DOS

MR. JACK WARNER
WARNER BROTHERS STUDIOS
4000 S. OLIVE AVENUE
BURBANK, CALIFORNIA

DEAR JACK: REITERATING WHAT I TOLD YOU LAST NIGHT, I THINK IT WOULD BE A VERY GREAT PITY INDEED FROM YOUR OWN STANDPOINT IF SO DISTINGUISHED AND COSTLY A PICTURE AS "JEZEBEL" SHOULD BE DAMNED AS AN IMITATION BY THE MILLIONS OF READERS AND LOVERS OF "GONE WITH THE WIND." AND I AM FEARFUL THAT THIS IS WHAT MAY HAPPEN, DUE TO A FEW COMPLETELY UNNECESSARY BITS. THE PICTURE THROUGHOUT IS PERMEATED WITH CHARACTERIZATIONS, ATTITUDES, AND SCENES WHICH UNFORTUNATELY RESEMBLE "GONE WITH THE WIND," REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE IN THE ORIGINAL MATERIAL. BUT I AM REFERRING TO A FEW SPECIFIC THINGS, SUCH AS THE VERY WELL-REMEMBERED PIECE OF BUSINESS IN WHICH SCARLETT PINCHED HER CHEEKS TO GIVE THEM COLOR. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THERE IS THE SCENE OF THE MEN AROUND THE DINNER TABLE, WHICH ACTUALLY IS A SLOW SPOT IN YOUR PICTURE, IF YOU WILL FORGIVE MY SAYING SO. I REFER TO THE DIALOGUE SCENE DEALING WITH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NORTH AND SOUTH, THE DISCUSSION OF AN IMMINENT WAR, AND THE PREDICTION BY THE SOUTHERNER THAT THE NORTH WILL WIN BECAUSE OF ITS SUPERIOR MACHINERY, ET CETERA.44 THIS SCENE IS LIFTED PRACTICALLY BODILY OUT OF "GONE WITH THE WIND," IN WHICH IT IS AN IMPORTANT STORY POINT LEADING TO RHETT BUTLER’S ENTIRE BEHAVIOR DURING THE WAR. . . . IF YOU LIKE, I WOULD BE VERY HAPPY INDEED TO STUDY YOUR PICTURE FURTHER AND TO GIVE YOU PAGE REFERENCES FROM "GONE WITH THE WIND" ON OTHER POINTS, BECAUSE I SINCERELY THINK IT IMPORTANT FROM YOUR OWN STANDPOINT AS WELL AS OURS THAT THE SUCCESS WHICH YOUR PICTURE DESERVES SHOULD NOT BE MARRED BY ANY APPEARANCE OF AN ATTEMPT TO CAPITALIZE ON A WORK FOR WHICH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HAS DEMONSTRATED SUCH A GREAT LOVE. I AM ASSUMING THAT THESE SUGGESTIONS, WHICH ARE ADVANCED IN GOOD FAITH, WILL BE GIVEN NO PUBLICITY BY YOUR PEOPLE. ONCE AGAIN MY CONGRATULATIONS TO YOUR ORGANIZATION ON A FINE JOB. CORDIALLY YOURS

DAVID O. SELZNICK

To: Mr. J. H. Whitney

. . . I feel that we must get the production and release plans of this picture settled before you leave California, and also that any plans involving Gary Cooper should be settled, if possible, before Goldwyn goes to Europe on Friday.

I therefore urge that you make clear to Mr. Goldwyn that there is no chance whatsoever of our distributing the picture through United Artists unless it is clear before he leaves for Europe that in any negotiations that may take place during his absence for the release of the picture through United Artists, we are to have Gary Cooper for the lead. If he is in no position to say that we can count upon this in such a release deal, then I think it should be further made clear to him that by the time he gets back from Europe we may have made a deal which involves other casting. . . .

DOS

Gone With the Wind

OF AN ATTEMPT TO CAPITALIZE ON A WORK FOR WHICH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HAS DEMONSTRATED SUCH A GREAT LOVE. I AM ASSUMING THAT THESE SUGGESTIONS, WHICH ARE ADVANCED IN GOOD FAITH, WILL BE GIVEN NO PUBLICITY BY YOUR PEOPLE. ONCE AGAIN MY CONGRATULATIONS TO YOUR ORGANIZATION ON A FINE JOB. CORDIALLY YOURS

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DOS

L. B. [Mayer] CALLED ME TODAY TO SUGGEST THAT THEY [MGM] WOULD BE INTERESTED IN BUYING "GONE WITH THE WIND" TOGETHER WITH MY SERVICES AS PRODUCER ON AN OUTRIGHT PURCHASE INCLUDING, OF COURSE, REPAYMENT OF OUR COMPLETE INVESTMENT PLUS A SUBSTANTIAL PROFIT. HE ASKED ME TO GIVE SOME THOUGHT TO THIS AND ADVISE HIM WHETHER WE WOULD BE WILLING TO MAKE SUCH A DEAL ON BASIS OF A PROFIT TO US THAT THEY COULD STAND. I WILL GIVE THIS SOME THOUGHT OVER WEEKEND AND WISH YOU WOULD DO THE SAME. I MENTIONED IMPOSSIBILITY OF OUR CLOSING OUR STUDIO WHILE I

24This scene later was deleted from *Jezebel*. 

Gone With the Wind
best Scarlett that shows up by that time will play the role willy-nilly. You may inquire why I didn’t give up the idea of a new girl and get Bette Davis, for instance. But certainly you ought to know that Warner Brothers wouldn’t give up Bette Davis for a picture to be released through MGM, even had we wanted Miss Davis in preference to a new personality. Warner Brothers offered me Errol Flynn for Butler and Bette Davis for Scarlett if I would release the picture through Warners—and this would have been an easy way out of my dilemma. But the public wanted Gable, and I was determined that the public should have Gable. And Gable it is going to have, at the very earliest date it could have had him.

There is no point in going through the strings tied to other stars who might have played Scarlett, because either they were choices whom the public would have hopped all over, or it was utterly impossible to get them. MGM and my company played around with the idea of having Norma Shearer do the role. It was never finally settled, but it leaked out that we were thinking about it and you know yourself what an outcry was raised. Mind you, I think the outcry was unfair, and I think people might have withheld their judgment until they saw her play the part. Norma is a grand woman and a grand actress, and out of deference to her oft-demonstrated versatility, and to the many years of loving care, and faithfulness to an ideal that have been given to her career by herself and by the late great Irving Thalberg, I think that she might have been treated with a little more consideration.

But let us say that all of the absolutely unavoidable delays could have been avoided, which is, of course, not so. What of it? Why shouldn’t the book be pictured a couple of years after it first appeared? There are still millions of people who haven’t even read the book; its newspaper serialization hasn’t even yet appeared; its cheaper edition hasn’t even yet appeared.

Please bear in mind, Ed, that I am not seeking any publicity on this picture. Almost two years ago I instructed my Publicity Department that they were to send out not one single word about the picture that was not an official and final announcement, and, on the contrary, I have done everything possible to stop publicity, because I anticipated two years in advance that the public might get tired of reading about it. (Maybe even now they’re not tired of reading about it, but that has been my attitude and I mention it now so that you will know that I have in no sense been responsible for the campaign that has gone on about it in relation to its cast, etc.) Therefore, when I am attacked by someone such as you, especially when that person is, to the best of my knowledge, a friend of mine, I am grieved and mystified.

Now really, Ed, don’t you think you’ve done me an injustice? And don’t you think you owe it to me to straighten this out?

Cordially and sincerely yours,

To: Mr. Dan O’Shea

September 21, 1938

CONFIDENTIAL

I have reluctantly, and at long last, come to the conclusion that we have simply got to do something, and promptly, about the Cukor situation. I have thought that George was a great asset to the company, but I am fearful that he is, on the contrary, a very expensive luxury . . . regardless of his great abilities . . .

George has been with us now for a long time and we have yet to get a picture out of him. We are in danger actually of winding up paying him about $300,000 for his services on Gone With the Wind.

There is a large measure of justice in George’s statement that this is not his fault—and that he could have done pictures; and this is because we have not forced him to do pictures. But it is also because we have deferred to his own wishes—and we have got to make our position clear so that the same thing does not occur in the future . . .

When I first tackled A Star Is Born I spoke to George about doing it and he didn’t feel that he wanted to do a Hollywood picture. When we took [director H. C.] Potter off Tom Sawyer I spoke to George about doing it, and he didn’t want to. When we needed him for another picture, he preferred to direct Garbo. Probably when we need him for another picture later, he will prefer to do another Garbo . . .

Let’s take the immediate situation: We have quite a period of time before George will be required on Gone With the Wind—time enough for any director in the business to make a picture. We have only one picture for him to direct, and that is Intermezzo. George doesn’t like it . . .

But let’s say that we are nice enough not to force him to direct it. Then we offer him an outside picture with [Claudette] Colbert: he doesn’t like it. We offer to try to get him a picture at Columbia: he doesn’t want to work for Columbia . . .

