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Layering *The March*: E.L. Doctorow's Historical Fiction

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Layering *The March*: E.L. Doctorow's Historical Fiction

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E.L. Doctorow implements ideas of intertextuality and metafiction in his 2007 novel, *The March*, which is most notably apparent through its resemblance to the 1939 film, *Gone with the Wind*. Using Michel de Certeau's theory of spatial stories and Linda Hutcheon's of historiographic metafiction, this thesis discusses the layering of Doctorow's *The March* from the film seen in the character of Pearl from the novel and Scarlett from the film and Selznick's version of the burning of Atlanta and Doctorow's burning of Columbia.

Keywords: Doctorow, Selznick, *Gone with the Wind*, historical fiction, spatial, metafiction

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Layering <i>The March</i> : E.L. Doctorow's Historical Fiction	1
Works Cited	21

Layering The March:

E.L. Doctorow's Historical Fiction

E.L. Doctorow and his reworking of famous American events in his historical fiction *Ragtime*, *The Book of Daniel*, and most recently *The March* highlight historical figures and events to show some of the characteristics and situations that are the building blocks for the American Experience. In the case of *The March*, Doctorow showcases Sherman's March to the Sea and its subsequent effect on both Northern and Southern characters by having this story told through the eyes of dozens of characters, occasionally even Sherman himself. *The March* follows Sherman through Virginia and North Carolina with its main characters of Pearl, the mixed race slave girl with a light enough complexion to "pass" for white; Arly and Will, the Southern soldiers who, as an act of survival, switch sides between the North and the South several times, Emily Thompson, the daughter of a wealthy Southern doctor who becomes a nurse to physician Wrede Sartorius; and the various characters who encounter them along their journey. The novel catalogs the devastation that Sherman brought to Southern lands and families and foreshadows a positive future for some characters, detailing how the young Pearl and her northern male suitor, Steven Walsh, head North to start a new life for themselves as a biracial family. As with all of Doctorow's novels, each of his characters manages to brush shoulders with famous characters of the day such as Abraham Lincoln and General Sherman. These fictional insights into the lives and struggles of some of America's most well-known figures re-imagines Doctorow's work in a twenty-first century American context as he builds up and around the historical narratives that have now become engrained in the American historical consciousness.

The standard idea of historical fiction seems to operate around a set generic description that doesn't usually acknowledge self-aware references to the production of history as a fiction.

Doctorow's fiction, on the other hand, metafictionally combines history and imagination, using history in a way that acknowledges the fictional manipulation of that history. According to Geoffrey Harpham, Doctorow critics and readers usually divide themselves into two groups: one that considers Doctorow to be a historical writer and the other who see him as a postmodern one. However, Harpham and I don't see the "historical" and the "postmodern" as mutually exclusive categories. Instead, we see Doctorow as creating a powerful metafictional commentary on history. In regards to Doctorow's work, Harpham has said, "[Doctorow] has...[reworked history and postmodernism] by producing work that invokes both the real, in the radical form of historically verifiable fact, and the 'experimental,' chiefly through dislocations of identity and the breaking up of the narrative line" (81). This blending of historical fiction and self-aware textual manipulation occasionally makes Doctorow difficult to place definitively within the field of literary studies. While this essay doesn't purport to classify Doctorow's work definitively, Doctorow's version of "history" is often aware that it is fiction. For example, his characters sometimes view situations with a knowledge outside of their own time and place because his fiction operates within and without its main historical setting.

Doctorow scholars such as Susan Brienza and Thomas Evans focus on a close reading of his characters (both fictional and historical) and literary themes without fully considering the implications of his use of elements from the world of pop culture. While I don't refute the essential ideas of historical fiction that are normally associated with Doctorow, I argue that we should consider the influence of other mediating texts as a significant element of his historical fiction. Doctorow brings together his historical figures and fictional characters in ways that display a playful manipulation of history as a fiction. This idea of "reworking" previously established historical events could also be termed "adaptation," especially since Doctorow's text

operates in a space, the Civil War, which has been “reworked” and adapted for modern audiences time and time again. Doctorow openly acknowledges this adaptation practice in his writing: “it is the principle of literary communalism that allows us to use other peoples’ myths, legends, and histories in a way to serve ourselves... The plot may be the same, of course, but the meanings are different as befits adaptation” (“The Little Bang” 79). Doctorow’s version of adaptation doesn’t just reuse old material—it reconfigures the material, adding something of his own from other historical contexts. Doctorow’s adaptation model allows for his engagement with controversial and difficult topics in an historically removed setting that is accessible and familiar to a twenty-first century audience.

