First, because the mythology of woman has changed; in the novel, in films, woman is less and less the femme fatale, no longer the destroyer of men; she can no longer be essentialised, stopped from existing or made into a precious and dangerous object; she has rejoined the human race.

Roland Barthes, *Jardin des Arts*, 1961

Millions of women watch movies and fantasize; gazing at stars acting as seductive style guides. We depend on Hollywood, alone in the Fashion firmament, to keep our imaginings alive, and its allure persists. Big screen Fashion legends influence the way women want to look: Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce*, Bette Davis in *The Great Lie*, Lauren Bacall in *To Have and Have Not*, Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday*, Kirsten Dunce in *Marie Antoinette*. Through these and other compelling moving image texts, we see ourselves as business gurus, sex goddesses, queens, criminals, mothers, beats, wives and lovers. These roles, and the way stars appear in them, pick up on the mesmerizing model set in motion by Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. This is the movie which began Hollywood’s love affair with Fashion and established a pre-post-Feminist ambience which became a potent marketing force. Roland Barthes, recognizing how film was playing its part in changing the way women were seen, and saw themselves, wrote of women as wearers of jewels as status symbols. *Gone with the Wind* is a model for his idea, a paradigm for his hypothesis. In it, Scarlett O’Hara begins as a precious and dangerous object and a destroyer of men; then, seen as a member of the human race, she becomes both Fashion and role model. Her obsession with the way she looked led to her downfall,
but it was the way the film looked that entranced her followers. These were the millions of women fans ready to buy into the designs which most reminded them of the film and of Scarlett’s doomed love affair with the devastatingly debonair Rhett Butler. Hollywood’s make was scorched onto Gone with the Wind, its magic conjured by the costumes for the cast, and in particular five of the dresses made for Vivien Leigh. Our seduction was assured as we fell in love with Rhett dressed in superbly draped clothes, commissioned by Clark Gable from his own tailor. In 2007, using new computerized lip-reading technology, footage from silent German wartime movies was released, showing Hitler speaking to one of his loyal countrywomen. She had been invited to visit Hitler’s mountain residence, the Berghof in Obersalzberg, bought by the Nazis in the 1920s as a retreat for privileged members of the Party. Eva Braun’s home movies, recording meetings with top conspirators, were on offer. ‘I know you would rather be watching Gone with the Wind,’ the mass murderer was filmed saying to the credulous loyalist. Even though Hitler censored Hollywood’s output, in both Germany and occupied France, he did not forbid costume dramas; so everyone had GWTW to feed their unsafe anti-modernism and even more dangerous nostalgia:

There was a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South. Here in this pretty world, Gallantry took its last bow. Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and of Slave. Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered, a Civilization gone with the wind ...

Margaret Mitchell, who wrote the American Civil War novel in 1936, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her book in 1937. By this time, work on filming the transatlantic bestseller was under way and a search for an actor to play the heroine had begun. It was released in 1939, just months before the outbreak of World War II. The film’s prologue sets the tone for post-war women to want to return to the looks and settings of the belle époque adored by Christian Dior’s mother. For Dior, there was the opportunity for him to start a reactionary revolution, designing dresses for hausfrauen across the developed world, and costumes for parties in Paris celebrating the Ancien Régime without fear of tumbrils or the guillotine.
In *GWTW* David O. Selznick was making a costume epic. He was making it in colour, still a new process at that time. It became a phenomenon, with more tickets sold for it than any other film to the end of the 20th century. Women watching the movie say of Scarlett O’Hara that she is ‘powerful’ first and ‘beautiful’ second. She is determined to save Tara, her family’s cotton-growing estate in Georgia and, like American pioneers, prepared to kill to defend her property. To succeed she has to take on male values and use her femininity to negotiate a power base while ceaselessly seeking the sexual fulfilment at the heart of the film’s romance. Regarded as a feminist role model by film critics in 1974, yet castigated by anti-male feminists for being obsessed by men, the control her glamorous character exerts as a woman interests gay men, and her business acumen is seen by career women as a positive
endorsement of their choices. Evidence for audiences to see Scarlett as a post-Feminist role model is found in her behaviour in the scene where she rips down her mother’s green velvet curtains. Having remodelled it as a sumptuous day dress for visiting the prison-bound Rhett Butler, she tries to negotiate a loan to pay the taxes on war-ravaged Tara. When Selznick made the movie he could not have realized how many women would be influenced by its story. Research carried out by Helen Taylor, the Exeter-based academic, for her book _Scarlett’s Women_ (1989), revealed:

ambivalence towards Scarlett, either because they think they ought to despise her for her outrageous behaviour or because she expresses herself in a way they are reluctant to acknowledge as valid for themselves. ‘She’s such a con – but also a very clever woman,’ says one, and another: ‘You can’t help admiring her gumption in spite of her faults.’ Adjectives with negative connotations, like ‘ruthless’, ‘greed’, ‘go-getting’, ‘flighty’, and ‘strong-willed,’ are juxtaposed with positive attributes such as ‘strong,’ ‘powerful’, ‘courageous’, and ‘having zest’.  

Investigating the meaning of _Gone with the Wind_ as a cultural phenomenon playing a significant part in the lives of audiences, Professor Taylor came to conclusions about its reach and influence across the globe, saying:

_GWTW_ lives in the imaginations, memories and experiences of individuals and groups – that is, through the eyes of its fans, who, to judge by the statistics of book sales, film and television viewing figures and a wealth of memorabilia and popular references, come from many nations, classes, races, generations and life experiences.

The women taking part in Helen Taylor’s survey are some of the many millions to have influenced the politics of Feminism, and Fashion, since the middle of the 20th century. Vivien Leigh’s portrayal of Scarlett O’Hara in the film offers the view of the dissenting woman forced into a man’s world who learns, perhaps too late, that her sexuality does not have to be submerged under veils of propriety. It is Clark Gable’s portrayal of Rhett Butler, with his understanding of the compromise
involved in dealing with human sexuality, which places Scarlett in this liberating position. Looking back to the time before World War II, film critic Molly Haskell places Scarlett as the ‘ante-bellum version of the flapper, the woman who defies all conventions except the sexual ones’. At this time it was ‘a woman’s only job to withhold favours, to be the eternal virgin, not all that difficult, really, since her repressive conditioning had so buried the urge in the first place’. During the 20th century, women were involved with much more than these sexual politics. Recognizing that *GWTW* was in tune with the spirit of the age, Haskell describes Scarlett as being:

unfairly lambasted for her wily flirtatious and waist-pinching femininity, but she was, in many ways a forerunner of the career woman, with her profession (the land), her business acumen, and her energy that accumulated steam from sexual repression.

For Scarlett to become the prototype for post-war woman, she first has to become a popular icon: a guide through lost dreams, a fantasy to enable the re-enactment of our enduring desires. In *Gone with the Wind*, as Cinema weaves its *mise en scène* myths, audiences are seduced by the film’s displays of delayed desire and constructed fetishism, its Oedipal quests and repressed sexual lust.