As to Gone With the Wind, I would be willing to negotiate a new deal with him for this particular picture, without, however, the obligation to make such a deal if his terms are exorbitant. We must bear in
mind that we could get great benefits for the future in the way of a contract director of importance if we were able to offer *Gone With the Wind*—by contrast with George, who is willing to do *Gone With the Wind* for us but isn't willing to take our other pictures. For instance, I am confident that we could sign Victor Fleming if we would give him *Gone With the Wind* as his first picture—and if we wanted him instead of borrowing [Jack] Conway from MGM. I am sure that we could even sign Frank Capra, who is dying to do *Gone With the Wind*—although offhand I don't think I would want him to do it as I don't think we need him on it, and I mention this only to show the buying power of a directorial assignment on *Gone With the Wind*.

In any event, I think the biggest black mark against our management to date is the Cukor situation and we can no longer be sentimental about it. . . . We are a business concern and not patrons of the arts. . . .

DOS

To: Mr. Butcher

September 23, 1938

Thanks for your report on the comparative estimates on *Gone With the Wind*. I am hopeful we can bring the picture in for $2,250,000 at the outside, and in cutting the script I will aim at a $2,000,000 cost—hence my desire for a breakdown of the estimated cost of the script by sequences, so that I may have this in front of me in making cuts.35

DOS

TO: JOHN HAY WHITNEY AND KATHARINE BROWN

OCTOBER 12, 1938

. . . WE MUST NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THE FACT THAT I AM GOING AWAY FOR TWO PURPOSES AND TWO PURPOSES ONLY, THE PRINCIPAL ONE OF WHICH IS TO CONCENTRATE ON FINISHING THE SCRIPT OF "GWTW," AND THE SECOND AND INCIDENTAL REASON OF WHICH IS, HOPEFULLY, TO GET A LITTLE REST. IT WOULD PROBABLY BE DIFFICULT OR EVEN IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCOMPLISH THESE OBJECTIVES ON A EUROPEAN TRIP WITH ALL ITS DISTRACTIONS, AND IT THEREFORE SEEMS THAT THE SAFEST THING TO DO WOULD BE TO HOLD TO OUR ORIGINAL SELECTION

TO: MR. HENRY GINSBERG AND MR. BUTCHER

OCTOBER 18, 1938

cc: MR. O’SHEA

To get the right cameraman on *Gone With the Wind* we will have to work far ahead. As a matter of fact, with our starting date now

35Edward W. Butcher, Production Manager of Selznick International.
36The production cost, exclusive of prints and advertising, eventually came to $4,250,000.

OF BERMUDA, UNLESS THE REPORT KAY GETS ON THE WEATHER IS TOO FRIGHTENING. CONCERNING THE WRITER, IT WOULD, OF COURSE, BE SIMPLY WONDERFUL IF YOU COULD TALK MARGARET MITCHELL INTO A BRIEF BERMUDA JAUNT AT OUR EXPENSE. PERHAPS IF HER HUSBAND COULD GET A WEEK OR TWO OFF AND COULD GO ALONG IT WOULD BE HELPFUL. IF I COULD HAVE MITCHELL FOR SO MUCH AS EVEN A WEEK TOWARD LATTER PART OF MY TRIP I FEEL CONFIDENT I COULD DO WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE ON THE SCRIPT BY MYSELF, PERHAPS WITH THE AID OF BILL MENZIES, AND I THINK THE MOST WONDERFUL THING WE COULD POSSIBLY ACCOMPLISH FOR "GWTW" WOULD BE AN ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THERE WILL NOT BE A SINGLE ORIGINAL WORD IN THE SCRIPT THAT IS NOT WRITTEN BY MARGARET MITCHELL. HOWEVER, EVEN IF SHE WOULD NOT PERMIT US TO MAKE SUCH AN ANNOUNCEMENT, SHE WOULD STILL, OF COURSE, BE INFINITELY PREFERABLE TO ANYBODY ELSE, AND SUCH A TRIP MIGHT NOT FRIGHTEN HER SO MUCH AS ONE TO HOLLYWOOD.39

TO: KATHARINE BROWN

OCTOBER 14, 1938

SUGGEST YOU TELEPHONE SIDNEY HOWARD IMMEDIATELY AND INFORM HIM THAT I AM LEAVING FOR BERMUDA AND THAT I CANNOT CONSIDER THE IDEA OF WORKING IN NEW YORK. FURTHER, THAT I MUST KNOW DEFINITELY WHETHER HE INTENDS TO GIVE UP ALL THE PLANS HE MADE WITH ME AND THAT I CHECKED AND RECHECKED REPEATEDLY WITH HIM, AND IF THIS IS THE CASE, I MUST GET ANOTHER WRITER IMMEDIATELY. PLEASE GIVE HIM NO ARGUMENTS OTHER THAN TO MAKE THE ABOVE STATEMENT ONCE, AND SIMPLY.40

To: Mr. Henry Ginsberg and Mr. Butcher

October 18, 1938

cc: Mr. O’Shea

To get the right cameraman on *Gone With the Wind* we will have to work far ahead. As a matter of fact, with our starting date now

39Miss Mitchell declined.
40Howard did no further work on the script. He was a precise, orderly man who delivered material on time and was used to little interference. Selznick insisted upon revisions in Howard’s script, but Howard felt the assignment complete and proper, did not want to involve himself in further revisions, and left for New York and his next scheduled Broadway play commitment.

Screenwriter Jo Swerling worked in Bermuda on revisions with Selznick.
I should like the photographic tests to include various experiments with ways of making up her eyebrows to make them look more natural and more in the period; different make-ups; experiments with her figure, including particularly her bosom.

To get back to the accent problem, we will certainly have to get busy with accent work with Rhett, and we may have the same accent problem with Ashley, Melanie, and others—almost certainly with Ashley and Melanie. Accordingly, regular instruction should be arranged for all of them—perhaps classes including all of them jointly, as well as individual work.

DOS

To: Mr. O'Shea

January 6, 1939

Fitzgerald starts with us today, 1/6/39, at $1250 week, on loan from MGM. He will work on GWTW dialogue.

He will undoubtedly be here all day Saturday and Monday, but it is possible that after that we may use him only an hour or two each day—however, I will let you know about this later.

DOS

To: Messrs. Cukor, Garrett, Fitzgerald

January 7, 1939

In relation to our length problem, the only way that we can really cut down may be through the elimination of some of the very best scenes in the whole picture—also some of the best-remembered scenes in the book.

I will note in this memo as I go along those scenes which from a standpoint of storytelling we can lose; and we should have a discussion on this before we start shooting, possibly postponing the shooting of these dubious scenes until the completion of the picture and until we see how long we actually are. It breaks my heart to consider losing any of them but I don't see any other alternative, and certainly the very least we should do is discuss them.

We are a couple of reels before we get to the story of Scarlett and Rhett, which is, after all, the stuff on which the book is built and upon which the success of the picture will depend. These couple of reels are made up of the following:

1. Scene with the Tarleton twins, which is defensible on only two grounds; first, that it is remembered that the book opens this way, and second, that it introduces talk of the war.
2. The scene with the father, which is undoubtedly necessary.
3. The scene of the mother's return from the Slattery, which has the following necessary points which perhaps could be handled elsewhere:
   - Introduction of the sisters;
   - Introduction of Jonas Wilkerson;
   - Introduction of the house servants.
4. Prayer Scene—which certainly is in no sense essential, and which I have included only because it is so well remembered and should be effective pictorially, and also because we see Ellen as the mistress of the house and the great lady in charge of her family and domestic servants—and performing her functions as the mistress of a Southern establishment. This scene has the additional point which is desirable but not essential—of planting Scarlett's intentions about the next day—because the scene with Ashley actually does not need this plant.
5. There is a considerable chunk of film that might be saved by going straight from the prayer scene to Twelve Oaks—because, actually, the intervening scene between Scarlett and Mammy, and the bits that surround it, do not progress our story one iota and, in fact, hold it up. It is an absolutely wonderful scene, one of the best we have, but there is no justification for it from a standpoint of storytelling or footage.
6. The arrival at Twelve Oaks and the scenes that precede the barbecue are not very exciting, and are justified only by the introduction of Ashley and Melanie, plus some minor relationships such as that between India and Charles Hamilton (the importance of which is not very great and which, actually, the picture can live without), as well as the relationship between Frank Kennedy and Suellen, which is also not terribly important if our footage problem continues to be as great as it presently appears.

Rhett's introduction could very easily be handled in the barbecue or in the library. As a matter of fact, a very good introduction is his popping up out of the couch.6

7. Similarly, the barbecue scene is completely unnecessary. Actually

6Author F. Scott Fitzgerald worked on a few scenes, contributing criticisms, suggestions, and some revised dialogue until on or about January 24, 1939. Virtually none of his material appeared in the final version of the script.

6Rhett's introduction took place immediately following the arrival at Twelve Oaks, as it occurred in the novel.
it has not any real value of any kind, except in relation to Scarlett's return to the scene of the barbecue on her way from Atlanta to Tara—and even this effect could be duplicated by having her in the house instead of at the barbecue pits. The only conceivable reason for the barbecue is that it is well remembered. (Note: if we drop the barbecue, perhaps we should change the dialogue in the sequence at Tara, with reference to the barbecue.)

