TYING THE KNOTS:

THE NATIONALIZATION OF WEDDING RITUALS IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

PATRICK W. O'NEIL: Tying the Knots: The Nationalization of Wedding Rituals in Antebellum America
(Under the direction of Dr. Harry L. Watson)

As middle-class culture became increasingly influential in the years before the Civil War, the white wedding became a powerful symbol of that culture, embodying both bourgeois, entrepreneurial values and a companionate view of marriage. In their weddings, antebellum Americans expressed their willingness or reluctance to view their relationships through a middle-class lens. Diverse groups of people alternately embraced a bourgeois, companionate identity for their relationships and their communities, or crafted counter-ideologies hearkening back to what many saw as America's more stable, powerful aristocratic and patriarchal past. The weddings of middle-class New Yorkers, wealthy southerners, enslaved African Americans, and Mormon pioneers all reflected these conflicts. New Yorkers centered their weddings around the marrying couple's love for each other, suggesting that marriage was not an economic arrangement but a romantic one. Outside the northeast, however, Americans struggled to comprehend and, often, to counter the growing cultural dominance of the middle class, and crafted ideological and ritual responses. The weddings of southern slaveholders and Mormon separatists both asserted different visions of America as a patriarchal nation, beating back the specter of gender equality with paeans to powerful masculinity. And southern slaveholders imposed their vision of patriarchy on the marriages of slaves, using ritual to undermine blacks' claims to patriarchal man- or womanhood. In

exploring these disparate rituals, I offer a vision of an America marked by intense debates over what form its interpersonal relationships, its gender roles, its economy, its spiritual future, and its national identity should take. Understanding these conflicting desires—to partake of the national culture as equals, yet to differentiate themselves as social and political actors—helps illuminate the halting, equivocal paths Americans walked toward sectional division, and toward their eventual accession to middle-class values.

For Gina

"Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom."

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Finally, a few words on marriage (although, in fairness, just you wait). Several years of putting marriage and its attendant rituals in their historical, economic, and social contexts has not entirely blunted my understanding of the encouraging fact that marriage can also be a partnership of equals in love with each other. It has been a pleasure reading the words of my subjects—Walter Lenoir and Cornelia Christian, for example, or Henry and Rosa Davis—because in one way or another, they appear to have found in their relationships a source of love and satisfaction that unavoidably reminds me of how I feel about my wife, Gina Difino. She is a true partner, brilliant, fun, compassionate, challenging, and always comforting, and the great privilege of my life is to share in these rituals and this life with her. Working a full-

time job while I mused in the archives, approaching a Master's degree of her own, cooking brilliantly, and raising a sweet, ridiculous dog, she has put up with a lot while this dissertation has been written, and I'm inexpressibly grateful to her. The least she deserves is to have it dedicated to her; the most I can give her is all my love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction……...….1

Chapter One: "A *Wedding* without the *Ring*": The Ascension of the
Middle-Class Wedding in America…….13

Chapter Two: "Eleanor & I Are Entirely United": Weddings of the
Northeastern Middle Class……...82

Chapter Three: "I am 'Doing Exactly Right'": Weddings of Southern
Slaveholders……...…125

Chapter Four: "They Were Commanded to Jump": Weddings of Southern Slaves……..186

Chapter Five: "It Seemed Duty Was Always Calling": Weddings and
Sealings of Mormons…….232

Conclusion: "No More Pleasing Peculiarities": Tom Thumb's
Wedding and Change and Confluence in Nineteenth-Century Weddings…….…286

Appendix One: WPA Narratives Referring to Broomstick Weddings
in North and South Carolina……..338

Appendix Two: WPA Narratives Referring to Broomstick Weddings…….…339

Appendix Three: WPA Narratives that Mention Broomstick
Weddings but Do Not Describe Them in Slavery…….…342

Appendix Four: WPA Narratives that Describe a Broomstick
Wedding but Do Not Make Clear Who Performed or Initiated It…….343

Appendix Five: WPA Narratives Describing Weddings Performed
by the Master……..345

Appendix Six: WPA Narratives Using Coercive Language in
Describing Jumping the Broom…….346

Appendix Seven: WPA Narratives Describing Broomstick Weddings
after Emancipation…….348

Bibliography……..349

Introduction

In the weeks after Gavin Newsom, mayor of San Francisco, legalized gay marriage in February, 2004, eager couples thronged City Hall to get married. Newsom's declaration precipitated a minor national uproar: President George W. Bush called for a constitutional amendment restricting marriage to heterosexual couples, and the specter of gay marriage played a role in that year's political debates. But it was not just an expansion of the definition of marriage that galvanized people: weddings themselves acquired political implications. One woman who married at City Hall insisted that her wedding constituted "an incredibly important statement."[1] Her political foes clearly agreed: as gay men and women married in the rotunda, protesters gathered outside the building.[2] And while all sides understood that marriage, not the rituals, lay at the center of the debate, many of the newly legal couples did not simply certify a legal bond. Instead, they married in style, joyously (if somewhat defiantly) appropriating the visual signifiers of traditional heterosexual weddings, donning tuxedos and wedding dresses, serving giant white cakes, and exchanging rings.[3] The mother of one bride declared, "Everyone here . . . is a pioneer."

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[1] This quotation and next come from Suzanne Herel, "Despite Political Uproar, Weddings Are Private Affairs; Ceremonies Cap Years of Love, Devotion—and Struggle," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 February 2004.

[2] Rachel Gordon, "Gay Wedding Foes Rally at City Hall," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 3, 2004.

[3] Photographss of same-sex couples marrying over Valentine's weekend, 2004 in San Francisco can be found at numerous websites, including San Francisco Valentine Weekend Revolution, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2004/02/18/gaywedgallery.DTL and Same Sex Weddings in San Francisco – Valentines Day 2004, http://www.shooter.net/hitched/main.html.

That a wedding could be invested with such significance would not have surprised the men and women who gathered to celebrate the nuptials of another pair of pioneers—"the first married couple at Nebraska Centre," a tiny outpost on the frontier.[4] The guests at this 1854 ceremony used their wedding to engage in boisterous discussions about political topics great and small. The assembled crowd shouted their approval of the election of "old pioneers to office in the West," while one guest ended his "congratulatory speech" by advocating "'plant[ing] the stars and stripes on the Eastern continent.'" The bridegroom himself spoke in favor of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and proposed cheers for Stephen A. Douglas.

Few weddings in the antebellum United States were so explicitly politicized as this one, or as the ones that took place in San Francisco in 2004. But these examples illustrate how the wedding could bear the weight of Americans' ambitions, hopes and prejudices. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, Americans came to view behavior at weddings as a marker of identity, and they unhesitatingly interpreted what they saw and experienced at weddings in light of the most pressing issues of the day. Americans invested weddings with personal, communal, and national significance, believing that their nuptials let slip clues to the status and identities of their participants. The writer who described the frontier nuptials in Nebraska Centre, for example, argued that the reception dinner proved the hardiness and, by extension, the political legitimacy of his or her subjects, comparing their rusticity favorably to the puffed-up airs of the Eastern gentry. The guests and bridal party sat "on the bosom of mother Earth," feasting on "dried buffalo tongues, dried venison, boiled antelope, boiled ham, wild duck, penola soup; . . . [and] for wine, pure Platte water." "Ye dainty

[4] T.T., "Pioneer Wedding—Romance in Reality," *New York Times*, 3 August 1854. The five-paragraph article originally appeared in the *Council Bluffs (Iowa) Bugle*.

dyspeptics of crowded cities," the author crowed, "who attend bridal parties in costly palaces of American mould, think you ever enjoyed such a repast?"

In weddings, then, antebellum Americans ordered and symbolized their lives, taking stock of their class, gender, and racial relationships and identities via an almost universally-recognized form. Although the same could be said of weddings today, what antebellum men and women did was unique to their times. The wedding took on a new form and meaning in the nineteenth century. Prior to the nineteenth century, weddings, while still joining couples in lifelong relationships, had nowhere near the social or national significance that they came to have in this century. The symbols which gays and lesbians appropriated in San Francisco in 2004 to signify their right to privileges formerly restricted to heterosexuals—white dresses, sculpted cakes, and golden rings—had little resonance for Americans before 1800, and in some cases were hardly associated with weddings at all. Indeed, prior to the nineteenth century, Americans had no standard wedding: they married almost entirely according to local custom. Only from 1800 to 1860 did the American wedding acquire an aesthetic and meaning similar to what it has today, and only haltingly did the form become the national standard. This change helped define major developments in American life, most notably the growth of the middle class and the ethic of companionate marriage, which upset and eventually superseded America's more explicitly patriarchal traditions. The new wedding heralded these changes, making proper comportment at and interpretation of the ritual a marker of one's adherence to middle-class values. As we shall see, not everyone craved such a distinction.

Weddings, of course, had taken place for centuries before Europeans colonized America. Attempting to counter a long tradition of clandestine marriage, the medieval Church had led

couples through fulsome rituals which combined verbal consent with a host of physical items, including rings, pieces of gold and silver, holy water, "a shield or a book," and the couple's hands, lips, fingers and (occasionally) feet.[5] Many of these physical signifiers recalled "pre-Christian notions that words were not enough to bind bodies to one another."[6] As the Reformation de-sacramentalized marriage, in hopes of stripping the church of jurisdiction over it, many Protestants (Anglicans, for instance) retained many of the ritual's earlier symbolic elements, rings among them.[7] However, Luther's dismissal of "tomfoolery [and] pagan spectacle" suggested a move toward simplifying the ritual which more stringent reformers took to heart. Weddings in John Calvin's Geneva left out rings altogether.[8]

Although Protestantism's less-elaborate ceremonies would leave a mark in America, the Reformation's most significant change to the wedding ritual (at least as it concerned America) was in de-centralizing it: as Luther wrote, "Many lands, many customs."[9] Each splinter group sought its own Biblically authentic path to marriage. Even as the Anglican Church promulgated a national wedding rite, colonial Americans felt free to reject it if they so chose. Elizabeth Freeman notes that "Betrothal, ceremonial form, and even the validity of marriages were matters of custom and community supervision" in America, not subject to a

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[5] See George Elliott Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1904), I: 305-07, quot. p. 306. Clandestine marriages, with varying degrees of Christian and secular ritual, remained endemic throughout Europe well past the Protestant Reformation. See Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, I: 340-350.

[6] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 13.

[7] Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, I: 388.

[8] Quoted in Frank C. Senn, *The People's Work: A Social History of the Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 220. See Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, I: 383-385, 375.

[9] Quoted in Senn, *The People's Work*, 219.

wider authority.[10] According to George Elliott Howard's exhaustive survey, colonial New Englanders originally made marriage a solely civil rite, Virginians adhered to the Anglican ritual, and North Carolinians required no minister and a bare minimum of ceremony.[11] (Both New England and North Carolina eventually allowed or mandated religious rites.) This diversity of form and legality was the defining characteristic of American weddings until well into the nineteenth century. The ritual spread in threadbare patchwork over the colonies' wide cultural and geographic expanse, touching some in quite different ways than others. (And as clandestine marriage persisted in rural areas, it touched some people not at all.) Americans found it correspondingly difficult to wrap themselves in the form. In Plymouth Colony, John Demos suggests that weddings appear to have been conducted with "a kind of rough and ready spontaneity," and that "any fitting words would do" to solemnize a marriage.[12]

The nineteenth century, however, brought significant changes in the way that Americans approached marriage and the ritual that commemorated it. The most important of these changes, the Market Revolution, helped enshrine the middle class as the nation's most important demographic. The increasing power and importance of the market forced men and women throughout the nation, but especially in the urban Northeast, to leave behind the "diversified agricultural production" of the colonial and Revolutionary economy and adapt to

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[10] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 22.

[11] Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, II: 127-128, 228, 249, 251.

[12] John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 163. See also Chilton L. Powell, "Marriage in Early New England," *The New England Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (1928): 323-334; and E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 129.

a new world dominated by "small-scale merchandisers and manufacturers."[13] Further, the political upheavals associated with the American Revolution encouraged Americans to replace the eighteenth-century ideal of leisured aristocracy with republican industriousness; and the economic changes taking place as the century developed buttressed that ideological change.[14] These economic and political changes spurred a number of psychological and social adjustments—most notably the decline of patriarchal, aristocratic ideology and the growth of middle-class culture, in which men and women redefined their family relationships away from class-stratified interdependent community structures and toward an atomized, female-controlled home, a supposed oasis within the more masculine world of the market.[15]

Middle-class culture affected both the ways Americans felt about their relationships and the ways they presented those relationships to the wider world. The new middle-class ethic prized companionship between spouses. Where previously people of European descent had married expressly to link themselves to the wider economic and social networks necessary for survival and prosperity, the middle-class ideal of the home as a sanctuary from the market encouraged men and women to marry for love, or at least for companionship. The ideal marital relationship became a *companionate* one, comprised of a man who earned money outside the home and a woman who maximized the household's economic efficiency inside, while giving her husband the comfort and spiritual solace he required to return to the market.

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[13] Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 11. See also Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5-29.

[14] See Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 271-286.

[15] See Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 231-35. Another, related adjustment was the Second Great Awakening, in which Americans both dismayed and excited by the growth of the market turned to evangelical Protestantism to help control and make sense of the changes. See Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 138.

Instead of weaving couples into the social fabric, companionate marriage became "a means of separating a couple from broader ties and obligations."[16] This isolation had significant consequences, putting economic and social pressure on couples to achieve high levels of emotional intimacy with each other, despite often having little preparation for how to do so.

If they hoped to earn wealth and status via entrepreneurial and cultural skills rather than inheritance or community structures, middle-class men and women had to be able to demonstrate those skills to their peers. The middle class therefore fostered the growth of sentimental culture, as Americans trained themselves to read and convey emotional "sincerity."[17] Plagued by class anxiety borne of economic and social dislocations, Americans cast aside residual Puritan ambivalence toward ritual and took refuge in it. Indeed, as Freeman argues, "the incipient U.S. middle class articulated itself by proliferating rituals and icons of feeling," which, properly performed, could identify their performers as social and economic worthies.[18] Between 1800 and 1865, weddings gained in psychological and social importance, as Americans increasingly viewed them through the prism of sentimentality, that collection of signifiers and ideas that conveyed sincerity and helped define middle-class legitimacy.[19] They also gained—as we will discuss in the first chapter—a more universally-acknowledged form and aesthetic, the Victorian "white wedding" replete with dresses, cakes, attendants, and flowers. The new ritual offered men and women a place in which to work out

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[16] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 11. As Ellen K. Rothman has argued, aspects of the wedding ritual came to reflect this change, "self-consciously isolat[ing] the couple" from their communities. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984), 176.

[17] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), xv-xvi; see also John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).

[18] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 109.

[19] For a similar formulation, see Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 124.

a host of new anxieties. Rejecting community structures in favor of the modern, bourgeois state of couplehood, and joining oneself emotionally and sexually to a single person exacted a heavy toll, and the wedding would help Americans pay the price.

But not everyone desired to cross over into middle-class status or to define their relationships (much less their community or their nation) in bourgeois, companionate terms. Although the aesthetic appeal of the white wedding was undeniable, the companionate ethic foretold significant dislocations for those who did not cotton to it. It privileged the middle-class worldview, suggesting that America's economic future lay in entrepreneurship rather than traditional agricultural economy. It idealized a democratic and dangerously fluid class structure instead of the seemingly-stable, aristocratic forms of the eighteenth century (and in doing so, threatened to strip white men and women of grace, dignity, and even—in extreme cases—racial privilege). And, perhaps most important, it seemed to rob men of their patriarchal mastery over women by forcing them into marriages of equals. The wedding rituals of diverse groups of people show that, while some antebellum Americans embraced the bourgeois, companionate ethic, others saw the growth of middle-class culture as a threat to their personal autonomy and their national identity, and crafted counter-ideologies hearkening back to what they saw as America's more stable, powerful aristocratic and patriarchal past.

After discussing the development and idealization of the white wedding, we will consider how four groups responded to the new form and its concomitant values. Not surprisingly, the weddings of the New York middle class most readily embraced the companionate ideal. Minimizing the importance of older communal factors such as family inheritance and parental consent, New Yorkers tended to center their rituals around the marrying couple's

love for each other. Even the truly wealthy sometimes avoided discussing dowries, preferring to speak as if their financial futures depended on their social and business skills, not on bequests from their parents. Accordingly, they treated marriage not as an economic arrangement but a romantic and spiritual one.

The southern slaveholding elite, on the other hand, rejected northerners' focus on the bride and groom's emotions and celebrated the economic power of patriarchs. They staged highly-regimented pageants of parental strength, ensuring above all that the substantial economic transaction at hand—passing money, land, and slaves through the generations—went smoothly, and that nothing untoward endangered the reputations of the men or women involved. Although in their actual lives, wealthy southerners often conceived of their relationships as loving and companionate, both men and women rejected the idea of presenting their men as anything less than aristocratic patriarchs, and simultaneously rejected the idea of participating in the bourgeoisification of America.

African American slaves offer a different perspective on the use of ritual to celebrate identity. When they could marry in the privacy of the slave quarters, blacks orchestrated rituals that celebrated familial relationships, often in fairly companionate terms: it certainly seems they gave women a greater voice in their rituals than their masters did. But weddings, while expressive of blacks' desire to normalize and own their relationships, also offered masters an opportunity to exert control over the black community, and specifically to undermine slave claims to they patriarchal mastery that whites put so much stock in. Masters forced blacks into sham weddings with strangers, they usurped the traditional roles of parents in the ritual, they sometimes denied slaves the right to marry at all, and they forced slaves to take part in rituals—such as jumping the broom—that rendered slave marriage comic and

flimsy. Under other circumstances, African Americans might well have used weddings to embrace the companionate ideal. But it testifies to how much the wedding had come to matter in America that slaveholders attempted to interfere in their slaves' rituals.

Finally, Mormons in Missouri and Utah explicitly rejected the companionate model in favor of a patriarchy which they believed was truly old-world. Their weddings, both polygamous and not, offered ritual support to their efforts to reform America by re-creating Biblical patriarchy. They centered their nuptial rituals on the authority of men on earth and in heaven, and emphasized their followers' spiritual duty to a far greater extent than their companionate love. In doing so, church leaders hoped to assert their own spiritual power and to help their adherents overcome the overly-romantic influence of the effete, corrupt middle class. Yet few Mormons could escape the dominant culture's notion that marriage ought to celebrate companionate love, and their weddings betrayed their participants' misgivings about sacrificing their romantic ideas to their religious ideals.

Parts of this story have been told before. Ellen Rothman's and Karen Lystra's excellent histories of courtship and romantic love deal perceptively with the psychological and social effects that the transition to companionate marriage had on the social, economic, and psychological lives of the northeastern middle class.[20] Rothman, in particular, constructs the most insightful narrative of the growth American wedding rituals to date, describing their development into consumerist ritual that helped to set couples apart from their communities. And Elizabeth Freeman's provocative *The Wedding Complex* offers an authoritative discussion of weddings in Western culture and surveys a wide swath of wedding-related ideas. But no one has examined the antebellum era, when the ritual came into its own, in

[20] Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, and Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

sufficient depth. Nor has any scholar examined the rituals by which various groups responded to the consumerist, companionate imperative established by the middle-class. In doing so, I offer a vision of an America marked by intense debates over what form its interpersonal relationships, its gender roles, its economy, and its national identity should take.

In studying how various groups responded to the newly standardized wedding ritual, I consider cultural changes via Americans' regional and ideological responses. The wedding is a convenient vehicle for this sort of analysis, as it is so intimately connected to the transatlantic bourgeois culture that attained dominance in the Victorian age. Americans' love affair with dresses and cakes, vows and receptions continues to the present day in both popular culture and personal fantasies. But the white wedding came with strings attached. Not all Americans were comfortable with the values the wedding promoted: in particular the ritual's companionate undertones alienated those with economic or social incentives outside the middle-class worldview. In a way, this project expands on James MacPherson's discussion of Northern exceptionalism, noting that, as the Northern middle class was changing the economic, social, and political game during the antebellum years, people on the outside looking in crafted ideological responses.[21] The Mormon experience shows clearly that elevating the white wedding to a position of cultural importance hardly guaranteed the universal adoption of its values. And even as wealthy southerners gravitated toward the wedding's look, they used the ritual to define themselves as avatars of traditional aristocratic gentility—culturally a world apart from the modernizing north. Understanding these conflicting desires—to partake of the national culture as equals, yet to differentiate

[21] James M. McPherson, "Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism: A New Look at an Old Question," *Civil War History* 50, no. 4 (2004): 418-433.

themselves as social and political actors—helps illuminate the halting, equivocal paths Americans walked toward sectional division, and toward their eventual accession to middle-class values.

In the end, it is entirely apt that the chronicler of the wedding at Nebraska Centre compared his subjects so pointedly to the "dainty dyspeptics" of "crowded cities." It was in the cities and small towns of the northeast that the middle class first codified the new bourgeois values, the ethic of companionate marriage, and the ritual by which they celebrated these things. Outside the northeast, Americans struggled to comprehend and, often, to counter the growing cultural dominance of the middle class, and crafted ideological and ritual responses. In particular, southern slaveholders and Mormon separatists both asserted a vision of America as a patriarchal nation, beating back the specter of gender equality with paeans to powerful masculinity. But they were fighting a losing battle. By the end of the nineteenth century, the subtler patriarchal thrust of the companionate white wedding would knot them together into a remarkably unified (and deeply contradictory) middle-class American identity.

Chapter One

"A *Wedding* without the *Ring*": The Ascension of the Middle-Class Wedding in America

In November of 1809, a southern planter sent a letter to his son, Thomas Ruffin, whom he addressed as "Tommy."[1] Thomas Ruffin had recently moved to Hillsborough, North Carolina and was preparing to marry Anne Kirkland, the fifteen-year-old daughter of a local merchant. His father wrote to advise him to accept an offer from the father of the bride to let the new couple live with him. As he closed, he sent a word of kindness to his future daughter-in-law: "To Anne," he wrote, "offer our unfeigned affection, tell her we begin to consider her as our Daughter." But he said nothing of wedding preparations, or of plans to travel to the ceremony, which would take place within a month. Indeed, aside from an effusive diary entry that Thomas Ruffin wrote immediately after getting engaged, the family left little record that the wedding happened at all.[2]

In 1829, a Connecticut shopkeeper took a business trip to New York City, "pressed" into the journey, he recalled, "by the necessity of purchasing goods for my store."[3] The next evening (coincidentally, exactly twenty years to the day after Thomas Ruffin's father wrote to his son), he met his fiancée, another Connecticut native in town visiting her uncle, and married her "in the presence of sundry friends and relatives." His memoirs named the

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[1] Ster[ling] Ruffin to Thomas Ruffin, 8 Nov 1809, Thomas Ruffin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter SHC).

[2] See Financial and Legal Volumes, Volume 5, 1805-1814, Thomas Ruffin Papers, SHC.

[3] P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs: Or, Forty Years' Recollections of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (1869; reprint: Arno & the *New York Times*, 1970), 61.

minister who performed the rites, but left no other details of the wedding preparations or ceremony; nor did they named any of the "friends and relatives" in attendance. By week's end, he and his bride had returned home to Connecticut.

The sparse information that has survived of the Ruffin wedding of 1809 and the shopkeeper's 1829 nuptials suggest the patchy rhetorical state of American weddings during the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Nothing about either wedding ought to have discouraged broader description or deeper reflection. Both couples had been engaged for several months prior to marrying. Both had the means to stage relatively elaborate ceremonies and, for all we know, did so. Yet neither reporter preserved any significant descriptions of their weddings: Ruffin's personal papers and the shopkeeper's memoirs reveal little of guests, preparations, or location, and less of any emotions they may have felt upon entering into marriage.

While many weddings throughout the nineteenth century went largely undocumented, these men's relative silence is intriguing because they and their progeny would have much to say about the subject in later years. As we shall see, when Thomas Ruffin's daughter, also named Anne, married Paul Cameron in 1832, her family sent her a steady stream of encouragement and advice, and contributed materially to her wedding preparations; her fiancé, meanwhile, composed breathtakingly lengthy and self-conscious ruminations on how marriage might change his life. Yet her grandfather's matter-of-fact advice to Thomas Ruffin reflected little of this self-consciousness. Meanwhile, the Connecticut shopkeeper would go on to orchestrate and publicize one of the most elaborate and exhaustively-documented weddings of the nineteenth century, the Civil War nuptials of the entertainer

Tom Thumb. But as he looked back upon his own marriage at the age of nineteen, Phineas T. Barnum—for once—found little to say.

The unadorned depictions of Thomas Ruffin's and P. T. Barnum's weddings, especially when compared to the effusive outpourings of their successors, reflect the scant attention paid to weddings in the literature of early-nineteenth-century America. If either man had sought a contemporary published model on which to base his wedding, he would have found the pickings decidedly slim: a few references scattered through religious texts and assorted novels comprised nearly all the information available. Yet within a few decades, either man could have divined the perfect wedding from any number of sources: novels, etiquette books, magazines, newspapers, even phrenological handbooks. This process took decades and extended well into the twentieth century, but it is fair to say that by 1860, an American who wanted to know how to hold a wedding needed only to get his or her hands on the right literature.

As we discussed in the Introduction, weddings had taken place for centuries before Europeans colonized America. Most colonial Americans, inheriting from the Puritans a distrust of ritual (which the early colonists disparaged as decadent and papist), kept their marriage rituals simple in comparison with the Catholic and Protestant rituals of Europe. In the wake of the Revolution, Americans' inculcation of what John F. Kasson has called a "radical Protestant antipathy toward social and religious ritual" and a "republican distaste for the least trappings of aristocratic luxury" conspired to render weddings potentially suspicious.[4] Citizens of the new nation little trouble linking their Puritan ethic to a republican fear of corruption, luxury, and power, and usually resisted rituals that, by celebrating aristocratic transfers of wealth and power, might loosen the precarious hold of

[4] Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 63.

liberty in the early republic.[5] Through the 1820s, then, most weddings were "simple, almost informal affairs" in the bride's home, with a justice of the peace overseeing a spare ceremony, and without, Elizabeth Freeman suggests, bridal attendants, "stereotypical costumes," or rings.[6]

The Market Revolution and the growth of a middle-class, companionate view of relationships, however, broke down Americans' fear of ritual. Weddings began to help Americans both to work out their anxieties about entering into atomized, emotionally intense spousal relationships and to display their sincerity and worthiness as middle-class actors. As they attached social and cultural meanings to a ritual that now bore the weight of their emotional and social anxieties, commercial interests arose to exploit their anxieties and direct the ritual's meanings.[7] These interests tended to promote versions of what Freeman has called "the Anglo-American white wedding," a mixture of old and new forms and aesthetics characterized by white gowns, "rings of betrothal, attendants, . . . veils, and new symbols like orange blossoms and double rings."[8] Promulgators of the white wedding encouraged Americans to go far beyond the simpler rituals of the eighteenth-century. As the century progressed, American authors devoted more and more space to describing and interpreting weddings.[9] Wedding rhetoric made its way into a wide array of published material between 1800 and 1865. This was a halting, irregular process, but it is fair to say that in the early

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[5] See Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 43-46.

[6] See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 77-79, quot. p. 77; Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 25.

[7] On the development of this literature, see Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 36-43.

[8] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, xiv, 24.

[9] On the growth of the beauty industry in antebellum America (which began to cater to weddings), see Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983).

decades of the nineteenth century, people read and wrote little about weddings: novelists included weddings in their plots but rendered them in incompletely or in problematic circumstances and settings, while other writers addressed them hardly at all. From the 1830s on, however, writers began to emphasize weddings as sentimental rites with potentially towering emotional, economic, and nationalistic ramifications. Authors came to privilege the companionate, sentimental outlook that increasingly defined the middle class, making weddings a staging ground for the creation not only of the bourgeois social sphere, but of a middle-class narrative of national origins and purpose. In doing so, they offered readers an opportunity to work out their anxieties about their family relationships, their class status, and their nation's future; yet the solutions they proposed did not always resonate with everyone's sense of their own identity. The bourgeois American wedding and the companionate, middle-class ideology these authors promulgated simultaneously captivated and alienated wide swaths of the populace.

Published Weddings in Colonial America

Prior to the nineteenth century, weddings made occasional appearances in the Atlantic literature. When they did appear, they did so typically in manuals instructing authorities on how to conduct proper religious or civil ceremonies, suggesting that weddings were primarily of interest to specialists rather than general readers.

By virtue of the Anglican Church's political and social sway in the mother country, the wedding rite of the rich and ambitious in colonial America was Anglican. Although its continual presence in books and films has given the ceremony archetypal familiarity in modern culture, it is still striking the extent to which the Anglican rite conveys the

impression that getting married was *hard to do*—that it took a great deal of religious and legal maneuvering to unite a man and woman. The front end of the Anglican ritual takes pains to establish the couple's legal right to marry. The priest first verifies that the Banns of marriage have been published on three separate Sundays before the service. Then he offers a lengthy exposition on the Biblical and social justifications for marriage, the equivalent of the "Inasmuch as . . ." sections of legislative resolutions and also a warning to couples that marriage is a serious business, "not by any to be enterprised . . . lightly."[10] The priest then asks both the congregation and the couple to reveal any "impediment[s]" they know of to the couple's marrying.[11] If they do not, the priest construes their silence as the community's legal consent. Only then do the vows commence: over and over again the couple affirm and re-affirm their relationship. First, the priest asks the couple if they "wilt . . . have" each other "in sickness, and in health, and forsaking all other . . . so long as ye both shall live," to which they each answer, "I will."[12] Although this, the "I do" moment, has contemporary resonance as the moment at which the marriage is completed, for Anglicans, the ritual is only getting started. After the priest asks for the consent of the bride's father or guardian, he leads the couple through the vows, sometimes repeating the previous matter verbatim—"in sickness, and in health"—and other times merely rephrasing earlier vows—"till death us do part" recapitulating "so long as ye both shall live."[13] After that, the man places a ring on his wife's finger. Later in the ceremony, the priest will describe the ring as a mere "token and pledge"

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[10] *The Book of Common Prayer [I], from the Original Manuscript* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1892), 294. This chapter uses the 1662 version of the wedding, which remained essentially unchanged in America for at least the next century and a half.

[11] *The Book of Common Prayer [I]*, 294.

[12] *The Book of Common Prayer [I]*, 295.

[13] *The Book of Common Prayer [I]*, 296.

of the couple's "vow and covenant."[14] But at the moment when the ring touches the woman's hand, the groom makes a more concrete and powerful statement: "With this ring I thee wed."[15] This is a profoundly ambiguous statement. Either he weds her "with" (i.e., in the company of) the ring, or, more likely, he weds her "with" (i.e., using) the ring, letting the ring play a constitutive role in the ceremony. Either way, the ring carries with it the same implications of physical binding that obtained in Catholic and pre-Christian ceremonies. Finally, the minister himself deems them married, "pronounc[ing] that they be man and wife together."[16] Whether the priest's pronouncement or the many words and actions beforehand seal the couple, the Anglican ceremony leaves nothing to chance. Its length—the ceremony approaches 3,000 words altogether—and repetitiveness leave no doubt that the couple has been properly married. The legal certainty the ritual establishes proved useful for the aristocratic upper class, as the transfers of property their marriages entailed needed to be certified and acknowledged by the community.

However, the Anglican rite did not inaugurate most American weddings. The English church served the elite and Southerners; elsewhere, it constituted only a minority faith. As a result, churches and governments in the several colonies allowed or mandated a wide variety of rituals. When people married in religious rites outside the Anglican tradition, their weddings were often simplified, and, at times, stripped of some of the older form's aristocratic implications. John Wesley's proto-Methodist revision of the Anglican rite, which he published in 1784 but which reflected the reforms of the eighteenth century, captured this

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[14] *The Book of Common Prayer [I]*, 297.

[15] *The Book of Common Prayer [I]*, 296.

[16] *The Book of Common Prayer [I]*, 297.

simplifying thrust.[17] Although Methodism had adherents at all levels of society, it had a more democratic thrust than the Anglican Church. Despite copying much of the Anglican ritual word-for-word, Wesley excised the tradition asking the consent of the bride's father or guardian, suggesting that marriage was less important as a transfer of patriarchal power than as a spiritual union between a man and wife. He also omitted any reference to a ring.

Perhaps the most common way of marrying in colonial America was in a civil ceremony under a justice of the peace. A number of handbooks for justices of the peace made their way to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But, as most of these handbooks were printed in England, where the Anglican rite held legal and cultural sway, they said little of weddings. 1619's *The Countrey Justice*, for instance, which Peter Charles Hoffer deems "the law book most often imported into the first English North American colonies," contained no weddings; neither did some of its successors.[18] However, a post-Revolutionary handbook, *The Massachusetts Justice* (1795), does contain a wedding ritual and thus offers some idea as to the nuptial resources available to New England justices in the eighteenth century. Its primary goal seems to be to squeeze as much of the Anglican ceremony as it can into as small a space as possible. It offers two sentences of Biblical justifications for marriage, and one enjoining the couple to take marriage seriously. It does not mention the bride's father or guardian, nodding, like Wesley, to the fact that many couples (especially poorer ones) were coming to make this life-choice for themselves. Instead of the Anglican rite's multiple marrying moments, the justice of the peace merely

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[17] See *The Sunday Service of the Methodists, Late in Connexion with the Rev. John Wesley, M. A.* (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1817), 145-151.

[18] Peter Charles Hoffer, *Law and People in Colonial America*, Revised Edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 7; see Michael Dalton, *The country Justice: Containing the Practice of the Justices of the Peace, as well in, as out of the Sessions* (London: John Walthoe, 1715) and Henry Care, *English liberties: or, the Free-Born Subject's Inheritance* (London: B. Harris, [1703?]).

asks the operative question to each party (in language similar in length and tone to that of the Anglican ceremony) and awaits an "affirmative" answer from each.[19] He then pronounces them "Husband and Wife, married according to the Laws of this Commonwealth."[20] Finally, the civil ceremony minimizes elements of physical binding that had survived from earlier rites. It indirectly suggests that the man and woman hold hands during the vows, but, again, leaves rings out of the equation.[21]

Ultimately, most colonial Americans were willing to treat matrimony in a remarkably informal manner. Weddings could be long, short, elaborate or simple. *The Massachusetts Justice* advised a justice of the peace to "enlarge, or alter it, as he shall judge proper."[22] Before the colony mandated Anglican weddings in 1715, North Carolina deemed that any couple who declared "that they doe joyne together in the holy state of Wedlock" in the presence of a government official and "three or fower of their Neighbors along with them" was as well married "as if they had binn maryed by a minister according to the rites and customs of England."[23] And one narrator relates that a New England magistrate approached a couple in the street on the pretext of admonishing them for living together as man and wife but refusing to marry. "John Rogers," he called out, "do you persist in calling this woman, a servant, so much younger than yourself, your wife?" "Yes, I do," the man "violently" answered him. "And do you, Mary," sneered the magistrate, "wish such an old man as this to

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[19] Samuel Freeman, *The Massachusetts Justice: Being a Collection of the Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Relative to the POWER and DUTY of Justices of the Peace* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1795), 216.

[20] Samuel Freeman, *The Massachusetts Justice*, 216.

[21] Samuel Freeman, *The Massachusetts Justice*, 216. It also betrays its author's quest economy by skipping the actual instruction to hold hands, but instead merely referring to "the man [or woman] whom you now have by the hand."

[22] Samuel Freeman, *The Massachusetts Justice*, 217.

[23] Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, II: 249.

be your husband?" Upon hearing her assent, the magistrate concluded, "Then . . . by the laws of God and this commonwealth, I as a magistrate pronounce you man and wife."[24]

These various ways of marrying were not without their wider implications. Simply by being Anglican, Americans might align themselves with the upper class and political elite; conducting elaborate weddings and taking care to seal a couple definitively to each other under the watchful eye of the bride's guardian could not have hurt their class prospects. It is also true that the standards for a proper wedding may have tightened as colonial society developed: even New Englanders came to prefer religious weddings, which eventually featured "revelry and extravagance."[25] But it also seems that Americans saw virtue in less-elaborate ceremonies. *The Massachusetts Justice* acknowledged that its truncated rite may appear to "*some* . . . as being too short," but noted that its brevity "may to *others*" render it "more agreeable."[26] The issue of rings is particularly telling. Reformers wishing, for whatever reason, to turn away from Anglican tradition had few better options than to abscond with the ring. Originating in pre-Christian rituals, the ring had no Biblical presence; Puritans associated it with papist superstition and aristocratic decadence, one minister describing it as "a diabolical circle for the divell to daunce in."[27] In Americans' civil and non-Anglican ceremonies, excluding the ring not only made getting married a less expensive proposition; it also symbolized participants' piety and humility. More than anything, however, their simple, stripped-down weddings suggest that colonial Americans did not necessarily invest a great deal of symbolic importance in the ritual, and weddings' minimal presence in the literature of

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[24] Alice Morse Earle, *Customs and Fashions in Old New England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 71.

[25] Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, II: 141.

[26] Samuel Freeman, *The Massachusetts Justice*, 217.

[27] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding* Complex,116.

the early republic, we shall see, implied the same.[28] The process by which Americans came to embrace rings and the other trappings of the Victorian white wedding as essential aspects of their rituals would demonstrate their changing notions of class, piety, and marriage itself.

1800-1830: Weddings Unspoken, Problematic, and Old-World

The written genres that contain the most direct discussions of weddings today—publications falling under the wide rubric of etiquette literature, such as etiquette books and *Bride* magazine, and celebrity and society pages—did not exist in 1800. Although prescriptive literature commenced its long vogue with Lord Chesterfield's epochal *Letters to His Son* (cleaned up for an American audience as *The American Chesterfield* in 1806), its authors would not discuss weddings for several decades more. Most prescriptive works in the early nineteenth century can be classified as advice literature, as opposed to the etiquette literature that would emerge in the 1830s and 1840s. Authors of advice literature instructed young men and women on self-improvement and moral (or, in Chesterfield's case, amoral) behavior in society. The 110 "Rules of Civility" copied down by a young George Washington in the 1740s fit into this tradition, advocating bodily and emotional control in society.[29] William B. Alcott's classic *The Young Man's Guide* (1834) augmented Washington's external regimen with internal controls, enjoining youths to "*set a high*

[28] By way of comparison, the few English works on weddings for a general readership suggested that the Anglican form was popular and considered to be a vessel of wider significance. The English preface to a 1704 book on weddings noted that "young Maidens" evinced a fascination for the ritual, based on the fact that they typically knew "the Service of Matrimony" in *The Book of Common Prayer* better than any other religious form. Louis de Gaya, *Marriage Ceremonies, as Now Used in All Parts of the World* (Dublin and London, J. Robinson, 1744), 2. See also Uxorius, *Hymen: An Accurate Description of the Ceremonies Used in Marriage, by Every Nation in the Known World* (London: I. Pottinger, 1760).

[29] J. M. Toner, *Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation* (W. H. Morrison, Washington, D. C., 1888).

standard of action" by means "*physical, mental,* and *moral*."[30] The project of delineating general rules for moral and socially efficacious behavior left little room for advice about specific social events like weddings. Alcott addressed numerous topics relating to marriage, including "Importance of matrimony," "Choice of a Companion," and "Qualifications of a wife," but not weddings themselves.[31] The author of the advice book *The Wife* likewise ignored weddings.[32] And, although Chesterfield wrote a little on marriage's economic aspects, he mentioned weddings not at all.[33]

Other sources also kept their counsel.[34] Peddlers of celebrity gossip, firmly entrenched in English newspapers, had nowhere to publish in America and little to talk about even if they had: with no court circle and little literature, the young nation could claim very few men or women who qualified as national celebrities. In politics, only a few Revolutionary luminaries had much written about their personal lives, and their early chroniclers evinced no interest in their nuptial celebrations. Benjamin Franklin's autobiography (1794) included a

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[30] [William A. Alcott,] *The Young Man's Guide*, Second Edition (Boston: Lilly, Wait, Colman, and Holden, 1834), 27.

[31] [Alcott,] *The Young Man's Guide*, x.

[32] See *The Wife; Interspersed with a Variety of Anecdotes and Observations, and Containing Advice and Directions for All Condition of the Marriage State*, First American Edition (Boston: A Newell, 1806).

[33] See [Philip Dormer Stanhope,] *The Works of Lord Chesterfield, Including His Letters to His Son, &c., to which is Prefixed, An Original Life of the Author*, First Complete American Edition (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856). Interestingly, some American editions of Chesterfield began including anonymous (and distinctly un-Chesterfieldian) "Maxims to Marry By" by 1827. These maxims remained mute on weddings themselves, but still suggested Americans' growing interest in marriage. See Kenneth Forward, "Manners for Americans," *American Speech* 2, no. 4 (1927): 182-90.

[34] In compiling sources for this chapter, I sampled a wide range of etiquette and advice books without reference to their popularity. In order to form a sample of the much larger literature falling outside the realm of prescriptive literature, however, I surveyed all the books written by Americans or about America before 1860 listed in James David Hart's *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950). While this hardly equals an exhaustive survey, it has the virtue of covering a wide range of the books that Americans actually read at the time (rather than books that later entered the canon). I do not discuss all of these books, and my discussion of them privileges those books written before 1850 (by which time etiquette books were clearly explicating what constituted an "ideal" wedding); but all of them received consideration.

lengthy description of his courtship but made no mention of nuptials (appropriately, as Franklin and his common-law wife never had a wedding ceremony).[35] "Parson" Mason Weems's hagiography of Washington (c. 1800) entertained a supremely strange fantasy about ladies ogling the future President at church, but somehow never imagined his actual wedding.[36] As for other forms of literature, Hugh Henry Brackenridge's satire *Modern Chivalry* (1792-1815) never shows us the altar its characters so assiduously avoid.[37] A bestselling book of poetry by Lydia Huntley, *Moral Pieces, in Prose and Verse* (1815), includes no weddings among its many pious treatments of birth, death, and beginnings and endings of months and seasons.[38] And Washington Irving's *History of New York* briefly mocks a "buxom county heiress['s]" dowry of "red ribbons, glass beads, and mock tortoise-shell combs," but that is the extent of it.[39]

Only in novels did weddings appear with relative frequency before 1830. The novel had gained wide popularity in both England and America with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). Those two works set the templates, respectively, for the adventure stories and domestic tales that would define literature on both sides of the Atlantic for at least a century. As American authors began trying their hand at novel-writing around the turn of the century, they usually fell into those two main currents and, in each type, used weddings to advance the plot and drive home the themes of their

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[35] See Charles W. Eliot, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin; The Journal of John Woolman; Fruits of Solitude* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909), pp. 67-69. Franklin also discussed the rumor that Moravians married "by lot" but still said nothing of their actual rituals (150). On Franklin's marriage, see Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 75.

[36] M. L. Weems. *The Life of George Washington; with Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honorable to Himself, and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen* (Philadelphia: Joseph Allen, 1840), 58.

[37] H. H. Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry* (New York: American Book Co., [1937]).

[38] Lydia Huntley, *Moral Pieces, in Prose and Verse* (Hartford: Sheldon & Goodwin, 1815).

[39] Washington Irving, *Knickerbocker's New York* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1868), 223-24.

books. Novels' comparatively frequent treatments of weddings make it clear that literate Americans could indeed formulate a general idea about what constituted a socially acceptable wedding. But fictional weddings in the early nineteenth century presented a problematic vision of the ritual's role in American life, often isolating the wedding behind a veneer of European aristocracy or making it a harbinger of doom for its participants.

It is not surprising that novels featured more weddings than other genres. The novel's famous (and oft-lamented) appeal for female readers made marriage a natural focus, especially when compared to other, more "masculine" genres such as history, biography or political satire. Marriage was on novelists' minds nearly from the outset, and weddings featured often in their plots: by 1822, the *North American* magazine deemed the wedding "the regular *denoument* of a novel."[40] Yet the wedding had not yet acquired a universally-acknowledged structure, aesthetic, or cultural meaning to enable novelists to treat it as an archetype. Authors rarely described the ritual in detail, and when they did, as often as not they depicted what I will call problem weddings, in which the ritual was negatively defined as a series of mistakes and irregularities. Couples married for the wrong reasons in the wrong ways, marriages were completed but went unconsummated, and ambiguity ruled.

Perhaps because the new nation was still negotiating its own aristocratic past, perhaps because slavish imitation of British novels required it, early American domestic novels revolved around the aristocratic question of their heroines' marital choices. The drama of these choices hinged on marriage's potential to foment social mobility, a recurring theme on both sides of the Atlantic. The fortunes of wealthy heiresses—and the chastity of unattached young women—were constant targets of upwardly mobile ne'er-do-wells, in whose view

[40] Quoted in Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 66.

women were reduced to the source of money or sex. Peter Sanford, the malicious rake in Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), unabashedly confesses his plans to marry a soulless woman with a great fortune—"that," he writes, "is all the soul I wish for in a wife"—and merely to dally with the unmoneyed Eliza Wharton.[41] In this marketplace, daughters could hope only that their parents would protect them from the designs of fortune-seekers. Parents failed in their duty when they did not exercise their motherly or fatherly prerogative to protect their daughters from charlatans. Sanford attributed his success in marrying an heiress to the fact that his target "had not been used to contradiction, and could not bear it, and therefore [her parents] ventured not to cross her."[42] Such novels implicitly lamented America's fluid social structures and all but begged for responsible characters to build up stronger walls between the classes in lieu of clear social identifiers. The incidental agents of Eliza's downfall in *The Coquette* are Eliza's guardians Mr. and Mrs. Richman, who fail to observe Sanford's true character and repeatedly allow him into Eliza's company.[43]

We would expect weddings to feature in books that made marrying (or not marrying) the key determinant of a woman's fortunes. Yet before the 1830s, authors gave weddings surprisingly little symbolic weight.[44] The first American novel, Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794) included no weddings at all. When Charlotte runs off with an unscrupulous rake, her parents receive a letter euphemistically informing them of her marriage, revealing

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[41] [Hannah Foster,] *The Coquette; or, the History of Eliza Wharton* (Boston: William P. Fetridge and Company, 1855), 77.

[42] [Hannah Foster,] *The Coquette*, 202.

[43] See Karen A. Weyler, *Intricate Relations: Sexual and Economic Desire in American Fiction, 1789-1814* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), 152-156.

[44] Elizabeth Freeman notes that "domestic novels tend not to linger on the display-oriented apparatus of the wedding, which discombobulates domestic ideology and tests many of its assumptions—including the tacit and private nature of couplehood, the nuclear family as the primary and most elevated social form, and the secondary public role of wives." *The Wedding Complex*, 42.

only that "she has voluntarily put herself under the protection of a man whose future study shall be to make her happy."[45] Her grandfather rightly takes this to mean that she is married: "'[s]he has eloped then,'" he sighs. Chapter XVII, about a proposed marriage between two ancillary characters, is entitled "A Wedding," suggesting perhaps that weddings were significant apart from marriage; yet the chapter never mentions its titular subject. *The Coquette* (1797) likewise gives its heroine Eliza Wharton no wedding: although Eliza succumbs to Sanford's seduction, she never marries. The wedding of her friend Lucy, on the other hand, is described as successful in the most cursory terms possible: "A large circle of congratulating friends were present. Her dress was such as wealth and elegance required. Her deportment was every thing that modesty and propriety could suggest. . . . Every eye beamed with pleasure on the occasion, and every tongue echoed the wishes of benevolence."[46] These lines hardly even aspire to the name cliché: they offer nothing to suggest that the wedding carried particular psychological or symbolic weight for either the characters or the readers, in spite of the obvious dramatic contrasts between Lucy's wedding and Eliza's eventual seduction and elopement. And Foster's failure to describe who participated in the wedding, where it took place, or how various characters performed their roles suggests that the ritual's visual and emotional language had not become so widespread in American culture that authors sought to exploit it.

Even in novels which discussed weddings with a fair degree of detail, such as Isaac Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa* (1804), suggest an America in transition, one not united behind an established ritual. Characters in Mitchell's novel talk continually about weddings,

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[45] Susanna Haswell Rowson, *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1905), 102.

[46] [Hannah Foster,] *The Coquette*, 130-31. Notably, the question of fortune, so integral to Eliza's marital prospects, goes unmentioned, suggesting that bride and groom, whose wedding reception attracts "all the neighboring gentry," hail from similarly comfortable estates (132).

and the title characters undergo a lengthy engagement. Mitchell does offer some brief description of the wedding, observing that "a brilliant circle of ladies" in a "bridal apartment" array Melissa in clothes "'white as the southern clouds,' spangled with silver, and trimmed with deep gold lace; her hair hung loosely upon her shoulders, encircled by a wreath of artificial flowers."[47] (No ring is ever mentioned.) Yet the wedding in *Alonzo and Melissa* reflects severe ambivalence about the economic and social aspects of marriage. Alonzo's father hopes to move the marriage up in order to secure Melissa to his son before his debts can destroy his son's marital prospects; meanwhile, Melissa's father refuses to let his daughter marry a poor man. Melissa's father eventually enters the wedding thinking that his daughter is dead, and that he is blessing Alonzo's marriage to another (remarkably similar-looking) woman. Only after the father publicly chastises himself is Melissa revealed. Although the wedding accomplishes a happy ending, it also places her father's folly at the center of the ritual, making his place in the wedding dependent on him renouncing his previous errors. *Alonzo and Melissa* offers a vision of a happy wedding, but one whose social purpose is muddled by forcing the older generation to pay obeisance to the younger. Ultimately, these economically-motivated disruptions, and the author's implicit disapproval of them both, suggest the transitional state of American marriage, in which novel readers were becoming uncomfortable with marrying for money (as Melissa's father encourages her to do) but could not quite stomach *not* marrying for money (as Alonzo's father hopes Melissa will do).

Alonzo and Melissa demonstrated the dramatic uses to which a wedding might be put: by invoking a set of agreed-upon forms, an author could interrupt them and know that his or her

[47] Daniel Daniel Jackson, Jr., *Alonzo and Melissa, or The Unfeeling Father. An American Tale* (Philadelphia: Leary & Getz, n.d.), 229.

audience would wait on tenterhooks until the ritual was complete. After Melissa reveals herself, her father deems finishing the wedding more important than hearing the full story of her return: "But first," he says, "let the solemn rites for which we are assembled be concluded; let not an old man's anxiety interrupt the ceremony."[48] Like Melissa's father, the audience will want to finish what it has seen started.

But in the early nineteenth century, the ritual forms and aesthetics to which authors might appeal had not yet gained universal currency. We can see this through Lucius Manlius Sargent's widely-disseminated tale *My Mother's Gold Ring* (1833), which advocated temperance via the tear-jerking tactics of the sentimental novel. In it, a formerly debauched workingman uses a gold ring borrowed from his wife as a talisman to keep him from drinking. What is interesting from our standpoint is that neither the husband nor the wife connects the ring to their wedding. Instead, they treasure the ring because the woman's mother gave it to her "'the day that she died.'"[49] "Whenever the struggle of appetite has commenced," the man explains, "I have looked upon this ring; I have remembered that it was given, with the last words and dying counsels of an excellent mother, to my wife."[50] Although his wife gives the ring to him in turn, she does so only many years after their wedding: the ring commemorates her mother's (and then her own) selfless act of love—not her wedding. If Sargent had believed that connecting the gold ring to their wedding would resonate with his readers, he surely would have included it: little else in the tract evinces subtlety or authorial restraint. Indeed, the wife mentions her wedding but does not mention the ring in its context, nor does she milk it for its emotional power: "Our wedding day," she

[48] Daniel Jackson, Jr., *Alonzo and Melissa*, 231.

[49] [Lucius Manlius Sargent,] *My Mother's Gold Ring*, 15th ed. (Boston: Ford and Damrell, 1833), 19.

[50] [Sargent,] *My Mother's Gold Ring*, 23.

recalls, "—and it was a happy one—was but an indifferent sample" of their pleasant life together.[51] Sargent's failure to link the couple's marriage to the eponymous ring suggests that the iconography of the wedding had not yet become sufficiently powerful to necessitate its inclusion.

Beyond the realm of domestic novels, early nineteenth-century adventure tales forged a vision of weddings that revealed their status as relatively unformed cultural artifacts. The dislocations and confusion that marked the wedding in *Alonzo and Melissa* were even more pronounced the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and his imitators. Cooper's reputation for writing out-of-door tales obscures the fact that nearly all his novels featured romantic subplots leading to marriages. Cooper's weddings, like *Alonzo and Melissa*'s, use the ritual form of the wedding to build dramatic tension: every misstep or break in the action waylays the expected outcome for the reader. But Cooper's weddings are *all* missteps and breaks. As perhaps the most prolific purveyor of American weddings to the reading public in the 1820s, Cooper served up multiple "problem weddings." Cooper's characters occasionally evince an awareness that their weddings are slowly coalescing into a standard (and thus exploitable) form, yet for them, that form mainly reveals Americans' discomfort with both marriage and a ritual designed celebrate it in the early republic.

In Cooper's adventure tales of the 1820s, marriage's main purpose is the aristocratic one of ensuring that women could remain under the protection of a man once she left her father's house. Although the most explicit form this protection took was economic, it sometimes included a blunter physical dimension: on the frontier or in times of war, a woman had to marry the man who could keep her safe from financial *and* physical depredations. Such unromantic motives render certain unions almost comically brusque: in *The Pilot* (1823),

[51] [Sargent,] *My Mother's Gold Ring*, 5.

Colonel Howard's last act is to drag his nieces kicking and screaming to the altar with their respective beaux. Although one submits "with an air of forced resignation," the other weeping "violently," the Colonel dies satisfied, having ensured that he has not "fail[ed] in [his] duty," and that the girls will never be left "without that protection which becomes your tender years and still more tender characters."[52] Early American adventure novels thus beat down the ascendant vision of romantic love (albeit promoting it simultaneously) with a more traditional notion of class fidelity, aristocratic transfers of power, and patriarchal gender relations.

Cooper's 1821 novel *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* offers an even better case study. The novel features two rituals set during the Revolutionary War that encapsulate the early American adventure novel's problem wedding, in which the ritual has a variable form and an uncertain meaning. In the first of these weddings, Cooper situates the debate over what constituted a proper wedding, much less a proper marriage, at the focus of the ritual. As Sarah Wharton and the British officer Colonel Wellmere attempt to marry, the muddled pronouncements of an ancillary character, Dr. Sitgreaves, on the ritual's history facilitate the wedding's many failings and underscore how unfamiliar and uncertain the new American marriage ceremony were.

The catastrophe hinges on the wedding ring. Recall that as late as 1833, a book entitled *My Mother's Gold Ring* could ignore weddings almost entirely; yet various characters in *The Spy* expostulate upon the ring's centrality to any legitimate wedding. Sitgreaves insists that "custom, antiquity, and the canons of the church" deemed a ring "indispensible" to a

[52] J. Fenimore Cooper, *The Pilot: A Tale of the Sea* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1884), 426, 425, 426.

wedding.[53] Although the couple is participating in an Anglican ceremony, Cooper takes pains to show that a ring was *not* crucial to the wedding's success: Sarah Wharton's father only agrees that the ring was necessary, Cooper writes, because "the question [was] put in a manner to lead to such a result" (i.e., his agreement), and even Sitgreaves admits that some of the mythology surrounding the trinket is in "error," followed only "in obedience to . . . opinion." Sitgreaves' lengthy expostulations on the ring's indispensability (which he pursues despite his academic doubts of their veracity) suggest that his audience may need some convincing on that point—quite reasonably, as many American weddings in the eighteenth century featured no rings at all. Harping on the ring highlights the inadequacy of the wedding at hand: the groom, Colonel Wellmere, has neglected to bring a ring to the ceremony. Far from sanctifying the marriage, Sitgreaves' insistence on including a ring thus distances the wedding from its purpose of uniting the couple. The supposed need for a ring delays the wedding, as the clergyman refuses to perform the ceremony without it. Further, the ring's absence changes the emotional tenor of the proceedings: observers note "the awkwardness of the situation," and Sarah Wharton's face "was suffused with . . . shame," hardly the appropriate mood.[54] Sarah's aunt, deferring to the notion that, "from time immemorial," the responsibility of procuring a ring had fallen to the bridegroom, refuses to

[53] James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 244. Sitgreaves, ever the scientist, acknowledges that some of the ring's significance to the wedding, no matter how ancient, is misplaced: the traditional insistence on the ring's placement on "the fourth finger of the left hand" arises, he says, from "an ignorance of the organic arrangement of the human frame." That he still insists on the ring's importance to a properly-performed wedding slightly undermines his notion that its symbolism is ancient and universal.

[54] Cooper, *The Spy* (1911), 245.

supply a ring she has at hand.[55] Instead, Sitgreaves sends for a ring originally meant for his own sister, who had died "ere the hour" of her own nuptials.[56]

The malign symbolism of Sarah using another, almost-married woman's wedding ring becomes clear when considered in the context of the other topic upon which Dr. Sitgreaves claims expertise. While the guests wait for the ring to arrive, the surgeon discourses on the history of the "honorable" institution of marriage.[57] Although he has traced the modern wedding ceremony (and rings in particular) back to the ancients, he now muses aloud that those same "ancients, in sanctioning polygamy, lost sight of the provisions of nature, and condemned thousands to misery."[58] The doctor's appeal to the wisdom of the ancients thus becomes an ironic acknowledgment of the ancients' misery-inducing (and immoral) marriage habits. Subsequent events curdle irony into tragedy. After the couple have finally said their vows but before the clergyman's "investiture," the news that Wellmere has abandoned a wife in England interrupts the ceremony.[59] The groom's bigamy certainly casts Sitgreaves' lecture about polygamy in a less humorous light. But the path the ring takes to the ceremony amplifies the wedding's transgressive qualities. Before the ceremony, Sitgreaves has "unconscious[ly]" slid the ring onto Sarah Wharton's finger, symbolically marrying her himself and doubling the ceremony's polygamous undertones by giving the bride two

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[55] Cooper, *The Spy* (1911), 245. Both Sarah and her sister Frances are aware of the ring as well, but Sarah's "shame" at marrying under unpropitious circumstances, and Frances' desire to delay the wedding, prevent either of them from revealing the existence of their mother's ring. For more on this refusal, see Shirley Samuels, *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 67-69.

[56] Cooper, *The Spy* (1911), 256.

[57] Cooper, *The Spy* (1911), 254.

[58] Cooper, *The Spy* (1911), 254.

[59] Cooper, *The Spy* (1911), 256.

husbands.[60] Extending the polygamous implications even further is the ring's association with Sitgreaves' sister, suggesting that perhaps Wellmere is marrying the ghost of a *third* woman (after his wife and Sarah Wharton)—not to mention that the ring seems to have a nasty penchant for preventing the women who wear it from ever marrying: Sitgreaves' sister wore it but died before she could marry, and the revelation of Wellmere's duplicity ends Sarah Wharton's wedding before the priest has pronounced the couple man and wife. So the insistence on following the ritual's supposed dictates actually reveals the marriage as a sham, and symbolizes its participants' many failings. The wedding also exploits the Anglican ceremony's repetitiveness, ending at precisely the moment of greatest ambiguity and tension, between the vows and "investiture," and thereby fails even to certify the marriage. As Wellmere rides shamefully away from the enraged guests, it cannot be said with certainty whether he is married to Sarah Wharton, or no.[61]

Unlike the union of Wellmere and Sarah Wharton, the second wedding in *The Spy* commemorates a happy, apparently successful marriage, between Sarah's sister Frances and the Patriot officer Major Peyton Dunwoodie. Yet it is scarcely less ambiguous in form or outcome than the first. For one thing, its participants approach it with a determined lack of sentiment. Anticipating the forced nuptials of *The Pilot*, Frances Wharton is marched lockstep to the altar by her brother Henry, who has been condemned to die and refuses to leave his sister "without a protector," wishing instead to attach her, in aristocratic fashion, "to

[60] Cooper, *The Spy* (1911), 256. Shirley Samuels discusses some of the ambiguities of this wedding in *Romances of the Republic*.

[61] Cooper here exploits the ambiguity over who, the couple or the minister, actually solemnizes a marriage, a question that had haunted not only the medieval Church but the Anglican rite of marriage as well. See Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 16-19.

[Dunwoodie's] powerful name."[62] After Henry escapes, Dunwoodie, who is charged with tracking him down and arresting him, suggests to Frances "with an insinuating voice" that he might exercise lenience if Frances marries him before he commences his chase.[63] Frances, for her part, marries him expressly in order "to detain Dunwoodie until the fatal hour had elapsed."[64] Even as the ceremony proceeds (albeit "violating all the order and decorum of a wedding to get it up so hastily, and with so little ceremony," in the opinion of Frances' aunt), the bride's mind wanders to her brother's predicament, and she returns her full focus to the ritual only while saying the vows.[65]

Beyond the fact that both bride and groom use the wedding to manipulate each other toward ulterior ends, the ritual contains crucial elements of ambiguity. Most significantly, Frances' acquiescence to Dunwoodie's proposal of marriage is hardly straightforward. Dunwoodie implores her, "Speak, my Frances."[66] In response, "Frances endeavoured to reply, but could only whisper something that was inaudible, but which her lover, with the privilege of immemorial custom, construed into consent."[67] Although Frances' determination to marry Dunwoodie becomes clear in subsequent pages, her failure to voice her assent injects a degree of uncertainty into the ritual. Moreover, Cooper's description of

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[62] James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy; A Tale of the Neutral Ground*, Vol. III (London: G. B. Whittaker, 1825), 95.

[63] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 216.

[64] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 216-17.

[65] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 219. Cooper's description of the wedding mitigates somewhat the Machiavellian activities of both Frances Wharton and Dunwoodie. Dunwoodie acknowledges that Henry's safety has already been guaranteed and that marrying would merely change his own status in relation to Henry; while Frances admits her plan to use the wedding to delay Henry's capture to Dunwoodie before they proceed with the marriage.

[66] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 217.

[67] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 218.

her assent undercuts the ritual's historical validity. "Immemorial custom" echoes the aunt's refusal to supply a ring at the first wedding because the ring was the groom's responsibility "from time immemorial." A somewhat hollow echo, if grooms have forever steered speechless brides to the altar by "constru[ing]" their actions into "consent." Cooper hereby reveals his ambivalence at the idea of companionate marriage: marriage may include love, but it often slides into more utilitarian purposes. The actions of the couple after the ceremony further heighten the wedding's ambiguity. Moments after the wedding ends, Dunwoodie is spurred on to battle by his new wife who, no Juliet she, tells him strictly when he contemplates delaying, "go at once. . . . [N]eglect not the orders of Washington."[68] Frances remains at home to hear her aunt deliver "an abundance of good advice on the subject of matrimonial duty."[69] The irony is palpable: Frances hears a sermon on her "matrimonial duty" on her wedding night, but she has no chance of performing it with her husband off to war. So the wedding ends, in classic Cooperian style, with characters discoursing upon what a marriage or a wedding ought to be, but acting it out incompletely if at all.

Other books of the 1820s offered similarly conflicted visions of the wedding's form and potential. The popular captivity narrative of Mary Jemison (1824) features an interesting anthropological footnote on Native Americans' gynocentric marriage customs, yet when Jemison herself marries a Delaware man, she leaves the ritual undescribed. Cooper's 1827 novel *The Prairie* cements the unconsummated wedding as his trademark, kidnapping its heroine after her wedding but before the night is out. One final work by Cooper, *Lionel Lincoln; Or, The Leaguer of Boston* (1825), piles new nuptial torments upon old, and

[68] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 225.

[69] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 225. The advice is "modestly received, if not properly digested."

reinforces the author's overarching depiction of ambiguous, unsettled marriage forms in the early republic. Although the main characters, the eponymous Lincoln and his love, Cecil Dynevor, engage themselves freely to each other, the bride's aunt still rushes Cecil into marriage: as soon as she discovers their engagement, she insists, against the bride's will, that they marry that very night. Cooper makes the wedding a compendium of ill omens: it takes place late at night, in secret, in a cold church buffeted by a storm and a smallpox epidemic. Cecil admits, "If I were superstitious, and had faith in omens, . . . the hour and the weather might well intimidate me from taking this step."[70] This assessment comes even before the ceremony turns out to be a pageant of gothic terror haunted by a shadowy, spectre-like figure who appears at the moment at which the minister enjoins the guests to "*speak, or else, . . . for ever hold his peace*."[71] This figure so terrifies the wedding party that they fail even to congratulate the bride and groom. After the ceremony, the groom goes missing, leaving yet another wedding unconsummated. The implication that the wedding has gone wrong might suggest that *Lionel Lincoln*'s audience understood how the proper forms were being disrupted. But Cooper consistently refuses to demarcate any wedding as proper or well-performed. Indeed, the fictional wedding's participants discuss how nuptial forms are changing and unfixed, debating whether the wedding should conform to the "loose" laws of Massachusetts or the more elaborate "forms and ceremonies" of the English Church.[72] And Cecil Dynevor's desire for a church wedding (which Cooper as well as the presiding minister deem quite unusual in America) stems not from any established tradition but from an admitted desire to cover up her wedding's "unreasonable haste" with a veneer of

[70] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 252.

[71] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 268.

[72] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 256, 250.

"solemnity."[73] The Cooperian problem wedding suggested that Americans had not yet shed their reticence about ritual, that their experience of weddings—and marriage—was still marked with anxiety over aristocratic traditions in a republican context. So the ritual remained an unfocused blur for audiences in the 1820s, something whose elements could be tapped for their dramatic power but had not yet calcified into a universally-acknowledged form, whose successful completion remained a potential threat to republic.

One last important type of wedding made its way to the American reader before the 1830s: the nostalgic, "Old World" wedding, marked by European aristocratic aesthetics and class values. The old world wedding offered readers a way to partake in an aristocratic ritual without entirely abandoning their egalitarian ideals.[74] A definitive Old World wedding takes place in *Bracebridge Hall*, Washington Irving's 1822 account of a visit to an English manor house. The wedding, between Guy, "the squire's second son," and the squire's "ward, the fair Julia Templeton," unifies what little there is of plot in this episodic novel.[75] The marriage of a wealthy aristocrat to a woman under his father's "protection" shares with problem weddings the aristocratic concerns for the protection of a family's women and the peaceful transfer of power and wealth through the generations. But Irving differentiates the wedding in *Bracebridge Hall* from the Cooperian mode by bathing the whole affair in a benign light. Where Cooper's heroes grimly sentence their wards to marriage, *Bracebridge Hall*'s match has been gently "promot[ed]" (to each party's satisfaction) by the romance-

[73] Cooper, *The Spy* (1825), 250.

[74] The roots of this vogue may perhaps be traced to a story in Washington Irving's *Sketch-Book*, published in 1819-20, entitled "The Spectre Bridegroom," which situates a story of mistaken identity and aristocratic love amidst a sumptuous pre-wedding feast in a German baronial castle.

[75] Washington Irving, *Bracebridge Hall, or The Humorists* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1867), 14.

minded Lady of the house.[76] And where Cooper's brides slink protesting down the aisle, Irving's bride blushes, trembles, and disappears happily into the festivities. Irving does not bother to stir up any dramatic tension between the two lovers; instead, the book's appeal derives from an invocation of nostalgia for "old English character" which, Irving speculates in the book's last pages, soon "will probably have passed away."[77]

The wedding intermingles a host of aristocratic customs under an umbrella of friendly class-based condescension. Along with "a numerous company of relatives and friends," "many of the tenantry" attend the ceremony "at the village church."[78] Among "the old ceremonies" that feature in the wedding are a gaggle of village girls, "dressed in white," laying flowers before the bride, and copious libations ("according to ancient usage") from the family "bride-cup."[79] The "honest peasantry" line the bride's path to the bridal carriage before sitting down to the "great rustic rejoicing" of the outdoor wedding-feast, at which "all the peasantry of the neighborhood were regaled with roast-beef and plum-pudding, and oceans of ale."[80] Meanwhile, the family offers a more exclusive, indoor repast (replete with "bridecake") to its friends.[81] Afterwards, rich and poor assemble for a lively dance—"not the modern quadrille, with its graceful gravity, but the merry, social, old country-dance"—at which the lord of the manor plays "master of the ceremonies" for "his rustic admirers."[82]

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[76] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 41.

[77] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 535.

[78] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 524. The groom, in his excitement, lets the wedding ring fall to the floor before placing it on his bride's finger, but the Lady of the house declares this "a very lucky omen" (526).

[79] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 524, 526.

[80] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 527.

[81] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 528.

[82] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 528, 529.

All of these activities take place within a cocoon of nostalgia for a purportedly vanishing old English class system. The nostalgia is Irving's, certainly, but it is also his characters'. The lord of the manor, in particular, adores "everything which smacks of old times," and adorns the wedding with old traditions and superstitions.[83] Many of these traditions romanticize the idea of members of the lower class waiting at their lords' beck and call, celebrating the upper class' life events as if they were their own, and generally ornamenting the weddings of the wealthy like so much taffeta. Everything—ideas, customs, social relationships—flows from the upper class downward: the "popular superstitions and traditional rites" upon which the squire expounds, writes Irving, are "carried from the parlor to the kitchen by the listening domestics, and, being apparently sanctioned by such high authority, the whole house has become infected by them."[84] The poor follow the example of the rich in life as in aesthetics: the wedding inspires not one but two marriages among the family's servants.

The class implications of this nostalgia implicitly reject modern egalitarianism. Irving laments that Bracebridge Hall itself, the scene of such comforting class pageantry, will soon be replaced by "petty farms and kitchen-gardens" aswarm with "coachmen, post-boys, tipplers, and politicians."[85] The fact that the wedding's traditional forms and hierarchies spring from the lord of the manor create the subtext that the common people of England have discarded the very traditions that mark them as "honest peasants." The responsibility of returning upwardly mobile peasants to their more pliant past falls on the upper class, as evidenced by the squire's attempts to maintain the venerable traditions of the old class

[83] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 168.

[84] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 168, 300.

[85] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 535.

system. England's transition into a middle-class country, in other words, set at stake a great many of its charming, happiness-inducing traditions and rituals, not to mention its very "character." What must Irving have thought of America, whose citizens approached weddings with republican ambivalence?

Other works published in the 1820s and afterward similarly cast the ceremonies of the European aristocracy in a nostalgic light for their American readers. *Lucy Temple*, Susanna Rowson's sequel to *Charlotte Temple*, published posthumously in 1828, ends with a chapter entitled "An Old-Fashioned Wedding." The wedding, set in England, engages its participants in a spectacle of *noblesse oblige* familiar to readers of *Bracebridge Hall*: poor villagers "crowded the church to witness the ceremony," and later "partake of the bride cake" and enjoy a party that lasts well into the night.[86] These peasants also participate in a "dance upon the green," to the appropriately rustic strains of "pipe and tabor."[87] Rowson picks up Irving's nostalgic strain and rhapsodizes about the benevolent aspects of Europe's strict social hierarchy. The wedding, she writes, was "celebrated after the fashion of the good old times when the poor not only looked up to the gentry for protection and friendship, but took a lively interest in their domestic affairs, were depressed at their misfortunes, and proud and happy in the fame and happiness of their patrons."[88]

These weddings' European settings and characters allowed authors and readers to sidestep their ambivalence about hierarchical rituals and indulge fantasies of aristocratic largesse. The fantasy of a gentle, charming European aristocracy allowed Americans to tap Europe's

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[86] Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple and Lucy Temple*, ed. Ann Douglas (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 260.

[87] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple and Lucy Temple*, 260.

[88] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple and Lucy Temple*, 259. See also Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage beyond the Sea* (London: George Routledge & Co., 1851), 44-45.

highly fashionable tastes and forms without resurrecting the American aristocracy of the eighteenth century.[89] Although they often shunted their class implications aside, bourgeois American taste-makers would adopt the old-world aesthetic and ritual more or less wholeheartedly over the next three decades, decking brides and grooms out in simple but rich material and surrounding them with pleasing, rustic ornaments.

Yet the Old World wedding propounded by these books did not just shelve aristocracy in Europe; rather, it took it down, dusted it off, and Americanized it. These books countered American criticisms of the mother country as snobbish and exclusive, diluting the vision of European (and particularly English) social stratification and class tyranny into something more palatable to Americans. The wedding at Bracebridge Hall, for instance, supposedly upended the manners of the hall and, by implication, relations between master and servant: "The approaching wedding," Irving wrote, "has made a kind of Saturnalia at the Hall, and has caused a suspension of all sober rule."[90] So even as the old world wedding encouraged its participants to act out their hierarchal relationships, these relationships were seemingly stripped of their unequal power dynamic, leaving behind only the beneficent concern of each class for the other. Indeed, these accounts invariably rendered the European class system harmless, even *charming*, with peasants following the lead of solicitous aristocrats, to everyone's benefit.

The vogue for Old World weddings in the novels and travel accounts of the 1820s and 1830s thus suggested a way for Americans to resolve their Puritan ambivalence about aesthetic richness, and to sidestep republican fears of behaving undemocratically. As the

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[89] See Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 306-07.

[90] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall*, 300.

middle class came to desire—and, not incidentally, to afford—the aesthetic richness of the Atlantic bourgeoisie, they began to craft a new vision of a benevolent, rustic European aristocracy which allowed them to claim upper-class cachet without wholly sacrificing their egalitarian ideals. Yet as we shall see, the old-world wedding's aristocratic implications would remain merely an undercurrent in most representations of American weddings over the next three decades. Although middle-class Americans happily ratcheted up their rituals' aesthetic richness, they endeavored to cloak their ideal wedding in republican garb. But for the subset of Americans who fancied themselves aristocrats—most particularly southern slaveholders—the old-world wedding would help define how they viewed themselves.

