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Wedding belles and enslaved brides: Louisiana plantation weddings in fact, fiction and folklore

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WEDDING BELLES AND ENSLAVED BRIDES:
LOUISIANA PLANTATION WEDDINGS IN
FACT, FICTION AND FOLKLORE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The Department of English

By

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May, 2012

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Abstract

Along with rites of passage marking birth and death, wedding rituals played an important role in ordering social life on antebellum Louisiana plantations, not only for elite white families but also for the enslaved. Autobiographical accounts of plantation weddings written by Louisiana women yield considerable insights on the importance of weddings for Louisiana plantation women before and especially during the Civil War. Moreover, information contained within the Louisiana Writers' Project narratives reveal various types of wedding ritual used to unite the enslaved on Louisiana plantations despite laws and codes that prohibited slave unions. In contrast to these historical accounts, plantation weddings in the fictional imagination reveal that the figure of the bride reflects careful authorial negotiation of racialized and gendered ideologies. Fictional images found in a wide-ranging collection of texts portray the Louisiana plantation wedding as a site of struggle by white or black brides against racial or patriarchal constraints. Currently, heritage tourism perpetuates notions of whiteness on Louisiana plantations, fostering romantic nostalgia of the past and adaptation of that past into the present. For contemporary brides, choosing a Louisiana plantation as a wedding venue evokes stereotypical notions of the Old South in terms of gendered femininity. Yet, there is some indication that previously entrenched notions of racial and class hierarchies are slowly being overturned. This project begins with a reenacted wedding at Rosedown Plantation State Historic Site which provides a discursive framework for examining the manner in which the white southern wedding belle or the enslaved bride and her wedding on a Louisiana plantation recycle through historical, fictional and contemporary productions.

Introduction

Each spring, when the camellias and azaleas are in full bloom, enveloping the landscape with rich hues of bright color, Interpretive Rangers from the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism reenact the April 9, 1857 plantation wedding of Sarah Turnbull to James Pirrie Bowman. A posting on the website for the Rosedown Plantation State Historic Site announces the marriage of this antebellum bride to the boy-next-door with the claim that “Love is in the air and two historic plantation houses and families are united on this day.”¹ For tourists or other interested spectators, there is the promise of viewing a nineteenth-century marriage ceremony followed by a reception with refreshments, period music and dancing. Intrigued by the possibility of viewing such an event, I left Baton Rouge on a spring morning in April, 2010 for the drive to St. Francisville, a small community that purposefully retains much of its historic plantation flavor to attract tourism to the area. Until the 1840’s, West Feliciana Parish was one of the richest cotton producing areas of Louisiana. However, with the introduction of sugar cane into the region in the late 1830’s, the West Feliciana Parishes rivaled the southeastern sugar parishes by the end of the 1840’s in terms of financial prosperity. Large plantation estates mark the verdant landscape as signifiers of the visible wealth and status of these nineteenth-century planters.

Rosedown, a plantation estate, completed in 1835 at a cost of thirty-five thousand dollars by Daniel Turnbull as a wedding gift for his bride, Martha Barrow, is now owned and operated by the Office of State Parks for the State of Louisiana. Throughout Louisiana alone over one hundred and fifty such sites designated by the word “plantation” are open to the public for

¹<http://www.crt.state.la.us/parks/rosedown.aspx>.

heritage tourism, offering insights into the lives of these elite planters by revealing biographical information on family members and by emphasizing the architectural features and period furnishings of the homes. The tour guides, predominantly women in period costume, expose visitors to cozy and informal versions of antebellum plantation life through their performance of southern identity. Heritage tourism, stretching throughout the Lower Mississippi Valley region extends across the Louisiana plantation belt in five distinct areas.² Each of these areas promote plantation tourism through guided tours, often arranged by companies in New Orleans that bring the tourist-guests by bus to view several of the homes in one excursion. Replete with gift shops and on-site restaurants, and most recently, an on-site spa, these plantations are open to the public for tours at a nominal fee. Thousands of visitors are drawn annually to these various sites, contributing substantial monies to the state and local economy.³

During the antebellum period, each of these areas supported plantation systems, defined as large-scale agricultural farming of specific crops, usually cotton and sugar cane, primarily with labor of the enslaved. In the 1850's, these areas, according to William Kauffman Scarborough in

² J. Carlyle Sitterson defines the plantation belt as the region that “extends from Plaquemines Parish on the Gulf Coast northward up the Mississippi and Red Rivers to a latitude of 31 deg 30 min 31 sec in Rapides Parish and westward from the Mississippi to Bayou Vermillion. This compasses an area of 10,000 square miles of which about one tenth or 640,000 acres are cultivable” (*Sugar Country* 14). The five regions are as follows: the area extending from the West and East Feliciana Parishes up to the Red River, including the parishes of West Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee, St. Landry between Bayou Teche and the Atchafalaya River, Avoyelles Parish and Rapides Parish. The second is the Lafourche region that includes the land between Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Teche, incorporating Terrebonne Parish, Lafourche Parish and Assumption Parish. The area west of Bayou Lafourche, often termed the Attakapas region, consists of Iberville Parish, the western part of St. Landry Parish, St. Martin Parish, Vermillion Parish, Iberia Parish and St. Mary Parish. The fourth region is composed of the parishes that line the east and west banks of the Mississippi River, following the Great River Road that extends from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. These are: East Baton Rouge, Ascension, St. James, St. John the Baptist and St. Charles. Lastly, the Plaquemines region is made up of Plaquemines Parish, St. Bernard Parish, Jefferson Parish and Orleans Parish.

³ Figures from the *Calendar Year 2008 Louisiana Travels America Visitor Profile Report* published by the Louisiana Office of Tourism places “Old Homes/Mansions” in the Top 10 Vacation Activities for 6% of Louisiana visitors, and between 3% and 5% of Texas, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi and Florida visitors to the state. Hoelscher describes the Spring Pilgrimage in Natchez as a “tourism industry that draws over 1,000,000 visitors and generates an estimated \$1.5 million during a four-week period every spring” (232). For more on the Spring Pilgrimage, see Steven Hoelscher, “Displaying Heritage in Natchez, Mississippi” in Celeste Ray, ed. *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity within Southern Regionalism* (2003).

Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth Century South (2003),

contained more millionaires per square foot than any other area in the slaveholding South.

Louisiana, with the Port of New Orleans, represented the second highest per capita wealth of all the southern states just prior to the Civil War.⁴ In Louisiana, sugar production, responding to the fluctuation in cotton prices and tariffs, significantly increased in the two decades between the 1840's and 50's, ultimately "reach[ing] almost a fourth of the world's exportable sugar."⁵ As tangible evidence of the planter's newly acquired wealth, imposing estates lined the waterways, reflecting architectural styles derived from a fusion of Creole, Classical Revival, Greek Revival and/or Italianate designs. Speaking of Nottaway, John Hampden Randolph's impressive Greek Revival/Italianate home in White Castle, Richard Follet alleges that "the mansion served as a stage" for the planter to "conspicuously perform his role as master of sugar, slaves and household" (*The Sugar Masters* 158). He further argues that the plantation "Big House" embodied the "monumental sense of the planter's personal prosperity and displayed his persona to everyone in the community, be they black or white, male or female, rich or poor, native or visitor" (158). Indeed, travelers to Louisiana in the sugar heydays often recorded their

⁴ In *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers during Slavery and After, 1840 – 1875*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1939), Roger Shugg notes, "The largest part of the wealth of Louisiana and the control of its commerce and plantation agriculture belonged chiefly to a small upper class. About one in thirty-seven families was a member of this powerful group. The sons and daughters of fifty families were each said to be worth more than \$100,000 and of nearly a hundred more, over \$50,000. Their parents owned the great estates in the country, produced most of the sugar, and much of the cotton. The rural slaveholders possessed over half of all the slaves, although hardly one in ten was a large planter" (17-18).

⁵ In *Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753 – 1950*, (Lexington: U Kentucky P, 1953), J. Carlyle Sitterson provides figures for Louisiana sugar production in the decade between 1840 and 1850. He writes, "Louisiana sugar production increased greatly during the 1840's and 1850's. From a figure of 120,000 hogsheads or approximately 60,000 tons in 1840 the output had more than doubled by the end of the decade, reaching 130,500 tons in 1849. The fifties saw an extreme variability in production from a high of 495,156 hogsheads in 1853 to a low of 73,976 hogsheads in 1856. The average for the decade was more than 300,000 hogsheads" (30).

impressions of these imposing estates.⁶ William Russell describes John Burnside's sugar plantation as "six thousand acres, better tilled than the finest patch in all the Lothians, green as Meath pastures" (*My Diary 182*). This portion of Burnside's estate described by Russell in 1861 is now known as Houmas House, often called "The Sugar Palace" in tourism literature.⁷

Many of these palatial plantation homes are no longer family residences. Several fell into disrepair following the Civil War and were never restored. Others were renovated and continue to be used for a variety of types of plantation tourism. Whether they are privately owned, managed by foundations or by corporations, or run by the state, most of these extant plantation homes serve in some aspect of regional tourism, often participating in a carefully orchestrated performance of local heritage that focuses on the extant home. As Steven Hoelscher maintains, heritage "is produced through objects, images, events and representations" (229). Deeming the guided tour of the plantation home as a cultural performance, Hoelscher comments that these events are "excellent 'symbol-vehicles' for the articulation of heritage" ("Displaying Heritage in Natchez" 229).

An additional expression of Southern heritage supplementing these orchestrated performances is one that plays on "[t]he link between money, courting and marriage" that promotes plantation sites as venues for elaborate weddings. Noted by Jennifer L. Eisenstedt and Stephen Small in *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (2002), during tours the guides often mention that "contemporary couples can hold their own weddings in a 'lovely and historic home'" (90). In their study of Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana plantation

⁶ In *Sugar Country*, Sitterson includes a lengthy description of Burnside's plantation estate derived from *London Times* correspondent W. H. Russell's *My Diary North and South*. F. L. Olmstead in *Journey and Explorations of the Cotton Kingdom* is often cited for his description of palatial estates as is a work in French, *Mémoire sur Ma Vie pendant les Années 1802 & 1803* by Pierre C. de Laussat.

⁷ Anne Butler, ed. *The Pelican Guide to Plantation Homes of Louisiana*. Gretna: Pelican, 2009. P.33.

sites, Eisenstedt and Small suggest that the tour guide's reference to elegant weddings held on these sites are the "stories of individual romances" that "are nestled within a larger romantic framework that operates across all three states" (90–1). Embedded in the advertising text of many plantation websites and promotional materials, romance is a featured attraction, thereby linking heritage tourism to modern romanticized notions of the plantation. Situated at the intersection of history, heritage tourism and consumer commodification, the plantation wedding is marketed to potential brides through what I determine as "the plantation mystique." I identify this marketing tool as carefully crafted images appropriating visions of a romanticized Old South landscape as a place where every bride can be a belle and have the romantic wedding of her dreams.

Returning to my discussion of the reenacted wedding at Rosedown on that spring day, I found that there were many tourists, both foreign and American, on hand to witness the event. The bride, a young Park Ranger wearing a yellow taffeta hoop-skirted gown, was delivered to the ceremony in a flower-trimmed, horse-drawn carriage. The groom and the officiant, both in period costume of black broadcloth suits, crisp white shirts, black string ties and black felt hats, approached the ceremony site directly from the house. There were no bridal attendants for the bride or groomsmen for the groom; however, as the bride and her father processed down the gravel walkway leading from the home to the ceremony site, a group of musicians performed a rendition of "Amazing Grace" for the Bridal March. The couple, prompted by the officiant, recited their traditional Anglican vows to one another in the gravel turnaround in front of the "Big House," then turned to mingle with their guests after they were pronounced man and wife. Following this brief (and kiss-less) ceremony, several members of the Parks Division served wedding cake, a dense fruitcake that was acknowledged to have come from Mother of the Bride,

Martha Turnbull's own stock of recipes, along with a fruity punch to the tourist guests while the "Bride" and "Groom" were joined by additional Interpretive Rangers to answer questions from the spectators.

While the task of providing a wide range of information to visitors is certainly within the realm of Interpretive Park Rangers, the reenacted Turnbull/Bowman wedding falls short in its oversimplified attempt to promote the historical and cultural significance of antebellum wedding ritual to modern tourists. While some may view the park performance merely as a way to draw tourism to a state park at a time when revenues are down, I suggest that this reenacted wedding is a cultural text that may be "read" in a variety of ways. Weaving together the imagistic threads of community and identity within the performative space of ritual, the reenacted wedding conveys specific messages about the social, racial and cultural nature of life on antebellum southern plantations. The park performance is produced from a mixture of signs based on an oversimplified concept of history mingled with nostalgic notions of imagined plantation life. In linking the romanticized space of the plantation to heritage tourism, this simplistic reproduction has multi-layered significance and far-reaching implications not only for the tourists who viewed it but also for those who performed it.

The reenacted wedding serves as a discursive framework for my discussion of antebellum wedding ritual as the park performance moves quasi-historical fact into the realm of authenticity which lies at the very heart of heritage tourism. In an attempt to portray elements of the social, racial and cultural lives of the local planters and their families, the park performance enacts a complex interaction of heavily freighted symbols, forming a pastiche that weaves together elements of the factual and the fictional. The reenacted wedding links together three consistent threads: the belle, her wedding and the family plantation. The overly simplistic representation

seen in the mixture of the signs and symbols of the park performance has challenged me to explore the historical precedents of antebellum Louisiana plantation weddings for both white and black brides. Along with my research on autobiographical texts, I explore authorial agency as fictional writers use plantation weddings with deliberate racial and didactic intent. My research propels me to suggest that we are only able to truly ascertain the intricate relationship between contemporary weddings and those of the antebellum past by looking carefully at these historical, racial and fictional renditions. In light of the complexity of the plantation in Southern culture today, I argue that we must seek out these divergent perspectives or discursive modes to uncover what was real and what is now only imagined.

On a literal level, the reenacted wedding resonates with characteristics derived from historical records. Scarborough notes an “extraordinary degree of intermarriage” within the elite plantation families (19). His analysis of antebellum documents supports his belief that “within every geographic sector of the plantation South the leading families were bound together inextricably by an intricate web of marriage alliances, which enhanced both wealth and social standing” (22). This is certainly true in St. Francisville where weddings fostered family alliances and strengthened kinship networks among powerful planter families. Although planter families marked daily life with rituals of birth and death, I argue that the wedding was the most important of these rituals. Because southern women lived sheltered lives and had little power in their patriarchal society, their wedding was the major event in their lives.

Steven M. Stowe suggests that the role of ritual on the plantation served to shape “the routines and novelties of everyday life.”⁸ He points to ritual as “a unique heightening of ordinary experience, creating a sense of being outside of normal place and time” (1).

⁸ Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old south: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.

Additionally, he describes the importance of ritual in regulating “the shared rhythms of a people’s experience over time even as it lent extraordinary intensity to each individual’s life” (1). While Stowe directs his study of plantation ritual to examine duels, courtship and adolescent “coming of age,” it is my assertion that weddings played a more significant role in ordering life on the plantation than those discussed by Stowe. Not only were young southern women expected to marry, they were expected to marry well.

In my first chapter, I explore the social, emotional and economic importance of weddings for antebellum Louisiana women. As both published and unpublished autobiographical writings of antebellum women of the Lower Mississippi Valley region indicate, the frequent notation of weddings in women’s writing reveals the importance of wedding ritual in their lives. Their diaries, journals and letters speak to the close bonds shared by women living on Louisiana plantations. Moreover, the life writings reveal the trials of everyday life especially during the social upheaval of Civil War. Embedded in Confederate women’s writings, details reveal practical information and record women’s innermost feelings. With marriage as perhaps the only avenue open to antebellum southern women, the personal writings reveal women’s fears and emphasize their aversion or anticipation planning their own wedding or one in connection to their community.

However, elite white women were not the only brides on Louisiana plantations. In my second chapter, I elaborate on both published and unpublished oral history accounts of the ideological constraints the slave codes placed on slave marriage and the wedding rituals seen in spite of these prohibitions. Despite laws expressly forbidding slave marriages, the Louisiana Writers’ Project narratives reveal that many of the enslaved were married in some type of ritual on Louisiana plantations. Whether condoned or discouraged by the planter, in the minds of the

enslaved, as the narratives reveal, these weddings signified a ritual of permanent commitment. Therefore, almost all of the narratives include some mention of wedding practices.

My goal in this chapter is to amplify and expand the embedded folklore and silenced voices contained in the unpublished Louisiana Writers' Project collection of oral histories. Moreover, I use the information contained in the narratives to uncover the forms of ritual used, to identify the race and gender of ritual participants, and to reveal how they participated and to what extent. I uncover what type of ritual clothing was worn and how the presence of an officiant changed the tenor of the wedding. As weddings of the enslaved simultaneously undermined and perpetuated the planter's benevolent image as the head of the family, black and white, I examine not only the community created through the wedding celebration but also analyze the logistics of space where the ceremony was performed. Ultimately, I argue that participation in the wedding ritual was not an act of resistance or a reflection of determinants of white planter power. Instead, as I point out, the types of ritual signal the adaptive processes of creolization in the creation of a bi-racial plantation culture. Thus, I enter into the current debate described by Frances Foster Smith in her recent *'Til Death Or Distance Do Us Part* (2010) in rejecting the idea that "marriage among African Americans was . . . often a doomed endeavor" (x).

Along with my research on autobiographical texts, I explore the literary imagination through the subtle yet consistent trope of plantation weddings as a thread that connects the work of a seemingly disparate group of Louisiana writers with other fiction writers who situate their work against the exotic backdrop of the state. I explore authorial agency as white and black, male and female fiction writers employ the racialized figure of the bride at the moment of her wedding with deliberate didactic intent. In my third chapter, I examine the Louisiana plantation wedding in the fictional imagination with its proscriptions and negotiations of race, class and gender. In

each carefully selected text, the bride and her plantation wedding are vital to our overall consideration of the fictional work as the wedding is a stylistic device that denotes authorial agency. On one hand, the wedding may support the gendered ideologies required white patriarchy or serve to highlight white fears of miscegenation. On the other hand, the text may critique laws prohibiting racial mixing or may interdict white male desires for the vulnerable black enslaved female body.

In the white plantation tradition, the figure of the white bride always stands in contrast to racial and class differences exemplified by the enslaved bride. Especially in sentimental or domestic fiction, the plantation wedding serves a didactic purpose of proscribing gendered roles for southern white women. While most of the plantation fiction written in the South by southern authors disavows the painful aspects of slavery, I point to the fictional stereotypical sentimentalized character of the tragic mulatta denied the protective tenets of civic marriage in texts written by both white and African American writers. As Ann duCille argues, the black bride is always constrained by white civil laws that deny her the protection of marriage in an “unconventional use of conventional literary forms.”⁹ In countering the white plantation tradition, the figure of the black bride serves to undermine racialized and gendered ideologies. Thus, in locating texts to compare the disjuncture between the white and black plantation tradition, I determine that the figure of the bride is always a locus of authorial agency in providing social commentary on the fictional community.

Through participant-observer fieldwork, I examine the contemporary plantation wedding as an aspect of heritage tourism. In my fourth chapter, I uncover the romance narratives employed

⁹ Noting that enslaved men and women “who for generations were denied the hegemonic, ‘universal truth’ of legal marriage,” deCille historicizes and contextualizes fictions written by black women writers in an attempt to “reclaim and resexualize the black female body” (4). See *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

by heritage tourism in marketing the venue for contemporary plantation weddings. From fieldwork based on weddings held on five Louisiana plantation venues, I compare how each venue markets their own version of the plantation mystique. Additionally, I argue that the image of the southern belle has been transformed into that of a modern bride, who, despite her race, class or ethnicity, now embodies the pinnacle of southern womanhood in her glorious, yet fleeting bridal role on what remains the “contested terrain” of the plantation. Highlighting the tensions between this romanticized portrayal of the plantation in the popular imagination and a historically accurate representation of real life in the antebellum South, recent studies examine plantation tourism through the lens of what Tara McPherson critiques as “the endurance of such treasured icons of whiteness” (*Reconstructing Dixie* 5). As such, the plantation today is a visible reminder of the intersection of white history, white culture and white commerce. McPherson is not alone in her critique of Louisiana plantation tourism. Michael Chaney critiques sentimental tourism as simulacra presented in the plantation tour for “the affective tourist whose personal, emotional reactions while viewing a psychically charged tourist spectacle privileges precisely that which common applications of poststructuralist theory tend to (dis)qualify: nostalgia, sentimentality, cultural memory and immediacy.”¹⁰

As part of heritage tourism, the plantation is marketed through a series of images that I determine as “the plantation mystique.” These idealized forms speak to connections that operate through the concept of symbolic landscape. Ultimately, heritage tourism results in the erasure of African American racial or cultural heritage while it perpetuates the marginalized images of the enslaved. Recently I was informed by the grandmother of a white- gowned, hoop-skirted modern-day belle that “if we were in older days, she [her granddaughter] would have a Prissy to

¹⁰ Michael Chaney, “Touring the Spectacle of Slavery at Magnolia Gardens Plantation.” *Southern Quarterly* 40.4 (2002): 126 – 40.

help her with her dress.” This oblique reference to *Gone With the Wind* with its prescribed hierarchical gendered and racial roles for women in the Old South is constantly perpetuated in the plantation imaginary. In romanticized, idealized plantation weddings today, the image of the southern belle has been replaced with the figure of a bride. Marking the passage of time through temporal and spatial signifiers, the plantation wedding becomes a vehicle of nostalgia for the past. My research reveals, however, some changing racial perspectives in that some African American brides are reclaiming the plantation venue for their destination weddings. This discovery suggests that the plantation imaginary is so strong and powerful that whites and sometimes even African Americans may forget the past racial traumas hidden behind the white porticoes of the Big House or on the carefully manicured exterior landscape where all traces of family life of the enslaved have been eradicated.

As evident in the reenacted wedding at Rosedown on that sunny spring afternoon in 2012, the figure of the belle and her plantation wedding is an image etched into the public imagination. The wedding belle is a recurrent reproduction that recycles repeatedly through historical and fictional texts. Yet, I have uncovered evidence to suggest that previously entrenched notions of racial and class hierarchies are slowly being overturned on the plantation through plantation weddings. Thus, the four disparate ways of looking at plantation weddings that I discuss in this project are variations on a theme - all unique visions and perspectives that intersect with images based on historical perceptions and perpetuated through a sense of heritage and repeated in the popular imagination. I believe that this synchronic approach will help to unravel some of the tensions surrounding the complex and complicated nature of the plantation as it is represented in Louisiana history, literature and culture.

*In peace, Love tunes the shepherd's reed;
In war he mounts the warrior's steed
In halls, in gay attire is seen
In hamlets, dances on the green.
Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And men below and saints above
For love is heaven, and heaven is love*

Sir Walter Scott – “Love”

Chapter I. Antebellum Louisiana Women’s Life Writings

My discussion of the antebellum plantation wedding rituals of elite Louisiana women embedded within women’s life writing is two-fold. As a conventional form of expression appropriated by elite antebellum southern women, diaries, journals, memoirs and letters provide an excellent method for exploring the emotional and social importance of weddings for Louisiana women residing on antebellum plantations along with the subsequent alterations to marriage customs during the Civil War. Numerous references to the rituals of birth, marriage and death connecting women into a portrait of family and community life are scattered throughout women’s life writings. These connecting threads highlight the ideological importance of family and community weddings by establishing historical precedents to inaugurate my discussion of Louisiana plantation weddings. In the initial section of this chapter, I assemble a variety of life writings by Louisiana women to reveal their individual and differing perspectives on events and issues not only surrounding their own weddings but also those of close female family members and friends. In light of rapid theoretical advancements in women’s autobiographical writings, I intersperse reading strategies to maximize the information embedded in the life writings and to expand awareness of the cultural practices that informed these writings. As examples of widely distributed published diaries of young, unmarried women living through the Civil War, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* and *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone*

1861 -1868 appeal to a broad readership.¹ The diary of Priscilla “Mittie” Munnikuysen Bond, not intended by the writer for the reading public has recently been edited and published as *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South*. Bond’s diary discloses the personal and intimate thoughts of a young bride who moved to a Louisiana plantation in the early days of the war. I include the archival diary of plantation mistress Ellen McCollam, kept during the years 1842 to 1846, that remains overlooked today due to its lack of “readability.” Despite her isolation on a Plaquemines Parish plantation, McCollam uses her diary to record weddings in her community, thus revealing how important weddings were in the social fabric of women’s lives. Unpublished and archived as well, the diary of Eliza Magruder reveals a life of “single blessedness,” a nineteenth-century term used for women who chose to remain single despite pressures from family and southern society to marry. A collection of letters written by Tryphena Blanche Holder Fox, published as *A Northern Woman in the Plantation South*, not only brings an epistolary dimension to my discussion but also highlights the regional differences embodied by this northern governess who married into Louisiana plantation culture. As marriage was the expected and highly anticipated choice for southern women, this disparate collection of life writings discloses a group of women, all living on Louisiana plantations either before or during the Civil War, who inscribe their innermost thoughts and concerns about weddings onto the written page. Although writing on nineteenth century British women, Cynthia A. Huff contends diaries in general “become spaces where women can create ideologies and symbol systems they control where they can inscribe

¹ Recent theorists of women’s life writings point to the distinction between public and private diaries. See Lynn Z. Bloom, “I Write for Myself and Strangers”: Private Diaries as Public Documents.” *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*. Ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff. Amherst, MA: U Massachusetts P, 1996. P 23 -37. Bloom’s article enumerates the distinctions between private and public diaries. She argues that private diaries are structurally and stylistically distinguishable from diaries that are “essentially freestanding public documents” (28). According to Bloom, “[t]ruly private diaries are those bare-bones works written primarily to keep records of receipts and expenditures, the weather, ‘visits to and from neighbors, or public occurrences of both the institutional and the sensational sort’” (25). Another aspect of Bloom’s argument suggests “the presence of an audience, whether near or remote, requires accommodation through the same textual features that in all cases transform private diaries into public documents” (24).

themselves in codes not understood by men” (124).² The diaries included here may thus be viewed as spaces where the symbolic images of weddings and “the bride” evoke emotional reactions and responses from the writers that signal acceptance, ambivalence or absolute rejection of the rigid southern social expectations of marriage. Moreover, the range in form of these writings provides a discursive framework for connecting daily writings to the larger cultural milieu of expectations for marriage and the social importance placed on weddings for Louisiana women as representatives of their southern heritage and culture.

The second part of this chapter joins Louisiana women to the larger Confederate region, yielding insights on the changing society of southern women during the American Civil War. To explore women’s life writing at this critical juncture in American history discloses a collective view of the shifting nature of wedding rituals during the upheaval of wartime. An array of thematic concerns disclosing women’s reaction to an economy of scarcity links these autobiographical texts, thus revealing the unique nature of wartime marriages not only in Louisiana but throughout the Confederacy. To provide a broader base for thematic comparison, I supplement the life writings of Louisiana women with selections from the over two hundred additional published diaries and memoirs written by Confederate women.³ I use the life writings of privileged plantation women in much the same manner as Jane Turner Censer does in *The*

² See Cynthia A. Huff, “Textual Boundaries: Space in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Manuscript Diaries.” *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays in Women’s Diaries*. Ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff. Amherst, MA: U Massachusetts P., 1996.

³ Although there is no complete listing of Confederate women’s life writings, a suitable starting place may be found in Walter Sullivan’s article, “Civil War Diaries and Memoirs” in *The History of Southern Women’s Literature* edited by Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weeks. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP 2002). Another source is *A Woman’s War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*. Ed. Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice. (Richmond, VA: The Museum of the Confederacy and Charlottesville, VA: U Press of Virginia, 1996). Additionally, references from Drew Gilpin Faust’s *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P., 1996) have proved extremely helpful. Mary Elizabeth Massey’s *Bonnet Brigades* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) provides numerous footnoted references to women’s life writings as does *The Women of the Confederacy* (Richmond and New York: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1936) by Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton. Gisele Roberts utilizes a variety of diaries and journals from Louisiana and Mississippi as the basis for *The Confederate Belle*. (Columbia: U Missouri P., 2003).

Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood 1865 – 1895, where she argues that her choice of material does not focus on elite white southern women “because their experience was more valuable” but because “women’s letters, diaries, and published writings, and those of their male relatives and friends, reveal both female activities and the mindset that lay behind them” (4).

The frequent notations of family and community weddings in the personal pages of these elite white autobiographical writings resonate with Margo Culley’s theoretical concept of women diarists as “family and community historians,” writing within what she determines “the *imagined* community of women.”⁴ Culley observes that women “recorded in exquisite details the births, deaths, illnesses, visits, travel, marriages, work, and unusual occurrences that made up the fabric of their lives” (4). Using theoretical tools from the rapidly expanding field of women’s autobiographical studies, I explore the ways in which diary and journal entries go beyond merely recording the historical by uncovering distinctive cultural connections in the texts. As Bloom contends, “[w]hen private diaries become public documents; they transcend the realm of the family legacies and historical records where truly private diaries live. In trusting themselves to speak beyond their diary’s pages to an audience of strangers, present and to come, the authors of public diaries . . . extend the boundaries of the self and the genre to leave a literary legacy for the world” (35). A large portion of the legacy left by the Confederate women diarists reveals a world of shifting social expectations and demands where women struggled together to adapt to a drastically changing lifestyle. Throughout the diaries, southern women consistently refer to

⁴ Margo Culley, in her introduction to *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women From 1764 to the Present*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985), echoes the terminology used in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* where Anderson argues that communities are imagined “because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). Culley’s book provides a spectrum of women’s writings ranging from before the American Revolution to more recent diaries from the twentieth century. The texts selected for inclusion are examples of Culley’s assertion that “[t]he writer’s relationship to ‘real time’ and representations of ‘time passing’ in the text itself, create formal tensions and ironies not found in texts generated from an illusion of a fixed point in time” (20).

themselves as proverbial “Mothers of Invention.”⁵ This proved especially true during wartime where, on one hand, gendered opportunities for women expanded rapidly in the absence of southern men and on the other hand, there was an almost maniacal rush to wartime marriage, especially toward the last year and a half of the war. The content of Confederate women’s writings confirms the tenets of Culley’s early work on women’s autobiographical writing and echoes Peggy Prenshaw’s more recent claim in *Composing Selves: Southern Women and Autobiography* that the focus of life writing for southern women is “the self’s surround – the family, the neighbors, the workaday world” (2).

Culley and Prenshaw point to theoretical distinctions between women’s life writing and that of men which focuses unrestrictedly, as James Olney claims, on “metaphors of the self.”⁶ Olney views autobiography as “a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition” (35). Olney focuses exclusively on male autobiographers, leaving what Prenshaw terms “the recent flowering of autobiographical theorizing” open to a variety of distinct methodologies more focused on the female voice in light of new approaches to women’s life writings and innovative directions in cultural studies (20). In

⁵ Drew Gilpin Faust derives the title of *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* from Confederate women’s diaries. The term appears frequently, the most notable appearing in a diary entry of Clara Solomon, a young Jewish girl living in New Orleans during the fall of the city to Admiral David Farragut and the subsequent occupation by General Benjamin “the Beast” Butler and General Nathaniel P. Banks. See *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861 – 1862*. Ed. Elliott Ashkenazi. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1995. In her entry on Sunday, May 18th, 1862, Solomon writes: “Necessity & war is the mother of invention” (371).

⁶ Culley and Prenshaw refer to a term derived from James Olney’s early work on autobiographical writings, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981). with the idea that such studies focused almost entirely on male forms of life writing. In a later work published in 1988, Olney notes that women and Afro-Americans are “among previously slighted groups” in the field of autobiographical writings. In his introduction to *Studies in Autobiography*, Olney maintains that these previously marginalized groups “have always been strongly drawn to creation of a distinct identity through autobiography” (xv). Georges Gusdorf, according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in “Introduction: Situation Subjectivity in Women’s Autobiographical Practices,” configured early autobiography theory as unquestionably “white, male and Western” (8). They critique Olney for his observation that “Women’s Studies courses have a sizeable autobiographical literature to draw on, but theoretical and critical writing is for the most part yet to come” (16).

the past three decades, theorists of women's autobiographical writings have uncovered the complexity of women's life writings while maintaining the historical, social and rhetorical importance of this developing field.⁷ In 1995, Paul John Eakin wrote, "The serious and sustained study of women's autobiography is the single most important achievement of autobiographical studies in the last decade" (quoted *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, 16). Despite the recent surge in scholarship, as Prenshaw notes, inherent within gendered distinctions between the nineteenth century notions of male/public and female/domestic concepts of elite social representation, southern women's writing has traditionally been marginalized not only by fears of "intruding the female self upon the male dominated turf" but also by the more socially internalized "constraints against public display" (2). She maintains:

The characteristic approach for a female writer of the early and late nineteenth-century South, as well as for most of the twentieth century, and indeed for most women generally, has not been studied attention to and analysis of the self. Such an overt display of self would have been regarded as immodest, egotistical, and above all, unladylike, thereby attracting hostile reaction and dismissal from many of the very audience one sought to address. Understandably, we find texts that focus attention not on the self but on the selves and events that surround the

7 Although a complete history of developments in the field of women's autobiographical writing is not to the purpose here, it is worthwhile to mention several of the germinal texts in the expansion of the field of women's autobiographical writing. A pioneer in the field, Estelle Jelneck's *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP) was published in 1980 and followed by *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to Present* (Boston: Twayne) in 1986. Elizabeth Hampsten's study of diaries of Midwestern women, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880 – 1910* (Bloomington: Indiana UP) was published in 1982. Domna Stanton's *The Female Autograph* (New York: New York Literary Forum) appeared in 1984. In 1985, Margo Culley's *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York: Feminist P at CUNY) was published and Penelope Franklin's *Private Pages: Diaries of American Women, 1830's – 1970's* (New York: Ballantine) appeared in 1986. Sidonie Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) was followed by Shari Benstock's *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P) in 1988. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schneck's *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell UP) was also published the same year. In 1989, Francoise Linnet's *Autobiographical Voices* (Ithaca: Cornell UP) appeared and in 1990, *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography and Gender* (Albany: State U of New York P) was published by Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom. In 1992, several works appeared: Margo Culley's *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P); Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's edited collection, *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P) along with Marlene Kadar's *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto: U of Toronto P). Leigh Gilmore's *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell UP) appeared in 1994. *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst: U Massachusetts P) edited by Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff was published in 1996.

writer, and most typically in forms of diary, journal, memoirs, day book, letters – those fragmented discontinuous ‘lower’ forms. (26)

Until recently, women’s diaries were considered a lesser form of literary text when compared to the autobiographies of influential male public figures whose reading audience was attracted by the self-referential disclosure of masculine power dynamics. As Estelle C. Jelinek observes in her work on women’s autobiographical writings, “‘Insignificant,’ indeed, expresses the predominant attitude of most critics toward women’s lives” (4).⁸ In the same essay, Jelinek argues, “During the Civil War period, there was an increase in autobiographies by military men, but women’s autobiographies did not begin to be published in significant numbers until the end of the nineteenth century” (5). That the focus of women’s autobiographical writing is less on the self and more on community is not only gender-based but also historically centered.

In identifying the focus of women’s autobiographical writing as the community of women and events that surround female domesticity, Prenshaw echoes the earlier work of southern women historians such as Jean E. Friedman and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. In *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830 – 1900*, Friedman notes that “the persistent theme of kinship and community is evident in the diaries and church records . . . Women thought in common symbols and acted according to common values, but within the spring of the unconscious a mature, autonomous self emerged” (39). Friedman uses autobiographical forms, including women’s diaries, to point to inherent distinctions between southern women and their northern counterparts in terms of community-directed women’s roles. Citing the power of the southern rural evangelical system that supported and maintained kinship systems, Friedman argues that southern women remained tied to family and community even in the face of sweeping social reforms taking place in the North. Another southern woman

⁸ Estelle C. Jelinek, *Women’s Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Bloomington and London: Indiana U P, 1980.

historian echoes Friedman's claims. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, in her article "Between Individualism and Community: Autobiographies of Southern Women," argues:

Even when most concerned with their own status as individuals – they understood the individual as grounded in ties of community – ties of class and race, of kinship and culture. They thought of themselves as particular kinds of individuals – women, of course, but also privileged, white southerners – whose individuality derived its meaning from membership in specific social groups. But their sense of their relations to the communities cannot easily be understood simply as a case of women's permeable ego boundaries, their general tendency to merge rather than to differentiate themselves from others. Rather their sense of those relations had more to do with a concept of delegations, of themselves as distinct representatives of a community. (26)⁹

Fox-Genovese speaks to an important consideration in reading nineteenth-century southern women's diaries as southern "ladies" were schooled in deference to male patriarchal figures who not only governed the home and the household, but also the entire southern society. She reiterates these views as reinforcing "gender constraints by ascribing all women to the domination of male heads of household and to the company of the women of their own households" in her larger work, *Within the Plantation Household: Black & White Women of the Old South* (39).

Each of these southern female historians place southern women at the heart of their community rather than focused on the expression of self that male critics claim is the essence of the autobiographical act. In arguing against Gusdorf's claim that "autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist," Susan Stanford Friedman maintains, "Historically, women as a group have never been the 'gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires'" but "[i]nstead, they have been the

⁹ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Between Individualism and Community: Autobiographies of Southern Women." *Located Lives: Place and Idea in Southern Autobiography*. Ed. J. Bill Berry. Athens and London: U Georgia P, 1990. P.26.

gathered, the colonized, the ruled” (55).¹⁰ She reiterates Nancy Chodorow’s belief that “‘the individual does not oppose herself to all others’ nor ‘feel herself to exist outside of others,’ ‘but very much with others in an interdependent existence’” (77). However, as Smith and Watson note in *Reading Autobiography*, the recent trend in women’s autobiographical studies seeks to balance the notions of community with self-inscription in women’s life writings. Therefore, in noting the developing tendency of women’s life writing to mediate between women’s allegiance to community and notions of the evolving sense of self in these autobiographical acts, Prenshaw’s claim that the southern women autobiographer’s “construction of self lies between individualism and community” appears well-grounded (20).

Women’s life writing is culturally significant because it exposes what is vital in a female community. As an important event in the female life cycle, weddings figured prominently in the lives of southern women. The antebellum and wartime diaries reveal that in addition to offering emotional support during times of fear and loss, seen especially in the high numbers of infant and child mortalities, southern women sustained one another in joyful times as well. In her germinal article, “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” Carroll Smith-Rosenberg maintains, “These supportive networks were institutionalized in social conventions or rituals which accompanied virtually every important event in a woman’s life” (9).¹¹ Perhaps due to the restrictive conventions placed on elite southern women, as Rosenberg suggests, “such a world of emotional richness and complexity, devotion to and love of other women became a plausible and

¹⁰ Susan Stanford Friedman, “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice.” *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Shari Benstock. Chapel Hill and London: U North Carolina P, 1988. This article differs from the version published in Smith and Watson with the addition of readings of Audre Lorde’s *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* along with Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and H.D.’s *HERmione*. P. 34 – 62.

¹¹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Life and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America.” *Signs* 1.1 (1975): 1 – 29. Jstor LSU 2007/11/16.

socially accepted form of human interaction” (*Ibid*). Bounded as they were by “home, church and the institution of visiting” (10), southern women used their diaries and journals as an alternative form of expression, allowing young unmarried girls and older married women to express feelings and emotions, not always for the sake of future publication but often for giving voice to tumultuous feelings or to register the visible changes occurring in wartime society. All of these writings reveal what Smith-Rosenberg terms “a female world of varied yet highly structured relationships,” disclosing strong “ties between mothers and daughters, sisters, female cousins and friends, at all stages of the female life cycle” (3).

This strong connection to an insular group of both female and male family members is readily discernible in *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*. Edited by Charles East, Morgan’s lengthy diary comprises the most vivid, extensive and revealing notations on the subject of weddings than any of the other Louisiana diarists. Sixteen-year old Baton Rouge resident Sarah Morgan makes the first entry of her diary on January 10th, 1862 where she confides that “a new year has opened to me while my thoughts are still wrapped up in the last; Heaven send it may be a happier one than 1861” (5).¹² The notable events that Morgan is referring to are the death of her brother, Harry, in a duel, and that of her father, Judge Thomas Gibbes Morgan, by a sudden illness. Her opening and closing entries frame the deaths of male family members as she writes in the early days of 1862, by heralding in the New Year and in June, 1865, in the days following Lincoln’s assassination. Morgan attributes her favorite brother’s death in the April duel to an archaic system of honor, while her father’s death from an asthma attack in November left the family vulnerable, as Sarah’s two other brothers were away

¹² Charles East, Ed. *Sarah Morgan. The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*. Athens, GA: U Georgia P, 1991. Rpt. Touchstone, 1992.

fighting for the Confederacy.¹³ In a dramatic entry at the end of Book 5, Morgan conveys her devastation at the loss of her two remaining brothers in the last days of the Confederacy. Following her inauspicious opening frames, Morgan's diary chronicles, in calendrical style, events of the Civil War in Louisiana as she details the Union capture and occupation of New Orleans in late April and early May, 1862, the ensuing occupation of Baton Rouge in August, 1862 along with the siege and ultimate surrender of Port Hudson from the middle of May, 1863 to July 4th of the same year. Morgan's diary is exemplary of diaries organized chronologically with entries conforming to the calendrical cycle. For example, Morgan's diary represents the "structural rhythms" of the calendar year by forming "a beginning, a middle and an end" that serves to sequentially organize the events that are often shaped, as Culley notes, by "external events in the diarist's life" (19). In "Toward Conceptualizing Diary," Felicity A. Nussbaum argues:

diurnal entries of the diarist are governed by the very fact that a day has its end. Even if in the maturing diarist a sense of selection begins to be guided by the growing awareness of what this person values and does not value, the journal entry is the completed precipitate of each day. It has its very value in being the reflection of but a brief moment; it attributes prime significance to the segments of life. A long diary will indeed reveal the development of the person as the writer but will do so in a totally different manner from an autobiographer. (127)¹⁴

Morgan's writing reveals another feature specified by Culley when she notes that the diary represents the temporal distinction of being "created in and represent[ing] a continuous present" (*A Day* 20). As Culley states, the diary is "always in process, always in some sense a fragment"

¹³ The opening frame of East's edition of *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* as noted above, begins with the deaths of two Morgan men. Her concluding entries to Book 5 of the diary include the following entry, undated, "March
Dead! Dead! Both dead! O my brothers! What have we lived for except you?" (597). The final entry of this book occurs on June 15th, 1865 where Morgan writes, "Our Confederacy has gone with one crash – the report of the pistol fired at Lincoln" (611). Book 6 relates Morgan's post-war experiences and remains unpublished.

¹⁴ Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Toward Conceptualizing Diary," *Studies in Autobiography*. Ed. James Olney. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. P.128 – 140.

(19). Typically, diary entries reflect the writer's chronological perspective of time as each daily account is situated on a linear continuum and is usually written in a narrative structural paradigm. While other forms of autobiography may adhere to the temporal/stylistic format of diary entries, women diarists typically do not deviate from the practice of regularly inserting their daily narrative recounting of activities into a specific heading that includes a calendar-based notation of the day, the month and the year. In contrast to fictional texts, Cully argues, women's diaries reveal "the writer's relationship to 'real time' and the representation of 'time passing,' [that] seen in the text itself, create formal tensions and ironies not found in texts generated from an illusion of a fixed point in time" (20). Especially as modern readers of Confederate diaries, we are often aware of certain outcomes or facts that the diary writer is unaware at the time of writing. The resulting presence or absence of shared knowledge between writer and reader, Culley claims, may result in "surprises, mysteries and silences" in the diary (21).

In between the frames of loss and war experience, Morgan's diary served as an important outlet for the tumultuous feelings and experiences of a young woman approaching marriageable age. While it is unclear from the diary whether Sarah Morgan initially wrote with any intention of publication, there are two editions of her writing, one of which has been widely distributed.¹⁵ Edmund Wilson, writing in *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* in 1966, was familiar enough with Morgan to include her in the ranks of notable Confederate

¹⁵ The issue of authorial intent and editorial emendation is an important one in the history of Morgan's autobiography. In 1913, Sarah Morgan Dawson's son, Warrington Dawson, published an edition of his mother's wartime diary as *A Confederate Girl's Diary*. According to East, Morgan put the diary away after the war and "did not return to it until 1896, when she took the books out of the linen wrappings in which she had kept them, a wrapping made secure by her stitches" (xxxiii). Following her 1896 review of the first five books of the diary, Morgan herself made emendations to the texts and destroyed a number of pages from the sixth volume. The sixth volume is not part of Charles East's edition of the diary, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*. East began his editing process on Morgan's diary in 1975, working from a microfilm copy provided by Duke University. At this time, he discovered "problems with the text presented to us by Warrington Dawson" through what East describes as editorial blunders or "where the editing crossed the line into rewriting" (x). He also notes that the 1913 edition of the diary "amounted to approximately half, a little less than half, of the original" (*Ibid*).

women diarists, suggesting that her “journal is not only distinguished by naturalness and vivacity but by something of a sense of style” (267). Part of what makes Morgan’s writing so notable is her ability to convey a woman’s sense of the chaos and confusion of wartime in her writing. Describing her subsequent removal to Linwood, General Albert G. Carter’s plantation, near Port Hudson, a strategic Confederate defensive position on the Mississippi River, Morgan conveys the mayhem and loss experienced by women as they struggled to survive without the customary patriarchal protection. Additionally, her writing portrays Morgan’s extreme devotion to her brothers, along with her close relationship with her mother and sister, Miriam, revealing the importance of highly intimate family relationships that connected at the same time as they limited Southern women to the domestic sphere.

As the youngest daughter of an affluent Baton Rouge family, Morgan was certainly considered a “belle” in the sense that she was approaching marriageable age before the war broke out. As a private space for reflections on her developing womanhood, Morgan’s diary reveals her profound ambivalence on the topic of marriage. In *The Enclosed Garden*, Friedman observes, “The deep importance that attached to marriage sometimes engendered a fear of marriage, especially in the case of women accustomed to the relative independence of single life” (33). Sarah Morgan’s diary provides numerous expressions of such fears. One example, early in the diary, transpires between Morgan and her brother Harry. In her entry of April 5, 1862, she writes: “He was kneeling on one knee near the trunk, and in his odd, abrupt way, he looked quickly at me, and said ‘Come! let us make a bargain! Promise me you will never marry, and I promise you *I* will not; and I’ll grow rich for both, and you shall take care of me, and be my little housekeeper; will you?’” (34). However, Harry’s death precluded any further male family disavowal of marriage intentions. Charles East notes in his introduction to the 1991

edition of the diary, that what makes Sarah Morgan “so interesting and so important” is that she “rebelled” against “the hypocrisies and tyranny of the society she had grown up in; the restraints imposed on her as a woman” (xxiii). Her writing reveals the tensions between her inner feelings and the expectations of her society.

One of Nussbaum’s several definitions of diary helps to clarify Morgan’s decisive private self struggling with the overt demands of southern womanhood. Nussbaum defines the diary as “the thing itself, not a failed version of autobiography, *itself* a mode of perceiving reality and a signifying system within the discursive practices available in the social-cultural domain. The diary delivers narrative and frustrates it; it simultaneously displays and withholds. The diary articulates modes of discourse that may subvert and endanger authorized representations of reality in its form as well as its discourse of self as subject” (137). As readers, we do not know why Morgan feels toward marriage as she does. What we do have, however, is the idea that writing in her diary as a “safe” space allowed Morgan a location to voice her disagreements with the expectations foisted upon her by southern society. In this manner, Morgan’s diary simultaneously displays and withholds information concerning her life. Since her previous existence appears to have been extremely sheltered and family centered, she offers no concrete basis for her feelings. Yet, as East maintains:

Again and again she voices her contempt for the role she is expected to play; the adoring and submissive wife, the loving and attentive mother. At one point she dreams of living out her life far away in a quiet cottage with a sign over the door that says “No gentlemen or children admitted.” Her words seem to resound all the more when we recall her age when she wrote them. (xxiii)

East’s praise for Sarah Morgan’s sensibilities discloses the diary as a space for women life writers to mediate, as Culley claims, “the sense of self as part of a social fabric” (*A Day* 7). Moreover, Morgan’s writing is an impressive example of what Bloom describes as ability of the

public diary to “circumvent” the diary’s “dailiness” through the use of ‘foreshadowing and flashbacks, emphasis on topics rather than chronology, repetition of philosophical themes and pervasive issues, character depictions, scene settings, and the use of integrative metaphors, symbols and other stylistic devices” (29). By looking carefully at Morgan’s use of stylistic devices, it becomes clear that the authorial voice expressed through her writing reveals tensions between her sense of self and her perceived social duty.

Morgan’s first conflict with the social expectations of marriage demanded of her by southern society is revealed in her confessional but imaginary conversation with her brother, Gibbes. In her entry dated May 6th, 1862, she notes that “Gibbes once said of me ‘I believe she agrees with me, that there is no man on earth good enough, or smart enough for her’” (59). Later in this long entry, she confides that she knows she is a “fool” but is wiser than to “tumble in love and get married immediately” for the main reason that she has “yet to meet the man [she] would be willing to acknowledge as [her] lord and master” (60). Morgan’s use of patriarchal terms to define a husband’s role as the ultimate authority of the home supports the image of the subservient woman that Anne Firor Scott, in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830 – 1930* maintains was part of a young southern girl’s training to “the ideals of perfection and submission” (7). Morgan transfers a portion of that expectation onto her vision of a suitable husband and ideal partner:

For unconfessed to myself, until very recently, I have dressed up an image in my heart, and have unconsciously worshipped it under the name of Beau Ideal . . . Well, my lord and master must be someone I shall never have to blush for, or to be ashamed to acknowledge; the one that, after God, I shall most venerate and respect; and as I cannot respect a fool, he must be intelligent. I place that first, for I consider it the chief qualification in man, just as I believe a pure heart is the chief beauty of a woman. (60 1)

For Morgan, masculine intelligence and proper conduct supersede physical appearance as she notes, “He may be ugly as mud, and I will never think of it; the more ugly he is, the more intelligent he will be” (62). Nor does she mention wealth as a prerequisite. In fact, she maintains that “I would not wish him to be rich” but rather to follow along in what she perceives as her economic station – “neither rich nor poor” (*Ibid*). Morgan’s portrait of her ideal southern gentleman reflects Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s belief that codes of honor and gentility, based on chivalric rules of conduct for gentlemen, were instilled in southern males at an early age.¹⁶ For example, Morgan rejects imaginary suitors with “well oiled hair and even more impudence,” thus replacing the image of a foppish courtier with the more substantial vision of an ideal husband; one who must have “a sense of honor as nice and delicate as a woman’s and a noble, generous, pure heart” (61-2). In her reversal of southern society’s expected role for woman described by Scott as the “custod[ian] of conscience and morality,” Morgan essentially feminizes the role of the patriarch by ascribing to him the pious qualities demanded of women (*Southern Lady* 19).

As education for southern women lagged behind that of the young southern gentlemen, Morgan seeks a husband that “must be smart enough for two; his brains must do duty for both, and supply all [her] deficiencies” (61).¹⁷ While many of the young southern women attending female academies did receive some training in mathematics and sciences, for the most part, their studies centered on literature, languages, musical proficiency and the social arts. Despite being in

¹⁶ In *Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, (Ann. Ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), Bertram Wyatt-Brown theorizes that a “silent code” of ethics and honor ruled masculine behavior in the Old South. Lorri Grovers, in *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007) adheres to Wyatt-Brown’s thesis but adds the importance of British conduct literature to notions southern manhood.

¹⁷ For more on southern belles and education, see Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South*. New York: New York U P, 1995, and *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family and Education*. Ed. Walter J. Fraser, R. Frank. Saunders, Jr. and Jon L. Wakely. Athens: U Georgia P, 1987.

the midst of the politics of secession and state's rights, southern women were not expected to participate in political commentaries. Morgan, however, expects that her ideal partner will be adept in that arena. Therefore, for Morgan, her beau ideal "must be a man of the world" (61). Her long list of attributes ultimately concludes with her belief that the man who fits this mold also embodies her prerequisites for marital happiness: "I have described such a man as I firmly believe exists, such a one as I believe I should marry, if I expect to be happy" (63). In her work on southern womanhood, Scott interprets these "romantic expectations and the myth of the southern gentleman" as more of a hindrance than a help in finding a suitable marriage partner (*Southern Lady* 23).

Among Morgan's written philosophies on the importance of marriage, she confides in her entry of May 23rd, 1862, "that women who look to marriage as the sole end and object of life are those who think less of its duties" (81). Holding herself apart from other women in a critique of her peers, she expresses her views on marital commitment in a flashback that she addressed the previous summer to Captain Huger, a Confederate soldier: "if women only considered for one minute all the awful responsibilities that land on that solemn 'I will!' and then could resolve to bear them come what will, there would be fewer unhappy marriages in the world" (82).

Additionally, in the same long entry of May 23rd, 1862, she criticizes the romantic tendency of feminine nature espoused by those "who never think of touching anything more solid than a yellow covered novel" (83). In this passage, Morgan reveals that she considers herself more educated and intuitive than other women as she echoes the prevalent belief of the destructive potential of reading novels. Many critics thought the yellow-backed dime novels would corrupt young female readers and should be replaced by more serious non-fictional forms of literature

that encouraged reasoning.¹⁸ Her harsh condemnation of southern womanhood critiques the “dear sweet little women in the world,” making it clear that this is not only a role but also an image that Morgan vigorously rejects (*Ibid*).

Morgan’s fear and repudiation of her image as a bride is clearly manifest in a dream that she records in her entry of October 11th, 1982. She writes:

O what a dream I had last night~! I have not yet recovered from my terror. I dreamed that I was to be married . . . I was standing in mother’s room, dressed in bridal array, with the exception of my veil. . . I saw myself walking up the aisle of the church with my hand on the arm of my bridegroom . . . I saw the altar I was approaching, and the minister with his book; I saw a sea of faces turned towards mine, that was bent down and deathly pale. A silent horror crept over me . . . Save me! Tell him I am crazy! . . . Again I pleaded wildly; in my agony I threw myself on the ground, and besought him at the last moment. (301-2)

Morgan’s dramatic rejection of bridal status provides ample signification not only of her subconscious horror of the risks of marriage but also reveals her dismay that courtship might not provide a substantial knowledge of the true feelings of either party involved in the wedding. In her dream, her mother and her sister, Miriam, refuse to interfere with the ceremony. Despite her panic, the two important female figures in her life encourage her to continue with the wedding. Morgan’s deep antipathy to marriage is apparent when she responds to Miriam’s challenge, “You promised of your own free will” that she has done so “only to please mother!” (302). Only when absolutely certain of her sister’s “real feelings,” in the dream, Miriam dispatches the wedding guests and Morgan then confides that she “hugged [herself] for joy crying “saved! Saved!” (*Ibid*). The intimate mother-daughter-sister relationships exposed in her dream speak to what Smith-Rosenberg terms “an apprenticeship system” that existed within families where daughters patterned their behaviors to follow the mother’s role (16).

¹⁸ Farnham notes in *The Education of the Southern Belle*, “Novel reading (except those titles approved by the administration) was specifically prohibited in most regulations, because the sentimental novel was thought to arouse sexual feelings in young women and the administration feared they might choose to act on them” (132).

However, the vehemence of this entry revealing Morgan's complete denunciation of her bridal role mirrors Steven Kagle's claim in *American Diary Literature* that "the life of the diary is often born of tension, a disequilibrium in the life of its author, which needs to be resolved or held in check" (17). Morgan's response to the expectations of southern womanhood is a source of subliminal tension that reoccurs in her dreams. Although at one point, Morgan is able to confide her fears to her mother and sister by asserting that she will be an "old maid," social pressures on young southern women for marriage came not only from the immediate family but also from the entire society as a whole, for as Victoria E. Ott argues in *Confederate Daughters*, marriage was the "realization of feminine duty" (100). However, Morgan maintained her stance against marriage even beyond the war years. In her post-war writings, as East observes, Morgan was quick to assert, "Marriage is *not* the end of woman!"¹⁹

In her dream, Morgan sees herself as a "sacrifice"; her word choice here conjures up an image of surrender that echoes the cultural constraints on the southern woman after marriage. As Anya Jabour argues in *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*, "marriage was not only a rite of passage from one stage to another, it was also a gateway between the female youth culture of resistance and the southern woman's culture of resignation" (162). Certainly the merry social life and giddy activities of the belle stand in contrast to the endless responsibilities of a plantation mistress. Morgan's dream, "reveal[s] psychic conflict or resolution in symbolic personal and cultural associations that derive their meaning from the individual life" as Jean E. Friedman argues (*Enclosed Garden* 40). Friedman specifies that "[i]n nineteenth-century culture, maternity, domesticity, self-sacrifice, and religious conversion were expected of women"

¹⁹ East discusses Morgan's later editorial writings in his introduction to the diary where he attests that she "challenged the 'article of belief' that marriage is the sole end for which woman was created" in her article appearing in the April 15th, 1875 edition of Charleston's *News and Courier* (xxxvii).

(40). These gendered expectations represent the complex struggles between social demands and preservation of self that Morgan is grappling with in her dream.

Another reading strategy suggested by Nussbaum advocates reading diary entries “as modes of signification, as linguistic representations derived from the many discourses available at a particular historical moment. In that context, we can begin to conceptualize diary and journal as we expose the manifold meanings, silences, and discontinuities in the texts, and question the assumptions about experience and identity that the texts ratify and challenge” (“Toward” 129). Charging that the diary form “creates and tolerates crisis in perpetuity,” Nussbaum speaks to diary writing as a location of consciousness for the writer. Morgan’s dream becomes a signification of her fears of surrendering herself to the control of a marital partner. For an elite young southern woman, rejecting marriage as a suitable path could signal a crisis. This is the interpretation that Elizabeth R. Baer suggests in her reading of Lucy Buck’s diary where she argues that Buck is “privately testing the boundaries” of southern womanhood (214).²⁰

Morgan records another dream in her diary on the identical topic. In her entry of September 6th, 1863, after an evening of discussing her plan with her mother and sister of remaining an “old maid,” she confides that “I went to sleep and dreamed that she [her mother] wanted to force me to marry some one I did not like. I had exhausted my tears and entreaties, and was sitting on the floor in speechless despair, when I was awakened” (550). Similar to the first dream of bridal despair, all of her fears surface during the dream wedding:

Think of the delight of trying on your wedding dress, and looking over your trousseau! Who ever saw an ugly bride? there is *once* in a life time you are sure of being beautiful.
And the wedding breakfast, or supper, and the congratulations, and journey – that’s delightful! But then--!

²⁰ Elizabeth R. Baer, “Ambivalence, Anger, and Silence: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Buck.” In *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*. Ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff. Amherst, MA: U Massachusetts P, 1996.

Orange blossoms fade in a night, mother; after a dream come waking. Suppose the trick played upon Jacob should be tried upon me; and after marrying my ideal, I should wake to the reality and find in the morning not the tender eyed Rachel of my imagination, but the bleary eyed Leah? (550)

Morgan's Biblical allusion to Jacob's difficulties in obtaining his "true" bride inverts the Old Testament story of persevering mate selection in terms of gender. In Morgan's version, the deceived is a woman, not a man. Recording not only her superficial fears of marriage but also an example of what Margo Culley terms "'double consciousness' as the self stands apart to view the self" (10), Morgan uses her diary as a method of expressing her innermost fears. Her "conflicted self" is not deceived by the romantic illusions that surround wedding ritual with its focus on the congratulatory space of female beauty. Despite the wartime dislocations of her remaining family, it is clear that Morgan felt repeated subliminal pressures from her mother and sister to marry and used her diary as an outlet for self-reflection. Yet Sarah Morgan was not the only young southern woman to question the institution of marriage; her subconscious revelations of ambivalence are echoed, although not as strongly, in the diaries of other young Louisiana women.

Kate Stone of Louisiana is another of the "three Confederate ladies" covered by Edmund Wilson in *Patriotic Gore*. Stone's wartime experience, edited by John Q. Anderson, was published in 1955 as *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone 1861 – 1868*. Stone's journal bears the name of the family cotton plantation thirty miles northwest of Vicksburg, Mississippi, just across the river in Louisiana. Wilson finds her much less interesting than Sarah Morgan, complaining that "even in her courage and grief, poor Kate is rather wooden" (260). Yet, in her defense, as Anderson observes, "the *Journal* reveals the resentment of an admirable young woman of the ancient dictum that woman's part in war is to watch and wait, her discovery of love amid the ruins of her country, and finally her acceptance of the defeat without cynicism"

(xxv). In the introduction to a new edition of the journal, Drew Gilpin Faust terms Stone's diary a *Bildungsroman* which not only reflects the popularity of the literary form in the nineteenth century but also suggests that the diary shows character development and growth (xi). Just as Sarah Morgan began her diary with events pertaining to the men in her family, Stone also sets her wartime journal in motion in the first weeks after the Confederate firing on Ft. Sumter in April, 1861. Her first entry on May 15th, 1861, describes her older brother's departure for New Orleans to join a company fighting in Virginia.

As Sarah Morgan's diary records her ambivalence and at times outright resistance to the idea of marriage, it is not surprising that she records few references to the engagements and weddings of female friends. However, in contrast to Morgan, Kate Stone's journal contains entries that connect her to a wider circle of female relatives and acquaintances and in that manner is more typical of other southern women's autobiographical writings of the period in describing the feminine network of family and friends. Smith-Rosenberg, observing several ways that women managed and maintained relationships states, "marriage involved a girl's traumatic removal from her mother and her mother's network. It involved, as well, adjustment to a husband, who, because he was male came to marriage with both a different world view and vastly different experiences. Not surprisingly, marriage was an event surrounded with supportive, almost ritualistic practices" ("The Female World" 22). The supportive network of women offered emotional support and assurance through structured, repetitious, and highly patterned actions during life passage events. Even before her participation in courtship or marriage rituals, a young girl's life was filled with ritualistic behaviors as she participated in or observed the weddings of other female members of her family.

One of Stone's earliest entries on weddings customs relates what folklorists' term "divination" or ways of predicting the future. In her entry of October 7, 1861, Stone writes, "Dr. Devine is to be married next Thursday. Dr. Lily is going and will report on the bride's dress and bring us a piece of dream cake" (58). In her entry of October 12th, she notes, "He [Dr.Lily] brought the wedding cake, Dr. Devine's, I made him a dream list, and he is to tell me the favored girl when he comes again" (60). In her entry of October 17th, ten days later, Stone confides, "Have slept on my paper and dreamed my best, but to no purpose, 'nobody coming to marry me, nobody coming to woo'" (61). John Q. Anderson, the editor of Stone's diary aids the reader by providing information not contextually apparent. In a footnote, he refers to the *Encyclopedia of Superstitions* to observe that "A slice of bride cake . . . laid under the head of an unmarried man or woman will make them dream of their future wife or husband" (n 50 p. 60). For young, unmarried girls, placing the cake under their pillow to "divine" the name of their future husband signifies a superstition derived from European culture and diffused to America.²¹

The wedding cake, always highly meaningful and culturally adaptive, is symbolic of the circular, non-ending quality of enduring love. As an aspect of the wedding feast, its central presence subliminally represents fertility as it also tangibly celebrates the sweetness of married life. Therefore, it is often associated with or a part of divination charms. Through the process of homeopathic magic, the fertility properties associated with the cake may be passed to the practitioner through close contact. By placing a piece of cake under her pillow, the young woman is coming into contact with what Sir James G. Frazer characterizes as sympathetic

²¹ In her article, "Signs and Superstitions Collected from American College Girls," *The Journal of American Folklore* 35 (1923): 1-15, folklorist Martha Warren Beckwith lists #150: "If you put a piece of wedding-cake under your pillow for seven successive nights, on the seventh you will dream of your future husband" and #151: "To sleep on wedding cake: Have a friend write on separate slips the names of seven eligible men, and place these slips with the cake under your pillow; each morning draw out a slip and throw it away unopened; the last one will have the name of your future husband."

magic.²² To quote Frazer, the two-fold “principles of thought” of sympathetic magic suggest “first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed” (11). In the case of the cake under the pillow, both principles of sympathetic magic are in use. Homeopathic magic (like-to-like) connects the girl and the bride through the Law of Similarity that implies that any effect may be produced “merely by imitating it” (*Ibid*). Because the girl is dreaming of the bride and in contact with the cake, she too, will become a bride; this is signaled by the term “dream cake.” The Law of Contact or Contagion is exemplified through the material connection to the cake. Frazer defines this principle as “whatever he [or she] does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his [or her] body or not” (*Ibid*). In this connection, the cake becomes a conduit of magical contagion – the girl has been magically “exposed” to being a bride through a fertility agent. Because the bride has cake and the young girl dreams of being a bride over a piece of bride’s cake, the young girl will be “equally affected” by becoming a bride. The cake divination was an important practice in eighteenth century English weddings. As John Brand notes in *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, it was customary in the north of England for the bride’s cake to be “cut into little square pieces, thrown over the bridegroom’s and the bride’s head, and then put through the ring” or sometimes, “laid under pillows, at night to cause young persons to dream of their lovers” (355).²³

²² For more on Frazer’s properties of sympathetic magic, see *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. Chapter III: Sympathetic Magic. P. 11 – 45.

²³ See “Ring and Bride-Cake” in John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities Chiefly Illustrating the Origin of Our Vulgar Customs, Ceremonies and Superstitions*. 1797. Rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1913. In *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History*, Simon R. Charsley provides a seventeenth-century example derived from Dr. White Kennet: “The maids of Oxfordshire have a way of foreseeing their sweethearts by making a *dumb cake*; that is, on some Fryday-night, several Maids and Batchelors bring every one a little flower, and everyone a little salt, and every one blows an egge, and every one makes y^e cake and lays it on the gridiron, and every one turns it, and when bakt

An interesting variant of cake divination appears in Susan Bradford Eppes's hybridized diary/memoir, *Through Some Eventful Years*.²⁴ Under her heading "these leaves selected from the little girl's diary," Eppes extracts what appear to her own entries from a diary kept when she was eight years old. In her entry on June 1st, 1859, she describes events surrounding her older sister's wedding:

For each bridesmaid there was a basket, made of cake, iced and ornamented, with a high handle wrapped with satin ribbon. In one basket was a ring and in another a three cent piece, the bridesmaid who got the ring would be the next bride and the girl who drew the three cent piece would-never marry. (95)

In this version, divination charms are baked directly into the cake. In his work on the history and cultural meaning of wedding cakes, Simon Charsley argues that the custom of baking "talismans" into the wedding cake is a distinctly Scottish custom.²⁵ However, Marcia Gaudet connects this practice to a larger European tradition that conceals divination charms into "festival foods and celebration cakes" (91). In her work on ribbon pulls as a New Orleanian tradition, Gaudet determines that these charms have symbolic meanings that may promote positive or negative effects for obtaining or attracting romantic love.²⁶ According to Gaudet's research,

enough every one breaks a piece, and eats one part and laies the other part under their pillow to dream on y^e person they shall marry. But all tis to be done in serious silence w^hout one word or one smile, or els the cake looses the name and the virtue" (42-3).

²⁴ Susan Bradford Eppes, *Through Some Eventful Years*. Macon, GA: The J.W. Burke Company, 1926.

²⁵ Simon Charsley has written extensively on British wedding cakes. His first article appears in *Man. New Series* 22.1 (1987): 93 – 110 where he analyzes Scottish wedding traditions in light of what he terms, "the wedding industry" (93). He views the wedding cake as "a central part of the larger pattern of objects and events which constitutes the way weddings are held, or marriages celebrated, within this particular culture at this particular period"(101). His next article, "The Wedding Cake: History and Meanings," (*Folklore* 99.2 (1988): 232-241) traces the historical origins and British adaptations of "bride-cakes." These articles constitute a portion of his full length work entitled *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History*, published in 1992, where Charsley follows the wedding cake through various British anthropological transformations.

²⁶In her article "Ribbon Pulls in Wedding Cakes: Tracing a New Orleans Tradition," (*Folklore* 117 (April 2006): 87 – 96), Marcia Gaudet describes the tradition of baking charms in wedding cakes. "Charms include a ring, a heart, a thimble, a button, a horseshoe, a clover – and sometimes a fleur-de-lis – an anchor, a dime, and also a penny. Each has a traditional meaning – the ring means 'next to marry,' the heart means 'true love,' the thimble or button means 'old maid,' the horseshoe or the clover means 'good luck,' the fleur-de-lis means 'love will bloom,' the anchor

cake pulls are often still a part of the cake ceremony in southeastern Louisiana weddings and have diffused to other parts of the South.²⁷

Recording what appears to be a “comic aside,” Eppes relates that she has inadvertently mishandled the cake charm. She writes, “Sister Mart brought her basket to me . . . so I asked Mother where she thought I had better put it. She wrapped it carefully and put it in the library and next morning . . . lo and behold it was gone . . . when a search was made, we found Frances under the bed in the front room with the remains of the basket in her hand and crumbs scattered about the floor” (96). The understated humor here appears to be racially based as Eppes reveals not only that Frances was her enslaved maid, but the two were exactly the same age. The writer’s tone and contrast with Frances denotes her sense of shameful responsibility as she deprecatingly admonishes Frances for failing to internalize appropriate behavior. All of this suggests that marriage divinations were taken as seriously in the antebellum South as they were when Martha Warren Beckwith collected “signs and superstitions” from American college women in 1923. Feminine interest in “divining” a possible marriage partner appears undiminished in the years spanning the Civil War through the First World War

While Sarah Morgan mentions few such gatherings, practices or divinations, Kate Stone makes abundant references to weddings in her diary. In her entry on July 26th, 1861, Stone writes that her friend Julia “was sewing on a wedding garment” (44). Later, in connection to Dr. Devine’s wedding, she notes, “We would like to attend a wedding occasionally but have no

means ‘hope,’ the dime means ‘wealth,’ and the penny means ‘poverty’” (87-88). The charms are baked into the cake with the ribbons attached. Only the single, female friends of the bride are allowed to pull a ribbon.

²⁷ A recent edition of *Alabama Wedding Magazine* published by PRO-Motion Publishing, Inc. in Jasper, Alabama, 2011, showcases a modern version of wedding cake charms. The copy text attributes the custom to “Victorian, England where the bride had small charms attached to ribbons within the layers of her wedding cake. These charms signified luck and good fortune” (35). The charms included in this article signify a distinctly modern twist to an older tradition by the addition of a purse which represents a life of financial security, an airplane for a life of adventure and travel, the Eiffel Tower for world traveling in one’s future and lastly, a tennis racket to represent country club life.

chance” (58). Stone does not offer a reason why she is unable to attend Dr. Devine’s wedding. On January 27th, she confides in her journal that “Rose and Dr. Lily are to be married very soon – my pet prejudice, Rose Norris and the ‘Tiger Lily.’ She will be Mrs. ‘Rose Lily’” (84). Despite Stone’s floral punning, she appears to be preoccupied with thoughts on the approaching wedding. In her entry of February 16th, 1862, she writes:

The wedding is to be a real grand, old-fashioned merry-making. All the relatives on both sides for four generations are to assemble at Mrs. Savages before the affair, and friends for miles around are to be invited and a great feast prepared. And of, the quantities of sewing to be done. Mrs. Savage says when there is a wedding she believes in straining a point. (89)

This entry provides a significant amount of information about the community importance of rural southern weddings. In this passage, we may see the community scope of the wedding is inclusive of a long list of local acquaintances and exclusive in that multi-generational family members are anticipated for the wedding feast. Mrs. Savage’s stance on “straining a point” suggests that antebellum weddings often signaled going beyond what was considered as merely substantial into a space of ritual excess. However, by February 22nd, Stone records that “Mrs. Savage has given out on the idea of a big wedding. “Only the families are to be present” (93). Stone offers no reasons for the change in plans. When she and her mother visit the newlyweds, Stone notes, “The bride had on a lovely dress of light blue silk with a silvery sheen, trimmed with dark blue velvet, black lace, and steel buckles. She looked as usual, sour and disagreeable, and was very silent, as was the groom” (97). Stone is scathing in her critique of the bride’s demeanor despite her considerable attention to the new clothing. In contrast, when she hears of her brother’s past girlfriend’s wedding, Stone complains on May 23, 1862, that she has not “heard of my darling Katie’s marriage. Who would have thought after our long close intimacy that I would hear of her wedding only by accident” (111). The community gossip that brings Stone news of her friend’s

wedding is doubly revealing; on one hand, the entry speaks to the strength of the local news network and on the other hand that the new bride has made no effort to contact her old beau's "little sister" to tell her about the marriage. By December, 1862, Stone appears angry at the lack of communication from her old friend. "Not a word from Kate Nailor since her marriage months ago. Why does marrying change one so? Why is it impossible to care for your friends if you have a new husband or wife? I should not think one lone man could take the place of all the loved ones of a lifetime. But I suppose a man's the reason" (163). The bride's silence, in Stone's viewpoint, stirs up issues of competition for attention between the new husband and the female network of friends. However, as for Stone's part, her feelings mark the gulf of separation between the casual cares of belledom and the heightened responsibilities of marriage. Moreover, the bride's reluctance to communicate news of her marriage may also signal some reticence or sense of impropriety on her part in speaking to persons connected to a prior courtship.

The most interesting of Stone's concerns reveals the problems of a fraudulent fiancé. In her entry of June 6th, 1860, she writes:

Letters from My Brother . . . he wrote us our one-time friend, Mr. Hewitt. He is passing himself off in Nashville as a wealthy Louisiana planter and as a colonel of a Mississippi regiment taken at Donelson and on parole. He is engaged to be married to one of the nice girls of Nashville. He is such a dreadful fraud, a perfect adventurer, and we think gets married at nearly every town in which he spends a month. He is very handsome, tall and blond, with delightful manners and always manages to get it with the best people. My Brother took the liberty of writing to the girl's father a full account of Mr. Hewitt, and we hope the girl will be saved (116-7).

That this sort of deception may have been widespread is supported by Mary Chestnut's entry from Richmond, Virginia in August of 1861. Chestnut observes, "A fiasco – A.D.C. [aide-de-camp] engaged to two young ladies in the same house. They were quarreling. They made friends unexpectedly, and his treachery was revealed among many other secrets under that august roof;

fancy the row when it all came out” (160). Codes of honor among men in the South sought to protect young women from unscrupulous advances from those not conforming to ethical standards. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown notes, the function of “gossip” or particularly what he terms “[t]he exchange of speculations and opinions among the whites” had the pointed purpose “to guide all members of the community toward a common set of standards for sexual and marital behavior.”²⁸ In speaking of pre-war “strategies of courtship and marriage,” he asserts that “local gossip was highly influential. Marriage of young people was public and family business not just that of the couple involved” (212). As layers of male protection provided in pre-war southern society subsided, women were left more vulnerable to victimization.

A plausible basis for this cautionary behavior may be seen in *Bliss of Marriage: or, How to Get a Rich Wife*, a small conduct book published in New Orleans in 1858. Following advice on courting manners, dress and grooming, the author lists eligible belles of elite planter families and includes a listing of their net worth.²⁹ During the pre-war period and certainly during the war, unscrupulous men sought easy ways in obtain entry into a family of wealth and privilege to achieve monetary gain through the marriage. Stone’s entry of June 6th, 1862 on the deceitful suitor not only supports Wyatt-Brown’s acknowledgement of community concern for the virtues of young women but also reveals the large distances that connected communities for a common goal of idealized conduct. Wyatt-Brown maintains, the pre-war “[f]ear of the male fortune hunter and insistent family inquiry into the backgrounds of a daughter’s suitors not only pervaded

²⁸ See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South*. Rev. Ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. P. 466-7.

²⁹ See Samuel Stone Hall, *Bliss of Marriage; or, How to Get a Rich Wife*. New Orleans: J. B. Steel, 1858. In this conduct/advice manual, Hall writes “Wealth in possession, ceases to be an object after which to grasp, and if a young man possesses all other worthy qualities, he can easier marry a rich girl than one whose necessity impels her to seek a better future” (105). He concludes his book with this adage: “Marriage is the great pivot upon which the destinies of every young man must turn, and decide if he shall rise to the topmost wave of human happiness, to be engulfed [sic] in the bottomless depths of domestic misery” (179).

matrimonial negotiations but also had an effect upon the girls themselves” (209). Thus, the pre-war courting strategies that acknowledged “[t]he risks of being swept away by some youth of doubtful nature [and] forced maidens to be tough, practical, and cool” was heightened during wartime due to the erosion of the protective presence of male family members in this case.