One of the key texts that Doctorow reworks in *The March* is the 1939 film *Gone with the Wind*, one of the most influential visual representations of the Civil War. Doctorow’s reconfiguration of certain aspects of Sherman’s March by using elements from *Gone with the Wind* acknowledges the influence of the film and reclaims parts of it for the novel, creating what Linda Hutcheon calls a “historiographic metafiction,” a term used to identify the way that texts can reclaim forms of the past in a self-aware way. Hutcheon’s theory of historiographic metafiction allows for the postmodern development of history, a framework that helps us to understand Doctorow’s appropriation of two major elements of *Gone with the Wind*: Scarlett’s character and the burning of Atlanta scene. Hutcheon describes “historiographic metafiction” like Doctorow’s in her landmark work, *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, saying, “[historiographic metafiction’s] theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and content of the past” (5). This “rethinking and reworking” of the specific forms of the past is

exactly what Doctorow does as he uses “forms” and images from previous adaptations of Civil War texts.

For Hutcheon, fiction such as Doctorow’s can access these elements of the past because the self-reflexive narrative that Doctorow has created in *The March* occasionally acknowledges its own awareness of cultural influences, becoming a fiction that “mediates the past” (Hutcheon 156). Doctorow isn’t just connecting with the past; rather, he mediates it for his audience, through his presentation of various aspects of history as through a film lens. This theory is actually demonstrated in Doctorow’s novel by Calvin, a black Civil War photographer, who uses the lens of photography to view and engage with the Civil War on a different level than a white man would. Calvin controls exactly what the viewer sees in his photograph; his hands shape the content and composition of each picture and then point the camera at his own angle. Doctorow’s use of a non-traditional type of character to act as the lens through which we see Civil War historical material makes a strong commentary about the subjective aspect of history. The way that history is represented in this novel depends on all the different factors that make up the “historian.” Calvin, a black man who holds a non-privileged place in Civil War era society will offer a different perspective on the war than another photographer would, despite the fact that both photographers may be looking at the same subject.

Calvin, then, offers a textual example of a greater theoretical principle: that of the presentation of history. Looking at it again through the lens of Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction, this scene becomes a point where Doctorow acknowledges the way that history is manipulated by those who encounter and preserve it. When Arly and Will first meet Calvin and Josiah Culp, the photographer for whom he works, Culp demands that Arly place his arm around the long-dead body of Will, and pretend that he’s still alive (172). As grotesque as the scene may

be, it suggests that Doctorow's larger presentation of history like Culp's in *The March* has been manipulated. Here Doctorow implies his own authorial awareness of the way in which history is made as he creates his own archive through his stories much as Calvin and Culp make theirs. As Culp tells Arly and Will in regards to his photography, "for the first time in history war will be recorded for posterity. I am making a pictorial record of this terrible conflict" (173). In this metafictional moment as Doctorow acknowledges Culp's awareness of the pictorial record's artifice, the text itself becomes self-aware. Culp's statement demonstrates the ways in which history can be created and preserved through manipulation and organization. Culp strategically places Will and Arly in the position that he believes will be most moving, then later on states he is creating a history in pictures, thereby adapting history through the lens of his camera, similar to what Doctorow himself does in his novel. Calvin and Culp's discussions on photography establish images as a medium for the creation of a historical archive. At one point Calvin, about to take a picture, remarks to Arly that, "Most people don't really look at what they're looking at. But we have to. We have to look at things for them" (200). Calvin's photographic eye becomes a new lens through which to view the medium of the Civil War. Doctorow is attuned to the possibilities of image as a strong force for history, since it offers a method of viewing a text. *Gone with the Wind* then becomes a historical text through which Doctorow's adaptation offers a new perspective on the Civil War.