**Close-ups**

Opening frames show Scarlett in close-up, a technique used sparingly throughout the film. One is used in establishing shots for its opening moments as she is introduced in flirtatious finery, attended by two attractive young southern gentleman beaux. They are excited at the idea of joining the military because they have been thrown out of college; fighting for a cause seems a thrilling adventure to them. She is pictured wearing a white and green, tightly sashed, sprigged cotton dress under a wide-brimmed sun hat, in one of the few close-ups, saying, ‘War, war, war. This war talk’s spoiling the fun at every party there’s been.’ In *Fashioning Film Stars*, Drake Stutesman (cited by Rachel Moseley) writes of the hat designer, John Frederics. She explains the hat-and-face illusion at the heart of a contradiction inherent in costume design, hiding to expose, tempting the audience in:
The milliner, making the look, must also prevent the hat from showing off, because if the woman disappears so will the look. As Vivien Leigh said when she met John [Frederics] to discuss *Gone with the Wind*'s costumes – ‘all I ask is – don’t let them see the hat before they see my face’.7

Moseley added that various hats like Garbo’s jewelled, triangular helmet in *Mata Hari* (George Fitzmaurice, 1932), Leigh’s wheel hat in *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), were wrongly attributed to the costume designer and were in fact all made by John Frederics, who as well as working with Adrian, also worked with Walter Plunkett for *Gone with the Wind*.7

In a later scene, and after Scarlett is seen being tightly laced into a corset by her devoted Mammy, she poses the rhetorical question, ‘Why does a girl have to be so silly to catch a husband?’ At that moment she is forcing down a mouthful of food to acquire a socially acceptable appetite for the Wilkes’ barbecue. In so saying, the naïve southern-belle heroine touches on the crucial dilemma of modern woman. She is victim of the pressures put on women by the modes of the day, not able to operate as a free-wheeling entrepreneur and sexually fulfilled wife because she believes to be desirable she must be virginally slim.

**Leigh stage-managed the occasion**

Vivien Leigh was a Fashion favourite in the mid 1930s even before she landed the role of Scarlett O’Hara. Cecil Beaton, the London photographer, often took her picture for *Vogue*. They were particularly keen to have models on their pages with the green eyes associated with heroines from novels. Vivien Leigh followed the progress of David Selznick’s hunt for Scarlett through the pages of *The Times*. Bronwyn Cosgrave, in *Made for Each Other*, believes Leigh was obsessed with the fictional character from Mitchell’s novel. Writing of Oscar-winning glories, Cosgrave says, ‘She acquired the necessary characteristic to clinch the part – blind ambition.’8 The actor Laurence Olivier, Leigh’s lover, arranged a meeting for Vivien with David Selznick through his agent, the director’s brother Myron. Leigh stage-managed the occasion on the first day of shooting, moving into view from the glowing embers of the ‘burning of Atlanta’ set, her eyes made up to emphasize their greenness and shape, which were Scarlett’s from the novel, and wearing a silk...
dress which clung to her sylph-like figure. The 36-year-old Selznick, known to be a snob, was completely swept off his feet by the vision. In a published memo he reveals that he knew from Leigh’s screen tests, authorized by him that day, that she could act the part, but added, ‘I’ll never recover from that first look.’ There seems to have been no arguing with the rightness of choice of actress except for an embarrassing discrepancy related to Leigh’s body shape. Scarlett is not ever seen as a victim figure, but Vivien Leigh suffered for her art and her aspiration. Victor Fleming, the director Selznick appointed after Cukor, and Selznick himself thought Leigh’s small breasts were wrong for the costumes. Things became even tougher for her when Selznick suddenly fired George Cukor. He had seen his Scarlett as a more delicate character than the tough cookie, femme fatale his successor, Victor Fleming, wished to create. Fleming and Selznick agreed a ‘heaving cleavage’ would be necessary for Leigh. They were obviously out of tune with the more relaxed, less tortured, lines of thirties Fashion which Plunkett’s unconscious imagination included in his designs. Cosgrave records:

Trouble was, Leigh’s flat chest had gone undetected during her screen test and preproduction. But before Fleming’s cameras, the top of Scarlett’s antebellum gown caved in, most especially the long burgundy velvet dress her husband, Rhett Butler, in a jealous rage, forces her to wear to the birthday celebration of her beloved Ashley Wilkes. ‘Wear that!’ Rhett orders Scarlett, removing it from her bedroom wardrobe and tossing it at her. ‘For Christ’s sake let’s get a good look at the girl’s boobs!’ bellowed Fleming from behind the camera when Leigh appeared in it on set.

Vivien Leigh had to endure the ignominy of having her breasts bound together with tape to create a more luscious effect. Other stresses for the actress were having to suffer tobacco-sodden breath, from fellow actors, and temperamental outbursts from Fleming and Selznick. Even after delivering lines perfectly, but with a not-so-spectacular sunrise, she and her colleagues were forced into 2.30 a.m. re-shoots for the ‘I’ll never go hungry again’ scene. Curiously in character, Olivia de Havilland, who plays the saintly Melanie Wilkes in GWTW, noticed changes in Leigh. From Love Scene by Jesse Lasky, cited in Made for Each Other, we learn that on the final day of shooting Leigh seems not to have recognized her co-star:
‘She looked so diminished by overwork,’ remembered de Havilland. ‘Her whole atmosphere had changed. She gave something to that film which I don’t think she ever got back.’

Leigh loved flowers and spent time on precious Sundays recovering from the pressures of filming in the garden belonging to George Cukor, the more humane original director, who had cast her in the role. For the 12th Academy Awards night, when the film won Oscars in nine categories, Leigh wore the Red Poppy dress designed by Irene Gibbons from her spring 1940 collection. Fashion gave something back in the uncorseted, gently flowing dress, with its softly floating flowers, which delighted Leigh.

Scarlett O’Hara is seen as a role model when, in Hollywood’s most notorious act of bricolage, she rips down her mother’s green velvet curtains to be remodelled as a sumptuous day dress for visiting prison-bound Rhett Butler.
During key scenes in which Ashley Wilkes, the honourable land-owning war hero, is introduced, along with the gun-running pragmatic, Rhett Butler, the camera is directed to give us clues to their status in the film. The sequence opens with a shot of Scarlett’s back, the first opportunity to show off bustles of every kind. Moving from the carriage to the Wilkes’s ‘Twelve Oaks’ mansion, we watch as Scarlett, with her wavy brown curls covered by the enormous, green-velvet-tied sun hat, holds our attention in the middle of the screen. As she turns to greet India Wilkes, saying, ‘What a lovely dress, I just can’t take my eyes off it!’, the camera reveals the compliment as a lie. Scarlett is not even looking at the dress as she says it; her eyes are glancing around to see who’s there. The camera continues to stay focused on Scarlett, her dazzling white dress and green sash in contrast to the muted shades around her. Everything is balanced: the pillars on either side of the doorway she walks through, the staircase running up on each side of the screen framing her; even the figures evenly distributed about room. The iniquitous old order is about to be destroyed and Scarlett is at the centre of the action.

The relationship between Rhett and Scarlett is based on a marriage of equals. They are two materialistic pragmatists. Their love-making in the film matches the ideal vision of sexual bliss imagined by Sigmund Freud, the author of modern sexual theory, who was analysing, and writing, at around the same time that Margaret Mitchell was penning her classic work of fiction. Rhett is able to see Scarlett as a suitable object for masculine sexuality: a synthesis between two feminine sexual types, the idealized chaste wife and the despised, but sexy, prostitute. He advises her on fashionable underclothes, buys her trousseau, although she, even after committing murder and twice marrying for advantage, is still concerned that people should not know about these intimacies. The script might make us think she is being too bold, asking for large diamonds, wanting to make everyone jealous but, in fact, we want her to win because of her gutsy invasions of patriarchal territory, her interest in money, her shoot to kill tactics. As the movie authors Lapsley and Westlake write:

The constitution of the subject typically takes the form of an identification with a character who is lacking – Scarlett in Gone with the
Wind seeking fulfilment; spectators identify not solely with idealised figures, but with those who lack, and they do so in order to have fantasy organise desire.  