Just as Sarah Morgan used her diary to express her ambivalence about marriage, several entries in Stone’s journal reveal her equally indecisive attitude toward marriage and her scorned reaction to the changing role that it evoked. As Anderson notes in his introduction to Stone’s diary, she “had spoken of marriage with distaste, remarking that women grew significantly uglier in wedlock, observing ‘How marrying does change a body for the worse’” (xxxix). Her diary entry of May 5th, 1863, goes further, “We went to see Florence Pugh [?] (now Mrs. Morrison), an old schoolmate. The family are near here now on their way to Texas. She is a dear, sweet girl but looks dreadful. How marrying does change a body for the worse. She was a pretty girl a year ago, fresh and dainty. Now she is married and almost ugly” (206). Another entry in Stone’s diary on December 22nd, 1861, relates that her Uncle Johnny has married a much younger woman. Stone describes the bride as “quite a young girl, not more than seventeen, while Uncle Johnny is thirty-five” (74). She comments, “I only hope that he will not try to educate her according to his theories but will let her go on as Nature and her own antecedents and education would have her. But for years he has had the idea of marrying a very young girl and moulding and educating her according to his pet theories” (74). In the same entry she writes: “My mind misgives me that such is still his plan” (74). Stone’s own misgivings give voice to Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s claim, “The younger the girl was, the more likely her malleability and the weaker her self-assertiveness was presumed to be” (201). While Stone confides her suspicions of over-determined patriarchy to the very private pages of her diary, she does mention that her

grandfather “is not pleased with the marriage, though he does not say much against it” (74). Stone’s comment, however, brings to mind Jane Turner Censer’s suggestion, “In the years leading up to the Civil War, southern women had begun to mount a critique of male power in marriage, a critique that would in time be directed at marriage itself” (31). One of Stone’s last diary entries in September, 1868, comments on a friend who “gave up the fight at last” by marrying a man who “has been devoting himself to her for eight long years” (376). Even Stone believes that this courtship was long enough.

Smith-Rosenberg’s claim that, “relations between young women and men frequently lacked the spontaneity and emotional intimacy that characterized the young girl’s ties to each other” is validated in Stone’s journal (21). While refugeeing in Tyler, Texas where her family moved during the time of Grant’s maneuvers around Vicksburg, Stone met Lt. Henry Bry Holmes, the man she would marry. She records in her diary in May, 1865 that she has “not an idea of marrying him or anyone else” (338). In comparison to her comments about her female friends, Stone is largely silent in her emotional response to Holmes. Several entries after their initial meeting, she records conversations about marriage that she and Lt. Holmes have during their preliminary courtship, expressing that they both share very different views on matrimony (344). Yet, despite the appearance of other suitors and her mother’s opposition, she eventually married Holmes in 1869, living with him on the plantation they established in Tallulah until her death in 1907.

As Smith-Rosenberg observes, women’s diaries reveal the wedding day as a space of conflicting emotions for the bride as the wedding was a celebratory yet a sad event. Marriage meant not only leaving the security of close family ties but moved the young woman into the unfamiliar role of wife. Maryland bride, Priscilla “Mittie” Munnikhuysen Bond’s diary is “filled

with conflicts and tensions as well as personal insight into human struggles and sacrifice during wartime” notes diary editor, Kimberly Harrison (44). The diary, originally written in two volumes spanning the years 1858 to the early months of 1865, was published in 2006. The first blank volume was a courting gift from her soon-to-be husband, Howard Bond. Her subsequent entries provide intimate details of her courtship, engagement, marriage and eventual move to Crescent Place, the Bond plantation in Houma. This diary, according to Harrison, is valuable because Bond died shortly after the war and could not edit her writing as did other Confederate diarists which “lends validity and immediacy to her account” (41).

During her courtship, Priscilla Bond’s daily activities centered primarily on her family, friends and her church. The volume begins as a courtship diary, a space where she records details of her developing relationship with Howard Bond; however, unlike true courtship diaries that end with marriage, Bond’s diary continues well into her marriage. As entries in the diary testify, the couple’s developing affection for each other was bolstered by an exchange of love letters along with Howard’s frequent visits to the Munnikhuisen home in Hartford County, Maryland. The entries in the diary support Steven M. Stowe’s assessment that “the ritual of courtship in the planter class became flooded with a vocabulary of personal wish, romantic choice, profound contrast between the sexes, emotional crisis, and transcendent pleasure which reveals what women and men hoped to experience in relation to each other.”³⁰ In her entry of Sunday, January 8th, 1860, Bond writes, “It is a nice long letter, breathing devoted love till death. Says he can never love any one as he does me. O if it my lot to be his wife, I may be all that a true wife should be. Guide me my Heavenly Father in the path that is right for me to go in” (138). The letter from Howard Bond signals a change in the courtship as this is Bond’s first mention of

³⁰ See Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.

marriage, supporting Stowe's contention that "words of love were at once highly conventional and yet thick with personal meanings" (89).

The changing nature of their courtship is revealed in her entry on October 2nd, 1858, where Bond questions her feelings for her suitor when she writes, "I got a letter from Howard yesterday; he is well, poor fellow, and has not got my last letter yet. When he does how sad it will make him. Why can't I love him? I know he loves me devotedly; and yet he does not seem to be my ideal. Perhaps I may never see the ideal I have pictured to my imagination" (81). Like Morgan, Bond admits to an internalized and idealized portrait of her would-be husband as her "beau ideal" yet unlike Morgan, she offers no concrete description of the physical features of this anticipated partner. However, by May, 1859, after a brief illness, Bond admits that she is seeking spiritual guidance about the relationship as the courtship transforms into something deeper:

I got a letter from H. He wrote 10 pages nearly, but somewhat different style from what he generally does. I felt very sad and grieved. But I remembered I had asked to be directed from on high, and I believe I have always acted conscientiously. I have tried to act honorably. . . .Oh! help me act towards him as thou wouldst have me, O Holy Spirit . . . (100)

Rather than creating an authoritative authorial voice, Bond's use of the diary represents one of the earliest forms of life writing, the spiritual *Bildungsroman* where the writer charts the self's acceptance of life's challenges.³¹ Her writing not only reflects her deeply religious convictions but also serves to record the turmoil of her feelings as her relationship with Howard turns toward marriage.

During her courtship, Bond's diary additionally serves as a register of other marriages in her community as she provides numerous details of typical nineteenth-century weddings. On

³¹ See Carol Edkins, "Quest for Community: Spiritual Autobiographies of Eighteenth-Century Quaker and Puritan Women in America." *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Estelle C. Jelinek. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980. Bond's diary is not a spiritual autobiography in the sense that Edkins refers to the conversion narratives of Puritan and Quaker women but it does serve as an outlet for Bond to record her spiritual turmoil over her impending marriage and chronicles her trust in God.

Thursday, December 1st, 1859 she writes that she went to “see the marriage at Churchville. Mr. Finney married them. Many were there. It was quite a novelty to see a marriage take place at four o’clock in a *country church*” (131). Her choice of the verb “to see” supports the visual component of wedding ritual as a sensory space. From her entry, we may determine that not only were “many” people present at the wedding but also that the timing of the event was unusual. By italicizing the location of the wedding, Bond seems to be inferring that this was not a typical venue for an afternoon wedding. Most nineteenth-century American weddings took place in the bride’s home around ten o’clock in the morning which was borrowed from the Anglican traditional of marrying in the early canonical hours. For example, Bond writes in her entry on Tuesday, January 17th, 1860:

I rose very early this morning to attend Victoria Billingslea’s wedding. I went with Lizzie Watters. She married a gentleman from the E[astern] S[hore] of Maryland. She was dressed in white satten, low neck & short sleeves, long veil hung to her feet. Orange blossoms in her hair. I never saw a prettier bride. (140)

Evidence that the American tradition of the “white wedding” was firmly entrenched in rural Maryland by the early 1860’s is apparent in Bond’s description of the white bridal gown with the floor-length veil and orange blossom headdress. She describes the two bridesmaid’s dresses as “corn colored” which echoes the fictional gown in Metta Fuller Victoria Victor’s Beadle Dime Novel, *Maum Guinea*.³² This connection suggests that just as seasonal colors for attendant’s attire and wedding accents currently change every year, specific color palette may also have been fashionable in the antebellum period. Bond ultimately concludes that the Billingslea wedding “was a very pleasant affair” (140).

³²*Maum Guinea* contains several references to a “corn colored tissue, with crimson trimmings, which was now in its second season and which she [Rose] had always admired exceedingly” (30). The timing of this reference suggests that this was a popular color for dress fabric in 1859 – 1860.

Her next mention of marriage is to her own. On Christmas Day, December 25th, 1860, she writes that on a recent trip to Baltimore, Howard received a letter from his mother “saying, she & his father wished him to marry me while here, and bring me on [to Louisiana] with him” (184). By this time, as Harrison observes, Priscilla Bond appears to be reconciled to marriage not only into an extended family network but also into a wealthy one (5).³³ She writes, “I have promised if the Lord sees best, I will be his wife – so I expect to be married in a few weeks” (*Ibid*). Her entry of Monday, December 31st, 1860 mentions the selection of a date, January 15th, 1861 for the ceremony and their choice of waiters- a nineteenth-century term for wedding attendants. In the same entry, she comments that “Sister Fannie went down to get my *wedding fixens*” although she does not elaborate on what these items might be. Later, it is clear that she is referring to new dresses and accessories although these are never specifically named. On Monday, January 7th, 1861, Bond notes that she is busy handwriting invitations to the wedding. The juxtaposed feelings of excitement and sadness are apparent in her entry of Tuesday, January 8th, 1861 when she observes, “One week from today I expect to be a bride. O, who knows the emotions of my heart” (187). Later in this entry, she relates her family singing a popular bridal song to her and the sadness it evokes.³⁴ On Thursday, January 10th, she and Howard rehearse for the wedding, revealing the practice of wedding rehearsals in the nineteenth-century to reflect the couple’s interest in “performing” correctly. “After tea, we all adjourned to the parlor, and commenced

³³ Kimberly Harrison explores the Bond family genealogy in her introduction to the diary. Her research reveals Howard’s parents migrated from Maryland to Louisiana in the 1830’s. The family in Maryland was also connected on the maternal side. Harrison writes that Bond’s “grandmother on her father’s side, Mary Howard, and Bond’s mother were descendants of Peter Bond, who moved to Hartford County from Anne Arundel in 1660” (4).

³⁴ In her entry for Tuesday, January 8th, 1861, Bond writes: “We all were sitting up in ‘our rooms,’ that is sister Fannie, brother, Peggie, Ann Lee, Howard & myself. We were all seated in a group. Peggie & sister Fannie sang the ‘Bride.’ ‘O take her & be faithful still.’” This appears on the Madden Ballads Author Index as “The Bride” written by J. Hill. The first line is “Oh! take her and be faithful still.” See <http://microformguides.gale.com> for information on Sir Frederick Madden and his Broadside Ballad Collection of 18th and 19th century Broadside Ballads housed in the University Library of Cambridge University.

practicing how to get married.” Still, amid the teasing and the fun, she confides in Howard, “I told him it was the greatest trial of my life to leave home, and O, when I think about it my heart *grows sick*” (188). On Monday, January 14th, she comments that the snow reminds her “[t]he earth [is] clothing herself in her bridal attire, preparatory to mine” (190). After “practicing getting married” again, her sister brought the bride’s cake. Bond notes, “It had a beautiful bride on it, which I gave to ma” (191). Her description of the wedding follows:

Tuesday, Jan. 15th, 1861

This morning about 15 minutes to ten o’clock, I gave my heart & hand to Howard. Mr. Valiant performed the ceremony. Mr. Stump, & sister F[annie], Peggie & brother, waited together. There were between 60 & 70 persons there. I felt very much frightened, and nervous half hour before I went downstairs, but I knelt down before God, and beseeched His blessing on us. That He would give me grace to overcome all such feelings, and He did. I felt the weight of leaving home taken off my mind. (191)

The cluster of male and female family and friends that surround Bond at the time of her marriage suggest that in her situation, the network that binds her to community is not just a female network. Her brothers appear to take an active role in the wedding rehearsal and her sister either prepares or brings the wedding cake. There is little notation of parental involvement or pressures to marry in Bond’s writing. Her wedding reveals the presence of some elements of the traditional white wedding but does not mention that a white wedding gown or any other type of gown was important for the ceremony. In comparison to her precise description of Victoria Billingslea’s bridal gown, Bond is strangely silent on the subject of her own wedding dress.

As the decisive event in a typical courtship diary, we might expect the writing to end with Bond’s marriage but her diary does not end there. Only two weeks after her own wedding, she writes from her new home in Louisiana on Thursday, February 2nd, 1862, “Jokey Goode was married last night to Miss Fannie Holden. They will come home today; are going to live with old Mrs. Goode in Houma. There has been several weddings this week. Buck Wright & Sarah Fields

were married Monday evening” (212). Like many southern women diarists, Bond provides a community record of local weddings. On Saturday, February 4th, she writes, “Had a wedding here tonight; two of the servants got married, Howard performed the ceremony. . . They were married at the gallery. The moon shone beautifully. They afterwards adjourned to the ‘hospital,’ where they enjoyed a ‘Ball’” (213). Bond is describing a wedding of the enslaved. However, in subsequent pages of the diary, there are no further references to weddings, perhaps reflecting Bond’s status as a community outsider and the instability of her life in the difficult years of the war. Instead, following the courtship and marriage entries, the majority of Bond’s diary written in Louisiana describes her numerous bouts of illness and her wartime struggles for survival as a refugee in and around the Lafourche district. Her entries conclude with her husband’s return from the war at the end of May, 1865. The last entry of the diary, written in July, 1865 notes, “Howard reached here last night. I shed tears of joy just to think he is with me & will go to Md. with me” (339). Sadly, Bond died of tuberculosis on January 2, 1866, shortly after returning to her family in Maryland. The legacy of her diary is important as an example of women’s life writing, revealing an animated narrative that speaks to the place of diary as a private repository for self-examination and as a marker of spiritual growth.

Ellen McCollam of Ellendale Plantation in Terrebonne Parish kept a “plantation diary” from the years 1842 through 1846.³⁵ Her husband, Andrew McCollam, owned two sugar plantations, Ellendale and Argyle. The McCollam’s had six sons and one daughter. McCollam’s particular style of diary writing has been overlooked by women’s diary theorists as a hybrid form of women’s autobiography. The plantation diary combines several forms of writing for one functional purpose; to keep and organize important information under one cover due to

³⁵ *Andrew and Ellen McCollam Papers, 1839 – 1867*. Louisiana & Lower Mississippi Valley Collections H:1, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

numerous responsibilities and limited time for writing. McCollam's plantation diary performs the primary role of a family record of births, deaths, and marriages along with notations of family events and milestones. Additionally, it serves as a business document for the yearly bookkeeping account of cash flow and expenditures. As the diary reveals, McCollam was an excellent bookkeeper, recording in great detail her monthly disbursements for food, clothing and miscellaneous household items. The diary also connects McCollam to her community through notations of social events that she and her family attended along with a record of visitors to and from the McCollam plantations. Unlike the younger southern women diarists mentioned above, McCollam presents no emotional remarks or religious affirmations in her diary. Instead, her writing is exemplary of Bloom's description of the private diary with its strict adherence to chronological time, minimal authorial voice, lack of contextualization, lack of dimensionality and a structure that does not seek to "integrate any additional information for the ease of the reader" (*I Write* 26 -7). Despite the lack of emotional range or authorial persona expressed in her terse writing style, McCollam's entries do, however, contain numerous references to weddings in her Episcopal Church, in her local community and in nearby New Orleans. For example, she writes:

March 29th, 1842,
Miss Alice Foley was married to Mr. Thomas Crogin in the Church by the Rev.
Mr. Bowyer the same Priest that married us
March 31st
Miss Kate Streick was married to Mr. Wilson by Judge Duffel" (n.p.)

McCollam's diary continues with no deviation in this type of entry until April 18th, 1846 when she writes that "Mrs. K. sent me some of Elizabeth's wedding cake" (n.p.). Here McCollam refers to the nineteenth-century practice of packaging the bride's cake for guests to take home with them after the reception. In contrast to the expansive, almost "infinite" historical, social and

emotional range of the public diaries noted previously, McCollam's diary presents an extremely limited scope. Her use of language is minimal and underdeveloped which, according to Bloom's schemata, suggests the lack of a "self-controlled authorial persona" (27). My purpose in including Ellen McCollam in this discussion is the significance of her twenty-five, factual, non-embellished and non-emotional entries concerning community weddings in her diary. The frequency of these entries reveals that not only were weddings common communal knowledge among plantation women but that they also garnered significant attention as noteworthy social events, whether one attended the wedding or not. In McCollam's plantation diary, the plethora of weddings recorded in the diary speak to the public yet simultaneously private nature of wedding ritual in isolated plantation communities.

As all of these life writings reveal, weddings were important events for the entire plantation community. Very few southern women chose to remain unmarried. Only one of the diaries archived in Hill Memorial Library speaks to an alternative to marriage. Tara Laver's research on the private diary of Eliza Magruder provides insights on marriage from the point of view of an intentionally unmarried woman. Magruder chose "single blessedness," a term used, as Laver notes, to "value single life, both as a benefit to society and to the individual."³⁶ According to the biographical information provided by Laver, Eliza Lloyd Magruder was born in Montgomery County, Maryland on December 21, 1803. Following the death of her father in 1836 and still unmarried at the age of thirty-three, Magruder moved to Arundo, a cotton plantation owned by her aunt's family near Natchez. Laver surmises that by the time Magruder arrived at her new home, "she would have been a confirmed spinster" (n.p.). Largely through her family standing and connections, Magruder appears to have circumvented the title of "old maid." Arguing

³⁶ Unpublished paper of Tara Laver, "Plantation Spinster: The Antebellum Diary of Eliza Magruder." Given before the Historical Natchez Conference on October 10, 2009, in Natchez, Mississippi.

against the social death ascribed to unmarried women in the South, Laver upholds Magruder's "important and vital role both on the plantation and in the extended network of kin and friends of which she was a part" (n.p.). While her diary offers no reasons for her decision to remain in single blessedness, she does make occasional comments on the weddings of those around her. She writes in her diary on October 16th, 1850, well before the disruptions of wartime, "Miss Susannah Bisland is to be married this evening, a change for better or worse. Tis all a lottery at last." Echoing the binary pledge repeated in traditional marriage vows, Magruder casts the potential for marital happiness in either/or terms. Her comment disallows any emotional ambivalence. On August 21st, 1856, she notes "Miss Rugar married in Church at 11 o'clock today to Mr. R. Donoho. Poor thing, I hope she may not have cause to regret it." Laver credits Magruder's caustic views on marriage to her own family circumstances: "her mother died as a result of her birth and her step-mother bore twelve children in twenty-four years to a husband who struggled financially and left his family virtually homeless" (n.p.). Any positive potential for the marriages described in these entries is immediately negated by Magruder's skepticism on the future of these unions.

At the age of forty-six, Magruder received a marriage proposal from a wealthy planter. Despite her continued refusals for a period of almost one year, the planter persisted in his attentions. Her diary entries from January 7th 1850 through December 1st of the same year, give insights into the intensity of Oscar Kibbe's "ardor." In her first entry on the topic Magruder writes, "I dread tomorrow, I expect a gentleman here on very important business that is to have a very unnecessary talk." The following day, she writes, "Well, the talk [torn] I did not feel so mean as I thought I sho[uld] though I felt badly enough, but it seems he is not satisfied yet, he goes to New Orleans tomorrow and when he returns, it all has to be said over, I should think two

noes would be enough.” On January 22nd, Magruder acknowledges, “Mr. Kibbe was here today, I think it was perfect nonsense for him to have the talk that he did, I think he might have let me off with what had passed.” On the following day the terse entry reads: “burnt Mr ___’s letters to night, surely he will not write or come again” but on February 18th, she notes that “Mr. Kibbe returned with us after church.” Two entries in March mention additional visits from the undiscouraged suitor. The rest of the year, Magruder is silent on the topic until an entry on December 1st where she notes, “Mr. Kibbe returned with us [after church] renewed the old subject, I reckon for the last time.” Following Kibbe’s visit to Arundo for dinner on December 12th, Magruder writes, “I don’t know what to think of him. I really feel quite (blank in transcript). Didn’t expect him after what occurred last Sunday week.” In her lecture, Laver comments that Mr. Kibbe finally gave up his pursuit of Magruder and married another woman in 1853. Eliza Magruder lived out her life in “single blessedness,” directing her energies to her family.

As Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller writes: “The Cult of Single Blessedness upheld the single life as both a socially and personally valuable state. It offered a positive vision of a singlehood rooted in Protestant religion and the concepts of women’s particular nature and special sphere. It promoted singlehood as at least as holy, and perhaps more pure, a state than marriage.”³⁷ Magruder was not the only southern woman to consider the negative possibilities of marriage. In her entry on July 24th, 1862, Sarah Morgan writes:

Dena says marriage is awful, but to be an old maid more awful still. I wont agree. I mean to be an old maid myself, and show the world what such a life can be. It shocks me to hear a woman says she would hate to die unmarried. I have heard girls say they would rather be wretched, married, than happy as old maids. Is it not revolting? If I had my choice of wretchedness on either hand, I would take it alone, for then I only would be to blame, while married *he* would be the iron that would pierce my very soul. I can fancy no greater hell – if I may use the only

³⁷ See Lee Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780 – 1840*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984. P. 18.

word that can express it – than to be tied to a man you could not respect and love perfectly. (175)

Morgan's attitude toward a life of "single blessedness" echoes a common sentiment expressed by antebellum women who maintained that "it was better to remain single than to suffer the miseries of a bad marriage or to compromise one's integrity to gain a husband or a competency" (*Liberty* 17). As noted previously, Sarah Morgan eventually married after the war. However, Magruder, living with various family members, remained in single blessedness until her death in 1876. Thus, as Laver argues, Eliza Magruder's diary provides insights into a life of a woman who remained in single blessedness, a living example of what Anne Firor Scott terms "a chink in the hierarchical structure of authority"³⁸

Another form of women's life writing appears in epistolary collections. In this style of autobiographical life writing, personal letters form a bridge of emotions from one person to another. Letters are not as confessional as a diary or a journal, nor backward looking like a memoir but rather represent directly conveyed emotions sent from the heart by the hand of one to the hand and heart of another. Letter collections contain numerous references to weddings in communities of women. The most complete record of an antebellum plantation wedding is derived from the letters from Tryphena Blanche Holder Fox to her family in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Edited by Wilma King and published as *A Northern Woman in the Plantation South: Letters of Tryphena Blanche Holder Fox 1856 – 1876*, the letters of the young plantation tutor reveal a unique perspective on plantation life in Louisiana. This collection of letters supports Patricia Meyer Spacks' claim that "[w]omen letter writers develop[ed] strategies of deflection, preoccupation with others, protestations of insignificance, or identification with women as a collectivity, that enable them to engage in the self-assertion of epistolary

³⁸ Anne. F. Scott, "Women's Perspectives on the Patriarchy in the 1850's." *Journal of American History* 61 (1974): 52-64.

correspondence” (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 31). After a brief courtship, Tryphena Holder married Dr. David Raymond Fox, a young physician employed by Plaquemines Parish planters to treat the enslaved. As King notes in her introduction to the text, Holder “married up” from her working class background into the planter class (9). She uses her educational background to paint a verbal portrait of her wedding on June 3rd, 1856 at Baconham Plantation in Warren County, Mississippi. Her letter to her mother on Friday, June 6th, 1856 was written from the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans. She writes:

I was married Tuesday morning by the Rev. Mr. Fox – now father. Can you see the ceremony performed, in imagination if I give you a slight sketch of the scene. It was as bright and beautiful morning as ever shown upon a bridal pair; the sun had but just peeped above the horizon and threw now and then one of his brightest rays through the dense shade of the China upon the gallery, making golden streaks upon the silvery hair & white robe of the aged pastor, who stood there with numerous others to solemnize and witness the marriage. A door on his right opens and the groom and bridesmaid followed by the bridal pair walk out and form a semi-circle in front of the clergyman. He commences the solemn ritual of the Episcopal church for matrimony and all is so hushed one might hear a sigh. (25)

In this entry, after the salutation, Holder immediately switches from her apologetic tone in the first-person to the position of third-person omniscient narrator. It is as if she is describing the marriage of an abstract bride. There is no emotional description of her feelings, only a sense of detachment. The writer confides to her mother, her intended reader that “you know how the bride looks as she stands repeating the vow.” Her statement signals a familiarity between mother and daughter that in some ways objectifies the bride in her mother’s memory. It is a rather odd aside. The narrative continues in the omniscient narrator’s past tense until Holder begins to describe the groom. Moving into the present tense, she relates his physical characteristics to her mother:

Just six feet tall, straight and slim with a finely proportioned form, small feet & hands. He has a high white forehead, a thick suit of dark brown hair, very dark hazel eyes, regular features and a heavy goatee. His complexion is sunburnt from frequent exposure. His figure is commanding, yet not stiff and he has an air of refinement which is very prepossessing showing him to be much accustomed to good society. (25)

Following this physical description of her new husband, the newly married Mrs. Fox again describes herself in third person as “the bride.” She writes, “The ceremony over, the bride receives the congratulations of his friends, a warm kiss and welcome ‘Dear Daughter,’ from the old gentleman, and a series of new titles – as Dear Sister, Dear Niece & Dear Cousin from the others.” Her remarks indicate that she has been accepted into a new family and community circle. She relates that the feast of incorporation, in this instance a wedding breakfast, commenced with the “table spread,” ready for the numerous family members and guests present. She also relates how strange it seems for people to address her with her new name as she notes “every one seemed so surprised to find that I was such for we had kept it as secret as possible on purpose” (26). In her description of leaving for her new home, Holder writes, “I disliked having it known on board the boat that I was a bride, because I thought I should be an object of curiosity and perhaps, remarks, but I got along very well and was shown every attention” (27). Holder’s letters exemplify the reticence of self noted by female autobiographical theorists. Her description of the wedding centers more on an abstract depiction of the people who participated in the event than revealing her own emotions about her marriage. Her only move from the abstract third-person tense occurs when she describes her new husband, thus revealing Holder’s use of a highly self-controlled authorial persona.

In a letter written on July 14th, 1856 from her new plantation home in Plaquemines Parish, Holder confides to her mother that although she has married and will live far away from her family and family home, she feels that her mother should approve of her match. She writes:

I feel that had you been with me at the time he was in Warren, you would have advised me by all means to accept him and I used to say to myself, how foolish Mother would call me if I should refuse so good an offer for I shall not probably have another such. (34)

There is nothing in this letter to suggest that Tryphena Blanche Holder Fox married for a romanticized sentimental type of marital union. She did, however, marry for financial security and with a sense of duty. In the same letter, she defends her choice of a companionate marriage by stating that:

I did not give my consent to this without mediation and reason, and my marriage vows were not lightly pronounced with the mere moving of the lips. I never felt more solemn than as I stood and promised to love, obey, serve, honour; and keep in sickness, and in health, one who hath offered me heart and home, on a short acquaintance. (34)

Such sentiments on the part of the new bride suggest the feminine agenda of “The Cult of True Womanhood.”³⁹ Barbara Welter defines this emphasis on piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity as a nineteenth-century ideal of the woman as the “angel of the home.” Certainly Fox is operating under this exchange of systems where she provides comfort and domestic cheer in exchange for her husband’s support and protection. In the place of sentimental or romantic notions of passionate love is a sense of her wifely duty to create her home as a place of refuge for her husband.

What is also remarkable about Tryphena Blanche Holder Fox is the speed between courtship and marriage. The brevity of her courtship and swift marriage is tempered by her satisfaction with the security that the marriage offers her. Her unsentimental view of companionate marriage is marked by her assertion, “I am so glad that I am no longer dependent upon this one or that for

³⁹ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood.” *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151 - 174. Welter writes that “[t]he attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them, she was promised happiness and power” (152).

food & shelter” (9). Despite her isolation on a remote plantation, Holder becomes connected to the community of women living on neighboring plantations. In her letter to her mother from Hygiene Plantation dated November 18th, 1856, Fox mentions two weddings in her community. She and her husband attended the wedding dinner of an “old flame” of Dr. Fox where they were “at table about two hours” and “had music & dancing” (44).

Yet, despite their fears and anxieties concerning marriage, many elite young women made pre-war matches that connected them to wealthy planter families through local networks of wealth and relations. “No less than career and education,” Bertram Wyatt-Brown notes in *Southern Honor*, “marriage was a means of securing livelihood and social position” (199). Moreover, as William Kaufman Scarborough claims, there was a “tendency to marry within the elite group” which “is scarcely surprising in view of the limited opportunities afforded sons and daughters of the great planters to make social contacts with those outside their class.”⁴⁰

Plantation weddings were important community events that connected local families in a network of wealth and alliance. As Wyatt-Brown argues, “consequently, within every geographical sector of the plantation South the leading families were bound together inextricably by an intricate web of marriage alliances, which enhanced both wealth and social standing” (22).

The social importance of these marital unions necessitated formal celebrations. Thus, as Scarborough attests, the pre-war weddings of the sons and daughters of elite southern planters “were often spectacular affairs. Not only were members of the extended families in attendance, but most of the local social elite were invited as well” (106). In his memoir, William C. Clement provides a detailed description of the wedding of the daughter of John Andrews, owner of Belle Grove Plantation in Iberville Parish:

⁴⁰ See William Kauffman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2003.

Notes about the wedding of Emily Andrews, which took place before the Civil War: ‘Fifty house-guests stayed a week. . . Imbert, the famous New Orleans chef and caterer, came with his entire staff a week in advance to prepare his daubes glacées, his pyramids of nougat, his incomparable salads, and bouillons . . . the great Greek porticoes of Belle Grove were hung with a thousand lights. . . dancing cloths were laid over the lower floors and the cambers were all festooned with flowers. The feast was so bounteous that the very boatmen on the Mississippi who brought ‘the dear five hundred’ [wedding guests] up the river to Belle Grove landing came in for their share (quoted Sternberg 256 -7)

These examples echo Scarborough’s assertion, “[e]verybody who belonged to a social circle attended weddings, regardless of gender” (273).

From a masculine point of view, Louisiana sugar cane/cotton planter Bennet H. Barrow records references to community weddings in his planter’s diary.⁴¹ Barrow’s chronological entries in his planter’s diary are typical of other Louisiana planters in that the first notation concerns the vagaries of the natural world: weather and the river height. An entry of this type is typically followed by comments on the planter’s family’s health and well-being. An accounting of work performed by the enslaved typically follows the first notation. Often, the planter will note discipline problems with the enslaved which includes punishment or runaways. The final entries relate to important personal, social or political events in his personal life. Therefore, details about family and community weddings are typically noted in the final portion of the daily entries. Barrow’s writing, recorded here verbatim from his diary, contains male commentary that adds to our understanding of weddings as community events. In his entry of December 1st, 1837, Barrow notes that he “went to Woodvill to Miss Jane Liddells wedding. Married to Hamden Randolph” (103). This entry refrains from any commentary on Barrow’s perception of the character of the groom. However, on January 10, 1840, he notes that “Miss Louisa Sterling was married last night to Pierce Butler son of Judge Butler. Miss Sterling very pretty young Lady.

⁴¹ See Edwin Adams Davis, *Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836 – 1846 as Reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow*. New York: Columbia UP, 1943.

Butler the *last* in the Parish vain as a Peacock & as ugly as an *Owl*” (177). Here we see Barrow’s personal opinion of a young man in his community that is not meant for public viewing. In this sense, his planter’s diary is a masculine version of the private diary but much more critical and opinionated of the parties involved than Ellen McCollam’s mere record. For example, in his entry for September 29th, 1840, Barrow notes, “Returned Home this evening, went to Town to Bennet J. Barrows wedding. Married to Miss Carolina Hall a veryyy [sic] fine young Lady” (210). On July 17th, 1841 Barrow writes in his diary, “Returned from Woodville this morning, Carolina B. Joor was Married on 15th to James Flower jr” (236). We may assume from this entry that Barrow went to town specifically to attend the wedding.

Barrow makes an interesting entry on November 12th, 1841 when he notes that “Mrs. Eliza Bowman is about to Marry H. A. Lyons Jr. A low trifling sponge looked upon as a mean & a Dandy from the North, repeatedly saying he would never marry a woman that was not rich” (227). Despite Barrow’s disdain for the groom, the anticipated marriage obviously took place the following day for Barrow notes on the 13th, “Mrs. Eliza Bowman to H. A. Lyons – Was married in the city – and left for the North the same evening, having heard they were to be *serenaded* with Tin pans & other like instruments” (*Ibid*). This reference to the practice of charivari or “shivaree” as it was sometimes called, signals a raucous community serenade using pots, pans, pipes and drums to a newly married couple following their wedding ceremony or reception. Such action may signal either community approval or disapproval of the match. It also appears from his entry that the couple suspected a charivari and left before the participating members could assemble. Wyatt-Brown remarks, “[t]he significance of this kind of charivari, even in its most jocular vein, was its mixture of fun and hostility, an ambivalence about the

marital event itself” (*Southern Honor* 445).⁴² In this context, it seems likely that Barrow is not the only member of the St. Francisville community to look askance at Eliza Bowman’s choice of husband. On November 17th, Barrow records another marriage. “Went up Last night to see Francina Wade married to Robert Semple – a widower with two children, very fine man” (242). One of his entries records a wedding after it has occurred. On February 20th, he records, “Jno Joor married to Miss S. Johnson last Week” (281). Here the planter’s diary serves as a public record of community events. And in 1844, on April 13th he notes, “Robt. H. B. here, ‘tis said he is to marry Mary Barrow shortly – Most Beautiful woman but very Fickle minded” (323). Again, in this entry Barrow uses his diary as an outlet for feelings that he would not reveal in public. In his entry on the 24th, he writes “saw Robert H. Barrow married to Mary E. Barrow Last night sufficient number there to make it gay – all seemed dull & Quakerish” (326). From this entry, it appears that this wedding did not excite Bennet Barrow as he describes it as unexciting and lackluster.

Largely dependent upon the community of guests gathered to celebrate, weddings could be exciting events, or as in the case of Robert Barrow’s family wedding, not so exciting. In spite of Barrow’s critique of this boring family wedding, Wyatt-Brown claims that weddings were one time “when women could express themselves in public without restraint” (247). The connection between weddings and expressive social life is readily apparent in a letter from Francis Weeks who was attending a wedding in St. Francisville and writing to her mother back home on the family plantation in New Iberia. She writes, “for the last four nights I have set up until 2 o’clock in the morning & night before last there was a large dancing party at Mr. Hickey’s & I danced

⁴² Wyatt-Brown describes charivari as “a range of crowd activity, from wedding-day jest to public whippings and tar-and-feathering. It was a means of community policing stretching back to Neolithic Europe. Examples can be drawn from Portugal to the Balkans, the Levant to the Hebrides, from Plutarch’s *Moralia* in the first century A.D. and the Old Testament book of Leviticus to news reports from present-day Belfast and Londonderry” (440).

constantly from 8 in the evening until 4 the next morning . . . I can assure you my Dear Mother that it has been so gay since my arrival here that if it were not for yourself & the children I should feel reluctant to return soon to that dullest of all Dull places New Town.”⁴³ Thus, weddings were grand occasions, offering opportunities for extended socialization and gossip not only for males and females but also young and old members of the planter culture. Therefore, in a society controlled and perpetuated by male power, it is no surprise that elite plantation weddings were premier social events.

These notations on weddings from both men’s and women’s forms of life writing may be appropriated for cultural study. As Peggy Prenshaw notes in *Composing Selves: Southern Women and Autobiography*, “[t]here is also the long-standing practice of historians and readers of history of seeking out the testimony and documents of eyewitnesses to lived experiences” (3). An early approach to the diary suggests that it is “a document to be mined for information about the writer’s life and times or as a means of fleshing out historical accounts” (*Inscribing the Daily* 1). Yet reading diaries only for their historical content is problematic. As Smith and Watson caution in *Reading Autobiography*, this form of life writing “[a]lthough it can be read as a history of the writing/speaking subject . . . cannot be reduced to or understood only as historical record” (13). Therefore, to expand the issues of historicity, Bunkers and Huff suggest that women’s diaries must be read to explore “important links between dailiness and social and cultural spheres” (*Inscribing* 13). Smith and Watson support this claim when they argue that the historical facts found in life writings offers “not actual and/or factual history about a particular time, person, or event,” but rather “incorporate usable facts into subjective truth” (*Reading* 13). Any attempt to “reduce autobiographical narration to facticity” is to “strip” the text of “the

⁴³ F. M. Weeks to Mary C. Weeks, March 9 [no year], *David Weeks and Family Papers*. LLMVC: OS.W. Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University

densities of rhetorical, literary, ethical, political and cultural dimensions” (*Ibid*). Therefore, simply culling historical events out of the text overlooks the important cultural connections or social ramifications contained within women’s life writings. Prenshaw argues succinctly for the developing use of Confederate women’s life writings:

These autobiographical writings have long served historians as primary sources for analysis of the Civil War period, but there is now also a growing body of research by scholars of southern women’s history who read these texts as primary sites of women’s experience, revealing not only of the Civil War story but of women’s history broadly situated in American and in feminist studies. The anxiety, devastation, and loss brought on by the war are reflected in details of the 1861 – 65 period, but these writers also sought to portray and preserve the antebellum era for their children and posterity. (16)

The narrative patterns seen in writing about one’s weddings or that of a family member, close friend or noted belle point to the collective nature of southern female society disclosed in women’s life writing. In some sense, personal memories divulged in the life writings may serve to perpetuate nostalgic notions of the “glorious Old South” especially during the difficult days of Reconstruction. Here memories are essential in constructing woman’s role in the Myth of the Old South. A further use of memory in women’s autobiographical writings is the heightened realization that the writer is connected to a larger collective group. In many of the Confederate women’s diaries, the narrative portrays southern women uniting into social groups, allowing women to become strong and adaptive in the face of adversity as each woman forms a part of a larger resistance to social and historical change. Fox-Genovese notes that in their traumatic subjection to suffering and deprivation during the Civil War, southern women life writers, as an “identifiable group of women autobiographers” are witnesses “to the experience of their community” and have thereby claimed “their right to speak in its name” (“Between Individualism and Community” 28). In perpetuating a collective memory of their experiences in

writing, southern women created an “imagined community” based on memories of their shared historical past. This concept of the southern woman entangled within the bounds of her community is also supported by feminist critic, Susan Stanford Friedman, who subverts Georges Gusdorf’s argument that women’s autobiography is possible only when “the individual does not feel *herself* to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community . . . [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being” (73).⁴⁴ This sense of community and connection is evident throughout Confederate women’s autobiographical writing.

Such communal connections precipitated a crisis in gender for Southern women.⁴⁵ As Prenshaw notes, “The ‘paradox’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century white southern woman as a figure moving illogically toward both tradition and change is a subject that has been widely addressed in late twentieth-century scholarship and continues to garner lively scholarly research” (*Composing Selves* 9). Nowhere are the tensions and manifestations of this crisis more apparent than in the conflicting actions of the rapidly expanding categories of Southern feminine self-definition set against the backdrop of patriarchy and the war-time rush to marriage. This head-long rush to marriage was a result of the wartime destabilization of social norms revealed in the contrast between the rigid discernment of antebellum class lines and the subsequent

⁴⁴ See Susan Stanford Friedman, “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: *Theory and Practice*,” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1998. P.72 -95.

⁴⁵ George C. Rable in *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* argues, “[i]n the first year of the war, plantation mistresses remained dependent on their absent men for advice on everything from butchering hogs to disciplining slaves. So long as they deferred to male judgment, the traditional sexual division of labor remained safely intact” (113). However, as the war continued, women’s reliance on their men diminished and they began to take over the daily operations of their plantations. Leeann Whites, in *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender* argues that issues of southern white masculinity during the war not only called for a support system by elite white women but also strengthened “same-sex female kin networks” as it “empowered” domestic labor (12). The crux of White’s argument lies in her assertion that “[a]s Confederate women’s public status expanded, their newfound autonomy threatened to undermine the very basis for the social construction of white manhood that they were supposed to be propping up” (13).

softening of perceptions of social hierarchies during wartime among many southern upper-class whites. Additionally, the pre-war insistence on family connections along with economic and age distinctions between many young white southern women and their prospective grooms diminished. Parental approval of the match and family participation and presence at weddings, originally two key factors in privileged southern pre-war matrimonial unions, were significantly diminished or sometimes non-existent. In many instances, the lengthy period of pre-War courtship, often extending for a period of at least a year and a half, was compacted into a whirlwind of several weeks. Previously engaged couples enacted hasty wedding ceremonies either before the soldier/groom was called to the war zone or later in the war, home on furlough. In *The Women of the Confederacy*, Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton argue, “[p]aradoxical as it may seem, the very reasons why so many persons objected to marriages – that is, the uncertain character of the times, often had the opposite effect. The brief furloughs, the certainty of separation, and the possibility of death in battle appeared to quicken the romantic inclinations of many young persons and to result in weddings which in normal times would have been deferred” (203). Confederate women’s diaries, letters, journals and memoirs reveal cross-regional thematic similarities as they also delineate the varying social pressures, changing assumptions and shifting values relating to weddings and the cluster of events surrounding them that populate these works. Close readings of the autobiographical writings reveal that the ritual processes described within these personal pages highlight significant contrasts in the role of wedding ritual before the war and its instability during wartime.

Each of these factors represents an aspect of “rapidly shifting foundations of social power,” argues Drew Gilpin Faust in *Mothers of Invention. Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. Such shifts, she notes, “brings every dimension of these women’s self-

definition into question” (7). In resistance to the disappearance of “wealth, gentility and dependence” or what Faust enumerates as “the props of whiteness,” many of the slaveholding women, she maintains, developed new categories of self-worth and self-definition in emotional and social areas of their lives. Faust observes:

Because the lives of young women of the South’s gentry class had been so exclusively focused on courtship and wedlock, because their identities had been so tied up with their visions of themselves as wives and mothers, and because their emotional expectations had been so fixed on the intimacies of heterosexual love, war and its mounting death toll would prove devastating not just to their life plans but to their fundamental self-definition. The wartime death of nearly a quarter of southern men of military – approximately the same as marriageable – age necessarily transformed both the emotional lives and the behavior of single women as it altered their social choices. (141)

With many of the men away fighting for the Confederacy and in light of pressures on planters to produce wheat, corn and other foods, some southern women turned to crop management and supervised other aspects of plantation administration, including control of the enslaved. Other women left the family plantation to join relatives in urban areas where they participated in the war effort through other forms of domestic production.⁴⁶ Some worked in hospitals caring for the wounded.⁴⁷ However, not all soldiers were nursed back to health as lack of medicines, poor nutrition and disease swelled the number of battlefield casualties. Due to the high number of Confederate wartime deaths, pre-war expectations that elite southern women would marry and marry well were further complicated by changes in male population demographics.⁴⁸ One might

⁴⁶ For more on the tensions between the economy of scarcity induced by wartime shortages and women’s domestic production, see Chapter 4 “Benevolent Men and Destitute Women” in Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*.

⁴⁷ See Richard Barksdale Harwell, ed., *Kate: the Journal of a Confederate Nurse*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1987 and Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Woman’s Story*. Columbia: U South Carolina P, 2002.

⁴⁸ “Casualties in the Civil War” cites the following figures: Confederate deaths in battle 94,000; deaths by disease 164,000. The total combined figure is 258,000. For a list of additional figures and statistics, see <<http://www.civilwarhome.com/casualties.htm>>.

think that there would be less emphasis or pressure for women to marry during the war in the face of these statistics, but this was not the case.

As Simkins and Patton note in *The Women of the Confederacy*, “[p]ublic opinion professed to condemn marriages during the war, at least those with which the critics had no immediate concern.”⁴⁹ And while the authors provide sentiments to support their claim, they ultimately admit that “[s]uch positive statements must be accepted with certain reservations, however, for if we are to believe accounts of the surprised chroniclers of the times, marriages were even more frequent during the war than before” (203). As Judith McGuire observes in her diary entry of November 11th, 1863:

I believe that neither war, pestilence, nor famine could put an end to the marrying and giving in marriage which is constantly going on. Strange that these sons of Mars can so assiduously devote themselves to Cupid and Hymen; but every respite, every furlough, must be thus employed. I am glad that they can accomplish it; and if the ‘brave deserve the fair,’ I am sure that the deeds of daring of our Southern soldiers should have their reward. (243-4)⁵⁰

Despite the confusion of the early days of the war, one plantation wedding was as extravagant as the pre-war weddings. Scarborough observes that the wedding uniting two of the largest South Carolina planter families took place less than two months after the Confederate firing on Ft. Sumter. In what Scarborough terms, “one of the most magnificent planter weddings,” Louisa Blake married Blake Heyward in May, 1861 (*Masters* 107). Unfortunately for us, Scarborough does not include details of what this magnificence might entail. However, he does capture a

⁴⁹ In Chapter Four, “Amusements and Social Diversions,” Simkins and Patton include a “typical masculine judgment regarding the matter” from Ham Chamberlayne who claims, “I think it indiscreet for anyone to fall in love much less to marry in such times as these” (203). On the other hand, “the typical feminine opinion,” they claim was the following: “I do not expect to marry until the war is over, if then, for I think it is much better to remain single than to marry a man in the army who is exposed to danger” (*Ibid*).

⁵⁰ The first two editions of Judith McGuire’s *Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War* were originally published in 1867 and 1868 respectively, by E. J. Hale & Son in New York. The diary was reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press in 1995.

negative comment from Rebecca Cameron: “As one observer commented disapprovingly, weddings and engagements were flourishing in that city ‘as if nothing were the matter’” (*Ibid*). South Carolina was not the only state where the number of marriages swelled in wartime as Louisiana women diarists recorded the prevalence of wartime weddings in their writings.

Julia LeGrand, as noted in the preface to her journal, was not native to Louisiana although she moved to the state from Maryland as a young girl. She personally experienced the occupation of New Orleans by Union General Benjamin “the Beast” Butler and his more amiable successor, General Nathaniel P. Banks. Along with her observations of Union army activity in the city, she records her observations relating to the surfeit of courtships and weddings occurring in the community around her. She writes in her journal entry of March 21st, 1863:

The young people outside have been amusing themselves with love affairs. They tell on each other when they write, and in this way we become familiar with the whole programme. Mrs. B. says Mary Lu is engaged to Jimmy Perkins, a Virginia soldier and a great-grandson of Patrick Henry’s. Charley Chilton is engaged, Mary Lu says, to Miss Stokes, of Clinton. (I thought he loved Betty Smith when he left there.) Sarah Chilton has been reaping coquettish honors on a large scale. She went to Mollie Emanuel’s wedding, in Vicksburg, and attracted much attention . . . There were some very distinguished people at Miss E’s wedding, the letters say, and by these people Sarah is very much admired. (237-8)

The penchant for flirtations and coquetry formed a social diversion that distracted young women from the gravity of wartime. According to the biographical sketch that introduces her journal, LeGrand’s complete and comprehensive wartime record was intentionally written for a young niece but destroyed by the author as she fled from Union forces through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and finally, to Florida. The extant chapters covering the years 1862 through 1863, found “hidden among the leaves of an old novel she [LeGrand] had been reading aloud to her friends during the long and tedious evenings of their forced marches” was published by the

Everett Waddey Company in Richmond, Virginia, in 1911 (33). In spite of the missing pages, we may see that LeGrand utilizes her journal to observe and record a heightened incidence of wartime flirtations, courtships and marital unions in commentary originally intended for the eyes of family members only. Two additional Confederate women's diaries offer commentary on pervasive wartime coquetry. As Kate Cummings writes in *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse*:

June 8 – This morning I went to church with my Missouri friend, Colonel Williams's assistant, and quite an amusing incident happened. I had seen and spoken to him a number of times, but did not know his name. We see so many persons here that it is impossible to remember their names. I recollected, while walking, with this gentleman, that I was ignorant of his name, and asked him what it was. He laughed so heartily that he could scarcely tell me. Surely these are strange times. We never think of requiring an introduction to a soldier, as we have perfect confidence in them. To be in the army is a passport. The men are all gentlemen – at least I have found them so thus far. (46)

Reflecting a wartime shift in the need for proper introductions, Cummings records an interaction that implies that male codes of honor and respectability transcended prior class boundaries to apply to all southern males fighting for "The Cause." Sarah Morgan records a similar encounter in her diary when, on Thursday, October 16th, she writes: "[a] young man of about twenty four, had the cap of his knee shot off at Baton Rouge. Ever since, he has been lying on his couch, unable to stand; and the probability is that he will never stand again. . . . He seems so pleasant and resigned, that it is really edifying to be with him. He is very communicative too, and seems to enjoy company, no matter if he does say 'her'n' and 'his'n'" (306). Morgan's subtle recognition of class distinctions in language is not enough to prohibit her association with this pleasant, young wounded soldier.

The elevation of the Confederate soldier to a trusted position of social regard and prominence may have been a factor in the plethora of wartime courtships. Louisiana diarist, Kate

Stone provides yet another explanation for the prevalence of these actions. In her diary entry of May 21st, 1865, she offers this solution: “One must not distress a soldier by saying *No* when he is on furlough. They have enough to bear. They may be going back to sudden death. Then they will most probably forget you for a sweetheart at the next camp, or their love will grow cool by the time you meet again. So it is just a piece of amusement on both sides” (345). Later, in July of 1865, Stone writes:

Mollie and I were longing for a ride and a good long gossip together, and all our cavaliers have left us. Mollie told me all about ‘Adonis’ and confesses to a partial engagement, but she evidently does not expect to keep it. We decided that the girls would all have to change their war customs, stop flirting, and only engage themselves when they really meant something. The days of lightly-won and lightly-held hearts should be over (354).

At this point in time, closely following the defeat of the Confederacy, Stone appears to have rescinded her wartime flirtatious behavior.

Many diarists refer to the heightened incidence of wartime weddings. For example, the unknown diarist included in George Washington Cable’s *Strange True Stories of Louisiana* writes in her entry of February 24, 1861, “Wedding cards have been pouring in till the contagion has reached us; Edith will be married next Thursday. The wedding dress is being fashioned, and the bridesmaids and groomsmen have arrived.”⁵¹ Fitzgerald Ross, a Confederate soldier, writes in *Cities and Camps of the Confederate States*, “I was present at Mobile at two weddings; one was that of General Tom Taylor, and the other of my friend Colonel Von Scheliha with Miss Williams, upon which occasion I officiated as groomsman. On the day this ceremony took place, we heard that nine other couples had been wedded. The happy men were all officers in the army. They say that marriages were never more frequent in the South than now” (202). Phoebe Yates

⁵¹ “War Diary of a Union Woman in the South, 1860 – 1863” in George Washington Cable, *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1888. Rpt. Gretna, LA: Gretna, 1994.

Pember, the chief matron of the Chimborazo hospital in Richmond, Virginia writes to her friend, Lou Gilmer, on February 19th, 1864, “every girl in Richmond is engaged or about to be.”⁵² In her entry dated March 12, 1864, Mary Chesnut notes, “Went to sixteen weddings” (584). Even as the war came to an end, Judith McGuire, writing from what she termed “this beleaguered city” of Richmond in January, 1865, notes, “There seems to be a perfect mania on the subject of matrimony. Some of the churches may be seen open and lighted almost every night for bridals, and wherever I turn I hear of marriages in prospect” (329). These entries by Ross, Pember, Chesnut and McGuire are only a few examples of the many references to the weddings of immediate or more distant family members, close girlhood friends or sometimes, even mere social acquaintances contained within the pages of Confederate women’s diaries. Taken together, these writings depict myriad shifting social, economic, religious and cultural factors that distinguished the weddings of antebellum elite southern women during the war by portraying changes in the social structure of elite Southern society.

Several recurrent themes that speak to wartime changes in wedding behavior connect Southern women’s wartime experiences throughout the Confederacy. The first of these discloses a relaxing of stringent pre-war courting rules during wartime. Victoria E. Ott writes in *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War*, “For older single or widowed women, their sense of urgency, aggravated by a lack of suitors during the war led them often to choose a mate hastily and forego a long courtship process that encouraged the development of romantic affection” (106). Ott suggests that young Confederate women, such as Louisiana belle, Sarah Morgan, “due to the luxury of youth” were able to “postpone marriage until they found a suitor who met their ideal” (*Ibid*). However, as the diaries attest, many women rushed headlong

⁵² Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Woman’s Story*. Ed. Bell Irvin Wiley. 1959. Rpt. Saint Simons Island, Ga.: Mockingbird Books, 1990, P. 137.

into hasty marriages. In her diary entry of June 2, 1864, Mary Chesnut writes: Emma Bradley's quaint marriage. She is two years older than I am – not my idea of a bride – forty-two if she is a day. She was alone in that large old house. And married there all by herself Sebastian Sumter” (613).

At times, the hasty marriage was the result of the army's control over the bridegroom as many previously engaged couples were married while the groom was home on furlough. In her entry of September 12th, 1861, Judith McGuire writes, “The bridesmaids were *three*, and the groomsmen *one*, and he, poor fellow, had to go off in the storm of last night, because his furlough lasted but forty-eight hours, and his station is Culpepper Court-House. The groom had a furlough of but three days, to come from and return to Richmond” (54). Kate Stone reports a similar situation in her entry on February 22, 1862, “We had a surprising piece of family news this morning. Either Cousin Jenny or Cousin Tita was married a week ago today . . . Feb, 24, It was Cousin Tita who was married. Feb. 25th: Cousin Tita married Mr. Charles Frazer of Memphis. They have been engaged for some time but it was an unexpected marriage. He got a furlough, came to Vicksburg, and insisted on being married, and so they were and went on to camp together at Columbus, Miss” (94).

Other brides married men without a long engagement or a lengthy courtship. Kate Stone writes on June 19th, 1863, “We met Harry Morris yesterday. He says Mary Gustine is to be married in about two weeks to a Capt. Buckner, a widower with one child. It is a short engagement as they have not known each other more than six weeks” (222). And, on April 15th, 1864, she writes, “Capt. King has married recently a pretty little Creole refugee from New Orleans. It was a short acquaintance” (279). Fitzgerald Ross offers a distinctly masculine perspective on hasty marriages. He notes, “General Stuart was a great promoter of matches. He

used to tell his officers that now was their time; they could marry without any questions being asked as to how they could support their wives, who would naturally remain at their homes and be taken care of by their parents. If they waited until the war was over it would be different. It was, to be sure, shockingly improvident, but seeing difficulties far ahead was not a foible of Stuart's. I believe his advice was frequently acted upon" (202).⁵³

Many diaries reveal that Confederate women viewed weddings as a distraction from the death and destruction of war. On July 19th, 1863, McGuire writes, "Yesterday morning we had quite a pleasant diversion, in attending a marriage in the village. Mr. _____ performed the ceremony, and we afterwards breakfasted with the bridal party" (233). Later in her diary entry of February, 8th, 1865, she writes: "In the midst of our trials, *Hymen* still comes in to assert his claims, and to amuse and interest us. We have lately seen our beautiful young friend, M.G. led to his altar, and two of our young office associates are bidding us farewell for the same *sacrifice*. One of them, Miss T. W., has sat by my side for more than a year, with her bright face and sweet manners. She will be a real loss to me, but I cannot find it in my heart to regret that she will bless with her sweetness one of our brave Confederate officers" (333). McGuire's use of the term "diversion" echoes Mary Chesnut's description of a wedding in Columbia, South Carolina. In her entry on April 23rd, 1862, Chesnut writes, "I saw a wedding today from my window, which opens on Trinity Church. Nanna Shand married a Dr. Wilson. Then a beautiful bevy of girls rushed into my room. Such a flutter and a chatter—"Bride and bridesmaids"—they talked of nothing else. Well! Thank heaven for a wedding. It is a charming relief from the dismal litany of our daily song" (328-9). As weddings represent the potential for life renewing itself, Chesnut's use of the term "litany" is an interesting choice. As a repetitive prayer, a litany also denotes a

⁵³Fitzgerald Ross, *Cities and Camps of the Confederate States*. Ed. Richard Barksdale Harwell. Urbana, IL: U Illinois P, 1958.

responsive petition. Her words evoke an image of daily petitioning on the part of Confederate women interrupted only by a joyful event. Even two years later, the promise of a wedding still distracts her. In her entry for October 30th, 1864, she writes, “Some days must be dark and dreary. At the mantua makers, however, saw an instance of faith in our future – a bride’s paraphernalia” (656). In this instance, Chesnut’s despair is supplanted by the image of a bride and the idea that her wedding perpetuates the ideals and values of elite southern culture.

Being left at the altar was the worst fear of a wartime bride. In the summer of 1862, Chesnut retells this anecdote of a young woman, Decca, and her wedding in her entry of June 13th, 1862. After a period of engagement, Decca and Alex decided to marry. However, as Chesnut writes, “The day came. The wedding breakfast was ready. So was the bride, in all her bridal array. No Alex! No bridegroom – alas, such is the uncertainty of a soldier’s life” (383). Chesnut observes that the bride “said nothing, but she wept like a water nymph.” Finally, at dinner, the bridegroom arrived. It seems that “Circumstances over which he had not control had kept him away.” The couple decided to marry that evening. Chesnut notes the frantic search for a “prelate” and that “the bride, lovely in Swiss muslin, was married” (384). The next day, the young couple “took the train for Richmond and the small allowance of honeymoon permitted in wartime.” Recording the unanimous expression of the young women who watched this story unfolding, Chesnut writes: “Chorus: ‘To be ready to be married – and the man not to come. The most awful thing of *all* we can imagine’” (383). Although being left at the altar is still a pervasive fear for some contemporary brides, what is significant in these examples is the conflict between military duties and the groom’s timely presence at his own wedding. In a society where the women are anxiously waiting at home while the men are off to war, ritual time is in conflict with the demands of wartime. On November 14th, 1863, McGuire writes: My niece, L. B., of Lexington,

would have been married to-morrow night, but her betrothed, Captain S., has been ordered off to meet the enemy. The marriage is, of course, postponed. Poor fellow! I trust that he may come safely home” (244). In this situation, the bride is not left standing at the altar but the wedding is still interrupted by warfare.

Many diaries contain narratives that conflate love (Eros) and death (Thanatos) with the figure of the bride, transforming her from a figure of joy to one of tragedy. Simkins and Patton relate the following story: “The fact that the fatal news often came in startling and unexpected forms served to intensify the grief of many of those bereft by the war. One day at Richmond a young bride, seeing a body being carried into a near-by house, retired from the porch of her own home to inform her mother that a neighbor’s son had been killed. Upon hastening to the front door the mother found that a mistake had been made, that the pallbearers were retracing their steps and bringing the body into her house. Understanding what had happened, she caught the fainting daughter in her arms and laid her, now a widow, on the same spot where a few months before she had stood as a bride” (213). Here the figure of the bride, a symbol of love and life, becomes merged with Death.

Several versions of the sad account of Hetty Cary and General John Pegram may be found in diaries from wartime Richmond. Writing from the city on March 12th, 1865, Judith McGuire relates, “A deep gloom has just been thrown over the city by the untimely death of one of its own heroic sons. General John Pegram fell while nobly leading his brigade against the enemy in the neighborhood of Petersburg. But two weeks before he had been married in St. Paul’s Church, in the presence of a crowd of relatives and friends, to the celebrated Miss H.C., of Baltimore. All was bright and beautiful. Happiness beamed from every eye. Again has St. Paul’s, his own beloved church been opened to receive the soldier and his bride – the one coffined for a hero’s

grave, the other, pale and trembling, though still by his side, in widow's garb" (341). In her memoirs, *Recollections Gay and Grave*, Constance Cary Harrison, Hetty's cousin, tells her version of the event. In her description of her cousin's wedding, she relates:

On the evening of January 19 all our little world flocked to St. Paul's Church to see the nuptials of one called by many the most beautiful woman in the South, with a son of Richmond universally honored and beloved. Two days before, I being confined to my room with a cold, Hetty had come, bringing her bridal veil that I, with our mothers, might be the first to see it tried on her lovely crown of auburn hair. As she turned from the mirror to salute us with a charming blush and smile, the mirror fell and was broken into small fragments, an accident afterward spoken of by the superstitious as one of a strange series of ominous happenings. (201)

Harrison's retelling of her cousin's tragedy within her memoir is an example of what autobiographical theorists Smith and Watson identify as a "set of shifting self-referential practices" (*Reading 1*). As first-person narrator of the family tragedy, Harrison's retelling is colored by her own interpretation of superstitions surrounding the event.

Taken as a sign of bad luck, the broken mirror is the first ill omen that Constance Cary views as a warning of impending tragedy. The next omen concerns the bride and groom's perilous trip to the church. Harrison relates that the couple were delayed arriving to the church which was already filled with expectant family members and friends. "At the moment of setting out the President's horses [Jefferson Davis's] had reared violently, refusing to go forward, and could not be controlled, so that they had been forced to get out of the carriage and send for another vehicle, at that date almost impossible to secure in Richmond" (202). In the trebling of bad luck, the narrator reveals a torn veil as the third unlucky omen. "When the noble-looking young couple crossed the threshold of the church, my cousin dropped her lace handkerchief and, nobody perceiving it, stooped forward to pick it up, tearing the tulle veil over her face to almost its full length, then, regaining herself, walked with a slow and stately step toward the altar" (202).

However, Harrison's denouement of the torn veil is contrary to the superstition that a torn bridal veil is a sign of luck, especially if it is split during the wedding ceremony in front of the altar.⁵⁴ As Harrison narrates, all was happiness until "Three weeks later, to the day, General Pegram's coffin, crossed with a victor's palms beside his soldier's accoutrements, occupied the spot in the chancel where he had stood to be married. Beside it knelt his widow swathed in crepe" (203). Harrison describes her cousin as "a flower broken in the stalk" (205). The tri-partite role of superstition along with a fractured image of wedded bliss builds narrative tension in Harrison's authoritative retelling of this family tragedy. Mary Chesnut offers a similar account of a recently widowed bride:

At the church door the sexton demanded your credentials. No one but those whose names he held in his hand were allowed to enter. Not twenty people were present, a mere handful grouped around the altar in that large empty church. We were among the first. Then a faint flutter, and Mrs. Parkman (the bride's sister, swathed in weeds for her young husband, who had been killed within a year of her marriage) came rapidly up the aisle alone. She dropped upon her knees in the front pew. And there remained, motionless, during the whole ceremony – a mass of black crepe and a dead weight on my heart. She has had experience of war. A cannonade around Richmond interrupted *her* marriage service – sinister omen – and in a year her bridegroom was stiff and stark, dead upon the field of battle. (448)

In each of these texts, the diarist suggests that the bride received some sign or omen during the wedding that onlookers determined as a prophecy of doom or death. As Chesnut observes, the figure of the radiant bride juxtaposed to the dark figure in mourning was a tangible reminder of the costly emotional nature of war for women in southern society.

Moreover, the significant loss of southern men on the battlefield created anxieties over a woman's potential for marriage. Many of the diaries comment on a woman's choice between spinsterhood and marriage to a maimed man. In *Bonnet Brigades*, Mary Elizabeth Massey

⁵⁴ See George P. Monger, *Marriage Customs of the World: From Henna to Honeymoons*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2004. P.290.

asserts, “The question whether a girl should marry a handicapped soldier was long debated. Some did not let the loss of an arm or leg stand in their way, but many confessed that they kept their promise because they felt obligated to do so, and others who had sent a healthy fiancé to war refused to wed the returned amputee” (256). The unnamed northern bride of Cable’s wartime diary expresses her concerns in her entry on April 25th, 1861: “We had a serious talk on the chances of his coming home maimed. He handed me a rose and went off gaily, while a vision came before me of the crowd of cripples that will be hobbling around when the war is over” (270). The narrator of this diary exemplifies forethought when speaking with her soldier/groom.

On the other hand, several Confederate women’s diaries divulge wounded soldier’s concerns and apprehensions that their marriage possibilities will be compromised due to their injuries. Writing from Richmond in January, 1865, Judith McGuire discloses her pervasive patriotic view toward wounded soldiers: “A soldier in our hospital called to me as I passed his bed the other day. ‘I say, Mrs. _____, when do you think my wound will be well enough for me to go to the country?’ ‘Before very long, I hope.’ ‘But what does the doctor say, for I am mighty anxious to go?’ I looked at his disabled limb, and talked to him hopefully of his being able to enjoy the country air for a short time. ‘Well, try to get me up, for, you see, it ain’t the country air I am after, but I wants to get married and the lady don’t know that I am wounded, and maybe she think I don’t want to come.’ ‘Ah,’ said I, ‘but you must show her your scars and if she is a girl worth having she will love you the better for having bled for your country; and you must tell her that

It is always the heart that is bravest in war,
That is fondest and truest in love.’

He looked perfectly delighted with the idea, and as I passed him again he called out, ‘Lady, please stop a minute and tell me the verse over again, for, you see, when I do get there if she is

affronted, I wants to give her the prettiest excuse I can, and I think that verse is beautiful” (330). In McGuire’s retelling of her encounter with the maimed soldier, courage and bravery in war have the power to transform maimed limbs into emblems of courage.

An entry in the diary of Confederate nurse, Kate Cummings reveals further concerns by soldiers over their disfiguring wounds. She writes, “Just at peep of dawn the little gallery in front of our house was crowded with the wounded. The scene was worthy of a picture; many of them without a leg or an arm, and they were as cheerful and contented as if no harm had ever happened them. I constantly hear the unmarried ones wondering if the girls will marry them now” (181). Some wounds were more extensive and disfiguring than the mere loss of a limb. An entry in the pages of Phoebe Yates Pember’s journal, the matron of the Confederate Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond, offers a more graphic rendering of a wounded soldier’s apprehensions on his matrimonial possibilities by revealing the levels of his disfigurement:

Two balls had passed through his cheek and jaw within half an inch of each other, knocking out the teeth on both sides and cutting the tongue in half. The inflammation caused the swelling to be immense and the absence of all previous attendance, in consequence of the detention of the wounded until the road could be mended, had aggravated the symptoms. There was nothing fatal to be apprehended, but fatal wounds are not always the most trying. The sight of this was the most sickening my long experience had ever seen. The swollen lips turned out, and the mouth filled with blood, matter, fragments of teeth from amidst all of which the maggots in countless numbers swarmed and writhed, while the smell generated by this putridity was unbearable. Castile soap and soft sponges soon cleansed the offensive cavity, and he was able in an hour to swallow some nourishment he drew through a quill. The following morning I found him reading the newspapers and entertaining every one about him by his abortive attempts to make himself understood, and in a week he actually succeeded in doing so. The first request distinctly enunciated was that he wanted a looking glass to see if his sweetheart would be willing to kiss him when she saw him. We all assured him that she would not be worthy of the name if she would not be delighted to do so. (49)

Confederate President Jefferson Davis was passionate on the point of marriage to a maimed soldier as woman's sacred duty to Confederate patriotism. Mary Massey in *Bonnet Brigades* quotes Davis as telling a group of North Carolinians, "Take the one-armed soldier who has proved his fidelity and manhood; when choosing between the empty sleeve and the man who has stayed home and grown rich, always take the empty sleeve" (257). Massey also quotes a North Carolina mother: "Girls have married men they would never have given a thought of had it not been thought a sacred duty" (257). An entry in Mary Chesnut's diary confirms this view of woman's responsibility in marriage: "After some whispering among us, she cried: 'Don't waste your delicacy. Sally H. is going to marry a man who has lost an arm – also a maimed soldier, you see – and she is proud of it. The cause glorifies such wounds'" (588).

As the above entries attest, the concern of marrying a maimed soldier is a consistent trope in the Confederate women's life writings which include both male and female perspectives. In her diary entry of December 25th 1862, Sarah Lois Wadley writes, "Mrs. Wheatly was married Tuesday night to Mr. Mays, the soldier whom she has nursed so long. There was no one invited – the bridegroom was too lame to stand and did not wish to have any company."⁵⁵ Judith McGuire writes on November 11, 1863, "Just received a visit from my nephew, W. N., who is on his way to Fauquier to be married. I had not seen him since he lost his leg. He is still on crutches and it made my heart bleed to see him walk with such difficulty" (243). Mary Chesnut's account of a discussion between two women on the possibility of marrying a maimed soldier suggests the controversial nature of such actions among women of the planter class:

Another arch comment? 'Sally H. 'Will she marry that man? He has no manners, no fortune. He is only a lucky soldier!' 'they say he has no education, even.' 'that is a drop too much', screamed Isabella. 'he is a

⁵⁵ Sarah Lois Wadley, *Diary, August 8, 1859 – May 15, 1865*. < <http://docsouth.unc.edu/mls/wadley/html>. >

graduate of West Point. As for his luck – he has lost a leg and has a disabled wrist.’ (631)

The wounded man in this discussion is none other than Confederate General John Bell Hood whose left arm was permanently crippled at Gettysburg and whose right leg was amputated following the Battle of Chickamauga. A man, who in the fire of battle was scarred for his bravery, often appeared as a hero to the women at home. Indeed, to marry such a hero was truly thought to be an acceptance of a southern woman’s sacred duty.

Undoubtedly, as Confederate women’s diaries and journals indicate, one of the most important events in the social life of the Confederacy was the war-time wedding. Obtaining the necessary items for a wedding, however, was complicated by the Union blockade of Confederate ports especially in the latter years of the war.⁵⁶ As a result, an “economy of scarcity”⁵⁷ required southern women to use their ingenuity and resourcefulness to find substitutes for these shortages. Southern women sought ways to obtain “makeshift” alternatives for a number of goods that were

⁵⁶ As Hamilton Cochran in *Blockade Runners of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs- Merrill Co, Inc., 1958) notes, President Abraham Lincoln ordered a blockade of six southern states on April 19, 1861, just five days after the evacuation of Ft. Sumter. The states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi and Texas had, at that time, already seceded. Several days later, the blockade was extended to include North Carolina and Virginia, thus extending the Union blockade of Confederate ports from Cape Henry to the Texas/Mexico border. Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles concentrated on ten Confederate ports to be shut down at once. These were: Norfolk, Beaufort, New Bern, Wilmington, Charleston, Savannah, Pensacola, Mobile, New Orleans and Galveston. Cochran notes that this included 4,000 miles of coast line. Originally, the Confederates felt that the Union blockade was “an empty threat” as between July 1, 1861 and March 30, 1863, “130 steamers cleared Charleston carrying a total of 32,050 bales [of cotton] valued at \$3,054,476” (164). Along with the participating British merchant ships, the Confederate blockade runners employed “small, fast, light-draught” ships to travel between Bermuda and Nassau. Cochran maintains that due to the lack of rules and regulations for blockade running, food supplies and munitions needed for the [Confederate] army were “allowed to spoil on the wharves of the islands because blockade running captains favored less bulky items and more profitable cargoes such as medicines, drugs, liquors and silks” (49). Mary Elizabeth Massey relates the anecdote of one blockade runner who purchased one thousand pairs of stays in Glasgow and, upon his return to Wilmington, sold them for a profit of 110%” (*Ersatz* 95). In *Recollections Gay and Grave*, Constance Cary Harrison recalls, “A blockade-runner coming into a Southern port, brought, instead of arms and drugs, an entire cargo of corsets sold out at great profit by the venture who had stocked her. For women must lace, while men will fight, might have been a motto of the hour” (36).

⁵⁷ The first usage of this term occurs in Simkins and Patton who devote a chapter to substitutions for medicines, household items, food and clothing that were scarce due to the blockade. See *The Women of the Confederacy* Chapter XI: The Economy of Scarcity (138 – 159).

unavailable. As Simkins and Patton assert, “[t]he women of the Confederacy undertook with energetic courage the difficult task of manufacturing substitutes for those commodities of which they were deprived by the blockade” (*Women* 138). Thus, the task of obtaining food to serve for wedding receptions was problematic, but the most significant of these challenges was procuring the material for wedding gowns. As Cable’s young bride in *Strange True Stories of Louisiana* writes in her diary entry of Friday, Jan. 24th, 1862, from New Orleans:

It was a sad time to wed, when one knew not how long the expected conscription would spare the bridegroom. The women folk knew how to sympathize with a girl expected to prepare for her wedding in three days, in a blockaded city, and about to go far from any base of supplies. They all rallied round me with token of love and consideration, and sewed, shopped, mended, and packed, as if sewing soldier clothes. They decked the whole house and the church with flowers. Music breathed, wine sparkled, friends came and went. (279)⁵⁸

Although very early in the war, this young bride was rescued by an “army” of helpful women who supplied the necessary clothing, food and accessories for her wedding. According to this bride, the negative effects of the Union blockade of the Mississippi River were immediate.

Despite the over three hundred vessels that ran the blockade into the generalized area surrounding New Orleans in the ten month period between 1861 and 1862,⁵⁹ goods and prices rose steadily throughout the Confederacy, making luxury articles needed for wedding meals and wedding dresses very difficult to obtain.

Several of the diaries provide substantial details to contrast pre-war and wartime wedding meals. The wedding breakfasts or suppers recorded in pre-war sources are depicted as sumptuous

⁵⁸ John D. Winters in *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1963) ascertains that on May 26th, 1861, responding to Lincoln’s blockade order, Commander Charles H. Poor arrived at Pass à l’Outre to begin the blockade of the Mississippi River. By the summer of 1861, food was beginning to be scarce in New Orleans. See also *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861 – 1862*. (Ed. Elliott Ashkenazi. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1995) for more details on scarcity within the city.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, P.53.

events. Pre-War accounts of tables “groaning” with a variety of southern specialties ranging from descriptions of meats and fish, game birds and venison to cakes, pies and imported nougats yield images of richly abundant receptions that followed plantation weddings.⁶⁰ During the war, however, southern women had to gather and assemble resources to obtain food for wedding meals. Judith McGuire, writing in her diary about her daughter’s recent wedding, describes the reception following the ceremony in her entry on September 12th, 1861. McGuire writes, “A beautiful entertainment was prepared for them. We all exercised our taste in arranging the table, which, with its ices, jellies, and the usual etceteras of an elegant bridal supper, made us forget that we were in a blockaded country. A pyramid of the most luscious grapes, from Bishop Meade’s garden, graced the centre of the table” (55). Donating grapes from his garden to create a natural centerpiece, the area minister even contributed homegrown foods for the wedding meal. However, the contrast between the early days of the war and escalating scarcity in subsequent years is seen in the following entry which reveals that the wedding supper in Richmond has now declined into just a beverage and cake celebration. On March 19th, 1863, McGuire records in her diary, “Mrs. H., who has lately been celebrating the marriage of her only son and took us into the next room for a lunch of wine and fruit-cake. We had never, during two years, thought of fruit-cake, and found it delightful.”⁶¹ The fruit consisted of dried currants and cherries from her

⁶⁰ In her memoir, *A Girl’s Life in Virginia Before the War* (1895, Rpt. Dodo Press, 2009) Letitia M. Burwell writes: “And, apropos of weddings, an old-fashioned Virginia wedding was an event to be remembered. The preparations usually commenced some time before, with saving eggs, butter, chickens, etc.; after which ensued the liveliest egg-beating, butter-creaming, raisin-stoning, sugar-pounding, cake-icing, salad-chopping, cocoanut-grating, lemon-squeezing, egg-frothing, wafer-making, pastry-baking, jelly-straining, paper-cutting, silver-cleaning, floor-rubbing, dress-making, hair-curling, lace-washing, ruffle-crimping, tarlatan-smoothing, trunk-moving, guests-arriving, servants-running, girls-laughing!” (46).