While most Americans have seen Selznick's 1939 blockbuster film *Gone with the Wind*, they may not consider its influence outside of the realm of film. Even those who have never actually seen the movie may not realize the extent to which the film has permeated most aspects of popular culture, from its famous four-hour plot line to the infamous, yet iconic, coupling of bad boy Rhett Butler and conniving Scarlett O'Hara. *Gone with the Wind* has become so

culturally important that it is sometimes known as the “800 pound gorilla” (Brown 168) of film studies, impressive since the film was not only critical to cinematic development, but seventy years later remains one of the highest grossing films of all time (adjusting for inflation). The film has become so engrained in the American consciousness that any text dealing with the Civil War must inevitably interact with the film’s images. Because of the film’s significance, E.L.

Doctorow patterns his 2007 novel *The March* after some of the scenes and characters from the film, allowing the audience to join in the self-awareness of the novel’s references of *Gone with the Wind*’s contribution to Civil War imagery. The presentation of the Civil War in *Gone with the Wind* works well for Doctorow despite the fact that he operates out of a twenty-first century perspective. Doctorow uses elements from *Gone with the Wind* to expound upon the already immense cultural influence that *Gone with the Wind* exercises over the Civil War, thereby creating a text in *The March* that is important not only to Civil War discussions but to cultural production.

As an underlying influence for some of the elements of *The March*, *Gone with the Wind* functions as a “layering” text among many others that can be “excavated” from multiple layers that influence Doctorow’s novel. Michel de Certeau, in “Spatial Stories,” a chapter from his larger work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, examines the way that one text can be mapped out to occupy a specific “space,” layering the events surrounding a text over each other until a spatial awareness of the narrative and the plane of influence can be created. For de Certeau, stories serve an essential function in the development of the way that we “map” a text throughout a literary space: “stories thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces” (118). He argues that we should see a text in relation to the movements within the story that build on the influence of other stories, eventually creating a “map” of the different overlays of the story’s

landscape. This landscape that a story or text presents to a reader or viewer must take on some form of presentation. De Certeau gives two different types of presentations that are offered to an audience: a larger, more comprehensive view of a space, which he calls a “tableau,” and a smaller, more intimate consideration of the elements of a space, which he calls “movement” (119). The tableau is a way of viewing the whole scene with a complete view instead of merely a portion, where the “movement” captures the small interactions and vignettes of a text’s characters. In considering *The March* as a whole, its sweeping presentation relies principally on tableau in showcasing the enormity of an army moving across multiple states. Further, the novel as a whole presents both the Northern and Southern side of the Civil War. This large-scale view highlights different perspectives on what is taking place overall.

Doctorow presents these layers through Dr. Wrede Sartorius, who predicts medical advancements far before his time. In one scene, he describes the idea of penicillin to cure infection and machines that would look through the body to the bones beneath it (59), highlighting the layers that overlay and rely on each other in *The March* and demonstrating how historical layers extend deeper than just the Civil War narrative. There is the basic layer of Civil War history where army doctors followed Sherman through the South as well as layers from chronologically later eras that manage to work themselves into Wrede’s prediction. Eventually Alexander Fleming would discover penicillin almost fifty years later, for instance, and Frank Austin would use X-rays to look through skin to the bone underneath twenty years after Sartorius makes his pronouncement. All these historical layers create a metafictional reading experience, one where the layers of history overlay themselves within a twenty-first century, historically-aware, postmodern text.

For de Certeau, the presence of so many layers in a “map” creates a situation where the layers “functions... change according to the groups in which they circulate” (125). *Gone with the Wind*’s function as a Civil War story allows it to become more than just a cinematic giant; it grows into a cultural icon that has literally influenced the stories that emerge about the Civil War. Similarly, Doctorow’s novel becomes more than just a modernized reclamation of a Civil War or film space. *The March* becomes a new cultural consideration for the Civil War, one whose historical re-creation and reconsideration functions through its acknowledgement of the Civil War “space” as layers of stories, all making up a “map” of one large space. *The March* represents one more story in the layering of the Civil War.