1830-1865: Weddings of the Middle-Class Nation

Between 1830 and 1865, the literary scene in America expanded far beyond its situation in the previous three decades, placing weddings in a much brighter light than before. The maturation of America's publishing capabilities was as much behind the expansion of wedding-related literature as anything else. Native-born writers published novels in massive numbers and increasingly included weddings in their plots—although, as we have seen, it took time for them to shake free of republican ambivalence about the ritual. Newspapers' new status as chroniclers of social mores led them to describe weddings in more detail as well: by the 1860s, readers not uncommonly found a column or two devoted to weddings—often of European nobles, but of escalating numbers of Americans, too. These decades also saw the rise of etiquette literature, which, according to John F. Kasson, "flowed from printing presses beginning in the 1830s and swelled to a torrent between 1870 and the turn of the

century."[91] Etiquette books codified social rituals for people who, as C. Dallett Hemphill says, could "no longer" "observe 'aristocratic' behaviors firsthand," covering a wide variety of advice about fashion, morals, rhetoric, and behavior in society.[92] By the 1850s, most such works contained at least a chapter on weddings. Finally, 1830 saw the maiden publication of *Godey's Lady's Book*, the unofficial bible of American fashion, etiquette, and sentimental literature that sat in thousands of middle-class parlors. By the 1830s, then, and especially from the 1850s on, a literate American would have had no trouble discovering the proper form and aesthetic for her wedding from a plethora of sources. Weddings were everywhere, and they were increasingly well-defined. The definition these books provided—the white wedding—restored the Anglican ritual to pride of place and amplified it with a host of bourgeois material goods. The ring came back into vogue, attended by orange blossoms, a white dress, and an ever-expanding bridal party.

At the same time that they wrote more about weddings, writers applied more accessible, explicitly nationalistic meanings to the ritual. By the 1830s, authors' ambivalence toward ritual had dissipated. The Cooperian problem wedding, whose characters were unable to conclude their nuptials in satisfactory fashion, much less consummate them, gave way to clearer, more linear narratives, and even tragic or gothic weddings lacked the dangerous ambiguity of their predecessors. Writers showed less concern for smooth transfers of aristocratic power that had marked earlier representations of the ritual. Instead, the ritual was adjusted to fit the perceived needs of a middle-class audience. The Victorian white wedding came to celebrate companionate love above all else, sublimating (if hardly mitigating) class

[91] Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 5.

[92] C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 147.

concerns beneath a veneer of sentimentality. What is more, novels, etiquette books, and periodicals attached a nationalist mythology to the ritual, celebrating its bourgeois, companionate ethic not only as an ideal representation of personal gender relations, but as a symbol of America's republican promise. In creating this mythology, writers papered over lingering questions of class, race, and religion, constructing narratives of America's origins and future that excluded significant constituencies.

In the three decades leading up to the Civil War, authors upped the amount of detail their descriptions of weddings.[93] This change came in two waves. Between 1830 and 1845 or 1850 or so, the ritual appeared with increasing frequency, but in essentially the same narrative forms as before. Sentimental novels as well as the shorter stories in *Godey's Lady's Book* featured weddings almost habitually—Harriet Beecher Stowe's syntax in one of her *Godey's* stories suggests just how habitually, describing "a wedding with five bride's maids, wedding cake, dancing, and so on."[94] Typically these stories fought what Richard L. Bushman has called sentimental fiction's "war of fashion versus modesty:" for the heroine of Stowe's story, the "bustle" of wedding preparations distracted her from higher moral purposes.[95] Other stories merely described the proceedings—often at extraordinary length—as did 1835's "The Wedding," which devoted nearly 5,000 words to a Virginia "frolic."[96] Beyond novels and stories, etiquette books, although published in relatively large numbers by the 1830s, still said little about weddings. *Etiquette for Ladies*, published in 1845, skipped

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[93] Elizabeth Freeman also pinpoints the 1830s as the moments when "the elements of the Anglo-American 'white wedding' . . . began their slow convergence into a form that is now taken as the standard." *The Wedding Complex*, xiv.

[94] Mrs. H. Beecher Stowe, "The Only Daughter, A Story," *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1839.

[95] Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 302; Stowe, "The Only Daughter, A Story."

[96] "The Wedding," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November, 1835.

weddings entirely; so did 1836's *The Laws of Etiquette*.[97] *The Young Man's Own Book*, published in 1832, offered readers only the painfully unspecific advice not to "distinguish your wedding day too ostentatiously," nor to "suffer it to pass away without proper marks of acknowledgment."[98]

In spite of weddings' absence from etiquette literature, the ritual was nonetheless acquiring an air of standardization, becoming not merely a wedding but the Victorian white wedding. A letter to *Godey's* published in November of 1842 suggested that the ring had become essential to any well-performed nuptials, comparing "a ball without *music*" to "a *wedding* without the *ring*."[99] The same standardization may be found in popular poetry, whose shorter narratives depended for their effects on either appealing to or disrupting readers' understanding of the ritual's regular form and aesthetic. Certain accessories showed up repeatedly. The poem "The Bridal" included bridesmaids bearing flowers and a gold ring; so did the poem "On a Very Old Wedding-Ring."[100] The bitter lament "He Wedded Again," the ode "A Bridal Melody" and the funeral dirge "White Roses" all tossed more wreaths on

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[97] *Etiquette for Ladies; with Hints on the Preservation, Improvement, and Display of Female Beauty* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1845); *The Laws of Etiquette; Or, Short Rules and Reflections for Conduct in Society. By a Gentleman* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1836).

[98] *The Young Man's Own Book* (Philadelphia: Key, Mielke and Biddle, 1832), 181. See also Count Alfred D'Orsay. *Etiquette; or, A Guide to the Usages of Society. With a Glance at Bad Habits* (New York: Wilson & Company, 1843), 19.

[99] "Our Fashion Plates," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November, 1842.

[100] Cotesworth Pinckney, ed. *The Wedding Gift, To All Who Are Entering the Marriage State* (Lowell: Milton Bonney, 1849), 111; Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Poets and Poetry of America*, Seventeenth Edition (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1856), 270.

the pile, and the gothic epic "Melanie" added another gold ring for good measure.[101] Even *Uncle Tom's Cabin* set "orange-blossoms" on Eliza's head when she married.[102]

Somewhere around 1845, didactic writers discovered the wedding. We recall that American didactic authors originally trafficked in moral instruction, and weddings' fripperies seemed as likely to lead into temptation as out. But as middle-class Americans cast aside their reservations about the ritual, didactic writers were free to engage the subject so long as they framed it in moral terms. Although the volume of didactic wedding writing would not peak until the twentieth century, a wide variety of literature began formulating the ideal wedding, promulgating a set of aesthetics and ritual forms necessary to start one's marriage on solid, middle-class footing. Since the new middle-class ethic placed companionate marriage near its ideological center, the way in which Americans inaugurated those marriages were of no small importance.

Where previous etiquette books mentioned weddings briefly, didactic literature after 1845 had far more to say on the topic. The etiquette book *True Politeness* (1848) told couples how to invite their guests, and told guests how to congratulate the couple.[103] Mrs. L. G. Abell's 1851 book *Woman in her Various Relations* devoted several pages to weddings, defining, among many other things, the proper hour ("eight o'clock P.M."), the proper headdress ("A white silk lace vail or wreath of white flowers, of orange blossoms, usually artificial") the proper mode of entrance (bridesmaids and groomsmen first, the couple second), and the

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[101] Griswold, *The Poets and Poetry of America*, 316 (first quotation), 575 (second quotation), 375 (fourth quotation); Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Female Poets of America* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, Chesnut Street, 1849), 212 (third quotation).

[102] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; Or, Life Among the Lowly*, Illustrated Edition [Original Designs by Billings; Engraved by Baker and Smith] (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853), 28.

[103] *True Politeness: A Hand-Book of Etiquette for Ladies. By an American Lady* (New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1848), 53-55.

proper order of congratulations after the ceremony (too elaborate to repeat).[104] "Professor Rondout's" etiquette book *The Bliss of Marriage*, published three years later, offered nearly the same advice—the good Professor may have plagiarized—but added a disquisition on the proper disposal of the wedding party's gloves.[105] And *Godey's* began supplementing its stories and fashion plates with explicit advice, offering editorial comments on changing fashions.[106]

Although etiquette books had only quite recently begun to discuss weddings, and although Americans had been distinctly wary of the trappings of ritual, authors now reveled in purportedly hallowed traditions. *Godey's* published more than one history of the wedding ring; other publications did likewise.[107] *Godey's* also offered brief histories of wedding cake, flowers, bridal parties, gloves, and party favors, all of which apparently had roots in ancient tradition.[108] And, heedless of the wide variety of bridal colors in the past, *Godey's* deemed white the "proper hue" for a wedding dress "from time immemorial."[109] The book *The Lover's Companion* suggested supplying guests with "'Dream cake,'" in which "narrow strips of the wedding-cake passed through the marriage ring," are distributed to "unmarried

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[104] Mrs. L. G. Abell, *Woman in her Various Relations: Containing Practical Rules for American Females* (New York: William Holdredge, 1851), 210-212.

[105] Professor Rondout, *The Bliss of Marriage. The Way to the Altar, Matrimony Made Easy, Or How to Win a Lover* (New York: Professor Rondout, 1854), 165.

[106] See, for instance, "Chit-Chat—Trousseau," *Godey's Lady's Book*, September, 1850, and "Chit-Chat Upon Philadelphia Fashions," *Godey's Lady's Book*, August, 1850.

[107] Mrs. White, "A Chapter on Rings," *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1853; "The Wedding Ring," *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1853; *The Lover's Companion. A Hand-Book of Courtship and Marriage* (Philadelphia: George S. Appleton, 1850), 59-62.

[108] "Bridemaids and Bridecake," *Godey's Lady's Book*, October, 1853.

[109] "Etiquette of Trousseau," *Godey's Lady's Book*, June, 1849.

ladies," who would place it underneath their pillows and dream of their future husbands.[110] Lest this ritual seem impious, the book advised that the clergyman himself be the one to run the cake through the ring.

Alongside more straightforward etiquette literature, a wide range of related works set about declaiming upon the ritual. A budding semi-pornographic genre capitalized on weddings' famously generative nights, enticing readers with attractive headings such as "The Wedding Night," "Conjugal Duties," and "SPECIFIC CONJUGAL ADAPTATIONS."[111] These titular come-ons usually climaxed in textual odes to morality, although the advice of *The Ladies' and Gentlemen's Hymeneal Instructor* to "Make a companion of your wife, in the fullest sense of the term" extended the double-entendres into the text itself.[112] "Medical" books, too, carried the wedding into realms beyond mere etiquette. In 1869, a faintly salacious handbook entitled *The Physical Life of Woman* featured lengthy discussions on courtship and engagement, as well as notes on "THE RIGHT TIME OF THE YEAR TO MARRY," "THE RIGHT TIME IN THE MONTH TO MARRY," and (briefly) "THE WEDDING NIGHT," on which couples were advised to keep themselves "fruitless" in order to protect the health of the bride.[113] Another book, *Matrimony, as Taught by Phrenology and*

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[110] *The Lover's Companion*, 56-57 (quot. p. 56). See Simon R. Charsley, *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 108-10.

[111] *The Ladies' and Gentlemen's Hymeneal Instructor: Or, The Philosophy of Love, Courtship, and Marriage; Showing The Time to Marry; The Requisites of a Good Wife; The Manner of Courting; Popping the Question; The Wedding Night; Conjugal Duties; Remarks Upon Rearing the Little Ones, &c. &c., By Quiz.* (New York: John Nicholson, 1847) (first two quotations); O. S. Fowler, *Matrimony, as Taught by Phrenology and Physiology* (New York: O. S. Fowler, 1859), 275 (third quotation).

[112] *The Ladies' and Gentlemen's Hymeneal Instructor*, 21.

[113] Geo. H. Napheys, *The Physical Life of Woman: Advice to the Maiden, Wife, and Mother* (Philadelphia: George Maclean, 1869), 67, 69, 70. Although it did not discuss weddings directly, another "medical" work, purportedly a French text translated into English in 1842, offered advice to men on "popping the question" alongside frank discussions of nymphomania and masturbation. Eugene Becklard, *Physiological Mysteries and*

Physiology, offered advice on how to marry according to the dictates of its "scientific" disciplines.[114] As it turned out, the phrenologically correct wedding shared a great deal with those described in other advice books.

The existence of all these books makes it clear that by 1845, Americans of a wide range of interests and backgrounds had gained an intimate familiarity with the ritual and a desire to discuss it. Few works testify to Americans' growing fascination with nuptial minutiae than George Lippard's scandal-making gothic novel *The Quaker City; Or, the Monks of Monk Hall* (1845). In a key scene, the villain Gus Lorrimer orchestrates a mock-wedding to seduce Mary Arlington, the fifteen-year-old "flower of one of the first families" of Philadelphia.[115] Any student of melodrama would notice that countless aspects of the wedding bode ill for the heroine: the wedding takes place at 3 AM in a gothic mansion, without the permission of the bride's family, and in the presence of sham "relatives" whom the bride has never met. But what is fascinating is the sheer volume of detail with which Lippard invests the charade. The "bridal-bed" (in the "Wedding Room") receives careful attention, as do the outfits of the impostor wedding party; meanwhile, the description of the bride in her dress and robe threatens to overthrow the narrative entirely.[116] Here is less than a third of it:

> From the shoulders to the waist her figure was enveloped in a bodice of snow-white satin, that gathered over her swelling bosom, with such gracefulness of shape that every beauty of her form,--the width of the shoulders, and the gradual falling off, of the outline of the waist,--was clearly perceptible.
>
> Fitting closely around the bust, it gave to view her fair, round neck, half-concealed by the

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Revelations in Love, Courtship and Marriage; An Infallible Guide-Book for Married and Single Persons, in Matters of the Utmost Importance to the Human Race, translated by Philip M. Howard (New York: 1842), 140.

[114] Fowler, *Matrimony, as Taught by Phrenology and Physiology*.

[115] George Lippard, *The Quaker City; Or, the Monks of Monk Hall. A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery and Crime* (Philadelphia: Leary, Stuart & Company, 1876), 13.

[116] Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 63, 79.

> drooping curls of glossy hair, and a glimpse of each shoulder, so delicate and white, swelling away into the fullness of the virgin bosom, that rose heaving above the border of lace. From the waist downward, in many a fold, but with perfect adaptation to her form, the gorgeous skirt of satin, fell sweeping to the floor, leaving one small and tiny foot, enclosed in a neat slipper, that clung to it as though it had grown there, exposed to the eye.[117]

This would verge on pornography, were the dress not so stylish. The book's characters find the wedding's form and aesthetics quite as fascinating as the reader is meant to; indeed, the ritual takes on a self-reflective quality. Almost every new detail inspires one character or another to name it in reverential tones: "'The bridal bed!' murmur[s]" Mary's brother.[118] "'This plain fillet of silver, with its diamond star—how well it becomes your brow!'" gushes the seducer's accomplice.[119] And Lorrimer tells Mary, "your arms seem to love the light embrace of these drooping sleeves."[120] Later, as the groom's pretended "relatives"—actually accomplices in Mary's intended seduction—plan their parts in the farce, they practice the same astonishment at the ritual's aesthetics, one of them contemplating saying "'Is *she* not *beautiful!*' in a sort of an *aside* tone."[121] These are people who have read about weddings and know precisely how they're supposed to look and feel. Even Mary, astoundingly naïve as she may be, notes that the wedding's circumstances are strikingly "like the stories we read in a book!"[122]

These stories, for what it is worth, had grown less problematic than their predecessors. Whereas Cooper ended one of the weddings in *The Spy* at the moment of greatest ambiguity

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[117] Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 75.

[118] Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 63.

[119] Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 74.

[120] Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 78.

[121] Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 81.

[122] Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 74.

and tension, between the couple's vows and "the investiture," and made a habit of leaving weddings unconsummated, later authors—even ones whose weddings ended badly—did not trespass so far upon the ritual. "Fashionable" women in *Godey's* stories routinely married for the wrong reasons, but the ceremonies themselves did not strand them in a state between singlehood and marriage. British soldiers separate the lovers in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1847 epic poem *Evangeline* on their wedding day, but the calamity takes place before the ceremony begins.[123] Even the amoral sham wedding in *The Quaker City* is interrupted before the lovers can be united. After the 1820s, authors evinced far less trepidation about the value or validity of the ritual and fit weddings into linear, easily interpreted narratives. They either took place or they didn't, and if they didn't, one could safely say how and why.

Authors from the 1830s to the 1860s on, then, set aside their ambivalence about the ritual and created (or, perhaps, catalogued) a repertoire of nuptial aesthetics and forms. And the gusto with which authors engaged the ritual suggests that Americans were willing to invest it with significance—it *mattered* whether a ritual was performed to standards of moral, fashionable, or even physiological correctness. So what significance did Americans apply to the wedding? What did this newly-acceptable ritual mean?

Most unavoidably, the white wedding signified one's membership in the middle class. Membership in that club entitled one to a great many satisfactions and frustrations, and its members found contradictions down every corridor. But mid-nineteenth-century literature's ideal wedding advertised marriage as a companionate, bourgeois relationship of relative equals, rather than a vehicle for promoting the transfer of wealth from one patriarch to

[123] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadia* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1878).

another. And, not incidentally, it prized businessmen over aristocrats, celebrating the wealth-earning values of temperance and industry over wealth-inheriting family connections. These changes suggest the increasing cultural dominance of the middle class in the post-Market-Revolution United States.

Scholars have documented significant changes in the way people got married between 1700 and 1850 or so, as the ethic of companionate marriage took hold on both sides of the Atlantic. Lawrence Stone has noted the decline "in the near-absolute authority of the husband over the wife among the propertied classes" in England, while Mary Beth Norton finds that, especially after the American Revolution, communities gave young people "greater freedom in the selection of a spouse."[124] Other scholars, meanwhile, have suggested that Americans began seeking love in their relationships as never before.[125] While we might assume that the works promoting weddings to an American audience would have reflected these changes, weddings can tell us how people interpreted these changes—how they conceptualized these changes within America's class and political structures.

Writers centered their vision of companionate marriage less around love per se and more around compatibility. Love was treacherous to men and women alike, opening their hearts up to "unworthy intruders."[126] One advisor cautioned women to avoid the "danger" of "suffering from '*falling in love*,'" which made "*depraved mortals*" appear as "*divinities*."[127]

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[124] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800*, Abridged Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 221; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), 230.

[125] See Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, and Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[126] Abell, *Woman in Her Various Relations*, 203.

[127] Abell, *Woman in Her Various Relations*, 202-03.

Fiction, too, cautioned against love untempered by reason. Henry Wyndham, the hero of the *Godey's* story "The Ideal and the Real," marries a fashionable beauty who has "enthralled" his "senses," and only later discovers her cruel, indifferent nature, thus proving the story's moral, "A man in love is easily deceived."[128] In *The Quaker City*, Mary Arlington's unceasing romantic obsession with Lorrimer leads to her ruin. In place of love, writers counseled seeking affection and compatibility. *The Lover's Companion* described "A good spouse" as "your kind friend; your counselor; the welcome soother of your cares and anxieties; the generous and charitable judge of your infirmities; the inspirer of honourable ambition; your fellow-labourer in joint interests; the ornament of your life; the gracious, considerate, faithful, gentle companion," and then asked, sarcastically, "Who that is 'in love' has leisure or inclination to think of such *trifles* as these?"[129] And *The Young Man's Own Book* argued for relative equality among marriage partners (each within his or her sphere, of course), suggesting that "the only true condition of matrimony" was that a husband and wife shared equally in the responsibilities of maintaining a frugal household.[130] Fiction writers agreed that lovers should seek more temperate partners: when Henry Wyndham's "obstinate" wife is fortuitously crushed to death by her own carriage, Henry offers his second wife "not a second love, but a first, true and abiding affection."[131]

Compatibility, "abiding affection" rather than romantic passion, was the goal. But if the search for affection and compatibility rendered love a little tepid, it also made the couple's desires the focal point of marriage rather than their parents'. This distinction was neither as

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[128] Miss Mary Davenant, "The Ideal and the Real," *Godey's Lady's Book*, October, 1843.

[129] *The Lover's Companion*, 11-12.

[130] *The Young Man's Own Book*, 179.

[131] Miss Mary Davenant, "The Ideal and the Real."

obvious as it seems today, nor entirely clear cut. The historian Daniel Scott Smith suggests that couple-centered marriage was relatively new: New Englanders' marriages came to focus more on the couple than their families only between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, changing from a "parental-run marriage system" to a "participant-run system."[132] But advisors did not seem entirely comfortable leaving parents out of the equation. Parental advice could save children from dangerous infatuations. One advisor commended parents for "prevent[ing] matches which must inevitably result in misery and wretchedness."[133] The phrenological handbook suggested that "every marriage should be a *family* affair, and discussed in full council."[134] In spite of these cautions, and amid much hemming and hawing, etiquette advisors ultimately left the choice in the hands of the couple. "Professor Rondout" bluntly favored the feelings of lovers over those of parents: "Parents have no right to tell their offspring where they shall place their affections, or persuade, or coerce them to unite their hands when their hearts cannot go with them."[135] The phrenological etiquette book answered the question, "who shall give the *determining* vote?" thusly: "THE MATRIMONIAL CANDIDATES THEMSELVES."[136] Significantly, one etiquette book purporting to describe "*Republican Etiquette*" argued that in a new, republican society, a woman had "a legal as well as a moral right to bestow her love and her hand upon whom she

[132] Daniel Scott Smith, "Parental Power and Marriage Patterns: An Analysis of Historical Trends in Hingham, Massachusetts," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35, No. 3 (1973): 426.

[133] Rondout, *The Bliss of Marriage*, 49.

[134] Fowler, *Matrimony, as Taught by Phrenology and Physiology*, 228.

[135] Rondout, *The Bliss of Marriage*, 49.

[136] Fowler, *Matrimony, as Taught by Phrenology and Physiology*, 235.

pleases."[137] The companionate ethic upset the well-established grievance of duty against will, parent against child.

If the question of whether marriage should focus on the couple or their parents seems ancillary to the wedding itself, it figured crucially in the ritual in the eyes of antebellum writers, and suggested how weddings had come to symbolize a generational shift in understandings of individuality, rights, and citizenship. Indeed, writers agonized over the ritual of asking parents' permission more than almost any other question. The "*Republican*" etiquette manual dismissed requests for parental consent as "mere form" that "may often be dispensed with;" but it concerned most writers nonetheless.[138] Its difficulty forced authors into describing parents as either meddlesome or sycophantic. *The Lover's Companion* declared that "the dictates of [a couple's] affections" should not be subject to the caprice of "unreasonably and obstinately hostile" parents.[139] Conversely, one letter-writing manual made its ideal father defer to his daughter with boot-licking reflexivity, never trumping her will, ever reinforcing it. He rejoices that she has "made a prudent choice" in a marriage partner, and happily rejects other suitors on her behalf.[140] The imagined father even speculates to a rejected beau, "I have reason to think she has already given her preference to another"—but he doesn't know![141] The decision is entirely hers. Authors' discomfort over whether parents (and fathers in particular) should play a determining role in a marriage or

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[137] *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette, and Guide to Correct Personal Habits* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1856), 114.

[138] *How to Behave*, 114.

[139] *The Lover's Companion*, 21, 25, 21.

[140] *The American Gentleman's Every Day hand-Book of Modern Letter Writing. Etiquette of Manners. Dreams, Their Origin, Interpretation and History. Fashionable Songs* (Philadelphia: Henry F. Anners, 1849), 19.

[141] *The American Gentleman's Every Day hand-Book of Modern Letter Writing*, 33.

wedding reflected changing social realities: Mary Ryan has observed "a shift from patriarchal authority to domestic affection" among nineteenth-century northerners, noting that "[t]he relations between adults and children" were coming to be "characterized by emotional interchange rather than strict hierarchy."[142] But it also reflected America's bourgeoisification. In the bourgeois worldview, Americans would navigate the worlds of commerce and society on the strength of their own talents. It supposedly mattered little anymore if their parents provided the social or, especially, financial support that had defined aristocratic success. The diminishment of marriage's financial importance for the new middle class wrought a corresponding decline in parents' authority, as they shrank from economic determiners into wise counselors. Professor Rondout based his assessment of parents' role in their children's marriage decisions on the negligible importance he accorded to either money or social status: "when the only reason [to prevent a match] is one of dollars and cents, rank or station, they [i.e., parents] should use no other means than reason and argument."[143]

Writers reflected America's developing bourgeois identity in their advice both about how to choose a mate and about how to celebrate that choice with a wedding. In both cases, moderation purportedly reigned. Writers quite consciously left dowries or marriage portions out of their portraits of ideal partners. William Corbett's inventory of "The things which you ought to desire in a wife" named one bourgeois virtue after another: "1. Chastity; 2. sobriety; 3. industry; 4. frugality; 5. cleanliness; 6. knowledge of domestic affairs; 7. good temper; 8.

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[142] Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 231-32. See also Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 93.

[143] Rondout, *The Bliss of Marriage*, 50. Vincent Bertolini discusses domestic conflicts over paternal power in literature in "Fireside Chastity: The Erotics of Sentimental Bachelorhood in the 1850s," *American Literature* 68, No. 4 (1996): 723-24.

beauty."[144] Meanwhile, *The Daughter's Own Book* made its list of faults the mirror image of Corbett's:

> Do not marry a fop. . . .
> Do not marry a spendthrift. . . .
> Do not marry a miser. . . .
> Do not marry a man whose age is greatly disproportioned to your own. . . .
> Do not marry a man who is not industrious in some honorable vocation. . . .
> Do not marry a man of an irritable, violent, or overbearing temper. . . .
> Do not marry a man who is deficient in understanding, or in mental acquisitions. . . .
> Do not marry a man who is skeptical in his principles. . . .
> Do not marry a man of questionable morality.[145]

Obviously, many of these attributes concerned money, but none of them were money itself. Rather, the ideal lover would excel at earning and conserving money, matters of talent and constitution rather than inheritance. And those attributes that did not contribute directly to a family's income, such as understanding, morality, and good temper, would still aid a man in the market. The ideal marriage partner, in other words, was a businessman or his wife. Of a woman with no talent for managing money or family affairs, *The Young Man's Own Book* cautioned, "let her be ever so sweetly tempered, gracefully made, or elegantly accomplished, she is no wife for a man of business."[146] For a businessman, a prudent, temperate wife contributed to the bourgeois project, keeping house economically and projecting an image of financial reliability; grace, sweetness, or conversational fluency were merely added bonuses. As to virtues more associated with aristocracy—an illustrious name, the ability to exhibit "mastery" over one's underlings—these carried less weight, or were mitigated by the

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[144] William Corbett, *Advice to Young Men, And (Incidentally) to Young Women, in the Middle and Higher Ranks of Life. In a Series of Letters, Addressed to A Youth, A Bachelor, A Lover, A Husband, A Citizen or a Subject* (New York: John Doyle, 1833), 79. This book was seemingly addressed to an English audience, but was printed in America.

[145] *The Daughter's Own Book; or, Practical Hints from A Father to His Daughter*, Sixth Edition. Philadelphia: Grigg and Elliot, 1839), 148-57.

[146] *The Young Man's Own Book*, 178-79.

emasculating circumstance of having to marry for money. The phrenological etiquette book decried nations (such as France, ever the easy target) whose citizens married for money, putting a man in the embarrassing situation of possessing his wife's "purse," but not her heart.[147] And a *New York Times* correspondent joked that Americans who wished for nobility should spurn the "dissolute and worthless sprigs of European nobility," who would cost "from two hundred thousand dollars to half a million" to marry, and instead wed a "plain homespun [American] Smith" and purchase a title for a mere three hundred dollars.[148] This transaction, the author claimed, was "vastly more economical . . . and . . . equally honorable to all concerned." Aristocracy was an old-world virtue; marriage in the new world demanded prudence and economy.

Authors extended their desire for moderation into the wedding ceremony, in ways that explicitly privileged the bourgeois ethic over the aristocratic. Virtually every authority encouraged simple, unadorned ceremonies, often for explicitly egalitarian or even republican reasons. *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette* avowed its distaste for "the usual ceremonies of a formal wedding," saying, "A simpler, less ceremonious, and more private mode of giving legal sanction to an already existing union of hearts would be more to *our* taste."[149] *Godey's* declared that "the simple muslin of the pretty country girl, who needs no foreign ornament" matched up quite adequately with "the silver brocade of a Parisian countess."[150] And the phrenological handbook cautioned against "extra rich or expensive"

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[147] Fowler, *Matrimony, as Taught by Phrenology and Physiology*, 248.-

[148] Dick Tinto, "Dick Tinto on His Travels," *New York Times*, 15 January 1855.

[149] *How to Behave*, 96.

[150] "Etiquette of Trousseau."

foods at a wedding reception, as being harder to digest.[151] It even suggested—anachronistically, as luxury clothiers had long dominated trans-Atlantic fashion—that the couple should make their wedding attire themselves, or "at least the bride's attire."[152] Emotions, like material goods, were to be kept in reserve: subdued, unaffected displays of emotion demonstrated that one could be trusted to protect the nation and to deal honestly in the bourgeois marketplace.[153] The actors in *The Quaker City's* sham wedding practiced not merely showing emotions, but reigning them in. One cautions another against "coming it a little too strong," and advises his fellows instead to take the bride "'by the finger –tips, and start as if her beauty overcame you, then exclaim "God bless you my love, God bless you—" as though your feelings were too strong for utterance.'"[154]

The *Quaker City* charlatans, of course, exposed the artifice that went into creating a "simple" wedding. Anyone who read *Godey's* could sense the inherent contradictions in a pageant of moderation and sentimentality, contradictions which troubled but rarely dissuaded authors from their task of describing the most fashionable weddings. *How to Behave*, the "Republican" advice manual, lamented that its readers would want "a stylish wedding," but nonetheless advised them on how to pull it off.[155] (However, the manual put some sanctimonious distance between itself and other guides, assuring its readers that it had merely

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[151] Fowler, *Matrimony, as Taught by Phrenology and Physiology*, 375.

[152] Fowler, *Matrimony, as Taught by Phrenology and Physiology*, 375. See Banner, *American Beauty*, 26.

[153] Karen Halttunen dissects the "sentimental ritual" of the funeral, wherein performances of suppressed emotions—"The lonely woman weeping over an unmarked grave, the solitary man gazing sadly at a locket he wore over his heart"—indicated sincerity. *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 133. John F. Kasson notes that "demonstrations of affection in public" amounted to "excessive mutual engrossment." *Rudeness and Civility*, 161. On sentiment's nationalistic implications, see Andrew Burstein, *Sentimental Democracy: The Evolution of America's Romantic Self-Image* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 16, 21.

[154] Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 81.

[155] *How to Behave*, 96.

"cop[ied]" its nuptial advice from "one of the numerous manners books."[156] Fair enough.) The editors of *Godey's* worried in 1854 that the recent trend of giving lucrative gifts at weddings threatened to corrupt its readers' republican virtues.[157] They decried it as "a system of fashionable beggary," tending "to create fictitious distinctions in society" based on wealth.[158] But even as the editors advocated sentimental restraint, they still noted that the custom was "becoming generally adopted" in America. Karen Halttunen argues that by the 1850s, Americans had come to view "an outward appearance of virtue" as an acceptable replacement for "an evangelical Christian trust based on heartfelt sincerity."[159] In the end, authors' statements of preference for simple ceremonies and plain fashions acted as decoration themselves—republican ornaments layered on a consumerist ritual. A newspaper writer in 1854, for instance, framed a ridiculously expensive and fashionable wedding in terms of republican simplicity. The bride wore a dress of "superb white silk, inlaid with lace, and deep flounced, and a long bridal veil of costly thread lace, secured by a myrtle wreath." Somehow, all this equated to a kind of austerity: "the toilette" was "altogether exquisite, without sacrificing simplicity to extravagance."[160]

Despite its abuses and ambiguities, Americans' oft-expressed preference for simple materials, foods, and performance had potentially inclusive implications. John F. Kasson has argued that "Manners provided yet another way of avoiding talking openly about the dirty

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[156] *How to Behave*, 96.

[157] This was in fact a recent trend. See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 167-68.

[158] "Wedding Donations," *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1854.

[159] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 187, 188.

[160] "Fashionable and Elegant Fete," *New York Times*, 8 June 1854. See also "Wedding in High Life," *New York Times*, 3 December 1853, which described the wedding of "one of Mississippi's daughters and wealthiest heiresses . . . to one of New-York's most wealthy sons" as "prompt, expeditious, and unostentatious."

secret of class in America."[161] The wedding's sometimes-confused vision of extravagant republicanism demonstrates one result of this silence, but another result was that a wide swath of the population could now access the materials necessary to display middle-class status. In their repeated praise of "The plainest dress," and their censure of "Costly cashmeres, very rich furs and diamonds, as well as many other brilliant ornaments," authors potentially opened up the realm of fashion to a less-wealthy audience.[162] Contemplating a Parisian woman's lavish trousseau, *Godey's* editors idealized the far sparer situation of a hypothetical American woman, asking "whether the happiness of this young countess was greater than that of the plain New England girl, whose friends arrange the simple white muslin dress she has, perhaps, fitted herself, and twine the fresh white roses gathered for the bridal in her rich brown hair."[163] A letter-writing manual from 1849 gamely (if perhaps not entirely authentically) included "A YOUNG TRADESMAN" and "A MAN SERVANT" in its ranks of suitors.[164] Both are upwardly mobile: the manservant writes to a serving woman, describing his habit of putting his earnings in the bank and expressing the hope for "our union, and a comfortable settlement in some honest calling."[165] The tradesman aims higher, declaring that his "expectations of being securely settled in business should be shortly realized"; and nothing in his letter suggests that the object of his affections is a working girl herself.[166]

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[161] *Rudeness and Civility*, 67.

[162] *Etiquette for Ladies*, 60, 64.

[163] "Chit-Chat—Trousseau."

[164] *The American Gentleman's Every Day hand-Book of Modern Letter Writing*, 41, 43.

[165] *The American Gentleman's Every Day hand-Book of Modern Letter Writing*, 43.

[166] *The American Gentleman's Every Day hand-Book of Modern Letter Writing*, 42.

Even as they described and facilitated the pursuit of fine markers of gentility, most etiquette writers acknowledged that nuptials could span—or erase—class boundaries. The book *Woman in her Various Relations* struck a laissez-faire tone toward bettering oneself through fashion, noting merely that attention to "neatness and personal habits" "dignifies poverty," and arguing that the best appearance favored "felicity of adaptation of color, style, and manufacture" over "costliness of material [and] brilliancy of colors."[167] But other authors made weddings the scene of fluid class relations. One advisor frankly denied that only the wealthy could win a spouse: "The possession of beauty or riches," he wrote, "is of course a ready passport to matrimony; yet those who have neither . . . need not despair. Wedlock is a lock to which there are many keys," he continued, including "Amiability" and "tact."[168] *The Lover's Companion* expressed the essential ambiguity of America's class situation, now admonishing poor men to keep in their place and then, in the next moment, offering them the chance to be the exception to the rule. Its author declared that a young lady "should not marry below her station," yet allowed for "extraordinary cases in which [men of] very uncommon merits, such as great talent or eminent public services" might deserve consideration.[169] What poor man would not believe that his talents surpassed the old strictures? In 1854, the *New York Times* described a case of social climbing through marriage, chronicling the fictional career of John Thompson, who began as ""a well known vagabond, . . . a worthless, miserable fellow, who has been loafing about for months."[170] Yet within nine months, Thompson's marriage to the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the

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[167] Abell, *Woman in her Various Relations*, 178, 179.

[168] Rondout, *The Bliss of Marriage*, 11-12. See Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 406-410.

[169] *The Lover's Companion*, 38.

[170] "Three Degrees of Crime," *New York Times*, 4 December 1855.

Hon. O. U. LETHERRIP . . . without the knowledge of her parents" had established him as "highly influential and universally respected."[171]

In its extreme manifestations, the wedding in antebellum American literature transgressed class and even ethnic lines. Robert Montgomery Bird's 1836 novel *Nick of the Woods*, for instance, finds John Atkinson, a backwoods buffoon, attempting to shoehorn a gentleman, Roland Forrester, into marrying his daughter. When Forrester refuses, the backwoodsman launches into an egalitarian tirade that expresses marriage's potential to muddle class relations: "you don't think her good enough for you, because you're of a great quality stock, and she's come of nothing but me, . . . a plain, backwoods feller?"[172] Guessing that his own reputation as "a d—d notorious rascal" has prejudiced the beau against his daughter, Atkinson makes marriage a driver of the protean social relationships in the young republic, suggesting that Forrester change his daughter's name to suit him better: "You can just call her Telie Jones, or Telie Small, or any nickname of that natur', and nobody'll be the wiser."[173] And although Forrester firmly rejects Atkinson's daughter, his doing so is richly ironic. Forrester, of wealthy stock, has lost his fortune, while Atkinson's daughter is an heiress—their marrying could have effected more than one reversal in fortune. The wedding in Washington Irving's non-fiction *Astoria* (1836) translates an even more radical change into ritual form. When the explorer M'Dougal and a Chinook princess marry, the princess arrives for the wedding in striking fashion, having, "according to the Chinook toilet,"

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[171] The Oxford English Dictionary reports that the phrase "let her rip" had circulated for at least the previous two years.

[172] Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods, or, The Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky* (New York: Redfield, 1856), 347.

[173] Bird, *Nick of the Woods*, 348.

"painted and anointed herself for the occasion."[174] Her appearance, however, "caused some little dismay" among the Americans. The situation is resolved "by dint . . . of copious ablutions," and the princess is "freed from all adventitious tint and fragrance, and entered into the nuptial state, the cleanest princess that had ever been known, of the somewhat unctuous tribe of the Chinooks."[175] The woman's tribal traditions—her very Indianness, perhaps—have to be scrubbed clean before she can marry a white man. The implication is that the wedding could even whitewash ethnic difference.

The wedding's potential to unite its participants under an umbrella of sentimental, middle-class culture had nationalistic implications. Authors in the thirty years before the Civil War used the wedding to symbolize their nation's republican promise, rendering America as an essentially bourgeois nation in which companionate marriage and middle-class economic values would guide the citizenry to love and prosperity. The writer who described the 1854 "Pioneer wedding" on the Nebraska prairie, for instance, linked his hopes for Stephen Douglas' egalitarian, white-supremacist democracy directly to the prairie wedding's rustic dignity. In a more domestic mode, *Godey's* preference for the New England country girl's simple dress over Europe's richer, more fabulous threads defined America as a simple, unostentatious, and fundamentally anti-aristocratic nation.

Further, authors imagined the bourgeois wedding backward in time, creating a mythology of "founding" weddings taking place during the American Revolution.[176] More than one

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[174] Washington Irving, *Astoria, or, Anecdotes of an Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851). 463.

[175] Irving, *Astoria*, 463.

[176] See Samuels, *Romances of the Republic*, 17. Samuels also suggests that the antebellum historical novel about the Revolution often functioned to "ratify" the separation of the spheres in both an intimate and a global sense (17-18).

antebellum novel made a bourgeois, anti-aristocratic rejection of parental authority both a pre-condition for and a result of the Revolution.[177] Authors linked fathers' attempts to force their daughters to marry for money to prospects of a Tory victory: fictional fathers repeatedly try to marry their daughters to wealthy Tories instead of letting them marry the Patriots they love. In books such as *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and Daniel P. Thompson's *The Green Mountain Boys*, the Patriot cause triumphs when daughters reject their fathers' advice and marry for love alone; the companionate ideal thereby becomes a guarantor of the safety of the republic.[178] Ignoring the companionate dictate, on the other hand, marrying for money or submitting to unreasonable parental demands, becomes a potential threat, corrupting men and women's hearts and minds.

The triple wedding that ends *The Green Mountain Boys* offers a consummate example of how authors made the bourgeois wedding a part of their national mythology, squeezing both the rejection of parental authority and an inclusive view of class relations into its narrative of America's origins. Two of the wedding's three couples have faced parental opposition at one point or another. The wrong-headed father in the above paragraph has long since been humbled into begging his daughter's forgiveness and sanctioning her marriage to a Patriot.[179] The second couple faces a moment of suspense just before the ceremony, when a friend of the bride's reads a letter from her father appearing to refuse his consent. The letter is

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[177] See Samuels, *Romances of the Republic*, 60.

[178] See J. P. Kennedy, *Horse-Shoe Robinson. A Tale of the Tory Ascendency* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co.), and [Daniel P. Thompson,] *The Green Mountain Boys: A Historical Tale of the Early Settlement of Vermont* (Boston: Hall and Whiting, 1881). Meanwhile, the Tories themselves have changed. Cooper's Tories were conflicted but honorable; the Tory Sherwood in *The Green Mountain Boys* is a villain out of melodrama, motivated entirely by greed and the desire to inflict pain on others. Elizabeth Freeman also notes the simultaneous growth of representations of founding weddings—"often between Pocahontas and John Mith or John Alden and Priscilla Mullins—[that] seemed to emblematize the founding of an 'America' distinct from both England and Native homelands." *The Wedding Complex*, 39.

[179] [Daniel P. Thompson], *The Green Mountain Boys*, 352.

immediately revealed to be outdated, and a second letter appears approving the match. But the assembled guests do not seem to receive even the first letter—delivered in thick, Scottish dialect—with entire seriousness, and it seems possible that the couple would not have heeded his caution, adverting instead to their own good authority, not to mention the good will of the Revolutionary hero Ethan Allen, who arrives to sanction two other unions without ever asking about parental wishes. The idea that fathers could deny their children the happiness of a loving marriage comes off as mildly laughable, not to mention negligible in the face of the support of one of the "fathers of his country." The triple wedding also showcases a tellingly fluid vision of class in the new nation. Two of the three grooms come from decently wealthy stock; but the daughter of the Scottish father does not, and can only offer a "crap o' wild oats" for her dowry.[180] The third couple slides the wedding even further down the class scale, uniting the fates of a woodsman and a servant. Each of these couples receives the attention (and the impeccable Revolutionary bona fides) of Ethan Allen.[181] Allen actually makes an abortive attempt to bring a fourth couple—an Indian and a "half-blood" Indian—to the altar.[182] Finally, the wedding's aesthetics walk the bourgeois line between wealth and simplicity, vacillating from one to the other sometimes several times in a single sentence: the bride sports a "simple, but rich and tasteful array of spotless white, surmounted by the emblematic rose of the same color, instead of the dumb, unspeaking jewel."[183] *The Green Mountain Boys* suggests how the wedding had come to symbolize both the national project and the bourgeois ascendancy, seemingly inextricable from each other.

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[180] [Daniel P. Thompson], *The Green Mountain Boys*, 361.

[181] Shirley Samuels points out that Martha Washington performs a similar role to Allen's in Catherine Sedgwick's 1835 novel *The Linwoods*. *Romances of the Republic*, 63.

[182] [Daniel P. Thompson], *The Green Mountain Boys*, 363.

[183] [Daniel P. Thompson], *The Green Mountain Boys*, 353.

Requirements, Exclusions and Alternate Visions

In discussing the ways in which weddings appeared in antebellum literature, I have largely failed to describe the ways in which they did *not* appear. Published works did not consider weddings with nearly the frequency or copious detail with which they would do after the Civil War, much less with the birth of the modern wedding industry in the twentieth century. Throughout the entire antebellum period, the amount of print about the wedding rarely approached the voluminous page-totals that chroniclers of balls or dinner parties devoted to their subjects—although it was catching up. Yet it remains true that by the 1830s, and increasingly into the 1850s and 1860s, the wedding came to occupy a far more prominent place in the cultural landscape than it had at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In its various manifestations, arbiters of taste and style had come to view the properly-performed wedding as a doorway to middle-class status and to a loving marital partnership, as well as a marker of America's essentially bourgeois nature. These facts carried with them the potential both to unite disparate Americans under an expansive, bourgeois vision and to alienate people whose values or identities did not fit the middle-class outlook.

The wedding's potentially alienating aspects were intensified by the fact that tapping the power of this class-reifying, nation-defining ritual demanded investments on the part of its participants.[184] Part of this investment was material. The expansion of didactic literature on weddings suggests the transformation of the ritual into a consumerist pageant. Prior to the 1840s, *Godey's* readers had been free to assume that they would simply wear their best clothes to their wedding. But in 1844, the magazine introduced dresses whose sole purpose

[184] C. Dallett Hemphill describes the codification of ritual during this period as the "price of admission" to the middle class. *Bowing to Necessities*, 147; see also 157-58.

was to be married in, demarcating nuptial fashions from every-day dresses.[185] It took next to no time for a market to develop around the ritual. Although decades passed before the wedding industry acquired its modern form, one etiquette book suggests that wedding planners had already begun to ply their trade as early as 1854: "Those who reside in any large city, like New York or Philadelphia," "Professor Rondout" assured his readers, "will have no difficulty in arranging a marriage party, for there are always to be found certain individuals who get up such ceremonies for 'a consideration.'"[186] Moreover, authors' penchant for cloaking rich materials in a veneer of "simplicity" suggest that even the "simplest," most republican wedding could potentially bankrupt its hosts. American authors' repeated calls for simplicity revealed their anxiety (and that of their readers and subjects) about ostentatious displays of wealth. Elaborate weddings fueled worries that the American middle-class itself had sacrificed virtue for show.

Aside from material concerns, the wedding also demanded a psychological toll. After exhausting their earlier ambivalence about ritual, writers approached the wedding as if it were indispensible to one's happiness, asking women, in particular, to place themselves continually inside an idealized ritual. *Godey's* claimed that one topic "engross[ed] the thoughts of a young lady from the time she comes out until she is married: The choice of a wedding dress!"[187] And from the very moment the wedding entered the consumer market, it became standardized: *Godey's* and other sources on etiquette almost always agreed with each

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[185] "Fashion Plate. – The fashions for this month are wedding-dresses," *Godey's Lady's Book*, September, 1844.

[186] Rondout, *The Bliss of Marriage*, 164-65.

[187] "Etiquette of Trousseau." Elsewhere, it deemed "a wedding-dress . . . a matter of first consideration with all engaged young ladies." "A Royal Bridal Dress," *Godey's Lady's Book*, August, 1854.

other (indeed, they sometimes lifted whole passages from each other), nudging Americans toward a single, not unrestrictive, goal in both aesthetics and social relations.[188]

But not everyone had the capacity—or the desire—to tap the wedding's unifying potential. Despite advice books' tendency to agree with each other, alternate visions of American weddings took root in various publications at the same time that didactic literature constructed a mainstream ideal. These alternate visions spurned the modern wedding's companionate vision of marriage, its rejection of aristocratic or patriarchal authority, or its attempts to unify Americans via consumerist ritual. Although these alternative weddings existed largely on the margins of public discourse, they offered Americans an ideological foundation upon which to build rituals according to their own needs and identities.

Some alternative weddings rejected the notion that a simple, egalitarian ceremony could express America's greatness. Sources suggested that wealthy Americans were constructing a vision of ideal class relations that had little to do with egalitarianism. By the 1850s, as wealthy northerners began, in the words of historian Sven Beckert, to "appropriate some of the strategies of social distinction of the elites who had come before them, most particularly of the European aristocracy," newspapers were there to ogle their outlandish nuptial behaviors.[189] They noted "large and brilliant" crowds at wealthy ceremonies: one wedding "was witnessed by some 300 or 400 persons," another by "over three hundred guests," and a third—a triple ceremony—by a quite incredible assemblage of "Upward of two thousand

[188] See Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 4.

[189] Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 42. On the genteel desire to model oneself on "an aristocratic past," see Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, xix, 419-20.

persons."[190] Another article reported that a groom in Saratoga, New York gave his bride "a marriage settlement of $200,000."[191]

In comparison with their northern peers, the literary boosters of the southern gentry crafted a more expansive ideological framework for their inegalitarian rituals, one that not only distinguished the southern gentry from their social inferiors but also created a mythology of a romantic upper class far removed from the bourgeois world. The weddings in self-consciously "southern" novels made a hierarchical society seem charming and benign, using precisely the same terms and aesthetics that the Old World wedding had employed to render the European class system safe for American consumption. In *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, Caroline Gilman makes one wedding an orgy of small-gift-giving, far outpacing the suggestions of any etiquette advisor. The bridesmaids shower the bride, Anna, with "kind manifestations of friendship—the pure satin cushion, . . . the beautiful vase, . . . perfumes, . . . books, . . . jewels, . . . and flowers."[192] One of the groom's "connexions" gives the bride "A china toilet cup and saucer, of classical proportions, with Anna's name in gilt letters on the outside"[193] And the wedding cake "contained a ring" which doled out the promise of marriage to any woman "who finds the ring in her portion."[194] Contrasting with Elizabeth Freeman's characterization of northern weddings, which "acknowledged the larger community only briefly in order to launch the couple into economic and emotional

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[190] "A Double Wedding," *New York Times*, 4 April 1856; "Long Island," *New York Times*, 5 June 1856; "Metropolitan Hotel—Brilliant Wedding," *New York Times*, 8 December 1855; "Fashionable," *New York Times*, 21 February 1855. This was not the only wedding to feature guests in the thousands: see "Wedding at the St. Nicholas," *New York Times*, 2 July 1855.

[191] "Saratoga," *New York Times*, 21 July 1855.

[192] Caroline Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838), 142.

[193] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 143.

[194] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 144.

autonomy," this idealized southern wedding underplays the companionship of the bride and groom in favor of the circle of hierarchy and obligation of the wider aristocratic community.[195] The relationships the wedding celebrates the most vociferously are not between husband and wife, but between newly-joined families, masters and servants, and the community at large. Save "one proud, triumphant glance" between the bride and groom, Gilman offers virtually no description of the couple. Instead, she glories in "The wide semicircle of groomsmen and bridemaids" surrounding them. And while Gilman buries the wedding vows in a passive, wordless summation—"the solemn words were uttered"—she makes paramount the new relationship between the bride and her husband's parents: "soon the parents of [the groom] embraced their daughter; and as she felt their twining arms and loving kiss, she whispered, 'I am no longer an orphan.'"[196] Likewise, Gilman lingers on the family slaves' affection for the bride. While one slave prays for her "young missis," the other looks after the bride's appearance, "quietly but instantly rearrang[ing]" her dress "whenever [the bridesmaids] interfered with any part" of it.[197]

Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* similarly romanticizes the relations between masters and servants. The planter's slave Albert is "mortified" to learn that his master, a widower, plans a "plain and matter-of-fact" wedding with his new, northern bride. Albert contrasts this with the rich rituals and aesthetics of his master's "former marriage,—the festal pomp, the crowding guests, the wreathing garlands, the illuminated halls, and the exhilarating dance."[198] Albert misses the "splendour" in which his master's social circle had

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[195] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 27. Freeman cites Ellen K. Rothman here.

[196] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 144.

[197] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 143.

[198] Caroline Lee Hentz, *The Planter's Northern Bride* (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, 1854), 172.

enshrined itself; but he also misses the pageantry of social hierarchy. His master's first wedding had given the slaves on his plantation license to party: "He remembered the jubilee among the negroes; the cake and lemonade distributed among them, the music of the banjo, the muffled thunders of the tambourine," not to mention the "barbecued pigs, . . . stuffed hams and roasted turkeys, to say nothing of cakes, confectionaries and wines" the masters had doled out on the occasion.[199] In this imagined scenario, slaves functioned essentially as European rural peasants, honoring the life cycles of their betters in a way straight out of the imagination of *Bracebridge Hall's* self-mythologizing paterfamilias. And by placing this nostalgia in the mouths of slaves, it reinforces the same sense that in a benign social system, social habits flow downward from the top. Depictions of slave weddings served the same purpose in these works, demonstrating slaves' contentment under the watchful, kindly eye of masters. In *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, for instance, two "field hands" "request . . . the family to be present" in "the servants' hall" for their wedding.[200] Another servant "chose to have [her wedding] performed in the wash-kitchen instead of our parlor."[201] As masters cater condescendingly to the esoteric whims of their bondsmen and women, providing rustic, second-hand accoutrements such as "tarnished silver and gold sprigs" for their slaves' hair, they act out the charms of a class system far removed from an egalitarian vision of America.[202] Perhaps the defining virtue of this idealized vision of southern, aristocratic weddings is that its participants (whether high or low) know their places: although they

[199] Hentz, *The Planter's Northern Bride*, 172-173.

[200] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 109.

[201] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 206.

[202] See Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 5.

cherish material goods, they do not compete for them, implicitly rebuking the perceived tendency among the northern middle class to make weddings pageants of consumerism.

An 1855 wedding of Irish immigrants at the Mission House in New York City's Five Points district provoked a similar critique of the bourgeois wedding's consumerist, striving tendencies. The article in the *New York Times* condescended to the wedding's participants, mocking the groom for keeping his overcoat on during the ceremony, the bride for retaining her bonnet and shawl, and he jokingly pronounced it "one of the most fashionable wedding parties of the season."[203] But the reporter also noted that "People on the Five Points . . . don't make so great a fuss about [getting married] as some folks." He used the Irish-American couple's failure to dress sophisticatedly, gather family and friends about them, or even shed sentimental tears, to critique middle-class mores. The reporter noted that the bride kept glancing out the window, and that the groom seemed contented with "nuts and raisins" for wedding favors. And, gently dismissing the self-aggrandizing habits of the city's middle and upper classes, he announced approvingly that the Irish "don't exactly see the propriety of putting everybody to incalculable expense for new trowsers," nor "block[ing] up Broadway with carriages when a Five Pointess gets married." The Irish presented an interesting case. Potentially "white," their manner of marrying could well have offered them a doorway into the American middle class.[204] But the *Times* reporter cast them in a different light, suggesting that their insouciant indifference to bourgeois forms and pretensions both alienated them from the middle class and—perhaps—rendered them slightly superior to them in some respects. Here, the *Times* implied, was real rusticity, not its extravagant imposture.

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[203] "A Wedding on the Five Points," *New York Times*, 26 December 1855.

[204] See Banner, *American Beauty*, 25.

Finally, a more extreme strain in antebellum literature denied that the modern wedding could ever be an authentic expression of the love of two people. The poem "The Quakeress Bride," probably written in the 1830s or 1840s by E. C. Kinney, and published in Rufus Wilmot Griswold's popular compendium *The Female Poets of America*, stripped the ceremony of nearly all its aesthetic, ritual, or even verbal components:

> THE building was humble, yet sacred to One
> Who heeds the deep worship that utters no tone ;
> Whose presence is not to the temple confined,
> But dwells with the contrite and lowly of mind.
> 'Twas there all unveiled, save by modesty,
> stood The Quakeress bride in her pure satin hood ;
> Her charms unadorned by the garland or gem,
> Yet fair as the lily just plucked from its stem.
> A tear glistened bright in her dark, shaded eye,
> And her bosom half uttered a tremulous sigh,
> As the hand she had pledged was confidingly given,
> And the low-murmured accents recorded in heaven.[205]

This is marriage by negation: in a silent meeting house (wherein worshippers "utter . . . no tone"), a woman "all unveiled" and "unadorned by the garland or gem" (note the conspicuous lack of a wedding ring) murmurs her vows. The veil, the garland, the jewelry, even the words of the worshippers would risk detracting from the ritual's essence. The poet retains her desire for the restrained sentiment that marked mainstream weddings—the unwept tear remaining reservedly in the bride's eye is the consummate sentimental artifact—but she evinces a clear discomfort with the less central trappings of the ritual. Yet in purging everything inessential, the author seeks to make the wedding transcend human limits, a desire we shall encounter with the marriage-reforming Mormons: God's presence suffuses the whole world, not just the temple, and the lover's vows are "recorded in heaven." The

[205] Griswold, *The Female Poets of America*, 195.

bourgeois clichés of dress, ornament, and even speech threaten to render the experience inauthentic.

Pushing the boundaries of both negation and transcendence, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* finds inauthenticity even in the Quakeress Bride's simple adornments of a "pure satin hood," and insists on celebrating an even starker emotional bond. Hawthorne shows neither the wedding of Hester Prynne and Roger Chillingsworth, nor Hester's fateful adultery with the minister Arthur Dimmesdale. But Hester's and Arthur's meeting in the woods seven years after her adultery is exposed offers two visions of weddings stripped to their emotional essence. As they talk in the forest, Hester describes her sexual union with Dimmesdale in terms that Elizabeth Freeman deems "contractual:" "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other!"[206] The couple's sexual, emotional, and verbal intimacy on that day had accomplished—had consecrated—their marriage more effectively than anything a magistrate could have done. Moreover, their sojourn in the woods itself functions as a second wedding of sorts, as Hester "pressed [Dimmesdale's] head against her bosom; little caring though his cheek rested on the scarlet letter," and then sits "side by side" with Dimmesdale, "hand clasped in hand."[207] The next chapter's title, "A Flood of Sunshine," suggests (metaphorically) that the couple is consummating their renewed marriage, an impression reinforced by Hester's letting loose her hair, and removing the scarlet letter that had signaled her infidelity. Elizabeth Freeman rightly notes that the couple's union participates in the bourgeois vogue for sentimental relationships, relying on "the postrevolutionary and antebellum emphasis on shared emotions

[206] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1871), 228; Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 109. Freeman notes the significant legal implications of Hester's choice of words "did," "said," and "felt." *The Wedding Complex*, 108.

[207] Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 227-228.

as a binding political force."[208] Indeed, their wedding is (in Freeman's words) a "ritual . . . of feeling," by which "the incipient U.S. middle class articulated itself." But the wedding also discards absolutely everything that the middle class had employed to demonstrate its weddings' sentiment and sincerity. Indeed, he wedding provides a stringent critique of the middle class' manner of self-articulation. Earlier in the book, Hawthorne notes that "The links that united her to the rest of human kind—links of flowers, or silk, or gold, or whatever the material—had all been broken. Here was the iron link of mutual crime, which neither he nor she could break."[209] Flowers, silk, and gold: all the trappings of a middle-class wedding, none of which expressed the union of two souls like a shared emotional intimacy, even a tragic one like Hester's and Dimmesdale's.

The Scarlet Letter, as much as "The Quakeress Bride" or *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, suggests how the middle-class wedding, however prominently it featured in popular literature, could alienate its audience. To be sure, the wedding allowed a potentially wide swath of Americans to enter the middle-class fold. In this the wedding extolled the promise of American republicanism: although sometimes at a cost to their dignity, local traditions, or identity, people from all walks of life could attain membership in the body politic by enacting the proper rituals, whether by voting or by marrying. Yet the middle-class wedding denied that promise to many, for reasons of race, economics, or ideology. For some, the wedding encouraged Americans to act out social relationships that confounded their ideas of themselves. While southerners took to the idea of companionate marriage quite as eagerly as northerners, the northern wedding's rejection of parental authority struck their chroniclers as anathema. For others, like the Mormons, the bourgeois wedding did not express their

[208] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 109.

[209] Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 184.

companionate, or spiritual, goals forcefully enough, obscuring the ideals of emotional intimacy that the middle class supposedly cherished beneath a façade of lace, rings, and ritual. As *The Scarlett Letter* suggests, the pretensions of plainness within a consumerist pageant left some seeking a more "authentic" path.

For much of the first half of the nineteenth century, then, American weddings lacked a universally-acknowledged form and aesthetic. Although marriage united Americans in all walks of life, from Thomas Ruffin to P. T. Barnum and thousands in between, the wedding itself emerged largely from regional (or old-world) traditions, and did not always occasion particularly deep reflections into self or nation. Only as the century progressed did novels, etiquette books, and other literature settle on a (generally) agreed-upon idea of what a wedding should look like or signify.

It is of special significance to note that, although the ritual itself had long antecedents, the meanings Americans invested in the white wedding, and particularly the ritual's claim to signify a sentimental, companionate, and bourgeois America, were *new*. As the northern middle class attained cultural, social, and (after the Civil War) political dominance, their ideas about family and nation, and the rituals they used to celebrate themselves, took on an aura not only of dominance, but of permanence. This is why the mythology of "founding" weddings during the American Revolution is so significant—the people who imagined them were creating the notion that their nation had been begun by middle-class people, and for middle-class ends. But in the antebellum era, things were not so settled. Weddings offered diverse Americans one of many stages on which to act out their priorities and give order to their lives; and the way they did so, and the meanings they applied to their actions, did not

always jibe with the new middle-class ethic. Rather, many Americans used their rituals to claim different heritages for themselves, some as old as European aristocracy, some as new as Mormons' ideas about plural marriage.

The growth of the wedding into a national (and nationalist) ritual was an exciting development for many people. Especially in aesthetic terms, the wedding had immense appeal. The southern elite, for instance, adopted the look and style of the wedding almost unconditionally between 1820 and 1860. At the very least, southerners wanted their wedding dresses from Philadelphia instead of Raleigh if they could get them—and Paris instead of Philadelphia, of course. Across the class and race divide, African American slaves appear in some ways to have been enamored of the ritual's style: one former slave noted that when they could, slaves quote "dressed lak a white folks weddin'."[210] It is also true that weddings became part of the nation's discourse. Where correspondents had formerly discussed the marital fortunes of their friends and family, by the 1830s they tended to discuss the manner in which those fortunes had been united. But the new ritual was not just a way of dressing, and not just a topic of idle interest: it incorporated personal and national ideologies that helped define a nation and a people. John F. Kasson has observed that manners "provided standards by which to assess entire social classes, ethnic groups, and cultures . . . , while at the same time they extended deep into the individual personality."[211] Weddings now factored into Americans' social calculus, suggesting sophisticated standards by which to judge one's peers or rivals. As they appeared in novels, etiquette books, and other literature,

[210] North Carolina Narratives, Vol. XI, Pt. 2, p. 422, available at the Library of Congress's Born in Slavery page on its American Memory website, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html. For the ease of the reader, all slave narratives from this website will be cited without listing the name of the webpage or the URL address, but instead merely state the state's name and volume number. All such narratives can be accessed from this page: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/mesnbibVolumes1.html.

[211] Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 7.

these idealized weddings helped define the parameters of American behavior, and the consequences that would result if Americans fulfilled or deviated from those parameters. But the new ritual and its attendant ideologies did not resonate with everyone's sense of themselves. The white wedding enshrined the companionate marriage of the northeastern middle class as the American ideal. And as we shall see, even Americans who loved the look and feel of the newly national rituals did not always love their meanings. Instead, they adjusted their performance of them to the degree that they held (or were able to hold) the values of the ascendant middle class.

Chapter Two

"Eleanor & I Are Entirely United": Weddings of the Northeastern Middle Class

Someone seeking the representative modern wedding of the antebellum era would do well to consider the nuptials of Mary Harris and Andrew Lester. Lester, a New York City dry-goods merchant and devout Presbyterian, married Harris on Monday, December 20 1847 at the Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Greenwich Village.[1] The wedding was some days in preparation. The couple sent out invitations the Monday before, and Harris and her mother went about town on Wednesday "to order things."[2] Harris spent much of Saturday cleaning house, and then devoted the evening to "tying up boxes of cake."[3] The couple met at the bride's home early in the afternoon of the wedding day, after which Harris dressed and had her hair done. "[A] little after 7" in the evening, they proceeded to church, walked arm in arm down the aisle, and were married before "a large company."[4] The party left the church "immediately" after the ceremony, returning to the bride's home in Hudson Street,

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[1] Neither Harris nor Lester said where they married, but they were married by the minister of that church.

[2] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 15 [December 18]47, New-York Historical Society (hereafter N-YHS). Information about the wedding and preparations can be found in this diary from 11 [December] 1847 to 21 [December 18]47, and in Andrew Lester Diary, 11 December [18]47 to 20 December 1847.

[3] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 18 [December 18]47, N-YHS.

[4] Andrew Lester Diary, 20 December 1847 (first quotation); Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847 (second quotation), N-YHS.

where they greeted "quite a large number of friends" as man and wife.[5] Their guests dispersed around midnight.

None of this may seem all that remarkable, much less modern. But a number of the wedding's features—and, just as important, the way the couple described the ritual and its emotional impact—marked it as characteristic of a new bourgeois ethic. First, the wedding contained elements that marked it as both consumerist and sentimental. As the previous chapter discussed, the nineteenth century saw the wedding undergo a process of standardization in both aesthetics and meaning, reflecting the anxieties and material culture of the northern middle class. Lester and Harris displayed an awareness that they were participating in a conventional rite. Harris' shopping trip with her mother, for instance, paid obeisance to the idea that a proper wedding required its participants to engage the market. So did her manner of getting her hair done: Harris's diary almost never mentioned hairdressers, but she hired one on her wedding day, who arrived at half past four. And by boxing up cake for guests to take home, the couple offered their guests souvenirs by which to commemorate and (to a degree) fetishize the sentimental rite taking place. Further, both bride and groom took special note of the march down the aisle, recognizing the ritual's significance as a synecdoche for the approach to marriage. Lester noted that he made the trip to the altar with "My dear Mary . . . upon my arm."[6] Harris acknowledged the cultural resonance of an act she had thought of many times before: "we walked up the isle," she wrote, "with less embarresment than I expected."[7]

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[5] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 [December 18]47, N-YHS.

[6] Andrew Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

[7] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

Second, the couple's reactions to the proceedings were not merely emotional—as anyone's might be on such a day—but specifically evocative of sentimental, middle-class notions about companionate, couple-focused marriage. Most significantly, Harris and Lester prized their spiritual union above all other considerations, linking them to the sentimental culture that prized romantic love and piety above nearly other value. In November, they had gone in tandem to see Harris "make a profession of Christ," both rejoicing in the event in their journals.[8] They viewed their marriage as an extension of their spirituality. Harris fondly recorded that one of the ministers at their wedding "made a very beautiful prayer."[9] Lester was more effusive: "I have tried all the way," he wrote on his wedding night, "to get directions from God. . . . I think God has directed my path. . . . [W]e have committed ourselves to God for the present, for the future."[10] This commitment lay at the heart of their relationship: neither one described their chosen partner as a good social match, nor did either one discuss money or a dowry; rather, love, sanctioned and directed by God, was their whole concern. Further, the ceremony spurred both to reflect on the turn their lives had taken toward each other, and, not incidentally, away from friends and family. Lester mentioned his parents only once in his diary during the weeks surrounding the wedding, noting that he had sent them an invitation; he did not even say whether they actually came.[11] His marriage also alienated him from his friends, who appear to have disapproved of Harris—"[m]y friends think it very strange that I should marry" her, he wrote—and both he and his new wife

[8] Andrew Lester Diary, 11 November 1847; see also Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 14 [November 1847], N-YHS.

[9] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

[10] Andrew Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

[11] Andrew Lester Diary, Monday [13 December 1847], N-YHS.

expressed disappointment that more friends and family had not come to the wedding.[12] But, Lester told himself, his love for his new wife outweighed his friends' skepticism: "I loved Mary & always had a regard for her from the first," he wrote.[13] Regardless, the very fact that the wedding took place at church (rather than the bride's home) suggests that the couple valued their own spiritual well-being above the need to honor their families or friends. As for Harris, although her mother had played an important role in wedding preparations, marriage would separate her from her mother and maroon her in an atomized household with only her husband, who was gone most days at work. A few weeks after the wedding, she expressed the mixture of eagerness and emptiness that many women felt when they left their parents for single-family, companionate homes: "I have felt quite lonesome today," she wrote, "but I have felt very happy[.] I will soon get used to being alone."[14]

In crafting a sentimental, consumerist wedding that emphasized a couple's spiritual affinity over their family inheritance or community ties, Harris and Lester (and thousands of couples like them) took part in a consummately modern, bourgeois ritual. Of all antebellum weddings, the rituals of the northeastern middle class most readily embraced the couple-focused companionate ideal, the wedding commemorated in advice books, which replaced community- or parent-focused marriage as the predominant social ideal in the eighteenth and

[12] Andrew Lester Diary, 20 December 1847; see also Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS. It seems possible that Lester's friends objected to Harris because she was an orphan: Lester had just finished discussing Harris' adopted state in his diary when he mentioned his friends' disapproval of marrying her.

[13] Andrew Lester Diary, 20 December 1847; Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

[14] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 8 January 1848, N-YHS.

nineteenth centuries.[15] The letters and diaries of the middle class—people who fit Stuart Blumin's helpfully broad and upwardly-mobile definition of people who did "non-manual" work—reveal rituals centering around the marrying couple, and them alone.[16] Parents and the concerns they embodied—patriarchal inheritance, community control—were often relegated to subsidiary status. Most middle-class New Yorkers wrote as if their futures would depend on their social skills and spiritual directedness, not bequests from their parents.

Rather than viewing the antebellum era as the heyday of the undifferentiated, all-encompassing middle class, historians such as Edward Pessen and especially Blumin have shown that the democratic revolution of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries did not lead to uninhibited class mixing. The middle-class "social milieu," Blumin writes, "overlapped but little with the upper-class and working-class worlds that were not so very far away."[17] The marriage patterns of New Yorkers reveal forceful class differentiation: as Pessen noted, the wealthy intermarried compulsively, and rarely did their paths to the altar

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[15] In focusing on New York City, I do not mean to make the city represent the entire northeast; aside from notable differences in the class makeup of different cities, little of America was even urbanized. It is safer to say that New York City represents the vanguard, the direction in which American culture appeared to be heading and a place invested with significant cultural power. It was, then as now, thereby home to attitudes and ideas that wide swaths of Americans would compare themselves to or react against. However, many New Yorkers adopted lifestyles and ideologies that corresponded with wider trends among the northeastern middle class. Mary P. Ryan and Paul E. Johnson, for instance, have noted that similar modes of behavior and values—particularly in regard to companionate marriage and domestic lifestyles—obtained in smaller cities as in the great metropolis. See Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, and Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*.

[16] Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 163; see also 178. Ellen K. Rothman offers the most detailed and historically contextualized discussion of any antebellum group's weddings for the northeastern middle class, noting how they changed as the middle class focused increasingly on companionate marriage. However, she does not place these rituals in the context of the national scene, nor does she offer a significant comparison of middle-class and wealthy rituals. *Hands and Hearts*.

[17] Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 240.

intersect with those of their social inferiors.[18] Yet, in spite of these social divides, middle-class Americans did not believe that their opportunities were nearly as limited as they were. Karen Halttunen has argued that members of the antebellum middle class were heavily invested in the idea social mobility: "Members of the middle class imagined themselves on a social escalator to greater wealth and prestige."[19] Whether the escalator was in working order was not something most people sought to know at the time: indeed, the scholars who have demonstrated America's class stratification have always had to shout over contemporaries loudly asserting its fluidity.[20] To protect their interests in this seemingly mobile society, Americans fashioned a set of values and behaviors—lauding self-control in manners and morals, buying into a market of sentimental signifiers, and idealizing the safety and sincerity of the middle-class home—which they believed would equip them with the proper tools for advancement and shield them from the designs of social climbers.[21]

The letters and diaries of New Yorkers in the non-manual middle class suggest that their authors married as if they believed in both America's egalitarian promise and the ability of middle-class values to protect them from the buffets of fortune. Weddings allowed them to display their good taste and capacity for sentimental love, illustrating their sincerity and trustworthiness in a changing world. But the propensity of New Yorkers to think of their rituals in sentimental, bourgeois terms crossed class lines. Members of New York's "first families" whom no one could call middling, such as the Beekmans and Lows, hosted larger gatherings in somewhat different circumstances than the less well-off. But they described

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[18] Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1973), 208-216. See also Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 33-37.

[19] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 29.

[20] See Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War*, 77-79.

[21] See Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

their marriages in similarly couple-focused ways, abjuring discussions of family and dowry in favor of a man and woman's love and fitness for each other—even when family and dowry played a part in their life choices. They also engaged in many of the same rituals and aesthetics, such as boxed cakes and white dresses. Blumin rightly noted that middle-class and upper-class lives did not often overlap; but what did overlap were their ideas about themselves and their rituals, which, while they did not perform them together, they often viewed through the same lens of companionate, middle-class values. The diary of the dry-goods clerk Henry A. Patterson proves particularly revealing of how wealthy and middling habits and ideals converged, and we will return to it often. Just as the wealthy described their weddings in light of middle-class values, Patterson closely observed the rituals of the wealthy and judged both himself and his economic betters by bourgeois standards. Patterson illustrates the emerging cultural power of the middle class in the antebellum era. C. Dallett Hemphill has observed that by 1820, "the middle class had completely taken over" the prerogative to instruct Americans how to behave.[22] In the thirty years preceding the Civil War, both the wealthy and the middling described their rituals in sentimental, couple-focused terms that reflected the economic and social realities of the middle class.[23] This was the promise of the modern wedding—the satisfaction of romantic love combined with the bright future of economic prosperity.[24] It was a promise that spoke to the possibilities of an

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[22] Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 131.

[23] Of course, wealthy men (and women?) might often refer to themselves in humble terms for reasons of democratic ideology or sheer vanity. See Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War*, 309; and Paul Goodman, "Ethics and Enterprise: The Values of a Boston Elite, 1800-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, No. 3 (Autumn, 1966), 440.

[24] Halttunen suggests that the middle class "lived suspended between the facts of their present social position and the promise, which they took for granted, of their economic future." *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 29.

egalitarian America, even as social realities divided people by class lines. It celebrated companionate marriage for its participants, even as that ideal left its adherents unsatisfied in many ways. The middle-class wedding, then, symbolized the ascension of a set of values, behaviors, and contradictions that would define American life—for better or for worse—until well into the nineteenth century.