⁶¹ As Simon Charsley notes in *Wedding Cakes in Cultural History*, from the fourteenth-century until the Victorian era, British wedding cakes were variations on fruitcake. He describes the “festive ingredients” for such cakes as “almonds, dried fruit, sugar and spices” (39). By the eighteenth-century, Charsley notes recipe books refer to “mixtures of the same kind” as having “acquired the generic title ‘plum(b) cake’” (55). Fruitcake in America was originally connected to a second cake at the wedding or what is now termed “groom’s cake.”

garden, at her elegant James River home, Brandon, now necessarily deserted” (200). McGuire does not reveal exactly how Mrs. H. amassed the fruit from her abandoned home orchard but her example of inventiveness in providing a repast for guests speaks to the material resourcefulness of using fruit as a substitute for sugar. As Mary Elizabeth Massey notes, the scarcity of sugar and flour was compensated for by various alternatives.⁶²

Clothing became extremely scarce and difficult to obtain as the war dragged on and the blockade tightened. As Simkins and Patton maintain, “[b]y the beginning of 1863 keeping clothed became one of the chief occupations of the people of Richmond” (186). Reflecting the dual nature of dress, for elite southern women, “[t]he scarcity of clothing was even more keenly felt than that of foodstuffs and household supplies, since the satisfying of this need involved not only the protection of the bodies of the women against exposure but also conformed to the elaborate feminine styles of the middle nineteenth century” (147). In their diaries and memoirs, Confederate women express dismay not only over the shortages of dress material generated by the war but also their lack of awareness of current fashions. In her journal entry on March 5th, 1863, Judith McGuire writes:

The blockade has taught our people their own resources; but I often think that when the great veil is removed, and reveals us to the world, we will be a precious set of antiques. The ladies occasionally contrive to get a fashion-plate ‘direct from France,’ by way of Nassau; yet when one of them, with a laudable zeal for enhancing her own charms by embellishments from abroad, sends gold to Nassau, which should be kept in our own country, and receives in return a trunk of foreign fabrics, she will appear on the street immediately afterwards in a costume which seems to us so new and fantastic, that we are forced to the opinion that we would appear to the world ludicrously *passé*. (197)

⁶² See Mary Elizabeth Massey. *Ersatz in the Confederacy: Shortages and Substitutes on the Southern Homefront*. Columbia: U South Carolina P, 1952. In her discussion of substitute desserts, Massey includes several references from the diaries of Confederate women to making fruit cake with an assortment of fruits. She notes, “fruit cakes contained all sorts of fruit. One recipe called for dried apples, peaches, figs, walnuts, and hickory nuts, and flavored with what few spices could be begged, borrowed, or stolen and with corn whiskey ‘made by the government.’ Another fruit cake contained ‘dried cherries, dried whortleberries, candied watermelon rind and molasses’” (67).

In her diary entry of December 24th, 1863, in describing new fashions for headwear, Mary Chesnut writes: “A lady came in from the wedding. She was excited at a new aspect of bonnets which had pervaded the company. Feathers, flowers, bows of ribbon mounted on top, like barbet guns” (513). While some dress material and fashion magazines did arrive via the blockade-runners, they were exorbitantly priced and highly treasured items. For most women, the silks, taffetas and brocades used before the war for wedding gowns were simply unobtainable or unaffordable. Even everyday fabrics such as muslin and calico were excessively expensive.⁶³

To complicate matters further, wire hoops made skirts fuller and wider. In the decade between 1850 and 1860, pre-war bridal styles incorporated increasing skirt sizes. Illustration 1.1. from the March, 1850 issue of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* displays two bridal ensembles. Catherine Zimmerman describes the first as a “rich robe of *soie d’antique*, a very heavy, old fashioned silk. . . ornamented with natural, full-blown white roses with their foliage, graduated in size from the hem to buds at the waist” while the second gown is “satin with five full flounces and a double bertha collar of a light French lace, styled *point d’applique*” (*The Bride’s Book* 93). In contrast, Illustration 1.2., from the December, 1862 issue of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, depicts the evolution of wider, fuller, multi-tiered skirts, almost full-length sheer lace wrappers, voluminous trimmed sleeves and a “double cupcake” veil. These images reveal additional layers or tiers of fabric and hint of copious tiers of petticoats or enlarged hoops to add extra fullness to the gown, further fabric required for wider Bertha collars or shawls, and additional yards of sheer fabric for veils.⁶⁴

Considering that a minimum of ten yards of fabric was required just for the full skirt of a

⁶³ Many southern women diarists record the escalating prices for dress fabric. As a standard rule, Hamilton Cochran claims in *Blockade Runners of the Confederacy* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1958. Rpt. U Alabama P, 2005), that muslin, the most common dress material, cost between \$6.00 and \$8.00 a yard while calico was anywhere between \$1.75 and \$4.00 a yard (186).

⁶⁴ See Catherine S. Zimmerman, *The Bride’s Book. A Pictorial History of American Bridal Gowns*. New York: Arbor House, 1985. P. 52.

wedding gown, most southern women found such substantial yardage almost impossible to obtain.



Illustration 1.1. *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1850



Illustration 1.2 *Godey's Lady's Book*, December 1862

Revealing innovative strategies used to surmount the scarcity of bridal fabric, stories taken from the pages of diaries and memoirs highlight the ingenuity and cleverness of southern women in devising ways to create suitable wedding dresses. Often, older dresses were remade into suitable garments. Many of the Confederate diaries mention remaking older dresses. Constance Cary Harrison, writing in the first year of the war recalls, “Wonderful were the toilettes concocted that festal winter. Maternal party dresses that had done duty at Newport, Saratoga, Sharon, the White Sulphur Springs, and in Washington and New Orleans ball-rooms, were already worn to rags. One of them would be made to supply the deficiencies of the other until both passed into thin air” (152). Kate Stone writes in her diary entry of May 5th, 1864, “Then we shall not see Julia married. She is very busy altering and making dresses, Mamma being chief councilor and cutter. Every day or so Julia comes with something to be cut or remodeled, and we have grand consultations on the fashions, which is an exemplification of the blind leading the blind as we are all in a state of dense ignorance” (282).

Just as Margaret Mitchell depicts Mammy and Scarlett making a dress from Miss Ellen’s moss-green Poitiers in *Gone with the Wind*, southern women used curtains, table linens and sheets for gown material. Attesting to the resourcefulness of Confederate women, Simkins and Patton maintain, “efforts were made to surround these war marriages with the glamour and ceremony which are characteristics of such events in normal times. Since no Confederate bride was willing to be without a trousseau, trunks were ransacked for wedding garments and other finery which mothers and aunts had stored away in the days of their youth. White slippers were mended and chalked, old muslins were renovated, linen table and bed coverings were made into soft fabrics” (204). In the section of her diary entitled “A World Kicked to Pieces”/1862 – 1863, Mary Chesnut recalls a group of women scrambling to make a bridesmaid’s dress for Julia

Rutledge: “We could not imagine what she would do for a dress. Kate remembers some [material?] she had in the house for curtains bought before the war and laid aside as not needed now. The stuff was white and sheer, if a little coarse, but then we covered it with no end of beautiful lace. It made a beautiful dress. And how altogether lovely she looked in it!” (456) Constance Cary Harrison echoes Chesnut when she writes, “The oft-told stories of damask curtains taken down to fabricate into court trains over petticoats of window curtain lace, and of mosquito nettings made up over pink or blue cambric slips, now took shape” (152).

Simkins and Patton refer to the memoir of Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle to claim: “The bridal costumes which resulted from such efforts were often described as triumphs. When Della Allston married Arnoldus Vander Horst at Charleston in June, 1863, she wore ‘a full plain dress of Brussels’ net, beautiful materials over a splendid white silk. With a beautiful real lace veil falling almost to the ground; a wreath of wild hyacinths and a bouquet of the same’” (204). As Massey maintains in *Ersatz in the Confederacy*, “Draperies and curtains were most frequently used. Damasks, nets, laces, velvets, and, in truth, any material suitable for draping windows were found equally well-suited for draping the feminine frame. Brides wore wedding dresses of curtain materials; and some of the loveliest frocks in the Confederacy were made of materials once used in curtains. So popular was this source of dress material that a verse of the day ran:

Let whisper: this dress I now wear for thee,
Was a curtain of old in Philadelphée. (90)

Women who were refugeeing from the plantation to the city did not have the same resources. However, several diaries recall how women shared wedding gowns among family members or friends. Mary Chesnut remarks that when Betty Bierne was married to William Porcher Miles, a few months later, she appeared “in the dress of a sister widowed by the war. . .

Then, while the wedding march turned our thoughts from her and thrilled us with sympathy, the bride advanced in white satin and point d'Alençon. Mrs. Meyers whispered as it was Mrs. Parkman's wedding dress. She remembered the exquisite lace, and she shuddered with superstitious foreboding" (648).

Two diary entries reveal that wedding guests along with wedding finery came through the Union/Confederate lines by a flag of truce. In her diary entry of January 14th, 1863, Julia LeGrand writes, "Just this moment got a letter from Mrs. Chilton; it came from Vicksburg where she has been to attend Miss Emanuel's wedding. She went by boat with a flag of truce" (78). In her entry on December 14, 1863, Mary Chesnut writes, "Mrs. Ould, who lunched with us at Mrs. Davis's, told of Mrs. Stanard's wedding finery, which has come by flag of truce – favor of Schenck and Beast Butler" (503). At other times, the women themselves smuggled material or goods in under their massive hoops skirts. In August, 1861, Mary Chesnut reveals, "All manner of things, they say, come over the border under their huge hoops now worn. So they are ruthlessly torn off. Not legs but arms are looked for under hoops" (172). Julia McGuire also reveals that some women solved the clothing shortage by carrying items on their person and in their trunks as they passed through the lines. In her description of the six hundred women and children allowed to accompany a prisoner exchange in Washington D. C. McGuire notes, "No material was allowed to come which was not made into garments. My friend brought me some pocket handkerchiefs and stocking scattered in various parts of the trunk, so as not to seem to have too many. She brought her son, who is in our service, a suit of clothes made into a cloak which she wore. Many a grey cloth travelling-dress and petticoat which was on that boat is now in camp, decking the personal of a Confederate soldier; having undergone a transformation into jackets and pants" (185).

The overwhelming desire for a white dress is most likely due to the influence of Queen Victoria. Most historians of wedding dress trends credit Queen Victoria with establishing the protocol of the white wedding dress. As Maria McBride-Mellinger observes, “No marriage has had as significant an influence on our modern marital rites as Victoria’s. Her wedding was a clear departure from earlier, more extravagant, royal unions” (24).⁶⁵ In her description of Queen Victoria’s dress, McBride-Mellinger notes that the fabric was a rich white satin trimmed with orange flower blossoms and over her face a veil of Honiton lace (*Ibid*). The satin was woven in Spitalfields and the lace in a Devon village. “Two hundred women were employed for eight months making the precious lace, and once finished, the designs, based on antique patterns, were destroyed to prevent reproduction. It is estimated that the lace alone cost £1,000 in 1840 (about \$100,000 today)” (24). Thus, according to McBride-Mellinger, “Victoria’s nuptials initiated a popular demand for distinctive, beautiful, white wedding gowns that to this day has never abated. The white gown symbolized all that a Victorian woman should be - modest, feminine, charming, respectable, acquiescent, and completely dependent on the male” (26). Victoria’s wedding dress clearly reflected her subscription to these values as a modest woman was always hidden under her clothes which camouflaged her physical form, covering as much skin as possible. Her face was covered by a bonnet or a hat, her hands covered by gloves, her legs covered by petticoats and hoops; all of which suggested Woman as a decorative object. As McBride-Mellinger claims, during the Victorian period, “some bridal gowns would layer at least four full skirts trimmed with flounces and ruches, incorporating at least 1100 yards of fabric for a single gown” (27).

Edwina Ehrman, a British fashion historian, observes, “The marriage of Queen Victoria (1819 -1901) to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (1819 – 61) on 10 February 1840 was a defining moment in the history of the white wedding dress in Britain. The young Queen wore a

⁶⁵ Maria McBride-Mellinger, *The Wedding Dress*. New York: Random House, 1993. P. 2.

creamy-white silk satin court dress embellished with lace, choosing Spitalfields silk from London and Honiton lace made in Devon to demonstrate her support for British manufactures. Instead of wearing the crimson velvet robe of state, she opted for a white satin court train bordered with sprays of orange-blossoms and in place of a circlet, she wore a deep wreath of artificial orange-blossom with a Honiton lace veil pinned to the back of her head.”⁶⁶



Illustration 1.3. The young Queen Victoria in her wedding gown

⁶⁶ Edwina Erhman, *The Wedding Dress: 300 Years of Bridal Fashions*. London: V&A Publishing, 2011.

Wearing a white satin wedding dress in place of her royal robes, Victoria, as a woman marrying for love connected with the minds and hearts of the English people. Erhman points to George Hayter's painting to support the visual impact that the wedding had for those in attendance as it "emphasizes the femininity of the bridal group and aptly conveys the visual and emotional impact of their massed white dresses" (58).



Illustration 1.4. George Hayter, *The Marriage of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert* 10 February 1840.

As Ehrman observes, upper-class brides and those of the British peasantry had been wearing white since the late 1700's as a sign of purity. From 1840 on, then, depictions of British brides on Valentine cards to sheet music "reinforced the notion that a wedding dress should be white

and worn with a veil and orange-blossom wreath” (59). In light of the American reliance on Continental fashion trends, it is not extraordinary that Mary Chesnut commented in her diary about the young Queen. In her entry of December 30, 1861, Chesnut records her response to the news of Prince Albert’s sudden death: “Queen Victoria, too, seems to have had a husband *good and true* . . . And maybe because I was married, too – in the spring of 1840, I have watched her with interest – her domestic life and all that looked on from afar” (272). Despite Victoria’s influence, Catherine A. Zimmerman, in *The Bride’s Book: A Pictorial History of American Bridal Gowns* argues that the tradition for wearing white for weddings in the United States is recorded as early as 1760.⁶⁷ She reveals that heavy silks were not in vogue, rather fabrics used for evening wear and weddings were muslin, mull, lawn, batiste, organdy, thin silks, gauzes, light voiles, linens and cashmeres (48). As fabrics were not available for the all-important wedding dress during the Civil War, stories of Southern women’s ingenuity and inventiveness in procuring a wedding dress appear frequently in a variety of printed material.

The story of Fanny Green’s search for a wedding gown originally appears in Eliza Ripley’s *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood*, published by D. Appleton in New York in 1912. In her nostalgia for plantation life, Ripley writes, “if we do not hasten to tell the story it may never be told. It is well to leave a record of a life that has passed beyond resurrection, a glorified record it may appear, for as we stand beside the bier of a loved and life-long friend, we recall only his virtues” (117). In Chapter XXXIII, “A Wedding in War Time” is set just as Admiral David Farragut and his Union gunboats are due to advance into New Orleans. With a flair for the dramatic, Ripley describes the “summons” she received in August, 1862:

“‘Marse Green says cum right away; he’s gwine to marry Miss Fanny to de Captain.’ ‘When?’

⁶⁷ In her study of American Bridal fashions, Zimmerman includes numerous references and illustrated plates of wedding gowns made from fabrics ranging from white and ivory satins to white silk or ivory taffeta. See Chapter 3: *Pride of the Colonies: The Graceful Age (1750 – 1800)*. P. 27 – 38.

‘Soon’s I kin git de preacher. I can’t wait for you; I ain’t got no preacher yit.’” Ripley relates that she left for the Green home to find everything in chaos as Colonel Green had mandated that his family must leave the city for their plantation close to Baton Rouge, far away from the encroaching invaders. As the Colonel sat in his law office contemplating the move, someone mentioned that Fanny’s suitor, a young wounded Captain, “must marry Fanny right away, or run the risk of being captured, for he had no place to go.” With the Colonel’s mandate, the direction of chaos changed to find a dress for Fanny as everyone concluded that “Dear Fanny must be married in white, so everyone declared. Then ensured a ransacking of trunks and drawers for a pretty white lawn she had - somewhere!” The minister sent for had fled but another was procured along with some refreshments, a ring and a crumpled white lawn dress. Then, as Ripley writes:

We guests who had been behind the scenes, and were getting to be mortally tired and fractious, too, assembled in the hastily-cleared parlor to witness the ceremony. I was struck with amazement to see my husband, who had been the busiest man there all day, march into the room with dear, pretty Fanny on his arm! I never did know where the necessary ring came from, but somebody procured a plain gold ring, which, no doubt, was afterwards returned with appropriate thanks. The Captain was a strikingly handsome man, even with a bandaged head and those ill-fitting clothes, not even store-made, and we all agreed Fanny looked very placid and happy. (166)

At the conclusion of this vignette, Ripley recalls seeing the couple again in post-War New Orleans and despite the “marriage in haste” they had remained a happily married pair. Interestingly, Fanny’s story appears in several modern texts.

In addition to Fanny Green’s search for a wedding gown, Linda Otto Lipsett records another young southern woman’s quest for a wedding gown. In *To Love & To Cherish: Brides Remembered*, Lipsett turns to the diary of South Carolinian, Louisa McCord for the story of her search for a wedding dress. Cloth was scarce in the South in the summer of 1865 when McCord

was to be married. But, as Lipsett notes, McCord had dreamed of her wedding and of being married in white ever since she could remember. She was determined not to be disappointed.

Louisa did have her wish, but not without great sacrifice. McCord's diary gives this account:

Nobody had a white dress. About this time a few shanties were put up in the burnt district by some enterprising Yankees who were keeping shop there. Mama, anxious to do this one thing so much desired, even went to the Yankees and found that one of them named Jackson, had a few yards of white organdie, but – he asked \$10.00 in greenbacks for it, and where could we get greenbacks! But Mama took the chairs out of her room and a piece of carpet (too stiff to cut into soldiers' blankets) also from her room and she sent them to auction. They were sold but not for \$10.00. And then, what did my mother do, my mother, with all her pride! She went and begged that Yankee to keep the muslin a few days, which he hemmed and hawed about doing, saying that his wife fancied it; and then she had the Merrimac hitched up with its chain harness and she took some lard and butter that had with great difficulty been sent up from Lang Syne, and she drove round town selling lard and Butter until she made up the deficiency in the \$10.00, bought the dress, and brought it home to me! Do you think that I can ever forget that? ⁶⁸

As Lipsett notes, despite severe obstacles, southern women struggled to have a “proper” wedding which included a “proper” wedding gown (62).

For women with no trunks to raid, no one to smuggle in material or no money to buy fabric, homespun was the last resort. Simkins and Patton write, “Those not so fortunate as to have relatives with stores of finery in reserve resorted to homespun” (204). Confederate women spent considerable effort spinning and weaving cloth to compensate for the shortages in fabric and clothing. As Mary Elizabeth Massey notes, in some years of the Confederacy, homespun “gained widespread fame for its beauty and durability” (88). ⁶⁹ For some Confederate women, wearing homespun became a symbol of patriotism as the popular song reveals.

⁶⁸ Excerpt from *Recollections of Louisa McCord Smythe*. Unpublished typewritten manuscript. The South Carolina Historical Society. Mss. 1209.03.02.05.

⁶⁹ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Ersatz in the Confederacy: Shortages and Substitutes on the Southern Homefront*. Columbia: U South Carolina P, 1952.



Illustration 1.5. Louisa McCord's wedding gown. Courtesy of The Museum of Charleston.

My homespun dress is plain, I know
 My hat's palmetto, too
 But then it shows what Southern girls
 For Southern rights will do.
 We send the bravest of our land
 To battle with the foe;
 And we will lend a helping hand
 We love the South, you know.
 Chorus
 Hurrah! Hurrah!
 For the sunny South so dear.
 Three cheers for the homespun dress
 That Southern ladies wear.⁷⁰

Despite the pride in self-production reflected in the popular song, as Massey maintains, “All did not agree on the beauty and patriotism of wearing homespun” (89). Citing “Letters to the Editor” printed in the *Southern Illustrated News*, Massey relates the experience of one woman who wrote, “the women of the congregation had smiled, sneered, ‘whispered and nudged each other’” when she wore homespun while another correspondent claimed “‘not five out of five hundred ladies’ in Richmond would ‘be caught in the street in a home-spun dress’” (90). The differing attitudes toward wearing homespun are substantiated in Mary Chesnut’s account of a wedding in Petersburg, in March 19, 1864: “The bridesmaids were dressed in black, the bride in Confederate gray homespun. She [the bride] had worn the dress all winter, but it had been washed and turned for the wedding. The female critics pronounced it ‘flabby dabby.’ They also said her collar was only ‘net’ – and she wore a cameo breastpin. Her bonnet was self-made” (590). Chesnut and her circle of female acquaintances decry the practice of wearing homespun.

Another more positive description of a homespun bridal gown comes from the diary of Parthenon Antoinette Hague:

⁷⁰ In *Ersatz in the Confederacy*, Mary Elizabeth Massey attributes this “song” to a “patriotic young lady” who wrote “‘Homespun Dress’ to the tune of the popular ‘Bonnie Blue Flag’” (89). For more on this song, see W. H. Hardy, “The Homespun Dress.” *Confederate Veteran*, IX (1901): 213-14.

We still had our merry social gatherings. Now and then a homespun wedding would occur, in which the bride and all who were bidden would be in homespun out and out. We were invited to one such marriage in our settlement. I wore a homespun dress of my own labor, but I neither carded, spun, nor wove it. I had become quite skillful in crocheting capes, Vandyke's, shawls, scarfs, and gloves, and as I had more than enough work carding and spinning my second homespun dress, I took a neighbor at her word. (137 – 8) ⁷¹

Hague provides a detailed description of the homespun wedding gown:

The bride's dress was woven a solid light gray color, warp and woof; the buttons were made of gray thread, overcast with white thread. Special pains had been taken with some white cotton flannel, three rows of which, about three inches wide, were placed around the bottom of the skirt, with about three inches' space between each row. The cuffs, collar, and shoulder-cape were trimmed with this white cotton flannel; and from only across the room it appeared as if the bride wore a real fur-trimmed dress and the effect was graceful in the extreme. (140)

In contrast to Mary Chestnut's more critical view of a homespun wedding gown, Hague appears to be proud of this southern bride's resourcefulness. The distinctions between the two diarists speak to class stratifications and values.

The importance of weddings for antebellum southern women is revealed throughout these pages. Nonetheless, while a planter's daughter's wedding was celebrated throughout the community, her wedding often disrupted the stability of another plantation community. The equilibrium of the enslaved community was disordered, especially when the young woman's dowry was created by the transfer of slaves from her family home. While none of the diaries, journals or memoirs written by elite southern women provides details of their dowries, narratives of the enslaved do note this disruption of established communities. In his Works Progress Administration interview in Ft. Worth, Texas, Bill Homer enslaved on Jack Homer's plantation near Shreveport, Louisiana relates this account:

⁷¹ Parthenon Antoinette Hague. *A Blockaded Family. Life in Southern Alabama during the Civil War*. New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., for the Riverside Press, Cambridge, MA. 1889.

But in de year of 1860, Missy Mary gits married to Bill Johnson and at date weddin' massa Homer gives me and 49 other niggers to her for de weddin' present. Massa Johnson's father gives him 50 niggers too. Dey has a gran' weddin'. I helps take care of the hosses and dey jus' kep' a-comin'. I 'spect dere was more'n 100 people dere and dey have lot of music and dancin' and eats and, I 'spects, drinks, 'cause we'uns made peach brandy. . . After de weddin' was over, dey gives de couple de infare. Dere's whar di nigger comes in. I and de other niggers was lined up, all with de clean clothes on and de massa say, "For to give my lovin' daughter de start, I gives you dese 50 niggers. Massa Bill's father done de same for his son, and dere we'uns was, 100 niggers with a new massa" (2).⁷²

Not only do we recover details of "Missy Mary's" wedding in Homer's interview but also retrieve the number of enslaved relocated from both families to a new plantation. The WPA narratives reveal that such ruptures due to the transfer of slaves through white dowries separated and disrupted recognized slave marriages and dislocated families within previously established slave communities.

⁷² Slave Narratives: Federal Writers' Project, 1936 – 1938. Texas Narratives Vol. XVI. Part II. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammen/ident.html>.

Chapter II. Weddings of the Enslaved on Louisiana Plantations

Any discussion of African American wedding ritual on antebellum Louisiana plantations is complicated by several factors, making Louisiana unique among states of the entire southern slaveholding region. European civil laws, derived from Roman slave laws, forged a considerable impact upon slave regulations and codes in French and Spanish Colonial Louisiana. Canonical laws of the French and Spanish spheres of the Catholic Church governing marriage sacrament also exerted a powerful influence on Catholic planters and the enslaved alike. In addition to these legal and religious aspects, Louisiana evolved from a society with slaves to a slave society with the increasing production of cotton and sugar commodities.¹ In contrast to states in the Upper South, the population of the enslaved reached much higher proportions in Louisiana due to large migrations from Virginia, Maryland and the Carolinas following the mechanization of cotton ginning and advances in the crystallization process used to refine sugar from sugar cane. These technologies were employed following Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1794 and Etienne de Boré's successful crystallization of sugar in 1793.

In comparison to the significant numbers of autobiographical narratives of fugitive slaves in other parts of the South that were written and published with the aid of abolitionists for the explicit purpose of revealing the evils of slavery, few of these narratives were written or

¹ It is helpful here to note Ira Berlin's distinction between societies with slaves and slave societies. In his prologue to *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard UP, 1998), Berlin distinguishes societies with slaves as systems where "slaves were marginal to the central productive processes; slavery was just one form of labor among many" while "slavery stood at the center of economic production" in slave societies and "the master-slave relationship provided the model for all social relations; husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee, teacher and student" (2). Berlin maintains that "all relationships mimicked those of slavery" in slave societies "[f]rom the most intimate connections between men and women to the most public ones between ruler and ruled" (*Ibid*).

published by the enslaved in Louisiana, thus making the pre-War cultural and life experiences of the enslaved African American men, women and children on Louisiana plantations difficult to ascertain.² Following Emancipation, the overarching purpose of the slave narrative was no longer directed to exposing slavery's ills, therefore, according to Davis and Gates, the prolific pre-War genre became virtually nonexistent.³ This lack of source material is compounded in the twentieth century by the actions of Lyle Saxon, Director of the Louisiana Writers' Project, who did not deliver the oral history narratives collected under the auspices of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration Project (WPA) to the Library of Congress as did all of the other slaveholding states. To date, Louisiana remains the only slaveholding state that has not contributed to this monumental oral history collection. This default has created a significant obstacle in recouping the voices of the ex-slaves who were born or lived in the state prior to Emancipation. Moreover, oral family histories passed from prior generations of the enslaved to their children

² Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave*, originally published in 1853, is the only pre-War narrative that offers a lengthy depiction of life on a Louisiana plantation. Josiah Henson, author of *Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (1849) who claimed to be the real "Uncle Tom" from Harriet Beecher Stowe's acclaimed novel, was never enslaved on a Red River plantation but spent most of his life in Maryland and Kentucky. However, Henry Bibb's *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (1849) details his experiences in the New Orleans slave market and reveals aspects of brutality on Deacon Whitfield's cotton plantation near the Red River in Claiborne Parish. Both Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) and Marion Wilson Starling in *The Slave's Narrative: Its Place in American History* (G. K. Hall, 1981) provide extensive bibliographies that have been helpful in locating these narratives.

³ In their introduction to *The Slave's Narrative*, Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., acknowledge that the ex-slaves, and by this they mean the fugitive slaves, were "motivated . . . to produce hundreds of testimonies of their enslavement rendered in painstaking verisimilitude" (xxx). The "notion of the presence of voice and self-creation through representation, transferred to writing through the metaphor of voice" that was so significant in the pre-War narratives was no longer needed after Emancipation (*Ibid*). Thus, they maintain that "[w]ith the ending of slavery, certain generic expectations disappeared from black autobiographical narratives" (309). However, in his more recent discussion of antebellum slave narratives, John Sekora points to the numerous post-War narratives written by black preachers as a source of fundraising for black churches throughout the South. For more on his analysis, see "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative." *Callaloo: A Journal of African American and African Arts and Letters* 10 (3 (32)): (1987): 482 – 515.

born during or after the Civil War have also been suppressed.⁴ Therefore, collating materials for the State of Louisiana requires significant archival research as the documents collected by the Louisiana Writers' Project remain scattered in various archives throughout the state.⁵

Through my archival research, I have recovered documents that contain sufficient descriptions to discuss African American wedding rituals performed on antebellum Louisiana plantations. An examination of the various forms of African American wedding ritual described in the narratives reveals the social and religious importance of these cultural practices for those living on Louisiana plantations. In ritual styles ranging from self-marriage to highly religious ceremonies, most of the enslaved on Louisiana plantations chose to mark their marital unions with some type of observance. According to information gathered from these available materials, “jumping the broom” was the most prevalent form of wedding ritual performed on Louisiana plantations. In light of the recent revival of “jumping the broom,” the origins, diffusion, and meaning of this custom are of interest to both folklorists and cultural historians alike. Questions

⁴ David H. Culbert located versions ex-slave interviews that are termed “Life Histories.” He argues that “[t]he term ‘life history’ suggests the life of a single person or his conception of his family” (41). According to Culbert, a number of life histories collected by the LWP remain unexamined and, like the ex-slave narratives, are scattered in archives throughout the state. See Culbert, “The Infinite Variety of Mass Experience: The Great Depression, W. P. A. Interviews, and Student Family History Projects.” *Louisiana History* 19.1 (1978): 43 – 63.

⁵ The Louisiana State Archives, Folder N1976-18 contains oral history interviews of ex-slaves as does the *W.P.A.: Ex-Slave Narrative Project 1937 – 1941* collection of thirty-nine narratives at the Hill Memorial Library of Louisiana State University. Duplicates of these documents may be found in the Louisiana State Library and the Louisiana State Archives. A collection of documents from the Louisiana Writers' Project is housed in the Cammie G. Henry Research Center at Northwestern University in Natchitoches. This is the most extensive collection available with 622 folders of material collected on a variety of topics. At the University of New Orleans, the *Marcus Christian Collection* contains four detailed interviews from E. Lilly, Jr. that were typed by the LWP typist but not included in the LWP. Another source of information on the enslaved in Louisiana may be found in George Rawick's forty-two volume collection *The American Slave: A Composite Biography* (1972 – 79) where interviews of ex-slaves who were born in Louisiana but were living in other states at the time of interview are gathered. The *John B. Cade Collection* at Southern University houses narratives collected by Cade's students at Southern University in 1926 and Prairie View A&M in 1928-9. These narratives have never been available to the public since their collection, despite numerous attempts by scholars to view them The Cade narratives fall into two groups; the first is a group of 486 interviews, apparently missing, that were collected by Cade himself while the second is a group of 183 collected by Cade's students at Prairie View A&M. This second group of narratives was made available to me through the kindness of Southern archivist, Ms. Angela Proctor.

concerning the folkloric roots of this practice shed light not only on the role of ritual on antebellum Southern plantations, but, more recently, reveal the social and monetary impact of this revival on today's \$161 billion dollar American wedding industry, as it markets ethnic identity.⁶ All of these factors combine to support the claim that the study of slavery in the United States, as Stanley Elkins maintains in *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959), is "a problem in Historiography" (1).

Elkins frames his discussion of slavery in terms of "the Old Debate" that centers on ideological differences between Northern abolitionists and Southern slaveholders. Due to the disparity of thought between the two groups, the topic of slave marriage initiated a highly public national debate. As Nancy F. Cott maintains in *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, "marriage definitions and practices became the means and ends, illustrations and purposes, in political debate" (56). From sermons launched from pulpits to addresses given before abolitionist societies to vitriolic attacks in print form – pamphlets, newspapers and autobiographies of fugitive slaves - the Northern flow of words against slavery was matched by an equally determined response from the Southern pro-slavery camp. Seeking to deflect the Northern attack on their morality, Southerners defended slavery from their pulpits and contributed articles to newspapers, planter's journals and literary magazines. Throughout these many texts from Northerners and Southerners alike, the issue of slave marriage and its effect on the slave family was a primary concern. In what Margaret Burnham terms "an impossible marriage," Northerners argued that "[t]he tenets of family law held that marriage and family were natural, sacred, and morally compelled . . . That slaves, who were admittedly human

⁶ Rebecca Mead derives this industry figure from statistics provided by *The American Wedding Study* which is based on annual accounting for 2006 provided by The Condé Nast Bridal Group. See *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding*, P.10.

creatures of God, were excluded from these sacred rules presented a profound challenge for a purportedly rationally based, consistent legal system.”⁷ Southerners lashed back with the concept of benevolent paternalism which sought to include the enslaved within the plantation “family.” Thus, according to Burnham, for Southerners “[t]he civil laws of marriage and child legitimation did not apply to the slave, but nature’s laws grouping men, women, and children in family formation were nevertheless abided because the slave *had* a family – the owners” (195). Southerners, explains Cott, “domesticated slavery, rather than treating it simply as a labor regime” giving rise to the widespread southern patriarchal expression “my family, black and white” (60).

Yet, despite Southern attempts to defend the institution of slavery, Burnham maintains that “[t]he deleterious and immoral effect of slavery on the family was a key plank in the abolitionists’ political rhetoric” (195). In his address at the anniversary of the American Abolition Society in May, 1858, later printed as “The Fire and Hammer of God’s Word Against the Sin of Slavery,” George B. Cheever argues that by denying the enslaved any of the protective rights of marriage, the South was in direct conflict with Christian Doctrine. He vehemently asserts:

The whole family relations, the whole domestic state, is prostituted, poisoned, turned into a misery-making machine for the agent of all evil. What God meant should be the source and inspiration of happiness, becomes the fountain of sin and woe. The sacred names of husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, babe, become the exponents of various forces and values in the slave-breeding institute. (4-5)

Cheever’s overarching metaphor operates on the Southern slave-based economy as an inhumane apparatus in conflict with natural moral laws. His alliterative “misery-making machine” plays on

⁷ Margaret Burnham, “An Impossible Marriage: Slave Law and Family Law.” *Law and Inequality* 5. 187 (1987): 187-225. P. 189.

the profitable production of the slave body in a dualistic image of work production and reproduction through childbirth where the slaveholder has usurped Divine power over the slave family. His accusation of slave breeding points to the perversion of the slave family in light of the nineteenth-century concept of the family as a “refuge and safe haven where flourished man’s purest and most selfless instincts” (Burnham 193). Other Northern critics pointed out that *partus sequitur ventrem* or the Roman-derived civil law that the children follow the status of the mother encouraged planters to promote reproduction, often by immoral means.

Abolitionists charged that the master/slave relationship was based on a demoralizing power disparity, with the result that the slave was unable to possess items physically, including his or her own body. William Godell, co-founder of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society opens his first chapter with a quotation from the Louisiana Civil Code, Art. 35. stating:

A slave is one who is in the power of a master *to whom he belongs*. The master may *sell him, dispose of his person*, his industry and his labor. He can do nothing, *possess nothing, nor acquire* anything, but what must belong to his master (23).

This passage is from *The American Slave Code In Theory and Practice*, published in Boston in 1853, by Godell’s Society. It lists slave laws and codes, organized by category and by state. In the section “Slaves Cannot Marry,” Godell writes: “The slave is chattel, and chattels do not marry. ‘The slave is not ranked among sentient beings, but among things’, and things are not married” (105). In his stance, Godell is challenging one of the cornerstone issues in proslavery thought which was that, in the southern social order, slaves were not fully human beings. Citing Martin’s “Louisiana Reports” as his source for the following, Godell reports:

It is clear that slaves have not legal capacity to assent to any contract. With the consent of their master they may marry, and their *moral* power to agree to such a contract or connection cannot be doubted; *but while in a state of slavery* it cannot produce any *civil effect*, because slaves are deprived of all civil rights. (107)

Thus, marriage, as a civil contract, was denied to the enslaved. Godell admits that masters might permit slave marriage on religious or moral grounds but were unable or unwilling to override the civil statutes.

According to Cott, benevolent paternalism assumed that “slavery, like marriage, was a relationship of unequals benefitting both parties. Women as a sex and blacks as a race flourished best where they were guided and protected” (61). Thus, southerners responded to northern claims of unjust and immoral treatment of the enslaved in a series of texts aimed at defining the rights and duties of masters. One such article by Robert Collins, reprinted from an earlier article in the *Alabama Planter*, appeared in *DeBow’s Review*, a popular planter’s monthly magazine, published in New Orleans by James D. B. DeBow.⁸ In “Article X: Management of Slaves,” Collins grounds his article with a pro-slavery argument supported by Biblical references, and then turns to the issue of slave management. Advice on such topics as housing, food and clothing distribution is given along with a section on slave marriage:

Taking wives and husbands among their fellow-servants at home, should be as much encouraged as possible; and although intermarrying with those belonging to other estates should not be prohibited, yet it is always likely to lead to difficulties and troubles, and should be avoided as much as possible. They cannot live together as they ought, and are constantly liable to separation in the changing of property. It is true they usually have but little ceremony in forming these connections; and many of them look upon their obligation to each other very slightly; but in others, again, is found a degree of faithfulness, fidelity and affection, which owners admire; and hence, they always dislike to separate those manifesting such traits of character. (425-6)

Collins’ ambivalence about slave unions is revealed in his stereotypic view of the unbridled promiscuity and sexual licentiousness of the enslaved; however, speaking collectively for slaveholders, he observes that most masters attempt to honor marital unions among certain

⁸ Collins, Robert, *DeBow’s Review* XVII (October 1854): 421-6.

couples. Cott supports Collins' statement by observing that most planters encouraged "coupling and family formation" on the basis that, following the 1808 law that prohibited the importation of slaves from overseas, "it was to the advantage of masters to have slaves reproduce themselves and nurture their young" (34).

Another source of insight into the planter's attitudes toward slave unions may be viewed in *Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South* (1980), a compilation of nineteenth century planter's writings collected by James O. Breeden. On the topic of slave marriage, Breeden provides short descriptive pieces whose primary purpose reveals "a general agreement" among the southern planters that "ideally slave unions should be among the Negroes on the same plantation and that marriage should be used as a means of promoting morality" (239). One planter reasons that he has "tried faithfully to break up immorality" but concludes that he has been unable to prevent what he terms "habits of amalgamation."⁹ Another slaveholder from South Carolina, writing in 1830, notes that "Marriages shall be performed in every instance of a nuptial contract" (239). And, a Tennessee planter in 1859 writes that: "It is the duty of Christian masters to promote virtuous and fixed attachments between the sexes, and, while encouraging marriage, to guard it with all the forms of consent, postponement, preparation and solemn consummation. A marriage supper is often given" (242). Tennessee, according to Darlene C. Goring, was the only southern state that recognized slave unions. She emphasizes that the enslaved in Tennessee, "notwithstanding their inability to contract, were entitled to a limited right to marry" (315).¹⁰ The Tennessee slaveholder's belief that it was the master's duty to

⁹ Breeden is using a multi-valent term employed by anti-abolitionists to underscore Northern white fears of miscegenation. Amalgamation has fallen out of usage and has been replaced by the word, miscegenation.

¹⁰ See Darlene C. Goring, "The History of Slave Marriage in the United States." *John Marshall Law Review* 39 (2006): 299 – 347.

facilitate an agreement between the couple and the slaveholders followed by a specified period of anticipating and preparing for a proper marriage ceremony, most closely parallels the engagement practices of antebellum whites. Consent might mean agreement by the parents of the enslaved bride and groom but almost all of the narratives note that the master's approval of the union must be obtained before a wedding could take place. Often, this meant the consent of two masters and negotiations between them for plans to relocate one of the partners.

A more caustic comment reflecting one planter's view of slave marriage comes from a Georgia physician in 1860:

From natural fickleness, from that strength of passion always dominant in inferior animal natures, and from the circumstances by which they are surrounded, negroes are very prone to violate their marriage obligations, and thus are they exposed to all the evils that are likely to ensue from roving licentiousness. These evils should be guarded against, as far as possible, by magnifying the marriage relation, by solemnizing the union with proper forms and ceremonies. (243-4)

This passage reveals the patronizing stance of many slaveholders in an attempt to place moral constraints over what they felt to be the licentious black bodies of the enslaved. As Drew Gilpin Faust argues in *The Ideology of Slavery* (1981), discussions like the example above provide insight into slavery as “a vehicle for the discussion of fundamental social issues – the meaning of natural law, the conflicting desires for freedom and order, the relationship between tradition and progress, the respective roles of liberty, equality, dependence and autonomy” (2). Proslavery adherents felt that as a race, the Negro was deficient in higher faculties when compared to the white Europeans. Descriptions ranging from “barbaric” to “childlike” were used by the planters to justify the paternalistic role that they assumed.

While the Georgia physician/planter's focus on encouraging slave marriage is to safeguard against immoral behavior among the enslaved on his plantation, Bertram Wyatt Brown offers yet

another motivation for promoting slave unions. He argues that “[t]hese ceremonies were not only reminders of the white people’s own marital vows, but also helped to make the black marriage rites dignified and sacred enough to throw some cold water on biracial temptations” (*Southern Honor* 276). Wyatt-Brown is not alone in ascribing the importance of the master’s encouragement of slave unions. C. Peter Ripley writes, “Prior to the Civil War many slaveholders not only acknowledged slave marriages but encouraged them within the limits of the institution . . . to many masters conjugal relationships among slaves means something more than merely pairing them off by sex to reproduce offspring for the plantation and to achieve greater tranquility in the quarters” (369 – 70).¹¹ Ripley offers plausible reasons for planter support of slave unions:

It is inaccurate to conclude that the planters were primarily concerned with maintaining the idea of the family among their slaves. No doubt the concept of family was often present in spite of the planters. It is suggested, however, that a strong sense of family did exist under slavery and that planter paternalism, economically sound plantation organization, the slave’s own strong commitment to his family, and the interaction between bondsmen and master all played contributing roles. (371-2)

While Ripley’s assessment voices several possible social and economic motivations, he overlooks any reference to the moral responsibility of the religious slaveholder.

Many Southern Protestant ministers encouraged masters to promote marital unions between the enslaved as part of their religious duty. Thomas S. Clay of Bryan County, Georgia, in a treatise read to the Georgia Presbytery and printed on its behalf, recommended that the master “should be present at the marriage ceremony, and bestow on the party and their friends, some

¹¹ C. Peter Ripley, “The Black Family in Transition: Louisiana, 1860 – 1865.” *The Journal of Southern History* 41.3 (1975): 369 – 380.

testimonials of his approbation, and interest in their happiness” (16).¹² The Rev. Dr. Charles Colcock Jones, Sr. a Georgia slaveholder and Presbyterian clergyman, felt that religious instruction was more than simply a master’s duty. Jones, in *Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (1842), mandates the master’s role in “solemnize[ing] their marriages; and at their *own homes* and at such times as may best suit their convenience, for like the rest of mankind, they like to see their friends in their own houses, and give them on such joyous occasions, the best entertainment they can afford” (232). On the topic of slave marriage, Jones writes:

The formal solemnization of their marriages is of great importance if their improvement in morals and religion is the object sought after. The effect is to elevate and throw around the marriage state peculiar sacredness. It is rendered ‘honorable in all.’ Polygamy and licentiousness are rebuked and overthrown. Masters protect families more, and make greater efforts to preserve them from separation. (233)

Along with statistics and figures derived from municipal and church records, Jones emphasizes that in the very early years of the nineteenth century, Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church were authorized to ordain African American preachers to “preach principally on the plantation to those of their own color and their preaching, though broken and illiterate, is in many cases highly useful” (56 - 8). This perception of the role of African American slave ministers is in keeping with R. Q. Mallard’s description of his experiences in *Plantation Life Before Emancipation* (1892).

Mallard, also a clergyman, lived in Liberty County, Georgia and married the daughter of the Rev. Dr. Charles Colcock Jones. He opposed the Northern assertion that “the marriage relation among the slaves was very loose and far from sacred” (49). “On the contrary,” maintained Mallard, “in our county not only was it gladly celebrated by the white pastor or colored minister,

¹² See Thomas Savage Clay, *Detail of a Plan for the Moral Improvement of Negroes on Plantations* (1833).

but, where they were preferred, by negro watchmen, who were appointed by the Church as a kind of under-shepherds, and duly authorized to solemnize marriages” (49). Such was not the case, however, testified Mallard, on the Louisiana plantation of Leonidas Polk, who served as the missionary Bishop of the Southwest and purchased Leighton, a Louisiana sugar plantation near the town of Thibodaux in 1841.¹³ Like the Rev. Dr. Colcock Jones, Bishop Polk promoted religious instruction for the enslaved on his plantation by performing slave marriages himself. Following in the footsteps of Stephen Elliott, Bishop of Georgia, who believed that religious instruction was “both a means for ensuring social control on southern plantations and for expanding the denomination’s influence in the region,” Bishop Polk established a plantation chapel system on Leighton. As Glenn Robins observes in his biography of Bishop Polk, “slave weddings were festive occasions and were always celebrated in Polk’s home, not in the plantation chapel and every white family member participated.” Polk’s wife added “an element of grandeur and reverence to the event by presenting the bride and groom with specially tailored wedding garments” (106).

Like those performed by the Rev. Dr. Charles Colcock Jones, these weddings served a variety of purposes, one of which was to lend an air of dignity to the slave unions while promoting moral instruction. Another function was to keep the master in control of the slave community through his consent and participation in the wedding. Mallard describes weddings of the enslaved on the Polk estate: “On a large sugar plantation in Louisiana, owned by a distinguished Bishop of the Episcopal Church, all the marriages were celebrated in the great house. The broad hall was decorated for the occasion with evergreens and flowers, and illuminated with many

¹³ Polk later became the Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana until he accepted a command as Major General in the Confederate Army. His actions caused him to be the subject of controversy in light of a clergyman taking up arms. For more on Polk’s role in the Confederate Army, see Glenn Robins, *The Bishop of the Old South: The Ministry and Civil War Legacy of Leonidas Polk*. Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 2006.

lights. The honor coveted by the white children, and given as the reward for good behavior, was to hold aloft the silver candlesticks as the good Bishop read the marriage service” (Mallard 50). In this example, all members of the white family are participants in the ritual by providing the setting, procuring the embellishments, and by conducting the ceremony. Bishop Polk’s daughter recalls that a wedding feast always followed the ceremony (quoted Robins 106). However, as a deterrent to immoral behavior, Polk inverted the joyous wedding ceremony by reversing the privileges given to the newlyweds. Instead of receiving “the material benefits of a wedding holiday and the blessings of both the church and the master,” slaves who exhibited “illicit behavior” were required “to participate in a perfunctory or even censorious wedding ceremony” (107). Robins includes an anecdote from Polk’s daughter who recalls that the mere rumor of promiscuity resulted in an enslaved couple being removed from the field, brought into the house and married in their work clothes without any of the usual celebrations.

Yet, despite these various religious attempts by southern planters to promote slave marriages, the topic continued to draw the ire of abolitionists. In his anti-slavery writings, Godell exposes the civic/legal ramifications of slave marriage by quoting George M. Stroud, a Pennsylvania jurist. In *A Sketch of the Laws Relating to Slavery in the Several States* (1856) Stroud clarifies:

A slave cannot even contract matrimony, the association which takes place among slaves, and is *called* marriage, being properly designated by the word *contubernium*, a relation which has no sanctity and to which no civil rights are attached. (106)

Stroud’s distinction conflates Roman laws of slavery with southern racial ideologies by invoking a specialized term for slave marriage. *Contubernium*, or a contubernal marriage, designated a slave marital union in Roman society. Lacking the power of the *paterfamilias*, slave marriages

were exclusive of property exchange or dowry negotiations.¹⁴ Roman slaves were only allowed to marry in a *contubernium* or contuberal marriage that signified a temporary marriage or a marital-like union without civic effects and only with the consent of the master.¹⁵

Civic laws in colonial Louisiana were derived from these Roman Laws.¹⁶ *Le code noir*, also known as “the Black Code” was placed into effect by Louis XIV, King of France in March of 1724. The presence of the Black Code was another of several factors that set Louisiana apart from other southern slaveholding states. Patterned upon an edict that Louis XIV issued for the Caribbean sugar colonies in 1685, the law was “promulgated to establish an orderly system of slave labor and race relations for French possessions in the Caribbean” (Schafer 1). This “first law of slavery” is emphasized by Judith Kelleher Schafer in her work on Louisiana law. In *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (1994), Schaefer explains that the civil codes during the period of French colonization in Louisiana specifically “provided that slaves should be instructed in the Catholic faith and married under its laws” (1). Moreover,

¹⁴ Unlike slave unions, the most prevalent marital agreements in classical society were based on transferring power over the woman from her father to her husband or through the exchange of a dowry or household goods. The traditional elite Roman marriage, known in legal terms as *Iustus Matrimonium* was termed the *confarreatio*, a form of marriage that entailed full rights to the husband over all property and children resulting from the union. This priestly form of marriage, described by Percy Ellwood Corbett, consisted of a ritual sacrifice where the couple offered a sheep, spelt cake or *fasseus panis*, fruit or a salt cake or *nola salsa* to Ceres, Tellus, Juno, Jupiter or Mars in the presence of a high priest or high-ranking civic official. This marriage took place on a threshold in front of a specified number of witnesses. In the *coemptio* or second type of marriage, the bride brought her dowry into the marriage and was fictiously sold to her husband in front of witnesses. In the third style of marriage, the couple could be joined *in manu viri* which roughly translates “to be under the husband’s hand or authority” if they agreed to live together for a period of one year. The resulting marriage, termed *usus*, did not require a ceremony and is equal to what the English and Americans currently term “common law” marriage.

¹⁵ For more on the terminology of Roman marriages and wedding styles, see Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (1986); Eva Cantarella, *Pandora’s Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (1993); Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law & Society* (1991); Gordon Williams, “Some Aspects of Roman Marriage Ceremonies and Ideals.” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 48.1/2 (1958): 16-29; and Jerome Caropino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (1991).

¹⁶ According to Schafer, “Several provisions of the Louisiana *Code Noir* of 1724 originated from the Roman law of slavery, particularly the legal disqualifications of slaves as witnesses, arbitrators, litigants, and parties in a contract. Under Roman law, slaves had almost no civil rights”(2).

Article XI of the Black Code states: “We forbid priests from conducting weddings between slaves if it appears that they do not have their master’s permission. We also forbid masters from using any constraints on their slaves to marry them without their wishes.”¹⁷ Yet, despite the protections inherent in the Black Code for the enslaved, Schafer maintains that “French borrowings from the Roman law of slavery are unique in their selection of those aspects that were often detrimental to slaves” (2). Perhaps the difference between the two legal systems exists, as Alan Watson argues in *Roman Slave Law* (1987), in the racial vision of each distinct group. For Watson, “the American South preferred to ignore the milder aspects of Roman slave law because slavery in the South was a racist system” (xviii-xix). As a determining factor, race was not a basis for the caste system in Classical Rome as it was in North America.

Following the French dispossession of Louisiana to Spanish rule, the slave law, contends Schafer, was “more beneficial” to the enslaved. Also patterned after Roman Law, the Spanish Law, *Las Siete Partidas*, differed in that it “held that slavery was contrary to natural law and reason” (2). Under Spanish control, many of the enslaved were able to purchase their freedom by a process termed *coartación*.¹⁸ The *Siete Partidas* remained the basis of rule until 1789 when the leaders of the Spanish Catholic Church pressured Governor Miró to enact the *Real Cédula*, a set of laws aimed at improving morality not only among the enslaved but the whites as well. These differences, however, did not markedly change the laws of slave marriage as much as they sought to disparage the practice of concubinage. Following the return of Louisiana from the French to the Americans, remnants of *Le Code Noir* and the *Real Cédula* remained in place until

¹⁷ From “Le Code Noir” at <http://thelouvertureproject.org>.

¹⁸ For more on the effect of this law, see Baade, “The Law of Slavery in Spanish Louisiana,” in *Louisiana’s Legal Heritage*. Ed. Edward F. Haas. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Museum, 1985.

overturned by new Americanized laws based on English Common Law.¹⁹ Thus, in 1806, the first governor of the Louisiana Territory, William C. Claiborne passed a new *Black Code*. Hereafter, “American rule initiated an era of diminished rights for slaves as Louisiana planters suddenly found themselves in a position to make their own laws” (Schafer 6). In 1825, this legal redirection culminated in the passage of the *Civil Code for the State of Louisiana* which determined that slave marriages “did not produce any civil effects” (Schafer 302).



Illustration 2.1. Marriage of a Colored Soldier at Vicksburg by Chaplain Warren of the Freedmen’s Bureau. Paper and pencil drawing by Alfred C. Waud, for *Harper’s Weekly Magazine*. Original in *The Historic New Orleans Collection*. June 1866.

¹⁹ For more on the distinctions between *Le Code Noir*, *Las Siete Partidas* and the *Real Cédula*, see James Thomas McGowan, *Creation of a Slave Society. Louisiana Plantations in the Eighteenth Century*. Unpublished Dissertation. The University of Rochester, Rochester, New York. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1968.

This law remained in place until the Union occupation of New Orleans in April, 1862. Following the end of the Civil War, General Nathaniel P. Banks issued an order requiring the enslaved in Louisiana to be married with a state-issued marriage license.

Catholic priests in Louisiana recognized that slave marriage was complicated through the conflict between canonical law and colonial laws. As letters of the first Bishop of Louisiana during the years 1815 to 1826 attest, slave marriage raised specific questions. Louis William DuBourg, in his correspondence with Rome, presented what Cyprian Davis terms “*dubia*” to the Catholic leadership. In *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (1990), Davis reveals that the content of the letters back to Rome “was asking . . . whether slaves could have clandestine marriages or whether a priest could consider slave marriages as canonically valid, inasmuch as the permanent basis for a marriage was lacking because of the arbitrary power of slaveholder” (42-3). Beginning with the Council of Trent in 1563, the marriage rite had been elevated to a sacrament of the Catholic Church. A marriage, according to this ruling by Church leaders, was “not valid unless the vows were exchanged before a priest and two witnesses” (Davis 42). Dubourg’s quandary concerned whose consent was required; the slaves participating in the marriage sacrament or their master’s. Davis points out another set of *dubia* from the Louisiana Bishop that presented an equally disturbing problem: if marriage is “a sacred institution to which all have a right, how can one participate in a system that abridges that right to a major portion of society?” (43). Clearly, canonical and civil laws were in conflict.

Yet, as the *Parish Sacramental Register Report from the Archdiocesan Archives* reveals, during the colonial period under the leadership of Antoine-Simon Le Page Du Pratz, “some planters allowed Capuchin missionaries to solemnize slave marriage and baptize children . . . in

church ceremonies with the owners in full participation” (Berlin 198). The *Libro de Velaciones de la Marrogula de Sn. Luis de esta Ciudad de Las Nva Orlenias* records marriages of the enslaved in the St. Louis Cathedral between the years 1778 through 1815.²⁰ The large number of marriages recorded in the Archives reflects numerous enslaved who were living in the city of New Orleans. However, for those enslaved on plantations throughout the Louisiana countryside, contact with a priest was less frequent. William Henry Elder, Roman Catholic Bishop of Natchez during the years 1857 through 1880, felt the church had to expand to be effective in its outreach. Far more evangelistic than DuBourg, as Davis asserts, Elder felt the constraints of distance in providing the enslaved with religious instruction. In his diary kept between the war years of 1862 through 1865, Elder writes:

Catholic masters of course are taught that it is their duty to furnish their slaves with opportunities for being well instructed, and for practicing their religion. And here is my anxiety, that I cannot enable those masters to do their duty because there are not Priests enough. The negroes must be attended in a great measure on the plantation . . . because in our case there are so few churches. (quoted Davis 44)

Elder’s diary records his attempts to minister to the enslaved despite distance, an insufficient number of priests along with upheaval caused by the Civil War. A major concern of his ministry focused on provisions for the marriage sacrament to be more readily available on the rapidly expanding number of cotton and sugar cane plantations.

In *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1998), Ira Berlin argues that the unique colonial slave culture of Louisiana was modified due to the rapid

²⁰ Marriage records from St. Louis Cathedral in the New Orleans Archdiocesan Archives are contained in two sacramental registers. Vol. I. Parts I and II cover the period of 1777 to 1830. Vol II. covers 1831 to 1866. Entries include slave marriages, noted by the term “esclavo(a)”. All of the slave marriages were conducted by Fr. Antonio de Sedella and recorded in his hand. The records often note the marriage of a slave to a “negro libre” or free Negro. Many of the slave couples recorded in the register were described as “esclavas de las Religiosas” or slaves of the Ursuline Nuns. The last marriage of an enslaved couple recorded by Fr. Sedella was entered into the register in February, 1815.

expansion of cotton and sugarcane farming. The accelerated process of creolization was largely due to the insular nature of Louisiana as Berlin asserts that the slaves were “cut off from direct knowledge of Africa” and that the planters were “cut off from new African laborers” following the termination of the Atlantic slave trade in 1808 (196). Supporting Berlin’s assertion, Gwendolyn Hall notes in *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (1992), that “[b]y January, 1731, twenty-two out of the twenty-three slave-trading ships that came from Africa while France ruled Louisiana had already arrived” (59). Basing her figures on French bills of lading, Hall reports that 5,951 slaves were imported directly into French Colonial Louisiana (Table 2, 60). The enslaved population increased during Spanish rule as Louisiana was strategically important for empire-building. Along with large numbers of African slaves, Acadian and Canary Islanders settled in the swampy regions to the south and east of New Orleans so that the “1788 census counted 20, 673 slaves and 18,737 free people (white) in lower Louisiana, or a total of 39, 410 people, including Natchez” (Hall 278). This increase in population of the enslaved, Hall maintains, was due to the unregulated importation of slaves into Spanish Louisiana by both slave traders and smugglers.²¹

Additionally, in a forced migration largely due to over-cultivated lands in the Upper South, large numbers of the enslaved were sold into the Lower Mississippi Valley region from Virginia and the Carolinas beginning in the late 1790’s and continuing through the first five decades of the 1800’s. The enslaved sometimes traveled by boat or overland in wagons, but more frequently, by walking in coffles; long lines of men, women and children, chained and manacled,

²¹ Hall observes that “while the French slave trade to Louisiana was highly centralized and well documented, the Spanish slave trade was neither” (279). According to Hall, the Spanish kept no customs records or maintained little control of slave trading, thereby allowing “smugglers and interlopers operating from Jamaica and the British Atlantic colonies [to introduce] slaves into Louisiana in 1758” and expanded operations from Cuba and St. Domingue after 1777. By 1782, Hall identifies “British, Scotch, and American slave traders illegally importing slaves into Louisiana” (279-80).

under the supervision of a slave trader. In *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana*, Ann Patton Malone confirms that in the nine year period between 1810 and 1819, “[t]he population of Louisiana expanded more than 100 percent, a higher rate of increase than in any subsequent decade” (20). In the decade between 1820 and 1830, the population of Louisiana increased by 41 percent while the population of the enslaved increased by 59 percent during the same period (25). Thus, the prolific migratory influx of the enslaved arriving into Louisiana brought with them African American culture that been in effect in Virginia, the Carolinas and Maryland for a period of almost two hundred years.

In light of the late evolution of Louisiana as a slave society, African American slave narratives fostered by the abolitionists are less frequent than those written by the enslaved in the Upper South. As these pre-War narratives contain rhetorical strategies framed by the anti-slavery debates, the slave narrative has been studied extensively as both historical source and as literature (*The Slave’s Narrative* 1985). As an historical source, Charles Joyner refers to folklorist Don Yoder’s belief that the slave narrative documents descriptive materials from the slave community, providing insights on the “exciting totality of verbal, spiritual and material aspects of a culture.”²² As literature, the slave’s narrative, notes Marion Starling in *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*, “served particularly well as a vehicle of expression for the man with a grievance, for the individual whose faith in the existing order has been crushed by injustice in the life about him, but who has become inspired suddenly by a new current of thought” (226). Thus, autobiographical forms of literature, Starling concurs, appeared in direct conjunction with the ideology of the Romantic Movement with its striving for individualism.

²² For more on the slave narrative as historical document, see the introduction to Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*. Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois P, 1984. P xxii.

Following a highly stylized, conventional form described by James Olney in “I Was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature,” the predominately male-authored slave narrative follows the transformation of the slave as he, or in several instances, she overcomes obstacles of birth, literacy, white control and cruelty to become a free man or woman. Solomon Northrup’s *Twelve Years a Slave*, published in 1854, is the only true slave narrative based in Louisiana and it follows a slightly different form than the conventional narratives. Northrup, a free man, was kidnapped and sold into slavery where he remained for a period of twelve years. Although noting his own marriage at Fort Edward in New York on Christmas Day in 1829 by a town magistrate, Northrup makes only a brief mention of slave weddings in his narrative. Included in his discussion of the festive nature of the Christmas holiday activities, he notes that slave marriages were typically conducted during this period of respite from heavy labor. Marriages of the enslaved on Red River region plantations in Northrup’s view are disqualified as a serious institution, the only requirement being consent from the master (221).²³

In contrast to Northrup’s account, the *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*, published in New York in 1849, is the first voice from the pages of a slave narrative to speak to the meaning and importance of marriage for the enslaved. As John W. Blassingame maintains in *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, “[b]ecause they were denied all of the protection which the law afforded, slaves had an almost mythological respect for legal marriage. Henry Bibb believed that ‘there was no class of people in the United States who so highly appreciate the legality of marriage as those persons who have been held and treated as property’ (171-2). Bibb’s more immediate aspiration for freedom was complicated by his desire for marriage. His ambivalence was revealed in his narrative when he

²³ Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave*. New York: Derby and Miller, 1853. Rpt. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1970. P. 221.

stated that his future wife's "fascinating charms" turned his vision from escape to "holy wedlock" (13-5). Bibb described his engagement to Malinda: "Clasping each other by the hand, pledging our sacred honor that we would be true, we called on high heaven to witness the rectitude of our purpose" (17). As Thomas E. Wills notes in "Weddings on Contested Grounds: Slave Marriage in the Antebellum South," Bibb, while observing that slave marriage was not legal, believed that "notwithstanding our marriage was without license or sanction of law, we believed it to be honorable before God" (110). From the passage, Wills determines that "despite the constant threat of division, slaves valued their marriages as ordained by a power higher than white law" (*Ibid*). After obtaining permission from both masters, Bibb and Malinda were married "one night during the Christmas holidays; at which time we had quite a festival given us" (18).

Charles J. Heglar emphasizes the thematic centrality of marriage to Bibb's narrative. In *Rethinking the Slave Narrative: Slave Marriage and the Narratives of Henry Bibb and William and Ellen Craft* (2001), Heglar posits the sanctity of marriage for Bibb and Malinda. It is only after several failed attempts to free her along with the knowledge that Malinda was willingly living in Louisiana as a white man's concubine that Bibb determined that the marriage was over. Thus, Heglar maintains that the theme of slave marriage and the family "shapes the form and content of Bibb's *Narrative* [to] represent a monumental variation in what critics have come to see as the usual structure and strategy for shaping a life in opposition to slavery" (75). Bibb's narrative is unique in providing insights into what the enslaved felt their marriages to represent. In addition to providing details of his own struggle to maintain his marriage vows, Bibb's narrative speaks to the sexual vulnerability of enslaved females.

The vulnerability and defenselessness of female slaves was highly problematic for abolitionists. Abolitionist and early feminist, Harriet Martineau, emphasizes the sexual

degradation of African American females as an example of the “grossest vice” on the plantation. In “Morals of Slavery,” Martineau insinuates that “[e]very man who resides on his plantation may have his harem, and has every inducement of custom, and of pecuniary gain, to tempt him to the common practice” (14). Martineau is referring to the practice of sexual depredations by slaveholders on their female slaves along with the practice of selling their mixed race offspring. “By the late 1830’s, antislavery literature” as Amy Dru Stanley contends, “focused on violation of the marriage contract, as abolitionists made a mission of revealing slavery’s unspeakable private dimensions” (*From Bondage to Contract* 24). She quotes from an antislavery tract of 1837 stating, “no part of the dark and hidden iniquities of slavery’ demanded exposure more than its ‘odious lusts’ and destruction of the ‘nuptial covenant’” (24). Stanley asserts, “[t]he flesh of female slaves thus took center stage in abolitionist propaganda” (25). Although she did not reside in Louisiana, there is no clearer literary example of black female vulnerability than that portrayed in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861). Therefore, it is significant to discuss her narrative here in terms of female agency.

In what many critics consider as a forerunner to African American fiction, Harriet Jacobs appealed to her Northern female readers in “an articulation based on the determinate memory and recalls of experience via the lens of traumatically constrained ideology” (Mostern 10). In “Identifying ‘Black Autobiography’” *Determination, Articulation, and the Racial Object*,” Mostern defines autobiography as a “*process* which articulates the determined subject so as to actively produce a newly positive identity” (11). Writing from the authorial viewpoint of her recent freedom, Jacobs’ points to the inequities faced by female slaves still living in the antebellum South where slave codes were written to provide the white master with control over

all slave bodies. As Yellin notes in her introduction to the text, Jacobs's narrative agency exposes southern patriarchy in its most rapacious form (xxi).

Linking the stylistics of the seduction novel with that of sentimental fiction, as noted by Davis and Gates, Jacobs incorporates "florid asides, strident polemics, [and her] melodramatic imagination" to compare her life to that of northern white women:

But, O ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice. (54)

Later in this passage, Jacobs reveals her conscious decision not to marry the free black man that she loves, instead providing details of her relationship with a white man, assumed, in part to protect herself from the unwanted attentions of her owner and also to resist his plans of forced concubinage. As her lover was white, there was no possibility of marriage, causing Jacobs' deep guilt over her actions. In her violation of the "four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity," Jacobs reveals the racial differences between white and black women.²⁴

The wide gulf between sexual standards for white and slave women, however, is given voice in her appeal for exoneration due to slavery's demands on her body and her helplessness to prevent it. Davis and Gates point to the political ramifications to Jacobs' actions, viewing her "melodramatic confessions" as an act of literary agency. Breaking the silence on the sexual abuse of black slave women, Jacobs moves beyond the "world of conventional nineteenth-century polite discourse" (*Slave's Narrative* xiv). Telling her story of sexual demands and her

²⁴ These are the qualities of "True Womanhood" as enumerated by Barbara Welter in "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820 – 1860." *American Quarterly* 18.2.1. (1966): 151-174. Welter's article is a classic statement of the qualities demanded and perpetuated by nineteenth century views of women.

choice to move beyond total vulnerability, Jacobs flaunts the conventions of the slave narrative in her stirring exposé. In the conclusion to her narrative, Jacobs again exceeds the boundaries of the sentimental novel by juxtaposing the traditional culmination of the marriage plot to her newly acquired status of individualistic liberty. She addresses her audience: “Really, my story ends with freedom, not in the usual way, with marriage” (201). Unlike the sentimental fictions that some critics argue subordinate women within stereotypic conventions, Jacobs metaphorically unites herself with her children in a free society divorced from any ideology of white patriarchy and the concurrent sexual traumas of slavery.

Following the Civil War, a period of stunning southern racism followed Reconstruction and continued well into the late 1930’s. African Americans reacted to their past by producing texts that countered the pastoral plantation myth espoused by Ulrich B. Phillips in his 1908 work, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*. While Phillips researched various forms of plantation records, he relied only on white voices. In what Norman Yetman terms a manner of writing against the “racial assumptions” of Phillips and his cadre of followers, both W. E. B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson sought to redefine American Negro history by a “serious study” of the past (528).²⁵ DuBois foregrounded his examination of the Negro family with a selection from the *Address of the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky*, delivered in 1834, which insists that “until slavery waxeth old, and tendeth to decay, there *cannot be any* legal recognition of the marriage rite” (*The Negro American Family* 1). Reacting against the “Southern apologist and his picture of cabin life, with idyllic devotion and careless toil, and that of the abolitionist with his tale of family disruption and cruelty, adultery and illegitimate mulattoes,” DuBois sought the truth

²⁵ For more on the political origins of the WPA narratives, see Norman R. Yetman, “The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection.” *American Quarterly* 19.3 (1967): 534-553. Rpt. Davis and Gates, *The Slave’s Narrative*.

which he suggested lay somewhere between these two images. He appealed to scholars to unearth African cultural retentions despite difficulties due to “the effectiveness of the slave system [that] meant the practically complete crushing out of the African clan and family life” (21). This path for cultural self-discovery was shared by Charles B. Johnson and John B. Cade, two African American scholars intent on vindicating the slave family by turning to the words of those that had experienced slavery first-hand - the voices of the ex-slaves.

Begun by scholars from Fisk and Southern University, interviews with ex-slaves were sought to provide an accurate rendering of the daily existence of the enslaved on southern plantations. Ophelia Settle Egypt’s “An Unwritten History of Slavery,” published in 1929, contained over 100 interviews supplemental to the work collected in collaboration with Johnson’s *God Struck Me Dead*. One of the first articles to take up the challenge of the true social life of the enslaved was published by E. Franklin Fraser in the newly formed *Journal of Negro History*. Fraser’s “The Negro Slave Family” appeared in 1930 followed shortly by Cade’s “Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves” in 1935, kindling interest for other researchers in additional states to pursue similar studies. Due to the financial difficulties of the Depression-era which instituted various New Deal employment plans, Lawrence Reddick of Kentucky State College approached members of the Federal Emergency Relief Agency with the idea of sending “unemployed Negro college graduates, who had . . . been left out generally in the program of recovery” to begin fieldwork by collecting data from the ex-slaves who, due to the passage of time and the age of the informants, might soon be unavailable (Yetman 541).²⁶ FERA, transformed into the Federal Project Number One, was better known as the Federal Arts Project and included the Federal Art, Music, Theatre and Writers’ Projects (544). Under the Federal

²⁶ For more on the WPA evolution, see Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers’ Project, 1935 – 1943*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1996.

Writers' Program, individual states were requested to submit a statewide guide focusing on areas of interest to promote tourism. The southern and border states were given the additional task of interviewing the ex-slaves.

The collection of folklore through oral and life histories of the ex-slaves began under the direction of John A. Lomax, Curator of the Archives of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress, along with aid from folklorist/editor Benjamin Botkin. The Office of Negro Affairs, headed by Sterling A. Brown, was also incorporated into the project. Interviewers were asked to query the ex-slaves from a set questionnaire that included age, place of birth, information on parents and siblings, the name of the master and the plantation along with questions relating to social life on the plantation. One of the questions focused specifically on slave wedding ritual. Following the dismantling of the WPA in the advent of World War II, several thousand of these interviews were housed in the Library of Congress Archives where they remained until 1972 when they were published as a collection by George Rawick under the title: *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography (1972 – 1979)*.

In Louisiana, Lyle Saxon, Director of the Louisiana Writers' Project chose not to send copies of the Louisiana narratives to the Library of Congress. Instead, he, along with Edward Dreyer and Robert Tallant, edited materials collected by workers from the state and published pieces of the interviews in *Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana* (1945) where limited use of the LWP materials is incorporated into a chapter focused on the enslaved. There is, however, much more information to be extracted from these documents. In 1990, Ronnie Clayton reworked many of the Louisiana narratives from original dialect into Standard English. His publication, *Mother Wit: The Ex-Slave Narratives of the Louisiana Writers' Project* (1990) provided long awaited transcriptions of the original LWP documents. However, Clayton makes little commentary on the

social history that the narratives contain and omits any narratives collected by black fieldworkers operating under the Dillard Project who were segregated from the rest of the LWP workers. His serious omission of the Dillard Project narratives excludes over one hundred additional pages of interview material. The valuable material contained in “these life histories, taken down as far as possible in the narrator’s words,” as Benjamin Botkin notes in his introduction to *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 – 1938*, “constitute an invaluable body of unconscious evidence or indirect source material, which scholars and writers dealing with the South, especially social psychologists and cultural anthropologists, cannot afford to reckon without” (4).²⁷ Therefore, despite the methodological problems that some critics claim to affect the validity of these narratives, they remain one of the few remaining sources to recover the life experiences of the enslaved.²⁸

As a major expression of what Herbert G. Gutman describes as “aspects of the larger Afro-American experience,” wedding rituals of the enslaved “allow us to study yet another aspect of slave belief and behavior” (*The Black Family* 269 - 70). Gutman refers to anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’ observations on the public nature of ritual:

Whatever way in which the collectivity expresses its interest in the marriage of its members, whether through the authority vested in strong consanguinal groups, or more directly through the intervention of the State, it remains true that marriage is not, is never, and cannot be a private business. (270)

²⁷ Botkin’s “Introduction” and other writings on the slave narrative collection are available online at <http://memory.loc.gov>

²⁸ See Paul D. Escott, “The Art and Science of Reading WPA Slave Narratives” and John W. Blassingame, “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves.” These articles are both reprinted in Davis and Gates, *The Slave’s Narrative*. See also Spindel, “Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27 (1996): 247 – 61 and “Introduction” to Rebecca J. Fraser, *Courtship and Love Among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, (Jackson: U Mississippi P, 2007). Emily West, in her introduction to *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: U Illinois P, 2004), also discusses problems in validity of interpretation. Both Fraser and West rely exclusively on the WPA narratives to comment on the legitimacy and wide-spread practice of wedding rituals by the enslaved in North and South Carolina, respectively.

Gutman points to the lack of “civil ritual” in weddings of the enslaved but concludes “[t]hat did not mean that slave marriages lacked ritual” (270). If we consider ritual, as Mary Douglas explains in *Natural Symbols*, to be “a deliberate self-conscious ‘doing’ of highly symbolic actions in public” that “communicates on multisensory levels” of “highly visual imagery” along with “dramatic sounds” that afford “tactile, olfactory, and gustatory stimulation,” then any form of wedding ceremony that presents these conventions may be deemed a ritual. Using Sidney Mintz’s assertion that “[i]n all cultures, marriage . . . signal[s] the social acceptance of rights and duties concerning such matters as sexual access, coresidence, and economic obligation,” Gutman concludes that “[s]ubstitute marriage rituals developed among the slaves” (*Ibid*). These ritual forms were highly dependent upon the consent and the cooperation of the white family along with “the developing Afro-American culture” which, according to Gutman, were “derived from ‘the folkways of the American environment’” (261). Thus, the evidence from the oral history narratives presented here from the enslaved in Louisiana reflects both the expansion of African American cultural forms along with specific instances of African American “borrowing” from white culture due to the close cultural proximity of the two groups.

Some Louisiana masters forced sexual unions between the enslaved, thereby denying men and women any opportunity for consent or control over their bodies. Such actions denied these enslaved any opportunity to participate in a public display of their union. Tom Douglas of Marion, on the B. B. Thomas plantation states, “[i]n slavery times, white folks put you together. Just tell you to go on and go to bed with her or him. You had to stay with them whether you wanted them or not.”²⁹ Cade’s work, “Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves” describes what he terms

²⁹ Rawick, *Arkansas Narratives* II P. 2, p. 193

“the utter helplessness of the slave family both as regards the selection and retention of a bosom mate” (302). Several narratives collected by Cade and his students point to “forced relationships,” raising the question as to whether the ex-slaves felt more comfortable speaking to young black students about compulsory relationships than they were with the predominately white Louisiana Writers’ Project interviewers. Cade includes the following interview from Mary L. Swearingan of Bastrop:

My grandmother, Mrs. Julian Wilcher, who is now ninety years, will cause tears to form in the listener’s eyes if he will but listen to her tell how she was treated. She said only a few of the slaves were lawfully married. In fact, whenever a woman was an extraordinary breeder, she was mated by the master to his own accord. (306)

Two additional narratives in the Cade article, both from residents of Bastrop, discuss slave breeding. Ella Alford says of her master that “Mr. Lyons also speaks of the value put upon a man and wife that had a large family, especially if the births of the children were close together. He said that man was exempted from work and the woman’s only duty was the care for the children. Likewise, if a family failed to produce children they were forced to work especially hard and soon sold so as to get couples to produce children” (307).

Lueatha Mansfield confirms that men or women could be purchased for “breeding purposes” (*Ibid*). Willie Williams, from a plantation with around ninety slaves in Vermillion Parish, near Sparta, told a white interviewer in Texas that “on dat plantation, dere am no weddin’ ‘lowed fer to git married. Dey jus’ gits married, but some not ‘lowed to git married, ‘cause de marster anxious to raise good, big niggers, de kind what am able to do lots of work and sell for a heap of money. Him have ‘bout ten wenches him not ‘low to git married and dey am big, strong women and de doctor ‘xamine dem fer de health . . . De marster sho’ was a-raising some fine niggers dat

way.”³⁰ Several of the enslaved conflate the “good crop” of infants on their plantations with abundant agricultural production, noting the master’s pleasure in successful re(production).