Doctorow’s intertextuality in *The March* offers new ways of reading texts within a particular literary space. This essay will look at two enduring aspects and images of *Gone with the Wind* that are re-worked for *The March*. First, Doctorow styles the most important female character of *The March*, Pearl, to resemble aspects of Scarlett O’Hara, even though the two women arise out of different social and racial situations. Second, Doctorow adapts the burning of Atlanta scene from the film to recreate the historic burning of Columbia. In highlighting Doctorow’s adaptation of these two film elements, I also argue that Doctorow’s selection criteria privileges the “epic” by drawing upon a pattern of similar epic choices in Selznick’s film.

Doctorow invites his readers into his self-aware process of fictional layering on previous texts because otherwise the reconfigured film scenes would lose much of their significance. As Hutcheon states, “[t]he postmodernist’s text’s self-conscious return to performative process and to the entirety of the enunciative act demands that the reader, the you, not be left out, even in dealing with the question of reference” (156). Even though he doesn’t explicitly state to the audience that he is using the film’s influence, Doctorow doesn’t hide it from us either. He

utilizes characters and scenes that have been played before, a strong female protagonist rebuilding her family's life, a fire in a Southern town—things most people have observed in many Civil War texts—and banks on the film's own critical standing to accentuate his text to produce a metatext, one that uses *Gone with the Wind* both as a plot device and as a means of highlighting the novel's ability to reform and reshape historical constructs around which we center our interaction with that history. Put differently, Doctorow's use of *Gone with the Wind* not only gives his text cultural importance for an American audience but also gives America a new spin on how to access layered historical events.

By “excavating” these layers of Civil War texts, we reveal the influence of earlier narratives on more contemporary works such as the layering that configures Pearl as a contemporary character patterned after Scarlett O'Hara. Pearl overshadows Emily Thompson, another character in the novel, and another Scarlett candidate, because Emily eventually fades from the narrative while Pearl becomes more prominent. Emily, the daughter of a wealthy upper-class Southerner makes a life for herself within Sherman's March, much as Pearl does. Emily attaches herself to a skilled but cold-hearted scientist, losing not only her “virtue” in the process (something a Southern woman relied on) but also her sense of place in the new world of the South. By the end of the book, Emily has disappeared, but Pearl survives as a figure who anticipates twentieth-and twenty-first century race relations in the United States in her implied future with Stephen Walsh in the North. Pearl and Scarlett survive because they are able to adapt societal expectations to meet their needs and are therefore able to be successful. Unlike Pearl, Emily lacks the necessary qualities required to move her forward into the next century; she is too polite, meek, and malleable.

In the case of Pearl, we see a clear illustration of how the layering of these spatialized stories and historiographic metafiction work together. Wilhemus sees Pearl as Doctorow's traditional ray of hope for the future of Civil Rights in America (351), a contribution to current minority reclamation scholarship since Pearl as the illegitimate daughter of a white plantation owner and a slave who can "pass" for white represents a privileged postmodern figure. Doctorow's retelling of the Civil War narrative through the eyes of a liberated, liminal slave girl adds to current historical and literary research, which recovers the lost or marginal narratives of America's past.

Likewise, the character of Scarlett represents an early twentieth-century version of a strong female character, operating through a different set of ideals than a nineteenth or twenty-first century character would. Yet Scarlett, as famously portrayed by Vivien Leigh, is not the end of the female Civil War layering, since Selznick's Scarlett is first based on Margaret Mitchell's Scarlett, who is in turn a figure based on real historical figures from the Civil War era. While the narratives that reconstruct the real women of the Civil War are plentiful and diverse, showcasing a variety of experience that cannot be fully discussed here, one prominent example of a representative Southern Civil War woman is Mary Boykin Chesnut. Chesnut was the wife of James Chesnut, U.S senator from South Carolina and a brigadier general in the confederate army. Her diary catalogs the experiences of a Civil War woman and the events that helped to shape her consciousness. As with many women during that time (just as with Pearl and Scarlett), Chesnut spent time in various hospitals offering services to men in need and overseeing medical conditions. She was also firmly rooted in her Southern patriotism, saying that, "we will do all that can be done by pluck and muscle, endurance, and dogged courage—dash and red-hot patriotism" (396). Chesnut was a Southern belle and her attitudes towards slavery and her slaves

reflected that position; although she didn't believe in abusing them, her belief in their inferiority and their willing submission to their masters is a theme that Mitchell and Selznick replay. This layering of historical narrative acts as one more element for understanding the characters of Pearl and Scarlett and the culture from which they originate.

