

**Original
Scarlett O'hara**

**Similarity to the French Empress Eugénie
Who Impacted the
Civil War, Mexico,
The Lincoln White House,
and the Gilded Age**

By Nancy Smith



*Walter Plunkett's
costume sketch for
Scarlett O'Hara's
barbecue dress in
Gone with the Wind*



*Eugénie, Empress of the
French,
1853-1870*

To my cherished daughter,
Christina



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MYSTERY MAN OF THE SECOND EMPIRE: THE DUKE OF SESTO, THE SPANISH GRANDEE ADORED BY THE EMPRESS OF FRANCE FROM HER TEENAGE YEARS THROUGH HER YEARS AS EMPRESS AND UNTIL HE DIED IN 1909. BELOW: CHAIRS IN THE NAPOLEON III ROOMS IN THE LOUVRE, IDENTICAL TO THE ONE IN WHICH THE DUKE OF SESTO IS SEATED.



With thanks to my Longtime friend Caroline Swann of Squirewood at Dandridge, Tennessee, who has been widely told she resembles the film version of Scarlett O'Hara

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Scarlett O'Hara in red plumed gown (above); formal portrait of Empress Eugénie (right); Empress Eugénie's crown (below).



Chapter 1: Parallel Lives and Vivacious Personalities of Southern Belle Scarlett O'Hara and Eugénie, Last Empress of the French

To what extent was Eugénie, the last Empress of the French, an original model for Scarlett O'Hara? The reader can decide by comparing the fictional Southern belle of *Gone with the Wind* with the historical figure who reigned three times as Regent of France.

What could Scarlett and Eugénie possibly have in common? Only their personalities, charm, energy, fashion, beauty, mannerisms, coquetry, homes, products, long-term pursuit of a man, older husbands, torment, and other aspects of their life stories.

Those who never made the connection probably have never heard of Eugénie in spite of her being the most copied woman of the 19th century, a woman obviously studied by Margaret Mitchell while writing her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel.

During Eugénie's years in the limelight, she was so emulated that the American First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln tried to model the Lincoln White House after her opulent French court. Gilded Age debutantes like Consuelo Vanderbilt gowned themselves in Parisian finery and lived in the French palaces that their railroad tycoon parents built in New York, Newport, and Palm Beach. The cereal heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post bought Eugénie's Winterhalter portrait and her giant pear-shaped diamond earrings, and lavished her residences with gilded moldings, such as at her estate Hillwood in Washington D.C., and at her estate Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida.

When Eugénie died on July 11, 1920, the *New York Times* devoted the front page plus two full inside pages to her obituary which gave her credit for influencing three generations of American women: "It was the strange fate of Eugénie Marie de Montijo, briefly obscure only in girlhood days spent in Spain, France and England, to become known in budding womanhood as one of the greatest beauties of her time, and later, as consort of Napoleon III and Empress of France, personally influential in European events

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and destinies of three generations. To mention one simple but obvious detail of that influence, the grandmothers of all the civilized world today were gowned in the (18)60s in the fashions of Paris dictated by the dress of Eugénie.”¹

Such an influential figure was like a dainty elephant on the world stage during the 1860s. Margaret Mitchell even gave the name “Eugénie” to the daughter born to Rhett Butler and Scarlett (before the baby was nicknamed “Bonnie Blue Butler”). And Rhett Butler bought Scarlett’s green bonnet from Paris and teased her whether she was sophisticated enough to have heard of the fashion street named “rue de la Paix”. And by the way, since 1990, she has a namesake in royal England—Princess Eugenie of York.

35 Parallels of Empress Eugénie and Scarlett O’Hara

There exist at least 35 commonalities between the fictional character Scarlett O’Hara and the historic personality Eugénie:

1. Both Eugénie and Scarlett had the same personality type: high-spirited and vivacious.
2. They were equally frustrated by unrequited feelings--Eugénie spent her life yearning for the most handsome grandee in Spain, the Duke of Sesto; Scarlett spent years yearning for the Southern aristocrat Ashley Wilkes.
3. Both Eugénie and Scarlett were jealous of the women preferred by the men they adored--Eugénie’s beloved Duke of Sesto was smitten with her sister Paca; and Scarlett’s beloved Ashley married Melanie Hamilton, her sister-in-law.
4. Both Paca and Melanie had sweet, refined personalities in comparison to the headstrong commanding personalities of Scarlett and Eugénie.
5. Both Paca and Melanie had frail constitutions and died young.
6. Scarlett’s story crescendoed to the Burning of Atlanta; Eugénie’s crescendoed to the Franco-Prussian War that resulted in a revolution in France which eventually erupted into the burning of Paris during the Paris Commune.

Original Scarlett O'Hara

7. Scarlett had to flee from Atlanta in the Civil War; Eugénie had to flee from Paris in the Franco-Prussian War and both had to seek safety so as not to be imprisoned or killed.
8. In Scarlett's impoverished period, she had to weed and hoe and pick cotton; Eugénie had to sell her jewels and adapt overnight to a relatively austere lifestyle in England
9. The official name of Scarlett and Rhett's daughter was Eugénie Victoria (then upon Melanie's urging, they nicknamed her Bonnie Blue Butler).
10. Both Scarlett and Eugénie locked their husbands from their bedrooms after the birth of their babies.
11. Knowing their wives did not love them, Napoleon III turned to various mistresses and Rhett Butler turned to Belle Watling.
12. Both Scarlett and Eugénie wore hats purchased from stores along the rue de la Paix near Place Vendôme in Paris.
13. Scarlett in the film version wore three examples of the hat style officially called the "Eugénie hat", the bonnet that dipped to the center of the forehead which Eugénie popularized.
14. Eugénie kept a secret photograph of the Duke of Sesto in her private boudoir; Scarlett kept a tintype of Ashley in a drawer of her dressing table
15. Both Scarlett and Eugénie lost a beloved child—Scarlett's daughter Bonnie Blue Butler broke her neck by falling from her pony; Eugénie's only child Louis fought for Queen Victoria's army in South America and was killed by 17 Zulu spears.
16. Scarlett's mother Ellen Robillard O'Hara was of French descent, and both Eugénie's father and Scarlett's maternal grandfather Robillard were soldiers of Napoleon I.²
17. Both Napoleon III's grandmother Josephine and his mother Hortense, and Scarlett's grandparents, the Prudhommes, the parents of Ellen O'Hara's mother Solange Robillard, escaped the Haiti Revolution of 1791.³
18. The prime years of Eugénie and Scarlett were the same—April 1861 was when Scarlett's story opened with the South having declared war; and 1861 was when Eugénie amassed power in France and dreamed of having France occupy Mexico.
19. Both Rhett Butler and Napoleon III had terrible reputations before they became successful. Napoleon III had staged two