In *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana’s Cane World, 1820 – 1860*, Richard Follett uses the narratives of Elizabeth Ross Hite, Julia Woolrich, Henrietta Butler and Frances Doby to claim that “[f]ormer slave women were fully cognizant of the roles their owners ascribed to them, and they were equally sensitive to the psychological burden their masters heaped upon them” (67). Each of these women mention forced reproduction in her interview. Henrietta Butler of Gretna confirms that her mistress “made me have a baby by one of dem mens on de plantation.”³¹ I located two additional narratives in the FWP Collection at Northwestern University in Natchitoches not cited by Follett that also refer to mandatory reproduction: Mary Ann John was saved from forced breeding due to the end of the war. Nonetheless, she recalled the “big ole husky man on de place dey waield send all de gals to” and Manda Cooper states that:

My maw never worked in the fields she had a baby every year she had twens one time, so the old master taken care of her she brought him more money having children then she could working in the field none of us had the same father they would pick out the biggest nigger and tell her they wanted a kid by him she had to stay with him until she did get one. When I got old enough to breed and never could have no children I stayed in the field.³²

Yet Follett’s focused argument in favor of the planter’s calculated attempts at scientific slave breeding and his suggestion that planters manipulated “lactated amenorrhea” to produce more

³⁰ Rawick, *Texas Narratives XVI* Part 4, P.189.

³¹ From an interview by McElwee dated 5/58/40 FWP CGHRC. Folder 19.

³² Mary Ann John’s statement was taken from an interview by Flossie McElwee dated 6/6/1940 WPA LSU/LSL/LSA. Mss. 2858. Hill Memorial Library, LSU. This interview with Manda Cooper is one of several handwritten interviews from the Federal Writers’ Project Collection at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center at Northwestern State University. I have recorded the interview exactly as it is written.

slave infants overrides any mention of other possible scenarios to describe martial unions for the enslaved on Louisiana plantations. He bases his entire commentary on the thirty-nine narratives found in the Hill Memorial Library, never mentioning the larger collection at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center in Natchitoches, and also omitting a significant portion of Elizabeth Ross Hite's interview.

Hite's interview, one of the longest in the LSU/LSL/LSA group, consists of nineteen typed pages of her recollections of slavery on Pierre Landro's Trinity Plantation in Lafourche Parish. The text of this manuscript includes memories of domestic life, a lengthy anecdote about a runaway slave, encounters with "po white trash," punishments, memories of religious meetings including the texts of five spirituals, and a version of a Brer Rabbit folktale. According to Follett, "Elizabeth Ross Hite bitterly gave vent to the psychological cost of such treatment when she snapped, "All de master wanted was fo'dem wimmen to hav children" (67). Correlating her words taken from the interview directly with a manuscript entitled "Food - Marriages" found in the FWP files at Northwestern, the text of Hite's full statement is more illuminating on the subject. As Dillon, the LWP interviewer, notes, Elizabeth Ross Hite explains, "Some slaves had 'marriages' like people today, wid all the same trimmings – veil, gown 'n' everything – day married 'fore de preacher and had big affairs in de quarters but sometimes dey went to de master, who said 'c'mon darky, jump over die brum an' call yo'self man an' wife.'" The interviewer, Dillon notes: "So many went to the master, that [she] suspected that he must have given them presents. Others dispensed with even this formality – they cared naught for the preacher or the

master's method – as Hite affirms, “dey jist married demselves – went out an’ got married – don’t know how dey did it, but dey did.”³³

Hite’s interview describes several forms of slave wedding ritual. Dillon’s manuscript notes that marriages may have been conducted by the master or the preacher while Cade enumerates five distinct styles of marital-type unions: concubinage, self-marriage, married over the broomstick, ceremony conducted by Scripture reading, and the “white wedding” with a dress, veil and flowers. What is important to note here is that each style or type of ritual denotes social processes at work in plantation society. While Roger Abrahams notes that “there remains a lack of understanding of how African American cultural forms emerged in the midst of a society that systematically repressed the slaves,” he encourages scholars to “reconsider . . . the dynamic expressive interrelations of the two cultures living side by side (*Singing the Master* xvii). Abrahams’ work on corn shucking, in some aspects, mirrors accounts of slave weddings as both studies consider black/white relations as guided by “formal gestures” (43). When viewed as an action that “dramatize[s] attitudes, values and place within society” as Abrahams defines gestures, then white participation in weddings of the enslaved reveals ritual as a tool of the dominant culture to maintain conformity to white cultural and social values. Conversely, for many of the enslaved on Louisiana plantations, weddings were highly celebratory events that marked the occasion distinctly from the daily norm and signified a public performance of marital commitment. Thus, evaluating the styles of ritual used on Louisiana plantations becomes a discursive framework for viewing the plantation as a bicultural space of acculturation. This method is akin to that used by Charles Joyner in his study of a South Carolina slave community where, he believes, “slavery constituted a special environment that compelled the slaves to

³³ Undated manuscript with Folklore, Slaves and (Dillon) in upper left-hand corner, entitled “Food - Marriages” p. 31-2. Federal Writers’ Project, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, NSU, Folder 546.

fashion a precarious new folklife in the face of enormous constraints” (*Down by the Riverside* xx).

The gestures or displays enacted between the enslaved and the white planter family, as Kamua Brathwaite explains in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1170 – 1820*, reveal the process of creolization. According to Brathwaite, within the institution of slavery “two cultures of people, ha[d] to adapt themselves to a new environment and to each other. The friction created by this confrontation was cruel but it was also creative” (307). He defines creolization as “a cultural action” which may be “material, psychological and spiritual” that is “based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and – as white/black culturally discrete groups – to each other” (296). According to Brathwaite, creolization is a social process delineated by four distinct stages. Seasoning, the first stage, occurs during an introductory period (between one and three years) of exposure and contact. Through this initial interaction with the new culture, the enslaved acquire a new language, an Anglicized name and learn the work patterns through exposure to already creolized workers (298). Implying a change in identity status acquired through work routines, Brathwaite speaks of the sublimation of “discontent and sense of loss” that are overcome through the rigidity of work routines. In the second stage, the enslaved would likely seek some recognition of the fruits of his labor following his “success at job-accomplishment” (298). These “fruits” may be “a house, a woman, a home, or a plot of land.” The third stage involves what Brathwaite terms “socialization” through “participation with others through the gang-system and through communal recreational activities.” Examples of these are participation in “drumming and dancing and festivals.” The final stage in the process of creolization is defined as “imitation of the master” (299). Describing creolization as a process allows scholars to view plantation

society “not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole” (307). Cultural exchanges create a “new construct, made up of newcomers to the landscape and cultural strangers each to the other; one group dominant, the other legally and subordinately slaves” (296). By examining aspects of culture where the creolization process takes place, recent scholars point to syncretic developments in architectural traditions, agriculture, music, medicine and language, overlooking ritual as an equally important area in visualizing the concept of creolization.³⁴ Therefore, evaluating the various forms of wedding ritual on Louisiana plantations is a convenient vehicle to visualize creolization as a process with distinct stages.

The first and most elementary form of marital-type union was termed “taking up” with one another. Jane Montgomery, from a Homer (near Shreveport) plantation with seven slaves, tells her interviewer, “I ‘mind you they didn’t marry in slavery they jest took up. Master jest gave a permit.”³⁵ Many of the narratives mention the need for the master’s approval as Montgomery’s interview confirms, reflecting southern white male ideologies of power and domination. Other narratives, however, leave out any mention of the master’s consent, revealing that two slaves “taking up” with another may have bypassed the need for white approval and consent. William Mathews, enslaved on a small plantation with fifty slaves owned by Buck Adams in Franklin Parish near Monroe, notes that “nobody marry in dem days. A gal go out and take de notion for some buck and dey make de ‘greement to live together.”³⁶ In this narrative, the agreement is

³⁴ For more on the process of creolization in the areas enumerated above, see *Creolization in the Americas*. Ed. David Buisseret and Steven G. Reinhardt. The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures. Published for UT Arlington by Texas A&M UP: College Station, Texas, 2000.

³⁵ Rawick, *Oklahoma Narratives*, Vol. XIII, P. 229.

³⁶ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. XVI, Part III, P. 69.

based on consent between the prospective partners without white intervention. One brief manuscript quotes Jordan Wingard, an ex-slave who “claims that when he ‘took’ his wife, they made an agreement to stay together, as long as they lived, and they did.”³⁷ In “Out of the Mouths,” Cade corroborates: “There were some marriages among the slaves but men and women often went together and considered themselves married when no ceremony had been performed” (305). As part of the interview omitted by Follett, Elizabeth Ross Hite notes that the enslaved sometimes took the marriage rites into their own hands and kept the union to themselves.³⁸ In what I believe to be the highest form of resistance to the master’s authority, “taking up” together is the most significant rejection of white control as such actions maintain that consent between the enslaved couple was the only necessary action required for the union. White approval was unnecessary to “bind” the two together. Yet, even these quiet, non-publicized unions would have been significant in the quarter where enslaved families lived in households.

Ann Patton Malone offers five possible family configurations that determined living arrangements on Louisiana plantations. In *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family & Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana*, Malone describes the “simple family” or standard nuclear family; the “solitaire household” or group of single, widowed or abroad wives; the “non-nuclear family” where members were not related”; the “extended family” or group that included relatives that were not offspring and the multiple family household that consisted of the nuclear family with the “addition of a unmarried daughter or grandchild, the latter two forming the ‘second’ family” (7-8). On Louisiana sugar plantations, there were higher numbers of single young men occupying “larger-than-usual slave quarters” (Vlatch 161). The additional presence of what

³⁷ FWP CGHRC, NSU, Folder 546.

Malone terms “solitaires” reflects the “acceleration of the interstate slave trade after 1834” where the sugar and cotton planters sought young, strong hands to handle the burgeoning crop production (*Sweet Chariot* 31). These young men, although unmarried, lived together and were considered a type of household. “In the French-settled areas of Louisiana,” Vlach explains in *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, the slave cabins “differed from slave houses in other parts of the South. At the Barbarra plantation in St. Charles Parish, a sugar estate established in 1820 just upriver from New Orleans, a surviving slave house followed French precedents in both its form and its construction. The building was an example of the Creole house type, a one-story structure two rooms wide and two rooms deep, with a central chimney between the two front rooms” (162). Therefore, cultural differences among the planters might account for some differences in household configuration. However, even with the additional space allotted by extra rooms, two adult slaves “taking up” would have reordered the equilibrium of the quarter, perhaps even necessitating a reconfiguration of certain cabins. While “taking up” may or may not have required permission from the master, or housing reassignment by the overseer, among the enslaved of the community such relationships would not go unnoticed or unacknowledged.

As the narratives disclose, the enslaved couples were often married by the master. Chris Franklin, from the Robert J. Looney plantation in Bossier Parish recalls that:

De marryin’ business go through by what massa say. De fellow git de massa’s consen’. Massa mos’ly say yes without waitin’, ‘cause marryin’ mean more niggers from him comin’ on.³⁹

Annie Parks, born near Baton Rouge, told Samuel S. Taylor that her mother “said they just read ‘em together, slavery times.”⁴⁰ Carly Stewart, enslaved by Octavo De La Houssaya, interviewed

³⁹ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. XVI, Part 2 P. 55.

by Flossie McElwee, remembered that when she was “down the coast, they just take a piece of paper and read the matrimony to us.”⁴¹ M. L. Leary of St. Joseph, cited by Cade in “Out of the Mouths of Ex-slaves,” acknowledged, “When anyone on this plantation wanted to marry the master would read a section from the Bible and declare them man and wife” (304). J. H. Carter, recalled that “if his master heard a man say he liked a woman, he would call the two up and pronounce them man and wife. Sometimes one or two verses of the Bible or lines from another book were read” (*Ibid*). The Bible held enormous sway over the predominately illiterate slaves.⁴² Scripture reading to the enslaved by the master or mistress was largely an aural experience due to laws prohibiting slave literacy. Therefore, the scenario of the master reading the wedding ceremony from the Bible supports the image of benevolent paternalism where the master’s actions may be interpreted in both secular and sacred ways. On a civic level, by pronouncing the couple as “husband and wife” the master enacts civil authority to declare the marriage. On a religious level, the master becomes a conduit for divine laws to sanction “holy matrimony.”

Additionally, recording dates of these important rites of passage for the enslaved in the Family Bible from the white perspective reinforces the planter’s paternalistic notion of “my family, black and white.” For the enslaved, seeing their names and distinctive dates recorded in a text that they believed was endowed with special powers is a marker of the significance of these memorable events. Throughout the narratives, many of the enslaved are able to recall birth and wedding dates as the act of writing the dates in the Bible serves as a record to anchor fact and

⁴⁰ Rawick, *Arkansas Narratives*, II P 5, P. 260.

⁴¹ Hill Memorial Library, LSU, LLMVC W:11.

⁴² For more on the importance placed by African Americans on the Bible, see Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*. Yale UP, 2006.

remembrance, dignifying the event as it was etched into memory. As Sarah Pittman, from Union Parish remembered, “I don’t know how long I was married. It is in the bible. It is in there in big letters.”⁴³ Uncle Si Carroll from Ashland Plantation in Ascension Parish relates that “Massa had my birth-age in de book, an’ when I’se twenty-one he wrote Millie’s name by de side o’ mine!”⁴⁴ Carroll’s narrative is not the only one to mention the established age of twenty-one as a suitable age to marry. Ellen Betts, born in St. Mary’s Parish on Bayou Teche, was enslaved on Tolas Parson’s plantation. Betts describes the plantation as having “’bout 500 slaves.” She recalls that Parsons did not permit reading on the plantation: “He allus say, ‘Book larnin’ don’t raise no good sugar cane.” Betts does note that “De only larnin’ he ‘low was when dey larn de cullud chillen de Methodist catechism. De only writin’ a nigger ever git, am when he git born or marry or die, den Marse put de name in de big book.”⁴⁵ Later in her interview, she states that “When a black gal marry, Marse marry her hisself in de big house. He marry ‘em Saturday, so dey git Sunday off, too.” Aunt Virginia Bell, whose narrative is recorded in *Life Under the “Peculiar Institution,”* from the Lewis plantation close to Opelousas, observes that “iffen any of the slave hands wanted to git married, Massa Lewis would git them up to the house after supper time, have the man and woman jine hands and then read to them outen a book. I guess it was the Scriptures. Then he’d tell ‘em they was married but to be ready for work in the mornin’. Massa Lewis married us ‘cordin’ to Gospel.”⁴⁶ She mentions later in her interview that following the war, she was married in a “Scripture weddin’, too” (Yetman 26).

⁴³ Rawick, *Arkansas Narratives*, Vol. II Part 5, P. 353.

⁴⁴ Orland Kay Armstrong, *Old Massa’s People: The Old Slaves Tell Their Story*. Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1931. P.165.

⁴⁵ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, XVI P. 1, P. 75 -83.

⁴⁶ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, XVI P 1 P. 63.

The significance of the Scripture wedding may be viewed as “a signifier of colonial desire and discipline” as Homi Bhabha notes in *The Location of Culture* (102). In “Signs Taken for Wonders,” Bhabha points to the power of the “English book” as it “established both a measure of mimesis and a mode of civil authority and order” (107). Reading from the Bible to unite two slaves in matrimony is a way for the master to promote his “civil authority” and to instill a type of “order” on his plantation by imitating sacred elements of the wedding ceremony utilized by the antebellum whites. In this instance, the book becomes a signifier not only of religious authority but also white power and control. This becomes even clearer when the book mentioned is not the Bible but instead, the plantation ledger as is occasionally the case in the narratives. Inscribing the rite of passage in a secular text delimits the sacred to a marker of descent and potential reproduction. In the segment “Names in de Book,” Orland Kay Armstrong includes a sketch of Aunt Mary who “insists that her marriage was stamped with the strongest legal sanction of any recorded before emancipation” (165). Married to a “colored” union soldier who came to Louisiana to fight in the Battle of Port Hudson, Mary affirms: “When de battle over, he comes to de plantation an’ want me ter marry him. So de Yankee so’jers put our names on de roll-book, an’ say dat’s de same as de gov’ment doin’ it, an’ dey ain’t no way ter change it ‘les dey lose de war. We wuh mustered out atter date, but de marriage stayed till dat man mustered inter Heaven!” (*Ibid*). Writing in a variety of forms offered a sense of permanence for these unions.

Catherine Cornelius, enslaved on the Smithfield plantation owned by Dr. William Lyler close to Bayou Sarah, interviewed by E. Lilly, Jr. responds that “Mah master married me – us didn’t have no license, dough.”⁴⁷ Later she answers that “De master made um marry – he’s a ‘ligion

⁴⁷ *The Marcus Christian Collection*, UNO. Mss. 011, Box 4.

man,” acknowledging her master’s attempt at promoting moral constraints on his plantation. Cornelius states that “Mos ob de time” the weddings took place “in de master’s office.” As a place of business for the plantation, the plantation office as a site for slave weddings conveys a different sense than in other locations of the “Big House.” As Vlach explains in *Back of the Big House*, the design of the plantation was built upon “a series of physical buffers that simultaneously functioned as social buffers” (8). For visitors to the plantation, the planter was situated behind an “intricate sequence of gates, terraces, pathways and other threshold markers” (8). Woven into this “highly rational formalism,” was the concept of ordered space (5). For the enslaved living on the plantation, the yard behind the “Big House” signified an approachable workspace. But the enslaved never approached the front entrance of the house unbidden. Therefore, a marriage on the front gate, porch or parlor of the private home had significant spatial resonance that some scholars believe speaks to an internal hierarchy within the enslaved community.⁴⁸ Being married in the semi-private planter’s office as Cornelius relates, speaks to this planter’s concept of the wedding as more of a business than a social event.

In her narrative, Cornelius relates the location of her post-ceremony celebration: “De spread wuz at de cabin,” thus signaling a separation between the public black-white phase of the wedding ceremony and the more private black community-inclusive phase of this wedding. In

⁴⁸ Emily West notes in *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* that “Slaveholders typically dwelled on the weddings of slaves that took place in the Big House. It seems likely that these celebrations would have been those of key slaves, a privileged few referred to frequently in their owner’s manuscript materials” (32). See also E. Fraser Franklin, “The Negro Slave Family.” *The Journal of Negro History* 15.2 (1930): 198 – 259 who quotes Robert Anderson: “There was a social distinction with the slaves. The house and personal servants were on a higher social plane than the field slaves, while the colored person, who would associate with the ‘po’ white trash’ were practically outcasts, and held in very great contempt. The slaves belonging to the lower class of white folks, were not considered on the same level as those belonging to the ‘quality folks,’ and the slaves of these families were always proud of, and bragged of their connection with the better families. Thus we had our own social distinctions, which were based largely on the social standing of the masters and within the inner circle, on the position occupied in the plantation or home affairs” (209).

another interview conducted by Breaux and McKinney, Cornelius recalled, “We had no special days to git married. We jest said dat we wanted to git married and doctor Lyles married us. Yeah, we had a little celebration among us. We had sweet cake an little frolic. No, de people from the big house din’t come down to our cabins an our celebrations.”⁴⁹ The deliberate separation of public and private spaces reflects what Bertram W. Doyle suggests is a form of manners between the races. In *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control* (1937), Doyle, an African American sociologist, argues that “in the South, before the war, a recognized social ritual and a code of etiquette regulat[ed] the personal relations of both races” (xvii). Etiquette, Doyle suggests, signaled times and places of appropriate “social distances” that he defines as “a principle of social order and an index of the stability of the society in which it exists” (xix).

The plantation, Doyle notes, “had its own rules, regulations, and customs; and the laws and institutions of the state touched it seldom, except as plantation customs had been incorporated into those institutions or enacted into its laws” (18). Each person had an assigned place on the plantation and there were times when individuals were permitted access to certain spaces and there were other times when entrance to that space was not in order. There were times when whites came to the quarter and there were times when whites stayed away. Cornelius specifically states that the planter and his family did not participate in the post-nuptial celebrations in the quarter on her plantation. Later in the interview, Cornelius mentions that she and the other enslaved sometimes attended the Episcopal Church in town. Therefore, marrying in the master’s office and not in the Big House or in the town church is a marker of patriarchal control and reveals the emphasis that Doctor Lyler placed on slave unions. But, despite the

⁴⁹ FWP, CGHRC, NSU, Folder 19.

location of the wedding, the enslaved believed as Rebecca Fraser notes, that they were “participating in an act that served symbolic function for the wider enslaved community as a whole” by confirming their commitment to one another (89). For the enslaved, this public sharing of their pledge to one another signals another step in the creolization process. As Brathwaite acknowledges, accepting the conditions of enslavement served to eradicate feelings of “discontent and sense of loss,” thereby allowing the enslaved to acquire domestic comforts, moving the enslaved closer to an assumption of white conjugal values. Many of the narratives note that the new couple began “homemaking” in a new cabin built specifically for their use.

Moreover, as the narratives reveal, many slave weddings were often held on Saturday or during the Christmas season so that the newlyweds would have some time together before the work cycle resumed. A. L. Dunn writes the following:

‘Uncle’ Thomas of Shreveport tells us something about the marriage customs of slave days. He said that in Louisiana custom decreed that wedding ceremonies should be said on Saturday night so that all night could be given over to jollification.” An’particular de eatin’. Pappy tell Massa do all de matrimony readin’ to de folks, an’ send ‘em back to de quarters ter have a big time. Barbeque meat an’ taters, roasted aigs an’ chittlin’s – um – most as good as Christmas . . . ⁵⁰

By coordinating slave weddings to the already festive holiday season, the planter could prohibit disruptions to the work cycle while maintaining his appearance as a benevolent master. In her interview with E. Lilly, Jr., Martha Stuart notes that: Dey’s have all day off preparing for the weddin’. . . . No sir, dey (the bride and groom) didn’t have to go to work de next day, dey had two days off after de weddin’ to do what dey wanted.” ⁵¹

⁵⁰ FWP, CGHRC, NSU Folder 326.

⁵¹ *The Marcus Christian Collection*, UNO. Mss. 011. Box 4.



Illustration 2.2. Martha Stuart from *The Marcus Christian Collection*

This somewhat abbreviated honeymoon was also part of the paternalistic plantation reward system. As Eugene Genovese argues in “Preliminary Observations on a Man and His World,” that “[t]he values of the plantation, its ways of thought and feeling, were antithetical to those of the bourgeois world” (121).⁵² He describes the relation of master to the slave as “an extension of the relationship of father to perpetual child” (*Ibid*). In this context, Genovese refers to Francis Terry Leak, a slaveholder who married two of his slaves “with a simple dignity and seriousness worthy of the occasion. The whole plantation family, white and black, attended; the barbeque lived up to its advance notice; and the dancing carried on well into the early hours of the morning” (120 – 1). This seeming benevolence on the part of the planter did not fool Louisa Martin from Madewood, Thomas Pugh’s plantation, who knowingly relates that “Yes, dey had a honeymoon, honeymoon goin’ to work, sure did had a honeymoon.”⁵³ Later in her narrative, however, Martin does speak to benevolent paternalism when she notes how involved the white family was involved in contributing specialty food items for the weddings. Ellen Betts’ interview conveys the patriarchal stance taken by many planters. She confides that “One time de river boat come bearin’ de license for niggers to git marry with. Marse chase ‘em off and say ‘Don’t you come truckin’ no no-count papers roun’ my niggers. When I marry ‘em, dey marry as good as if de Lawd Gawd hisself marry ‘em and it don’t take no paper to bind de tie” (79 – 80).

Quoting excerpts from C. G. Memminger’s lecture from 1851, Eugene Genovese writes that “Each planter is in fact a Patriarch . . . his position compels him to be a ruler in his household”

⁵² See Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation*. Hanover, NH: U P of New England, 1969. Rpt. Wesleyan UP, 1988.

⁵³ *The Marcus Christian Collection*, UNO Mss. 011, Box 4.

(*The World the Slaveholders Made* 195). As the family lay under the general rule of the planter, Betts' account echoes both the belief that marriages among the enslaved were based on control



Illustration 2.3. Christian Friedrich Mayr, Kitchen Ball at White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, 1838

by the master and discounts the separation between divine law and civil law. Also clear from Betts' interview is that both the parents of the enslaved along with the "Marse and Missy" had to

approve of the union. Once that was done, Betts states “dey go ahead and git marry. Marse have de marry book to put de name down.” It is clear from the following statement, made in a manuscript dated 5/15/1940 by Silas Spotfore that this master sought to control marriages on his plantation. Spotfore reports to Flossie McElwee that “when dey went to get married, dey would not asks de pa and ma, dey would ask de “boss and de ole missus about it. If dey said it wuz all right, dey read some kind of writing on a paper and dey was married.”⁵⁴ Spotfore’s statement recalls Bhabha’s description of the process of displacement that “makes the presence of the book wondrous to the extent to which it is repeated, translated, misread, displaced” (102). This narrative seemingly indicates that the slaveholder had the wedding ceremony written out on paper rather than using a Bible. Despite the distinction of the locus for the words, Spotfore’s narrative reveals his belief that the enslaved couple was “read” into marriage.

Like the book, clothing may also become an item that is freighted with various meanings. Often, members of the white family donated clothing for the slave couple. Louisa Martin from Madewood Plantation recalls that “They’d wear fine clothes; w’en dey wante to git married dey’d go to de white folks and dey’d give em fine clothes to wear.”⁵⁵ Wash Wilson, from the Anderson plantation remembers that, “I married Cornelia Horde and she wore a purty blue gingham de white folks buyed and made for her.”⁵⁶ Ellen Betts recollects that following her arrival on the plantation, the new mistress greeted the slaves: “[s]he wave to us and smile on us and nex’ day she give her weddin’ dress to my ma. Dat de fines’ dress I ever seen. It was purple and green silk and all de nigger gals wear dat dress when dey git marry. My sister Sidney wore it

⁵⁴ Hill Memorial Library, LSU, LLMVC W:11.

⁵⁵ *The Marcus Christian Collection*, UNO Mss. 011:Box 4.

⁵⁶ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. XVI, Part 4, P. 145.

and Sary and Mary.”⁵⁷ As a gift to an enslaved woman upon her arrival, Miss Cornelia’s wedding gown becomes a form of cultural currency exchanged from white female to black female. The purple and green silk gown worn by the white bride at her wedding becomes an endowment to the black females who are permitted to replicate white clothing status only on special occasions. In their study of African American expressive culture appropriately entitled *Stylin,*’ Shane White and Graham White argue that “[c]lothing was embedded in the system of rewards and punishments designed to make the plantations and, indeed, the whole institution of slavery run smoothly” (14). As Fraser claims in her study of the WPA materials for North Carolina, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*; “Enslaved men and women from across the South recalled how they appropriated and altered the wedding attire of their masters and mistresses in order that they could use it for their own ceremony” (89). By “appropriating and altering” gifted wedding garments, the enslaved were participating in the process of creolization by imitating the master and in this case, the mistress.

Some white women were active participants in the creolization process by producing clothing specifically for a slave wedding. Priscilla Bond, a newlywed who married and moved from Maryland to a plantation near to Houma, writes in her diary entry for Saturday, January 4th, 1862:

Had a wedding here tonight; two of the servants got married. Howard performed the ceremony. The bride looked quite nice dressed in white. I made her turban of white swiss – pink tarlatan & orange blossoms. They were married at the gallery. The moon shone beautifully. They afterwards adjourned to the ‘hospital’ where they enjoyed a ‘Ball.’ I wonder what the ‘Yankees’ would think of it if they had seen, how happy they were, dressed in their *ball dresses*. The groom had on a suit of black, white gloves & tall *beaver*. The bride dressed in white swiss, pink trimmings & white gloves. The brides-maid & groom’s man dress to correspond. (213)

⁵⁷ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, XVI P. 1, p. 78.

Bond synthesizes two textile forms into a hybrid style for this slave wedding by transforming the turban or *tignon*, a kerchief traditionally worn by women of color to signify their status as workers with materials associated with white bridal fabrics. The *tignon* became politicized during Spanish colonial rule in Louisiana when Governor Miró acted to separate clothing styles worn by white women from those worn by women of color. Joan M. Martin, in her article on the system of *plaçage* in New Orleans, holds that this law, passed on June 2, 1786, “made ‘excessive attention to dress’ by women of ‘pure or mixed African blood’ a criminal offense” (62).⁵⁸ The law additionally mandated that mixed race women wear a kerchief to cover their hair in an “attempt to *prevent* the women from dressing beyond what he [Governor Miró] felt was their proper station in life” (*Ibid*). Thus, the *tignon* visually signified race and class caste.

Through the conflation of fabrics associated with white bridals, the white swiss and pink tarlatan,⁵⁹ along with the traditional orange blossom wreath brought into vogue by Queen Victoria to a design that signified racialized class and lower status, Priscilla Bond and her enslaved bride enact the process of creolization where new cultural forms are created through the exchange from one group to another. Although Bond’s impression of the event reflects white stereotypic images of the enslaved as “happy darkies,” it is clear through the clothing choices made by the enslaved that they viewed the wedding as a rite of status elevation. For Victor Turner, rituals of status elevation occur when “the ritual subject or novice” moves from a lower to a higher position in an institutional system of such positions” (*The Ritual Process* 167). By

⁵⁸ See Joan M. Martin, “*Plaçage* and the Louisiana *Gens de Couleur Libre*: How Race and Sex Defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color.” *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*. Ed. Sybil Kern. Baton Rouge, LA; Louisiana State UP, 2000.

⁵⁹ Tarlatan is defined as “a kind of thin open muslin, used esp. for ball dresses” by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. White swiss is defined as white muslin “with woven coin spots.”

not challenging but emulating the dominant culture, the enslaved bridal party is enacting the creolization process. As this wedding publicizes, the bride and groom and the wedding party are all attired symbolically and formally, thereby signaling that they are “attached to place and/or persons with whom they had identified themselves” (Brathwaite 298). In this case, the enslaved identify with the elite status of the white planter family on this Houma plantation. Such acts actively disrupt what Shane White and Graham White determine as the “nuanced social order that clothing was supposed to display, blurring the borderlines between black and white, slave and free” (16). Even the enslaved man in Bond’s passage is dressing far beyond his daily status with his suit, his gloves and his hat, thereby “embracing” what Fraser terms “the alternate identities of bride and groom” (88).

Evidence from other narratives also reveals high levels of white involvement. Some masters gave not only material goods but also financial support to the newlyweds. Henry Lewis, enslaved on the Cade plantation in Caginly, describes his wedding:

I marries in slavery time, when I’s about 22 year old. My first wife name’ Rachel an she live on double Bayou. She belong to de mayes place. I see her when I ridin’ de range for Massa Bob. I tells massa I want to git marry and he make me ask Massa Mayes and us de big weddin’. She dress all in white. I have de nice hat and suit of black clothes and daddy a shoemaker and make me a good pair of shoes to git marry in. Us stand front Mass Mayes and he read out de Bible. Us had a real big supper and some de white folks give us money.⁶⁰

These newlyweds received materials rewards of clothing, shoes, and money in addition to a dinner reception. In Cade’s article, Mrs. Rhiner Gardner claims, “On certain occasions of a festive nature, the slaves were given dainty foods and sometimes wine by their owners. If a marriage between couples the owner liked occurred on the plantation he would treat the slaves to

⁶⁰ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, XVI P. 3, p. 12.

a big dinner consisting principally of pigs taken from the pasture.”⁶¹ Ebleaux Washington notes, “For such slaves the master showed respect for family ties, allowed the slaves to marry and furnished the wedding usually at the big house” (*Ibid*).

Many of the narratives mention food gifts, often substantial enough to be termed a wedding feast. Mamie Jackson claimed that if the slaves “got married, like on Saturday, dey call yo’ company an’ hab a big dinner. T’ hep us out, dey gib us sugar, flour, chickens an’ aigs.”⁶² Jackson’s narrative suggests that the white planter family invited extended family members and friends of the enslaved from the surrounding countryside to attend the celebration, thereby expanding the sense of community for the celebration. Louisa Martin, from Thomas Pugh’s plantation in Thibideaux, recalls:

De white folks ud give em all de drinks an all de cakes. . . . An de next day, dey’d give em a nice dinner, big dinner. Our white folks was nice in dat way, when de folks got married.⁶³

For the white planter family to provide beverages and cake for the reception denotes several nuanced meanings. From the text of Martin’s narrative, it is unclear whether the “drinks” provided were alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverages. Scholars note that, at times, the planters provided rum or whiskey to the enslaved as either incentives or rewards for future or past production especially over the Christmas holidays thus marking the exceptional nature of the celebration. Nonetheless, in his role as benevolent paternalist (suggested by Martin’s use of the possessive pronoun in referring to the white family), Thomas Pugh highlighted his image as a benefactor for the entire plantation by providing meals and refreshments. The presence of the

⁶¹ John B. Cade, “Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves.” *The Journal of Negro History* 20.3 (1935): 292 – 337.

⁶² WPA Collection., Mss. 2858. Hill Memorial Library, LSU.

⁶³ *The Marcus Christian Collection*, UNO, Mss. 011:Box 4.

highly symbolic cake stands in contrast to the everyday rations of the enslaved on most plantations. Such delicacies reflect the “time-out-of-time” nature of this celebration suggested by Martin’s description.⁶⁴

Additionally, as part of the ritual performance, the concept of sharing food joins participants into the web of community. As a rite of reincorporation, the wedding feast provides an opportunity to celebrate the individual’s rite of passage from one status to another, thus resetting and stabilizing the shifting change in the social dynamic. That Thomas Pugh provided both reception items and a communal feast on the following day speaks to the role of ritual in maintaining group boundaries through participation. Although the white planter family would typically not sit to share food with the enslaved, in this instance, they are actively giving participants who valorize the newlyweds in the context of the entire community. In contrast to slaveholders who did not contribute to weddings of the enslaved on their plantations, benevolent masters reinforced their authority by ceremonially authenticating the new slave union through a performance of support and reward. The wedding feast may be aptly determined as a rite of conspicuous display of the master’s generosity and goodwill occurring simultaneously as the enslaved participated in a rite of conspicuous consumption of these delicacies.

Another important aspect of “reading” the ritual not only determines the events but also identifies the leading roles. Several of the oral history narratives recount instances where white preachers were called to marry the enslaved. Clara Brim, enslaved by William Lyons of Branch, claims that “Ole Massa even git de preacher for marryin’ de slaves.”⁶⁵ Recorded in Dillion’s

⁶⁴ For more on the idea of the nature of time in festival, see Alejandro Falassi, *Time Out of Time; Essays on the Festival*. Albuquerque: U New Mexico P, 1987. For Falassi, a festival, or a “sacred or profane time of celebration marked by special observances” occurs in a temporal zone outside of the daily norm (2).

⁶⁵ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. XVI, Part 1, P. 148.

section “Marriages,” Bongy Johnson recalls: “Mos’ folks don’t understand dat but enduring slavery de negroes married by de consent fo dere masters. After de war, sonn’s dey got a lil’ piece of money, dey got a license and married by law – dat is, mos’ ob dem did. I was a good big girl when mudder and fadder married an’ I went to de weddin’. De pastor of de white folks’ church married’em right up dere on de front lawn under dat ole pee-cawn tree what was struck by lightnin’ last week.”⁶⁶ Anne Parks, from Mer Rouge, states in her narrative collected in Arkansas that, “My mother said they just read’em together, slavery times. I think she said that the preacher married them on the Offord plantation.”⁶⁷ James Lucas whose interview is published in Norman R. Yetman’s *Life Under the “Peculiar Institution”: Selections from the Slave Narrative Collection* shares his account of slave weddings:

Den sometimes dey had big weddin’s and de young white ladies dressed de brides up like dey was white. Sometimes dey sent to N’awlins for a big cake. De preacher married’em with de same testimony dey use now. Den everybody’d have a little drink and some cake. It sure was larrapin’. Den everybody’d get right. Us could dance near about all night. De old-time fiddlers played fast music and us all clapped hands and tromped and swayed in time to de music. Us sure made de rafters ring. (218)

As an example of benevolent paternalism, the white planter family arranged for a store-bought wedding cake for the couple as a rite of conspicuous display. Along with the cake, Lucas notes the presence of alcohol, another conspicuous display of the master’s benevolence, to help wedding attendees “get right” in the sense of warranting the colloquial pronouncement of approval – “larrapin.” In this narrative, Lucas notes that a white preacher, not the master, married the enslaved couple, distinguishing this wedding from others where the master served as officiant. Rebecca Fraser emphasizes, “[i]t is evident from statements such as these that the

⁶⁶ FWP, CGHRC, NSU, Folder 546.

⁶⁷ Rawick, *Arkansas Narratives*, Vol. II, Part 5, P.260.

presence of the preacher at the wedding ceremonies of the enslaved fundamentally changed the meaning of the occasion” (92). While Fraser claims that “[e]nslaved cultural practices may have appropriated some elements of the white slaveholding elite in their wedding ceremonies,” she argues that [the enslaved] sought “their own zones of emotional autonomy” (*Ibid*). While this may be true, others such as Shane White and Graham White, see that “this ritual (although not the celebrations afterwards) may well have been the point when slave behavior most nearly corresponded to that of whites” (54). Although these scholars do not expressly identify the process, this emulation of white wedding ritual signals the process of creolization. In this instance of ritual performance, the enslaved, aided and supported by the elite whites, are syncretizing white wedding ritual along with African American forms of African musical and dance retentions as part of the celebration. As Louisa Martin recalls, “An after de weddin, you know, dey’d dance, an, dat was whut de while folks lak, to see em dance.”⁶⁸ Martin’s statement stands in direct opposition to scholars, such as Patrick W. O’Neil, who claim that “African Americans were forced to temper their self-expression and submit to various degradations of both their culture and their claims to autonomy” (“Bosses” 12).

West Chapman recalls that “servants” on his plantation were married in the parlor of the big house and “lots of white people were there. A white preacher married them, too. Then there was a big supper – cakes, all kinds of hog-meat, mutton in season, chicken-pie, clothes to wear to marry in, an’ we had a little rest from work”⁶⁹ The location of this wedding in the parlor of the “Big House” with a white minister present reveals a high level of involvement by this white family. Chapman’s narrative discloses that these enslaved received added support from the white

⁶⁸ *The Marcus Christian Collection*, UNO. Mss. 011: Box 4.

⁶⁹ FWP, CGHRC, NSU Folder 546.

community as he notes that “lots” of additional whites came to witness the wedding. As Fraser acknowledges, “Big wedding ceremonies with the preacher served to confirm and strengthen extended familial ties as well as reinforcing the bonds of community for the enslaved” (92). Fraser views imitation of elite whites by the enslaved as “one of the most complex and multifaceted acts of resistance to the system as a whole” in that the wedding ceremonies served as “a very public confirmation that the enslaved refused the system of slavery and its trade in human beings” (89). However, the proximity of the white family and the enslaved required to enact a wedding ritual with its material requirements along with the attendant celebration precludes forms of resistance. Such communal enactments support Brathwaite’s concept that imitation is the final stage in the process of creolization.

Other narratives reveal that black preachers conducted the wedding ceremonies. Mattie Lee, enslaved on a plantation in Franklin Parish remembers, “On weekends we would dance and they would always be getting married. We had a colored man on de place who could read good and he did de marrying” (171).⁷⁰ Chris Franklin, enslaved by Judge Robert J. Looney on a plantation in Bossier Parish, recalls that “[t]he Rev. Elder Venable, what um de old culled preacher, marries us.”⁷¹ Martha Stuart, from a plantation on Black Creek close to Clinton, discloses:

They married out de Bible in de quarters – colored preachers, yes, ---yes, -
---everybody kissed de bride. Dey had de marriage at night and de slaves
from everywhere would come. Dey had everything to eat and dem dat
wasn’t b’long to church would dance.⁷²

⁷⁰ Rawick, *Missouri Narratives*, Vol. X, P. 171.

⁷¹ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. XVI Part 2, p. 59

⁷² *The Marcus Christian Collection*, UNO. Mss. 011:Box 4.

Additional information in Stuart's narrative reveals the power of religious interdiction on dancing, the fact that the couple had the wedding day off from work and were given nice clothes, and that "dey'd all come to de weddin'." For this context alone, it is unclear if Stuart is referring to the white family or the entire community of the enslaved although in the quotation cited above, she confirms that "de slaves from everywhere would come." This testimony substantiates Fraser's belief that "the significance of an African American preacher was fundamental to their marriage ceremonies because he incorporated extra meaning into these occasions" (*Courtship and Love* 94). Confirming the role of the black preacher, Eliza Ripley writes in her memoir, "There was a burial ground for the slaves. One of them, the engineer, by the way, and a mighty good negro, too, acted as preacher. He married and buried and in all ways ministered to the spiritual needs of his flock."⁷³ While I support Fraser's claim that the African American preacher was significant because "His presence symbolized that these unions were sanctified under the authority of God," and that he "represented the high moral standards of community life for the enslaved" (94). I do, however, disagree when Fraser suggests that the black preacher's presence served to refute "the images of sexual licentiousness and uncivilized heathenism" that the elite white southern "had constructed and imposed" on the enslaved. Nor do I agree with Kenneth Stampps's comment that "[t]he white family 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'" (*Peculiar Institution* 329).⁷⁴ I suggest that we may view the

⁷³ Eliza McHatton Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1912. Rpt. New York: Dodo Press, 2009.

⁷⁴ Perhaps Stampp is basing his comment on Mary Chesnut's disdainful account of the slave wedding on her Camden plantation. Stampp is not the only historian to cite Chesnut. Patrick W. O'Neil cites Chesnut's "sentiments

presence of the black preacher in another way which is as “a concession to the ambition of slaves who had been ‘called to preach’ and a symbol of the growing tendency to separation in religious services and ceremonials” (Doyle 43). The separation that Doyle notes in *The Etiquette of Race Relations* comes from three areas: “Negro preachers were being licensed or ordained to preach to Negroes; separate services for slaves within the churches . . . where there was a ‘church within a church’ and when the Negro members had organizations of their own, within the white church, and subordinated to it” (45). This idea is more in keeping with the writings of Leonidas Polk, Charles C. Jones and Thomas S. Clay in their studies of the development of religious institutions aimed at promoting religious instruction on southern plantations.

Other narratives recall a priest at weddings of the enslaved. Two men enslaved on plantations owned by Creole planters mention the presence of a priest for various ministrations. Victor Duhon from a plantation in Lafayette Parish, between Broussard and Warcille, recalls that the priest married and baptized the slaves on his plantation.⁷⁵ Valmar Cormier, a slave of Duplissant Dugat of Lafayette remembers: “I git marry at 20 and my first wife de French gal. We marry by de priest in de church.”⁷⁶ Two sisters, Pauline Johnson and Felice Boudreaux from Dernas Martine’s plantation near Opelousas, recall that “One day us papa fell sick in bed, just ‘fore freedom. And he kep’ callin’ for the priest. Old massa call the priest and just ‘fore us papa die the priest marry him and my mama ‘fore dat they just married by the massa’s word.”⁷⁷ Francis Doby’s narrative is the most informative:

toward African Americans mingled by disgust, condescension, and fear” (“Bosses and Broomsticks” 29). For the complete text of her description of the wedding, see C. Van Woodward, ed. *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*. p.259.

⁷⁵ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. XVI, Part 1 p. 307-8.

⁷⁶ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. XVI, Part 1. P. 253.

⁷⁷ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. XVI, Part 2. P. 226.

Pere Jean standin in front of' em, he says blah blah blah blah, den he stop: Donnez les bangles (Give the rings). 'Den de man, he fool 'round his pockets and look and look and look; den he find de rings and give it to de priest and de bride. She be's lookin' so innocent and blushin; and makin' herself 'pat to be so good, talkin' soft, yen, yen, yen. I say to myself, "Go on, gal. Stop makin' does yen yen yen. You known al you done heer de thunder rollin'".⁷⁸

Doby's narrative contains the only reference to an exchange of wedding rings that I have seen in any of the oral histories collected by WPA or LWP interviewers. His narrative comically depicts a demure, yet according to Doby, sexually aware bride at the time of her wedding ceremony. We have no idea of his connection to the bride and groom or where the wedding was held in this narrative, only a hint of Doby's disparagement over the double ring ceremony. This narrative is also notable as there is a curious similarity between Doby's repetitive use of "blah" and the preverbal participle "blan" as a possible marker of the Gullah dialect.⁷⁹ Anita Fonvergne, the granddaughter of an emissary of Napoleon and a slave woman from Santo Domingo, recalls that her mother was married by a priest in her family home. At her father's request, Fonvergne's mother delayed her marriage until she turned twenty-two. Fonvergne comments that her mother wore bridal clothing at her wedding and at the reception that followed.⁸⁰ From additional comments in the narrative, it is clear that Fonvergne was a wealthy quadroon and was not enslaved. The presence of this misfiled narrative in a folder with interviews by ex-slaves is an example of the problem in using materials from the LWP collection.

⁷⁸ Hill Memorial Library, LSU. Mss. 2858.

⁷⁹ For the linguistic significance of "blan" as an interrated action, see J. L. Dillard, "Evidence of Pidgin/Creolization in Early American English." In *Creolization in the Americas*. Ed. David Buissert and Steven G. Reinhardt. College Station, TX: TAMU P for UT, 2000.

⁸⁰ A copy of this interview is included in DaNean Pound's Master's Thesis, "Slave to the Ex-slave Narrative." LD3091L3687T1568 from Northwestern State University at Natchitoches. In the left-hand top of the page, Breaux is identified as the interviewer. The right-hand top gives the interview date 4/13 – 17/39 and the title "Life History" is centered on the top of the page.

For some scholars, none of ceremonies mentioned above constitute true ritual. In *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South*, Anthony Kaye states distinctly that weddings of the enslaved were not rituals. However, he does note that “a wedding . . . seemed from the slave’s standpoint to symbolically mediate the conflict between slave owners’ property rights and bonds between spouses” (72). However, despite variations in wedding styles of the enslaved, these actions are rituals, signifying a committed union between a man and a woman. Each ritual style functions as an acknowledgment of an emotional commitment with promises of fidelity in a deliberate public ceremony. Even the “broomstick marriage” is a ritual. However, it is the least understood and most misaligned form of wedding ritual on southern plantations. In *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, John Blassingame argues that “blacks who had been children watching such ceremonies often conflated the wedding ritual and the post-nuptial jumping of the broom” (167). Patrick W. O’Neil in his more recent article “Bosses and Broomsticks: Ritual and Authority in Antebellum Slave Weddings” claims “that the broomstick ritual served whites far more than blacks” and that it “was part of the insidious iconography of enslavement” (41, 47). These are only two scholars in a long list of those who neglect to discern that “jumping the broom” was not only the most prevalent form of wedding ritual enacted by the enslaved but that it was also based on a recognized form of temporary or informal marriage in Anglicized parts of Europe.

Solomon Johnson, enslaved on Avery Island, recalls that marriage on the Dupree plantation consisted of jumping the broom.⁸¹ Elizabeth Hite notes that “Den sometime dey would go to master to git his permission an blessings an he would say, “C’mon darky jump over this brum an

⁸¹ This narrative is part of the John B. Cade Collection at Southern University. The interview was conducted by Mrs. P. L. Johnson. There is no date on the handwritten interview.



Illustration 2.4. The Old Plantation. Attributed to John Rose around 1785 – 1795

call yo'self man and wife" (16).⁸² Mary Reynolds, enslaved on the Kilpatrick plantation in Black River, Louisiana remembers: "After a while I taken a notion to marry and massa and missy marries us same as all the niggers. They stands outside the house with a broom held crosswise of the door and we stands outside. Missy puts a li'l wreath on my head they kept there and we steps over the broom into the house. Now, that's all they was to the marryin'. After freedom I gits married and has it put in the book by a preacher" (4).⁸³ Reynolds' statement

⁸² LSA Microfilm N1976-18. Slave Narratives 1944.

⁸³ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. 16, Part 3.

confirms Ann duCille's insistence in *The Coupling Convention* that the newly freed men and women sought to legalize their marriages as "signs of liberation and entitlement to both democracy and desire" (14). Several of the interviews note the display of a framed marriage license on a wall in the main living area and the pride with which the ex-slave directs the interviewer's attention to it. Dillon's manuscript also references several ex-slaves who complained that their marriage licenses had been stolen by others and passed off as their own.⁸⁴ Fred Brown, eight years old when the Civil War began, enslaved on a plantation in Baton Rouge Parish recalls, "Den sometimes a couple us 'lowed to git married and dere an extry fixed for supper. De couple steps over de broom laid on de floor, dey's married den."⁸⁵ These narratives reveal variation in the positioning of the broom: at times, the broom is in the threshold of a doorway and at other times it is on the ground and the couple must jump over it.

In an interview from the collection by Cade's students, Lou Quanles, enslaved by George Green, responded: "Marriages depended on the willingness of their masters. At his consent, they jumped the broomstick and the ceremony was performed."⁸⁶ Aaron Russel who was born a slave of William Patrick on a large plantation in Ouachita Parish, near Monroe, was six years old when the Civil War started. He remembers that his master "have lots of married couples on he place. I knows most plantations de cullud folks treated like cattle, but massa different. Him have de reg'lations. If dey wants to marry dey asks him and dey has de cer'mony, what am step over de broom laid on de floor."⁸⁷ Julia Woolrich, born on a La Fouche Crossing plantation, describes her

⁸⁴ FWP, CGHRC, NSU. Folder 546.

⁸⁵ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. 16, Part I, P. 158.

⁸⁶ The John B. Cade Collection, Southern University, Interview #163.

⁸⁷ Rawick, *Texas Narratives*, Vol. 16, Part 3, P. 271-2.

first owner as a “mean man” before she was auctioned off to her new Creole master by the name of Guitlot. She describes weddings on her plantation: “Dey didn’t marry befo’ de war, de Missus taken an alphabet, or some book, an’ read somethin’ out of it, and den put a broom down and dey jump over it – den dey was married. Sometimes dey would give dem a chicken supper.”⁸⁸

Lewis Whitmore, interviewed by a student of John B. Cade recalls, “He was married. His master permitted him to marry in the “Big House” and when the ceremony was performed, he ‘jumped the broom” an event considered a great feat on his plantation.”⁸⁹

Perhaps the most interesting account of jumping the broom is a second carbon, entitled only “Slave Tale” with no additional notation except for 11a in the right-hand corner. This brief rather atypical narrative of Edmund Lewis, “Marse Landro’s favorite slave” casts Edmund as a slave hero. After relaying Edmund’s exaggerated deeds and accomplishments picking cotton and courting women, the third person omniscient narrator describes Edmund Lewis’s marriage:

The Driver (person who whipped the slaves) married Edmund to a woman from Alabama. He made the woman jump over a broom just after marriage. Edmund explained, “If a woman can’t jump a broom, she can’t jump a window – cause when I say jump I’s mean jump. Git in de habit baby, I’s might have ya jumpin’ real soon. (2)

This brief but amusing story concludes with the supposition that “jumping over the broom just after marriage became a seal of marriage on all of the plantations. “Git outta heah! later became “jump gal jump.”⁹⁰ Edmund Lewis’ narrative is credited with providing a *terminus pro quem* for jumping the broom. This is the only narrative that I have found in the Louisiana narratives that supports Blassingame’s notion that the jumping ritual was a “humorous test” (166).

⁸⁸ Louisiana State Archives Microfilm N1976 – 18. Slave Narratives. Woolrich’s narrative is also available at FWP, CGHRC, NSU, Folder 19.

⁸⁹ The John B. Cade Collection, Southern University, Interview #205.

⁹⁰ FWP, CGHRC, NSU, Folder 326.

Through the examples provided here, jumping the broom as a type of wedding ritual found on Louisiana plantations reveals multiple existence and variation which are two hallmarks of folklore.

In the 1970's, American television viewers who had not read Alex Haley's recreation of his family genealogy published earlier in print form, watched *Roots* in a made-for-television miniseries. As part of the narrative, Haley's ancestor, Kunta Kinte, a proud African Mandingo warrior marries Bell, a culturally assimilated African American in a broom jumping ritual on a Virginia plantation. In the presence of a combined audience of fellow slaves and white onlookers, Kunta and Bell commit to a martial union that held deep meaning not just for the newly married couple but for their immediate community as well. Haley describes the broom jumping ceremony:

And then very solemnly, Aunt Sukey placed a broomstick on the close-cropped grass just in front of Kunta and Bell, whom she now motioned to link arms . . . he heard Aunt Sukey asking, "Now, y'all two is sho' you wants to get married?" . . . And then Aunt Sukey said, 'Den, in the eyes of Jesus, y'all jump into de holy lan' of matrimony.' (417-8)

Bell warns Kunta as they prepare to jump the broom that "a marriage would meet the very worse kind of luck if the feet of either person should touch the broomstick, and whoever did would be the first to die" (418). In addition to enumerating interdictions on broom jumping performance, Haley includes historically accurate asides to the wedding preparations; Kunta's consideration and subsequent rejection of a cross-plantation marriage, his need for permission from the master, the presence of the white family at the wedding and a testimony to the abundant feasting, dancing and drinking that follow the ceremony in the slave quarters. Through the publication of *Roots* not only did Haley prompt an overarching interest in African American genealogical research, he also facilitated the African American folk revival of jumping the broom.

In 1993, noting the impact of *Roots* on African American culture, Harriet Cole, fashion editor for *Essence* magazine, a “fashion and trends” publication aimed at upwardly mobile African Americans, published *Jumping the Broom: The African-American Wedding Planner*, to the delight of a receptive black female audience. Deriving her title from the slave practice of jumping the broom, Cole determined that the custom had traditional African roots. In light of white denial of legal and binding marriage contracts for the enslaved, Cole asserts:

Yet the enslaved were spiritual people who had been taught rituals that began as early as childhood to prepare them for that big step into family life. How could they succumb to this denial? They did not. So they became inventive. Out of their creativity came the tradition of jumping the broom. (7)

Cole envisions the broom as a signifier of domesticity for certain African tribes who used the broom to “represent the beginning of homemaking for a couple.”⁹¹ Using slave narratives and “other early nineteenth-century documentation,” Cole presents a reconstructed slave wedding: “With the master’s permission, a couple was allowed to stand before witnesses, pledge their devotion to each other, and finally jump over a broom, which would indicate their step into married life” (8). She follows this rather straightforward description with additional evidence derived from James Mellon’s *Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember* (1988). Cole includes the only two narratives from Mellon’s work that mention slave weddings, one from a male informant, the other from a female. In recounting what appears to be a family story of his parents’ union, Joe Rawls “reminisces”:

Dey say my daddy was allus gittin’ permits t’go ober’n’ see the cook on de Smith place . . . Mister Rawls he say he try t’range it . . . Yes, dey fix it all up purty soon so dey could step ober the broom – dat’s what dey uster

⁹¹ Cole notes, “For the Kgatla people of southern Africa, it was customary, for example, on the day after the wedding for the bride to help the other women in the family to sweep the courtyard clean, thereby symbolizing her willingness and obligation to assist in housework at her new in-law’s residence until the couple moved to their own home” (7).

call it when niggers git marry. (Mellon 145-6)

Rawls reveals how his master facilitated a marriage between his slave and one on a neighboring plantation by illustrating the ceremony:

Well, dey jus' lay de broom down, 'n' dem what's gwine ter git marry walks out'n' steps ober the broom bofe togedder, 'n' de ole massa, he say, "I now pronounce you man 'n' wife," 'n' den dey was marry'. Dat was all dey was t'it – no ce'mony, no license, no nothin', jis' marryin'. (8)

Cole comments that in both narratives it is “especially revealing” that the southern planter “encouraged and blessed the union of ‘his’ slaves” (*Ibid*). Cole includes a second narrative from Tempie Durham which is a fairly long, detailed description of her marriage ceremony. She relates that she was married on the front porch of the “Big House” wearing traditional bridal attire which included “a white dress, white shoes, an’ long white gloves dat come to my elbows” along with a veil made “of a white net window curtain” (146). She walked down the porch to music where a Negro preacher waited to marry her at the “alter Mis’ Betsy done fixed” (146). Following the actual ceremony, Tempie and her groom jumped the broom. Tempie confides that Marse George “got to have his little fun” while she and her new husband “got to jump over the broomstick backwards. You got to do dat to see which one gwine be boss of your household” (147). Tempie Durham’s narrative is one of the most frequently cited WPA narratives and it is also the most misconstrued in its representation of plantation power and racial dynamics.

Cole notes that Durham’s narrative is “particularly disturbing” as the master “also had fun at the expense of his slaves” (10). Her statement and that of many other scholars highlight the problem of using slave narratives separated from historical and folkloric contexts. While Cole terms the broomstick wedding an African tradition that has been “reworked,” Patrick O’Neil views jumping the broom as “part of the insidious iconography of slavery” that was used “not merely to mark slave marriage as transitory and unimportant but also to assert authority over

black households.”⁹² Other scholars view the broom ceremony in a different light. Historian Thomas E. Wills in “Weddings on Contested Grounds: Slave Marriage in the Antebellum South,” asserts, “[i]n slave-led ceremonies, the preacher or elder typically read passages from the Bible before the bride and groom jumped over a broomstick” (111). Eugene D. Genovese glosses broomstick marriages as an example of “each planter having his own idea of what was proper to celebrate the occasion”⁹³ while Herbert G. Gutman, confessing to be responding to the “bitter public and academic controversy” over the scathing portrait of the black family presented in Daniel Moynihan’s report issued in 1965, *The Negro Family in America: The Case for National Action*, conflates the broomstick ritual with African American belief in witchcraft.⁹⁴ Brenda E. Stevenson comes closest in *Life in Black & White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (1996), when she identifies the broomstick ritual as a “pre-Christian ritual” but betrays her Anglo-European bias when she comments that this “relic of their ‘pagan’ past is a ‘cultural albatross on slaves’ that white slaveholders ‘imposed’ on their slaves, suggesting ‘the lack of respect and honor that they held for their black’s attempts to create meaningful marital relationships’” (229). What Cole, Blassingame, Gutman, Stevenson and others misconstrue is a besom wedding.

⁹² In “Bosses and Broomsticks: Ritual and Authority in Antebellum Slave Weddings,” *The Journal of Southern History* LXXV.1. (2009): 29 – 48, O’Neil argues “African Americans’ accounts of slave weddings demonstrate that slaves contented not merely with daily physical, mental, and spiritual brutality but also with invasive, ritualized attempts to degrade them and normalize their subordination” (32).

⁹³ See *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, where Genovese includes Tempie Herndon’s account of her wedding with the comment that “[t]he paternalistic effort of the whites had its less attractive side” (479).

⁹⁴ See Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750 – 1925*, p. 283 – 4. For examples of African American folk beliefs concerning brooms and ill omens, see Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folks Beliefs of the Southern Negro*, (1926, Rpt. Kessinger, 2003). Puckett is clear in asserting that “Stepping over a broom (or mop) brings bad luck, non-marriage, or a trip to jail” (397-8). Another old folk belief is that by placing a broomstick across a doorway at night, one may prevent witches from entering the house as they have to stop to count the bristles.

Gwenith Gwynn (W. Rhys Jones) depicts the Welch practice of jumping a “besom” as a distinctive wedding custom. In “Besom Wedding in the Ceiriog Valley,” Gwynn notes the presence of besom weddings in this Celtic enclave, “lingering” until 1840. Using birth records to explore the social demographics of this small community, Gwynn ascertains that many of the children christened in the parish came from parents married outside of the religious sanction of the Church.⁹⁵ From these records, he uncovers a type of wedding depicted as independent of the rites and ceremonies of the Church form of marriage. The wedding is as follows:

The Besom Wedding was a wedding after this manner: - A birch besom⁹⁶ was placed aslant in the open doorway of a house, with the head of the besom on the doorstone, and the top of the handle on the door post. Then the young man jumped over it first into the house, and afterwards the young woman in the same way. This jumping was not recognized as marriage if either of the two touched the besom in jumping, or, by accident, removed it from its place. It was necessary to jump in the presence of witnesses too. (154)

Thus, the saying “they have jumped over the besom” meant a wedding outside the sanction of the church. The wife became the partner of the husband (*cydfyddio*) and the “only object of the wedding was the procreation and rearing of children” (158). In his article, Gwynn reveals the diffusion of broomstick marriages to areas outside of the Ceiriog Valley. An informant from Anglesey shares her recollections of the custom causing Gwynn to remark that “at one time, the Besom Wedding was the only form of marriage known on the island’ (160-1). Gwynn remarks that the person officiating may have been a “holy man . . . the head of the tribe

⁹⁵ In “The Besom Wedding,” Gwynn refers to the Register of Christenings and Deaths from the parish Llansantffaid Glynn Ceiriog that covers the period from May 29th, 1768 to May 1st, 1805. See *Folklore* 39.2 (1928): 149 – 166.

⁹⁶ Gwynn identifies the birch besom as a “phallic symbol of fertility” (158). That the besom was made of birch is symbolic as birch wood was closely associated with Beltane fires in Scotland and in England. The birch is connected mythologically to fertility rites throughout the European continent. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the secondary usage for the term “besom” to refer to “An implement for sweeping, usually made of a bunch of broom, heather, birch, or other twigs bound together round a handle; a broom. (Dialectically, as in Scotland, the generic name for sweeping implements of any material, e.g. a *heather, birch, or broom besom, a hair besom*; but literary English ‘broom’ is now generic, and ‘besom’ specific).”

. . . or kindred group . . . or a priestess” (156-7). The besom wedding could be undone by merely jumping backwards through the doorway. As Gwynn notes, “[t]he method of annulment was by placing a birch besom in the open doorway, and the disappointed party jumping backwards over it from the house into the open” (159). This, however, was only permitted during the first year of marriage and if the couple had no children.

An earlier reference to besom weddings in Wales, a Celtic enclave, provides a textual *terminus pro quem*. In *A Tour Through Part of North Wales in the Year 1798, and at Other Times*, the Reverend J. Evans distinguishes great and small weddings. The great wedding, Evans states, “resembles the *confarreatio*, and the latter *de usu*” styled after Roman marriage customs (162). As I have mentioned previously, the *usus* was the type of wedding practiced under Roman Law that conferred a marital-type status on a couple living together for a period of one year. According to Gwynn, the custom is also recorded in the folklore of Caermarthen and Glamorgan counties where “*neidio dros ysgubell*” or jumping over the besom conveys several meanings. First, “*weedi neidio dros ysgubell*” (Cohabitation without marriage) denotes a couple who have lived together without performing the marriages rites. It also may mean that the marriage is a “trial” (Gwynn 163). Both meanings signify a wedding outside the sanction of the Church. Charles Sullivan, in “Jumping the Broom: A Further Consideration of the Origins of an African American Wedding Custom” alludes to Gwynn in “remarking that the general term for all such unions, found in all parts of Wales, is *priodas coes ysgub* or *priodes coes ysgubell* – broomstick wedding” (203).

Additional references reveal diffusion of the custom to other areas of Great Britain. Christina Hole refers to the besom wedding in *English Traditional Customs* (1975) and *Traditions and Customs of Cheshire* (1937). J. Harvey Bloom discusses a “marriage over the

broomstick” that he identifies as a “hasty marriage” in *Folk-Lore, Old Customs and Superstitions in Shakespeare Land* (1929). He notes that the practice consisted of “holding the broomstick horizontally behind the jumper, and, without letting go, jump backwards over it – a difficult task” (10). From these early English and Welsh texts, we may arrive at two conclusions: the besom wedding was an early form of a Celtic marriage rite with a close connection to fertility, and that over time the broomstick wedding has come to represent a wedding outside of the church.

The history of common-law marriage in Europe and its development in the United States is too vast a topic to consider here. However, explaining some milestones in tensions over control of the marriage rite is necessary for my purpose here. In the seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries, common-law marriage was so widespread in Great Britain that many attempts were made to prohibit lay contracts. The English were not the first to question Church-sanctioned versus non-Church sanctioned unions. As early as 1164, Peter the Lombard addressed the “seriousness and solemnity of marriage” in his *Sentences* as the Catholic Church sought to distinguish between civil and religious unions, thus reflecting the conflict between Christianity and the ancient rites of the Germanic peoples of Europe who saw marriage as a civil union not a religious one. In 1215, Pope Innocent III required that banns be published before any marriage ceremony.⁹⁷ In an attempt to wrest control of marriage from municipal powers, the Catholic Church elevated the marriage mass to a holy sacrament in 1563 at the Council of Trent. Due to the rise in clandestine marriages in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-centuries in

⁹⁷ For more on the actions of the Catholic Church and their evolving stance on the marriage sacrament, see Willystine Goodsell, *A History of Marriage and the Family*. Rev. Ed. New York: Macmillan Co., 1935. Pope Innocent III and his fourfold plan for marriage, “De quad ripartia specie nuptiarum” outlines a marriage bond between a man and his wife, Christ and the Church, God and the just soul and the Word of God and human nature. For more on Pope Innocent III, see *The Catholic Encyclopedia online*.

England, an act passed during the reign of William III, notorious for his dislike of Catholics, required a duty on marriage licenses and a fine for officiants who married couples without the civic license. Despite these attempts, common law marriages continued to flourish.

In England, the Marriage Act of 1712 renewed the penalty for couples skirting the civil mandates and added a bribe to informants for revealing offending couples. Lord Harwick's Marriage Act of 1754, commonly known as the "Broomstick Marriage Act," although "hotly contested in the Commons" required that "all marriages, save those of Jews, Quakers, and members of the royal family," were to be celebrated only after publication of banns or securing of a license, and only during the hours from eight to twelve in the morning (the canonical hours) in an Anglican Church or Chapel, and before an Anglican clergyman" (Goodsell 334). Severe penalties were placed on those violating this attempt by the State to regulate marriage and to prevent clandestine unions, thus broadening the term that initially signified broomstick marriages to include marriages by under-age participants. An entry from the *Yorkshire Gazette* on September 12, 1840, reveals that despite a period of almost one hundred years from the passage of Lord Hardwick's Act to quell common-law marriages, it was largely unsuccessful. "We always expected that the Broomstick Marriage Act would be treated as a dead letter by the people of this country" (Hole 262 n3). John Gillis, in his study of British marriages, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages 1600 to the Present*, estimates that the Anglican Church "was losing at least a quarter and perhaps as many as a third of all marriages to irregular unions of one kind or another" (84). As late as 1845, couples were still jumping the broom with witnesses in attendance at Woodhead Tunnel Cheshire (Menefee 9). A survival of this custom, jumping an anvil, is still practiced today in the Scottish border town of Gretna Green which has been

historically notorious as a destination for “small” weddings or weddings outside the church (Monger 143).⁹⁸

Variations of the jumping custom appear cross-culturally. Eric Otto Winstedt records the ritual in connection to Gypsy weddings in England and Scotland while E. Estyn Evans reveals a version incorporated into Irish marriage rites in *Irish Folkways* (1957). Crooke records the curious custom of “the working folk” of jumping the “petting stick” in Ford, Northumberland around 1858. In “The Lifting of the Bride,” Crooke describes the practice:

It was customary at a village wedding for the young men of the place to take a long pole, known as the ‘petting-stick,’ and hold it across the principal exit from the churchyard, this barring the bride’s exit unless she chose to jump over the obstacle, which, of course, was never held to a very formidable height. The idea was that if the bride was cheerful and agreeable about this hindrance to her progress, and skipped over it with a good grace, the husband was to be regarded as a lucky man, whose partner’s amiability was well calculated to make him happy. If, on the other hand, the bride pouted and hung back, or made a difficulty observing the custom, the poor husband was to be commiserated on the possession of a shrew, whose ill-temper would probably make him smart in the future. (quoted Crooke 230)

The bride’s willingness to jump over an obstacle is also recorded in Brand’s *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (1797). Categorized as a divination, or superstition, stepping over the petting stone determines the outcome of the marriage. Brand cites Hutchinson referring to a familiar landmark “near the ruins of the church in Holy Island, in Durham” where, following the wedding ceremony, “the Bride is to step upon it; and if she cannot stride to the end thereof, it is said that the Marriage will prove unfortunate” (397). Where there was no natural petting stone, one was procured, often “a makeshift obstacle, perhaps a stool or a bench or, as

⁹⁸ A number of websites offer contemporary brides and grooms the opportunity to marry in the historic Anvil Hall with the explanation that during the seventeenth century many English couples crossed the border into Scotland to marry under stringent Scottish laws. For more, see George P. Monger, *Marriage Customs of the World: From Henna to Honeymoons*, 2004.

sometimes described, “three upright stone flags set on edge with another laid flat on top” (Crooke 229). These variations reveal that, for symbolic reasons, the bride may be required by custom to leap over an object. As a display of homeopathic magic, crossing over or jumping over a threshold or an object symbolically representing a threshold is said to ensure fertility or protection. These marriage rites act as sexually figurative protective charms for the bride and groom as preventative actions to dissuade evil spirits. Following the Roman custom of marrying over a threshold or carrying the bride over a threshold, these rites suggest either fertility charms or divinations to shed bad spirits from attaching to the bride’s body.

In explaining the symbolic meaning of jumping, folklorist Géza Róheim interprets the “significance of stepping over” a threshold as a metonym for sexual intercourse. Included in his collection of essays, *Fire in the Dragon and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore* (1992), Róheim notes that “when the husband lifts the bride over the threshold, we have one of those frequent cases in which a ceremonial act appears as an imitative introduction of the realistic one which follows, i.e. coitus” (15). Róheim bases his reading on his psychoanalytic interpretation of the threshold as a repressed feminine symbol, the vagina. Supporting his reading of windows and thresholds, Róheim offers a variety of European cultural taboos that signify a “collective form of primal impulses” (12). He connects “stepping over” as a variant of the symbol of coitus and gives stepping over a broom as an example:

The anxiety of Yorkshire mothers that their daughters should not stride over a broom, as well as the unconscious intention of boys who try to make them do this is of course connected with the belief that, “if a girl strides over a besom handle she will be a mother before she is a wife’. If an unmarried woman has a child people say ‘She jumped o’er t’besom’ or ‘She jumped o’er t’besom before she went to church. (16)

Here is another example of the connection between the besom and fertility along with the connotation of jumping over an object as a folk metaphor for intercourse. An example

supporting Róheim's reading is included by Gillis in *For Better, For Worse* who notes that "[r]esistance [to jumping the petting stone] not only added to the fun of the occasion, but demonstrated a proper degree of modesty on the part of the new wife" (66). If, as Róheim maintains, jumping over an obstacle signals the woman's acceptance of her husband as a sexual partner, then the conditions of jumping reflect her willingness (or unwillingness) to engage in sexual intercourse. Gillis describes the conditions:

It was said that most brides were only too pleased to jump, but that it was bad form to show too much alacrity, a sign of unbecoming independence. On the other hand, if a bride 'pouted or hung back,' or made a difficulty of observing the custom, she was said to have 'taken a pet' and 'the poor husband was to be commiserated on the possession of a shrew.' (66)

Gillis' depiction of the divinations of the English petting stone takes us full circle in my discussion of jumping the broom as seen in Tempie Durham's method of determining who would be "boss" of the new slave marriage on a North Carolina plantation. The connection between these two geographically distant events lies in what folklorists term the process of diffusion.

David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* is a study in the cultural paths of diffusion of British folkways into the United States. In his discussion of two types of marital customs in Virginia, Fischer remarks on the convention of jumping the broom as a common occurrence among Anglicans in the early Virginia colonies: "[t]he first was a Christian ceremony, which was solemnized sometimes in a church or more often in the bride's home, but always by a minister according to the laws of the Anglican Church and the Book of Common Prayer" (282). The second type Fischer refers to as "an ancient pagan practice in which the bride and groom were made to jump over a broomstick" (*Ibid*). He provides no source material pointing to historical examples of this practice but in the same passage continues by stating, "[t]his ritual had long been observed throughout Britain and much of Western Europe

and especially in the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia” (*Ibid*). I argue that cross-cultural sharing between English indentured servants brought to Virginia at the same time as African slaves were imported to the colony may account for the transmission of the broom ceremony into African American culture. During the early years of the Virginia Colony, claims James Curtis Ballagh in *White Servitude in the Colony of Virginia: A Study of the System of Indentured Labor in The American Colonies*, large numbers of London street vagrants were shipped to the colony in 1619 (28).⁹⁹ These indentured whites mixed with the large numbers of African enslaved also being imported into the colony at the time. From figures provided by Ira Berlin, the number of African slaves “slowly but steadily replaced white indentured servants as the main source of plantation labor” (*Many Thousands Gone* 110). Berlin claims that the imported slaves in Middlesex County were outnumbered by indentured servants in 1668 but that by 1700, a period of thirty-two years, the tendency had been reversed. A small number of the servants sent for indenture went to the colony for a specified amount of time and for a fixed salary. Moreover, these numbers were increased as Ballaugh cites the large number (over 1600) of Scottish prisoners captured following the Battle of Worcester that also may have contributed to cross-cultural sharing in the new colony (35). Thus, the influx of imported slaves along with “quite a number of English lower classes and criminals” had, according to Ballaugh, “the effect of lessening the barrier between servant and slave and increasing that between the ruling and dependent classes” (73-4). The proximity of a group of lower class indentured servants and the newly arrived African slaves provides fertile ground for cross-cultural sharing as a method of adaption.

⁹⁹ Ballaugh provides population statistics from the new colony as follows: “The general muster of 1624 shows the number of servants then in Virginia as 378 in a population of 2500. They were well distributed, most of the planters having but one or two. Afterwards many planters brought in as many as 30, and in 1671 the servants were 6000, 15 per cent of the population” (41).

An additional migratory pattern may come from Scotland where Scottish settlers and indentured servants immigrated to the United States directly from Scotland, from the Ulster Plantation and from Nova Scotia. In tracing the Scotch-Irish from Ulster, Charles A. Hanna details the movement of Scottish settlers as part of James I's plan to Anglicize Catholic Ireland. In *The Scotch-Irish or The Scot in North Britain, North Ireland, and North America*, Hanna traces the genealogies of numerous Scots families, called Scotch-Irish not because they intermarried with the local Irish but "because of purely local, geographical reasons" (161). Two of the ten districts of Ulster, Down and Antrim, were settled by a mixture of predominately Lowland Scots. Frictions between the Scottish kirk and the Church of England resulted in a lack of ministers for Scottish congregations in Ulster. James G. Leyburn in his social history of the Scotch-Irish notes that for the five years following Archbishop Laud's influence over the Scottish Presbyterians in Ulster, the Scottish churches were without leaders.¹⁰⁰ New patterns of immigration began with the settlement of the North American colonies. Hanna cites Hotten's *List of Emigrants to America from 1600 to 1700* to determine that many Scots were sent into Barbados or Bermuda along with significant numbers to Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and what is now South Carolina. Leyburn asserts that over a quarter of a million Scots migrated to the United States between 1717 and the start of the Revolutionary War (157).¹⁰¹ The migratory patterns followed five successive waves: 1717-1718, 1725-1729, 1740-1741, 1754-1755 and 1771-1775 (Leyburn 169). In addition to the large numbers of Scotch-Irish families who settled into the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, Leyburn claims that over one hundred

¹⁰⁰ For more on the conflict between the Scottish Presbyterians and Archbishop Laud's Church of England, see James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History*. Chapel Hill, NC: U North Carolina P, 1962.

¹⁰¹ For a distribution of Scot-Irish settlement patterns, see Illustration 2.5 and 2.6.

thousand Scot-Irish indentured servants made the trip across the ocean to provide manpower for the growing colonies (176).

On the basis of Leyburn's figures, jumping the broom as a sign of a temporary marriage diffused from the borderland between England and the Lowland region of Scotland. Additional migration of Scots settlers from Welsh enclaves throughout England and from the Scot-Irish settlements in Ulster brought the broom jumping tradition to the Virginia colony. Thus, the sign of an informal marriage found its way across the ocean to the tobacco and indigo plantations of Virginia, where contact between Scot-Irish settlers, English and Scot-Irish indentured servants and the enslaved brought about initial cross-cultural sharing of the besom wedding. Then, through the overland slave trade, jumping the broom as an established form of wedding ritual spread into the Lower South. The later period of heightened slave trade in Louisiana, in addition to the French, Spanish and Africanized creolized society with its hub in the port city of New Orleans, reinforced the practice of jumping the broom on the sugarcane and cotton plantations of the state. Due to the similarity of Roman/French/Spanish slave codes which exerted moral pressure on Louisiana slaveholders, jumping the broom became the dominant form of wedding ritual used to mark the marital unions of the enslaved on Louisiana plantations.