For Love or for Money

When a suitor proposed to her, Charlotte Delaplaine responded with a conditional "no." Her primary reason, she said, was "the *frailty of my health*;" if that improved, she advised the man to ask again.[25] But she also suggested that their different financial situations might encourage him to retract his offer: "of '*worldly goods*,'" she wrote, "I have but *little*;" and she acknowledged that this fact might "make a material difference in your intentions."[26] Having said this, though, she immediately backtracked, asking her suitor to "forgive my indulging any such suppositions."[27] Both in suggesting that her lover might want to marry for money and in begging his forgiveness for supposing this to be so, Delaplaine walked the line traversed by many marriageable Americans, understanding that money was important but claiming—perhaps even believing—that it was not. This ambivalence reflected the changing state of marriage in America, which plunged the middle class into a sea of appealing but, for some, inevitably-discouraging contradictions, in which they were

[25] Lottie to N. Bingham, 9 May 1854, Delaplaine Family Papers, N-YHS.

[26] Lottie to N. Bingham, 9 May 1854, Delaplaine Family Papers, N-YHS.

[27] Lottie to N. Bingham, 9 May 1854, Delaplaine Family Papers, N-YHS. She originally wrote "thoughts," then crossed the word out and replaced it with "suppositions."

encouraged to believe that hard work and entrepreneurial prudence would suffice to win them prosperity, and that companionate marriage would satisfy their emotional needs.

One of the characteristic features of the nineteenth-century middle class was its romantic view of love and marriage. Karen Lystra argues that "American middle-class youth were selecting their own partners by at least 1800, with little interference from parents," and that "'the heart' played an increasingly larger role in mating as the century progressed."[28] The increasingly individualist cast of the nineteenth century, says E. Anthony Rotundo, made marriage the scene of romantic love, not merely community stability: "matrimony was viewed increasingly as a union of two unique individuals."[29] This focus on romantic love had important social and ideological ramifications. If Americans married for love, perhaps they lived legitimately bourgeois lives, marrying to satisfy emotional needs, not financial or community imperatives.[30] Knowing that marriage alone could not secure their futures, they would merely have wanted a partner to give them aid and solace as they made their way in the marketplace.[31] If they married for money, on the other hand, Americans may have bowed more to hierarchy and aristocracy than they claimed. Like Charlotte Delaplaine, New Yorkers seemed at least vaguely aware of these opposing possibilities, acknowledging that marrying for money was a possible path they might take; and indeed, historians have demonstrated that many northeasterners did indeed follow social and economic imperatives

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[28] Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 28.

[29] Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 130.

[30] See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 30.

[31] On this idealized role for women within the middle-class market economy, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), 151-74. It is notable that the "four cardinal virtues" that defined a perfect mate—"piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity"—did not include financial resources (152). Indeed, Welter points out that "Marrying for Money" was strictly enjoined against, presumably because it might impinge upon a woman's virtue (171).

into marriage, socializing along class lines and marrying along lines of sociability.[32] What is interesting, then, is their propensity to argue that love—or amiability, at least—was the key factor in marriage, and that money or society should have no role in determining one's mate. Even though they often married with money on their minds, New Yorkers typically declared that love conquered all.

When they talked about marriage, most New Yorkers highlighted lovers' emotional and spiritual affinity. When James Burton, a clerk, got engaged, he wrote in his diary, "now our thoughts and feelings are in unison."[33] (And when he returned home for the night, he "retired to dream over the events of the day and evening.")[34] And after Eleanor Wright accepted the proposal of Henry A. Patterson, the two spent an evening together "in unfolding to each other our situation, prospects, hopes, principles, feelings."[35] Although Patterson's mention of "situation" and "prospects" had undeniable pecuniary implications, he minimized them: declaiming upon his and his fiancée's "suitableness to each other," he described not their similar social strata but the "sensation of mutual love, & trust" that existed between them.[36]

Coming from a long tradition of aristocratic marriage alliances, New Yorkers knew that relying on feelings rather than social situation and economics was potentially dangerous. When it appeared to Burton that his fiancée had rejected him, he admitted that it was not her fault: "She like others," he wrote, "is not able to control her feelings she cannot bestow her

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[32] See Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 178; Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War*, 208-216, and Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 33-37.

[33] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 12 June 1843, N-YHS.

[34] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 12 June 1843, N-YHS.

[35] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 28 October 1843, N-YHS.

[36] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 28 October 1843, N-YHS.

love merely to gratify another"[37] Yet men and women consistently refused to acknowledge factors which might have rendered their relationships more stable. Parental opinion, for instance, appeared to weigh little on them. Burton had been introduced to his fiancée by a friend, not by his or her parents.[38] And it was only after Patterson was engaged that his mother met his fiancée for the first time.[39] (Of course, parental supervision of courtship continued, and most middle-class parents would not have allowed unknown or un-recommended men access to their daughters. But it is still interesting to see New Yorkers brushing aside these influences in their writings.) Bowing to financial considerations was even less acceptable. The ship captain Hewlett T. Coles declared, "nothing is so repugnant to my feelings as the 'marrying for money.'"[40] And in constructing a narrative of how his and his fiancée's paths converged, Patterson had no trouble acknowledging financial difficulties in their pasts, noting "pecuniary embarrassments, unavoidable separation, & other things" they had endured.[41] But his assessment of these difficulties embodied the individualist optimism of the middle class, whether warranted or not: he pronounced such matters of "but temporary or trifling moment."[42] If financial failure was merely temporary, marrying for money was not merely reprehensible; it was irrelevant.

Language such as this spanned the divide between the wealthy and the non-manual middle class. A friend of James W. Beekman, a member of New York's wealthiest set, wrote him in

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[37] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 10 June 1843, N-YHS.

[38] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 18 Jun [18]43, N-YHS.

[39] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 11 November 1843, N-YHS. A week later, Patterson met her stepfather for the first time. Henry A. Patterson Diary, 18 November 1843.

[40] [Hewlett T. Coles] to [Catharine V. Smith], undated, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[41] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 2 December 1843, N-YHS.

[42] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 2 December 1843, N-YHS.

1840 to congratulate him on his choice of a bride, describing the woman in glowing terms. "I am happy," he wrote, "to see you have not flattered yourself in believing your beloved M perfect. (for there is no perfection in this world) but have chosen her as a sound healthy goodlooking Girl. physically & morally of genuine principles, and good heart, lovely, and gentle."[43] Each of these features rendered her an amiable and affectionate wife whose "genuine principles" would serve Beekman well in the worlds of commerce and society. Going on to advise his friend on how to reciprocate such good qualities, he suggested: "if you love her, which I know you do, I hope . . . you will make her a good kind affectionate and attentive Husband."[44] Even though both Beekman and his bride were wealthy and prominent members of society, his friend wrote about them as though money didn't matter—all that mattered was the degree to which both partners would be loving and attentive to each other. Likewise, Abbot Augustus Low, scion of a wealthy family, recorded having attended the wedding of his first cousin, at which he "wished the bride joy, which apparently she will experience as it is said they are much in love."[45] Love, not money or the quality of the match, drew Low's attention. There were exceptions to this rule, of course: Philip Hone praised his daughter's union to Jones Schermerhorn in aristocratic terms: "Schermerhorn," he wrote, "is a young man of most amiable disposition, good morals, agreeable deportment, and a gentleman, and of a family with which I shall consider it an honor to be allied."[46] Not only did he praise his future son-in-law's illustrious family, he made family interest out to be a

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[43] Robert Sanders to James W. Beekman, 9 February 1840, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[44] Robert Sanders to James W. Beekman, 9 February 1840, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[45] A. A. Low Journal, 26 April 1865, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

[46] Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company), Vol. I, 75.

key player in the relationship: "it is an union calculated to promote our happiness."[47] His daughter's happiness certainly factored in his pleasure, but it was far from his only concern.

None of this changes the fact that the wealthy rarely married below their station, no matter how blithely they insisted on love as their guiding light. Further, we need not doubt that the rich saw marriage as an opportunity to pass money down through the generations. The obvious contradictions between people's ideals and their behavior occasionally came to light. James Beekman's brother-in-law believed that an unpropitious marriage choice had prevented his family from giving him financial assistance. "I have taken it for granted," he wrote to his sister, "that your refusal or neglect to assist me, is based upon my marriage Mr Beekman has told me many times that had I not so married, every thing I could have asked would have been done for me."[48] If this was true, Milledoler exposed the cracks in the companionate façade that the upper-class wrapped around itself, revealing cold calculation underneath. He himself still claimed to hold to a romantic view of love, declaring, "I alone could judge what was right and proper [in marrying], and for my act I and not you, will be held responsible by my God."[49] But for marrying, if not for love, at least for individual fulfillment, he (not surprisingly) paid a price. In other cases, northeasterners' frustrations with the seeming hypocrisy of marrying for love in the context of a market economy would spur a small minority to advance a radical critique of both marriage and middle-class values,

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[47] Nevins, ed., *The Diary of Philip Hone*, Vol. I., 75.

[48] W. J. Milledoler to [Mrs. J. W. Beekman, 24 February 1859, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[49] W. J. Milledoler to [Mrs. J. W. Beekman, 24 February 1859, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS. Ellen K. Rothman points out that the cultural wind was behind Milledoler's back, noting that "When parents sought to impose their will, . . . public opinion was inclined to hold parents responsible for such undesirable situations." Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 29.

as historians of the Free Love movement have demonstrated.[50] Most people, however, simply absorbed the contradiction into themselves. It was not as if they simply found the wealthiest person they could and made a proposal; rather, they sought out people with similar, bourgeois values whom they found in middle-class social networks: churches, clubs, and neighborhoods. In many cases, marrying a woman or man of similar or greater social or economic standing was not dissimilar to marrying for love. Regardless, the fact that New Yorkers paid homage to the values encapsulated in the contradiction suggests that they had imbibed a sense of themselves as modern, bourgeois lovers.

Preparations

The engagement period offered couples a useful moment of transition between courtship and married life. Courtship was often fraught with emotional turmoil, as lovers tested each other's character and fidelity. As Karen Lystra points out, the new bourgeois economy had stripped power from traditional sources of community control; in their stead, lovers tested each other, as "courtship testing" provided "a private mode of checks and balances in a system that had all but lost any outside supervision."[51] Now that their commitment to each other was relatively secure, lovers could contemplate more fully what that commitment meant. This they did through a range of rituals, almost all of which emphasized the paramount importance of their companionate love for each other. Family and friends often participated alongside them; yet certain facts of life in New York—particularly the freedom of movement accorded to people in a densely-packed urban space, and the patterns of

[50] See John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 2.

[51] Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 158.

consumption that were developing around the growing middle class—helped keep the focus on the marrying couple.

The first thing many couples did after getting engaged was often to ask their parents' permission to do so. This ritual had its roots in older (and often aristocratic) traditions in which parents, if they did not routinely veto their children's marital choices, nonetheless had incentives to exercise significant control over them: if their money or land was to go to their children's lover, they wanted to make sure that it went into responsible hands. But by the middle of the nineteenth century (or, as Rothman has it, the end of the eighteenth), parents exercised far less sway over their children's choices.[52] The cavalier manner in which young men and women treated requests for parental permission suggests that community elders, associated with social stability and financial power, had far less to do with marriage than a couple's feelings for each other. More than a month after Henry Patterson got engaged to Eleanor Wright, he made his way to her father's residence to meet him for the first time. (Her mother and father were separated.) There, he wrote, he "briefly acquainted him with my past intercourse with his daughter & my plans for the future; & asked his approval."[53] This request was almost offensively late—and effectively meaningless to boot. When Eleanor's mother expressed dissatisfaction with him, apparently threatening to revoke her permission, Patterson seems not to have considered that her disapproval might torpedo his marriage. Instead, he merely railed in his diary against Mrs. Wright's "suspicious, jealous, & ardent temper," concluding, "Eleanor & I are entirely united," whatever trouble her mother

[52] Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 27. Lystra dates parents' failure to intervene in their children's marital choices to "the 1830s at least." *Searching the Heart*, 159.

[53] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 30 December 1843, N-YHS.

might cause.[54] Others reacted to the disapproval of elders with good humor. When Charlotte Delaplaine's aunt, wrongly believing her engagement to have been "broken off," declared "she was 'perfectly rejoiced to hear it," Delaplaine simply mused, "I guess its just as well she should remain unenlightened on the subject."[55] These New Yorkers seem to have agreed with the "Republican" etiquette book that deemed asking parental consent "mere form" that "may often be dispensed with." [56]

Rather than viewing parents as the sine-qua-non of marriage, people seem to have simply folded them into their romantic views of their relationships. James Burton's diary throughout his engagement period mentioned his fiancée's mother only briefly and incidentally. Even when he met her mother for tea, the entire significance of the event was that it re-focused his mind back on the one true object of his attentions, his fiancée Ann Elisa: "took tea with [Ann Elisa's mother] it was gratifying to see any one who was a relation to *one*," he wrote, using his code name for his fiancée.[57] A clearer statement of the individualist, companionate priorities of the middle class could hardly be found: Ann Elisa's mother was reduced from an indispensable voice in her daughter's life choices to a mere relation, a reflecting pool in which her new son-in-law might see her daughter. Parents in some cases accepted this position without complaint. Hewlett Coles wrote his mother to assure her that he was not married, as she had heard rumored, nor even engaged. But what is noteworthy is the tenor of the letter his mother sent in which she mentioned the rumor. Not only did she have little trouble believing him married already, but she sent him (unasked) both her "congratulations"

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[54] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 4 January and 25 February 1844, N-YHS.

[55] Charlotte to Nathaniel, 20 May 1855, Delaplaine Family Papers, N-YHS.

[56] *How to Behave*, 114.

[57] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 23 August 1843, N-YHS.

and her "forgiveness" for keeping her in the dark.[58] She even seems to have been preparing to bake a cake in honor of the occasion. The reduction of requests for parental permission to a mere form suggests that many New Yorkers really did view marriage as a fundamentally companionate relationship. Of course, these negotiations differed for men and women. Unmarried men, who often lived alone or in boarding houses, haunted the homes of their lovers; their own parents exercised little control over their social lives. Unmarried women typically remained at home, and so had more daily reminders of their families' power over them and investment in their futures.

Many of the activities of the engagement period helped acclimate men and women to a companionate relationship. With some of the tension of courtship over, couples had an opportunity to act and speak around each other *as couples* with an established, albeit informal, relation—an experience that many took advantage of, preparing emotionally and spiritually to attach themselves to one another. (Their peers certainly were aware of their new status: New Yorkers discussed their acquaintances' engagements as a matter of habit.[59]) In the confined spaces of the city, couples were able to spend a great deal of time together, sometimes without the supervision of elders. Andrew Lester and Mary Harris rode about together day after day, and seem to have reserved weekends in particular for each other's company.[60] Henry Patterson might as well have set up camp at the home of Eleanor Wright and her mother for how much time he spent there, but he occasionally sojourned with her

[58] [Hewlett T. Coles] to [Catharine V. Smith], undated, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[59] See, for instance, Mary DePeyster to [cousins—Mr. and Mrs. James Beekman], 8 February 1855, Beekman Family Papers; Mrs. Mary Ann [Coit] Parker Diary, 13 September 1849; Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 6 February 1844; and Hewlett T. Coles to Catharine V. Smith, undated, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[60] See Andrew Lester Diary, N-YHS.

alone to the shops on the Bowery or, more often, to a great variety of churches with Eleanor and (sometimes) her sister.[61]

The manner in which couples interacted during this period focused on their emotional and mental sympathies. Patterson, having become familiar with his fiancée's "checkered life [full of] adversity, trials, temptations, & afflictions," came to see his congruence with his beloved as their spiritual fulfillment: "I lift up my heart in unspeakable gratitude to the Infinite Disposer of Events," he wrote, "in that he has constituted us with capacities for the enjoyment of such love as we now experience."[62] James Burton and his fiancée Ann Elisa endeavored to make themselves more familiar to each other, exchanging tokens and words of tenderness. Ann Elisa gave him an unnamed "present . . . of not much intrinsic value" but still important because it had come from her.[63] They also worked out the sensitive issue of how to address each other in their liminal state: after Burton complained about being called "*Mr*. Burton," Ann Elisa wrote him a teary letter assuring him that "I do love you as well as you can wish & better than you do me & I will not call you Mr any more, but Dear James."[64] They also turned their minds toward each other, even when apart. In a fit of romantic excitement, Burton memorialized his feelings in perhaps the most stereotypically romantic way imaginable, "immortaliz[ing] myself by carving my name out in a tree and also the name of another who is dear to me."[65]

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[61] See Henry A. Patterson Diary, 30 December 1843 and 14 January 1844, N-YHS.

[62] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 2 December 1843, N-YHS.

[63] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 21 July 1843, N-YHS.

[64] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, note from Ann E after 5 September 1843, N-YHS.

[65] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 23 September 1843, N-YHS.

As they worked out the intricacies of their relationships, men and women described companionate marriage as a deep and mysterious thing, even the ultimate goal in life. And yet achieving this goal would necessarily isolate couples emotionally and spiritually from their peers. As a result, the engagement period offered them time to practice and reflect on their coming atomization. We recall that Andrew Lester and Mary Harris saw marrying each other as an expression of God's will, which they would accomplish whether their friends approved or not. Similarly, Patterson noticed that general society left him dissatisfied in comparison with his intended. Even though he and Wright saw each other several times a week, he sighed, "I cannot be anywhere contented entirely, before . . . I can be with her, whose presence is necessary to the completion of any scene of happiness, at all times."[66] Bachelorhood came to seem bleak by comparison and, bowing low to the cult of domesticity, he contrasted his "loneliness when at home; my days of toil, without any reward at their close" with the "advantages, & superior enjoyments of married life."[67] We will have occasion to compare Patterson's sentiments to those of the southern elite, who repeatedly (albeit jokingly) likened marriage to slavery. Burton, too, noted that love had made him appear foolish to his peers, writing, "I am inclined to think . . . that love makes a fool of a man, that is in other peoples estimation."[68] But he gladly gave in to his feelings: "but what is the use," he continued, "I love Ann Elisa."[69] As they envisioned themselves in the marriage state, lovers sought to venture beyond what etiquette could reveal of control and decorum and uncover each other's "true selves," proving beyond a doubt that they were right for each

[66] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 5 May 1844, N-YHS.

[67] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 26 May 1844, N-YHS. On the advantages men hoped to reap via a comforting domestic life, see Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 151.

[68] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 16 November 1843, N-YHS.

[69] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 16 November 1843, N-YHS.

other.[70] In doing so, they sometimes opened themselves up to each other in new ways. Burton, for instance, gave his diary to Ann Elisa to read, asking her to choose "which of the dates [she] liked best," and exposing a cavalcade of insecurities and misunderstandings to his lover's eye.[71] Again, compare this New Yorker's willingness to enter into marriage with his failings in full view of his bride to the aspiring patriarchs of the South, who, as we shall see, lectured their fiancées on how to write a proper love letter and feared that marrying might strip them of their mastery. Patterson also noted that getting engaged allowed him to express himself more fully, writing, "I shall no more feel the restraint which I have always had imposed upon me when in her presence."[72] Marriage, quite as much as public life, could be the theater in which men sought self-actualization.[73] None of this is to say that the northern middle class pursued—much less achieved—gender equality in their married relationships: they would not have taken kindly to assertions of autonomy from their future wives. Moreover, the effusive idealizations of men such as Patterson and Burton placed heavy

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[70] See Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 38, and, in a somewhat contrary vein, Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 137.

[71] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, note from Ann E after 5 September 1843, N-YHS.

[72] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 12 June 1843, N-YHS.

[73] The development of separate spheres, that middle-class ideal in which husbands pursued success outside the home and women ruled within it, has suggested to most historians that men lost a degree of power in the home compared to their surer dominance over subsistence households. By "reduc[ing] the number of occasions for wifely obedience," Mary P. Ryan argues, the modern, sex-segregated home "left little space in which ["the male household head"] could exercise his masculine power. . . . The revered mother dominated the emotional space of the home." *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 232. However, this point misses both the power that men continued to exercise in the home and the emotional fulfillment they sought there. Stephen M. Frank argues that, as the hypocrisy and anxiety associated with "market-oriented work often had the ironic effect of intensifying domestic feeling," the nineteenth-century middle class developed "a distinctive social type—'the family man'" to offer men a sense of comfort within marriage; Patterson and Burton would seem to have been pursuing that ideal. *Life With Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3-4. Rothman offers a similar opinion, saying, "The heightening of domestic expectations in the second quarter of the nineteenth century had made marriage the key to home and home the key to success in, and succor from, the world." *Hand and Hearts*, 171. See also Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 20-21.

burdens on their future wives, without necessarily offering them reciprocal opportunities for self-discovery.[74] But the way they spoke as they prepared to marry suggests that they believed that marrying for love was the clearest path to happiness, despite the separation from wider community structures that taking this path would entail.

Beyond this emotional preparation, New Yorkers readied themselves in two ways. First, a couple worked out their domestic arrangements for after marriage. And second, they planned the ceremony and a party to follow. These more practical preparations—especially the second—typically took far less time than we are used to, rarely more than two to three weeks. The relatively short time Americans spent readying the material aspects of weddings points to the embryonic state of the wedding industry before the Civil War, only just beginning to cultivate the garden of necessities that make the modern wedding such a time-consuming prospect. Indeed, most of what even the most fastidious etiquette books advised could be accomplished in a matter of weeks, not months. Still, in preparing for both their lives after the wedding and the wedding itself, middle-class New Yorkers engaged a consumer market in ways that helped reify their sense of themselves as companionate lovers within an atomized, bourgeois household.

Couples sometimes planned their living arrangements several months before they married. Patterson and Wright began discussing their "plans for the future" with Eleanor's mother about six months before their wedding (and just short of three months after they got engaged); they continued the conversation a month later.[75] Of course, deciding things and

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[74] Historians have noted that men and women approached marriage with different anxieties. On the impact marriage had on men's and women's sense of self, Rothman concludes that women's anxieties and expectations about marriage likely made it ultimately a more distressing prospect for them than for men: "A man could expect to be ready for marriage before his bride." *Hands and Hearts*, 157; see also 144-57. For a useful counter-argument, see Cogan, *All-American Girl*, 179.

[75] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 21 January and 25 February 1844, N-YHS.

actually doing them were not the same thing: having decided to move into Eleanor's mother's home after their marriage, Patterson waited until the morning before the ceremony to send his "furniture, clothing, &c" to his new home.[76] These conversations involved women as well as men. Women's primary responsibility, however, was in constructing their trousseaux. The extent of this task depended on a family's material resources, and less-wealthy women added little to their store of clothing and household goods during the engagement period: Mary Lester, for instance, did not mention dressmaking in the month before her wedding took place, suggesting that marriage was only slowly developing into the orgy of consumption it would later become.[77] But for other women, marriage occasioned a heavy round of dress-making and -buying. One bride brought "10 new dresses"—"some of them . . . very handsome" to her marriage, along with her wedding dress.[78] Friends and family might offer assistance: to the ten dresses mentioned previously, the bride's friend contributed a "vizette" which the bride then "embroidered herself."[79] For women who brought trousseaux to their weddings, marriage became a consumerist benchmark in their lives, when they acquired the finer things—linens, dresses, beds—without which a middle-class lifestyle was becoming impossible to maintain.[80] Although these consumer goods demonstrated the importance of material goods to starting a life together, dowries received almost no discussion, suggesting a change in attitudes about marriage. While wealthy

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[76] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 21 July 1844, N-YHS.

[77] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 4 November 1847-passim. Ellen K. Rothman writes perceptively on the development of nuptial consumption through the early nineteenth century. *Hands and Hearts*, 76-77.

[78] Sarah to Ida [Ann Coles Williams], 18 April 1847, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[79] Sarah to Ida [Ann Coles Williams], 18 April 1847, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[80] See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 77.

southerners gossiped continually about how much brides and grooms were worth and how much various fathers had bestowed upon new sons in-law, northerners rarely brought this issue into their private correspondence. This is not to say that wealthy New Yorkers did not pass money and other goods along at weddings; they most certainly did. But, in obeisance to middle-class standards, their letters and diaries focused far more on love than money.

Preparing for the wedding itself concentrated a good deal of work into a small window of time. According to the dictates of contemporary gender ideals, men typically took care of the details that would take the couple outside of the home, while women organized the domestic aspects of the wedding. This meant, in effect, that the groom worked out the ceremony while the bride (and, often, her family) organized the reception, an arrangement that left men with exponentially less to do than women. Although Andrew Lester often appeared at Mary Harris' home in the week before their wedding, he does not seem to have offered much help, aside from possibly helping her tie up boxes of cake. Henry Patterson noted that, nine days before the wedding, he "made an engagement with Mr Edwin Hatfield, pastor of the Presbyterian Church, corner of Broome & Ridge streets, to perform the marriage ceremony for us, next Thursday evening at eight o'clock."[81] (Mr. Hatfield was actually his third choice, but one does what one can on short notice.) Patterson, too, was often at his bride's home prior to the wedding, but mostly for "tea" and "conversation."[82] Women, on the other hand, found preparing the home for a reception exhausting work. A family member of one bride wrote of the all-consuming tasks at hand: "my thoughts and times have been devoted to [the bride], making preperations for the wedding, receiving bridal calls, returning them,

[81] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 14 July 1844, N-YHS.

[82] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 21 July 1844, N-YHS.

paying parting visits, making preparations for her departure has fully occupied our time."[83] As Mary Harris's wedding drew near, she found herself increasingly put upon. The Wednesday before her wedding, she noted in her diary, "have a great deal to attend to at present."[84] By Sunday, her words had taken on a more frenzied air: "Oh what a busy day, house to be cleaned; and every thing to be sent home that has not come. . . . quite busy all the evening."[85]

As they readied their homes, women engaged a slowly burgeoning wedding industry. The week before a wedding found most women heading from store to store, buying essential goods in order to display their homes—the all-important scene of middle-class women's achievements and failures—in their best light. Mary Harris, we recall, went shopping with her mother in the week before her wedding. A wedding reception stretched the in-house resources of even the wealthiest families, spurring women to seek outside help. Ellen Low, who had set all her servants to work "putting the house in perfect order" for a wedding reception for a family member, still needed to hire outside men to complete the job. She hired "Mr. [Nevers]" "to make arrangements for lighting our home;" the workman installed "a chandalier with four burners in each parler four solar lamps at the folding doors, and two candelabras for five candles each, on either side of the mirrors."[86] She also engaged caterers, who arrived "here at one o'clock & from that time until after midnight preparing our suppers."[87] Although the Lows were fabulously wealthy (they invited three hundred people

[83] Nellie [Cornelia Brett] to Dear Aunt Abr'an, 7 November 1855, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[84] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 15 December 1847, N-YHS.

[85] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 19 December 1847, N-YHS.

[86] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 17 February and 19 February 1845, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

[87] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 20 February 1845, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

to this particular party), other, less-wealthy women also hired outside workers, albeit on a smaller scale: on the day of Harris's wedding, she noted that a "Waiter came and arrainged [sic] every thing and set the table."[88] Even for people outside the highest economic or social strata, the spectacle of a middle-class gathering—especially one so important as this—simply could not be achieved by one's own effort.

It was not just homes that needed outside assistance to measure up to bourgeois standards: women's bodies also needed help to show themselves in their best light. Hairdressers had come into vogue in the early nineteenth century, making house-calls to assist women on special occasions.[89] Hairdressers served both the wealthy and the merely comfortable on wedding days: again, both Low and Harris had outsiders come do their hair for weddings.[90] Low also might venture from Brooklyn to New York City to get her hair dressed—once she did so two days before the event—while Philla Delaplaine patronized a Mrs. Ramsey "to dress my head."[91] Brides and bridesmaids were expected to buy or make new clothes for weddings, too, one woman writing excitedly to a friend to tell her that, with three weeks left before her wedding, the bride "has not purchased her vail as yet."[92] The wedding veil, by now indispensable to any proper wedding, embodied the coming specialization of the wedding industry: here was an accessory which no woman wore except at her wedding, a clear divider between the eighteenth century, when women merely wore their best dresses to get married in, and the nineteenth, when women came to wear costumes specifically

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[88] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

[89] See Banner, *American Beauty*, 38.

[90] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 1 February 1845, Low Family Papers, and Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

[91] Philla Delaplaine Diary, 4 June 1844, Delaplaine Family Papers, N-YHS.

[92] Sarah to Ida [Ann Coles Williams], 18 April 1847, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

designed for the purpose of marrying.[93] Aside from purchasing clothes, wealthier women hired people to dress them: a "Mrs. Ten Eyck" dressed Ellen Low for more than one wedding she attended.[94]

That wedding preparations involved New Yorkers not only in the search for love, but in the middle-class quest for genteel status can be seen in the way socially ambitious New Yorkers sent and received wedding invitations. Invitations' main purpose was, of course, to tell friends and family when and where a wedding would take place. But they also constituted a fashionable mode of conduct, based in the tradition of urban aristocrats leaving calling cards at each other's homes when they visited. Most people sent invitations between four and ten days before a wedding: Mary Ann Parker, for one, received notice of a Thursday wedding the Saturday previous.[95] Suggesting that invitations went beyond mere practicality, couples sent them to people who already knew the relevant details: even after writing two letters full of information about a family member's wedding, one woman enclosed an official invitation for good measure.[96] People noted receiving them. One diarist fastidiously delineated which events she attended "by invitation;" another used flowery, genteel language to describe receiving an invitation, declaring to his diary that he had "been honored with an invitation to call on" a couple.[97] In the antebellum era, people spent long hours writing and addressing these tokens of gentility by hand: two friends arrived to help Ellen Low at this task at noon one day, and remained "until 10' at night, most of the time assisting me in

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[93] See Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 24-26.

[94] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 3 and 20 February 1845, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

[95] Mrs. Mary Ann [Coit] Parker Diary, [22 November 1849], N-YHS.

[96] Sarah to Ida [Ann Coles Williams], 2 May 1847, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[97] See Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, Low Family Papers; Henry A. Patterson Diary, 14 August 1841, N-YHS.

writing invitations."[98] Perhaps unusually, Mary Harris and Andrew Lester wrote invitations for their wedding together, spending an evening "very much engaged in preparing the invitations."[99] Not surprisingly, however, this mode of gentility was coming to take on more standardized, commercialized form. The pamphlet celebrating Tom Thumb's wedding in 1863 deemed invitations constituting "bits of prettily printed pasteboard" to be "strictly after *la mode's* latest edict."[100]

The ticket to genteel status promised by the nascent wedding industry had potential for abuses inscribed on its surface. A man who worked in a dry goods store told a diarist that one of his customers had succeeded in convincing a man that she was wealthy—and therefore a desirable partner—by purchasing enough goods to stage a lavish wedding. "It seems," wrote the clerk, "she had run up Bills for her wedding dress, confectionary, false hair, &c &c."[101] By the time her mark, "a clerk in a dry goods store receiving a salary of $800 a year," discovered the deception, they had already married.[102] The brief windows of time that people spent preparing for weddings facilitated the woman's deception: by the time the bills arrived for her dress and the rest, she had already absconded. The diarist who recorded this "curious incident" acknowledged how quickly one's status could change if it was defined by the possession of these dangerously powerful symbols, and did his best to

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[98] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 15 February 1845, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

[99] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 18 [December 18]47, N-YHS.

[100] *Sketch of the Life, Personal Appearance, Character and Manners of Charles S. Stratton, The Man in Miniature, Known as General Tom Thumb, And His Wife, Lavinia Warren Stratton, Including the History of Their Courtship and Marriage, With Some Account of Remarkable Dwarfs, Giants, & Other Human Phenomena, of Ancient and Modern Times* (New York: Wynkoop, Hallenbeck & Thomas, 1863), 15.

[101] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 9 July 1857, N-YHS.

[102] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 9 July 1857, N-YHS.

strip the woman of her assumed gentility, calling her "(a lady) I mean to write a female."[103] Yet each of the men involved in this story—the diarist, the storyteller, and the duped man himself—worked in stores that sold French bonnets, glace silk, and other nuptial accoutrements.[104] The storyteller had gotten married a few years earlier, hosting a ceremony and reception that emphasized the couple's companionate love for each other.[105] The productions of the nascent wedding industry threatened to catch middle-class Americans in a dangerous thrall. But they were too valuable—as signifiers of companionate love, as symbols of bourgeois gentility—to give up.

The Wedding Day

The wedding day, when it arrived, saw New Yorkers enacting—and interpreting—a pageant of companionate love and bourgeois consumption. Participants and observers reflected on ceremonies' companionate implications, searching for indicators of couples' emotional and spiritual affinity in the way the rites were performed. Receptions, meanwhile, saw couples celebrating their love within the semi-private, feminized (and consummately middle-class) space of the parlor. All of these reflected the wide reach of the bourgeois wedding and its attendant values of consumerism, individualism, and sentimental expression.

It is perhaps surprising that not all New Yorkers devoted the whole of their wedding day to getting married, a fact that reflected both the nascent state of the wedding industry and women's greater visibility within the ritual. Women's responsibility for dressing and getting

[103] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 9 July 1857, N-YHS. On the pitfalls of basing status on material goods, see Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 409-10.

[104] See Henry C. Southworth Diary, 1 March 1851, N-YHS.

[105] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 1and 2 October 1850, N-YHS.

their homes in order for the reception typically made the wedding an all-day affair for them, readying themselves in the presence of family, friends, and paid help. Mary Harris first made sure that their house was in order: "all things sent," she recorded.[106] Then, after the hairdresser had done, a number of people congregated around her: "Amanda came shortly after[,] Mr Dubois and sister was there before 7 OClock[,] Mr Beaty and Mother came shortly after."[107] Interestingly, unlike in southern weddings, this gathering prior to the wedding featured both men and women, suggesting a focus on couples rather than female solidarity. But men, requiring simple black suits rather than elaborate dresses, sometimes managed to fit a day's work into their nuptial schedule. Henry Patterson spent the day at work before marrying: "Thursday I spent at my usual business, until four o'clock PM, then went home, & dressed" for his wedding.[108] Another man serving as a groomsman likewise worked through the morning before starting wedding preparations: "left the store at One O clock P.M.," he wrote, "for the purpose of dressing myself for Mr Paddons wedding."[109] As important as the ritual had become during the first half of the nineteenth century, as much time and effort as middle-class people spent preparing for it, weddings had not become so all-encompassing as to disrupt the business day.

Ceremonies rarely lasted long: Patterson attended one which "was got through in about five minutes."[110] But descriptions of these brief rituals revealed a number of significant facts about the northern middle class. First of all, almost every discussion of weddings, no matter

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[106] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

[107] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 20 December 1847, N-YHS.

[108] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 21 July 1844, N-YHS.

[109] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 1 October 1850, N-YHS.

[110] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 3 December 1842, N-YHS.

how brief, named the minister who performed the rite. "Mr Henry Exall, & Araminta were made man, & wife by Mr Moore," wrote one observer.[111] "They were united by the Rev Mr Beal," wrote another.[112] A third noted that "George Horsfield was married on Wednesday last . . . by the *Rev Mr Clarke*."[113] The attention paid to ministers suggests the significance of clergymen as social actors in the middle-class milieu. But it also contrasts with the way wealthy southerners described the wedding rites. Southerners rarely mentioned who performed the ceremony, focusing instead on how the couple and their parents looked and acted. Northerners, by contrast, gave more emphasis to the spiritual aspects of their weddings. Deviating from Puritan tradition, for instance, they increasingly married in church. While home weddings still took place, the church wedding had entirely lost its stigma by the middle of the century.[114] Harris and Lester married at church; so did a worker in a dry-goods store, and so did many of the city's economic elite.[115] On one level, church weddings simply followed the dictates of continental fashion: English etiquette books took (Anglican) church weddings as a given, and upwardly-mobile Americans rarely deviated from the English in matters of gentility when they could help it.[116] But church weddings were not merely fashionable: combined with the prominence of the minister in accounts of weddings, they suggest that New Yorkers saw weddings as, at least potentially, moments of

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[111] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 28 October 1836, N-YHS.

[112] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 6 September 1848, N-YHS.

[113] Sarah to Ida [Ann Coles Williams], 2 May 1847, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[114] See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 78. Rothman situates the new vogue for church weddings among "the urban elite," but I find no pattern differentiating the fabulously wealthy from the middling clerk in this regard.

[115] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 1 October 1850; Mrs. William Webb (Sarah Anne Todd) Green Diary, 27 April 1852, N-YHS.

[116] *The American Gentleman's Every Day hand-Book of Modern Letter Writing*, 38. On England as the paragon of gentility in America, see Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 419.

spiritual consummation.[117] Lester and Harris considered their marriage a manifestation of God's will; so did Henry Patterson. The audiences at weddings appeared to understand the spiritual import of what they were witnessing: at one wedding, a hymn, "suitable for the occasion" and "done in a most masterly manner," earned more approbation than the wedding it followed, winning "three rounds of applause" at its close.[118] These weddings' spiritual aspects helped highlight couples' appropriateness for each other, and to give their relationships with the imprimatur of middle-class piety.[119]

The piety that middle-class New Yorkers felt and displayed at weddings connected directly to their sense that they were watching or enacting the formation of a companionate union. They related the ritual to a host of sentimental referents, all of which encouraged them to think of the couple as a union of pious lovers. When Sarah Webb recorded the rainy-day wedding of two friends in her diary, she first invoked a scriptural reference to the wedding at Cana; then she copied out a quotation from a sentimental poem.[120] Finally, she wrote an epigraph which made the wedding's weather a metaphor for the joys and sorrows awaiting the couple:

> In sun shine and in tears
> fit emblem of the married life
> Married by Dr. Williams
> Miss Eliza Lee to
> Mr. Charles A Morford
> 20[ ] East 11th St.[121]

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[117] See Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 129.

[118] Diary of an Unidentified Single Man, 1843-1844, 14 May 1843.

[119] On the sway of evangelical religion in establishing an industrious, upwardly-mobile middle class, see Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 140.

[120] Mrs. William Webb (Sarah Anne Todd) Green Diary, 20 April 1852, N-YHS.

[121] Mrs. William Webb (Sarah Anne Todd) Green Diary, 20 April 1852, N-YHS. It was not incongruous to anticipate tears along with happiness; rather, as Halttunen has shown, advocates of sentimental culture believed

Also given a sentimental gloss were brides and bridesmaids who wore simple clothing at their weddings. Bridesmaids sported "plane tarletons" at one wedding; at another, a bride was described as wearing "not an ornament, exept a *breast Pin*, she had never worn a *ring* before George put the *plain Gold* one on her finger."[122] Referring to a "plain gold" ring invoked a deep vein of sentimental poetry, putting the bride and groom in the context of much-praised romantic simplicity (no matter how expensive her dress or ring actually were).[123]

By dwelling on the sentimental aspects of a ceremony, observers placed more emphasis on the couple. Historians have seen the growth of the white wedding, particularly the larger crowds that began to appear as the nineteenth century progressed, as indicative of a shift in marriage's focus from "the community" to "the two individuals being wed."[124] In a later chapter, I will argue that southern slaveholders' large, elaborate weddings still kept a clear focus on the patriarchal family and community, occasionally at the expense of the marrying couple. But in the northeast, elaborate weddings do appear to have settled most of their attention on the couple. Over and over again people attended weddings and failed to mention the couple's families: not even the cliché of the weeping mother appeared.[125] Henry Patterson's parents do not seem even to have come down to the city for his wedding. By contrast, bridesmaids and groomsmen received frequent notice. Wedding attendants drew

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tears to be "'infallible signs of grace in the religion of the heart.'" Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 56. On the perception of sunshine and tears in marriage, see Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 60.

[122] Sarah to Ida [Ann Coles Williams], 18 April and 2 May 1847, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[123] See, for instance, "Uncle Philip," *Godey's Lady's Book*, September, 1847, and "The Plain Gold Ring" by W. T. Moncrieff. *Poems* (Lambeth: 1829), 151-52.

[124] Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 129.

[125] See, for instance, Henry A. Patterson Diary, 3 December 1842, N-YHS.

attention to couples' bestowal of favor upon their friends, and to friends' and siblings' support of their union.[126] Women and men expected their friends to ask them to serve—one woman wrote her friend, inquiring, "how long will it be before I am to be called upon to officiate as bridesmaid for you dear Ida?"—and observers made note of them when they appeared: one woman noted, "the bridal party looked beautifully."[127] This makes sense within the context of a middle-class, market-based economy, in which peer networks replaced kin networks as means of economic and social advancement. Granted, couples in long-distance relationships typically traveled to the bride's hometown to get married, an act that necessarily directed attention toward the bride's family.[128] But the family was clearly not the most important element. At John Giffing's marriage, much of the family actually missed the ceremony: "the Mother and many of the other relatives were to [sic] late and they did not see them married."[129] Mother of the bride or no, the wedding went on according to schedule: "the new married couple was leaving the church when [the family] came in."[130]

The story of the bride and groom passing their families in the church doorway calls attention to the open-door nature of weddings in the big city. New Yorkers, as much as or more than their contemporaries, viewed weddings not merely as interesting or revealing events, but specifically as *public* spectacles. Even rituals with pretensions to privacy seemed to be open for public display: a groomsman at one wedding reported, "the attendance at the

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[126] On wedding attendants, see Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 78; and Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 129.

[127] Sarah to Ida [Ann Coles Williams], 18 April 1847, Coles Family Papers, and Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 1 February 1845, Low Family Papers; see also Cornelia Brett to Dear Aunt Abr'an, 9 March 1855, Beekman Family Papers, and Henry C. Southworth Diary, 3 July 1850, N-YHS.

[128] See Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 6 September [1848] and Andrew Lester Diary, 6 September [18]48, and Henry A. Patterson Diary, 25 and 27 October 1836, N-YHS.

[129] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 12 April 1847, N-YHS.

[130] Andrew Lester Diary, 12 April 1847, N-YHS.

Church was unusually large considering that the affair was kept so private."[131] In the crush of the city, almost anyone who was adequately dressed and decently behaved could play a part in almost anyone else's wedding. As she "wait[ed] for a stage in 3rd avenue," Sarah Webb noticed "Carriages driving before Rev. W. McAuley Church."[132] Seeing "so many Ladies a going," she felt no compunction about joining them: "so I went in too," she wrote, finding that "it was a marriage ceremony, (Mr John McLane to Miss Maria C Moore[)]."[133] Did she know either party? It hardly mattered. The wedding was a public event. Indeed, a wedding at St. Paul's Church was so wide-open that it featured a minor kerfuffle in the cheap seats, where Patterson, "after some difficulty, & hustling in the crowd" finally secured "a place in the negroe's gallery."[134] It is not hard to see why the wealthiest New Yorkers eventually began to retreat to the privacy of their homes, or to elite churches that barred outsiders from entering. Tom Thumb's wedding in 1863, where police blocked the entrance to exclusive Grace Church to prevent the uninvited from entering, was in line with the times.[135] But if the cost of marrying in church according to the dictates of religion and society was some minor tumult at their weddings, many elite New Yorkers were willing to pay it—for a time.

Weddings' public nature offers some insight into the ritual's implications for class identity. The many complaints of Henry Patterson, who seems to have made a habit of attending weddings of people with whom he was minimally acquainted, go far to suggest

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[131] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 1 October 1850, N-YHS.

[132] Mrs. William Webb (Sarah Anne Todd) Green Diary, 27 April 1852, N-YHS.

[133] Mrs. William Webb (Sarah Anne Todd) Green Diary, 27 April 1852, N-YHS.

[134] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 14 January 1844, N-YHS.

[135] *Sketch of the Life*, 29.

what sort of ritual fit the middle-class standards of decorum and display. At a Baptist rite, his irritation (aside from his opinion that "the bride & groom were neither of them handsome, nor even well looking") stemmed from the wedding's ritual simplicity.[136] "I was not pleased with any part of the ceremony," he wrote: "the plan of merely asking the contracting parties a set of questions, to which they give a nod of assent, seems to me not sufficiently binding."[137] The same objection recurred at a Presbyterian church: he pronounced the ceremony "slight, undignified, & wanting in deliberation & solemnity."[138] In these criticisms, Patterson rejected as undignified and legally suspect the rough-and-ready ethic of simplicity that had marked colonial American weddings. More ceremony, more ritual excitement, was required to set a wedding off as important, worthy of the aspirations of the upwardly mobile. A year and a half later, he corrected these deficiencies somewhat with his own wedding. This he deemed "short, but impressive" and added, nodding to weddings' capacity to express their participants' identities, that it "suited us both."[139]

As much as the ritual itself, participants' behavior and attitudes also determined whether a wedding set them in the proper light. The union of "Mr Weston Gale, of Raleigh, NC, to Miss Mary Spies, of this City," Patterson found lacking in decorum: it "was not at all a pleasing spectacle to me, nor consistent with my ideas of propriety; from the character of the assemblage, & the nature of the circumstances, there arose such a mixture of persons, such unbecoming postures, such striving for places, such a stoppage of the passages & aisles, even where the bridal party had to pass, & such a complete disarrangement of every thing, as was

[136] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 10 September 1842, N-YHS.

[137] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 10 September 1842, N-YHS.

[138] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 3 December 1842, N-YHS.

[139] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 21 July 1844, N-YHS.

utterly subversive of all grace & dignity."[140] The wedding's participants ignored a cardinal rule of middle-class public behavior: self-control. Adopting "unbecoming postures" and trespassing into "passages and aisles" amounted to what John F. Kasson has called "social obscenity," in which people exposed private behaviors or wishes to public view.[141] This behavior marked its perpetrators as unworthy of middle-class status. However, unlike the previous two rituals Patterson discussed, this one had all the hallmarks of an upper-class wedding: George Washington himself had worshipped in St. Paul's, and the wedding, overseen by an Episcopalian bishop, united two relatively wealthy people. Patterson thus documented not only the transgression of upper-class space by less-cultivated orders of people, but the failure of the upper class to live up to its responsibilities. The wedding's paramount crime was the participants' "striving for place:" in doing so, the wealthy conveyed the anxious desire for social advancement that they should have kept hidden. The prerogative Patterson claimed for himself is key here. A clerk who did a fair bit of striving himself—he got himself received at Horace Greeley's office, and was introduced to Daniel Webster by the mayor of New York—Patterson clearly believed that he moved in the same circle as his economic superiors (whether they took any notice of him or not). He did not hesitate to castigate them for behavior unworthy of him. Richard Bushman has argued that "the refined middle class," "[t]hough far removed in levels of splendor and display, not to mention actual political authority, . . . nonetheless laid claim to the same culture as the aristocracy and so to a portion of its power."[142] The wedding was a sentimental, consumerist

[140] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 21 July 1844, N-YHS.

[141] Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 115.

[142] Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 410.

pageant, emblematic of a couple's love for each other, their piety, and their social stature, and it had to be performed properly. If not, the middle class would know.

After the ceremony, almost anyone who deemed themselves middle-class (or better) hosted a reception of some kind. Since receptions were typically hosted by the bride and her family, they accordingly took place in the parlor. Karen Halttunen has examined the parlor as a middle sphere "between the public world of strangers" and "the private family," a place where "middle-class men and women might place tentative confidence in one another without relying on each other's personal sincerity."[143] And, as Richard Bushman has pointed out, the trend of middle-class people "making parlors for themselves" was "one of the great democratic movements of the nineteenth century," in which middling people staked a claim to gentility.[144] It was, in other words, the perfect place for the middle class to perform their companionate relationship, acting out the part of bourgeois man and wife before an audience of supportive friends and family. Wedding receptions gave New Yorkers a chance to mark themselves as genteel in both their personal relationships and their economic standards; but they also offered the truly wealthy an opportunity to distinguish themselves from the ambitious multitudes.

Just like ceremonies, wedding receptions featured expressions of companionate piety, almost always centered on the couple. At one wealthy wedding, a family member mixed secular and religious themes as she serenaded the couple: "Sister sang 'The Bride,'" wrote Ellen Low, "and then, several hymns, in which she was joined by most of the company."[145] The distribution of wedding cake, which happened at almost every wedding, rich or

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[143] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 59, 187.

[144] Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 273.

[145] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 20 August 1844, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

otherwise, also focused attention on the couple's love for each other: it was called "bride's cake," after all, and the contemporary trend of "dream cake" probably encouraged the association. Although families appeared at most receptions, the couple remained at the center of attention, and siblings or parents of the bride and groom sometimes went to the ceremony but skipped the reception "at the house."[146] One bride actually extended her influence over the gathering even after her departure: "Mary addressed a very pretty note to her family friends, and requested Sister H. to read it to, them, immediately after her departure, which she did, much to the satisfaction of all."[147] Even in absentia, the couple, and their expressions of love for each other and their family, reigned supreme.

Receptions gave couples and their families a chance to prove their munificence as genteel hosts. A friend of the couple hosted one reception, summarizing, "we reciev'd calls, ate cake, drank wine &c, &c, & at ten o'clock retired."[148] (Just as invitations recalled the tradition of aristocratic calling cards, receptions featured calling itself.) A reception after a simple wedding brought "a great many" to the groom's house afterward, and (as ever) saw wedding cake distributed.[149] Wealthier weddings featured elaborate entertainments: a reception with "more than three hundred" present, noting, "I never was at so crowded a company before."[150] After music and dancing, "supper was announced at 11'o'clock, and a most beautiful, an[d] elegant repast it was." The hosts clearly pulled out all the stops: indeed, in crowded drawing rooms "the air was so perfumed with the profusion of flowers,

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[146] Mrs. Andrew (Mary Harris) Lester Diary, 1 June [1848], N-YHS.

[147] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 20 August 1844, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

[148] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 29 October 1836, N-YHS.

[149] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 1 and 2 October 1850, N-YHS.

[150] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 3 February 1845, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

that several of the Ladies fainted."[151] But the spreads at wealthy weddings differed from those of the middle class by degree more than by kind. Patterson, attending a wedding of two people who were not extraordinarily wealthy, mingled with "a large, & fashionable collection" "promenaded, *saw* some dancing, had piano forte music; & a *splendid* supper, consisting of oysters, champagne wine, quail, chickens, confectionary, fruit, &c, &c, &c; to all which I did ample justice."[152] As the century progressed, such parties attained a level of largesse that the merely comfortable could not meet. "[I]t was quite a large wedding," wrote Sarah Webb in 1852: "three large-parlors and fill'd with company."[153] One parlor may have democratized gentility, but three parlors remained strictly the province of the rich. While such celebrations had their appeal—as we will discuss in a moment—they had the potential to disrupt people's republican vision of themselves. Hints of lavishness might trigger negative responses: the chronically dissatisfied Patterson admonished the purveyors of the magnificent spread above for being "*too* fashionable, too formal."[154] Such critiques highlighted the tenuous position the middle class occupied, and the complicated cultural terrain they had to navigate.

While the middle class continued to fret over the appearance of their weddings, in the 1850s, the wealthiest New Yorkers stopped worrying so much about the likes of Patterson. Letters the Beekman family sent and received during that decade suggest that they were beginning to forego the idea of themselves as bourgeois, plainspoken middle class; rather, they gloried in their weddings' material extravagance and compared themselves to European

[151] Mrs. Abiel Abbot Low Diary, 3 February 1843, Low Family Papers, N-YHS.

[152] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 11 December 1841, N-YHS.

[153] Mrs. William Webb (Sarah Anne Todd) Green Diary, 20 April 1852, N-YHS.

[154] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 11 December 1841, N-YHS.

aristocrats. They took refuge in notions of titled gentility: Mary DePeyster wrote to tell James W. Beekman that a relative was marrying "a Mr. Mo[a]k an English gentleman."[155] Deeming the groom "of high standing," she pronounced the marriage "a very good match."[156] In the same letter, she described another bride who wore diamonds "valued at over *five thousands dollars* her dress Moire Antique trimmed with point [dé] L'attencon lace[;] all the ladies," she added, "were dressed in the most extravagant manner.[157] But far from censuring this display of largesse, she praised it: "she was the handsomest dressed bride they ever saw."[158] Catherine Beekman received a letter telling her about the cavalcade of gifts at another wedding, including "some elegant pieces of silver from Mr Embury's friend a silver tea set from James, spoons from Mother, various small pieces of silver from brothers and sisters, a real silver cake basket from Cousin Louisa some other pretty pieces of silver from the Fellows family a very beautiful breast pin green enamel and pearls from Uncle William, a cameo-set, set around with pearls from Cousin William, a bracelet from Mrs Andrews and some other pretty things from friends."[159] These gifts were not designed to help a couple establish a household on their own, but to display their aristocratic wealth. Yet none of these could top the wedding that took place in Belleville, New Jersey in October of 1855. Three hundred guests—including "half of Albany," and dozens of old Knickerbocker names—watched the bride dressed in "white silk with Thule skirt and Thule vail with a wreath of lilies of the Valley," flanked by four lavishly-dressed groomsmen and bridesmaids

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[155] Mary DeP[eyster] to [James W. Beekman], 30 October 1854, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[156] Mary DeP[eyster] to [James W. Beekman], 30 October 1854, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[157] Mary DeP[eyster] to [James W. Beekman], 30 October 1854, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[158] Mary DeP[eyster] to [James W. Beekman], 30 October 1854, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[159] Cornelia Brett to Catherine Beekman, 7 November 1855, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

apiece.[160] The table was covered "with everything of the best to eat and drink," not to mention a two-hundred year-old table cloth and equally ancient china and silver.[161] The author deemed that "there was as much show and pride in Bellevill [sic] as at Paris at the Queens grand 'entrée.'"[162] Rather than republican dismay, she expressed pleasure at such a display: "the greatest wedding ever given there"—"everyone," she said, "was delighted."[163] The Beekman family had been wealthy for a long time. But weddings of this scale veered away from the bourgeois wedding that had come to dominate the antebellum years (as well as from the bourgeois note that James Beekman had struck in his letters in the 1840s), and re-asserted the family's aristocratic prerogatives.

When the party was over, couples made further visits or embarked on a bridal tour. Ellen Rothman has described the wedding tour as "a sort of buffer state" that eased men (and especially women) into the "heavy responsibilities of married life."[164] Elizabeth Freeman notes that between the 1830s and 1880s, the honeymoon came to "foster . . . nuptial intimacy and separation from the natal family."[165] One couple went south to Richmond, leaving their options open, going "perhaps farther South," accompanied in the trip's first stage by two friends.[166] Another couple meandered from New York City to Philadelphia and then back to

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[160] Mary DePeyster to James W. Beekman, 23 October 1855, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[161] Mary DePeyster to James W. Beekman, 23 October 1855, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[162] Mary DePeyster to James W. Beekman, 23 October 1855, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[163] Mary DePeyster to James W. Beekman, 23 October 1855, Beekman Family Papers, N-YHS.

[164] Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 83.

[165] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 128.

[166] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 31 October 1836, N-YHS.

Long Island, visiting friends and family where they found them.[167] Some less-wealthy couples did not honeymoon at all, but kept up a round of visits among their peers: their groomsman stopped by their home the day after their wedding to find them "as smiling as a basket of chips," and dined with them again three days later.[168] Yet even couples who interacted with friends and family, even those who moved in with family, still looked at themselves in an atomized light. Henry Patterson, living with his wife and his mother-in-law, wrote as though marriage had gained him an independence: "How swiftly & silently the weeks roll by," he wrote, "& how great the changes they bring! I am now at 212 East Broadway; seated in my own room, & at my own desk; with the delightful consciousness that this is *my* home as well as Eleanor's."[169] His mother in-law, in whose house *his* room and *his* desk were, did not factor into his calculations. But this is the essence of the middle-class antebellum wedding. Not only did it encourage its participants to think of themselves as spiritual, companionate lovers, it idealized them as independent economic actors, blessed with the social and economic skills that could guarantee their future success.

When Stuart Blumin writes that antebellum "Americans came to experience class not as part of a national consensus of values but in daily routines and social networks that made their lives visibly similar to those of some people and visibly different from those of others," he means, in part, to differentiate upper-class behavior from middle-class.[170] But the ways people interpreted their daily routines were not the same as the way they actually lived.

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[167] Sarah to Ida [Ann Coles Williams], 2 May 1847, Coles Family Papers, N-YHS.

[168] Henry C. Southworth Diary, 2 and 6 October 1850, N-YHS.

[169] Henry A. Patterson Diary, 4 August 1844, N-YHS. Living with one's parents for a time after marriage was not unusual, nor was it confined to people who lacked the resources to make it on their own: Philip Hone's daughter and son-in-law alternated between their parents' residences "for several months" after their wedding in 1832, and they certainly did not lack for money of their own. Nevins, ed., *The Diary of Philip Hone*, Vol. I, 82.

[170] Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 297.

Middle-class New Yorkers had little trouble believing that their sentimental activities, their treatment of lovers and inferiors, and their wedding rituals (which they experienced with an awareness of how the upper crust performed theirs) roughly corresponded to the daily rituals of the upper class. In so believing, they helped set and act out national standards of behavior and ideology, standards that assumed that the middle class really embodied the best America had to offer. The primary ideological differentiation that took place in the antebellum era was not between the middle class and the rich, but between northeasterners who embodied middle-class lifestyles and priorities and people elsewhere who did not view themselves in the same companionate, consumerist light. In the 1850s, New York's truly wealthy began to enact a version of the same process, re-establishing the borders between them and their economic inferiors by building up a material culture about them that the less-well-off simply could not match.[171] It is possible that they decided that the benefits of participating in middle-class culture were not worth the strain of the contradictions that culture required them to take on: at a certain point, the super-rich lost the incentive to keep up the egalitarian masquerade. As we shall see, they were hardly the only Americans for whom adhering to middle-class standards was not worth the trouble. But for the socially- and economically-ambitious middle class, mixing egalitarian social ideas with continental manners was as natural as marrying for love.

[171] On the growth of aristocracy in 1850s New York, see Douglas T. Miller, *Jacksonian Aristocracy: Class and Democracy in New York, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), and especially Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*.

Chapter Three

"I am 'Doing Exactly Right'": Weddings of Southern Slaveholders

A few weeks before she was to marry, Cornelia Christian lost her nerve. Her wedding was set for June 11, 1856, but around the first of May, she sent a letter to Walter Lenoir, her fiancé, confessing misgivings about their upcoming nuptials.[1] Her worries seem to have stemmed primarily from her reluctance to leave her family in Staunton, Virginia and relocate to Walter's home in Lenoir, North Carolina. Walter wrote back to allay her fears, assuring her that he sympathized as she prepared to relinquish "all those kind friends and dear relations, the familiar scenes, the sweet home, the old church, the countless cherished associations, all to be mine, for my sake." He promised that his love would measure up to that of her family—indeed, he wrote, he would love her "better than a brother."[2] By this time, however, Cornelia had found reassurance in the words of her friends and family. In her next letter, she told her fiancé: "I feel better reconciled to going away from my brothers than when I last wrote, because, several friends upon whose judgment I set much store, say I am 'doing exactly right.'"[3]

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[1] This letter is lost. Cornelia referred to it explicitly in Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 16 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter SHC), and Walter's letter of 8 May 1856 answers it. This paper examines the wedding activities of the North and South Carolina elite. Though from Virginia, Cornelia fraternized with the North Carolina elite and joined their ranks upon her marriage to Walter.

[2] Walter Lenoir to Cornelia Christian, 8 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[3] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 16 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

Within a week, Cornelia wrote Walter again, betraying none of her earlier qualms. She happily described her purchase of clothing for their wedding ceremony and suggested a minor change in their honeymoon plans. She also mentioned that three of her uncles had been to visit over the past few days, helping to "arrange our business matters for us."[4] The task of determining what property would take with her into marriage seemed to drive home for Cornelia the changes facing her. "Everything begins to look like I was going away," she wrote. "Bettie will go with me."

Cornelia Christian's correspondence with Walter Lenoir in the weeks before their wedding points to multiple processes at work during a transitional moment in the lives of elite southerners.[5] In her letters, Cornelia expressed apprehensions many felt as they prepared to marry.[6] Marriage was of paramount importance to the elite southern way of life, exerting a determining influence on their economic, social, and personal lives. Jean E. Friedman has noted that "Family and property," rather than "education or professional skill," "defined power" in the antebellum South.[7] While family connections and access to property profited men and women everywhere, the plantation economy gave them particular significance to the southern elite. When a couple married, cementing family and property

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[4] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 23 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[5] The term "elite" has demarcated a wide range of social and economic criteria. Most historians follow Guion Griffis Johnson in treating the ownership of twenty slaves as a rough dividing line between elite and non-elite southerners. *Ante-bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 56; Catherine Clinton, *Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), xiii; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 86. While still considering slave ownership an important factor in determining elite status, I use the term "elite" fluidly, to indicate people who moved in the highest strata of social life before the Civil War.

[6] For expressions of apprehensions similar to Cornelia's, see Eliza Worthington to William Gaston, 9 and 31 July 1816, William Gaston Papers, SHC.

[7] Jean E. Friedman, "Women's History and the Revision of Southern History," in *Sex, Race, and the Role of Women in the South*, ed. Joanne V. Hawks and Sheila L. Kemp (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), 7.

relations, they fulfilled their economic, social, and personal destinies with a unique finality and comprehensiveness. Both men and women approached this milestone with a degree of apprehension: for women, who had less experience of the world beyond their households, marriage occasioned an especially violent rupture, moving them from their parents' home to their husbands' (and often away from their circle of friends), and plunging them into the roles of wives to husbands, mistresses to slaves, and mothers to children.[8] Cornelia's prenuptial anxieties were thus quite understandable.

So was the manner in which she resolved those anxieties. Unlike the northern middle class, who charged headlong into intimate relationships, wealthy southerners saw marriage as a cause of ruptures within their community and within their own identity. Their communities therefore employed wedding rituals to assuage the fears of their young and ensure that they would follow through on their promise to marry. Both the engagement period and the wedding itself surrounded couples with supportive rhetoric and activities. When engaged persons like Cornelia Christian voiced doubts, their family and friends reacted quickly to remind them of their commitments. Cornelia, momentarily irresolute, found herself surrounded by "several friends" assuring her that marrying was "exactly" the "right" thing to do (even as marrying ensured that she would see less of those friends in the future).

Exactly what southerners were committing themselves to in marrying was revealed in the business matters orchestrated by Cornelia's uncles. Nothing underlined white supremacy as forcefully as the transfer of slaves from one family to another, an occurrence that marked almost every elite wedding. Anne Scott has argued that southern family relations were

[8] Brenda E. Stevenson calls marriage "a rude awakening" for southern belles. *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 69. And Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues that most women directly linked "the prospect of marriage" with their "entry into womanhood." *Within the Plantation Household*, 255.

bound up in slavery: "Because they owned slaves and thus maintained a traditional landowning aristocracy, southerners tenaciously held on to the patriarchal family structure." Marriage, by which family traditions and property were passed down through the generations, fortified this structure and its attendant race relations. In almost their every aspect, wedding rituals reinforced white southerners' privileged position over their African-American slaves and inculcated them (as if they needed prodding) in habits of mastery. Few brides considered how their marriages would disrupt slave life: Cornelia was unusual in recording the reactions of her family's slaves to the news that her slave Bettie would accompany her into marriage, observing that they did not want to be separated from each other. "They all seem to want to go," she told Walter. "Emily took a cry about it. Bettie is rather a favorite in the family."[9] Cornelia, like most brides, took it for granted that she would enter marriage with human property in tow. The rituals surrounding her wedding, with their incessant focus on her *own* transition, inclined her to gloss over her slaves' tears, believing that they indicated not sadness at having their family broken up, but grief over not being able to join her as she began her new life.

It is not surprising that white southerners used their weddings to reify their own dominance: this impulse would seem to characterize most dominant social groups. But southern communities exerted unusual effort to ensure that their weddings proceeded properly. Stephen M. Stowe has observed that wealthy southerners considered rituals such as weddings to be emblematic of themselves: "The planters understood typical family events—marriage, schooling, childbirth—to be . . . thick with signs of the family's worldly purpose.

[9] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 23 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. Cornelia did not specify whether Bettie was a favorite in the slave family, the slaveholding family, or both. Cornelia's letter to Walter is the only evidence I have found regarding the property she brought into marriage. Other slaves may or may not have come with her as well.

Such events, passing through ritual, elicited from the planters their most sustained reflections about identity and social values."[10] As Cornelia Christian's experience suggests, the values southerners conveyed in their rituals centered on mastery over social inferiors, particularly the maintenance of patriarchal domination over slaves. They placed an extraordinarily close watch over brides and grooms, who moved through the ritual in a tightly constricted manner.

Historians of antebellum America are divided as to whether, or to what degree, southerners resembled northerners in their social and economic lives. Much difficulty has arisen from the question of what southern patriarchy actually entailed. The most persuasive arguments that southerners inculcated distinctive values and behavior have assumed that, in order to keep slaves in check, southern planters adopted the mode of aristocratic patriarchs, exercising firmer control over their household dependents than the northern bourgeois did.[11] On the other hand, scholars who have doubted the South's distinctiveness have argued that if the region truly nourished aristocratic rather than bourgeois values, then southern patriarchs must have asserted their leisured dominance at every turn. Jane Turner Censer, for instance, ably documents the many ways in which southern patriarchs did *not* rule their like imperial lords but instead behaved in ways that seemed suspiciously bourgeois. Parents, she notes,

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[10] Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 4. "The marriage of a daughter," he continues, "was the occasion for the family to characterize their hopes and reveal their assumptions about femininity, sexuality, and binding ties."

[11] See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*. See also C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 5; Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 8; and Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 84, who emphasizes along with Stephen M. Stowe that the South's continuing emphasis on hierarchy rendered southerners more devoted to appearance and display. William Dusinberre suggests that the mobility of free labor in nineteenth-century America rendered major landed estates worked by free labor unprofitable. "If one wished to recreate in North America the British system of agricultural capitalism, based on great estates run by gentleman farmers," slavery was absolutely necessary; thus, in the antebellum years, the South was the only appropriate location for a truly powerful landholding aristocracy. *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 27.

desiring "to be friends and confidants as well as figures of authority to their children," idealized "the conjugal family held together by bonds of affection."[12] Did southerners follow (or even precede) northerners into middle-class values and behaviors (such as companionate marriage, thrift, and egalitarianism), or did they pursue their own aristocratic path?[13]

As moments in which the southern elite acted out something akin to an idealized vision of itself, weddings offer an excellent testing ground for the question of southern exceptionalism, and ultimately complicate our sense of how the patriarchy perpetuated itself.[14] Marriage, which allowed landowning families to exchange property among themselves and to secure the fortunes of future generations, kept the southern economic system dynamic and encouraged its expansion. But marriage also occasioned significant risks: bad matches could decimate family fortunes and subject participants and their families to ridicule and dishonor. Communities therefore took special care to ensure that engagements, once they had been deemed socially acceptable, resulted in weddings that honored participants and their choices. The intensity of community commitment to encouraging individual couples to follow

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[12] Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 152.

[13] James M. McPherson provides a useful summary of many of these arguments in "Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism." McPherson, following C. Vann Woodward, ultimately suggests that "it was the *North* that was different" (431).

[14] Historians have not had much to say about the weddings of antebellum southerners, typically passing directly from courtship to the early years of marriage. Until very recently, the most complete account was Guion Griffis Johnson's chapter "Courtship and Marriage Customs" in her 1937 book *Ante-bellum North Carolina: A Social History*. Johnson described the economic motivations for marriage and offered a synthesis of the ways in which North Carolinians conducted their nuptials in the context of wider legal and social structures. Daniel Blake Smith and Brenda E. Stevenson have since suggested that southern wedding rituals helped strengthen the bonds of kinship and community. Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 151-3 and Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 64. Anya Jabour's 2007 book *Scarlett's Sisters*, however, offers the first extended consideration of the engagement period since Johnson, and also offers a relatively lengthy discussion of weddings. Her discussion, while insightful regarding romantic love and its effects, does not sufficiently consider the role community played in weddings, and neglects men (and masculinity) almost entirely. For historians passing over weddings, see, for instance, Catherine Clinton's *Plantation Mistress*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household*, and Steven M. Stowe's *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*.

through on their commitments, and the regimented ways in which communities performed the rituals, distinguished southern rituals from those of their northern contemporaries.[15] The key here is community: while elite men certainly asserted their power when absolutely necessary, even people who might have less to gain by from perpetuating the patriarchy (such as young women) actively participated in sustaining its power.

These apparently superficial differences had deep significance, suggesting that southerners, no matter their ties to national commerce or politics, maintained a regional culture centered around aristocratic hierarchies and patriarchal mastery. Southerners married in ways that defined themselves as a world apart from the bourgeois, companionate North. Their weddings, far from promoting egalitarian values and companionate love, saw their participants taking refuge in patriarchal and aristocratic ideologies that represented the stability and strength of their relationships and communities.

The Economics of Elite Southern Weddings

Southern communities literally invested prospective brides and grooms with economic responsibilities, helping to ensure their continued allegiance to the system. In spite of their increasing devotion to the ideals of companionate marriage and romantic love, southerners never doubted that marriage ought to improve one's economic standing.[16] Indeed, contrary to Jane Turner Censer's observation of "the absence of financial negotiations and

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[15] My use of the word "community" stems from Joan Cashin's probing work on the expansive structure of antebellum planter families. Family life, she argues, extended well "beyond the nuclear core," and its "borders were permeable and its structure elastic." Familial membership was defined not merely by residence but by "shared activities and behavior." Cashin, "Structure of Antebellum Planter Families: 'The Ties that Bound us was Strong,'" *Journal of Southern History* 56, No. 1 (1990): 56. Cashin's work is on families per se; I apply her concept of membership to the wider social circle with whom members of an elite family regularly socialized or corresponded as relative equals. See also Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3.

[16] See Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 105-6; and Glover, *Southern Sons*, 121.

transactions accompanying marriage" in North Carolina, marriage probably ranked second only to death as an occasion for transferring property.[17] Marriage settlements from Bertie County, North Carolina, between 1800 and 1860 (excluding contracts covering all of a fiancée's property without specifying what that property consisted of) reveal that southerners from a variety of backgrounds considered marriage a moment when property changed hands.[18] Out of twenty-one settlements, twelve gave between one and twenty-eight slaves; the others involved a wide range of assets, including cash, tracts of land, livestock, furniture, farm implements, and interest in a fishery.[19] Most wedding-related transactions seem to have taken place privately and at a remove from the ceremony. However, John Berkley Grimball, a South Carolina planter, recorded an apparently ritualistic bestowal of money from the father of the bride to the groom the day after the wedding: "This morning Mr Lowndes presented $10,000 to Gouverneur—in a Bond for $5,000, and in an order for $5,000 in cash."[20] On the other hand, couples might wait months or even years to receive their

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[17] Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 74. Censer, of course, acknowledges that "economic and family standing" remained important qualifications for suitors" (65).

[18] On marriage contracts and techniques of analyzing them, see Marylynn Salmon, "Women and Property in South Carolina: The Evidence from Marriage Settlements, 1730 to 1830," *William and Mary Quarterly* 39: 4 (October, 1982): 655-685.

[19] Eight contracts listed between one and five slaves, one listed nine, another fourteen, and another nineteen; a final contract listed a bride's interest in twenty-eight slaves as her father's next of kin. Nine contracts were from before 1830, twelve from after 1830. Bertie County Miscellaneous Marriage Records, 1749-1914, Marriage Contracts, North Carolina State Archives. For the specific contracts listed above and in the text, see Timothy Walton, Mary Wilkins and Aaron Askew Contract, 26 December 1818; Sarah G. Pugh, James Jones and William Blanchard Contract, 18 May 1852; Sarah Hodder, Samuel Sh[ary] and Jonathan J. Rhodes Contract, 12 November 1847; Ann Eliza Rayner, Stark B. Smith and Robert A. Parker Contract, 11 May 1852; Henry Speller, Martha Kittrell and James Ross Contract, 28 January 1807; Margaret Collins, Jeremiah Devan and Jonathan [ ] Contract, 16 January 1804; James S. Mitchell and Frances Gilliam Contract, 21 October 1851; Willie Anne Smith, Thomas B. Hardy and James Ward Ballance Contract, 19 January 1860; and Mary Albina Swain, Lewis T. Thompson and Joseph Jordan Contract, 25 June 1856.

[20] John Berkley Grimball Diary, 27 February 1856, SHC. Grimball did not state who else was present as this transaction took place, but the fact that the meeting included himself as well as the groom and the bride's father indicates at least a slightly wider audience. Marylynn Salmon reports that in South Carolina, "most couples executed [settlements] prior to marriage." "Women and Property in South Carolina," 661.

marriage gifts. Catherine Edmonston and Mary Chesnut both came into the estates promised them by their fathers several years after their weddings, and both found their property much depleted in the interim.[21]

These transactions were arguably more important in the South than elsewhere in America. In the North, where the middle class was coming to make idols of self-made, entrepreneurial men, property changed hands without the psychic and social significance accorded it by southerners. Bertram Wyatt-Brown notes that "Northern credit-rating agents . . . thought men ought to stand on their own merits," whereas southern creditors considered a man's family, including "wives" and "in-laws;" in the South, therefore, marriage could make—or preserve—a fortune.[22] Anxious about the security of these transactions, increasing numbers sought the protection of marriage contracts. Marriage contracts (which were never especially frequent) addressed a weakness inherent in using family relationships to distribute economic and social power: namely, that doing so put women too close to the axis of power.[23] Never

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[21] Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton, eds., *Journal of a Secesh Lady: The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866* (Raleigh: [North Carolina] Division of Archives and History, Dept. of Cultural Resources, 1979), 4-5; and C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 284.

[22] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 213. But see Glover, *Southern Sons*, 39. Interestingly, parents appear to have distributed property relatively equally to sons and daughters, a sign that southerners saw family, not individuals, at the root of economic and social improvement. Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 107.