8. The scene of Scarlett tiptoeing out of the girls' room is also not necessary, but presumably the dialogue about the war and Rhett's attitude toward it is essential. We may be able to reduce it considerably, but our present method of handling it seems rather adroit, in that it keeps the Ashley-Scarlett story going while the war talk and Rhett's attitude is being slipped to the audience.

From all of the above something can be dropped—just what, I haven't finally concluded, but I think we should have a meeting immediately to decide which, if any of these scenes, we should lose.

I think we must realize that if the book were 2000 pages long instead of 1000 pages, we would obviously have to throw away many, many great scenes; and I think there is only one policy to follow in concluding what we can and cannot retain—and that is, that we must retain scenes that are essential to the story, and lose scenes, however valuable, that are not essential.

DOS

Mr. Ed Sullivan
631 North Alta Drive
Beverly Hills, California

January 7, 1939

Dear Ed:

I think the following answers your question:

1. Scarlett O'Hara's parents were French and Irish. Identically, Miss Leigh's parents are French and Irish.
2. A large part of the South prides itself on its English ancestry, and an English girl might presumably, therefore, be as acceptable in the role as a Northern girl.
3. Experts insist that the real Southern accent, as opposed to the Hollywood conception of a Southern accent, is basically English.

None of the possibilities mentioned was dropped.
MEMO FROM DAVID O. SELZNICK

To: Mr. R. A. Klune

March 29, 1939

While we are all sympathetic with Mr. Fleming's desire to shoot in continuity, I would like to see you with him to discuss the holding of several sequences until we have disposed of Gable, Howard, and Miss de Havilland. It seems silly to be shooting such things as the hospital sequences while Gable and Howard are on the payroll doing nothing. We have the further factors that we must get through with Leslie Howard in order to start *Intermezzo* and that we may run into difficulties in keeping Miss de Havilland.

To: Mr. Lambert

April 3, 1939

I spoke today to Walter Plunkett about Gable's costumes. I think there is no excuse for their fitting him so badly, especially around the collar. I think it is very disappointing indeed to have the elegant Rhett Butler wandering around with clothes that look as though he had bought them at the Hart, Schaffner, and Marx of that period and walked right out of the store with them.

I have also asked repeatedly for all our clothes to be aged sufficiently and worn sufficiently to look as though they had been worn and not to look what they are—fresh out of the tailoring shop. But nothing seems to be done about this either.

To get back to the fitting on Gable, if he is being fitted according to the way he stands in the shop, I'd like to call to your attention that his carriage is quite different when he is relaxed, and that necessarily he has to do a great deal of bending because of the difference between his height and Miss Leigh's, etc., and that a little more imagination should be used as to how he is going to wear them, without taking it for granted that he is going to stand stiff as a ramrod in all the scenes.

Also, his collars shouldn't be fitted so tightly that he looks as though he is overweight. The trick about collars on any man with a large neck, a trick which should be known to any costumer, is to make the collars slightly large so that they don't press against the neck and make it look as though it is bulging. Look at Gable's own collars in private life and see how well he looks in them, and then compare them with our collars. As a matter of fact, look at how well he looks in his own clothes generally, and compare the fit and the tailoring and the general attractiveness with what I regard as the awful costuming job we are doing with him.

DOS

To: Mr. Klune

cc: Mr. Ginsberg

April 7, 1939

Dear Ray:

... I have always felt that it is the falsest kind of economy to save on bit actors. The time that cheap and inexperienced actors cost, through the director's inability to get performances out of them, alone more than makes up the difference between their salaries and the salaries of good actors; film shot with cheap actors for a picture requiring the perfection of *Gone With the Wind* obviously cannot be used, where the cheap actors fail to deliver what is demanded of them; and even if the cheap actors should work quickly and should give adequate performances, it is still false economy because nothing is as important on the screen as the actor. To save money on actors and spend it on sets is silly—the audiences are looking at the actors, not at the sets, if our action means anything. And while a bit actor is on the screen, if it is for only two seconds, he is as important as the star.

DOS

To: Mr. Ginsberg—Mr. O'Shea

April 14, 1939

We may soon have a serious worry to face that I think we should be prepared for if we are not going to be met with the possibility of again halting production. We should keep our worry confidential, but should be active on it none the less.

I have for some time been worried that Fleming would not be able to finish the picture because of his physical condition. He told me frankly yesterday that he thought he was going to have to ask to be relieved immediately, but after talking with his doctor was told that it would be all right for him to continue. However, he is so near the breaking point both physically and mentally from sheer exhaustion that it would be a miracle, in my opinion, if he is able to shoot for another seven or eight weeks. Since it would be difficult, if not actually impossible, for any substitute director to step in without taking the time to thoroughly familiarize himself with the book, the scripts and the cut stuff, I think we ought to start now selecting an understudy and familiarizing...
izing him with the material, so that he could step in on brief notice.

I have also discussed with Fleming the possibility of throwing in a substitute almost immediately for perhaps a week's shooting, to give him a chance to get a little rest and also to secure the benefit of his help on the script of the final part of the picture. As a matter of fact, this suggestion came from Fleming, and if we went through with it it would have the double advantage of having another man familiar with the material and actually having shot on the picture, and consequently prepared to step in should Victor have to quit.

I'd like you to talk this over between yourselves, and then one of us, discuss it with MGM to see if we can get some help from possibilities would be Bob Leonard, since Bob knows

ghly and told me at the time Vic went on the picture needed him to shoot any particular sequences on the be happy to stop in and help out. Leonard is also completely without any nonsense about stepping once dragged him in on A Tale of Two Cities when he started shooting for me on twenty minutes might be wise for Henry [Ginsberg] to run up the have a discussion with Mannix and Thau about the possibility of Leonard coming down and shooting for a while.

Another very good possibility would be Bill Wellman, if we could arrange to get Bill for a brief period in between his two pictures. I am sure Bill would do this as a favor for me, and I think Paramount owes it to us.**

April 14, 1939

Darling [Irene Selznick],

... I wish I could just be with you somewhere, away from need of money, habit of work, drive of years' silly hopes. Maybe—oh, I hope so—we can map a program: months, eight or ten, of hard work and drive for financial freedom, then some place where there is neither... Clover Club nor synopses.

... I don't think any more my Fate is millions, and Leadership. I hope it isn't (as though the hope were not gratuitous). I'm damned if I know quite what's the alternate hope. . . .

**Benjamin Thau was now MGM Executive Producer.

**On April 26, Fleming collapsed and was out for two weeks. Sam Wood took over and continued to shoot material after Fleming's return in order to expedite the picture's completion.

**Popular Hollywood gambling club of the period.
Wind were omitted from these announcements for a couple of reasons: to begin with, Al Lichtman shares my hopes that the picture is turning out so brilliantly that its handling will have to be on a scale and of a type never before tried in the picture business. The only close approach to it would be The Birth of a Nation. Al has a lot of wonderful ideas as to different experiments in road showing and shares my hopes that the picture will be road shown in every town and hamlet in America, undoubtedly not reaching the regular theaters for a year, most probably not reaching them for two years, and quite possibly not reaching them for three or longer. Al has stated on several occasions that there is no telling what the gross of the picture may be—perhaps ten million dollars, perhaps twelve or thirteen million, perhaps fifteen million. I know all this sounds like Hollywood insanity to you, but if these expectations and hopes are insane, then I have been insane in the manner in which I have approached the picture (which I grant you is possible), because I have staked everything on it, including my personal future and the future of my company. For your confidential information, the cost is presently only a little under three and a half million dollars—how much more than this it will go we don’t know. This means that its cost is almost twice that of any other picture ever made, with the possible exception of Ben-Hur [1925, silent], the cost of which I don’t know (and I doubt that anybody else does: the boys were still charging luncheon checks to it a couple of years ago). You can see that we’re going to have to have the largest gross any picture has had in the last ten years simply to break even.

Incidentally, it will be the longest picture ever made—running somewhere between three and four hours. Obviously, the very least we will have to have will be two intermissions. Plans I have discussed with Al include showings with two intermissions; and perhaps even experiments with the picture running in two theaters simultaneously—the first half in one theater and the second half in another theater, with one admission ticket sold for both theaters. . . .

I am more grateful than I can say that the picture is in the hands of Loew’s, because I think it needs the vision of men such as Al and yourself to feel the picture’s way as it is completed and as it goes along. You know from experience that I am not in the habit of bulling you, or of salving anybody, so please believe what I say about the large measure of relief it gives me through these sleepless weeks and months to know that the finished product will have loving and expert care in its handling.

It is for all of these reasons that I think it is a mistake to include the picture with the rest of your product in any announcements. I think that psychologically it is a mistake to have it grouped with any pictures, however important. Certainly films like Wizard of Oz and Northwest Passage and The Women should be enormous grossers—probably the biggest of the year; but forgive me if I feel that these are mere pygmies alongside of Gone With the Wind. San Francisco and [The Great] Ziegfeld (1936), for instance, were enormous pictures, but you would scarcely group them with Ben-Hur and The Big Parade. And I am hoping that Gone With the Wind will make even The Big Parade and Ben-Hur seem like small grossers. I think that in the handling of the picture by Al, as against another distributor, there is literally a difference of millions of dollars, and I think that Al is out to get a record on the gross of the picture that is not likely to be approached by any other film for many years. I feel, too, that in the psychological approach to the picture of the trade and of exhibitors, particularly, there is also a difference that may amount to hundreds of thousands or even millions. It is for this reason that even a single inclusion of the film on the same basis as other films in any ad seems to me to be wrong.