The spatial stories in which Scarlett and Pearl move include sexuality and race. Pearl and Scarlett, although in different layers of the spatial story, use their beauty and sexuality to facilitate their comfort and survival in parallel ways. Their movement throughout this story is facilitated by how Doctorow's text dips into the layer of *Gone with the Wind* and the earlier layer of Civil War historical figure, Mary Boykin Chesnut. Pearl's character can then be examined through the lens of de Certeau's theories of spatialized stories, which argues for multiple layers of retelling to map out the literary space and its internal interaction. There are several layers in this space, layers of sexuality and racial complications, of Civil War era expectations for women, and even of twentieth and twenty-first century ideas of female sexuality. Pearl's potential as a Southern woman moving into a new post Civil War era doesn't just offer hope to a contemporary American audience for a future of diversity and inter-racial relationships, but also retells the sexuality that Scarlett embodied to modern audiences. The second spatial story is a substantial issue in any Civil War text, the issue of race; despite its importance here, though, I will use it more as an intertwining element of the first spatial story since the attraction to these women, especially Pearl, is enhanced by racial characteristics. Doctorow gives Pearl a much different background than Mitchell and Selznick give Scarlett, since Pearl grew up a slave in her own father's household as the daughter of a black slave and a white plantation owner. Doctorow's recreation of Pearl in this light is a technique of contemporary scholarship in remapping the

racial space occupied not only by those of African descent but also by those who were of mixed race during the Civil War.

Although Pearl doesn't receive the same large-scale financial help Scarlett does, she is treated with delicacy and gentleness by most of the men she encounters, most notably Lieutenant Clarke, Stephen Walsh, and even General Sherman. In this developing new order of Southern culture, both Pearl and Scarlett revise certain sexual boundaries, becoming more aggressive and overt in their use of female charms than would have been usual in polite society. Pearl becomes Lieutenant Clarke's ward, allowing him to care for her by giving her clothes, correcting her speech, and making sure she is well fed. Even more noticeably, she tantalizingly allows Stephen Walsh to watch her bathe, knowing his attraction to her, and then discusses their possible sexual future with him. In Clarke's acknowledgement of the strange pull that the beautiful and exotic Pearl has over him, he also recognizes the censure and danger that could come from being attracted to a thirteen year-old recently freed slave: "he knew that he was attracted inappropriately" (43). However, because of her grace and bearing Clarke still wants to "do things for her" and "to take care of her" (43). Both Scarlett and Pearl capitalize on this male inability to extricate themselves from morally compromising and illegal situation as an acceptable way to live to comfortably in war. In the case of Stephen Walsh, Pearl revels in the obvious sexual attraction he has for her despite his awareness of her manipulation of him. In the scene where Walsh fixes her a bath, Pearl, "sat down in the water crossed-legged... looking up at him with such pleasure in her eyes that he felt vile for the feelings going through him. Yet he could tell Pearl knew the effect she was having" (251). In Scarlett's case, she pushes the sleeves on her dress down her shoulders to reveal more skin; professes her love to Ashley; allows Rhett to kiss her and discuss sexual acts despite the fact that she's in mourning; shamelessly flirts with and

agrees to marry Charles Hamilton, and even steals her sister's lover, Frank Kennedy, by initiating physical contact with him.

