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Anxiety and Orange Blossoms: Sexual Economics in Wedding Texts by Grace Lumpkin, Eudora Welty, and Alice Childress.

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ANXIETY AND ORANGE BLOSSOMS:  
SEXUAL ECONOMICS IN WEDDING TEXTS  
BY GRACE LUMPKIN, EUDORA WELTY, AND ALICE CHILDRESS

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  
Ida Maxwell Wells  
B.A., Mississippi College, 1970  
M.A., Louisiana State University Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1990  
May 2000
With much love and deep thanks
to Mom
who always taught me to follow my dreams
and
to my cousins McMains
who made it possible for me to follow this one
"When they were married, there were just ten people in the church, including the wedding party, of the hundred who had been invited. . . . That was the other half of the reason for Ellen's tears. . . . But Sutpen wanted it. He wanted, not the anonymous wife and the anonymous children, but the two names, the stainless wife and the unimpeachable father-in-law, on the license, the patent. . . .

Ellen went through the rehearsal, but afterward the aunt took her home in a state very near hysteria, though by the next day it had become just quiet intermittent weeping again. There was some talk even of putting the wedding off. . . .

"For a time Ellen walked out of the weeping, the tears, and so into the church. It was empty yet save for your grandfather and grandmother and perhaps a half dozen more who might have come out of loyalty to the Coldfields. . . . She seems to have walked out of the church and so into it without any warning whatever. Perhaps she was still moving beneath that pride which would not allow the people inside the church to see her weep. She just walked into it, probably hurrying toward the seclusion of the carriage where she could weep. . . ."

Absalom, Absalom!
William Faulkner
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Jean Hurlbert of the same department generously agreed to be the Dean's Representative for the Final Examination with rather short notice. Students in my Fall 1999 Introduction to Fiction class were interested in and supportive of the project, and several of their ideas are included in the Conclusion. And, finally, Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, who knows more than I could ever hope to learn about American, Southern, and women's literature, has shared that knowledge with exceptional grace and been teacher, friend, and mentor extraordinaire. To all, my deepest thanks.
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ABSTRACT

This study examines how problematic representations of brides reflect anxiety about women's roles in the marriage market of the early twentieth-century United States in Grace Lumpkin's *The Wedding*, Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*, and Alice Childress's *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White*. The study develops a theoretical model of stages young women negotiate in order to participate in the sexual economic process underlying the marriage exchange: initiate, self-fashioner, marriageable woman, bride, wife, and mother. In moving through these stages, the young woman increasingly loses her identity as she fashions herself into the socially-constructed persona "lady," or marriageable woman.

As the young woman becomes a bride, the self-effacement required to become marriageable woman/lady and the self-sacrifice required as wife and mother are represented in the young woman's moving through a series of increasingly dehumanized representations—anticipation, anticipation disrupted, altered corporal and mental states, suspended between old and new lives, self-sacrificed on the marriage altar—until she finally becomes no longer herself, but the objectified, fetishized icon bride. The study also examines the roles of mentors, older women who assist young women through the sexual economic process and who enforce the economy's rigid code of conduct for female behavior which guarantees the groom an unsullied product at the marriage altar. At the altar, the bride literally and figuratively exchanges herself as the fashioned commodity marriageable woman/lady in return for the financial security and social respectability of marriage.
CHAPTER 1
BEAUTY, BRIDES AND BARTER:
GENDER ROLES, SEXUAL ECONOMICS,
AND THE MARRIAGE EXCHANGE

Issues

The inspiration for this study of sexual economics in texts about weddings by Grace Lumpkin, Eudora Welty, and Alice Childress emerged from my reading of two novels by a contemporary of Lumpkin and a mentor of Welty, Katherine Anne Porter. I first noticed a faceless bride and groom repeatedly promenading the deck in Porter’s Ship of Fools (1962) and thought that the honeymooning couple’s isolation from other passengers and lack of identity—they are the only undeveloped characters in the novel—was an interesting portrayal of the danger of losing one’s individuality in the union of marriage. I then noticed that Porter expands this view of marriage, especially insofar as it affects women, in the "Old Mortality" section of Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1939). Porter again portrays marriage as a threat to individuality, especially for women, in the portrayal of dead Aunt Amy, who is held up to her nieces Maria and Miranda as a simultaneously good and bad example of how a young woman should fashion herself, i.e., develop and present herself if she wants to be courted and married. Aunt Amy, who died soon after her wedding, represents the loss of individual identity women incur in having to mold themselves into a standardized ideal of beauty and accomplishment if they wish to participate in the process of courtship and marriage, which in materialist feminist terms can be called the marriage market.
This concept of women's losing their identity in fashioning themselves to participate in the marriage market raised a number of interrelated questions. Beyond the broad definition of the process of courtship and marriage, exactly what is the marriage market? How does it function? Has it changed historically and/or culturally, and, if it has done so, how did it function in Porter's milieu, roughly the first half of the twentieth century in the United States? How necessary was it for young women coming of age in this period to participate in the marriage market? Did the first phase of the women's movement connected with abolition and the second phase centered around suffrage do so little to widen opportunities for women beyond marriage? Was there a standardized ideal of beauty and accomplishment for women connected to the marriage market during this period? How essential was it for a young woman to mold herself into that standardized persona of the marriageable woman/lady if she were not only to participate in the marriage market but also to meet societal expectations of the gender role woman? And, most importantly for this study, did other American women writers besides Porter portray this loss of identity in representations of early twentieth-century brides? If so, how did they express this concept of the brides' loss of self?

In this study, I am using the term "gender role woman" as defined by materialist feminist critics such as Jill Dolan. As Dolan notes:

Materialist feminism deconstructs the mythic subject woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations. . . . It views women as historical subjects whose relation to prevailing social structures is also influenced by race, class, and sexual identification. . . . gender is not innate. . . . [it is] a construct formed to support the structure of the dominant culture. Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes,
an arrangement of relationships that also prescribes sexuality. . . . [and] an expression of gender relationships within a power dynamic. The social relations of sexuality demand compulsory heterosexuality and the constraint of female sexuality. . . . Through a system of social relations, females are fashioned into genderized products that are exchanged on a political economy that benefits men.

In the early twentieth-century United States, the gender role woman is a persona constructed by the white patriarchal power structure into which women must fashion themselves if they wish to participate in the marriage exchange. They must become the objectified commodity, woman, market themselves as this commodity to an appropriate male, and close the deal by marrying in order to achieve financial security and social respectability, which are predominantly available through marriage in the first two decades of the twentieth-century considered in this study.

A number of American women writers have explored the issues of gender roles and the marriage market. Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Zora Neale Hurston, Carson McCullers, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Dorothy West, and Edith Wharton particularly come to mind. And while each of these writers offers one or more texts in which these issues are at some point related to a bride, two novels and a play set in the early part of the twentieth century especially well focus the issues of gender roles and the marriage market in the representation of a bride throughout the work: The Wedding, a novel by Georgia-born labor activist and winner of the annual Gorky Prize for the United States' best labor novel, Grace Lumpkin; Delta Wedding, a novel by Pulitzer Prize-winning Mississippi author Eudora Welty; and Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White, a drama by Obie-winning and Pulitzer-nominated African-American playwright Alice Childress. Many other works
in which brides appear emphasize larger issues of class, race, the more general search for self, regional identity, or a combination of those issues.

Each of the three texts considered in this study concerns a wedding scheduled to take place in one of the years between 1909 and 1923. Lumpkin's *The Wedding* (1939) analyzes events surrounding the 1909 wedding of a young Georgia woman, Jennie Middleton, to a surgeon named Shelley Gregg. Welty's *Delta Wedding* (1945) details the pre-nuptial week and wedding of Dabney Fairchild in the Mississippi Delta in 1923. Childress's *Wedding Band* (written 1966; produced 1972-73; published 1977), set in 1918 South Carolina, centers upon whether or not the long-planned wedding of African-American Julia Augustine to her white lover, Herman, will ever take place.

Each of these texts provides a detailed portrait of a bride anticipating her wedding ceremony, which in American culture is both the legal and cultural marker of a young woman's transition from life with her family or from life on her own to life with a husband. Typically, this rite of passage is celebrated with a civil and/or religious rite which focuses on a joyous, radiant bride surrounded by happy, supportive family and friends. However, in these three texts, virtually every representation of the brides and of their weddings contains elements which disrupt the celebratory nature of the event. These disrupted representations suggest anxiety about the same issues which caught my attention when I read Porter's *Pale Horse*, *Pale Rider*: a general anxiety about the gender role woman in the heterosexual economy of early twentieth-century American culture, and a specific anxiety about
what participation in the marriage market represents for most women in the 1909-1923 time period of the texts’ weddings—an exchange of individual identity and sometimes independence for the financial security and social respectability of marriage.