Of course it is entirely possible—God forbid!—that I am wrong; that the picture will not be what Al and I hope. . . .

As you have no doubt heard and read, our troubles are by no means over. Vic Fleming collapsed on us, and we had to make another directorial switch. But Sam Wood seems to have taken over beautifully and I don’t think there is going to be any letdown in quality. I have two other units shooting presently, and there is one stage of the picture at which five units will actually be shooting simultaneously! It looks to me as though we will be finished with the picture, exclusive of montages and an enormous amount of trick [special-effects] work, about the middle of June.

Are you likely to be out here soon? I’m dying for you to see some of the stuff.

Cordially,

David O. Selznick
We sneak-previewed the picture at Riverside Saturday night with sensational success. Jock can tell you all about it, since he was there. The reaction was everything that we hoped for and expected.

To: Miss Katharine Brown

September 20, 1939

Dear Kay:

Please tell Miss Mitchell that I was terribly worried about the ending of the picture, as we found it impossible to get into script form even the hint that Scarlett might get Rhett back that is inferred in the book. We tried two or three ways, and even shot one indicating something of the kind after she went back to Tara, but it didn’t work; and I finally cooked up an ending of my own which was pretty loudly jeered at on paper, and which I imagine will sound pretty awful to you and Miss Mitchell on paper, but which, believe me, worked like a charm. My own feeling always was that the whole picture led up to Rhett’s saying, “Frankly, my dear I don’t give a damn.” (Incidentally, one of my greatest disappointments about the picture is that Breen has forbidden the use of this line, and to my disgust, and I imagine Miss Mitchell’s, Rhett says, “Frankly, my dear I just don’t care.”) He has taken such a beating from Scarlett that I think it would be the most puerile sort of ending to negate everything that has preceded it by bringing them together, and I did not succumb to this temptation, despite the coaxing of many Hollywoodites. In reaching for a satisfactory ending for motion-picture purposes, I felt that the one thing that was really open to us was to stress the Tara thought, more even than Miss Mitchell did. Accordingly, the ending is as follows (and I beg you and Miss Mitchell not to judge this until you see it in the film itself, because on paper I imagine it will sound as bad to you as it did to everyone else I tried it on):

After Rhett leaves Scarlett she turns from the door reading the lines, sobbingly, “I can’t let him go. I can’t. There must be some way to bring him back. Oh, I can’t think about this now. I’ll go crazy if I do. . . . I’ll . . . I’ll think about it tomorrow.” Still crying, she sinks on the steps,
preview card mentioned that they wanted to see Rhett and Scarlett together again. I think they still hope that they will get together, but it leaves them something to discuss, just as the end of the book did.

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**MR. BEN HECHT SEPTEMBER 25, 1939**

**PERRY LANE**

**NEW YORK**

**DEAR BEN:** THERE ARE ONLY SEVEN TITLES NEEDED FOR "GONE WITH THE WIND" AND I AM CERTAIN YOU COULD BAT THEM OUT IN A FEW MINUTES, ESPECIALLY SINCE A FEW OF THEM CAN BE BASED ON TITLES YOU WROTE WHILE HERE. WILL YOU DO THESE FOR ME IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR PROMISE? COULD SEND THEM TO YOU IN SUCH FORM THAT YOU WOULD KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WE NEEDED. VERY ANXIOUS TO GET PICTURE INTO LABORATORY AT ONCE AND WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU COULD TACKLE THEM IMMEDIATELY UPON THEIR RECEIPT. PLEASE WIRE REPLY.

CORDIALLY

DAVID

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To: Miss Katharine Brown

October 7, 1939

I am in receipt of Howard Dietz's letter to you concerning the billing on *Gone With the Wind*.

Frankly, I don't understand Dietz's attitude about segregating Gable. I suggest you call to his attention that they costarred Gable with Constance Bennett, of all people; that he was costarred with Marion Davies, with his name coming second; also that they have costarred Norma Shearer and other important stars with everybody but Baby Sandy.

Personally, I think that it is all a lot of nonsense, and I think the smartest actor in the business is Bing Crosby, who, through his entire starring career, has insisted that they costar somebody, even if it was a bit player, so that he couldn't be blamed alone if the picture failed. But regardless of how I feel about it, we are bound by contracts, so let's start out by saying that whatever is done for Gable must also be done for Leigh, [Leslie] Howard, and de Havilland. It is not a matter of discussion, or of MGM's wishes, or of my own wishes—we have contracts, and if they think they are going to get Leslie Howard to agree to a change, or Warners to agree on a change with reference to de Havilland, I suggest they try it ... .

It accordingly comes down to whether we use the four stars' names before the title or after the title, on the main title, and in advertising; and the relative size of the names of the four stars to the name of the picture.

As to the main title, I will take this up with Al Lichtman, as Dietz suggests. We have our main title all laid out on the basis of having *Gone With the Wind* come first, and in a unique manner; but if MGM for some strange reason thinks that Clark Gable is more important than *Gone With the Wind*, and should come first, and wants to bitch up our main title layout, I suppose there's nothing I can do but get up a new main title, since under our contract with MGM Gable's name must precede *Gone With the Wind*.

As to the advertising, I still think that to use the names of four stars in anything more than fifty per cent of the height, width, and heaviness of type that is used for *Gone With the Wind* would be the equivalent of having done the same thing with Henry Walthall and Lillian Gish and Bobby Harron on *The Birth of a Nation*. What was sold was *The Birth of a Nation*, and what should be sold is *Gone With the Wind*. I would prefer that their names come under the title with the word "starring," but if they insist upon putting them above the title, here again I don't suppose there is anything we can do about it, and the important thing is to make sure that *Gone With the Wind* is not minimized. If Gable alone were starred in the picture, I would still feel this way, but since we must use the names of four stars, if we try to use each of them [in a size] seventy-five per cent of the title we are going to have very messy advertising, and the names of the four stars will occupy much more room on the billing than *Gone With the Wind*. . . .

Also, in case Mr. Dietz does not know it, it is important that he should know that MGM receives no credit on advertising, other than its distribution. . . .

You can tell Howard for me that after what I, personally, and our company have gone through, and after the investment we have made, . . .

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"The written introductory sequence and other titles which set the scene and condense the narrative throughout."
we expect our company to benefit and the picture to be known as a
Selznick International picture, and not as an MGM picture. . . .

DOS

To: Mr. O'Shea

October 9, 1939

Some time ago, it was my intention to have, in addition to the Sidney
Howard credit on Gone With the Wind, a list of contributing writers. I
would rather now abandon this idea, first because while it is true that
Sidney Howard did only a portion of the script, there is no other writer
who worked on it whose contribution is worth serious mention; sec-
ond, because our titles are cluttered enough as it is; and third because
I don’t want to deprive Sidney Howard, and more particularly his
widow, of any of the glory that may be attendant upon his last job.

When I mentioned to Oliver Garrett that I had some intention of
giving him a contributory credit, he seemed rather upset and felt to
my amazement that the credit ought to read: Adaptation by Sidney
Howard and Screenplay by himself, which would of course be ridicu-
ulous. But rather than get into any argument at that time, I told him
that when the script was finished, I would take it up further. Since that
time, I myself did the last half or two thirds of the script without
anybody’s help, and Garrett’s claim has become even more ridiculous.
However, I want to avoid the possibility of any trouble with him about
this, and I wonder what we should do about it. It would be most
unpleasant if Garrett started filing claims after the picture was
released; and most difficult and expensive if we had to revise our
credits subsequent to the making of the prints and the advertising.
Since the advertising must go into work at once, and the main title
cards are now being lettered, I regret that I have let this go so long,
but it frankly hasn’t occurred to me recently until today.

What is your advice in the matter? Do you think you ought to call
Garrett? Or should we simply ignore him? Or should we take it up
with the Writers Guild, or what?

I don’t think there is a chance of anybody else advancing any claim
in connection with it even though, if you should discuss it with Garrett,
you can say frankly that of the comparatively small amount of material
in the picture which is not from the book, most is my own personally,
and the only original lines of dialogue which are not my own are a few
from Sidney Howard and a few from Ben Hecht and a couple more

100Howard died in August 1939, after an accident on his farm in Massachusetts.

from John Van Druten. Offhand I doubt that there are ten original
words of Garrett’s in the whole script. As to construction, this is about
eighty per cent my own, and the rest divided between Jo Swerling and
Sidney Howard, with Hecht having contributed materially to the con-
struction of one sequence.

If necessary, Bobby [Barbara Keon] could send the script of the
picture as it stands, but this might take some time that we could not
afford; and even this wouldn’t prove anything to Garrett unless he saw
that the only things from his script which are in the finished picture
are construction points which were laid out by myself with Jo Swer-
ling. He might try to prove his point by showing that the picture is a
lot closer to his script from a construction standpoint than any script
of Howard’s, which is a fact; but the construction of his script is based
on the notes taken by Bobby of the conference between Swerling and
myself in Bermuda, which notes are available. And in any discussion
with Garrett, if he gets tough, you might say that we have examined
the notes taken by Bobby of the conferences between Swerling and
myself, that these are available, and that his contribution could be
proved before any arbitrators as being practically nonexistent.