[23] By no means did the majority of southerners had marriage contracts; but the practice increased after the 1820s. Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 76; for an alternate view, see Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children*, 74-75. Although Marylynn Salmon is correct in noting "few women" had marriage contracts at this time, Elizabeth Warbasse argues that "the large landholdings and strong family consciousness in the southeastern states" of North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia "probably made more common the recourse to trusts." Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Warbasse, *Changing Legal Rights of Married Women, 1800-1861* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 168. Salmon does acknowledge that "middling" as well as wealthy persons sometimes felt the need for marriage contracts, although not as often as the elite. "Women and Property in

fearing that women might grab power for themselves, families instead fretted over women's vulnerability to fortune seekers or hard times; thus more and more families gave their daughters ownership or control of some or all of the property they brought into marriage, protecting them from her husband's debts.[24] When William Elliot's daughter Harriet married Ambrosio Gonzales, for instance, Elliot gave 10,000 dollars "for the use of . . . Harriet Rutledge Elliot during her natural life, so as not to be subject to the debts, contracts or engagements of the said Ambrosio Jose Gonzales."[25] In practice, marriage contracts rarely prevented husbands from making use of or even selling their wives' property, unless a family took legal action against their daughter's husband; walling off a wife's property from a husband's, however, served as debtor relief for the wife and sometimes the husband as well.[26] Women's titular control of property always competed with concerns about their family's well being—would they withhold assets even as their families sank into debt?—not to mention their husbands' not insignificant powers of coercion.[27] Mary Ferrand Henderson, whose husband squandered much of her property, ruefully asked her diary, "What does the

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South Carolina," 664. My research on Bertie County corresponds with Salmon's, finding contracts that protected not only vast estates but small assemblages of goods.

[24] Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 57-58, 72.

[25] William Elliot, Ambrosio Gonzales, and Harriet Elliot Contract, 17 April 1856, Elliot and Gonzales Papers, SHC.

[26] Warbasse, *Changing Legal Rights of Married Women*, foreword. Despite the security that marriage contracts afforded, some prospective husbands still chafed at their lack of control over their wives' affairs: one correspondent described an engagement which the groom broke off when he discovered that, "were he to be involved in debt. . . he would . . . not have it in his power to appropriate his wife's property to the payment of such liabilities." William S. Pettigrew to [ ] Johnston, 23 April 1853, Pettigrew Family Papers, SHC. See also Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 62.

[27] Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that married women's property rights in the antebellum South depended not so much on the law as on their husbands' lenience: "[w]hen so inclined, husbands did what they liked with their wives' property regardless of the law." By and large, he writes, "women had to do what their menfolk wished, if only to keep peace at home." *Southern Honor*, 268. Still, Lebsock holds that "[m]arriage contracts were empowering documents on the whole" for women. *Free Women of Petersburg*, (72).

marriage contract avail" if a woman was "too readily consenting [and] not thinking of the future"?[28]

Even as they sought legal means to prevent marriage from bringing financial calamity, southerners simultaneously discouraged their sons or daughters from making a risky match by constantly stressing the importance of marrying well. Anxious about marriage's economic implications, southerners habitually derided men and women who failed to bring substantial property to marriage, linking praise of a bride or groom to praise of his or her finances.[29] "She is amiable, intelligent, and not so young as to shock propriety," wrote one planter. "She is withal likely to be rich."[30] Another man extolled a potential groom's independent fortune, while a third deemed his brother's bride "a young lady of beauty, merit, and wealth."[31] Similarly, Meta Morris Grimball linked her hopes for her son's marriage directly to his recent financial advances: "I have been trying to persuade Berkl[e]y to get married," she told her diary. "[H]e has been set up with 5 thousand dollars, he had saved 1 thousand himself, and is so saving I suppose he will soon have 10 thousand."[32] Conversely, a low opinion of a match often followed directly from a fiancé(e)'s poor economic outlook. "It is said that Mary Little has made a very bad selection, in the choice of her partner for life," wrote Mary Polk to her brother, explaining, "Mr Mosely's family are a 'broken down

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[28] Mary Ferrand Henderson Diary, 22 November 1855, John Steel Henderson Papers, SHC.

[29] See Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-bellum North Carolina*, 192; Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 154; Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 66; and Glover, *Southern Sons*, 115.

[30] John Berkley Grimball Diary, 21 December 1833, SHC.

[31] William Lowndes to Mrs. W. Lowndes, 16 November 1811, William Lowndes Papers, SHC; William Hawkins to Benjamin Hawkins, 21 January 1803, Hawkins Family Papers, SHC. See also Margaret Ann (Meta) Morris Grimball Diary, 15 December 1860, SHC.

[32] Margaret Ann (Meta) Morris Grimball Diary, 10 December 1860, SHC.

sett.'"[33] One man admitted to his sister that money was not necessarily "the chief good" in a prospective marriage partner. "But," he continued, "it is positively necessary both to happiness and respectability, and it would be a hazardous enterprise to attempt life without it."[34] Compare southerners' open discussions of marriage's financial aspects to wealthy and middling northerners' insistence on making love their focus, and we can see how southerners conceived of themselves as something other than bourgeois. Men and women were brought up with the understanding that if they left their wedding with substantial property, their marriage would be a success; if not, it would be a dubious undertaking at best.

In weddings, slaveowners casually disrupted slaves' lives, an action that had a lasting effect on all parties involved. Years later, Lila Nichols remembered that being part of a marriage gift moved her from a relatively kind master to an abusive one: "We belonged ter Mr. Nat Whitaker atter his marriage. His daddy, Mr. Willis, give us to him," she recalled. "Ole massa [Willis] wus good ter his slaves, but young massa Nat wuzn't."[35] For some young whites—especially women, who often grew up sheltered from the responsibilities of slaveholding—marriage constituted the first moment in which their actions would change slaves' lives in substantial ways.[36] The sense of finality that settled on Cornelia Christian upon discovering which slave would accompany her into marriage aptly expressed the lasting importance of her new identity as a slave mistress. This change bound her to a certain kind of life, inducting her and her husband into a community of slaveholders and implicating them

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[33] Mary Polk to Lucius Polk, 16 March 1826, Polk, Badger, and McGehee Family Papers, SHC.

[34] Leonidas Polk to Susan S. Polk, 16 August 1839, Leonidas Polk Papers, SHC.

[35] Rawick, George P., ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Supplement, Series 1, Vol. 15: North Carolina (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1977), 148.

[36] In his biography of Cornelia's fiancé, Walter Lenoir, William L. Barney describes married slaveowning as a life-changing event for both man and wife. *The Making of a Confederate: Walter Lenoir's Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39.

in its maintenance. The transfer of slaves at weddings helped the elite retain their economic power, ensuring that wealth remained within a small constellation of wealthy planters and select aspirants to that class.[37] But it also served as a ritual focal point, in which an older generation passed the mantle of slaveholding power and responsibility to their offspring.

Wedding Preparations

Before they could cement their economic ties to an adult community of slaveholders, however, engaged couples had to make it to the altar. With the community's social and economic continuity at stake, the period prior to a wedding was fraught with significance. Engagements lasted anywhere from a few weeks to a few years, and were fruitful times for the strengthening of community bonds. As couples and their families contemplated a transfer of property, arranged, if necessary, travel to and from the wedding, organized a ceremony, planned a honeymoon, and negotiated future living arrangements, communities sprang into action in order to smooth the sometimes rocky way toward marriage, ensuring that the event on which so much capital was riding actually happened. Friends and family produced a hum of rhetoric and activity that assured the couple of the strength of elite social bonds and of their own involvement therein.

Communal reassurance was necessary because men and women did not glide easily into marriage; rather, engagements occasioned bouts of soul-searching in which young men and women questioned the specific choices they had made as well as their readiness for marriage more generally. Such soul-searching, as one historian points out, rarely took the form of

[37] See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 207. Indeed, some marriage settlements left a good deal of power in the hands of brides' fathers, as older patriarchs stipulated the uses to which their gifts could and could not be put. See Caroline Eliza Clitherall Diaries, Vol. 5, SHC.

frank dialogue (whether written or oral) between a man and woman.[38] Few brides or grooms found it easy to articulate their expectations of themselves and each other. Lovers fumbled awkwardly toward an understanding of their roles via abstruse and often tentative declarations in conversations and letters.[39] Still, the prospect of marriage clearly unnerved both men and women, forcing them to reconsider their accustomed identities and behavior.

Engagement forced men into poses of supplication strikingly at odds with the ambitious independence that southern men generally attempted to convey.[40] As he asked permission to marry Thomas Ruffin's daughter, Anne, Paul Cameron mused, "I now find myself placed in a most delicate, and I may add a novel relation to you and your Lady—: and I must needs present myself to you in the language of a petitioner."[41] In stressing the "novelty" of the situation, Cameron reminded his future father-in-law that they would be equals under almost any other circumstance; but he simultaneously acknowledged that love had—for the first time—temporarily undermined his independence, leaving him beholden to the actions of others. In this "novel" position, he admitted, "I know no rules"—a fascinating admission of being cut adrift from a man otherwise obsessed with rules (and writing to a State Supreme Court Justice who wrote copiously about rules himself).

When he asked for Anne Ruffin's hand in June, Cameron merely acknowledged his obeisance to a wealthy and important man (and, probably out of politeness as much as

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[38] Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 121.

[39] An excellent example of this sort of dialogue may be found in the letters of Eliza Worthington and William Gaston (already twice married before) in the summer of 1816. William Gaston Papers, SHC. See Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 173.

[40] Stephen Berry's concept of "éclat" nicely captures the ambition for "extension, . . . breadth of imagination, . . . building an empire, personal and national, . . . [and] surrendering to something so much bigger than the self that a man might be treasured up forever" that southern men evinced. Berry, *All That Makes A Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21.

[41] Paul Cameron to Thomas Ruffin, 7 Jun 1831, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

anything, to that man's "Lady"). More unfamiliar territory lay ahead. By September, he was gushing to his bride, "I have more than once been ready to exclaim to myself, 'My Love I am not worthy of thee[’] . . . For the more I see of you, . . . the more strongly, and let me in sincerity add the more positively I am persuaded that I am claiming for myself a Priceles [sic] Jewel, which I fear, that I shall never be worthy to possess."[42] If Cameron ever felt unworthy of anything else in his life, his exuberant, boastful letters from this period do not indicate it. But he placed himself at his fiancée's feet. Wyatt-Brown notes that southern men avoided spending too much time with, or revealing too much to, their wives, for fear of displaying "a too-uxorious manner" in front of male friends; yet in the engagement period, men experimented with poses of submission.[43] They did not always enjoy doing so, precisely—one man bitterly recalled his feelings after a lover rejected him, wishing "never" to subject his "proud heart" to "such humiliations again"—but once engaged, they became willing to test these "thoroughly novel" behavior and feelings.[44]

This rhetorical submission extended into surprisingly sensitive areas. Among themselves, men toyed with comparing marriage to slavery. One of Walter Lenoir's friends joked that Walter was "caught at last! desperately, decidedly, hopelessly entrapped—ensnared—led captive!"[45] Another put the matter even more bluntly, congratulating Walter as he left the freedom of bachelorhood for the "slave state" of marriage: "if you have gotten yourself into a

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[42] Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 2 September 1831, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

[43] *Southern Honor*, 274. Anya Jabour has identified a group of southern men who, she argues, "rejected masculine competitiveness and achievement and instead embraced such feminine values as cooperation and intimacy." Jabour, "Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South: William Wirt and His Friends," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20, No. 1 (2000): 108. These men's career trajectories bore striking resemblances to that of Walter Lenoir; yet there remains a wide gulf between valuing intimacy and cooperation and courting enslavement.

[44] Joseph Roulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 8 November 1836; Joseph Roulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 27 September 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

[45] Sam'l [ ]evon to Walter Lenoir, 6 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

Condition of hopeless bondage," wrote William Bingham, he hoped "that your mistress may prove anything but a xanthippe, and may [ ] with discretion."[46] Obviously, neither well-wisher actually believed that Walter's wife would dominate him. In his next sentence, Bingham begged his friend's pardon and turned the metaphor on its head: "excuse my freedom with a man who is about to receive the noble degree of 'wife master.'" Yet the irony of slaveholders joking about being enslaved by their wives remained, gaining particular potency in light of the fact that, as the nineteenth century progressed, slavery's spokesmen increasingly compared masters to husbands and slaves to wives. This comparison replaced the older one representing masters as fathers and slaves as children, and meant to soften slavery's image by implying that slaves, like wives (and unlike children) willingly accepted "protection and dependence" at the hands of masters.[47]

Why did men entertain—however facetiously—the idea that marriage might enslave them? Some seemed to nourish a genuine ambivalence about losing their bachelorhood and its attendant sexual and social license. An unattached young southerner reflected, "I often dwell with pleasure over the untrammelled [sic] life of the bachelor;" and one of Walter Lenoir's friends conveyed a note of loss at his friend's failure to remain "an incorrigible old bachelor—of the crustaceous kind."[48] Men who described bachelors as "untrammelled" and

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[46] William Bingham to Walter Lenoir, 30 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. Xanthippe was the wife of Socrates, who complained incessantly about her. For a similar comparison, see Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 171.

[47] Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 63; see also Stephanie McCurry, "Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina," *Journal of American History* 78, No. 4 (1992): 1245-1264. Stephen Berry notes that at least one young white man willingly compared himself to a slave "until I come of age; but a married man would certainly have come of age, thus rendering a slavery comparison less appropriate. Berry, ed., *Princes of Cotton: Four Diaries of Young Men in the South, 1848-1860* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 11.

[48] Jos. G. Wright to Paul Cameron, April 1832, Cameron Family Papers, SHC; Sam'l [ ]evon to Walter Lenoir, 6 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. Bertram Wyatt-Brown notes that, unlike with women, "by

"incorrigible" perhaps approached the moral responsibilities of marriage with unease. But for slaveholders to compare wives to slave drivers and themselves to slaves, their anxieties must have dug deeper. Stephen Berry argues that romance and courtship offered men a "rest from their own competitive drives and masculine pursuits," a rare arena "in which they could explore and disclose the softer side of their psyches."[49] Paul Cameron's letters to his fiancée allowed him to experiment with submissiveness without risking his manly reputation; for, as Berry notes, unlike in relations with other men, a southern man "could surrender his will" to a woman "with the perfect knowledge that he could always take it back."[50] The same is true—in a more extreme sense—of men comparing themselves to slaves. Apprehensive about the responsibilities awaiting them in marriage, men fantasized about submitting in the most extreme way possible—overturning their society's bedrock social institution, the very institution that kept them in power, and their lifelong identity—in the only safe way possible.[51] Being enslaved by their wives was obviously not a realistic possibility (and far less likely than an uprising by actual slaves); thus they could joke about it without fearing it. Yet the fact that engagements sparked such topsy-turvy fantasies shows that men's minds were not untroubled when they entered marriage; indeed, the prospect of marriage spurred men to question their ability to uphold their society's most basic hierarchies as masters of

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the Jacksonian era there was nothing scandalous or wholly pathetic about the aging bachelor" in Southern society; in marrying, men consciously forewent a potentially pleasant, and not socially-prohibited, lot as lifelong bachelors. *Southern Honor*, 240. But see Glover, *Southern Sons*, 135.

[49] Berry, *All That Makes a Man*, 89-90. While Jabour documents men who revealed their softer sides often to male friends, she acknowledges that they, as professionals in a planter society, were outliers. "Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South," 86. This study encompasses both planters (such as Paul Cameron) and professionals (such as Walter Lenoir), and suggests that engagement allowed elite men of many different walks of life to court such "feminine" ideals as intimacy and submission.

[50] Ibid., 218.

[51] Lorri Glover notes that southern "boys learned to communicate" the "authority" of mastery "early in their lives." Glover, *Southern Sons*, 26-27.

women and slaves.[52]

Marriage brought more concrete changes to women. While men's anxieties during the engagement period focused on the psychological transition from youth to adult and their legitimacy as masters, women faced tangible ruptures. Most women's fears during the engagement period centered around their impending move away from family and friends. Upon getting engaged, Anna Johnson wrote to her friend Eliza Haywood, despondent at the prospect of leaving her family: "more than to my great discomfort," she sighed, "I suspect I shall be married in the month of May. High ho! My feelings are not very pleased at the thought of leaving father & mother sister & brother—but the die is cast."[53] Another woman, worried about her own marital prospects and afraid of being "left *alone*," confessed her fear that female friendships would end or diminish upon marriage, imploring her friend to waylay marriage until they both had secured a mate: "you must *wait* for me Kate."[54] In marriage, women's familiar connections would be replaced by a husband who almost inevitably appeared unsatisfactory by comparison. Their lives in the presence of friends and family had been relatively easy; their husbands, whom few fiancées knew well, would carry them away from childhood and into a far lonelier world of adult responsibility. Anna Johnson (never short on drama) downplayed her excitement at seeing her fiancé in comparison to seeing her friend Eliza: "I shall look for you," she promised Eliza, "as certainly and more so than I shall look for the Gen[era]l [her fiancé]."[55]

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[52] See Glover, *Southern Sons*, 132.

[53] Anna Johnson to Eliza Haywood, 22 March 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC. See also William Gaston to Eliza Worthington, 21 July 1816, William Gaston Papers, SHC.

[54] Ellen to Catharine Ruffin, 7 April 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

[55] Anna Johnson to Eliza Haywood, 13 April 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC.

Interestingly, some women confessed to feeling the same sense of unworthiness that their fiancés harbored. Catharine Ruffin, for instance, confessed that she feared she would not live up to her husband's expectations of her, as her "father, and too partial friends, have lifted [his] expectations too high."[56] She may well have wanted to temper what Stephen Stowe calls the "language of superlatives" that characterized southern courtship, a language that, he says, reflected "the raised expectations and fears of gender, self, and society inherent in an impending marriage."[57] And expressions of unworthiness certainly fit the submissive pose mandated by the Victorian Cult of True Womanhood.[58]

Yet it is strange that women might feel unworthy as they approached marriage. For these jewels of southern womanhood, marriage should have represented the fulfillment of their hopes. Conditioned since girlhood to consider marriage their natural state, women should have breathed a sigh of relief upon getting engaged.[59] That even women—who, by getting engaged, fulfilled their gender expectations and were on the verge of securing their futures—entertained fears that they were unworthy of the married state, suggests that these fears

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[56] Joseph deRoulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 8 November 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

[57] Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 103.

[58] See Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." Welter cites Caroline Perkins Gilman, who wrote that "the three golden threads with which domestic happiness is woven" were "to repress a harsh answer, to confess a fault, and to stop (right or wrong) in the midst of self-defense, in gentle submission" (160-61).

[59] Several historians have noted the unhappiness and anxieties that plagued both northern and southern women in antebellum America. See Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 165-67; Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 156-57. Wylma Wates suggests that the southern elite considered "marriage . . . the natural condition" of men and women and that women acquired what "freedom and latitude" they could hope to attain by marrying. "Precursor to the Victorian Age: The Concept of Marriage and Family as Revealed in the Correspondence of the Izard Family of South Carolina" in *In Joy and In Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*, ed. Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 12. Wates echoes Julia Cherry Spruill's observation that in the southern colonies, "[u]nmarried persons were regarded as pitiable encumbrances." *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*, 137. See also Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 35, 44. For a detailed consideration of the obstacles separating women from "single blessedness," see Anya Jabour, "'It Will Never Do for Me to Be Married': The Life of Laura Wirt Randall, 1803-1833," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, No. 2 (1997): 193-236.

played an important part in the wedding ritual itself. Participants in this liminal ritual built up tension within themselves, only to have their anxieties resolved by the ritual.[60] The engagement period gave southern men and women an opportunity to consider where their priorities lay, and allowed them to contemplate transgressive ideas (white men becoming slaves, women growing up as old maids) that contravened the social mainstream. Then their communities helped them put these ideas to rest. The activities of the engagement period prodded couples in socially-sanctioned directions, impressing their expectations of class and gender behavior on their young. The anxieties inherent in the ritual made couples uniquely receptive to these expectations.

The communal push toward consummating engagements is clearest in southerners' extremely negative reactions to elopements. Southerners learned at an early age that there were few sins more terrible than marrying without community sanction. Stephen Stowe argues that elopement broke the social compact not only by spurning the pool of acceptable partners (thereby hurting feelings and threatening family legacies), but by sidestepping a community's system of social control: "Elopement was perhaps the greatest trespass against courtship's social character. . . . Not only was personal esteem at stake, but the planter community's honor as a whole was implicated."[61] This point was doubly true for engaged persons: abandoning one's fiancé(e) for another when so close to the goal was nearly unforgivable. When one North Carolina woman eloped, for instance, leaving her fiancé only a short while before their expected wedding date, the jilted man's friends and family voiced

[60] "[I]n the intervals between occupying their culturally defined socioeconomic positions and statuses," writes Victor W. Turner, "men, women, and children [are] in some cases . . . enjoined and in others choose to act and feel in ways opposite to or different from their standardized modes of behavior." Specifically, the strong experience e weakness and "the weak, strength." *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 200.

[61] Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 100.

severe disapproval. Lucy Battle reported the consensus to her husband William: "*I* think & every one I hear speak of it, thinks he has made a happy escape."[62] William replied in kind, decrying the woman's "perfidy, . . . folly and levity" and relaying a rumor that the errant woman "had broken off a similar engagement with her cousin Nash Waddell."[63] However they felt about marriage, engaged couples (and women in particular) knew that their communities would sanction them severely if they followed their anxieties into the arms of another.

Most community activity was far more benign, of course, but it pointed couples toward the altar all the same. As southerners learned of an engagement, they contacted the bride, the groom, or their families to offer blessings. Stowe observes that wealthy southerners, conscious of the importance of marriage to the maintenance of their society, adopted formal, ritualistic language in discussing recent engagements.[64] Congratulatory messages varied little in substance or style. Thomas Pinckney wrote to William Lowndes to congratulate him on becoming engaged, saying, "you have my prayers for your mutual felicity."[65] S.M. Wool sent Anna Johnson (via an intermediary) her "warmest wishes for their mutual happiness."[66] In conversation, too, friends and family assumed formal or semi-formal postures while praising a union: when Walter Lenoir visited friends two months before his wedding, he told his bride-to-be, "Miss Anne Morehead made a pretty little speech about its seeming to be a

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[62] Lucy M. Battle to William H. Battle, 19 October 1850, Battle Family Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

[63] William H. Battle to Lucy M. Battle, 21 October 1850, Battle Family Papers, SHC.

[64] Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 101-2.

[65] Thomas Pinckney to William Lowndes, 5 October 1802, William Lowndes Papers, SHC. See also Jos. G. Wright to Paul Cameron, 19 November 1831, Cameron Family Papers SHC.

[66] S.M. Wool to Eliza Haywood, 10 April 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC.

match made in heaven."[67]

This was more than idle chatter. Ritualized, congratulatory rhetoric encouraged engaged couples to follow through on their commitments. When brides or grooms expressed doubts during the engagement period, community members mobilized to reassure them that they had their support as they married.[68] Joseph deRoulhac and Catharine Ruffin testified to the attempts of family and friends to sway their opinions in favor of each other, deRoulhac acknowledging, "my [ ] friends [have] given a high coloring to my picture!"[69] During an engagement, the pattern of social visits intensified as neighbors welcomed engaged persons into their homes. Cornelia Christian told Walter Lenoir that she had received more invitations than usual, musing, "I really had no idea I was such a popular personage in my own country before."[70] Even if visits did not increase, couples still found themselves at the center of attention. Moreover, during the engagement period, family and friends verbally incorporated their fiancé(e)s into their ranks. William Pettigrew told his brother's fiancée that he planned "to welcome [her] as a sister."[71] And William Gaston, conscious that his fiancée was not acquainted with most of his family, soothed her worries by emphasizing his children's warmth toward her: "let me assure you," he told her, "they are all eager to know

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[67] Walter Lenoir to Cornelia Christian, 9 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[68] On patterns of community mobilization in courtship, see Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 66-67.

[69] Joseph deRoulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 8 November 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

[70] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 23 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. See also Joseph deRoulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 27 September 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC; and Mary Polk to George E. Badger, 22 October 1826, Polk, Badger, and McGehee Family Papers, SHC.

[71] William S. Pettigrew to Caroline North, 11 April 1853, Pettigrew Family Papers, SHC. See also Joseph deRoulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 12 November 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC; and Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 4 July 1832, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

you and determined to love you."[72]

"Told them my news," reported Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, "but found it had preceded me."[73] More than one bride or groom reached a given locale and discovered word of his or her engagement already there.[74] It was proverbial to complain about gossip, or at least to feign astonishment at its efficiency, but being the object of attention seems to have given most couples pleasure, assuring them that their community took an active—sometimes hyperactive—interest in their fortunes.[75] Indeed, wedding gossip confirmed the vigor and robustness of social connections. Engaged persons enjoyed repeating what people said about them, passing along interesting or mildly salacious morsels to their betrothed.[76] The talk that found its way back to a bride or groom was, on the whole, friendly, demonstrating to an engaged couple that members of their community cared about their future happiness.[77] Walter Lenoir found that hearing gossip related to his engagement gave him a feeling of well-being: his friends and relations "smile so pleasantly when they throw out their hints

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[72] William Gaston to Eliza Worthington, 21 July 1816, William Gaston Papers, SHC.

[73] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 22 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[74] See also Joseph deRoulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 21 October 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

[75] See [ ] to Catharine Ruffin, 27 October 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC; Walter Lenoir to Cornelia Christian, 19 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; and Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 3 October 1831, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

[76] See Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 3 October 1831, Cameron Family Papers, SHC; and Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 23 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[77] Steven M. Stowe, perhaps too sanguine but correct about the prevailing tone of engagement-period correspondence, writes, "[a]n engagement prompted everyone involved to reflect on the meaning of family life in as full a mythic sense as their command of ritual allowed. . . . [T]his phase in the ritual did not enlighten so much as it approved, in the name of everyone." *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 101. Likewise, Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests that this sort of speech, "gossip as myth-making," tends to be "unifying, reassuring, more often inclusive than exclusive. . . . The talk itself, as well as the results in lasting legend, unites its participants." *Gossip* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1985), 231.

about it, that I smile, too, and feel happy."[78] With similar pleasure, William Gaston told his fiancée Eliza Worthington about a woman who had shared a boat ride with Eliza the previous summer and taken an early interest in the couple's fortunes, several months before their engagement. "Mrs. Snead," he wrote, "said she had travelled with my intended in the Steam Boat between New York and Albany last summer and then suspected from her conversation 'how it was to be.' It would seem that she was much wiser than either of us."[79] Such anecdotes reassured couples that marriage, far from disrupting their lives, would solidify their membership in communities that cared about them.

Gossip also served a prescriptive or punitive function. Most gossip was supportive, but all of it educated southerners as to what actions might provoke the community censure.[80] The discussion of the North Carolina woman who eloped, for instance, certainly articulated the proper and improper ways to go about marrying. Southerners used gossip's power to "create and maintain a sensibility" to exercise control over members of their community.[81]

Like most nineteenth-century Americans, southerners reflexively attributed gossip to women. Paul Cameron claimed to hear the questions "'Is he paying attentions to her,' 'Are they engaged[,]' [and] 'When will they be married' . . . wherever there is a gathering together of 'babbling widows' and 'hope sick mothers' and . . . the 'grown up children' or

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[78] Walter W. Lenoir to Cornelia, 9 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[79] William Gaston to Eliza Worthington, 20 July 1816, William Gaston Papers, SHC.

[80] See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 446-7.

[81] Spacks, *Gossip*, 13. In her study of an antebellum New Jersey man and his friends, C. Dallett Hemphill has persuasively suggested that gossip—especially inter-generational gossip—had little-to-no direct influence over a courting couple's actions. Hemphill, "Isaac and 'Isabella': Courtship and Conflict in an Antebellum Circle of Youth," *Early American Studies* 2, No. 2 (2004): 429-30. This may well be true; yet I suspect that gossip—like any other aspect of one's upbringing or education—retained at least an indirect influence over people's actions and beliefs.

'Misses' of our little village."[82] If, as Cameron and others claimed, gossip was a particularly female province, women—or at least elite women—ought to have exercised some power independent of men over southern sexual life and marriage, subverting or modifying their society's values.[83] And it is true that women used gossip to help shape the boundaries of acceptable behavior: Catharine Ruffin, for instance, felt comfortable criticizing a local widower's o'er-hasty remarriage, saying, "I had hoped he would wait a little while longer for decency's sake."[84] But men had access to gossip's functions of value-definition as well as women.[85] In the same letter in which Cameron derided "*womanish* 'gossip,'" he opined on the engagements of no fewer than three other couples and speculated somewhat nastily as to the marital prospects of a recently-engaged acquaintance: "from my idea of the disposition and feelings of Elanor," he wrote, "in Mr Moohn she dose not find 'her man' tho' I do not think that she would ever do better."[86] Despite their avowed aversion to gossip, men engaged with women on the field of rhetoric, asserting their right to judge sexual and marital behavior. Even though women had a proverbial monopoly on gossip, patriarchal power structures continued to grant men the prerogative to shape both public and private discourse.

Still, the question of gossip highlights the fact that during the engagement period, things

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[82] Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 3 October 1831, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

[83] Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that women have used gossip to curry power in their communities: "gossip, 'female talk,' provides a mode of power, of undermining public rigidities and asserting private integrity, of discovering means of agency for women, those private citizens deprived of public function." *Gossip*, 170.

[84] Catharine Ruffin to Thomas Ruffin, 6 May 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

[85] Bertram Wyatt-Brown suggests that if fathers did not approve of their children's choice of spouse, writes, they "could command formidable resources by marshalling kinfolk sentiment against controversial pairings." *Southern Honor*, 207. More generally, Kathleen M. Brown argues that in the colonial South, "[f]emale self-perceptions and interactions with other women . . . remained infused with patriarchal values." *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Class in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 286.

[86] Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 4 July 1832, Cameron Family Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

considered feminine occupied the attentions of both women and men. The attitudes of the southern elite toward love letters reveals intricate power dynamics at work as men and women approached a purportedly feminine activity. When men wrote about love, they emphasized the newness of both the language and the emotion. Joseph deRoulhac described the giddiness of love as "thoroughly novel" to him.[87] Paul Cameron, similarly, wrote that he experienced an "intoxication of Joy . . . to which I am an *entire* stranger" while thinking of his betrothed.[88] By contrast, few if any southern ladies would have called love a "novel" emotion; indeed, they had been raised to speak and write in the language of love.[89] Cornelia Christian, for instance, seamlessly incorporated a horticultural metaphor into a discussion of her anticipation of her June wedding. "*Heartsease*," she told her fiancé, referring to the flower of that name, "don't seem to bloom [in Virginia] as easily as in N.C. but I think we'll have it in June."[90] Women in the antebellum South, writes Steven M. Stowe, "were understood as having an almost preternatural affinity for words. They were supposed . . . to model their letters on fiction's overwrought prose and dramatic gesture," while men perfected more public topics and styles of discourse.[91] When men wrote of love, they avowedly stood in foreign rhetorical territory, no matter how appealing that territory was

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[87] Joseph deRoulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 27 September 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

[88] Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 8 July and 3 October 1831. Emphasis in original. See also Paul Cameron to Thomas Ruffin, 7 June 1831, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

[89] Steven M. Stowe points out that many young women had been writing to and about female objects of affection for quite some time before beginning heterosexual courtships. *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 150, 158. See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, No. 1 (1975): 1-29.

[90] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 8 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

[91] Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 143. Stowe suggests that women's authority over romantic discourse increased in the antebellum period (63).

(and whether or not they had actually ventured there before).[92] But as nineteenth-century southerners came to view marriage through a companionate lens, men found themselves obliged, as one historian has said, "to submit to the dictates of romantic love and act," at least rhetorically, "in whatever manner would please" their fiancées.[93] They grasped for words to match those of their more sentimentally-assured partners.

The discourse of love seemed to give women pre-eminence as they prepared to marry. But as with gossip, men were loath to cede control to women, and endeavored to shape women's rhetoric. The purportedly joking efforts of two planters to manipulate their fiancées' habits of letter-writing testify to men's awareness of a potentially-influential female culture, and their desire to keep that culture under their control. In 1816, William Elliott offered to "instruct" his fiancée Ann Smith in the writing of love letters, embarking upon a highly literary exposition which he entitled "'how to answer tenderly and promptly a love letter:'"[94]

> First read [my] letter attentively—and be sure to believe all the compliments it contains—this will heighten the complexion; then with your face arrayed in its richest ornaments—its smiles—run to the looking glass—there read your face attentively—and then reflect [ ] the poor devil who is fascinated with these charms . . . . Then be

[92] For a contrasting view of masculine and feminine standards of letter writing, see Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 5. Several historians have argued that antebellum men had a great deal of experience writing about love. See Jabour, "Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South," 91-92 and Melinda Buza, "'Pledges of Our Love': Friendship, Love, and Marriage among the Virginia Gentry, 1800-1825," in *The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia*, ed. Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 10-11 and 14 regarding the South, and, in the North, Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 20, Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 11, and C. Dallett Hemphill, "Isaac and 'Isabella,'" 402, 410. While Jabour rightly characterizes the sometimes "rhapsodic" rhetorical flights of men, I find that women's letters still tend to internalize literary styles and show more general comfort with the topic of love than can be found in the letters of men, who expressed love in a more self-conscious, if sometimes more effusive, manner. See Glover, *Southern Sons*, 137.

[93] Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 21. On the transition to companionate marriage, see Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House*, 140-150. In *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), Cynthia A. Kierner suggests that "by emphasizing the benefits of feminine virtue and affection," the new ideal of companionate marriage "implicitly encouraged men to respect and value their wives" (30).

[94] William Elliott to Ann H. Smith, 29 May 1816, Elliott and Gonzales Papers, SHC.

> pensive—then before you have time to laugh—run to your desk, and write whatever a feeling and a generous heart may dictate!

Amid the flowery language and winking self-deprecation, the reader may discern William's directive that Ann write from her heart, rather than from more deliberate consideration. His reason for so directing can be seen in the introduction to his treatise, in which William suggested that "[i]f Madam Talband [Ann's schoolteacher] has not instructed you in love, Nature will do it better!" William placed a premium on Ann's "natural" feelings because Ann had not written her previous letter by herself, but instead received help from a female relative. He implored her to write future letters by herself: "when you say some flattering thing to me hereafter, let me not fancy that I see your Aunt Anna leaning over your shoulder, prompting the compliment!" William wanted his fiancée's letters to reflect only her own sentiments (although, if she needed a "teacher," he had one in mind: "let me be the instructor."). But Ann, a mere fourteen years old at the time, clearly felt that composing love letters demanded recourse not merely to her own, "natural" feelings, but to the insights of a potentially wide-ranging group of female friends and relatives. Several months later William was still complaining that his fiancée was betraying his confidences "*for the benefit of our friends*" and imploring Ann to promise "that my letters shall meet no eyes but yours."[95] Nor was Elliott the only man to try to shape the discourse of his fiancée or to object to the number of people she made privy to their letters. Paul Cameron went so far as to compose a love letter addressed from his fiancée to himself when she did not write often enough to satisfy him, suggesting that she copy it down and send it back to him: "'My Dear Paul," he suggested she write,

[95] William Elliott to Ann H. Smith, 14 September 1816, 30 December 1816; Elliot and Gonzales Papers, SHC. Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests that a man might value "secrecy" while a woman values "community. She needs such community," she adds, "in order to resist an imposition of power." *Gossip*, 45.

> Your long letter has been received & I thank you for it. I am well—& no cloud has crossed my path—to mar my present or anticipated happiness. I shall be prepared with a warm heart & open arms to bid you welcome to the hospitality of the Hermitage [Anne's home] when you can most conveniently visit us. Yours most Truly & affectionately—Adieu—Anne Ruffin.[96]

The letter Cameron addressed to himself was surprisingly brisk, lacking the self-conscious rhetorical flights of his own compositions. Instead, it evokes a letter template from an advice book, albeit slightly less effusive; this fact renders his letter somewhat tongue-in-cheek.[97] But Cameron often mixed the facetious with the serious. He nudged Anne, "Laugh not at my little letter—you *little* dream what pleasure it would give." Also like William Elliott, Cameron repeatedly chided Ruffin for sharing their private moments with friends and family, strictly admonishing her, "once for all let me here tell you never do you mention *either* to relation or friend any word or *act* that has ever passed between us. Let not the most distant information escape your mouth."[98]

By falling in love and finding themselves, even temporarily, beholden to women, men submitted to women in ways that made them uncomfortable. While their fiancées could not actually enslave them, women could still undermine their manhood by revealing them at their most intimate and unguarded moments, moments at which men revealed "softer" sides of themselves that they did not wish exposed to the wider world. Some men therefore tried to rein in their women's speech and behavior.

But even as men endeavored to control women's words and feelings, women fashioned a separate space from which young brides could feel a degree of comfort and power.

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[96] Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 17 February 1832, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

[97] Cf., for instance, the letter "ON RECEIVING A MINIATURE FROM A LADY," from *The American Gentleman's Every Day hand-Book of Modern Letter Writing*, 35.

[98] Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 4 July 1832; see also 8 July 1831, Cameron Family Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

Weddings' feminine attributes discomfited men (as they may have simultaneously attracted them), but they lent crucial and compelling support to women wavering on the edge of marriage. This separate space was deeply conflicted, however, and not at all feminist in our sense of the word. Although women's culture sometimes beat back individual men's desires for control, it ultimately encouraged brides-to-be to submit to the dictates of their community and attach themselves to men in socially accepted ways. In this manner, "women's culture" consistently upheld the power of slaveholding patriarchs. Perhaps no moment in southern life illustrates this point so poignantly as wedding preparations.

Anya Jabour has recently helped steer the debate over whether southern women participated in a "female culture" similar to that described by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg away from the question of whether the South featured (or could have featured) proto-feminist politics or female interracial cooperation and toward an interrogation of what impact a female culture might have had on the southern patriarchy more generally.[99] Jabour finds a culture in which young women "sanctioned and encouraged resistance to prevailing models of southern womanhood," largely by "prolong[ing] each life stage as long as possible" and

[99] Historians of southern women originally centered their analyses around the question of why organized feminism did not develop in the South as it did in the North. In the 1980s, Suzanne Lebsock found "the outlines of a distinctive women's value system or culture" in black and white women in urban Virginia. "Altogether," she wrote, "women as a group were more personalistic, more attuned to the needs and interests of other women, more concerned with economic security, more supportive of organized charity, and more serious about the spiritual life than were men. *Free Women of Petersburg*, xix. Jean E. Friedman, conversely, argued that a homosocial women's culture did not develop in the context of the South's "older agrarian and family-oriented structural pattern," in which women were bound "to kin rather than to each other." "Sporadic social occasions," she contended, "could not compete with the demands of family and farm." Friedman, *Enclosed Garden*, 6-7, 128, 25-26. More recently, historians like Jabour have moved away from the notion that this women's culture (if it existed) featured a proto-feminist politics, instead considering how same-sex relationships affected southern gender roles and whether or not they helped women perpetuate or avoid the South's patriarchal hierarchies. Melinda Buza has argued that "same-sex relationships served" both men and women "as "a learning ground for emotional commitments, as a way to alleviate the sadness of unpreventable tragedies, and as a way to explore their feelings about the problems of marriage." Buza, "'Pledges of Our Love,'" 11. And Joan Cashin has suggested that "a women's culture based on 'personalism'" did exist, but perhaps lacked the "reformist" strain described by Lebsock; indeed, the women she studies "held extremely conservative social and political views." Cashin, "Decidedly Opposed to *the Union*": Women's Culture, Marriage, and Politics in Antebellum South Carolina," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 78, No. 4 (1994): 736, 759, 737.

thereby resisting "cultural imperatives that would usher them smoothly and quickly from the status of dependent daughters to that of submissive wives ."[100] It was "southern women's cult of romantic love," she argues, that "helped to destroy their female youth culture of resistance," encouraging women to sacrifice both individual ambitions and supportive female friendships to secure the love of a single husband.[101] When women reached motherhood, they resigned themselves to a life of submission. While Jabour makes a compelling argument about the power of romantic love, the wedding preparations of North and South Carolinians (which Jabour herself has examined) suggest that the southern women's culture only intermittently protected women from male power. Instead, the culture of women, while communal and self-preserving, was (*contra* Jabour) multi-generational and often directed at reconciling young women to patriarchal power rather than encouraging them to resist it.

As marriage tore a woman from her sisters, mother, cousins, aunts, and friends, women of all ages gathered to institute habits in brides that would help them retain psychological strength and a sense of autonomy while adjusting to married life.[102] A culture of women took advantage of weddings' intensification of visiting and correspondence and used its authority over the language and aesthetics of love to retain influence in the face of significant disruptions in a bride's life. William Elliott and Paul Cameron's efforts to prevent their

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[100] Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 12, 13.

[101] Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 175, Chapters five and six.

[102] Jabour notes that "adults controlled the customs that defined [young women] as southern belles," acknowledging older women's role in the marriage rituals; but she minimizes young women's concomitant role in these rituals. *Scarlett's Sisters*, 118. As it focuses only on engagements and weddings, this study cannot say for certain whether this female culture existed all the time, or whether it only emerged in particular ritual spaces. The excitement that many brides expressed about making both physical and written contact may suggest that southern female culture was actually ephemeral, emerging specifically to steer women toward marriage and comfort them along the way. An ephemeral female culture subsiding during everyday life, not superseding kin networks but working within them, actually jibes with Friedman's depiction of women's manner of achieving autonomy in the South: "[s]outhern women's autonomy, which threatened to alter the nature of relationships, . . . expressed itself in subtle ways, ways that did not destroy the form or the structure of the evangelical community." Ibid., 128.

fiancées from sharing manifestations of their intimate, private, selves with female friends and relatives demonstrate the emergence during wedding preparations of women who steered brides in self-protective, communal directions. We can only speculate as to why some brides read and wrote love letters communally, as opposed to individually as their fiancés might have preferred, but it seems that female friends and relatives coalesced to instruct and protect their charges during this transitional period. These women impressed on brides the understanding that they could not rely on their own feelings alone when dealing with their husbands, but instead ought to consult female friends and relatives about even the smallest matters.[103]

The round of visits that engagements sparked helped strengthen community ties in a general sense, but it also enabled women to gather to support each other.[104] Guests who lived a long way from the location of a wedding began planning visits immediately after learning of an engagement. Some women tied their happiness at hearing of a wedding directly to seeing old friends and family. One woman told a relative, "[w]e were all very much pleased to hear of cousin Walter [Lenoir]'s good fortune, especially as there is some possibility of our seeing *you* upon the occasion."[105] Anna Johnson expressed similar happiness at the prospect of seeing her friend Eliza Haywood, telling her, "I feel pleased very much pleased

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[103] Ellen K. Rothman argues that in the North, "People who allowed their parents to influence the course of their courtship were [seen as] weak and irresponsible." *Hands and Hearts*, 119. This may have been true of men in the South (but see Glover, *Southern Sons*, 115), but it was certainly not true of southern women. For an example of a woman struggling between a man's request to reveal her innermost sentiments and yet to prevent "every thought & emotion of my heart" from being "discovered," see Eliza Worthington to William Gaston, 19 May 1816, and William Gaston to Eliza Worthington, 3 Jun 1816, William Gaston Papers, SHC.

[104] Joan Cashin lists "weddings, commencements, and funerals" as the major events which precipitated visits among planter families. "Structure of Antebellum Planter Families," 58.

[105] [Sallie] to Sarah Lenoir, 29 March 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. See also Caroline Carrell to Catharine Ruffin, 6 October 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

that I shall see you so soon."[106] For Anna, who confessed "more than . . . great discomfort" at becoming engaged, the thought that her friend might travel to South Carolina to celebrate her wedding buoyed both her spirits and her ego, as, indeed, it was intended to.

Women supplemented encouraging rhetoric and physical proximity with material evidence of their investment in the couple, helping prepare a wedding's aesthetic elements. Walter Lenoir's cousin Adelaide offered to help his sister in any way she could, saying, "If I can do anything else to oblige you you must let me know, either in *shopping* or *advice*."[107] Nine days before Catharine Ruffin's wedding in 1836, her aunt wrote to tell her that she had purchased "everything that she wanted" in town, minus a basket "*fit* for a bride" that she had been unable to find.[108] A relative of Catharine's, Mary Cameron, hemmed a "frill" for use on her wedding day (or, perhaps, night), instructing Catharine's godmother to tell Catharine to "'Put [t]his *frill* on a particular garment to be worn on a particular nameless occasion'—be sure you understand me."[109] And S.M. Wool purchased wedding gear for Eliza Haywood.[110]

Brides, grooms, and their attendants all typically bought new clothing for weddings, and men and women corresponded about what they had bought or planned to buy. But men

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[106] Anna Johnson to Eliza Haywood, 22 March 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC. Some visits lasted for weeks. See [Mary E] to Emily Elliott, 13 December 1847, Elliott and Gonzales Papers, SHC.

[107] Adelaide to Sarah J. Lenoir, 12 May 1836, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

[108] MSK to Anne Ruffin, postscript of John Kirkland to Anne Ruffin, 15 November 1836, Thomas Ruffin Papers, SHC.

[109] [ ] to Catharine Ruffin, 27 October 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers. Emphasis in original. It is unclear whether it was Mary Cameron or Catharine's godmother who wanted Catharine to "understand" her, as is which garment the frill was meant to accompany.

[110] S.M. Wool to Eliza Haywood, 20 May 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC. Community members might also assist marrying couples by delivering wedding invitations: Mary Chesnut reported doing so a few days before Mary Preston's wedding in 1864, writing, "Today we left Mary Preston's wedding cards. Johnny [Chesnut's nephew] acted as charioteer." Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 648. (It is possible that such activities resulted only from the disruption caused by the Civil War; however, Chesnut's language does not indicate that the delivery of invitations was particularly unusual.)

feigned ignorance of or distaste for fashion among themselves, while women displayed an intuitive, down-to-the-minute knowledge of the latest styles.[111] When Walter Lenoir bought a suit for his wedding, he described the occasion to his fiancé in momentous language. "[S]omething of so much importance has transpired . . . that I must haste to tell you about it. I have just been purchasing my outfit for June!"[112] But in a letter to his brother, Walter affected nonchalance about his purchase, saying, "I got a black cravat, which I am told is the style now."[113] His brother, in turn, expressed a disdain for fashion even alongside a desire to follow its dictates: "I intend to have my rigging exactly right," he declared. "I am sorry that I did not ask Col. Harper, to send for a [ ] of boots [and] a hat of the latest agony."[114] Fashion, according to Thomas Lenoir, was a hostile, outside force.

Conversely, ladies' talk of bridal dresses and accoutrements lacked any of the disclaimers of male language, as women exhibited an internalization of fashion sense. In April 1823, Anna Johnson told Eliza Haywood what kind of bonnet she ought to buy for Anna's upcoming wedding, writing as if knowledge of bonnets were as natural as knowledge of walking. "As to your Bonnet My Coz," wrote Anna, "I can only say that our spring hats have not yet come in. Leghorns are yet altogether worn."[115] Similarly, a friend of Margaret Mordecai's in Philadelphia discussed Margaret's ideas about a wedding dress in terms of her own, long-held opinions: "You[r] fancy of a silver muslin," she wrote, "was always my *beau*

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[111] Men distanced themselves from the world of fashion in spite of the fact that historians have noted southern men's peculiar obedience to its dictates. See Glover, *Southern Sons*, 98.

[112] Walter Lenoir to Cornelia Christian, 9 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[113] Walter Lenoir to Thomas J. Lenoir, 21 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[114] Thomas Lenoir to Rufus Lenoir, 26 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[115] Anna Johnson to Eliza Haywood, 13 April 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC.

ideal of a bridal dress."[116] Furthermore, the elaborate nature of women's bridal wear compared to men's often necessitated, then as now, the involvement of a large group of people to choose and assemble women's outfits. Aesthetic preparations for a wedding let women gather together in an imagined space that emphasized what they shared as women. A man wishing, like Thomas Lenoir, to "have his rigging exactly right" knew that he was entering a realm defined as feminine. Even if men denigrated or dismissed the female world of fashion, wedding preparations mandated that they acknowledge, however begrudgingly, its legitimacy, and their own lack of mastery over it.

Women's monopoly on fashion, however, illustrates the complex and tenuous situation of a female culture within the southern patriarchy. The command of aesthetics that ladies exercised at weddings demonstrated an investment in continuing their class' patriarchal power. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has observed that the families of elite southerners tried to instill in young ladies what she calls an "instinctive" understanding of the uses and appropriate limits of aesthetic display: "[f]ashion articulated class position. . . . A lady . . . had to manifest in her person a restrained elegance that simultaneously betokened internalized self-control and solid male protection."[117] Wealthy southerners were incisive judges of who could and could not hope to compete with their women's highly developed discourse of appearance. One man condescendingly reported to his sister-in-law his having seen "a wedding party and a most ludicrous scene it was. . . . '[W]hat do you think the bride was dressed in'—she had on some sort of thing that had silver spangles on it and in her head was stuck silver flowers and a lace veil tied on to her bonnet and then over all was thrown a brown satin cloak which the gallant bridegroom was very attentive in keeping round her

[116] [ ] to Margaret Mordecai, 30 March [1842], Margaret Mordecai Devereux Papers, SHC.

[117] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 212-13.

neck—altogether she put me in mind of a bull in a china shop."[118] Elite southerners spent heavily to distance themselves from such undignified persons, mobilizing their economic resources to render themselves (especially women) as visually impressive as possible. Ben Johnson, an ex-slave from North Carolina, told a particularly blatant tale of how the wealthy leveraged their human resources in order to improve bridal appearances: "I had a brother Jim," he recalled, "who wuz sold ter dress young missus fer her weddin'."[119] Although most wealthy southerners had enough cash on hand to avoid quid pro quo situations such as this, Johnson's account pinpoints the material source of elite wedding gear: slave labor. When women gathered together to help each other fulfill their society's expectations of wedding-day appearance, giving each other strength via their command of fashion, they reinforced the hegemony of the elite class.

So wedding preparations allowed women of all generations the opportunity to join together in a nurturing, self-protective manner. But this female culture coalesced at just the moment when it would tie women most tightly to their society's social hierarchies. The "several friends" who assured Cornelia Christian that she was "'doing exactly right,'" for instance, were almost certainly women. Her letter telling Walter that her friends had calmed her fears was written the day after she returned from a stay with her sister, and in the weeks prior to her wedding, she visited and hosted a number of female friends, acknowledging that she was conscious of the opinions and reactions of "the girls" to her actions.[120] Cornelia's access to a female culture helped steady her as she entered marriage.

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[118] John Devereux to Ellen Mordecai, 28 February 1842, Margaret Mordecai Devereux Papers, SHC.

[119] Rawick, ed., *American Slave* Supplement, Series 1, Vol. 15: North Carolina, 9.

[120] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 23 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. See also Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 8 March 1856 and 13 March 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

Further, Cornelia's friends complicate, if they do not refute, Jabour's point that young women "resisted" their lot in the patriarchy, whereas older mothers resigned themselves to it. Although Jabour documents many young women encouraging each other to reject or delay marriage, the experiences of this study's subjects suggest that under at least some circumstances women of all ages encouraged not only their daughters and nieces, but also their sisters and friends, to marry. Mothers (Jabour's embodiment of resignation to the patriarchal system) may have been particularly complicit: one mother defined marriage as the objective for both men and women, telling her diary, "I wish they, the elder ones could be settled married well, it is for the happiness of a woman, & for that of a man."[121] But when Cornelia expressed doubts, her (married) sister and "the girls" helped set her back on the path to marriage. Marriage, by which the community propagated itself, invited community effort to ensure that it took place, and even groups within the community with specific interests—such as women looking to gain a degree of autonomy within marriage—got on board.[122] Elite southerners, devoted to ensuring that their weddings went off as planned, acted out powerful rituals of social strength and continuity, comforting both men and women as they neared the altar. The female culture that came together around a wedding might have made Paul Cameron nervous. But it should have given him comfort: this temporary, not-quite-illusory culture helped women muster the strength to join themselves to him and his fellow patriarchs.

The Wedding Day

[121] Margaret Ann (Meta) Morris Grimball Diary, 15 March 1861, SHC.

[122] See Glover, *Southern Sons*, who argues that "Young women . . . absorb[ed] the values of their older kin" in choosing mates (118). See also 125.

As the ritual neared consummation, elite North and South Carolinians closely guarded the actions of wedding participants, stifling almost opportunities for deviance or even comment. The wedding day telescoped the functions of wedding preparations into a series of rituals heavily laden with pressures and incentives to go through with the union, and featured a demonstrative element which made conformity particularly imperative. In weddings, elite southerners not only reinforced a couple's sense of their proper roles and behavior before sending them into adulthood, but, just as important, reified and displayed the efficacy of their social and economic relationships, not to mention their own personal worth. Southern weddings exemplified Stephen Stowe's argument that slavery rendered masters more concerned with personal display than other Americans: "It was not inner worth that mattered [to southerners], but an obvious, fully displayed awareness of self and others quite in concert with the vigilance required of a master of slaves and a pater familias."[123] And if Stephanie McCurry is correct in arguing that the household's heightened political meaning in the antebellum South "inevitably" politicized and publicized domestic issues, then weddings were particularly important moments in a society that based political and social power on household mastery.[124] In weddings, in which participants acted out their household duties, the southern patriarchy hid all but the smallest chinks in its armor. They orchestrated strikingly consistent and tightly controlled exhibitions of elite power, and ultimately subordinated individual actors to the all-encompassing project of making the slaveholding patriarchy appear unassailable.

Many of the activities on the wedding day, like the months leading up to it, emphasized female collectivity. When a bride rose from bed, she often found a group of friends and

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[123] *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 22. See also Glover, *Southern Sons*, 41.

[124] McCurry, "Two Faces of Republicanism," 1246.

family there to help adorn her. Women (then as now) treated aesthetic preparations for a wedding as a communal event, as brides dressed with bridesmaids or other female friends and relations. On a spring morning in 1848, one woman reminisced fondly about dressing for her wedding. "[T]his time seventeen years ago," she reminded her cousin, "we were together, adorning ourselves for my approaching marriage. . . . [W]hat a lovely day that."[125] Female friends and family visiting from out of town often stayed at the home of the bride; thus they could attend her from the moment she awoke. Anna Johnson's family, for instance, offered to house Eliza Haywood for nearly a month prior to Anna's wedding and several days afterward to boot.[126] Receiving assistance and encouragement from so many women who either had been in her shoes before or expected to wear them later likely bolstered a bride's confidence as she prepared to join herself to a husband. (It may also have contributed to feelings of self-importance: Mary Chesnut grumbled about a bride "who scented offense and want of consideration for her august brideship in every one of her movements.")[127] Alongside friends and relatives, of course, stood a slave woman who probably did most of the actual dressing. Former slave Adeline Johnson remembered that her mornings began

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[125] [ ] to "Tilly" [Sally Matilda Westray], 7 April 1848, Battle Family Papers, SHC. But see Susan Davis Nye Hutchison Journal, 29 June 1815, SHC for mention of a bridesmaid arriving at a wedding already dressed, separate from the bride; it may be that the communal process of dressing a bride only developed as the century progressed. An antebellum etiquette book confirms that grooms wore less elaborate clothing than brides and thus required less help from their peers, making male adornment a less communal event than female. *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook for Ladies and Gentlemen* (New York: Carleton, 1860), 424-5.

[126] Anna Johnson to Eliza Haywood, 19 April 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC. See also [Mary E] to Emily Elliott, 13 December 1847 Elliott and Gonzales Papers, SHC. Orville Vernon Burton notes that major social events sometimes saw visiting ladies stay in the home of the party's host, while men found lodging elsewhere or traveled back and forth: "[w]omen would stay over for several days, and men would leave and return again." *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, 40. Even when travel arrangements necessitated that men spend the night at the bride's residence, weddings gave women pre-eminence. At one wedding in Edgecombe, North Carolina, visiting ladies seem to have stayed in the estate's primary residence while men were relegated to "the house which was [its owner's] residence before he built [his] large new dwelling." Blake Nicholson, "An Old Time Wedding" [typescript], Francis Marion Parker Papers, SHC.

[127] Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 834.

with clothing and grooming her "young mistresses," "dress[ing] them and comb[ing] deir hair."[128] As on most days, a slaveowning woman's appearance depended on having a slave woman on hand to perfect it.

Despite the tension inherent in marriage vows—reciting vows, of course, gave one the option publicly to refuse to marry—elite southerners experienced the most anxiety before the ceremony actually began, as one member of a couple awaited the arrival of the other. About a Civil War wedding delayed by a groom's late arrival, Mary Chesnut mused: "To be ready to be married—and the man not to come! The most awful thing of all we can imagine."[129] It is telling that most southerners, always concerned about display, endured this anxious stretch in relative privacy and did not commence the ceremony until the bride and groom had a chance to interact. Our current proscription against couples seeing each other prior to the wedding gave no one pause: brides and grooms orchestrated assignations in church entryways, and many couples met for the purpose of lining up side by side for the bridal march.[130] Conferring before the ceremony reduced the likelihood of public humiliation: if either were considering backing out, he or she could do so before the guests arrived. One bride, "upon [the groom's] reaching the house the evening appointed for the marriage, . . . very deliberately told the old Gentleman she had thought better of it."[131] Obviously this situation was embarrassing, but since it happened beyond the confines of the actual

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[128] Rawick, ed., *American Slave* 3 (3): South Carolina, 36-7.

[129] Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 383. This particular groom's tardiness may have resulted from wartime exigencies, so Chesnut's concerns for the state of the marriage probably mingled with fears for the man's life; however, her sentiment seems more generally applicable.

[130] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 23 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; Henry DeSaussure Fraser to Jane Ladson, 2 April 1859, Henry DeSaussure Fraser Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina (hereafter SCL); and *Civil War Etiquette: Martine's Handbook & Vulgarisms in Conversation* (Mendocina, CA: R.L. Shep, 1988), 140.

[131] Mary Polk to Lucius Polk, 30 June 1826, Polk, Badger, and McGehee Family Papers, SHC.

ceremony, far fewer people witnessed the aged groom's jilting than if he had been left at the altar.

The entrance of the bride and groom, then, was the most significant confirmation for spectators that the couple would go through with their marriage. The ceremony itself left little room for deviance. Pressing conformity on its participants, the bridal march was a pageant of elite wealth and power. As a bride and groom entered the room and made their way down the aisle, they were swept toward a positive answer before the minister.[132] Historians of southern honor, including Steven M. Stowe, Betram Wyatt-Brown, and Kenneth S. Greenberg, have noted the special emphasis southerners placed on physical appearance. Southerners "were concerned," writes Greenberg, "to a degree we would consider unusual, with the surface of things—with the world of appearances;" and Stowe argues that southerners linked appearance to "wider social stability:" "An entire class's power was thus legitimated by an individual's living a 'good life.'"[133] No set formula dictated the arrangement of the bridal march, but parents, attendants, and guests all exemplified the importance of the particular people on display and the legitimacy of the southern social system as a whole.[134] They offered a living tableau of the southern patriarchy

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[132] The trip down the aisle captivated observers: rarely did an account of a ceremony, no matter how brief, fail to describe the appearance of the marchers or at least to say who walked with whom.

[133] Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, xviii. See also Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 34.

[134] See Glover, *Southern Sons*, 145; on the other hand, Ellen K. Rothman notes that mid-nineteenth-century northern weddings performed essentially the same function. *Hands and Hearts*, 168. But Anya Jabour, somewhat oddly, suggests that "For young women in the Old South, wedding days revolved not around elaborate ceremonies but around the meaning of marriage itself." *Scarlett's Sisters*, 185. No doubt women devoted considerable thought to marriage's meaning, but they also put a great deal of energy into the ceremonies. For examples of bridal marches, each of which featured different orders and arrangements of the participants, see Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 505; Susan Davis Nye Hutchison Journal, 29 June 1815, SHC; and Blake Nicholson, "An Old Time Wedding" [typescript], Francis Marion Parker Papers, SHC.

at its most brilliant. Weddings demonstrated to everyone involved that if they conformed to the behavior the ritual prescribed, exhibiting appropriate gender and class behavior, they could reap the benefits of the hierarchies they were acting out.

Wedding guests both witnessed and played a crucial role in this pageant. The number of guests varied depending on space (some rooms could accommodate far more people than others), on recent events (when a wedding followed hard upon the death of a family member, few invitations went out), and on personal preference. One wedding had 175 guests, another sixty, and another "not more than twenty."[135] Some ceremonies hosted just a few family and close friends, only to be followed by large parties afterward: this tradition, while not pervasive, eliminated the risk of public rejection, allowing families to keep the final decision-making moments private, and then celebrate before a larger crowd only after the ceremony had succeeded.[136] Regardless of size, the crowd represented community sanction of a union, emphasizing for the couple that their marriage vows would fulfill the hopes of a large group of people. Guests came out in formal clothes, reinforcing their sense of the occasion's magnitude.[137] This large group may have meant more to the bride than the groom. Wedding guests skewed toward the bride's family and social circle, for the simple reason that most weddings took place in or nearby the bride's home. Many weddings among the North and

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[135] William Elliott [Sr.] to William Elliot [Jr.], 1 February 1848, Elliott and Gonzales Papers, SHC; Lucy M. Battle to William H. Battle, 3 July 1850, Battle Family Papers, SHC; Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 649; John Berkley Grimball Diary, 26 February 1856, SHC; and Mary Polk to Lucius Polk, 16 March 1826, Polk, Badger, and McGehee Family Papers, SHC. Anya Jabour argues that most antebellum weddings were small, but the elite certainly had their share of large weddings. *Scarlett's Sisters*, 185.

[136] Louise McCaa to Mary G. Davis, 18 January [18]42, Mary G. Davis Papers, SCL; Mary Lucas to Melissa Williams, 11 February 1836, Badger Family Papers, SHC; John Berkley Grimball Diary, 19 November 1845.

[137] Two of Lucy M. Battle's sons, in fact, chose not to attend weddings or receptions when faced with the prospect of lacking suitable clothes to wear. Lucy M. Battle to William H. Battle, 1 November 1845 and 13 October 1849, Battle Family Papers.

South Carolina elite necessitated at least a day or two's travel, often thinning the groom's entourage.[138]

At the center of the crowd's orbit was the bride. Most guests had come on her behalf, to wish her well and (perhaps) farewell.[139] At no other time in her life would so many people pay her so much attention. One wedding guest placed the bride at the wedding's literal focal point: "the bride," she wrote, "had her husband on the one hand and the bridesmaids on the other."[140] And while the presence of siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, friends and even strangers no doubt comforted her in this transitional moment, it also drove home how important it was for her to say yes when she reached the altar. Everyone expected her to complete the ritual, and women who failed to do courted approbation from all sides.

A wedding guest would have had little trouble interpreting a bride's appearance: she embodied the highest degree of material wealth and sophistication to which one could aspire, thereby honoring her family as well as her class. Bridal gowns were essentially party dresses, but ladies bought them specially for the occasion and thought them particularly important purchases.[141] Brides or their delegates had scoured the shops of Charleston, Raleigh, Philadelphia, New York, and other cosmopolitan centers for clothing that at least

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[138] See Walter Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 21 April 1856 and Thomas Lenoir to Rufus Lenoir, 12 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; Eliza Haywood to Anna Johnson, 26 April 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC; Joseph deRoulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 12 November 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

[139] As with the bridal party, brides received with chagrin the news that certain family members could not attend this most important occasion. When Catharine Ruffin's godmother informed Catharine that she could not make her wedding, she pleaded, "dont be angry Cate." [ ] to Catharine Ruffin, 27 October 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC. Wary of slighting the bride or her family, people sending their regrets might promise to be at the wedding in spirit if not in body. Caroline Carrell to Catharine Ruffin, 6 October 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC; James H. Ruffin to Thomas Ruffin, 19 October 1836, Thomas Ruffin Papers, SHC.

[140] Susan Davis Nye Hutchison Journal, 19 July 1815, SHC.

[141] S.M. Wool described buying bridal clothes for Eliza Haywood as "mak[ing] purchases of . . . much importance." S.M. Wool to Eliza Haywood, 20 May 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC.

resembled "the most elegant lace dresses of the latest European importation."[142] Bonnets, veils, and lavish ornamentation supplemented dresses of expensive, high-quality fabrics—moiré, tulle, silk, lace, and satin. One guest remembered the entrance of "the tall, beautiful, queenly bride, robed in satin and fine laces, with bridal veil held in place by a tiara of diamonds, falling back over the long train," while another described the bride wearing a veil of "blond lace—and the dress tulle and blond lace—diamonds and pearls."[143] Women took pleasure in dressing up and sought to do it well. Margaret Mordecai's dress-buying deputy warned her, "*silver muslin*, & thread lace veils are both expensive articles, & [ ] you must expect to pay for them;" but brides, while conscious of price, seem generally to have bought whatever suited their hearts' desire, so long as it rendered them elegant and in good taste.[144] Brides far outshone their husbands-to-be in terms of aesthetic extravagance, as men sported dark fancy-dress clothes, including top hats, coats and tails, vests, and neckwear.[145] In fact, women risked dwarfing their men as they swam toward the altar in layer upon layer of costly fabric. One visitor to Norfolk, Virginia, reported, "all efforts are ma[de] to look large.

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[142] Ibid.

[143] Blake Nicholson, "An Old Time Wedding" [typescript], Francis Marion Parker Papers, SHC; and Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 648; see also Mary Ferrand Henderson Diary, 25 January 1856 and 18 January 1857, John Steel Henderson Papers, SHC; S.M. Wool to Eliza Haywood, 20 May 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC; [ ] to Margaret Mordecai, 30 March [1842], Margaret Mordecai Devereux Papers, SHC; and *Habits of Good Society*, 424-5.

[144] [ ] to Margaret Mordecai, 30 March [1842], Margaret Mordecai Devereux Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original. See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 215.

[145] An etiquette book declared in 1860, "men show less joy in their attire at the fond consummation of their hopes, and more in their faces." *Habits of Good Society*, 425. See Walter Lenoir to Thomas J. Lenoir, 21 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. Kathleen M. Brown's theory of elite women serving as "class ballast" may apply here. In Brown's formulation, elite men were able to highlight the similarities between themselves and their economic inferiors precisely because their women "embodied class differences," ensuring that male shows of equality would not "eras[e] important social distinctions." *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 306, 317. The clothing men wore at weddings, though of high quality, likely resembled that of most men on most days, while the extravagance of ladies' wedding gear elevated them far above other women. In this light, women did as much or more work differentiating their class from inferiors on their wedding days as men did.

Bustles or rumps are all the go!"[146] Even the least sophisticated observer knew that such luxury expressed economic superiority: only the wealthiest of men could afford to see their wives and daughters so bedecked.[147]

The bride's father cut an impressive figure, too. For young southern women who often felt closer to their mothers, fathers wielded authority that rarely brooked contestation.[148] Their fathers' presence reminded young women that failing to marry would disappoint and publicly embarrass the most significant authority figure in their lives. Indeed, whether walking down the aisle beside her or awaiting her near the front of the room, the father of the bride enacted his continued influence over his daughter: it was he who had permitted the union, and he who would see it through to its proper end. To their future sons-in-law, brides' fathers appeared as social and economic superiors who could improve their standing. Youth and inexperience denied young men access to the privileges accorded their elders—John Berkley Grimball attended a wedding reception that split guests into two rooms, one "for the Ladies and Young men," and one "for the older Men"—and receiving property from their elders placed grooms in a subordinate position, rendering them at least somewhat beholden to them.[149] The superiority of their future fathers-in-law, then, necessitated that grooms show them public respect: if they did, however, these older men held the keys to the old boys' club of elite planters.

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[146] [ ] to Mary Ann Cameron, 7 May 1832, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

[147] Although fashionable ladies could be found throughout America (usually near cosmopolitan centers) from at least the 1830s on, beauty historian Lois Banner notes that antebellum southern ladies, spurred by "personal pride and sectional jealousy," viewed fashion as one way in which to assert the superiority of their section's way of life. They attempted to "establish southern leadership in another area concerned with the aristocratic world that southerners claimed they represented" by outdoing the northern ladies they met. *American Beauty*, 69.

[148] See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 30, 64, and 113.

[149] John Berkley Grimball Diary, 26 February 1856, SHC. See Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 332-9, and Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 52-3.

The performance of friendly relations between grooms and brides' fathers conveyed the continuity and vitality of the elite class. Guests saw this continuity partly in blunt economic terms: rumors circulated freely in the months before a wedding about the size of marriage gifts, rhetoric that reminded community members of their neighbors' economic power and reliability.[150] Further, as Steven M. Stowe has argued, friendly interactions among elite men buttressed their class' dominance and unity: "the emotional harmony of elite men was perceived to be a major support of class authority. If men acted and felt warmly respectful to each other they would be obeyed by their slaves and loved by their families."[151] As the father of the bride gave the groom property, and as the groom acted out his ability to protect and care for his wife-to-be (not to mention her property), each man validated the other's membership in an exclusive group. The public intimacy of two patriarchs, endorsing each other's legitimacy as masters, assured the crowd of the continued viability of the southern social and economic systems, and of the fitness of the elite to rule.

The weeping mother was as much a wedding stereotype then as she is today, so much so that one observer inferred tears where he saw none: "the sad looks of her sisters and mother were not calculated to cheer [the bride;] there was no foolish crying during the ceremony but I dare say there were many inward tears smothered."[152] A mother's unhappiness (real or imagined) may well have reflected the bride's own feelings, but it also helped lessen the pain of leaving home. While men might greet news of an impending marriage in jocular terms—one letter to Paul Cameron described marriage as "the gam[e and Miss] Ruffin the prize!"

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[150] A number of letters and diary entries discuss rumors of marriage gifts. See, for instance, Mary H. Walker to Susan P. Cabanne, 4 February 1841, Battle Family Papers, SHC; and Margaret Ann (Meta) Morris Grimball Diary, 15 December 1860, SHC.

[151] Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 22

[152] Henry DeSaussure Fraser to Jane Ladson, 2 April 1859, Henry DeSaussure Fraser Papers, SCL. See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 173, and Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 188.

while another man essayed a legal metaphor ("I congratulate you, that the *suit* in which you were so assiduously engaged . . . is brought to a happy *termination*, by a decision *upon* its *merits* . . .")—women took a more somber view, expressing sadness at losing their friends and family.[153] When Cornelia Christian told a friend about her engagement, she responded with grief: "she expressed great distress," Cornelia wrote, and "said she 'would not give me up.'"[154] A friend of Harriett Elliott's lamented the end that Harriett's engagement would bring to their adolescent dreams of a life together: "can I think that you have *so soon* renounced all idea of bearing me company in old maidism[?] Ah! Hattie, I am afraid those splendid air castles we used to build together were by *you* reared on a most sandy foundation."[155] Joseph deRoulhac speculated (jokingly) that Catharine Ruffin's aunt refused to see him when he visited because "she was unwilling to see the *cruel man* who was to carry away her favorite niece."[156] If a bride's mother cried at a wedding, she provided her daughter with a psychological outlet, validating the mixed emotions she might be experiencing. But her presence, even in sadness, also encouraged the bride to go through with her marriage. Especially when escorted down the aisle by the groom, the mother of the bride assured her daughter of the continuity of patriarchal relationships, implying that the

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[153] Jos. G. Wright to Paul Cameron, 19 November 1831 (blanks filled in by Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 10 December 1831, in which Paul quoted the original extensively) Cameron Family Papers, SHC; E.H. Mills to William Gaston, 26 October 1816, William Gaston Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

[154] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 8 March 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[155] Marion to Harriett Elliott, 21 February 1856, Elliot and Gonzales Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

[156] Joseph deRoulhac to Catharine Ruffin, 27 September 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original. Certainly both this and the preceding quotation were delivered in at least a somewhat jesting manner; yet they convey emotions not touched upon by male correspondents. See also Lucy M. Battle to William H. Battle, 6 May 1851, Battle Family Papers, SHC, Sarah Ann Tate to Cornelia Christian, 11 February 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; and Mary Harper Beall Letter, SHC.

support she had given her in childhood would follow her into marriage.[157] And by walking his future mother-in-law down the aisle, a man showed his wife-to-be that she would not enter marriage alone, but that her (female) family could still play a role in her life.

Although their practical purpose was to witness the ceremony and assist the couple with clothing and other incidentals, wedding attendants or "waiters" highlighted the couple's interconnectedness with others in the southern social system.[158] Bridal parties typically consisted of equal numbers of young men and women, symbolizing the intention of other couples to marry too someday, and suggesting that the bride and groom, by going through with their marriage, would conform to their peers' expectations.[159] Couples knew they were distributing social capital in naming their bridal party.[160] Cornelia Christian felt obligated (by her family? by the bonds of friendship?) to ask a friend to attend her. "[E]xpect I will have to ask her to officiate," she told her fiancé.[161] In return for solidifying their relationships with them, the bridal party reassured a couple that their union had the backing of their closest friends. Like brides' mothers, wedding attendants seem to have held more significance for brides than for grooms. Anna Johnson's reaction to Eliza Haywood's decision not to attend her in her wedding, although unusually fulsome (and possibly with a

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[157] For two such examples, see Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 505 and 648.

[158] *Habits of Good Society*, 423-6.

[159] See, for instance, Patty Cain to Catharine deRoulhac, 7 February 1841, Tod Robinson Caldwell Papers, SHC; and Susan Davis Nye Hutchison Journal, 29 June 1815, SHC. Despite the fact that Walter Lenoir could bring only two attendants to his wedding, Cornelia Christian filled out his side with her own friends and relations. Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 22 April 1856 and Walter Lenoir to Cornelia Christian, 28 May 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. See also Eliza Worthington to William Gaston, 31 July 1816, William Gaston Papers, SHC. For an explicit mention of attendants walking as heterosexual couples, see Henry DeSaussure Fraser to Jane Ladson, 2 April 1859, Henry DeSaussure Fraser Papers, SCL. See also *Habits of Good Society*, 423-4.