Although the weddings in the three primary texts considered in this study are relatively contemporaneous, the situations of the authors and the composition dates of the texts could not be more divergent. Lumpkin, who was raised in the post-Civil War plantation culture of South Carolina, became a labor organizer, moved to New York, and peripherally participated in Communism before writing *The Wedding* in 1939. Welty, who left Mississippi only briefly to attend the University of Wisconsin and the Columbia University Graduate School of Business, had returned to her childhood home, devoted herself to writing for a decade, and received honors such as the O. Henry Prize and a Guggenheim Fellowship when she published *Delta Wedding* in 1945. Childress was born and reared in poverty in South Carolina and Harlem and has been one of the few African-American women who had consistently published and produced plays since 1950; *Wedding Band* was written in 1966, first produced in 1972, and published in 1977. Lumpkin’s writing is concerned primarily with union and race issues, Welty’s with concerns of the human heart, and Childress’s with the experiences of African-American women in American culture. Nevertheless, each of these three women devoted one of her primary works to exploring sexual economics in a text centered around a wedding taking place between 1909 and 1923. Why?
The weddings in Lumpkin's *The Wedding*, Welty's *Delta Wedding*, and Childress's *Wedding Band* take place within a fourteen-year span of American history in which women's status in American was changing dramatically. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg observes:

The years immediately preceding and following the First World War saw women's greatest professional visibility and political activism. The number of women receiving advanced degrees and entering the professions reached a peak not to be equaled again until the late 1970s. Neither before nor since have women been so political—and so politically successful. They battled for peace, suffrage, child-labor and protective labor legislation, for birth control and sexual liberation. They encouraged women's participation and leadership in the trade-union movement. They helped to found the NAACP and fought lynching. Flamboyantly, they not only supported but reported the Bolshevik revolutions in Russia, in Germany, and in Hungary. (34)

George Brown Tindall maintains that this period also saw a "revolution in manners and morals" symbolized by the roaring twenties' flappers. This revolution was characterized by "an active disdain for . . . old-fashioned rural-small-town-values" which was demonstrated in novels such as Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922) and Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929). The period was also characterized by "an obsession with sex" which was derived both from rebellion against Victorian sexual codes and from the popularization of the theories of Sigmund Freud. Tindall notes:

The most pervasive change brought by the new moral code was in its views of marriage. The old code had made the husband head and master of the family, responsible for its support, while limiting the wife's "sphere" to the care of the home and the children, and the nurturing and gentling of the male animal. By the 1930s a code exalting romantic love and companionship as the basis for marriage had gained ascendancy. One sociologist announced in 1934 that the "breaking of the former taboo on sex has made possible for younger men and women a healthier attitude toward marital relationship" and a greater chance for mutual happiness. (1038-44)
Lumpkin, Welty, and Childress no doubt chose the second decade of the twentieth century and its periphery as a setting for these examinations of young women confronting the sexual economics of the marriage market in the early twentieth-century United States because that decade brought the greatest changes to affect women’s lives prior to the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and ’70s. Additionally, each of the writers would be involved in some of the cultural movements which began in this decade, although not until later. Lumpkin would be associated with interracial and labor activities and, briefly, the Communist Party. Welty would be one of the women to obtain an advanced degree and to work as a writer for the Works’ Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s. Childress would also become a professional in the theatre and would devote that professional life to improving opportunities for African-Americans and women by exposing the inequities in American culture. The changes in women’s roles in marriage to which Tindall alludes provide the central conflict in each of the texts by these authors analyzed in this study; the brides they create are suspended not only between their old and new lives as single and married women but also between the conflicting identities of the old code’s “marriageable woman/lady” and the burgeoning morality’s “new woman,” personas which will be defined later in this introduction.

History of Marriage

Marriage is one of the oldest and most important institutions in human history. Anthropologists, sociologists, historians, political theorists, economic theorists, and literary critics from a variety of cultural backgrounds cite the
importance of marriage as a ritualized rite of passage in virtually all cultures. French theorist Claude Levi-Strauss goes so far as to deem "the incest taboo," the socio-psychological infrastructure of marriage which categorizes possible and prohibited spouses, to be the defining element of man’s transition from nature to culture (xxiii, 24). French anthropologist and social theorist Arnold van Gennep observes that "[m]arriage constitutes the most important of the transitions from one social category to another, because for at least one of the spouses it involves a change of family, clan, village, or tribe, and sometimes the newly married couple even establish residence in a new house" (116).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural theorists have been engaged in a debate over whether marriage originated as a communal group arrangement or as a two-adult monogamous family. One of the chief proponents of communal history is Frederick Engels, whose The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State outlines a "materialistic examination" of the history of marriage and the family (5). Basing his theory on the works of Karl Marx and of nineteenth-century American anthropologist Lewis H. Morgan, Engels describes primitive man’s marriage as a communal group arrangement in which females were passed from man to man (28-40). He alleges that group marriage was followed by pairing marriage in the age of barbarism, an arrangement in which men could have an occasional infidelity, but in which women were held to strictest fidelity and "cruelly punished" for adultery in spite of the fact that ownership of property and division of tribes was based on matriarchal blood
Elise Clews Parsons, Ph.D., a Barnard College sociologist, writing in 1906, also observed that many different cultures required female chastity and that there were "no groups in which adultery by the wife is not condemned" and punished with divorce, beating, imprisonment, rape, mutilation, or murder (116-17).

Engels asserts that the next change in marriage, the change from pairing marriage to modern monogamy, which occurred with the advent of civilization, was one of the most dramatic occurrences in history (40-48). This shift, he suggests, created man's supremacy by creating the patriarchal family, an extended family in which a number of persons and generations yielded to the power of the family's oldest male paternal figure for the purpose of holding land (47-66). Parsons also describes a patriarchal family as "[a] household consisting of a patriarch, his wife or wives, his unmarried daughters, his sons and their wives and children" (302). Engels contends that the creation of the patriarchal family marked the "world historical defeat of the female sex":

The overthrow of mother-right [which occurred with the creation of the patriarchal family] was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of the woman, especially conspicuous among the Greeks of the heroic and more of the classical age, has gradually been palliated and glazed over, and sometimes clothed in milder form; in no sense has it been abolished. (50, emphasis Engels')

Engels asserts that this patriarchal family structure contains "in miniature all the contradictions which later extend throughout the society and its state" and that its appearance marks the first class opposition in history, that "between man and woman
in monogamous marriage" (50, 58, emphasis Engels'). While Engels' theories regarding communal marriage and the advent of the patriarchal family are important bases for feminist analyses of the theory that women are men's property, most scholars of marriage and the family believe that the monogamous, two-adult family "has been the norm throughout Western history" (Mount 220). Many historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural theorists consider nineteenth-century British anthropologist Edward Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage*, which describes the evolution of the two-adult monogamous marriage, as the definitive work on the history of marriage.

In the eighteenth century, the Church of England standardized a wedding ceremony whose traditional vows are still used today in marriages both secular and sacred (Underhill 107). Most of the wedding traditions practiced today in Western cultures began in ancient Roman civil ceremonies, and virtually every ingredient of the marriage rite passed down from primitive and Greco-Roman cultures symbolizes fertility, especially female sexuality, and with it, female submission (Bliss 24, Underhill 100). Nevertheless, most present-day brides choose to observe at least the customs of altar or other special setting, attendants, white gown, veil, flowers, ring, wedding cake, champagne or wine, and celebratory honeymoon departure (Seligson 23; Munro 85; Underhill 103, 108). The authors of *The Wedding*, *Delta Wedding*, and *Wedding Band* employ most of these standard wedding traditions in their brides' wedding celebrations; however, as the discussions in subsequent chapters will demonstrate, in many instances Lumpkin, Welty, and Childress subvert these ancient
rituals to express anxiety about the bride’s loss of identity in the marriage exchange which is the hallmark of these texts.

Origins of Sexual Economics

Except in relatively rare instances of marriage by capture, throughout history marriage has required the payment of a "bride price" to the bride’s family in exchange for the loss of a good worker whose children will increase another clan (TF 65; Underhill 90, 76-77). Westermarck and anthropologist Ruth Underhill observe that bride purchase evolved into the customs of, first, the dowry and, later, the exchange of presents between the wedding couple, a practice which continues today (Westermarck 164-65, 178; Underhill 82-83; TF 192). For ancient Greeks and Romans and early Christians, the dowry, which was given to the husband by the bride’s father, was simply a portion of the bride price which was returned to the husband to support the wife and to defray joint household expenses (Westermarck 178, 181; Underhill 82-83). Early Christian grooms gave the wife a ring "as a pledge" of that support, a symbol which persists today and which will be especially important in Childress’s Wedding Band (Tegg 25-26). Although men no longer pay a bride price in most twentieth-century Western cultures, remnants of these ancient customs remain in weddings which use the standard eighteenth-century Church of England vows: grooms pledge "With this ring I thee wed, With my body I thee worship, With all my worldly goods I thee endow" (Underhill 105; Tegg 303, 24-28).
Levi-Strauss asserts that the concept of the marriage exchange in primitive cultures is based not upon an economic transaction, but upon a system of reciprocal gift exchanges designed to build an alliance between two groups of men (xlii, 51, 84, 480). These exchanges of food, manufactured objects, and, most importantly, women, have "social . . . religious, magic . . . economic, utilitarian . . . sentimental, jural and moral" significance; the value of the exchange is not in the actual utility, or use value, of the goods exchanged, but in this "supra-economic" nature of the exchange itself (51, 55, 61, 480). Levi-Strauss alleges that, although the marriage exchange may appear to be a contract between a man and a woman, it cannot happen in a culture unless all men of that culture are willing to exchange their daughters or sisters for other men's daughters or sisters, and is, therefore, always an exchange between men (115-16). Like Levi-Strauss, Parsons observes that although some cultures have "free consent" where the marriage contract is made "directly with the bride," that "wherever the idea of parental or kinsfolk ownership . . . prevails" that daughters are exchanged for another woman, for service by the son-in-law, for a set amount of goods, or for a bride-price (7F 62).

French feminist Luce Irigaray asks the obvious question here: "why are men not objects of exchange among women?" Her answer, that the systems of the production and exchange of commodities in patriarchal societies "always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another," goes back to Levi-Strauss's argument that men treat women as commodities because they are "not only scarce but essential to the life of the group" (Irigaray 171; Levi-Strauss 36). Levi-Strauss
extrapolates that, although "there is a biological equilibrium between male and female births" in any given culture, man's innate tendencies to become tired of his sexual partner and, therefore, to practice polygamy when his importance in a group allows it, "always makes the number of available women seem insufficient." Add to those tendencies the fact that not all women are equally desirable in the broader sense than simply the "usual erotic connotation," and man must resolve the scarcity of women through the practices of homosexuality, polyandry, wife-lending, or, much more commonly, the exogamous exchange of women in marriage (Levi-Strauss 17 n 1, 36-38).