Granted, neither woman ever actually steps outside of the sexual mores of her society to have sex with any of these men, but they do both allow themselves to be objectified by the men around them as a means of obtaining financial and social stability. They both understand and emphasize those physical traits that are desired by men, and in terms of behavior and conversation step beyond the bounds of what would have been appropriate at the time. Obviously, having these two women be willing participants in their own objectification doesn't further a progressive contemporary female agenda or make them more sympathetic. Scarlett is generally more unsympathetic than Pearl since Scarlett doesn't hesitate to use people for what she wants, as in the social seduction of Frank Kennedy and her use of prisoners for slave labor. Still, the way that Doctorow, following Mitchell and Selznick, maps out this space of sexual power by recreating a beautiful and aggressive female and reveals a complex layering of two cultural products, *Gone with the Wind* and *The March*.

Doctorow patterns Pearl after the earlier layer of sexuality and race laid down by Scarlett as a sexually aware Civil War woman—that is, a woman willing to set aside “refined” female social mores—to restructure his Civil War space in a twenty-first century light which can recast Scarlett in a way that Mitchell and Selznick never could have dreamed possible. Pearl isn't just a strong, independent woman—she's also a racially complex character characteristic of twenty-first century culture. Pearl's struggles are markedly different from Scarlett's, but Doctorow fills Pearl with the same kind of self-confidence and sexuality that Scarlett uses. Pearl not only reconfigures the female space of the Civil War (something that Scarlett's character did earlier)

but also adds a racial facet to that space by embodying the same beauty and will established by Scarlett in a mixed-blood character.

Both Pearl and Scarlett are of a mixed race or ethnic heritage, Pearl being both black and white and Scarlett being Irish and American. The mixed identity of these women reflects the mixed identity of America as a multicultural space, although Selznick and Mitchell's Scarlett occupies a much more privileged position than Pearl does. Pearl's patterning of Scarlett offers a metafictional commentary on the other layers in the novel. For example, Doctorow gives a graceful nod to *Gone with the Wind* and Scarlett in Clarke's first encounter with Pearl in the attic where "she regarded him as if she was the mistress of the house. She couldn't have been more than twelve or thirteen, barefoot, in a plain frock to her knees, but caped by the shawl into a shockingly regal young woman" (13). This view of Pearl allows her to claim ownership of a place that could be rightfully hers by birth (as the master's daughter) and shows her personal strength and iron will. The image of Pearl standing in the house, facing the Northern soldier, looking "shockingly regal" (13) despite her shabby clothing this image layers over the tableau from *Gone with the Wind* where Scarlett, in a faded and worn pink dress, greets the Northern deserter from the grand staircase. This scene highlights Scarlett's strength and determination despite having been reduced from wealthy plantation owner to a struggling, starving plantation owner. The re-creation of Scarlett in Pearl standing in a similar plantation house asserting her ownership and self-possession represents a key moment of visual layering in the novel. As Pearl stands there, looking in the mirror as she tries on the mistress's old clothes, Clarke comments that with, "her chin lifted, she regarded him as if she were the mistress of the house" (13). In this image of Pearl Doctorow reconfigures the earlier space of a tattered but refined white woman asserting her dominion by layering a former slave over that space.

Doctorow's visual layering creates spaces for historical reflection: a twenty-first century text layered on the same space as early twentieth-century texts as well as nineteenth-century texts. This layering may be most evident in Doctorow's immense tableau of the destruction of Columbia through the fire that raged there the night after the arrival of Sherman's soldiers. This tableau overlays *Gone with the Wind's* burning of Atlanta, a cinematic image that has become one of the most iconic in American culture. In so doing, Doctorow attempts to recapture the sense of the epic tableau that Selznick introduced to great effect in *Gone with the Wind*. In Lev Grossman's *Time* interview with Doctorow, Doctorow calls the Civil War a part of American DNA—a traumatic recurring memory with an “epic quality” that makes it “more than a trauma.” By using the epic narrative of the Civil War—which means using *Gone with the Wind*—Doctorow mimics in prose the cinematic construction of the Civil War the film pioneered. Likewise, in an interview with James Campbell in *The Guardian*, Doctorow tells Campbell that he tried to create a sense of the “epic” in *The March*, intending it to be his “Russian novel,” a text with epic scope, thousands of characters, and intricate plots and subplots. Not surprisingly, the title of Roland Flamini's contemporary book of criticism on *Gone with the Wind*, called, *Scarlett, Rhett and A Cast of Thousands: The filming of Gone with the Wind*, references directly the epic scope of Selznick's production.

