High Hearts is brutally graphic in its description of war scenes, almost excruciatingly so. Descriptions of field operating tables unadorned with improvised band-aids, gangrene and maggots festering in ripped-off flesh, and one particularly gruesome scene where a young man goes insane after seeing her son's maimed body, litter this book. The author's乙方 of Change has been properly praised for its honest depiction of war and its refusal to glorify combat; but High Hearts is surely this classic novel's equal in that regard.

As the bloody war progresses, the tide starts turning in favor of the Union forces. The North started with a larger population and more highly developed industrial capacity than the South, and thus were better able to withstand the war of attrition which ultimately developed. This was in spite of the superior military training afforded the Rebel armies; most of the career military men fighting on the side of the Confederacy had been high-ranking officers in the US Army prior to secession. Some would even venture to say that the forces of the Confederacy were more valorous on the battlefield.

Whether this is true or not, the South certainly lost the war, with disastrous long-term ecological consequences. Slavery is dismissed as the secondary issue inflaming passions which led to the war. However, the issue of succession is explored in more detail, with a particular emphasis on the political leadership of the Confederacy and the reasons for the political ambitions of many of the military leaders, whose minds were more often in the statehouse than on the battlefield. Some of the myths surrounding the underlying causes of the Civil War are also laid to rest. The characters in High Hearts blame the radicals on both sides, such as Pennsylvania Senator Thaddeus Stevens and South Carolina Senator John Calhoun, for inflaming passions which led to the war. Slavery is dismissed as the secondary issue that it actually was.

This is by far Miss Brown's best work to date, which is not to be interpreted to mean that her other writings are not good. They are, in fact, quite fine. High Hearts eschews much of the verbal slapstick that poppers her earlier books, replacing it with a darker, more brooding, conversational regrettably. Her character development is more complete here than in her previous books, a natural development in the refinement of her writing craft since her first novel, Rubybush Jungle, was published a decade ago.

High Hearts is a novel of exceedingly high quality, and contains the ingredients which make it a potential candidate for the Pulitzer Prize in literature. It is quintessentially American, covering a large story and relating the important issues of an era in American history, and is extraordinarily well-written. Ms. Brown's exceptional kemia will be a factor in any awards consideration, as judges often attempt to avoid any hint of controversy or politics in their decisions. Wind of a Gone. With the Wind is deserving of a Pulitzer (1937). High Hearts is eminently as deserving.