[160] One etiquette book called the naming of bridesmaids "a compliment." Ibid., 423.

[161] Cornelia Christian to Walter Lenoir, 13 March 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

lame attempt at humor), suggests the intensity of brides' feelings: "I see nothing but want of inclination to hinder you," she wrote. "[I]f you do not [come], remember I will never invite you to come and eat collards and Bacon with me, . . . I will never speak to you nor write to you or see you or do anything but abuse you for the future."[162] Women like Anna may have taken rejection harder than men because they had more riding on the request.[163] She wrote as if she needed support as they entered marriage. "You must come, for I cannot do without you."[164] Grooms exhibited no comparable neediness.

An etiquette book expected the bridal party "to complete the picture with effect;" like the bride, waiters embodied material wealth.[165] Guests understood that attendants enjoyed social and economic status similar to that of the bride and groom, as most were siblings, cousins, or close friends of the couple.[166] Economic power shone in their clothing, which diverged from the bride's and groom's only minutely in color or design.[167] Like the marrying couple, attendants often bought new outfits for weddings, at no small expense.[168] Waiters might wear streamers or other accessories to set themselves off from other guests and to invest their appearance with ritual strangeness or distinction. One observer reported, "[t]he bridmaids

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[162] Anna Johnson to Eliza Haywood, 3 May 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC.

[163] Compare Anna's response to Eliza with Walter Lenoir's remark to his brother that a prospective groomsman of his might not be able to attend his wedding, 21 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[164] Anna Johnson to Eliza Haywood, 3 May 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC.

[165] *Habits of Good Society*, 426.

[166] Ibid., 423.

[167] S.M. Wool bought a dress for Eliza Haywood despite not knowing whether Eliza was engaged, and suggested only a slight change depending on whether Eliza married in it. "[T]he dress will be very beautiful," she wrote, "over a white, lemon colored, or rose coloured silk. If worn *by a bride* white satin will of course be most suitable." S.M. Wool to Eliza Haywood, 20 May 1823, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC. Emphasis in original.

[168] Lucy Battle fretted to her husband about how much it would cost to dress their children as attendants. Lucy M. Battle to William H. Battle, 4 Nov 1851, Battle Family Papers, SHC.

[sic] wore splendid gowns. The gentlemen were attired in the latest fashion. Each carrying a tall silver candlestick with a lighted candle thereon."[169] Even the size of the bridal party bespoke class status, as weddings usually featured at least three or four waiters for both the bride and groom: fewer than that might betray a couple's lesser economic standing. Indeed, although an etiquette book deemed more than eight waiters "ridiculous," one wedding in 1856 featured sixteen groomsmen and sixteen bridesmaids—thirty-two in all![170]

Despite the material extravagance of these performances, and the cosmopolitan sophistication necessary to pull them off (fashionable southerners looked unwaveringly to "the latest European importation"), the white elite still cherished a notion of themselves as simple country folk. Walter Lenoir wrote his brother that "plain" dress would suffice for his wedding: "A plain white Marsailes [sic] vest will answer every purpose for you, . . . and you will not need a white cravat at all. There will be no necessity for extravagance in the rest of your preparation, as the company . . . will, I suppose, be mostly country people like ourselves."[171] Lenoir, a lawyer and a prominent member of a politically powerful family, was not entirely unused to pretension or artifice; nor were southern weddings at all adrift from the currents of fashion.[172] Identifying themselves with country simplicity, however, aligned elite southerners' interests and behavior with powerful and long-standing values. According to Lois Banner, cosmopolitan tastes in fashion began to veer away from

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[169] Blake Nicholson, "An Old Time Wedding" [typescript], Francis Marion Parker Papers, SHC. See also Walter Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 21 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; and Susan Davis Nye Hutchison Journal, 28 June 1815, SHC.

[170] *Habits of Good Society*, 423; John Berkley Grimball Diary, 26 February 1856, SHC. See Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 65.

[171] Walter Lenoir to Thomas J. Lenoir, 21 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[172] After the Civil War (and after the death of his wife Cornelia), Walter retired to the North Carolina mountains to live alone in a cabin. But in 1856 his status as simple country folk was doubtful.

republican simplicity in the 1830s.[173] For the southern gentry, whose women, especially, kept assiduously *au courant*, praising their own countrified lack of pretension tied them to more solid, reliable modes of society and economy than might be found in the Northeast: to land rather than markets, to tradition rather than modernity, and, implicitly, to the ancient, Biblically-sanctioned practice of slavery rather than new-fangled free labor.[174]

Weddings helped southerners define their values and broadcast them to their communities.[175] Their material splendor and emotional resonance smothered any transgressive impulses a bride or groom might have nurtured during the engagement period, along with any doubts as to their ability to go through with the ritual. All the elements of the bridal march, for instance, combined to impress upon a couple that failing to follow through when the moment arrived would publicly humiliate the authority figures who had so much invested in their marriage. Men women had learned to abhor this prospect, and nothing in the ceremony encouraged them to court it. Elite southerners, tying their self-worth to public display, used a tightly constructed, highly persuasive manner of bringing their young to the altar, minimizing the risk that wedding participants might act out anything less than benevolent male mastery and willing female submission. This risk was minimized further by many weddings' location: the bride's home. The percentage of weddings that happened at home rather than at church is uncertain, but southerners attached no social stigma to either location. It is possible that the ritual process may have made women's homes seem

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[173] *American Beauty*, 17-18.

[174] On the southern cultural aversion to modernity, see Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 253.

[175] Victor W. Turner argues that "[w]hen a social group . . . celebrates a particular even or occasion, such as a birth, harvest, or national independence, it also 'celebrates itself.' . . . [I]t attempts to manifest, in symbolic form, what it conceives to be its essential life, at once the distillation and typification of its corporate experience." "Introduction" in Turner, ed., *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 16.

temporarily strange and new; more likely, women found their options circumscribed by the familiar location. They had formed their expectations of adulthood (and, no doubt, marriage) in these rooms: the image of their parents, comfortably ensconced in the seat of comfort and power, would have guided them toward the easiest and most socially-sanctioned choice.

By the time they reached the front of the room, then, both bride and groom had passed through such a dazzling array of pressures and incentives that their acquiescence before the minister was nearly a foregone conclusion. The rites themselves provoked little comment. Rather, most reporters abridged discussions of the ceremony with a commonplace like "'they twain were made one'" or did not describe it at all.[176] One groomsman's summation that "[t]hey both behaved well, repeating their parts after Mr. D[ ]" aptly characterized the ease with which most couples did what was expected of them.[177] Slight deviations from the prescribed norms spurred nervous reactions. One observer told a friend, "Nothing remarkable happened during the wedding times, only Mr. Caldwell [the groom] said 'I will' rather too soon, and made all the girls laugh."[178]

If ceremonies were unremarkable, they did not lack meaning. Words and customs based in Biblical texts and used by Christians the world over resonated with the southern elite in particular ways, tending most of all to affirm white male mastery. Both the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches, from which most wealthy southerners hailed, enshrined female obedience in their rites. Episcopal vows diverged for men and women in only one respect, but the difference implied male dominance and female subordination. Episcopalian ministers

[176] Blake Nicholson, "An Old Time Wedding" [typescript], Francis Marion Parker Papers, SHC; see also Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 648-9.

[177] Henry DeSaussure Fraser to Jane Ladson, 2 April 1859, Henry DeSaussure Fraser Papers, SCL.

[178] Patty Cain to Catherine Roulhac, 7 February 1841, Tod Robinson Caldwell Papers, SHC.

asked men, "[w]ilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her?" but women, "[w]ilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour and keep him?"[179] The Presbyterian rites likewise found men vowing to "be unto her a loving and faithful husband," while wives went a step further, pledging to "be unto him a loving, faithful, and obedient wife."[180] The Anglican Book of Common Prayer (but not the Presbyterian Constitution) retained the explicit suggestion that a woman was her father's or guardian's to give away, stipulating that the minister ask, "Who giveth this Woman to be married to this Man?" and "receiv[e] the Woman at her father's or friend's hands."[181] Perhaps most participants ignored the hierarchies conveyed by their words and actions, accepting them as part of the ritual but not necessarily applying them to their own lives. Their writings, however, indicate an awareness and perhaps an internalization of weddings' gendered language. Catharine Ruffin used humor to distance herself from language portraying her as a gift: her godmother described her "'being given away' as you sportively say."[182] But George Badger seriously (although in a self-consciously literary mode) quoted the marriage rites in a letter to his daughter: "in giving you to [your fiancé] I shall bestow a treasure of the highest value, I am sure."[183]

Jean E. Friedman has argued that southerners believed that women's domesticity gave them greater access to Christ than men had: "evangelical tradition assumed that women

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[179] *The Book of Common Prayer [II], and Administration of the Sacraments; and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America; Together with the Psalms of David* (Philadelphia: Thomas Wardle, 1848), 316-7.

[180] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Ed. Barrington and Geo. D. Maxwell, [1850?]), 444.

[181] *Book of Common Prayer [II]*, 317. Note that it was the *minister*, not the groom, who received the woman, limiting the specifically patriarchal implications of the act; yet the absence of any similar giving rhetoric in regard to the groom clearly placed women in a less autonomous position than men.

[182] [ ] to Catharine Ruffin, 27 October 1836, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers, SHC.

[183] George Badger to Sally Badger, 17 June 1854, Badger Family Papers, SHC.

possessed a greater spiritual capacity than men who engaged in worldly pursuits. Women took their spiritual superiority seriously and used it to attempt to build an equal partnership."[184] Standing before a minister, women may have felt spiritual proficiency that their fiancés lacked. During the engagement period, some men did play the part of spiritual novices under the influence of beneficent women. Paul Cameron praised Anne Ruffin for knowing "but little of this worlds [sic] dissimulation," and being "a stranger to its corruption."[185] Walter Lenoir likewise noted that he had been praying more under his fiancée's care and expressed the hope that marriage would "be the means through God's mercy of preparing me for heaven."[186] But whatever women's spirituality might accomplish, it never upset the course of the ritual in which they transferred their obedience (in religious words, no less) from one patriarch to another.[187]

With the ceremony over and any doubts about the couple's intentions put to rest, reassured communities paraded their wealth and power at a reception. These events took a variety of forms: families whose children married in the morning might host a breakfast after the ceremony, while an evening wedding sometimes followed a brief gathering and preceded a gala lasting into the wee hours. Post-wedding activities expanded the circle of people who were exposed to a family's hospitality, involving as many as 300 partiers celebrating the

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[184] *Enclosed Garden*, 35. Civil ceremonies were an option, but apparently a relatively rare one. Women, perhaps enacting their deeper religiosity, may have lobbied to have their marriages solemnized by ministers as opposed to civil servants: Mary Polk and George Badger, at least, wrote back and forth debating who should perform their wedding, with Polk favoring a Presbyterian minister and Badger supporting a justice of the peace. Mary Polk to George E. Badger, 25 and 27 October 1826, Polk, Badger, and McGehee Family Papers, SHC.

[185] Paul Cameron to Anne Ruffin, 10 July 1832, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.

[186] Walter Lenoir to Cornelia Christian, 9 April 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[187] And indeed, increases in piety traveled along a two-way street: one bride assured her fiancé, "Through you I shall be continually improving in piety & virtue." Eliza Worthington to William Gaston, 9 Jul 1816, William Gaston Papers, SHC.

continued good fortunes of the bride, the groom, and their families.[188] Receptions prompted guests to reflect upon the impressive resources a southern patriarch had at his disposal. Guests marveled at the quality and quantity of food and decorations. "[S]uch a supper!" remembered one. "Everything good to eat and drink were there in the greatest profusion." John Berkley Grimball, too, praised the spread he encountered at another reception: "Supper in two rooms. One richly and tastefully ornamented for the Ladies and Young Men, and the other of a more substantial but very recherché kind for the older Men."[189] All this largesse shored up elite dominance, both by demonstrating the impressive resources patriarchs commanded and by indebting guests to their hosts in a multitude of small ways.[190] Bertram Wyatt-Brown has described hospitality in the antebellum South not merely as a way for the elite to cow their inferiors with displays of wealth, but as a competitive system of obligation.[191] Some hosts kept up the festivities for upwards of two days, and with every

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[188] Louise McCaa to Mary G. Davis, 18 January [18]42, Mary G. Davis Papers, SCL. Wealthy families sometimes went to impressive lengths to disseminate the celebration of a successful wedding. Mary Chesnut attended one wedding whose guests were split into two receptions on two different nights, though, she observed, "[t]he second-best did not like it." Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 696. Even people who were not invited to the actual receptions might come to visitations held at the bride's house the following afternoon; and the people who could not come to *those* might find pieces of wedding cake delivered to their homes. Mary Ferrand Henderson Diary, 25 January 1856, 18 January 1857, John Steele Henderson Papers, SHC; Susan Davis Nye Hutchison Journal, 29 June 1815, SHC; John Berkley Grimball Diary, 14 February 1834, SHC; and Lucy M. Battle to William H. Battle, 14 October 1851, Battle Family Papers, SHC.

[189] Blake Nicholson, "An Old Time Wedding" [typescript], Francis Marion Parker Papers, SHC; John Berkley Grimball Diary, 26 February 1856, SHC. See also Mary Ferrand Henderson Diary, 18 January 1857, John Steele Henderston Papers, SHC. Frances Trollope noted similarly segregated situations at parties in Cincinnati. *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, ed. Richard Mullen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 256-57.

[190] This applies particularly to wedding presents from the community, apparently rare until midcentury. See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 167. Mary Ferrand Henderson noted "many handsome bridal presents" including "silverware jewelry &c &c" at a wedding in 1856. Mary Ferrand Henderson Diary, 25 January 1856, John Steele Henderson Papers, SHC.

[191] *Southern Honor*, 332-9, quot. p. 337. An anecdote Mary Chesnut recorded about a man who attempted to elope with a South Carolina belle bears out Wyatt-Brown's theory. Rather than being confronted with anger or violence, the man and his friend "were received with a cold and stately and faultless politeness" by the woman's family and treated to an extensive round of "balls and parties," "which made them feel as if they had been sheep-stealing." Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 178. In this way the family both retained control

meal, every favor they bestowed, they accumulated a social debt.[192] In the context of a wider display of class unity, throwing a magnificent wedding reception enabled a host to distinguish himself from his peers as being particularly generous.

Receptions alert us to a crucial facet of elite weddings that guests noticed but rarely mentioned: their idealization of slavery. In 1815, Susan Davis Nye Hutchison attended one reception at a Judge Taylor's home in Raleigh, and wrote in her diary: "[a]t ten tea was carried around and all kinds of cake served. . . . At eleven syllabubs and sweetmeats were presented."[193] Her passive constructions beg the question, *who* served the food? Who carried tea around, who presented syllabubs and sweetmeats? Who made these delicacies in the first place? Accounts of southern weddings before the Civil War exhibited a striking visual block when it came to slaves. Hutchison, like almost every other white reporter I have found,[194] left no conclusive evidence that slaves walked among the wedding guests, but who else in Judge Taylor's—or anyone else's—household would have served his guests? Slaves were not invisible—they did important physical and symbolic work at white weddings—but they were not spoken of. We know from slave narratives that slaves attended some

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over the nuptial process (as opposed to suffering an embarrassing elopement) and shamed the perpetrators by displaying magnanimity in the face of the stranger's violation of social codes. More generally, Eugene D. Genovese has argued that material splendor helped the southern elite maintain its dominance: consumption of luxuries, he writes, "provided the ruling class with the façade necessary to control the middle and lower classes, . . . impress[ing] a whole community and keep[ing] before its humbler men the shining ideal of plantation magnificence. . . . In this manner, every dollar spent by the planters for elegant clothes, a college education for their children, or a lavish barbecue contributed to the political and social domination of their class." *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy & Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 18.

[192] Blake Nicholson, "An Old Time Wedding" [typescript], Francis Marion Parker Papers, SHC; William Polk to [his daughter] Mary Polk, 24 January 1824, Polk, Badger, and McGehee Family Papers, SHC.

[193] Susan Davis Nye Hutchison Journal, 29 June 1815, SHC.

[194] Mary Chesnut did describe one slave who fiddled "at all our parties," though she did not specifically mention weddings. Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 20-1. Her account seems to be corroborated by the slave narrative of Richard Mack. Rawick, ed., *American Slave* 3 (3): South Carolina, 151-2.

weddings: Georgian James Bolton, for instance, recalled, "When the young marsters and mistesses at the big houses got married they 'lowed the slaves to gadder on the porch and peep through the windows at the weddin'. Mos'en generally they 'ud give the young couple a slave or two to take with them to they new home."[195] Bolton offered a telling juxtaposition of black faces peering through parlor windows to witness a wedding and black bodies moving from plantation to plantation in dowries. At weddings, evocative and ritually important moments in their lives, the southern elite exhibited slaves—in their silence, in their un-remarked service, in their status as valuable property—as much as they exhibited themselves. Aside from making weddings run smoothly with their labor, slaves symbolized the power of their owner in particular and the elite class in general. That this embodiment of elite power was so common that whites did not think to mention it hardly undermines its significance.

At times, the display of patriarchal power trumped almost all other concerns. John Berkley Grimball's description of separate suppers for older men and young men and women suggests that after-parties sometimes focused not on the newly-married couple, but rather on their elders. The bride's father did not need bright clothing to shine at a wedding; the legion of slaves providing lavish hospitality on his orders also answered that point. Weddings were traditionally women's events, and a female culture did coalesce around them; yet at the wedding Grimball attended, the most exclusive table (and the "more substantial"—"but very recherché" dinner) was reserved for the older men.[196] The southern instinct for honoring patriarchs prevailed. Once the bride and groom had done their duty, the community could go

[195] Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 1, 101.

[196] Frances Trollope noted that this sex-segregated arrangement marked "many private balls," and did not deem it a regional habit. *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 257.

back to celebrating the brilliance and mastery of their patriarchs. Indeed, southerners were so accustomed to weddings' focus on men that the bride and groom's presence was not always required. One guest remarked upon the "fine times, agreeable company, good music, fine eating & drinking &c &c" at a wedding reception. He noted that illness had prevented the happy couple from appearing; yet the party went on without them.[197]

"Such, my dear Dorothy, is the account of my wedding which took place so many years ago, and with it ends the first period of my life."[198] When Nancy Bostick DeSaussure reflected upon her wedding nearly fifty years after the fact, she marked it as one of her life's defining moments, the beginning of her adulthood. On the other side of marriage, a new life awaited elite men and women, a life of difficult adjustments to each other's presence and their new roles (sexual as well as social) as husband and wife. Men, now possessing both the requisite property and social imprimatur, began to assert themselves as masters. Women set about the frequently exhausting work of housekeeping and became mistresses to slaves. They also worked to form or strengthen relationships with their husbands' friends and family members, some of whom might live in the house over which they now exercised at least nominal authority, and did their best to keep up with the ones they had left behind.[199]

In weddings, members of the southern elite cemented ties to their social system before entering adulthood. From the time a couple announced their engagement until the end of the wedding ceremony, brides and grooms found themselves immersed in imagery and rhetoric

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[197] Lucy M. Battle to William H. Battle, 8 May 1832, Battle Family Papers, SHC.

[198] N.B. DeSaussure, *Old Plantation Days: Being Recollections of Southern Life Before the Civil War: Electronic Edition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997), 60, available online at http://docsouth.unc.edu/desaussure/desaussure.html.

[199] See Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 191-95.

that connected their future happiness with their allegiance to the southern hierarchies of class, gender, and race. Weddings economic activities hardly diminished this connection, as men and women understood that the successful completion of the ritual offered them financial as well as social and cultural maturity. As members of a landholding (not to mention slaveholding) patriarchy, southerners were unusually invested in weddings' success, and so marshaled unusual resources to ensure that all went smoothly. Through formulized and persuasive rhetoric and activities during and leading up to weddings, communities gathered together to support and encourage couples; and if a bride or groom strayed away from the path toward marriage, friends and family mobilized quickly to set them right. Indeed, the emergence of a sustaining women's culture during this period shows just how forcefully wedding activities ushered participants toward acceptance of their society's hierarchies. The structure of the ritual was so tightly organized, and quashed transgressive impulses so efficiently, that most men and women probably entered and left the experience without ever seriously considering other options.

Southern weddings' emphasis on patriarchal mastery did not only enshrine white male authority at the heart of their relationships; it also advanced an implicit critique of northerners' more egalitarian marriages, and suggested that only slaveowning southerners retained the patriarchal strength necessary to uphold civilization. George Fitzhugh, the critic of free labor and apologist for slavery, excoriated northerners both for advocating women's rights and for "reduc[ing]" marriage to "a mere civil contract, entered into with no more thought, ceremony, or solemnity than the bargain for a horse."[200] Southerners, by contrast, "take care of the women of the South," and acted out their mastery via Episcopal rituals

[200] George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, VA.: A. Morris, 1854), 195.

which, Fitzhugh declared, "reminded the parties of the solemn and sacred engagements into which they were about to enter."[201] Fitzhugh bridled not only at northerners' lack of ritual but the lack of patriarchal dignity northerners' truncated rites conveyed, dispensing with a sacred marker of civilization like so much taffeta. Marriages of authority, mastery, and patriarchy had defined civilization from Virgil to Shakespeare, and Northerners were throwing them away, just as they seemed to toss aside white supremacy and male power for bourgeois egalitarianism and women's rights. Southerners, Fitzhugh declared, would hold to the old traditions. God "instituted slavery from the first," he wrote, "as he instituted marriage and parental authority."[202] The southern wedding honored those three covenants as one, and set its participants apart from the bourgeois North.

The honeymoon offered a final moment of comfort and community reassurance before the stresses of married life (some nearly universal, some particular to the antebellum South) set in. In effect, it extended all the good things that had helped convince a man and woman to go through with their wedding in the first place. Soon they would return to a more familiar world, but for now elite southerners tasted the finest fruits that wealth provided, touring Europe in style or spending long sojourns at resorts like the Virginia Springs.[203] In these locales, wealthy southerners interacted with people of their own, rarefied social strata and engaged in fine dining and leisure activities.[204] If couples did neither of these things, they still visited family and friends on both sides, enjoying their hospitality and receiving their

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[201] Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society*, 216 and 195.

[202] Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society*, 167.

[203] On life at the Virginia Springs, see Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

[204] See, for instance, Harriet [Gonzales] to Annie, 11 July 1856, Elliott and Gonzales Papers, SHC; Mary Harper Beall Letter, SHC.

congratulations. Some couples even brought friends and family, especially mothers of the bride, along with them for a leg or two of the trip.[205] And, perhaps more than in the North, families welcomed new members by bringing them into their homes and using familial forms of address. As she traveled from home to home on her honeymoon, the new Cornelia Lenoir told her sister how friendly her husbands' relations had been, writing, "This family . . . rec[eive]d us very kindly[,] call me 'cousin' already."[206] For Cornelia, the pleasurable activities surrounding her wedding assuaged her earlier fears of leaving her family and eased her transition into adulthood. She left no record of having thought twice about the structure of these activities, their deeper significance to a slaveholding society, or about the hierarchies they perpetuated. Everything was in its right place. "Tell William," she instructed her sister, "I'm quite in love with being married so far."

[205] Peg [Margaret Devereux] to Ellen Mordecai, 18 June 1842, Margaret Mordecai Devereux Papers, SHC; William S. Pettigrew to [ ], 23 April 1853, Pettigrew Family Papers, SHC; N.B. DeSaussure, *Old Plantation Days*, 62-3; and Mamie [Elliott] to Hattie Gonzales, 26 August 1856, Elliot and Gonzales Papers, SHC. Ellen K. Rothman describes northern bridal tours that, until the 1870s, were similar to those enjoyed by southerners. *Hands and Hearts*, 82-83, 175-76.

[206] Cornelia Lenoir to Sarah Ann Tate, 21 June 1856, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

Chapter Four

"They Were Commanded to Jump": Weddings of Southern Slaves

Tempie Herndon Durham relished the memory of her wedding day. At the time of her marriage—most likely the mid-to-late-1850s—she was enslaved by George and Betsy Herndon of Chatham County, North Carolina. Interviewed some eighty years later, she recalled how the plantation community came together to celebrate her union with her husband:

> We had a big weddin'. We was married on de front po'ch of de big house. Marse George killed a shoat an' Mis' Betsy had Georgianna, de cook, to bake a big weddin' cake all iced up white as snow wid a bride an' groom standin' in de middle holdin' an's. De table was set out in de yard under de trees, an' you ain't never seed de like of eats. All de niggers come to de feas' an' Marse George had a dram for everybody. Dat was some weddin'.[1]

Far afield from Durham's wedding ceremony was the blunt, parodistic rite in which another enslaved North Carolina couple participated. Willie McCullough testified that her mother's master had forced her to marry a man from a neighboring plantation in what can only be described as a travesty of a traditional wedding. "Her marster," McCullough reported, "went to a slave owner near by and got a six-foot nigger man, almost an entire stranger to her, and told her she must marry him. Her marster read a paper to them, told them they were man and wife and told this negro he could take her to a certain cabin and go to bed. This was done without getting her consent or even asking her about it."[2]

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[1] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 286-87.

[2] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 78.

Different again were the nuptials of Vicey Rogers and Bob Hunter of Wake County, North Carolina. Their daughter Rena Raines told an interviewer that their wedding featured a rite peculiarly associated with African-American slaves. "Mother and father married by jumpin' de broom. Dey put de broom down on de floor den dey helt one another's hands an den dey jumped de broom."[3] Unlike at Tempie Herndon Durham's wedding, Rogers and Hunter seem not to have had a reception or party: after the ceremony, Raines reported, "dey went ter de slave house an' went ter bed." Although Rogers' and Hunter's two masters allowed them to marry despite living on separate plantations, Raines did not specify whether either master oversaw or attended the proceedings. Nor did she say how many of their fellow slaves sanctioned the union with their presence.

Finally, Henrietta Fields, enslaved in South Carolina, said that weddings during her enslavement were notable only for their absence. On her plantation, marriage among slaves was prohibited. "You know dat in dem times," she reminder her interviewer, "de didn't let um marry."[4]

Although the laws of neither North nor South Carolina recognized slave marriages, enslaved African Americans participated throughout the antebellum period in social and cultural bonds that both they and historians have rightly called marriage.[5] As these stories show, they commemorated these unions with a wide range of rituals, whose enormous

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[3] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 195.

[4] Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Supplement, Series 1, Vol. 11: South Carolina, 125.

[5] Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 270. A good example of the confusion about the status of monogamous sexual relations among enslaved persons comes from the former slave John Smith, who declared that "Nobody married on marster's plantation," yet also spoke of a female slave who lived on the same plantation and who "had a nigger husband." North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 275, 270. Even where marriage was prohibited, many (probably most) slaves considered their monogamous sexual relations "marriage."

variety stemmed from the multitude of legal, social, and cultural circumstances that might surround them. Although this variety makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions about slave weddings, it points to the multitude of uses—for both slaves and masters—to which weddings could be put.

Historians have long discussed slave weddings as part of a wider consideration of how slaves related to their masters, but the brief scholarly forays into the topic generally discount the rituals' complex meanings for their participants.[6] Thomas E. Will has provided a more thoroughgoing examination of slave weddings, finding a "paternalistic mindset" in masters who orchestrated the rituals and noting that "slaves who married sought to assert their

[6] Early scholarly treatments of slave weddings allowed slaveholders' words to dominate the analyses, even as the best of the pioneering work refused to take slaveholders entirely at their word. By the 1970s, historians such as Eugene D. Genovese and Herbert G. Gutman had begun to give African Americans' words precedence, leading to a better sense of the power relations involved in these rituals. See Gutman, *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 269-91; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*: *The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 463-81; and John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 85-87. More recently, historians have added gender and other useful constructs to their analyses. The most important early works on slave women, by Deborah Gray White and Jacqueline Jones, unfortunately did not consider weddings in detail. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 98-99; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 33-35. Rebecca J. Fraser offers a useful consideration of the importance of who presided over slave weddings in *Courtship and Love Among the Enslaved in North Carolina* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), chap. 5. Marie Jenkins Schwartz considers weddings at some length but presents master-slave relations during weddings in too benign a light. Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), chap. 7. Brenda E. Stevenson, Wilma A. Dunaway, Emily West, Leslie A. Schwalm, and Larry E. Hudson Jr. all discuss the topic briefly, but they focus primarily on other issues. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 63-94; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 117-20; West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 19-42; Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 52-54; Hudson, *To Have and to Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 156-162. The bulk of the evidence for this article comes from the 1930s slave narratives transcribed by the Federal Writers' Project (under the aegis of the Works Progress Administration, (WPA)), supplemented by a number of other published sources. On the possibilities and pitfalls of using WPA slave narratives, see Norman R. Yetman, "Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery," *American Quarterly*, 36 (1984): 181-210. Donna J. Spindel, highly critical of using slave narratives as evidence, still grants that "individuals are likely to recall such 'life cycle markers' as marriage, childbirth, divorce, widowhood, or poor health." Spindel, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27 (1996): 247-61 (quotation on 254).

identity in terms drawn largely from the dominant culture."[7] Will determines that slaves—"not their masters—ultimately determined and guarded" their own marriage rituals. Yet even as he notes blacks' efforts to claim the rituals for themselves, Will underestimates the degree to which white intrusions affected African American rituals. A closer look at how African Americans described slave weddings—and particularly the ways in which they attributed certain rituals (most especially the practice of jumping the broom) to whites or blacks—leads to less encouraging conclusions. When black men and women could withdraw to their own spaces they did indeed craft rituals that established their essential dignity, countering slaveholder attempts to cast them in the light of immoral behavior and childish gender neutrality. When whites interfered, however, African Americans were forced to temper their self-expression and submit to degradations of both their culture and their claims to autonomy.

In recent years, historians have questioned the extent to which slaves, in spite of formidable efforts at resistance, achieved autonomy before freedom. William Dusinberre has criticized the "surprisingly uncritical analysis of the system which masters tried to impose upon their bondsmen and women" that has marked much of the historiography of slavery.[8] This is hardly the first study to consider masters' intricate attempts to dominate their slaves: Drew Gilpin Faust, for instance, has thoughtfully documented the South Carolinian slaveholder James Henry Hammond's "carefully designed plan of physical and psychological domination," asserting mastery via "symbolic and psychological control."[9] However, slave

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[7] Thomas E. Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds: Slave Marriage in the Antebellum South," *The Historian* 62, No. 1 (September 1999): 99-117 (quotations on 100). Although stemming from a dissertation chapter about slave weddings in North and South Carolina, this article expands its inquiry to all the southern states.

[8] Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 206.

[9] Faust, "Culture, Conflict, and Community: The Meaning of Power on an Ante-Bellum Plantation," *Journal of Social History* 14, No. 1 (1980): 83-97 (first quotation on 83, second quotation on 87).

weddings help show how white control over slaves' ritual lives allowed slaveholders to insert signifiers of white power into slaves' most intimate rites of passage, which reinforced black subservience in subtle but widely diffused ways.[10] African Americans' accounts of their weddings demonstrate that slaves contended not merely with daily physical, mental, and spiritual brutality but also with invasive, ritualized attempts to degrade them and normalize their subordination. Indeed, many blacks had to wait until freedom—or later—to realize autonomy in their ritual lives. Seeing the specific ways in which masters attempted to insinuate their dominance into slaves' lives can only increase our appreciation of how tremendously difficult a project resistance really was.

Slave weddings illuminate the conflicted uses of ritual in slavery and illustrate the enormous challenges African Americans faced in their struggle for autonomy. One scholar has suggested recently that slave rituals defied masters' attempts to render them mere productive bodies in a system of scientific management: "when [a slave] became more than a vehicle for profit and more than a discrete and secular object . . . , she attacked not only the condition of being a slave but also the systems of modernity and scientific rationalism that supported slavery."[11] This is true to an extent: in weddings slaves, by celebrating their familial and social roles and obligations, did sometimes challenge their status as dehumanized laborers. But weddings, and particularly the broomstick ritual, allow us to see the intricate and multifaceted techniques by which masters wedged themselves into their slaves' lives.

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[10] On ritual, see Charles Joyner, "History as Ritual: Rites of Power and Resistance on the Slave Plantation," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 5 (1986): 1-9, which mentions but does not explore weddings.

[11] Jason R. Young. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 14.

The rituals by which southern slaves married suggest that their race and class both separated them from and bound them to the values and identities that other Americans were using to define themselves by. In many senses, the weddings of enslaved African Americans operated outside the parameters defined by the Victorian white wedding: with a companionate marriage hardly guaranteed, and with almost no chance of achieving (or, in some cases, knowing about) middle-class status, slaves had few reasons to engage the national debate on the proper way to marry. On the other hand, their weddings were loaded with significance for their participants, helping to define each party's position in terms of the other. The wedding helped both masters and slaves to stake out their roles, slaves using ritual signifiers to demonstrate their humanity, their dignity, and their desire for autonomy, and masters using the rituals to assert their authority in a multitude of ways. Indeed, as hard as they worked to make their own weddings symbolize their own patriarchal mastery, white southerners endeavored equally hard in slave weddings to undermine blacks' claims to patriarchal man- (or woman-) hood.

Always outside the law and sometimes beyond the sanction of masters, the content of slave weddings depended above all on whether or not masters styled themselves benevolent.[12] Masters were of two minds about slave marriage, and their dueling impulses had important consequences for African American weddings. On the one hand, married slaves bore children who would grow into productive workers; just as important, marriage

[12] Other factors, such as location (i.e., lowland or city) and status (i.e., house slave or artisan) may have contributed to the variety of slave weddings, but the available evidence does not suggest a strong correlation between the type of ritual and either location or status. William Dusinberre notes that among slaves on one South Carolina rice plantation, "the wife of each especially privileged male was a field hand," meaning that even if "privileged" slaves received fancy weddings (and there is little indication that they did so either universally or exclusively), so too did their unprivileged partners. Local tradition, combined with a master's own sense of himself, was likely more important than status or location in determining what kind of wedding a slave had. *Them Dark Days*, 199.

implicated slaves in a web of interpersonal relationships, making them less likely to try to escape.[13] Some slaveholders therefore encouraged marriages and celebrated them with elaborate rites. On the other hand, marriage threatened to confer on African Americans the twin stamps of adulthood and morality. Slaves in monogamous relationships undermined notions of African American childishness and immorality—pervasive ideas that helped justify white supremacy and black enslavement.[14] Further, while slaveholders benefited from the birth of a slave child, they might later benefit from selling that child—or her mother. Masters who promoted marriage too zealously risked losing their credibility as paternalistic guardians when they broke those marriages up. (That some slaveholders were concerned about their reputations as moral masters is evidenced by William A. Smith's admonishment not to separate husbands from wives. In a manual for slaveholders, the Virginian taught that violations of slave morality threatened the peculiar institution itself: Masters who disrespected the marriage tie, he suggested, "must revise their system unless they would continue to outrage the moral sense of their fellow citizens.")[15] Slaveholders as a group never decided whether it was more to their advantage to sanction or prohibit slave marriage,

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[13] One former slave from Missouri likened his mistress' attempts to get him to marry to a "trap . . . to make me satisfied with my . . . home." William W. Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849), available at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/brownw/brown.html#BroNarr84, 87. See Janet Cornelius, "Slave Marriages in a Georgia Congregation," in *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies*, ed. Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 128-30, and Betty Wood, "Some Aspects of Female Resistance to Chattel Slavery in Low Country Georgia, 1763-1815," *The Historical Journal* 30, No. 3 (1987): 608.

[14] On slaves' alleged immorality, see William A. Smith, who suggested in the 1850s that African Americans "are peculiarly addicted to licentious indulgences, and particularly disposed to violate the marriage bed." *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, As Exhibited in the Institution of Domestic Slavery in the United States* (Nashville: Stevenson and Evans, 1856), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/smith/smith.html, 315.

[15] William A. Smith, *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery*, 316. See also [David Brown,] *The Planter: OR, Thirteen Years in the South. By a Northern Man* (Philadelphia: H. Hooker, 1853), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/brownd/dbrown.html, 47, and Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 40.

to praise or deride it. As a result, even masters who celebrated slave weddings disparaged them simultaneously, signaling at every turn the inconsequence of the rituals and the unworthiness of their participants.

Wedding Preparations

As African Americans prepared to marry, whites wedged signifiers of slavery into almost every part of the process. Although blacks hardly needed reminding of their enslavement, by intruding just as enslaved men and women set about defining their relationships to each other and to their community, whites attempted to mark blacks as inferior and subservient. Further, by inserting themselves into marriage preparations, whites staked their claim to authority over black hearths and homes, thereby undermining any claims black men might have made to patriarchal authority, or black women to Victorian femininity.

Slaveholders' economic and social motivations helped render the wedding preparations of African Americans quite different from their own. The engagements of elite southern whites lasted anywhere from a few weeks to a few years, during which time friends and family produced a hum of rhetoric and activity that assured the couple of the strength of elite social bonds and of their own involvement therein. This period played a crucial role in ensuring that a couple followed through on the extremely important financial transaction that their marriage would accomplish. Slave marriages, in contrast, had nowhere near the economic impact of those of their owners: dowries, if they existed at all, did not involve the major sums of money and property (not to mention slaves) that changed hands at elite weddings.[16] Slave

[16] John W. Blassingame does describe enslaved persons accumulating small property like utensils for use in a new cabin. *The Slave Community*, 85. Dylan Penningroth agrees, arguing: "Some slaves may have married with an eye toward gaining property, and property-owning slaves may have had more marriage proposals" (415). Penningroth, "Slavery, Freedom, and Social Claims to Property among African Americans in Liberty

weddings' lack of economic heft rendered short engagements a seemingly natural arrangement for African American slaves—and subtly devalued their marriage unions. Yet their relative economic insignificance may also have given women a more prominent role in their community's decision-making process.

John W. Blassingame argues that some slaves' engagements rivaled masters' in length: "In some cases," he writes, "the slaves were engaged for as much as a year before their union was consummated."[17] But most evidence points to much shorter engagements. The man who owned Willie McCullough's mother, for instance, apparently sought to marry her off the moment she turned sixteen, and completed the transaction as soon as he could find a suitable man to do the deed. Under less humiliating circumstances, Elizabeth Hobbs (the future Elizabeth Keckley), a young woman enslaved in Hillsborough, North Carolina, had little more than a week to prepare her dress as a bridesmaid in an 1837 ceremony.[18] Former slaves commonly recalled engagement periods that lasted a day or less. Henry Brown of Charleston reported that "W'en [an enslaved man] want to marry he jus' went to master an' say there's a gal he would like to have for wife. Master would say yes an' that night more chicken would be fry," and the marriage would be considered valid.[19] Washington Dozier, another South Carolinian, remembered: "Aw colored people hadder do to marry den wus to go to dey

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County, Georgia, 1850-1880," *Journal of American History* 84, No. 2 (1997): 415; see also pp. 421-4. Economic significance is, of course, a relative and multifaceted concept: marriages between slaves from different plantations, for instance, were economically significant enough to their masters to keep them from living together. See also Hudson, *To Have and to Hold*, 32. Still, comparatively little property held by enslaved persons changed hands when they married. Emily West suggests that this fact encouraged blacks to enter "modern," romantic marriages and abandon the African ideal of "economic partnership," as romantic love was simply more useful than economic accumulation to bondsmen and women. *Chains of Love*, 26.

[17] Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 85.

[18] John W. Blassingame, ed. *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 21.

[19] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 124.

Massa en ge' uh permit en consider demselves man en wife."[20]

Brief engagements did not reflect a lack of forethought or emotional commitment on the part of slave couples: many reported lengthy courtships before marrying. But for any number of reasons—most likely to keep whites from getting involved—most couples kept quiet about their relationships, and did not spread word of their engagements until they were ready to marry.[21] Whites, however, would have interpreted brief engagements as evidence of slave marriages' unimportance. The southern elite defined maturity not merely as coming of age, but as having enough economic resources at one's disposal to assure a potential spouse (and her father) that her bridegroom could one day bear the responsibilities of a patriarch. No slave could promise such wealth.[22] With little-to-no property at stake, slave marriages

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[20] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 1, 331. For short engagements, see Francis Frederick, *Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick, of Virginia* (Baltimore: J. W. Woods, 1869), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/frederick/frederick.html; *Aunt Sally*, 51; Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 536; and North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 188. Blassingame's contention that some enslaved persons remained engaged for several months may still be true. One who recorded having done so was Kentuckian Henry Bibb, who arranged a "conditional contract of matrimony" between himself and his fiancée, to "marry if our minds should not change within one year." *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written By Himself* (New York: Henry Bibb, 1849), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html, 37. For other long engagements, see Octavia V. Rogers Albert, *House of Bondage; or, Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves Original and Life-Like, as They Appeared in Their Old Plantation and City Slave Life; Together with Pen-Pictures of the Peculiar Institution, With Sights and Insights Into Their New Relations as Freedmen, Freemen, and Citizens* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1890), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/albert/albert.html, 107; Henry Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson, A Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston, 1848), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/watson/watson.html, p. 18; and *Aunt Sally: Or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-Life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams, of Detroit, Michigan* (Cincinnati: Western Tract and Book Company, 1858), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/sally/sally.html, p. 50.

[21] Discussions of marriage preparations almost in the WPA narratives uniformly began at or near the moment of a slaveholder's involvement. (The narratives' silence on this matter might have resulted from the questions the predominately white interviewers asked; for a discussion of the bias of interviewers, see Rawick's introduction in *The American Slave*, Supplement, Series 1, 15: North and South Carolina.)

[22] Regarding financial maturity as a prerequisite for white marriage, one southern woman linked her hopes for her son's marriage directly to his financial maturation: "I have been trying to persuade Berkl[e]y to get married," she wrote; "he has been set up with 5 thousand dollars, he had saved 1 thousand himself, and is so saving I suppose he will soon have 10 thousand." Margaret Ann (Meta) Morris Grimball Diary, 10 December 1860, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

appeared trifling—literally childish—to whites eager to see them as such.[23] Blacks were certainly familiar with the elaborate preparations that slaveholders made for their own rituals. They also possessed an intimate understanding of the economic considerations involved in elite weddings, as they themselves might factor in them as property. When their marriages were announced and then accomplished in a matter of hours, slaves could not help but recognize the condescension with which white society viewed them. This was of course doubly true of the weddings (such as they were) that masters forced upon slaves.

A hasty marriage also underscored slaves' status as property, and in particular enslaved men and women's role as breeders rather than people with concerns of their own. There were few compelling reasons for wealthy white couples to marry quickly. Although whites frequently enjoined against engagements of more than a year or two, a few months' wait gave families time to investigate the character of proposed partners and to accustom uneasy brides or grooms to the prospect of marriage. Further, as today, a long engagement allowed a couple to enter into social networks (as a *couple*) at parties, family introductions, and other occasions; as well as giving them time to plan a wedding and—if necessary—change their minds before embarking on married life. Conversely, slaveholders who wanted their slaves to marry had every reason to hope they would marry and bear children as quickly as possible. North Carolinian Clara Jones reported that her master expressed frustration with her and her beau for failing to marry: "I can't tell yo' much 'bout our courtin'," she said, "case hit went on fer years an' de Marster wanted us ter git married so's dat I'd have chilluns. When de

[23] On masters' attempts to infantilize slaves, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 327. Short wedding preparations were, of course, only one of the ways in which enslavement denigrated marriage. Most things that nineteenth-century Americans considered central to marriage—a lifelong emotional commitment, the opportunity to raise children, even a wife's subjugation to her husband—were undermined if not destroyed by slavery. A short engagement period did not necessarily compromise the dignity of a slave marriage by itself, but it symbolically reinforced slavery's denigration of marriage.

slaves on de McGee place got married de marster always said dat dere duty was ter have a houseful of chilluns fer him."[24] While Jones' master did not compel her to marry before she wished, many slaveholders endeavored—whether by encouragement or force—to have slaves consummate their engagements post-haste. Once a master learned of a relationship between his slaves, he typically moved quickly to ensure that the union would bear fruit.[25]

When African Americans attempted to inaugurate "abroad" marriages, or unions with slaves from other plantations, they faced difficulties. (Hoping to retain control over slaves' offspring, many slaveholders discouraged such unions.) After deciding to link their fates together, a couple had to obtain the consent of at least two different men with potentially conflicting economic motivations. Parker Pool, who lived near Garner, North Carolina, described the machinations that took place: "When a man, a slave, loved a 'oman on another plantation dey axed der master, sometimes de master would ax de other master."[26] Ideally, two slaveholders could come to terms allowing a husband and wife to live together on one plantation—an arrangement that generally necessitated one owner buying at least one slave

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[24] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 32.

[25] Jacqueline Jones argues that slaveholders' hurried attempts to have slaves marry reified white power by disrupting African Americans' own timetables: "Whites often intervened . . . to upset the sexual order that black men and women created for themselves, thereby obliterating otherwise viable courtship and marriage practices. . . . [W]hite men and women at times seized the opportunity to manipulated slave marital choices, for economic reasons." *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 34. This may account for some slaves' attempts to delay a master's awareness of their relationships. For counter examples, see C. Peter Ripley, "The Black Family in Transition: Louisiana, 1860-1865," *Journal of Southern History* 41, No. 3 (1975): 370, who describes a master who insisted on a "one-month waiting period before either marriage or divorce," and Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 463-4. It is also true that slaves did not have as much at stake in a bad match, risking only a couple's happiness, not the economic and social stability of an entire community. A number of factors influenced the speed with which slave marriages were completed. One mistress in Maryland, distressed by her husband's philandering, encouraged a slave woman to marry quickly in hopes that the master would respect the slave woman's vows and stop pursuing her. (The gambit was apparently unsuccessful, and the mistress later "died of a broken heart.") John Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave; Containing His History of 25 Years in Bondage, and His Providential Escape* (Worcester: John Thompson, 1856), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/thompson/thompson.html.

[26] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 188.

from the other.[27] Rebecca Jane Grant, from Hampton County, South Carolina, described the dislocations that occurred when the ideal failed to materialize: "My father belong to Marse Tom Willingham; but my mother belong to another white man. Marse Tom was always trying to buy us so we could all be together, but de men wouldn't sell us to him."[28]

In abroad marriages we find evidence for Blassingame's suggestion that slaves might become engaged or act and conceive of themselves as husband and wife long before their masters consented to the match. Slaves who did so asserted their autonomy, refusing to place the desires of whites above their own. Even though Charlie Davis' mother and father were not officially married, Davis recalled that his parents considered their abroad marriage legitimate, regardless of their masters' opinion. "My mammy and daddy got married after freedom," he said, "'cause they didn't git de time for a weddin' befo'. They called deirselves man and wife a long time befo' they was really married. . . . I reckon they was right, in de fust place, 'cause they never did want nobody else 'ept each other, nohow."[29] Insisting on the validity of their own relationships, Davis' parents and countless others combated masters' attempts to undermine their social and gender relations.

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[27] For discussions of the ideal, see South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 3, 2; and North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 152. The possibility that slaves already had children together might require slaveholders to purchase more than one slave if they were to allow families to remain together.

[28] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 2, 178. For an instance of a slaveholder discouraging an "abroad" union, see Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on their Economy* (London: Sampson Low, Son, & Co., 1856), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/olmsted/olmsted.html, p. 448. Wilma A. Dunaway, however, posits that "small and middling plantations" encouraged such marriages in order to bypass a smaller range of marriage choices. *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 61. For an example of a master requesting such an arrangement of another master, see Wm. Ozell to Col. [E.] Peete, Permission to Marry, 1825, Slave Collection, North Carolina State Archives; see also South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 3, 201. For more on familial dislocations, see North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 171. And for a thoughtful discusson of abroad marriages, see Hudson, *To Have and to Hold*, 141-54.

[29] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 1, 252. See Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 12-13.

Not all masters prohibited marriage outright; some worked more insidiously. Many a slaveholder withheld his or her consent to a union until after quizzing slaves on proper marital behavior. A master and mistress in Kentucky interrogated a slave man as to how he could be sure that he loved his bride, and then told him: "we don't whip Fanny, Jerry, and you must not whip her."[30] The owner of Lunsford Lane's fiancée in Raleigh assented to their match only if Lane promised to "behave [him]self . . . and make her behave herself."[31] And a Georgia master asked a man: "Will you act the dog and beat my good darky when you get mad with her?"[32] Some whites wished to imbue slave households with values now considered unobjectionable: few today would quarrel with admonitions against domestic violence. But there was more at work here than concern for women's welfare. In these "catechisms," as one observer called them, slaveholders depicted themselves as the arbiters of behavior and morality in African American homes. Patriarchal ideology held that women fell under the jurisdiction of their husbands, who were duty-bound to protect and provide for them. No antebellum southerner could have missed the implications of masters regulating slaves' treatment of women. In insisting that men defer to white rule, masters attempted to minimize marriage's capacity to confer adulthood on slaves. Whether married or no, black men would not be patriarchs; instead, they would defer to whites in all important matters, including the disposition of their women. Moreover, even though slave marriages often saw

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[30] Frederick, *Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick*, 28.

[31] Lunsford Lane, *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, N.C.* (Boston: J.G. Torrey, 1842), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/lanelunsford/lane.html#lane10, 10.

[32] Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth* (Atlanta: Index Printing Company, 1919), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/felton/felton.html, 56. This slaveholder desired a response in the negative. See also Nina Hill Robinson, *Aunt Dice: The Story of a Faithful Slave* (Nashville: M.E. Church, South, 1897), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/robinsonn/robinson.html, 25; and William W. Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 85-86.

a couple moving into a new cabin together, slaveholders asserted via these catechisms that this physical change would not affect the symbolic control of a "household;" plantations encompassed only one household, controlled by the master.[33] One slaveholder made this point clear, telling a slave man: "It's my house you will live in with your wife but you are welcome if you behave yourself."[34]

In the engagement period, then, whites denigrated black men's claims to patriarchal authority. Intriguing, then, is the suggestion that enslaved African Americans did not structure their own communities around the white patriarchal model. Although historians have agreed that enslaved men tended to take the initiative in courtship, the testimony of former slaves suggests that some African American women took a more active role than their elite white counterparts did.[35] Discussing the difficulties involved in securing an abroad marriage, Andy Marion, a former slave from near Winnsboro, South Carolina, catalogued the people whose consent was necessary to complete a marriage. "I'm here to tell you," he declared,

> dat a nigger had a hell of a time gittin' a wife durin' slavery. If you didn't see one on de place to suit you and chances was you didn't suit them, why what could you do? Couldn't spring up, grab a mule and ride to de next plantation widout a written pass. S'pose you gits your marster's consent to go? Look here, de gal's marster got to consent, de gal got

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[33] On households in the antebellum South, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who argues, "Slaves can more appropriately be regarded as members of the household of their master—defined as the plantation or farm—than as primarily members of distinct slave households." *Within the Plantation Household*, 95.

[34] Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, 56. These catechisms prefigured masters' "pre-empt[ion of] parental authority" later in marriage. Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 75. On this "benevolent" paternalism, see West, *Chains of Love*, 27. It does not strike me as coincidental that all the examples I have found featured slaveholders questioning *men*, not women, although the point would likely remain if women received such instructions as well.

[35] Historians who have suggested that men initiated more courtships than women include Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 33; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*; Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 85; and Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 227. Emily West traces this male initiative to West African roots, while acknowledging that southern white men also took the lead in courtship. *Chains of Love*, 22.

> to consent, de gal's daddy got to consent, de gal's mammy got to consent. It was a hell of a way![36]

It is possible that, in listing a litany of obstacles, Marion exaggerated them. But taken in context, his words represent an important, and not a unique, departure from southern white mores. Southerners black and white acknowledged that in the vast majority of cases a man needed the permission of both the object of his affection and her father to get married. Marion's contention that marriage required the consent of a woman's mother, however, would not have resonated with both races. An elite white engagement in the antebellum South was at base an agreement between two patriarchs—the groom and the bride's father. Even the consent of a widowed mother paled in importance next to that of a brother or uncle of the bride, and no self-respecting white bridegroom would admit being to beholden to the mother of his betrothed by anything more than the dictates of honor and manners.[37] Perhaps it was not so among some African Americans. A less direct source than Marion—a turn-of-the-century paean to slave docility—also described a North Carolinian slave woman having a decisive voice in marriages of African Americans: in this case, "The turbaned African Mrs. Grundy would pass both parties to the marriage in sharp review and settle whether Ben was 'de nigger for dat gal, Fanny, to marry.'"[38] Blacks may have granted women more power over marriage decisions because of their weddings' relative lack of economic significance (as a bad match would do less to imperil male fortunes); or other factors may have played a part.

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[36] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 3, 167-68.

[37] Ellen K. Rothman suggests that in the mid-nineteenth-century North, a woman being asked for her daughter's consent was "unusual." *Hands and Hearts*, 217. See Lucy M. Battle to William H. Battle, 6 May 1851, Battle Family Papers, SHC, in which the letter's author expressed regret that her daughter had considered getting engaged before consulting her father.

[38] James Battle Avirett, *The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin Before the War* (New York: F. Tennyson Neely Co., 1901), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/avirett/avirett.html, 124.

But the idea that a mother's, not just a father's, consent was a prerequisite for getting married suggests, ever so tenuously, that enslaved African Americans accorded women a significant, even decisive, voice in their communities.[39]

Weddings as Contests for Authority

In December of the Civil War's first year, a wedding took place that to some eyes would have been indistinguishable from a wedding of white slaveholders. The ceremony was performed in a church near South Carolina's Camden plantation by a white minister who doubtless had celebrated many an elite white union. The guests appeared "respectable" and greeted the occasion with almost "unbroken solemnity," and the bridesmaids—of whom there were more than one, par for the course for an elite wedding—arrayed themselves in "white swiss muslin."[40]

Mary Chesnut's eyes, however, were more discriminating. As she committed her memory of the ceremony to her diary, Chesnut spared even paternalistic praise for the similarities that this wedding between two of her family's slaves bore to the rites enacted by her own class. Her sentiments toward African Americans mingled disgust, condescension and fear, and these emotions shone forth in her full account:

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[39] Stevenson suggests that some slave mothers might have had decisive power over their children's—particularly their daughter's—marriage choices. *Life in Black and White*, 227. Jacqueline Jones likewise alludes to the possibility that both parents had to consent to their daughter's marriage in slavery. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 33. Other sources that describe the consent of both parents, not merely the father, as being necessary for a marriage, include H.C. Bruce, *The New Man. Twenty-Nine Years a Slave. Twenty-Nine years a Free Man: Recollections of H.C. Bruce* (York, Pa.: P. Anstadt & Sons, 1895, available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/bruce/bruce.html, 74; and I.E. Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days, OR A Story Based on Facts* (Columbia, S.C.: The State Co., 1911), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/lowery/lowery.html, 59. See also Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds." For an illustration of the relative importance of fathers compared to mothers in white marriage negations, see *The American Gentleman's Every Day hand-Book of Modern Letter Writing*, 35.

[40] Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 259-60.

> Oh! the bridal party—all as black as the ace of spades. The bride and her bridesmaids in white swiss muslin, the gayest of sashes—and bonnets too wonderful to be described. They had on red blanket shawls, which they removed as they entered the aisle and seemed loath to put on when the time came to go out—so proud were they of their finery. But it grew colder and colder—every window and door wide open, sharp December wind.
>
> Gibbes Carter arose amidst the ceremony and threw a red shawl over the head of the congregation, to a shivering bridesmaid. The shawl fell short and wrapped itself about the head of a sable dame comfortably asleep. She waked with a snort, struggled to get it off her head, with queer little cries. "Lord ha' mussy! What dish er here now." There was for a moment a decided tendency to snigger—but they were too well-bred to misbehave in church, and soon it was unbroken solemnity. I know that I shook with silent laughter long after every dusky face was long and respectable.
>
> The bride's gloves were white, and the bridegroom's shirt bosom was a snowy expanse fearfully like Johnny's Paris garments, which he says disappear by the dozen. This one had neat little frills and a mock diamond of great size in the middle. Miss Sally Chesnut said, "Those frills marked it Camden or homemade."[41]

Chesnut's description is worth quoting at length because it offers insight into the complex ways antebellum southerners viewed—and used—slave weddings. For her part, Chesnut enacted one version of the condescension Kenneth M. Stampp ascribed so eloquently to whites at slave weddings: "The white family," he wrote in 1959, "found it a pure delight to watch a bride and groom move awkwardly through the wedding ceremony, to hear a solemn preacher mispronounce and misuse polysyllabic words, or to witness the incredible maneuvers and gyrations of a 'shakedown' [a dance]."[42] Certainly Chesnut's painstaking description of the sleeping slave woman represents the finest currency in arch disdain. In literary terms, the shawl thrown by Chesnut's friend onto the woman's head could well represent an artifact of civilization settling briefly but awkwardly upon the head of a savage. That the woman responded to the disturbance with animalistic noises and a semiconscious outburst of dialect made clear just how far she and her enslaved sisters remained from the

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[41] Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 259-60.

[42] Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 329.

diarist's own role as urbane sophisticate. Further, Chesnut's repeated emphasis on the color of the slaves' skin—describing "a sable dame," bridesmaids "all black as the ace of spades," and the "dusky face[s]" in the crowd—and her sister-in-law Sally Chesnut's suggestion that the slaves had stolen their masters' clothing underscored the disjuncture between the ritual in its ideal (that is, elite white) form and its African-American perversion. Mary Chesnut aimed particularly piercing barbs toward the women in the party: as an incisive critic of gender conventions, Chesnut knew just how to cut pretenders to the Southern Lady's mastery of aesthetic expression. In this context, Chesnut rendered the idea that a slave wedding might be solemn and "respectable" every bit as laughable as the clownish woman's waking snort.[43]

Yet historians ought not simply ignore Chesnut's tone and praise the solemnity and respectability she reported. Perhaps Eugene D. Genovese protests too much when he calls his readers' attention to "the dignity and seriousness" of enslaved wedding participants, the attempts of slaves to make their ceremonies "dignified" in spite of circumstances, and their "solemn, elaborate, and dignified" rites—all in the space of three pages.[44] While no one should understate the dignity African Americans exhibited throughout their enslavement, emphasizing that trait as described by the slaveholding class might actually diminish our appreciation of African Americans' unique "cultural aesthetics," as Elsa Barkley Brown uses

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[43] Chesnut's troubled attitudes toward African American women are well known, but they seem to me unique more in their cutting eloquence than in the emotions they reveal. Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, li-liii. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has observed that the families of elite southerners tried to instill in young ladies what she calls an "instinctive" understanding of the uses and appropriate limits of aesthetic display: "[f]ashion articulated class position. . . . A lady . . . had to manifest in her person a restrained elegance that simultaneously betokened internalized self-control and solid male protection." *Within the Plantation Household*, 212-13. Wealthy southerners were sophisticated judges of who could and could not hope to compete with their women's highly developed discourse of appearance. See also Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 307, 316. Antebellum etiquette books documented the "sable dame's" many faux pas—only some of which could be eradicated by changes of behavior—more explicitly than Chesnut's arched eyebrow did. In particular, see the sections on "Peculiarities in Female Carriage and Demeanour," "The Management of the Person in Dancing," and "Management of the Voice; Consistency of Deportment and Dress" in *Etiquette for Ladies*.

[44] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 479-81.

the term. The historian risks judging enslaved African Americans by the very standards by which slave-owning southerners so cunningly denigrated them. It is perfectly possible that slaves could retain their dignity—in the sense of possessing "inherent nobility and worth"—without being constrained by the cultural values that insisted upon their exhibiting all the time "stateliness and formality in manner and appearance"—qualities elite white southerners consistently judged blacks incapable of possessing and whose meanings in this context still bear some of the weight of white southerners' glib, self-serving rhetoric.[45] Many activities in slave weddings would not have struck whites as particularly dignified, and, indeed, whites' activities throughout their slaves' nuptial celebrations, particularly in orchestrating the "broomstick ritual," were meant to render African Americans faintly ridiculous. Yet in their weddings, blacks continually endeavored to express positive cultural characteristics and values distinct from their owners'. The ways in which they did and did not succeed at these goals tell us much about the institution of slavery in the nineteenth-century south.

Like Chesnut, slaveholders who gave their slaves weddings positioned themselves as benevolent guardians concerned about black families' moral upkeep; yet Chesnut's barely suppressed scorn reveals the cultural power the ruling class kept in reserve behind a facade of solicitude. For their part, weddings forced slaves to step gingerly through an interpretive thicket, celebrating an important rite of passage for themselves while refraining from allowing the ritual to upset white supremacy in ways that might endanger them.

By no means were all the weddings of enslaved African-Americans as elaborate or comfortable as that of the Camden slaves. As ever, variety defined slave weddings. (Indeed,

[45] Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," in *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine et al (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995), 40; and *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition.

a master's ability to impose variable strictures on his slaves' rituals constituted one prop to his power.) Many slaveholders placed themselves at the center of marriage proceedings, whether by insisting that the wedding be performed in a certain way or at a certain time, or by conducting ceremonies themselves. In doing so, they endeavored to undercut slaves' ability to order their own lives as they wished. But most blacks found ways to make weddings define and celebrate their own social and cultural institutions—in however limited a fashion. Included in this project was defining themselves in gendered terms, while still allowing for female self-expression and autonomy to an extent that simply did not exist in the marriages of their white overlords.

Innumerable slaves were allowed no wedding at all, not even a totemistic reading of a scrap of paper such as in the wedding of Willie McCullough's parents.[46] Of course, many blacks who could not celebrate weddings still lived together as married couples. But they chafed at the absence of ritual. Although Henry Brown reported that slave marriages were celebrated with a dinner "at master' expense," he still noted the lack of ceremony: "The couple went home after the supper, without any readin' of matrimony, man and wife."[47] Lewis Evans defined his parents' relationship, unmarried on separate plantations, as unofficial and deviant: "My pappy," he said, "wasn't married reg'lar to my mammy."[48] And

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[46] Slave narratives describing the outright prohibition of weddings include I.E. Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days*, 16; Bethany Veney, *The Narrative of Bethany Veney, A Slave Woman* (Worcester, Massachusetts, 1889), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/veney/veney.html, p. 18; and John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/jackson/jackson.html, p. 21. Wilma A. Dunaway finds that "One of every eight" slave marriages in Appalachia featured "no ceremony at all." *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 117.

[47] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 1, 124.

[48] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 2, 33.

Friday Jones dismissed his non-wedding with an animal metaphor: "we went together, like a goose and gander—no wedding."[49]

Still, many masters sanctioned weddings for their slaves. The most elaborate weddings took place under the direct supervision of whites. To see these rituals as evidence of a master's lenience or kindness—or, as white contemporaries did, of slavery's benevolence—is to underestimate slavery's effect on its participants. Slaveholding families used such occasions, on which "marster's dinin' room" might be "decorated wid flowers" and "marster's dinin' table [be] set," to prove their paternalistic beneficence.[50] One Virginia slave recalled that his master "had always promised that he would give me a nice wedding,

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[49] Friday Jones, *Days of Bondage. Autobiography of Friday Jones. Being a Brief Narrative of his Trials and Tribulations in Slavery* (Washington, D.C.: Commercial Pub. Co., 1883), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fjones/jones.html, p. 7. The failure of slave weddings (or the lack thereof) to satisfy blacks can be seen in the story of William and Ellen Craft, who, desiring "a more legal and civilized mode of conforming to the marriage rite than had been permitted them in slavery," married soon after escaping to Massachusetts. As a wedding gift, William received "a revolver and a dirk-knife" to use "manfully in defense of his wife and himself, if ever an attempt should be made . . . to re-enslave them." James Williams, *Life and Adventures of James Williams, a Fugitive Slave with a Full Description of the Underground Railroad* (San Francisco: Women's Union Print, 1873), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/williams/williams.html, p. 90. For slaves' umbrage at being denied weddings, see Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 225.

[50] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 1, 326; North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 139-40. A number of sources testified that only favorite slaves, often those who worked in the big house or in proximity with the master's family, received big weddings. But I would caution against emphasizing this factor without more evidence than I have been able to uncover. William Dusinberre notes that among slaves on a South Carolina rice plantation, "the wife of each especially privileged male was a field hand," meaning that even if "privileged" slaves received fancy weddings (and there is little indication that they did so either universally or exclusively), so too did their unprivileged partners. Local tradition, combined with a master's own sense of himself, was likely more important than a slave's status in determining what kind of wedding took place. *Them Dark Days*), 199. See also R.Q. Mallard, *Plantation Life Before Emancipation* (Richmond, VA: Whittet and Shepperson, 1892), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/mallard/mallard.html, p. 49-50; Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days*, 59; Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 449; Susan Dabney Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter* (Baltimore: Cushings and Bailey, 1887), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/smedes/smedes.html, p. 78; Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 33; and *Aunt Sally*, 52. One master allowed two slaves a honeymoon of "two or three weeks to ourselves, which we spent in visiting and other amusements." Needless to say, such treatment was exceedingly rare. Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 33.

and he kept his word."[51] The master's motive? "He was very proud, and liked praise." Kind treatment also stemmed from a desire to have slaves propagate. Julius Nelson's master gave receptions to reward and encourage slaves intending to breed: "de marster usually give us a big supper," he remembered, "case he knowed dat he was gwine ter soon habe more slaves from de union."[52] Further, some slaveholders used weddings to insinuate themselves into their slaves' community structures, as did the master who took the first dance with the bride (thus usurping the place of her father): "Dey gived a big dance atter de supper dey had," said the bride's daughter, "an' Master Charlie dance de fust set wid my mammy."[53] Racial hierarchies did not dissipate with these rituals, nor did accustomed habits lie fallow: at least one slaveholder in Fayetteville, North Carolina, could not quite muster the kindness to exempt a slave bride from service: "Aunt Sally" baked her own wedding cake and "was made to sit down and pour coffee for the company" at her own wedding.[54]

Celebratory (not forced or truncated) weddings sponsored by masters typically found enslaved persons sporting fine clothes, often cast-offs from the slaveholding family. George Fleming, from Laurens County, South Carolina, recalled, "Dem dat got married back den sho

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[51] Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom; The Institution of Slavery as Seen on the Plantation and in the Home of the Planter; Autobiography of Louis Hughes* (Milwaukee: South Side Printing Company, 1897), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/hughes/hughes.html, p. 94.

[52] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 146.

[53] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 84.

[54] *Aunt Sally*, 53. It is also true that few slaves were allowed to sit in the presence of (or perhaps even at the same or adjoining tables with) their masters. Sally's wedding thus offered her a unique moment of acceptance into the white community. Yet did not disrupt her life-long pattern of service to that community; moreover, it gave whites yet another chance to smile condescendingly at the violations of etiquette that were sure to follow. Cf. Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of My Girlhood*, which describes children of the slaveholding family serving the wedding dinner (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/ripley/ripley.html, 256-57. But see Avirett, *The Old Plantation*, in which slaves waited to eat until "'de ole marster and all de white folkses' had been generously served" (126); as well as Bruce, *The New Man*, 74. See also See Charles Joyner, "History as Ritual, 2-3.

did have it in high fashion. Man would have a good striped suit, and de woman have silk and satin clothes."[55] Anna Wright noted that at slave weddings "De niggers dressed lak a white folks weddin'."[56] And another former slave reported, "Brides use to wear some of de finest dress an' if dey could afford it, have de best kind of furniture. Your master nor your missus objected to good t'ings."[57] Masters who allowed slaves to sport such clothes during their weddings likely evinced some version of Mary Chesnut's condescension, smiling at what she saw as slaves' quaint attempts to look the part of the southern gentry.[58] One need not think that African Americans internalized their masters' condescension, however; they likely took what fine things they could get and ignored the messages behind the gifts.[59] Indeed, the fact that more than one bride wore red, a color with special sexual connotations and folk ties to parts of Africa (as well as to a popular narrative of whites tricking blacks into enslavement), suggests that African Americans attempted to use wedding rituals to assert autonomy, particularly when that assertion would not be understood by a white audience.[60]

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[55] Rawick, *The American Slave* Supplement, Series 1, Vol. 11: South Carolina, 136.

[56] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 422.

[57] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 2, 234. For other examples of slaves wearing similar clothing, see Frederick, *Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick*, 29; Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days*, 60; *Aunt Sally*, 51; and Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 256-257.

[58] See Thomas Nelson Page, *Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/pagesocial/page.html, p. 101-102; and *Aunt Sally*, 52.

[59] In "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past and Present*, No. 148 (1995): 181, Shane White and Graham White suggest that slaves wore clothes similar to their masters in order to subject their master to "gentle . . . ridicule" as well as to wear styles that they themselves found appealing (163).

[60] For examples of slaves sporting red at weddings, see North Carolina Narratives, Vol. XI, Pt. 2, p. 172; and Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 259. See Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 28; Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds," 112-13; Fraser, *Courtship and Love Among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 91-95; and, on "red cloth tales," Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The*

It also suggests that black women, rather than heed slaveholders' dictum that bright colors betokened an unladylike lack of modesty, dressed to please themselves and their community, not slaveholders, and thereby asserted their autonomy on the field of gender behavior.

The majority of slave weddings were located in the slave quarters. These ceremonies sometimes, though not always, took place beyond the purview (or the consent) of whites. African Americans considered relationships formed without their masters' consent or knowledge perfectly legitimate, although they would have preferred wider recognition for their unions. Weddings in the slave quarters may have lacked the visual splendor and sumptuous food of ceremonies at the big house. But blacks gladly exchanged these for the more adventurous entertainment and relative freedom of expression that flowered in whites' absence. Nellie Boyd of Union County, South Carolina, described the dancing that took place at weddings: "Niggers had lots of dancing and frolics," she wrote. "Dey danced de 'flat-foot'. Dat was when a nigger would slam his foot flat down on de floor. De wooden bottom shoes sho would make a loud noise. At weddings everybody would eat and frolic."[61] Another South Carolina wedding featured "rhythmic stick beating, from morning until night."[62] At a remove from slaveholder supervision, African Americans engaged in loud, boisterous behavior without fearing white derision. Women, in particular, could act in "unladylike" ways, escaping the pressure to conform to gender roles to which the color of their skin left them unable to measure up—regardless of their desire to do so.

Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 199-209 (quotation on 208).

[61] Rawick, *American Slave* Supplement, Series 1, Vol. 11: South Carolina, 63.

[62] See Arthur P. Ford and Marion Johnstone Ford, *Life in the Confederate Army: Being Personal Experiences of a Private Soldier in the Confederate Army; And Some Experiences and Sketches of Southern Life* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1905), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/ford/ford.html, p. 85-86. See also Rawick, *American Slave* Supplement, Series 1, Vol. 11: South Carolina, 57.

Some weddings seemingly negotiated the prerogatives and desires of both whites and blacks. Margaret Hughes, who had lived as a slave near Columbia, recalled that her plantation divided its spaces and resources between the big house and the slave quarters: "We had a big time when any of de slaves got married. De massa and de misses let them get married in de big house, and then we had a big dance at one of de slave house. De white folks furnish all kinds of good things to eat, and de colored peoples furnish de music for de dance"[63] The division of space seems to have assured whites of control over what they would have viewed as the important, sacred part of the wedding. But the frolicking afterward enabled African Americans to draw from a cultural repertoire that encouraged and validated rather than constricted and judged them. Whites could consider themselves sufficiently benevolent, while the black community took ownership of at least part of the ritual.[64]

Some marriage rites evinced confusion about whether black or white traditions ought to predominate. Masters varied from plantation to plantation in whom they allowed to perform slave weddings. Sometimes white preachers did so, as in the wedding Mary Chesnut described. Richard C. Moring recalled that on Anderson Clemons' North Carolina farm, "De preacher married 'em up good an' tight jist lak he done de white folks."[65] Other weddings straddled white and black religious institutions: one woman told an interviewer, "I was married in the town of Newberry at the white folk's Methodist church, by a colored preacher named Rev. Geo. DeWalt."[66] Eugene D. Genovese notes that "many slaves clearly

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[63] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 2, 329.

[64] For a similar formulation about courtship and marriage more generally, see West, *Chains of Love*, 27.

[65] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 140.

[66] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 1, 63.

preferred" black preachers as celebrants; otherwise, masters conducted the ceremonies themselves.[67] A master who took the place of a minister made his authority the focal point of the ritual, expressing slaves' subordination to both God and master.[68] Masters and white ministers also asserted white authority in the phrase they brutally excised from most weddings. "One t'ing," Susan Hamilton bitterly recalled, "no minister nebber say in readin' de matrimony 'let no man put asounder' 'cause a couple would be married tonight an' tomorrow one would be taken away en be sold."[69] There is evidence that prohibitions against this phrase were not ironclad, but the phrase, whether uttered or omitted, highlighted the

[67] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 476. The question of who performed slave marriages is a contentious one. For white preachers, see South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 3, 202; and Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 94. At least one Kentuckian slave claimed to have been married by a justice of the peace, although the legal status of his union was no firmer than that of other slave marriages. Israel Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free: Or, Yearnings for Freedom, from My Green Brier House. being the Story of My Life in Bondage, and My Life in Freedom* (Philadelphia: Israel Campbell, 1861), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/campbell/campbell.html, p. 58. Wilma A. Dunaway reports that "about one-tenth" of masters in Appalachia allowed religious weddings. Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 118. Marie Jenkins Schwartz suggests that more and more slave weddings featured religious (and extravagant) ceremonies as the antebellum period progressed, a result of slaveholders' desire to improve slavery's image. *Born in Bondage*, 200-202. See also Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 224, and Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds," 111-12. If African American ministers received approval from the slave community, they won at least as much condescension from whites. Black ministers misreading the rites, or reading from an upside-down book, appeared in several stories about African American weddings, to predictably "comic" effect. See Frederick, *Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick*, 29; Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth*, 56-57; and (after emancipation) Frances Butler Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation Since the War* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1883), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/leigh/leigh.html, 161-63 and 248. A former slave from Tennessee suggested that African Americans desired legality above all: "The slaves," he wrote, "have no particular rules, except in regard to marriage: they try to make it as near lawful as they can." Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., 1856), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/drew.html, p. 187.