To recreate the sense of enormous damage Sherman's March wrought upon Southerners both Doctorow and Selznick recreate the scenes with a feeling of the grand, the epic, and the massive. Doctorow and Selznick's mutual epic sense of the fire burning scene becomes another component of the layered spatial stories on which this scene operates, a broad tableau of Selznick's layering the burning of Atlanta over the actual historic burning of Columbia, which Doctorow replicates in his layering of the burning of Columbia over Selznick's Atlanta burning.

Doctorow is emphasizing the fire that raged through Columbia, which allows him to use more historical elements to create his epic, since Atlanta never burned to the extent that we see in the film. Columbia, on the other hand, was subject to a chaotic burning by the North that closely resembles the one that takes place in the film albeit with a different setting. In the burning of Columbia as well as other texts such as *Gone with the Wind*, Doctorow's attention to historical detail allows him to lay claim to both historic and cultural precedents in his depiction of this tableau. His reconfiguration of this iconic scene relies on multiple spatial layers starting with Doctorow's re-creation of the film's epic burning of Atlanta in his burning of Columbia. Selznick's refashioning overlays Mitchell's novelistic version, which itself overlays the actual historical burning of Columbia. Each of these layers occupies the space of the burning South, an iconic event both in historical and cultural terms.

These flames of the South, as portrayed by Selznick and Doctorow, represent in their epic tableaux the loss of a society which encompassed the most elite, gracious, and yet the most oppressive and cruel aspects of America. This fiery representative space embodies both destructive and purifying effects as Walsh muses: "What hell was this? Surely not the composed Hell of the priests and nuns. Their Hell was comforting. It meant there was a Heaven. This hell, my hell, is without ascription. It is when life can no longer tolerate itself" (187). Essentially, the tableau shown by Selznick and repeated by Doctorow conveys this fiery devastation with a realistic harshness and an aesthetic grace designed to evoke the emotional trauma associated with the Civil War. Doctorow highlights the incredible display of pyrotechnics we have come to associate as the apex of Sherman's March when Stephen, a young confederate soldier, witnesses the burning of Columbia: "For Columbia was an inferno, whole streets aflame, home after home

collapsing thunderously into itself, its wood sap hissing and cracking like rifle fire. The sky, too, seemed to have caught fire” (178).

However, this isn't the exact same scene we witness in Scarlett's furious escape from Atlanta in the broken wagon with Melanie and Prissy in the back. Instead, this is the burning redone, one that highlights the entire night and the fire's effect on those still in Columbia, not just those who are leaving the city. In *Gone with the Wind*, we see Atlanta burning through the eyes of Scarlett, yet we watch Columbia's flames through the Northern viewpoints of Stephen Walsh, General Sherman and Colonel Teack. Walsh sees the awfulness of the destruction around him, but lacks the emotional attachment to the city that Scarlett has, so he notices the chaotic tableau unfold before the people in the city instead of merely focusing on his own escape. Stephen sees the things that Scarlett wouldn't have noticed or Selznick wouldn't have portrayed, like the gang rape of a black woman, all against the same backdrop of a burning Southern town. Walsh sees that, “the world was remade, everything became something else—the sky a shimmering bronze vault, and billows of thick black smoke the clouds” (179). Doctorow's *Civil War South* is also a world “remade” by *The March*'s overlaying the already established imagery of *Gone with the Wind*.

Selznick's famous burning of Atlanta scene in *Gone with the Wind* is epic, not only because it was the largest ever filmed, but also because it was filmed on the RKO backlot and required hundreds of extras and crew members to create. The film's famous poster, which depicts a lusty Rhett Butler holding a seductive Scarlett O'Hara against a flaming Atlanta simultaneously references the physical fires that ripped through the South as well as the famous sexual tensions of Scarlett and Rhett that rip through the film. Further the film's “cast of thousands” became one of the reasons why it was so popular in 1939 (the film won Best Picture