In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that, as reflected in Shakespeare's sonnets and in English novels, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the exchange of women between men in patriarchal Western culture was no longer invested in the survival of the group, but in one man's desire to consolidate partnership with another authoritative male "in and through the bodies of females" (38). In this triangular exchange, the sexuality of the woman functions "as a signifier for power relations" between the men, and the men's desire for the woman is not so much an "affective state" of erotic arousal as it is a social *structure* of the relationships (2, 7, emphasis Sedgwick's).

However, as Catharine MacKinnon observes, "Each element of the female gender stereotype is revealed as, in fact, sexual. . . . Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness,
which means sexual availability on male terms. . . . What defines woman as such is what turns men on" (536, emphasis MacKinnon's). Sedgwick extrapolates MacKinnon's argument to the relationship between men: it is one man's control of her sexual availability—the "privatizing and circulative relation" of her sexuality—that determines the value of the female as commodity (55). Sedgwick further suggests that this containment of female sexuality is dependent on the woman's acquiescence to a constructed persona within Western culture's understanding of the gender role woman: the lady. Sedgwick observes that "for successive generations of American women the constraints of the 'feminine' role" are categorized in Gone With the Wind: "to be born female is to be defined entirely in relation to the role of 'lady,' a role that does take its shape and meaning from a sexuality of which she is not the subject but the object" (8).

According to American historian Willystine Goodsell, although the courtly love movement of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the influence of the study of Plato in the Renaissance, and the more important cultural and moral role assigned to women in Renaissance Courts had introduced the concept of romantic affection between men and women, arranged marriages based on economic contracts persisted until the mid-eighteenth century (250-56, 328-31). Goodsell asserts that it was not until the economic independence of women changed with the Industrial Revolution and the idea of human rights emerged with the political revolutions in America and France in the late eighteenth century that marriage in all classes was based on other than economic considerations (428-34). Nevertheless, sexual economics remain at
the heart of the exchange, which occurs on three levels. First, there is the literal, material exchange of the woman's body which occurs as the bride's father gives the groom her hand at the marriage altar. Second, this literal, physical exchange symbolizes the cultural exchange of responsibility for her physical, financial, and social well-being from one patriarchal caretaking male to another. These exchanges, however, are subordinate to the primary exchange of early twentieth-century marriages: the woman's exchange of herself for the financial security and social respectability of marriage. In Lumpkin's, Welty's, and Childress's wedding texts, this exchange hinges on the woman's accession not only to the gender role woman, but to its constructed persona "lady," an accession which gives her value as a "marriageable woman" in the marriage market of the early twentieth-century United States.

The nature of the marriage exchanges is different in each of the three wedding texts. Although each of the women makes the self-for-security exchange, the triangular exchange of a woman between two men as defined by Sedgwick occurs in *Delta Wedding* when Dabney Fairchild is "given" to her groom by her father. In Lumpkin's *The Wedding*, it first seems that a similar father-to-groom exchange will take place at Jennie Middleton's marriage altar. However, because the engagement is broken over a misunderstanding of appropriate gender roles and spheres, the "natural" father-to-groom exchange is disrupted. As Jennie Middleton's father proves to be ineffective in reconciling the bride and groom after they have argued about who will furnish and decorate, *i.e.*, control, the home, the best man and friend
of the groom, Dr. Greve, takes Robert Middleton's place as the third member of the woman-exchanged-from-male-to-male triangle. In Childress's *Wedding Band*, Julia Augustine is a lone, independent woman without the "name and protection" of a patriarchal caretaking male; therefore, there is no male-to-male exchange but only Julia's exchanging herself as desirable commodity for the financial security and social respectability of marriage.

Interweaving the theories of Levi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud and viewing them through the psychoanalytic lens of Jacques Lacan, Gayle Rubin, in an analysis with many parallels to those of Sedgwick and MacKinnon, describes the basis of the sexual economic exchange in terms of gender roles. Rubin maintains that the "sex-gender system" of Western culture produces the commodification and exchange of women. Rubin defines a sex-gender system as the arrangements through which humans, through social intervention, shape biological sex and procreation into a product of human activity that satisfies the biological need for sexuality and procreation in a conventional manner (158-59, 165). Rubin further alleges "that oppression is not inevitable in that domain [the sexual world], but is the product of the specific social relations which organize it" and that Levi-Strauss, in seeing "the essence of kinship systems to lie in an exchange of women between men ... constructs an implicit theory of sex oppression" (168, 171).

The marriage exchange and the sex-gender system operate in what materialist feminists call the sexual economy. Rubin, using Marxian terms in a socio-psychoanalytic framework, defines an economy as "the system by which elements of
the natural world are transformed into objects of human consumption" (165). She suggests that "there is an 'economics' of sex and gender," and that this economics is "a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products" (158, emphasis Rubin's). Rubin further observes that, although men are trafficked, they are always transacted as something other than men, such "as slaves, hustlers, athletic stars, serfs, or as some other catastrophic social status." Women, while they may also be trafficked "as slaves, serfs, and prostitutes," are overwhelmingly exchanged as "women sexual semi-objects--gifts" (175-76).

Rubin asserts that the term "'exchange of women' is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin" (177). Rubin, through her critical analysis of the theories of Levi-Strauss and Freud, demonstrates how the theories of kinship and psychoanalysis "[enable] us to isolate sex and gender from [Marx's] 'mode of production,' and to counter a certain tendency to explain sex oppression as a reflex of economic forces" (230). Rubin maintains that gender identity--gender roles--"[f]ar from being an expression of natural differences, is the suppression of natural similarities" and "is a socially imposed division of the sexes" (179, emphasis Rubin's).

Historians Stephanie Coontz and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese define significant social and economic changes in the late sixteenth-century American colonies which
would have an impact on gender roles: the American Revolution, developing
capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization (Coontz 143; Fox-Genovese 59, 78-
79). Sociological historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg asks an important question:
why did industrialization not create new roles and economic opportunities for women
(12)? Coontz maintains that these changes in America were more rapid between
1815 and 1840 than during the colonial period or after the Civil War: "By 1840,
America was already the second most industrialized nation in the world. . . . a
transportation revolution linked all but the most recent frontiers," and there was a
rapid growth in urbanization (164). These rapid changes created tension and a
"heightened concern for the preservation of order," and the family seemed the place
where "social order might be maintained" (Coontz 178). Coontz further argues that
from about 1820 a domestic family emerged which was characterized by "a
conceptual separation between female reproductive activities and male productive
ones" (34, 96, emphasis mine). Fox-Genovese traces the "model of separate
spheres" to the same sources and says that these models "dominated the
interpretations of women's experience during the first half of the nineteenth century"
(78-79). Coontz and Fox-Genovese indicate that this ideology of separate spheres
placed law and production in the male, public sphere and morality in the female,
private, domestic sphere (Coontz 213, Fox-Genovese 80).

Changing Gender Roles:
True Woman to New Woman

Smith-Rosenberg suggests that "the new bourgeois men of the 1820s, 1830s,
and 1840s" codified the separation of spheres by creating the Cult of True
Womanhood, an ideology which created a romanticized, ideal woman which males worshipped, but which "submerged the individual" (Smith-Rosenberg 13, Coontz 221). Smith-Rosenberg, Coontz, and feminist critics Barbara Welter and Ann duCille all characterize the Cult of True Womanhood, also called the Cult of Domesticity, around four basic characteristics: 1) piety—the True Woman was religious and a moral wife, mother, and daughter; 2) purity—the True Woman maintained her virtue (for unmarried women, virginity; for married ones, fidelity) at all costs; her purity was the component which most deified her because it separated her from the baser instincts of males; 3) submissiveness—the True Woman was happily subordinate and subservient to her husband in all matters; and 4) domesticity—the True Woman was the "angel of the home" who reveled in her female role as wife and mother (Smith-Rosenberg 13; Coontz 95-97; Welter 154; duCille 6, 43, 62-63; Welter 151).

Smith-Rosenberg asserts that living up to the Cult of True Womanhood caused most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American women to live "within a world bounded by home, church, and the institution of visiting. . . . It was a world inhabited by children and other women. Women helped one another with domestic chores and in times of sickness, sorrow, or trouble" (61). Writing just after the turn of the century, sociologist Elsie Clews Parsons also indicates that, under the guise of her being protected at home, a young wife was often "forced into idleness" by the pride of her husband, whose manhood was invested in supporting her—thus her wedding ring becomes a token of her inadequacy as well as of her respectability.
Parsons devotes several chapters of *The Old-Fashioned Woman: Primitive Fancies About The Sex* to discussing the nature of separation by sex in the early twentieth-century United States. Although Lumpkin, Welty, and Childress do not use the term True Woman to define the brides in their texts, it is clear that these are some of the standards by which they are judged.

Coontz, Fox-Genovese, and Smith-Rosenberg all indicate that the Cult of True Womanhood did create some gains for women, although they hardly offset the losses created by such confinement and exclusion from the public worlds of production, property, and exchange and the entitlements to such traditional rights as dower (Fox-Genovese 61). The Cult of Domesticity at least gave women an "acknowledged dominion in the home to which they were confined" and a new sense of community among women (Fox-Genovese 61). It also gave women "an increasingly positive image . . . especially . . . as 'mothers of the republic,'" which provided more educational opportunities so they could effectively teach their children how to be responsible citizens (Fox-Genovese 61; Coontz 218). Women also gained "more control over their reproduction and their sexual relations with their husbands" and "new rights within marriage" against husbands who might abuse them or "squander their money" (Coontz 218, 151; Smith-Rosenberg 46).

One of the chief creators of anxiety about the loss of identity and autonomy women experience in marriage for the brides in Lumpkin's, Welty's and Childress's texts is the fact that they are living in a time period when they are straddling two differing variations of the gender role woman, True Woman and New Woman. The
Cult of True Womanhood had been created from the 1820s to the 1840s by bourgeois males who sought to confine and limit women to the domestic sphere in the hopes of making family life a stable haven from the rapid changes in American culture created by capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization.