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- bumbling and one successful coup d'états, and had been imprisoned for seven years. Rhett had a shady incident in Charleston involving a lover and a duel that caused genteel families not to receive him.
20. According to *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara was not a beautiful woman but no one would have thought that she was anything but beautiful because she had such charm. Eugénie's face was also more handsome than beautiful but she was considered a great beauty in her day, almost certainly due to her charm. Actual photographs of Eugénie, such as exist at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, show her to be hardly stunning by the standards of recent decades. However, even her imperfect looks showed that she had much in common with Scarlett O'Hara whose first mention in the book was: "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm as the Tarleton twins were."⁴
 21. Eugénie and Scarlett each had especially fair skin. Eugénie's deep blue eyes and porcelain skin were said to be captivating. Scarlett's "thick black brows slanted upward, cutting a startling oblique line in her magnolia-white skin--that skin so prized by Southern women and so carefully guarded with bonnets, veils and mittens against hot Georgia suns."⁵
 22. Ashley was more worldly and cultured than Scarlett, and Sesto was more worldly and cultured than Eugénie. Ashley had just been on a Grand Tour of Europe for three years before he returned to Atlanta and reencountered Scarlett; the Duke of Sesto had been living in Italy where his family had estates before he went to Spain and met Pica and Eugénie.
 23. Ashley squired Scarlett around the county—"His awkward restrained courtship only served to increase her determination to have him for her own"⁶. And the Duke of Sesto showed such interest in Eugénie that he wrote her love notes and gave her a small gold ring, making her feel his proposal was imminent, prompting her to wait until she was 26 years old before considering marriage to someone else.
 24. Scarlett had turned down numerous marriage proposals, and so had Eugénie while they were expecting the proposal from Ashley and the Duke of Sesto.

25. Eugénie's love for the Duke of Sesto was platonic, and so was Scarlett's for Ashley except for an occasional kiss.
26. Scarlett and Eugénie were both bored by their situations. Scarlett was bored when she became a widow--"Her boredom was acute and ever present,"⁷ wrote Margaret Mitchell. Similarly, Eugénie complained to Paca that court life was boring. "You do not know how tired I am by all the dances and so many ceremonies; but now, thanks to God, they are concluded."⁸
27. Both Scarlett and Eugénie realized they were smarter than the men they were with. "I'm tired of saying 'How wonderful you are' to fool men who haven't got one-half the sense that I've got," said Scarlett.⁹ Eugénie realized Napoleon III's weaknesses and tried to talk him into retiring and appointing her regent until their son was mature enough to become the next emperor.
28. Both Eugénie and Scarlett continued their obsessions even after they were married. Eugénie pursued the Duke of Sesto while married to Napoleon III, and Scarlett pursued Ashley even while married to a series of three men.
29. Both Scarlett and Eugénie had limited formal educations. Scarlett enrolled in the Fayetteville Female Academy where she had a "sketchy education"¹⁰; and Eugénie was removed from classes at her Paris convent at age 13, told by her mother that life and not school would provide her best education.
30. Both Scarlett and Eugénie had careers: Scarlett kept the books at the lumber mill and Eugénie read diplomatic papers in preparation for being a Cabinet member and Regent.
31. Napoleon III married Eugénie because he could not have her any other way, and the same was true of Rhett Butler.
32. *Tableaux vivants* were held in Atlanta just as they were held at Eugénie's Château de Compiègne regularly; at one benefit at the Elsing house, a *tableau vivant* was held in which Scarlett represented the Spirit of the Confederacy in the last scene. (*Tableaux vivants* were scenes from a painting or art work with real people standing in costumes portraying the characters.)¹¹
33. Both Eugénie and Scarlett respected the French warriors called Zouaves. They were originally recruited in the 1830s from native North African troops but the units were soon made up

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entirely of Europeans. The Zouave seemed the “beau-ideal of a soldier,” as General George B. McClellan described him. The Atlanta socialite Maybelle Merriwether was engaged to René Picard, described in the book as a “little Zouave”. One French language newspaper commented “Ils pleut des Zouaves” (“It is raining Zouaves”) because there were so many of the units formed in 1861 and they served at every major Civil War battle from First Manassas or First Bull Run to Appomattox.¹²

34. Rhett Butler was about 20 years older than Scarlett, and Napoleon III was 18 years older than Eugénie.
35. The main theme of Scarlett and Eugénie’s lives was survival—their ability to adapt in spite of almost insurmountable challenges, using what Margaret Mitchell called “gumption”.

Various excerpts from *Gone with the Wind* are compared with biographies written by court figures acquainted with Eugénie. Their descriptions in many cases are virtually identical:

PERSONALITY

Scarlett: “She’s just high spirited and vivacious”—Melanie Hamilton to three belles descending the staircase at Twelve Oaks.¹³ “Mammy’s eyes were sharper than Ellen’s, and Scarlett could never recall in all her life having fooled Mammy for long. It was not that these two loving mentors deplored Scarlett’s high spirits, vivacity and charm. These were traits of which Southern women were proud.”¹⁴

Eugénie: “In a moment, joy, anger, animation, pleasure, desire, enthusiasm, activity, paint themselves on that deliciously pretty face. She is a child giving herself up to every impression of the moment and allowing it to appear in every feature and every movement of her person...She speaks a great deal, usually dominates the conversation, and asks very rapid and frequent questions. She gives very absolute opinions, sustaining the discussion with vigor, animation and energy.”¹⁵

