

-----Original Message-----

From: PAT CONROY [mailto:PCONROY98602@rotterdam.cruisemail.net]

Sent: Wednesday, April 11, 2001 9:23 PM

To: jbeck@kilpatrickstockton.com

Subject: pat conroy's statement

your honor, my name is pat conroy and i am writing you from the deck of the Rotterdam as the ship makes her way from Alexandria egypt and the ruins of ephesus in Turkey. i'm an american novelist of the Southern variety and the author of the prince of tides and beach music. atlanta born and atlanta shaped and baptized at sacred heart catholic church in downtown atlanta at the same font where margaret mitchell was christened forty-six years earlier. [please note; this is unsophisticated email and punctuation isnt always accurate]. margaret mitchell was my mother's favorite novelist by far, and it was a religious sentiment to my mother that gone with the wind [hereafter, gwtw] was the greatest novel ever written. gwtw suffused the world of my childhood like no other book with the possible exception of the bible. my mother raised me to be a 'southern novelist' because of her passion and devotion to the fictional world created by margaret mitchell. i wrote an introduction to the sixtieth anniversary edition of gwtw, and told of my mother's extraordinary relationship with that novel which she first read to me when \i was five years old, living on rosedale road in atlanta while my father fought in the korean war. because my mother had risen out of a poor white south that had cheapened and ruined her chldhood, she remade her life out of the pages of gwtw and simply modeled her life after scarlett o'hara and did it so successfully that people called her miss scarlett everywhere my father sweved as a marine aviator. my mother took me to see gwtw every time it was released during my childhood, and i could come out of the theater thinking that my mother, peg conroy, was prettier and smarter than scarlett ohara.

after the appearance of my introduction which included my own deep appreciation for the artistry of gwtw, the estate of margaret mitchell contacted my agent, julian bach, in new york and asked if i would be interested in doing a sequel to gwtw. a sequel by alexandria ripley had appeared years before, had generated enough money to satisfy the heirs of Ted turner, but had drawn enough critical fire to bring deep embarrassment to the estate. this is not meant to disparage ms. ripley who wrote the estate exactly the kind of book ms. ripley was born to write.

next they turned to the superb english novelist emma tennant, who wrote a sequel that the estate deeply disliked and sent poor emma packing, though i hope a slightly richer woman. that, your honor, is when my warship floated in to the battle zone called the margaret mitchell estate where your own court will now joining its archipelago.

when julian bach called me, he issued a strange decree from the estate that julian said was non-negotiable and he wanted me to know it up front. he said, 'you're not going to like this, but the estate will require you to sign a pledge that says you will under no circumstances write anything about miscegenation or homosexuality.' 'julian,' i said, 'that's the stupidest thing i've ever heard. i'd never sign anything like that nor would any other self-respecting novelist. in fact, tell them here's my first line of the sequel.' 'pat, i'll just say no.'

'no tell them my first line is this; after rhett butler made love to ashley wilkes, he lit a cigarette and said, ashley, did i ever tell you my grandmother was black.'

later that first line was published in the new york times, your honor. by then the estate had weighed in again and said that i would not have to sign such a hateful and humiliating proviso. my agent began a long negotiation with their agent, the gentlemanly owen laster. i had spent years reading about the margaret mitchell estate and their tenacious and scrappy lawyers, paul anderson and hal clarke. i duly forwarned all the agents and lawyers and editors and publishers that paul and hal had defended the noror of the mitchell estate with the bloodthirtiness of caligula and they were greatly admired in the atlanta legal community for it. my people, new yorkers all, smiled indulgently at my praise of two southern lawyers and were surprised in the end when hal and paul handed them all back their heads displayed neatly on plates. i dropped out of the project several years ago now [i think, your honor] we are now in the adriatic going from venice to sicily], and i have a letter from paul anderson telling me that the project blew up because of my own insatiable greed.