DOS

To: Mr. Max Steiner, Mr. Lou Forbes

October 9, 1939

The score on Intermezzo is receiving a great deal of comment and
extraordinarily favorable attention, for which I thank and congratu-
late you both.

The outstanding point that has been commented on by so many, and
that certainly has served to make the score so beautiful, is its use of
classical music to such a great extent instead of original music hastily
written. This is a point on which I have been fighting for years, with
little success . . .

I have had a dozen people ask me hopefully whether Gone With the
Wind will give the feeling of the Old South in its whole score—
whether the score will be based entirely, or to a large extent, upon the
strains and songs and compositions of that particular period and civili-
ization. And I am increasingly depressed by the prospect that we are
not going to use the great classical music of the world for our score,
nor are we even going to use the great Southern pieces for a large
section of our score. But if we don’t, we will have failed to learn the

101Sidney Howard received sole writing credit.
MEMO FROM DAVID O. SELZNICK
on the screen; Katharine Brown, to whose insistence and foresight I owe the purchase of the story. . . . I was motivated in this idea by the gracious gesture of crediting Sidney Franklin on [Goodbye, Mr. Chips] [1939]. . . . My conversation with Vic on the subject literally didn't last thirty seconds. I asked Vic how he felt about it, but I got no further than the names of Cukor and Wood; Vic obviously, and no doubt understandably, wasn't happy about the idea, saying in so many words that he didn't think it was necessary to credit them on the screen. I immediately, and without further discussion, told him to forget about it; and as far as I was concerned, it was a closed issue.103

Actually, I am not even sure that all of these people would have liked credit. I know that George has particularly requested me never to use his name in connection with the picture, as the incident concerning him is a closed one—and happily, and as I predicted when I urged that he be given The Women, he has emerged at least as important in the trade as ever before. . . . Sam Wood has stepped in on other jobs before, and has had other people step in to help on his jobs, so I am certain that he expects nothing. . . . But in my happiness over the picture—and, far from my desire to do anyone out of credit, in my eagerness to give credit to everyone who contributed—apparently I was misunderstood. I am sorry, not so much at being misunderstood, because this seems to be a particular characteristic of Hollywood, but over the apparent disappointing unfamiliarity with my character.

Vic Fleming will receive enormous credit for Gone With the Wind. I told him at the time that we persuaded him into doing it, and all through the months when he was uncertain—to say the least—about the result of both my labors and his own efforts, that it would make him far more outstanding in the industry than ever before in his career. . . .

Candidly, Eddie, I don't like interference in what is this studio's business; and my feelings are considerably stronger than this when it comes to any influence that Vic Fleming needs protection from me by anybody. There is no occasion for this, and the only conclusion I can draw, if the facts are as reported to me, is that somebody is trying to build themselves up as Vic's friend against an enemy from the Land of Oz. My relations with Vic were completely pleasant and cordial. I don't recall a single unpleasant moment between us through what was probably the most nerve-racking experience any producer and director have had to share in the history of Hollywood. And it would be a
great pity indeed if, having gone through the war together, his peacetime pals gave rise to even a rumor of difficulty, or differences, or of doing each other in. . . .

Sincerely yours,

To: Mr. Klune
October 17, 1939

I have been thinking about how difficult I must be to live with these days, and the amount of barking that I have done, both verbally and by memo, at you, Lyle Wheeler, and some of the other boys around the lot. I should appreciate it if you would explain to them that I am uncomfortably aware that I must have been pretty awful; that it doesn't mean that I am not appreciative of all their efforts; and that the only excuse I can offer is that I am simply worn out, and I suppose my nerves are pretty well shot. You can do me a service if you will explain this to any of the boys that I may have made unhappy.

DOS

Mr. Will H. Hays
October 20, 1939
Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc.
28 West 44th Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Hays:

As you probably know, the punch line of Gone With the Wind, the one bit of dialogue which forever establishes the future relationship between Scarlett and Rhett, is, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

Naturally I am most desirous of keeping this line and, to judge from the reactions of two preview audiences, this line is remembered, loved, and looked forward to by the millions who have read this new American classic.

Under the code, Joe Breen is unable to give me permission to use this sentence because it contains the word "damn," a word specifically forbidden by the code.

As you know from my previous work with such pictures as David Copperfield, Little Lord Fauntleroy, A Tale of Two Cities, etc., I have always attempted to live up to the spirit as well as the exact letter of the producers' code. Therefore, my asking you to review the case, to

103Victor Fleming received sole directorial credit.
look at the strip of film in which this forbidden word is contained, is not motivated by a whim. A great deal of the force and drama of Gone With the Wind, a project to which we have given three years of hard work and hard thought, is dependent upon that word.

It is my contention that this word as used in the picture is not an oath or a curse. The worst that could be said against it is that it is a vulgarism, and it is so described in the Oxford English Dictionary. Nor do I feel that in asking you to make an exception in this case, I am asking for the use of a word which is considered reprehensible by the great majority of American people and institutions. A canvass of the popular magazines shows that even such moral publications as Woman's Home Companion, Saturday Evening Post, Collier's and the Atlantic Monthly, use this word freely. I understand the difference, as outlined in the code, between the written word and the word spoken from the screen, but at the same time I think the attitude of these magazines toward "damn" gives an indication that the word itself is not considered abhorrent or shocking to audiences.

I do not feel that your giving me permission to use "damn" in this one sentence will open up the floodgates and allow every gangster picture to be peppered with "damns" from end to end. I do believe, however, that if you were to permit our using this dramatic word in its rightfully dramatic place, in a line that is known and remembered by millions of readers, it would establish a helpful precedent, a precedent which would give to Joe Breen discretionary powers to allow the use of certain harmless oaths and ejaculations whenever, in his opinion, they are not prejudicial to public morals.

Since we are trying to put Gone With the Wind into the laboratory this week, I should appreciate your taking this matter under immediate consideration. Mr. Lowell Calvert, our New York representative, has a print of the scene referred to, which will take you literally only a few seconds to view. . . . However, you may feel it possible to give the consent without viewing the film.

The original of the line referred to is on page 1035 of the novel, Gone With the Wind, and you might have your secretary secure it for you.

We have been commended by preview audiences for our extremely faithful job on Gone With the Wind, and practically the only point that has been commented on as being missing is the curious (to audiences) omission of this line. It spoils the punch at the end of the picture, and on our very fade-out gives an impression of unfaithfulness after three hours and forty-five minutes of extreme fidelity to Miss Mitchell's

work, which, as you know, has become an American Bible.

Thanking you for your cooperation in this, 104

Cordially and sincerely yours,

Mr. Al Lichtman, Vice-President
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Culver City, California

Dear Mr. Lichtman:

I have listened to all the arguments, and I am more strongly than ever opposed to the policy that is presently planned on the selling of Gone With the Wind. I intend to do everything that is within my power to stop it. I am hopeful that you will not regard this as a personal issue between us, but will understand that it is entirely a matter of business . . . .

I think it is as wrong not to road show Gone With the Wind as it would have been wrong not to road show The Big Parade or Ben-Hur. In fact, I do not think there is anyone who will disagree with the argument that there is a vastly greater audience waiting in advance for Gone With the Wind than there was for either of these two pictures. And I do not believe that there is anything in present-day times or conditions to warrant the belief that the public will not go to see Gone With the Wind at road-show prices.

I think it is as wrong not to road show Gone With the Wind as it would have been not to road show The Birth of a Nation. In fact, I think it is infinitely more wrong. It is not for me to say that Gone With the Wind is as outstanding a picture for its day as The Birth of a Nation was when it was made; however, your own people have said this, and much more. But what I do claim is that Gone With the Wind actually has an infinitely greater audience waiting for it than The Birth of a Nation had in advance of its release. And I call to your attention that the public paid road-show prices to see The Birth of a Nation to an amount, I understand, of between $10,000,000 to $15,000,000, at a time when motion-picture theaters were charging five to fifteen cents per ticket. It is inconceivable that the American public, which was willing to pay road-show prices at that time, is not willing to pay them now.

The failure, or the mild success, of dozens of other road shows is no criterion. There were dozens of road-show failures at the time of

104Permission was granted to use "damn."
Ben-Hur and The Big Parade. Clearly the pictures did not warrant road showing.

I regard your ownership of fifty per cent of the profits of Gone With the Wind as the most generous deal ever made by a producer in the history of the picture business, and I don't think you need more than the original terms to make the deal a good one for you.

It is possible that it is better for your company to get the money in quickly, but it is not a determining factor with us. And in any event, it is not clear to me that there would be any material difference in the speed of revenue if the picture were played two-a-day, at road-show prices, instead of three-a-day at lesser prices: there might be a few months' difference at the most.