in the 1940 Academy Awards) and throughout the succeeding years the hundreds of actors necessary to create the film's epic tableaux gives it a sense of history in the "remaking." As Todd Brown states, "*Gone with the Wind* is probably the most famous *spectacular melodrama* of all time" (177, original emphasis). It seems inevitable that the film would cast its huge shadow on all subsequent Civil War treatments. According to Jan Cronin, the film (as well as the novel) occupies an essential space within the "public consciousness" and possesses "the capacity of this space [1930's society] to facilitate a univocal cultural narrative" (398). The film became a "univocal... narrative," because it was a cross-cultural phenomenon, one that moved through all layers of society. Many of the film's images, such as the burning of Atlanta, have become so canonical that they have become perpetually linked to the Civil War itself within popular culture, academia, film culture, and general American consciousness.

Although Scarlett's escape from Atlanta with flames licking at her carriage wheels may be the most famous representation of Sherman's March in the media, the Atlanta fire was not as destructive or as chaotic as Selznick's portrayal; the fire that demolished Columbia was far more destructive (Kennet 199). In Atlanta there was a "good bit of disorder" in the last few days of Sherman's occupation including the fire which burned a few buildings. As one soldier said of the Atlanta fire, "nobody paid any attention to it other than to remark how finely it burn[ed]" (141). However, the film's depiction of the actual historic event overshadows historical accounts. As a "placeholder" for the burning of Columbia it occupies the same iconic space which Doctorow's account overlays.

Historians have gathered accounts from soldiers who were in Columbia and who gave epic accounts of what they observed. According to them, when Sherman's troops wearily marched into the city smoldering bales of cotton lined the streets. General Wade Hampton's men

had lighted the bales as they evacuated the capital city; once Sherman's troops arrived the small local fire brigade attempted to extinguish the bales without success. The slaves of Columbia, in their joy at being freed, began to hand out liquor to Union soldiers and lead soldiers to cellar caches and stores of liquor all over the city. Many of the men hadn't eaten in a day or two and were drinking on an empty stomach, so by the time Sherman rode into the city many soldiers were drunk or on their way to becoming so. Eventually, some semblance of order was restored, and the men and officers began to settle down for the night believing that the afternoon's antics were over. By six o'clock that night, however, fires had broken out all over the city and more were springing up due to a stiff wind and the unextinguished bales of cotton. Prisoners of war were missing, civilians were pouring into the city, and someone had opened the doors to the city jail, freeing the inmates to wander around the city. By 8:00 pm, the officers had lost control of the city as fires continued to burn and expand. Throughout the night, fires raged and drunken soldiers ran amok, looting and destroying houses and buildings until eventually, Union officers were able to regain control of the city around 3:00 am (Davis 165-71). This anarchy and destruction is also captured by Doctorow as his characters describe the terrible tableau in great detail, because *Gone with the Wind's* Atlanta fire is the most visually known fire, *The March's* layering of the Columbia fire combines both historical weight as well as strong cultural associations.

Gone with the Wind as an influential Civil War text which occupies a space over which subsequent texts have been layered demonstrates current notions of intertextuality. The ease of access to information and images offers a quick, seemingly inexhaustable source for almost any historical event, idea, person, places or text, which can be layered together. This notion of intertextuality makes it clear that any new text rests on the layered foundation of earlier texts

occupying the same space. Framed in de Certeau's terms, intertextuality takes the form of spatial stories, stories that are not just pushed together, but are instead layered over each other. This layering allows for a text to be added while at the same time demonstrating a recognition of the text's earlier influences. It also allows a text to become even more powerful to an audience because it retells spatial stories cultural significance from multiple layers of historical aesthetic accounts. In the hypertextual age we inhabit, de Certeau's theories on spatial stories and the way that they are continuously layered on top of other stories help us reconsider intertextuality as we discuss the way that each text is reconfiguring spaces that have been occupied for years. By understanding the layers and layers of stories that come before a particular text, we can more fully understand how all the textual layers fit into current culture. By seeing *The March* as a spatial story, we can understand how the text works as a layering of Sherman's March on top of earlier texts. *The March* demonstrates how a twenty-first century narrative, with the powerful backing of previous texts layered together, can produce a metatext of cultural importance.

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