i see it differently, your honor. that ugly little phrase kept coming up again and again, the one about homosexuality and no miscegenation. paul anderson never brought it up and always left it to hal clarke and it kept coming up again and again. in new york during a session that i thought would seal my fate for the next five years, hal brought it up another time in front of my agents and i walked out of the meeting and went back to my home in south carolina. paul and i had lunch in south carolina later that week and he again assured me that i would never have to sign a contract with that offensive and appalling line in it. negotiations began again and dragged on and on until i felt my original peg conroy-inspired passion beginning to fade was the years wore on. finally i received a phone call from barry frank, vice president of img and an experienced negotiator who once put together a deal between cbs and major league baseball for televison rights.

barry said, 'pat, i don't like this. i dont trust these guys or anything about them and i dont want you to have anything to do with this project. no matter what you do, i think these atlanta boys will sue you. i dont know for what, but i know it'll be for something.' i withdrew from the fray, your honor, because everyone in my professional life found it unpleasent to deal with the margaret mitchell estate. i think pual and hal made a great error in judgment. i was going to try to write a masterpiece, a work of art that approached the high standards of gwtw itself. i never asked any of my agents a single thing about money, then or now. i write for reasons that the estate of margaret mitchell will never fathom or ever slightly understand. i write becaues i am the son of peg conroy who took me to margaret mitchell's grave when i was a young boy and told me she wanted to write a book as great as gwtw. that sequel was for my mother and my mother alone. i know exactly the damage it would do to my literary reputation, and frankly your honor, i did not give a damn.

now, we come to alice randall and her wonderful book the wind done gone. neither pual no hal are eaten alive with a strong sense of humor, nor did they give me any indication they would know humor if it entered the same room with them. this will cause them little harm in the legal profession but will cast great doubt in their judgment when they seek to quash the publication of a parody. houghton mifflin was my birthplace as a novelist, and there are no finer or more distinguished publishers on earth. i will always call myself a

houghton-mifflin boy and do it with great pride. someone from houghton mifflin sent me an early copy of the book knowing my involvement with the gwtw sequel, and i read it with pleasure and laughed out loud at its clever inversions and insid3ers jokes on the themes of gwtw. the only suitable response that black america can have to the immense popularity of gwtw is to turn to parody, to mockery, to humor and to the power of laughter. the portrait of slavery done by margaret mitchell is one of the most smiley-faced and happy darkies in the field we have in american literature, and i know very few blacks who dont shudder with revulsion at gwtw's portrait of slavery. but margarret mitchell's genius was so telling that even her black characters are among the most sharply drawn and memorable in american literature. does alice randall have a right to parody gwtw...yes, your honoe, and an inalienable one. does she have a right to make scarlett ohara part black...she certainly does, and it's far funnier to me because the men who are trying to censor her once wanted me to promise not to mention homosexuality or miscegenation in my book. scarlett's black and ashley's gay and belle wathing's running a house of ill-repute filled with lesbians. this is funny stuff, your honor, and far, far funnier that it is being held up in court by the overzealous guardians of the rapacious margaret mitchell estate.

alice randall's book is a parady and a grand send-off of gwtw. she is uncommonly talented and a great welcome to american letters. if you censor her book, then saturday night live has no right to exist, nor does any comic strip, or any late night tv show, or any novelist who makes fun of another author or book. if you suppress the book, then give paul and hal a lockbox and a key and tell them they own the rights to all humor and parody in this country.

in all my dealings with the mitchell estate, paul and hal never once mentioned the word literature. it's what's at stake in your court room, your honor. that the margaret mitchell estate is trying to suppress the publication of an african-american woman's first novel is both an outrage, your honor and ---forgive me---one of the funniest things i've ever heard of in my life.

yours very truly,\

pat conroy

p.s. i understand i write this under the threat of perjury. also, i affirm that this is my signature and my letter. joe beck, counselor for houghton-mifflin, has the right to present it to the court.

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