On a short picture one argument against road show is in the number of performances: there can be five or six turnovers daily on a picture of average length. It is utterly impossible to have more than three shows on Gone With the Wind daily unless the first performance is held for night watchmen. It is conceivable that an early-morning show might do some business—although the argument that has been advanced in relation to The Wizard of Oz in New York has no bearing whatsoever in this case. In the first place, Mickey Rooney was appearing in person for a limited length of time, and people knew that if they did not catch him during this particular engagement, they might never be able to see him again. In the second place, it was vacation time, and the morning crowds were traceable to the inclusion of great numbers of children—as witness the falling-off of business on The Wizard of Oz as the day went on. And in the third place, Gone With the Wind is not a picture for children, by the widest stretch of the imagination.

I understand that Mr. Rodgers has agreed to have an intermission in the picture. It would be a defiance of the laws of nature to assume that there would not be a substantial percentage of the audience who would find it necessary to go to the lavatory in the course of almost four hours of film. Since the time of ancient Greece, theatrical managers have known the wisdom and even the necessity of intermissions where the performance deals with one story. To make a guinea pig of Gone With the Wind, which you state is the greatest picture ever made, and make it the great experiment of the no-intermission entertainment, would, in my opinion, be unthinkable.

But Mr. Rodgers has warned us that in his opinion, the intermission plan will not prevail after it is tried out. It is not hard to understand why he makes this prediction. If tickets are going to be sold for unreserved seats, and standing room is going to be sold to an unsuspecting public, there would at intermission time be a mad scramble for the seats of those people who had gone to the lavatories. The members of the audience would be faced with the alternatives of sitting miserably through the second half of the picture, and taking a chance on bladder trouble, or of losing their seats, and for this alternative they have paid .75¢ to $1.00. Obviously, if an intermission is necessary, and I can tell you point-blank, without the slightest equivocation, that an intermission is not merely desirable but essential, the only answer is reserved seats.

Since no amount of argument could convince me that an intermission was not an absolute essential to the enjoyment of the picture, and to the health and comfort of the audience; and since reserved seats are a necessity if there is to be an intermission, a scale of road-show prices becomes the obvious choice as to policy, if only in order to give the theater a large enough revenue.

This picture represents the greatest work of my life, in the past and very likely in the future. I am associated with it in the public mind, and will be further associated with it. I do not intend, without every struggle that it is possible for me to put up, to be blamed for making a miserable batch of its exhibition to the point where a large part of the audience sees it backward, or a large part of the audience sees it incomplete, or a large part of the audience stands in line, and then in back of the theater, for part or all of its four hours running time. I certainly shall fight to the end that the public may see the picture as we have produced it, and may enjoy the picture in accordance with its merit.

You will recall that you laughed at the incident I reported to you of the woman who said she had been saving her money to pay $1.65 per seat to see Gone With the Wind, and to pay $1.10 per seat for the members of her family for "second-best tickets"; but who, upon hearing that she would be able to buy the best seats, unreserved, for $1.10, said that she certainly would not do this, and that if this was to be the price of the best tickets, obviously the picture wasn't what it was cracked up to be, and would soon be playing at lesser prices, and she would wait until it got to the neighborhood houses at the regular price. Since then, I have had occasion to cross-examine a number of other people in the middle-class and lower-middle-class brackets. The reaction has in each case been identical, and has, in addition, been one of great disappointment that an event which they had looked forward to for so long was evaporating. I firmly believe that there are countless people who would wait until the picture got to the neighborhood houses at the regular price, and would not pay the added price for the picture at the theater where they are unaccustomed to paying extra.

\[\text{William F. Rodgers, Loew's, Inc. General Sales Manager.}\]
thousands of people who will be eager to pay $1.10 for "second-best tickets" and $1.65 for the best seats, provided they can get reserved seats and it can be a gala event; but who will refuse to pay $0.75 to $1.10 for unreserved seats at something that is not an event. I believe that there are countless thousands of people who will be enraged at being gouged for advanced prices to stand in line, to take their chances at seeing the picture partially, to see the picture in discomfort—but who would storm the box offices to pay $1.65 to be sure of a seat, and to see it under the proper circumstances.

Actually, my principal present objection is to the folly of leaping into a distribution plan, and an exhibition plan, on Gone With the Wind without experimentation, and from which there can be no retreat. Nobody on earth knows how Gone With the Wind should be handled; and nobody on earth can find out without experimentation. Even the hours at which the picture should be exhibited should, if the merchandising is to be sound and thorough, be determined by a nation-wide Gallup poll, so that in each city it could be learned what hours were most convenient for the public to see this extraordinarily long film. In one city there might be as much as an hour's difference from another city, according to the working hours of the greatest number of the population. It might even be found necessary—in fact I believe that it would be found necessary—to exhibit the picture simultaneously in two or more theaters in each city, with different starting times, so that the individual members of the public could choose the hours that fitted into their working hours, their retiring hours, and their family plans for lunch, for dinner, for taking care of the children, and for any number of other things. To assume that we can sit in Hollywood, or in New York, and decide at what hours the American public should see Gone With the Wind is in itself a fantastic presumption.

I am aware that the picture will do tremendous business under your plan, or under any plan, but we would never know what we had passed up; and if your plan should be proven wrong, we are doomed and must immediately fall back upon runs in regular theaters at regular prices.

Very truly yours,

David O. Selznick

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196 The modified road-show policy eventually agreed to specified an absolute minimum admission charge of 75 cents for the morning and afternoon performances, $1.00 for evenings, and $1.50 for preferred seats. Reserved seating was optional, but MGM demanded that a thirty-minute lapse of time be provided between each showing. The intermission time during the film was decided by the exhibitor and distributor representative.
MEMO FROM DAVID O. SELZNICK

Both for music and sound effects, I think this is practically the best opportunity we have in the whole picture. I wish that Lou would get together with Max Steiner immediately, show him this note, and discuss the matter with him.

DOS

To: Mr. Russell Birdwell

November 24, 1939
Dear Russ:

I have succeeded in persuading Mr. Whitney that he should associate himself publicly with Gone With the Wind, and overcome his long-standing resistance to personal publicity.

I am anxious, if possible, to associate Mr. Whitney with articles such as those appearing in Life, Time, Look, etc. Among the other things that I think should be brought out are ... that he insisted Gone With the Wind should be made in its full length; that as chairman of the company, he refused to consider any offers to purchase it, even when these offers got up to the million dollar mark; that throughout the picture his faith in it never wavered; that he kept in touch with me by telephone almost every day as to its progress, and that never for a moment did he have any doubt about the outcome, or any worry about its cost, assuring the members of our Board at all times that he was confident of the final result, and that he would share responsibility for it; that every major decision was made jointly with him, including the one whereby we made the deal with MGM for release through them, and securing Gable.

DOS

To: Mr. Russell Birdwell

November 25, 1939
Dear Russ:

... In all candor, is this what you would call a publicity report on the greatest theatrical attraction of all time, a couple of weeks in advance of its release? For the love of Pete, let's get someone in to do some work here.

If you would like to make me a little bet, or a large one, I will undertake, busy as I am, to devote fifteen minutes a day to publicity on Gone With the Wind for the next week, and at the end of that week, to have accomplished personally five times as much as is covered on this report. Do you want the bet?

DOS

To: Miss Katharine Brown

November 27, 1939

As I have wired you, I hope you are discouraging any idea of an earlier arrival in Atlanta.

You must bear in mind that Gable has been opposed to this whole trip from the outset. He is still squawking about the ball, claiming that going to the opening is bad enough, but that selling thousands of tickets because of a personal appearance by him at a ball is a little thick. I understand his viewpoint, especially since he is very self-conscious and shy with crowds and obviously is going to have an uncomfortable time. Strickling assures me that the ball will be all right, since he is sure Clark will go through with it once it is clear to him that it is for charity, etc., and once we have him in Atlanta. But now to go back to him, in view of his feelings about the entire trip, and try to tell him that a few hours before the ball, the ball itself, the entire next day, and the opening are not enough is something that I won't do.

Clark is a very nice fellow, but a very suspicious one, and very quickly and not infrequently gets the notion in his head that people are taking advantage of him. All we have to do is to have this happen through trying to get too much, and anything can happen, from not having him show up at all to having him very difficult when he does get there. Carole Lombard's nonappearance is solely the result of the Gables getting the idea that MGM was not behaving properly about the trip. It's not a question of whether his attitude on these matters is right or wrong: It's simply that we are going to put him through enough torture for the time he will be in Atlanta without aggravating it simply because the mayor and half-a-dozen other Atlantans decide it would be nice to have him there for the better part of still another day. I am surprised they didn't decide they would like to have him there for the whole week. This would have made just as much sense.

I would like you to consider whether it wouldn't be a smart thing to have the arrival in town a complete secret from the public, with a dramatic entrance of Gable and Leigh at the ball, where they would be seen for the first time in Atlanta with all the glamour that we can surround them with. It seems to me this would be much better showmanship, especially since there will be plenty of festivities the next

110 For the gala première of GWTW.
111 Howard Strickling, Director of Publicity for MGM on the West Coast.
112 The actress was Mrs. Clark Gable in private life.
day, and probably a mob at the airport when he leaves. I would like to be in a position to be able to tell Clark the exact reverse of his going through additional things—and rather that, at our insistence, we have spared him festivities that were planned for the afternoon of his arrival.