Still using *GWTW* as a case in point, they say that Rhett is the object, constituted at the same time as he is introduced in the film, which will, apparently, make good the lack. Casting Clark Gable as Rhett did not alone lead to besotted fans saying ‘Everyone wants a Rhett Butler in their lives’. Gable was Hollywood’s biggest star; no one else could have played the part. Even though Selznick had paid dearly to get Gable for the film, and went to great lengths to make sure that nothing would detract from his performance, he did not take on Gable’s tailor. Gable’s agent came to his aid and in a note (4 April 1939) to the directors explained:

> Since Schmidt has been Gable’s tailor all through his career, from the time he started as an obscure actor to the time he became the biggest star in the world, this was an insane order to begin with. I would like to know why, in the first place, the one tailor who should have outfitted Gable was ruled out? As for the future, and in the hope that we will do a decent job with him and not have a repetition of what we have had in the past, I am in hopes that you will sit down with Gable, determine exactly how he has worked in the past, and make sure this is the way he works in the future on his clothes. This should be so organized that, if possible, I see all the sketches for Gable’s clothes for the rest of the picture at one time – but not until and unless Gable has personally approved them all.

**Monitoring crowd scenes**

Having searched across the globe for an actress to play Scarlett O’Hara, it was thought that although Walter Plunkett’s meticulous research and careful design processes were fine for the smaller roles and for the hundreds of extras, he was not producing the ‘sensational’ costumes Selznick wanted for her. Muriel King, a designer in the frame, wanted screen credit and $750 a week, and she would do only Scarlett’s costumes. Other designers were asking for similar arrangements. Shooting had started with the burning of Atlanta scene, and Vivien
Leigh had been cast in the important lead role. The production had shifted into a high gear, and Plunkett came through. During the production he had to contend with the difficult Selznick, changes in directors and unreasonable Technicolor advisors. He created more than five thousand separate items of clothing for more than 50 major characters and thousands of extras, as well as monitoring crowd scenes for the proportion of men to women, and the number of women in mourning to reflect the ravages of war. Not a fan of the film, Frances Tempest, the costume designer responsible for *A Room with a View, Calendar Girls, Bertie and Elizabeth* and *The Cazelets*, who kindly spent time watching GWTW, now offers her thoughts on the clothes Plunkett created:

A film always reflects the time when it is made regardless of when the story is set. This is unconscious and only becomes apparent after, say, ten years hindsight. Even when creating a faithful, historically accurate, reproduction of a particular era, after a few years the film will obviously belong to the 1970s, 1980s or whenever it was made. So *GWTW* belongs to 1939 and is in the tradition of other 30s historical dramas such as *Little Women*. To our eyes these films look ‘very 1930s’. I am sure the film-makers thought they were accurately reproducing 19th-century society. With Europe on the brink of war *GWTW* creates a fantasy Deep South. Walter Plunkett has tapped into the zeitgeist, and mined a rich vein of nostalgia, to a world that never actually existed. This is a romantic world of crinolines, ruffles and bows. The men in this world are merely foils for the elaborately dressed women. It is only Rhett Butler, dressed in black, who has any strength or individuality. The Simplicity and Butterick pattern books of 1939 were filled with paper patterns for these full-skirted, puff-sleeved fantasy dresses with ribbon sashes encircling tiny waists, and large picture hats. This is a look also popularised in Walt Disney’s *Snow White*. It was a fashion created by the movies, glamorous but not sophisticated. Think of the dresses of Mae West and Ginger Rogers. World War II brought this style to a standstill with its fabric restrictions and military silhouette, only to emerge triumphant as the New Look when the war was over. The dresses in *GWTW* are firmly part of this moment in fashion. The ultra feminine fashions reinforce the idea of women as helpless decorative creatures. The corset scene where Scarlett’s waist is whittled down to 18 inches must surely have inspired Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock*!\(^{15}\)
Paris

Scarlett, as a model for post-feminist woman, is able to have it all while remaining highly desirable; not cooking brown rice or wearing dull clothes with sandals. Unlike feminists of the 20th century, who marched alone and pitched up tents, Scarlett was helped by Rhett Butler, played by Clark Gable as a ‘new man’, who lent her horses and chose her lingerie, her dresses and her hats. During the American Civil War, Rhett Butler was a gun-runner and international traveller. After rescuing Scarlett from the boredom of enforced mourning for her duped young husband, he bid a large amount of money for a dance with her during a charity auction to raise funds for the Confederacy. He later returned to Atlanta with the gift of a hat, from Paris, which Scarlett did not know how to wear. Turning it the right way round, and watching her experiment with a sideways angle, he said he thought the war had gone on for too long when women like Scarlett were no longer in touch with French Fashions.

**RHETT BUTLER:** … And those pantalettes, I don’t know a woman in Paris who wears pantalettes.
**SCARLETT:** Oh Rhett, what do they – you shouldn’t talk about such things.
**RHETT BUTLER:** You little hypocrite. You don’t mind my knowing about them, just my talking about it.
**SCARLETT:** But really Rhett, I can’t go on accepting these gifts although you are awfully kind.
**RHETT BUTLER:** I’m not kind, I’m just tempting you.
**SCARLETT:** Well if you think I’ll marry you just to pay for the bonnet I won’t.
**RHETT BUTLER:** Don’t flatter yourself. I’m not a marrying man.

This can be seen as the seminal dialogue from *Gone with the Wind* which planted the idea of Paris in the minds of ordinary women all over the USA and Europe, positioning it back at the heart of Fashion after WWII. The city, a Fashion centre over centuries, is considered by Agnès Rocamora in *Fashion’s World Cities*:

Today the Parisian model is no longer conveyed through the principle of patterns to reproduce, but it is no less overt. In the French media, fashion still means Paris. Regularly anchoring fashion to the
Parisian territory, the media have long naturalized the signifying relation between the French capital and *la mode*. The centrality of Paris in all things cultural is consecrated, as it has been since the seventeenth century with the Parisian academies' leading role in the definition of culture, the split between court society and the provinces being replaced by the opposition between Paris and provinces in the eighteenth century.\(^{16}\)

David Gilbert knows Paris has been ‘promoted with great vigour from outside France, particularly in Hollywood’s construction of the city and in the international Fashion press’,\(^{17}\) with ‘metropolitan centres of style such as New York, Paris and Milan … routinely incorporated into the advertising of designer brands and retail outlets’. Agnès
Rocamora, who researches in Cultural Studies and whose interests are in Fashion journalism and Fashion consumption, is insightful in her understanding of how Fashion journalism participates in the production of Paris as a Fashion capital:

The media discourse on *la mode*, then, is also a discourse on Paris, and in the same way that the process of symbolic production of fashion entails the production of the value of designers and their creations, it also entails the production of the symbolic value of Paris. Absorbed, like its derivative ‘Parisian’, into the Fashion rhetoric, the word ‘Paris’ no longer simply refers to a geographical origin. Rather it is turned into a fashion signifier whose value resides in its power to evoke the world of fashion, with the word ‘Paris’ now a synonym for ‘chic’ and ‘elegance’, the latter being a ‘recurring spiel of French fashion’, as Remaury observes in *Paris Vogue*, October 2004.  

Half a century before the internet, in the late 1940s Christian Dior, who had spent much of the war dressing the wives of Nazi officers and French collaborators, revived pre-war looks for post-war customers targeted at *GWTW*’s worldwide audience. He created feminized ‘flower women’, happy to turn their backs on careers and military uniforms. Christopher Breward writes regretting the passing of the exclusiveness of Paris, believing the ‘look’ represented a disruption of Fashion’s inherent inventiveness:

In February 1947 the evocative imagery of the first couture collection to be presented under the name of the designer Christian Dior imprinted an indelible suggestion of the Parisienne on the consciousness of the fashion world … the articulation of these themes through the extraordinary architecture came to be termed the New Look engineered a beautiful but flawed marriage between ideas of place and body. It resulted in the mass consumption of versions of the style in every city of the developed world whilst also announcing the decline of the very notion of Paris which had informed its genesis and guaranteed its popularity.

