

## Letters, Escape, and Eternity

by Dr. Rosalie de Rosset

I don't get many letters anymore; as I have noted before, they are becoming a thing of the past. Few people pull up to their desks, take out a pen (one that writes smoothly and makes your handwriting look handsome—I prefer fine-line Sharpies myself), retrieve some paper from a drawer and write the first words, "Dear Rosie." Instead, of course, I get e-mail, plenty of it, most of it short, chatty, sometimes abbreviated and irritatingly casual, almost never careful and crafted, though there are exceptions. The other day, however, I got a letter, an authentic, handwritten, five page missal, one so interesting I had to write a commentary about it. Not only did it have all the earmarks of an old-fashioned, thoughtful conversation on paper, but it also was delightful, opinionated, and poignant. Finally, it was a testimony to the way a great book brought the writer some sanity.

The starting point for the letter was a response to my last selection for the Midday Connection book club, a novel by Henry James called *Washington Square*. An important and discussable book, the story addressed the tensions between a daughter and an unloving, controlling father, between the same girl and her chosen fiancé, a man not worthy of her who, in the end, does not love her either. The girl comes to understand both realities. During the book club hour, I spoke in passing of the great Civil War novel, *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, which while a popular not entirely literary piece, is unforgettable for its dimension and memorable scenes and for the lavish movie based on it. I read it eight times before I was twenty-one and was going to write the sequel. I choose not to explain the complexities of that behavior. Someone beat me to that sequel, unreadable in its lack of any single redeeming feature.

After making some intelligent comments about the book club selection, the writer (let's call her Kate) confessed, "I was particularly interested in what you had to say *about Gone With The Wind*. That is my favorite book, and I credit it with saving what was left of my mind when I was living with a cheating liar. When life was too much for me—I could begin reading that book and escape the horrendous pain in my mind and heart. I don't know how to justify an 'escape' in a born again Christian's life. Perhaps it is a sin. I don't know. I only know I read it about ten times during those hard years, and it provided relief for my very soul." Then she added, "Just yesterday I read *Jane Eyre* again. I love how Mr. Rochester loved Jane. His love words to her were so beautiful and charming."

I don't think that such escape is a sin. I think it's a longing for wholeness in the midst of brokenness, a hope that somewhere, somehow men love enough to pursue women to the ends of the earth, that those who have illusions and behave unfairly receive their just dues. Furthermore, it's a longing for drama in its richest sense, drama in a sometimes way too banal, cruel world. Finally, in a way, and I am not the first to say this—C.S. Lewis said it much better—it's a longing for the beauty of the eternal where there is faithfulness, the romance of the divine, and transcendence, where things are beautiful and charming. God bless you, Kate. That's what I've been thinking about.

For Prime Time America, this is Rosalie de Rosset