[68] One Louisiana master allowed a slave minister to perform a wedding, but intervened to assert his own authority: when the minister finished administering the vows, the master "advanced and made some remarks, to the effect that this marriage was a solemn tie, and there must be no shirking of its duties; they must behave and be faithful to each other; he would have no foolishness." Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 258.

[69] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 2, 234.

ironies of celebrating families within slavery.[70] Indeed, one black minister commented on slave marriages' precariousness when he himself modified the phrase to read, "Dem what de Lord hab j'ined together is married."[71] The white man who recorded this incident seems to have considered this merely one of many malapropisms in the ceremony; but the blacks in attendance undoubtedly understood its ironic undertones. With poignant hope, a groom at a wedding in Virginia drank to the prospect that he and his wife "nebber will be parted from each other, or our children."[72]

The most unique and problematic question regarding the ownership of a cultural form in slave weddings involves jumping the broom. In one of the most complete descriptions of the broomstick ritual, North Carolinian Tempie Herndon Durham recalled:

> Uncle Edmond Kirby married us. He was de nigger preacher dat preached at de plantation church. After Uncle Edmond said de las' words over me an' Exter, Marse George got to have his little fun: He say, 'Come on, Exter, you an' Tempie got to jump over de broom stick backwards; you got to do dat to see which one gwine be boss of your househol'.' Everybody come stan' 'roun to watch. Marse George hold de broom 'bout a foot high off de floor. De one dat jump over it backwards an' never touch de handle, gwine boss de house, an' if bof of dem jump over widout touchin' it, dey won't gwine be no bossin', dey jus' gwine be 'genial. I jumped fus', an' you ought to seed me. I sailed right over dat broom stick same as a cricket, but when Exter jump he done had a big dram an' his feets was so big an' clumsy dat dey got all tangled up in dat broom an' he fell head long. Marse George he laugh an' laugh, an' tole Exter he gwine be bossed 'twell he skeered to speak less'n I tole him to speak.[73]

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[70] One woman claimed that her parents' wedding ceremony included "a clause . . . which gave the slave-holder the right to separate husband and wife whenever he chose to do so," reading "until distance should them part." Eliza Suggs, *Shadow and Sunshine* (Omaha, 1906), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/suggs/suggs.html, p. 23, 72. See also Veney, *Narrative of Bethany Veney*, 18; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 480-81; and Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 239-40. A North Carolina master is reported to have stood by while a slave minister spoke the phrase, but apparently listened with a "satirical" ear. *Aunt Sally*, 52-53.

[71] Avirett, *The Old Plantation*, 126.

[72] Hedging his bets, he also drank to the slaveholding family's continued prosperity and ultimate ascension to heaven. Frederick, *Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick*, 31.

[73] North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 374.

This is a confounding passage. In Durham's telling, the broomstick ceremony would decide whether she or her husband would be "boss" in their household. By successfully leaping over the broom handle, she earned the right to boss her husband who, addled by drink, stumbled and fell. Now, no one interpreted the ceremony with utter seriousness: Durham described it as merely a "little fun," and her master proclaimed her "boss" of her husband through gales of laughter. But the use of a wedding ritual to foster or joke about ambiguity in gender roles stands in marked contrast to the nuptials of elite white southerners, whose tightly-choreographed rites reduced the risk of unpredictability or ambiguity to a minimum. Further, the architect of this ambiguity was not the black preacher who had pronounced the couple man and wife. Instead, it was Durham's master, George Herndon, who defined the broomstick ritual as a contest over household rule. Yet Durham herself did not deny that she might be "boss" in her household; and, while she attributed the ritual to her master, she seemed to enjoy it. Did other slaves or slaveholders consider household authority to be at issue in the broomstick ceremony? And did other masters take control of the ritual in a manner similar to George Herndon, or did slaves exert their own influence?

The broomstick wedding is remarkable for the multiplicity of meanings that historians have found in it. John W. Blassingame denied that slaves every married by jumping the broom, instead deeming it a metaphor or "post-nuptial" ritual; while Thomas E. Will suggests that jumping the broom "typically" (if sometimes unremarkably) followed readings from the Bible in "slave-led ceremonies," but also notes that masters coordinated broomstick rituals.[74] Herbert Gutman suggests that the ritual, particularly if it originated in Africa, magically cemented marriage bonds, thus serving masters by stabilizing the slave

[74] Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 167; Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds," 111.

community, and slaves by validating bonds that the legal system did not recognize.[75] Brenda E. Stevenson, conversely, argues that the broomstick ritual came from "pre-Christian . . . western Europe," and that southern whites "impos[ed] this cultural albatross on slaves" to mark slave marriages as "quaint" and "amusing."[76] Meanwhile, Alan Dundes seems to have put to rest the popular notion that jumping the broom originated in Africa, and instead argues that the ritual's origins in European folklore support his anecdotal that masters "forcibly imposed" the ritual on slaves.[77] The ritual's multivalence results partially from the ways that slaves and their descendants described it: one can find a multitude of meanings ascribed to it in the slave narratives (as well as in other sources from both blacks and whites). Yet a systematic evaluation of WPA accounts of the ritual, which no historian has yet attempted, does much to clarify its meanings.[78] One hundred WPA narratives discussed broomstick

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[75] Gutman, *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 283-284. Gutman found evidence that "some southern whites also used broomsticks in marriage ceremonies" (277). My search of the WPA narratives yielded one confirmation of that suggestion: Willis Cozart of Person County, NC reported that, even as "de slave weddin's in dat country" were performed with broomsticks, "de pore white folks done de same way." North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 185.

[76] Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 228-29.

[77] Dundes, "'Jumping the Broom': On the Origin and Meaning of an African American Wedding Custom," *Journal of American Folklore* 109, No. 433 (1996): 328. See also Hudson, *To Have and to Hold*, 213 n. 37; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 117-18; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 475 and 480; C. W. Sullivan III, "'Jumping the Broom': A Further Consideration of the Origins of an African American Wedding Custom," *Journal of American Folklore* 110, No. 436 (Spring, 1997), 203-04; and Orville W. Taylor, "'Jumping the Broomstick': Slave Marriage and Morality in Arkansas" (1958) in *Women and the Family in a Slave Society*, ed. Paul Finkelman (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), 373-87.

[78] The WPA narratives' fourteen references to the broomstick ritual in North and South Carolina suggest intriguing answers to these questions, but to put my conclusions on firmer ground, I have expanded my inquiry in this area to all the slave states, increasing the sample to 100 narratives. The larger sample size allows significant patterns to emerge. For a list of all the WPA narratives that discuss broomstick weddings in North and South Carolina, see Appendix One. Searching the WPA narratives has recently become much easier with digitization. The Library of Congress' invaluable "Born in Slavery" website contains the complete WPA narratives in text-searchable form. In order to prevent references to the broomstick ceremony from slipping through the cracks, I used multiple search terms. They were: "broomstick," "broom (and) stick," "broom," "jump (and) marry," "jump (and) married," "jump (and) weddin'," and "jump (and) wedding." The search engine included number and tense variations on each word, meaning that the search for "jump (and) wedding" also included "jumped," "jumps," and "weddings;" hence my exclusion of plural terms in my searches. For the 100 narratives that these searches yielded, see Appendix Two.

weddings, and, taken as a whole, these narratives offer compelling evidence that the broomstick ritual was almost universally imposed on slaves by masters. Slaveholders used the broomstick not merely to mark slave marriage as transitory and unimportant, but to assert their authority over black households.

Although most former slaves did not discuss jumping the broom any further than to say that it solemnized a slave marriage, a few touched on the ritual's significance in greater detail. Some proposed that the ritual revealed or governed future fortunes. Two men suggested that jumping the broom determined whether a marriage could be completed. John Ellis, for instance, stipulated that in Texas "de bride she has to jump over [a broom] backwards and iffen she couldn't jump it backwards she couldn't git married."[79] However unlikely it was that a couple would cancel their nuptials on account of a failure to jump over a broom, the myth that a marriage hinged on a successful jump related to the notion that the broomstick ritual could affect a man and woman's future life and marriage. Two former slaves (one describing slavery times, the other life after emancipation) reported that couples jumped for "luck," while a third warned that in slave weddings, stumbling over the broom

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As Paul Escott's work on nineteenth-century African American life suggests, quantifying the information in slave narratives can be both useful and problematic. The sample of interviewees is far from random. More troubling, many narratives do not lend themselves to easy quantification. How shall one weigh the word of a former slave who testified that all slaves married by jumping the broom against another who vouched that all the slaves on his plantation did so, or against a third who could only verify that her own mother and father married that way? Granting the difficulty of interpreting what one number of slave narratives implies against another, however, it remains important for me to demonstrate that the patterns I claim exist really do. If I say that "many" former slaves reported that broomstick weddings happened in a certain way, I ought to tell the reader how many actually did so.

Finally, in hopes of making my findings easier to replicate and test, I have excluded discussions of the broomstick ritual that come from sources other than the WPA narratives from my statistical tabulations. However, I still refer to non-WPA sources to buttress and complicate the WPA narratives.

[79] Texas Narratives, Vol. XVI, Pt. 2, p. 23; see also Mississippi Narratives, Volume IX, 87

boded ill: "If either of you stumps you toe on de broom, dat mean you got trouble comin' 'tween you, so you sho' jumps high."[80]

Other African Americans testified to a more general connection between the broomstick and luck or magic, not always in relation to marriage. They viewed proper employment of the broomstick as one key to good fortune. Josephine Anderson argued that blacks used the broom in postemancipation marriage ceremonies because of its power to thwart witches and ghosts: "Ya see brooms keep hants away," she said.[81] "One thing bout witches, dey gotta count everthing fore dey can git acrosst it. You put a broom acrosst your door at night an old witches gotta count ever straw in dat broom fore she can come in." Presumably, one could avoid marrying a witch by subjecting a partner to this final test on the threshold of matrimony. Two others testified that brooms possessed magical properties—and further suggested that they did not always work for good. Betty Curlett testified that even in the 1930s, "You can't get nobody—colored folks I mean—to step over a broom; they say it bad luck. If it fall and they step over they step back. They say if somebody sweep under your feet you won't marry that year."[82] And Measy Hudson, enslaved in North Carolina, included in a litany of "bad luck signs" this admonition: "bad luck to step over a broom."[83]

That some people connected jumping the broom to luck or magic might suggest that African Americans, putting stock in broomsticks' otherworldly significance, emphasized the

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[80] The narratives associating jumping the broom with good or bad fortune in marriage are Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 257; Florida Narratives, Volume III, 4; and Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 189.

[81] Florida Narratives, Volume III, 4.

[82] Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 76.

[83] Tennessee Narratives, Volume XV, 32. For a useful discussion of magic in the African American worldview, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 55-80. It bears mentioning that some Southern whites, too, associated brooms with magic: brooms, then as now, were the preferred mode of transport for witches. Whether African Americans' sense that brooms were magical objects relates to witches' use of brooms, I have not been able to discover, but see also Dundes, "'Jumping the Broom," 327.

ritual. Its prevalence might therefore demonstrate that slaves retained authority over their weddings that their masters could not suppress.[84] Yet this suggestion contradicts the overwhelming impression given by the WPA narratives, which is that the broomstick ritual served whites far more than blacks. Recall that Tempie Herndon Durham's wedding consisted of two distinct parts, the first conducted by blacks, the second by whites. She and her husband jumped the broom *after* a "nigger preacher" married them, and Durham's master defined the terms on which the couple jumped.[85] She portrayed the ritual as her master's "little fun." Solomon Lambert described his parents' broomstick wedding in Arkansas in nearly identical terms: "How they marry? They say they jump the broomstick together! But they had brush brooms so I recken that whut they jumped. Think the moster [sic] and mistress jes havin' a little fun outen it then."[86] And Charlotte Willis, whose grandfather jumped the broom in Mississippi, reported, "Grandpa said that was the way white folks had of showing off their couples."[87]

Taken as a whole, the WPA narratives demonstrate that masters almost always instigated and played a central role in the broomstick ceremony. Of the 100 narratives that mentioned broomstick weddings, eighty-nine actually describe ceremonies in which slaves jumped the broom.[88] Forty-two of these offer no hint as to who orchestrated the rituals—saying neither who performed them, nor where they took place (at the master's home, in the slave quarters,

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[84] On the possibility that the broomstick wedding had a positive purpose in black life, see Gutman, *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 276-78.

[85] Although the division of roles in Durham's wedding is illustrative, this was not the norm: most broomstick ceremonies took place simultaneously with, or in place of, the more traditional ritual.

[86] Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 4, 229.

[87] Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 198.

[88] For a list of the eleven WPA narratives that mention broomstick weddings but do not describe them in slavery, see Appendix Three. A few interviewees described broomstick weddings after slavery, while others denied having seen or participated in broomstick weddings.

or elsewhere), and six say who orchestrated the wedding but fit no significant pattern.[89] Only three interviewees attributed broomstick weddings to slaves: Dora Roberts's was one, saying that slaves in Mississippi "got togedder" to jump the broom after the master read the marriage rites.[90] But all of the remaining thirty-nine interviewees (representing 43.8 percent of the total number of descriptions and 83.0 percent of the narratives indicating who performed the ceremony) described either weddings that masters initiated or solemnized or weddings which took place at the "big house" under the gaze of the slaveholding family.[91] It seems, then, that the Reverend W.H. Robinson, a former slave from Wilmington, North Carolina, was correct in describing the broomstick ceremony as a form "prescribed by the master."[92]

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[89] For the forty-two narratives that describe a broomstick wedding but do not make clear who performed or initiated it, see Appendix Four. Six weddings do not conform to a clear pattern: one was said by a justice of the peace (Texas Narratives, Vol. XVI, Pt. 1, p. 152); a second featured a "'jack-leg' preacher" but did not specify his race (South Carolina Narratives, Vol. XIV, Pt. 1, p. 323); two more interviewees testified that white clergymen sometimes performed broomstick marriages (the second of these narratives implies that masters did so as well) (Georgia Narratives, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, p. 74; Texas Narratives, Vol. XVI, Pt. 3, pp. 63-64); another narrative implies, but does not say outright, that masters and slaves orchestrated ceremonies together (Georgia Narratives, Vol. IV, Pt. 1, p. 101); and, finally, the narrative of one involves an enslaved woman's negotiations for self-purchase (Texas Narratives, Vol. XVI, Pt. 3, 62-64).

[90] Georgia Narratives, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, p. 206. See also and Oklahoma Narratives, Vol. XIII, 207. To this list ought to be added the report of Alabaman Anne L. Burton that a wedding party "would be arranged some Saturday night among the slaves," the wedding itself consisting "of the pair jumping over a stick." Burton, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (Boston: Ross Publishing Company, 1909), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/burton/burton.html, p. 5.

[91] For a list of WPA narratives that describe broomstick weddings performed or initiated by masters, see Appendix Five.

[92] W.H. Robinson, *From Log Cabin to the Pulpit, or, Fifteen Years in Slavery*, third ed. (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: W. H. Robinson, 1913), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/robinson/robinson.html, p. 152. See also William Wells Brown, *My Southern Home: or, The South and Its People* (Boston: A. G. Brown & Co., 1880), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brown80/brown80.html, p. 45; John Hawkins Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade, and of the Slave-Rearing Plantations. The True Story of Dinah, an Escaped Virginian Slave, Now in London, On Whose Body Are Eleven Scars Left by Tortures Which Were Inflicted by Her Master, Her Own Father* (London: A. W. Bennett, 1863), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/simpson/simpson.html, p. 28. Intriguingly, Robinson and others noted that some broomstick ceremonies featured women or girls from the slaveholding family: in his case, "the young mistresses" as well as "older ladies" alternated holding the broom depending on the age of the couple getting married. Why women featured so prominently I can only speculate, although two reasons seem likely. First,

The nature of masters' participation in the broomstick ritual comes into higher relief when we consider the language former slaves used to describe those rituals. Descriptions of the ritual often betray a note of coercion, suggesting that even if jumping the broom constituted merely a "little fun," many slaves were essentially required to do it. Of the eighty-nine descriptions of broomstick weddings in the WPA narratives, twenty-three (25.8 percent) include some form of coercive language.[93] Six merely say that one "had to" jump the broom in order to marry: Georgina Giwbs, for instance, said that "When yer married, yer had to jump over a broom three times. Dat wuz de licence."[94] But the others reported more forceful interactions. George Womble portrayed one ceremony as a series of commands: "A broom was placed in the center of the floor and the couple was told to hold hands. After joining hands they were commanded to jump over the broom and then to turn around and jump

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slaveholding women often assumed a degree of moral responsibility over slaves, so their participation may have been designed to impart morality to the slave couple. Second, the idea that women—as opposed to male ministers or even masters—could play an integral part in solemnizing a slave marriage might indicate that whites viewed slave marriages as more playful and less solemn than their own, less needful of the imprimatur of male authority. See also Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 28.

[93] In narratives describing the broomstick ritual, I noted all the descriptions using these terms (or obvious variations on them) in close proximity to the act of jumping: "had to" or "have to," "made" or "make," "told" or "tell," "had them jump," or "commanded to." For a list of narratives using coercive language in descriptions of jumping the broom, see Appendix Six. Analysis of the language of WPA narratives is a risky project because of the large number of variables that must be accounted for. Some interviewers merely summarized what former slaves said; others attempted to transcribe former slaves' words (usually in dialect which further obscures accurate readings). Even those reporters who purported to offer an accurate record of what their subjects said cannot be expected to have done perfect work without modern recording devices. However, I found a strong trend toward coercive language in descriptions of broomstick ceremonies, one that seems to correspond to masters' prominence in these rituals.

[94] Virginia Narratives, Volume XVII, 15. The terms "had to" and "have to" are the vaguest terms and therefore the least reliable in representing coercion. When Rachel Sullivan said that "In dem days all dey hadder do to git married was step over de broom," she may have meant merely that jumping the broom was a necessary element of marriage, in the manner that couples "have to" say "I do" before they are considered married (Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 229). On the other hand, Will Glass' description of the broomstick ceremony intimates a higher degree of coercion: "After old man Glass bought Jennie," he said, "he held up a broom and they would have to jump over it backwards and then old man Glass pronounced them man and wife" (Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 39). If we remove the expressions "had to" and "have to" from consideration, eighteen of the WPA narratives used terms of coercion to describe broomstick marriages.

back."[95] And another former slave described jumping the broom as entertainment for a condescending slaveholding family: "Old Marster and Missus," said Tom McGruder, "fixed up a lunch and they and their chillum brought it to my cabin. Then they said, 'Nigger, jump the broom' and we wuz married." McGruder's wedding encapsulates the strange, contradictory nature of the broomstick ritual. Although he and his bride received extra food and attention, their marriage was solemnized by a direct, derisive command from the owner's family: "Nigger, jump the broom."[96] In the final analysis, McGruder reflected that his leap over the broom constituted something less than a real wedding: "you see," he concluded, "we didn't know nothing 'bout no ceremony."[97]

What, finally, did jumping the broom mean? Tempie Herndon Durham's experience suggested that the ceremony enacted a contest over household authority, determining whether husband or wife would act as "boss." The WPA narratives as a whole provide little support for this theory: no one else described the broomstick ceremony in such starkly gendered terms. But on another level, Durham's wedding was perfectly representative. Indeed, almost all broomstick weddings hinged on the question of authority—specifically, the authority of masters to force their ideas of appropriate slave behavior and identity into the most intimate corners of African American life. Ultimately, it was Durham's master who wanted to be "boss" in his slaves' households.[98] Masters made slaves marry by jumping the broom, and

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[95] Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 189.

[96] Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 77.

[97] McGruder's opinion seems to correspond to a former slaveholder's observation: "it must be admitted that the blacks always preferred being married by a clergyman" to the broomstick ceremony. William Wells Brown, *My Southern Home*, 46.

[98] As to whether or not Durham enjoyed a ritual intended to reinforce her subordination, one cannot definitively say. But one might well ask whether she should not have. Refusal to participate likely would have earned her physical punishment, at the very least; why inject more pain and suffering into an event that all

encouraged them to view the ritual as a predictor of a couple's marital fortunes. Wielding a symbol with deep meanings in African-American (or, perhaps, southern) culture, they attempted to inject themselves into slaves' domestic and ritual lives and expressed power over their destinies. Further, by insisting on a ritual that openly (albeit lightheartedly) courted the prospect of a marriage's failure, they marked slave marriages as fundamentally different from, and more precarious than, their own. Something of masters' ideas about jumping the broom can be seen in pro-slavery apologist George Fitzhugh's attempt to illustrate the Northern disregard for marriage. "The people of our Northern States," he wrote, "who hold that domestic slavery is unjust and iniquitous, are consistent in their attempts to modify or abolish the marriage relation. Marriages, in many places there, are contracted with as little formality as jumping over a broom, and are dissolved with equal facility by courts and legislatures."[99] The irony of a slaveholder condemning *Northerners* for using the broomstick ceremony is staggering, but also revealing.[100] Apparently Fitzhugh could conceive of no better illustration of how Northerners had trivialized the marriage tie than by declaring that they jumped the broom.

Of course, no one could control the ritual's meaning entirely. African Americans had long years of practice at turning their masters' actions to their own ends, and they undoubtedly made the broomstick ritual serve their own cultural needs. Some may have seen the ritual as an opportunity to lampoon whites. One man recalled that on his plantation, slaves entrusted with holding the broom approached their task with a mischievous spirit:

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parties involved knew did not truly protect her or her husband from the ravages of slavery? It was hardly unreasonable for her to take what enjoyment she could from the ritual. For a similar line of reasoning, see Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 195, as well as Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds," 117.

[99] Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society*, 216.

[100] Fitzhugh's own slaves may or may not have jumped the broom, but he almost certainly knew that the ritual was performed by slaves throughout the South.

"The master of the bridegroom would . . . pick a straw broom or a pole and give two slaves the job of holding the ends of it," said Benjamin Henderson.[101] "To be devilish they often held the stick too high and would not lower it until the master asked them to." To fight derision with play, condescension with laughter, was one strategy that African Americans employed to retain a modicum of control over their lives.

Emancipation

Soon after the Civil War's end, Bethany Veney traveled from her home in Massachusetts to Virginia, where she had been enslaved. At a train station, she saw a black couple approaching, and asked the woman: "How are the times going with you?"

> She repeated: "How's times? Why, de ole man an' me just dun got married last night, an' we're takin' our weddin' journey." They ate watermelon with us, and we all laughed together over the new times, that made it possible for this woman, whose many children had enriched her master's treasury, lo! these many years, now to realize in any degree the sanctity of a marriage relation and a wedding journey.[102]

After emancipation, former slaves looked to marriage as a symbol of freedom. To be sure, they honored marriage as a social relation, relishing that their unions were no longer subject to the intrusions of masters.[103] It was not only the desire to give legal sanction to their

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[101] Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 175. It is worth noting that the WPA narratives do not suggest that slaves held the broom any more commonly than masters. On slaves making the broomstick ritual their own, see Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 229.

[102] Veney, *Narrative of Bethany Veney*, 41. See also John Patterson Green, *Recollections of the Inhabitants, Localities, Superstitions, and KuKlux Outrages of the Carolinas. By a "Carpet-Bagger" Who Was Born and Lived There* ([Cleveland?], 1880), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/green/green.html, p. 27; and [Abigail Mott,] *Narratives of Colored Americans* (New York: William Wood & Co., 1875), available online at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/mott/mott.html, p. 269.

[103] This is actually a surprisingly contentious point. Ann Patton Malone argues that slaves "put great stock in marriage" and valued two-parent households whether or not they were attainable. Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 224. However, Leslie A. Schwalm cautions that many freedpeople, reluctant to submit to any outside authority (such as the Freedmen's Bureau), approached marriage with a great deal of care and suspicion. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We*, 239-48.

relationships that caused African Americans to celebrate their lives and loves with weddings.[104] Weddings promised symbolic as well as actual freedom, a truth to which the woman at the train station testified, savoring the dual "sanctity of a marriage relation and a wedding journey." The marriage was important, but so too were the ritual indulgences of a ceremony and a honeymoon.[105]

At their weddings, newly freed slaves asserted their right to express themselves aesthetically and verbally. Eliza Hasty, for instance, donned a frankly magnificent concoction of color and ornament. Fellow South Carolinian Mary Chesnut might have scoffed, but Hasty had earned the right to judge her own appearance, and she alerted her listener to her wedding outfit's most graceful components:

> How I dressed? I 'members 'zactly. I wore a blue worsted shirt, over a red underskirt, over a white linen petticoat wid tuckers at de hem, just a little long, to show good and white 'long wid de blue of de skirt and de red of de underskirt. Dese all come up to my waist and was held together by de string dat held my bustle in place. All dis and my corset was hid by de snow white pleated pique bodice, dat drapped gracefully from my shoulders. 'Round my neck was a string of green jade beads. I wore red stockin's and my foots was stuck in soft, black, cloth, gaiter shoes.
>
> My go-away-hat was 'stonishment to everybody. It was made out of red plush velvet and trimmed wid white satin ribbons. In de front, a ostrich feather stood up high and two big turkey feathers flanked de sides.[106]

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[104] For a far better-documented discussion of the longevity of marriages lasting from slavery into Reconstruction than I can provide here, see Gutman, *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 272-73. Barry A. Crouch shows that some state officials dragged their feet for periods ranging from months to years after the Civil War ended before finally certifying marriages of former slaves. "'The Chords of Love': Legalizing Black Marital and Family Rights in Postwar Texas," *The Journal of Negro History* 79, No. 4 (1994), 338.

[105] The argument that weddings helped blacks articulate their newfound freedom goes counter to that of Charles Joyner, who, in an otherwise brilliant book, offers the surprising opinion that "the day-to-day life of former slaves," including "courtship and marriage, weddings and funerals," "went on as always, outside of either enmity or alliance with the whites, outside of the political struggles of Reconstruction." Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 235. To the contrary, behavior at weddings suggests that blacks' day-to-day lives in freedom, while carrying on many time-honored traditions, were markedly different from slavery, both in their communities' use of ritual and in their relationship with whites.

[106] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 2, 255.

If ever a hat conjured up the joys of freedom after thirteen years of slavery, surely it was this tri-feathered marvel that was, undeniably, "'stonishment to everybody." Not all weddings featured such extravagance, but a heightening of expressiveness would correspond to Shane White and Graham White's contention that free blacks "present[ed] their bodies with a degree of flamboyance and forcefulness that announced their determination to refute the bodily regime imposed upon them by whites, with all the notions of black identity and power relations which that regime implied."[107]

For African Americans who stayed on their plantations, the tradition of receiving gifts from white landowners continued, or in some cases, one suspects, began for the first time. One cannot but think that this constituted an effort on the part of whites to retain their claims to paternalistic authority over black laborers. As previously, it is doubtful that many sharecropping families looked askance at either the valuable material goods that came their way or the feasts at which they were presented: former slaves likely accepted these tokens without accepting the power relations embedded in them. Quite probably they thought them their due. Henry Davis, who married a number of years after emancipation, described the wedding gifts he and his wife received from their landlords; taking him at his word, the memory pleased him.

> De white folks of both plantations 'courage us to have a big weddin'. Her white folks give her a trousseau and mine give me a bedstead, cotton mattress, and two feather pillows. Dat was a mighty happy night for de "Rose of Sharon'. Her tells young niggers 'bout it to dis day, and I just sets and smokes my pipe and thinks of all de days dat am passed and gone and wonder if de nex' world gwine bring us back to youth and strength to 'joy it, as us did when Rose and me was young.[108]

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[107] White and White, *Stylin'*, 127. For a counter-example, see South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 2, 75.

[108] South Carolina Narratives, Voume XIV, Part 1, 261-62. See also Rawick, *American Slave* Supplement, Series 1, Vol. 11: South Carolina, 90.

In post-emancipation weddings, African Americans enacted in aesthetic and material terms a more elaborate and more forceful vision of the manhood and womanhood that had predominated in slave weddings. In addition to more flamboyant clothing, the material bases for their weddings changed. Although W.M. Green married on the estate of his wife's former mistress, the pride the black families felt in giving material support to him and his wife invigorated his description of the wedding: "We married one Sunday morning at 'leven o'click and had dinner at twelve; give de preacher twenty-five cents. Never no one give us no presents. We stayed at my pappy's house fer years. He give us a bed, a bureau and a washstand. Carrie's folks give us de bed clothes, and dats what we started on."[109] The gifts at Green's wedding corresponded to traditional nuptial giving patterns throughout the South—the bride's family providing the trousseau, the groom's family a bed and other furniture—but their value was increased by the previously unattainable pride of ownership.[110]

Generally, then, the weddings of former slaves continued or expanded upon a number of aspects of slave weddings. However, free African Americans left one feature of the slave wedding firmly in the past: jumping the broom. Isabella Duke, whose mother had been enslaved in Alabama, said, "Mother married before freedom, jumped the broom she said. Then after freedom she married my father."[111] Maggie Broyles told a similar story: "Ma said when she married they had a corn shucking and a big dinner four o'clock in the morning. . . .

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[109] South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 2, 202.

[110] The similarities of free black and white giving patterns would seem to validate Thomas E. Will's observation that "slaves appropriated the signs of planter authority for their weddings," thus internalizing "the hegemonic culture's means of asserting dignity and respectability." "Weddings on Contested Grounds," 117. But their nearly wholesale abandonment of the broomstick ritual, discussed below, complicates that argument as they dispensed with perhaps the key metaphor for their marriage that the hegemonic culture had given them. Former slaves may also have appreciated the fact that their weddings could now be legitimated by preachers of their own race and community. Barry A. Crouch suggests that African Americans in post-war Texas, at least, preferred black officiants to white. "The Chords of Love," 341.

[111] Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 215.

After freedom, she married Ben Pitts. The way she married at the corn shucking, they jumped over the broom back'ards and Master Bob Young 'nounced it."[112] Both Duke and Broyles took care to say that their mothers' *first* weddings had featured the broomstick ritual, and neither said that their second, post-emancipation weddings had. It seems that both of women's mothers jumped the broom in slavery, and that both excluded the broomstick from their weddings come freedom.

The WPA narratives suggest that the broomstick ritual fell into widespread disuse after slavery. Difficult as it is to prove something by its absence, the narratives establish a surprisingly clean break between the weddings of slaves and freedpeople. Of the 89 narratives that described broomstick weddings, five are impossible to locate before or after emancipation, and only eight (9.0 percent)—none in North or South Carolina—attested to the persistence of the ritual in the years after emancipation. Meanwhile, seventy-five narratives (84.3 percent) described broomstick weddings before emancipation.[113]

How do we account for the missing broomsticks? The few blacks who spoke about jumping the broom in freedom did not always explain their actions. Annie Morgan, however, recalled that members of her community in Kentucky continued to jump the broom because isolation rendered more formal rites impractical: "In dose days hit were too fer ter go git a preacher an most colored folks married dat way."[114] Bert Luster and Dock Wilborn suggested another reason for the ritual's persistence after slavery's end: former slaveholders

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[112] Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 1, 325.

[113] For WPA narratives that either describe broomstick weddings after emancipation or do not specify whether the ritual took place before or after emancipation, see Appendix Seven. The narratives' focus on slavery does not explain this imbalance. Many interviewers asked their subjects about their lives during freedom, and dozens of former slaves described weddings after emancipation. But hardly anyone mentioned jumping the broom.

[114] Kentucky Narratives, Volume VII, 104.

continued to orchestrate it. In a wedding that Wilborn's former owner performed in 1870, "the only formality" (wrote Wilborn's interviewer) consisted of the bride and groom "jump[ing] over a broom that had been placed on the floor between them."[115] Likewise Luster, who married in Texas in 1879, recalled, "in dem days we didn't buy no license, we jest got permits from old Master and jumped over a broom stick and jest got married."[116] Significantly, neither white man encouraged the couples to obtain the legal recognition which most freedpeople sought for their marriages. Rather, both acted in the ad-hoc manner of masters marrying off slaves. In continuing to have black men and women jump the broom, these white men attempted to retain at least some of the paternalistic authority that the Civil War had stripped them of.

In abandoning the broomstick wedding, freedpeople enacted their independence from and equality with their former masters. No longer would their weddings revolve around whites or symbolize their marriages' precariousness. African Americans ceased jumping the broom in all but the most remote areas or under former masters' supervision. And one former slave evinced discomfort with the possibility that his forebears had *ever* jumped the broom. John Van Hook, born in 1862 in Macon County, North Carolina, had been describing the esteem in which freedpeople held marriage when the broomstick ritual entered the conversation. He was telling his interviewer, "Marriage in those days was looked upon as something very solemn," celebrated without hard liquor or frolicking.[117] His wife Laney, however, interjected: "My mother said they used to make up a new broom and when the couple jumped over it, they was married. Then they gave the broom to the couple to use keeping house."

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[115] Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 145.

[116] Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 204.

[117] Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 84-85.

The interviewer described John Van Hook as "evidently embarrassed." "Laney," he reprimanded her, "that was never confirmed. It was just hearsay, as far as you know, and I wouldn't tell things like that." Why would Van Hook deny the existence of broomstick weddings? He did not say, but it seems he shared the sentiments of many former slaves. The broomstick wedding was part of the insidious iconography of enslavement. Jumping the broom encapsulated what African Americans were so eager to discard when they attained freedom: it took the authority of whites over blacks as a given, it portrayed blacks as subservient and dependent, and it cast doubt upon the most central of their social and cultural institutions. It had to go.[118]

Slave weddings allow us to see the extraordinarily subtle means by which whites denigrated African Americans' claims to autonomy. Masters who refused to allow weddings at all cemented their power to determine the proper cultural and social institutions for their slaves and implied that African Americans were incapable of maintaining such a bedrock cultural institution. In a way, all masters were guilty of this, as all reserved the right to break up slave marriages. Yet even those who allowed slave weddings still branded African Americans as inferior. Whites placed themselves at the center of proceedings and cast blacks as pathetic (albeit sometimes sympathetic) pretenders to white cultural status and forms, marking them with cast-off clothing, paternalistic gifts, and truncated rites. Slaveholders denied slaves gender roles whites expected for themselves, transparently celebrating slaves' status as breeders, and denigrating men's claims to patriarchal authority, lecturing them on

[118] Brenda E. Stevenson suggests that "The slave's acceptance" of the broomstick ritual "demonstrated the ability of slave culture to absorb, reconfigure, and legitimize new ritual forms, even those masters imposed out of jest or ridicule." *Life in Black and White*, 229. True as this is, it remains notable that African Americans' well of acceptance for jumping the broom dried up as quickly as freedom came.

the proper treatment of their spouses. And in the broomstick ritual, slaveholders forced their way into slaves' ritual lives, establishing white power at the focal point of a black rite of passage and attempting to render African Americans' relationships both comic and flimsy, inherently incapable of attaining the solid social footing of patriarchal mastery that whites claimed for themselves.

Of course, African Americans avoided these degradations when they could.[119] When possible, they drew back to spaces wherein they were free to celebrate as they saw fit. In their cabins, blacks married under the gaze of preachers from their own communities and acted in ways that satisfied their own needs—particularly in terms of gender behavior, establishing norms of manhood and womanhood that heightened their own sense of dignity. They brought distinctive aesthetic sensibilities to their rituals and danced to music that moved them; and they may have accorded women a more active role in their life decisions. On a more elemental level, many slaves defied masters' attempts to deny them the right to marry, holding weddings whether they were allowed to or not. When slaveholders insisted on playing a larger part, African Americans modified their behavior to protect themselves and their families, which meant obeying masters' commands and accepting their condescension, even while mocking whites in ways that would not endanger them or the slave community. But many blacks had to wait for emancipation before casting off the dubious rituals masters forced on them. Then, often on their own terms and without the aid of broomsticks, African Americans showed that they wanted no boss but themselves.

[119] Thomas E. Will argues that masters who allowed their slaves weddings in order to "[give] expression to a measure of slave self-assertion that masters could not safely deny, but in a manner that did not pose a serious challenge to slaveownership," thereby "confining latent class tensions to manageable and relatively innocuous ceremonies." Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds," 115. The degree to which slaves avoided masters' condescension and the speed with which they dismissed the broomstick ritual suggest, however, that slaves understood the purpose their masters hoped their weddings would serve.

The constant negotiations between masters and slaves had a tendency to turn the rituals inward. What else mattered but asserting one's dominance, or protecting one's family? Nonetheless, slave weddings offer clues to the changing situation of weddings in America. Left to their own devices, African Americans might well have used weddings to embrace a version of the companionate ideal. Although black men appear to have asserted patriarchal power in the years after emancipation, their rituals during slavery may well have accorded women significant power. What is more, African Americans (not unlike their owners) seem to have been enamored of the style of the white wedding, which they saw paraded before them whenever their masters married: we recall that Anna Wright declared that blacks "dressed lak a white folks weddin'." This is an enticing phrase, which suggests much but—in the absence of more evidence—proves little. What is undeniable is that the wedding had come to matter enormously in America. Not for nothing did slaveholders think it worth their while to deny slaves the right to marry as they wished.

Chapter Five

"It Seemed Duty Was Always Calling": Weddings and Sealings of Mormons

In 1847, the Mormon vanguard brigade met by the forks of a creek near the Great Salt Lake. Sitting "in shirt sleeves" and bathing in the light of the moon, they made the momentous decision not to travel farther on, but to locate their church's Temple on the ground where they sat, and to lay out the grid of Salt Lake City from that point.[1] Then Brigham Young, president of the church, put aside the business of the night and offered his men a vision of life in Zion. "We do not intend to have any trade or commerce with the gentile world," he began.

> [W]e shall need no commerce with the nations. I am determined to . . . live free and independent, untrampled by any of their detestable customs and practices. You don't know how I detest and despise them. We have suffered by persecution at their hands which makes me so sanguine with regard to law and its execution upon this land. You ma[y] think it oppression that your children are not permitted to run and ramble about the streets. Well I have a sermon to preach to the sisters concerning their duty and I believe I will give some of it to you now. . . . I will begin by saying that there is not a woman in this church that knows her duty. My wife probably knows as much as any woman in the church and she does not know her duty. . . . In as much as I inquire of the Lord what is thy will, my wife should enquire of her husband what is thy will. Wife it is my will that you will take care of my clothes and keep them and your house clean. It is my will that you take care of that little boy and see that he has a lesson given him every day to learn. That he does not run about the streets and associate with bad boys. It is my will that you see to that little girl and teach and instruct her in her duty. But instead of that she has so much to do to watch me that she can find no time to attend to these things as they should be attended to. . . . Just as though Brigham did not know enough to take care of himself. So my boys are allowed to run wild in all kinds of difficulties before they are old enough for me to lay my hands upon them and assign them their business and calling. . . . All this arises from the husbands not seeking to know and do the will of the Lord and from the wife not seeking to know and do the will of her husband. How is it that men have such

[1] All quotations in this paragraph and the next three taken from Norton Jacob Autobiography, Utah State Historical Society (hereafter USHS), 28 [July 1847].

> perverse dispositions? All spirits are pure when they enter the tabernacle which is when in a state of pregnancy the woman first feels a notion. Then the spirit is pure but it becomes untied [sic] with the flesh and is controlled by it.

On this momentous occasion—quite literally a foundational moment in Mormon history—Young delivered not a pep talk, but a jeremiad against the infidelities of both the outside world and his own people. As he spoke, he revealed key connections between three lodestars in the firmament of Mormon identity.[2] In his eyes, his people's separateness from mainstream American culture, their focus on marital duties, and the fragile state of their spiritual lives were indissolubly linked. A close reading of the president's sermon suggests how Mormons saw their marriages (and, by extension, their weddings) as the path by which they could reform American society.

Young began by insisting that his people isolate themselves from "gentiles" not only in "commerce" but in "customs and practices." He did not seek mere cultural differentiation, although he could hardly find words strong enough to describe his hatred of mainstream Americans. Young's desire to distance his people from gentiles stemmed also from the "persecution" that outsiders had inflicted upon them: a very real history of harassment, scorn, and murder encouraged the Mormons to isolate themselves in the West.

Then, without preamble, Young turned inward, shifting from denouncing gentile customs to describing how corruption was seeping into Mormon life itself, namely through failures of marital "duty." Women who let their children run wild, he claimed, had let their love for their husbands overwhelm their call to motherhood. "Wife where is the boys?" he asked his hypothetical spouse; "O, I don't know," she replied; "I was so concerned about you," that she had left them to their own devices. Such women, "watch[ing]" their husbands rather than

[2] In his biography of Young, Leonard J. Arrington quotes William Woodruff's account of this meeting, but does not mention this speech. *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 146.

"attending to these things as they should be attended to," placed their romantic feelings above motherly duty. Young dismissed the bourgeois vision of companionate marriage, in which men and women doted on one another as friends and lovers. Indeed, in criticizing women for having a surfeit of romantic love, Young advanced a profoundly patriarchal argument, noting that while men should ask the Lord what their duty might be, a woman should learn her duty secondhand by "enquir[ing] of her husband." Women who failed to obey their husbands threatened the entire future of the Mormon people, a threat Young illustrated with the image of Mormon children running about unsupervised in the streets.

Finally, Young put men's and women's dereliction of marital duty in theological terms, outlining the problematic relationship of the spirit to the body. The spirit, he declared, originally "pure" within the "tabernacle" of a woman's womb, faced corruption when it joined with flesh. Marriage, the traditional method by which spirits and flesh united, posed inevitable dangers to men and women's spirits, as the temptations of the flesh threatened to "control" the spirit. But he ended on a positive note, enjoining women to let their minds be "guided and ruled by the principles of righteousness and kept continually upon holy things." If they did, their spiritual purity would strengthen their children's bodies: "if she will continually resist all temptation she will be blessed herself and the body of her child will be larger and more strong and robust and in this way our race will become improved until the age of man shall be as the age of a tree." In the isolation of the Great Salt Lake, men and women could rebuild the ties of patriarchal affection and duty that would keep both their bodies and their spirits pure. This was why they were here.

The wedding rituals of Latter-day Saints or Mormons between 1840 and 1865 combined the concerns of religious separateness, marital duty, and purification of spirit just as Young

did when he spoke by the forks of the creek. Mormons married in ways that suggested that they saw marriage as a key factor in bringing about their own—and their nation's—sanctification, emphasizing their duty as descendents of patriarchs to reform society. Mormons also evinced an awareness of the public and national implications of their rituals. As practitioners of America's most controversial marital relation, polygamy (which they called plural or celestial marriage), Mormons sometimes approached their weddings with the defiant piety of the righteous, conscious that their marriages would restore men and women to their proper places in society, help them turn their backs on the effeminate and dissipated gentile critics, and mold their own men into biblical patriarchs.

Holding to this piety posed challenges from within and without. Despite their disdain for gentile corruption, their sense that romantic love and companionate marriage threatened to distract people from their spiritual and societal duties, many Mormons clung to the companionate ideal that enshrined bourgeois couples in a loving, complementary union. The sometimes complementary, sometimes warring ideals of religious duty and romantic love found powerful expression in their wedding rituals (and their marriages). Couples wrestled with the substance of their own beliefs, and with the theocratic state that enforced them. Not all Mormons found it easy to accept the implications of the doctrine of plural marriage that the religious elite propounded. Mormon women, in particular, had grown up with a primitivist mindset that enabled and validated charismatic expressions of female power; such women bristled at the idea of sublimating their spirits to the power of patriarchs. Further, wedding rituals saw many Mormons struggling to balance their desire for salvation with beliefs about love they had nurtured in the middle-class milieu from whence most of them

came. Despite the active encouragement of the church hierarchy, few—not even Brigham Young and his wife—found it easy to sublimate love to duty.

Historians have observed the separatist origins of early Mormonism, and have noted the role that marriage played in their quest to isolate themselves from mainstream America. The combined forces of the market revolution, the growth of a bourgeois culture and economy, and the increasing pluralism of American religion, they agree, awakened in Joseph Smith and his followers a desire to assert a unitary economy, religion, and society.[3] Smith's vision of a traditional, godly society mixed an imagined re-assertion of biblical patriarchy and a return to "the ordered rural village life of the early nineteenth century."[4] Disparate as these two antecedents were, the Old-Testament Middle East and nineteenth-century New England seemed to share appealingly uncomplicated religious and social power structures: in both, God's power over the Church was universally acknowledged by His people, and men's power over economically-autonomous households was universally respected by dependent families. Mormonism thus figured into a larger yearning toward patriarchy in which antebellum men, confronted with bourgeois, egalitarian values and companionate marriages, attempted to fight their increasing sense of powerlessness in both the world and the home.[5] By establishing patriarchal households in Zion, Mormons planned to reform (or overthrow) the effeminate, entrepreneurial middle class and renew biblical patriarchy on earth.

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[3] See Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: the Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989).

[4] Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation Among the Mormons*, Second Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 3; see also Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 28.

[5] See Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 225; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society, From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 167; Bertolini, "Fireside Chastity, 724; and Daniel J. Herman, "The Other Daniel Boone: The Nascence of a Middle-Class Hunter Hero, 1784-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, No. 3 (Autumn, 1998), 439-40.

Mormon weddings offered their participants a chance to act out patriarchal roles and counter emerging middle-class norms. Most significantly, the ritual institution of polygamous households focused attention on men's power not only within the home and church, but also in the spiritual world.[6] But even weddings of monogamous couples featured numerous patriarchal signifiers, highlighting a man and woman's ancient, biblical heritage and charging them to carry patriarchal customs forward into modern times. Yet, as we shall see, the emphasis on masculine power coexisted uneasily with Mormon women's own sense of spiritual power.

Also in contrast to the eastern middle class (and to elite southerners, who wished to uphold patriarchy in a very different way), Mormons typically kept their weddings low-key. Spurning the elaborate celebrations of the white wedding, which sometimes showed its participants in a "middle-class, nominally-feminine" light, Mormons preferred a solemn focus on men's and women's religious duties, which served to emphasize both their allegiance to patriarchy and their distance from corrupt outsiders.[7] Yet however far they traveled, spiritually and physically, from the corruption of mainstream America, few could escape the dominant culture's notion that marriage should celebrate companionate (often romantic) love. Eugene E. Cambpell and Bruce L. Campbell note that "Romantic love posed a dilemma for Mormon polygamists because it had the potential to disrupt marriages contracted for religious reasons rather than for love or personal attraction."[8] The Mormon

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[6] B. Carmen Hardy, argues that polygamy acted "as a brace for paternal authority." Hardy, "Lords of Creation: Polygamy, the Abrahamic Household, and Mormon Patriarchy," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, No. 1 (Spring 1994), 138.

[7] Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 115.

[8] Eugene E. Campbell and Bruce L. Campbell, "Divorce among Mormon Polygamists: Extent and Explanations," in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 189. The story of the Mormons' mediation between love and religious duty has

conception of marriage did not exclude love, but the church's emphasis on religious duty pushed adherents far from the companionate ideal they had grown up idealizing. Brigham Young's wife, worrying about him instead of the duties he prescribed for her, is emblematic of the Mormon experience of marriage. Especially in the pivotal experience of polygamy, men's and women's continuing inclination toward companionate marriage threatened to put Mormons in conflict with the goal of separating themselves from corrupt, "gentile" practices, and with the hierarchy of leaders who enforced that goal. The records they left of their wedding rituals show a people struggling mightily to reconcile their religious and personal ideals.

Toward a Theology of Marriage

Mormon theology in the mid-nineteenth century made marriage—and the creation of family relationships—absolutely central to its conception of the afterlife. Salvation could be attained without marriage, but Mormons could only win exaltation—a higher degree of salvation reserved for patriarchs and their kin—if they were "sealed" (that is, united in a family, usually marital, relationship for all time) to at least one, and more likely multiple partners. But it was not always that way: marriage attained its central position via a lengthy process of historical contingency and theological revelation. Although both Joseph Smith's 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon and his revision of the Bible intimated the possibility of revising current marital practices, no one who read either work in Mormonism's earliest years would have predicted the central position marriage would come

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not yet been written definitively, although a few historians have explored it. See also Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 64.

to occupy in Mormon theology.[9] Instead, the early church promised to restore its adherents to Biblical practices, in the vague and appealing manner that most such promises must be made. Its primary innovation was to promote a vision of spiritual and material interconnectedness, resulting in what one scholar has called "an extremely anthropomorphic definition of God" ruling over humans with the potential for divinity themselves.[10] Smith's preoccupation with the divine destiny of the spirit would play a part in future developments in Mormon marriage doctrine, but it hardly necessitated them.

Through the 1830s, the Mormons moved from (or were chased out of) Smith's home of Palmyra, New York, then Kirtland, Ohio, and then Independence, Missouri, until finally landing in Nauvoo, Illinois from 1839 to 1847. During these years of dislocation, a distinctive practice of marriage developed through informal channels without becoming official doctrine. Smith first broached the idea of polygamy, thinking to marry his own missionaries to Native American converts, in 1831.[11] If we accept Smith's claims not to have committed adultery in the eyes of God, his behavior during the 1830s suggests that he received instructions to engage in polygamous behavior early on, or else his sexual liaisons in Kirtland are hard to justify.[12] Just as significant as Smith's provocative behavior, the church was beginning to assert control over its members' connubial relationships. Lawrence Foster argues that "At least as early as 1835, the Mormon church began to take responsibility

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[9] See George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy: ". . . But We Called It Celestial Marriage"* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008), 13-15; and Klaus J. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 155.

[10] Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, 71.

[11] See George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 14; and Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, 156.

[12] See George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 46; and Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), which places Smith's first plural marriage in 1833 (33).

for the marriage and divorce practices of its members, increasingly ignoring the plethora of contradictory state laws on the subject and sometimes even directly violating those external regulations."[13] By claiming the authority to regulate its members' marital practices, the church laid the groundwork for defining the institution's significance in their lives.

A theology of (plural) marriage grew up in conjunction with these changes, although it sometimes lagged behind the actual practice of it. Whether Smith actually experienced a revelation sanctioning polygamy in 1831, as church historians assert (thereby justifying his otherwise extramarital relationships) seems impossible to prove. Whether Smith asserted in 1835 that "the ancient order of plural marriage was again to be practiced by the Church" is likewise uncertain.[14] By 1840, however, Smith had definitely begun discussing his plans to restore "the ancient order [of marriage] . . . as it was in the days of Abraham."[15] Reviving biblical marriage fit with Mormonism's wider restorationist goals, what Nathan O. Hatch has called its "apocalyptic and supernatural literalism," although not everyone may have grasped that literalism in this case would lead to Mormons taking multiple marriage partners.[16] By April of 1841, however, Smith had emulated Abraham quite exactly by marrying his first plural wife (and two more before year's end). He also taught the "principle" of plural marriage to Joseph B. Noble in 1840 and Brigham Young and others in 1842.[17]

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[13] Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 128.

[14] George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 46.

[15] Bathsheba Smith affidavit, quoted in George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 47.

[16] Nathan O. Hatch, "Mormon and Methodists: Popular Religion in the Crucible of the Free Market," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, No. 1 (Spring 1994), 40.

[17] George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 47; see also 53-87.

It took the continued resistance of Smith's fist wife Emma to polygamy to spur him into articulating the full theology of Mormon marriage, which he finally did in 1843.[18] What he produced, the "new and everlasting covenant," went far beyond merely justifying polygamy, and instead reformulated marriage as an eternal, universal state. Building on ordinances he had created over the previous three years, including "baptism for the dead (1840), eternal marriage (1841), and eternal proxy marriage (1842)," Smith established the doctrine of eternal families.[19] He declared that he had received a revelation that only the Mormon priesthood could solemnize such eternal relationships: "all covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows . . . connections, associations . . . that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed . . . are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in or after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead."[20] The immediate goal was to convince Emma that plural marriage was God's will and that accepting it would earn her not merely salvation but exaltation: "If a man marry a wife according to my word" and entered polygamy, the revelation went, "and they are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise . . . they [the man and his wives] shall come forth in the first resurrection, and enter into their exaltation."[21] Smith's brother Hyrum promptly took the revelation to Emma, hoping that she

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[18] See Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 118.

[19] Gary James Begera, "The Earliest Eternal Sealings for Civilly Married Couples Living and Dead," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, No. 3 (Fall 2002), 41. Mormon historians typically argue that Smith had this revelation as early as 1831 but did not dictate it until 1843. But the revelation's transcriber, William Clayton, did not intimate that it had any history prior to 1843. George D. Smith adds, "If there had been an earlier "revelation," it did not produce any material change in the teachings or customs of the community. Not until the prophet once more heard the Lord speak." *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 48.

[20] Quoted in Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 118.

[21] Quoted in Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 118-19.

would accept the doctrine. (She, in turn, gave Hyrum "a severe talking to" and rejected the doctrine, at least for the time.)[22]

Smith's justification of polygamy is the most famous aspect of this revelation, and he quickly made it known to his inner circle that plural marriage offered the highest realization of the marriage state and would lead to its participants' exaltation. But the covenant had enormous significance for all Mormons, even those who never married polygamously. First, the eternal nature of marriage turned traditional marriage on its head. "Efficacy, virtue, [and] force in or after the resurrection" were precisely what Christian marriage lacked (and still lacks). Perhaps the most famous line in the Christian wedding rite, "until death us do part," denies the validity of marriage in the afterlife. But Smith claimed the opposite. Klaus J. Hansen argues that "from a theological perspective the novel idea that the marriage covenant was not only for time but for eternity if sealed by the proper priesthood authorities was of equal if not greater long-range significance" as polygamy.[23] Not only did it place death "in an entirely new light," but it reconstituted marriage as the path toward divinity.[24] As Lawrence Foster argues, "Those who were not married for eternity would be the lowest class in the afterlife. . . . Sealings for eternity, by contrast, made possible progression toward godhood, as men became great patriarchs who ruled over an ever-increasing posterity and moved on to settle whole new worlds."[25] Far from being an ancillary spiritual concern, marriage became the only means by which Mormons could achieve exaltation. As they worked out the significance of this new doctrine, Mormons defined gradations of both

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[22] Hyrum Smith quoted in Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 156.

[23] Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, 101.

[24] Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, 101. See also Daynes, *More Wives Than One*, 4.

[25] Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 132-33.

marriage and salvation. On earth, one could be sealed for either—or both—"time" and "eternity," with roughly corresponding implications in heaven. (Sealing for time was often referred to as "marrying," while sealing for eternity might be called either "marrying" or "sealing;" for our purposes, we will describe sealing for eternity as "sealing.") In the afterlife, only people who had been sealed for eternity could attain exaltation and sit in the highest ranks of heaven.[26] The upshot of all this was that, for Mormons, marriage became not merely an expression of community continuity, nor of romantic love between a man and a woman, but rather the key to doing God's work on earth and to attaining an elevated position in the afterlife.

Just as important for the daily lives of most Mormons, the covenant invested the priesthood with enormous personal power. Although the church had already begun to consolidate authority over its members' marital lives, the new revelation put their eternal fates almost entirely in the hands of the religious elite, and made previously intimate, personal choices of marriage partners the stuff of universal importance. Having already restored "the lesser and higher priesthoods" on earth, Smith now gave them authority over Mormons' marriage choices, bestowing on them "the keys to signs and witnesses supporting the doctrine."[27] Lawrence Foster has argued that the church in Nauvoo, when Smith first promulgated the idea of eternal marriage, if not of polygamy itself, encouraged "an almost

[26] Even the unmarried, however, could achieve salvation. For an explication of these differences, see Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 10. However, Todd Compton makes the important point that these gradations were neither universally understood nor agreed-upon, especially in the Nauvoo period. *In Sacred Loneliness*, 22-23. What remains is the fact that marriage had been elevated to a position of high importance in Mormon theology.

[27] Hardy, "Lords of Creation," 126; Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward, "Plurality, Patriarchy, and the Priestess: Zina D. H. Young's Nauvoo Marriages," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, No. 1 (Spring 1994), 98.

compulsive emphasis on unquestioning loyalty to the Mormon priesthood."[28] The doctrine of eternal marriage reinforced a tendency to look to the priesthood for guidance in matters of love and marriage, and the religious elite did not shy away from offering their guidance: indeed, numerous journals attest that plural marriage was a common topic of sermons.[29] Marriage's increased importance in Mormon life enmeshed the everyday concerns of church members in the designs and goals of the church hierarchy.

Not until 1852, eight years after Smith's death and five years after the transit to Utah, did Brigham Young open the "principle" of polygamy to the wider mass of Mormons. Prior to that, the need to protect its adherents by keeping their polygamous marriages secret made polygamy largely the province of an influential elite. As more people adopted it, plural marriage certainly inculcated patriarchal values and undermined companionate marriage for its participants. But the development of plural marriage, in tandem with the theology of eternal families, affected Mormons outside the sometimes-clandestine circle of polygamists. If marriage was the only path to exaltation, both marriage and the church leaders who orchestrated it took on greater importance in their followers' lives. In the gentile world, the doctrine of separate spheres increased the psycho-social importance of home and family for bourgeois Americans. But the Mormon theology of marriage far outpaced the bourgeois idolization of the home: as Foster notes, "Mormons saw family life and the relationship between family and larger kinship networks as the ultimate basis for all progression, not only

[28] Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 129.

[29] See, as one example of many, Andrew Love Journal, 8 and 11 November 1855, USHS. Arrington's biography of Brigham Young includes a tellingly long section on the advice Mormons sought—and received—from the president on all manner of marital difficulty. Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 313-17.

on earth but throughout all eternity."[30] By insisting on family and kinship as the prerequisite for exaltation, Mormons made the primary aim of their marriages not bourgeois contentment and safety, but national purification and cosmic salvation.

The Fast Track to Marriage

It was in October or early November 1856 that Priddy Meeks set out from Parowan, Utah, to Salt Lake City, a journey of more than two hundred miles. As he left home, his daughter Peggy Jane in tow, his wife made an unusual request: "Don't you come back without another wife."[31] As he rode, Meeks pondered his wife's ultimatum. "That put me studying," he wrote, "for she never talked that way before."[32] He quickly became inured to the idea, however. "[T]he more I studied about it the more I was determined to try and get another wife."[33] By the time he reached the city, he had made his decision. Leaving his team of horses with a friend, he went to consult Brigham Young, and eagerly took the suggestion of one of Young's wives that he marry her sister, a woman named Mary Jane. He sought her out that afternoon and, without ever laying eyes on her, obtained her agreement through an intermediary to become his second wife.[34] The next morning, Meeks and Mary Jane, aged sixty-two and seventeen, respectively, were sealed to each other.

The reasons Meeks' wife had for wanting him to marry a second wife remain obscure, although we may speculate that as she aged (she had married her husband some forty years

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[30] Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 233. He argues that "Mormon literature of the polygamy period . . . frequently sounds more Victorian than the writings of the Victorians" (232).

[31] Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 25, USHS.

[32] Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 25, USHS.

[33] Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 25, USHS.

[34] Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 26, USHS.

earlier), she needed help around the house; and in Mormon society, polygamy offered an easy answer to this dilemma. Meeks probably shared in this desire, and no doubt happily anticipated the sexual benefits that came with a new, younger partner, but the primary justification he offered for marrying was the spiritual progeny that it would bestow upon him: marrying Mary Jane gave him "the blessings and an exaltation thro[ugh] the lineage of her posterity."[35] As for Mary Jane, she married Meeks to fulfill a dream she had had "about three nights before," in which she had seen a vision of a man dressed like Meeks.[36] Inquiring of the Lord "what she ought to do" if she met such a man, the Lord responded, "that was the man she must go home with."[37] When Meeks arrived, she was waiting.

Meeks' story reveals much about the way in which Mormons made their way to the altar in the 1840s and 1850s. A great many Mormons attempted to treat marriage, especially polygamous marriage, as a purely economic and religious relationship. This typically made their engagements quite brief: people believing in the imminence of Christ's return felt they would be well served to fulfill their spiritual mission and propagate quickly. The goals of bettering one's household economy and increasing one's spiritual standing by bearing children did not require a great deal of preparation. In the vast majority of cases, Mormons made and consummated engagements over the course of a few weeks, some almost on the spur of the moment. It is particularly telling that Brigham Young signed on to Meeks' marriage so quickly: the Mormon hierarchy had a vested interest in making sure that their acolytes married, hoping to people the desert, fulfill their spiritual mission, and cement their people's loyalty. The ways in which their religious beliefs butted heads with their

[35] Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 29, USHS.

[36] Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 27, USHS.

[37] Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 28, USHS.

companionate impulses caused Mormons to spend much of their brief engagements mulling over the meaning of marriage—more time than they spend making physical preparations for the wedding itself, in fact, which is one reason why we will focus at so much length on their ideas about marriage. The expedited, state-sanctioned path to marriage left many people dissatisfied. It undermined the autonomy of women, some of whom had more expansive spiritual ambitions than merely to take second (or third, or fourth) place in a patriarchal household. And it confounded notions of companionate love, which had come to define the married state for a great many people, no matter their level of religious commitment.

Like Priddy Meeks, other Mormons often got engaged and married within a short span of time. On New Year's Day 1851, Joseph Heywood first "hinted" to Martha Spence the "probability" of their marriage; sixteen days later, they were married.[38] David Osborn married an immigrant from Denmark in 1857, despite their having almost no knowledge of each other. It was only two months after her arrival, and, as "she could not speak any English—and . . . I did not understand Danish," Osborn remembered, "we had to come together with a very limited acquaintance."[39] And within twenty days of fifteen year-old Maria Van Valkenburg coming to live in Norton Jacob's house in 1851, they were married.[40] Such expeditious engagements left little time for the flowering of companionate love—not to mention the preparation of elaborate weddings. Mormon weddings, which were often simple in comparison to rites back east, required a few days' preparation at most. Eliza Maria Partridge noted in her diary "[m]aking preparations" for a friend's wedding that took place

[38] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 1 and 16 January 1851, USHS.

[39] David Osborn Journal, 26, USHS.

[40] Norton Jacob Autobiography, 167, USHS.

two days later.[41] William Gibson gathered his current wives around him in order to have them present as he married his newest wife in 1857, but he seems not to have done anything more to prepare.[42]

Mormons often combined sealing for eternity and marriage (which they often called sealing for time). But one could be exclusive of the other, and people sometimes gave sealing more deliberation than marriage. James Farmer married Harriett Bateman on August 4, 1854.[43] Even after Harriett gave birth to his child, the couple viewed sealing as a graver step, and they waited more than a year before taking it. During their first year of marriage, James recalled, "[S]he repeatedly desired me to have her sealed to me;" he finally consented, but only after asking her assurance that "you do sincerely love me . . . and are willing to act as proxy for Ann that is my first wife that she may have her right place and you think you would love me in time and all eternity."[44] For most Americans, simply promising to love one another for the rest of their lives was enough; the more-lasting commitment of sealing gave some Mormons more pause even than marrying.

In marrying so quickly, Mormons responded to a number of pressures. Most obviously, economic circumstances tended to push both men and women into marriage.[45] If a household was struggling, Mormons saw marriage (or plural marriage) as a solution. When Priddy Meeks encountered a man in difficult circumstances, he quickly encouraged him to

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[41] Eliza Maria Partridge Smith Lyman Life and Journal, 24 September 1849, USHS.

[42] William Gibson Diary, 20-27 January 1857, USHS.

[43] James Farmer Diary, 42, USHS.

[44] James Farmer Diary, 46, USHS.

[45] See Bradley and Woodward, "Plurality, Patriarchy, and the Priestess," 114.

marry.[46] Emily Jacob allowed her husband Norton to marry Maria Van Valkenburg after her own "weakness and debility" rendered her "unable to preform [sic] alone her duties of house wife."[47] Although Norton Jacob deemed his new bride "a kind obedient and affectionate wife," this was a marriage not of love, but of convenience—for Emily Jacob.[48] On the flip side of that coin, the church hierarchy encouraged men to marry poor women, women alone, or women recently arrived from Europe, in hopes of promoting social stability and welfare by offering a potentially indigent class a means of productive survival.[49] When Jane Snyder Richards' sister "needed . . . assistance" in 1852, "getting along with considerable difficulty," Jane found the solution in polygamy: "I gave her to my husband as a wife."[50] In 1851, Lewis Barney married a "poor Sick woman" whom his family had housed and nursed back to health.[51] And before marrying Mary Jane, Priddy Meeks had been encouraged to marry "a hand cart girl"—that is, a woman so poor she had traversed the mountains on foot, rather than by wagon—specifically "one who had no relations."[52] Once a Mormon found someone who matched his or her economic needs, they saw little reason for delay. Plural marriage occupied an economically ambiguous state. As Marie Cornall and Laga Van Beek point out, it was supposedly reserved for men who had attained "a certain level of economic well-being;" yet adding additional wives "contributed to household production and therefore to the

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[46] See Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 16, USHS.

[47] Norton Jacob Autobiography, 167, USHS.

[48] Norton Jacob Autobiography, 167, USHS.

[49] See Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 317 and Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 189.

[50] Jane Snyder Richards, Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards, 38, USHS.

[51] Lewis Barney Autobiography, 59, USHS.

[52] Priddy Meeks Autobiography, 25-26, USHS.

economic stability of the household."[53] Although the church frowned on men taking second wives if they lacked the resources to care for them, some poor men did so anyway: William Ellis Jones took a second wife in 1862 even while he struggled to feed his family.[54] Associated as it was with prosperous manhood, taking a second wife may have occupied a place in Mormon culture somewhat analogous to owning slaves in the antebellum South, with poor men desiring to do so in order to validate themselves socially or economically.[55]

The church also encouraged its members to marry. William Flake informed his wife one night in 1868 that he had "been councelled to take another wife."[56] Jane Snyder Richards remembered that although Brigham Young "never commanded it," he certainly "would counsel men to marry."[57] Young himself wrote in 1868 that the church "encourage[d] early marriages," and proudly noted that "the percentage of the married is very large, and as a general thing the people marry young."[58] Young's reasons for promoting marriage focused on the institution's moral qualities. Along with building up their families on earth and filling the universe with holy spirits, marriage, he said, taught "correct principles with regard to the beauty of holiness and virtue, and the value of their existence in this life."[59] As for the

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[53] Marie Cornall and Laga Van Beek, "The Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage: The Social Construction of Religious Identity and Commitment," in *Religion and the Social Order*, vol. 5.: *Sex, Lies, and Sanctity: Religion and Deviance in Contemporary North America*, ed. David G. Bromley, (Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI PRESS, 1995), 19.

[54] William Ellis Jones Diary, 8-9, USHS.

[55] See Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), ch. 2.

[56] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 57, USHS.

[57] Jane Snyder Richards, Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards, 46, USHS.

[58] Quoted in Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 317.

[59] Quoted in Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 317.

Mormon theological imperative to marry, Young assured his unmarried followers that "a man can be saved in the Celestial Kingdom with no wife at all."[60] But it is worth noting Young's choice of words. An unmarried person could be saved—but he could not be exalted. Surely, many felt or internalized the pressure from church leaders to reach a higher state. Indeed, in the Mormon "reformation" of 1856, church leaders "forcefully" chastised their congregations for failing to marry polygamously.[61]

Responding, then, to pressures both economic and ecclesiastic, Mormons lived within a culture of marriage, viewing the trip to the altar as their society's economic, spiritual, and emotional panacea.[62] Joseph Lee Robinson, who received several visions regarding polygamy, believed that his and his wife's very salvation hinged on his adherence to the principle: he married a second wife in 1847 "for the glory of God and also for her good and my good also. . . . [V]erily it's true, if I had not taken her I should have been condemned of God."[63] Martha Spence appears to have viewed conversion as intimately related to marrying. As she traveled west to Utah (having been converted to Mormonism by her future husband), she reflected, "What have I not enjoyed except a wedded life and its consequent happiness."[64] Joining the Mormons brought her that happiness almost immediately, as she married just a few months after her arrival. Constant encouragement from the church hierarchy morphed into a cultural imperative to marriage (and polygamy). Emma Lynnette Richardson described her parents as swept up in a craze for polygamy around 1858: "My

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[60] Quoted in Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 317.

[61] Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 46.

[62] Leonard Arrington observes that "Mormon society in nineteenth-century Utah had built into it a certain amount of pressure to marry." Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 317.

[63] Joseph Lee Robinson Journal, 15, USHS.

[64] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 10 September 1850, USHS.

parents got the disease with the rest."[65] They found a man for her to marry, and despite her having "cried and begged, begged and cried, . . . I was forced to marry and go into his family." Angry as she was at her father, she acknowledged that his intentions were not malicious. In forcing her to the altar, she said, he simply acceded to "the pressure of the times."[66]

That Richardson's parents ignored her protests suggest that Mormon culture placed a premium on marrying for duty rather than love, distinguishing Mormons from the trends developing in much of the rest of the country. Jane Snyder Richards argued that marriage fulfilled Mormons' religious duty: "In polygamy, a man marries again from a sense of religious duty. . . . His religion demands it, and all three [ithe man and his two wives] enter polygamy with earnest convictions of it being done in the sight of God at his command."[67] This, too, fit into the goals of the church hierarchy. Lawrence Foster argues that framing marriage (and polygamy) in terms of duty tended to serve the state: "partially breaking down exclusive bonds between a husband and wife and . . . undercutting direct emotional involvement in family affairs in favor of church business," he writes, "contributed significantly to the long-range demands of centralized planning and the rapid establishment of a new religious and communal order."[68]

Yet as they chronicled the trip to the altar, men and women repeatedly described how their religious duty conflicted with cherished notions of romantic, companionate love. Hannah Tapfield King, watching her daughter's husband preparing to take on a plural wife in

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[65] Emma Lynette Richardson Conover Autobiography, 5, USHS.

[66] Emma Lynette Richardson Conover Autobiography, 5, USHS.

[67] Jane Snyder Richards, Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards, 50, USHS.

[68] Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 189.

1853, expressed her allegiance to a more companionate ideal: "it seems to me," she lamented, "that such a girl as Georgey [her daughter] ought to content a man for a proper time at any rate—I cannot reconcile myself to this new doctrine coming in such a form."[69] The suggestion of plural marriage contravened Lucy Flake's expectations of romantic love as well. When her husband proposed marrying another, her bruised feelings took on a romantic, fateful tinge: "For ten years we had been all the world to each other. We were made for each other. Why should I let someone else come between us."[70] A deeply romantic strain ran through many Mormons' discussions of marriage.[71] Indeed, some went to the altar apparently heedless of the social or religious consequences: Soren F. Jensen, a Danish immigrant, met Mary Christensen while driving her from Omaha to his home in Salt Lake City. "She and I fell in love while crossing the plains together," he recalled, "but we didn't tell anyone about it. She was a good and wonderful girl. We were married about three weeks after we arrived. Everyone was surprised."[72] And Lucy Flake remembered how companionate notions filled her head during her courtship: she had been, she said, a "romantic young girl," and her beau (anachronistically) "My Prince Charming."[73] When they married, the rooms in their home had "very little in them besides love."[74]

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[69] Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Journey to Zion: Voices from the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997), 498.

[70] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 56, USHS.

[71] Campbell and Campbell argue that "the regulations in American monogamy emphasizing romantic love and interpersonal attractions as social mechanisms were not easily adapted to Mormon polygamy." "Divorce Among Mormon Polygamists," 195.

[72] "Interesting Events in the Life of Soren F. Jensen," 8, Serilda Jane Allred Blain Collection, USHS.

[73] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 16-17, USHS.

[74] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 32, USHS.

People's reluctance to heed their religious and social duty usually centered on polygamy, as it violated most thoroughly the dictates of companionate marriage. Sarah De Armon Pea Rich admitted that her love for her husband made entering into a plural marriage difficult: "Many may think it very strange," she wrote, "that I would consent for my dear husband whome I loved as I did my own life and lived with him for years to take more wives. This I could not have done if I had not believed it to be right in the sight of God and . . . that those holding the preasthood of heaven might by obeying this order attain to a higher glory in the eternal world."[75] When Lucy Flake's husband asked her to allow another woman into their marriage, she was distracted by her child crying in the cradle. Getting up to tend the child, she reflected, "Duty was calling me. It seemed Duty was always calling."[76]

When they sanctioned polygamy, women shaped their sacrifice of romantic feelings into testaments of their own piety. When Elmira Pond Miller's husband married a second wife, it violated her inclinations, yet she submitted nonetheless: "This was not according to my natural feelings," she wrote, "but I was willing for the Gospel's sake to make the sacrifice and gave my consent."[77] And Eliza Maria Partridge Smith noted that marrying polygamously went against the dictates of her heart, "but," she acknowledged, "I know it was the Lord who kept me from opposing his plans although in my heart I felt that I could not submit to them, but I did and I am thankful to my Heavenly Father for the care that he had over me."[78]

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[75] Madsen, *Journey to Zion*, 175.

[76] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 57, USHS.

[77] "A Short Journal of Elmira Pond Miller," 5, Henry William Miller Diary, USHS.

[78] Eliza Maria Partridge Smith Lyman Life and Journal, USHS.

Why did Mormons enter a relationship that contradicted their notions of what love meant? Mormonism's primitivist goal of restoring personal discourse with God, in the context of an authoritarian theocracy, helped people find their duty within themselves. Plural marriage offered them not only a test of faith and loyalty, but a chance to pass that test, thereby proving their own worthiness for exaltation and their legitimacy as members of Zion's body politic.[79] As people of deeply-felt faith, Mormons devoted a good deal of time after they had been counseled or asked to enter into plural marriage to meditating upon it, looking for a sign from God. Many claimed that accepting plural marriage challenged men and women in equal measure. Lucy Flake believed that her husband's "struggle" to accept polygamy "had been as hard as mine."[80] Bearing out her words, Brigham Young described his first exposure to the doctrine of polygamy as "the first time in my life that I had desired the grave."[81] There is little reason to doubt their sincerity in these deliberations, but the array of cultural pressures we have already discussed bent their minds toward assent.