CHARM

Scarlett: “Then, last summer at a political speaking in a grove of oak trees at Jonesboro, they (the Tarleton twins) both suddenly became aware of Scarlett O’Hara. They had known her for years, and, since their childhood, she had been a favorite playmate, for she could ride horses and climb trees almost as well as they. But now to their amazement she had become a grown-up young lady and quite the most charming one in all the world.”¹⁶



Oval Winterhalter portrait of Empress Eugénie

Eugénie: “Friendly and gracious towards all, but irresistible when she laid herself out to conquer, and nearly always eager to captivate, she possessed a marvelous power for drawing all hearts towards her. She united the charm of a winning cheerfulness and a refinement of feeling that carried even greater weight than her beauty, with that cordial goodwill which French men so truly call *politesse du coeur* (politeness of the heart). She understood to perfection the art of using her gifts, and possessing as she did an inexhaustible, sparkling and witty flow of conversation, she was always fortunate in saying the right thing in the right way.”¹⁷



Original gown worn by Empress Eugénie

ENERGY

Scarlett: “The green eyes in the carefully sweet face were turbulent, willful, lusty with life.”¹⁸

Eugénie: “Eugénie loved colour and light, gaiety and perpetual life. She possessed the power to mentally intoxicate her surroundings, her companions. Young and old followed where she led. It was a marvelous sight

to see her driving in her open barouche drawn by four beautiful stallions. Thousands of spectators awaited her coming to cheer her as she passed and to enjoy her bewitching and ingratiating smile.”

FASHION

Scarlett: “Scarlett rode triumphantly, newly a bride, dashing pretty in her fine clothes, with Rhett’s money solidly behind her. It was an era that suited her, crude, garish, showy, full of overdressed women, overfurnished houses, too many jewels, too many horses, too much food, too much whisky.”¹⁹

Eugénie: “Eugénie was ambitious to be the queen of fashion—as Marie Antoinette had been in her day. Every commission she placed with a great couturier, milliner, jeweler or dealer in *objets d’art* had repercussions on the whole contemporary ‘rag trade,’ rapidly becoming one of the most flourishing in Europe. It was at this time that Paris acquired its reputation for *haute couture*, a reputation

which spread throughout Europe and America and to a large extent 'the latest from Paris,' a tag still the hallmark of some of the most elegant and exquisitely made clothes in the world today, is a tribute to Eugénie, who purposefully set out to make Paris the home of *haute couture*. She inspired designers to dazzling heights and the rest of Europe enviously followed suit."²⁰

"She was by far the best-dressed woman in Europe. How she wore her clothes with great authority, and on those gala occasions—the State visits, the balls, the soirées, which were such a feature of the Second Empire, she always looked magnificent."²¹ ... "Her toilettes were wonderful, she had a great deal of personal taste, and her original colour schemes were adopted by Worth. What an empire she ruled!"²²

BEAUTY

Scarlett: "Scarlett's face was arresting, pointed of chin, square of jaw. Her eyes were pale green without a touch of hazel, starred with bristly black lashes and slightly tilted at the ends."²³

Eugénie: "It is extremely difficult, at this distance in time, to appreciate Eugénie's rather special beauty. It had to be seen, they say, to be fully realized," wrote biographer Theo Aronson. "Hers was essentially a beauty of coloring and mobility, all but impossible to record in paintings or photographs. Her skin was like faintly glowing alabaster. Her hair was as rich and lustrous as burnished copper. Her large, down-slanting eyes, as variable in mood and color as the sea and never without their boldly penciled outline, had a peculiar heavy-lidded attractiveness. Her profile had the aquiline perfection of an antique cameo. It was a sensitive, aristocratic and particularly Spanish face. In repose, it was a sad one. But she was seldom in repose. It was her animation, in fact, that brought her beauty to life."²⁴

"The great official portrait of the Empress, representing her in a Court mantle and wearing a crown of precious stones, which is to be seen among the symbols of royalty in every palace and in every official dwelling, shows a rigidity which destroys the likeness. Her charming features, the nobleness of her figure and bust, and the clear color of her complexion are certainly represented; but the Empress was especially very lively, whereas the inanimate expression that is

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to be seen in this portrait does not in any way recall the individuality of the person delineated...Attempts have been made in a hundred ways to reproduce the beauty of the Empress; painters, sculptors and engravers have essayed it, but few have succeeded. There was something in the Empress's expression which they could not 'catch,' an animated fugitiveness which defied every interpretation."²⁵

MANNERISMS

Scarlett: "She smiled when she spoke, consciously deepening her dimple and fluttering her bristly black lashes as swiftly as butterflies' wings. The boys were enchanted, as she had intended them to be."²⁶... "She knew how to smile so that her dimples leaped, how to walk pigeon-toed so that her wide hoop skirts swayed entrancingly, how to look up into a man's face and then drop her eyes and bat the lids rapidly so that she seemed a-tremble with gentle emotion."²⁷

Eugénie: "Possessing a wonderfully natural grace, her every movement was a delight. Every tilt of that red-gold head, every turn of that slender neck, every flutter of those tiny hands was an enchantment. She seemed incapable of making an inelegant gesture."²⁸

COQUETRY

Scarlett: "But with young bachelors--ah, that was a different matter! You could laugh softly at them and when they came flying to see why you laughed, you could refuse to tell them and laugh harder and keep them around indefinitely trying to find out. You could promise, with your eyes, any number of exciting things that would make a man maneuver to get you alone. And, having gotten you alone, you could be very, very hurt or very, very angry when he tried to kiss you. You could make him apologize for being a cur and forgive him so sweetly that he would hang around trying to kiss you a second time....Oh, there were so many things to do to bachelors and she knew them all, the nuance of the sidelong glance, the half-smile behind the fan, the swaying of the hips so that skirts swung like a bell, the tears, the laughter, the flattery, the sweet sympathy. Oh, all the tricks that never failed to work--except with Ashley."²⁹

Eugénie: “Perhaps for an Empress, she was too much of a coquette. But as an Andalusian, which she is, and looked upon simply as a woman, she was the most perfect creation I have seen anywhere!”—United States Ambassador to Spain Gustav Koerner.³⁰

HOMES

Scarlett: Her plantation Tara with its white columns was based on hundreds of examples of Greek Revival architecture in America, especially throughout the South. There were also numerous French-style pieces used for movie props such as a pair of Louis XVI style chairs among the furnishings in the parlor of the O'Hara plantation Tara and the crossed trophy Louis XVI bed used by Scarlett in the bedroom of her Atlanta mansion.