To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Paris launch of Christian Dior’s ‘New Look’ in 2007, radio producer Susan Marling invited Dior
scholar and Paris resident Malcolm McLaren to present a programme for BBC Radio 4 profiling the man whose reactionary revolution enchanted and outraged women in Europe and America.\textsuperscript{20} McLaren described the anniversary bash in the orangerie at Versailles, where the House of Dior’s 2007 collection was being shown, as the most fabulous Fashion event of the year, to which they had ‘all been invited’. He said the $2 million worth of flamboyance, flamenco dancers and fireworks would have ‘amused the Sun King himself’. The collection, celebrating Art from Michelangelo to Cocteau, had John Galliano, Dior’s chief designer, taking inspiration from Goya’s Spanish dancers, Picasso’s harlequins and the Muses of the Impressionist and Modern painters, ‘many of whom were friends of Christian Dior, himself’.

The atmosphere at Versailles that night was very different from the climate into which the House of Dior had emerged. After four years of Nazi rule the ‘city of lights’ was dim, but after liberation by the American forces and discovery of bebop, which swept Paris, black Americans stayed on rather than return to the segregated USA. On the streets the cult of cool was about to be born, and women wanted a designer to help them shake off the ‘horrible overalls’ and the boxy shapes of wartime clothes. They wanted to look sexy and feminine. It was then, in February 1947, that 30 Avenue Montaigne would become the world headquarters of Fashion. Claire Wilcox, who curated The Golden Age of Couture exhibition at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, was interviewed for the programme and recounted the story of Dior’s clever launch of the New Look. She explained how he had packed his salon with little gilt chairs; perfume everywhere, curtains drawn, crammed to capacity, creating a ‘hot-house atmosphere’. The most important person there was Carmel Snow, influential editor of \textit{Harper’s Bazaar}, with American buyers and the Press. As Dior showed late in the season, some were about to leave when Snow started reporting. They all turned round, and it was the beginning of a new era. She witnessed ashtrays being knocked over by the ‘vast skirts’, and later named the collection the New Look. Lady Antonia Fraser, who translated Dior’s biography into English, remembered being a schoolgirl at the time when everything was about shortages. Her mother did manage to buy a full-skirted turquoise coat, for Antonia, which
used up all her clothing coupons and was impracticable as it caught in her bicycle wheels. ‘We wanted to be ourselves, be women with curves, and tiny waists,’ like English model Princess George Galitzine who, as Jean Dawnay, modelled Dior’s clothes. Bronwyn Cosgrave described the rebirth of Paris through haute Couture. With its fine tailoring, lace-making and fabric production, it produced a glamour and a ‘particular sense of excess, which a new generation craved’.

**French bourgeoisie**

Explaining how the New Look was very good for fabric manufacturers, and especially good for Dior’s sponsor, Marcel Boussac, Claire Wilcox talked of the ‘Bar’ suit, famously photographed by Willy Maywald. With its padded, static jacket and its heavy 80-pound long black wool pleated skirt, it depended for its sculptural form on the 19th-century skills of the corset maker. Coco Chanel said of her rival: ‘Christian Dior doesn’t dress women. He upholsters them.’ Antonia Fraser interpreted his raison d’être, saying: ‘All he wanted was to dress the French bourgeoisie.’ He was not quite the romantic hero from her imagination, which, perhaps, had been inspired, on some unconscious level, by the work of Clark Gable’s tailor. While Harold Wilson was decrying the senselessness of long skirts in Britain, and the UK faced continuing cuts and shortages, Feminists were decrying corsets and long skirts on other grounds. They protested outside Bergdorf Goodman in New York with the slogan ‘Monsieur Dior, we abhor dresses to the floor’. Nevertheless, so strong was the urge to return to the feminized romanticism of earlier decades that most women in New York, Hollywood, Toronto and Boston were improvising to achieve the New Look. ‘Scarlett O’Hara-style, these women were ripping down curtains to make their voluminous skirts,’ Bronwyn Cosgrave revealed. Christian Dior realized that the new silhouette, which was instantly recognizable, caught on with Fashion journalists, making the designs immediately attractive to the public. Even so, Dior seemed perplexed by the level of his success. His designs made up 75 per cent of French Fashion exports, which must have seemed extraordinary, knowing the flow of the political tide in America and Britain.
Before, and during, World War II, New York was poised to become a world-beating Fashion centre. Numbers of American women were being employed away from the home, taking up a diverse range of work and leisure activities. This gave them less time to be involved with having clothes made; for the sourcing of fabrics, the dressmakers’ fittings. There was an opportunity for the rise of ready-to-wear and more especially, within that market, for the emergence of sportswear. Norma Rantisi, in *Fashion’s World Cities* on the status of American Fashion in the 1930s, writes:

Claire McCardell, who was trained at the Parsons School of Design, has been credited as one of the first sportswear designers, redefining American fashion, by introducing beautiful yet comfortable garments, which were *not* inspired by Paris. These simple, wearable styles gained broad acceptance because they resonated with new social roles but also, more generally, with values of democracy and with a view of dress as a means of blurring rather than marking social distinctions. However, the broader recognition and acceptance of this burgeoning New York talent demanded the support of local buyers, fashion editors and journalists, who mediated consumption trends.  

Important movers and shakers in the New York Fashion industry came through with this backing. Rantisi records:

Social ties were forged between key actors in the Garment District. In February 1931, a group of leading women in the industry, including *Vogue* editor Edna Woolman Chase, Helena Rubinstein, Elizabeth Arden, Dorothy Shaver and Eleanor Lambert, held the first meeting of the Fashion Group (later known as Fashion Group International.) The stated objectives of the group were to promote the exchange of information and to enhance the careers of women in the industry. Shortly after its establishment, group members acted on these objectives. The association sponsored lectures on merchandising and advertising. By 1932, prominent group member Dorothy Shaver started naming American designers, such as McCardell, in her store advertisements. Local talent also benefited from the annual openings at the Costume Institute, which became the industry’s biggest social event, linking designers with style promoters and other cultural elites.  


Harnessing America’s innate talent for marketing and promotion was only part of the story. After Paris was occupied by the Nazis in 1940, it could no longer be turned to for inspiration and models for replication. There was a need for America to concentrate on native resources. The American Fashion industry had to step up, and have its efforts encouraged by the powerful and energetic Fashion Group International. America’s influence through Hollywood was a continuing force in the battle for supremacy. Drake Stutesman, the editor of Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media, records:

American style as a world competitor was the first to outstrip the French, who dominated fashion commercially and artistically. By the 1910s, stars were photographed in cinema clothes for fashion magazines and Sears-Roebuck catalogues, and the word ‘film’ was used as an advertising lure. But the public’s desire for these clothes is ironic, as many are impossible to wear. Jean Harlow’s form-fitting satin gowns were glued to her body and steamed off. Mae West was sewn into two identical garments for a scene, one for sitting, one for standing, because each was so tight she could not do both in either of them. Glenn Close also was unable to sit in Anthony Powell’s sexy costumes for her role in 101 Dalmations (1996). The pink gown Marilyn Monroe wore to sing ‘Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend’ in How to Marry a Millionaire (1953) was made from upholstery satin and lined with felt. Given this, it is astounding how many fashion firsts emerged from the bizarre necessities of a film set: padded shoulders (Adrian in the 1930s for Joan Crawford), the cling dress (Rambova for Salome), the strapless bodice (Jean Louis in 1946 for Gilda, anticipating Christian Dior’s New Look of 1947), the pillbox hat (John Frederics and Adrian for Greta Garbo in 1932) and many others.23