However, in the 1850s, '60s, and '70s, women had "feminized," in the sense of women's liberation, the Cult of True Womanhood. They "had transported the cult's original religious and moral imagery into a female symbolic system that expressed women's attitudes toward family change and justified new roles for women." They argued that, if women were more pious, pure, tender, and domestic than men, they must extend their talents beyond the home. As a result, they justified the formation of "women's clubs, educational and industrial unions, the YWCA, and the WCTU," which tackled issues such as religion, gender roles, male and female sexuality, female education, prostitution, intemperance, unwanted pregnancy, orphans, and homeless women and children (Smith-Rosenberg 264, 256, 45; Fox-Genovese 59, 80).

From the 1870s through the 1890s, "a novel social and political phenomenon" emerged—the New Woman. Born between the late 1850s and 1900, these women "were college-educated and professionally trained at a time when few men were." They married late compared to their mothers or not at all, and they rejected conventional female roles by asserting their right to education, career, service to humanity outside the family, a public voice, visible power, intellectual self-fulfillment, and most "rights and privileges customarily accorded bourgeois men"
(Smith-Rosenberg 26, 46, 176). In spite of the fact that they set off for college laden with ladylike accoutrements such as hats, ball gowns, and lace antimacassars, they searched for roles that were not ladylike, which caused them to forfeit their "right[s] to a place in fashionable society":

From the 1870s through the 1920s, between 40 and 60 percent of women college graduates did not marry, at a time when only ten percent of all American women did not. . . . [However,] medical arguments and sensationalist literature began to exert an influence upon young women. The percentage of women college graduates who married increased significantly in the 1910s and 1920s. The percentage who attended graduate and professional schools and who pursued careers dropped proportionately.

(Smith-Rosenberg 249, 251, 253, 281)

Parsons suggests that the phrase "new woman" means:

the woman not yet classified . . . not only to men, but to herself. She is bent on finding out for herself, unwilling to live longer at second hand, dissatisfied with expressing her own will to power merely . . . through children, servants, younger women and uxorious men. She wants to be not only a masterless woman, one no longer classified as daughter or wife, she wants a share in the mastery men arrogate.

(55-56)

Lumpkin and Welty, who were New Women by virtue of their education and careers, became so during the two decades when the backlash against New Womanhood began to occur. Lumpkin completed college in 1911, and Welty completed college and graduate school at the end of the period, in 1929-30.

Lumpkin benefitted from the feminization of the Cult of True Womanhood into extending women's talents beyond the home. Her work with poor North Carolina mountain people as a home demonstration agent placed her on the fringes of the union movement, and her work as industrial secretary with the South Carolina YWCA involved her in the "social purity" movement, which drew parallels between
the sexual economics of prostitution and marriage, both relationships where women exchange sex in return for economic support (D’Emilio and Freedman 149, 153). Although Welty did not benefit as directly from the efforts of the women who "feminized" True Womanhood in the 1850s to the 1870s, she undoubtedly benefitted from the New Woman movement; it is unlikely that without it a single women would have been hired by the WPA in the early 1930s to travel the state of Mississippi alone as a publicity agent. It was her observations in these travels that developed her strong sense of place and other material for her fiction (vande Kieft, Southern Writers 477-78). Along with these changes in women’s roles, the nature of the family also changed during the time period of Lumpkin’s, Welty’s, and Childress’s wedding texts. Whereas the nineteenth-century family emphasized the parent-child relationship, in the early 1900s, the emphasis shifted to the couple relationship, and the nuclear family as we describe it today emerged (Coontz 34). Childress, of course, was writing Wedding Band during the next phase of the United States women’s liberation movement in the 1960s and ’70s.

Sexual Economics in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century South: A New Theory

A gender role such as the True Woman or the New Woman "is a social, not a biological, category, and, therefore, fundamentally a historical category." Gender roles create "distinct roles for women and men" and are "the activities through which women and men are encouraged to find their identities—their deepest sense of who they are" (Fox-Genovese 29). Because the gender roles developed in the United States and Southern culture discussed above dictated that
women depend upon men for financial security and social respectability, a system of sexual economics developed in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American culture to prepare girls and boys to accede to the socially-constructed gender roles "woman" and "man" in order that women obtain and men provide the security and respectability of the marriage exchange. The sexual economic system is based on romance and marriage, and it requires that heterosexual girls and boys, from puberty through young adulthood, interact in ways that foster romantic relationships leading toward marriage to a financially-, socially-, and often racially-appropriate mate. The characteristics of appropriate mate vary widely depending on the class and cultural standards of one's family, friends, business associates, and acquaintances. To successfully adopt the gender role woman or man, girls and boys must be trained to adhere to specified codes of conduct.

In this study, I am concerned with girls' learning and enacting the code of conduct associated with the gender role woman, specifically with its specialized version "lady," which developed in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States and the South. My theory is that girls and young women move through stages of a sexual economic process which require increasing self-effacement and loss of identity as they fashion themselves into marriageable woman/lady, the product they give to an appropriate male in exchange for his "protection"—for his providing the financial security and social respectability of marriage. The loss of identity which young women experience in fashioning themselves into the marriageable woman/lady commodity and in making the self-for-security exchange in marriage is reflected in
Lumpkin’s *The Wedding*, Welty’s *Delta Wedding*, and Childress’s *Wedding Band* in each bride's moving through a progression which makes her increasingly dehumanized until she is no longer her previous incarnation of daughter, niece, cousin, and/or friend, but the iconized ur signifier of the marriage exchange, "bride." To successfully reach that state, which is one to which most heterosexual young women still aspire, the female must enter the sexual economy at a very early age.

In the first stage of the sexual economic process, the young (usually prepubescent) girl is initiated into the process by mentors who teach her how the economy operates and who train her to fashion herself into its chief commodity, the marriageable woman/lady. In the second stage, which begins with the onset of puberty and lasts through adolescence (generally ages twelve through fifteen), the girl must package herself as the product marriageable woman/lady by self-fashioning: by constructing her looks, personality, and intellectual, artistic, domestic, and social skills within culturally-prescribed parameters. In the third stage, the young woman (sixteen or older) must market herself by advertising these assets to appropriate men she meets, or her family must market her through class-appropriate venues such as debuts. In the fourth stage, once a financially- and socially- (which can include racially-) appropriate male expresses interest in obtaining the marriageable woman/lady commodity into which the young woman has fashioned herself, she must close the deal by completing the legal and cultural transaction of marriage—she must become a bride.
Throughout the initiation/packaging/marketing/transaction process, the young woman must adhere to the contradictory social/moral code of conduct of the sexual economic, i.e., she must present herself as sexually desirable and desirous, yet she must not only remain a virgin, but contain all sexual activity within the boundaries of what nice girls do. The code of conduct required of women in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States and South is that of the specialized female gender role "lady," which will be defined further below. In the fifth stage of the sexual economic process, the young woman is expected to uphold her end of the self-for-security exchange by, within the few hours of her wedding and reception, transforming herself from chaste, coy marriageable woman/lady into sexually satisfying but submissive wife. In the sixth stage, the young woman is expected to transform herself again, this time into self-sacrificing, asexual mother.

Young women are usually assisted in negotiating the stages of the sexual economic process not only by their mothers, but also by other female kin, friends, neighbors, and servants who serve as mentors to guide the young women through the process. These mentors serve as both teacher/advisor to younger women and as enforcer of the economy's rules and codes of conduct. Mentors are in an especially interesting, often ironic position. Although they are often aware of the self-effacement and self-sacrifice women experience in order to participate in this social structure that was created by and that primarily benefits white patriarchal males, they have invested their lives in the system; unless they are not financially dependent upon a male and they do not care about social respectability, it is in their economic
and social best interests to enforce the system which provides their "protection."

The concept of male-provided "protection" is a trope which appears in much of the
criticism discussed in this study and which is especially important in novels by
eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African-American women and in Childress' 
*Wedding Band*.

Each of the stages in the sexual economic process requires the young woman
to assume a different position in the spectrum of female sexuality associated with
romance and marriage: initiate, self-fashioner, marriageable woman/lady, bride,
wife, mother. Each of these positions requires a constructed persona which is often
at odds with the sense of self, sexual nature, and desire for autonomy expressed by a
young woman. As a result, the brides in the wedding texts of this study experience
an increasing loss of individual identity as they move through the sexual economic
process. By the time they reach the fourth stage of bride, each young woman's self-
effacement is so complete that she is no longer the individual who began the sexual
economic process, but the virtually inhuman, iconized figure "bride."

The discussion below will provide more information on each stage of the
sexual economic process and link it to historians' and sociologists' views of women
and men in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States. Much of the
information will come from Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation
Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, Stephanie Coontz's *The
Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families 1600-1900*, and
Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's *Disorderly Conduct*. Several notes of explanation are in order.

First, in writing about women in the nineteenth-century South, Fox-Genovese is primarily writing about slaveholding women, or plantation mistresses, slaves, and the relationships between the two. Although I am applying my theoretical model to brides between 1909 and 1923, roughly half a century after slaves were freed, Fox-Genovese's observations about the lady, wife, and mother specializations of the gender role woman hold true for Lumpkin's and Welty's texts, which are based on plantation culture. The only change in the gender role lady between the antebellum period and the period of the wedding texts in this study is that the lady no longer holds slaves, although in *The Wedding* and *Delta Wedding*, the families have servants. Smith-Rosenberg is also writing primarily about nineteenth-century women, but many of her observations also still hold true in the twentieth century. Because there is so much continuity between the representations of nineteenth- and very early twentieth-century women, I will not make a distinction in the time period unless some discontinuity makes the time period distinction important. Additionally, both Fox-Genovese and Coontz make a distinction between the bourgeois lady of the industrialized north and the lady of southern plantation culture. Even though all three brides in the wedding texts are southern women, I will use the term southern lady to describe Jennie of Lumpkin's *The Wedding* and Dabney of Welty's *Delta Wedding* and the term lady in its northern bourgeois incarnation to describe Julia of
Childress's *Wedding Band*. The reasons for this distinction are explained in the discussion of the lady which follows.