People in situations that might become polygamous tended to have visions instructing them to do so: after Laura Farnsworth moved in with Perry and Elizabeth Liston, Perry Liston soon had a vision instructing him to have both her and his wife "sealed to me by the Prophet Brigham, and I should be greatly blessed."[82] Lucy Walker told Joseph Smith that she could not become his wife "unless I knew that God approved my course."[83] Smith, after

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[79] Bradley and Woodward note that plural marriage "helped define the boundaries of faith and assured women of their faithfulness by setting them an enormous loyalty test." "Plurality, Patriarchy, and the Priestess," 117. See also Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 135.

[80] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 59, USHS.

[81] Quoted in Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 26.

[82] Commodore Perry Liston Autobiography, 4, USHS.

[83] Lucy Walker Smith Kimball Statement, 6, USHS. See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 465.

telling her that "the gate will be closed forever against you" if she rejected him, assured her that God would indeed make the principle clear to her.[84] In the nick of time, a vision of polygamy's righteousness appeared to her after a sleepless night. Mormonism's separatism also encouraged people to accept the new doctrines their leaders offered them. Church leaders, at whose behest Mormons had broken off from their families and traveled to distant lands, made it clear that polygamy was both a positive good and a spiritual obligation. Hundreds of miles away from home, scrabbling to survive in the unforgiving wilderness, most people could not have felt much choice in the matter. William Flake began his meditation on the issue from the premise of polygamy's rightness, and then moved himself to accommodate that premise: "he had battle with himself," his wife wrote, "to see if he was good enough to undertake it."[85] Flake was not testing polygamy; he was testing himself. When Joseph Holbrook similarly set himself to "meditating upon the principles of the doctrine of having more than one wife" in 1845, he acknowledged that "I could not so well understand it," but yet maintained, "still I believed it was true because of the revelation of God had so declared it by our prophet."[86] Little wonder that he soon had a vision confirming it.

There were exceptions. Large sectors of the Mormon population never practiced polygamy. Stanley S. Ivins estimates that as many as eighty-five percent of Mormons in Utah were not polygamous, while Cornall and Van Beek argue that at least half the women in

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[84] Lucy Walker Smith Kimball Statement, 6, USHS.

[85] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 59, USHS.

[86] Joseph Holbrook Autobiography, 54, USHS.

Salt Lake City did not uphold the principle.[87] Many remained monogamous (or were not counseled to take a second wife) for economic or social reasons—many men could not afford one wife, much less two. But some refused on grounds of faith. David Osborn recalled that his wife Cynthia found the doctrine "repugnant to her feelings," and that "her confidence was shaken in the presidency of the church" on its account.[88] Troubled by her lack of obedience, David took comfort in the promise of his patriarchal blessing, which told him that if he remained "faithful[,] I should have power to redeem and bring her forth in the first Resurrection."[89] But most of those whom the leadership counseled to take more wives seem to have acquiesced.

Once they submitted, men and women found themselves entering into relationships that the Mormon leadership framed in explicitly patriarchal terms. Lucy Flake's patriarchal blessing (which she received some years before she married) tied her spiritual worth to marrying: "Thou shalt be connected with a man of God, thru whom thou shalt receive the priesthood, exaltation power and eternal glory and become a mother in Israel."[90] Marriage's patriarchal implications increased with polygamy, and church leaders encouraged men to take up the mantle of polygamous biblical patriarchs.[91] Wilford Woodruff made it clear that a failure to marry polygamously would have negative spiritual consequences, deeming them

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[87] See Stanley S. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 170, and Conrall and Van Beek, "The Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage," 18.

[88] David Osborn Journal, 20, 24, USHS.

[89] David Osborn Journal, 24, USHS.

[90] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 12, USHS. See also Hardy, "Lords of Creation," 137.

[91] Kathryn Daynes argues that plural marriage gave men "superior power and authority" over women. Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 5. See also Hardy, "Lords of Creation;" and Bradley and Woodward, 97.

"of but little account in the Church & Kingdom of God."[92] Aroet Lucius Hale remembered that when Joseph Smith encouraged Hale's uncle to marry a second wife, Smith appealed to his patriarchal aspirations, instructing him that he needed to "rais up a famley" in order "to Honor and revere his name" and placing him in a long line of patriarchs, telling him "the Lenige that he was of."[93] Further heightening the patriarchal thrust of marriage was the at least intermittent tendency among church leaders to encourage young women to marry older men. Although Leonard J. Arrington mentions that Brigham Young once counseled a young woman not to marry a "an older man as a plural wife," but rather to wed a "younger man closer to her own age as his first wife," this appears to have been, at most, only intermittently the rule among church leaders.[94] Authorities suggested that men marry younger women rather than women their own age. Joseph Smith counseled Heber C. Kimball not to marry the two "elderly Sisters Pitkin," but instead to wed a woman a decade younger than him.[95] Some leaders may have even made marrying old, already-married men a matter of religious salvation. Emma Lynnette Richardson claimed that in the late 1850s, "Some old fanatics were preaching that a young man could not save a girl if he married her. That to be saved she must marry some old codger tried and true."[96] Pairing young women off with older men almost necessarily instituted unequal power relations within a household, as young,

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[92] Quoted in Hardy, "Lords of Creation," 137.

[93] Aroet Lucius Hale Diary, 8, USHS.

[94] Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 315.

[95] Quoted in Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 29.

[96] Emma Lynette Richardson Conover Autobiography, 5, USHS. Although Richardson's allegation is not far from anti-Mormon accounts that proliferated in the nineteenth century, it also potentially jibes with Mormon theology, which did tie exaltation to having more than one wife: in this way, an older, polygamous man might potentially offer a woman a better eternal life than a younger, unmarried man.

inexperienced women can hardly have been expected to challenge their older, often already-married husbands for authority.

In spite of the patriarchal push toward marriage, some historians have argued that Mormon culture offered women a great deal of power within the family. They have claimed that a supportive female culture existed among Mormon women, especially within polygamous households, where "sister wives" offered each other love and sometimes power.[97] In some ways, women's behavior and words in the months and weeks before weddings took place confirm those suggestions. For one thing, some women clearly acquiesced to polygamous overtures—or made those overtures themselves—in hopes of improving or maintaining their position within a household. James Farmer recalled that his wife Harriett "frequently desired me if I took a second wife to take her sister Emma who was in England."[98] But this was no simple accession to her husband's authority. By bringing her sister from England, Harriett would make her household easier to run and give herself a companion whom she loved and trusted, rather than risk bringing a stranger into the fold.[99] Joseph Heywood's first wife apparently resigned herself to the idea of her husband's marrying Martha Spence. But she fell into "uncontrolable grief" upon learning that Joseph planned to take his new wife south on a mission. "She expressed her feelings," wrote Spence, "that in the event of my coming into the family she thought it but reasonable that I

[97] See Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "The 'Leading Sisters': A Female Hierarchy in Nineteenth-Century Mormon Society," in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 161-62. Beecher of course refers to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual." Lawrence Foster finds "a considerable degree of freedom and autonomy for women in Mormon society." *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 209.

[98] James Farmer Diary, 46, USHS.

[99] On men marrying their wives' sisters, see Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," 175.

should remain with her to be a help in Brother Haywood's absence."[100] In attempting to keep Joseph's new wife at home with her rather than on the road with her husband, his first wife argued that duty—in this case, a woman's duty to help maintain a household—took precedence over romance, and used her position as first wife to prevent her husband from growing overly attached to his new bride. (And she won the argument: Martha stayed home.)

Along with using polygamy to gain power in their marriages, women passed the doctrine down to their daughters. When Lucy Flake asked her mother whether she should allow her husband to take another wife, her mother demurred, saying, "My daughter, . . . That is one thing I cannot advise you about."[101] Less bashful, Ann Prior Jarvis proudly declared that "my children know I have taught them to do right" in following the principle, "and I would exhort my children to always honor the priesthood."[102] And when he was sealed to his step-daughter Martha, his "2nd wifes oldest . . . daughter" in 1862, William Ellis Jones noted that Martha's mother Dinah had helped unite Martha to her husband: "She was promised to me by herself and her Mother," he wrote, "long before we left" on the journey for Utah.[103]

Despite women's ability to find avenues for power within the married state, and even despite women's indoctrination of their children into polygamy, other evidence suggests that the Mormon culture of marriage encouraged women to enter the married state under highly subordinate circumstances. It is noteworthy that Mormons viewed parental consent as far

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[100] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 12 January 1851.

[101] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 58, USHS.

[102] Ann Prior Jarvis Autobiography, 23, USHS.

[103] William Ellis Jones Diary, 8, USHS. On the other hand, given that William and Martha had almost certainly been having sex before they married, Dinah Jones may have had little choice but to allow the union to proceed. Martha gave birth to William's child six and a half months after they married (8-9).

from crucial. Since the ideal of couple-focused marriage had rendered asking parents permission to marry obsolete for bourgeois relationships, one might expect self-consciously patriarchal Mormons to have kept up or reinstituted the tradition. But Mormon leaders wished to establish a patriarchy not along existing lines of social or economic power, but among church leaders and their acolytes. Giving too much power to protective fathers might undercut men's ability to marry whomever God declared they should. Especially during plural marriage's clandestine years, parents threatened to obstruct God's will by withholding their consent, and were to be avoided if necessary. Indeed, as he pursued union after union in the 1840s, Joseph Smith repeatedly circumvented parental objections, although he occasionally obtained their consent after the deed was done.[104] Further, the Mormon predilection for marrying poor or lonely women—something that Smith did more than once, and that church leaders advocated in the name of social welfare—underscored the fact that women approached matrimony without the protection of social networks.[105]

Moreover, as women acquiesced to marriage—and to polygamy—they often forfeited or compromised their greatest potential strength within the Mormon theocracy: the power of their direct connection with God. By emphasizing both women's and men's receptivity to revelation, early Mormonism gave women a clear path to spiritual and social power. Mormon women in the 1830s and 1840s prophesied, spoke in tongues, healed the sick and may even (although historians are divided on the subject) have shared in the Mormon

[104] See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 465. On the other hand, John Pulsipher noted that he had "obtained" "The consent and blessing of all parties concerned" when he married Rozilla Huffaker. John Pulsipher Diary, v. 1, 37, USHS.

[105] For one example of Joseph Smith's marrying women with few social networks to rely on, see Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 408.

priesthood.[106] Women's spiritual power sometimes took on a public or semi-public role: Lewis Barney described how the apparent authenticity of men's and women's speaking in tongues managed to pacify an angry mob in the early 1840s.[107] And as late as the 1850s, Lucy Flake claimed that "there were more righteous women than men, especially in every Church," and Joseph Pulsipher recorded a declaration from Brigham Young that "Every person that obeys the Gospel that is baptized and has the ordinance of the laying on of hands . . . can by their own faithfulness obtain the gifts and blessings" of "Visions . . . or prophecy."[108]

But as they struggled with the prospect of entering polygamy in the weeks before their weddings, women turned their visionary power to patriarchal ends. The story of women first opposing plural marriage and then relenting repeated itself ad infinitum, almost always at a cost to women's autonomy. Maria Robinson's husband recalled that "she could never endure the subject of plural marriage. . . . She felt she could not live and have her husband have more wives."[109] But after making polygamy "the subject of humble and fervent prayer," Maria received a vision confirming its goodness.[110] The vision, wrote her husband, "did for

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[106] See Beecher, "The 'Leading Sisters,'" 159; Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 206; Bradley and Woodward, 87 (n. 4), and Hardy, "Lords of Creation," 125. It is possible to argue that Nauvoo Mormonism offered more spiritual chances for women (cf. Lawrence Foster, 207); and that Utah Mormonism was a period of retrenchment and settling into a stricter brand of patriarchy. The bulk of the evidence seems to lead in this direction; and yet the path that women and men took to the altar (especially the polygamous altar) was similar in both periods.

[107] Lewis Barney Autobiography, 20, USHS.

[108] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 57, USHS; John Pulsipher Diary, v. 1, 45, USHS.

[109] Joseph Lee Robinson Journal, 34, USHS.

[110] Joseph Lee Robinson Journal, 34, USHS.

her what was intended. She was converted. She never fought any more."[111] In thanks for her pliant behavior, her husband planned (albeit rather grudgingly) to uphold her spiritual future: in giving "her hearty consent to every wife that I received," he wrote, "I do affirm that she behaved remarkably so much so that I shall be in favor of her having a kingdom and retaining her position as first wife."[112] Humble and fervent prayer still left her spiritual fate up to the "favor" of her husband. Eliza Maria Partridge Smith Lyman reflected that the submission demanded of her by becoming a clandestine polygamous wife conflicted with her more independent personality: "nothing but a firm desire to keep the commandments of the Lord could have induced a girl to marry in that way. . . . I am often led to wonder how it was that a person of my temperament could get along with it and not rebel."[113] Some women apparently attempted to leverage their acquiescence into some residual spiritual power. Emily Jacob, who had always "been rather opposed" to polygamy, suddenly found her mind "wrought upon by the spirit of God, to cease her resistance, and in consequence the Lord gave her a greater testimony of the work of the last days than she had ever received before."[114] If she was to allow her husband to marry another, she might as well have the credit of a closer connection with God. Mormon women's spiritual powers, then, often resulted in their acceding to patriarchal goals. And their female culture—not unlike that of elite southern women—worked as often as not to buttress the patriarchy, to acclimate women to its strictures.

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[111] Joseph Lee Robinson Journal, 34, USHS.

[112] Joseph Lee Robinson Journal, 34-35, USHS.

[113] Eliza Maria Patridge Smith Lyman Life and Journal, USHS.

[114] Norton Jacob Autobiography, 166-67, USHS.

The case of Lucy Walker suggests how entering marriage could minimize a woman's spiritual power. Walker grew up with an extraordinary sense of mission, having been encouraged to speak in tongues, prophesy, and faith-heal.[115] She maintained her sense of righteousness and spiritual calling throughout her life, chastising fellow Mormons in her later years for ever "yielding to popular opinion."[116] Accepting polygamy allowed her to act on her radical impulses, to craft an identity for herself as a trailblazing spiritual martyr, making a pious example of herself by violating her society's deeply-held taboos. By becoming Joseph Smith's plural wife, she said, she hoped "to establish a principle that would benefit the human family and emancipate them from their degradation into which they, through their wicked customs, had fallen."[117] Yet she channeled her radical desires into a patriarchal institution, subordinating her will to that of her husband (not to mention to God). Reflecting on what a life of polygamy had taught her, she summed up: "it is a grand school. You learn self-control, self denial, it . . . teaches us to study and subdue self."[118]

Also imbued with a sense of spiritual power was Perry Liston. While riding from Cedar City to Salt Lake City in 1856, he had a vision: "the Lord Showed 4 women to me," he remembered, "and also the place where to find them, and told me it was my privilege to take these women to wife."[119] Going to the appointed place and finding two (not four) women, a mother and daughter who had recently immigrated from England, Liston asked Brigham

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[115] See Lucy Walker Smith Kimball Statement, 1, USHS.

[116] Lucy Walker Smith Kimball Statement, 7, USHS.

[117] Lucy Walker Smith Kimball Statement, 7, USHS.

[118] Lucy Walker Smith Kimball Statement, 8, USHS. The experience of Sarah S. Leavitt is similar in some ways to Walker's. Although she never married polygamously, she also practiced faith-healing and saw a vision instructing her to accept polygamy. Sarah S. Leavitt Journal, 22-23.

[119] Commodore Perry Liston Autobiography, 8, USHS.

Young for his advice. According to Liston, Young responded, "[']bring them on,['] and he would Seal them to me," which he did before Liston left Salt Lake City.[120] Family tradition says that Liston's first wife did not hear of the two new additions to her family until the party had nearly reached home.[121] Whatever else may have influenced him, we may take Liston at his word that he felt divinely inspired to take two or four extra wives—give or take. In this he was hardly alone: Mormons saw visions of marriage everywhere in the 1840s and 1850s. Following the example of Joseph Smith and his successors, men and women opened themselves to divine inspiration, and the nuptial thrust of Mormon theology left little doubt as to where their visions would lead.

But divine inspiration almost always favored men. Acting on their visions was not always pleasant or easy, but it bought men the heady experience of helping to re-write the rules of marriage according to their desires, without any diminishment of (and, in fact, often increasing) their patriarchal power. Women, too, experienced the thrill of following their religion where it led them, and the satisfaction of doing their duty. But while Mormon experiments with marriage taught men to seek out women whom they could protect and dominate in the context of divinely-inspired patriarchy, it taught women, even charismatic figures like Lucy Walker, the virtues of "self-control, self denial," and the ability to "subdue self."

The Wedding Day(s)

[120] Commodore Perry Liston Autobiography, 8, USHS.

[121] "Elizabeth Reeves Liston, by her Daughter, Ovilla Rosaltha Liston Empey," Commodore Perry Liston Autobiography, USHS.

As men and women prepared to marry, the wide significance that Mormon theology and church leaders accorded marriage and polygamy occasioned bouts of psychological and spiritual searching, particularly as they weighed their religious duty against their romantic inclinations. Mormon wedding rituals underscored their culture's emphasis on marriage, and especially the tendency to value spiritual duty over romantic inclinations. Their participants worked out their anxieties about marriage by performing multiple variations on the same ritual many times over during their married lives. In this way, they used weddings (or rituals resembling weddings) to reassure themselves of their spiritual goodness, and to smooth over or resolve moments of tension in their relationships. As they did so, they emphasized elements of their relationships that resonated with their sense of themselves as "Saints." Their ceremonies were simple, but they featured effusive declarations of their religious devotion—both of these factors serving to separate them from the corrupt, companionate consumerism of impious easterners. But they also displayed patriarchal power in subtle and explicit ways, suggesting that their religious duty could not be extricated from their mission to restore biblical patriarchy on this earth. In asserting the masculine prerogative, Mormon weddings helped men and women enact the biblical patriarchy that the reformation of the world would require. And in encouraging the sublimation of romantic impulses to religious duty, Mormon rituals implicitly acknowledged that their participants may well have been more amenable to the trappings—and perhaps the companionate implications—of the bourgeois wedding than the church hierarchy wished.

It is not entirely correct to speak of a Mormon "wedding day." Because of the varied but complementary meanings that a number of Mormon rituals had, uniting a man and a woman in the bonds of wedlock was often not so much an event as a process. On a given day, a

couple might be baptized in each other's presence, receive their endowments (analogous to confirmation in Protestant and Catholic churchs), get married (that is, be "sealed for time"), receive their patriarchal blessings (declarations of a person's spiritual potential and lineage in one of the houses of Israel), be sealed for eternity, be sealed for time and eternity, or stand proxy for another being sealed for time or eternity. They might do many of these at once, or they might do only one of them. Each of these different rituals had distinct meanings in the Mormon worldview, and while only two of them—marriage (or sealing for time) and sealing for eternity—were strictly analogous to marriage as modern America conceives it, the others added to the ritual significance of a union. When they were performed in the presence of one's current or future spouse, any or each of these rituals might give their participants the sense of coming together as a unit. Indeed, baptisms, confirmations, or patriarchal blessings, which were nominally unrelated to marriage, often closely followed or anticipated a marriage or sealing rite, either on the same day or a few weeks or months beforehand; and they offered participants the same sense of spiritual mission as sealing did. Martha Spence Heywood, for instance, was baptized and confirmed by her husband in October of 1850, was "sealed" to him in January of 1851, received her endowment in his presence in April of the same year and, five years later, was sealed to him yet again "in the house of the Lord," that is, in the Endowment House that had been completed since they were married.[122]

Did all this repetition render their weddings meaningless, like Christmas in December, June and July? No, but it likely affected the way participants viewed the rituals. Instead of significant community and family build-up before one day of celebration, the diffusion of Mormons' ritual life over an expanse of time probably encouraged them to limit the amount

[122] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 20 April 1856; see also 13 October 1850, 17 January 1851, and 20 April 1851, USHS.

of community celebration surrounding each of these rites. In diminishing the wider family's role, the ritual placed a heightened emphasis on the people participating, namely, the man and woman (or women) being sealed, and the priests performing the ceremony. Here Mormons both followed and rejected middle-class practice: just like in the Northeast, they placed a premium on a couple's spiritual union, but they emphasized the importance of duty over romance or companionship far more than the eastern middle class.

Just as most engagements were brief, so were weddings. Mormons could be sealed for eternity (which they believed united them in the afterlife), for time (which united the concerned parties only for their time on earth) or for both. Only a church patriarch could seal people for eternity, and he could only do so in at least a relatively-sacred location—preferably a Temple or, in Salt Lake City from 1855 to 1889, the Endowment House. People typically described being sealed for time as a marriage or a wedding, and being sealed for eternity as a sealing; but they did not follow that rule fastidiously. Sealings were private, attended only by the participants and perhaps their immediate family, while weddings took place in public or semi-public circumstances—usually at someone's home.

There was little or no shame in being sealed for time rather than eternity. Indeed, some couples, like Harriett and James Farmer, married one year and were sealed for eternity the next. Similarly, Aroet Lucius Hale was married to his wife by the Apostle Heber C. Kimble, and then "a Short Time after. Merred & Sealed in the indowment House."[123] Marriage required exceedingly little ritual to accomplish.[124] In an analogy to the upright New England magistrate who married a couple on the street, Fred Cox and Lucy Allen were married in

[123] Aroet Lucius Hale Diary, 19, USHS.

[124] Presumably because they did not have implications in the afterlife, Daynes notes that "records of marriages that were not also sealings [for eternity] were indifferently kept." Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 57.

1857 by a bishop who passed them in the road; the groom assumed the bishop was joking, but when he explained his predicament to Brigham Young, the church president saw little to laugh about and refused to undo it.[125] Slightly less informally, William Gibson's account of his marriage to Lilias Clark, one of his plural wives, took place not in some important ritual space, but in Young's office.[126] More often, marriages for time took place in the home of the bride's father, adhering to pre-nineteenth-century traditions and emphasizing the patriarchal nature of the event.[127] If the bride's father was absent, as was often the case among this mobile, separatist people, another male family member might host the event, as did Anson Call for his sister-in-law Hannah Flint.[128] But other weddings took place at the groom's father's house, and James Farmer married Harriett Bateman "in the 4th. Ward School Room."[129] Still, priests performed even the least-formal marriages: from Nauvoo onward, Mormons essentially abandoned civil marriages, making it clear that the church maintained control over the marital choices of its members.[130]

As the locations of the above weddings suggest, sealings for time offered the community and family the chance to celebrate themselves and their children. In 1853, Simpson D. Huffaker arranged a fine party for the wedding of his daughter, Rozilla. The groom remembered, "we were married at her fathers house. . . . This being the first wedding in his

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[125] See Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 55-56. Cf. Earle, *Customs and Fashions in Old New England*, 71.

[126] William Gibson Diary, 17 February 1854, USHS.

[127] See, for instance, Appleton Milo Harmon Diary, 5, USHS; and William Wallace Hammond Autobiographical Sketch, 17, USHS.

[128] See Joseph Holbrook Autobiography, 48, USHS.

[129] James Farmer Diary, 42, USHS; see Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 23 March 1851, USHS.

[130] Daynes deems the fact that "marriage was considered a religious, not a civil, rite and was governed by ecclesiastical rules" "the most important feature of nineteenth-century Mormon marriage." *More Wives than One*, 56.

family it was got upon a liberal and large scale."[131] Belying Mormons' tame reputations, these community "infares" often featured lively music and dancing. Farmer noted that "we danced till about 2 Ocllck in the morning" after his wedding.[132] Another wedding "came off in good style," reported a guest, "and every one seemed pleased with themselves and every body else. Staid till one oclock and night and danced, Went home and rested till morning then went to Cotton wood and had another party and dinner at the residence of the bridegroom."[133] The wedding of one poor man even featured the old, pre-bourgeois tradition of communal inauguration of the couple's sex life: Albert King Thurber reported, "As usual at weddings it was thought proper to put the wedded couple to bed."[134] Wealthier families used marriage to set their children up with the means to live. Joseph Holbrook catalogued the wedding gifts he gave to his various children, including "34 acres of land . . . 100 bushels of wheat . . . 2 colts . . . 1 cow . . . a wagon . . . some farming tools etc. . . . [and] beds and bedding etc for keeping house."[135] These practical gifts had little to do with the standards of bourgeois consumption taking hold in the eastern United States, but rather fit older patterns of agricultural and household giving. Nor did anyone describe such bequests while discussing their friends' or neighbors' wedding receptions: unlike the similarly patriarchal weddings of southern slaveholders, Mormons do not appear to have made their gifts known outside their family circle, emphasizing religious faith over material wealth.

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[131] John Pulsipher Diary, v. 1, 37, USHS.

[132] James Farmer Diary, 43, USHS.

[133] Eliza Maria Partridge Smith Lyman Life and Journal, 26 September 1849, USHS. See also Jacob Hamlin Journal, 1 January 1855, USHS.

[134] Albert King Thurber Diary, 49, USHS.

[135] Joseph Holbrook Autobiography, 105-06.

In contrast to the white wedding which had come to prevail up and down the east coast, the aesthetics of Mormon weddings were typically meager. Virtually the only reference I have found to wedding decorations comes from 1849, when Patty Bartlett Sessions recorded making wreaths for the purpose.[136] Few descriptions of nuptial clothing have survived from this period; it is likely that men and women followed the older tradition of simply wearing their best clothes on their wedding day: George Whitaker recalled that his wedding in 1846 featured "all of the family dressed in their best."[137] Occasionally, however, one can find a description of a white dress of silk or muslin. Lucy White married William Flake wearing "a simple white muslin, made belt waist. There was nothing elaborate about the affair," she remembered, "But nothing could have been simpler and sweeter."[138]

Appropriately for a wedding that looked like the new bourgeois form, Flake's reception focused its attentions on the couple's companionate love for each other. After the wedding, Lucy's father told the couple that their young love—"it was the first real love that had come to us"—should make them "very happy."[139] Yet for most, religious duty took precedence over romantic love. Indeed, Flake's is the rare account that mentions the happiness of the bride and groom; most other descriptions of weddings merely describe the dinner or name the guests. At a wedding reception of a relatively important man, Brigham Young showed up

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[136] Donna Toland Smart, ed. *Mormon Midwife: The 1846-1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1997), 127-28.

[137] Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Journey to Zion*, 74. Mormon women were not immune to the lures of fashion, however: Heber C. Kimball preached in 1855 "that many of the Sisters were loosing the Spirit of the Lord because they think so much of dresses and fashion." John Pulsipher Diary, v. 1, 42, USHS.

[138] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 32, USHS.

[139] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 32, USHS.

("by special request") and attempted to put the event in perspective.[140] Oliver Boardman Huntington summarized Young's remarks in his journal: the President discussed "how, to keep the love and fear of God before our eyes in all times of recreation, so as to be acceptable, and preserbe [sic] our purity and innocense; under which rules being observed, such as our present assemblage was pleasing in the sight of Angels and just men."[141]

In line with Young's emphasis on "Angels and just men," sealings for eternity offered their participants a more transcendent sense of ritual significance than mere marriage for time. The church keeps the Mormon sealing ritual secret from non-Mormons to this day, and no authoritative source describes the actual process or language of the ritual. Martha Spence Heywood, however, offered a decent approximation of the comings and goings involved in a polygamous sealing: Her fiancé, "Brother Haywood," she wrote, "stood on the floor, his wife taking hold of his left arm with her right and taking first Sister Vary by the right hand and placing it in that of Bro. Haywood's right hand and in that way she was sealed to him for time and eternity by a form of words most sublime. When done she fell back by taking Sister Haywood's arm. I then went forward going through the same ceremony. After this, Brother [Brigham] Young proposed to Brother [Heber] Kimball giving me a blessing that I felt truly grateful for."[142]

Despite its apparent simplicity, Mormons treated sealing as an enormously important ritual event. Almost every diary of a man or woman who was sealed made special note of the day and circumstances. Some marked down the names, birthplaces, and birthdates of their partners, suggesting that their sealing, above all other moments in their lives, gave their

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[140] Diary of Oliver Boardman Huntington, 10 February 1845, USHS.

[141] Diary of Oliver Boardman Huntington, 10 February 1845, USHS.

[142] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 17 January 1851, USHS.

lives on earth eternal significance. James Farmer noted that his wife "rejoiced to think we had been sealed," and he took the occasion to record his wife's name, her parents' names, and other pertinent information about her.[143] Norton Jacob's description of the place and ritual likewise highlighted its significance: he and his wife Emily entered the Temple at Nauvoo, advanced into what Jacob called "the Holy of Holies," and were, "according to the holy order of the priesthood, sealed to-gether for time and all eternity."[144] And Martha Spence noted the compelling nature of the ritual itself, calling it "solmn [sic] and interesting and different from anything the world knows of." They had reason for excitement: by sealing themselves to each other, a man and woman effected each other's salvation. In accordance with Joseph Smith's revelation that sealing virtually guaranteed one's salvation against almost any sin, Norton Jacob noted that he and Emily were "sealed up unto eternal life and against all sin except the sin against the Holy Ghost."[145] John Pulsipher described his sealing in terms that advanced how close the ritual advanced him toward godhood: "When an Endowment House was built on the Temple Block, we had the Privilege of being sealed upon the Alter of the Lord in that holy place, which is the nearest to heaven of any place we know of on Earth."[146]

Sealings replaced the sense of familial and community connection that marked weddings with a more sober sense of ritual significance. (And it is telling that Mormons valued sealing, which emphasized their unions' religious nature in stark, almost ascetic terms, more than weddings, which shared a number of features with the bourgeois white wedding.) The

[143] James Farmer Diary, 45, USHS.

[144] Norton Jacob Autobiography, 23, USHS.

[145] Norton Jacob Autobiography, 23, USHS.

[146] John Pulsipher Diary, v. 1, 38, USHS.

only reference to post-sealing festivities that I have found came in William Gibson's diary, where he recorded having "a family party" the day after he was sealed to a plural wife.[147] Yet sealings clearly meant more to most Mormons than weddings. Since people could only be sealed in the Temple (in Nauvoo) or the Endowment House (in Utah), out-of-towners made the trip to the city to do so. Lucy Hannah White Flake was sealed to her husband (whom she had already married) for "time and eternity" and "received the great blessing of our endowments" while they were in Salt Lake City "attend[ing] the Conference."[148] Being sealed in the Temple by important church figures likely emphasized men's and women's relationship to the church rather than to their familial or community. The message was clear: although sealing for time, with its minimal spiritual implications, could be entrusted to the local community, the most important work went on in view of the church hierarchy in Salt Lake City. The same was true of the Temple at Nauvoo, where men and women swarmed the endowment rooms in 1845and 1846 in order to be sealed to each other before the trek to Utah.[149]

As they enacted rituals of undeniable importance, Mormons understood that the relationships the rituals celebrated were under scrutiny. Indeed, by the time they reached Nauvoo, much less Utah, Mormons had inculcated a sense of themselves as a persecuted people. Communication with family members outside the fold gave Mormons a personal, sometimes alienating awareness that the wider world questioned their morality. Jacob K.

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[147] William Gibson Diary, 18 February 1856, USHS.

[148] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 38, USHS.

[149] See Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 34-35.

Butterfield's mother wrote to ask "if adultery is upheld by the orthorities of the church."[150] John and Anna McCay wrote from Illinois to ask Catharine Winget about Mormon marriage customs: "tel us all about the latterday saints," they wrote.[151] "[T]el us whether they do belive in the spiritual wife sistom or not. that is that a man can have as many wives as he pleases from one to forty or as many more as he chooses."[152] Much like Forty-Niners who told friends they had Seen the Elephant, visitors to Utah simply had to describe polygamy to their friends and family back home. "Polygamy is practiced here to a great extent," wrote John G. Hoagland to a friend in Ohio, "hardly a man but has more than one wife & many of them 4 or 5 yet all seem to live happily . . . but still don't take me as endorsing the system."[153] Mormons could not have failed to notice how outsiders scoffed at their lifestyles. Lawrence Foster attributes Mormons' "emphatic" denials "that they were breaking up the family, demeaning motherhood, or failing to rear righteous and healthy children" "in part [to] the intensity of external attacks on their marriage practices"[154] The ways in which they described and enacted their weddings suggest that some Mormons internalized a defensive attitude about their lifestyles, and they used their weddings to reify their self-image as paragons of both piety and patriarchy. These were the features of Mormon life that Brigham

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[150] Jacob K. Butterfield to Widow Persis Butterfield, 7 August 1848, Jacob K. Butterfield Letters, USHS.

[151] John and Anna McCay to Catharine Winget and children, 5 March 1865, Yergen Yergensen Papers, USHS.

[152] John and Anna McCay to Catharine Winget and children, 5 March 1865, Yergen Yergensen Papers, USHS.

[153] J. G. Hoagland to J. B. Ward, 28 November 1859, John G. Hoagland Letters, USHS. Sylvester Mowry, who blazed a trail of sexual aggression and braggadocio from Utah to San Francisco, made the crude inference that women who lived by such an obviously immoral principle must be ripe for the plucking. Declaring to a friend, "All you have ever heard about polygamy here is true, and a damned sight more," he stated his objective to "f—k [sic] our way through" Salt Lake City. Sylvester Mowry to Ned Bicknall, 17 September 1854, Sylvester Mowry Miscellaneous, USHS.

[154] Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 232-33.

Young had outlined along the forks of the creek in 1847, the principles that their corrupt gentile critics lacked, and the means by which they would reform the world.

We have already noted Mormons' sense that their marriage rituals—especially being sealed in the Temple or Endowment House—brought them "nearest to Heaven" and paved the way for their own salvation. But their weddings also sacralized relationships that they believed would reify and demonstrate their spiritual salvation. First, through the miracle of polygamy, Mormons forged intimate, familial links with the church hierarchy. Wedding after wedding joined church elders, priests, and presidents to men and women of lesser spiritual standing. The same ceremony that sealed Joseph Corroden Kingsbury to his two wives "for time and eternity" also sealed him to Bishop N. K. Whitney "as his son;" moreover, his wives "were sealed to [the bishop] as his daughters."[155] In 1842, Edmund Ellsworth married Brigham Young's eldest daughter Elizabeth; later, Young himself sealed Ellsworth to a polygamous wife, Mary Ann Dudley, thereby sanctioning polygamy and tying his daughter and son-in-law to the relationship.[156] And even as Perry Liston was sealed to Laura Farnsworth "for time," Farnsworth was sealed to the deceased church patriarch Hyrum Smith "for Eternity."[157] Scholars have noted that plural marriage formed "a network of familial ties" between the church elite.[158] But the relationships these marriages created would also serve to improve one's chances of salvation in the afterlife. Marrying the late brother of Mormonism's founder carried considerable social value; but it also allowed both

[155] Joseph Corroden Kingsbury Autobiography, 8, USHS.

[156] Edmund Ellsworth Autobiography, 2, 7, USHS.

[157] Commodore Perry Liston Autobiography, 6, USHS.

[158] Bradey and Woodward, "Plurality, Patriarchy, and the Priestess," 85; see also Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 132.

Liston and Farnsworth to demonstrate their salvation in a way that no gentile wedding could match.

Through the same means, weddings helped their participants invest family relationships with spiritual significance, casting their controversial relationships in a moral light. Joseph Smith's "new and everlasting covenant" gave family ties spiritual importance, and weddings offered people a chance not only to improve their standing in God's eyes but to care for their families in the most meaningful possible way—by looking after each others' souls. Two weeks after his wedding, Samuel Whitney Richards adopted and was sealed to his wife's brother, taking on "the responsibility of seeing that all the works of salvation, both for him and his Progeniters, were done."[159] The theological imperative to expand their families spurred Mormons to create family bonds even where they did not exist. At a wedding in England, a church elder assumed the position of father of the bride: a witness noted, "Bro. Angus acted as Father to Sarah Ann Morgan who married Bro. Smart."[160] Along with their spiritual significance, sealings and marriages helped families work out or confirm their interworkings. This offered a potential rebuttal to criticisms that polygamy stripped women of their dignity. Before Martha Spence married Joseph Heywood, his first wives walked hand in hand to the altar to affirm their relationship with their husband (and their support of his decision to take another wife, if not necessarily of the new wife herself). Then, as Martha

[159] Samuel Whitney Richards Journal, 13 March 1846, USHS.

[160] James Farmer Diary, 8 July 1852, USHS. Along the same lines, the weddings of non-Mormons were eagerly parsed for their geneological implications. One woman wrote to her sister in Massachusetts, asking how a relative's recent marriage might have added to their family both living and dead: "If Ophelia is married love, . . . Tell her to write all about herself. We feel very anxious to know about our ancestors. If you can get the genealogy as far as you can get it please (and) send it." Irene to Dear Sister, 29 August 1853, Ursalia B. Hastings Hascall Correspondence, USHS. Intriguingly, though, when John Pulsipher's father married "two other wives," his son does not appear to have been informed of the weddings until after the fact. John Pulsipher Diary, v. 1, 59, USHS. Since his father's marriage might well have had implications for Pulsipher's own spiritual future, this seems an odd omission.

and Joseph married, the two sister wives stood arm in arm behind them, a living tableau of family unity.

Finally, Mormon weddings countered accusations that polygamy demeaned women by letting first wives either consent to or refuse to allow their husbands to take on a plural wife. The plural marriage ceremony usually featured a place for first wives to offer their assent. Jane Snyder Richards used the first wife's giving of consent in the wedding to justify the practice: only "with her consent and perhaps recommendation," she declared, could a man "take . . . to himself another wife."[161] Men did sometimes take the trouble to attain this consent: William Gibson spent ten days in early 1857 gathering his multiple wives around him in Salt Lake City before he was sealed to his newest bride.[162] Intriguingly, at least one ceremony, a woman—one of Brigham Young's wives, the venerable Eliza R. Snow—asked Lucy Flake, the first wife, whether she assented to her husband's second marriage. Flake wrote, "Eliza R. Snow asked me if I was willing. I said yes. Then she asked if I thought I could live in that principle. I answered that I was quite willing to try."[163] Snow then offered Flake a spiritual reward: "She said my reward would be great because I was willing," recalled Flake, "and that I would never get old."[164] The wedding also gave women another, perhaps less-wrenching choice, the decision whether or not to marry a husband for time or eternity. Dinah Jones, William Vaughan's widow, was sealed in the endowment house to her husband, William Ellis Jones. "She had her choice to take her former husband Wm Vaughan or me," noted William Ellis Jones. "She chose me. . . . She was then Sealed to me . . . for

[161] Jane Snyder Richards, Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards, 50, USHS.

[162] William Gibson Diary, 20-30 January 1857, USHS.

[163] Quoted in Cornall and Van Beek, "The Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage," 24.

[164] Quoted in Cornall and Van Beek, "The Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage," 24.

time and eternity."[165] By bestowing this honor upon her living husband, Dinah may have won a degree of power and influence within her marriage.

But the question of women's consent did not always receive such a clear answer. Jane Snyder Richards acknowledged that Brigham Young "wished the wives at home to be consulted . . . and that their full consent should . . . be obtained," but his wish did not make it so.[166] We have already discussed marriages, such as Perry Liston's, in which men took on plural wives without their first wife's knowledge, much less their consent. And Martha Spence Heywood noted a diminishment in wives' role in sealing over time. In her first sealing ceremony to her husband in 1851, Joseph Heywood's first wife gave her (Martha) away; five years later, when she was sealed to him again, the ritual had changed to give women a less-prominent role. "I was struck," she noted, "with the fact that the first [wife] was not called upon to give away the other wives to her husband, but was asked if she was willing that he should take so and so to be his wife."[167]

Women's conflicted (and sometimes non-existent) role in sanctioning polygamy jibes with the other major idea that Mormon weddings promoted: enshrining patriarchy in Zion. Weddings and the rituals surrounding them consistently glorified male power not only as the natural state of society, but as the key to reforming America. In doing so, weddings helped tamp down women's dangerous charismatic potential.

Weddings explicitly subordinated women to their husbands. Although this hardly made these rituals unique, Mormon weddings' loud bestowals of patriarchy on its male participants and the active role men played in sealing and other rituals highlighted male supremacy more

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[165] William Ellis Jones Diary, 8, USHS.

[166] Jane Snyder Richards, Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards, 46, USHS.

[167] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 20 April 1856, USHS.

vociferously than other groups' rituals. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton note that Mormonism featured a "nearly universal male priesthood."[168] Alongside visionary leaders such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, "most adults . . . [took] part in some kind of leadership or missionary role."[169] As priests, most every man could expect to exercise at least some ritual authority in his wedding. Indeed, weddings offered men several chances to make their spiritual power felt. A few months before Martha Spence married, her husband-to-be, Bishop Joseph L. Heywood baptized her "at [his] hands."[170] The next morning, Heywood and another man confirmed her, emphasizing both Heywood's spiritual power and his links to other members of the church hierarchy. And soon after their sealing, he led her "through the vail" to receive her endowment.[171] Samuel Whitney Richards made his wedding the scene of his saving not only his wife's soul but that of her family. "By my interposition," he wrote, "Father John Parkers family received their endowment, his Daughter Mary being my intended wife."[172] He then "obtained permission" from one of the church presidents "for [Mary] to have the privilege of spending her time in the temple also, where she commenced her labours on the morn. of the 27th, and in the evening of the 29th we were sealed upon the alter, Husband and Wife for all time and all Eternity."[173] These rituals emphasized one by one that Richards held in his hands the key to both Mary Parker's and her family's salvation (and possibly exaltation)—what woman would not gratefully submit?

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[168] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 39.

[169] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 42.

[170] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 13 October 1850, USHS.

[171] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 20 April 1851, USHS.

[172] Samuel Whitney Richards Journal, 23 January 1846, USHS.

[173] Samuel Whitney Richards Journal, 23 February 1846, USHS.

Men's power was inscribed at all levels of the Mormon ritual experience, a key way of differentiating Mormons from middle-class Americans whose rituals appeared increasingly egalitarian. Emily Jacob received a patriarchal blessing one week that assured her that "a woman can have but little power in the priesthood without a man;" the next week, her husband Norton Jacob was "ordained a king and priest unto God."[174] At the pinnacle of this self-aggrandizing patriarchy stood Joseph Smith. According to George D. Smith, Joseph Smith's bride in his first polygamous marriage ceremony "listened quietly as the church president told her brother-in-law, Joseph Bates Noble, what to say as he conducted the ceremony."[175] Smith thus illustrated his direct connection to God and his power to hold or loose the keys of heaven on earth. Although Mormon leaders had a number of reasons to make their wedding rituals validate their own authority, an important factor seems to have been a desire to compensate for their youth—both their own and their religion's. Marvin Hill has noted that the Mormons were extraordinarily young: a huge majority of new converts before 1846 had not yet reached thirty years of age. One may imagine them compensating for their youth and inexperience by giving themselves the titles of elders and patriarchs: Aroet Lucius Hale, for instance, became "an Elder in the Church" when only eighteen or nineteen years old.[176]

The irony of young men claiming the mantle of ancient, biblical patriarchs becomes especially clear when gauged against the sometimes-formidable women whom they married. Their patriarchal displays did not merely celebrate male power; they reacted to and attempted to regain control over women's independence of thought and spiritual power. John Smith

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[174] Norton Jacob Autobiography, 25-26, USHS.

[175] George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 1.

[176] Aroet Lucius Hale Diary, 8, USHS.

offered joint patriarchal blessings to Joseph and Hannah Holbrook in August of 1845. While he pronounced that Joseph would "go forth as a mighty man, . . . have power over [his enemies, and] . . . be blessed with wisdom and intelligence to confound the wise of this generation," Hannah received a far more domestic, subordinate charge: "Thou shalt be blessed in thy basket and thy store . . . Thou shalt live to be a comfort to thy companion and assist him in all his labors even be satisfied with life according to the blessing sealed upon thy companion."[177] While it is hardly surprising that Smith apportioned gender roles according to the nineteenth century's ideology of separate spheres, his injunction that Hannah "be satisfied with life" suggests that the Mormon priesthood was attempting to accustom women to a lesser spiritual role. Similarly, Martha Spence, an independent-minded woman in her late thirties, was none-too-impressed by Joseph Heywood, her intended husband: in her diary, she deemed him "a good man but not interesting."[178] And in her marriage preparations, she had threatened to upset Heywood's family dynamics by pursuing missionary work within her marriage to him. Her wedding, then, seems to have been almost tailored to muffle her independent spirit. Blessing her at the end of the ceremony, Brigham Young played to her desire to exercise spiritual power, telling her she "was to speak in tongues and prophecy."[179] But Young also emphasized her "weakness" and the importance of subjugating her will to the needs of her family: "The Lord would be merciful to my [i.e., Spence's] weaknesses . . . and my faith and prayers in connection with the family should be a blessing to the family."[180] In return for her submission, Young seemed to offer reassurance

[177] Joseph Holbrook Autobiography, 55, USHS.

[178] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 3 November 1850, USHS.

[179] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 17 January 1851, USHS.

[180] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 17 January 1851, USHS.

that she was doing her duty: "especially during the sealing ordinance," Spence observed, "[Young's] spirit seemed to say—'I am doing a good deed'."[181] Men endeavored to muffle women's spiritual power even as they amplified their own. And the key role that marriage played in assuring Mormons' salvation meant that these rituals inscribed women's docility and submission into their very salvation.

Mormon weddings thus promulgated an image of Mormon men as strong, self-sufficient, and in control—creators of worlds on earth and in heaven. All this clearly meant to differentiate Mormons clearly from feminized, companionate easterners. Placing unique theological significance in marriage, their wedding rituals had to emblematize their worthiness to lead Americans into a new world of strength, justice, and morality. As Mormon men cultivated an image of themselves as restorationist, biblical patriarchs, they engaged the simultaneous and complementary projects of asserting control over their women—via polygamy and a constant barrage of ritual and verbal patriarchal signifiers—and purifying both themselves and the rest of America. It is therefore eminently appropriate that the "Pioneer Wedding" we discussed in the introduction of this dissertation which emphasized its participants' hardiness and self-sufficiency (in contrast to weak, dissipated Easterners) was a Mormon wedding. The groom had been raised in Nauvoo, the bride was a protégé of the wife of Utah's Mormon Secretary, A. W. Babbitt, and the man who proposed to "plant the stars and stripes" across the continent was a Judge Stiles, who had been raised

[181] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 17 January 1851, USHS. It is possible that a "Brother Kimball" (likely Heber C. Kimball) offered the blessing; however, she made it clear that it was Young whose spirit seemed to encourage her during the event.

as a Mormon.[182] All distrusted the "dainty dyspeptics of crowded cities," and saw themselves as avatars of a new people whose faith and strength would purify the nation. Their weddings, which rejected the effeminizing romance and corrupting market values of the bourgeois white wedding, helped Mormons act out a pageant of patriarchy and purification. The bourgeois white wedding had symbolized Americans' acceptance of an entrepreneurial market, of relatively egalitarian social relations, and of companionate marriages. Mormon rituals explicitly rejected all of these.

After they married, Mormon men and women attempted to reconcile the realities of their frontier lives with the ideals of their marriages. Their relationships potentially offered a number of satisfactions, one of which turned out to be romantic love. Many still held to the companionate ideal, albeit often in forms they modified to fit their religious duty. Lucy Flake described her attempts to navigate the boundaries of romance with her husband and his second wife: "I learned early," she wrote, "to keep my love making for my husband until we were alone, as I did not want to create any jealousy in our lives, and Prudence was as thoughtful as I."[183] Her husband reciprocated their affections, sometimes nearly simultaneously. Lucy recalled, "William would . . . put his arm around both of us and say, 'No man had as choice a wife as either of you and here I have you both,' or some other blarney which we both liked to hear. When he came in he would kiss the one first who was

[182] On the groom, Alba Sherman, see Lyman D. Platt, "Nauvoo School Records," *Nauvoo Journal* 1 (1989): 15; on Judge Stiles, see T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons, From the First Vision of Joseph Smith to the Last Courtship of Brigham Young* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873), 280.

[183] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 63, USHS.

closest to the door."[184] Yet the complex kinship arrangements their weddings created in the name of heaven fostered uncertainty on earth. In spite of repeated ritual assurance and access to God's revelation of their piety, Mormons did not always feel certain that their weddings had ensured that their relationships would keep them close through all eternity. Even on her deathbed, Harriett Bateman, who married James Farmer after Farmer's first wife died (and who had sealed herself both to Farmer and his first wife), begged her husband not to take her baby from her "when I am gone."[185] Farmer recalled trying to put her fears to rest: "I promptly answered . . . the baby is yours and will be through out all Eternity."[186] Only after Harriett repeated her desperate inquiry did James realize the root of his wife's fear: "she thought that Ann Farmer my first wife would take it."[187] Just as the consumerist, companionate ideal sometimes put middle-class northeasterners contradictory, dissatisfying positions, the Mormon ideal of duty and religious destiny did not answer all the longings that plagued the hearts of their adherents . Within ten days of being sealed as a plural wife, Martha Spence Heywood noticed the disconnect between her romantic hopes and her actual, more distant relations with her husband. "I meet with the little rubs that I anticipated. Tis rather trying to a woman's feelings," she wrote, "not to be acknowledged by the man she has given herself to and desires to love with all her heart."[188]

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[184] Lucy Hannah White Flake, *To The Last Frontier: Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake*, 63, USHS.

[185] James Farmer Diary, 53, USHS.

[186] James Farmer Diary, 53-54, USHS.

[187] James Farmer Diary, 54, USHS.

[188] Martha Spence Heywood Journal, 26 January 1851, USHS.

Conclusion

"No More Pleasing Peculiarities": Tom Thumb's Wedding and Change and Confluence in Nineteenth-Century Weddings

The key change in the history of American weddings—the growth of the Victorian white wedding—took place between 1800 and 1830. The white wedding resulted from a number of wider developments in American life, as the Market Revolution and the expansion of democratic ideals combined to make couple-centered companionate marriage (and displays of bourgeois respectability and wealth) appealing to a growing middle class. The white wedding and its concomitant values proved almost immediately influential, and Americans soon began to define themselves in terms of (or against) the ideal. By the 1830s, middle-class northerners showed clear evidence of having adopted the white wedding, focusing on couples' compatibility and tasteful displays of bourgeois values. Just as early, the weddings of wealthy southerners, despite largely adopting the white wedding's aesthetic, evinced a rejection of bourgeois values and attempted to orchestrate shows of traditional aristocratic, patriarchal strength. Elite southerners also made the wedding one more standard by which to expose their slaves' inability to measure up to this patriarchal ideal. Meanwhile, Mormons developed both a critique of overly-romantic companionate love and a re-conceptualization of the marriage ceremony away from what they saw as impious, effeminate fripperies and toward marriage that would certify them as patriarchs in heaven and on earth. These groups' insistence on marrying in different ways—and accepting or rejecting bourgeois models of social and familial relationships—suggests how Americans responded to the growth of

middle-class culture. Antebellum Americans invested significant energy into creating distinctive social identities for themselves, and people outside the Northeastern market economy made a less-than-seamless transition into a new and potentially-upsetting value system.

However, these behaviors and attitudes were already in evidence by the 1830s and 1840s. A study of weddings between 1830 and 1865, then, although it reveals Americans' differing attitudes about bourgeois egalitarianism and companionate marriage, is not perfectly positioned to consider change over time: by the beginning of this period, the most significant change had already taken place. Indeed, little evidence for any of the groups we have studied indicates much change. The sources themselves, often attempting to demonstrate a solid, traditional footing for their relationships, often highlighted how ancient and hallowed their rituals were (whether they actually were or not). To see the degree to which weddings changed after 1830 requires an adjustment in scale.

As the Civil War raged, a wedding took place that was of altogether a different scale than any we have considered to this point. This wedding, both bigger and smaller than any other of its day, pointed to a significant move away from the fragmented localism of the antebellum era and toward a more uniform sense of what was appropriate and desirable in American nuptials. In doing so, the wedding underscored wider convergences in public behavior, as Americans from all walks of life increasingly adopted consumerist, middle-class-oriented values and, if necessary, adjusted their experience of bourgeois consumerism to fit a more comfortable patriarchal model. With no little irony, the wedding that best expresses the standardization and nationalization of American weddings in the nineteenth century was that of one of the Victorian era's most unique figures: Tom Thumb.

The wedding of Tom Thumb (the stage name of Charles Stratton, the diminutive man who rose to international fame under the promotion of the showman P. T. Barnum) took place in New York City in 1863. Prodded by Barnum's propaganda, contemporary reporters described his wedding—to fellow Barnum attraction Lavinia Warren (like her fiancé, also a little person)—with wild hyperbole. The New York *Times*, calling it a "most momentous" affair, suggested that all other questions paled before this one: "Did you or did you not see Tom Thumb married?"[1] The New York *Observer*, similarly breathless, deemed it "the event of a century, if not unparalleled in history."[2] And *Harper's*, although dismissive of the whole affair, still acknowledged "a very general public excitement."[3]

Granting the absurdity of labeling almost anything "the event of a century" six weeks after Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Barnum's hype and the press' delight in documenting his productions gave the wedding special distinction. As we have discussed, weddings were only beginning to receive significant attention in national publications. They appeared often, of course, in etiquette books, novels, moral tracts, newspapers and magazines, even medical manuals. But not until after the Civil War did these sources explore the ritual in anything approaching the exhaustive detail that the modern wedding industry promotes. Even etiquette books, which had begun to give weddings significant notice by the 1840s, did not discuss weddings nearly to the extent that they would from the 1870s on.[4]

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[1] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[2] *Sketch of the Life*, 27.

[3] "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, April 1863, 706.

[4] For one of many etiquette books that say much about social forms (including courtship) but nothing at all about weddings, see *True Politeness*. By the 1850s, a scattering of more detailed accounts began to appear in etiquette books, but none with anything approaching the detail included in reports of Stratton's wedding.

Bucking this trend, Stratton and Barnum offered a complete, copiously detailed (albeit esoteric) narrative of a wedding. Almost every major newspaper covered the story, some granting it several columns, and Barnum commissioned a pamphlet (with the modest title *Sketch of the Life, Personal Appearance, Character and Manners of Charles S. Stratton, The Man in Miniature, Known as General Tom Thumb, And His Wife, Lavinia Warren Stratton, Including the History of Their Courtship and Marriage, With Some Account of Remarkable Dwarfs, Giants, & Other Human Phenomena, of Ancient and Modern Times*) compiling several accounts and offering a lengthy report of its own. The autobiographies of Barnum and Warren helped fill out the picture. Together, this material constitutes the most complete account of an American wedding, real or imagined, before the Civil War's end.[5]

While the wedding featured elements familiar to many antebellum Americans, this unprecedented outpouring of information foreshadowed the explosion of literature—etiquette books, magazines, and society pages—which would make the ritual accessible to a national audience in the last half of the nineteenth century. The availability of such detailed descriptions highlights a significant change in the American approach to marrying. What had formerly been a ritual suffused with the values and aesthetics of the northeastern middle class

[5] Other weddings receiving comparable press were those of England's Queen Victoria and of France's Louis Napoleon; obviously an American wedding is more germane to this project. It is worth noting that whereas Europe's "biggest" weddings featured royalty, America's starred an entertainer. This probably does not represent the ascension of celebrity culture (although it no doubt foreshadows it) so much as a quirk of the American political system. Royalty are famous from birth; politicians (with some exceptions) are not. Unlike their gilded-age successors who idolized wealthy businessmen, antebellum Americans celebrated political and military luminaries above all others. But most politicians or generals did not achieve national notoriety until they were already married. Tom Thumb, who campaigned neither in the battlefield nor at the polls, was that rare antebellum celebrity whose fame preceded his marriage. A book entitled *Court Circles of the Republic* did examine the weddings of politicians and their children in antebellum America, but its 1871 publication date suggests that significant interest in these weddings was largely retrospective, sold to people who assumed that earlier generations took more interest in the weddings of their politicians than they actually did. E. F. Ellet, *Court Circles of the Republic, or the Beauties and Celebrities of the Nation; Illustrating Life and Society Under Eighteen Presidents; Describing the Social Features of the Successive Administrations from Washington to Grant; The Drawing-Room Circles; the Prominent Statesmen and Leading Ladies; the Brilliant Belles and Distinguished Visitors; the Principal Entertainments; Fashionable Styles of Dress; Manners; Etiquette; Anecdotes; Incidents; Etc.; Etc.* (Hartford, Conn.: Hartford Publishing Co., 1871).

now made those values and aesthetics accessible to people from many different backgrounds. Indeed, for all its quirks, and despite the undeniable distinctiveness of its principle actors, a number of chroniclers took pains to emphasize how *normal* Tom Thumb's wedding was. The *Times* asserted, "The service was performed in the usual manner. . . . [Stratton and Warren] were married as they should be, and all things were done decently and in order."[6] Warren, too, was satisfied that "the ceremony was conducted as would be any marriage of people less before the public."[7] Now, no one really thought Tom Thumb was unexceptional. Journalists expected readers to marvel (or perhaps shake their heads) at the wedding's extravagance, and to smile at the tiny tableau the couple presented. But they also assumed all Americans could relate to what they were describing. Even critics of the wedding indirectly attested to its normalcy. Robert Bogdan has observed that Tom Thumb's public presentation consistently included "a strong current of farce."[8] Certainly the minority of disapproving observers seemed discomfited by the wedding's farcical aspects: *Harper's*, for instance, deemed it "both ludicrous and humiliating" to "make a show of the marriage of two persons who are dwarfs."[9] But if Tom Thumb's wedding was farcical (and it is not a foregone conclusion that it was), it could not have achieved its comic effects without appealing to a broad base of knowledge about what a proper wedding should entail.

Tom Thumb's wedding thus heralded the crystallization and nationalization of nuptial form and meaning in the United States. In doing so, it pointed nineteenth-century Americans

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[6] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[7] Countess M. Lavinia Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb (Some of My Life Experiences), with the assistance of Sylvester Bleeker*, ed. A. H. Saxon (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 58.

[8] Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 152.

[9] "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, April 1863, 706.

toward a more homogenous public culture, in which the values and activities of the northern middle-class increasingly became the norm against which all others failed to measure up—and, simultaneously, in which those values and activities became sufficiently appealing to a large number of Americans, taking on comforting vestiges of aristocratic power and male household supremacy, that Americans from all different backgrounds could abandon their esoteric rituals for mainstream ones instead.[10] Yet historians have paid Tom Thumb's wedding little attention, generally viewing it as merely one example among many of Barnum's genius for promotion.[11] Two scholars who have analyzed the event in some depth, however, suggest that the wedding helped codify the way the ever-expanding middle-class viewed itself. Susan Stewart briefly describes the wedding as embodying the Victorian cult of "the toylike . . . child."[12] Building on Stewart's work, Lori Merish suggests that the wedding, by displaying cute, childlike bodies partaking in "a familial and familiar structure of domination and hierarchy," helped make the middle-class "social and property relations" bound up in the marriage tie seem safe and acceptable.[13] This point, of course, could reasonably apply to all weddings, which swathe potentially disturbing social relations in attractive cloth. Tom Thumb's wedding, which combined elements of sacred, personal ritual with farcical exaggeration, and which honored the ritual's emerging standards even as it gently lampooned its largesse, suggested that Americans harbored conflicted feelings about

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[10] Lawrence W. Levine charts a wider swath of this change (and tallies the losses it occasioned) in *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[11] See, for example, Neal Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 163-64, and Bogdan, *Freak Show*, who deems the wedding "Barnum's finest triumph of freak promotion in the high aggrandized mode" (149).

[12] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 123.

[13] Lori Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics: Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraoridinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 194.

their changing ways of marrying, as well as about changing codes of respectability and refinement. The numerous contradictions to be found in accounts of the wedding indicate some of the rocky social and political transitions Americans underwent as they moved into the Victorian era.

A Brief Narrative of the Wedding Day

For all that was written about their wedding, we know surprisingly little about how Charles Stratton and Lavinia Warren passed the early hours of February 10th, 1863. Since neither bride nor groom were native New Yorkers, they probably awoke in hotel beds—perhaps at the St. Nicholas, where the bride first appeared in the city, but more likely the Metropolitan, to which they would repair in the evening.[14] Whether they dressed alone or were aided by their attendants we do not know, but the New York *Times* informs us that the bride and groom, as well as the maid of honor (Lavinia's sister Minnie) and best man (fellow Barnum attraction Commodore Nutt), all rode to church together in the same carriage.[15] If they left from the Metropolitan, it was a ride of just over two thirds of a mile.

Broadway outside Grace Church was filled with sunlight, even in early February: inside the church, "the mid-day sun" sent "a luxury of golden light streaming in through the windows."[16] It was also filled with people. "Long before the hour appointed for the ceremony," a crowd of thousands gathered.[17] The *Times* called it a heterogeneous bunch, noting gawkers and hawkers alike: "All classes of society were represented, not excluding

[14] See Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 50 and *Sketch of the Life*, 25.

[15] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[16] *Sketch of the Life*, 15, 29.

[17] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

the 'spectacle man' and the woman retailer of apples."[18] Police directed traffic, blocking all carriages except those of invited guests and keeping the crowd clear of Broadway "until nearly noon, when the multitude became so vast that they were obliged to form new lines nearer the centre of the street."[19] The arrival of the bridal carriage sparked "a general rush" in the crowd, but the excitement subsided after the diminutive quartet vanished into the Church.[20]

Inside the sanctuary waited a more select group of "the *haut ton* of Gotham, and the celebrities of the country."[21] Barnum had sent invitations "Gotten up strictly after *la mode's* latest edict, being bits of prettily printed pasteboard," and the crowd of "nearly a thousand" repaid their host by dressing their best.[22] The New York *Herald* raved, "here was the carnival of crinoline, the apotheosis of purple and fine linen. . . . There were silks of every possible hue . . . [and] every possible species of toilet—dainty head-dresses, delicate bonnets."[23] Another commentator compared the crowd to "one vast parterre of brilliant tulips."[24] Well, then. To complement the visual dazzle, the famous organist George Washbourne Morgan played a selection of romantic favorites. It is a testament to the extraordinary level of detail we have about the wedding that commentators preserved at least a fair slice of his repertoire: among other songs and marches, guests heard "Robert Toi Que

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] *Sketch of the Life*, 15. As Sven Beckert notes, Grace Church often hosted lavish assemblages, as one of the most fashionable and wealthiest churches in New York. *The Monied Metropolis*, 59-60.

[22] *Sketch of the Life*, 15, 28.

[23] *Sketch of the Life*, 29.

[24] *Sketch of the Life*, 15.

Jaime" from the grand opera "Robert the Devil," parts of Wagner's "Tannhauser," and—incongruously for Americans who grew up after the Lone Ranger conquered radio, but accordant with contemporary tastes—Rossini's "William Tell" Overture.[25]

Seemingly every participant was met with the cry, "They come!"[26] The arrival of the four clergymen brought guests to their feet, and then set them down again when it was determined that they were not the bride and groom.[27] It was not until 12:30, thirty minutes after the appointed hour, that the bridal party appeared. Barnum headed up the group, followed by a smattering of family, friends, and "members of the General's staff"; in their wake came Commodore Nutt with Minnie Warren on his arm.[28] Here is how the *Times* summed up the entrance of the bride and groom, who followed the wedding party: "All looked, few saw."[29] The couple's height ensured that people not seated on the aisle missed the bridal march entirely, though not for lack of trying: the *Times* observed that "many stood upon the seats, others stood upon stools placed on the seats," and chastised, "by many good breeding was forgotten."[30] After a "very slow progress up the aisle," the couple mounted a platform that had been placed before the chancel, designed specifically to accommodate the little people and "prettily bordered with gilded mouldings."[31]

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[25] *Sketch of the Life*, 29; PBarnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 603. Although all accounts merely call him "Morgan," they could only have meant George Washbourne Morgan. See Orpha Caroline Ochse, *History of the Organ in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 206.

[26] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[27] *Sketch of the Life*, 16.

[28] Ibid.

[29] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[30] *Sketch of the Life*, 31; "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[31] *Sketch of the Life*, 31, 16.

Having ascended the platform, the couple, flanked by their best man and maid of honor, was now visible to much of the audience; even so, "ladies stood on tip-toe" to see "and masculine necks were stretched as far as white neck ties would permit."[32] The quartet presented an extraordinary exhibition of material extravagance. Stratton sported modest but rich attire, "a full dress suit of the finest broad cloth, vest of white corded silk, with blue silk under vest, white gloves and shining boots."[33] The blue vest apparently bespoke "secured happiness;" whereas the pink one donned by Commodore Nutt "typif[ied] easy hopes."[34] The groom's "curled and frizzled" hair drew special notice.[35] But nothing in the appearance of either man could compare with the splendid assemblages adorning Lavinia Warren and her sister. Observers agreed that the bride appeared "to great advantage," and devoted several lines to her costume.[36] She wore a "bridal robe of snowy satin, its skirt, fashioned with a flowing train" of half a yard, and she carried "a star-shaped bouquet" of "Roses and japonicas."[37] "Her massive hair" received praise as well, "rolled" as it was "*á la Eugenié* in front, and elaborately puffed in *noeuds* behind, forming the outspread wings of a butterfly."[38] Her veil was "interwoven" with these knots, and her forehead bore "a diamond star" and "natural orange blossoms" which, perhaps unavoidably, "mingled their fragrance with the

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[32] *Sketch of the Life*, 31, 18.

[33] *Sketch of the Life*, 18.

[34] Ibid.

[35] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[36] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863; *Sketch of the Life*, 18.

[37] *Sketch of the Life*, 18-19; "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[38] "The *Times*, while praising her "*tout ensemble*" as "singularly attractive," thought less of her hair, sniffing, "Her head was overladen by the absurdities of fashion, and her hair-rig generally was not marked with good taste." "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

soft sighs of her gentle bosom."[39] Adding richness to her presentation was a fabulous array of jewelry, featuring a diamond necklace "with pendants like strung dew-drops," bracelets, earrings, a broach, and two diamond pins to "fasten . . . the mystic veil."[40] Minnie Warren's dress, equally rich but a touch simpler, was comprised of "white silk . . . covered with tulle puffings, interspersed with bright rosebuds." Interestingly, amid these descriptions of material extravagance, commentators still fit the couple's appearance into a rubric of a standardized wedding. The author of the promotional *Sketch of the Life* practically yawned while describing Lavinia Warren's "White satin slippers" and "inevitable and tiny white gloves and a point lace mouchoir."[41] By 1863, such adornments were standard, even cliché.

The ceremony itself passed quickly. The Reverend Junius Willey of Stratton's hometown of Bridgeport, Connecticut read the rites, and Stratton and Warren answered him "clearly and affirmatively at the proper places."[42] One Rev. Dr. Putnam, rector at Warren's church, stepped forward to give the bride away, walking "with the measured tread of the Commander in 'Don Juan,'" mused the *Herald*, "though he did not make so much noise about it."[43] After Grace Church's rector, Rev. Dr. Taylor, said the benediction, "the General saluted his wife

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[39] *Sketch of the Life*, 18.

[40] *Sketch of the Life*, 20, 19.

[41] *Sketch of the Life*, 19.

[42] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*; 603; *Sketch of the Life*, 31. More than one commentator highlighted the "audible distinctness" with which the couple spoke—a tribute to their stage backgrounds and meant to convey to readers the couple's sincere desire to be married. *Sketch of the Life*, 18, "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[43] *Sketch of the Life*, 31; see also Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 34. The *Times* thought that this man was "the Rev. Dr. Palmer." "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

with an honest kiss," whereupon the organist Morgan escorted them from the building to the strains of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March."[44]

The day was far from over. The crowd, which had not thinned, surged as the couple and their attendants returned outside.[45] Not content merely to cheer as their carriage departed, many chased it as it headed down Broadway. The New York *Times* found this acceptable for "the junior portion of the throng," but ludicrous for adults: "Although it may seem ridiculous, yet it is nevertheless true, that hundreds of persons, including adults, ran after the carriage, not diminishing their speed until the Metropolitan Hotel had been reached."[46] No one needed exert themselves too much, however, as the volume of traffic the wedding occasioned probably made keeping up with the carriage an easy task. A "long line of carriages . . . came pouring down" Broadway toward the Metropolitan; above them, "the windows of the buildings on each side were thronged" with faces peering down.[47] The *Times* compared the impromptu parade to the massive outpouring in honor of the laying of the transatlantic cable in 1858.[48]

An estimated 5,000 people crammed into the Metropolitan Hotel between one and three o'clock that afternoon. Upon debarking from their carriage, the couple waded through a chorus of "welcome words, with God-speeds, and mirthful comments, and importing exclamation points" and climbed the stairs to the bridal chamber.[49] There the new Mrs.

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[44] *Sketch of the Life*, 18.

[45] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[46] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[47] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[48] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[49] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

Stratton exchanged her wedding outfit for an equally elaborate reception dress, highlighted by a skirt that had been "ornamented to represent the emblems of different nationalities on each separate breadth. . . . The design in front of the dress represents Growing Corn for America—on the right a Rose for England, . . . —on the left, an Acorn, . . . for Germany—a Shamrock for Ireland—the Thistle for Scotland, and a Vine, with cluster of Grapes, for Italy."[50] Warren's dress thus allegorized America's past and future. The dress depicted America as the natural focus and culmination of these old-world forbears. Among its antecedents, it gave pride of place to England (sitting alone at America's right hand), but also acknowledged what many Americans would have viewed as their nation's other cultural predecessors: Germany, Ireland, Scotland, and Italy. Not incidentally, the dress gave America the only cereal crop: its ear of corn offered sustenance; the thistle, shamrock, and grape were mere garnishes by comparison.

Meanwhile, the crowd grew ever larger. People "stowed themselves in every available nook and corner of the house, and lined the passageways from the hall to the bridal chamber with rows of peering, anxious, inquisitive and expectant eyes."[51] As at church, the guests contributed to a surpassingly rich atmosphere: the reporter from the *Times* declared that "The brilliant assemblage, the delicious music, the merry laughter, the surging sea of laces, tulle, silk, satin, broadcloth, *moire antique*, muslin, velvet, furs, and fine feathers of every imaginable hue and material, have rarely been surpassed."[52] The hotel's proprietors won praise for their generosity: "All that the Messrs. Lelands could do for their guests was done," wrote one observer, "and if a hundred or so did accidentally stray into the dining room, it

[50] *Sketch of the Life*, 25.

[51] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[52] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

seemed to be considered in the programme of enjoyment."[53] The street outside the hotel witnessed somewhat less munificence: two pickpockets "were discovered in the act, and taken to the station house."[54]

The return of the bride and groom again galvanized the crowd, who scurried toward the stairs to see them. (Outside, once "the last of the carriages" had passed, the crowd finally dispersed.)[55] "Piloted by the smiling BARNUM," Mr. and Mrs. Stratton made their way over to the hotel piano and were quickly placed atop it "by the athlete DIBBLE."[56] From this perch, they greeted their admirers "with a nod, or a shake of the head, as the circumstances might prompt."[57] By all accounts, Charles and Lavinia Stratton exhibited contentment with their lot, "manifest[ing] so much spirit, gaity, and life, that all were charmed beyond measure; in fact, Mr. and Mrs. Stratton acted as if they had been in the habit of being married."[58] The ubiquitous Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren flanked them as usual, "repl[ying] good-naturedly" to "suggestions that they would form the next match."[59]

If anyone wandered away from the quartet on the piano, there was much to divert their attention. In a nearby parlor, guests could view the wedding presents. A chief attraction was the cake, which

> weighed about eighty pounds, the base gracefully ornamented with leaves of the forest, surmounted with shells of the ocean, with scrolls neatly entwined, on which rested a

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[53] *Sketch of the Life*, 20.

[54] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[55] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[56] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863. I have not been able to discover anything about Dibble, but the newspaper reporter, at least, found him worth noting.

[57] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[58] *Sketch of the Life*, 19.

[59] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

> magnificent Egyptian Temple of Fame, each column bearing cupids and angels, with scrolls and harps, recording the nuptial vows of the youthful couple standing beneath its splendid arches, while the reverend doctor pronounces the blessing. On the extreme top is seen the Angel of Fame, proclaiming to the world that two beings are made happy. At the base are cupids scattering flowers from horns of plenty, as they glide along life's voyage.[60]

In the unlikely event that a guest could tear his or her eyes away from this monstrosity (of which "over two thousand boxes [were] distributed"), they could take in a cornucopia of individual gifts. *Sketch of the Life* included an illustrated list, stretching across four pages of text and featuring a jaw-dropping array of jewelry, furniture, clothing, dinnerware, fruit, wine, and ornamental knickknacks. Among the givers were representatives from New York's first families in money, art, and influence, including Vanderbilts, Belmonts, Astors, Lennoxes, and Greeleys, not to mention Barnum himself; the first lady, Mary Lincoln, contributed a "Gorgeous set of Chinese fire-screens."[61] The *Times* reported that "the main attraction was, of course, the jewelry case," but, as its own report included an eighty-six-word paean to a billiard table Stratton received, it seems safe to say that guests found stimulation wherever they looked.[62]

The party broke up around three o'clock. Presumably the couple took some food and rest over the next several hours, and they may well have entertained a more intimate group of well-wishers. Newspaper reporters resumed the story at ten-thirty that evening with the appearance of the eight-piece New York Excelsior Band, playing "The Land of the Brave

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[60] *Sketch of the Life*, 20.