Eugénie: Her design taste was so specific that it was given a name--Style Louis XVI Impératrice and could be seen throughout Scarlett's bedroom in her Atlanta mansion. Eugénie repopularized the preferences of Marie Antoinette with her garlands, ribbons, bows, cupids, rosettes, flowers, acanthus leaves and every other detail. In America this style was called Louis XVI revival and was seen in virtually every Gilded Age mansion and every five-star hotel such as the Plaza in New York. The èbenist Guillaume Grohé created the most elegant examples of the style Louis XVI-Impératrice which he sold to Eugénie, French nobility and wealthy bourgeoisie. Furniture makers Dasson and Burdeley were also permitted to copy Marie Antoinette's pieces. Lord Hertford and the Rothschild family

were among the collectors who acquired large numbers of furnishings and objects that belonged to Marie Antoinette and had been sold and dispersed after the French Revolution.



Louis Vuitton trunk and initials



Clock owned by Empress Eugénie

PRODUCTS

Scarlett: As of 2014, a Harris poll found *Gone with the Wind* to be the second favorite book of American readers, just behind the Bible. More than 30 million copies have been printed worldwide. The movie won 8 Academy Awards, 2 honorary awards and 5 Oscar nominations. There were hundreds of

products depicting the book and movie including Scarlett Barbie dolls by Mattel, models of Tara by the Franklin Mint and baby dolls by Madame Alexander.

Eugénie: Her presence crafted the mystique of Paris and reinforced its finery and brands—Louis Vuitton, Creed, Guerlain, Christofle, Baccarat, Sèvres. She was the muse of the “Father of Haute Couture”, Charles Frederick Worth, whose spectacular fashions were so coveted that a steady millionaires’ parade visited his salon on rue de la Paix near Place Vendôme. He was fond of saying that women “have faith, figures, and francs – faith to believe in me, figures that I can put into shape, francs to pay my bills.”³¹ At luxury department stores, one can purchase a “Eugénie” wallet by Louis Vuitton, the trunk maker who came to the palace and packed her ensembles. Dinner sets named for “Impératrice Eugénie” were made by Haviland, Raynaud, and Saint-Louis crystal. Christofle continued to make “Eugénie” trays. Creed created the perfume “Jasmin l’Impératrice Eugénie”. Guerlain produced “Eau Imperial”. In 1890, L-T Piver produced “Eau de Cologne de l’Impératrice Eugénie.” Houbigant was also an official supplier for the court of Napoleon III. In 2006, François Rancé 1795 launched “Eau de Eugénie” based on a fragrance originally treasured by Empress Eugénie. And the firm “Histoires de Parfums 1826” produced the

fragrance named “Eugénie de Montijo,” a light rich floral eau de parfum, inspired by “a woman of influence who knew how to make use of her feminine wiles...reminiscent of a blazing sunset as seen from a balcony overlooking a Spanish garden. 1826 is for the stylish woman who possesses the rare combination of refined tastes and fiery passion.”

Second Empire tradesmen flourished. In 1858, Frédéric Boucheron opened his first store in the Galérie de Valois, at Palais Royal, and won his first Gold Medal at the 1867 Exposition Universelle.

The Hermès family was originally Protestant German and settled in Paris in 1828. Nine years later, Thierry Hermès established Hermès as a harness workshop. The firm won first prize at both the 1855 and 1865 Exposition Universelles.

Many patterns of porcelain were named for the Empress: Haviland “Impératrice Eugénie”; Bernardaud “Eugénie de Montijo” pattern #0108; Harmony House “Eugénie,” Japan; Royal Cauldon “Eugenia”; Raynaud “Eugénie” pattern; Noritake “Eugénie”; Baronet (Bareng) “Eugénie”; Homer Laughlin “Eugenia”; J&G Meakin “Eugenia” porcelain; Thomas Goode & Co. “Eugénie”; Galérie de France “Impératrice Rose.”

Manufacturers of crystal that named patterns for Eugénie include: Tiffin’s “Eugenia”; St. Louis “Eugénie”; Fabergé “Eugénie”; Royal Leerdam “Eugenia”; Lamaison crystal “Impératrice.”

Flatware patterns named for Eugénie: Schofield Co. “Eugenia” sterling, 1935; International Silver “Eugénie” sterling; Watson “Eugénie” sterling, 1895; Christofle “Eugénie” hollowware.

In Egypt, the *M.S. Eugénie* cruise vessel sailed down the Nile River. A Villa Eugénie event staging company directed European fashion shows. A Eugénie garter was made by the American Garter Co., X. B. Stevens, sole agent, Bruton, Mass., sold c. 1900. Scalamandré Eugénie silk has been available for about \$270 a yard. Some Trifari costume earrings were named “Eugénie”.

When pieces bearing her provenance came up for auction, they were assumed to be the finest available in the 19th century and commanded inflated prices. One of her armoires sold at M.S. Rau in New Orleans in 2008 for \$127,000. At auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s, her provenance has been highly coveted.

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Christie's offered one of her brooches in 2008, but withdrew it when a donor was willing to pay \$10.8 million and contribute it to the Louvre which was attempting to restore the Crown Jewels of France and any pieces ever worn by France's sovereigns.

Perhaps the ultimate compliment to the Empress: The asteroid 45 Eugénie was named for her, and its moon, Petit-Prince, after her son, the Prince Impérial.