Illustration 2.5. Scot-Irish Settlement

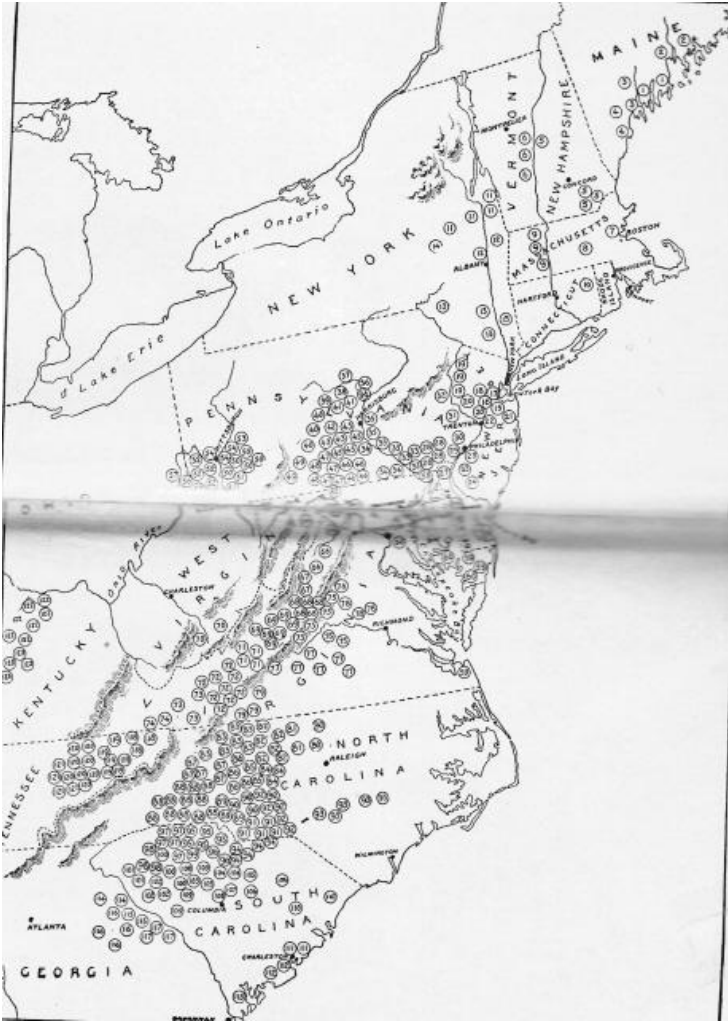


Illustration 2.6. From Charles A. Hanna, *The Scotch-Irish*, New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1902

“Now the plantation alone among native institutions, satisfies this craving for a system of caste.”

Francis Pendleton Gaines, *The Southern Plantation*

Chapter III. Louisiana Plantation Weddings in the Literary Imagination

Since the publication of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* in 1936 and David O. Selznick’s film production in 1939, the plantation has become entrenched in the fictional imagination. Yet the imaginary Louisiana plantation was influential in a variety of fictional texts long before Mitchell’s creation of Tara. In contrast to the historic plantation wedding rituals of elite whites and the enslaved embedded in the autobiographical materials contained in the first two chapters, weddings appear frequently in fictional works from the early nineteenth century through the twentieth century. This chapter explores plantation weddings as a thread that connects the work of a seemingly disparate group of Louisiana writers with other fiction writers who situate their work against the exotic backdrop of the state. The signifiers existing within this practice are often highly politicized and racialized as the wedding culminates in either the acceptance of a feminized domestic role by the white bride, or conversely, turn out to be a locus of vulnerability for the black bride. A significant number of racially diverse male and female writers discussed in this chapter situate the plantation wedding in his or her work, covering a period of almost one hundred and fifty years. Early nineteenth-century portrayals of complicated marriage plots culminating in off-stage weddings in sentimental *Bildungsromans* substantiate Northrup Frye’s assertion, “In every age the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendancy.”¹ In contrast to these romanticized

¹ “The Mythos of Summer: Romance,” in *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957. In this section, Frye traces the literary development of romance from chivalric beginnings to more modern

weddings of white female characters, the stereotypical sentimentalized figure of the tragic mulatta,² denied the protective tenets of civic marriage through the institution of slavery exposes, as Ann duCille claims, an “unconventional use of conventional literary forms” in texts written by both white and African American writers (3).³ Thus, by focusing attention onto the racialized body of the bride, we may ascertain authorial agency in critiquing the legal, social, and moral constructions that inform the communities where these fictional brides reside.

Additionally, like those seen in sentimental fictions, notations of elite white weddings in southern domestic fictions, written by southern white women for a specifically gendered audience, encourage the concept of weddings as feminized spaces that, as Steven Stowe argues, “familiarize women with their unique responsibilities and define their expectations of womanhood, specifically courtship and marriage.”⁴ Stowe maintains that “the relationship between literary convention and social reality seems not so much a matter of whether convention ‘came true’ in the lives of readers or not, but how these conventions helped to shape women’s expectations of men and their very perception of love and womanhood” (68). In his commentary on the place in culture dominated by domestic novels, Stowe notes, “The novels thus occupied

forms. For Frye, “[t]he essential element of plot in romance is adventure. . . [t]he complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest. . . A quest involving conflict assumes two main characters, a protagonist or hero, and an antagonist or enemy . . . The central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focused on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader’s values are bound up with the hero” (186 -7).

² I use the term “tragic mulatta” expansively here to cover the sentimentalized female mixed race figure that may be a mulatta, a quadroon or an octoroon.

³ Noting that enslaved men and women “who for generations were denied the hegemonic, ‘universal truth’ of legal marriage,” duCille historicizes and contextualizes fictions written by black women writers in an attempt to “reclaim and resexualize the black female body” (4). See Chapter One: “Conventional Criticism and Unconventional Black Literature” in *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

⁴ Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South. Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* for his discussion of the connection between courtship rituals and popular women’s fiction. See also Stowe’s “City, Country and the Feminine Voice” in *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston*, ed. Michael O’Brien and David Moltke-Hansen. Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 1986.

an important intellectual borderland in between subjective experience and wider social values.”⁵ In domestic fictions, weddings serve a didactic function by illustrating what Stowe terms a “simulacra of love” (52). Thus, the fictional weddings of young elite white brides provide moral instruction directed to a specific reading audience while the fictional marriages of the enslaved or mixed-race female characters divulge unresolved issues of race, class and gender in Louisiana culture. By the post-Civil War period, local color writings, as Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke observe, portray “provincial customs” and further serve to illuminate the “cultural purposes that literature can serve” in the formation of regional identities.⁶ As a synthesis of a “myriad of literary techniques and traditions,” local color writers were instrumental in “fostering the development of realism, adapting the tropes of domestic fiction, incorporating the discourses of slave narratives and those of plantation romances” (lxv).

In later works, the plantation wedding disrupts previously prominent racial and class hierarchies by redrawing boundaries for the fictional community, thus revealing what Patricia Yaeger terms “moments of crisis and acts of contestation, about the intersection of black and white cultures as they influence one another and collide” (38).⁷ By placing these texts, side by side, it becomes apparent that the figure of the bride is a pivotal character in each work. Moreover, it will be clear in my discussion of each of the fictional works in this chapter that wedding events are strategically placed to serve as a vehicle for authorial agency. Each text utilizes the figure of a plantation bride, whose gendered body, inscribed with issues of race and

⁵ Steven M. Stowe, “City, Country and the Feminine Voice.” *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston*. Ed. Michael O’Brien and David Moltke-Hansen. (Knoxville, TN: U Tennessee P, 1986).

⁶ For more on local color conventions, see the introduction to *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender* edited by Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke. Athens, GA: U Georgia P, 2002.

⁷ In *Dirt and Desire. Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930 – 1990*, Yaeger seeks “the world of common reality – a world of striking gender inequality, a world unevenly shared by two races” (43).

class, ultimately reveals how each writer views the bride; as a sentimentally vulnerable figure due to her race or class, as part of a traditional didactic plot convention, as a focal point for racial comparison or a twentieth century transfiguration of the sentimental white, female champion of domesticity. Interdictions against a “white” marriage based, not on physical skin color but on the hidden taint of black blood, confirm Leslie Fiedler’s conviction that in America “the class-war meanings of [British] sentimental fiction are lost” and are replaced with racial conflicts.⁸ By scrutinizing these images and their contexts along with the political and racial determinants that surround the various settings and characters of these fictional events, we may uncover the ideological purpose of the plantation wedding in each author’s imagination, as the carefully positioned plantation wedding reflects each author’s trajectory on race and class and locates the novel within a framework of historically temporal and spatial concerns.

In each work selected for discussion, a plantation is central to the plot. The plantation, suggests Francis Pendleton Gaines in *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition*, is the most “spacious and gracious” contribution to “the popular imagery” of the southern landscape. He notes, “Other local color types have been as sharply differentiated, as persistently exploited, but no other has proved so rich in romantic values” (1). Gaines asserts that the plantation “stands as a kind of American embodiment of the golden age” and that “[t]he plantation romance remains our chief social idyll of the past; of an Arcadian scheme of existence, less material, less hurried, less prosaically equalitarian, less futile, richer in

⁸ Fiedler argues in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, “To write about the American novel is to write about the fate of certain European genres in a world of alien experience. It is not only a world where courtship and marriage have suffered a profound change, but also one in the process of losing the traditional distinctions of class; a world without a significant history or a substantial past; a world which had left behind the terror of Europe not for the innocence it dreamed of, but for new and special guilts associated with the rape of nature and the exploitation of dark-skinned people . . .”(31).

picturesqueness, festivity, in realized pleasure that recked not of hope or fear of unrejoicing labor” (4).

Gaines designates John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn* (1832), the first text in what he views as the American plantation tradition, a “forensic weapon” that presents “an idyllic pastoral existence” populated by a cast of what would also become stereotypical characters: the planter, his gracious wife, the lovely marriageable belle, and the “happy darkies” consisting chiefly of a devoted mammy and a butler (22). Gaines paints a verbal portrait of what he deems a consistent pattern:

The setting reveals the conventional mansion, a large white house with commodious grounds, the latter lovely with prodigal growth of flowers and shrubbery considered Southern. The background is usually the cotton field; if a moon-light scene can be introduced, so much the better. The characters fall into stock types: the old planters, or if the time is post-bellum, the former general; his daughter or ward, heroine of the drama, owner of an elaborate wardrobe, marked particularly by hoop-shirts and delicate bodices; the butler, who may also be the body-guard, clothed in grotesque finery; the old mammy who may also be the cook, with her inevitable bandanna. Various suggestions of the old regime are brought out. The famed hot biscuits and fried chicken are usually provided for the gustatory delight of the whites, while the bare mention of ’possum, ’taters, or watermelon, occasions eloquent lip-smacking on the part of the blacks. Dignified dances, particularly the Virginia reel, are emblematic of the recreational life of the big house, as the jugging and clogging reveal the merry-making of the quarters. Always present and never too subtle is the inter-racial psychology: blustering kindness on the part of the master, tender consideration on the part of the heroine, matched by a hollow sham of frightened obedience and a real affection and self-immolation on the part of the slaves. (5-6)

Yet despite his considerable attention to detailing racial hierarchies and establishing the sensory nature of the plantation tradition, Gaines overlooks the marriage plot of the belle and her beau as a standard feature of the convention. While the characteristics enumerated above are certainly apparent in *Swallow Barn*, the novel is focused on the courtship of Isabel Tracy and Edward Hazard, whose resulting marriage would link the two feuding families by uniting the two

bordering estates. As we have seen, this merging of property through marriage is historically based and will become a common convention in pastoral plantation romances.

However, Kennedy's mock heroic marriage plot is not ultimately resolved within the pages of the novel. The work concludes by suggesting but not depicting or finalizing the wedding between Isabel and Ned, thereby making the text, as Lucinda MacKethan notes, the "prototype of a national novel of manners" and not a traditional marriage plot (Introduction xxix). This genre, states James W. Tuttleton, in *The Novel of Manners in America*, "emphasizes social history" by reflecting "the manners, social customs, folkways, convention, traditions, and mores of a given social group at a given time and place" (10). He maintains that the novel "is primarily concerned with social conventions as they impinge upon character" (12). Moreover, "the picture that emerges from *Swallow Barn*," claims MacKethan, "while satiric, is also fondly loyal to its ultimate evaluation of the quality of life on the plantation" (xxi). Ultimately, as Kennedy's novel reveals, the forces compelling a young aristocratic couple to marry are indeed powerful, represented in the idea that courtship between the knight and his lady is a central premise of the novel. Ned, the knight errant, is a mock heroic inversion of the traditional figure of the hero in southern literature.⁹ While Scott Romine argues that "Kennedy's depiction of the marriage plot involves a kind of comedy in reverse, instead of the paradigmatic plot in which the hero wins his beloved by forging a closer relationship with established society, Hazard does exactly the opposite, wining Bel by participating in her medieval fantasies," the novel concludes with hints that the two will marry to unite the land and the families and put an end to the feud (80).¹⁰

⁹ See Michael Kreyling, *Figures of the Hero in Southern Literature* where he refers to Ned Hazard as the "tempestuous Virginian" in contrast to stronger "candidates" for his discussion of southern heroes (15).

¹⁰ Scott Romine, *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999.

Swallow Barn also evokes another type of plantation marriage that most critics have overlooked. George Meriwether proposes a plan to legalize slave marriages on his plantation:

I think we are justly liable to reproach, for the neglect or omission of our laws to recognize and regulate marriages, and the relation of family amongst the negroes. We owe it to humanity and to the sacred obligation of Christian ordinances, to respect and secure the bonds of husband and wife, and parent and child . . . We have no right to put man and wife asunder. The law should declare this, and forbid the separation under any contingency, except of crime. (457)

As the southern planter's mouthpiece for the debate over the moral condition of the enslaved on southern plantations, Meriwether's suggestion reflects the more political and religious deliberations underway at the time in the South.¹¹ In *Swallow Barn*, the comic figure of the plantation black that Francis Pendleton Gaines describes as a "folk figure of a simple, somewhat rustic character, instinctively humorous, gifted in song and dance, interesting in spontaneous frolic, and endowed with artless philosophy and irrationally credulous," is offset by the presence of a long-married enslaved couple. Kennedy's narrative strategy in introducing Lucy and Luther points to the stability of slave marriage and the family in service to the patriarch. Thus, by careful consideration of Meriwether's philosophic musings on slave marriage tempered by the satiric insensitivity and convolutions of Kennedy's white mock-heroic marriage plot, it may be determined that very early in the formation of the literary plantation convention, a dual tradition exists reflecting the bicultural nature of the plantation tradition. On one hand, the novel reveals concerns over the master's role in maintaining legitimacy and control over slave marriages and, on the other hand, that in the Edenic setting of the plantation, the beautiful chaste belle and her anticipated marriage are inextricably intertwined and required by the plantation convention.

¹¹ For more on this debate, see Thomas Savage Clay, *Detail of a Plan for the Moral Improvement of Negroes on Plantations* published in Georgia in 1833. See also Charles Colcock Jones, *Religious Instruction for the Negroes* which appeared in 1842. George Fitzhugh's *Sociology of the South, or The Failure of Free Society*, published in Richmond in 1854 uses social science and Biblical support to defend slavery. For more on the intersection between southern hegemony and religion, see Chapter VI: Scriptural Authority for Slavery.

The Edenic setting is implicated as a vestige of the Old South. Louisiana plantations were sometimes viewed, especially in French colonial propaganda, as a New Eden, reflecting the New World setting as a fertile garden ready for propagation. Nineteenth-century Louisiana writers or writers who locate their fictional work in the state (especially New Orleans) are often allured by the distinctive sense of place. In the opening lines of “The Great South,” a series of essays appearing in 1873 in *Scribner’s Monthly Magazine*, Edward King claims, “Louisiana to-day is Paradise Lost. In twenty years it may be Paradise Regained . . . It is the battle of race with race, of the picturesque and unjust civilization of the past with the prosaic and leveling civilization of the present.”¹² Suzanne Disheroon-Green and Lisa Abney assert, “Despite its numerous similarities with the South at large, Louisiana is a region possessing a unique cultural identity” (*Songs of the Reconstructing South*1). Their claim is based on the fact that Louisiana is the most distinctly creolized state in the United States, having a background of French and Spanish colonial settlement, followed by patterns of Anglo-Americanization. Furthermore, the influx of circum-Caribbean Black, Spanish and French migration heightened in the aftermath of the Haitian slave insurrection and expulsion of the French from Cuba along with the importation of slaves from Africa directly to Louisiana plantations adds to the layering effect of cultures.

Moreover, the early to mid-nineteenth century overland migration to Louisiana of large numbers of African American enslaved in regions of the Upper South contributed to the intensified sense of cultural mixing. The arrival of the exiled French Acadians from British-held Nova Scotia in successive waves beginning in 1755 brought another cultural dimension to the state. Due to this multiplicity of cultures, Louisiana is a melting pot, a “gumbo” of racial mixing

¹² In the introduction to *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain and William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1996), Barbara Ladd quotes Edward King’s opening to “The Great South.” She argues that the “principle that underlay the construction of New Orleans (and the South) as a ‘paradise lost’ that might be regained is the old one that pits the American nation against the senility of Europe and the savagery of African in a battle of the forces of progress against those of degeneration and decadence” (9 -10).

whose writers produce fictional works that often celebrate the European colonial power dynamics reflected in the French and Spanish heritage of the state. At other times, the fictional works expose social and racial boundaries to censure members of a fictional community for their racialized views or to extol the enslaved or mixed race character that is marginalized by these tightly drawn social boundaries.

As Barbara Allen suggests in *Sense of Place: American Regional Cultures*, attempting to demarcate “[a] sense of place, a consciousness of one’s physical surroundings is a fundamental human experience” (1). For Allen, that sense “seems to be especially strong where people in a neighborhood, a community, a city, a region, possess a collective awareness of place and express it in their cultural forms” (*Ibid*). Several accurate, natural features unite to create a distinct sense of place in the fictional Louisiana landscape in addition to the plantation setting. In his adventure novel, *The Quadroon or, Adventures in the Far West*, published in 1856, Thomas Mayne Reid gives this description of the Louisiana landscape:

The forest no longer fringes here. It has long since fallen before the planter’s axe; and the golden sugar cane, the silvery rice, and the snowy cotton-plant, flourish in its stead. Forest enough has been left to adorn the picture. I behold vegetable forms of tropic aspect, with broad shining foliage – the *Sabal* palm, the anona, the water-loving tupelo, the catalpa with its large trumpet flowers, the melting *liquid-ambar*, and the wax-leaved magnolia. Blending their foliage with these fair *indigenes* are an hundred lovely exotics – the orange, the lemon, and fig; the Indian lilac and tamarind; olives, myrtles, and bromelias; while the Babylonian willow contrasts its dropping fronds with the erect reeds of the giant cane, or the lance-like blades of the *yucca gloriosa*. (13)

Along with the unique flora and fauna, another distinguishing factor lies in the geographic uniqueness of the state. Its major rivers, abundant lakes, numerous bayous, swamps and coastal marshes form a unique semi-aquatic terrain requiring adaptation by those who work the land for cotton and cane farming. The Mississippi River and its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico initially

fostered exploration, and then became a viable port for importation of commodities and exportation of local goods and crops. New Orleans, with its blending of Old World and New World cultures, was a major port, attracting people from all parts of the world. The French, Spanish, Native American, African, African-Caribbean and French West Indies ancestry of Louisiana inhabitants all contributed to the polyglot sounds of life in a key metropolitan hub.

For Allen, sense of place is compounded by the people who live “within the context of the environmental conditions and natural resources” (2). New Orleans, as a French colony, had a reputation for an unusual relationship between the colonists and the enslaved. The Africans imported to Louisiana, according to Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, were not subjected to “the racial exclusiveness and contempt that characterizes more recent times” (155). Instead, Hall claims that “nations of racial and/or cultural and national superiority were a luxury beyond the means of the colonists in French Louisiana; Africans and their descendants were competent, desperately needed, and far from powerless” (Ibid). As a result of French colonial policies, large numbers of free blacks or *gens de couleur* populated the state. It was only in the early nineteenth century, after the heightened technologies of cotton and cane farming expanded the potential for agricultural wealth that an “Americanized” Louisiana began to participate in the overland slave trade. The city of New Orleans, North America’s largest slave market, was at the hub, according to Walter Johnson, of a slave trade that relocated “155,000 in the 1820s, 288,000 in the 1830s, 189,000 in the 1840s; 250,000 in the 1850s” of the enslaved from the Upper South to Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.¹³ Johnson maintains, “Thousands of slaves from all over the South passed through the New Orleans slave pens every year in the antebellum period, their purchase and sale linking the city to both the larger southern economy and the regional economy of the

¹³ Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1999. P.5.

lower South” (7). As a site of thousands of human commoditized slave bodies, antebellum New Orleans became a fictional stage for the comparison of divergent racial ideals.

For the enslaved, Louisiana and neighboring Mississippi signified the harshest plantation labor regime in the entire South. As Johnson writes:

After years of answering questions at antislavery meetings, Lewis Clarke explained slaves’ fear of the slave trade to an imaged interlocutor: ‘Why do slaves dread so bad to go to the South – to Mississippi or Louisiana? Because they know slaves are driven very hard there, and worked to death in a few years.’ Or as Jacob Stroyer put it, ‘Louisiana was considered by the slaves a place of slaughter so those who were going there did not expect to see their friends again.’ The fear of being sold South, wrote the Reverend Josiah Henson, the man whose life was thought to be the basis for Harriet Beecher Stowe’s fictional Uncle Tom, filled the slaves of the Upper South with ‘perpetual dread.’ (23)

The abuses of overworked field hands on Louisiana cane and cotton plantations were compounded by the sexual exploitation of the auction blocks in New Orleans. Sold as “fancy girls” at extraordinarily high prices, beautiful young quadroon girls represented the notorious traffic in female flesh. Separated from the enslaved by the designation of “free black,” the mixed race offspring of Santo Domingo planters who fled the slave insurrections and arrived in the city in large numbers were unable to marry into white culture due to laws against racial mixing. They found economic viability in a system termed *plaçage*.

Plaçage relationships were a well-known feature of nineteenth century New Orleans. In a type of concubinage facilitated by legal contracts, octoroon and quadroon women not allowed to marry with whites by civil codes on race mixing or miscegenation became the mistresses of affluent Creole or Americanized white men. The *placée* was maintained through an arrangement referred to as a “*marriage de la main gauche*” which translates as “left-handed marriage.” I am using the term Creole here in the sense of a native-born man of European ancestry which does not signal racial mixing. There are many historical claims for the phenomenon of *plaçage*. The

most commonly ascribed, as noted previously, traces the free people of color, or *gens de couleur*, to the mixed race offspring of French planters and slave women arriving in French Colonial Louisiana from Caribbean sugar plantations where they fled to avoid slave insurrection. Others cite population statistics and the overwhelming ratio of colonial white men to women as the source of large numbers of quadroon women in the city of New Orleans.¹⁴ Joan Martin writes in “*Plaçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre*” that “[p]opular belief holds that the first of these affairs originated at the end of the eighteenth century, while Louisiana was controlled by Spain” (65). Yet, despite the concern over origins of plaçage, nineteenth-century New Orleans was well-known for its quadroon balls where mothers displayed beautifully appointed daughters to attract a wealthy white aristocratic Creole gentleman who would contract to support the young woman, often for life. Thus, the plaçage system remained in effect for almost a century until it was dissolved following the Civil War.¹⁵ Whether as a result of race mixing in the Caribbean or in Colonial Louisiana, the offspring of white men and female slaves of Afro-Caribbean descent formed an in-between or third group in the hierarchical white and black caste system of New Orleans. Thus the factors that contributed to the creation of New Orleans as a leading area of agriculture and slave trade also swelled the city into a racially diverse local population.

These two factors, Allen maintains, when supplemented by the history of “shared experience,” are displayed in the “economic and social structure and systems, in historical development and experiences” or “in cultural patterns” (2). In addition to colonial ideologies and

¹⁴ Kimberly S. Hanger provides population ratios for New Orleans in her article “Free Black Women in Colonial New Orleans” where she notes, “White male New Orleanians outnumbered white women (with a sex ratio of 175 males per 100 females in 1777, 162 in 1791, and 115 in 1805) and free black females outnumbered free black males about two to one” (220).

¹⁵ For more on quadroon balls, see Joan M. Martin, “*Plaçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre: How Race and Sex Defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color.*” *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*. Ed. Sybil Klein. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2000 and Kimberly S. Hanger, “Coping in a Complex World: Free Black Women in Colonial New Orleans.” *The Devil’s Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*. Ed. Catherine Clinton and Michelle Gillespie. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.

customs, French and Spanish laws, derived from Roman law, conflicted with the principles expressed in the English-based Common Law developed in America. Focused primarily on the family (*la familia*), European laws stood in contrast with the focus on the individual as expressed in English Common Law. Bertram Wyatt-Brown illustrates the complexity of individual state's laws concerning mixed-blood marriages in his retelling of Colonel Thomas Hart Benton's fall from power. Benton, who married his slave mistress during the brief period of time when mixed-blood marriages were allowed under Louisiana law was ultimately, as Wyatt-Brown notes, "ostracized from respectable society" (318). As Wyatt-Brown attests, the Louisiana law was later changed to prohibit mixed-blood marriages. Certainly gender and race distinctions and racialized caste systems remain the most visible reminders of earlier social structures. These enumerated elements combine to create what Allen determines is "a regional sense of self" that may be "as much a matter of subjective perception and of objective observation" (3). Allen determines that:

A full understanding of the nature of a region, then, may best be achieved by adopting the perspective of residents to see a place from the inside rather than from the outside, to understand the totality of perceptions and knowledge of a place gained by residents through their long experience of it, and intensified by their feelings for it. (3)

In situating fictional brides within the culture of Louisiana, especially New Orleans, writers utilize a sense of the region from the perspective of cultural insiders. In contrast to this emic viewpoint, the viewpoints of cultural outsiders, or etic perspectives contribute to the reader's understanding of social and cultural life on the Louisiana plantation.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, appearing serially in *The National Era* between 1851 and 1852 is ideologically akin to William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* published in London in

1853 and also with Metta Victoria Fuller Victor's famous Beadle Dime Novel, *Maun Guinea and Her Plantation "Children;" or Holiday-Week on a Louisiana Estate* published in December of 1861. These three sentimental fictions depict Louisiana plantations as a site where white men are destroying the southern family with their greed and lust. As Elizabeth Ammons notes, "Like her famous sister Catherine Beecher, she [Harriet Beecher Stowe] concurred in the culture's insistence on the importance, even sacredness, of maternal values, and she argues from that premise that, rather than segregate maternal ethics into some private domestic realm, motherhood – the morality of women – should be made the ethical and structural model for all of American life."¹⁶ Stowe's work in particular enraged Southerners with her charges of white male depravity and depictions of sexual abuse of the enslaved black female body. Jane Tompkins suggests that readers should "see the sentimental novel not as an artifice of eternity answerable to certain formal criteria and to certain psychological and philosophical concerns, but as a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time" (*Sensational Designs* 126).

In her discussion of plantation novels, Lucinda MacKethan observes, "Clearly, they intended to domesticize the plantation, to place the woman-centered home viably at the center of patriarchal slave society but in such a way that the ideology of home would not threaten the necessary assumption of absolute patriarchal power in the society."¹⁷ The sentimental plantation novel places women squarely within the family and under patriarchal control. Viewing Stowe's contrasting depictions of marriage in her novel in terms of Tompkins' argument draws attention

¹⁶ Elizabeth Ammons, "Stowe's Dream of the Mother Savior: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and American Women Writers Before the 1920's." *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ed. Eric J. Sundquist. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.

¹⁷ Lucinda H. MacKethan, "Domesticity in Dixie: The Plantation Novel and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*. Ed. Anne Goodwyn-Jones and Susan V. Donaldson. Charlottesville: U Virginia P, 1997. P. 223 – 242.

to the fact that in the pre-War South, marriage laws were in place to protect the white male slaveholder's inheritance of his wife's dowry and property. Marital unions of the enslaved, no matter how loving and stable were not protected by law.

According to Leslie Fiedler, Stowe's novel presents two contrasting portraits of white marriage; "one between an opportunistic, morally lax husband and an enduring Christian wife; another between a hypochondriacal, self-pitying shrew – an acute but cruel caricature of the Southern lady – and a gentle, enduring husband."¹⁸ Neither of these marriages between the Shelby's and the St. Clare's can compare to the loving and respectful unions of Tom and Chloe or George and Eliza as depicted in the novel. Early in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the reader discovers that, despite slave laws and codes to the contrary, Eliza, a beautiful quadroon, and George have been "married in her mistress' great parlor, and her mistress herself adorned the bride's beautiful hair with orange blossoms, and threw over it the bridal veil which certainly could scarce have rested on a fairer head; and there was no lack of white gloves, and cake, and wine, - of admiring guests to praise the bride's beauty, and her mistress' indulgence and liberality" (11). Stowe both praises and critiques Mrs. Shelby's involvement and participation in her generosity for providing elements of the "white wedding," a dress, a veil, the orange blossoms, and the gloves for Eliza. Yet in the passage, the reader senses Stowe's critique of the slavery system that denies lasting sanctions for enslaved unions. As Minrose Gwin maintains, "Mrs. Shelby's loyalty to Eliza supersedes her loyalty to her own husband."¹⁹ For Gwin, not only do the "black and white southern women characters . . . develop similarly strong interracial attachments" but they also "provide a literal and metaphorical frame for the novel" (23). Yet, throughout the novel, this

¹⁸ See Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* where he compares the Shelby's and the St. Clare's marriage but does not mention the marriage of Tom and Chloe to complete the comparison. P.264.

¹⁹ Minrose C. Gwin, *Black and White Women of the Old South: The Peculiar Sisterhood in American Literature*.

slave union sanctioned by the white mistress is jeopardized by the intervention of male slaveholders. Early in the novel, George attests that his master has become disgruntled with his cross-plantation marriage and has encouraged George to “take a wife and settle down on his place,” voicing his unhappiness with George’s “abroad marriage” (15). Eliza’s response - that they were married by the same minister that married the white mistress and master - provokes a rejoinder from George that comes straight from abolitionist texts; one that expresses the primary anti-slavery grievance concerning slave marriage: “Don’t you know a slave can’t be married? There is no law in this country for that; I can’t hold you for my wife, if he chooses to part us” (*Ibid*). This passage projects Stowe’s view of “the central evil of slavery – the disruption of family ties” (Gwin 31). Throughout the action of the novel, this marriage will remain vulnerable until the couple crosses over the border into Canada.

In its appeal to the morality of a largely white northern middle-class society of women readers, the novel may be seen, in Tompkins’s words, as “an act of persuasion aimed at defining social reality” which “means that the new society will not be controlled by men but by women” who will demand social and moral reforms. As Tompkins argues, “the popular domestic novel of the nineteenth century represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman’s point of view; that this body of work is remarkable for its intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness; and that, in certain cases, it offers a critique of American society far more devastating than any delivered by better-known critics” (124). This assessment, especially apparent in the figure of the quadroon, Cassy, places New Orleans at the hub of interracial sexual relations and desire. As Cassy relates her story to Tom, she describes how, upon her father’s death, she fell from a position of wealth and status through the taint of black maternal blood. Stowe describes her concubinage in terms of a placée: “He put me into a beautiful house, with

servants, horses, and carriages, and furniture, and dresses. Everything that money could buy, he gave me” (315). Yet, as Cassy divulges, “I wanted only one thing – I did want him to *marry* me. I thought, if he loved me as he said he did, and if I was what he seemed to think I was, he would be willing to marry me and set me free. But he convinced me that it would be impossible; and he told me that, if we were only faithful to each other, it was marriage before God” (315). Stowe’s moral sentiment behind Cassy’s voice echoes the words of fugitive slave Henry Bibb who believed his marriage to Malinda to be “honorable before God, and the bed undefiled.”²⁰ Cassy’s situation mirrors that of Bibb’s wife, who later became the concubine of her master in Louisiana (*Narrative* 19). Thus, these vulnerable true-to-life figures of light-skinned black women who believe their marriages sanctioned before God are the historical basis for characters in the fictional sentimental seduction plot.

As the site of the South’s largest slave market, Louisiana figures heavily in Stowe’s text as an exemplary space of sexualized predations on the black female slave body. Not only has Mr. Shelby originally purchased Eliza in the New Orleans market but also, as P. Gabrielle Foreman points out, the other mixed-race characters in the text, Cassy, Emmeline, and George’s mother and sister have passed through what Stowe terms “the public and shameless sale of beautiful mulatto and quadroon girls.”²¹ As Walter Johnson notes “the racial gaze of the slaveholder

²⁰In *Narrative of the life and Adventures of Henry Bibb: An American Slave*, Bibb writes: We had quite a jolly time at my wedding party. And notwithstanding our marriage was without license or sanction of law, we believed it to be honorable before God and the bed undefiled’ (19).

²¹ See “This Promiscuous Housekeeping”: Death, Transgression, and Homoeroticism in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” *Representations* 43 (1993): 51-72. While I disagree with Foreman’s claim that death in the novel, especially in the characters of Tom and Eva, are not redemptive but are “the consequences of sexual transgression,” I do support her reading of Eliza as a “purely sexual commodity, an object of “speculation” on which an illegal and illicit fortune can be made” (51, 54).

projected sexual meaning onto the bodies of light-skinned women.”²² Johnson provides a slave trader’s description of a fancy girl and summarizes that “[f]or slave buyers, the bodies of light-skinned women and little girls embodied sexual desire and the luxury of being able to pay for its fulfillment – they were projections of slaveholder’s own imagined identities as white men and slave masters” (155).²³ In an era that supported the Victorian view of the home as a female-sanctioned space governed by strict rules of morality, Northern women were outraged by the display of immorality so rampant in the South. A common trope in mid-eighteenth century plantation fictions depicts the beautiful quadroon on the New Orleans auction block.²⁴

Even some southern women commented (albeit in the private space of their personal diaries) on what they considered an immoral and dissolute system. The South Carolina diarist Mary Chesnut remarks; “You people who have been everywhere, stationed all over the U.S. – states, frontiers – been to Europe and all that, tell us homebiding ones: are our men worse than the others? Does Mrs. Stowe know? You know?” (169). In her now famous reference to the questionable sexual proclivities of southern men, Chesnut examines the foundation of Southern patriarchal power dynamics. She condemns the sexual nature of patriarchy:

Like the patriarchs of old our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines, and the mulattoes one sees in every family exactly

²² Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1999. P.155.

²³ Johnson quotes these descriptions by slave traders: James Blakeny “described Mary Ellen Brooks: ‘A very pretty girl, a bright mulatto with long curly hair and fine features’” (155). “Philip Thomas simply described a woman he had seen in Richmond as ‘13 years old, Bright Color, nearly a fancy for \$1135’” (*Ibid*). Lastly, Mildred Ann Jackson was “about thirty years old. Her color was that of a quadroon; very good figure, she was rather tall and slim. Her general appearance was very good. She wore false teeth and had a mole on her upper lip. Her hair was very straight” (*Ibid*). Through these excerpts, Johnson determines that “the racial gaze of the slaveholder projected sexual meaning onto the bodies of light-skinned women” (*Ibid*).

²⁴ For depictions of the quadroon on the auction block, see William Wells Brown, *Clotel: or. The President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853, Rpt. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), P. 87; James S. Peacocke, *The Creole Orphans: Or Lights and Shadows of Southern Life. A Tale of Louisiana* (New York, 1856, Rpt. Nabu P, 2010) P. 353 – 358; and Thomas Mayne Reid, *The Quadroon or, Adventures in the Far West.*(London, 1856, Rpt. Adamant Media, 2006) P. 337 – 352.

resemble the white children – and every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody’s household, but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds, or pretends so to think. (29)

From Chesnut’s words, we may determine that for southern women, the white planter’s sexual activities with the mulatto or quadroon was a mark of dissention between inter-racial female relationships in the patriarchally controlled space of the plantation. In her entry for August 26th, 1861, Chesnut observes:

You see, Mrs. Stowe did not hit the sorest spot. She makes Legree a bachelor. Remember George II and his like. (168)

This oft-quoted statement by Chesnut points to the tensions between white and black women within the plantation over the sexual digressions of white married planters.

Yet, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as P. Gabrielle Foreman claims, “Stowe avoids involving the reader in *explicit* situations where the sexual dynamics inscribed on the bodies of Stowe’s mulatto characters could explode. We do not see rape or interracial concubinage within a white domestic setting. Indeed, the mere presence of white women relegates the interdicted desire of married men, the sorest spot, to the subtext.”²⁵ Foreman’s claim points to the difference between Eliza’s initial situation and that of Cassy. For Northern women, however, all mixed race figures were a focal point in the argument against southern claims of morality. In Stowe’s novel, another stock figure in the form of Simon Legree preys on the beautiful mixed-race girl. As Jules Zanger notes in his study of sentimental heroines, the predator “is coarse, ill-bred and crudely spoken. Most interesting, he is often a Yankee.”²⁶ In a slightly atypical reading, Zanger suggests that the

²⁵ See P. Gabrielle Foreman, “‘This Promiscuous Housekeeping’: Death, Transgression, and Homoeroticism in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” *Representations* 43 (1993): 51 – 72.

²⁶ Jules Zanger, “The ‘Tragic Octoroon’ in Pre-Civil War Fiction.” *American Quarterly* 18.1 (1966): 63 – 70. Zanger argues that the narrative strategy of centering the octoroon as the focal character in the plot “was to win sympathy for the antislavery cause by displaying a cultivated ‘white’ sensibility threatened by, and responding to, a ‘black’ situation” (64).

loathsome Yankee prototype exemplified by Simon Legree is meant to contrast between most Northerners to the Northerner abolitionists, not as propaganda against the Southern slaveholders. He observes, “to make the overseer explicitly a Yankee is to acknowledge that the guilt of exploiting slaves was not exclusively Southern” (68).

Another of Stowe’s narrative strategies points to disruptions in marriages of the enslaved.

The slave trader Haley and the smith are conversing about Tom:

“He leaves his wife an chil’en up here, s’pose?”
“Yes, but he’ll get another thar, Lord, thar’s women enough
everywhar,” said Haley. (86)

Revealing the differences in white perceptions regarding slave marriage, Haley’s justification in taking Tom from his wife and children provides Stowe with a mouthpiece to critique white slaveholder policies of separating families. This precept forms the basis for Stanley M. Elkins’ claim of the emasculating nature of slavery where white patriarchy displaces the enslaved male as head of his own household.²⁷ More recent critics also comment on masculine roles in the text. Christina Zwarg clarifies masculine issues in her reading of Tom and the space of the black slave home where she argues that Tom “is a figure of social cohesion in a community whose contacts are constantly challenged by the larger imperatives of slavery.”²⁸ Under Stowe’s gaze, the separation of married couples, mothers and children was a critical part of that white imperative. As the reader’s attention is drawn to Chloe’s momentum to reclaim Uncle Tom, Stowe recounts a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Shelby on the longevity of slave marriage. In response to Mr. Shelby’s speculation that Tom would take a new wife along with the suggestion that Chloe

²⁷ For more on Elkins and what he describes as a “closed system,” see Chapter Three: Slavery and Personality in *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*. P. 81 – 133.

²⁸ See Christina Zwarg, “Fathering and Blackface in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 22.3 (1989): 274 – 87. P. 276.

“take up” with another man, Mrs. Shelby, as a spokeswoman of True Womanhood reveals her moral powers as a slaveholder’s wife: “Mr. Shelby, I have taught my people that their marriages are as sacred as ours. I never could think of giving Chloe such advice” (220). Mr. Shelby’s reply encapsulates the slaveholder’s moral dilemma: “It’s a pity, wife, that you have burdened them with a morality above their condition and prospects. I always thought so” (*Ibid*). As we have seen in the previous chapter, many southern slaveholders viewed their slaves as sexually licentious and unable to govern themselves through moral constraints and had no hesitation, under certain economic conditions, to separate established families.

Despite the honorable precepts espoused by his wife, Mr. Shelby, as the voice of the southern planter, negates the possibility of steadfastness in the marital commitment of the enslaved. His is not the only household where such sentiments exist. Chloe’s situation is mirrored in the St. Clare home in the character of Marie’s “Mammy,” a stereotypic figure of black female domesticity. Marie, as “Belle Gone Bad,”²⁹ explains to Miss Ophelia that Mammy has been physically “over-indulged” with material items after being separated from her husband and children. Ironically, Marie complains that “She won’t marry anybody else; and I do believe, now, though she knows how necessary she is to me, and how feeble my health is, she would go back to her husband tomorrow, if she only could” (147). Through contrasting the tender-hearted pious Bible-teaching Mrs. Shelby to the unfeeling, spoiled, selfish belle, Marie, as a Janus-faced version of the slave mistress, Stowe illuminates the personal sacrifices that slave women are expected to make in performing domestic roles within southern households. When the slave trader Haley repeats

²⁹ Bettina Entzinger. *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2002. Entzinger argues, “In the works of these nineteenth century white southern women novelists, however, a character appears who manifests these writers’ discontent with the domestic structure they outwardly defended. As a foil to the morally pure heroine of their novels, these writers often employ as villain the southern belle gone bad” (2). Obviously, Stowe does not fall under the rubric of a southern novelist but she does employ the figure in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

similar sentiments to Lucy after separating her from her husband and child, he rationalizes that “you’ll soon get another husband – such a likely gal as you” (113). Lucy’s response to her loss is to throw herself overboard. Yet none of these mixed race minor female characters in Stowe’s sentimental novel embody the rhetorical power displayed by what Jules Zanger terms “the conventional ingénue ‘victim’ of the sentimental romance” so popular in the nineteenth century (63).

Revealing the evolving power of racial stereotypes, the tragic mulatta appears centrally as the sentimental heroine in the first African American novel, William Wells Brown’s *Clotel: or, The President’s Daughter; A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*, published in London in 1853. Brown bases his sentimental fiction on two distinct threads: the rumor of Thomas Jefferson’s alliance with Sally Hemings and the plot of Lydia Maria Child’s novella, “The Quadroons.”³⁰ Each of these threads lends itself to the sentimental tragic heroine outlined by Jules Zanger who describes the tragic octoroon:

a beautiful young girl who possesses only the slightest evidence of Negro blood, who speaks with no trace of dialect, who was raised and educated as a white child and as a lady in the household of her father, and who on her paternal side is descended from ‘some of the best blood in the ‘Old Dominion.’ In her sensibility and her vulnerability she resembles, of course, the conventional ingenue ‘victim’ of sentimental romance. Her condition is radically changed when, at her father’s unexpected death, it is revealed that he has failed to free her properly. She discovers that she is a slave; her personal is attached as property by her father’s creditors. Sold into slavery, she is victimized, usually by a lower-class, dialect-speaking slave dealer or overseer often, especially after the fugitive Slave Act, a Yankee- who attempts to violate her; she is loved by a high-born young Northerner or European who wishes to marry her. Occasionally she escapes with her lover; more often, she dies a suicide, or dies of shame, or dies protecting her young gentleman. (63 -4)

³⁰ Child’s text first appeared in *The Liberty Bell* in 1842 and reprinted in 1846 in *Fact and Fiction: A Collection of Stories*. Sections of Child’s dialogue appear almost verbatim in *Clotel*, especially in the conversation between Clotel and Horatio Green over the concept of a marriage made in Heaven and not on earth: “Let the church that my mother loved sanction our union, and my own soul will be satisfied, without the protection of the state. If your affections fall from me, I would not, if I could, hold you by a legal letter.”

As we will see repeatedly throughout the plantation tradition, the figure of the light-skinned octoroon is a metonym for white desire. “It was the single drop of black blood that made the tragic octoroon available; it was the seven drops of blue blood that made her desirable” (Zanger 69). Brown’s fictional charge that Thomas Jefferson fathered children with his wife’s enslaved half-sister not only confirms the “repeated pattern of guilt of the Southern slaveholder” but muddles the boundary between democracy and race. In an irony of all ironies, in the novel the author of the Declaration of Independence cannot guarantee the freedom of his own offspring due to racial boundaries.

Brown also altered the setting of Child’s story from the Sand-hills region of Georgia to an area surrounding New Orleans and the famed slave market. Nonetheless, Brown retained and elaborated on a central feature of Child’s text which is her concern with limitations of the marriage contract for those with minute traces of black blood. At the center of Brown’s patchwork of texts and vision is the issue of slave marriage. Before the reader is ever introduced to *Clotel* and made aware of her vulnerability, Brown offers a lengthy treatise on marriage. He opens his text by observing that “Marriage, the oldest and most sacred institution given to man by his Creator, is unknown and unrecognized in the slave laws of the United States” (82). Brown queries the judicial and religious determinations of slave marriage and reviews these in the opening scene of his novel. His commentary affirms many of the social and moral benefits of marriage but also enumerates the humanitarian qualities those marital unions promote:

Marriage is, indeed, the first and most important institution of human existence –The foundation of all civilization and culture – the root of church and state. It is the most intimate covenant of heart formed among mankind; and for many persons the only relation in which they feel the true sentiments of humanity. It gives scope for every human virtue, since each of these is developed from the love and confidence which here predominate. It unites all which ennobles and beautifies life, - sympathy,

kindness of will and deed, gratitude devotion, and every delicate, intimate feeling. As the only asylum for true education, it is the first and last sanctuary of human culture. (83)

Thus, Brown frames his tragic story with a sentimental portrait of virtuous marriage. *Clotel*, as representative of enslaved black women denied the sanction and protection of legal marriage becomes, as Ann duCille argues, a symbol “of the barbarism of a ‘civilized society’ that put the white lady and ‘true womanhood’ on a pedestal and the black slave and black womanhood on the auction block” (*The Coupling Convention* 18).

The end result of Brown’s intertwining of truth, rumor and reality is a fiction that has been variously interpreted by scholars and critics.³¹ Bernard W. Bell, in *The Afro-American Novel and its Tradition*, terms *Clotel* a “historical romance” which delivers the “urgent message” that “chattel slavery in America undermines the entire social condition of man” (38 – 9). Bell’s supposition that Brown directed his fiction to a British audience most interested in abolishing American slavery is even more convincing if we consider the importance of Jefferson’s diplomatic relationship with the English while he was American Minister in Europe. In a reading that supports the “motif of the sudden reversal of fate,” Kristin Herzog argues the novel “appealed to a middle-class audience whose future was uncertain because of constant immigrations and migrations” (*Women: Ethnics and Exotics* 125). While I agree with Herzog that the sudden reversal of fortune is a signifier of the sentimental style, her reading overlooks the significant inversion of the sentimental marriage plot. As Ann duCille maintains Brown’s novel is a “pastiche and bricolage” that subverts the marriage plot into “primary signifiers of freedom and humanity” (19). duCille claims that Brown ultimately creates “an ‘unreal estate,’ a

³¹ Recent DNA testing supports claims that Thomas Jefferson was the father of six children born to Sally Hemings. For more, see Lucia Stanton, *Free Some Day: The African American Families of Monticello*. Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2000; and Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008.

fictive realm of the fantastic and coincidental . . . an ideologically charged space, created by drawing together a variety of discursive fields –including ‘the real’ and ‘the romantic,’ the simple and the sensational, the allegorical and the historical” (18). For duCille, the unreal estate is “[o]ften misdiagnosed by critics as sentimental melodrama or badly written realism” when it should be considered as “a formal strategy that dominates the African American novel at least until the realism and naturalism of Richard Wright and Ann Petry in the 1940’s” (18 -19). Brown’s formal strategy brings the idea that the tragic mulatta cannot be protected by the tenants of civic law to the forefront.

The figure of the tragic octoroon is a central character not only in a text produced by a male African American writer but also in a sentimental fiction written by a white woman. Despite the distinct differences in racial perception, the tragic octoroon remains a sympathetic figure, especially when she imagines herself as a bride. In her introduction to *Maum Guinea, and Her Plantation “Children;” Or, Holiday-Week on a Louisiana Estate: a Slave Romance*, the author, Metta Victoria Fuller Victor (1831 – 1885) states that her intention is “to reproduce the slave, in all his varied relations, with historical truthfulness” in what she terms “a slave romance” (iii). Helen Waite Papashvily writes that Victor’s fifth novel for the Beadle Dime Library, *Maum Guinea*, was “a favorite, it was said, of President Lincoln and, according to Henry Ward Beecher, extremely influential in counteracting Southern sentiment in England.”³² Charles M. Harvey notes, “‘It is as absorbing as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,’ was the judgment which Lincoln was said to have passed on it. The New York *Tribune*, the New York *Evening Post*, and other prominent papers in that day of large deeds, when newspaper space was valuable, gave some

³² Helen Waite Papashvily, *All The Happy Endings*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956. P.145.

space to Mrs. Victor's story.”³³ Published as Beadle's Dime Novel #33 in early December, 1861, to meet the demands of the Christmas book market, *Maum Guinea* is thematically a typical dime novel with its melodramatic action and stereotypical characterization. Dime novels, as Merle Curti claims, were aimed “for the great masses and designed to fill the pockets of both author and publisher” with “themes that were found to popular attitudes that met with the most general approval.”³⁴ Irwin and Erastus Beadle were credited with implementing a cheaply produced paperback novel which sold for a dime and was geared to the interests of the everyday reading public. As “Dime Novels and Penny Dreadfuls”³⁵ argues, “the dime novels were aimed at youthful, working-class audiences and distributed in massive editions at newsstands and dry goods stores.”³⁶

Published in large quantities with sensational titles, early dime novels lacked the brightly colored illustrations that later became popular as printing techniques evolved. As a basis for its popularity Conti claims, the “dime novel not only idealized and promoted the spirit of adventure and individualism; in good Jacksonian fashion it also exalted the humble man as opposed to those born with a silver spoon in their mouths” (765). Characters representing ordinary people populate the pages of dime novels and the perpetual happy endings are largely a result of their self-reliance and personal achievement. However sensationalized and sentimentalized we may think of the works today, the dime novel remained popular from the mid-nineteenth-century

³³ Charles M. Harvey, “The Dime Novel in American Life.” *The Atlantic Monthly* 100 (1907): 37 – 45.

³⁴ Merle Curti, “Dime Novels and the American Tradition.” *Yale Review* 26 (1937): 761 – 778.

³⁵ Dime novels sold in England were sometimes called “shilling shockers.”

³⁶ See “Dime Novels and Penny Dreadfuls.” <http://www.-sul.stanford.edu/depts/dp/pennies/home.html>.

through the early twentieth century.³⁷ Filled with “the sheer force of rugged individualism and courageous exploits,” the dime novel as Conti maintains, assumed “democratic implications” (765). She argues that “these fragile, rare and highly fugitive books will be useful likewise to anyone interested in proletarian literature. They must be taken into account particularly by those interested in the democratization of culture and the commercialization of leisure, in the rise and reinforcement of our traditions of adventure and rugged individualism, in the development of class consciousness, and in the growth of American patriotism and nationalism” (778). Thus, Metta Victoria Fuller Victor’s love story of a tragic mulatta, published just at the onset of the Civil War, proved extremely popular with sales exceeding 100,000 copies. The novel was also issued in London as a “Special Publication” and translated into several languages. In her time, Victor was hailed as a versatile and prolific writer of sentimental fiction, mysteries and even cookbooks.

Her novel opens with a courting scene between two young slaves, Hyperion and Rose, who live on neighboring plantations. Hyperion wishes to marry Rose on Christmas Eve but his master is not supportive. Meanwhile, Colonel Fairfax’s white son, Hyperion’s half-brother, begins to court the plantation girl-next-door, Virginia Bell, who is Rose’s young mistress. In keeping with the holiday season of visiting, Mr. Talfierro, a business acquaintance from New Orleans, arrives at Judge Bell’s plantation. During Virginia’s first ball, Talfierro spots Rose and attempts to exchange her for the debt owed by Judge Bell. Virginia, newly engaged to Philip Fairfax, plans a double wedding for the white couple and the enslaved couple. Maum Guinea, the plantation cook for Colonel Fairfax, maintains a special position in the slave hierarchy on the

³⁷ Several university libraries house collections of dime novels revealing a recent interest in this early form of mass marketed paperbacks. The Library of Congress maintains a collection of close to 40,000 titles while Stanford and New York University both have large collections. Some items in their collections are available online. For more on the dime novel, see Helen Papashvily, *All the Happy Endings*, p. 141 – 148.

plantation. To protect Rose from the clutches of Talfierro, Maum Guinea plots an escape by hiding with Hyperion and Rose in a nearby cave. While hiding in the cave, Maum Guinea tells the story of her seduction by her mistress' young son, followed by the birth and subsequent loss of her beautiful, nearly white daughter. After several days, the three runaways are apprehended in the cave by the two planters and a Northern sea captain, who has come searching for Maum Guinea as he is her daughter's husband. The novel ends happily with the newlyweds, Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax, visiting Maum Guinea's daughter's family in the North with the newly married Rose and Hyperion.

Victor's "slave romance" is a hybrid text, inverting and subverting elements of ethnography, published slave narratives, the seduction novel and the sentimental romance. Early in the novel, to contrast with the wedding denied Hyperion and Rose, Victor depicts a plantation wedding for two of the enslaved. The bride, July "was resplendent in a white dress, white cotton gloves, a string of mock-pearls about her neck, and a wreath of silver flowers about her head" and her groom "wore a gorgeous waistcoat, had a spring of flowers in the button-hole of his coat, and also sported white cotton gloves" (40). Not only is this wedding of the enslaved followed by wine and cake, feasting and dancing, it is also supported by the master, the bride and groom and the entire enslaved community. Victor presents this wedding as having all of the ingredients Rose's longings but such a wedding is withheld from her.

In keeping with the tenets of the marriage plot, Hyperion and Rose must face and overcome numerous obstacles. Parental interference, a trope that Herbert Ross Brown designates as an essential element of plot development in the sentimental novel, takes on a sinister twist in this work. Hyperion, who is described with his "flowing curls, purple and shining, and with scarcely a trace of the original wiry kink," to signify his level of whiteness, laments to Maum Guinea: I

was t'inking as how Massa Fairfax he don' like to let any of his people go 'way from home to get married" (13).³⁸ Ironically, the parental interference in this case is from the master, Colonel Fairfax himself, who is (as Victor hints) the un-acknowledged father of the young slave. Victor parallels Rose's desire for marriage as "the pretty dream" also rejected by her young mistress who "had no idea of allowing her favorite maid to marry, and be having interests of her own, which might interfere with dressing her hair and humoring her caprices at all times" (21). Her interference, instead of issuing from a parent, comes from her young mistress. On the threshold of her belledom, Virginia's plans to vacation at the Springs require "Rose as much as her trunks or purse" (Ibid).

Undaunted however, Hyperion and Rose "met by the spring, on the previous Sabbath night, as they had agreed; and there, very much after the fashion of whiter and freer lovers, had, all coquetry aside, solemnly promised to marry each other – provided, they were allowed. They knew very well that it was against the rules to marry off their own plantations" (20).

Highlighting the tensions between Rose's desire to marry and her mistress' subsequent refusal to allow the marriage, Victor presents the young slave girl dreaming of the details of her wedding:

Rose's imagination had already selected the very dress, out of her young mistress' wardrobe, which she was to beg for her own wedding-dress – a corn-colored tissue, with crimson trimmings, which was now in its second season, and which she had always admired exceedingly. She felt certain, too, "that Miss Virgenny would give her a real gold ring," to be married with, and a wreath of flowers for her hair, and plenty of cake to make merry with. They would be married Christmas Eve, and then they would have a whole week to spend together – a whole week of regular honeymoon. (20)

³⁸ Herbert Ross Brown's *The Sentimental Novel in America 1789 – 1860* (Durham: Duke UP, 1940) is a very early yet germinal study in the origin and development of this genre. Ross enumerates several consistent themes that dominant sentimental fiction. These are parental interference; the rake, the possession of sensibility, and persecuted innocence.

Despite the hand-me-down wedding gown, the visual trappings of the standard Victorian “white” wedding – the floral headdress, the ring and the cake, are projected onto the body of the female slave, serving the dual purpose of establishing her as the true heroine of the fiction while situating her in contrast with the young white mistress who faces no complications in her plans to marry. In fact, as the text states, in marrying Philip, Virginia faces none of the financial problems commonly associated with choosing a partner as “she knew that Philip was a favorite with her parents, and that there were none of those hateful financial difficulties in the way, which disturb so many matches otherwise” (46). The only other possible barrier to the match between Virginia and Phillip comes with the arrival of Mr. Talfierro, the rich businessman and friend of her father’s from New Orleans; however, he is portrayed as a villain, threatening the sanctity of marriage, not by meddling with Virginia’s romance, but by attempting to sexually possess her maid. Like Stowe’s characters, Cassy and Emmeline, the figure of the beautiful Rose, as a commodity that may be purchased, allows Victor to critique a system that enables white southern males to acquire enslaved women for immoral purposes.

In several scenes in the novel, in an obvious appeal to her reader’s sympathy, Victor situates Rose as a form of currency to repay a debt, as a reason to return a gift, or as funds to purchase Virginia’s trousseau. Colonel Fairfax confesses to Judge Bell: “Four thousand dollars would buy her [Virginia] lots of wedding-finery” (62). In this instance, the sentimentality calls on the reader, as Nina Baym argues, to see through “a world dominated by money and market considerations, where she [woman] was defined as chattel or sexual toy” (27).³⁹ Even though Baym is referring to white authored sentimental fictions focused on the evolution and growth of

³⁹ In *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820 – 1870*, Nina Baym appeals to modern scholars to reevaluate sentimental fiction, or “fiction of sensibility” by pointing to its underlying objection to “a concept of woman as inevitable sexual prey” (26).

white female characters for a white readership, we may, however, appropriate her viewpoint and apply it to Rose. The concept of materialism even creeps into Hyperion's fears that Rose might "want to accept of the brilliant lot in store for her, as the favored slave of so wealthy and handsome a man, with whom she could lead a life of idleness' (79 -80). Rose, of course, as a sentimental but also a racial heroine, abhors and rejects such attention.

In fact, Rose is so deeply drawn as a character of piety and virtue that even her owner expresses reluctance to complete this transaction. Victor notes that Judge Bell's "conscience, as a man, was troubled, for he knew, much better than his child, the object of the purchase" (120). Carolyn Karcher explains that for nineteenth century American women writers, this brief aside, is "a means of circumventing the obstacles faced when they attempted to write opening about the sordid realities of slavery" (58).⁴⁰ Inhibited by the Victorian Code of the Genteel Tradition, women writers skirted "'indecencies' and 'villainies' endured by slaves" claims Karcher "because the genre represented a compromise with the code of gentility which forbade women writers to 'name' the wrongs they sought to expose" (59).

In this novel, Victor parallels the main seduction plot with the lesser developed plot relating the attempted seduction of Maum Guinea's daughter, Judy. In accordance with sentimental conventions of the white female fiction writer, all of the vulnerable black females in the novel are ultimately saved from white male predations. Ironically, Rose is saved through purchase; however, it is Philip Fairfax who buys Rose as a wedding present for Virginia, his prospective

⁴⁰ Carolyn L. Karcher argues that women's antislavery fiction "represented a compromise with the code of gentility which forbade women writers to "name" the wrongs they sought to expose" (59). In this way, she notes, "antislavery fiction imposed severe constraints on them. On the other hand, in the guise of championing the slave woman, whose sexual exploitation became its main focus, antislavery fiction allowed women writers to explore what feminist-abolitionists came to call 'the slavery of sex' – the predicament of women in patriarchal society" (*Ibid*). See "Rape, Murder, and Revenge in 'Slavery's Pleasant Homes': Lydia Maria Child's Antislavery Fiction and the Limits of the Genre." *Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century American*. Ed. Shirley Samuels. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. P. 58 – 72.

wife. The white courtship - marriage plot runs concurrently alongside the courtship - seduction - wedlock plot of the enslaved couple, magnifying catastrophic racial hegemonies on this fictional plantation. Victor's use of what Boone terms "the thematic function of marriage" instead of twinning the two couples as so often seen in sentimental fiction, serves to illuminate the distinctions between the white bride and the enslaved bride. Virginia comments, "Oh, I am so happy, Rose. We will have a splendid wedding! And you shall be married the same evening. Yes, I've set my heart upon that, as one of the accessories – to have you and Hyperion married at the same time" (101). Always seen as a compliment to her mistress' desire, Rose's marriage cannot be treated as a valid union. While Victor prescribes a double wedding as the final solution to the plot and ends her novel with "a happily ever after" conclusion, the reader's sympathies certainly engage the precarious plight of the slave bride. Will she be "safe" in this marriage?

As David Levy observes, "One of the clearest statements of this recognition of white superiority occurred in Mrs. Victor's *Maum Guinea*. Maum Guinea, herself a mulatto, had an opportunity to marry her quadroon daughter to a heroic white man who loved her."⁴¹ In the scene where Mr. Slocum comes for Maum Guinea's daughter, Victor writes:

"Mrs. Ginny," he began at last, "you must have seen dat I love Judy. I do love her, wid all my heart and soul. I think she's too good for any man living. I mus marry her – dat is, if she loves me and will marry me. I can't help it. I'm a New Englander; and I've my prejudices against black blood. I tell you candidly. I don't think its right to mix it wid w'ite. But I'm so infatuated wid date angel, I forget everything only date I love her. I've made up my mind to ask her to be my wife. But, Mrs. Ginny, though I've overcome my prejudices, I never could dose of my relatives; I'd never lke to tell'em dat my wife had African blood in her – I'd never like'em to know dat you was her mudder. (176).

Not only is the dialect in this passage racist in its attempt to recoup black dialect but the content also suggests that Maum Guinea must be willing to release ties to her daughter to permit Judy's

⁴¹ David W. Levy, "Racial Stereotypes in Antislavery Fiction." *Phylon* 31.3 (1970): 265 – 279. P. 270

happiness in a white world where her mother, due to her skin color, is not welcome or even acknowledged. Moreover, the racist implications in this passage speak to white fears of miscegenation. In an appeal to her Northern readers, Victor must somehow qualify Judy's marriage to a white man to avoid charges of upholding amalgamation. It is only in the last two paragraphs of the novel that the reader sees Maum Guinea off the Louisiana plantation and living happily with her daughter's family in Newport. The last sentence of the novel returns the reader to the Louisiana plantation by depicting an image of two plantation brides, "Rose as happy in her pink tissue, as her mistress in her pearly satin" which suggests, despite the apparently happy ending, that the tragic octoroon is still slightly stained by her mixed blood.

The marriage plot of a Louisiana planter's son to a quadroon is the central plot of Julia C. Collins's *The Curse of Caste: Or, The Slave Bride*. The African American writer from Williamsport, Pennsylvania most likely never visited New Orleans or a Louisiana plantation, yet the plantation figures strongly in her work, a serialized sentimental fiction not complete when she died. Editors William L. Andrews and Mitch Kachun claim *The Curse of Caste* to be the earliest published novel written by an African American woman. Written in the style of a sentimental novel, *The Curse of Caste* is deceptively simplistic. However, in spite of the overtly stereotypic sentimentality, Ann duCille notes that sentimental novels casting black characters as players in the marriage plot are dissimilar to plots where white characters take these roles.⁴² This proves especially true in *The Curse of Caste* where elements of the wedlock plot are blended with those of the seduction plot in this novel about a mixed race marriage. The plot concerns Claire Neville, a young girl living in the North who unsuspectingly moves to a Louisiana

⁴² Ann duCille, in *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction*, argues that the marriage plot was "appropriated" in fictional texts by black women writers "who for generations were denied the hegemonic, 'universal truth' of legal marriage" (3).

plantation after she is orphaned to serve in the role of governess to who are, in reality, her white nieces and nephews. Through a series of flashbacks, the reader discovers that the family patriarch, Colonel Tracy, has disinherited his son Richard, who is Claire's father for marrying Lina, the beautiful quadroon daughter of a neighboring Louisiana planter. Richard is shot by his father when he returns to the family plantation following his marriage to Lina. Betrayed by his friend Manville who lies to Richard about his wife's death, Richard moves to France. Lina believes that she has been abandoned and dies while giving birth to Claire. Juno, a faithful black nurse raises Claire until she goes to boarding school. Innocent of her relationship to the Tracy family and unaware of her racial "taint," Claire's gentle nature and excellent character endears her to the Tracy family. Only Isabelle, Richard's younger sister, whose name reflects her status as a reigning belle, is an exception as she continually challenges and resents the attention Claire receives from Count Sayvord. The novel ends abruptly with the Tracy family, including Claire, awaiting the return of Richard to the family plantation.

The first installment of *The Curse of Caste* appeared in February, 1865 in *The Christian Recorder* and continued weekly for the next sixteen months, ending in September of 1866. Underneath this simplistic and predictable plot, Collins's novel addresses far more racially prominent issues facing both free blacks and ex-slaves at the end of the Civil War. Her work extends the antebellum tradition of the sentimental racialized tragic heroine into prominence during the last months of the war and into the initial months following Lincoln's assassination and Johnson's presidency. The timing of Collins's heroine is, as duCille argues, "a sign of the times that shifts with the times, the place, and the people. It takes on different social and political meanings for different historical subjects at different historical moments. The multiple meanings black writers have given to marriage, together with their racially charged appropriations of the

marriage plot and the sentimental form, make a study of those revisions and appropriations essential” (4). There are two marriage plots in the novel. The first is that of Richard and Lina. Collins’ depiction of the wedding is very simple: “One beautiful morning, in a quiet New England village, far from their own home, Richard Tracy and the beautiful quadroon, Lina, were united for life” (24). As this description makes clear, the couple was unable to marry in their own community due to laws that prohibited racial mixing. They must move away from home to be joined together.

Nonetheless, the taint of ‘black’ blood sends the wedlock plot in a tragic direction, as Andrews and Kachan agree, for Lina’s “opportunities for fulfillment though love and marriage are threatened by slavery and caste prejudice” (xiv). Even though Richard and Lina move to the North and are married legally by a minister, as P. Gabrielle Foreman claims “the book’s generative organization around the couple’s marriage, that is, around the legal union between a woman regarded as property and a propertied white man who together move north, was radical in the throes of the War when the newly coined term “miscegenation” had just been forged as a political scare tactic.”⁴³ Colonel Tracy is a mouthpiece for both Northern and Southern fears of miscegenation when Collins writes: “Our society is getting into a pretty state, when the sons of the best families stoop to marry their father’s slaves” (39).

Moreover, Lina and Richard are both victimized by Colonel Tracy’s racism. Yet, Richard’s actions and words espouse anti-slavery attitudes when he claims that “[t]hose pernicious sentiments, as you are pleased to term them, which I have imbibed at the North, only teach me to respect the rights of my fellow-citizens . . . I would not own a slave if I possessed the wealth of a Croesus’ (40). The differing views over slavery between father and son echo the conflicting

⁴³ P. Gabrielle Foreman, “The Christian Recorder, Broken Families and Educated Nations in Julia C. Collins’s Civil War Novel The Curse of Caste. *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 705 – 716.

Northern and Southern national sentiments heard before the Civil War. Foreman observes that Richard's "near-mortal wound at the hand of his father replaces the fratricidal metaphor of brothers at war and fits squarely within the grief of families torn asunder by ideological and national strife" (710). Collins's character is the only white male in a long list of "American literary predecessors,"⁴⁴ as Colleen C. O'Brien maintains, where "the white male strives to do right by his slave bride; Richard Tracy is the only male figure in a 'tragic mulatta' story to marry his enslaved beloved legally by removing her to a place where slavery is not the law of the land" (670).

Yet, despite Richard's honorable intentions, Lina remains the stereotypic tragic mulatta as her actions in marrying her white husband ultimately bring about her demise. As duCille claims, the figure of the tragic mulatta is "both a rhetorical device and a political strategy" that allows Collins to critique "social and sexual relationships between the races" (7). As Andrews and Kachun note in their introduction to the text, "Collins's novel endorses unequivocally the freedom and fitness of African American women, whether formerly enslaved or freeborn, to marry whom they love, regardless of actual laws forbidding slaves (such as Lina) marriage rights or caste-bound customs that would proscribe women of color (such as Claire) the same rights" (xii). Lina dies of a broken heart, fearing that her husband has abandoned her. Andrews and Kachun view this as "Collins's way of underlining her heroine's utter faithfulness to her marriage vow and devotion to her husband" (xvii). This defense on Collins's part serves to uphold the virtue of her heroine thereby "[r]efuting the social myth that black women lack sexual virtue" (O'Brien 664). O'Brien continues her argument that metaphorically the Tracy family

⁴⁴ Colleen C. O'Brien, "What the Dickens?: Intertextual Influence and the Inheritance of Virtue in Julia C. Collins's *The Curse of Caste; or, The Slave Bride*." *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 661 – 685. O'Brien is referring to texts where the white male abandons the mulatta figure. These are Lydia Maria Child's *The Quadroon*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, William Wells Brown's *Clotel*, and Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl*.

may be “read” as a “national family struggling with issues of equality in the body politic” (665). In this manner, O’Brien compares this novel to the social commentary seen in Charles Dickens’ novels. She argues, “Collins establishes the inheritance of virtue as precursory evidence that black people are equal members of the American national family; as American citizens, people of African descent were likewise entitled to inherit the American national legacy of freedom” (670). Marriage, long denied to the enslaved, is certainly part of those freedoms.

At the end of the novel, Collin’s social commentary is incomplete as the text ends suddenly due to her untimely death. However, the editors supply two possible endings for the novel. In a possible happy ending to resolve the second marriage plot, Claire moves to Europe with her white husband to escape further racism.⁴⁵ There are hints in the later chapters that Claire has overtaken her grandfather’s prejudice and that she will marry the Count. This ending requires Colonel Tracy’s recognition of the legitimacy of Richard and Lina’s marriage. O’Brien notes:

The failure of the marriage contract becomes a sign of past misdeed needing execration. The Colonel must rescind his refusal to recognize Lina and Richard’s marriage if he is to accept Claire as his granddaughter. This recognition legitimates Claire’s birth and endows Lina with the status of a legal subject with rights; as the only means of access to liberal contract and democratic rights available to women, marriage is the foundation of male legal responsibility to protect and act on behalf of women’s rights. (677-8)

In this “happy ending,” the Tracy family is reunited and Claire will be protected by civic laws in an enlightened, post-War South.

From another perspective, the tragic ending suggested by the editors has the competitive Isabelle, as belle gone bad, shoot her rival in a jealous rage after Count Sayvord proposes marriage to Claire. As she is dying, Claire urges the family members to reunite for her sake.

⁴⁵ In *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain and William Faulkner*, Barbara Ladd notes that this is a common trope in fictions concerned with miscegenation. See Chapter 1. Race and National Identity in the Work of White Writers. P. 15

Colonel Tracy, repentant and now reconciled with his son, rejects slavery and frees all of his slaves. Although the editors have provided two possible solutions to the second marriage plot that concern Claire's future, we may only project how Collins would have ultimately resolved these intricately embedded social and racial issues facing her African American heroine in the turbulent political times of her writing.

The sentimental happy ending, suggests Foreman, is a way of healing national wounds. She notes "Claire is not our titular 'slave bride.' Rather her maiden presence mends the family that stands for the divided nation; in this role, she embodies hope for national regeneration" (711). Ultimately, however, Foreman rejects either ending provided by the editors. She argues, "Claire's marriage to the aimless, if innocuous, Count Sayvord – whose romantic interest in her seems entirely unrequited and unilateral – would have made Claire 'passive and inert,' to borrow from one of Collins's essays" (714). Instead, Foreman offers an ending to the novel that "rejects female passivity and a marriage for which she has expressed no desire" to be replaced with "the larger democratic project of educated nationhood that its author advocated in the pages of the *Christian Recorder*" (*Ibid*). In Foreman's mind, Claire's responsibility is to not implicate herself in a loveless union but to educate the newly freed ex-slaves in the post-bellum environment.

Highlighting the tensions between sentimental marriage plots written by black and white writers, E.D.E.N. Southworth's domestic novel sequence, *The Changed Bride* and *The Bride's Fate*, offers a portrait of virtuous white southern womanhood displayed in the didactic features of Southern domestic fiction. Although Elizabeth Moss does not include Emma Dorothy Eliza

Nevitte Southworth in her study of five best-selling southern domestic fiction writers,⁴⁶ Southworth was “the most consistently popular author in nineteenth-century American.”⁴⁷ Southworth’s style perhaps echoes her own biography as she deals with abandoned women whose ultimate virtue and strength overcome all of the obstacles in her way to wedded bliss.⁴⁸ There are two marriage plots in this novel sequence; the first begins as a seduction plot, however, eventually convert into the conventional wedlock plot. Drusilla, as the heroine, eventually manages to convert the rake into a loving husband through her sincere and loving nature.

Her submissive wife follows the structural pattern of the folktale outlined by Vladimir Propp where the least likely to succeed (in the domestic novel this is typically a young orphaned girl), undergoes a series of challenges to ultimately end in marriage. As part of the structural morphology outlined by Propp, the heroine must move through a series of disastrous situations or experiences. Southworth’s *The Changed Bride*, incorporates these folktale elements as it follows the seduction/wedlock plot of a childlike heroine who is of lower social status than the aristocratic man who marries and then abandons her during pregnancy. The novel opens with a melodramatic stormy scene and follows the folk motif of the changed or substituted bride.⁴⁹ Drusilla Sterling arrives out of the storm to reveal Alexander Lyon’s betrayal of their marriage.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South; Defenders of Southern Culture*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 1992. Moss includes Caroline Gilman, Caroline Lee Hentz, Maria McIntosh, Mary Virginia Terhune, and Augusta Jane Evans in her study of domestic fiction writers.

⁴⁷ Karen Manners Smith, “The Novel.” *The History of Southern Women’s Literature*. Ed. Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weeks. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2002.

⁴⁸ As Nina Baym writes in *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820 – 1870*, Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte married Frederick Southworth in 1840. After four years in Wisconsin with him, she returned to Washington D. C. with a small child and pregnant with another. Much of Southworth’s fiction, Baym maintains, is a “[re]cast[ing] of her own experience into the form of a heroine’s triumph, all the more glorious because of the depths from which she had emerged” (111).

⁴⁹ According to Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1955- 1958), K1800 - 1899 includes Deceptions through Shams , Disguise or Illusion, specifically K1840: Deception by Substitution and K1900 – 1910 Includes Marital Impostors.

Southworth's plucky child heroine, dripping wet and visibly pregnant, courageously states, "But I am not a subject of charity, Miss Lyon, I am a subject for justice" (56).

Through a series of twists and turns that create the sensational plot of the domestic novel, Drusilla's first wedding has been complicated by an unfiled marriage license and stigmatized by a black wedding dress. Drusilla, in mourning for her recently deceased mother, exclaims, "Oh, it is considered a bad omen for anyone, though but a guest, to wear a black dress, even a black silk one, to a wedding. And for a bride to be married in black, especially in deep mourning, is the worst of all omens" (118). Drusilla's comment recalls the folk belief:

Married in White, you have chosen right
Married in Grey, you will go far away,
Married in Black, you will wish yourself back,
Married in Red, you will wish yourself dead,
Married in Green, ashamed to be seen,
Married in Blue, you will always be true
Married in Pearl, you will live in a whirl
Married in Yellow, ashamed of your fellow,
Married in Brown, you will live in the town
Married in Pink, you spirit will sink.⁵⁰

Traditional superstitions relating the "put off" wedding and the color of the bride's clothing contribute to the gothic quality of Southworth's novel. In *The Changed Bride*, the persecuted heroine is marked for failure in her choice of a gloomy color for her wedding dress, even if she is in mourning for her recently deceased mother. As foreshadowed in the folk rhyme, Drusilla must return for a second time for her "real" wedding. Always in the shadow of the beautiful and charming Anna Lyons, Drusilla is described throughout the first novel as child-like, naïve, long-suffering and selfless. It is not until the end of the first novel and only after Drusilla has recounted her story of betrayal that Anna decides to switch places with Drusilla. Thus, white-

⁵⁰ Margaret Baker, *Discovering The Folklore and Customs of Love and Marriage*. Aylesbury, Bucks, U.K.: Shire Publications, 1974. P.29.

gowned, heavily veiled and pregnant, the right bride stands beside her husband and is properly married for a second time.