[61] *Sketch of the Life*, 23.

[62] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

and the Home of the Free" and other songs below the Strattons' window.[63] Once again a crowd (this time of "About five hundred people") tied up traffic.[64] When the band had quieted, Stratton spoke from his balcony, thanking the crowd for their support and wishing them "health and happiness" and "a cordial good night."[65]

The following day, the couple began their honeymoon, an extended jaunt up and down the eastern seaboard to "Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and the residences of their respective parents in Connecticut and Massachusetts."[66] Their reception in Philadelphia rivaled the one at the Metropolitan for the opulence of its setting and the exuberance of its guests. Nor did the new Mr. and Mrs. Stratton fail to impress: a Philadelphia paper, prophesying the couple's happiness, found in history "no more pleasing peculiarities than these two."[67] In Washington, they spent an evening at the White House with several members of Lincoln's cabinet and their families. The couple received the attentions of Mrs. Lincoln and her son Tad, as well as several Presidential puns.[68] Lincoln inquired as to the provenance of Stratton's appellation "General" but exempted him from service in the Civil War, saying, "his duty now will always be required in the matrimonial field; he will serve with the home front."[69] With a planned trip to Europe on the horizon, the Strattons ended

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[63] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863. I presume this was "The Star-Spangled Banner," but the *Times* did not specify any further title. *Sketch of the Life* placed the serenade at ten o'clock, not ten-thirty (25).

[64] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863, *Sketch of the Life*, 25.

[65] *Sketch of the Life*, 27.

[66] *Sketch of the Life*, 33.

[67] *Sketch of the Life*, 37.

[68] *Sketch of the Life*, 37. Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 62.

[69] Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 62.

their honeymoon with receptions in their hometowns of Bridgeport, Connecticut and Middleboro, Massachusetts.[70]

Here, then, is an extraordinarily detailed account of a wedding at the tail end of our period of study, a wedding of a different scale than any we have examined. As I have suggested, contemporaries described it as a kind of model wedding, or at least as a semi-farcical twist on one. Indeed, the more complimentary reports praised the wedding's fidelity to the fashions and norms of the day. The couple's wardrobe, the cake topped by a bride and groom, the ceremony, and the reception all passed muster as outsize (or undersized) versions of normal, bourgeois forms. In more complicated fashion, observers also held up the wedding's *participants* as models. Commentators deemed Tom Thumb "a good citizen, a sensible man, a good fellow generally," and his wife "quiet, modest, and proper"—"a paragon of beauty and perfection of form."[71] Although they winked as they wrote, these assessments hit their marks with surprising accuracy. For all their idiosyncrasies, Stratton and Warren's wedding rendered ideas about gender and class, and particularly about theatricality and bourgeois consumption, not only the norm in the Northeast, but accessible to observers who desired a greater degree of patriarchal and aristocratic display from their nuptials.

Tom Thumb's Wedding and the Ascent of Theatrical Gender

That a man and woman who identified primarily as entertainers could be considered a good citizen and proper lady reveals that the definitions of citizenship and propriety had changed. In the early nineteenth century Americans viewed performance as a "threat to the . . . republic," as performers' "self-aggrandizing power" menaced the "passive liberty" of

[70] *Sketch of the Life*, 38, Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 63.

[71] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863; *Sketch of the Life*, 29.

vulnerable citizens.[72] Moreover, the theater's longstanding taint of immorality might have relegated the couple to the unsavory periphery of American gender standards. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, American theater underwent what Richard Butsch has called a "re-gendering," in which theaters became safe spaces for "respectable" patrons, especially women. Not coincidentally, those same respectable women were beginning to adopt the fashions and even the "theatrical" demeanors of actresses.[73] Karen Halttunen has described this change as part of a larger transition in the 1850s, in which "the sentimental demand for sincerity that had given rise to the complex code of genteel conduct had fallen away, leaving behind the social forms themselves."[74] Americans, she contends, "were learning to place confidence . . . in the social mask . . . [and] in elaborate disguise."[75] Stratton's ability to masquerade as a respectable citizen depended on this change. However, the literature about Tom Thumb's wedding suggests that Americans' feelings about the "social mask" depended on deeply-ingrained assumptions about gender. Even if everyone wore the mask, only men could acknowledge its presence. Continuing social pressures to keep women submissive and pliant made acknowledgements of public artifice dangerous for respectable women. If a woman wore a mask in public, from whom else might she be hiding her true self? Commentators thus exercised extreme caution in discussing Lavinia Warren, suggesting that she *embodied* rather than *performed* the role of upper-class lady.

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[72] Eric Fretz, "P. T. Barnum's Theatrical Selfhood and the Nineteenth-Century Culture of Exhibition," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraoridinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 97-107 (quot. p. 97), Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 10.

[73] Richard Butsch, "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth-Century American Theater Audiences," *American Quarterly* 46, No. 3 (1994): 390-91; Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 186-87.

[74] *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 196.

[75] *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 188.

Commentators exhibited few qualms about Stratton's theatrical past. Rather, they thoroughly integrated his identity as an actor into descriptions of his wedding. They openly acknowledged that Stratton had changed his name for show-business reasons, the *Times* mentioning that Barnum had "christened" him Tom Thumb.[76] And they gleefully explored Stratton's enjoyment of the benefits theatrical fame: the "honest kiss" he planted on his bride, marveled the author of *Sketch of the Life*, was "the last of nearly *three millions*" won from "his lady admirers."[77]

It is notable that Barnum, always attuned to evolving sensibilities, inaugurated this openness about Stratton's background. Although Barnum freely adjusted Tom Thumb's image to fit the perceived desires of the ticket-buying public, he rarely pretended that Stratton's appeal lay anywhere but in his ability to please a crowd. Indeed, the showman's greatest trick was transforming his star pupil from a freak—a more customary role for men and women of his stature—*into* a performer (and then, almost as impressively, into a personality). Stratton's debut at the American Museum, for instance, was a variety show wherein he declared his intention of "amusing" the audience.[78] He reappeared regularly on that stage, often in full-blown dramatic productions. He sang songs, he did impressions, he donned blackface to play a slave boy, he enacted his "famous Grecian Statues routine" in a body stocking, and with these antics he won his following.[79]

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[76] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[77] *Sketch of the Life*, 18. While this estimate seems high, Barnum's biographer A. H. Saxon estimates that Stratton "appeared before more spectators than any other performer of the nineteenth century." *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 155.

[78] Raymund Fitzsimmons, *Barnum in London* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 61.

[79] Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U. S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 142.

If Tom Thumb's performative identity could be considered normal (and Stratton himself not just a good man but a "good citizen"), Americans had indeed acquired a more theatrical sense of self, and lost a republican fear of corruption by "self-aggrandizing" power.[80] But the media's embrace of an unabashed entertainer helps chart other patterns in American masculinity. As an actor, Stratton was neither self-made nor independent. These two facts (especially the latter one) would have damned him to ignominy in the early republic. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, Stratton achieved respectability by presenting an alternative, reactive image of manhood.

At least since Thomas Jefferson valorized the independent farmer, Americans had cherished the notion that their men were independent.[81] The refusal to serve any master but oneself could be found in a variety of imagined Americans, from Jeffersonian small farmers to northern and southern aristocrats and war heroes. The independent man supported a number of myths. He upheld America's economic strength by working in the fields or the shop. His unsullied political engagement kept the government free and uncorrupted. And, when duty called, he safeguarded American liberty by serving in his local militia. No one pretended to such independence as effectively as Andrew Jackson. Jackson was never more dangerous in political battles than when pitting himself against, in the words of historian Harry L. Watson, "a foreign and corrupting influence."[82] A week before vetoing the charter of the Second Bank of the United States, he suggested that his honest independence could

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[80] If this was true of Stratton, it was true of Barnum as well. On Barnum's theatricality, see Fretz, "P. T. Barnum's Theatrical Selfhood and the Nineteenth-Century Culture of Exhibition."

[81] Lois Banner argues that the "romantic" or Byronic ideal—featuring thin, pallid men—dominated in the1830s and 1840s before being replaced by the "muscular model" of Jackson. However, both models celebrated "Power and force," and both claimed independence of other men. *American Beauty*, 226-29. The middle class, every bit as much as yeomen or aristocrats, valorized rough-hewn independence. See Herman, "The Other Daniel Boone," 429-457, especially p. 455.

[82] Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 147.

overcome any number of forces arrayed against him, rumbling, "The bank . . . is trying to kill me, *but I will kill it!*"[83]

Tom Thumb did not much partake of this mode of independence. Most obviously, he was universally known as a Barnum creation. Here is how the *Times*' reporter described Stratton's rise to fame: "Mr. BARNUM . . . found him out, and brought him out, and has kept him out ever since."[84] This was hardly a man who controlled his own destiny. At his wedding, observers noted that Barnum preceded the couple down the aisle, "piloted" the Strattons about at their reception, and, they whispered, may well have staged the whole thing as a publicity stunt.[85]

Moreover, Stratton's style of acting did not convey independence. Some actors in the antebellum period adopted independent postures: a "muscular school" featured titanic blusterers such as Edmund Kean and Edwin Forrest.[86] But a variety performer like Stratton played to the crowd far more explicitly than dramatic actors. Tom Thumb's stage routine demanded always that he please, or at least appear to consider, his audience. Like Barnum himself, Stratton conveyed a nimbler, more reactive manhood.[87] Tellingly, he played independent characters for laughs: one of his most popular impressions was that of Napoleon,

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[83] Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 143. See Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 240.

[84] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[85] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863; "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, April 1863, 706.

[86] Butsch, "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies," 379-80. But the robust style was apparently more in evidence in the 1820s and 1830s than the 1860s, as American tastes veered more toward "respectable" entertainments such as could be found on museum stages. Butsch, 383-85.

[87] Neal Harris marvels at the way both men adjusted their performances to suit their audiences, saying, "The showman possessed an amazing talent for adaptability. As he moved from audience to audience he sensed their changing requirements. Subtle differences marked Tom Thumb's American appearances, with their emphasis on innocent brashness, from the mock heroic caricatures of his European shows and his condescension to the wealthy and noble." *Humbug*, 108.

whom he depicted strutting about cockily or musing despondently on Waterloo; he also lampooned that icon of rustic American self-creation, Yankee Doodle.[88]

Stratton's reactive, audience-oriented persona represented a new wave in American manhood, as men modified their self-conceptions in response to social changes. In the early nineteenth century, it had been possible (in some parts, some of the time) to pretend to Jacksonian independence. Distant authority figures left westerners and small farmers with a sense of autonomy in their daily lives, and urban trading networks remained personal and un-integrated, allowing a man to feel, in the words of Robert Weibe, "a personal control over his own affairs."[89] But by the 1850s, that control was harder to come by. Manly independence shrank before the machinery of the Victorian Age, be it industrial machines that reduced laborers to anonymous, efficient parts, military machines (some still on the horizon) that rendered one's flair for independent action secondary to the artillery backing him up, or political machines that depreciated the value of a vote.[90] Tom Thumb, with his impotent body (which an athlete had to place atop a piano so that the groom could greet his guests) and his nimble movements and wordplay, suggested a new man who, though he could not control events, might secure social standing by reacting nimbly and coolly to circumstances.

That at least some people saw this new, reactive model as praiseworthy can be seen in the way observers discussed Stratton's navigation of the crowd at his wedding reception. "He, a

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[88] Saxon, *P. T. Barnum*, 130. However, Neal Harris argues that Stratton aimed such "mock heroic caricatures" more at audiences in Europe, where he found "more to criticize." *Humbug*, 94. On Yankee Doodle, see J. A. Leo Lemay's definitive "The American Origins of 'Yankee Doodle,'" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. 33, No. 3 (1976): 435-464.

[89] Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 150; see also chapter seven.

[90] John F. Kasson's *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976) offers a useful perspective on changing ideas about machinery in the nineteenth century, tracing R. W. Emerson's growing fears that technology would not "aid the individual spirit" but instead "support the forces of social convention and restraint" (135).

veteran in the show business," raved the New York *Herald*, "was . . . of course, quite at his ease."[91] The *Times* compared his behavior in a crowd to heroism in battle: "if he knows anything," it wrote, he "knows what's what in a crowd. He—if any one—can endure the flashing artillery of ten thousand eyes—the running fire of ten thousand comments—the bombardment with admiring exclamations, which the hero of such a scene must endure. He, therefore, looked, not unusually astonished—nor remarkably surprised—but as pleased and joyful, and smiling, and jolly as the happiest of happy bridegrooms might."[92] The fact that the reporter's tongue was lodged firmly in his cheek does not negate the salience of praising Stratton's navigation of a crowd, deflecting comments with smiles. Indeed, he might as well as have described Wall Street, where businessmen weathered thousands of comments to cultivate favorable perceptions among an audience of investors. Or he could have depicted Abraham Lincoln, vexing and cajoling White House visitors with a steady barrage of jokes and puns, not exactly Andrew Jackson's natural successor.[93] All of which seems to confirm Halttunen's observation that arbiters of middle-class respectability had by the 1850s "cast aside . . . sentimental uncertainly about all forms of theatricality" and accepted the virtues of conspicuous display in their own lives.[94] It did not trouble them (or their spokesmen in the press) to celebrate Stratton, as he, like them, had thoroughly incorporated theatrical display into his persona.

Concurrent discussions of Lavinia Warren, however, suggested that women still needed to don the trappings of theatricality more delicately than men. It is certainly true that actresses

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[91] *Sketch of the Life*, 31. Cf. *Sketch of the Life*, 18.

[92] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[93] See David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 259, 639n.

[94] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 187.

carried more baggage than actors. Actresses had long enjoyed a suspect reputation, based partly in theaters' unsavory atmosphere (in the early nineteenth century, Butsch says, theaters "offered men a place for both conviviality and contact with prostitutes"), and partly in wider fears about the behavior of "public women."[95] While Warren's virtue was never questioned in print, her profession forced her to violate some of the tenets of the vaunted Cult of True Womanhood. Even if she remained pious, pure, and submissive, her stage experience marked her as decidedly not domestic.[96] Her autobiography, written several decades after she married Stratton, revealed an active, public life. Before Barnum "discovered" her, she had exhibited herself in a variety show, confessing that she "eagerly craved" "fame, fortune," and "glamour."[97] On the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers' rough-and-ready vaudeville circuits, she had experienced several fights between her troupe and local townspeople and had entered into an affectionate friendship with a giantess.[98]

Warren was fortunate, though, to follow in the wake of the singer Jenny Lind, "the Swedish Nightingale," whom Barnum had led on a fantastically successful American tour beginning in 1850.[99] Lind, notwithstanding her shrewd business sense and practiced singing

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[95] "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies, 381; see also 378. In England around the time of the American Revolution, Samuel Johnson was asking James Boswell, "Would not a gentleman be disgraced by having his wife singing publicly for hire?" Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. Mowbray Morris (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899), 310. The association of the phrase "public woman" with prostitution is indicative of the elisions that occurred when women appeared onstage.

[96] These were the "four cardinal virtues" of the Cult of True Womanhood as defined by Barbara Welter. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 152.

[97] Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 49, 39.

[98] Although Warren's autobiography, not surprisingly, depicted her as remaining aloof from these dust-ups, she admitted, "As these missels [sic] were not discriminating, we non-combatants were in as much danger as anybody." She claimed not to have enjoyed those escapades, but eventually learned "to regard these troubles with less terror and finally treated them philosophically." Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 43-44.

[99] Other examples included the actress Frances Kemble, who married into the Philadelphia aristocracy in 1834, retaining her honor by retiring from the stage as soon as she married, and Queen Victoria, who, according to Lois Banner, cast aside "her love of fashionable dress and entertainment" upon marrying and avoided any

style, cultivated an image perfectly in line with a sentimental vision of women. With some prodding from Barnum, the press hailed her for displaying (in the words of historian Bluford Adams) "privacy, artlessness, sensibility, charity, innocence, and piety," features that were not only "everything that . . . Barnum was not," but also everything the theater (in its less reputable forms) was not.[100] Neal Harris argues that "With her chaste, girlish demeanor," Lind unsexed the theatre: "Jenny posed no threat to the security of hearth and home; no men would drink champagne from her slipper in hidden dens of iniquity."[101] Lind's experience demonstrated the careful path women might walk to succeed in show business without contravening middle-class sensibilities.

Following the example set by Lind's hagiographers, accounts of Warren's wedding buried her theatrical background beneath a narrative of sentimental gentility. Commentators depicted Warren as a genteel young lady who had risen almost unaccountably to renown. *Sketch of the Life* slipped easily from a reverie on Warren's genteel childhood to her first appearance in New York:

> At home, her good mother taught her how to sew, knit, cook, and do all manner of housework, so that she is really a good housekeeper. . . . The reader . . . may fancy a child using elegant language—appreciating music, poetry, eloquence, painting, and statuary—travelling unattended (as she has done, from Boston to Buffalo), going through the streets shopping—waltzing in the ball-room—singing sentimental and patriotic songs—writing letters to friends—keeping a journal, etc. When this little lady stopped at the St. Nicholas Hotel, she was visited by many hundreds of the *elite* and *literati* of New York.[102]

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stain on her reputation. William Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 217-220; Banner, *American Beauty*, 92. Both of these women, however, mitigated the stain of being fashionable, public women by their Britishness (always a stamp of respectability in America) and what Dusinberre calls "good breeding."

[100] Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum*, 41.

[101] Harris, *Humbug*, 139.

[102] *Sketch of the Life*, 9.

Segues such as this one suggested that Warren's upbringing had prepared her for an ordinary middle- or upper-class lifestyle, arming her with domestic skills and genteel charms.[103] Only when she wandered into the city did she find herself besieged by admirers, all upper-class, who presumably coalesced around her spontaneously and without encouragement. Barnum's 1869 account of meeting Warren also propounded the notion that Warren was a show-business neophyte. He had, he wrote, "heard of an extraordinary dwarf girl, named Lavinia Warren, who was residing with her parents in Middleboro', Massachusetts. . . . I found her to be a most intelligent and refined young lady, well educated, and an accomplished, beautiful and perfectly-developed woman in miniature."[104] Papering over Warren's vaudeville experience, he instead highlighted her genteel refinement and education. Both Barnum and *Sketch of the Life* left unanswered the question of whether Warren was a "child" or a "lady" (or, in Barnum's words, a "girl" or a "woman").[105] In both sources, these two life-stages slid seamlessly into one another. Placing her at home with her parents, Barnum encouraged readers to think of her as young and dependent, and also buttressed her domestic credentials. This depiction of Warren suggested a lingering discomfort with "theatricality" and a continuing attachment to "sentimental" culture as described by Halttunen. Women who were young, dependent, and domestic, even those who ventured out to shop or sightsee,

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[103] Granted, this Warren was no stranger to the world, traveling "unattended . . . from Boston to Buffalo." However, Lois W. Banner reminds us that antebellum women moved about with more freedom than their descendants (although perhaps on a more limited scale than Lavinia Warren): "Chaperonage and other formalized attempts to monitor the behavior of young men and women in the courting years were not enforced with any degree of success until well after the Civil War. During these earlier years a young woman could walk throughout much of New York unescorted." *American Beauty*, 79. See also Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 207-208. But see Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 117.

[104] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 583.

[105] Harris notes that the press made the same elision of years with Lind that they later did with Warren. Lind "was already thirty" at the time of her tour, he writes, but was "invariably described by Americans as a young girl." *Humbug*, 121.

presumably had little intercourse with the world and retained their innocence, "sincerity," and transparency.[106]

But if commentators could sweep Warren's earlier show-business life under the rug, they could hardly ignore her career under Barnum. This they addressed gingerly, erecting a verbal and chronological wall around her entertainment career, cordoning it off from her identity as a demure, obedient girl. At most, reporters described her appearances on Barnum's stage as "exhibitions."[107] More often, they gave them the more genteel (and far less performative) terms "visits" and "levees," as if the paying throngs at Barnum's Museum were in fact wealthy friends congregating in her parlor.[108] In the same vein, her continual plans to tour Europe were generally put down to Warren's "inclination to travel," rather than her desire to perform for pay.[109] In addition to cloaking her career in inoffensive verbiage, all sources agreed that her wedding would mark the end of her brief theatrical career. The wedding announcement in the New York *Times* predicted that she would "immediately" "withdraw from public life."[110] Meanwhile, Barnum, never short on irony, advised the public to catch one last glimpse of her before she disappeared behind the veil of domesticity (a veil that, incidentally, protected women from the indignity of potentially out-earning their husbands). "SEE HER NOW OR NEVER," blared his advertisement, as "Her engagement here closes

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[106] See Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 59.

[107] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[108] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 584; Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 51. While A. H. Saxon claims that Warren's "'levees' were not so extensive as Tom Thumb's," they were performances nonetheless, featuring songs and audience patter. Magri, 11.

[109] *Sketch of the Life*, 12.

[110] "Tom Thumb's Courtship," *New York Times*, 14 January 1863.

with her nuptial ceremony, after which she retires to private life, TO ENJOY IN LUXURY AND EASE the fortune of the little General, her future husband."[111]

Descriptions of wedding activities kept up the image of Warren as a submissive, retiring helpmeet to her more public spouse. A Philadelphia newspaper praised the way she stood "demurely" at Stratton's side and described her conversation (in the best sentimental style) as polite, quiet, and altogether overshadowed by her pregnant facial expressions: "Her voice is small, but not unpleasant; the looks which accompany it furnish more language than the words."[112] Stratton's address to the crowd below the hotel balcony likewise acknowledged his own life on the stage while portraying his wife as a private lady awaiting his return. According to the promotional *Sketch of the Life*, Stratton first thanked the crowd for their continued support: "After being for more than twenty years before the public, I little expected, at this late day, to attract so much attention. Indeed, if I had not become a 'family man,' I should never have known how high I stood in public favor, and I assure you I appreciate highly and am truly grateful for this evidence of your esteem and consideration."[113] He then apologized on his wife's behalf for putting an early end to the evening: "ladies and gentlemen, a little woman in the adjoining apartment is very anxious to see me, and I must, therefore, make this speech, like myself—*short*." In this telling, Stratton bade the crowd "good-night," and left the balcony to general applause. But what *Sketch of the Life* left out was what took place after Stratton's farewell. According to the *Times*,

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[111] "BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM," *New York Times*, 18 January 1863. Behind the scenes (but not too far behind, as *Sketch of the Life* recounted the story in part), Barnum attempted to convince the couple to postpone their wedding "as long as possible" in order to milk the excitement over their engagement for more profits. *Sketch of the Life*, 14; see Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 602. Barnum promised to "cancel all claims I had upon Lavinia's services" upon their marriage. *Struggles and Triumphs*, 600.

[112] *Sketch of the Life*, 35. On appropriate public behavior for husbands and wives, see Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 162.

[113] *Sketch of the Life*, 27.

Warren "advanced and waved a kiss to the company." Here was a more fitting curtain call for a professional actress than the more domestic, submissive lot accorded her by Barnum's promotional material.

Thus, a new theatricality in gender behavior placed Stratton's impish, reactive persona more in the mainstream of American masculinity than it could have been in previous decades. But that theatricality was not yet sufficiently established to cleanse Lavinia Warren of disrepute, or to render her public playacting entirely unthreatening to private homes.[114] Her handlers and chroniclers therefore carefully shunted her stage experience into the distant past, molding a public actress into a domestic, submissive wife.[115]

The changing status of theatricality in the nineteenth century might seem merely a side note, were it not so illustrative of changes in weddings themselves. Americans' mixture of fascination and discomfort about theatrical display directly informed their simultaneous attraction to and uneasiness over the conspicuous display of the modern wedding ritual. The author of *Sketch of the Life*, devoting hundreds of words to Warren's costume but still jibing at her "inevitable" white gloves, expressed the ambivalence many Americans felt about a ritual which had once been private (or even relatively inconsequential) but which now offered unprecedented opportunities and pressures for the public exhibition of private relations.[116] The codification of this sort of theatricality, not to mention its marketing

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[114] John F. Kasson argues that "only gradually" did middle-class women "widen . . . the narrow compass" of their public exposure. *Rudeness and Civility*, 112.

[115] As she aged, Warren acknowledged that this mold did not fit her very well: "I belong to the public," she said. "The appearing before audiences has become my life. I've hardly known any other." Quoted in Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 161.

[116] John Kasson argues that, as he or she "responded to the crisis of social representation and the instability of identity in the public realm," "In public the individual uneasily pretended to be in private." *Rudeness and Civility*, 117. And Sven Beckert notes that after the civil War, "social events of [elite New Yorkers] became more elaborate and more public than ever before." *The Monied Metropolis*, 154.

(wedding planners first appeared in eastern cities nine years earlier, in 1854) clearly intrigued Americans.[117] But it did not necessarily comfort them.

Tom Thumb's Wedding and the Spectacle of Consumption

That weddings inspired both excitement and ambivalence stemmed from the class masquerade that newly standardized rituals offered their participants. I have argued that weddings throughout the antebellum period helped define their participants' class roles. But a wedding such as Tom Thumb's—and the weddings that were becoming the national standard—featured a more explicit and more extravagant code of class behavior than those earlier rituals. Participants in such events paraded the values of bourgeois consumption with a zeal that would have stunned antebellum Americans. But a general expansion of middle-class values throughout the nineteenth century, in tandem with increasingly available deluxe goods (and faux-deluxe goods, such as off-rack clothing sold by the new department stores like Stewart's) that brought "an upper-class style to the people," rendered weddings sites in which couples could act above their normal class station, a prospect that both enticed and alarmed commentators.[118] It also offered an opening for people for whom displays of aristocratic largesse were crucial components of their self-presentation.

Tom Thumb's wedding offered an unmatched example of how to use conspicuous consumption to stamp oneself with gentility. The thousands of words written about the wedding exhaustively catalogued the elements of a wedding that would qualify its

[117] Rondout, in *The Bliss of Marriage*, provides the first evidence I have found that "certain individuals" would "get up such ceremonies for 'a consideration'" (164-65).

[118] On the expansion of upper-class style, see Banner, *American Beauty*, chapter 2 (quot. p. 35). *Sketch of the Life* listed at least ten separate luxury retailers and clothiers from whom guests purchased gifts for the couple.

participants as upper- (or even middle-) class. Lavish descriptions of the principals' clothing, the reception, the gifts, the playing of the "Wedding March," the outrageous cake—all of these codified elements of the wedding whose forms had only recently been standardized. The cake, for instance, was presented as merely the best of its kind, "the nonpareil of bridal cake"; yet that form of cake had circulated only since the wedding of Queen Victoria's daughter in 1858.[119] At her own wedding eighteen years earlier, in fact, the Queen herself had had merely "a great beast of a plum-cake," nothing like the tall, white, intricately decorated confection that the Strattons (and millions of successors) enjoyed.[120] The mountains of gifts, too, were recent developments, as even elite couples rarely received gifts from outside the family before 1830 or so, and only at this moment did couples begin displaying their gifts at weddings themselves.[121] Such displays of material largesse appealed to Americans who fancied themselves aristocrats. Yet reporters presented almost everything in Tom Thumb's wedding as models of presumably long and hallowed traditions. No commentator, not even the *Harper's* editor who disparaged the couple as a sideshow exhibition, suggested that the Strattons' performance of these traditions (as opposed to their fitness to take part in such a ceremony, or their audience's desire to see them do so) was inadequate. Indeed, the wedding's material elements, as well as the couple's behavior, all lived up to Barnum's promise to "give the couple a genteel and graceful wedding."[122]

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[119] *Sketch of the Life*, 20.

[120] Charsley, *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History*, 82-85, quot. pp. 83-84. An etiquette book printed in 1851 defined "the bride's loaf" as "a large one of the richest of fruit cake"—a far cry from the highly decorated confection featured here. Abell, *Woman in her Various Relations*, 210.

[121] See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 76, 167-68.

[122] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 603.

But Stratton and Warren stretched the contradictions of bourgeois consumption nearly to their breaking point, forcing their audience to confront—in limited ways, at least—the extent to which one could "pass" as upper-class. They repeatedly confounded viewers' expectations. We recall Lori Merish's insight that the wedding's cute, childlike bodies rendered middle-class "social and property relations" appealing to a formerly skeptical public. Yet the disjuncture between the Strattons' physical selves and the roles they acted out left some in the audience uncomfortable. "Sacred as was the place, and as should be the occasion," admitted the New York *Observer*, "it was difficult to repress a smile when the Rev. Mr. Willey, of Bridgeport, said, in the ceremony—'You take this *woman*,' and 'You take this *man*,' &c."[123] Similarly, the reporter for the *Times* observed, "As the little party toddled up the aisle, a sense of the ludicrous seemed to hit many a bump of fun and [an] irrepressible and unpleasantly audible giggle ran through the church."[124]

Tom Thumb's presentation certainly exposed cracks in the façade of class performance. Neither Stratton nor Warren possessed a spotless class pedigree, an open secret that rendered the extravagance of their wedding slightly farcical. The *Times* described Stratton's parents as "poor but honest," a background that might have sounded honorable had Barnum's promotional material not crowed so loudly about the wedding's appeal to "the youth, beauty, wealth, and worth" of New York.[125] Barnum made much of how he had tutored young Charlie Stratton to enable him to commune with royalty, but if this fact proved that humble Americans could compete on the world stage, he undermined it by savaging Stratton's

[123] *Sketch of the Life*, 27.

[124] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[125] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863; *Sketch of the Life*, 15.

parents as uncultivated rubes.[126] With Lavinia Warren (whom he introduced to the world almost twenty years after Tom Thumb), Barnum abandoned the narrative of upward mobility he had given Stratton. Rather, Warren was (he said) the scion of one of America's first families. "THE name of WARREN has been rendered illustrious, in England and America," wrote the author of *Sketch of the Life*. "The WARRENS of America occupy conspicuous positions in our country's history, and among them we mention JAMES WARREN, JOHN WARREN, and General JOSEPH WARREN."[127] Quite true, and in her autobiography, Warren proudly (if gratuitously) traced her ancestry back to William the Conquerer.[128] But the *Times* incongruously referred to her as both "QUEEN LAVINIA WARREN" and "MISS LAVINIA WARREN BUMP," and A. H. Saxon notes that she "began her life under the more plebeian name Mercy Lavinia Warren Bump."[129] Her sister's (possibly punning) name "Minnie," too, was a Barnum creation, replacing the far less blue-blooded Huldah Pierce Bump. The Stratton-Bump marriage united two New England country clans. But the *Thumb-Warren* marriage joined a fabulously wealthy striver to an illustrious family name, precisely the effect of many marriages among the "*haut ton* of Gotham," as well as among the inter-regional elite of the North and South. Although many in the audience clearly knew that the wedding was of the former class, not the latter, the largest objection they raised to this class-bending masquerade came in the form of mild, tolerant laughter, suggesting that they were willing to tolerate a breech of class lines, if only because of the diminutive nature of the invaders.

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[126] Saxon, *P. T. Barnum*, 141-42.

[127] *Sketch of the Life*, **7, 8 or 9**.

[128] Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 33-34.

[129] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863; Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 9.

The crowd may have been laughing as well at the ways in which the wedding violated upper-class standards of respectability by flirting with the conventions of stagecraft. Barnum's promise to give Stratton and Warren "a genteel and graceful wedding" did not stop him from playing up the pleasing peculiarities of its stars.[130] The presence of Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren, in particular, betrayed Barnum's calculations. Nutt and Stratton were not friends; indeed, they carried on a famous rivalry that Stratton's courtship of Warren, whom Nutt also coveted, only exacerbated. But the prospect of Stratton having a best man even smaller than himself was immensely appealing. Barnum suggested to Nutt that he should act as Stratton's best man; within a few weeks, Stratton took the hint and asked Nutt himself.[131] Minnie Warren, too, seems to have stood up for her sister at least in part because they shared the same body type. Lavinia Warren had other sisters, but they were not dwarfs; it is hardly surprising, then, that Minnie took the most prominent place. Contributing to the sense that the couple violated upper-class decorum by attempting to profit from their wedding was the persistent rumor (which the showman denied) that Barnum had sold tickets to the event.[132]

However, the couple's tiny bodies would have been the primary reason for the audience's unease. Stratton's body in particular undermined his pretensions as an upper-class man. In spite of an early-century vogue for "pale and thin" men in the Byronic mode, strength and

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[130] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 603.

[131] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 601. Nutt originally refused Barnum's suggestion, in a fit of pique, Barnum supposed, over losing Warren to his rival. When Nutt later acceded to Stratton's overtures, he chastised the showman for interfering in his employees' personal affairs: "It was not your business to ask me," he told Barnum. "When the proper person invited me I accepted."

[132] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 603. The couple also refused Barnum's offer to "postpone the wedding for a month, and continue their exhibitions at the Museum," which, because of public excitement about the wedding, were pulling in significant crowds (602). The sense of exploitation surrounding the wedding appears to explain why the wedding was moved from Trinity Chapel to Grace Church, and why even the *Times* noted that the couple's original choice of an officiant eventually demurred. "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

physical prowess were deeply rooted ideals of American manhood, enduring through all changes in fashion.[133] In the 1850s and 1860s, upper-class men, enamored with battlefield prowess as well as business acumen, embraced the body types of muscular military heroes and businessmen—the latter of which Lois Banner describes as "mature," "portly" and "bearded."[134] Stratton, with his clean-shaven face, his impotent body, and his condescending exemption from military service, fell short of both ideals, and his wedding's seeming validation of such an improbable claim to bourgeois manhood was surely part of what struck his audience as "ludicrous." No amount of material splendor could transform such a childlike figure into an upper-class patriarch, and the fact that his extravagant wedding let him pretend to that status made it uncomfortably clear that only the ability to act the part and own a few choice possessions separated the upper class from their underlings.

Warren's body, on the other hand, exaggerated the upper-class feminine ideal until it was almost meaningless. Banner's inventory of "aristocratic" traits in Victorian women emphasizes smallness at every turn: "Small hands and feet had long been considered a mark of nobility. Slim waists were the luxury of a social class that did not have to live on a heavy starch diet. Small noses and mouths, too, were seen as signs of superior gentility, as was a pale complexion."[135] Lavinia Warren had all these in spades (although she was described as being "decidedly of the plump style of beauty").[136] The *Herald* deemed her "a little lady of

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[133] Banner, *American Beauty*, 226; on the persistent vogue for "power and force" in American men see 228.

[134] Banner, *American Beauty*, 231-32. Abraham Lincoln overcame his reputation as a punning lawyer partly by appealing to America's love for physical size and strength. His 1860 presidential campaign highlighted his capacity for manual labor, playing up his brief experience as a rail-splitter and praising his height. One campaign song, describing him as "sun-crowned and tall," went so far as to describe his arms as "Herculean." William H. Burleigh, ed., *The Republican Campaign Songster for 1860* (New York: H. Dayton, 1860), 10-11.

[135] Banner, *American Beauty*, 53.

[136] *Sketch of the Life*, 31.

very fair proportions," and a Philadelphia paper gloried in "Her tiny, snowflake hands . . . arrayed in white kids."[137] Her smallness rendered her beautiful, and her body's unfitness for manual labor encouraged observers to accord her an aristocratic bearing. There seemed no limit to how small a woman could be and still fit the ideal, as reporters' treatment of Lavinia's sister Minnie (who stood almost a head shorter than Lavinia) shows. The *Times* described her in childlike terms but complimented her nonetheless, calling her "the dearest little duck of a creature on the face of the globe. She is sweet sixteen and short; her face is pretty, her form good, her manners pleasing."[138] The *Herald* went a step further, declaring Minnie Warren "to our heretical taste, the prettier of the two."[139] Such effusive praise for such tiny women certainly points to the Victorian obsession with children and fairies: a reporter claimed to hear reception guests exclaiming (among other things), ""Dear little creatures!" and "It's like a fairy scene!"[140]

Yet something was out of joint. The reporter for the *Observer*, musing on the profusion of beautiful women filling the aisles of Grace Church, found examples of everything that "can make the sex beautiful, and lead every body else into temptation. But," he continued, "beautiful as they were, they were not dwarfs. How many wished they were! How many regretted their 'superb abundance!'"[141] Lodged in the writer's joke about an entire audience of women yearning for "freak" status were deeper misgivings about the gendered instability of upper-class status in modernizing America, and particularly women's potential to confuse

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[137] *Sketch of the Life*, 29, 31.

[138] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[139] *Sketch of the Life*, 31.

[140] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[141] *Sketch of the Life*, 29.

class relations by entering the public sphere. The reporter took the phrase "superb abundance" from Robert Browning's 1855 poem "A Toccata of Galuppi's," which nostalgically described a woman's bosom as a source of comfort: "Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,— / On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed, / O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head?" These lines captured much of the appeal of the doctrine of separate spheres: from within her domestic, maternal sanctum, the ideal woman used her charms (and her abundant body) to comfort and revivify a man exhausted by the strains of the outside world. But the "superb abundance" the reporter observed at Tom Thumb's wedding did not comfort him. Rather, it tempted him, verging on the profane: "Babylon was a rag-fair to it," was his exotic assessment; more scandalously, he judged that "Never before was the scarlet lady seen to such advantage." Descriptions of this sort appeared often enough in stories of Broadway or the Bowery, but these women were not street walkers; they were the respectable cream of New York society—in church, no less! They had abandoned pretensions to privacy and turned their "superb abundance" to public use.

Observers' half-joking idealizations of tiny Lavinia and Minnie Warren make sense in this context. John F. Kasson has argued that "both ladies and gentlemen avoided elaborate shows of finery on the street, favoring wardrobes that were cloaks of genteel anonymity."[142] In a newly theatrical age, however, and particularly when the private symbolism of marriage allowed women the license to dress extravagantly in a public space, women expressed class position by displaying themselves.[143] But with fine fashions becoming increasingly available

[142] Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 118.

[143] Sven Beckert notes that "by the 1850s, New York's mercantile elite slowly began to replace their relatively simple dress, décor, and food with more overt displays of riches," as a result of increased wealth and a

to a wide sector of the population, and as women of all classes paraded those fashions in public, Americans struggled sometimes to differentiate the "*haut ton*" from "scarlet ladies."[144] Men could no longer trust their women to out-dress their economic underlings as their forebears had done. Instead, women appeared potentially threatening to men's class status. Little wonder that women whose very bodies identified them as unthreatening and subordinate held a certain appeal.[145] In an "idealized miniaturization," Susan Stewart argues, "what is . . . lost . . . is sexuality and hence the danger of power."[146] In praising tiny Lavinia Warren as well-bred and retiring, reporters resolved fears about women's potential power to destabilize men's class status.

Discussions of her similarly miniscule groom, however, took a surprising turn. Certainly some of their rhetoric "miniaturized" him, condescending to him even as it praised him. And indeed, Stratton is the veritable "type" for Bogdan's theory of the "aggrandized" freak, in which a subject's "Social position, achievements, talents, family, and physiology were fabricated, elevated, or exaggerated and then flaunted."[147] Given that, Stratton's body, and the laughter it inspired, could have "normalized" his audience against his identifiable

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"desire to delineate the boundaries of their world and appropriate some of the strategies of social distinction of the elites who had come before them, most particularly of the European aristocracy." *The Monied Metropolis*, 42.

[144] C. Dallett Hemphill notes that Revolutionary etiquette books advised that respectable women "only dance in private companies," limiting their exposure to "undesirable men." The respectable women of 1863 did not shrink so delicately from public displays of themselves. Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 109, 145.

[145] For a consideration of how one strain of public women—women's rights activists—spurred men to fear that women were abandoning their proper social role at precisely this moment, see Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 147- 154.

[146] Stewart, *On Longing*, 124.

[147] Robert Bogdan, "The Social Construction of Freaks," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraoridinary Body*, ed. Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 23-37 (quot. p. 29).

"otherness."[148] Yet the crowd's laughter was short-lived. The giggles that spread "through the church" as the audience glimpsed the couple died down "After a moment's reflection," and thereafter "the most absolute silence was maintained."[149] Reporters' discussions of Tom Thumb operated analogously to the crowd's response: even while partaking of the spirit of fun that pervaded most Barnum happenings, they generally minimized his freakish aspects. Rarely settling for marking Stratton as the "other," they instead cloaked him in an independent, upper-class manliness to which he bore little-to-no obvious resemblance. This was, not coincidentally, virtually the same image of manhood to which Victorian men—in the North and the South, and even in the Mormon hinterlands—appealed with increasing desperation in the late nineteenth century. Insecure about the value of physical strength and no longer able to trust their women to assert class authority, men placed heightened faith in upper-class and manly symbols.

A primary way by which Stratton laid claim to independent, upper-class manhood was by invoking his stash of titles and honors bespeaking supposed martial prowess. Most explicitly, he went by the name "General" Tom Thumb. The honorific was a joke, of course, playing on the contrast between the weightiness of the office and the tiny man who supposedly held it.[150] But, as Stratton told Abraham Lincoln, when Queen Victoria calls you

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[148] According to Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "the institutionalized social process of enfreakment united and validated the disparate throng positioned as viewers." Thomson, "Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-19 (quot. p. 10).

[149] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[150] Stratton's imitation of Napoleon underscored the comic nature of his military title. Lori Merish argues that such titles "ridiculed the pretensions of the "low" to the status and privileges of the "high;" I am not sure the point is so cut-and-dried, and I suspect that Stratton's pretensions to nobility and military prowess subjected the "high" to gentle ridicule as well. "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics," 190-91. Raymund Fitzsimmons notes that London audiences sensed that Stratton was "mocking" them in his performances. *Barnum in London*, 118.

General, even in jest, "English soldiers always present arms when I pass."[151] His wedding further obscured the question of whether his rank was comic or serious, as his most famous "assistant" on the occasion was none other than Union General Ambrose L. Burnside, generously lending him martial credibility.[152] (The fact that Burnside was best known for his innovative facial hair—his famous sideburns—underscored the era's fondness for theatricality and begged the question of whether the clothes might actually make the man.) But if Stratton's military title was a joke, his membership in the determinedly-masculine Masons (a group that inspired both middle-class Northerners and Joseph Smith himself) was not. Barnum's pamphlet noted, "He has already taken three degrees, and expresses a determination to ascend the mystic ladder until he has reached the top round."[153] Stratton also acquired proto-Rooseveltian totems of manhood on a western hunting trip, shooting "several deer."[154]

Despite some clear limitations, the Little General's chroniclers also contributed to an impression of independent manhood by highlighting his sex life.[155] Stratton was a famous flirt: as mentioned before, his wedding kiss was reputed to be "the last of nearly *three*

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[151] Magri, *Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, 62.

[152] *Sketch of the Life*, 15-16.

[153] *Sketch of the Life*, 7. The pamphlet cited the Bridgeport *Standard* for this quotation. On the Masonic appeal to insecure men, see Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*. It is notable that the some of the Mormon ritualized celebration of patriarchal manhood stemmed from Masonic traditions as well.

[154] *Sketch of the Life*, 7. Daniel J. Herman notes that "sport hunting . . . rapidly gained popularity after 1830." "The Other Daniel Boone," 456.

[155] Sex is a controversial question among scholars of freakery. Scholars of freaks generally have noted "a perverse kind of sexual curiosity" among their observers; Tom Thumb's wedding, however, has been noted not for voyeurism but for "eras[ing]" the dangerous aspects of child sexuality through its promotion of "cuteness." Elizabeth Grosz, "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraoridinary Body*, ed. Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 55-66 (quot. 64); Stewart, *On Longing*, 124; see also Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics," 188.

millions pressed in public upon the lips of his lady admirers."[156] The *Times*, too, described Stratton putting the moves on his new wife: "in the presence of the entire audience," it wrote, he "bestowed upon her the 'killing glance' with which he has, in days gone by, captivated so many millions of equally susceptible damsels."[157] Here, as some theorists have suggested, Stratton rendered public sexuality "safe": in both cases, reporters winkingly described him making love in public, a potentially transgressive act which might have besmirched ladies' reputations if they had been cuddling something other than Stratton's childlike body.[158] Also "safe" was his rivalry with fellow Commodore Nutt, mentioned in nearly every account of the wedding: since he was fighting a dwarf for the hand of another dwarf, readers could interpret their manly contest as child's play. But Stratton's speech to the crowd that gathered below his hotel balcony addressed sexuality in a less "cute" manner, declaring that "a little woman in the adjoining apartment is very anxious to see me, and I must, therefore, make this speech, like myself—*short*."[159] Here Stratton positioned himself as a sexual mover anxious to get inside to see his patient, passive wife. Far from being reactive, he buttressed his manly credentials with an aggressive, independent sexuality.

A continual emphasis on Stratton's financial largesse and security further supported his claim to upper-class independence. The whole wedding—the exclusive locations, the clothing of the principals, the jewels Stratton gave his bride, the outrageous cake—received

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[156] *Sketch of the Life*, 18.

[157] "Loving Lilliputians," *New York Times*, 11 February 1863.

[158] Raymund Fitzsimmons resorts to classical allusions in his attempt to explain Tom Thumb's relationship with his female public: "One of the most curious manifestations of the exhibition [in London] was the attraction Tom Thumb had for women They grew soft and tender-hearted over him They looked upon him sometimes as a man and sometimes as a child. They wanted to kiss and caress him. These were strange sensations for Victorian ladies, but ones they shared with those ladies of ancient Rome who liked to have dwarfs running about their apartments, naked and bedecked with jewels." *Barnum in London*, 129.

[159] *Sketch of the Life*, 27.

what one commentator called "*carte blanche*, as to style and cost," trumpeting Stratton's upper-class status at every turn.[160] Other aspects of the wedding repeatedly cast Stratton as a powerful economic force. Barnum claimed that Stratton popped the question to Warren almost immediately after showing her an insurance policy he had forced a debtor to take out on his property and describing his prudent habits of investing.[161] Maybe not the most romantic gesture, but this depiction of Stratton downplayed his variable, unreliable stage background and instead situated his fortune in solidly old-fashioned land-ownership. Here, too, was a sop to those who wished that economic and social fortunes would emanate from aristocratic sources rather than entrepreneurial success. *Sketch of the Life* noted, he "has an ample fortune, and the financiering skill and experience to take care of it"[162] Similarly, reporters highlighted the fact that guests included New York's aristocracy, future members of the vaunted "four hundred:" Astors, Belmonts, Vanderbilts, and Lennoxes—not his fellow entertainers. Even Stratton's body, small as it was, was described as "stout," in line with the fuller figures who gained prominence as Americans came to idolize businessmen.[163] And although photographs of the wedding showed him as clean-shaven, *Sketch of the Life* quoted a newspaper article from a few months earlier that depicted him "twirling his elegant little moustache, of which he seems quite proud," facial hair being appropriate to the business and military ideals gaining social currency during the 1860s.[164] Stratton's prosperity, these reports implied, consisted of stronger stuff than that of a mere actor depending on the

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[160] *Sketch of the Life*, 25. Barnum's pamphlet applied this phrase to the reception dress Barnum purchased for Warren.

[161] P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 592-595. It seems highly likely that this story was spurious.

[162] *Sketch of the Life*, 14.

[163] *Sketch of the Life*, 31. See Banner, *American Beauty*, 112, 232.

[164] *Sketch of the Life*, 8. See Banner, *American Beauty*, 232.

transitory applause of the masses. Instead, his financial portfolio (and the elevated company he kept) would safeguard his social and economic power regardless of changes in fashion—or in economic climate. The police presence at the wedding—not merely directing traffic but actually lining the aisles of Grace Church itself—suggests another current of conspicuous membership in the upper class.[165] From whom did the couple or their guests need guarding if not the lower, plebian classes from whom Stratton had risen in the first place?

One final document buttressed Stratton's veneer of independence with a similar lack of subtlety. Barnum sold a number of *cartes de visites* to celebrate and exploit the wedding, depicting the Strattons in various poses of nuptial happiness. One of these showed the couple at home in a comfortable parlor, an image of married bliss perfectly compatible with the bourgeois cult of domesticity (in which men ventured out into the world alone to provide for submissive, domestic wives). It is surely no coincidence that it featured an African-American servant standing behind the couple. The upper-class manhood proposed by chroniclers of Tom Thumb's wedding was unabashedly performative, as Stratton and others took it upon themselves to act out wealthy masculinity in ways that no one could miss, or mistake for the behavior of lesser men. In the North as well as the South, this included perpetuating longstanding race, class and gender hierarchies, and putting one's private authority over blacks (or women) to public use.

Though he was unusual in a multitude of ways, Charles Stratton's inability to secure manhood via steely resolve or old-fashioned valor gave him many peers in an age of industrialization, mechanization, and civil war. The fact that commentators praised him as "normal" suggests that at least some Americans were seeking another path, one which would

[165] *Sketch of the Life*, 29. Observing the police, a reporter deemed Grace Church "the matrimonial Warsaw," referring to the civil unrest and violent troop response that took place in Warsaw in 1861.

secure them a measure of fulfillment as their traditional autonomy shrank. But Stratton exemplified also the limits of alternate paths for men bound up in time-honored mythologies and hierarchies. If Tom Thumb's wedding portended the diminishing efficacy of Jacksonian independence, it also suggested how sorely men throughout the nation missed that independence. To compensate, they created a repertoire of identifiers that would let them claim power in spite of their limitations.[166] Stratton offered a veritable cheat-sheet of affectations with which men might cover up modern impotences: have money, give yourself titles, join the Masons, have sex, kiss promiscuously, hunt, be physically imposing, affect nobility, own land, fraternize with the rich, consume conspicuously, have a submissive, domestic wife, have black servants. Many of these activities hearkened back to the Jacksonian era, but they also anticipated (especially in their often unself-conscious stridency) the vociferous revivals of manhood championed by Theodore Roosevelt and others. Whether looking forward or back, all of them kept power in the hands of white, wealthy men. Victorian innovations—powerful, world-beating machinery, women grasping at public power, the egalitarian promise and threat of an entrepreneurial economy and companionate marriage—may have diminished white men's sense of independence, but it did not prepare them to yield power to their social or economic inferiors.

Being a Barnum production, the wedding featured a torrent of jokes big and small. But no joke was bigger than this one: Tom Thumb's wedding, an exclusive, elite affair, was becoming accessible to the masses, not just as spectators, as they were on this day, but as participants. Across the nation, brides, grooms, families, and guests all played with

[166] C. Dallett Hemphill notes that "The American embracing of democracy simply muddied the cultural waters in such a way as to make the clarifying power of elaborate social ritual all the more necessary." *Bowing to Necessities*, 131.

assumptions about gender and class in the weddings they attended. Charlie Stratton, a tiny, effeminate man-child, was transformed in his wedding into a paragon of mature, even militaristic manhood; further, a low-born vaudeville comic adopted the mantle of a gentry landowner. This performance of the transformative possibilities of *performance* trumpeted how cheap (and accessible) traditional identifiers of elite status had become for modern American whites. Manhood and aristocracy (if not necessarily the power associated with them) could be had for the price of fame and a few choice possessions.[167] As Stratton had mocked earlier representations of Jacksonian gusto in his impressions of Yankee Doodle and Napoleon, now he subtly, even unconsciously, mocked people who used material largesse to claim prerogatives over their fellow men. But the use of police to enforce orderly behavior at his wedding suggests the growing role of the state in protecting class boundaries.

That this magnificently elaborate wedding starred a man so demonstrably unfit for the traditional trappings of elite status tells us much about the progress of weddings through nineteenth-century America. As the century dawned, weddings helped wealthy Americans display their beneficence, material splendor, and pure lines of generational succession: a tradition which the southern elite continued to employ throughout the antebellum era. The weddings of the poor and middle class, on the other hand, were modest at best: in 1829, Barnum's own wedding was a humble, unremarkable affair.[168] The antebellum era brought significant changes, making the white wedding more accessible to—and emblematic of—the middle class. It was the dominance of middle-class economic and social values that

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[167] Richard L. Bushman notes that Adam Smith made a similar point in his *Wealth of Nations*. *The Refinement of America*, 409-10. For a similar consideration of a later era, see Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 223.

[168] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 61. For a brief summation of weddings circa 1800, see Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 129.

Americans outside the entrepreneurial northeast chafed against from 1830 to 1865, and they consequently came to celebrate themselves via rituals proclaiming their distance from companionate and bourgeois identity and asserting their continued allegiance to patriarchal, aristocratic forms.

But Tom Thumb's wedding heralded (although it did not inaugurate) the modern era of American nuptials, advertising a future in which bourgeois, companionate marriage coexisted peacefully with pretensions to aristocratic largesse. Increasingly as the Civil War approached, and almost universally afterwards, everyone had a wedding. Just as significant, everyone was beginning to have the *same* wedding. Although demographic changes, particularly the arrival of diverse immigrant groups, ensured a steady influx of new styles and traditions, the form and aesthetic pioneered by the antebellum elite now became accessible—not to mention desirable—to the majority.[169] It is not coincidental that the archetypal wedding outfit—the bride's dress, the groom's tuxedo—remains closer to the fashions of Victorian America than any other aspect of modern attire: it was at this moment that Americans abandoned regional and esoteric habits of marrying and adopted a single model.[170] A huge expansion of literature promoting and explaining the material lifestyle of the rich—including etiquette books, magazines, and society pages, not to mention irregular publications such as the pamphlets about Tom Thumb's wedding—led large numbers of Americans to idealize the elite wedding, and enabled patriarchal holdouts to see themselves in the wedding's aesthetics and values. And the gradual dissemination of merchandise from

[169] See Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 170-72.

[170] This transition involved not-insignificant ironies, perhaps none so great as the fact that Americans adopted a standard form of expressing their love even as, as Karen Lystra notes, they directed their courtship experiences toward "building unique, emotional bonds between lovers that emphasized their individuality, their distinctiveness, and their separateness." *Searching the Heart*, 9.

stores like Stewart's (or, later, catalogues by Sears-Roebuck) allowed poor and middling Americans to incorporate that ideal—or at least the off-rack version of it—into their own rituals.

The economy that emerged in the late nineteenth century opened up capital and luxury goods to an ever-expanding circle, enabling people to dress and act as if they were wealthy—if only for a day. It also led to the growth of major urban industrial centers where the wealthy could congregate, merging their regional behaviors into a national aesthetic standards. If the majority couldn't afford the material largesse of their economic superiors, they at least began to desire it.[171] Yet as America's Gilded-Age citizens bowed to the aesthetic choices of the elite, they sacrificed some of that fierce independence of thought and action that they had once applied to their most personal rituals. C. Dallett Hemphill suggests that the new "codification" of bourgeois rituals in the antebellum period may have arisen in response to the disintegration of older communities, so that newly-adrift citizens might be able to "agree on rules."[172] In the wake of the Civil War, Americans who had previously resisted certain bourgeois encroachments would take comfort in the social satisfactions of a well-performed wedding.

The dominance—and the expanded appeal—of the white wedding in the latter years of the nineteenth century can be seen in a number of literary works about people who previously either had been denied or had rejected the white wedding and its attendant values. For African Americans, the well-performed wedding came to symbolize their legitimacy not only as people free to marry of their own accord but as upwardly-mobile citizens. Emma D. Kelley-Hawkins' 1898 novel *Four Girls at Cottage City* concludes with a wedding at which

[171] See Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 147.

[172] Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 147.

its characters easily fill the shoes of white brides and grooms. The wedding takes place in a well-appointed home of "pretty rooms," featuring that classic middle-class artifact, a piano, and decorated by "an arch of smilax and white flowers."[173] The couple is depicted in terms that emphasize their upper-class, even aristocratic, pedigree: the groom, "tall, slender, but strong," with a face "fair and beautiful as a picture," resembles "a young prince, in his evening suit, with the one white rose bud in the button hole," while his bride sports "a lovely white silk dress, covered, but not hidden, by a beautiful bridal veil," and "a wreath of orange-blossoms resting on the heavy, dark braids."[174] They marry, according to bourgeois dictates, for love, staring at each other with "eyes . . . full of a deep, abiding love."[175] The fact that each of the "four girls" has blue eyes and extremely light skin completes this nuptial proof of African Americans' capacity to measure up to white standards, even at the "nadir" of the free black experience. In a similar way, Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces* (1900) cleanses its wedding of the malign influence of white patriarchal mastery, replacing the slaveowner's force and condescension with the sanction of a wealthy black patron. In the absence of her father, the bride's former employer Monsieur Louis, a well-to-do black man, "insisted that he should furnish the wedding dress and breakfast, and be allowed to give the bride away."[176] Here is an image of economic power that served not to denigrate blacks, but to uplift them on their own terms. African Americans saw the white wedding as a clear symbol of their upward mobility.

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[173] Emma D. Kelley-Hawkins, *Four Girls at Cottage City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 374.

[174] Kelley-Hawkins, *Four Girls at Cottage City*, 374-75.

[175] Kelley-Hawkins, *Four Girls at Cottage City*, 376.

[176] Pauline E. Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (Boston: Colored Co-Opereative Pub. Co., 1900), 398.

Southerners, too, submitted to the dictates of entrepreneurial egalitarianism and companionate marriage, no matter how hard they tried to resist. Grace Lumpkin's 1939 novel *The Wedding* would seem on the surface to suggest that the southern elite still saw the wedding as a symbol of their culture's enduring separateness from the North. Jennie Middleton, the book's protagonist, plans to have the bridesmaids at her 1909 wedding carry Confederate flags instead of flowers: "the whole wedding was to be southern."[177] But if nostalgia for the Lost Cause gave southerners a feeling of distinctiveness, Lumpkin's book subtly suggests that this devotion is curdling over what remains of southern society's vitality. Instead of having young men attend the couple, Middleton arranges for silver-haired "Confederate officers in their uniforms" to act as groomsmen.[178] At a pre-wedding party, the southern youth are further bypassed in favor of nostalgic idolatry of old men: "The girls, rosy young and smiling paid little attention to the younger men, but gathered about the Veterans."[179] What is more, Middleton's father is no aristocratical patriarch. Neither he nor the Bishop (who himself had served as "a Captain in the Confederate army") can muster the strength to force their northern minister to allow Confederate flags in his church: ultimately the wedding proceeds without the stars and bars. He cannot even afford the wedding. Having long since lost his land, he has been forced to take a middle-class profession. His "small salaried position" paying "a hundred and fifty dollars a month" cannot begin to cover the party or the trousseau, which send his family deep into debt, making the wedding an

[177] Grace Lumpkin, *The Wedding* (New York: Lee Furman, Inc., 1939). Thanks to Jacquelyn Hall for making me aware of this book.

[178] Lumpkin, *The Wedding*, 36.

[179] Lumpkin, *The Wedding*, 124.

agent of the family's further degradation.[180] Ultimately, the very fact that Middleton has to demarcate her wedding as explicitly "Confederate" (and the speed with which the idea becomes controversial) makes it clear that, by the turn of the century, "southern weddings" had become anachronistic. Only with efforts beyond most people's means could southerners attempt to cast off the hegemonic bourgeois ritual.

Change came to everyone, eventually. While Mormon wedding rituals remain distinctive and secret to this day, the church and its acolytes slowly began to incorporate values of companionate marriage and monogamy into their doctrines of celestial marriage. Bowing finally to intense federal pressure, Wilford Woodruff, who had once deemed men who did not take plural wives "of but little account in the Church & Kingdom of God," in 1890 issued the Woodruff Manifesto banning all future polygamous marriage.[181] Eight years later, Nephi Anderson published his enduringly popular novel *Added Upon*, which translated the doctrine of eternal marriage into the medium of the popular, sentimental novel. Anderson uses the device of following the transit of two couples through the universe to frame Mormon marriage in deeply romantic terms. Rather than focusing on religious duty, Anderson highlights the idea that couples may be destined to be together from the beginning through to the end of time. One character even quotes Victor Hugo, declaring that love can "blend . . . two beings in an angelic and sacred union."[182] When one of the couples marries in the spirit-world, they undergo a ritual that focuses on the couple's companionate links throughout time: "Kneel here by me, Rachel," the man tells his bride, "—your hand in mine, like this. Listen, can you hear? 'For and in behalf of,' . . . you and me. . . . . [sic] It is done. We are husband

[180] Lumpkin, *The Wedding*, 18, 113.

[181] Quoted in Hardy, "Lords of Creation," 137.

[182] Nephi Anderson, *Added Upon*, Fifth Edition. (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1912), 102.

and wife. You are mine for eternity, mine, mine."[183] This is celestial marriage in the companionate mode: men and women are destined for each other, and polygamy never rears its head. Of course, not everyone was so sanguine. Vardis Fisher's 1939 novel *Children of God* ends with a group of Mormons declaring of Woodruff, "He has just deliberately sold us out."[184] The group eventually heads to Mexico to form a polygamous colony. None of the groups we have discussed here adopted the white wedding unconditionally, and each turned it to their own purposes. But few could withstand the ritual's appeal, or deny the firmness with which middle-class values had established themselves far and wide.

As for Tom Thumb, in the years after 1863, Tom Thumb's wedding reappeared in a strange, unpredictable way that suggests how pervasive the new form had become. The phrase "Tom Thumb Wedding" most commonly refers not to the Stratton-Warren affair of 1863, but to a wedding in which children act out the wedding ritual (often using satirical or mock-adult language). As Susan Stewart, their ablest critic, has shown, these events became popular in the late nineteenth century and survived as community pageants at least into the 1950s.[185] These rituals took the standardization of the Victorian wedding to an extreme: pamphlets circulated suggesting the proper way to stage the wedding, and participants recalled at least one Tom Thumb wedding planner who went from town to town staging the same spectacle with different participants.[186] Some towns with aging populations even

[183] Anderson, *Added Upon*, 169.

[184] Vardis Fisher, *Children of God: An American Epic* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 758.

[185] See Stewart, *On Longing*, 117-124.

[186] Stewart, *On Longing*, 119-20.

staged Tom Thumb weddings in lieu of actual weddings, suggesting that the symbolic power of this now-national ritual superseded even the practical need to conduct marriages.[187]

The popularity of Tom Thumb weddings indicates that the wedding was now so pervasive that people could perform it without even having a bride or groom to celebrate. Disparate strands of religious, material, and social experience had been knotted together to form a distinctly American ritual, one key thread in the fabric of a new, national, and middle-class-oriented American identity.

[187] Stewart, *On Longing*, 121-22.

Appendix One

WPA Narratives Referring to Broomstick Weddings in North and South Carolina

Cornelia Andrews (NC), North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 30-31
Clay Bobbit (NC), North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 118
Betty Foreman Chessier (NC), Oklahoma Narrarives, Volume XIII, 32
Willis Cozart (NC), North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 183
Will Dill (SC), South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 1, 323
Tempie Herndon Durham (NC), North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 286-288
Millie Evans (NC), Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 246
Rachel Fairley (NC or MS), Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 260
John Hunter (NC), Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 361
Paul Jenkins (SC), South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 3, 30
Tempe Pitts (NC), North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 175-176
Rena Raines (NC), North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 195
John F. Van Hook (NC), Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 84-85
J.W. Whitfield (NC), Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 139

Appendix Two

WPA Narratives Referring to Broomstick Weddings

Josephine Anderson, Florida Narratives, Volume III, 4
Cornelia Andrews, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 30-31
Campbell Armstrong, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 1, 69
Cora Armstrong, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 1, 75
Joe Barnes, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 45-46
Clay Bobbit, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 118
James Bolton, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 1, 101
Donaville Broussard, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 151-152
Maggie Broyles, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 1, 325
Jeff Calhoun, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 189
Cato Carter, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part I, 206-207
Betty Foreman Chessier, Oklahoma Narrarives, Volume XIII, 32
Jeptha Choice, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 218
John Cox, Kentucky Narratives, Volume VII, 33
Willis Cozart, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 183
Betty Curlett, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 76
Will Daily, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 272
Carrie Davis, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 107
Minerva Davis, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 128
William Davis, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 293
James V. Deane, Maryland Narratives, Volume VIII, 7
Will Dill, South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 1, 323
Alice Douglas, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 73
Isabella Duke, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 215
Willis Dukes, Florida Narratives, Volume III, 123
Tempie Herndon Durham, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 286-288
George Eason, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 1, 303
John Ellis, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 2, 23
Millie Evans, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 246
Rachel Fairley, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 260
Minnie Fulkes, Virginia Narratives, Volume XVII, 13
Angie Garrett, Alabama Narratives, Volume II, 134
Jim Gillard, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 155-156
Georgina Giwbs, Virginia Narratives, Volume XVII, 15
Will Glass, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 39
Wesley Graves, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 75
Lizzie Hawkins, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 206
Ann Hawthorne, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 2, 121
Eliza Hays, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 224
Benjamin Henderson, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 175-176
Rebecca Hooks, Florida Narratives, Volume III, 176

John Hunter, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 361
Lina Hunter, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 261
Emma Hurley, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 276
Virginia Jackson, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 4, 26
Paul Jenkins, South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 3, 30
Lizzie Johnson, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 4, 102
Susie Johnson, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 344
Hamp Kennedy, Mississippi Narratives, Volume IX, 87
Charlie King, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 16
Solomon Lambert, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 4, 229
George Leonard, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 268
Dellie Lewis, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 257
Bert Luster, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 204
James Martin, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 63-64
Hattie Matthews, Missouri Narratives, Volume X, 249
Emily Mays, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 118
Stephen McCray, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 207
Amanda McDaniel, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 74
Tom McGruder, Georgia Narratives, Volume IX, Part 3, 77
Frank Menefee, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 280
Liza Mention, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 125
Annie Morgan, Kentucky Narratives, Volume VII, 104
Fanny Nix, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 139
Amamda Oliver, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 231
Wade Owens, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 306
Mary Estes Peters, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 5, 329-330
Tempe Pitts, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 175
Jenny Proctor, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 212
Charlie Pye, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 187
Rachel, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 216
Rena Raines, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 195
Mary Reynolds, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 244
Shade Richards, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 204
Dora Roberts, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 206
Amanda Ross, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 6, 83
Aaron Russel, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 272
Robert Shepherd, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 262-263
Andrew Simms, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 295
Allen Sims, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 344
Paul Smith, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 333
Elizabeth Sparks, Virgina Narratives, Volume XVII, 52
Rachel Sullivan, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 229
George Taylor, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 372
Cordelia Thomas, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 22
Annie Thompson, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 6, 307
Penny Thompson, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 4, 105

Hannah Travis, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 6, 349
John F. Van Hook, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 84-85
Lula Washington, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 135
Rosa Washington, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 4, 136
Julia White, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 110
J.W. Whitfield, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 139
Dock Wilborn, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 145
Callie Williams, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 428
Charlotte Willis, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 198
Robert Wilson, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 207
George Womble, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 189-190
Alice Wright, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 245
Hilliard Yellerday, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 434-435

Appendix Three

WPA Narratives that Mention Broomstick Weddings but Do Not Describe Them in Slavery

The Interviewee Never Saw or Participated in Them in Slavery

Minerva Davis, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 128
Willis Dukes, Florida Narratives, Volume III, 123
Lizzie Hawkins, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 206
Ann Hawthorne, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 2, 121
Virginia Jackson, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 4, 26
Lizzie Johnson, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 4, 102
Liza Mention, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 125
Amamda Oliver, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 231
Wade Owens, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 306
Amanda Ross, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 6, 83
Allen Sims, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 344

Appendix Four

WPA Narratives that Describe a Broomstick Wedding but Do Not Make Clear Who Performed or Initiated It

Josephine Anderson, Florida Narratives, Volume III, 4
Cornelia Andrews, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 30-31
Campbell Armstrong, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 1, 69
Cora Armstrong, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 1, 75
Clay Bobbit, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 118
Cato Carter, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part I, 206-207
Betty Foreman Chessier, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 32
Betty Curlett, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 76
Will Daily, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 272
Alice Douglas, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 73
Isabella Duke, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 215
George Eason, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 1, 303
John Ellis, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 2, 23
Rachel Fairley, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 260
Angie Garrett, Alabama Narratives, Volume II, 134
Georgina Giwbs, Virginia Narratives, Volume XVII, 15
Wesley Graves, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 75
Eliza Hays, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 224
Rebecca Hooks, Florida Narratives, Volume III, 176
John Hunter, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 361
Emma Hurley, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 276
Susie Johnson, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 344
Hamp Kennedy, Mississippi Narratives, Volume IX, 87
George Leonard, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 268
Bert Luster, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 204
Emily Mays, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 118
Frank Menefee, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 280
Annie Morgan, Kentucky Narratives, Volume VII, 104
Jenny Proctor, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 212
Charlie Pye, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 187
Rachel, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 216
Rena Raines, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 195
Shade Richards, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 204
Aaron Russel, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 272
Andrew Simms, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 295
Rachel Sullivan, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 229
Annie Thompson, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 6, 307
Penny Thompson, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 4, 105
Hannah Travis, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 6, 349
John F. Van Hook, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 84-85

J.W. Whitfield, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 139
Robert Wilson, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 207

Appendix Five:

WPA Narratives Describing Weddings Performed by the Master:

Joe Barnes, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 45-46
Maggie Broyles, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 1, 325
Jeff Calhoun, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 189
Jeptha Choice, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 218
John Cox, Kentucky Narratives, Volume VII, 33
Willis Cozart, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 185
Carrie Davis, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 107
William Davis, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 293
James V. Deane, Maryland Narratives, Volume VIII, 7
Tempie Herndon Durham, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 286-288
Millie Evans, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 246
Minnie Fulkes, Virginia Narratives, Volume XVII, 13
Jim Gillard, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 155-156
Will Glass, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 39
Benjamin Henderson, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 175-176
Lina Hunter, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 261
Charlie King, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 16
Solomon Lambert, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 4, 229
Dellie Lewis, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 257
Hattie Matthews, Missouri Narratives, Volume X, 249
Tom McGruder, Georgia Narratives, Volume IX, Part 3, 77
Fanny Nix, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 139
Mary Estes Peters, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 5, 329-330
Tempe Pitts, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 175
Mary Reynolds, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 244
Robert Shepherd, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 262-263
Paul Smith, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 333
Elizabeth Sparks, Virgina Narratives, Volume XVII, 52
George Taylor, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 372
Cordelia Thomas, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 22
Lula Washington, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 135
Rosa Washington, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 4, 136
Julia White, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 110
Dock Wilborn, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 145
Callie Williams, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 428
Charlotte Willis, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 198
George Womble, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 189-190
Alice Wright, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 245
Hilliard Yellerday, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 2, 434-435

Appendix Six

WPA Narratives Using Coercive Language in Describing Jumping the Broom

WPA narratives that included the words "had to" or "have to" in describing the broomstick ceremony:

John Ellis, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 2, 23
Georgina Giwbs, Virginia Narratives, Volume XVII, 15
Will Glass, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 3, 39
James Martin, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 63-64
Rachel, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 216
Rachel Sullivan, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 229

WPA narratives including the words "make" or "made" in describing the broomstick ceremony—e.g., "her and him was made to jump over the broom" (Arkansas Narratives, Volume XVII, 198):

Donaville Broussard, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 151-152
Minnie Fulkes, Virginia Narratives, Volume XVII, 13
Charlotte Willis, Arkansas Narratives, Volume XVII, 198

WPA narratives including the words "told" or "tell" in describing the broomstick ceremony, or actually describing a slaveholder telling slaves to jump the broom:

Jeff Calhoun, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 189
Willis Cozart, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 185
Tempie Herndon Durham, North Carolina Narratives, Volume XI, Part 1, 286-288
Millie Evans, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 246
Emma Hurley, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 276
Tom McGruder, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 77
Julia White, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 110
Callie Williams, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 428

WPA narratives including the words "had them jump" in describing broomstick ceremonies:

John Cox, Kentucky Narratives, Volume VII, 33
Will Dill, South Carolina Narratives, Volume XIV, Part 1, 323
Lina Hunter, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 2, 261
George Taylor, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 372
Lula Washington, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 135

(Dora Roberts, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 3, 206, also uses this formulation, but to describe a wedding performed by slaves, not by masters, and therefore has little bearing on my contention that masters coerced slaves into jumping the broom.)

WPA narrative including the words “commanded to” in describing broomstick ceremonies:

George Womble, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 189-190

Appendix Seven

WPA Narratives Describing Broomstick Weddings after Emancipation

Josephine Anderson, Florida Narratives, Volume III, 4
Betty Curlett, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 2, 76
Will Daily, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 1, 272
George Leonard, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 268
Bert Luster, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 204
Annie Morgan, Kentucky Narratives, Volume VII, 104
Rachel Sullivan, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 229
Dock Wilborn, Arkansas Narratives, Volume II, Part 7, 145

WPA narratives describing broomstick weddings that may have taken place either before or after emancipation:

Betty Foreman Chessier, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, 32
James Martin, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3, 63-64
Frank Menefee, Alabama Narratives, Volume I, 280-281
Rachel, Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4, 216
Aaron Russel, Texas Narratives, Volume XVI, Part 3

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Slave Collection

South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina

Henry DeSaussure Fraser Papers

Mary G. Davis Papers

Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Badger Family Papers

Battle Family Papers

Cameron Family Papers

Caroline Eliza Clitherall Diaries

Elliot and Gonzales Papers

Ernest Haywood Papers

Francis Marion Parker Papers

Hawkins Family Papers.

John Berkley Grimball Diary

John Steel Henderson Papers

Lenoir Family Papers

Leonidas Polk Papers

Margaret Ann (Meta) Morris Grimball Diary

Margaret Mordecai Devereux Papers

Mary Harper Beall Letter

Pettigrew Family Papers

Polk, Badger, and McGehee Family Papers

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Jacob Hamlin Journal

Jacob K. Butterfield Letters

James Farmer Diary

Jane Snyder Richards, Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards

John G. Hoagland Letters

John Pulsipher Diary

Joseph Corroden Kingsbury Autobiography

Joseph Holbrook Autobiography

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Sarah S. Leavitt Journal

Serilda Jane Allred Blain Collection

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