**Initiates**

Initiates are prepubescent girls who are too young to understand the self-effacement consequences of later stages of the sexual economy, and they do not express anxiety about participating in it. Nevertheless, their relationship to the economy is inherently contradictory. They are not old enough to menstruate and thereby produce for the economy either the product, self as sexually-appealing marriageable woman/lady, or the by-product, children. Yet they must prepare for participation in the economy by being groomed, literally and figuratively, into proper young ladies. They are taught the importance of proper appearance such as keeping their clothes clean and their hair combed, and they begin to learn domestic and artistic skills. They modulate between observing and emulating older girls and women and engaging in childish play or seeking the security of their mothers' or other mentors' arms. In contrast to marriageable women/ladies who display their assets in public markets like parties, initiates and self-fashioners practice packaging and marketing in closely supervised situations within the protected domestic sphere, where mistakes amuse rather than embarrass or ruin marketability.

Fox-Genovese indicates that young women are "trained from their earliest years to assume their responsibilities as females . . . and to perform specific skills," which included "manners and literacy, including correct grammar and tone, appropriate sentiments and forms of address" (111). Smith-Rosenberg indicates that
these skills were taught in a female network as "daughters walked in their mothers' footsteps and mothers strove to impart their domestic skills and lore. The world of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters formed a relatively harmonious whole, oddly isolated in critical respects from the rapidity of change that lay beyond the home" (33). Both the initiates and the self-fashioners in all three wedding texts are trained primarily at home within a tight circle of kin, neighbors, friends, and servants.

Smith-Rosenberg indicates that rigid demarcation between girls' and boys' gender roles also begins at an early age:

There is evidence in children's books, child-rearing manuals, marriage guides, and books of etiquette that women were sharply discouraged from expressing competitive inclinations or asserting mastery in such "masculine" areas as physical skill, strength, and courage, or in academic, scientific, or commercial pursuits. Rather they were encouraged to be coquettish, entertaining, nonthreatening, and nurturing. Male religious writers and educators forbade overt anger and violence as unfeminine and vulgar and they did not reward curiosity, intrusiveness, exploratory behavior, in women. Indeed, when such characteristics conflicted with the higher feminine values of cleanliness, deportment, unobtrusiveness, or obedience, they were criticized or punished. . . . While most children's literature asserted that boys were "brave, active and lively, Strength swelleth in their bones and labor is their delight all day long . . . ," girls were taught that their greatest happiness lay in an unending routine of caring for the needs of others (212-13)

The wedding texts introduce eight initiate characters. In The Wedding, the initiate is the bride's nine-year-old sister, Susan. Delta Wedding has five initiates: nine-year-olds Laura, India, and Maureen; bossy Aunt Tempe's granddaughter Lady Claire; and the black initiate Pinchy. Childress's Wedding Band has two initiates, eight-year-old Teeta and six-year-old Princess.
Self-Fashioners

Self-fashioners are girls generally between the ages of twelve through fifteen, past puberty, but not out of adolescence. Unlike initiates, who are naive about the sexual nature of the economy and who are told how to behave as young ladies, self-fashioners are aware of the sexual nature of the economy, are beginning to take responsibility for fashioning themselves into young ladies, and are learning more through the observation of other women than through being directly instructed. They are progressing from the neat appearance and good manners of initiates to the sexually-appealing appearance and coquettish manners of marriageable women/ladies. These adolescent girls are at once fascinated by and also repelled or frightened by the new world of sexuality and responsibility the bride represents. Because the self-fashioner has these contradictory feelings about the bride's status and because she is frequently left out of the flurry of wedding preparations, the bride assumes an almost mystical status in the mind of the adolescent girl.

Following their mothers and other mentors such as aunts, neighbors, and servants as they go about their domestic routines, self-fashioners learn to handle the responsibilities of the female sphere, of "the house and its natural extension, notably flower and vegetable gardens and perhaps the dairy" (Fox-Genovese 117). They learn how to read; to write; to sew; and how food, clothing, and nursing care for the family should be handled. Their responsibilities as adolescents might include taking care of their own rooms and clothing—such as mending their kid gloves—the gathering and arrangement of flowers, and perhaps assisting with the putting up of
preserves or other food preparation. They also begin to learn the finer points of ladylike grooming and behavior, such as how to visit, shop, dress and fix their hair for the evening, and how to serve as a hostess with "character, virtue, and charm" (Fox-Genovese 111, 114-15, 117).

The only self-fashioning character in the wedding texts is Shelley in Delta Wedding, who, at nineteen, is too old to be in this stage. Because she is a keen observer of the other women in her family, she understands the sacrificial nature of the self-for-security marriage exchange, and she is reluctant to give up her identity to participate in the process.

Marriageable Women/Ladies

Marriageable women/ladies are usually sixteen or older, and their responsibilities are to conduct themselves according to the specialized gender role lady, which makes them marriageable (desirable) women, and to market themselves to appropriate men they meet either through dances and other social activities or through their parents' arrangements until an appropriate male proposes marriage. Smith-Rosenberg indicates that "in the years following the end of her formal education and before her marriage. . . . a girl . . . . devoted her energies to two tasks: mastering new domestic skills and participating in the visiting and social activities necessary to finding a husband," which might include teas or balls marriageable women/ladies might give together (65, 67). Parsons describes marketing in terms of the debutante's life, which focuses on looks and events such as coming out receptions and teas. She also indicates that the young lady will now be
called "Miss . . . " rather than her first name, and that she will visit and receive
visitors with her mother (OFW 24-30).

The specialized gender role lady developed for the same reasons as and
shared the same qualities as the True Woman, although the role lady is more
complex than True Woman. Like the True Woman, the specialized gender role lady
developed because of the rapid economic and cultural changes of the nineteenth
century which, as William R. Taylor explains in *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old
South and American National Character*, "dismembered" the family unit of home
(147). Southern intellectuals began to argue the need for symbols of stability and
order in southern culture; as a result, Taylor indicates the "mythmaking" of the
southern planter began in the 1830s (52, 127, 146).

Taylor describes the "plantation legend [as] a set of popular beliefs about the
Southern planter, the plantation family and what was assumed to be the aristocratic
social system . . . in the South" (146). In *The Mind of the South*, a twentieth-
century Southern intellectual, W. J. Cash, describes the southern planter as he
appeared in the plantation novels of the 1830s, '40s, and '50s:

What had really happened [in the South], indeed, was that the gentlemanly
idea, driven from England by Cromwell, had taken refuge in the South and
fashioned for itself a world to its heart's desire: a world singularly polished
and mellow and poised, wholly dominated by ideals of honor and chivalry
and noblesse—all those sentiments and values and habits of action which used
to be, especially in Walter Scott, invariably assigned to the gentleman born
and the Cavalier.

During the period that plantation novelists were creating this persona, the
Cult of True Womanhood was giving American women new authority as the "moral
guardians of the home and spiritual regulators of the acquisitive society" (Taylor 96).
In *The Southern Lady*, Anne Firor Scott also maintains that in the 1830s and '40s "a
common culture of home and family, a common image of woman . . . stretched
across the whole South"—the image of the southern lady (xi). Coontz and Fox-
Genovese assert that the North had upper-class ladies, "but northern society preferred
to celebrate the virtues of domesticity. . . . over those of privilege," which was a
primary characteristic of the southern lady (Coontz 143, 145, 151; Fox-Genovese 47).

Anne Goodwyn Jones suggests that the southern lady also shared traits
connected to the Cult of True Womanhood and to the British Victorian lady (4). She
was "the heart and soul" of the plantation system, the benevolent "queen of the
realm" to whom the plantation master yielded because he recognized her moral and
spiritual superiority (Taylor 162-63). Both Jones and Fox-Genovese indicate that in
the southern lady, the purity of the Cult of True Womanhood merged with racial and
class status; the southern lady had her "own sense of honor, which depended heavily
on her embodiment of the privileges of her [upper] class" and on her reinforcing
plantation culture ideology (Jones 5; Fox-Genovese 203, 210, 44-45). Peggy
Whitman Prenshaw asserts that the lady was "neither uniquely of the nineteenth
century nor of the American South," but stemmed from the courtly lover and
cavalier traditions in Western literature which nineteenth-century romantics like Sir
Walter Scott revived. Prenshaw agrees, however, with Coontz, Fox-Genovese,
Jones, Anne Scott, and Kathryn Seidel that "the image assumed peculiar force in the
South" and that "[t]he invocation of the medieval fair lady and the avowed loyalty to aristocratic values show up in the United States, however, principally in Southern writings" ("Southern Ladies" 75-76).