PURSUIT OF A MAN

Scarlett: She tried to finesse Ashley Wilkes away from his wife. "*Gone With the Wind* boils down to a story about a spoiled Southern girl's hopeless love for a married man," wrote a review in the movie critic website "Rotten Tomatoes".³²

Scarlett's father Gerald O'Hara asked her, "Have you been running after a man who's not in love with you when you could have any of the bucks in the county?"³³

Eugénie: She was even more determined. She spent her entire adult life pursuing the Duke of Sesto, Marqués de Alcañices, until he died in 1909. First he was attracted to her sister Paca. After Paca died, he married Eugénie's sister-in-law Sofia. Toward the end of her life, Eugénie said, "I was always in love with this man, and if he had married me, it would have changed the history of Europe."³⁴

OLDER HUSBANDS

Scarlett: Her second and third husbands were much older than she was. Scarlett's second husband was Frank Kennedy whose income from a lumber mill enabled her to pay the taxes on her plantation Tara. Scarlett's third husband, Rhett Butler, was in his mid-30s when Scarlett was 16.

Eugénie: She had only one husband--Emperor Napoleon III—and he was born in 1808 and she in 1826, making him 18 years older.

TORMENT

Scarlett: She felt emotionally tormented by Ashley Wilkes. "The mystery of him excited her curiosity like a door that had neither lock nor key," wrote Margaret Mitchell. "The things about him that she could not understand only made her love him more."³⁵

Eugénie: The depths of Eugénie's struggle in pursuing the Duke of Sesto were hidden and secretive and have not been described in virtually any histories except for a limited few written in Spanish. Her secrets have come to light through her letters that read like a diary of her innermost thoughts. Several Spanish historians gained access to her original letters stored at the Duke of Alba's Liria Palace in Madrid. Among these were Ana de Sagrera, José del Corral, Ricardo de la Cierva, and Isabel Margarit. They uncovered significant excerpts from her letters that had never been published.

One of the most provocative was the one published by Ana de Sagrera in which Eugénie hinted that she wanted the Duke of Sesto to rendezvous with her in London after her sister Paca died:

"I have received your letter in Edinburgh where it was sent to me, and my first thought was to write to you to ask you to come to London where I have to stay several days, but after reflecting, I have thought that the time would not be good for trips and besides, in addition, this would be considered unusual in Madrid...I would have great pleasure to



*The Empress Eugénie.
From a portrait by P. de Pommaignan.*

**Portrait of Eugénie after original
by P. de Pommaignan**

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chat with you of all this and of my poor sister...Several days before my trip to Algeria, she gave me her favorite photograph of you, telling me that you would come to Paris and I would see that you are the same as before. She told me that your smile would be charming in regard to me. She did not believe that you would be in danger, but I don't know, because I would redouble my affection for you...Believe in my sincere and affectionate friendship, Eugénie”³⁶

Some of the most revealing insights came from Eugénie herself in volumes of letters that were published, but only in Spanish and French, and never English. More than a hundred of her messages to her sister and mother were released by her great-nephew the Duke of Alba in two editions a decade apart. The French translation was entitled *Lettres Familières de l'Impératrice Eugénie*, Collection Saint-Germain-des-Prés, published by the Paris firm Le Divan in 1935, volumes 1 and 2. The Spanish version was entitled *Cartas familiares. Emperatriz Eugenia*. Prólogos del Duque de Alba y de Gabriel Hanotaux. Guión biográfico, comentarios y notas de Félix de Llanos y Torriglia. Traducción de Fernando Paz, published by Iberia - Joaquín Gil, Editor, Barcelona, 1944.

The letters were identical in both languages and continually mentioned “Pepe, Marqués de Alcañices”. They demonstrated how often she had “Pepe” on her mind and how she fretted when he did not communicate with her.

For example, she wrote this message to her sister Paca in 1855:

“I saw Teresa the other evening. She was very nice but I don't see that she has as much beauty as she is renowned for...she has a Greek type of good looks--like that of Alcañices. Give my regards to the Marqués. He has written to his uncle Toledo that he loved me very much and that I was his favorite. I also have much affection for him.”³⁷

Because “Pepe” operated mostly from Spain, few of the French had any knowledge of him or his relationship with the Empress. Many vaguely distrusted Eugénie because she was a native of Spain, just as they had been wary of her predecessor, Queen Marie Antoinette, the native of Austria. But they had no idea how profoundly a Spanish marqués was influencing the French court.

One of the Spanish historians, Isabel Margarit, prefaced her book by summarizing how Pepe was a major player in both countries:

“With his profound knowledge of the world, if he had written his *Memorias*, they would have been one of the most revealing documents, not only for the Spain of Isabel II, the exile, and the Restoration, but also of France and the Second Empire.”³⁸

Napoleon III was the nephew of the great conqueror Napoleon Bonaparte, and like his uncle, the authoritarian sovereign of France. His uncle's reign was called “The First Empire”, so Napoleon III's was the “Second Empire.” (Napoleon I had a son by Marie-Louise of Austria, and he was sometimes called Napoleon II, or the Duke of Reichstadt in Austria; he died at the age of 20 and never reigned over an empire.)

Regardless of Napoleon III's power, Eugénie married him reluctantly. Because of censors intercepting messages, he knew that she still adored the Duke of Sesto but hoped that eventually she would erase him from her mind. “She has known a time of hesitancy. But now she is resolved,” wrote her biographer Octave Aubry. “If he asks for her hand she will marry the Emperor. He loves her. She does not love him at all, but she does not dislike him. He is delicate and kind, and she finds an engaging charm in his smile and his blue eyes. Much older he is than she, but older husbands are the most attentive. And finally, he is the Emperor. Since she has not been able to choose according to her heart, and since she has no settled fortune, and surrounded by perils in which her reputation is crumbling away, she must still marry if she wants to arrive at a normal life--well then, she will marry. But at any rate her marriage will be a fairy-tale marriage, such as no one has even seen except in olden times when shepherdeses became queens, a marriage that will be the talk of the whole wide world. Eugénie de Montijo will be an Empress. Not having love, which she would perhaps have preferred, she will put satisfied pride in its place. She will try to be useful to the country over which she is to reign. To a proud and active nature that may bear a distant (tomorrow no one will ever insult you again) resemblance to a kind of happiness.”³⁹

Napoleon III officially named Eugénie the Regent of France for three separate periods, trusting her to make political decisions for the entire French Colonial Empire for several weeks each in 1859, 1865, and 1870. Even when she was not the Regent, she attended

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Cabinet meetings and many times directed foreign policy on her own.