In all of this I haven’t mentioned Miss Leigh. No mention is necessary. You know her as well as I do, and she’s not going to be exactly Pollyanna about what we put her through. But in her case I feel that she owes it to herself, and to the picture. In Clark’s case I feel that whatever he does for us is in the nature of a great favor, and that we should regard it as such. He doesn’t need Atlanta and he doesn’t need us and he doesn’t need these idiotic festivities. He is the biggest star in the world, and any time he wants to show his face for three minutes, he can get a fortune for it. . . .

I checked with Larry Olivier this morning, and it is satisfactory with him if we announce that he is coming to Atlanta as a trailer for Rebecca. We will arrange today to send photographs of Olivier and stories concerning him in Rebecca, as you suggest. . . .

My sister-in-law, Edith Goetz, informed me last night that Claudette Colbert is coming with her and Mr. Goetz. . . . Poor deluded Claudette is coming under the notion that she is going to have a good time. It is okay with me, as she is really a terribly sweet girl and we will have no trouble with her of any kind. . . .

DOS

To: Miss Katharine Brown

November 28, 1939

. . . Before I could say anything whatsoever about the Atlanta hope of getting Gable there earlier, Strickling mentioned that if just one more request were made of Gable, we wouldn’t have him at all.

Strickling went on to say, interrupted every few seconds by Birdwell speaking in agreement, that in his opinion the plans that he has heard about concerning the festivities on arrival should not be gone through with. He and Birdwell both feel, and I must say I agree with them one hundred per cent, that the parade, or anything else in connection with the opening festivities that smacks of the reception of a conquering hero, is going to be so ridiculous as to make Gable, the picture, the entire trip, MGM, and ourselves laughingstocks of the whole country. After all, we have only made a motion picture, and we are only motion-picture people, and the idea of a town receiving us as though we had just licked the Germans is something that I for one will not go through with. You couldn’t get me into one of those cars for a million bucks, and I daresay you won’t get Gable into any of them either, so the parade will probably wind up with Nick Schenck and [Loew’s, Inc. Vice-President] Charlie Moskowitz being received with rotten eggs by an outraged Southern citizenry. . . .

As far as I am concerned, and anybody else other than the stars, for God’s sake, don’t let us in for any nonsense that makes us ridiculous. The public isn’t interested in us as personalities, and if the press wants us, they can get us at the hotel.

Furthermore, I am thinking of coming by train with Irene and some of the others, for various reasons—first, because I see no reason for going by plane when I can go by train, getting a little rest, and some sleep; second, to avoid a great deal of the nonsense (and I hope that my arrival by train won’t be publicized either); and third, to avoid the one-in-a-hundred chance that something would delay the plane so that I wouldn’t be there for the opening. My anxiety to be at the opening is not to be seen, but to see. I want to be present to enjoy (hopefully) the first opening of the picture, but not to make a horse’s ass of myself. . . .

I hope all of this doesn’t upset His Honor and various others who want to make a Roman holiday out of this. Let’s satisfy Atlanta in a dignified way.

DOS

Mr. William S. Paley

485 Madison Avenue

New York, N.Y.

December 6, 1939

Dear Bill:

The thought occurs to me that you might like to have one of your record companies get out one or more records of the musical score of Gone With the Wind. I know that under ordinary circumstances the musical score of a picture couldn’t be expected to sell records, but everything in connection with Gone With the Wind is apparently attracting such unprecedented attention that this may be the exception. And incidentally, the score is quite beautiful.

115Selznick flew to Atlanta.
116Chairman of the Board of Columbia Broadcasting System.
Is there anything in union rules that prevents your making a record and selling it from motion-picture sound track? If there is no such rule, then the record might be made very cheaply.116

Cordially,

MISS KATHARINE BROWN DECEMBER 11, 1939
GEORGIAN TERRACE HOTEL
ATLANTA GEORGIA
HAVE JUST FINISHED "GONE WITH THE WIND." GOD BLESS US ONE AND ALL.

DAVID

Mr. Frank Capra117
9336 Washington Boulevard
Culver City, California
January 22, 1940

Dear Frank:

I have been brooding about our talk of last week, and burning over the cause of it. There are several conclusions I have reached, and several points that I should like to make. I want first of all to express my very sincere appreciation of the frankness with which you replied to my questions, and of the characteristic honesty of your discussion. It is only because of my knowledge of your character that I write you as I do, and only because of my knowledge of the unselfishness with which you have devoted yourself to industry problems, large and small, that I ask your patience in wading through this letter. I write as I do in acceptance of your statement that matters of this kind are held in the strictest privacy by your Board [Screen Directors Guild Board]. As you know, there have been leaks about previous discussions, but I am confident that you will be able to avoid a repetition of this.

I leave it entirely with you as to what you do with this letter. You may use it in whole or in part with your group; you may destroy it; or you may use it for the excrescence of the Guild, which is a suggestion that may be made to you if any of your confreres hear that I have written a letter. There is only one thing that I wish you would do, and that is to check its accuracy with everyone who worked on Gone With the Wind, including particularly Victor Fleming. Until recently, I would have acted under the assumption that my word was good enough, and that my integrity was unquestioned in this business. As a few of my friends know, I have tossed away millions of dollars in the protection of this integrity, and of my reputation, which a few of your men seem inclined so casually to impair. But apparently there is a new grand jury in the business, composed of your associates, that either does not know me, or that wishes to disabuse me of any notions I may have about my reputation. And it is for this reason that I suggest that you check up, particularly with Vic.

It is a pretty sad commentary on Hollywood that a group of important leaders in an important industry can spend their time trying to figure out how to correct a situation they deem important, a situation in which a member of the industry is receiving credit for his own work, a credit which is apparently not to the liking of this group.

I say that I am receiving credit that is properly mine. Since I am not expectant that my statement would be accepted by a group of directors, I quote one of their group, Victor Fleming (in speaking to a group at his own studio, whose testimony is available): "David not alone produced the picture; he wrote it, and he half directed it."

But whatever credit is being given me is a credit that comes almost entirely voluntarily from the press, a credit that could no more have been stopped than could the blame that would have attached to me, and me solely, if the picture had been a disappointment .... Since the picture has been finished, I have tried very honestly and sincerely not to blow my own horn. I have turned down all kinds of interviews and other publicity that was offered, since my satisfaction with the finished job, and my knowledge that I was inseparably connected with the picture in the public mind, made it completely unnecessary for me to seek any publicity. However, I am forced into the details of my contribution by your men; and, frankly, if it is Victor Fleming they are trying to serve, I can only say that the more they talk about it, the more they are going to reveal just how much this was a producer-made picture ....

We went ahead with the script, with the casting, with the sets, with the color plans, with the staff, and with all the fabulous preparation involved in a picture of this size, long before Victor Fleming ever came near it. When Victor did come on the picture, and often subsequently, he said, "This is your picture, David. I am doing exactly what

116Background scores from dramatic films produced in America were not made available on commercial recordings until the 1940s, primarily because it was thought there was not a sufficient market. The score from GWTW (a recreation, not the sound track), was not issued until 1954, although various short renditions of the Tara theme had been available for several years.

117At this time Capra was President of the Screen Directors Guild.
you tell me to do, and I hope it turns out all right."

I do not mean in any way to detract from the brilliant job that Victor did. I have gone on record with the press many times, starting with almost the first rushes that he directed, that in my opinion he was doing one of the greatest directorial jobs the industry has ever seen. I regard it as doubly brilliant because he did not know the complete story, and did not have time to finish reading the book until the picture was almost completed; because he did not have any preparation; because he was lighting actors who did not want him, and whose feelings I had to assuage morning, noon, and night, and who did not appreciate what he was doing; because he was a sick man who undertook the job unwillingly, and despite the fact that he was physically and mentally worn out; and because he executed with such brilliant perfection every single conception of Margaret Mitchell, of myself, and of a staff which knew the subject backward, had devoted two years to thought of it, and which would have been horribly critical if Victor’s work had been anything short of perfection. I think that if Victor does not win the Academy Award for his job on this picture—probably the most difficult, particularly under the circumstances, in many, many years—it will be in large measure traceable to the detraction from his work that has been occasioned by his well-meaning friends, particularly if they persist in forcing the exact facts about the picture to become more widely known. As you well know, this town is filled with envy and hypocrisy, and there are many people who would leap at the knowledge of the extensive work done on the film by other men to attempt to minimize Victor’s outstanding job. . . .

The billing of the picture was entirely in my control, and if you will investigate the advertising, you will find that his name and my own are in exactly the same size. The same is true of the screen credit, and I showed Victor the two places where I wanted to use the direction and production credits and asked him which he would like to have, and I followed his choice. I even went to the extent of retaking the entire main title to give Victor’s name additional prominence, which is also a matter of record. . . .

I pleaded with Victor to go to the Atlanta and New York openings, and one reason why he has not received more publicity is that he did not attend either, because of his pique over a piece of literature prepared and issued not by me, but by the studio to which he is under long-term contract. I straightened this all out with Victor; we had some very nice talks in which we expressed mutual regrets that anything had ever come up to separate us after the trial we had been through together; and we literally threw our arms around each other and decided not to let any outsiders spoil a long and warm friendship; and I thought that this was the end of it, until some others took the matter up and decided to make it their issue, even when it was obviously of no interest to Victor. . . .