Linda M. Scott, in Fresh Lipstick, redresses the balance between Fashion and Feminism. She raises issues surrounding the power of Fashion itself, the influence of advertising and journalism on women; dealing with ideas of sexualization and objectification. Giving women the opportunity to think beyond looks, and focus on the challenge of achieving equality, she examines evidence of subjugation and stereotyping, exploring ideas of domination, myth, popular culture
and commercialism. She observes the incarnation of the American Girl:

In the decades [since], the American girl has appeared in many incarnations. She is Holly Golightly, Scarlett O’Hara and Nancy Drew, we find her in the TV series *That Girl* and *Clueless*. She is Patty Duke’s American twin. She is Cyndi Lauper singing ‘Girls Just Want to Have Fun’. From these characters, even though they differ, we draw a broad outline of the American girl prototype … the American girl is a flirt. She likes to dress up and go to parties, but she would rather be staked to an anthill than go to Sunday school. She is neither stuffy nor self-righteous. Like Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer, the American girl is disobedient … She may seem, at

*During WWII there was the fear that American design would take over. So the Paris group Chambre Syndicale put together Théâtre de la Mode, a collection of dolls on display during the V&A exhibition in London in 2007. Said to have been designed to raise funds for war victims, they were really commissioned to raise the profile of haute couture.*
once, outrageously materialistic and truly heroic, like Scarlett O’Hara driving a mill wagon while pregnant.\textsuperscript{24}

**Fashion consumption**

It is this new woman, from the New World, who became part of a wider narrative, through women’s understanding of Hollywood and the experience of Fashion consumption. If European women were conventional, and followed the rules dictated by their mothers or their nannies, before World War II, they wanted to be à la mode after the conflict was over. Scott believes that the American Girl had been encouraged to feel like this from earlier on in the century. The American Girl, she asserts:

> Always dresses in a way that is both the height of fashion and the edge of fashion. Her look, shocking in its own Fashion time, becomes the cliché of an era.\textsuperscript{25}

Speaking at the Unravelling Couture Culture conference held at the V&A in November 2007, Alexandra Palmer of the Royal Ontario Museum asked the question, ‘How did “Corolle” get onto the streets?’ Considered revolutionary by the fashion press, the New Look was actually called ‘Corolle Line’ by Christian Dior himself. Asking, ‘Why here? Why now?’, Professor Palmer suggested that the flower petal collection contained ‘romantic symbols of a lost world of the elite when women had no need to mend’. This is in almost direct contrast to what was happening in America; here, Fashion customers were being encouraged to buy ready-mades, created by women designers for department stores. She went on to explain the importance of French designers’ marketing strategies. The collections were first shown to buyers and the Press and then shown in boutiques and salons twice a day. Saying ‘If the House relied on models to show haute couture without the Press it was like weddings without the bride,’ she described how essential Carmel Snow was to that Dior ‘Corolle’ collection. Dior became the ‘master of marketing’, selling perfumes, and realizing the ‘importance of the public identifying with the designer’. Dior had his personal and business journeys mapped and followed by the Media, becoming the first popular celebrity couturier. Recognizing the importance of trade between the House and buyers, by 1948 he and his team include Cuba, Finland, Holland, Mexico and Sweden in their contact lists. When Bettina
Ballard, the journalist who was Editor-in-chief of *Vogue* US in the 1950s, heard that designs were being geared towards department store owners’ wives, she said, ‘I would not put it past Dior!’ She would not have been surprised also to learn that both Dior and Andrew Goodman of the New York department store Bergdorf Goodman received the *Légion d’honneur*, France’s highest accolade for services to the country.²⁶

Between 1947 and 1957 all eyes were turned to Paris. So when Paul Gallico wrote *Mrs ’Arris Goes to Paris*, about Ada Harris, a London charwoman in the 1950s, who sees a Dior dress and decides she’s going to own one, he conjured a fairy tale which half the world could identify with. First, she scrimps and saves her money, but when she has enough and takes a trip to Paris, she learns that buying an original couture

With its padded, static jacket and its heavy 80-pound long black wool pleated skirt, it depended for its sculptural form on the 19th-century skills of the corset maker. Coco Chanel said of her rival: ‘Christian Dior doesn’t dress women. He upholsters them.’
creation is a little harder than simply paying up. Gallico, a first-generation Italian immigrant to America, created a legend which had very little realism, either magical or otherwise. His experience of the lives of British cleaners seems to have been sketchy, but his evocation of Dior’s headquarters captures all the hectic commercialism of an international Fashion destination.

The great gray building that is the House of Christian Dior occupies an entire corner of the spacious Avenue Montaigne leading off the Rond-Point of the Champs-Élysées. It has two entrances, one off the avenue proper which leads through to a Boutique, where knick-knacks and accessories are sold at prices ranging from five to several hundreds of dollars, and another more demure and exclusive one.

Claire Wilcox, Fashion curator at the V&A, told conference delegates that research from ‘publications, press and publicity’ began a panoramic view when designing an exhibition. Unravelling couture culture after WWII she had discovered that the recovery of the French Fashion industry had been in the hands of Dior, who saved haute couture in the face of a ‘growing market of ready to wear, especially in the United States’. Paris was put into a position where it was also able to set the template for London couture and Fashion training. During the war there was the fear that American design would take over. So the Paris group Chambre Syndicale put together Théâtre de la Mode, a collection of dolls which were on display during the V&A exhibition in London. Said to have been designed to raise funds for war victims, they were really commissioned to raise the profile of haute couture.

Dior’s New Look, in 1947, made every other dress look outmoded. There was an electric tension – ‘wasp waist of jacket, weight of skirt barely worn by human beings, real old-fashioned corsets to create shape’, in direct contrast to the forties look. Journalist Alison Settle reported that Harold Wilson had said it was ‘unstoppable’ in spite of his warnings against extravagance. London was part of the excitement. In 1947 the V&A decided it had to have a Fashion department and Dior himself visited the capital to be fitted for Savile Row suits. The renaissance of haute couture was central to the exhibition, two to five years in preparation, and to its continuing education and research projects. ‘The construction of haute couture has been the cipher for the whole exhibition,’ Claire Wilcox told delegates. She talked of the Queen wearing Hartnell
in 1950 for a visit to Paris: ‘couture as diplomatic weapon’. This crucial sector of the Fashion industry, used as a yardstick and guiding principle today, is reflected in the extraordinary number of hits to the V&A timeline, tracking the history of couture from Worth to John Galliano, for the 2007 Couture Culture exhibition. There were 100,000 hits in the first six weeks; this was into tens of millions before the end of the show. The writer and broadcaster Drusilla Beyfus talked about haute couture to Claire Wilcox for the Daily Telegraph at the time of the exhibition and came to this conclusion:

"It is natural to speculate on the future of haute couture as it represents such an impenitent display of personal consumption; additionally the exhibition is likely to be viewed against a dicey stock market and a go-green attitude to our glad rags. The metier survives today in a handful of fashion houses, where once there were hundreds. When held, the collections are ‘often extreme and extravagant … Their role is to garner publicity and provide inspiration … I hope couture doesn’t die. It’s very important to retain the craft of couture. These skills once lost become extinct – the tailoring, the embroidery, the weaving, the quality."