In the wedding texts in this study, each of the three brides accedes to the specialized gender role lady. The lady as represented by Jennie Middleton of Lumpkin's The Wedding and Dabney Fairchild of Welty's Delta Wedding both merge the ideals of True Womanhood with the privilege of the planter class. Dabney still lives the plantation myth; the only change from the ante-bellum period is that the blacks who work the land and care for the family are free and paid. Jennie still lived the plantation mindset, although her family has had to close down the plantation and move into town for economic reasons, as Cash indicates many members of the class had to do during Reconstruction and the period following it (193). However, although Julia, like her slave ancestors, "suffer[s] the restrictions of white gender conventions," meaning she is judged by the same moral standards as white women, she more nearly represents the northern bourgeois lady than the southern lady (Fox-Genovese 290). As Fox-Genovese notes, the attributes of the southern lady are tied tightly to the planter class and to the expectation that she will have servants, neither attribute applicable to Julia. Further, Ann duCille describes late nineteenth-century African-American women novelists as writing about a middle-class northern bourgeois lady, and Julia is much more like the characters of those texts than like Jennie or Dabney.
Taylor and Fox-Genovese indicate that the cult of chivalry which the southern planter/Cavalier enacted toward the southern lady, while protective and deferential—partly out of guilt over widespread miscegenation—limited a woman's authority to the home and imposed on her a code of conduct which included an obligation to obey (Taylor 147-48, 167-68, 172; Fox-Genovese 195, 187, 199, 203). Cash indicates that the isolated nature of the plantation made domestic sentiment stronger in the South than the North in the sense that it created an "unusually intense affection and respect for the women of the family—for the wife and mother upon whose activities the comfort and well-being of everybody greatly depended." When this respect for women became associated with the Confederacy, it became "downright gyneolatry," the southern lady becoming "the mystic symbol of its nationality in the face of the foe" (88-89). Lumpkin's depiction of Jennie Middleton's selection as Daughter of the United Confederate Veterans and of the way she is deified as she speaks at the reunion and at her Confederate wedding illustrates the gyneolatry to which Cash alludes.

In contrast to the True Woman, who only had to represent "piety, purity, chastity, and obedience" and to "cultivate [her] special calling for motherhood," the southern lady is quite complex (Taylor 202). She is often fragile, delicate, nervous, "even an invalid" (Fox-Genovese 109, Taylor 162-63). She is passive and deferential and "unobtrusively" carries out her duties as mistress, manager, doctor, nurse, counselor, seamstress, teacher, and housekeeper (Taylor 162-63). Because she is weaker, she has "to find other means than force for exercising her will," and
she does it with "her own power of allurement—in short, her sex appeal: 'grace, modesty and loveliness.'" However, if she makes demands overtly, she loses "the fateful charm to which [she] owe[s] [her] power." She must suppress her emotions, particularly any violent feelings, and demonstrate "contentment and ease" (Taylor 170-71). Ellen Fairchild of *Delta Wedding* represents the fragile, unobtrusive mother aspects of the southern lady, while her daughter Dabney depicts the belle aspect of using her sex appeal to exercise her will. Jennie Middleton violates the last element of suppressing one's emotions by arguing with her fiance and parents rather than passively submitting to their wills.

The southern lady uses fashion—meaning "both dress and a way of life"—"to demarcate her class position." She must not indulge in self-display and must dress and deport herself with "restrained elegance," which means with purity and chastity as an unmarried woman and with decorum, but not necessarily passionless, as a married woman. When she marries, she must put her years as a belle behind her and retire to the duty and safety of marriage (Fox-Genovese 213-16, 235). Jennie, who indulges in somewhat transgressive sexuality with her fiance, has difficulty maintaining restrained elegance, and both Dabney and her mentor/aunt Tempe have trouble leaving behind the party-girl aspect of the belle.

A lady must also follow a strict code of conduct in her relationships with people outside her home. She must know whom to greet and not to greet while out in public (Fox-Genovese 235). She must perform charitable gestures such as visiting the sick, but she must mesh her religious responsibilities with her class, granting
beneficence only to those who display appropriate deference, gratitude, neatness, and piety (Fox-Genovese 232-35). A lady should also be skilled in music and art; if she must work, teaching is the only honorable profession open to her. Above all, a lady must be unfailingly polite and graceful; nothing can substitute for good manners (Fox-Genovese 258). Dabney Fairchild, of course, bends the rules of the code of conduct in her relationships with people outside her home by continuing to attend dances with old beaus in the week before her wedding, and she is too self-absorbed in enjoying the last stages of her bellehood to think about charitable gestures or the arts. Jennie Middleton, who has worked several months in teaching, the only honorable profession open to her, does well with her charitable gestures, visiting her family's ill, elderly retainer Old Rosin, and she looks forward to helping her fiance with his "holy" medical work. However, she does not do as well with her conduct on the street, for she is seen alone with Dr. Greve, a married man who will be her husband's best man, in the days just before her wedding.

Taylor asserts that the ideal of the southern planter/Cavalier with its attendant southern lady was "predestined to fail" because "[t]he men who originated it were no aristocrats in any sense which Europeans would have recognized[,] [but] ... were self-made men, provincial in their outlook and historically naive, who possessed no sure sense of any cultural tradition" (340). He also maintains that few Southerners every really believed in the Cavalier, but only in the need for such an ideal to create a sense of order in Southern society during the turbulent early nineteenth century. The Civil War, however, was to change the theoretically short-lived nature of the
Cavalier/lady ideals, for the legend was given a new lease on life as the gentleman planter and his lady became symbols of the Lost Cause (341, 336).

Cash also links the strength of the southern planter and lady ideals to the "sentimental cult of the Confederate soldier" (124). He observes that with free blacks no longer under the intimate control of white patriarchal males, the specter of miscegenation became even "more terrifying" during Reconstruction than it had been "even in the Old South," a situation which served to "intensify the old interest in gyneolatry, and to produce yet more florid notions about Southern womanhood and Southern virtue, and so to foster yet more precious notions of modesty and decorous behavior for the Southern female to live up to" (131). Cash suggests that there is a popular conception that between 1880 and 1900, the South "embarked with conscious purpose upon the way of Yankeedom and modernity," creating a New South "in fundamental contrast with the old." But, Cash asserts:

there was no revolution in basic ideology or relinquishing the central Southern positions. . . . So far from representing a deliberate break with the past, the turn to Progress clearly flowed straight out of that past and constituted in a real sense an emanation from the will to maintain the South in its essential integrity. (183)

This essential integrity now included the reification of the myth of the southern planter and the deification of the southern lady, as southern planters who had lost control of the economic trappings of their patriarchal power—their slaves, their income, and their property—sought to protect one of the few things still under their control, their women. Scott agrees with Cash that, in contrast to the New Woman movement sweeping the North, which would gain some foothold in the South, in
general, Southern women did not change significantly from the 1880s to the 1920s, but maintained "shared behavior patterns" of the southern lady (xi). Jones maintains that "with all her paradoxes, the southern lady has represented the best of the South," and Prenshaw suggests that "longing for proof that she can exist, is perhaps the last vestige of the romantic idealization of the past" ("Southern Ladies" 79). The romanticized, deified lady reaches her apex in the sexual economy's objectified icon "bride."

The Bride as the Icon of the Sexual Economy

The stages the young woman moves through in the sexual economy describe how she must transform herself into a product to be marketed and exchanged. Her transformation in the packaging and marketing phases of the process requires increasing self-effacement as she molds herself into the marriageable woman. It should come as no surprise, then, that by the time she seals the deal of exchanging self for security in the wedding ceremony of stage four, her effacement is so complete that, as "the bride," she is represented as no longer an individual with an identity, even a self-fashioned one, but as virtually inhuman.

The figure of the bride represents the inherent contradiction in the nature of the marriage exchange: the fact that, as MacKinnon and Sedgwick argue, to be "what turns men on"—in my theory, to be the marriageable woman/lady—means to be both sexually attractive and seemingly sexually available without really being "in circulation," or sexually active. Because the sealing of the self-for-security exchange in marriage is the goal for women participating in the sexual economic schematics I

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have introduced, the wedding becomes the chief signifier of the sexual economic process because it represents, in the terminology of corporate marketing and sales, "the closing of the deal."

At this point in the sexual economic process, the bride is a symbol of male desire, a paradoxical representation of virginity and impending sexual fulfillment, an untried product whose satisfaction is guaranteed. In her role as bride the young woman must represent sexual desire without either feeling it or invoking it, since the bride is the True Woman/lady incarnate: pious, pure, and submissive. Because woman cannot represent this contradictory sexuality corporally, the persona bride is constructed iconically. The young woman is no longer called by her name, but becomes "the bride," a veiled, radiant figure in white devoid of facial or corporal characteristics. In the wedding texts, the radiance is not that of the joyful young woman we typically associate with the term bride, but the radiance of an ethereal being. As the young women in the wedding texts move closer to becoming the iconic figure of the "bride," they are represented as increasingly dehumanized.

This dehumanization occurs through a number of changes the young women undergo before and during their weddings. First, they eagerly anticipate their coming weddings and attaining the gender roles wife and mother. Second, their anticipation is disrupted by disturbing elements. Third, leading up to the weddings, the brides are represented in a variety of altered mental and corporal states which reflect the loss of identity inherent in the self-fashioning process. Fourth, they are represented as in a state of liminality or suspension between their old and new lives.
Finally, during the weddings, they are depicted as sacrificed on the altar of marriage by the iconic figure of the "radiant" bride, who in these texts is an ethereal, ghost-like figure surrounded by images of loss, violence, and death, including the loss of significant persons and symbolic objects which further manifest the loss of self sustained in the sexual economic exchange.

As the wedding texts open, each of the brides is anticipating her marriage and accession to the gender roles wife and mother. Jennie is preparing for her role as homemaker and helpmeet to her doctor fiance; Dabney is happily planning her wedding and eagerly anticipating her sexual initiation; and Julia, who has actually been fulfilling the role wife for Herman for ten years, nevertheless is looking forward to the wedding ceremony which will legally give her his name and protection. Each of the bride's anticipations is disrupted in some disturbing manner. In all three texts, war provides a context for anxiety and disruption; and, in Lumpkin's and Childress's texts, the betrothed have verbally violent arguments. Traditional elements of celebration connected with weddings are subverted to demonstrate anxiety about the loss of self the young women are experiencing in the self-for-security exchange.