As Helen Papashvily observes in *All the Happy Endings: A Study of the Domestic Novel in America*, the role and tasks of the traditional folklore heroine are implicit in domestic fiction. “Marriage was still the primary goal of women,” she argues, “except now that they had become the sought rather than the seeker, and they could, if they were clever, make better bargains” (34). Consequently, the many of the traits of the folklore heroine are still visible in Southworth’s characters. Drusilla’s innate qualities speak to what Moss describes as the “emphasis on the regenerative powers of the southern home and family as mediated through the aristocratic southern female” (10). In the sequel, *The Bride’s Fate*, Drusilla undergoes a fairy tale transformation from waifish girl to a stunning beauty in order to recapture her errant husband’s eye. The inherited wealth that transforms her from a poor orphan to a woman of wealth is not as important as the inherent goodness of her character. In *The Changed Bride*, the central character is a Cinderella-type heroine, one who is isolated in domestic space and whose response to her trials and tribulations reveal Drusilla’s innate goodness to the other characters in the novel. By the end of the second novel, Drusilla has succeeded in restoring her home and family under the same roof with her once prodigal husband. Thus, she has established what Baym describes as the image of a happy home:

It assumes that men and well as women find greatest happiness and fulfillment in domestic relations, by which are meant not simply spouse and parent, but the whole network of human attachments based on love, support, and mutual responsibility. Domesticity is set forth as a value scheme for ordering all of life, in competition with those of money and exploitation that is perceived to prevail in American society. (27)

Drusilla’s domestic *bildungsroman* marks her movement from a sexually vulnerable waifish child to a strong woman capable and empowered by her domestic achievements contained in her

serene home. Drusilla's innate qualities speak to what Moss describes as the "emphasis on the regenerative powers of the southern home and family as mediated through the aristocratic southern female" (10).

Exemplifying the characteristics of domestic fiction enumerated by Moss in *Domestic Novelists of the Old South*, Drusilla is the prototypic heroine. Her initial roots are humble; as the daughter of a Methodist minister, she is deeply religious and always optimistic that her beloved will return to her. She embodies the qualities of good education, self-reliance and resourcefulness that Moss attributes to the domestic heroine as a "hybrid of aristocratic grace and middle class virtue" (56). To remedy her husband's "defective male nature," she sets out on her quest of personal growth.⁵¹ For domestic fiction, this quest offers the domestic heroine the dual opportunity to face, as Baym points out, "trials on the secular level as occasions designed to strengthen and 'perfect' . . . the faulty character. From an otherworldly vantage point, trials were sent to detach a person from earthly impermanence and turn her (or him) to God, who alone does not change or fail" (42). That the virtue of the fictional female figure was consistently rewarded by marriage and motherhood reinforced the antebellum image of the home as the locus of southern civilization. Therefore, as marriage was integral to the plot of the domestic novel, most works present an array of marriages. *The Changed Bride* and *The Bride's Fate* critique arranged marriages, loveless marriage, marriage between social unequals and hints at child marriage until the plot resolution reveals that the heroine, with her powers of reformation directed to the errant male, has overcome all obstacles to a truly loving union.

⁵¹ In *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp enumerates thirty-one functions, or building blocks of story that provide a structure to the plot. Propp argues that while the "fairy tales" appearing within the Aarne-Thompson classification system (AT 300 to AT 749), the dramatis personae may show variation; however, the sequential ordering of the functions may not be altered.

Along with her critique of marriages Southworth delves into feminine nature to present a range of bride types: the child bride, the changed or substituted bride, the unwilling bride and the true bride.⁵² The plethora of these gendered folk-based roles confirms Papashivly's assertion that early domestic fiction consisted of "homely moral tales of everyday, middle-class life, while admitting the frustrations and injustices women faced, offered no solution but submission and endurance" (42). Drusilla personifies the "Patient Griselda" of medieval romance (also seen in the one-dimensional characterization of the folktale heroine) yet by the end of the sequel, she has grown from a child into a woman. Southworth uses this portrait of female suffering as she contrasts both of Drusilla's weddings with her impression of an ideal marriage between loving partners in *The Bride's Fate*.

The second marriage plot concerns Anna Lyons and her rejection of a marriage alliance with her cousin, Alexander. Drusilla's cousin, Anna marries the man she truly loves instead of the man chosen by her family. The details of the wedding include elaborate descriptions of the preparations prior to the event. The modern theorist, Joseph Bonoe, terms these images "realistic modes of representation" while Nana Baym regards them as "generally designed to provide broad and detailed depiction of regional and class characteristic including homes, dress, manners, occupations, celebrations, rituals, local speech, and so on" (340). Therefore, by looking closely at the text, we may note that Anna's wedding is an intentional contrast to the manipulations and chicaneries of Drusilla's, for, as Baym maintains, "[a] flawed and flawless heroine may counterpoint one another" (36). I view Anna Lyons as representing the right bride, marrying the right groom at the right time.

⁵² As a recurrent folk motif, K 1910: The False or Substituted Bride persists in a number of folktales. See Stith Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale*, under the heading "Supernatural or Enchanted Husband (Wife) Or Other Relatives." The false or substituted bride is a common theme that circulates widely in Indo-European folklore.

Anna's marriage for love in the sequel stands in contrast to her feelings about the arranged union depicted in the opening pages of *The Changed Bride*. As the novel begins, Anna is waiting for her cousin, Alexander Lyons to arrive for their wedding. She appeals to her grandfather to delay the ceremony:

Dear gran pa, I cannot bear to be married under these evil auspices, without witnesses, without bridesmaids, and on a dark night and in a heavy storm. Why cannot the marriage be deferred until to-morrow morning? What difference can a few hours make? At least, what difference that is not very desirable? . . . It is awful to be married in solitude, on a dark, stormy night. (50).

In typically melodramatic fashion, her grandfather will not wait. He argues, "A marriage put off three times will never come to pass" (51). In contrast to Drusilla's problematic marriage, Anna deflects the unlucky superstitions common to gothic romances. Opposing a marriage alliance with Alexander to join family wealth, Anna chooses to marry Richard Hammond due to their mutual affection.

In the chapter, "A May-Day Marriage," Southworth paints lavish verbal images of this wedding ceremony and celebration in highly romanticized language. Because Anna is a domestic heroine who "might be singled out from the merely wealthy by their psychological freedom from money, their devotion to gracious living and virtue rather than to acquisition and display," her grandfather signals the male emphasis on materialism as he hires and negotiates with a crew of workers who come for the "business of preparation" (71). Before the wedding, a host of workers descend upon the mansion. First are the "carpenters and upholsterers" who see to it that the "house and grounds were fitted up and decorated for the happy occasion. The walls were hung with festoons of fragrant flowers, and the large table in the centre was loaded with the splendid wedding presents to the bride" (73). Next, the French cook and his assistants prepare a wedding breakfast:

Every variety of flesh, fish, and fowl that was in season dressed in the most delicate manner; every sort of rare and rich fruit and vegetable; wonderful pastries, creams and ices; crystallized sweetmeats, cordials, wines, liquors, black and green teas and coffee, such as only a Frenchman can make. (73)

As Anna remains confined upstairs preoccupied with sewing her wedding gown and selecting clothing for her trousseau, Southworth devotes a full paragraph to her description of the bridal gown:

Anna's dress was a rich white honiton lace robe over a white silk skirt, made with a low bodice and short sleeves, both edged with narrow lace. On her neck and arms she wore a necklace and bracelets of diamonds; on her hair the wreath of orange blossoms; over her head and shoulders the deep bridal veil of lace to match her robe; on her delicate hands kid gloves as white as snow and soft as down. (74)

This vision in white is more closely aligned to a ritual garment rather than a functional one, more royal than American as Queen Victoria wore a Honiton lace bridal gown in 1840 for her marriage with Prince Albert. Southworth is impressing nineteenth century readers with the show of wealth the dress reflects due to amount of material required for the skirt alone.⁵³ Also bride-like are the "six bridesmaids [who] were all dressed in white tulle, with wreaths of white moss-rose buds on their hair, and veils of white tulle" (74).

Even the wedding gifts, described as "'sets' of diamonds, emeralds, rubies, pearls and other gems; 'sets' of silverplate; 'sets' of fine lace, et cetera" are suitable endowments for a royal bride (73). In addition to the descriptions of precious jewels, Southworth reveals that Drusilla, as a marker of her new affluent status and achievement of wealth, has given Anna a solid gold tea set. Unlike many domestic fiction writers, Southworth provides details for the actual ceremony:

⁵³ Southworth published *The Changed Bride* along with the sequel, *The Bride's Fate* in 1869. Gown styles in the post-Civil War period reflected more ornate styles of separate skirts and bodices with the use of overskirts of lace or a similar fabric. However, both before and following the war, a two-piece wedding dress could require at least ten or more yards of fabric for the skirt alone. For more on the changing dress styles, see Catherine S. Zimmerman, *The Bride's Book: A Pictorial History of American Bridal Gowns*. New York: Arbor House, 1985.

The procession was formed in the usual manner and passed down stairs. Two gentlemen friends who took upon themselves the office of marshals, opened a way through the crowd for the bridal cortège to enter . . . The bridal party, with due decorum, took their places before the officiating minister. There was not let or hindrance now. The face of the blooming bride was as clearly seen as that of the happy bridegroom. Both parties responded clearly and distinctly to the questions of the clergyman. General Lyon, with smiling lips, but moist eyes, gave the bride away. And the ceremony proceeded and ended amid prayers and blessings of the whole company. (75)

In typical fashion, the bride was escorted into the ceremony site by a high ranking male family member. Emotionally supportive guests stood to witness the happy couple exchange their vows. Adding to her previous description of the lavish preparations, Southworth identifies the delicacies on the wedding breakfast table with Old World geographical and mythological elements: “beautiful pyramids of pound cake, the snowy alps of frosted cream, the glittering glaciers of quivering jelly, the icebergs of frozen custard, the temples of crystallized sweetmeats and groves of sugared fruits” (76). The exotic and luxurious nature of the food items also speak to the local royalty of the couple. Due to Southworth’s elaborate and descriptive prose, the reader is allowed to follow the wedding party from the bustle of pre-wedding preparations to the sumptuous feast and lavish ball. As a space of ritual excess, the entire wedding is permeated with materialistic trappings of the male monetary system as a reward to the young woman who has ironically married for love and not for riches.

Southworth’s sanctioning of marriage for love appears in glowing terms; however, the main plot connecting both novels negotiates being the “right” bride for the “right” husband, thereby supporting the role of the passive, submissive wife to allow time for the wayward husband to reach a position where the stability of the family will ensue. While Moss maintains that the southern domestic novel responds to northern criticism of southern institutions, Southworth’s novels also confront, and then resolve, deep fears that women face in marital relationships (2). In

contrast to Moss's observations that the South is "portrayed as an ordered, harmonious society governed by the aristocratic code of noblesse oblige," Southworth avoids any embroilment over the slavery debate in this novel or its sequel. Instead, as Moss asserts, Southworth's novels participate in "laying the foundation for the romanticized version of southern history that captured American imagination during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (2). Moreover, by patterning her fiction using predictable structures, Southworth treats women's inner spiritual events as a means of gaining insight into life's problems. In speaking of southern domestic fiction writers, Moss writes, "Paradoxically, their fiction provided female readers with means and motivation to transcend the bounds of culturally prescribed womanhood" (3). Thus, the role of marriage maintains a central position in domestic fiction for didactic intent.

Yet, other perspectives on women's lives appear in domestic fiction. As southern historian Nina Baym maintains "many heroines must endure apparently permanent separations from men they love and hence learn that they cannot depend on marriage for identity or meaning in their lives" (40-1). This is the case of the true sentimental heroine of Eliza Ann Dupuy's early domestic novel. Published in 1858, *The Planter's Daughter: A Tale of Old Louisiana* speaks to marital roles and expectations of marriage for southern women as the novel exemplifies nineteenth century women's concerns with courtship and marriage. A popular writer of women's domestic fiction, Eliza Ann Dupuy was born in Petersburg, Virginia, lived in Kentucky, and eventually moved further south as a tutor to a wealthy Natchez, Mississippi family. Little is known about Dupuy, although J. S. Hartin includes her brief biography in *Lives of Mississippi Authors, 1817 – 1967*.⁵⁴ Dupuy published short stories in *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1840, 1841, and again in 1843 and her writing reflects, as Hartin maintains, the influence of nineteenth

⁵⁴ J.S. Hartin, "Eliza Ann Dupuy." *Lives of Mississippi Authors. 1817 – 1967*. Ed. James B. Lloyd. Jackson: U Mississippi P, 1980. P. 147 – 151.

century periodical fiction (147). In pointing to the long list of domestic novels that follow her earlier writings, Hartin claims, “After the Civil War, Miss Dupuy’s fiction was of a consistently lurid character, based on domestic exaggerations tinged with Gothic elements not unique in her work alone” (149). Thus, according to Hartin, her later writing comprises of instances of “duplicity,” embraces “oversentimentalized relationships” and contains “idealized heroines” (150). Yet these are the very elements operating in *The Planter’s Daughter*. Dupuy’s penchant for sensational prose is described by James Wood Davidson who designates her writing as “‘redolent of murders, madness, tears, robbers, revolvers, corpses, and confusions’ and asserted that it ‘trips lightly through the mazes of guilt, blood-and thunderous declamation, threats, stage love-making, and Italian gallantry.’”⁵⁵ Yet, as these critics suggest, *The Planter’s Daughter* is less “overwrought” than Dupuy’s previous two novels, supporting a review in *Harper’s* in April, 1855 that describes her work as “‘set forth in high-wrought language,’ often inclining toward ‘an excessive intensity of expression,’ and her plots are sure to include, ‘situations of exciting interest, portraying the lurid exhibitions of unbridled passion’” (Beam 104). It appears that the best explanation for Eliza Ann Dupuy’s elaborate style is that she wrote popular “pot-boilers.”

Dupuy’s novel, set on a Louisiana plantation, expands the conventional marriage plot described by Moss as it “manipulat[es] the key elements of domestic fiction – a naïve young girl, a brooding hero, a family in chaos” (13). The plot concerns Pauline Harrington, a sentimental heroine, one of a set of twins, who falls in love with a man who attempts to destroy her father’s financial stability. The “sweet expression of her face, and the winning face of her manner” are offset by the beauty of her twin sister, Adèle (16). As Dupuy writes, “It was charming to behold the perfect union which subsisted between the two sisters, and the unobtrusive efforts of the

⁵⁵ For more on Eliza Ann Dupuy, see Dorri R. Beam, “Eliza Ann Dupuy.” *Antebellum Writers in the South*. Ed. Kent P. Ljungquist. Detroit; Gale, 2001, P. 104 – 108 and James Wood Davidson, *Living Writers of the South* (New York: Carleton, 1869). P. 174 – 177.

more attractive one, to bring forward and show the best points of the other” (30). Dupuy complicates the marriage plot in this novel through a brooding hero who is attracted to both sisters. In a pseudo-seduction plot, Malcolm confesses, “The soul of one responds to all that is good in mine, while the mere outward beauty of the other, bewilders and enchants me. I am in a singular position between the two; however, let time and opportunity decide between them” (36). Trapped between the choice of a wife with a fine mind and one with physical beauty, Malcolm struggles with his selection. I read this scenario as Dupuy’s comment on men who disregard the manifestations of inward or spiritual beauty in favor of a woman’s outward appearance.

Malcolm is a greedy land speculator who underhandedly obtains the mortgage to Wavertree, the Harrington plantation. He attempts to coerce Adèle into marrying him and ignores his feelings for Pauline. For the reader, it is obvious that Malcolm needs the positive influence of Pauline’s gentle nature at the same time that his more base attraction to the beautiful sister is problematic. Dupuy exposes Malcolm’s qualms in selecting a marital partner between the two young sisters:

By heavens! he thought, ‘this girl might have made an impression upon me it would have been hard to erase, if I had only met her away from that bewildering creature, her sister. *She* is as cold to me as an icicle, yet one glance upon her peerless loveliness makes me her slave. I can now see some sense in the eastern law which renders it criminal for a woman to unveil her face to any man save her husband. Were Adèle my wife, I should be jealous of every eye that beheld her charms. I know that she can never render me half as happy as the less attractive sister, yet from the moment I first beheld her, a species of frenzy has possessed me. I know that she does not, that she never will love me, but I must and will call her mine, either with her own consent, or if needs be, even without it. (31)

In her critique of Malcolm’s masculine response to feminine beauty, Dupuy, as reflected in the singular noun “the planter’s daughter” in the title, focuses the novel on Pauline as only she reveals the characteristics of the sentimental heroine.

Pauline follows the formula for a sentimental heroine described by Herbert Ross Brown in her attempts “to refine and to spiritualize man and through their soft influence upon him, to ennoble civilization itself” (113). The other sister, Adèle represents feminine sensibility. Throughout the novel, she exemplifies truth and sincerity. Dupuy writes, “Adèle knew that she was beautiful; but so judicious was the training she had received, that she also knew she must be much more than that, if she wished to retain her hold on the heart her loveliness impressed” (17). A figure drawn from “The Cult of Single Blessedness” is a replacement mother figure. Charles Harrington’s sister, Gertrude hurt in love and never married, urges her nieces to marry for the right reasons and to ignore social pressures. Dupuy notes that her influence on her nieces resulted in their being:

not likely to rush into matrimony from the vulgar fear that the epithet of old maid might be applied to them. They loved and valued on of that class, and after, all, there was nothing so terrible in living as Aunt Gertrude had lived. She was happy, and useful, and made a noble use of the great boon of life; why then should they deprecate the date which she had preferred to a wretched lot with the lost and unhappy being it had been her misfortune to love in her girlhood; for the fair and placid Miss Harrington had loved with a truth and a fervor of which half the wedded dames are utterly incapable. (11)

In the character of Aunt Gertrude, Dupuy embodies the tenets of woman’s usefulness outside of matrimony. Additionally, in adding a third but thwarted marriage plot between Victor, the twin’s older dandified brother and their flirtatious cousin, Louise to the novel, Dupuy advocates using care in selecting marriage partners. In making a didactic appeal similar to that presented by E.D.E.N. Southworth in her novel sequence discussed previously, Dupuy speaks to a good marriage as being the right person with the right partner.

The male characters in the novel are weak and self-absorbed. The presence of Mr. Harrington as head of the family represents a trope in southern domestic fiction. Moss maintains, “Whereas

northern heroines usually were orphans, southerners typically had at least one living parent, usually their father' (13). In Dupuy's novel, however, Mr. Harrington's quest for money in "speculating" and his trust of the man who ultimately tries to destroy him through financial blackmail threatens the financial and emotional well-being of his family. It is his desire to supply his family with material success that leads to his vulnerability. In fact, all of the male characters in the novel are in some sense greedy and materialistic. In the end, the forces of Nature in the form of a tornado and a crevasse finally destroy both Mr. Harrington and his plantation. It is almost as if Dupuy believes that a planter without his plantation cannot survive. His son Victor is depicted as a failure due to excess femininity and self-concern. Dupuy describes him as "Nearly as beautiful as his sister, Adèle, he was too effeminate in appearance to be considered a handsome man' vain and self-conceited, he considered himself the 'glass of fashion and the mould of form,' and the exquisite style of his toilette, proclaimed him at once, a dandy of the highest pretensions in that line" (23-4). Adèle, the voice of feminine sensibility, comprehends that Louise falls short of Victor's ideal marriage partner. She observes, "After all, Victor has genuine feeling left, in spite of his affectation and nonsense. Yet my giddy little Louise will never elevate him above his present standard. Why could he not have chosen differently! There are women in this world who might have made Victor quite a different being from his present self. Yet would those women have loved him, or he them! Ah, my own heart answers no" (27). Through the mouthpiece of a sensible young woman, Dupuy is commenting on the propensity of her brother's nature to gravitate toward an unsuitable partner as she is simultaneously foreshadowing Victor's demise.

At the end of the novel, to resolve one of the numerous wedlock plots, Victor is shot by a rival suitor as he fails in one of his many attempts to dishonorably acquire the material

circumstances demanded by Louise's mother who attests that her daughter "must marry in such a manner as to secure her the means of living according to her tastes, or she will be miserable, and render her husband so too" (159). Adèle marries Philip Evelyn in a companionate marriage as he is not wealthy and does not have high social status. Throughout the novel, their "meeting of the minds" and quiet friendship as the basis of a solid marriage is developed throughout the novel.

When compared to her twin sister Adèle, Pauline, as the sentimental heroine, must achieve a level of sensibility. After following in the convoluted path of the sentimental formula, Pauline resists and overcomes the temptation of death, responds heroically to the demise of her family home and eventually finds her true identity as a teacher. Only when she is content with that role does Dupuy allow her errant suitor to return. Thus, Malcolm returns, seeking Pauline's healing and restorative character. In this novel, woman's goodness is the only trait that can heal his greedy nature and restore the innate goodness of his heart. Their marriage confirms what Pauline had earlier conveyed to him: "Love with her was not the mere idle preference of a young girl, who has been taught to believe that only in early marriage can a woman find her legitimate destiny. It was the strong attachment of a responsible and thinking being for one preferred before all others; with whom she was willing to link her being throughout all time" (61). In the novel, Dupuy's depiction of goodness over beauty and love over lust speaks to Moss's differentiation between regional forms of domestic fiction. She observes, "The persistence of marriage to cement families and fortunes within the southern aristocracy at the same time that white southerners were moving toward a companionate model is but one suggestion that northerners and southerners brought different assumptions to popular women's fiction" (15).

In *The Planter's Daughter*, the one marriage that would cement the Harrington fortune is initially rejected by Adèle and replaced at the end of the novel by a union between Pauline and

the repentant Malcolm that is based on her sentimentalized, emotional rescue of the supposedly dying man. There is no focus on solidifying or recouping wealth in this wedding. Dupuy depicts the circumstances surrounding the ceremony:

Soon a groupe collected around the chair in which the invalid had been placed, and a white-robed figure kneeled on a cushion at his side, while the clergyman performed the solemn and impressive ceremony which united them until death should part them; and each one shuddered at the word as if the icy phantom was already in their midst, breathing his chilling breath on both bridegroom and bride; for Pauline, pale with agitation and intense feeling, looked as if ready to pass way with him to whom she so tenderly clung. (413)

This death-bed wedding clearly presents Pauline as a domestic goddess or healing angel whose task is to redeem and restore the repentant, dying groom. Dupuy notes, following “this strange union, no congratulations were offered, for each one felt that they must be a painful mockery to the sad hearts thus united” (413). Reflecting his changed heart, Malcolm bids his domestic angel to “rise, my darling wife, from that lowly position and pillow your head upon my heart; there should be your place of rest and shelter – thus let us pray to the Eternal that our united lives may not so soon be severed. That I may be restored to prove to you how sincere, how tender is my affection for you” (414). Such is the sentimental stuff of Dupuy’s domestic fiction. Yet, by comparing northern and southern forms of domestic fiction, as Moss maintains, “Both literary forms, for example, tapped into readers’ apprehensions about the precarious state of southern affairs, stressing the stability of the south and the instability of the North; both lamented the materialism of the modern day; both designated the home, with woman as its custodian, as the bedrock of southern civilization” (20). This designation is exemplified in the last lines of the novel: “A bright and Eden-like day was it to the devoted wife when Malcolm again walked forth in the light of heaven with the hue of recovered health upon his cheek and the tranquil light of

happiness in his eyes. Pauline felt as if all her trials were more than compensated by this great mercy” (415). In her journey as a sentimental heroine with marriage as the reward for her trials, Pauline clearly follows the folktale pattern of the “Innocent Persecuted Maiden.”⁵⁶

While Moss associates these enumerated components of domestic fiction with proslavery rhetoric, Dupuy’s novel is not a proslavery apologia. Writing from an insider status while living in a southern community, her fictional Louisiana plantation contains nominal mention of the enslaved.⁵⁷ Slaves are virtually nonexistent until the end of the novel when the plantation is literally washed away and the author confides that the enslaved have been sold to another nearby plantation only after Wavertree is deluged and destroyed. It is during the destruction of the plantation by storm and flood that Dupuy informs her reader: “They [the enslaved] were warmly attached to their master and his children, and each individual one was as proud of the grace and elegance of the two young ladies as if they had been allied to them by ties of blood” (310). In her creation of an overwhelmingly “white” plantation setting, Dupuy’s elimination of slavery sanctions what Scott Romine determines as, “the general exclusion of the slave from narrative space acted as a kind of formal equivalent to denying the tensions and conflicts inherent in the institution” (69).⁵⁸ In Dupuy’s domestic fiction, any tendency toward racial and political apologia for her imaginary plantation is overshadowed by the sense of urgency relayed through the novel that “it was incumbent upon women to intervene, to transform that society through the imposition of feminine values upon the larger world” (Moss 18).

⁵⁶ In “The Innocent Persecuted Heroine Genre: An Analysis of Its Structure and Themes,” (*Western Folklore* 52.1 (1993): p. 13 – 41), Steven Swann Jones points to the trials and mistreatment that the heroine must endure as she moves forward on the journey from childhood to womanhood.

⁵⁷ Dupuy was residing in either New Orleans or Natchez at the time this novel was written.

⁵⁸ In *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999) Scott Romine argues that “the southern literary mind tended toward a pastoral ratification of slavery as a static, extrahistorical – and hence, extranarrative, institution” (69).

In the years following the Civil War, the tensions between “pro-slavery confederate romances” and black autobiographical writings, according to Henry Louis Gates, “seem to have been locked together in a bipolar moment, as it were, or a signifying relationship.”⁵⁹ Unlike Dupuy’s domestic fiction where the political and racial characteristics of her plantation are vague and imprecise, the Louisiana plantation landscape was highlighted in the tradition of post-War “local color” writing. In short stories and novels by both male and female white writers, conflicting versions of white displays of aristocracy and power collide with carefully crafted images of black plantation culture. At times, these images critique white caste distinctions while at other times, racial caricatures built on stereotypes of blacks were used to render the ex-slaves as childlike and comic. Many of the writings published in the two decades following the Civil War promote what Norman Yetman describes as “nostalgic and sentimental affirmations of the ‘plantation legend’” that are disavowed by the later black oral histories of the WPA collection (“Background” 537). At the time, however, local color writing served as the descriptive presentation of local customs and mannerisms in the decades following the Civil War that placed exotic images of the post-War South in magazines for a northern readership. It was the project of Louisiana local color writers to present what Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Minke term the hallmarks of realistic local color: “an accurate attention to detail, an emphasis on landscape, carefully created characters, provincial customs, and the peculiarities of local speech.”⁶⁰ Both *Scribner’s Monthly* and *Harper’s Weekly* presented not only short fiction divulging southern race

⁵⁹ Gates writes in his introduction to *The Slave’s Narrative* that “the presence of black discourse both popular and compelling, one which even informed and helped determine the shape of its narrative antithesis, the plantation novel” suggests that “the two forms seem to have been locked together in a bipolar moments, as it were, or a signifying relationship” (xvii).

⁶⁰ In *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender*, (Athens: U Georgia P, 2002), editors Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke historicize and contextualize southern local color writing. In the introduction to their edited collection of local color writing, the authors maintain that pre-War romances were quickly being replaced by a new form of literary realism (xxxviii).

relations on an extraordinary landscape to northern readers but also contributed to the new force of nationalism that surged to unify the previously warring segments of American society.

Louisiana local color writer, George Washington Cable wrote from an “insider” perspective of New Orleans and the surrounding plantation landscape that was directed specifically to Northern readers unacquainted with southern customs and traditions, especially those of the newly freed slaves. Due to the politics of Reconstruction, as Ewell and Menke note, racial distinctions were heightened in fictional works along with “competing national/regional allegiances, rigid class distinctions, an interest in common folk, and the skillful uses of detail, dialect, and exotic local landscapes” (xviii). Thus, as Ewell and Menke argue, “the most fertile resource the South contributed to a turbulent nation was not its mineral and agrarian riches but a highly idealized, hierarchical heritage based on an aristocratic class structure, courtly male behavior, and proper womanliness” (xxxix). Moreover, as these authors claim, “local color is a far more complex phenomenon than has generally been appreciated” (xiv).

George Washington Cable is often hailed as the first Louisiana local color writer to gain a national reputation through his short stories featured in Northern magazine publications. In Cable’s work, the Louisiana plantation becomes a site of authorial negotiation that embodies the signifying relationship noted by Gates. As weddings reveal the internal workings of culture and custom, the plantation wedding becomes a crucial site for examining differences on problematic issues such as race, class and gender. Moreover, as Julie Goodspeed observes, “critics miss Cable’s insight into the business of love and marriage in nineteenth century (specifically 1803 – 1804) New Orleans and the oppression that the institution of endogamous marriage caused women (of all status in the caste system) in particular.”⁶¹ She reflects further that “Cable is not

⁶¹ Julie Goodspeed, “The Use of Endogamous marriage in the Formation of Creole Identity in Cable’s *The Grandissimes*, Chopin’s “Athénaïse,” and King’s “La Grande Demoiselle.” *Southern Studies* IX .V (1998): 45 – 67.

reinforcing identity politics but exposing them in *The Grandissimes*” (48). Her argument is reflected in Aurore’s comment to her daughter:

Do you not see why it is that this practical world does not permit ladies to make a living? Because if they could, none of them would ever consent to be married. Ha! Women talk about marrying for love; but society is too sharp to trust them, yet! It makes it *necessary* to marry. I will tell you the honest truth: some days when I get very, very hungry, and we have nothing but rice – all because we are ladies without male protectors - I think society could drive even me to marriage! (371)

Aurore’s critique is against the Creole society that oppresses her by holding her in a subordinate position socially and financially. In a society where women are ornamental and are not self-reliant, marriage is the only way for woman’s survival.

Cable’s first novel, *The Grandissimes* was originally serialized in *Scribner’s* for twelve months beginning in 1879 until 1880. When the novel appeared in book form, it “promptly established Cable as a popular novelist nationwide.”⁶² Writing during Reconstruction, Cable brings his fascination with French Louisiana’s colonial society to the forefront in his best-known novel, *The Grandissimes*. The plot concerns an equally challenging historical time as Cable explores the period of French transfer of the colony to the United States in 1803 in Thomas Jefferson’s “Louisiana Purchase.” The clash between the established aristocratic French Creole society and the encroaching Anglo-American culture lies at the heart of the novel. As Barbara Ladd observes, “Despite attempts by scholars to decenter the local color appellation, the richness of Cable’s setting with his presentation of Creole New Orleans with its preoccupation of race and resistance to the overwhelming process of Americanization is dependent on the once colonial territory being swept into the larger process of nationhood.”⁶³ Moreover, as John Clemens

⁶² W. Kenneth Holditch, “Foreword.” *The Grandissimes*. Scribner’s:1880. Rpt. Gretna: Pelican, 2001. P.xi.

⁶³ Barbara Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line*. P.24.

observes, Cable centered the novel in the city of New Orleans which was “inescapably exotic to some degree and Cable developed his locale with full attention to its color, that is, to atmosphere.”⁶⁴ Clemens argues that Cable “creates a sense of mystery or ambiguity that is integrated but dramatically and significantly deepened in the use of the natural environment” that ultimately makes this novel “great, not despite its local color elements but through them” (397). Cable is often hailed as the first local color writer to gain national prominence; however, critics appear conflicted on what literary convention or style is prevalent in his work.

Robert O. Stephens claims that “from the finished work emerges the plot strategy of a comedy of manners: establishment of the code of a limited and closed society, challenge that code by an outside or a renegade or both, and a resolution either rejecting the challenger and reaffirming the code or showing the challenger successful and the code altered.”⁶⁵ Using Northrup Frye’s demarcation of the comedy of manners as a novel where the central character is incorporated into society following a trial period, Stephens makes his case for viewing *The Grandissimes* as it follows “an erotic intrigue of a young man and young woman blocked by parental opposition” (511). Stephens’ assessment of the romance between Joseph Frowenfeld and Clotilde Nancanou as a comedy of manners, however, overlooks the two additional marriage plots found within the novel; that of Honorè and Aurore and Bras-Coupè and Palmyre. Yet, Stephens himself ultimately asserts that Cable’s novel is “also a local color novel, a novel of manners, a novel of character, a convention romance, an historical romance in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott, a story of racial as well as cultural conflict, and a critique of Southern mores after

⁶⁴ John Cleman, “The Art of Local Color in George W. Cable’s *The Grandissimes*.” *American Literature* 47 (1975): 396 – 410). P.396.

⁶⁵ Robert O. Stephens. “Cable’s *The Grandissimes* and the Comedy of Manners.” *American Literature* LI.4 (1980): 507 – 519.

the Civil War” (508). Neither does H. H. Boyeson’s description of the novel as a *Kulturroman* or “a novel in which the struggling forces of opposing civilizations crystalize[sic] & in which they find their enduring monument,” accurately account for the complexity of Cable’s seemingly simple novel.⁶⁶ Nor does Richard Bozman Easton’s assertion that the novel is a historical romance truly explain the depth of this work.⁶⁷ Eric Sundquist comes closest when he remarks that “as a literature of memory, local color often has elements of the historical novel; yet it strives to delineate not history’s great figures or movements but the scant record of time’s passage left when a simpler way of life succumbs to one more complex.”⁶⁸

In light of these differing viewpoints, Cable’s novel is a hybrid text, composed of elements of historical romance combined with picturesque details derived from local color writing, mixed with plot elements borrowed from the comedy of manners that all combine in the clash of differing social and racial groups. As Louis Rubin observes, “The typical local color story . . . provided close detail of setting and, within limits, a realistic descriptive texture but these were grafted onto an essentially romantic plot structure.”⁶⁹ Thus, in what many considered his best work, Cable not only exposes Creole society with its virulent forms of racism but also discloses the personal and familial consequences of racism. I am using the term Creole here, as does Cable, in the sense of a person born in the New World of parentage derived from the Old World.

Using the term in this way does not signal racial mixing. Instead, as Cable professes, “Among

⁶⁶ The quotation from H. H. Boyeson is taken from Alfred Bendixen, “Cable’s *The Grandissimes*: A Literary Pioneer Confronts The Southern Tradition.” *The Grandissimes: Centennial Essays*. Ed. Thomas J. Richardson. Jackson: U P Mississippi, 1981. P.25.

⁶⁷ Richard Bozman Easton, “George W. Cable and the Historical Romance.” *The Southern Literary Journal* 8.1. (1975): 82 – 94.

⁶⁸ Eric Sundquist, “Realism and Regionalism.” *The Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Ed. Emory Elliott. New York: Columbia UP, 1988. P. 508. Also quoted in John Cleman, *George Washington Cable Revisited*. New York: Twayne. 1996. P. 20.

⁶⁹ Louis D. Rubin, Jr. includes Cable in a list of local color writers but then calls *The Grandissimes* the “first ‘modern’ southern novel” (78).

the great confederation of States whose Anglo-Saxon life and inspiration swallows up all alien immigrations there is one in which a Latin civilization, sinewy, valiant, cultured, rich, and proud, holds out against extinction.”⁷⁰ Merrill Maguire Skaggs offers another explanation of the term by quoting Cable’s own definition as “Any native, of French or Spanish descent by either parent, whose non-alliance with the slave race entitles him to social rank.”⁷¹ Creole heritage, as John Cleman notes, “became a status label, not only marking the difference between language and national-origin groups but also implying historical priority and cultural superiority” (2).

In *The Grandissimes*, Cable noticeably disavows the purity of Creole blood in the very first scene of the novel when he presents Clotilde as a *Fille à la Casette* and Dr. Keene as the Natchez-Tchoupitoulas Indian princess, Lufti-Humma. Responding to the need for wives for the early French colonists, Governor Bienville requested that women be sent to the new colony. The origin of these women is confusing as some came from orphanages; some came from the Salpêtière, the poor house established in Paris by Louis XIV, or from the streets and prisons of France. While some present-day Louisianan’s claim genealogical distinction for having one of these female historical figures in their family background, the women who were imported from France married for opportunistically rather than for heartfelt sentiment or romance.

As Skaggs argues, Cable further ridicules Creole pretensions to gentility by emphasizing the fact that most Creoles are descended from the *filles à la cassette*, ‘maidens from the hearthstones of France,’ who were sent in boatloads to Louisiana in the early days of the colony to provide wives for the Frenchmen already busy building the colony. She observes, “While these girls were undoubtedly honorable, their marriages were obviously based more on expediency than romance. The *filles* could hardly be considered aristocratic ladies, courted and wed in an aristocratic way”

⁷⁰ George W. Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana*. Scribner’s: 1884, Rpt. Gretna: Pelican, 2005. P.1.

⁷¹ Merrill Maguire Skaggs, *The Folk of Southern Fiction*. Athens: U Georgia P, 1972.

(158). Cable plays with these genealogical distinctions in his fourth chapter, “Family Trees.”

With a tone of derision, Cable writes that one early Frenchman took a wife from “the first cargo of House of Correction girls” while another married a “lady of rank” who came “under a *letter de cachet*” (31). Cable explains the namesake of Clotilde in the novel as:

one of sixty, the last royal allotment to Louisiana, of imported wives. The king’s agents had inveigled her away from France with fair stories: ‘they will give you a quiet home with some lady of the colony. Have to marry? – not unless it pleases you. The king himself pays your passage and gives you a casket of clothes. Think of that these times, fillette; and passage free, withal, to – what more say you, can a poor girl want? Without doubt, too, like a model colonist, you will accept a good husband and have a great many beautiful children, who will say with pride, ‘Me, I am no house-of-Correction-girl stock; my mother’ or ‘grandmother,’ as the case may be – ‘was a *fille à la cassette!*’ (35)

In Louisiana, however, the first Clotilde initially refuses to “submit” to marriage; that is, until she meets Georges De Grapion. Through this family connection, Cable leads his reader to the main marriage plots of the novel – the wedlock plots of Honorè Grandissimes and Aurore De Grapion-Nancanou, and of her daughter Clotilde and the German immigrant Joseph Frowenfeld.

Both wedlock plots of the white couples are based on what Joseph Allen Boone terms “the fictional idealization of the married state as the individual’s one true source of earthly happiness” (*Tradition* 9). Much of the action of the novel centers on the tensions and misunderstandings in the developing courtships between these two couples. As typical of marriage plots, both wedlock plots are resolved through marriage at the end of the novel. However, a major tension in the plot that leads to Aurore’s confusion is the existence the two men with the same name of Honorè Grandissime. The older Honorè is a free man of color or as Cable writes, a *gen du couleur*. His younger white half-brother is the head of the Grandissime family. Both are sons of Numa Grandissime, who, as Cable notes, “had forfeited the right to wed, they all know how.” In other words, he had taken a mixed race woman as his wife. As Cable sardonically reveals, Numa “had

‘nobly sacrificed a little sentimental feeling’ as his family defined it, by breaking faith with the mother” of his first son. Cable presents the mixed race Honorè as the wealthiest character in the novel, appearing to reward him financially for the loss of his severed parental home.

Both Honorè Grandissimes are entangled in the third, and most interesting, marriage plot in the novel. Palmyre, Aurore’s maid and childhood playmate, loves the white Honorè; yet, it is the darker brother that loves her. As for Palmyre, she feels “the entire masculine wing of the mighty and exalted race three-fourths of whose blood bequeathed her none of its prerogatives, regarded her as legitimate prey” (191). In the only wedding depicted in the novel, Palmyre weds the enslaved African prince known as Bras-Coupè. As the reward in a plan to coerce Bras-Coupè to work, Palmyre initially refuses to marry him although she respects him for his strength and spirit. She reveals, “an entire absence of preference; her heart she could not give him – she did not have it” (251). Palmyre loves the unobtainable white Honorè, who, conversely, is in love with her mistress and childhood friend, Aurore De Grapion. However, despite objections by the De Grapions, and after the passage of several months, the marriage ceremony of the white couple, Mademoiselle Grandissime and Don Josè, is planned along with the accompanying nuptials of the enslaved couple. Cable describes the dual wedding:

A goodly company had assembled. All things were ready. The bride was dressed, the bridegroom had come. On the great back piazza, which had been inclosed with sail-cloth and lighted with lanterns, was Palmyre, full of a new and deep design and playing her deceit to the last, robed in costly garments to whose beauty was added the charm of their having been worn once, and once only, by her beloved Mademoiselle. (253)

In the details of Palmyre’s clothing and the location of the second wedding in back of the house, it is clear that Cable is presenting this union as a vivid contrast to that of the white couple.

Moreover, Cable’s notation of Palmyre’s “new and deep design” reflects revenge rather than affection or positive emotion. When Bras-Coupè is sent for, the overseer returns with news that

he “has painted himself all rings and stripes, antelope fashion” (254). Throughout the novel, Bras-Coupè and Palmyre are referred to in terms of animal imagery. Bras-Coupè’s hands are “paws” and Palmyre is feline, sleek and cat-like.

Just before the wedding, Palmyre’s mistress comes out in her white bridal finery and Bras-Coupè mistakes her for a *zombie*.⁷² The whiteness of the young mistress’s bridal regalia, a sign of purity in one culture, becomes a sign of death and hollowness in another. Mademoiselle Grandissime convinces Bra-Coupè to change his clothing for the wedding. He does so, but the change is more incongruous than the original as he reappears “in ridiculous red and blue regimentals, but with a look of savage dignity upon him that keeps every one from laughing” (255). The images of savagery and civilization clash in this segment. Despite his willingness to comply with suitable clothing for the occasion, Bras-Coupè cannot fit emotionally or socially within the system that has enslaved him. He is neither African nor French as he lives in a type of liminality between the two cultures. In his love song to Palmyre, Bras-Coupè appears to be solemnizing his own union with her; but no one can understand him.

After the priest’s arrival, the white couple is married inside the house and the enslaved couple is married on the back porch. Cable writes: “It was just as the newly-wed Spaniard, with Agricola and all the guests, were concluding the by-play of marrying the darker couple, that the hurricane struck the dwelling” (256). Cable’s timing of a strong storm metaphorically unleashing the forces of nature on the plantation during the second wedding foreshadows the events to

⁷²According to Wade Davis, two types of zombies appear in Haitian folklore. The first is “a spirit, a part of the Voudon soul which has been sold to or captured by a bokor and which, if released, will be ‘doomed to wander the earth until its destined time arrives to return to God’” (Herskovits 1975). In *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*, (Chapel Hill; U North Carolina P, 1988) Davis writes that “these spirit zombies, once captured; however, are usually carefully stored in jars that they may later be transmuted magically into insects, animals, or humans in order to accomplish the particular work of the bokor” (60). “The other type of zombie is the more familiar living dead; innocent victims raised in a comatose trance from their graves by malevolent sorcerers, led away under cover of night to distant farms where they must toil indefinitely as slaves’ (*Ibid*). A bokor is a priest or houngan and may perform rites of good or evil.

follow. As Bras-Coupè reaches for his wife, the mistress stops him with her words: “Bras-Coupè must wait till I give him his wife” (257). Still believing that she is a spirit of the dead, Bras-Coupè calls on the Voodoo forces of nature for assistance:

The crowd retreated and the storm fell like a burst of infernal applause. A whiff like fifty witches flouted up the canvas curtain of the gallery and a fierce black cloud, drawing the moon under its cloak, belched forth a stream of fire that seemed to flood the ground; a peal of thunder followed as if the sky had fallen in, the house quivered, the great oaks groaned, and every lesser thing bowed down before the awful blast. Every lip held its breath for a minute – or an hour, no one knew – there was a sudden lull of the wind, and the floods came down. (257)

I read this passage as Cable’s comment on the frightening natural response to white duplicity in this wedding of the enslaved. In comparison with similar accounts of the Boukman of the West Indies, Barbara Ladd reads this passage as denoting Bras-Coupè as “a black hero” who “is challenging a white god, summoning wind and rain and fire to emphasize his demand for ‘blessings’” (72).⁷³ Despite the storm outside, the wedding reception continues. The white couple celebrates their wedding in a banquet spread in the hall while the black couple revels below in the basement. For Bras-Coupè, it is the wine that is problematic, not the storm outside. Cable describes Bras-Coupè as “throwing his heels about with the joyous carelessness of a smutted Mercury, for the first time in his life tasted the blood of the grape. A second, a fifth, a tenth time he tasted it, drinking more deeply each time, and would have taken it ten times more had not his bride cunningly concealed it” (258). Yet even Palmyre’s protective actions cannot control the forces unleashing in Bras-Coupè. The abundance of wine has emboldened him to test the balance of social control.

⁷³ In her research on the historical precedents of the Bras-Coupè figure, Barbara Ladd connects Cable’s story with the legendary figures of black insurrectionists. See “An Atmosphere of Hints and Allusions”: *Bras-Coupè and the Context of Black Insurrection in The Grandissimes*.” *The Southern Quarterly* XXIX No. 3, (1991): 63 – 76.

Drinking wine within the social space of a wedding is commonplace as the wedding feast provides an opportunity to eat and drink lavishly. As a display of wealth, the host/groom Don Josè has permitted his slaves to drink. It is to him that Bras-Coupè turns for his request that leads to violence. Cable depicts the scene:

Leaving the table, he strode upstairs and into the chirruping and dancing of the grand salon. There was a halt in the cotillion and a hush of amazement like the shutting off of steam. Bras-Coupè strode straight to his master, laid his paw upon his fellow-bridegroom's shoulder and in a thunder-tone demanded: 'More!' (258-9)

Here the class distinctions between the two men become even more apparent. Bras-Coupè has committed an infraction by entering the “white space” and demanding more wine. Striking his master assures that Bras-Coupè will receive “the death of a felon” (259). Instead, after receiving a voodoo course from the fleeing Bras-Coupè, following the wedding the master's riches are turned to weeds and he dies.

Several critics read the “coarse” joke of marrying the enslaved along with the white union as Cable's forum for critiquing slavery. Louis Rubin comments that the double wedding as “the callous willingness of the whites to flout Bras-Coupè's dignity and integrity by staging the mock wedding of the slave with the unwilling Palmyre is a measure of the white South's insensitivity to the negro's humanity, and the acquiescence of the Catholic priest who performs the ceremony in the violation is emblematic of the failure of southern Christianity to perceive the moral wrong of slavery and caste.”⁷⁴ Barbara Ladd reads the story within a story as “universalizing” to “suggest that the real problem with slavery was that it violated the slave's right to love where he or she chose to love” (60). Ladd observes that Cable's “switch to melodrama” is a “strategic”

⁷⁴ Louis Rubin, Jr. “The Division of the Heart: Cable's *The Grandissimes*.” *Critical Essays on George W. Cable*. Ed. Arlin Turner. Boston: Hall, 1980.

move on his part to reduce the marriage of the two slaves to “‘by-play’ and the groom’s hand a ‘paw.’”⁷⁵

In yet another reading, William Tynes Cowan argues that Bras-Coupè “becomes not only a sign of [Palmyre’s] disgrace, being wedded to a full-blooded Negro, but the instrument of her revenge against Agricola for arranging the marriage.”⁷⁶ The marriage between Bras-Coupè and Palmyre remains sexually and insurrectionally unconsummated yet Argicola considers her “the lawful wife of Bras-Coupè; and what God has joined together let no man put asunder” (266). In repeating the officiant’s charge to the wedding guests, Argicola is usurping the civil role given to officials. Cable exceeds the boundaries of local color to make his point of racial injustice. In *The Grandissimes*, the participants are defined by the location of the ceremony and by the color of their skin in the plantation wedding. Yet, the double ceremony that “twins” the white couple and the black couple serves more than a critique of slavery. In using elements of the seduction plot to describe the union between Bras-Coupè and Palmyre, Cable reveals that the two are unable to fully join one another under the domesticating influence of marriage. Palmyre encourages what Boone terms, “division” that “replaces union as the endpoint toward which the metonymic of flow of narrative sequence is directed” (*Tradition* 10). Cable uses the unconsummated marriage to point to degrees of racial injustice. In the years following Bras-Coupè’s death, Honorè Grandissime still feels guilty. As he remarks to young Frowenfeld, “this stone is Bras-Coupè – we cast it aside because it turns the edge of our tools” (287). Honorè’s comment expands on Cable’s reformist concept of the maiming nature of slavery by revealing the damage racism has done to the Creole community.

⁷⁵ Barbara Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*. Baton Rouge: LSU P, 1996.

⁷⁶ William Tynes Cowan, *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative*. New York: Routledge, 2005. P. 267.

Due to constraints of time and space allotted here, I have omitted my discussion of Ruth McEnergy Stuart's short story, "The Golden Wedding" along with Alice Dunbar-Nelson's "Little Miss Sophie." Moreover, I have left out my discussion of plaçage as it appears in Frank Yerby's *The Foxes of Harrow*. Likewise, I have omitted Thad St. Martin's novel, *Madame Toussaint's Wedding Day*. This leaves a glaring omission in my carefully researched continuum of nineteenth to twentieth century fictional works. However, I will resume with two twentieth century pieces.

Published in 1964, toward the end of the African American Civil Rights Movement, *The Keepers of the House* is a modern story of the destructive nature of southern racism. In its critique of racial prejudice, Shirley Ann Grau's Pulitzer Prize winning novel is a modern Bildungsroman told by Abigail Howland Mason Tolliver to relate her story of the Howland family.⁷⁷ Abigail's two first-person narratives provide opening and closing frames for the text. In between these two sections, Abigail, as omniscient narrator tells the interracial love story of William Howland and Margaret Carmichael. Grau weaves five weddings into the text of her novel without the use of traditional marriage plots. The first, the wedding of William Howland, the Howland family patriarch, is conveyed simply in two sentences. Grau writes, "In two weeks William was engaged. In four weeks he was married and on his way home" (21). This matter-of-fact notation of William's wedding contrasts with the wedding of William Howland's daughter, Abigail. The second wedding in the text depicts a community of women preparing the house before a family wedding. William Howland's response to his daughter's wedding is not comic or satiric. Instead, from his masculine viewpoint, news of the wedding causes an emotional pang

⁷⁷ In an interview with Kay Bonetti, (The American Audio-Prose Library, Columbia, Miss, 1989) Grau "castigates Abigail on all fronts – as not 'the brightest character, and tiresome.'" To the interviewer's protest that Abigail grows in the course of the novel and transcends her initial ignorance and 'sees things clearly' at the novel's end, Grau responds with the question "Does she see correctly?" (386).

as he realizes that he is aging. Grau conveys William's thoughts: "He followed her inside, not bothering to call the servants, carrying her single bag himself, feeling for the first time old and solid and tired . . . Our children grow up, he thought, echoing something he had heard long ago and had not remembered for some years since. 'Our children grow old and elbow us into the grave'" (43-44). His daughter's marriage causes William to confront his own aging process. We may read this as Grau's commentary on parental rites of passage for just as the bride and groom celebrate a rite of passage in their union, their parents also undergo a rite of passage as they move into a new status of a shared relationship with their children.

In the novel, Abigail and her father go to Atlanta to buy her trousseau and to have a wedding gown made and fitted. The planning details of the wedding are handed to William's sister who seemingly understands the upheaval created by a wedding: "'Willie.' She put a pudgy hand on his arm. 'It's the first wedding. It gets you down, but everything's all right with the first grandchild. You'll see'" (47). As a marker of life crisis, rituals provide a way to structure life passages and may be seen, as Ronald Grimes observes, "a primary means of safely navigating the rapids" (*Deeply* 103). Meanwhile, the women work busily to prepare the house for the wedding:

They hired six maids and got all the silver out and polished it on the back porch; the strong ammonia smell drifted through the house. They washed all the glassware and polished it carefully and scrubbed the cabinets and the buffets, trying to remove the old old smell of sweet fruitcake. They washed down the walls, and they polished the floors by hand, creeping across them like some sort of beetles, swirling rags ahead. They opened up all the wings of the house, wings that had been closed for years. They brought in painters, and those bedrooms were done quickly, just one coat, because there was no time. All the sheets and spreads were washed and boiled in a big tub over a charcoal pot in the back yard, left spread out on the grass for the dews to bleach out the brown age spots. (49)

In this passage, Grau depicts women swarming through the home in frenzied preparation for the family and community display. Weddings as performances display not only family wealth but also feminine organizational skills. On a metaphoric level, the southern womanhood contained within the house is also on display, thereby connecting Abigail to the legacy of Howland women before her. This connection is symbolized by Abigail's grandmother's "great silver bowl" that has been retrieved from the attic, polished and put on display on the front hall table. Even the handyman appears overhauled in "polished shoes and black pants, a white shirt and a black tie. He had parted his thin kinky hair, and plastered it down with brilliantine" to greet the guests at the train station (51). The wedding guests create a community of relatives that includes "cousins, and second cousins and great-uncles and -aunts by marriage. People [William] hadn't seen for thirty years, old people, crusty and fragile with age" (53). Just as notations of weddings in antebellum women's life writings reveal their ideological importance, Abigail Howland's wedding is an event that attracts family participation and involvement.

On the day of the wedding, William and the groom, Gregory Mason attend the groom's breakfast at a nearby hotel where all the men drink to oblivion. Later that night, the men gather "bathed and shaved and aching" to attend the wedding ceremony. Grau portrays the ceremony from William's perspective:

In his crowded parlor, during the ceremony when John Hale, the Methodist minister, was pronouncing the familiar words in his very best manner, William's eye focused on a swatch of green that hung directly over the portrait of his grandfather. He could have sworn that in the massed and twisted leaves he saw the unmistakable shape of poison ivy. (56).

During the wedding ceremony, William observes poison ivy mixed in with the smilax. His sister Annie takes responsibility, "'It's green like the others,' she said, 'and we were running short'"

(56). In a comic aside, Aunt Annie and her helpers decorate the ceremony space with smilax interwoven with a toxic irritant.⁷⁸ I view this as Grau's embedded comment on the possibility of toxicity woven in among the good in a marriage. Through these serious and comic details, Grau conveys gendered activities before the wedding for both the community of men and the community of women. The men hunt and fish and drink while the women clean and gather and polish. The overall feeling of Abigail's wedding is one of a united and cohesive family.

The third wedding in the novel is an elopement. William's granddaughter, also named Abigail, gets expelled from college for her participation in helping her friend "run off" to get married. Abigail confesses, "I had no trouble until early in my final year. Then I got expelled – because of a wedding" (188).

Now, in those days you could get married in ten minutes; they even rushed out to meet you and be assured of your business. So we all crowded, giggling and pushing, into the office to hear the ceremony. Then we drank to their health in champagne – we brought for bottles neatly packed in ice. They got into his big white Cadillac convertible and drove away, waving. We finished the champagne and drove slowly back to campus, feeling daring and romantic. None of us had ever been to an elopement before. (*Ibid*)

Abigail's college escapade is culturally telling. For the daughter of a strong Catholic family to marry a "tiny leathery man" who has been divorced three times is, as Grau writes, "a horrible sin" (*Ibid*). When her grandfather intervenes to reinstate her in school, Abigail realizes his patriarchal power. At the meeting at the dean's house, Abigail observes, "He was as courtly as a planter out of a novel" (191). With his polite decorum, William Howland is a southern gentleman. At the end of this scene, William Howland also introduces Abigail to the man she will eventually marry.

⁷⁸ The Greek myth of Krokus and Smilax is the tragic love story of a mortal man who is turned into a flower while his love, the woodland nymph, was transformed into a brambly vine. Another name for Smilax is Greenbrier. Grace Lumpkin also mentions smilax as a decoration for a wedding in *The Wedding*. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1939).

When Abigail returns from college with the news that she is engaged, her grandfather suggests, “You better call your Aunt Annie. Seems like she runs all my weddings for me” (199). Abigail shares her experience of the fourth wedding in the novel as a first person narrator. “We had a big June wedding, as everyone expected. The biggest wedding of the year. My grandfather took over the Washington Hotel in town for the extra guests. Even that wasn’t enough, and the Bannister cousins . . . opened their huge house” (200). The community response to her large wedding is telling, more so than Grau cares to present to the reader. Abigail does not share any of the details except that “It seemed to me that I drove over the whole state going to receptions, to cocktail parties, to showers, to dances. Old-fashioned week-long house parties on the Gulf coast. Hunts in the woods of the northern counties. And more dances: black tie, square dance, masquerade . . .”(200). Just as Eudora Welty does in *Delta Wedding*, Grau limits her reader’s access to the intimate family space of the actual wedding ceremony. As readers, we are left with Abigail’s minimal description of her wedding. “On the day of the wedding, I was so tired that I stumbled and almost fell coming down the stairs on my grandfather’s arm. When the ceremony was done and the reception over, and we drove off in the new Thunderbird convertible that my grandfather had given us, I fell asleep” (201). The images Grau presents here give the impression of a sleepwalker who walks through the day without awareness or feeling. Oleksy offers a possible interpretation for the last-luster emotionality of this wedding. She argues “Abigail is *expected* . . .to conform to the stereotype of the southern lady, with its notions of inherent scatterbrainedness, non-intellectuality, and dependency” (387). In contrast to the first Abigail’s wedding that centered around a community of women working within the house, the second Abigail’s pre-wedding socials are all events away from the family home. Her mother is dead, and there is a limited community of family women or friends available for her.

The most problematic wedding in the novel is a clandestine union between William Howland and his young black housekeeper, Margaret. It is this relationship that exposes what Yaeger determines as “the different valences of race and class as they play across the horizon of gender.”⁷⁹ In contrast to the “fragility” that “was valorized as the ideal state of white women,” Margaret Carmichael, Grau writes: “was as tall as [William] was. Who could work like a man in the fields. Who bore him a son. Margaret, who’d asked him for nothing. Margaret, who reminded him of the free-roving Alberta of the old tales. Margaret, who was strong and black. And who had no claim on him” (223). In this text, the black bride must again go North to marry. Closely related in form and content to the nationally publicized trial of Mildred and Richard Loving in 1958, the marriage license becomes a symbol of government sanctioned unions. Unlike the ex-slaves who often proudly displayed a marriage certificate on the walls of their home in freedom, the marriage license of William Howland and Margaret Carmichael obtained in Ohio, not in the town where they lived, has been hidden away. It is a clandestine reminder of southern intolerance of racial mixing.

Several years after William Howland’s death, his mixed-race son Robert, publically exposes Howland’s relationship with Margaret. Not only does this divulgence derail Abigail’s husband’s political goals but also causes the community to ignite over what it considers to be the offense of miscegenation. The day before the barn burning, Abigail received a brown envelope in the mail containing a photograph of Robert and a copy of a marriage license revealing the legal union of William Howland and Margaret Carmichael two months before Robert’s birth. Abigail affirms, “I put the clipping and the photostat back in their crisp brown envelope and slipped them under

⁷⁹ In *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930 – 1990*, (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2000) Patricia Yaeger argues that scholars need a new theory “for assessing the scripts we use to connect black and white women’s writing.” She quotes Hazel Carby who “cautions that ‘any feminist history that seeks to establish the sisterhood of white and black women as allies in the struggle against oppression of all women must also reveal the complexity of the social and economic differences between women’” (43).

the phone, thinking what I had always known; that my grandfather had been a good man. That he had found a woman to fill the last decades of his life and that he had married her. A good man. And when I thought of what would happen now, I felt sick” (260). The white panic that ensues following Robert’s exposure attempts to eradicate the site of miscegenation of one of the area’s founding fathers.

Abigail, as a proper southern lady, takes a violent turn when men from the community come to burn the house down. As omniscient narrator, Abigail testifies, “They were shooting steers and cats. The Howland they wanted was dead. His Negro wife was dead. Their children disappeared. And so they were wrecking the only thing that was left of him, of them. First the barn and then the house . . .” (285). Critics familiar with Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* suggest that the house is a representation of the female body. Elzbieta H. Oleksy in her reading of Grau, asserts, “Houses, in particular, often constitute a metaphor for the female body.”⁸⁰ However, since the final tension in the novel culminates in Abigail’s defense of her family home, and in light of Abigail’s perceptive comment on the arsonists, viewing the house as a feminine symbol does not work here. Therefore, as Buloski maintains, “Because in Grau’s fiction the houses that shelter inhabitants are so regularly a party to, and a symbol of, the inhabitant’s psychical, emotional, and physical distress, one must conclude that the patterns of imagery and symbolism, or at least her house symbols derive from the subconscious” (182). In this light, we may follow Bukoski’s claim that “fictional houses alienate, however, when they become representative of the failure of the family to provide direction to its member” (181). Due to her support of her grandfather’s relationship with Margaret, who became a surrogate

⁸⁰ Elzbieta H. Oleksy, “‘The Inexorable Plot of Racism’: The Case of Abigail Howland.” *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction*. Ed. Lothar Hönnighausen and Valeria Gennaro Lerda. Tübingen: A. Franke Verlag, 1993. P. 382 – 390.

mother/grandmother figure to Abigail without asking anything in return, Abigail abandons the expected role of a southern lady to stand as a keeper of her family legacy. Her feelings for her family home are so strong that at least one critic has compared Abigail to a modern-day Scarlett O'Hara.⁸¹

The gendered prescriptions for southern ladies are an important component of *Steel Magnolias*, an off-Broadway play written by Robert Harling in 1985-6. The play reveals another community of women preparing for a wedding. Based on biographical elements of Harling's sister Susan, who died following the birth of her child from complications of diabetes, *Steel Magnolias* was first performed in New York City at the WPA Theatre on March 22, 1987. Harling claims that his "fury" at his sister's death resulted in a surge of creativity. Having never previously written either fiction or drama, he completed *Steel Magnolias* in ten days."⁸² The play was followed by a film version appearing in 1989, produced by Herbert Brown Ross, starring Sally Fields, Dolly Parton, Shirley MacLaine, Olympia Dukakis and Julia Roberts as Shelby. The film version, as Tara McPherson notes, "opens with the preparations for the young belle Shelby's wedding in full swing and also delineates the 'proper' behaviors for southern women, both troubling and embracing the power of decorum and the well-mannered belle" (159)

The play opens at Truvy's Beauty Spot on the Saturday before Easter as several women of Natchitoches, Louisiana prepare for the wedding of Shelby Eatenton to Jackson Latcherie. Annelle is questioning the sound of gunshots nearby. Truvy acknowledges that the noise "has to do with Shelby's wedding and her father" and suggests that Annelle "ignore it like the rest of the neighborhood" (9). In the play, Shelby, the reigning town belle is getting married. The wedding

⁸¹ Elzbieta Oleksy, "The Keepers of the House: Scarlett O'Hara and Abigail Howland." *Louisiana Women Writers: New Essays and a Comprehensive Bibliography*. Ed. Dorothy H. Brown and Barbara C. Ewell. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992.

⁸² Martin Andrucki, "Steel Magnolias by Robert Harling."

is in a small southern community where the plantation is now a dignified home in town, the planter is trying to rid his trees of birds and plantation mistress is supervising the event. Truvy's Beauty Spot is the local gathering place for "anybody who's anybody" in the town. Shelby's complaint that her parents are "fighting like cats and dogs" prompts Truvy's assessment of pre-wedding jitters. Truvy's evaluation of the situation comically establishes the negative stress of wedding planning. She affirms, "You know. I was just reading an article in *Glamour* about tension during family occasions. It seems there can be a lot of stress and trauma. The thing I found most interesting is that stressful times can unleash deep dark hostilities that make your hair fall out" (13). For Truvy, a self-proclaimed "glamour technician," the world revolves around women's attempts to achieve beauty.

Even the bride and her mother appear at Truvy's to have their hair done the day of the wedding. Working on Shelby's hair, Truvy remarks: "This is so exciting. I feel like I am present at the creation. There is something so wondrous about the way a bride looks. I feel it is beauty in its purest form" (13). Truvy is giving voice to romanticized notions of bridal beauty that marks the bride on her "special day." Shelby wants to emulate royalty, opting for a Grace Kelly look and not that of a popular movie star. She asks Truvy to put her hair up.

Truvy : "So, . . . we want to sweep it up, but leave some softness around your ears . . .

M'Lynn: Sweep it up? Shelby: Yes, Mama. Up. Like Princess Grace.

M'Lynn: Did you bring Truvy the picture of Jaclyn Smith?

Shelby: No. I brought the picture of Princess Grace. I destroyed the picture of the Jaclyn Smith hairdo . . . (15)

In the space of the beauty shop, the tensions between the bride and her mother are readily apparent. Sensing the tension between the two, Truvy attempts to mediate. She begins to question Shelby about her groom:

Truvy: Hush girls. Shelby. Tell me things about the wedding. How many bridesmaids?

Shelby: Nine.

Truvy. Good Lord!

Shelby. Exactly.

Truvy. I hope that photographer brings a wide-angle lens.

Shelby. It will be pretentious. Daddy always says, “an ounce of pretension is worth a pound of manure.”

With nine bridesmaids, Shelby is having a big southern wedding. The Eatenton family is on display and M'Lynn has negotiated with Shelby to include several extra young women. Shelby as the belle paraphrases the proverbial “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” to capture her father’s sentiments on social posturing. As the bride and her mother squabble, Truvy again intercedes by asking Shelby to describe her wedding:

Shelby. My colors are blush and bashful. I have chosen two shades of pink. One is much deeper than the other.

M'Lynn. The bridesmaids’ dresses are beautiful. . .

Shelby. And the ceremony will be too. All the walls are banked with sprays of flowers in the two shades of blush and bashful.

There’s a pink carpet specially laid for the service. And pink silk bunting draped over anything that would stand still.

M'Lynn. That sanctuary looks like it’s been hosed down with Pepto-Bismol. (18)

Shelby’s pink wedding fantasy is her mother’s nightmare, disclosing that while Shelby is romantic, her mother M'Lynn is pragmatic. As Tara McPherson observes, “Shelby waxes poetic about the carefully orchestrated setting she has constructed for her wedding, a girlish fantasy of all things pink, including nine bridesmaids, yards of rosey-hued silk bunting, and a church decked out in her signature shades, blush and bashful” (160).⁸³

In presenting the wedding, the visual images of the film contribute to the overall effectiveness of the dialogue that is limited in the play. The sense of color and floral excess

⁸³ Tara McPherson, “Steel Magnolia, Fatal Flowers, and Designing Women: On the Limits of a Politics of Femininity in the Sun Belt South.” *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

presented in the film cannot be conveyed in the staging of a play. As McPherson notes, a large part of the overall marketing plan for the film included promoting stills of the added “wedding sequence” (160). In her study *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*, sociologist Chrys Ingraham provides a lengthy list of wedding movies from 1890 – 1999. The plethora of wedding films in cinema and on television permeates American culture. Although I disagree with Ingraham’s argument that “popular film and television commodify weddings and create the market, the desire, and the demand for the white wedding,” I do agree with her assertion that “weddings in popular culture are powerful sites for the enactment of dominant messages about society-at-large” (128).

The film *Steel Magnolias* presents more subtle messages about weddings than the play. The film opens with a wedding cake delivery to the Eatenton home. The bride and groom poised on the top of the cake are surrounded with pink roses. The groom climbs in through the bride’s window with the demand, “Say you’re gonna marry me.” Shelby quips, “Meet me at 2:00 in the Presbyterian church. I’ll be the one in the veil down front.” Shelby is a generous belle who extends the community of her wedding to include the new girl in town. She not only invites Annelle to her wedding but also provides clothing for her. The mother of the bride is stepped on literally and figuratively throughout the film. Moreover, the film capitalizes on the sounds along with the visuals: the flower filled church, the soprano vocalist and the traditional wedding march played on the church organ. Clairee serves as the wedding coordinator. When the church doors open, a nervous Shelby, escorted by her father, proceeds into the people-filled pinkly decorated church.

Following the wedding processional, the film cuts to the reception where eating, drinking and dancing are depicted. Dancing with her father, Shelby remarks, “This has been the happiest

day of my life, Daddy,” thus continuing the romanticized promotion of the wedding day as the most important day in a woman’s life. There is a scene for the cake cutting and more conversation on the armadillo groom’s cake. In the decades following the film, the armadillo groom’s cake has become a popular feature of southern weddings. Created by using gray fondant frosting and red velvet cake inside, an armadillo groom’s cake was recently featured in the local Baton Rouge area monthly magazine, *Country Roads*. For approximately two hundred and fifty dollars, modern brides may purchase their own “Tacky,” as M’Lynn terms it, groom’s cake.

Again, the visual images in the film supplement the dialogue in the play:

Shelby. The wedding cake will be by the pool. The groom’s cake will be hidden in the carport.

M’Lynn. Shelby and I agree on one thing.

Shelby. The groom’s cake. It’s awful! It’s in the shape of a giant armadillo.

Truvy. An armadillo?

Shelby. Jackson wanted a cake in the shape of an armadillo. He has an aunt that makes them.

Clairee. It’s unusual.

M’Lynn. It’s repulsive. It has gray icing. I can’t even think of how you would make gray icing.

Shelby. Worse! The cake part is red velvet cake. Blood red! People are going to be hacking into this animal that looks like it’s bleeding to death. (19)

M’Lynn. Jackson is from a good old Southern family with good old southern values. You either shoot it, stuff it, or marry it. (20).

I read the armadillo cake as a comment on the interfamilial tensions between the two merging families. The fact that Jackson has chosen the cake and that it is made by a member of his family suggests that they do not have the status that Shelby’s family does. Again, M’Lynn has the last word, embodying McPherson’s observation that “[t]he southern woman is figured as the keeper of family values, the self-sacrificing core that holds the family in its centripetal orbit, articulating the power of sisterhood and female playfulness to conservative notions of family and femininity” (164). In this Louisiana Eden, disease is the cause of Shelby’s fall. Her kidney’s

failing due to the stress of childbirth, Shelby dies thus completing the cycle of life that is highlighted in the film through the cycle of holidays; Easter, Christmas, Halloween and back to the closing frame at Easter with the suggestion of resurrection and rebirth.

For over a period of more than one hundred years, the gendered and racialized body of the bride is a signifier on the fictional plantation. If she is a white bride, the belle and her wedding on the family plantation may speak to the female world of love and ritual proscribed in nineteenth century. However, as we move along the continuum of time, the female world changes in the fictional texts. From antebellum texts to more modern novels, the body of the black bride continues to remain vulnerable. The bride's body is a social and racial construct and the wedding serves as a locus for cultural commentary in each selected text.

“Weddings are proof that you can never control Mother Nature or human nature.”

Penny Scioneaux – Wedding Coordinator at Oak Alley

Chapter 4. The Plantation Mystique

The southern belle and her plantation home as a setting for her aristocratic family wedding are all evocative symbols. Captured in the public imagination, these sentimentalized, racialized and gendered notions of antebellum plantation culture resonate in weddings held on Louisiana plantations today. The contemporary plantation wedding consolidates these three evocative images derived partly from the historical accounts of weddings discussed in my first chapter but also appropriated from pervasive images promoted through literary works and depicted in popular culture as noted in my third chapter. Currently, these three powerful threads from the past intersect in the contemporary plantation wedding. As an iconic marker on the Louisiana landscape, the plantation remains at the center of a complex of ideas fusing mythic notions of the Old South to romanticized ideals of southern womanhood. In contemporary weddings held on popular Louisiana plantations, the image of the southern belle has been transformed into that of a modern bride who, despite her race, class or ethnicity, now embodies the pinnacle of southern idealized womanhood in her glorious yet fleeting bridal role. While the grand tradition of the antebellum wedding of historical accounts has reverted into a ceremony and reception spanning only a few hours, food and beverages offered to guests often reflect regional foodways and area identity with the intent of performing a rendition of gracious southern hospitality, even if only for a short time. In choosing a plantation venue for a wedding ceremony, the bride and groom and their families enact an association with the extant plantation home that is at the very heart of the southern web of racial, regional and gendered relations. Through the passage of time, what was, in antebellum times, once a personal home may now be

what is termed a house museum.¹ As a result, the contemporary plantation wedding reconstitutes a complex of semiotic signifiers resonating with refabricated visions of once-celebrated, refined, and hospitable antebellum southern traditions. Situated at the intersection of history, heritage tourism and consumer commodification, the plantation wedding is marketed to potential brides through “the plantation mystique,” identified as carefully crafted images appropriating visions of a romanticized Old South landscape as a place where every bride can be a belle and have the romantic wedding of her dreams. Built of images melding together the scenic topography or natural features of the region along with distinctive man-made structures, the plantation mystique, moving beyond mere notions of a sense of place, is promoted by affiliates of the Louisiana tourism and wedding industries to entice brides both at home and abroad.

Fusing elements of the historic past into the present, the plantation wedding becomes a cultural production built of bits and pieces fashioned from smatterings of truth and fiction. Jennifer L. Eisenstedt and Stephen Small comment on racial politics at work in plantation “house museums,” but also successfully recapitulate the idea that “[c]ultural production, while often seen by the public as a power-neutral site, is always about the embodiment and construction of meaning and power.”² In the antebellum period, many weddings served to solidify family wealth through marriage connections; now marrying one’s daughter on the plantation may be viewed as a display of familial cultural capital in expressing ancestral wealth along with depicting an illusory lineage of prestigious connections. Representative of antebellum echelons of wealth and

¹ Jennifer L. Eisenstedt and Stephen Small, in *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution P., 2002) offer the following definition of the plantation house museum: “We include several types of buildings under our definition of a plantation museum site. The first type, and the one most frequently covered . . . is a site based on physical structures that were originally used as part of plantation complexes during the period of slavery. This includes the so-called big house or mansion along with a range of outbuildings (kitchens, coach houses, overseer’s houses, barns, smokehouses, cribs for storing crops, slave cabins, and garden structures such as wells, gazebos, or teahouses)” (60).

² *Ibid*, p.8.

aristocracy, the Louisiana plantation house museum today pays homage to a pre-war lifestyle once truly marked by opulence and white prosperity. Contemporary weddings held on Louisiana plantation sites utilize, interact and negotiate these perceptions of antebellum affluence. Furthermore, as a type of cultural production, the ritual display seen today in “white weddings”³ hints of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the accumulation of symbolic cultural capital. As Bourdieu argues, “‘Symbolic capital’ is to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a ‘credit’ under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees ‘economic’ profits.”⁴ In this respect, plantation weddings are ritualized productions that are symbolically linked to displays of perceived social power and reconstructed performances of distinction and taste built on current concepts of the antebellum planter’s wealth and aristocracy. Thus, in accord with Bourdieu’s concepts of social taste, procuring the plantation for the few hours needed for a wedding signals class distinctions where the ritual participants not only “possess things from the past” but also, in a sense, have the ability “to master time” even if it is only borrowed or rented for a short while (*Distinction* 71).

It is precisely this connection to antebellum wealth and distinction that solidifies the plantation’s role as an agent of heritage tourism. Louisiana plantation “house museums”

³ In this context, a “white wedding” is defined by the wedding industry as a wedding where the bride wears a white gown, is veiled and carries a bouquet of flowers. The bride and the groom perform a ring exchange and they share a celebratory meal and a wedding cake. The “white wedding” is the target of critics who argue that consumer spending for extravagant events is largely due to artificial consumer standards set by members of the wedding industry and that ultimately promote heterosexuality in American culture. See Jaclyn Geller, *Here Comes the Bride: Women, Weddings, and the Marriage Mystique*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2001; Katherine Jellison, *America’s Love Affair with the White Wedding 1945 – 2005*. Lawrence: U Kansas P, 2008; Rebecca Mead, *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding*. New York: Penguin P, 2007; Carol McD. Wallace. *All Dressed in White: The Irresistible Rise of the American Wedding*. New York: Penguin, 2004; Vicki Howard, *Bride’s, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition*. Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2006; Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 1999; Marcia Seligson, *The Eternal Bliss Machine: America’s Way of Wedding*. New York: William Morrow, 1973.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*. Ed. Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. P.75.

negotiate the intersection of Louisiana history and heritage.⁵ It is important to note that many of these antebellum mansions serve dual duty. By day, the plantation homes are house museums, symbols of a by-gone era that now seek to educate or inculcate tourists who wander the halls in search of an antebellum experience of facets of pre-Civil War Louisiana lifestyles. Tourists view not only the extant house or “mansion” as it is sometimes termed, but also the expensive, often imported, artifacts of family life. They are free to explore the landscaped grounds of the home, following walkways that lead to artistically maintained plantings and European fountains. Tour guides, often in antebellum costume, divulge intimate narratives to personalize the original occupants of the home, yet physical boundaries remain to keep visitors within cordoned off areas.