Dior’s part in the revival of this fascinating industry after WWII is considered by Valerie Steele, director and chief curator of the museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York:

"The post-war era would indeed be characterised by an extravagantly romantic and ultra feminine fashion that differed dramatically from wartime attire. Yet it is also true that the fashionable silhouette epitomized by Dior’s New Look actually began before the war. During the war years this image of lush femininity was essentially ‘put on ice’; it was only after the war that the freeze melted and the rhythm of fashion burst out again in the work of many designers of whom Dior was only the most famous."

It was Christian Dior himself who said, ‘A golden age seemed to have come again.’ He wanted women to be feminine, describing his intention to create ‘clothes for flower-like women, with rounded shoulders, full feminine busts and hand-span waists above enormous spreading skirts’. Eleri Lynn, assistant curator of The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947–57, writing the preface for their 2008 diary, says, ‘Given the austerity of the post-war years, the swathes of fabric required for
these flowing designs were an extravagant luxury, attracting a great deal of admiration and controversy.’\textsuperscript{30} So how did Dior do it?

**Inventive motorist**

Originally a student of politics who also studied music, Dior was born in Granville, Normandy, and until 1935 ran an art gallery and spent time travelling. He began earning a living in Paris selling fashion sketches to newspapers, and in 1938 worked at the house of the French/Swiss designer Robert Piguet. Joining Lelong in 1942 alongside Pierre Balmain, he was spotted by the cotton magnate Marcel Boussac, who became his patron and helped him open his own couture house. The success of his first collection gave rise to the return to health of the Paris couture industry, with its thousands of specialist workers supporting hundreds of ancillary trades such as embroiderers and featherers, producing hand-made garments.

Writing in *The Fifties in Vogue*, Nicholas Drake recounts the story of this turnaround:

> Fashion in the fifties had never been more feminine. The success of Christian Dior’s extravagantly romantic *New Look* of 1947 with its waspy waists and billowing full skirts reasserted the dominance of Paris fashion and established Dior as its dictator until his death in 1957.\textsuperscript{31}

Christian Dior’s publicity machine was so effective that in a *Vogue* feature, proposing numerous routes through Europe by car by inventive motorists, Dior was featured by the magazine rather in the way Victoria Beckham was written about by Alexandra Shulman for British *Vogue*, April 2008. We are taken behind the scenes to view the superstar at play. Nicholas Drake’s 1950s piece would work just as well today in *Vogue* or *Wallpaper*:

> The difference between Christian Dior’s two homes was as great as that between his tweed sports suits and his embroidered ball dresses. In his old mill house at Milly, near Fontainebleau – white stone walls, stone and red-tiled floors, great blackened beams. His Paris house, by contrast, was rich and elaborate, ‘reflecting the times of Madame Bovary, Whistler, Louis XVI and the Austrian Empire’.
Precious *objets* were everywhere – particularly Persian and early Chinese, but despite the echoes of many epochs the house had unity. Various shades of red, white and green followed through the rooms which repeated the use of textured fabrics for wall hangings and of ormolu and silver for highlights.\(^{32}\)

His activities as a designer and guest at charity balls were recorded:

Christian Dior a jovial moustachioed *garçon* and the Comtesse de Beaumont an enigmatic Egyptian mummy swathed in gold lamé. For the Baronne de Cabrol’s Circus Ball, in aid of underprivileged children, the flower of the French aristocracy rode into the ring cracking whips and performing dressage, in period costumes especially created by Dior, Givenchy and Lanvin-Castello.\(^{33}\)

Georgina Howell, looking back over 40 years in *In Vogue: 75 Years of Style*, comments on the contrast between Dior’s models and the women in the audience at a show:

His models looked absolutely different from the women in the audience. Dior’s newly designed woman had soft neat shoulders, a wasp waist, a bosom padded for extra curve, and hips that swelled over the shells of cambric or taffeta worked into the lining: the dressmaking techniques were immensely complicated, some Victorian, some newly evolved. She walked leaning backward to make the hips more prominent, and her skirt burst into pleats, sometimes stitched over the hips or blossoming out under the stiff curved peplum of her jacket. Her hem bustled around some twelve inches from the floor, from which it was divided by the sheerest of silk stockings and the highest of pointed shoes. She was delicious, and she made all other women green with envy.\(^{34}\)

Her overview includes comment on the worldwide take-up of the Dior phenomenon. British and American companies, using licences, provided the look for women on home territory:

Women no sooner saw the New Look, but they had to have it. Dereta was one of the first off the mark in producing a grey flannel copy, and was taken aback to see 700 of them vanish from the rails of one West End shop within a fortnight. Naturally, because of the amount of fabric needed, the New Look could only appear in
non-Utility clothes, of which production was limited. Yet manufacturers caught with large stocks of Utility ‘man-tailored’ suits lost money hand over fist: no one wanted them. Sir Stafford Cripps summed up outraged official reaction: fury at the thwarting of fabric restrictions. He called a meeting of the British Guild of Creative Designers and suggested that they would be helping the national effort considerably if they would co-operate in keeping the short skirt popular – and the Guild obediently agreed to try. He then called in a committee of fashion journalists and, with the help of Harold Wilson, President of the Board of Trade, tried to persuade them to ignore Paris. They pointed out that their job was to report.  

And Christopher Breward, writing Fashion for the Oxford History of Art series in 2003, takes an even wider view of the French return to Fashion prominence:

After the war, designers associated with the revived French couture industry like Dior, Balmain, and Givenchy also found Hollywood to be an important source of patronage and a key marketing proposition.

He lists among the most influential fashion films Gone with the Wind, from which:

Walter Plunkett’s designs prefigured the New Look and influenced a generation of brides.

Quoting Valerie Steele, Breward explains how Dior himself knew his designs were part of the zeitgeist by saying:

No one person can change fashion – a big fashion change imposes itself. It was because women longed to look like women again that they adopted the New Look.

Dior was correct in assuming that people wanted something new after years of war, brutality and hardship. His New Look was reminiscent of the belle époque ideal of long skirts, tiny waists and beautiful fabrics that his mother had worn in the early 1900s. In the post-war period, the avant-garde Elsa Schiaparelli found it difficult to compete with Christian Dior’s ‘retrogressive and conservative trends’.
The website Fashion-Era (fashion-era.com) places Dior in his historical context. In the words of Pauline Weston-Thomas:

Dior’s timing made his name in fashion history. After the war women longed for frivolity in dress and desired feminine clothes that did not look like a civilian version of a military uniform.40

Such a traditional concept of femininity also suited the political agenda. Women had been recruited during the war to work on farms and in factories while men were away fighting. In peacetime, those women were expected to return to passive roles as housewives and mothers, leaving their jobs free for the returning soldiers. The official model of post-war womanhood was a capable, caring housewife who
created a happy home for her husband and children. Dior’s flower women fitted the bill perfectly. Didier Ludot, in his book *The Little Black Dress*, captured the atmosphere of the times in which Dior made his mark:

After five years of hardship, opulence and hyper-femininity made a comeback in a positive riot of fabrics that Christian Dior brought to life with genius in his first post-war collection: The New Look of 1947 made history. In the next year’s season, the Diorama dress took up 29 yards of black wool crepe with a 51-inch width.\(^{41}\)

Coco Chanel made a surprise return to couture in 1954. She had moved into obscurity, keeping a low profile after the war, so as not to cause distress as a result of her alleged associations with the Nazis during the occupation of Paris. She had seen Dior’s New Look as a retrograde Fashion, which would not help women to feel free. Her sleek and stylish bouclé suits and signature handbags took off in the American market.