Most of the characterizations of the brides in altered mental and corporal states depict their loss of individuality through both literal and figurative representations of the loss of self or of self-consciousness. Many of the altered mental states depict this loss in straightforward representations of the brides as suffering from drunkenness, loss of intellectual ability, madness, hysteria or grief.
Smith-Rosenberg, discussing the work of psychologist Karen Horney in the 1930s, describes the hysterical woman as suffering from anxiety, inferiority, and "an absence of adequate aggression." Smith-Rosenberg suggests that the hysterical may have been a response to the gender roles imposed on women by the sexual economic system:

The discontinuity between the roles of courted woman and pain-bearing, self-sacrificing wife and mother, the realities of an unhappy marriage, the loneliness and chagrin of spinsterhood may all have made the petulant infantilism and narcissistic self-assertion of the hysterical a necessary alternative to women who felt unfairly deprived of their promised social role and who had few strengths with which to adapt to a more trying one. (215)

Each of the brides experiences altered mental and corporate states in the days before her wedding which can be described as hysterical, and these states reflect not only their anxiety at losing their identity in the marriage exchange, but also the discontinuity between marriageable woman/lady and self-sacrificing wife and mother which Smith-Rosenberg suggests.

Some characterizations portray the brides in paradoxically elevated states such as being "lost" in love or in an overdetermined anticipation of sexual initiation. The paradoxical representations of brides in altered mental states reproduce the paradox of woman as bride: the alt(a)red state is the pinnacle of the sexual economic process, and it is reached only through the "success" of self-alteration; therefore, it celebrates the young woman not as a real, corporal woman with an individual identity, but rather as the iconic signifier of the product she has created and now exchanges, herself refashioned as marriageable woman/lady.
Although it is Lumpkin who uses the phrase "suspended in an indeterminate position between her new and old lives" to describe Jennie Middleton, all three brides are depicted as suspended between old and new lives in some manner. The suspension represents the bride's, and sometimes her family's, ambivalence about not only her loss of self, but also the loss of close proximity which she and her family will experience upon her impending marriage. Even as their festive preparations for the ceremony anticipate the bride's gaining security and respectability in the marriage exchange, the bride and her family and friends also consciously or unconsciously seek to defer the loss of self and former relationships intrinsic in the marriage exchange. Ironically, however, this desire to defer loss actually creates movement toward it, for the state of suspension is much more analogous to the ghost-like iconic bride than to the self-fashioned marriageable woman/lady.

The brides' pre-wedding state of being suspended between their old and new lives is also analogous to what anthropologist Victor Turner calls liminality:

I call liminality, the state of being in between successive participations in social milieux dominated by social structural considerations, whether formal or unformalized... liminality may imply solitude rather than society, the voluntary or involuntary withdrawal of an individual from a social-structural matrix... liminality occurs in the middle phase of the rites of passage which mark changes in... an individual's social status. Such rites characteristically begin with the subject's being symbolically... separated from ordinary secular or profane relationships, and conclude with a symbolic birth or reincorporation into society. The intervening liminal period or phase is this betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life. (62)

The symbolic birth or reincorporation into society usually includes "[t]he drama of ritual action":

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singing, dancing, feasting, wearing of bizarre dress, use of alcohol or hallucinogens. . . .

liminality represents. . . . a situation of instruction . . . but it is also replete with symbols quite explicitly relating to biological processes. . . (252)
in a situation which is temporally liminal and spatially marginal the neophytes or "passengers" in a protracted rite de passage are stripped of status and authority—in other words removed from a social structure which is ultimately maintained and sanctioned by power and force. Their secular powerlessness may, however, be compensated by a sacred power. . . . (259)

When the brides experience the liminality of being temporarily suspended between their old and new lives, they are between stages three and five of the sexual economic process, between marriageable woman/lady on the market and wife off the market, which is the middle phase of the sexual economic process. Each bride goes through a period of voluntarily withdrawal from her family and friends. The bride's separation from her ordinary relationships with family and friends concludes with her symbolic reincorporation into society through the ritual of the wedding, which includes singing, dancing, feasting, wearing of special costumes, and, frequently, the use of wine or champagne at the reception.

Dabney and Julia spend more time than usual with women mentors in the days before their weddings. Characteristically, the time a bride spends alone with women just before her wedding is when her mother and other mentors offer last-minute advice, especially regarding the sexual initiation the bride is about to experience—"instruction . . . explicitly relating to biological processes" (Turner 252). Jennie in Lumpkin's The Wedding gets sexual instruction when she is in liminality in her room, but it is from her father, a femininely sensitive man who has been
stripped of a great deal of his patriarchal power by the loss of his family’s plantation, rather than from her mother.

Brides are temporarily stripped of the limited status and authority women experience in white patriarchal culture, "a social structure which is ultimately maintained and sanctioned by power and force." They are no longer the sought-after marriageable woman/lady, but not yet the moral and spiritual queen of the home, wife. This temporary secular powerlessness will be compensated with a sacred one, as the bride is iconized as the ur signifier of the sexual economy’s marriage exchange. Jennie especially experiences this "sacred power." The elderly Confederate veterans who serve as attendants at her wedding greet her with reverence and awe as she steps into the vestibule of the church, and she feels "sacred" because in her role as wife, she will be helpmeet to her doctor husband in his "holy work."

Each of the three wedding texts in this study has a "radiant" bride as the centerpiece to its wedding. However, she is not the joyful young woman we typically associate with the term bride, but an ethereal being whose radiance is spectral rather than spousal. The wedding dress, which is never described in the detail assigned to the bridesmaids’ or even the groomsmen’s clothes, becomes a diaphonous shroud for a ghost-like icon which in the Confederate ceremony of The Wedding represents the dead, which in Welty’s Delta Wedding is described as looking dead, and which in Childress’s Wedding Band marries the dead. The bride’s self-sacrifice is represented by her being surrounded by images of loss, violence, and
death. Frequently the three converge in one event, making the event's signification as a symbol of the bride's losing her identity particularly disturbing and ominous.

**Submissive Wife**

In the fifth stage of the sexual economic process, the young woman is transformed within the space of a few hours from daughter and sister into wife, a very demanding role for both the northern and southern lady. Both Fox-Genovese and Smith-Rosenberg indicate that although young women had learned domestic skills from their mothers and other mentors, they were still unprepared to assume the role wife. Fox-Genovese indicates that "[w]omen normally married too young to develop into young adults in their parents' households. They went to their marriages still firmly identified with the role of daughter. No wonder, then, that they found the new responsibilities of household mistress bewildering" (113). This is certainly true in the case of Dabney, who is marrying at seventeen and who has not paid particular attention to the domestic lessons of the self-fashioning period. However, because she and Troy will live on the plantation in the large extended Fairchild family network, she will continue to have a network of mentors to guide her.

Smith-Rosenberg indicates that, frequently, "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" (69). The problem that can be created by women's and men's differing expectations of marriage is graphically illustrated in *The Wedding*, in which Jennie and the Doctor argue violently the night
before the wedding about his having bought furnishings for the house without her input and about whether or not she will have an afternoon at home to receive callers.

Smith-Rosenberg also observes that part of the shock of becoming wife was the extent of self-denial required in the gender role wife, which required continual self-abnegation and a desire to please others. Literature on child rearing, genteel women's magazines, children's books, all required of women an altruistic denial of their own ambition and a displacement of their wishes and abilities onto the men in their lives:

Contemporaries noted routinely in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s that middle-class American girls seemed ill-prepared to assume the responsibilities and trials of marriage, motherhood, and maturation. . . . The realities of adult life no longer permitted them to elaborate and exploit the role of fragile, sensitive, and dependent child. (213, 199)

Although Jennie Middleton has been away from home for a year and studied and taught acting, she has gained independence, but not maturity. One of the ways she appears suspended between her old and new lives is in her continually shifting between petulant, willful child and charming, submissive lady in the week before her wedding. She is one of the "childlike women who cannot cope with life" whom Prenshaw describes in "Southern Ladies" (82).

Julia Augustine, of course, has long-since adapted to the role wife in her relationship with Herman, where she serves in that role in every capacity except living with him. However, because of the legal and social prejudice against their miscegenation, she has had to live in places where she can hide their relationship, and, until she forms bonds with her neighbors in the common backyard of Fanny
Johnson's rent houses, she has suffered from the "isolation, loneliness, and depression" which Smith-Rosenberg indicates many young wives experience (199).

**Self-Sacrificing Mother**

One of the most interesting ways the authors indict the economy's effect on women is in their representations of mothers, who provide the most dramatic examples of the economy's contradictory nature. Mothers, having successfully negotiated all six stages of the process, should serve as the most knowledgeable female mentors to their daughters and other girls. A mother should be competent to run her household and raise her children. However, as portrayals of the mothers in the wedding texts illustrate, the self-effacement required by the sexual economy is so complete that by the time they complete stage six, women who are mothers have sacrificed their individuality to the degree that they need mentors themselves.

Young women of the period of the wedding texts were even less prepared for motherhood than for marriage. Fox-Genovese indicates that mothers were generally unwilling to speak to their daughters about sexual matters, and young southern women of the planter class were not taught about the raising of children in spite of the fact that they may have had numerous younger siblings. Older daughters accompanied their mothers through the day's domestic activities, and childcare was left to servants, not siblings (112-13). Smith-Rosenberg indicates:

> women who were married with children . . . complained of isolation, loneliness, and depression. Physicians reported a high incidence of nervous disease and hysteria among women who felt overwhelmed by the burdens of frequent pregnancies, the demands of children, the daily exertions of housekeeping and family management. (199)
The key mother figures in the wedding texts are Carrie Middleton of *The Wedding*, Ellen Fairchild of *Delta Wedding*, and Mattie of *Wedding Band*. All three are ineffectual in assuming responsibility for managing their households and their children, and Ellen and Mattie need mothering themselves. The authors of the wedding texts also demonstrate anxiety about the self-effacement of motherhood by having female servants stand in for these three self-sacrificed women.