The French empire during her reign was literally global. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, most of France's colonies were restored including Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, and Île Bourbon (Réunion) in the Indian Ocean. In 1825, King Charles X sent an expedition to Haiti. And in 1830, France invaded Algeria which was not fully conquered until 1858. Under Napoleon III, France colonized New Caledonia in the South Pacific as a penal colony, Cochinchina (later part of Vietnam), Senegal in Africa, and a protectorate in Cambodia. France also joined with Britain to send

an army to China during the Second Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion in 1860.

During the Second Empire, the French Navy was the second most powerful in the world, after Britain's, modernized with fifteen steam-powered battle cruisers and a fleet of troop transports. Fighters included new elite units of naval infantry, Zouaves, the Chasseurs d'Afrique, Algerian sharpshooters, and the French Foreign Legion. By 1870, French overseas territories had tripled



Map of 19th century Indochina

in area and covered a million square kilo-meters with more than five million inhabitants.

Reigning over such diverse colonies required skill and diplomacy, and for several years coinciding with America's Civil War, Eugénie was literally the most powerful woman in the world.

So why have most American women seldom noticed her? Why is she less famous than her 18th century predecessor Marie Antoinette?

By the time Eugénie died in 1920 at the age of 94, she was a walking ghost of the dazzling belle who had been the toast of Paris during the glamorous Second Empire from 1852 to 1870. Although she was highly respected in Great Britain where she was a friend of Queen Victoria, she had lost most of her power.

Nevertheless, her influence continued through America's Gilded Age and deep into the 20th century.

Margaret Mitchell Researches Eugénie

Such a celebrated 19th century figure as Eugénie could not have gone unnoticed by the Atlanta journalist who in 1926 started writing a book set during America's Civil War. Margaret Mitchell was bored after injuring her ankle, so she asked her husband John Marsh to visit the local Carnegie Library. By the end of summer, he was growing weary of lugging dozens of books to keep her mind occupied. Finally one day, he was so exasperated that he asked her, "For God's sake, Peggy, can't you write a book instead of reading thousands of them?"

He purchased a second-hand Remington typewriter and a stack of copy paper⁴⁰ and turned a vintage sewing table into her desk. She produced the book's final chapter first and wrote the rest where it seemed to fit. When her ankle recovered, she visited the library daily to check the accuracy of historical facts relevant to her story. Her manuscript grew to describe how a fiery woman with a backbone of steel managed to survive the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. Margaret Mitchell experimented with numerous titles until she settled on *Gone with the Wind*.

When the novel was published in 1936, it soared to be the number one best-seller of 1936 and 1937 and the film rights were purchased by producer David O. Selznick. He in turn commissioned

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costume designer Walter Plunkett to research fashions of the 1860s for the movie version. Intriguingly, his depiction of Scarlett O'Hara so closely resembled Eugénie that one of Plunkett's most famous Scarlett costumes appeared to have been modeled after one of Eugénie's originals.

Scarlett's barbecue dress had ribbons interwoven in the ruffles at the neckline, and she wore her full skirted gown with a wide-brimmed straw hat. In Eugénie's official 1857 portrait by the artist Franz Xaver Winterhalter, she wore a full-skirted gown with interwoven ribbons and a wide-brimmed straw hat. Eugénie's version of the dress can be viewed publicly in the main parlor of Hillwood, the Washington D.C. estate of the late cereal heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post. She bought the Winterhalter portrait and hung it in the most prominent spot of her home which was turned into a museum after her death.



Melanie Wilkes played by Olivia de Havilland

Scarlett's barbecue dress was coincidence enough, but the costume designer Walter Plunkett also borrowed the image of Eugénie's sister Francesca, nicknamed "Paca", who married the Duke of Alba. Plunkett used this likeness for Melanie Hamilton as played in the movie by Olivia de Havilland. Both understated their looks with

their brunette center-parted hair styles gathered into buns at the napes of their necks.

Thanks to Napoleon III's appreciation of all things feminine, his court emphasized fashions, jewels, and perfumes. His main role models were his grandmother, Empress Josephine, and his mother Queen Hortense (Josephine's daughter), who fascinated him with their ball gowns and jewels. The Second Empire beckoned to the early years of Marie Antoinette when she first arrived at the court of King Louis XV, and all Versailles was abuzz about fashion, finery and frivolity.⁴¹

Eugénie personified the apex of 19th century luxury and focused on every detail of her wardrobe. She was constantly aware of being watched and assessed, not only by her immediate entourage but by France's twenty million subjects who read about her in the day's journals. Her most important ball gowns were made in duplicate so she could discreetly leave a gala, go to her suite, change into the facsimile dress, and reappear at the party looking as dewy fresh as when the ball began; her guests were left wondering how she managed to stay cool while they were wilting in the crush of three thousand guests.

In the scheme of the Second Empire's emphasis on marketing the goods of France and promoting prosperity, she was the model of



Eugénie's sister, Paca, Duchess of Alba

ultimate finery and laid out road maps to the pursuit of luxury that remained in vogue. She had access to jewelers and designers creating the finest array of luxury goods ever produced. The economy was soaring, bourgeois

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tradesmen were prospering, and many could afford to copy Eugénie's latest trends throughout Europe and America.

The quest for luxuries was so magnetic that it only intensified during the Civil War. While many soldiers' boots were so worn they were falling apart, women craved more and more of what France had to offer. "With the rise in prices, Confederate money sank, and with its rapid fall there arose a wild passion for luxuries," wrote Margaret Mitchell in the text of her novel. "Blockaders were commissioned to bring in necessities and were permitted to trade in luxuries only as a side line, but now it was the higher-priced luxuries that filled their boats to the exclusion of the things the Confederacy actually needed. People frenziedly bought these luxuries with the money they had today fearing that tomorrow's prices would be higher and the money would be worth less."⁴²

In spite of the Civil War, people paid attention to fashion news, even inside the Lincoln White House. "No matter what the war news and no matter the financial concerns of the Union government, there was always room alongside the casualty lists for detailed descriptions of Eugénie," wrote Jean H. Baker in her biography of Mary Todd Lincoln. The correspondent for the *Washington Daily Chronicle* marveled at how many genuine jewels were sewn into Eugénie's ball gowns: "She arrived in a pale tulle dress completely covered in violets. At the heart of each violet sparkled a diamond—800 in all."⁴³

Such descriptions stirred Mary Todd Lincoln's imagination. She focused on the *Godey's* clippings that showed the Empress in her more understated frocks such as the ones she wore when parading at the fashionable new park in western Paris, the Bois de Boulogne. There she appeared in her carriage wearing "a violet taffeta dress trimmed with rouches of the same and bias bands of black velvet edged with white at the bottom of the skirt."