During weddings, however, several of these house museums revert to the sense of a private family home. Doors normally closed to tourists open to members and guests of the wedding, thereby revealing elements of modernity existing within. The nomenclature of the people who now wander the halls changes from tourist to family member or wedding guest. My participant-observer fieldwork at four plantation house museums in southeastern Louisiana and along with my own wedding coordination at one site in Baton Rouge reveals two distinct types of brides who choose a Louisiana plantation venue for their wedding. The first is what I term the “Cinderella bride,” who is a local bride having a long connection with the area plantations. The second is the destination bride who is from out of the area and drawn by the Louisiana plantation mystique. For noticeably different reasons, each type of bride suggests a distinct relationship with the plantation that motivates her choice of venue. Furthermore, as my observations of

⁵ For more on the definition and history of house museums, see Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution P, 1999. In the introduction, West notes, “When a house becomes a museum, its function changes radically. That function is shaped by the exigencies of the period in which the museum is founded, in particular by the political issues so meaningful to those defining its public role” (xi).

weddings held on these plantations reveals, each venue promotes and utilizes the plantation mystique in uniquely different ways.

Yet, despite tranquil and pastoral images appearing currently in both tourist and wedding online and print publications, the plantation continues to be a site of ideological conflict. As Catherine Clinton claims, “the plantation remains contested terrain, a vital intersection of historical images that summon up warring visions of the southern past.”⁶ On one hand, numerous scholars critique plantation tourism sites for their overt participation in silencing slavery by focusing on the heroic deeds and achievements of the elite white family while omitting any mention of the enslaved that worked and lived there also.⁷ However, there have been attempts by some plantation tourist sites to discuss slavery openly and accurately in the last decade.⁸ On the other hand, plantations are integral to Louisiana’s marketing of heritage tourism, deriving large sums of money for state and private revenues by offering tourists cultural experiences through representations of the historical past. Couples who select a plantation for their wedding often pay an expensive site fee for using the venue. At several of these plantation venues, monies derived from weddings supplement tourism revenues, often enabling the

⁶ See Catherine Clinton. *Tara Revisited: Women, War & the Plantation Legend*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1995. P.23.

⁷ See Katherine Bankole, “Plantations Without Slaves: The Legacy of Louisiana Plantation Culture.” *Plantation Society and Race Relations: The Origins of Inequality*. Ed. Thomas J. Durant, Jr., and J. David Knottnerus. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999. P. 193 – 204. Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution P, 2002. Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation*. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2007. Elizabeth Christine Russ, *The Plantation in the Postslavery Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.

⁸ John Cummings, III, an attorney practicing in New Orleans, purchased the Haydel Plantation in St. John the Baptist Parish with the intent of educating tourists on the debilitating practices of slavery. Now a future stop along the African American Heritage Trail, Whitney Plantation, as Cummings maintains, will be open for tourists in the summer of 2012. Cummings has created a “Garden of Angels” that contains the names of enslaved children who died in infancy. The names, carefully researched from baptismal records of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, are etched onto black marble slabs that surround the perimeter of the enclosed garden. For more on Whitney plantation, see Ron Stodghill, “Driving Back Into Louisiana’s History.” *The New York Times Online*. <http://travel.nytimes.com/2008/05/25/travel>. Following the fire at Tezcuco Plantation in May, 2002, Kathe Hambrick relocated the African American River Road Museum to Donaldsonville for the dual purpose of educating local children and participating in area tourism.

plantation's continued operation. Without wedding revenues, several of the plantations would not remain economically viable and numerous employees of the plantation who reside in the surrounding area would also be affected.

In today's economy, choosing a wedding venue can be a complicated and expensive process requiring negotiation between the bride, the groom and their families. Typically, the wedding venue is selected by the couple, usually in the initial stages of wedding planning.⁹ Most advice manuals and bridal magazines suggest that once the groom has proposed and the bride has an engagement ring, the next step for the couple is to set a date and determine the number of guests that the bride, the groom and their families want to invite to the wedding. These determinations play a significant role in selecting a ceremony site. According to wedding authority Carley Roney, founder of *The Knot*, an enormously popular online wedding planning website that also sells paperback copies of a detailed advice manual, the "first big planning task to tackle is deciding where to do the deed."¹⁰ Roney gives prospective brides several ideas for researching a wedding location. Her first suggestion is to put "all those research skills you learned in school" to work on the Internet, as most venues have websites laden with information. Today's bride is Internet-savvy. She typically investigates venues through her computer, which opens a wide range of site opportunities.

⁹ As weddings may involve large expenditures of energy and financial resources, brides and their families often seek advice in planning a wedding. While wedding etiquette advice books appeared shortly after the Civil War, the current regard for wedding guides, according to Dennis Hall, suggests "[t]he people who resort to these books, presumably couples and their parents, but functionally brides and their mothers, are likely not from the upper classes, who either already confidently possess this knowledge or hire and willingly follow a consultant who does, nor are they likely from the lower classes, who either do not care or have very few choices" (38). See Dennis Hall, "Modern and Postmodern Wedding Planners: Emily Post's *Etiquette in Society* (1937) and Blum and Kaiser's *Weddings for Dummies* (1997)." *Studies in Popular Culture* 24 (2002): 37 – 48. In the decade since Hall's article appeared in print, a plethora of wedding advice planners in both book and magazine form speak to social pressures of hosting a "perfect wedding." I disagree with Hall that consumer lack of confidence is at work here. Instead, I maintain that since planning a wedding involves a significant outlay of money and the selection of a variety of vendors, a good wedding planner may prove extremely useful throughout the process.

¹⁰ Carley Roney, *The Knot Complete Guide to Weddings in the Real World: The Ultimate Source of Ideas, Advice, and Relief for the Bride and Groom and Those Who Love Them*. New York: Broadway Books, 2004. P. 145.

Among Roney's additional search suggestions are local papers and magazines, historical societies, tourism bureaus, chambers of commerce, wedding professionals and lastly, other couples. In this instance, Roney does not mean speaking with other couples; she implies searching wedding websites or reading wedding magazines. As a social barometer of popular culture trends and a subtle marketing tool for vendors, bridal magazines present "real weddings" as idea sites for future brides with glossy, full-page color photography showcasing a variety of venue options. As the following examples reveal, plantation weddings have, in the past and continue in the present, to be very popular topics in many of these publications. The most recent edition of *Southern Living Weddings*¹¹ highlights two plantation weddings. In the summer of 2011, the wedding of Heather and Addison was celebrated on the groom's family plantation. Thomas Jefferson's childhood home, Tuckahoe Plantation, in Richmond, Virginia, was purchased by the groom's great-grandmother in the 1930's. The four-page article, composed of text and interspersed with photographs, describes and depicts the outdoor wedding ceremony held on the lawn under a rose-covered bower set in a grove of trees. The bride and groom and their minister form a visual apex at the very heart of a full-page photograph. Guests are seated on either side of the natural grassy aisle, while leafy green trees form a natural ceremony site that fills the upper half of the page. An Edenic image of the plantation is presented throughout the article. What I designate and will discuss fully in the following pages as "the plantation mystique" is at work in this featured wedding and also readily visible in the photograph of the bride and groom dancing just in front of the columned *porte-cochère* of the white plantation home.. At this wedding, the traditional wedding cake was replaced with homemade chocolate pecan pie baked by the bride's mother from a special family recipe. We may read this as a nod to

¹¹ *Southern Living Weddings* 2012 is published by Southern Living, Inc.

the power of southern feminine domesticity, coupled with a motherly performance of the family's southern identity.

A two-page presentation featuring the wedding of an African American couple held on Runnymede Plantation in Charleston, South Carolina immediately follows the article on the Tuckahoe event. Described in the text as “a laid-back Southern affair filled with tradition,” a half-page photograph depicts the bride and groom standing with their minister in front of a centuries-old oak tree (30). In this photograph, the bride and groom are slightly off-center as space is made to include the bridal attendants with the couple. Four bridesmaids and two flower girls stand close to the bride while three groom's men are standing to the right. A huge oak tree, ornamented with a single white wreath, forms a backdrop for the photograph. Symbolizing the plantation mystique, the single yet mammoth oak tree is moss-draped. The text identifies the centrality of the tree to the plantation venue but grossly exaggerates the temporal span: “The 1,1000-year-old live oak at the ceremony site on the banks of the Ashley River set the tone for a day filled with tradition and hospitality. In addition to the Lowcountry fare, guests were offered baskets of peaches and Mason jars filled with jams and pickled vegetables canned by Marcus's family” (31). In this rendition, the bounteous yield of the plantation is conveyed as a source of sustenance-styled gift giving. The importance of regional and ethnic foodways is revealed in the menu choices of the bride and groom. Selena and Marcus selected a meal of “fried shrimp, fried chicken, corn succotash, and homemade cornbread” to reflect their southern heritage. Following African American tradition, family members supplied and cooked the food for this plantation wedding.

The Winter 2012 edition of *Martha Stewart Weddings* features “Sweet Carolina,” an eight-page article depicting a wedding on a family-owned plantation. Jeffrey and Katherine selected a

site in Green Pond, South Carolina as the venue for their wedding. Writer Riann Smith establishes this plantation site as, “The recipe for an unforgettable outdoor fête: two lovebirds, a thousand lush acres, and a dash of Southern charm” (309). The left side of the initial two-page spread pictures a full-page photograph of the bride and groom in the foreground, posed amid moss-draped oak trees on a rolling green landscape. In this photograph, the bride and groom are the only occupants of this Carolina Eden. However, as other photographs reveal, southern hospitality and identity are on display, signaled by the white picket plantation gates hung with evergreen wreaths and trays of signature drinks that include, of course, Mint Juleps served in traditional silver tumblers. The bride chose an avian theme to emphasize the abundant wildlife that now inhabits this old rice plantation. Replete with testimonials of gator hunting on the Combahee River acreage newly acquired by the bride’s family, the account of this plantation wedding near Edisto Beach places southern heritage and charm on display through images that evoke the plantation mystique. These recent magazines are not the first to feature plantation weddings. In 2009, *Elegant Bride* featured the Charleston, South Carolina wedding of a couple on “the lawn of historic plantation house Drayton Hall as the site for their nuptials” (103). A quick look through the glossy pages of both new and older bridal magazines reveals that plantation weddings are regular features.

Such popular bridal magazine promotions reinforce Roney’s site selection advice housed in the section on “Mansions, Castles and Other Great Old Buildings” where she confirms that “the biggest advantage to renting a landmark location “is the potential for ‘major photo ops’” (152). She adds that “[m]any historic mansions and estates also come complete with beautiful grounds – perfect for romantic walks” (*Ibid*). Because these sites are usually so picturesque, Roney contends, there is no need for major embellishment as the elegance and the grandeur of the space

allows fantastic opportunities for photographs. Roney defines the venue as “the backdrop” for the wedding. She offers the following advice:

Okay, now that you know where to look for the greatest location, you need to know what you should be looking for (aside from that sense of rightness you know you’ll have the moment you see the perfect spot). Shopping for a site is a lot like finding a mate, a test you’ve obviously aced. You should be looking for the same sort of things – charm, personality, depth, more than just a pretty face (although looks do count!). (146-7)

Although Roney is obviously speaking to the bride and not to the couple, she encourages a connection between the location and the couple’s identity. She believes that for “good” weddings, the site should somehow reflect an aspect of the couple’s relationship. “The best weddings are the ones the guests walk away from saying ‘That was so *them*.’” The unique location should be related to a special event in the couple’s courtship. Or, the venue may suggest a shared personality. For example, she suggests, “If you’re both animal lovers, consider the zoo” (149). This adventurous list of advice, however, excludes any mention of the performance of religious identity.

According to a “veteran” wedding coordinator in the Baton Rouge area, religion is an important factor in Louisiana, as many local couples choose to marry in the family church. In fact, the majority of weddings that she coordinates are church weddings, reflecting strong family ties to a specific religious community. The same coordinator who has been in business in the area for almost thirty years confides that wealthy “old” Baton Rouge families would never choose a plantation for their daughter’s wedding. They hold family weddings in the local church; following the religious ceremony, they often hold the wedding reception in their country club. Church weddings followed by country club receptions suggest membership or ways of belonging to a set social group as a marker of class in ways that other popular venues such as hotels, restaurants and banquet halls do not.

In contrast to the social elite, middle class markers of distinction work differently. In her highly cynical look at American weddings in the 1970's, Marcia Seligson points out "[t]hen, too, his daughter's wedding is perhaps the non-rich father's one chance in life to experience the luxury and affluence that the rich take for granted. The single occasion when he can unpress his nose from the glass and actually partake of the greatest of American dreams – extravagance, splurge, even waste."¹² What is blatantly obvious in Seligson's book and hidden between the lines in this quotation is an echo of Bourdieu's assumption that those who have achieved distinction no longer need to employ "symbolic manifestations whose meaning and value depend as much on the perceivers as on the producer."¹³ Therefore, it is safe to say that contemporary weddings held in conventional non-sacred or secular spaces like the plantation sponsor social and class performances. However, while on one level, we may argue that it is the middle-class drive for economic and social distinction that propels brides to the plantation venue, on another level, we must also consider regional identity as a motivating factor in selecting this venue.

Through its connection to the historical and cultural past, the plantation as a wedding venue may be considered as a form of southern ideology on display. In her work on southern regionalism, Celeste Ray recommends that "[w]e consider the layers and contradictions in cultural ideologies expressed through display, by which we mean some kind of public ritual (a church assembly, demonstration, commemorative service, parade, etc.) performed in a public space of affirmation of an asserted identity and/or heritage."¹⁴ Although Ray is not speaking of

¹² See Marcia Seligson, Chapter 11: "White Bread and Upper Crust." *The Eternal Bliss Machine: America's Way of Wedding*. New York: William Morrow, 1973. P. 179.

¹³ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984. P.66.

¹⁴ Celeste Ray, "Introduction." *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity Within Southern Regionalism*. Tuscaloosa: U Alabama P, 2003. P.4.

weddings in this context, weddings do, however, fall under the rubric of spaces of public affirmation and personal display. The ideologies on display may be easily determined through analyzing bridal and wedding photographs taken on plantation wedding venues.¹⁵ These images celebrate and perpetuate what I have referred to previously as “the plantation mystique.” Each year, wedding photographers pose a parade of white-gowned brides on the porches and balconies and in the landscaped gardens of architecturally distinct Lower Mississippi Valley plantations. Many of these photographs lining the office walls of area wedding coordinators, plantation site coordinators and wedding photographers are carefully selected for placement on plantation venue and photographer’s websites, and are printed by the venues for mailing to prospective brides. Moreover, at each plantation wedding venue, photo albums of past brides are handed to prospective brides for review, attesting to the power of the plantation with its nostalgia for an Old South past. After viewing a number of these wedding albums along with various plantation and photographer’s websites, it is clear that more than standard bridal photography operates in almost every plantation wedding photograph.

Numerous websites marketing Louisiana plantations as wedding venues confirm the genteel ambiance of the grand white-columned mansion with its canopy of majestic ancient oaks forming a visual aisle to the front gallery of the house as a space of romance and dreams. However, because the plantation is connected to a time in American history of heightened social and racial class distinctions, there is much more at work here than Roney’s assumption of merely taking or making pretty pictures with a nice background. The majority of images on exhibit confirming the presence of the plantation mystique incorporate the bride and groom either standing or sitting in front of the classically-inspired white antebellum home which is centered in

¹⁵ Bridal photography is an industry term referring to portrait photographs taken of the bride in her bridal array at a unique location several months before the wedding. In Louisiana, this portrait is typically displayed at the wedding. Wedding photography refers to photographs taken just before or during the actual wedding event.

the background of the verdant landscape. Not only is the bride in all her splendor on display but the plantation landscape is also on exhibit. The connection of the bride with the landscape performs a visual rhetoric, situating the bride as a symbol of perfect femininity in a position of southern social power. Images operating on the plantation mystique consistently form a photographic bricolage that positions the bride, sometimes alone or with her groom, with family members or with her female bridal attendants, on a naturalized green and often brilliantly flowering landscape.



Illustration 4.1. The Plantation Mystique. Courtesy of Old South Photography

The bride may be standing or seated, but as a vision in white, she is always framed within and in contrast to the natural landscape. In other photographic styles, the bride is foregrounded in the portrait with only a side view or fleeting glimpse of the home included. Even though these shots contain remote images that offer mere glimpses of the plantation home, the association connecting her to the residence is still strongly suggested. Projected in that image is the idealized presentation of the plantation landscape with its moss-draped trees and a full display of the antebellum home with classic columns, entablature and pediments. These bridal images not only convey an antebellum period feel of the past but they simultaneously move the past into the present by connecting historical evidence of an earlier period to the present natural grace and beauty of the landscape.



Illustration 4.2. The Plantation Mystique. Courtesy of Old South Photography

In some wedding photographs, especially bridal portraiture, the bride may be situated on the porch of the home, standing in her bridal gown with her bridal bouquet as she overlooks the vista before her. Often, particularly in close-up photographs of the bride on the porch of the home, only a column is visible. When details of the house are included, the column is the foremost feature in the photograph. In their work on antebellum Greek Revival architecture, Michael W. Fazio and Patrick A. Snadon point to the period in southern history where, “the column became a device of exhibitionism, a sectional emblem, and a symbol of paternalistic and chivalrous society, aristocratic rule, and hierarchical rigidity.”¹⁶ One straightforward way of interpreting these porch images is to suggest a type of ownership in the home. Additionally, we might consider the bride’s movement through at least one threshold as she moves from the walkway onto the porch as subliminally positioning the contemporary bride into a historical succession of famed southern feminine domesticity. The mythic ideal of southern womanhood that was celebrated in notions of the Old South is being embodied today in the physical proximity of this young woman to the plantation home. Such portraiture may evoke subliminal thoughts that this modern bride is located within the traditional southern patriarchal system and under masculine control. In yet another type of outdoor setting, the photographs omit any indication of the plantation home and instead highlight the formal gardens of the plantation displaying the bride on the natural landscape. This is the type of natural location that Roney and the advice manuals tout as needing little “extra decoration” because “[t]he place is going to be gorgeous” (152).

Yet, the appeal of such a venue revealed in the inherent beauty of the images is only one aspect of the meanings these photographs convey. Even with no suggestion of the antebellum home nearby, photographs of the bride in the formal gardens of a plantation are still a means of

¹⁶ See Michael W. Fazio and Patrick A. Sandown. “Greek Revival Architecture.” *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Ed. Charles Reagan Wilson. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1989. P.76-79.

expression, connecting her through temporal and spatial signifiers of antebellum status and wealth. As the portrait intimates, the bride “belongs” on this landscape. Thus, it is clear that subliminal connections suggesting aristocratic lineage and heritage, wealth and taste are projected outward to viewers in the styles of bridal portraiture operating visually on the plantation mystique. Moreover, in utilizing Dell Upton’s concept of “articulated processional landscape,” John Michael Vlach affirms that during the antebellum period “a highly formalized layout of showplace plantations” was predicated on “a spatial system designed to indicate the centrality of the planters and to keep them aloof from any visitors behind a series of physical barriers that simultaneously functioned as social buffers” (*Back of the Big House* 8). In these contemporary images, the bride is proximally past such social and economic barriers. By placing the bride inside the “intricate sequence of gates, terraces, pathways and other threshold markers” the portrait may be read as an indicator of the bride’s close proximity to the social standing of the planter family (*Ibid*).

Moreover, the overwhelming presence of the plantation mystique in bridal photography signals more than immediate geographical representations, it indicates the emergence of a symbolic landscape. The plantation mystique features moss-draped stately oak trees that encircle the ancestral home, framing the setting of the house. Thus, the special powers of nature create and lend an air of mystery to this landscape. A quick search of tourism websites promoting Louisiana plantations yields the following descriptions: “With exquisite antebellum mansions, ancient oaks dripping with Spanish moss, and, of course, Ol’ Man River, the Great



Illustration 4.3. The Plantation Mystique. Courtesy of Old South Photography

River Road offers visitors an exploration into a mythical past and a glimpse into a bygone era.”¹⁷ Suggestive of common southern tropes that employ adjectives such as “long,” “silvery” and “drooping” to characterize the southern ecosystem that privileges the symbiotic relationship between Spanish moss and the stately, enduring, legendary oak trees, numerous images of this combination abound not only in southeastern Louisiana tourism literature but also, as we have

¹⁷ <http://www.inetours.com/New_Orleans/RR-plantation.html>.

seen, in plantation wedding photography. As D. W. Meinig notes in his introductory essay to *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, “We regard all landscapes as symbolic, as expressions of cultural values, social behavior, and individual actions worked upon particular localities over a span of time” (6). However, later, in the same text, Meinig argues, “There are also landscape depictions which may be powerfully evocative because they are understood as being a particular kind of place rather than a precise building or locality” (165). Therefore, the plantation, despite being regionally limited, symbolizes a part of American history and culture that goes well beyond its physicality. In wedding photography that places the bride so familiarly on or within this plantation landscape, the photographer creates a visual association suggestive of ways of belonging between the bride and the plantation. In these modern shots, the bride replaces the southern belle, usurping the place of antebellum southern womanhood by moving it into the present. Moreover, the photographs based on the plantation mystique delimit the distance between the bride’s actual lifestyle and the changing status she adopts on her wedding day.

The plantation mystique is a powerful visual marketing tool used to draw brides to the plantation venue. My fieldwork uncovered two distinct types of brides gravitating to Louisiana for plantation weddings in response to the plantation mystique. A small number of local, white “Cinderella” brides select the Louisiana plantation venue for their combined wedding ceremony and reception site. All of the site coordinators and photographers that I interviewed corroborated that no local African American brides choose Louisiana plantation venues for their wedding. Although I discovered a large number of bridal portraits of African American brides are being taken on the grounds at Rosedown, the local photographer who takes these pictures confirmed that most of her brides marry in local churches. However, the majority of weddings held on the

larger, heavily advertised, well-known Louisiana plantation venues are “destination weddings.” Most of the destination brides are white although at Nottaway and Oak Alley, the site coordinators confirmed that occasionally, an out-of-area African American bride may choose their plantation as a venue for a destination wedding. I construe this shift to destination weddings as a signal of the pervasive spread of the Louisiana plantation mystique marketed through heritage tourism to areas outside of the state and often, even the country. There is a significant difference between resident brides who choose the plantation as a venue for a local family wedding and brides from out-of-state that select the venue as a destination in response to the nationally advertised appeal of the romanticized plantation mystique. The local wedding indicates one type of identity performance while the destination wedding points to another. As one young bride I interviewed succinctly stated: “I grew up next to Nottaway. When I was a little girl, my grandmother lived in White Castle. My grandfather worked in the sugar house. When people came to visit, we always took them to Nottaway. The mansion is like a lady to me.” Through her statement, it is clear that this young woman feels a personal connection to the plantation that while it hints of class distinctions, also evokes images of family and community. In contrast, destination brides, attracted to the plantation through the marketing images of heritage tourism, perform a type of southern “identity [that] typically refers to a *perception* of reality rather than to reality itself.”¹⁸

According to the site coordinator at Houmas House, a well-known plantation tourist attraction, fifty percent of the weddings there are local and fifty percent are destination weddings. However, these figures may be slightly skewed as one area wedding coordinator confirmed that many of the weddings counted in this split percentage are “reception only” with the wedding ceremony held in a local church. Houmas House, on the River Road in Burnside, is

¹⁸ James C. Cobb. *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. P.6.

close enough to Baton Rouge for wedding guests to travel to the venue for a wedding reception following a church ceremony. Often, shuttle transportation for guests may be arranged to and from the plantation. Nottoway, however, located on the east bank of the Mississippi River near the small town of White Castle, is more remote, as it is not close to the major interstate highway. It is not surprising then that the majority of the weddings held at Nottoway are considered destination weddings. On the particular day that I viewed a wedding at Nottoway, the bride was considered local, although the bride and groom, the wedding party and their parents and some family members stayed in the overnight accommodations located on the venue. Moreover, as the site coordinators at Oak Alley claim, based on the overwhelmingly Catholic population in the town of Vacherie, none of the weddings at Oak Alley are local; they are all destination weddings. They note that the local residents of Vacherie have large weddings of 300 to 400 people in the neighborhood Catholic Church. While some area residents might be tempted to hold a wedding at Oak Alley, a major conflict arises when the priest will not officiate a wedding outside of his church. For strong Catholic families who live in the area, this is a deciding factor in not booking a wedding at the plantation. A new type of wedding, termed “the elopement” constitutes a significant number of the destination weddings at Oak Alley and Nottoway.¹⁹ In nearby St. Francisville, in West Feliciana Parish, the majority of weddings at Greenwood are destination weddings with brides coming from the neighboring state of Texas or as the site coordinator there claims, as far away as China. However, on the day that I viewed a wedding at Greenwood, the bride was from nearby Baton Rouge.

¹⁹ According to the site coordinators at Oak Alley, the elopement wedding is a very small wedding of just the bride, the groom, and sometimes a small number of family members or friends. Many times, the coordinators claim, only the bride and groom come to the plantation for the half-an-hour ceremony and follow the wedding with a special couple’s dinner and overnight stay in a plantation accommodation.

Magnolia Mound, a Creole plantation originally owned by Achille Murat, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, now owned and operated by the BREC division of the East Baton Rouge Parks and Recreation Department. The majority of weddings performed involve area residents as the restored plantation sits very close to the Louisiana State University campus, making the venue attractive and affordable to university faculty, students and their families. I am currently planning a wedding at Magnolia Mound to be held in May of this year. The bride and groom have connections to Louisiana State University and were drawn to the venue for that reason along with the affordability of the site. The five venues noted here represent only a few of the many choices available for Louisiana plantation weddings. Representing a wide-ranging spectrum of possible ceremony styles and amenities along with variations in price from economical to expensive site fees, plantation venues compete heavily for bridal dollars through website and other online advertising.

When the bride is a Louisiana resident, her relationship to the plantation landscape may be revealed in a variety of ways. While one area photographer told me, “locals just don’t marry there;” another thinks that it is “not so very unusual” that a friend of his is getting married at Nottaway. She grew up in White Castle and her father is a sugar cane farmer. This young bride is exemplary of the brides that I interviewed who expressed a personal relationship to the plantation venue. One bride from Denham Springs whose wedding I attended related to me, “I always wanted to get married at Nottaway. Ever since I was a little girl, I dreamed about getting married here.” This bride, a recent graduate of a vocational nursing program, is the mother of twin three-year old sons. She and her fiancé spent the money to, as they described their wedding at Nottaway, “do it right.” Weddings can be expensive and this young couple had assistance from the bride’s mother and step-mother in planning and paying for what other family members and

friends described as the bride's "dream wedding." One young woman's early childhood connection with the plantation had far-reaching effects. An area photographer shared this "love story" with me. In 2009, she photographed a small wedding at Oak Alley. The bride toured the plantation with her family when she was a young girl. During the tour, she enthusiastically told her mother that when she married, she wanted to have her wedding at Oak Alley. Almost two decades later, this young woman selected Oak Alley as her venue. On the wedding day, the bride's mother gave her daughter a card with a photograph from that childhood visit. It said – "dreams can come true." This bride's connection to the plantation is literally reframed in a wedding photograph that conveys her childhood dream into present reality.

Part of the task required of a wedding photographer is to capture events like the one described above. In my interviews with area wedding photographers, it became clear that highly successful wedding photographers realize that the wedding is all about the bride and making her dreams come true. Charles Lewis discloses the collaborative illusory nature of the wedding day by repeating a comment from one photographer: "Part of it's the dream, you know? . . . I mean since [a bride] was a little girl, she's thought of that wedding day as a point of focus."²⁰ The photographer quoted by Lewis describes the couple as "local royalty" who "were the stars in their own perfect production" (89). One bride chose Nottaway for her wedding venue after seeing the White Ballroom on a school tour and hearing the tour guide tell stories about the six Randolph daughters who purportedly married in that room. She told me she dreamed of having her wedding in that beautiful ballroom ever since she saw it almost fifteen years earlier. I call

²⁰ See Charles Lewis. "Working the Ritual: Professional Wedding Photography and the American Middle Class." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 22 (1998): 72 – 92.



Illustration 4.4. A Dream Come true. Courtesy of Bray Danielle Photography

this local young woman and the two brides noted above, “Cinderella” brides because their relationship to the plantation in many ways echoes the plot of the famous folktale.²¹ Living in

²¹ “Cinderella” is the world’s most beloved fairy tale. Known among folklorists as AT510, the tale has three strong subtypes : 510A “Cinderella”, 510B “Cat-skin” and 510C “Cap o-Rushes.” The motif of the helpful fairy god-mother appears in Charles Perrault widely known version of the story, “Cendrillion” which appeared with seven other tales in *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé* in 1697. The Brothers Grimm include two Cinderella versions in *Kinder und Haus Märchen*. Grimm’s 21, “Aschenputtel” is an example of AT510A while Grimm’s 65, “Allerleirauh,” is a AT510B type. For more on Cinderella see, Alan Dundes, *Cinderella: A Casebook*. New York: Wildman, 1983.

proximity to the plantation, a metaphoric castle,²² the young woman imagines a time when she will be transformed into a vision of loveliness and will capture her prince's heart. Just as Cinderella was altered by her fairy godmother from her lowly kitchen state to that of a princess, many modern brides feel a need for a magical transformation on their wedding day. In their critique of holding an extravagant wedding to celebrate a marriage, Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H. Pleck argue that such excessive spending serves to "marry the tenets of both consumer culture and romantic love."²³ Other critics of the white wedding target the popularity of the white wedding with the amount of consumer spending required by the bride's "once in a lifetime" opportunity to wear the nicest dress she has ever purchased, to have the details of her personal grooming at its best and to be at the center of attention from family and friends. Ultimately, despite their critique of the white wedding, Otnes and Pleck maintain that certainly such special occasions will "provide memories of a sacred and singular event" (8).

Several critics of the white wedding claim that photographs perpetuating memories of the event are not only narrativized but also highly idealized renditions of the actual wedding.²⁴ From his past experience as a wedding photographer, Charles Lewis argues, "Photographs make permanent the fantasy of wealth for the middle-class couple, and the wedding album is the

²² Nottoway is located near the town, White Castle and is often referred to in common parlance and in print as "The White Castle." See M. R. Ailenroc, *The White Castle of Louisiana*. Louisville, KY: John P. Morton & Company, 1903. Advertising for Nottoway often includes the phrase "Every castle needs a queen . . .".

²³ In *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding* (Berkeley: U California P, 2003) Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H. Pleck argue that lavish weddings in American culture reflect the "union of romance and consumption" with the result of 'valorizing' both" (11).

²⁴ See Lily Corbus Bezner, "'Divine Detritus': An Analysis of American Wedding Photography." *Studies in Popular Culture* 18.2 (1996): 19 – 33 where Bezner argues, "the highly scripted and narrative nature of most wedding albums reinforces the creation of idealized memories and symbolism The images, then, when shared verbally and visually, provide communication of cultural continuity and community" (21). Charles Lewis argues that "wedding traditions as well as the behaviors of brides and grooms are altered by professional photographers concerned with making their commodity of photographic coverage as effective as possible" (72). See "Working the Ritual: Professional Wedding Photography and the American Middle Class." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 22 (1998): 72 – 92.

signifier of that status” (175). However, in my discussion with brides in the days following the wedding, they offer a more utilitarian use of the wedding photographs. Many brides claim that one of the most treasured possessions left from the day itself is the photo album that combines formal photographs of the bride, the groom, their families and attendants with informal photographs of friends and guests. These brides maintain that the overwhelming nature of the day itself allows them little time to process all of the events and memories; therefore, the wedding photograph album allows them, in a sense, to remember and to relive the wedding day. Yet, as Lewis infers, there are social, economic and familial pressures on brides and their families to host a memorable event. As Otnes and Pleck argue, today’s lavish wedding demands “legitimate lavish consumption through the ‘ethic’ of perfection – or the standard that includes the desire for flawless beauty and a perfect performance – as well as an appreciation and recognition of the occasion by both participants and guests” (8 – 9). Thus, for a local “Cinderella bride” choosing the plantation as a venue for her wedding makes all of her dreams come true by providing a castle where her transformation into a princess is gathered into a tangible form for collecting memories. Among the local brides I interviewed, their dream of being married on the plantation is a repetitive theme. Moreover, as the following anecdote discloses, dreams are not always subject to race or gender.

During an interview at Hemingbough, Arlin Dease, who restored Nottoway in the 1980’s told me this story: For many years, Ms. Elmer Thomas, an imposing African American woman, was the tour guide at Nottoway. Dease recalls how she would open the front door to area school children who came to tour the plantation and welcome them inside. On one such outing, after hearing the story of the six Randolph daughters and their weddings in Nottoway’s famous “White Ballroom,” Dease relates that a small African American boy came up to Ms. Thomas and

excitedly told her that when he married, he was coming to Nottoway to be married in that room, too. This brief story exemplifies not only the link between tourism and future weddings but also the power of cultural experiences relayed by narratives retold through tourism. In his work on modern tourism, Dean MacCannell argues initially that “all tourist attractions are cultural experiences.”²⁵ He then determines that “a cultural experience has two basic parts which must be combined in order for the experience to occur” (24). The first part or “model” represents an aspect of life. The second part is the influence or “the changed, created, intensified belief or feeling that is based on the model” (*Ibid*). In developing his argument, MacCannell claims that the model and its influence are connected by a “medium.” Unified into an argumentative whole, MacCannell maintains that these parts interact in cultural productions. The narrative retelling of the six Randolph daughters’ weddings, in MacCannell’s term “the model” occurs in the “White Ballroom,” or the medium, which ultimately inspires and influences not only young girls but also small male schoolboys through a carefully orchestrated cultural production geared to tourism.

Another anecdote reveals performing regional identity may be a motivating factor for reconstructing and reenacting historically accurate local antebellum plantation weddings. An area wedding coordinator relates the details of her very first experience in wedding coordination in the 1970’s. The details of one Baton Rouge bride’s antebellum period wedding were carefully recreated through research in the *John Hampden Randolph Family Papers* housed in the Louisiana State University Archives.²⁶ As a prelude to the wedding, held on the family-owned Mount Hope Plantation in 1978, the African American gardener doffed a top hat and tails to

²⁵ In *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell argues, “It is the middle class that systematically scavenges the earth for new experiences to be woven into a collective, touristic version of other peoples and places” (13). Although MacCannell does not include school field trips in his definition of tourism, in this sense the school field trip is a type of tourism designed to promote an experience of the history and heritage of antebellum Louisiana plantation culture.

²⁶ Patricia L. Hudson, “Boss Man of the Big Plantation.” *Americana* (1984): 57 – 60.

hand-carry a silver basket containing hand-written invitation scrolls to the invited guests. The bride's wedding gown was styled in the antebellum fashion. She and her bridal attendants wore large hoop skirts while the groom and his men wore morning coats, top hats and tails. Currently, few brides opt for such extreme attention to historical details; however, occasionally newspapers or websites feature an antebellum-themed wedding. In the spring of 2011, local Civil War reenactors married in a costumed ceremony at The Victorian of the Felicianas in St. Francisville. As photographs posted on the website of the venue reveal, careful attention to reconstructing antebellum clothing details were an important feature in performing southern identity in this wedding. Implying an authentic connection to tradition, the wedding of these Civil War reenactors hints of a theatrical performance of southern identity mixed with touches of historical legitimacy.

Interestingly, there are now websites available to guide reenactors. In the online "Cooking for a Civil War Wedding," the unnamed author notes, "[a]s more people have taken to participating in reenactments as civilians the need for additional activities beyond the purely military, and one of them is weddings. . . People want to see a full reenactment of the 19th century ritual, and the wedding meal is a big part of that."²⁷ In my repeated attempts to uncover antebellum-themed weddings in southeastern Louisiana, I successfully located three. The historically detailed wedding, and the Civil War reenactors nuptials at the Victorian Inn along with actress Delta Burke's vow renewal at Oak Alley in the 1980's are the only examples where weddings were used to recreate a visual sense of antebellum plantation culture. Wearing hoopskirts and Confederate uniforms for a wedding ceremony now appears to be left to Civil War reenactors or consigned to the memories of earlier generations.

²⁷ See *Civil War Interactive & BlueGrayDaily*. <http://www.civilwarinteractive.com/CWCBWedding1.htm>.

While historic costuming provides a sense of bygone connection to the region, another way that contemporary brides and grooms perform identity at their wedding is through regional food selections. As the final step in the tri-partite system of rites of passage identified by folklorist Arnold van Gennep, the wedding dinner is a feast purposely designated to incorporate the two previously distinct families of the ritual participants (bride and groom) through a celebratory meal.²⁸ Moreover, as part of a social system described by anthropologist Mary Douglas, food usage is not only determined by culture but also indicates a level of socioeconomic status.²⁹ Although Douglas's research focuses on food prepared within the home and not in a celebratory space outside the privacy of domestic space, her determination of socioeconomic distinctions proves useful. Reflecting an important aspect of the culture of southeastern Louisiana, food is a signifier of regional culture. As Janet S. Theophano observes "the presence or absence of a food item, dish, or recipe on a particular occasion may indicate the continuity of culture or its breach."³⁰ At all of the plantation weddings that I attended, selections representing the culinary heritage of southeast Louisiana were offered to guests. At each venue, I noticed a spicy version of chicken and Andouille sausage gumbo over rice was served, although other selections showed variation. The repetitive presence of gumbo performs what Theophano identifies as "the symbolic load of ethnicity" and brings to mind her argument that "food is multivalent; only in particular contexts do meaning emerge" (46).

²⁸ Arnold van Gennep's study of life crises, first published in 1909, separates rites of passage into three distinct stages: separation, transition, and incorporation "(vii). See van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage. Rpt.* Chicago; U Chicago P, 1960.

²⁹ See Mary Douglas, "Sociocultural Dynamics and Food Habit in a Southern Community." *Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities.* New York: the Russell Sage Foundation, 1984.

³⁰ See Janet A. Theophano, "I Gave Him a Cake': An interpretation of Two Italian-American Weddings" *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life.* Logan: Utah State UP, 1991. Pp. 44 – 54. Theophano's article explores conscious food selections reflected in the weddings of two Italian-American brides.

Here, in the context of the wedding feast, gumbo symbolizes more than just a bowl of steaming chicken and sausage stew. The word gumbo has come to stand for the melting pot of ethnic cultures that combine to represent the unique culture in the state of Louisiana. Fusing together elements of French, Spanish, African, African American and Native American ingredients, gumbo is a metaphor for the ethnic and racial mixture of the state. At each venue, a ladle of their “special” gumbo was poured over a small scoop of rice and handed to each guest. At a recent wedding at Houmas House, the bride’s grandfather, who was from Pennsylvania, had never had gumbo before and was unsure, even after several attempts on my part, how to pronounce the word. I noticed, however, that he did eat all of his gumbo. Although several of the larger plantations now have competitively-inspired professional chefs to prepare wedding menus, the regional fare of local favorites such as boudin balls, meat pies, shrimp balls and fried catfish remain popular menu items. Of course, the ubiquitous presence of the crawfish is a signifier of the Cajun influence on regional foodways. Judith Goode comments on the relationship between Cajun culture and the crawfish: “[s]haring certain special foods communicates a positive identity and solidarity.”³¹ Just as gumbo was present at each of the weddings that I attended, crawfish was present in some form. At one venue, a crawfish and shrimp cheese sauce accompanied fried eggplant. At another, the crawfish was served etouffe style with rice. Crawfish balls and crawfish fettuccini also appeared on the buffet meal service at two weddings. Thus, as C. Paige Gutierrez observes: “The new role of the crawfish as gourmet food partially explains the acceptance of the crawfish as ethnic symbol by the Genteel Acadians. Tail meat may be combined with cream, wine, mushrooms, or other relatively expensive ingredients to produce any number of refined

³¹ Judith Goode, “Food.” *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*. Ed. Richard Bauman. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

dishes appropriate for posh occasions.”³² Therefore, the meal and beverage selections that I observed (and enjoyed!) not only reflect special family favorites and traditions but are also grounded in an edible/social display of regional identity.

The music selected for local weddings is another feature of identity performance. At a wedding that I coordinated at Magnolia Mound, the bride, a young woman from Houma, hired a Zydeco band to play during the reception. Jeffrey Broussard and the Creole Cowboys entertained guests with Louisiana Creole music. Defined by Michael Tisserand, Black Creole music “reflects a complex historical mingling of people, including the enslaved Africans, European colonists, Cajuns, Haitian ‘gens libres de couleur,’ and Native American tribes.”³³ In this Zydeco band, the lead guitar player was accompanied by an accordion, a fiddle, a washboard and a set of drums. During the dancing, the bride with her special “bridal umbrella” started a second-line parade with her groom alongside. Because many of the guests at this wedding came from the groom’s state of Virginia, the band leader had to explain a second-line. Louisianans and Virginians made several loops of the Pavilion to the popular tune of “When The Saints Go Marching In.” The guests became enthusiastic when they caught the spirit of the second line. In selecting the type of music, the bride was not only celebrating and sharing but also performing her Louisiana identity and heritage.

At a recent wedding that I observed at Oak Alley, the bride’s mother hired an African American jazz band from Mobile, Alabama. The band, four male musicians and two female vocalists, played and sang soul favorites for dancing during the reception from a portable band

³² C. Paige Gutierrez, “The Social and Symbolic Uses of Ethnic/Regional Foodways: Cajuns and Crawfish in South Louisiana.” Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell. *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity*. Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 1984. Pp. 169 – 182.

³³ See Michael Tisserand. “The Creole Tradition.” *Mardi Gras, Gumbo and Zydeco: Readings in Louisiana Culture*. Ed. Marcia Gaudet and James C. McDonald. Jackson: U Mississippi P, 2003.

wagon that was placed outside the front gallery of the house. When I asked the band how they came to play at a wedding in Louisiana, they acknowledged a connection with the bride's mother who was a resident of Mobile and hired the band as a gift to her daughter. Even non-live music providers, such as dee-jays, play music selected by the bride and groom to reflect their musical tastes as way of displaying family, regional and racial heritage along with privileging personal musical tastes.

Wedding favors,³⁴ once ribbons attached to the bride's body, have now evolved to become take-home gifts for attending guests. Sweet-treat favors at local weddings now include more creative items that imply a connection to the region. The old status-quo of tulle bags filled with pastel-tinted butter mints or equally muted Jordan almonds have been replaced by dazzling displays of delicacies representative of the state, some produced in the Crescent City. One area wedding coordinator reported that at a recent wedding a table filled with Hubig pies were a big success. Hubig pies are small fried pies that have been produced in New Orleans since 1922. According to the Hubig pie website, Simon Hubig originally began baking these treats in Texas just at the start of World War I.³⁵ The only remaining bakery producing the fruit-filled hand-held pies is now located in the Faubourg Marigny as all of the other stores have been closed. Hubig pies are available in a variety of flavors: peach, lemon, apple, coconut, pineapple, chocolate and sometimes strawberry, blueberry, sweet potato, cherry and banana.

³⁴ According to John Brand, "the knot seems to have been the symbol of love, faith, and friendship, pointing out the indissoluble tie of affection and duty" (359). In his *Observations on Popular Antiquities Chiefly Illustrating the Origin of our Vulgar Customs, Ceremonies and Superstitions*, first published in 1777, Brand observes: "In England these knots of ribbons were distributed in great abundance formerly, even at the marriages of persons of distinction" (361). Various colors of gold, silver, red, blue and white ribbons signifying specialized meanings were attached to the bride's body to be pulled off following the wedding ceremony. See John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities*. Rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1913.

³⁵ < <http://www.hubigpies.com> >.

Pralines are another popular favor that represent the French culture of New Orleans. There are many recipes of this brown sugar-pecan confection sold on the streets of New Orleans to residents and tourists alike. Individually wrapped, pralines are often given as wedding favors. At Oak Alley, the favors were New Orleans truffles bagged and wrapped in the bride's wedding colors. An area coordinator disclosed that one of her brides selected miniature king cakes as wedding favors, as her groom's family was not from Louisiana and she wanted to share some of her state's culture with them. The King Cake appears in Louisiana at the beginning of the Carnival season. Related to the feast of the Epiphany, the King Cake or the Twelfth Night Cake signals the opening of the Mardi Gras season. The cake is baked in the shape of a king's crown and decorated with sugar in the traditional Mardi Gras colors of green, purple, and gold.³⁶ Each of these sweet treats serves to represent the couple's connection to edible items reflecting Louisiana culture.

In addition to wedding cake pulls which I covered in my first chapter, the groom's cake is another display of southern identity. As part of the wedding feast itself, the presence of cake, as Simon Charsley observes in *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History*, "makes sense to all involved with it; yet whether it has meaning of any kind is commonly doubted" (5). While I support the former part of Charsley's observation, I disagree with the latter part of his comment. Celebratory cakes do have highly symbolic meanings as I will demonstrate later. In many ways, however, Charsley correctly comments that the celebratory cake "may, as has been said, be regarded as a food, yet it is not consumed for its nutritional value nor even, often, for the pleasure of its eating. It is expensive, but not a luxury" (5). For Mary Douglas and the School of British Structural

³⁶ For more on the King Cake, see Marcia Gaudet. "The New Orleans King Cake in Southwest Louisiana." *Mardi Gras, Gumbo and Zydeco: Readings in Louisiana Culture*. Ed. Marcia Gaudet and James C. McDonald. Jackson: U Mississippi P, 2003. P. 48 – 59.

Anthropologists, cake is problematic because it “tests the boundaries of food” in that cake represents “the non-nutritional use of objects which could be food” but clearly are not. Thus, the presence of cake at weddings makes no sense unless we consider the cake as a symbolic equivalent of a much older fertility symbol. The presence of a cake-like ceremonial loaf may be traced to Greco-Roman times when a barley loaf was broken over the Roman bride’s head, or the bride and groom shared a sesame seed cake as required in the Greek ceremony. That this custom was later practiced in England is clear in Wendy A. Woloson’s reference to “ceremonial crackers or biscuits made of wheat, symbolizing abundance and plenty” which were thrown over the newlywed’s heads as they crossed the threshold into their new home.³⁷ The conversion of sugarless ceremonial crackers to sweetened cake signals what Sidney Mintz describes as the “spread of sugar downward and outward” in the eighteenth century as “sugar lost many of its special meanings when the poor were also able to eat it.”³⁸ Thus, the similarity between Greco-Roman forms and eighteenth and nineteenth-century British customs are clear in John Brand’s *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, where he describes the Yorkshire custom of the bride’s cake:

The connection between the bride-cake and wedding is strongly marked in the custom still retained in Yorkshire, where the former is cut into little square pieces, thrown over the bridegroom’s and bride’s head, and then put through the ring. Sometimes it is broken over the bride’s head, and then thrown among the crowd to be scrambled for. (355)

Through these examples, the connection with fertility remains clear. Moreover, related to the seventeenth-century “dumb cake” as noted by Charlsey, the association of celebratory cakes to

³⁷ Wendy A. Woloson, in *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionary, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002) interprets this as a form of community support. She notes, “Everyone present shared in eating this communal nod to future success. Breaking the crackers over the couple’s heads, the community overtly sanctioned the union and recognized it as beneficial to the welfare of the whole society” (168).

³⁸ See Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. (New York: Penguin, 1985).

fertility properties make them useful for divining marital partners.³⁹ As mentioned in my first chapter, on both sides of the Atlantic, unmarried, young men and women often placed boxed cake under their pillows to “divine” future mates. Louisiana diarist Kate Stone makes a specific reference in her journal to placing a piece of bride’s cake under her pillow to dream of her future husband. In England and America, pieces of boxed cake were taken home by wedding guests or taken to family members who were unable to attend the wedding.⁴⁰

While Charlseay connects the wedding cake to an evolved form of bread for the wedding feast, Woloson ascribes the early wedding cake, or a “stack of wedding buns covered with a thick icing” to “fancy confectioners” who fled revolutionary France for England with the return of Charles II where “English royalty elevated the wedding cake, making it three tiers and sometimes five feet high” (169).⁴¹ Woloson’s assumption disregards recipes collected as early as 1769 for making traditional English wedding cakes or dense, rich fruitcakes called plumb cakes. The tradition of plumb cake or fruitcake traveled to American shores, but as Charsley writes, the tendency toward whiteness was “a theme of American cake-making” and in the United States,

³⁹ George P. Monger in *Marriage Customs of the World: From Henna to Honeymoons*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004) portrays the dumb cake as follows: “Similarly a ‘dumb cake’ may be prepared on Christmas Eve. The cake had to be prepared while fasting; the girl would prick her initials in the cake, place the cake on the hearth, and leave the room door open. At midnight the apparition of her future husband would enter the room and prick his initials beside hers. A variation was for two girls to prepare the cake, divide it equally, walk backward to their bedrooms, and eat the cake before getting into bed. They would dream of their future husbands” (100).

⁴⁰ See Ellen McCollam’s diary entry of April 18th, 1846 where she mentions waiting at home for a piece of bride’s cake.

⁴¹ Monger also provides some clarification for Woloson’s description of the stacked buns. He references John Cordy Jeaffreson who’s *Brides and Bridals* was published in London in 1872. Jeaffreson claims that following the Restoration, French chefs followed Charles II back to England to make wedding cakes with stacks of buns topped with a “hardened white sugar and decorated with toys and figures. The crust could easily be broken to allow the buns to be scattered over the bride’s head” (50). As Monger notes, “this was probably conjecture on Jeaffreson’s part, but the traditional bridal ‘cake’ in France and Belgium is the *croquembourche*, which consists of a cone structure, wide at the base, composed of round choux pastries filled with confectioner’s cream and dipped in hot toffee. When cooled, it can be decorated with ribbons, almond figures, and sugared almonds, and at wedding today may be decorated with bride and groom figurines on the top. Jeaffreson wrote that, later, two cakes were prepared, one as an ornament for the bridal table and the other to be broken over the bride’s head” (50).

the tradition of “the two cakes did persist, with the light cake usually being associated with the bride, the dark with the groom” (23). Martha Turnbull of Rosedown Plantation kept a recipe for Mrs. Doherty’s White or Bride’s Cake in her hand-written collection of receipts. Her recipe calls for the “whites of 18 Eggs, the weights of 12 Eggs in sugar, weight of 9 eggs in flour, & four of butter. Flavor with almond.”⁴² From this example and many others, it is clear that Woloson is correct in contrasting the highly refined properties of confectioner’s sugar and white flour used for the typically white bride’s cake with “the dark and edifying groom’s cake, which was eventually completely supplanted by the white bride’s cake, [and] could sustain the guests. It [the groom’s cake] was substantive and had nutritional value, while the bride’s cake stood to be appreciated for its beauty alone.”⁴³ The comparison between the Victorian bride and her cake as an “ornamental showpiece,” Woloson suggests, “confirmed the status of an entire family, and established the dominance of a husband over his wife by equating her with a decoration whose roles and appearance he could undermine” (175). George P. Monger notes American variations on the tradition of the groom’s cake. In *The Book of Household Management* published in 1880, Mrs. Isabella Beeton included a recipe for “black cake,” another name for groom’s cake, printed along with instructions that the cake be “cut by the bridegroom and given to the bridesmaids, with a glass of wine, before going to the church” (51). Monger also mentions the practice of stacking the two cakes together with the groom’s cake on top” (*Ibid*). The lighter bride’s cake was cut at the reception and the layer(s) of groom’s cake saved for future use, often implied as a christening. However, as both Monger and Woloson claim, eventually the tradition of the

⁴² See Richard Scott, Stella Pitts, and Mary Thompson. *Family Recipes from Rosedown & Catalpa Plantations*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2005. P. 142.

⁴³ Wendy A. Woloson in *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionery, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002) argues “sugar as these various forms assumed widely shared cultural meanings. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had lost its original meaning as a sign of masculine power and had been endowed with properties perceived as feminine, such as refinement, gentility, piety, and weakness’ (10).

second cake disappeared altogether. The idea of two cakes resurfaces in an American book on wedding that appeared in the 1970's. In light of the sexual politics of the time, journalist Marcia Seligson comments, "What we think of today as the wedding cake is actually the 'bride's cake' – frilly, decorative, not meant to be eaten. The 'groom's cake' was dark, a fruitcake, practical, substantial. The sexist implications rise like yeast" (*Eternal Bliss Machine* 98). These gendered assumptions reflected in the Victorian period and conveyed into the twentieth century along with popular ornate ornamental confectionery work have given way to contemporary American wedding cakes, still tiered and decorated but not in the exaggerated Victorian style. The unwritten cultural proscriptions for wedding cakes have now changed and all cake served at the wedding, in addition to being a form of edible art, should also be flavorful. In some American regions, the groom's cake is not part of the wedding reception. However, groom's cake has remained a distinctive feature in southern wedding receptions due to the antebellum southern tradition of infare, or the practice of the newly married couple visiting the groom's family for a special reception including a meal and a cake in the days following the wedding.

The dark fruitcake of the Victorian period has evolved into the contemporary groom's cake which expresses overtly masculine identity and conveys male qualities in contemporary southern weddings. In contrast to the highly feminized white multi-tiered, traditionally floral or ornamented bride's cake, today the dark, usually chocolate, groom's cake reveals a regional type of individual improvisation on a traditional form. In Louisiana, sometimes the groom's cake is served at the rehearsal dinner at the end of the meal either as a prelude or to follow toasting. In southern tradition, toasting the bride and groom is often reserved for this intimate family gathering instead of more public space of the wedding reception. Or, at other times, the presentation and cutting of the groom's cake is a highly anticipated event immediately following

the cake cutting ritual of the larger wedding cake. Woloson suggests that sexual symbolism is enacted in the cake cutting ritual. “Because the cake and the bride were as one, what was done to the cake physically was done to the bride metaphorically. . . . Since the wedded couple now cut the cake themselves, the act [of cutting through the thick layer of frosting] represented the breaking of the bride’s hymen by her husband, the consummation of the marriage, and the larger power dynamic between the wedded couple” (177). Today, including a groom’s cake into the cake cutting ritual displaces much of the overt sexual symbolism suggested by Woloson because we cannot advocate that the modern groom, in cutting his cake, is somehow signifying the loss of his virginity. Instead, I suggest that we view the contemporary groom’s cake as a signifier of juxtaposed gendered roles celebrated in the heteronormative nature of the traditional white wedding. The presence of the groom’s cake, reflecting masculine attributes and interests along with aspects of male personality, is the only attempt at masculine display in the otherwise feminized space of the wedding.

What is interesting to note here, however, is that typically it is the bride and not the groom that makes this cake selection. According to Kyleen Kiger-Smith, owner and creative director of Fairy Dust Cakes and recent Food Network baking contestant, the groom’s cake is usually a surprise gift to the groom from the bride or from the groom’s mother. Only occasionally does the groom participate in choosing his own cake or even have input into what is selected. But despite who does the choosing, the groom’s cake embodies either masculine personal interests or hobbies, qualities of male personality or professions traditionally considered for men. Often these expressions are displayed in a humorous and playful manner. When I interviewed Kiger-Smith, she showed photographs of several of her groom’s cakes and explained the process of making some of these oddly shaped theme cakes. Over the years, she has made personalized

guitar cakes, numerous replicas of Tiger Stadium, Wrigley Field, a multitude of LSU football helmets, Marine and LSU band uniforms complete with hats made of rice crispies or Styrofoam, crawfish pots, and even a chef's cutting board and knife. At times, she uses construction concepts to build these cakes. For example, she revealed some of the structural techniques that she used for a Congo drums groom's cake. Due of the height to this cake, Kiger-Smith used a system of dowels and cake separators to structurally support the two one-foot tall segments that connected each drum of the cake. The cake was baked, stacked and staked with dowels, section by section, until the desired height was achieved. The side surfaces of this cake were created of rolled fondant, air brushed and colored to resemble the groom's own set of drums. The white drum top was recreated by using gum paste. The result was a cake that looked just like the groom's drum set, a uniquely edible testament to his musical hobby.

Kiger-Smith tells a funny story about how realistic her cakes appear. Once, when she was taking the bride's cake and the groom's cake into the Shaw Center, the security guard stopped her because the groom's cake was so realistic the guard thought it was a real bulldog. The dimensions of this cake are proportional to a life-size dog. Specialized frosting techniques make the nose, tongue and eyes appear moist and wet.

Kiger-Smith scoffs at my assumption that cutting the cake could be symbolic in some way of cutting the dog or in other ways, consuming the dog. "Oh no," she says, "that is not what is happening at all. The bride who had this cake made was trying to support her husband's love of his dog."⁴⁴ She compares the bulldog cake to her golf bag groom's cake. Golfing is a common theme for groom's cakes, she observes. For one wedding, the bride covered the groom's cake

⁴⁴ In her reading of the relationship between the bride and her white cake, Wendy A. Woloson claims "[t]he bride's cake symbolically reiterated the bride and alluded to her function in both the immediate wedding ceremony and the larger context of her future social and familial roles. Because the cake and the bride were as one, what was done to the cake physically was done to the bride metaphorically" (*Refined Tastes* 177).

table with artificial turf and placed a photograph of herself in her bridal gown on a putting green alongside the cake. The couple chose tees and golf balls as their favors, imprinted with their names and wedding date. Kiger-Smith interprets the cake and accompanying display as the bride truly “taking her place in the groom’s life.” To read this metaphorically, however, it appears that the bride may be subliminally usurping or competing through the medium of the cake with her new husband’s leisure time by visually interjecting herself into the space allotted to display his hobby. Thus, there does appear to be the potential that the cake may signal metaphoric conflict between the bride and the leisure and hobbies reflected in the cake as these are the groom’s interests that may conflict with her control.

The most unusual groom’s cake Kiger-Smith constructed was a giant cockroach, lying in its back cradling a can of beer in between its many legs.



Illustration 4.5. Courtesy of Kyleen Kiger-Smith

Made for a local exterminator, this realistic appearing cake is simultaneously grotesque and humorous. Kiger-Smith commented on the spread of the groom’s cake tradition to other areas of the United States. As Rachael Myers notes, the increasing number of groom’s cakes baked in her

small California bakery not only reflects a new level of interest in baking creativity but also the spread of popular culture through the media.⁴⁵ Largely the result of wedding websites on the Internet and through social media, wedding magazines, and television sponsored baking competitions such as the Food Network Challenge where Kiger-Smith competes, the southern tradition of groom's cakes has diffused to brides and grooms throughout the United States.

Media accessibility and influence also plays a role for brides from outside the state who choose a Louisiana plantation as a venue for their wedding. In contrast to the local weddings of Louisiana residents, destination weddings presage the opportunity for a fun-filled weekend quasi-vacation in an exotic location. As the name implies, destination weddings are a recent marketing tool of the wedding industry to seek out the unique, the unusual and the exotic as a wedding venue. There are several reasons that a bride might choose a destination site. As a local Baton Rouge coordinator noted, brides today are a little older than those of twenty years ago. Most of these more mature brides have career positions and earn substantial salaries. This area coordinator identifies the typical bride as a young woman in her 30's who often wants something different than a "cookie cutter" wedding in her local church or country club. Several area wedding coordinators suggest that there are currently ongoing changes in wedding planning. While previous generations of women allowed their mothers to do the planning, today's bride does her own, and most of it online. Currently, brides who chose a destination venue are opting for a smaller guest list and a more intimate wedding, as destination events filter out large numbers of attendees. Destination weddings often include a weekend full of fun activities for the couple, their parents, their attendants and other close family members and friends. Due to the restricted number of guests, they may also be less expensive than hosting a wedding where all of

⁴⁵ See Lisa A. Flam, "Groom's Cakes, long a simple Southern tradition, grow in popularity, creativity." *The Canadian Press Online Edition* 10/4/2011. <<http://www.printthis.clickability.com>.>

the bride and groom's friends, neighbors and family acquaintances are included. According to the site coordinators at Oak Alley and Nottoway, brides from all over the United States - including several African American brides from the Atlanta area and Houston - have chosen the plantation venue for their destination weddings. Some couples opt for an elopement style of destination wedding to relieve the stress of planning a lavish white wedding. I met a young couple on my way to Jamaica who were "escaping" the demands of the bride's mother for an elaborate wedding. The groom confessed that his mother-in-law's interference had severely stressed his fiancé and he was very relieved to protect her from the anxieties of wedding planning. The couple was headed to a resort venue in Ocho Rios, a popular beachfront destination site.

Numerous websites promote exotic destination venues such as the beach resort towns of Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta and Cancun on the Mexican Riviera, and the Caribbean islands of Jamaica, the Bahamas and St. Lucia. Within United States, the Hawaiian Islands and the California wine country are also popular. Martha Stewart, the do-it-yourself domestic guru, promotes destination weddings in combination with the Sandals Corporation, a company that markets all-inclusive destination weddings and family vacations in several Caribbean locations. Recently, as part of a promotion directed to wedding coordinators, I went to Sandals Whitehouse, a five-star resort on the south-central part of Jamaica to celebrate and promote Stewart's new affiliation with Sandals. Five wedding packages ranging in price and sophistication are designed by Stewart and marketed to brides who are seeking a visually appealing yet stress-free wedding.

The practice of high profile wedding planners associating with destination resorts appears to be increasing. Not long ago, celebrity event planner Colin Cowie affiliated with the Aventura

Spa Palace located in Riviera Maya in eastern Mexico.⁴⁶ The combination of a celebrity planner with an exotic location signals a type of target marketing that appears frequently in the pages of bridal magazines and online wedding and honeymoon websites basically packaging the planner's creative vision along with the exotic destination into one price. As part of the Palace Resort system, Cowie's destination site is publicized in current bridal promotions as "a privileged place of natural wonders, including coral reefs, underground rivers, inlets that are true aquariums, beaches such as the picturesque Playa del Carmen, impressive tropical forests and countless ancient archeological sites."⁴⁷ As advertising for these exotic destinations reveal, weddings in such settings offer a uniquely different quality of experience. The destination location speaks to interactive adventures and activities that maximize the unusual glamour or natural features of a landscape. Here, images of hiking in the rain forests, diving in the coral reefs and exploring the nearby Mayan ruins replaces the ho-hum golf weekend featured by many of the more typical destination sites. Thus, the wedding becomes a chance for wedding attendees to participate in a mini-vacation as traveling to a destination for a wedding develops into an opportunity for new experiences in out-of-the-ordinary settings.

Although the persistent promotion of extraordinary venues in bridal magazines tends to focus primarily on Mexican and Caribbean beach resorts, occasionally a moss-draped Louisiana plantation is a featured destination venue. The 2009 Martha Stewart *Destination Weddings & Dream Honeymoons* includes New Orleans and the surrounding area as a "homegrown" destination venue. As Stewart's feature denotes, couples may be attracted to Louisiana

⁴⁶ Cowie's propensity to memorable Mexican settings is apparent in *Colin Cowie's Extraordinary Weddings: From a Glimmer of an Idea to a Legendary Event* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 2006). For a wedding in 2004, Cowie selected Los Cabos for a featured wedding "Coralizing Los Cabos." P. 164 –179.

⁴⁷ *The Texas Wedding Guide*. 39.1. (January 2012): 144 – 145.

plantations because of the exotic nature of the landscape. The image accompanying the plantation destination is presented as a scenic setting where a white antebellum home surrounded by massive live oaks festooned with moss appears amid the green grounds. It is clear that the plantation mystique celebrates romanticized notions of the Old South in versions and visions of the landscape.

Yet, as these advertisements reveal, images of the plantation mystique disavow any association between the plantation and the antebellum institution of slavery. In an interview with a local photographer who is hired for destination weddings at virtually all of the area plantation venues, it is clear that he believes most brides are drawn to the plantation due to the lovely natural landscape, and give no thought to the past history of slavery or the lives of the enslaved. His idea may be the basis for the increasing number of African American brides who come to Louisiana plantation sites from other areas of the South, predominantly Atlanta and Houston. However, it is this view of the plantation as a pastoral landscape that many critics argue eradicates any notions of the enslaved hands that built the status symbol of white wealth and domination. As Elizabeth Christine Russ writes, “[i]n the United States, meanwhile, the white-columned mansions of the antebellum South continue to be objects of nostalgia, not to mention magnets for tourist dollars, as is demonstrated by online advertisements for plantation tours that encourage prospective customers to ‘feel the gentle breeze of Southern hospitality on a tour that take you back to the glory of the Old South’ or that promise ‘a visit to these stately plantations will make you think you are sipping a Mint Julep on the Veranda!’”⁴⁸ Almost concurrently, Jessica Adams claims that “the plantation has always signified an irreducible social strain, and the many plantations that are rumored to be haunted – and so attractive to tourists as a result –

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Christine Russ, *The Plantation in the Postslavery Imagination*. Imagining the Americas. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. P.9.

probably are.”⁴⁹ Thus, this very complicated landscape, in its performance of the plantation mystique, translates as a space of whiteness only. Eisenstedt and Small term this “a racialized regime of representation that is common in all of the white-and elite-centric sites. This regime both constructs and is constructed by a discursive framework of the South as genteel, beautiful, romantic, marked by honor and nobility, and filled with chaste white women and generally upstanding, brave white men” (9) As another area photographer shared with me: “Brides just don’t think about the past when they are thinking about how pretty it is. That never even enters their minds about what kind of activity was going on at the plantation or what the plantation was used for. It doesn’t even enter their minds. I think it is more about the aesthetics and really the beauty.” For that reason along with the reasonable photography fee of \$5.00 compared to \$160.00 to \$250.00 charged by other venues, the park director at Rosedown claims that at least one third of all the bridal portraiture taken on site is of local African American brides. According to area photographers and site coordinators, African American brides will choose the venue for bridal portraits in the lovely garden landscape; however they will not choose a plantation venue for their wedding ceremony but will marry instead in a local church.

As contested terrain, the plantation lies at the intersection of Louisiana’s history as a slave state and the state’s multi-faceted cultural heritage. For this argument to be clear, heritage must be defined. This may prove a difficult task for, as David Lowenthal notes, “Heritage today all but defies definition. Overuse reduces the term to cant.”⁵⁰ Despite Lowenthal’s pessimism, cultural theorists continue to work in areas that explore how heritage intersects with history and how that intersection is displayed in heritage tourism. Folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in

⁴⁹ Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation*. New Directions in Southern Studies. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2007. P.4.

⁵⁰ David Lowenthal. *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.



Illustration 4.6. African American bride at Rosedown
Courtesy of Precious Memories Photography

Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage, crafts an evolving definition of heritage.

Using her work along with concepts derived from Lowenthal's earlier work *Possessed by the Past* proves helpful in providing a working explanation of the term. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's initial step is to denote heritage as "a new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past" (149). This is certainly true at the plantation house museums where tour

guides relay reconstructed narratives about the family that lived in the home over one hundred and fifty years ago to explain the presence or specific features of the home. Without these historically-based narratives, the house museum tour would have little meaning. I have mentioned before how the tour guides present John Hampden Randolph's construction of the White Ballroom at Nottoway as the anticipated location for the weddings of his six daughters. Another favorite anecdote of plantation tourism is a domestic narrative of how the house came into being – as a wedding present to the bride such as Daniel Turnbull's Rosedown, as a wedding gift to a daughter such as Fanny Bringer's Bocage, or, as tour guides at Oak Alley claim, built on "love" as a gift from the husband Jacques Telesphore Roman for his wife, Céline in an attempt to keep her on the plantation and out of the city. Lowenthal's argument is very similar to that of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's when he writes:

In domesticating the past we enlist it for present causes. Legends of origin and endurance, of victory or calamity project the present back, the past forward; They align us with forbearers whose virtues we share and whose vices we shun. We are apt to call such communion history but it is actually heritage. The distinction is vital. History explores and explains pasts grown even more opaque over time; heritage clarifies past so as to infuse them with present purposes. (xi)

Thus, these romantic narratives abounding in plantation tourism fuse ideas from the past to current interpretations of the plantation today as a monument to enduring love. There is little or no mention of the enslaved who lived and worked on the plantation. Often, any evidence of their material culture is no longer present, although I have recently heard tour guides at Houmas House and at Nottoway give some information about the duties and lifestyles of the enslaved on each plantation.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett builds on her definition of heritage by adding that "heritage produces the local for export" (149). Much of the Louisiana tourism literature exports the plantation

mystique as a commodity for tourist consumption. The natural landscape and architectural details of the homes are advertised online and in print brochures. As a glossy flyer for Greenwood Plantation in St. Francisville reveals, architectural distinctions play an important role in perpetuating heritage. Along with photographs of the rebuilt home, the informative brochure notifies the inquisitive tourist that the home “is considered the South’s finest example of classic colonial.”⁵¹ Distinctive features of this style are marked by what photographer Clarence John Laughlin observes as a mingling of Louisiana Classic details with Greek Revival and sometimes Georgian influences.⁵² Many of the homes display architectural distinctions created by noted craftsmen such as James Gallier, James Gallier, Jr., and Henry Howard. This architectural aspect supports Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s claim, “To compete for tourists, a location must become a destination” (152). Certainly the plantation as museum represents an earlier more viable form of itself. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett expands this concept:

Heritage and tourism are collaborative industries, heritage converts locations into destinations and tourism makes them economically viable as exhibits of themselves. Locations become museums of themselves within a tourism economy. Once sites, buildings, objects, technologies or ways of life can no longer sustain themselves as they formerly did, they ‘survive’ – they are made economically viable as representations of themselves. (151)

In terms of economic viability, this is very true of the plantation where sugar cane farming today, even if on a large scale and aided by mechanized farm equipment, does not yield high enough returns to maintain an expensive property. Thus, a large emphasis for the plantation operating as tourist destinations is nostalgia for the extant lifestyle of antebellum Louisiana plantation

⁵¹ On August 1, 1960, Greenwood was struck by lightning and burned almost completely to the ground. Only the 28 Doric pillars were left standing. At the time, the home was the residence of Frank and Naomi Fisher Percy who were in the home at the time it burned. In the 1980’s, the land of Greenwood and the remaining foundation and pillars were purchased by Richard Barnes and his father who began the process of rebuilding Greenwood using photographs and archival materials. Greenwood is the private residence of Richard Barnes and is open for tours.

⁵² John Clarence Laughlin, *Ghosts along the Mississippi: The Magic of the Old Houses of Louisiana*. Part I: “The Historico- Architectural Perspective.” n.p.

families. As Jessica Adams maintains, the point is, finally, to allow the ‘vanished era’ to inhabit the present moment; and this is achieved in part by reducing the meaning of *plantation* to house alone, to the significance of architecture and furnishings.”⁵³ According to Adams and Eichstedt and Small, African American tourists are often uncomfortable when presented with the “depersonalized and dehumanized” role of the enslaved that is presented in plantation tourism. However, during several tours at oak Alley and Nottoway, I witnessed groups of African American tourists participating in heritage industry tourism. In the decade between the publication of *Wounds of Returning* and *Representations of Slavery*, changes in collective memory have been reflected in heritage tourism.

As the venue for a destination wedding, the plantation doubles as a tourist intention and a personal terminus. During a wedding at Oak Alley, costumed tour guides were on hand to take guests on personal tours of the home during the reception. At this particular wedding, I did not see any guests participating in tours of the home because all of the areas normally closed to tourists were opened for guests. However, during the photography session in the White Ballroom at Nottoway, the site coordinator moved the wedding party from the ballroom to make room for an incoming group of tourists providing an example of the intersection of different usages. The contrast between the two groups was most apparent in the casual clothing of the tourists, when compared to the formal wear of the wedding guests. Because the two groups were not supposed to meet, it was interesting to me to see how the two groups negotiated the space. As the bridal party moved from the White Ballroom to the hall/foyer of the home, the tourists stood back to permit them to pass. Some of the family members remained inside of the home while the bride and groom walked out the front door to begin taking pictures in front of the house. The

⁵³ Jessica Adams, “Local Color: The Southern Plantation in Popular Culture.” *Cultural Critique* 42 (1999): 163 – 187.

presence of the wedding party and family members intimated a connection to the home that the tourists deferred to, distracted and literally spending as much time observing the bride and groom in their finery as the tour guide struggled to keep her group organized and their attention focused on continuing their tour. Thus, the wedding party added an unexpected, and from the tour guide's perspective, unwelcomed, dimension to the tourists' experience. This type of observation may only be achieved through participation-observation fieldwork.

Using what folklorists' term participant-observation fieldwork, or a type of fieldwork where the observer participates in the actions of the group being observed, I exercised my skills and training as an academic researcher and utilized my experience as a professional wedding coordinator to do fieldwork inside ritually restrictive boundaries at four plantation venues. For weddings held on "closed," meaning private, not public venues, I was required to present proper documents and personal assurances to be allowed to participate. At the fifth venue, I left my role as a participant-observer fieldworker and took on and was paid for the full responsibilities as a wedding coordinator. The difference between these two distinctions is important to note here. To become a professional wedding coordinator requires a level of training and expertise. At this point in time, I have coordinated personally or worked with other coordinators in approximately two hundred weddings. The majority of these weddings were in the San Francisco Bay Area but while I have been in Louisiana, I have continued to coordinate weddings for personal friends and a limited number of clients, although on a relatively small scale. I also maintain membership with a national group, the Association of Bridal Consultants, the largest network of American wedding coordinators with ties to international wedding coordinators and consultants. My fieldwork has provided opportunities to meet numerous area wedding professionals who have

been interested in and supportive of my project and proved willing to allow my presence in restrictive spaces.

The most helpful site coordinator is the owner of Houmas House. On a beautiful crisp fall day in November, 2011, I drove out to meet him and the on-site wedding coordinator. I was invited to lunch so I packed my tape-recorder and a fresh supply of tapes and set out for Houmas House just beyond the small town of Burnside. Named after the famed sugar baron John Burnside, what was once the town now exists only in what Mary Ann Sternberg denotes as a “complex of salvaged and vernacular buildings” commonly known as the Cabin Restaurant and Bernadette’s.⁵⁴ Promoting “authenticity and realism,” two catch words of twentieth century tourism in his advertising, restaurant owner Al Roberts alleges that the building housing the popular eatery was once a slave cabin. Today it is a popular dining place, serving Southeastern Louisiana- style cuisine for locals and tourists alike. Claiming that “spider webs of 100 years ago are still clinging to the ceiling,” Roberts has assembled bits and pieces of vernacular architecture to the area to create his collection of old farming implements and relocated historic buildings. As he states on his website, his goal is “to preserve some of the local farming history, serve meals typical of the River Road tradition, and make your visit a relaxed and memorable one.”⁵⁵

Just after this collection of vernacular buildings and a little further down on the River Road is Houmas House, a Greek Revival home built around 1800, revised in the early 1840’s and home to a succession of wealthy antebellum sugar planters such as General Wade Hampton, John Burnside, and William Porcher Miles. According to local historian Anne Butler, the original home was built by Alexandre Latil, a Frenchman living in New Orleans. In the 1770’s,

⁵⁴ See Mary Ann Sternberg, *Along the River Road. Past and Present on Louisiana’s Historic Byway*. Rev. Ed. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2001. P.177.

⁵⁵ See <<http://www.thecabinrestaurant.com/comeinside.htm>>.

he began building what she describes as “the two-story brick, dogtrot structure presently called the French House” (90). Strangely enough, Butler’s description of Houmas House comes from her *River Road Plantation Country Cookbook*, a combination history lesson, storehouse of family recipes and supplemental photographs.⁵⁶ Sternberg adds that Latil and Maurice Conway bought the property from the tribal chief of the local Houma Indians in 1776. The next owner was South Carolinian and Revolutionary War hero, General Wade Hampton III, who purchased the property in 1812. His daughter, Caroline Hampton, inherited the home when she married Col. John Smith Preston. In the 1840’s, the couple expanded the home and added Greek Revival elements to the existing structure. Sternberg notes that Preston is responsible for the name, Houmas House. Identified as “the best example of the Louisiana Classic style,” Houmas House was “built in much its present form in the early 1840’s” (Sitterson 74).