Now permit me to comment on the treatment of the other directors who worked on the film. There were some things said about George Cukor which were untrue and possibly damaging. I did my very best to contradict these errors, as I can prove. I was extremely careful at the time George and I came to a disagreement that he should not be harmed. . . . I was made the subject of a great many nasty remarks, both in the press and privately, and I am glad to be able to look back upon my behavior and know that I kept silent and took the rap along with the knowledge that my silence increased the difficulty of the spot I was in in relation to the whole endeavor. I must say that George’s behavior was exemplary, and I was glad to have it proven that my long-standing friendship with him had not been misplaced. Neither then, nor since, has George been anything but sympathetic and unselfish; and one of my most cherished mementos of Gone With the Wind is an affectionate wire from George to me at the Atlanta opening expressing his most fervent hopes for the picture’s success. I could wish that all people in the business behaved as well.

I might inquire in passing as to just how much I held down George Cukor’s publicity and credit through all the long years we were associated.

Before George left Gone With the Wind, I made very sure that his future was protected, and spent days securing for him his next assignment [The Women (1939)]. I urge that you call George Cukor and ask him, first, whether he holds me in any way accountable for unfortunate things which were said in some of the papers; and second, how he feels about the treatment that I accorded him generally, during the long years of our association and right up to and including the time that he resigned from Gone With the Wind, and also since then.

Sam Wood, I believe, came off without either credit or blame. . . .

I wanted very much, and I freely admitted, to see George and Sam get some credit out of their labors; but they didn’t want it, and Vic didn’t want it. Vic did suggest, when I discussed the matter with him, that they be credited in the program; but when this credit appeared,
it was so phrased—not by me, but by the MGM people in New York—as to offend Vic.

I say I wanted to give George and Sam credit because if anyone has been done an injustice in connection with the credits on *Gone With the Wind*, it is these two men and Bill Menzies. I think there is an ironic note in any complaints about Victor’s credits, when the fact of the matter is that Victor is receiving enormous credit, not simply for his own brilliant work, but also for the work of these other men. Frankly, a complaint as to improper credits to Cukor, Wood, and Menzies would make much more sense; and against such a charge, I would have no defense except the precedent of the business, and the extent to which I went to protect Victor.

Cukor . . . has several sequences still in the picture—several very important ones.

Three solid reels119 of *Gone With the Wind*, as it stands today, were directed by Sam Wood, including several of the most important sequences in the film.

Bill Menzies spent perhaps a year of his life in laying out camera angles, lighting effects, and other important directorial contributions to *Gone With the Wind*, a large number of which are in the picture just as he designed them a year before Vic Fleming came on the film. In addition, there are a large number of scenes which he personally directed, including a most important part of the spectacle. Day and night, Sundays and holidays, Menzies devoted himself to devising effects in this picture for which he will never be adequately credited.

Since your associates are so concerned about the directorial credit, does it not occur to them that they might also be concerned about Cukor, Wood, and Menzies? It seems to me that if the directors are honest with themselves, or were to be psychoanalyzed, it would develop that what they really resent is the increased credit that has recently been given to producers, rather than what has happened to Vic Fleming; and that what they really fear is that some producers may get credit for work that directors have done. I sympathize with their fears, and I even understand their resentment. I think that there are many producers in this business who are receiving credit for directors’ work; but I also think there are some directors who are getting credit for producers’ work; and I think that there are too few of the ideal collaborations, where both director and producer contribute, and both receive credit.

119 Approximately thirty-three minutes.

And furthermore, I have never understood why it is impossible for two men to get credit for different jobs. I have known of no case where a director has suffered through a producer also getting credit for a fine picture, any more than the director has suffered through a writer getting credit. Attempts to eliminate such collaborations can only be harmful to the business as a whole. I say without fear of refutation that neither Victor nor myself could have done as well on *Gone With the Wind* without the other. The growing obsession of the one-man jobs is based on vanity, as some men who are attempting to write, direct, and produce will to their sorrow learn, and, in fact, have in some cases already learned. The reaction is already setting in, and two or three splendid directors have had the good sense to give up their vanity, rather than let it destroy them, and return to direction, working in collaboration with first producers.

In any event, I do not think that a group of men who have set themselves up as a Guild in pursuit of equity, and presumably with the avowed purpose of protecting the individual against the group, should this early in its career turn around and so distort its objectives as to have the group attack the individual, in this case myself, without regard to equity. . . .

The last time a gang sat around and decided to cut me up was at a producer meeting some years back, after I had stated that the business should be broken up into units, and that I proposed to start this movement by forming a company with Lewis Milestone. The producers temporarily succeeded, and I had to await my chance for independence. One would think that the success of my independence was something to be rooted for by the directors who have so long fought factory methods, as I have fought this. (Perhaps your gang can harm me. But I suggest that they consider whether in harming me they are not harming a leading advocate of so much that they have stood for.)

If it be one of the purposes of the Directors Guild to attempt to tear down producers, despite repeated assurances to the contrary during discussions I had with your members, and regardless of whether or not they have benefited the business, regardless of their record with directors, and without even the most cursory investigation, then I am very sorry indeed that I have had any dealings with the Directors Guild. I was thrown out of producer meetings, and have never been invited back, since I fought violently and singlehandedly on behalf of the Guilds; I can only say that I am sorry at this late date to discover that the producers en masse were right, and that I was wrong . . . .

I suggest also that the Guild investigate my dealings with directors.
in the past. To go back to MGM, I should like to remind any of your group who were with that company that for many, many years the director received a very small credit, along with many other credits, on all MGM pictures. My contract with MGM gave me control of my pictures, and I insisted, despite considerable argument, that whatever was done on other MGM pictures, the director would receive a separate card on my pictures. As a result of this, MGM was forced to give a separate card to the director on all its pictures.

I suggest that you ask John Cromwell what treatment he received from me on Little Lord Fauntleroy, Prisoner of Zenda, and Made for Each Other [Selznick International (1939)].

I suggest that you ask William Wellman what treatment he received from me on A Star Is Born and Nothing Sacred. I also call to your attention that if credit-stealing were in my line, Billy Wellman would not have found it in order to say, upon receiving the Academy Award for the story of A Star Is Born, that the Award should have been given to me.

I suggest that you ask Norman Taurog what treatment he received from me on Tom Sawyer.

I might comment that I have had any number of directors seek the opportunity to work with me, if only for one picture, and they mention, among other things, the tremendous credit that they receive as a result of having made a picture under the perfection ideal that I always seek.

I suggest that you give particular attention to the case of Alfred Hitchcock, and decide for yourself whether any studio in your knowledge, in the entire history of the business, has ever given the publicity build-up to a director that I have given to Alfred Hitchcock, and the proof of this build-up is that whereas his agent could not get bids for him at the time I signed him, he is now in tremendous demand, despite the fact that his first picture since that time has not even been seen... and is not yet even edited!

I daresay that in checking with the directors who have worked with me, you will find that I have increasingly become a supervisor of every detail of production and direction. This reached its climax on Gone With the Wind, because of the spot I was on, and because I alone had the reins of the picture in my hands.

\[194\] A single name on the screen during the credit titles which precede a film.

\[195\] Director Alfred Hitchcock had not worked on an American film until Selznick hired him to direct Rebecca (1940).

I say that I have increasingly supervised every detail, and I am aware that there have been complaints from directors on this score. But this happens to be my production method, and if directors resent this method, they don’t have to work with me. They are free men, and until advised to the contrary by the Directors Guild, I am also a free man. I have had a long and difficult struggle in this business, particularly since starting my own company, which I like to think has, in itself, been a very fine thing for the business as a forerunner of other independent units, and particularly in proving to financiers the feasibility of such units. I went ahead and made Gone With the Wind according to my own lights, against the advice of every single person who had any contact with me in or outside my company, and including without exception every single other person connected with the more important phases of the production. I was told by the most important people in this business that no independent company could hope to achieve the result I was after; and I replied that only an independent company could achieve such a result, that it was impossible in a factory. Everything in Gone With the Wind, without exception, is as I wanted it to be. I took the gamble on my own conceptions, and on my own methods. So let’s not cloud the issue. Let them attack me on the grounds of too much interference, or let them attack me on their personal animosities to my face.

Whatever I have been accused of, I am not aware that anyone has yet charged me with being yellow; and I could not sit by and let attacks upon me take place without fighting back. I have not been terrified by producer groups, and I don’t intend at this stage of my career to be terrorized by director groups. I will meet them fairly and squarely on any issue any time.

January 22, 1940

PERSONAL

Dear Carole [Lombard]:

I have received your messages through Myron [Selznick], and am anxious to get together on the [writer Norman] Krasna idea as soon as possible.

Before we proceed, there is something I would like to discuss with you very frankly. Are you sure, Carole, that we should make another picture together? I know from countless sources how highly you

\[196\] Carole Lombard had appeared in Nothing Sacred and Made for Each Other for Selznick.