With post-war Fashion, a new photography emerged which seems to have emphasized the belle époque climate Dior adored. Christopher Breward writes of visions of the ‘atmospheric parks and hotels of Paris’ where:

Dior’s creations suggested the romance of the 18th and 19th centuries. There complex constructions relying on supportive undergarments and dramatic cutting similarly emphasised an idea of femininity that harked back to the decorative roles played by aristocratic women in decades past.

Breward, again in regretful mood, echoing some of Coco Chanel’s feelings, concludes:

In the immediate post-war period, the closely related mediums of fashion and film lost much of their sharp relevance to modern life in the face of an onslaught of vaguely historical and socially conservative set pieces which revived the glamour and gender politics of the Second Empire and the belle époque.\(^{42}\)

Christian Dior is seen by industry watchers as a merchant as much as a designer. He knew there were hordes of glamour and waist-obsessed women hooked on Scarlett O’Hara, the devastating flirt from *Gone with*
the Wind, waiting to swish around in full skirts, in post-bellum party mood. In 1947, they were ready to fall for his New Look and he needed little help in identifying and attracting consumers. In 1945 he was designing for the textile tycoon Marcel Boussac, a man who had made his fortune from fabric and was interested in Dior’s new idea that involved using layers of extravagant fabrics.

The four-hour epic Gone with the Wind closed a chapter on four decades of change and transformation for women across the globe as Scarlett became the prototype for the post-Feminist woman; someone who would wear Paris hats to deal with death and defeat, become the pioneering head of house, grow crops, and trade to feed the family while still searching for romance. As we cannot return to the goddess-worshipping matriarchies of ancient Celtic, Grecian, Roman or African times, we have to make do with the post-Feminist compromise summed
up for us when Camille Paglia remarks, ‘A contemporary woman clapping on a hard hat merely enters a conceptual system invented by men.’ When she rips down her mother’s green velvet curtains to have them remodelled as a sumptuous day dress for visiting the prison-bound Rhett Butler, it is not just an interesting piece of bricolage. Katie Scarlett O’Hara Hamilton is making ready to attack the male bastions of barter and commerce with the trappings of fetish and desire.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Camille Paglia leads a new generation of ‘Equity Feminists’ who are keen to throw off the acrimony between the sexes which began in the 1950s. While supporting equality before the law and the removal of obstacles to women’s advancement in society, she opposes special protections for women. Paglia maintains that the reforming wing of Feminism, to which she belongs, is growing and gathering momentum from a younger generation who are no longer in sympathy with the censorious anti-pleasure wing of mid-20th-century Feminism. It is my belief that the character of Scarlett O’Hara, supported by Rhett Butler in the film Gone with the Wind, is the prototype for the post-Feminist woman and that the film set the scene for a return to romantic, feminine, sexually provocative dress emphasizing the differences between men’s and women’s body shapes.

In Selznick’s Vision, Alan Vertrees pays tribute to the passion and dedication of the man who he claims created his own and Hollywood’s ‘magnum opus’ in the production of GWTW. He describes it as the ‘most successful motion picture of the classical Hollywood period’, adding his critique to the many documents in praise of the film’s production values. He lists its nine Oscars, presented in February 1940 soon after the movie premiered, and sets it in the context of other excellent films released in the same ‘annus mirabilis of American filmmaking’, including The Wizard of Oz and Wuthering Heights. Vertrees explains that the film has remained the undisputed biggest hit in the history of cinema. Entertainment Weekly in 1994 confirmed it as ‘for decades the unassailable Mount Everest of popularity. This Civil War soap opera has still been seen by more people in cinemas (198.5 million) than any other film.’ Recent television polls continue to put GWTW at the top of the list of films seen by most people, inevitably numbering a high proportion of adult women, from Britain and America, during the 70 years since its release. Evaluating its influence on female fans fifty years later in 1989, Helen Taylor writes, ‘It depicted a world of omnipresent women and intermittently stable and dependable men; it showed a
society held together – often against heavy odds – by women’s energy, labour and ability to “make do and mend”. It presented men as objects of mystery and fantasy, creatures who seemed to offer strong shoulders for women to lean on but who all too often vanished into the night, assuring women how capable they were on their own.\textsuperscript{45} Helen Taylor was describing how women felt towards Rhett Butler in the film. Revisiting her findings, at the beginning of the 21st century, I discovered many women still waiting for their own Rhett Butler to arrive bringing a hat from Paris, which only he knew how to wear.\textsuperscript{46}

**Nostalgic designs and women in red**

A link between the 1939 box-office hit and the post-war designer came during a decisive moment in planning the V&A’s Couture Culture exhibition in 2007. They had acquired a version of Dior’s ‘Zémire’ ensemble a year earlier. It had been a private order from Lady Sekers, wife of the British textile manufacturer, made in an innovative synthetic fabric in red. Mysteriously, it was found stored in a cellar by the Seine in Paris, and a decision was made for it to be cleaned and repaired to become a key piece in the show. One of Dior’s most nostalgic designs, it was named after an opera by Grétry, first performed at the royal palace of Fontainebleau in 1771. In thrall to the \textit{Ancien Régime}, Dior first named the creation ‘Fontainebleau’, but this was crossed out on the chart and replaced by ‘Zémire’. From Dior’s ‘Ligne H’ collection, the original model in grey silk satin was shown to Princess Margaret at Blenheim Castle in 1954. It appears in several British and American magazines, in many issues of \textit{L’Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode de Paris} of the times, and in a promotional film. Susan Small, a British company making ‘line-for-line’ licensed copies, produced ready-to-wear versions that sold in Harrods for 22 guineas. Claire Wilcox, writing about Zémire in her catalogue to accompany The Golden Age of Couture, describes its historical significance, saying it was one of Dior’s most consciously historical designs:

The ‘riding’ jacket and full skirt have a distinctly eighteenth-century flavour, and are made using traditional construction techniques.\textsuperscript{47}

Stressing the longing for the past, inherent in Dior’s works, she quotes Edna Woolman Chase, Editor-in-chief of American \textit{Vogue} from 1941 to 1952:
His clothes gave women the feeling of being charmingly costumed; there was a faintly romantic flavour about them.\textsuperscript{48}

Again, alluding to Dior’s empathy with times gone with the wind, Wilcox suggests:

The attraction and paradox of Dior and many of his contemporaries is that although they established a modern identity for couture between 1947 and 1957, its practice and philosophy were rooted in the past.\textsuperscript{49}

A further, rather surprising link with \textit{GWTW} is in the revelation of the connection between the actress, the designer and the ‘Zémire’ model:

\textit{The coup de grâce is the sign-off when Antonio Banderas, as Clark Gable from Gone With the Wind, using the exact camera plot and in the precise pose from the original, is identified as the ‘him’ everyone wants.}
Christian Dior also created designs for the theatre and an outfit made for Vivien Leigh by Angels & Bermans, the theatrical costumiers, bears a striking resemblance.\textsuperscript{30}

A picture of the dress, worn by Vivien Leigh, was sent to me by Eleri Lynn, who wrote to say:

> It was designed by Dior for the 1956 play \textit{Duel of Angels} directed by Jean-Louise Barrault in which Vivien Leigh plays Paola. It, along with the programmes of the play, is in the care of the Theatre Museum, based here at the V&A. It looks just like our Dior ‘Zémire’ dress in the exhibition, which is why we were initially drawn to it.\textsuperscript{51}

There is a woman in red archetype; she is the femme fatale, the fertile goddess of the middle period of women’s lives, treacherous and potent. Valerie Steele has devoted a whole book to \textit{the red dress}, in which she explains its symbolism, strongly linked to sexuality; in China and India it is worn by brides because of its association with happiness. She points to the significance of the colour choices for costumes in \textit{GWTW}:

> When Vivien Leigh played Scarlett O’Hara in \textit{Gone with the Wind}, she wore a red dress for several pivotal scenes, most notably when Rhett Butler carried her upstairs to bed.\textsuperscript{52}

It is the revealing, crimson, be-feathered number, not unlike the red dress image drawn by David Downton for Golden Age publicity texts, which gave Leigh such agonies of embarrassment. It was this Walter Plunkett creation which caused the despotic Fleming and Selznick to cruelly deride her small breasts. It most epitomizes the scorned woman, and was chosen by Rhett for her to wear to face her critics at Ashley Wilkes’s party. Audiences are drawn, in sympathy, to her framed in the doorway of the Wilkes’s modest entrance hall. Leigh is filmed in mid shot, to make the most of her sexual display, and then in close-up to show her resolve as she makes ready to face Melanie’s disapproving guests. Fashion may have given something back to Vivien Leigh, wearing the Red Poppy dress, with Jean Patou \textit{Joy} perfume for Oscar night, but in the wearing of the red Dior, for a British West End appearance, more of the ghosts of \textit{Gone with the Wind} might well have been laid to rest for Leigh.
During and after the world wars, women in Europe and America had begun to take hold of the reins of destiny in the way Scarlett drove her own buggy and fought her own fights. In each decade of the 20th century, women from both sides of the Atlantic have shared common concerns, influencing each other’s progress and policies. The film’s prologue, the relationship between Rhett and Scarlett, became the backdrop to Dior’s rise to eminence and for Paris to return as a Fashion city. The romantic themes and feminine dresses set up Dior’s ‘New Look’ to seduce American, and European, women back to their homes, aprons cinched round tiny waists, still hoping that tomorrow would be ‘another day’. In a tone-setting scene in the film, generous-hearted Melanie says to Scarlett, who is being deliberately provocative and territorial, ‘You have so much life.’ Then, in a temperamental flourish, our heroine begins a regal procession through the crowds, flirting with everyone’s sweethearts as she moves. The camera faithfully follows her, in both middle distance and close-up shots. It moves to her face, then back to our first sight of Rhett Butler. He’s standing framed in the centre of the screen at the bottom of the stairs of the Wilkes’s grand mansion, in totally chic black-and-white spotted cravat, silver grey trousers and black jacket. As the camera pans up to her looking down on him, she is filmed saying to her companion, ‘He looks as if he knows what I look like without my shimmy.’ She sees Rhett as a sexual creature from the moment they set eyes on each other. Then the money shot. Swiftly zooming away from her, down the sweeping staircase, is the close-up of Rhett, glass in hand, arms curved insouciantly around the carved balsustrade, looking up at her. This cinematic moment, which left millions of fans feeling, like Selznick with Leigh, ‘I’ll never recover from that first look’, was appropriated, not to say successfully hijacked, by Marks and Spencer for its Christmas 2007 television commercial. In the Christmas Belles Hollywood pastiche, five girls all want the same thing for Christmas; him, thrills, spills and clothes. In Christmas Belles, models appear in character: Elizabeth Jagger as Rita Hayworth in Gilda, Laura Bailey as Lauren Bacall in To Have And To Have Not, Noémie Lenoir as Jane Russell in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Erin O’Connor as Audrey Hepburn in Sabrina and Twiggy Lawson as Bette Davis in Now, Voyager. The coup de grâce is the sign-off when Antonio Banderas, as Clark Gable from Gone with the Wind, using the exact camera plot and in the precise pose from the original, is identified as the ‘him’ everyone wants.
Notes

1. The opening words of the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939), dir. David Selznick and Victor Fleming.
3. Ibid., p. 79.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 42.
13. Interviewing *GWTW* fans in 2001, I realized how important the character of Rhett Butler is to the film’s influence. Leeds-based Fashion sales manager Margaret Ambler said the things which interested her about Scarlett were her tiny, tiny waist and her clothes, and that ‘we would all be swept off our feet if there were more Rhett Butlers around!’ A Muslim Civil Servant from Manchester and her London-based barrister sister say of Scarlett, ‘She never gave up. She was strong against the odds. The romance helps and the scenery. Everyone could do with a Rhett Butler in their lives.’ Asian sisters Rushpal Lali and Jaspal Samra believe it is the ‘ultimate romance’. ‘Scarlett did not do what was expected. She moved away from the normal. She was inspirational, and as Asians we would not have so many expectations; by seeing Scarlett, we could begin to feel aspirational as women. Sometimes when things are not going so well we will just say to each other let’s watch *Gone with the Wind.*’ Heather Horry, a Cheshire Inland Revenue officer with three children and a full social life: ‘It showed me that by being a woman you could still be independent and have a mind of your own; that you could have both a social and a business life. Scarlett showed how it is possible to make compromises.’ Angela Charters, a retired teacher from Liverpool, saw it in her late teens at the cinema with her mother, two aunts and at least two sisters. ‘I’m more inspired by Melanie than Scarlett. She was beautiful as well as brave. She had insight and could see good in everyone to such an extent that she was blinded to her husband’s infatuation. Scarlett
was a conniving, selfish little bitch, self-considering but fascinating.’ Others said, ‘Neither Scarlett nor Rhett would conform. Scarlett was a challenge to him. She was so glamorous and then, of course, there is the survival factor. Rhett was mature and experienced. She was cosseted. She became a woman because of the war, surviving against the odds.’ ‘My temperament is like Scarlett’s and I believe that Rhett is the ideal man,’ says Rachel Marsden, a beauty therapist from West Yorkshire who has watched the film many times and wanted her children to be named Rhett and Scarlett.

14 Quoted from ‘Gone with the Wind – Rhett Butler’ at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin; www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/gwtw/wardrobe/rhett/rhett.html (accessed 12 April 2009).

15 Frances Tempest, e-mail to author, 23 March 2008. She added these observations: ‘To a modern eye the colours of the costumes seem very much of their period, featuring, particularly, a repellent salmon pink. Was this early Technicolor? The ballroom scenes feature so many different, and such crude, colours that the only excuse could be the novelty of coloured film. To my eyes the costumes are nothing special, the cheerful Negro workers and servants look as if they have been dressed with little or no thought and throughout the film there is no significant use of detail.’


22 Ibid.


25 Ibid., p. 102.

26 GWTW’s international smash hit status, and its influence on how women wanted to look, could well have been recognized by the French government by inclusion of its producer, David O. Selznick, in the Légion d’honneur. Both Christian Dior and Andrew Goodman, director of the New York department
store Bergdorf Goodman, were admitted to the prestigious list, in 1948 and 1949 respectively, for their services to Fashion.

30 Eleri Lynn, ‘Preface’, *The Golden Age of Couture*, 2008 diary (London: V&A, 2007), writing after the Unravelling Couture conference: ‘I would say however, that really, during “the golden age” Paris was the last word in fashion. Front pages of newspapers all over the world were held for the latest Dior look! Dior, Balmain and Fath were the “Big 3” in America – outselling homegrown couturiers. It was really only during the war that America posed a threat to Paris, because nothing was coming out of France! Couture continued, but not on an export level that was competitive.’
32 Ibid., pp. 51–2.
33 Ibid., p. 60.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 136.
39 Breward, *Fashion*, p. 75.
46 See also Note 13 above.
48 Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid.

Eleri Lynn, e-mail to author, 10 December 2007


The campaign was developed at RKCR/Y&R, London, by Creative director Mark Roalfe, copywriter Pip Bishop and Art director Chris Hodgkiss.