An immigrant from Ireland, John Burnside purchased the home in 1858 and “expanded the plantation to include four large brick sugarhouses, boiling houses, laboratories, crystallizing sheds, and other outbuildings, as well as an extensive quarters area with gardens” (Sternberg 178). By 1860, according to Sitterson, Burnside was the largest planter on record in Ascension and St. James Parish with lands holding of “7, 600 acres of improved land and 22,000 acres in forest, prairie, and swamplands, having a total valuation of \$1,510,000. The sugar mills and farming implements were valued at \$250,000. The livestock, including 38 horses, 390 asses and mules, 83 work oxen, 43 dairy cows, 64 sheep, 51 swine, and 156 other cattle, was valued at \$104,950. The slaves, conservatively estimated at 937 of all ages, were worth more than \$500,000” (45-6). In his recent work, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana’s Cane World, 1820 – 1860*, historian Richard Follett begins his discussion of sugar cane farming

⁵⁶ See Anne Butler, *River Road Plantation Country Cookbook*, Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2010. P. 89 – 102. Butler has other regional historically based cookbooks. See *Audubon Plantation Country Cookbook*, also published by Pelican in 1988. The *Bayou Plantation Cookbook* appeared in 2006.

in Louisiana with a portrait of Burnside's plantation taken from the writings of William Howard Russell. As special correspondent for the *London Times*, Russell's account of his visit to Louisiana is recorded in *My Diary North and South*.⁵⁷

From March 1861, to April, 1862, Russell traveled through the United States, interviewing both Union and Confederate politicians and military commanders. Following a brief stay in New Orleans, Russell arrived at Burnside's plantation on June 4th, 1861. His writings present a feeling of kinship with a fellow Irishman as Russell describes the verdant splendor of Burnside's fields:

If the English agriculturist could see six thousand acres of the finest land in one field, unbroken by hedge or boundary, and covered with the most magnificent crops of tasseling Indian corn and sprouting sugar cane, as level as a billiard table, he would surely doubt his senses. But there is literally such a sight. My host was not ostentatiously proud in telling me that, in the year, 1857, he had purchased this estate for £300,000 and an adjacent property, of 8000 acres, for £150,000, and that he had left Belfast in early youth, poor and unfriended to seek his fortune and indeed scarcely knowing what fortune meant, in the New World. (183)

Russell's description of the house itself is less impressive than this depiction of the fertile cane fields. He does, however, note that the house, "the porch of which was visible at the extremity of the lawn" had "pillars supporting the veranda." And, to complete his verbal portrait of the home, he concludes that "[t]he view from the belvedere from the roof was one of the most striking of its kind in the world" (182). After recounting his experience at the abundant breakfast table, Russell set off on a tour of the plantation. He compared the slave gangs to "*a corps d'armie* of some despotic emperor maneuvering in the battle field." Russell's foremost critique was that the enslaved were invisible "in the midst of this waste of plenty and wealth" (184). His entry of June 10th, 1861 remarks: "At last *venit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus* [came the final day and the inevitable moment]. I had seen as much as might be of the best phase of the great institution –

⁵⁷ There are several editions of Russell's diary. The first, published in London in 1863, is a two volume set that contains over nine hundred pages that are organized into sixty chapters. The edition of the diary that I am using for my source material is an edition based on the 1863 London imprint, edited by Eugene H. Gerwanger with a "new" introduction by William E. Gienapp and published by Louisiana State University Press in 2001.

less than I could desire of a most exemplary, kind-hearted, clear-headed, honest man” (190). This critical compliment to Burnside is, at the same time, a censure of the “peculiar institution.” Indeed, as Richard Follett argues, the sugar planters “exercised a ‘patriarchal sway’ over those in their household and shared, Russell concluded, a ‘particular turn of mind’” (4). After a week with Burnside, Russell left for Baton Rouge and went on to Natchez, leaving a permanent record of his visit to what is now called Houmas House. In the following years, Burnside managed to keep the home intact despite the hostile Union occupying forces. As Butler notes, “[c]aiming neutrality as a subject of the British Empire, Burnside managed to save the house from occupation and destruction during the Civil War” (90). Upon his death, with no living heirs, the home passed to Oliver Beirne, a business partner of Burnside’s. However, Beirne had no interest in the property and passed it to his nephew, William Porcher Miles who retained the property until 1899. After that time, the home fell into disrepair until Dr. Antoine Crozat began a restoration project in the 1940’s. Kevin Kelly, a New Orleans real-estate developer and entrepreneur purchased the home in 2003 and began another extensive renovation.

Kelly initiated his wedding venture at Houmas House with his own version of a “royal wedding.” In a quirky but clever promotion of the site for potential weddings, Kelly hosted the canine nuptials of his yellow Labrador retrievers, Princess Grace and King Sam. The lovely white-gowned and veiled canine bride arrived with a glowing Kelly in a horse-drawn carriage. King Sam, clad in a canine version of a tuxedo, waited patiently on the porch of the Big House for his bride’s arrival with the officiant dressed in antebellum attire. Local historian Anne Butler provides this journalistic impression of the wedding:

The Houmas House royal wedding featured lovely lady Lab Princess Grace, resplendent in white lace with long trailing train, arriving in a fancy horse-drawn carriage with proud papa Kevin Kelly, as groom King Sam anxiously awaited in his tuxedo. There were attendants in 19th-century ball gowns, fancy frockcoats,

and Confederate uniforms; fireworks, serenading from the upper gallery; and an incredibly detailed wedding cake replica of Houmas House taller than the bride and groom and most of the guests as well. (96).⁵⁸

Still a topic of conversation today for those who were guests at the event⁵⁹ and maintaining a revered place on the Houmas House website, the “royal” retriever wedding initiated what has been a very successful wedding venture at Houmas House.

Today, there are several distinct wedding sites at Houmas House. The majority take place on the Grand Lawn in front of the Mansion under the Cathedral of Oaks. The online information for Houmas House weddings reads:

The bride has at her pleasure the ability of having a 300 foot aisle in order to make that spectacular entrance. Chairs are placed in a semi-circular fashion around the front of the mansion and everyone has a spectacular view of the bride and groom on the gallery of the Mansion, with the mansion itself as the back drop. We love to have the bride and groom face the guests for the ceremony, so that their friends and relatives are able to see those momentous expressions at that special moment.⁶⁰

Facing the Big House (or Mansion as the tour literature describes it) positions the bride and groom with their officiant on the opening threshold of the home. The guests are seated looking toward the front of the home. Just as in the bridal portraiture, this positioning suggests a more intimate relationship between the couple and the house as they have already crossed over the steps and are adjacent to the principal threshold. As in most weddings, the guests are seated audience-style on either side of a natural aisle on the front lawn of the home. After the ceremony, the guests may retire to the Pavilion or to Neptune’s Ballroom for the reception while the bride, groom, family and attendants remain on the gallery of the home for photographs.

⁵⁸ Anne Butler. *River Road Plantation Country Cookbook*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 2010.

⁵⁹ In an interview at Nottaway, the main tour guide recalled this wedding and the sensation that it created.

⁶⁰ See “Weddings” at <<http://www.houmashouse.com>>.

At Houmas House, wedding guests do not eat in the main house. Dinner inside the home is reserved for the Sugar Baron's Dinner, a special feast of variations on southeastern Louisiana cuisine prepared by Chef Jeremy Langlois and paired with wines from around the world. The wedding reception meal is typically served buffet style in the Pavilion, a special banquet hall that Kelly confesses he built just in time for a family wedding. The wedding literature describes the Pavilion as Romantic Gothic, resembling the now ruined Carriage House of nearby Germania Plantation. Or, for small, intimate dining, the couple may chose a seated dinner at Alexander Latil's 1770 French House, "an intimate setting replete with original beamed ceilings and wood floors, wood-burning fireplaces, and museum-quality artwork now connected to Houmas House at the upper level" (*River Road Cookbook* 97). The only food allowed inside Houmas House is the wedding cake. One area coordinator notes that the newly married couple may often go into the main house with just their attendants to cut the wedding cake. However, this particular coordinator prefers to keep the cake cutting ceremony in the main dining hall as she feels that the guests often enjoy the cake cutting ritual.

The grounds at Houmas House provide more diverse settings than the weddings on the Grand Lawn. For small, intimate weddings, there is the Upper Garçonnière described in the wedding literature as "extremely romantic and intimate," as it resembles a small chapel. For this wedding, the guests are seated in the Horseshoe Garden "which is a fabulous hedge garden planted with annuals and perennials that are always white." Another venue for small outdoor weddings, Dragonfly Point is designed to resemble Monet's Gardens at Giverny, France. For larger groups who wish to remain outdoors, the Hampton Fountain Court can accommodate three hundred guests for cocktails or two hundred for a seated dinner. Should none of these settings appeal to the bride, she may consider Neptune's Ballroom, a 2,500 foot square dining

room/ballroom connected to a courtyard with two lily ponds with fountains. At a future point, Kelly plans to add forty-nine “cottages,” a Steamboat Landing, a large hotel and a museum, all patterned after drawings derived from the drawing of famed New Orleans architect James Gallier. As the online tourism section on weddings reveals, Houmas House is “all about turning dreams into reality by having an event that is like nothing like a wedding at home. Formal sculptured gardens, a water-lily garden, a European-styled courtyard with a fountain and an inviting oak alleé all enhance the manicured landscape of over sixteen acres that surrounds Houmas House.”

At the wedding I observed at Houmas House in March 2012, the bride was originally from Pennsylvania and the groom from the Baton Rouge area. However, both were living in Houston, Texas at the time so this would be considered a destination wedding. Prior to the ceremony, the groom and his men were relaxing near the Turtle Bar, the converted garçonnière. When I asked him why he and his bride had chosen Houmas House as the venue for their wedding, he responded that the on-site restaurant was the most important feature. I peeked into the Pavilion dining room and saw that the tables were set with specialty linens, flower arrangements, mostly cream and blush colored roses were arranged in silver vases, some tall, some low. Menu cards were centered on the main plate along with a favor, a wrapped chocolate. Before the ceremony, the bride and her attendants were taking photographs under the trees in front of the house and then returned to the “Bridal Cottage.” The officiant, the groom and his men came from inside Houmas House and took their places on the front steps. The bride and her attendants came from the cottage and entered the ceremony site from the pathway that runs in front of the house. The guests were seated on sides of the grassy aisle while the string quartet was positioned on the lower gallery of the house. Following the ceremony, the attendants remained in front of the

house while the bride and groom recessed down the main aisle and disappeared around the side of the house. A few minutes later, they remerged through the front door of the house and invited their guests to join them as they went through the house and into the kitchen of the French house. There, in the old kitchen, guests were offered cups of gumbo while they headed out to the fountain area for a short cocktail hour. While the bridal party was taking pictures inside the home, the guests were entertained by a jazz band. After taking pictures, the bride and groom rejoined the guests and with music from the jazz band, led a second-line into the Pavilion dining hall for the sit-down plated reception dinner. On the back of the wedding program, the couple provided a brief history of “The Second Line Tradition.” The front cover of the program featured a black and white rendition of Houmas House along with the names of the bride and groom. The back cover also reiterated the famous Louisiana call for good times: *Laissez les bons temps rouler!*

White Oak Plantation, on the outskirts of East Baton Rouge Parish, is a wedding venue built to replicate the exterior façade of Houmas House. A popular wedding site for local brides, it is owned and operated by famed local Louisiana chef John Folse. A large-scale privately owned banquet venue devised for weddings and corporate events, White Oak was built originally in the 1970’s as a private home. Sold first to Boudreaux’s, a local restaurant, the property was eventually purchased by Folse as a venue for his catering company. White Oak is architecturally styled after Houmas House and advertises with glowing appellations that the faux plantation retains “elegance and style, straight out of the pages of *Gone with the Wind*.”⁶¹ Furthermore, the website announces that “[o]ur kitchen is a replica of Jean Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop and Gallery located in the historical New Orleans French Quarter.” Despite Folse’s claims of authenticity, his

⁶¹ This text may be seen on the Wedding Page of the White Oak Plantation Website at http://www.jfolse.com/whiteoak/weddings_main.html.

attempts to recreate historical elements serve to connect the newly constructed residential home to concepts derived from popular culture and heritage tourism. Although I was allowed in areas not generally permitted to visitors while I was on site, I did not see any successful representations of historical verisimilitude at White Oak inside, outside or in the public wedding and banquet areas of the venue.

However, despite the exaggerated claims of authenticity and largely due to his renowned Southeastern Louisiana style of cooking, Folse has created an extremely popular, more affordable and consequently busy venue for local Baton Rouge brides and their families. Some vendor services may be utilized to create variation within the time allotted for the wedding. Area vendors offer different types of wedding transportation that range from the popular, romantic horse-drawn carriages seen in the French Quarter in New Orleans and also at historic plantation venues to more modern stretch limousines. The venue allows live musicians and personally selected wedding and groom's cakes. However, only three and one-half hours are designated for the wedding; one half hour for the ceremony and three hours for the reception. At the wedding that I attended on December 30th, 2011, the bride arrived an hour before her allotted time but she was permitted to enter the private dressing room early. She remained in this private suite fitted with a large table and chairs, a separate bathroom with shower area and mirrored dressing area with her attendants until the wedding ceremony began. The groom, his attendants and the minister were waiting in a second-floor room comfortably fitted with several large sofas for seating with a bathroom close by. The bride's and groom's family members gathered in the living room inside the house before the ceremony began. Wedding guests took their seats on chairs provided on either side of the brick aisle walkway.

As this couple chose not to see one another before the wedding, there was no photography done until the wedding procession began. The groom's parents followed by the bride's mother walked out the front door, down the front stairs to the walkway leading away from the house to the ceremony site, which was defined by white-twinkle-lighted crepe myrtle trees. The bridal attendants also came from the house down the brick walkway that florists had marked with hanging floral candleholders. The bride and her father were the last to come from the home into the ceremony site. A disc jockey played ceremony music from his equipment on the front porch for the processional and the recessional. There was no musical interlude or readings in this brief ceremony which was conducted by the bride's grandfather, a retired minister. Following the recessional, the couple and their attendants and family members returned to the living room of the home for bridal photographs, while guests were directed to a large dining room behind the house. This feature, built by Folse to accommodate a maximum of two hundred guests is described on the website as a "Grand French Ballroom, featuring a black and white simulated marble floor, three LeBaron crystal chandeliers with matching wall sconces and a sound system to suit anyone's taste."⁶² After searching for some length to determine what LeBaron chandeliers might be, I was unable to find any indication online that these are antiques. This building appears fairly new and looks much like other area banquet halls with the careful placement of exterior doors and windows to foster a sense of spaciousness by maximizing outdoor light. Tables with colored linens and covered chairs were centered about a small centralized dance floor. For the wedding meal, stainless steel chafing dishes on covered buffet tables lined the back walls of this ballroom, serving chicken and Andouille sausage gumbo served over rice, fried catfish and fried eggplant, beef at a carving station, and a seafood pasta alongside a cheese and fruit table. A single bar was in the left-hand corner of the room by the gas

⁶²< <http://www.jfolse.com/whiteoak/welcome.htm>>.

fireplace. Coffee and a hot chocolate service were on the right-hand side of the main entrance. Food and beverage prices at White Oak range from \$25.00 per person with an additional charge for beverage service priced per person depending on the type of bar chosen to \$63.00 per person, with full menu including appetizers and entrees along with a bar stocked with name brand liquors. The site fee for the ceremony and reception at this venue on weekends is \$1000.00. It drops to \$800.00 for Sunday afternoon ceremonies. For receptions only, the site fee is \$800.00 for Fridays and Saturdays and \$600.00 for Sundays. The wedding rehearsal is included in the site fee and the website does mention the possibility of off-season rates for budget-minded brides.

At the wedding I observed, many of the one hundred and fifty guests remained outside in the temperate December weather on the patio connected to the main dining room. A dee-jay played music in the main dining room; however few of the guests danced at this wedding. Seating was available in the main dining room but many people chose to enjoy the mild weather outside. The patio was tented and bistro seating was arranged around a circular planter box. The bride had a photo booth and some props, consisting of hats, feather boas, fake moustaches and wands, were placed in one corner of the patio where many of the younger guests congregated. Inside the main house, the cake cutting was done in the living room area. Placed beside the white wedding cake, the groom's cake reflected his occupation as a Honda mechanic. His cake was chocolate, frosted with grey fondant and a Honda logo was placed in the center of the cake. Most of the wait-staff at this venue were white college students although there were several black kitchen workers. The wedding staff at this venue appears quite young but committed to their jobs. There is one site coordinator at White Oak who works closely with the on-site banquet manager. She is planning for her own wedding at the venue in the spring of 2012. White Oak hosts over one-hundred and fifty weddings a year, as many as four weddings a weekend in the peak months of March, April

and October; one on Friday, one Saturday morning/afternoon, one Saturday evening and one on Sunday afternoon. This type of rapid turnover of more than one wedding a day is what those in the wedding industry term a “wedding factory,” although the venue does advertise for corporate and other personal events such as graduations, birthdays and anniversaries.

Unlike White Oak Plantation, the coordinators at Oak Alley assured me that they do not have more than one event scheduled per day. Oak Alley is not only the most photographed of the Louisiana River Road plantations but also has been designated as the “Iconic image of the Louisiana Great River Road” by the directors of the National Scenic Byway Commission as part of the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. Built originally on land from a Spanish land grant owned by the wealthy Creole Valcour Aime, Oak Alley was sold to Jacques Telesphore Roman, Aime’s brother-in-law in 1837. Said to be the architectural design of Roman’s new father-in-law, Gilbert Joseph Pilie, evidence of the home’s master builder G. Swainy is inscribed over the main doorway. The home is in the Classical Revival Style and is atypical of other Creole homes in architectural features, which include an entry hall and living quarters on the first floor. It does, however, feature twenty-eight classical columns, smaller than those of Greenwood, as these are only eight feet thick. The walls are solid brick, sixteen inches thick to keep the interior of the home cool, as does the thirteen foot deep exterior veranda. Named Bon Séjour by Céline Roman, Oak Alley is the most renowned and publicized of all the Louisiana plantations in both print and online materials, most likely due to the distinctive oak allée of three hundred year old oaks that form a natural pathway from the river to the home. The allée begins at the property boundary of the River Road and continues for a quarter of a mile, until it stops just before the front galleries of the home. One favorite tour guide story relates that the trees were planted by an early French settler before Jacques Roman

purchased the property. Another tour guide account derived from letters and family stories, relates that Celina Roman, was a socialite who loved being in the city so when her husband built the house for her, he built it on “love.” However, the fact that Celina Roman did not like plantation life seems to be well-known. Mary Ann Sternberg claims that Celina “is remembered as hating to come out to ‘the river’” (*Along* 298). Following the Roman family who lost the house after the Civil War, Oak Alley has been occupied by a series of owners; the last, the Stewarts restored the property in 1925, saw that it was enrolled on the National Register of Historic Places, and designated as a National Historic Landmark. Ownership of the property has passed to The Oak Alley Plantation Foundation, and Oak Alley remains the only River Road plantation/tourist attraction with a stated mission as an educational trust. In addition to weddings, the non-profit foundation works for the preservation of historical Louisiana culture. The tour guides, who are dressed in antebellum costumes, do not tell a generic story of slavery but they do celebrate the agricultural achievement of Antoine, an enslaved gardener who is credited with developing the “paper shell” pecan, a popular and hardy variety of the local pecan trees.⁶³

Three women are employed at Oak Alley specifically for weddings. The plantation website is designed to capture a target market of destination brides. All information on the plantation is now digitalized. After their initial contact with the plantation, usually online, prospective brides receive a DVD in the mail providing information on the venue, the menu and pricing and explaining the policies and potentials of Oak Alley. Once a bride has selected the venue, the

⁶³ The printed material given to me at Oak Alley includes the following selection under the heading “Slavery at Oak Alley Plantation”: “In the winter of 1846, Jacques Telesphore Roman invited Dr. A. E. Colomb, whose efforts to perpetuate a superior variety of pecan through grafting had not yet e with success, to conduct further experiments at Oak Alley. Dr. Colomb had in his possession some scion cuttings of a special tree which stood on the east bank of the Mississippi River at Mr. Amant Bourgeois’ Anita Plantation. By grafting these cuttings, Dr. Colomb hoped to develop a hardy, high quality pecan cultivar suitable for commercial purposes, and Oak Alley offered both adequate land and the notable talents of Telesphore Roman’s slave gardener, Antoine. Dr. Colomb found in Antoine a gifted apprentice who in no time succeeded in grafting 126 trees near the mansion and quarters with the scions from the Anita Plantation tree. The work continued without interruption and, before J. T. Roman’s untimely death in 1848, there were 110 trees grafted in the orchard located some forty arpents from the river.”

sales director handles the initial contracts and then hands the wedding to the on-site event planner. On the day of the wedding, an onsite coordinator implements the details set by the planner. At one time, the same person who had the initial contact with the bride would also plan and implement the wedding, as one coordinator put it “sell it, book it, plan it, work it” but now the women work as a team and bring in a “fresh face” to coordinate the actual weekend wedding. In our interview, the site coordinators at Oak Alley disclosed that they hold twenty-five to thirty large events a year. The venue holds up to two hundred and fifty guests but most wedding parties have between one hundred to one hundred and fifty guests. The majority of these are destination weddings with the wedding ceremony and the reception held on the plantation. When I asked if African American brides ever chose this venue for a wedding, the coordinators recalled that recently a bride from Jamaica who married a local man from St. James Parish held her wedding at Oak Alley. The coordinators also feel that a major factor contributing to the popularity of the plantation as a venue is the proximity of Oak Alley to New Orleans. They note that guests can fly into the airport in New Orleans, rent a car, tour the French Quarter and then drive out or ride out to the wedding in busses. Providing transportation to and from the wedding and keeping an eye on excessive drinking are all part of a plan to prohibit inebriated drivers from tackling the dangerous, dark and winding River Road. However, there are several facilities on the plantation property for people who wish to stay overnight.

One of the coordinators expressed that as a property, Oak Alley is very unique because it offers the ambiance of a plantation, the comfort of a home and the functionality of a banquet facility. The coordinators at Oak Alley appear to love their jobs. They claim that working at Oak Alley allows them to enact a gracious level of southern hospitality to every bride who marries

there. In the wedding material handed to prospective brides, there is letter displayed from a previous mother-of-the-bride commenting on the venue. She writes:

I just wanted to say thank you to you and everyone at Oak Alley! The wedding and reception were just beautiful! Lou and I and all out guests had a great time. *Everyone has told me this was the prettiest and most fun wedding they have ever been to!*

I think we have started a new tradition in our family for weddings! We have 6 daughters and nieces as potential future brides for Oak Alley. I'll send you some photos when they come in!

Again thanks for everything - you are a great wedding planner!
Karen

Another online testimonial in the section headed "What folks are saying about Oak Alley Plantation" shared compliments about the employees at Oak Alley for their hospitality. Elizabeth writes: *"I had the utmost confidence in everyone's abilities, and for good reason – you far surpassed our expectations and all of our guests got to enjoy what true Southern hospitality is."*

Two keywords of the tourism industry, hospitality and tradition, are apparent in the literature. It is clear from these writings that these are out-of-area guests had set expectations for their experience. However, as noted previously, the coordinators maintain that local brides from the nearby town of Vacherie do not marry at Oak Alley; they wed in the local Catholic Church where as many as 400 to 500 people may be in attendance. Any interest in the plantation venue is quickly set aside when brides learn that priests from the local churches will not come to perform weddings on the plantation. However, as the coordinators revealed, an exception to this rule occurred on February 2, 2002 (02 – 02 – 02) where a rabbi, a priest and a deputy came to Oak Alley to marry a couple. The first two officiants, the rabbi and the priest, accompanied the couple from out-of-area and were present to appease the religious interests of the bride's and groom's family; the deputy came out to make the wedding ceremony official according to the laws of the state.

A new trend, the elopement has become very popular at Oak Alley. Elopements are small and intimate, usually just the couple, their parents, and sometimes grandparents with a few bridal attendants. The coordinators cap the elopement at twenty people and told me that they compared their venue to “places like Maui where it all centers on setting.” Following the elopement, the wedding party and guests may stay overnight in cottages on the property that have been there since the nineteenth century.

In response to my question about what features attract brides to Oak Alley, one coordinator immediately responded, “Weddings here give a ‘wow factor.’” The famous oak allée is a large part of the ambiance. The ceremonies are typically held on the lawn between the third and fourth tree, facing toward the levee and away from the home. The coordinators commented that the wedding ceremony always faces the alley of oak trees “because it is a blank canvas.” Even rain doesn’t put a damper on their spirits for, as they shared with me, Oak Alley does not have Spanish moss like many of the other plantations. The green moss-like growth in the trees is not moss but instead is a plant named Resurrection Fern which turns very green just after it rains. They showed a photograph taken by an area photographer that I know well and they were correct; it was elaborately green and gorgeous. Another reason to hold a wedding at Oak Alley, one coordinator feels, lies in the level of service that the Oak Alley staff provides. She takes pride in this as she feels that bridal attendants are not as helpful today as they used to be. The staff at Oak Alley takes tremendous enjoyment in their jobs. This satisfaction is reflected in the length of time that many of the employees have worked there. The Director of Operations, they told me, has been there for thirty years. Mrs. Stewart’s nephew runs the restaurant and has provided Creole and Cajun menus for over thirty-five years. He started his food service making ham and cheese sandwiches; it has now grown to a major restaurant located on the plantation

grounds. The coordinators that I interviewed maintain that the people who work at Oak Alley are vested in keeping the plantation going. The site fee for an evening wedding for three hours based on a maximum of one hundred guests is \$2,000.00 with an additional charge of \$18.00 per guest for that number. Each additional hour is \$800.00. An estimate of \$60.00 per person for heavy hors d'oeuvres averages \$6,000.00 with premium bar service per person around \$2500.00. The harpist is an additional \$595.00 with an extra charge for the wedding cake and the groom's cake.

When I asked if any brides chose an antebellum theme for their wedding, they showed a photograph of actress Delta Burke who renewed her vows there in the 1980's. In the photograph Burke is wearing an antebellum hoop-skirted bridal gown; her lavender-clad attendants are also portrayed in hoop-skirts. However, when I suggested a connection to *Gone with the Wind*, the coordinators immediately corrected me. No, Scarlett and Rhett are not the main motivations for brides choosing Oak Alley for their venue. A more important influence, they claim, is the television daytime drama, *Days of Our Lives*. In 1984, two major characters, Bo and Hope married in their own version of an antebellum wedding.⁶⁴ In what was one of their five televised weddings, the wedding ceremony of these two characters has contributed to the fame of Oak Alley. The coordinators laugh about prospective brides contacting them by email with the question: Is this where Bo and Hope got married? Based on the coordinator's comments, I thought that *Gone with the Wind* might be well out of the picture until I spent an afternoon watching YouTube reruns of *Days of Our Lives*. At one point in the episode, Bo turns to Hope and says to the appropriately gowned Hope who is twirling a parasol, "You are supposed to call me Rhett. Miss Scarlett. I'd be obliged if you'd marry me --." This scene is strongly reminiscent of the scene in *Gone with the Wind* with Scarlett and Rhett in their dressing gowns. Later scenes carry through the Scarlett and Rhett dialogue. In one scene, Hope, in a red antebellum gown,

⁶⁴ See Episodes 1 – 5, *Days of Our Lives*. 8/21/1984. <<http://www.youtube.com>>.

references “my daddy” to Bo’s response straight from Mitchell’s pages, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.” Later Hope evades Bo’s sexual overtures when she comments, “things move a lot slower in the South.” However, this scene ends with Bo unlacing Hope’s corset and revealing her layers of pink petticoats. I thought that perhaps I was the only one who ‘got’ this until I read a blog that made the same comparison. Aphrodite Beauty writes: “Bo and Hope were the Rhett and Scarlett of the 80’s. They were so hot and passionate.” This all proves that romance at Oak Alley is not gone with the wind. Instead, the plantation is interpreted in popular culture through daytime television not only as a real museum but also as a space of desire.

On December 10, 2011, I was invited to Oak Alley to view a wedding. When I arrived, the bride and her attendants were upstairs. All of the stanchions were pulled away and the bride was sitting on the bed in the upstairs bedroom. A door leading out of the room, normally closed, was now open to reveal a modern bathroom with electric lights and plumbing. Four bridesmaids were in the bathroom curling and spraying their hair. The bride and groom, two alumni from Louisiana Tech, did not wish to see one another before the ceremony so one photographer was upstairs with the bride and her attendants taking “Getting Ready” pictures. The other photographer was with the groom and his “men.” A significant number of couples adhere to the old superstition that it is bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the ceremony. Many times the couple will not see one another before the wedding as many people believe it is bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the ceremony. Perhaps a survival of guarding against marriage by abduction, this is only one of the numerous superstitions surrounding the couple on the wedding day as they participate in a transforming ritual rite of passage. In modern weddings, however, a current trend gives leave for the couple to take wedding photographs before the ceremony. This allows more time for photography and also permits the couple to spend more

time at their reception. When I asked one bride in California if there was anything that she would change in reviewing her wedding, she regretted spending so much time taking pictures as she felt that she missed time during the reception with important family and friends. Therefore, some photographers are now encouraging couples to revise their thinking as pre-wedding photographs with bridal attendants and family members before the ceremony allows the couple more time to enjoy guests at their reception. Because it is an emotional moment when the groom first sees his bride, photographers are now staging this as “The First Look.” This particular couple, however, chose to remain on the side of tradition and stayed in separate areas of the venue until the ceremony.

For this wedding, the guests were seated on both sides of the brick walkway in front of the house facing the levee. The trees made a dark tunnel with flower arrangements and candelabra on both sides of the walkway for illumination. The parents and the bridal party came out of the front door of the house and walked to the ceremony site. The wedding procession is marked by a hierarchy. In most ceremonies, the reigning elders “break” or enter ritual space as a prelude to the transformative space that follows. The grandparents may or may not be included in the processional as a matter of taste. As a part of the family hierarchy displayed during the wedding, the groom’s parents are typically the first “elders” to enter the ceremony. In this wedding, the groom’s parents entered as a couple; however, the bride’s parents were divorced and the bride’s father had remarried. In this situation, one is reminded of Victor Turner’s delineation of structure and anti-structure in ritual space. Ritual structure is evidenced by the creation of a community of family members and friends who gather to share in the common values on display in the wedding. Anti-structure, however, erupts when social or personal dynamics interrupt the *communitas* performed by the group. The potential for eruption is most often seen in animosity

between divorced parents of the bride or the groom. These changes in family structure and how the family adjusts and adapts the ritual to these changes is one of the most interesting displays of ritual process in the wedding. In this wedding, however, the ex-spouses seemed pleasant and amiable to one another. In traditional weddings, the bride's mother is escorted by a "ranking" male family member, often her brother or son. In this wedding, the stepmother was listed on the program with the bride's father as *Parents of the Bride* but she was not included in the wedding processional. Following the parents of the groom and the mother of the bride, the bridesmaids may enter alone; in a more formal wedding they are escorted by a groomsman.

On this December night, the weather was clear and very cold. While the bridal party processed out of the front door under the direction of the site coordinator, I stepped into my professional role and helped the bride down the stairs.⁶⁵ The bride and her father went out of the back door where they stepped into a white carriage drawn by an oversized white horse. The carriage was covered with flowers and lit with LED lights. Because I was unfamiliar with the speed of the processional, there was a slight delay in the bride's arrival to the ceremony site under the oak trees (oops!). The guests were seated, the attendants fanned out in a line on either side of the officiant, and the wedding ceremony site was very still and quiet with only a harp playing. Suddenly, the sound of horse's hooves filled the air as the bride and her father came in the carriage from around the side of the house. When the carriage rounded the first section of oak trees and was visible to the guests, there was audible "ahh" sound. The horse's breath steamed, the carriage twinkled as it carried the bride and her father across the walkway, turned in

⁶⁵ Wedding dresses often weigh several pounds. Strapless gowns, with hard stays in the bodice for a proper fit, and large full skirts with layers of tulle petticoats may interfere with normal movements. Some brides choose high-heeled shoes that impinge on their ability to navigate rough sidewalks or walkways. The encumbrance of a train often creates difficulties for the bride in performing the most basic of movements.

a circle under one of the grand oaks and deposited the bride and her father on the walkway. This type of entrance is considered to be highly romantic.



Illustration 4.7. The Carriage Entrance at Oak Alley. Courtesy of Fine Art Exposure.

I emerged from my position behind one of the oak trees and after I adjusted her train, “fluffing” I call it, the bride and her father proceeded into the ceremony space, accompanied by a harpist playing Handel’s “The Rejoicing” and moving into Wagner’s “Bridal Chorus.” Because it was very cold, the ceremony was very short. While the bride and groom were exchanging vows, I maintained my position beside the oak tree and moved toward the end row of chairs to be ready to help the bride back into the carriage. This time her new husband was there to help her also. I noticed that during the ceremony, people driving by on the River Road parked their cars on the levee to take pictures of the event. The white lights amid the swags of Christmas decorations on

the upstairs gallery and the up lighting among the oak trees made the venue very romantic and magical.

Following the ceremony, food was served buffet style on the front patio of the home and also on the long dining table in the formal dining room of the house. Although this was a buffet, the food item formed a traditional meal with pork loin, mashed potatoes and green beans. A carving station, small plates of cheese and crackers and a crawfish pasta dish were set on the main dining table inside the house. A chocolate fountain with small pieces of fruit and sponge cake was also placed on the sideboard in the main dining room. A gumbo station was placed on the front gallery and because the evening was very cold, was very popular. There were two bars; one on either side of the gallery. According to southern tradition, there was no toasting. It had been done the night before at the rehearsal dinner, a more private and intimate gathering of family and friends. The couple did their first dance on the upstairs gallery with guests looking up from below. A band from Mobile was positioned on a moveable bandstand to the left of the front patio. The wedding cake and the groom's cake were placed directly on the lower left front gallery. The guests gathered in the front of the home for the cake cutting ceremony. A downstairs restroom, normally screened from public view behind a door in the planter's office, was available for guests, as was the restroom upstairs just off the bedroom. Most of the wait staff working the wedding were local college students working weekends to "make money for school" although two of the main cooks were African American and had worked at Oak Alley for over twenty years. Of all of the plantation venues that I attended, Oak Alley suggested Bourdieu's concept of the "mastery of time" in that the wedding party and their guests had complete access to the home and its furnishings throughout the entire event.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ In *Distinction*, Bourdieu writes, "Legitimate manners owe their value to the fact that they manifest the rarest conditions of acquisition, that is, a social power over time which is tacitly recognized as the supreme excellence, to

Nottoway, the largest remaining plantation in the South, was originally a plantation home built by John Hampden Randolph. An immigrant from Nottoway county in Virginia close to the Nottoway River, Randolph completed his massive home in 1859, using labor of the enslaved after four years of work. Tour guides share a local legend that the home got its name from the enslaved who called “throw the knot away” as they pitched wood with holes aside for quality control of materials used in building the home. Designed by New Orleans architect Henry Howard, Nottoway is architecturally distinct from the other planter residences, some say purposely “indicative of the owner’s desire to build a house that would surpass any other in the state.”⁶⁷ The architectural style blends elements of Neo-classical and Italianate modes incorporating Corinthian columns and Roman-styled arched windows to create an imposing exterior façade split on the second gallery with twin granite curving staircases leading to the ground level. A large front door on the second floor gallery opens into the main wing of the house. The front hallway, twenty feet wide with fifteen foot high ceilings is ornamented with doubled Corinthian columns connecting interior archways and detailed with elaborate moulding. The high ceilings are encircled with frieze work. The interior light fixtures are the original gas lights. Additional wings of the house provided living space for the Randolph’s numerous biological and adopted children. Local historian Anne Butler describes Nottoway:

Sixty-four rooms, 200 windows, and a doorway for each day of the year. 16

fireplaces and 7 interior stairways are enclosed under the original slate roof, a

possess things from the past, i.e. accumulated, crystallized history, aristocratic names and titles, chateaux or ‘stately homes’, paintings and collections, vintage wines and antique furniture, is to master time, though all those things whose common feature is that they can only be acquired in the course of time, by means of time, against time, that is, by inheritance or through dispositions which, like the taste for old things, are likewise only acquired with time and applied by those who can take their time” (71-2).

⁶⁷ W. Darrell Overdyke in *Louisiana Plantation Homes: Colonial and Antebellum*, is not the only researcher to claim that John Hampden Randolph built Nottoway to compete with other planters. Mary Ann Sternberg in *Along the River Road* mentions that competition to “outdo” one another was evident between John Andrews of Belle Grove and Randolph at Nottoway

staggering number of 53,000 square feet in all. Fine red cypress was milled on location for the bulk of the construction. The main hall is 20 feet across with 15-foot ceilings. The formal dining room measures 25 by 35 feet, and the final plaster frieze work around its ceilings, a mixture of mud, clay, horsehair, and moss, highlights the camellias beloved by the original mistress of the house (25).⁶⁸

The floral friezes and medallions inside the home are attributed to “Jeremiah Supple, the Donaldsonville store owner, who worked for Howard on this project” (Sternberg 250). Just off the main hallway is the famous White Ballroom, which includes two hand-carved Corinthian columns, frieze work that circles the entire room, white marble mantels and a solid maple floor. Emily Randolph and several of her children remained in the house through the Civil War while John Randolph moved many of his slaves to continue cotton cultivation in Texas. Another frequently told tour legend relates that the house was saved from destruction by patrolling Union gunboats due a Union officer’s prior connection with the Randolph family. Following the war, the house remained in family possession until John Hampden Randolph’s death made it necessary for Emily Randolph to sell the house at auction in 1889. Following a series of subsequent owners, Nottoway was purchased by Arlin Dease at the suggestion of owner Odessa Owens in 1980. At that time, Dease began an overall restoration of the house and opened it to tourism although he allowed Owens, a widow, permanent occupancy in a private wing of the home. When I interviewed him, Dease, a self-styled preservationist, chuckled when he recounted his experience with the second-floor draperies of the home. According to Dease, he found information on architectural and interior furnishing at Nottoway in Cornelia’s diary. In an interview in *Americana*, Dease relates his attempt to recreate authentic details. He recalls the

⁶⁸ Anne Butler, *Bayou Plantation Country Cookbook*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2006.

“‘silk damask curtains, tied to one side’ in the third-floor center hall that fall the length of the glass and ‘puddle’ on the floor. That extra length was considered a sign of immense wealth, an indication that the owner could afford even more drapery material than was necessary” (59). In 1985, Dease sold Nottoway to Australian entrepreneur Paul Ramsey who has recently converted the plantation into a resort and spa. In 2009, due to damages sustained in Hurricane Gustav, the original slate roof at Nottoway was replaced. Water damage necessitated that several rooms of the house be repainted. At that time, according to the site coordinator who worked there for close to ten years, it became apparent that the many locals were also invested in saving the mansion. To celebrate the 150 year anniversary of Nottoway, Ramsey planned a commemoration with celebrities and locals in attendance. Included in the program was a local African American gospel choir from a neighborhood church and a black minister from another White Castle church was asked to give a benediction. Ramsey’s latest marketing plan promotes Nottoway as destination hotel and resort but the locals I interviewed are skeptical, since the area around Nottoway is remote, rural, and at times, the site of local racial tensions.

As I have noted previously, romantic narratives are told during house tours to connect the weddings of the numerous Randolph daughters specifically to the famed White Ballroom. Images of the White Ballroom at Nottoway permeate tourism literature, making it one of the most photographed interiors in Louisiana heritage tourism. The interview with Dease in the pages of *Americana* offers this description of the room:

One of the most elegant rooms in the house is the white grand ballroom. Everything in the room, including the floor, is painted white. Built for the benefit of the eight Randolph daughters, the ballroom features marble fireplaces, delicate plasterwork, and chandeliers. Although most of the house is constructed of cypress, the dance floor is maple, which was considered the finest surface for dancing. ‘Besides painting and polishing, we’ve had to do very little to the ballroom,’ Dease explains. ‘Most of it is original, right down to the silver servant call bells. (58)

At one point during a recent tour, the female guide mentioned that thirteen coats of white paint used for the startlingly white floor represent thirteen famous balls held in the ballroom during the antebellum period. When I mentioned this to Arlin Dease, he scoffed at the suggestion. However, the connection between the house and overt forms of femininity cannot be overlooked. During our interview, Dease affectionately recalled a tour guide at Nottoway who traced her genealogy to one of Randolph's slaves. With obvious concern and respect for her, Dease suggested that I interview her for answers to questions posed by plantation tourism critics such as Adams. In her critique of plantation tourism, Adams writes:

One of the tour guides at Oak Alley in recent years was a young black woman, costumed in crinolines as a Southern belle. In one sense, this figure takes to its logical extreme the plantation's tour insistence on disregarding the history of slavery. It is almost as if her blackness has simply gone unnoticed. Like her white coworkers, she functions, by virtue of her dress and speech, in part as a surrogate for the white plantation mistress; and in her performance as tour guide, she thereby enacts causes of the white insecurities with which the plantation tour is so intimately involved, as a black woman plays a role that whites have so desperately guarded. At the same time, however, she can be seen as a house servant. Finally, I would suggest that her identity is not really white nor is it exactly black; it is potentially mistress as well as servant. Her position is more subversive than either of these singular identities permits. The black woman in crinolines cannot be understood simply as servant or mistress – instead, she is a kind of quadroon figure created through tourist performance and embodying racial slippage. (176)

While I with disagree Adams' racialized criticism of plantation tourism, I do approve of her assessment of the plantation home "as feminized space." Adams maintains, "tourism within this feminized region is not so much about an erotics of space, however, instead, the figurative woman that we enter as tourists is intended to function more as an architectural manifestation of 'pure' womanhood" ("Local Color" 170). A central strategy of heritage tourism at Nottoway

operates by conflating the antebellum southern belles with contemporary brides. This is apparent in the promotion literature at Nottoway that markets The White Ballroom as “Breathtaking, with over 150 years of Wedding Tradition.”⁶⁹

I interviewed a previous site coordinator who worked at Nottoway for over ten years and present site coordinator at Nottoway who started working as a tour guide and is now the primary site coordinator. The original site coordinator recalls that over the years, she saw a change in the type of bride who married at Nottoway. During her ten year tenure there, brides increasingly had more money to spend. When she left, she was averaging around fifty weddings a year. These weddings drew around one hundred guests, and as Ramsey expanded Nottoway from a bed & breakfast to a hotel, many of the couples stayed in rooms in the mansion, in the garçonnière, and in the overseer’s cottage. An occasional celebrity requesting privacy set the stage for Nottoway as a destination venue. When I asked if African American brides chose the venue, she remarked when the bride came on site to view the venue, she could tell if the accompanying father, aunt, cousin or friend was bitter about the historical associations with slavery. She did few black weddings. As she stated in our interview, “The number of black weddings I did - you could count on one hand.” In her opinion, the black brides that choose Nottoway as their venue were not living in Louisiana and often came from large cities in Texas or from Atlanta although she acknowledged that they may have lived in Louisiana at one time. The original coordinator convinced Ramsey to add amenities such as a bridal dressing room. She also encouraged him to build a brick walkway in the front of the house but the area still remains unpaved and grassy today. For the ceremony, she positioned the bride and groom on the front gallery with the attendants fanning out on both sides of the curving granite staircases. With the female attendants on one side and men on the other, the wedding guests, seated in chairs on the lawn below, could

⁶⁹ See <<http://www.nottoway.com/html/wedding-ceremonysites.htm>>

“see and hear everything.” She felt that most of her brides wanted to use the staircases to maximize the structural beauty of the house. She also stated that many brides chose Nottoway because of her ability to sell the place. She told brides, “I am going to be here to take care of everything for you while you are there – and when you come here, it will all be done in this beautiful, romantic place.” While she worked at Nottoway, she encouraged small weddings in the White Ballroom and suggested that larger weddings be held outside in front of the home. In 2010, she noted, Ramsey “headed in a corporate direction” by hiring a New York resort planner. According to this young woman, the resort planner is not successful because he doesn’t understand southern ways. She stated sadly, “He just doesn’t get Southern hospitality.” Currently, two young women manage the weddings at Nottoway. Ramsey hired a high profile wedding coordinator who worked with celebrity planner Mindy Weiss in Los Angeles but she left after having a baby and has no plans to return. The current site coordinator disclosed that ninety-five percent of the weddings at Nottoway are destination weddings which include the new elopement package. She divulged that “Weddings keep us afloat.”

I attended a wedding at Nottoway on December 3, 2011 as the guest of the photographers. When I arrived on site, the groom was waiting in the White Ballroom for the staged “First Look.” After taking pictures of the couple, their family and attendants, the photographers took the bride and groom up on the levee overlooking the house. Despite the slight sprinkle of rain, the bride and groom stayed on the levee for series of posed pictures taken with the house in various angles in the background. During the session, the photographer encouraged the couple to look at their house, suggesting a type of ownership in the home. Just as at Oak Alley, the sense of “mastering time” is suggested.

Approximately one half hour before the ceremony, the bride returned to her dressing room to “freshen up” before the ceremony. During that time, it rained but cleared up just as guests began to arrive and in time for the brief wedding to take place. The bride was driven from the bridal dressing area at the back of the site to the front gates where she and her father walked through the large white gates and processed into the ceremony site. For this ceremony at Nottoway, the couple stood in the grassy area called “The Front Lawn” between the descending stairways with their bridal attendants fanned out on either side. The parents and wedding guests were seated on each side of the grassy aisle. The bride’s parents were divorced but the step-mother was escorted into the ceremony immediately following the bride’s mother who was escorted by her new husband, the bride’s step-father. As a sign of cooperative family dynamics in this group, the bride and groom included a “Special Thank You” in the printed program to the step-mother for her help and support in planning the wedding. During the ceremony, I sat beside the bride’s step-mother’s mother who shared with me that since she was a young girl, it was the bride’s dream to marry at Nottoway and her daughter, the step-mother, had helped to make this possible. As noted previously, I term her a “Cinderella bride.” In keeping with the transformative theme, an earlier advertisement for Nottoway reads “Every castle needs a Queen . . .” This wedding information packet from 2010 – 2011 provides buffet reception packages with food and beverage minimums starting at \$10,000/\$8,000 on Friday nights ranging from \$75.00 to \$130.00 per person and \$12,000 to \$10,000 on Saturday nights. Wedding seated dinners range between \$85.00 and \$95.00 per person for a choice of fish, steak or chicken entrees. With the exception of the wedding cake, all food and beverages must be purchased through Nottoway. An additional charge of \$7.00 per person is required for the on-site wedding ceremony.

In contrast to the use of the house museum during the wedding at Oak Alley, the wedding guests at Nottoway were restricted to the White Ballroom. Before the ceremony, the site coordinator brought water for the wedding party into the White Ballroom but there was no food present, and guests were only allowed in the hallway and in the White Ballroom. However, the site coordinator disclosed that the White Ballroom was available for small, intimate private dinners. In this way, Nottoway is similar to Houmas House as both venues maintain on-site restaurants and employ noted chefs. At this wedding, the reception was held in the new Cypress Pavilion, a recently constructed brick banquet hall that looked much like the Pavilion at Houmas House. One of three banquet facilities on site, the newest is the smallest. Located at the right side of the house and not visible from the main road, the banquet hall is situated beside a small pond with a bridge overlooking the water. The Christmas lights in the trees and around the bridge create additional photography options for the couple. The traditional Southeastern Louisiana food was served buffet style in the main hall of reception area. At this wedding, the only signifier of local identity was the food. The dining room was a combination dance floor and eating area. The wedding cake was positioned in front of the windows of this room. This set-up reminds me of John Folse's banquet area at White Oak Plantation, only much smaller. At the same time of this wedding reception, a large corporate dinner in the restaurant located on the bottom floor of the home was serving over two hundred guests. Due to the carefully constructed site design, however, guests or attendees of the two parties did not intersect. The Nottoway website suggests several other ceremony sites in addition to The White Ballroom. These are listed on the webpage as "Under the Oaks" or "Under the Live Oaks next to the Mansion," the "Fountain Garden Courtyard" described as "Beside the Romantic Fountain and Mansion" or "The Pavilion"

depicted as “A covered open-air alternative (heated & air conditioned) that can be dressed as simply or as elaborately as your imagination allows.”

In an area of West Feliciana Parish, in what is still known as the Florida Parishes, Greenwood Plantation, built between 1830 and 1835 by William Ruffin Barrow, the son of William Barrow, was part of a dynasty that connected families throughout the area. Originally, the Barrows migrated to Louisiana from North Carolina in the later 1790’s in search of new lands. In his family history, William Barrow Floyd observes that when Olivia Ruffin Barrow, a widow, moved to Louisiana, she and her numerous children chose a predominantly English enclave set close to be apart from the French and Spanish territory. The Barrow family plantation initially settled on Highland Plantation as the base for their agricultural endeavors. Following the West Florida Rebellion in 1810, several Barrow offspring established landholdings and became noted for their agricultural production throughout the Lower Mississippi Valley region. Barrow family members intermarried frequently. William’s sister, Martha married Daniel Turnbull of Rosedown which is the site of the Interpretive Ranger’s reenacted wedding of daughter Sarah Turnbull to James Pirie Bowman. Other descendants of the Barrow family are connected to Locust Grove, Prospect, Rosedown, Deer Run, Solitaire, Rosebank, and Afton Villa plantations. Robert Ruffin Barrow, according to the family historian, was the wealthiest member of the family owning over 21,000 acres in Terrebonne Parish alone. His net worth in 1860 was estimated at \$1,607,000.00 just before the advent of the war.⁷⁰

Robert Barrow’s younger brother, however, was responsible for the construction of Greenwood. In conjunction with architect James Coulter, William Ruffin Barrow’s architectural achievement is described by local historian Anne Butler:

⁷⁰ See William Barrow Floyd, *The Barrow Family of Old Louisiana*. Lexington, KY: 1963.

The massive result was Greenwood, called the finest example of Greek Revival architecture in the South, nearly 100 feet square and completely surrounded by 28 huge Doric columns of slave-made brick supporting a solid copper roof. A 70-foot central hallway was flanked by spacious rooms with 14 foot ceilings on the first and second floors, while the third-floor attic was topped by a rooftop belvedere from which Barrow could survey his lands and look out as far as the Mississippi River several miles away. (184).⁷¹

Photographed by Louisiana photographer Clarence John Laughlin for *Ghosts along the Mississippi: The Magic of the Old Houses of Louisiana*, Greenwood is architecturally distinct among the large plantation homes. As Laughlin observes, these distinctions occur in the missing gallery off the second floor; the porch-level placement of the columns; the addition of entablature displaying “mutules, triglyphs and guttae” usually absent in southern Louisiana construction and lastly, plaster over lath instead of brick walls (Plate 43). During the Civil War, the home was used a hospital and was eventually restored by Frank and Naomi Fisher Percy in the first decade of the 1900’s. Greenwood was struck by lightning on August 1, 1960 and subsequently burned to the ground. Only the 28 Doric columns remained. The house was rebuilt according to research done by Richard Barnes and his father. Now it is a private home available for tours and weddings. Nearby, the addition of a twelve-room bed and breakfast facility facilitates destination weddings as the property is some distance outside of the town of St. Francisville. The brochure encourages tourists to “Discover the Experience” of “the legacy, the setting, the style, the charm” by promising that “it all comes together in a place to savor, enjoy, remember and revisit.” Two antebellum-gowned women in the photograph disclose that Greenwood was selected as Madeline Fabray LeMotte Main’s house in the popular television mini-series *North and South*.

In my interview with the site coordinator at Greenwood, she related that the potential for employment in St. Francisville is extremely limited. Additionally, the post-Katrina jump in land

⁷¹ Anne Butler. *Audubon Plantation Country Cookbook*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2004.

prices resulted in many young people leaving the area. She states “we don’t have anything but beauty to offer our young people.” Therefore, jobs for area locals are hard to come by and Greenwood maintains a very small staff. Greenwood typically averages eighteen weddings a year but in the months of March, April, May and October, they may have one every weekend. For weddings of over one hundred guests, the site fee for the use of the house and surrounding grounds is \$50.00/person and includes an overnight room for the bride and groom at the bed and breakfast. For brides who choose to self-cater, there is an additional \$3.00/person fee. Included in the fee, the staff at Greenwood arranges the outdoor set-up of tables and ceremony chairs, and provides basic white linens. Smoking is allowed outside the house but not inside. Between one hundred and fifty to two hundred guests are typically invited to a Greenwood wedding. Only on infrequent occasions have the number of attendees exceeded three hundred people. On the day of the wedding, the bride is allowed to enter the site by 9:00 in the morning. The coordinator allows three and one-half hours for the wedding and reception. The rehearsal is included in the price. Greenwood has the least expensive site fee of all the plantation sites. The coordinator states that most of their weddings are destination weddings with brides coming predominantly from Texas although she recalls brides from a variety of other states.

At the wedding that I attended at Greenwood in October, 2011, the bride and groom were a local couple from Denham Spring. The actual wedding ceremony took place under several large oaks trees in the front of the house. About one hundred and twenty-five guests were seated facing the grove of large oaks with chairs set in rows on either side of a center aisle. The late arrivals stood at the back of the ceremony site. The family members met in the main parlor of the home before the wedding. The bride and her attendants dressed in a second floor bedroom. Just before the wedding procession, the bride came down the stairs alone from the upstairs area,

catching her dress on one of the stair rails. Leaving the bride alone just before the ceremony is not a good idea. Victor Turner argues in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, life-crisis rites are “punctuated by a number of critical moments of transition which all societies ritualize and publically mark with suitable observations to impress the significance of the individual and the group on living members of the community” (168). Dresses tear, shoes break, bouquets explode and in a hundred other ways, many brides get “the nerves.” This vulnerability is marked by literally hundreds of superstitions that determine the bride’s actions as she prepares to cross the threshold.⁷² However, once this bride was detached from the rail, her father met her at the bottom of the stairs and escorted her into the ceremony. The minister’s familial association with the bride was apparent as it was the type of ceremony that offered audience rapport and religious support for the couple. The couple participated in a sand ceremony, a new addition to the ritual somewhat like the unity candle that became popular in the 1980’s. In this ceremony, the groom, the bride and her seven year-old son each added a vial of sand into a larger container to represent the new family created by the ceremony. Just as the unity candle may be taken home to serve as a reminder of the wedding, the sand container (when done aesthetically) may serve in a similar manner.

Following the brief ceremony, the bridal party and family members took photographs in the main parlor while the guests proceeded to the dining room inside the house for the food service. Guests at Greenwood are allowed to eat inside the home. For this wedding, the bar area was positioned outside in what the coordinator described as the old kitchen. This brick building was not connected to the house and appeared to be new construction. There were also tables and

⁷² For a brief listing of American superstitions for brides, see Martha Warren Beckwith, “Signs and Superstitions Collected from American College Girls.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 36 (1923): 9 – 13; Lela Allison, “Folk Beliefs Collected in Southeastern Illinois.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 63 (1950): 309 – 324; and F. W. Waugh, “Folk-Lore from Grey County, Ontario.” *The Journal of American Folklore* (1918).

chairs placed outside in the back courtyard centered around an ancient oak tree for eating and dancing. The wedding cake and the groom's cake were displayed and cut in the gentlemen's parlor. Parking was allowed on the gravel road leading to the house with overflow spaces available between the family cemetery and the road. Guests had access to the entire downstairs for eating and drinking, including the use of indoor restroom facilities. This venue is far less formal than Houmas House, Nottaway or Oak Alley but much more private than these other plantation sites due to the remote setting of the house.

In March, 2009, I coordinated a wedding at Magnolia Mound Plantation in Baton Rouge. Saved from destruction by the Foundation for Historic Louisiana, the plantation of Napoleon's nephew, Charles Louis Napoléon Achille Murat sits close to the campus of Louisiana State University. The house is celebrated for its vernacular architecture based on the Raised French Creole style with a wide gallery extending on three sides. Named Magnolia Mound due to the profusion of magnolia trees located around the house, the plantation home was acquired by the city of Baton Rouge in 1966. Just for an opportunity to coordinate one wedding a semester I advertised online and a young woman graduate from Louisiana State University in law school at Yale responded to my email. The bride was originally from Houma and her groom was from Virginia. I did not meet this bride personally until two weeks before her ceremony but her mother contacted me and arranged a meeting approximately one month before the wedding. Coordinators are often hired for what is known as "day-of." The bridal industry is moving to change this to "month of" due to misconceptions on the part of brides who think that they can hire a coordinator just for the wedding day. Not only is the term highly problematic but also the mindset behind it. With the average cost of a wedding between \$30,000 and \$40,000 dollars, brides often sign numerous contracts. It is important for the wedding coordinator to read through

the contracts and to make a detailed itinerary of the day. Once the bride has agreed to the schedule, it is either faxed or emailed to each vendor. Once the vendor receives the itinerary, I ask that he or she ‘sign off’ on it to prevent any “errors and omissions.” I feel that it is an important part of coordinating to read each contract, to personally contact each vendor and to encourage a communicative and informed team working together on the day of the wedding. Most vendors appreciate having one blueprint of the day as they are aware that it prevents confusion and the potential for errors. In the decade that I have been coordinating weddings, I have met very few vendors who purposely venture off from the set itinerary.

For this wedding, the bride chose a church ceremony in the local Methodist Church on the Louisiana State University campus followed by a reception in the Pavilion at Magnolia Mound. When I met with the bride, we went through all of her contracts and developed her itinerary. Because she had a caterer and a live band using the same loading area, I attached a detailed drawing of the Pavilion, a recent open-sided barn-like construction, with information on how the caterer and the band should enter and set up. The drawing, called a site map, reveals the number and location of parking spaces, the location and wattage of electrical plugs, restrooms, the kitchen equipment already on site, and the location, expected time of arrival and contact number of the person designated to open the locked gates. There is also a complete listing of telephone, fax and cell numbers to facilitate communication between each of the vendors in case I am temporarily unavailable for questions. Interestingly, security was an issue at the reception site. Large chain-link fencing over six feet tall enclosed the entire property. All of the entry gates in the back area of the plantation were padlocked. As part of the contract, the bride had to hire her own security guard, and once the caterer and the band were unloaded and inside, the gates had to be relocked. I met the bride and her family on the morning of the wedding to set up the reception

site. In an effort to save money, the bride made all of her floral arrangements in Mason jars, Depression glass cups, teapots and china vases that belonged to her recently deceased grandmother. Her father and brother strung large round white twinkle lights in the rafters of the pavilion and her mother, sister and family friends hung Mason jars for candleholders in the large oak trees that surround the reception site. We set the cake table with her grandmother's cake plates on a large round table under the trees. Instead of a traditional wedding cake, red velvet cakes, German chocolate cakes, and coconut cakes were ordered from a local bakery. The cake toppers were two wooden elephants with long slender carved tusks. Tables and chairs in the covered pavilion provided seating for guests to eat and watch the dancing. Several areas outside of the Pavilion were marked off with wooden signs encouraging the guests to "Picnic" on quilts placed on the grass. A photo booth made with a quilted backdrop, funny hats, hand-held moustaches and other props was positioned in one corner of the Pavilion. By using her grandmother's personal china and family quilts, the bride was connecting to previous generations of women in her family.

The traditional southeastern Louisiana food for this wedding included shrimp balls fried in a portable deep fryer in the back of the Pavilion as was the fried catfish. Large serving dishes on the buffet tables contained jambalaya, potato salad and green salad. Interestingly, there was no crawfish present at this wedding, although gumbo with rice was served. As the couple entered the reception area, they jumped over a decorated household broom. Just as many African Americans jump the broom as part of their wedding ritual, jumping the broom is often part of the wedding reception at Cajun weddings.⁷³

⁷³ In my research on jumping the broom as part of a wedding ritual, I uncovered Canadians in Nova Scotia who also jump the broom as part of wedding ritual. As the ritual is a Scot-Irish besom wedding, it is reasonable to claim that Scots settlers that came to Nova Scotia (New Scotland) in 1628 with Sir. William Alexander brought the tradition with them. Living in proximity to the Scottish settlers, the original Acadians, many of which were indentured



Illustration 4.8. Jumping the Broom. Courtesy of Bray Danielle Photography.

When I asked the students in my folklore class, many recalled seeing couples jump the broom at Cajun weddings of family members or friends. They also shared another broom tradition. If a younger sister is the first to marry, the older brother is required to dance with a broom during the reception. Here the broom is a symbol of domesticity and through the properties of sympathetic magic, the hope is that the elder son will be “exposed” to marriage.⁷⁴ For the wedding at

servants, may have borrowed the tradition during the century before the British expulsion of the Acadians in 1755. For more on the history and origins of Acadian settlement in Louisiana, see Barry Jean Ancelet, Jay Edwards, and Glen Pitre, *Cajun Country*. Jackson and London: U Press Mississippi, 1991.

⁷⁴ I view dancing with the broom as an example of the dual nature of sympathetic magic. As Frazer observes in *The Golden Bough*, “on the principle that like produces like” the elder son, following the example of his younger sibling, will choose an imitative course of action which is marriage. In terms of contagious magic, as Frazer writes, “things which have once been conjoined must remain ever afterwards” so the fertility connected with the broom must

Magnolia Mound, the couple hired a Zydeco band to play for the reception. As noted previously, music is one way to perform identity. Toward the end of the evening, the band played a traditional jazz funeral song for the bride and her new family to “second line.” In New Orleans tradition, the jazz band playing for the funeral is the first or main line while those following behind and not playing instruments, twirl parasols, umbrellas or wave handkerchiefs as they follow the musicians.

Thus, contemporary weddings held on plantation venues in Louisiana demonstrate that the plantation mystique resonates with images connecting antebellum history and heritage to the present. The architectural landscape reflects the power of the antebellum sugar barons in dominating Louisiana history and culture. When I first began this project, I assumed that previous racial and caste hierarchies would still be in place. However, as more brides, African American women included, respond to the prevalent marketing images of the plantation previously rigid racial and caste hierarchies are being overturned.

similarly affect the older sibling. See Chapter III: Sympathetic Magic (pp. 11 – 45) for more on the principles of magic enumerated by Frazer in his study of magic and religion.

Afterword

As evident in the reenacted wedding at Rosedown on that sunny April afternoon in 2010, the figure of the belle and her plantation wedding is an image etched into the public imagination. The Turnbull/Bowman wedding is exemplary of the oft-recurring trope of the plantation wedding that pervades the post-bellum plantation imaginary and resonates in popular images of the plantation as a space of “moonlight and magnolia” romance. As the yellow taffeta figure of the bride in the reenacted wedding suggests, the presence of a hoop-skirted belle is a visible reminder of carefully articulated concepts of southern femininity. This repetitive manifestation of white, idolized southern grace, hospitality and charm is a resurrection of the southern woman on a pedestal derived from nostalgic accounts of the Old South. These images of whiteness, trapped in the plantation imaginary, are highly gendered, mythologized and romanticized representations of the real women who inhabited southern plantations. The plantation bridal belle is a recurrent reproduction that recycles repeatedly through historical and fictional texts.

To separate wedding fact from wedding fiction, I have attempted to recoup the voices of real Louisiana women in my first chapter. As their life writings attest, women viewed weddings as important events within the family and the community. This was also true for the enslaved on Louisiana plantation as the long-silent voices confirm in my second chapter. As my research reveals, despite civic laws prohibiting slave marriages, at least five different types of wedding ritual were practiced among the enslaved on Louisiana plantations. However, even committed relationships sanctioned by a ritual performance could be disrupted by any number of external factors, especially the marriage of a young master or mistress or the death of the master. Moreover, as I point out in my chapter on fictional texts, we must “read” the racial inscriptions

placed on the bride's body by nineteenth and twentieth century authors as signifiers of the numerous social and class distinctions between elite southern white and enslaved black women. Additionally, the fictional wedding ceremony, literally and figuratively, becomes a locus of civic law, either sanctioning southern white male power over women and property, or at times, consigning the body of the black female to a future of vulnerability and exposure.

In the reenacted wedding at Rosedown, there is no mention of slavery, no family slaves participating or observing the ritual and few African American tourists in the audience. This absence of color supports what Tara McPherson claims as “our national inability to conceptualize what racial contact might even look like” as she critiques heritage tourism and popular culture to observe that the current plantation imaginary is a space of whiteness only.¹ As part of the project of eradicating slavery from Louisiana plantation heritage tourism, Jessica Adams asserts that “there has been a trend toward the deliberate effacement of the history of slavery at sites where slaves lived, labored, and died, from plantation houses to burial grounds.”² Certainly this is true of the River Road, St. Francisville and Natchez plantation estates where most of the discussion of Louisiana slavery and consideration of slave culture occurs on state-operated plantation sites or is moved to the margins or non-existent on privately owned locations. For Eisenstedt and Small, these plantation “museums” offer “strategic rhetorics” which “are a part of a racialized regime of representation that valorizes the white elite of the pre-emancipation South while generally erasing or minimizing the experiences of the enslaved African Americans” (2). Of the thirty-nine Louisiana plantation sites visited by Eisenstedt and

¹ Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. P. 6.

² Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation*. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2007.

Small, only one plantation offered insights into the slave system. Four plantations offered a separate tour to explain slavery. The remaining plantation sites were split between rhetorical strategies that the authors term “Symbolic annihilation” and “Trivialization and deflection.”³ The meaning of the categories is readily apparent. However, in contrast to the historical accounts of enslaved women presented in my second chapter or the empathetic figure of the fictional tragic mulatta discussed in my third chapter, my fieldwork for the fourth chapter discloses the recently developing trend of African American brides in reclaiming the Louisiana plantation. In spite of the contested nature of the plantation terrain, a small but steadily increasing number of African American brides are now choosing Louisiana plantation venues for their destination weddings.

As I argue in Chapter Four, the plantation is marketed to contemporary brides through the plantation mystique. Marking what may be considered as the initial step in overturning previously entrenched racial and caste hierarchies, African American brides are consciously appropriating the traditionally white image of the southern belle to achieve the wedding of their dreams. In an article appearing in the January 2012 edition of *Country Roads*, staff writer Dale Irvin relates the “do-over” wedding of African American bride, Patrice Johnson of Prairieville whose wedding day was ruined by a migraine: “On my wedding day I woke up and started having symptoms. Migraines don’t care that it’s your wedding day,” she recalls vividly. “That day I was going through the motions, trying to be the Southern Belle even though I was dying inside.” She won a chance to “Rewrite Your Day,” a contest sponsored by the National Headache Foundation “offering a chance for people who’d had a major event in their lives ruined by a migraine, to have a ‘do-over’” (9). California event planner-to-the-Hollywood-stars, Mindy

³ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small. *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*. Washington; Smithsonian Institution p, 2002. P. 18 – 19.

Weiss worked with Johnson and her husband to renew their vows at Mt. Hope Plantation in Baton Rouge on Dec. 14, 2011. In “The Do-Over,” Irwin describes the ceremony and reception “that took its cues from all the things Patrice had shared with Weiss, including a bold pink and purple color scheme that reflected Johnson’s favorite flower – the Stargazer Lily” (*Ibid*). Through this example and the increasing frequency of African American destination weddings on Louisiana plantation venues as noted in Chapter Four, I suggest that the plantation is in a transition phase.

Richard Sexton, in his photographic exploration of Louisiana River Road plantations, outlines four distinct periods of historical transition. During the antebellum period, Sexton maintains, the plantation houses were built and “served their initial purpose as grand, showy residences and seats of business for the affluent planter families.”⁴ Following the financial demise of many planters in the Reconstruction period, many of the personal homes were sold for taxes. Sexton terms this period “postbellum utilitarianism,” a time where “diminished resources fostered a certain enforced gratitude for the presence of substantial and desirable shelter” (234). During the decades between the 1920’s and the 1930’s during what Sexton terms the “nadir of the historic architecture of the River Road,” the Great Flood of 1927 and the Great Depression created insurmountable obstacles and many plantations were sold due to high cost of upkeep and continued maintenance. Many of these “rehabilitated country estates” reflected “the needs of a more endowed socioeconomic class” (238). However, currently due to “the expense of rehabilitation and encroachment by the emerging petrochemical industry,” Sexton argues that the “River Road landscape . . . is at a critical crossroads.” According to Sexton, the plantation has transitioned to a period where “[c]ultural tourism has emerged as an

⁴ Richard Sexton, *Vestiges of Grandeur: The Plantations of Louisiana’s River Road*. San Francisco; Chronicle Books, 1999.

economic force and a source of employment, and money can be made by offering the experience of plantation architecture to a public eagerly seeking a viable connection to its past” (241). Thus, from Sexton’s viewpoint and those of his fellow preservationists, Louisiana plantation sites are architectural treasures that are in jeopardy and must be preserved. But preservation, restoration and maintenance are costly processes. Ironically, the highly romanticized marketing of plantation wedding venues ultimately results in funds to “preserve” these sites. In several instances, site and reception fees received from plantation weddings supplement the insufficient monies generated by tourism and play a determining role in the continued viability of these venues.

Today, romanticized images of plantation weddings abound throughout popular culture. I conclude this study with three recent examples of on-going engagements with the plantation as a site for a wedding that move this work into the present. Last fall, I received an email from a colleague sharing a conversation that she had with an area resident who mentioned emulating the legendary golden trees of Pine and Oak Alley Plantation on her family plantation for her daughter’s spring wedding. Stephanie Durand, a direct descendant of Monsieur Charles Durand, the “Loving Father” described in the legend tells this story on her website:

It seems that just after the Civil War, two of the Durand daughters became engaged at the same time: Marie Lucille Heloise Durand to James E. Mouton, and Corrine Marie Philomene Durand to Zachary Fournet. The proud father promised his daughters the most beautiful, elegant, and unusual wedding ever seen in Louisiana. To fulfill his promise, as the romantic (and perhaps embellished) tale is told, he ordered a million spiders sent from China and sent by courier to California to fetch hundreds of pounds of silver and gold dust. Shortly before the wedding day, the spiders were set loose and soon had spun millions of yard of delicate webs among the limbs and mosses of the oak and pine trees leading to the mansion. On the morning of the wedding, May 21, 1870, servants armed with bellows filled the silver and gold dusts sprayed the cobweb canopy to set it glittering in the sunlight like something from a fairy tale. Other servants placed elegant carpets beneath the trees, leading to an open-air altar. Tables set between the trees overflowed with rich food and drink, served by as many servants as Durand could muster. Musicians played from hidden spots up and down the avenue. Two thousand guests attended the marriage ceremony. Toasts, dancing,

laughter, and song lasted until dusk, when a steamboat chugged up Bayou Teche to take the newlyweds to New Orleans honeymoons.⁵

This widespread account of the Durand daughters' wedding is the most fabulous of depiction of wealth found in historical accounts of antebellum plantation weddings. In this fabricated legend, planter superiority and aristocracy mingle to create a spectacular illusion of luxury and economic status. As the legend intimates, Reconstruction-era Louisiana was civilized through French Creole aristocratic, imaginative display and the war-devastated New Eden was ablaze with unlimited possibilities. With so much dispensable wealth at his fingertips, the planter converted an agricultural venture into a landscape of exotic extravagance. Based on the number of people who have shared this story with me along with the wide circulation in print sources, this local legend speaks to popular concepts of the plantation wedding as a space of celebrated excess. While there is no extant plantation home to mark the landscape as a reminder of Charles Durand's prosperity, his legendary actions remain very much alive.

Additionally, the plantation wedding maintains a prominent position in recent films. *Jumping the Broom* ((2011) and *Sweet Home, Alabama* (2002) contrast images of the plantation presented in the dialogic metanarrative space created between Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and Alex Haley's *Roots*. *Jumping the Broom* opens with a photomontage of African American bridal couples in wedding attire patterned after the Harlem wedding photographs of James Van Der Zee. First-time director Salim Akil depicts the wedding of Sabrina Watson and Jason Taylor on the Watson family estate in Martha's Vineyard. In the film, the plantation is owned by upwardly mobile African Americans whose ancestors were black slaveholders. As one of the black wedding guest's comments on seeing the lavish estate, "they got white people

⁵ Stephanie Durand. "Durand History: Pine and Oak Alley 'Gold Dust Wedding.'" May 17, 2010. <<http://durandhistory.blogspot.com/2010/05/pine-and-oak-alley.html>.>

working here.” Situations portraying racial role reversals occur repeatedly throughout the film. One of the first of several conflicts between the two merging families concerns the wedding ritual of jumping the broom. The groom’s mother, Mrs. Taylor, a postal clerk, views jumping the broom as the “only way the slaves could show their union.” However, the class-conscious modern couple initially opts for elegance instead of following in traditional footsteps. Thus, in this film, jumping the broom initially becomes a signifier of ties to a middle-class black community. Throughout the film, markers of middle and upper-class black culture collide and rebound, adding the tensions of class conflict to a traditional wedlock plot. At one point in the film, the groom’s mother pushes aside the caviar and asks for greens and neck bones to be served at the rehearsal dinner. In several comic scenes in the film, the bumbling and racially naive white wedding planner comments on variations of skin color among the family. From her viewpoint, one is “milk chocolate and the other is mocha.” At the end of the film, as a sign of conciliation to the groom’s problematic mother, the couple does jump the broom she used in her wedding. During the last scenes in the film, the couple performs traditional vows. Immediately following the final benediction, as they turn to leave the ceremony site, the coordinator puts the heirloom broom down in front of them and they jump over it on their way down the aisle. Thus, the community created by the wedding on this cinematic plantation melds together two types of African American ancestry into one modern yet traditional couple.

Sweet Home Alabama is a Cinderella tale of a “white trash” girl from Pigeon Creek, Alabama who goes to New York and makes it big in the fashion industry. The opening lines of the film spew “southernisms” as Melanie is described as “a little debutante right off the plantation” but, as her design mentor observes, she is his “steel magnolia.” “Always the belle of the ball,” she is an overnight fashion sensation and snags a prince. As outlined in Nina Silber’s *Romance of the*

Reunion, the main plot of post-war fiction depicts a southern girl who marries a Northern man. In this film, the Northern man is Andrew Hennings, the politically aspiring son of the female Mayor of New York. But before Melanie Carmichael, the heroine, can marry her prince, she has to divorce her childhood sweetheart. It seems that this Dixie sweetheart's redneck husband got drunk at their wedding, "puked" on her dress and then "slept it off at the Travelodge." Instead of being "born into one of the wealthiest families in Greenville, Alabama" into "cotton and all that it implies" the fashionista is really Melanie Smooter whose parents live in a doublewide trailer and whose father lives to participate in Civil War reenactments. Following his fiancé to her hometown, Andrew uncovers her true identity but determines to marry her anyway. The only suitable location for the wedding is the Carmichael Plantation whose name Melanie has coopted for her own. Halfway down the aisle, she discovers that she has not signed the divorce papers and is still married to her first love. Responding to her father's proverbial assessment, "You can't ride two horses with one ass, sugar beet," she decides not to marry Andrew. More "Southernisms" and verbal bantering follow in quick succession. When the Mayor commands Melanie's mother to "Go back to your doublewide and fry something," Melanie punches her because "Nobody talks to my Momma like that." The wedding guests join in the rousing response: "Praise the Lord, the South has risen again." In this film, as a metonym of the conquered South, the wedding belle has lady-punched her way out of defeat.

Throughout this project, I have presented variations on the thematic union of the belle and her wedding on her family plantation. These discursive modes refer to specific points in time and establish historical precedents for white and black women's weddings on Louisiana plantations. Moreover, as I have shown, the fictional imagination informs the history of memory and the Louisiana plantation today remains a landscape of nostalgia for the past. Part of that past

romanticizes the plantation as a space of imagined whiteness but there are small ripples on the pool of memory that may signal changes ahead. While I have suggested that the plantation is in a stage of transition, the social role of the plantation wedding may also be in transition. What remains to be seen is whether future brides will continue to overthrow the racial and class hierarchies embedded in our collective memory. How will the plantation and plantation tourism adapt to the challenges posed by critics of visual segregation as we move into the future? Furthermore, how will weddings adapt to challenges of their performance of heteronormative romantic love in the future? This remains to be seen as the strong link between the belle and her plantation wedding march into the future, together, hand in hand.

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