Mrs. Lincoln asked her dress-maker Elizabeth Keckley for a version of this dress that was simpler but still required twenty-five yards of material. By early 1862, Elizabeth Keckley had copied sixteen versions of Eugénie's ensembles. "Madame President's clothes were, if not front-page news, guaranteed inside coverage in national newspapers," Jean Baker added.⁴⁴

Sketches of Eugénie's fashions were transmitted to America via *Godey's Lady's Book*, the *Vogue* magazine of its day. *Godey's* published high-styled French fashions and reported on the whims of the empress. Fashion historian JoAnne Olain gave an example of how Eugénie was mentioned in *Godey's* in this item published in October, 1867: "As the Empress is decidedly in favor of short dresses for promenade and traveling purposes, we are willing to follow her example and invite attention to a few of the latest styles."⁴⁵

However, shipments of fashion magazines were scarce during wartime, and Margaret Mitchell claimed that Atlanta ladies relied on Capt. Butler's fashion advice instead. "He not only brought Maybelle the satin but he was able to give excellent hints on the making of the wedding dress. Hoops in Paris were wider this season and skirts were shorter. They were no longer ruffled but were gathered up in scalloped festoons, showing braided petticoats beneath. He said, too, that he had seen no pantalets on the streets, so he imagined they were 'out.' Afterwards, Mrs. Merriwether told Mrs. Elsing she feared that if she had given him any encouragement at all, he would have told her exactly what kind of drawers were being worn by Parisiennes.

Had he been less obviously masculine, his ability to recall details of dresses, bonnets and coiffures would have been put down as the rankest effeminacy. The ladies always felt a little odd when they besieged him with questions about styles, but they did it nevertheless. They were as isolated from the world of fashion as shipwrecked mariners for few books of fashion came through the blockade. For all they knew the ladies of France might be shaving their heads and wearing coonskin caps, so Rhett's memory for furbelows was an excellent substitute for *Godey's Lady's Book*."⁴⁶

The 19th century American writer Emily Edson Briggs was the first female White House correspondent and wrote a regular newspaper column, *Olivia Letters*, in which she dispensed pointed observations about capital society. Not only did she enjoy easy access to the Lincolns, she was also admitted to the Congressional press gallery and was elected first president of the Woman's National Press Association when it was organized in 1882.

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In 1906 a collection of her columns was published as a book. For her entry on March 24, 1868, she wrote: “Paris has Eugénie; Washington has Mrs. Senator Sprague, the acknowledged queen of fashion and good taste.” Mrs. Sprague was the only woman she knew who was “on a par with the Empress whose fame is wafted to us across the great water.”⁴⁷



Empress Eugénie and her Ladies-in-Waiting, 1855, by Winterhalter

Eugénie’s most famous group portrait was painted by Winterhalter in 1855, showing the empress surrounded by the most beautiful women in the court, each wearing full-skirted silk gowns. This painting made such an impression on American women that it was remembered by Emily Edson Briggs during the Ulysses S. Grant administration more than fifteen years later. “The receptions of Mrs. Grant reminded the beholder of the picture of Eugénie and her maids-in-waiting,” she wrote. “True, Mrs. Grant did not possess the beauty of the charming Spaniard but her ‘suite’ would compare favorably in dignity, beauty and grace with the same number of women found near any throne in Europe.”⁴⁸



Original gown owned by Empress Eugénie

Diplomat Gustav Koerner, the United States Ambassador to Spain in 1863, attended a ball at the Royal Palace in Madrid hosted by Queen Isabel II. Afterwards he wrote an article published in newspapers all across the United States. American women had seldom read any such glowing reports about any one woman that compared to his rave review of Eugénie:

“After coffee, an informal reception was held in the royal drawing-room when their Majesties simply bowed to most of the guests and exchanged a few words with one here and there as they stood in rows or groups. The Queen dragged herself from one to the other, nodding and smiling in her usual friendly manner. Eugénie, on the contrary, flitted from one to another, going up close, almost affectionately, to some, and chatting in the most winsome way. But the contrast was the most apparent when they took leave and turned to bow to the guests. The Queen set her whole body in motion and nodded her head as familiarly as any citizen’s wife; but Eugénie turned towards them in all her graceful charm, placed her feet firmly and then stood bending the upper part of her body back and bringing

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in forward again with the easiest, prettiest movement from side to side like a swan curving its neck; then, without turning, she slowly withdrew backwards to the doorway. In this way she copied to perfection the wonderful swaying movement of the upper part of the body in which the Andalusian *danseuses* are inimitable. And then her dress! The ladies contemplated it in silent awe and even grave diplomatists were in raptures about the arrangement and adorning of her hair.”⁴⁹

Koerner may have been the first observer ever to describe a woman as undulating “like a swan.” Soon the highest compliment an American woman could receive was that she resembled a swan. Well into the 20th century, the writer Truman Capote accorded the honor to Babe Paley, Gloria Vanderbilt and Slim Keith, calling each of them “swans”. Well into the 21st century, *Town & Country* magazine periodically nominated its “New Swans”.

The resort town of Biarritz was merely a sleepy seaside village until Eugénie turned it into a haven for aristocrats. It was the French spa closest to her native Spain and Napoleon III built her a château there in 1854 which was called Villa Eugénie. People of wealth can still take suites there since in the early 1900s it was turned into the five-star Hotel du Palais. Eugénie was most relaxed at Biarritz, away from the bustle of Paris, and her son’s pediatrician Dr. Barthez wrote a book describing his experiences and depicting Eugénie similarly to what the ambassador had written: “Yet some means is needed of satisfying the activity, the life that fills her to overflowing, for



Eugénie style hat by Irene, 1930's

Original Scarlett O'Hara



Scarlett O'Hara wearing Eugénie style hat

it is really she that is responsible for the swing and animation of life in the château. Without her, one would die of *ennui* (boredom).”⁵⁰

Scarlett and Eugénie placed their adored men on pedestals and kept their relationships platonic. In Margaret Mitchell’s words, Scarlett’s “love for Ashley was something different, having nothing to do with

passion or marriage, something sacred and breath-takingly beautiful, an emotion that grew stealthily through the long days of her enforced silence, feeding on oft-thumbed memories and hopes.”⁵¹

Eugénie’s biographer Robert Sencourt described her as possessing that same lofty-mindedness: “She was a brilliant woman, of phenomenal nervous energy,



Scarlett O'Hara wearing fringed “drapery” hat in the Eugénie style

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belonging to a slightly but distinctly abnormal type where the lift of natural impulse was replaced by passions on another plane.”⁵²

Scarlett and Eugénie were so similar that they seemed cut from the same cloth. But even more coincidental was that Melanie and Paca’s personalities were also virtually interchangeable.

A court observer noted that Paca was “an adorable woman—all who knew her lauded her grace and gentleness; her affectionate and lively humor won the heart of everybody.”⁵³ In Margaret Mitchell’s words, Melanie had “a sweet, timid face but a plain face, and she had no feminine tricks of allure to make observers forget its plainness. She looked—and was—as simple as earth, as good as bread, as transparent as spring water. For all her plainness of features and smallness of stature, there was a sedate dignity about her movements.”⁵⁴ Eugénie admired Paca’s refined style and wished she could have been more like her older sister. Scarlett was envious of Melanie but admired the qualities that made her attractive to Ashley.

The fashions shown throughout the *Gone with the Wind* film appeared to be straight from Eugénie’s style book, including the various versions of “Eugénie hats” which was the actual name given to the style that the Empress popularized in the 1860s. These dipped to the center of the forehead while the rear part was decorated with plumes, net, or fringe. The most exaggerated in the film was the bonnet Scarlett wore in the saw mill when she was hugged by Ashley. Another was the green velvet hat with gold tassels made from the parlor draperies of the plantation Tara. A similar style was the green bonnet that Rhett Butler brought from Paris, telling her it came from rue de la Paix. The Eugénie hat was revived as an American fashion trend, rating an article in *Time* magazine in the 1930s along with magazine advertisements run by the famous milliner Irene that she was making Eugénie hats.⁵⁵ In the article France: Empress Eugénie Again on August 3, 1931, the article stated: “Paris last week talked of Empress Eugénie and of ostriches in the same breath. Historians and ornithologists had nothing to do with the case. Couturiers and stylists were pronouncing la mode for autumn and early winter. It was the official Fall Opening. When the Empress Eugénie hat reappeared cautiously last spring the style world took a guess. It was a saucy fillip to be followed by surprises.

U. S. department store buyers, fashion reporters, newsgatherers, sweltering in a Paris hot spell, dodged traffic last week from the Place Vendôme.⁵⁶

The University of Texas at Austin bought the archives of *Gone with the Wind* producer David O. Selznick. In the storage vaults were original sketches of the Paris fashions reproduced in European publications such as *Illustrated London News* and *Godey's Lady's Book*. Obviously they were selected to inspire the styles of the female characters in the film. These color plates were similar to those that many American women cut from magazines and framed for their walls like fine art. The film's bazaar scene showed a wide array of such ball gowns based on their French originals.

LIFE STORY

Both Rhett Butler and Napoleon III married Scarlett and Eugénie because they refused to give in until marriage. About Rhett, Margaret Mitchell wrote: "No, he hadn't married her for any of the usual reasons that men marry women. He had married her solely because he wanted her and couldn't get her any other way... They had made a bargain and she was pleased with her side of the bargain. She hoped he was equally pleased but she did not care very much whether he was or not."⁵⁷

Napoleon III offered to make Eugénie his mistress, promising that she would be "magnificently provided for" and was to "share his heart, if not his throne." To this proposal she gave the famous answer: "Your Majesty should know that the only approach to my bed-chamber is through the door of the church."⁵⁸ One day when the Emperor was reviewing troops at the Court of the Tuileries, he happened to look up at the windows of the palace and saw her among the guests. He led his horse beneath the balcony and called out to her: "Tell me, how can I reach you?" In her flippant repartee, she replied: "To the right, Sire, by way of the Chapel."⁵⁹

Yet another example of Margaret Mitchell's research was that she echoed Victor Hugo's description of Napoleon III. In the book's version of the Wilkes home during the Shantytown raid, Melanie read aloud from the French book, *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, rather than from *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens as was

Nancy Smith

shown in the film. And Margaret Mitchell made a veiled reference to Victor Hugo's depiction of Napoleon III as *Napoléon le Petit* (literally, "Napoleon the Little"), the title of Hugo's political pamphlet that condemned the reign of Napoleon III. Hugo lived in exile in Guernsey for most of the Second Empire and his criticism of Napoleon hardened its reputation.

Rhett Butler summarized European policies toward the North and the South by saying: "For your information I was in England not a month ago and I'll tell you this, England will never help the Confederacy. England never bets on the underdog. That's why she's England. Besides, the fat Dutch woman who is sitting on the throne is a God-fearing soul and she doesn't approve of slavery. Let the English mill workers starve because they can't get our cotton, but never, never strike a blow for slavery.

"And as for France, that weak imitation of Napoleon is far too busy establishing the French in Mexico to be bothered with us. In fact he welcomes this war, because it keeps us too busy to run his troops out of Mexico...No, Scarlett, the idea of assistance from abroad is just a newspaper invention to keep up the morale of the South. The Confederacy is doomed."⁶⁰

When Scarlett pointed out to Rhett that she would inherit property from her father and from her late husband Charles Hamilton, he alluded to the original French Revolution of 1789: "I imagine the French aristocrats thought practically the same thing until the very moment that they climbed into the tumbrils."⁶¹