**Mentors**

Mentors function as stern enforcers of the sexual economy’s code of social/moral conduct and serve as cultural midwives, quality control managers who monitor the development of the sexual economic product, the marriageable woman/lady, and deliver her unsullied to her father’s arm at the head of the bridal aisle. Although providing enforcement of the sexual economy’s code of conduct serves a married woman’s interest by protecting the structure which provides her financial and social security, upholding the code primarily serves males’ interest in allowing them to acquire an appealing but previously unobtained female sexual product. Cousin Fannie in *The Wedding* and Bossy Aunt Tempe in *Delta Wedding* represent the married woman upholding the code to preserve the protection it provides her.

The authors also introduce spinster mentors who seem ironic because they do not receive financial security for enforcing the code; however, they do receive social respectability for enforcing it. The spinster mentors are Jennie’s former school headmistress, Miss Lizzie, in *The Wedding*; the maiden aunts Primrose and Jim
Allen in *Delta Wedding*; and Julia’s landlady, Fanny Johnson, in *Wedding Band*. Fanny is especially interesting because she insists that younger women follow the code while she transgresses it by asking a man to have sex with her.

The location of mentorship activities indicates that, while young women need training in negotiating the sexual economy, that instruction should be concealed to make their movement from one stage to another seem an effortless, natural occurrence. Most of the female mentoring takes place behind closed doors in the kitchen or the bedroom, or in connection with domestic activities such as cooking or sewing. In *The Wedding*, the cook Louisa teaches Susan in the kitchen, while the maid Annie May shares information with Susan and Jennie in the bedroom. In *Delta Wedding*, Tempe, Partheny, and even self-sacrificed mother Ellen mentor through cooking. Although the word “kitchen” has a negative connotation in Childress’s *Wedding Band* by its association with Julia’s demeaning former job, the backyard which the three houses share frequently serves as a symbolic women’s private space which fosters mentoring.

Much of the female mentoring occurs not only in women’s spaces, but through what I call women’s wisdom: through intuitive knowledge acquired and transmitted within the confines of the emotions. In Lumpkin’s and Childress’s texts, Julia, Nancy, and Old Rosin have premonitory dreams. In *Delta Wedding*, Partheny and Studney provide spoken and unspoken information on romantic relationships and female sexuality. Although some of the women’s wisdom is imparted in locations other than women’s spaces, virtually all of it is shared outside the presence of men.
Lumpkin, Welty, and Childress also introduce female mentors who enforce the code on other women while transgressing it themselves by having sex outside marriage, by too-public displays of wifely sexuality and affection, and by not submitting to their husbands' authority.

As indicated in earlier discussions, much of the gender role lady and its code of conduct originated in nineteenth-century northern bourgeois and Southern culture, particularly in plantation culture, which was venerated in the plantation literature of the 1830s-1850s. Lumpkin's, Welty's, and Childress's texts have other literary antecedents as well, which will be discussed in the following section.

Literary Antecedents

The Marriage Plot

Perhaps the most obvious literary antecedent for novels and a play about weddings is the marriage plot. In *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels*, Rachel Brownstein traces the marriage plot in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-48), Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1818), Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879), George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1874-76), and in the American Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Brownstein indicates that the "realistic novel rose in England alongside the newly leisured wives and daughters of the new middle class, who were rising to the economic occasion of the mid-eighteenth century and making themselves into ladies" (34). The marriage plot remained a staple of the English novel for more than a century because it reflected
the lives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women who "had little chance of living comfortable or fulfilling lives outside of marriage" (81).

The basic structure of the marriage plot has a female protagonist seeking an "achieved, finished identity" by trying to find perfect love (Brownstein xxi, xv). In the typical plot, she will either realize her identity by marrying and being acknowledged as a wife (usually of a man who also happens to be rich), or by being seduced and dying from it (Brownstein xxi, 81). The writers Brownstein evaluates revise this traditional marriage plot by exposing many of the issues regarding the sexual economy and the marriage market that Lumpkin, Welty, and Childress critique in the twentieth century. The major issue these writers critique is how a woman can achieve an identity in pursuing the "objectified, coherent, gender-based, essential self," the "artifact . . . social construct" lady (Brownstein xxv, 84).

In *Clarissa*, Richardson analyzes the sexual economy's convention that chastity provides a woman's value as a commodity, one of the key issues in Childress's play (Brownstein 46). In several novels Jane Austen questions the "rigorous code of behavior" of the gender role woman, which Lumpkin, Welty, and Childress all critique (Brownstein 120, 155). In *Jane Eyre*, Bronte effectively creates a heroine who is "a developing individual, not a creature made at puberty for a man." Jane marries at the end of the novel, but remains herself rather than being transformed into the codified gender role wife (Brownstein 156). All three writers considered in my study similarly depict the difficulty of remaining an individual in a sexual economy which requires a standardized commodity lady. In *Villette*, Bronte
introduces a heroine who rebels against the notion of arranged marriages and insists on marrying for love rather than for financial security. Although her lover is evidently lost at sea before they can marry, he has helped her establish a career and a home before he leaves by giving her a school with a house attached (Brownstein 179-80). Lumpkin and Childress also confront women's difficulty in developing autonomy and financial independence through a career in a culture which virtually requires that women participate in the marriage exchange to achieve social respectability if not financial security.

In The Egoist, Meredith confronts the problem created by a woman's selecting an inappropriate mate (Brownstein 190). Each of the brides in the wedding texts of this study pick males who are class- or racially-inappropriate partners, and Jennie in The Wedding, like Clara in The Egoist, wants to call off her engagement, but faces tremendous social pressure in doing so. Clara finally does break her engagement, but Jennie goes ahead with what even as she leaves for her honeymoon seems a dubious match. In Eliot's Daniel Deronda, the male and female protagonists, though married to other people, achieve a spiritual bond higher than worldly marriage (Brownstein 234). Jennie Middleton of Lumpkin's The Wedding hopes she is achieving such a spiritual union in becoming her doctor husband's helpmeet, but the novel leaves significant doubt about the likelihood of her achieving it.

Brownstein discusses the marriage plot in one American novel, Henry James's Portrait of a Lady. In the story of Isabel Archer's deciding whether to
return to her husband or not, James reveals the "rigid conditions" placed on married
women in the 1880s United States (Brownstein 253). Lumpkin's, Welty's, and
Childress's brides will be chafing against the same conventions three and four
decades later.

The Coupling Convention

Childress is writing not only in response to the traditional marriage plot
discussed above, but also in the literary tradition of what African-American feminist
critic Ann duCille calls the coupling convention. DuCille maintains that until the
late nineteenth century the marriage plot was generally "coded as white, female, and
European" (13, 3). She asserts that African-American women (and one male)
novelists writing between 1853 and 1948 reconfigured the marriage plot, in the late
1800s, by stressing sexual reticence and the literary purification of black
womanhood; and, in the 1920s to 1940s, introducing a gradual resexualization of
black womanhood (10). DuCille chooses to call the marriage plot the "coupling
convention" in African-American fiction because of the freedom it provides to
"move outside the traditional legal and social meanings of marriage" (13). The
application of duCille's work to Childress's texts is discussed at length in the chapter
on Wedding Band.

The Southern Literary Tradition

One of the earliest Southern novels is John Pendleton Kennedy's Swallow
Barn (1832), a work cited by William R. Taylor as the best example of plantation
literature because it "ranged far beyond the elegiac and the sentimental and probed
the significance of the South's mixed cultural heritage" (177). The most famous plantation novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) also seriously probes the South's cultural heritage.

Not all plantation literature is so serious as Kennedy's and Stowe's; Lucinda MacKethan describes the genre as taking the trappings of Northern sentimental, or domestic, fiction and relocating it to the Southern plantation (224). Writers of the genre included proslavery apologists George Fitzhugh and William Harper and, on the other extreme, abolitionist writers like William Wells Brown, whose *Clotel* was published in 1853 (Donaldson and Jones 2, Davis 22). Southern domestic fiction reached its peak in the 1850s with the publication of Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the works of E.D.E.N. Southworth (Davis 22). Later practitioners of the form included Paul Laurence Dunbar, who was writing in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and Margaret Mitchell, who won the Pulitzer Prize for *Gone with the Wind* in 1936 (Walker 29).

In order to be published, many women writers of the nineteenth century had to restrict their work to acceptable topics like religion and nature, and critics often denigrated their work as "appeal[ing] to females and reflect[ing] female sensibility" (Manning, *With Ears* 4-5). Following the Civil War, writers such as Kate Chopin, Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson began writing in the local color tradition, a genre by women which was acceptable to the patriarchal literary establishment (Davis 25). In the decades around the turn of the century, Chopin and King, along with Augusta Jane Evans, Mary Johnston, and Frances
Newman, were writing fiction which questioned traditional versions of female gender roles (Davis 41, 48). Ellen Glasgow, who also began writing during this period, went on to become what William Brantley and other critics describe as the "consummate example" of the really modern southern novelist (Brantley 4-5, Davis 39, Rawlings 18). Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Zora Neale Hurston, and radical writers Grace Lumpkin, Myra Page, and Fielding Burke also began writing in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries (Rawlings 19, Brantley 11).

Restating Allen Tate’s well-known "looking backward" thesis, Carol Manning observes that, following World War I, "the Southerner became conscious of a disparity between the South’s traditional values and values developing out of a modern industrialism. That tension between the old and the new inspired the Southern Renaissance," which produced the South’s most famous, and, many say, greatest writer, William Faulkner ("The Real" 38). Brantley identifies conservative and liberal elements in the literary movement. Nashville’s Fugitives and Agrarians of the 1920s and ’30s are the conservatives, "men who looked to the past for meaning, who defended the South’s customs, traditions, and folkways, and who attempted to salvage its declining, semifeudalistic Agrarian system that . . . was under threat by an industrial order that to them represented anything but progress and reform" (Brantley 8). Southern liberals such as Katherine Anne Porter, Zora Neale Hurston, and Lillian Smith advanced causes such as the New Deal, feminism, the denouncement of the excesses of American capitalism, and, especially, self-
Brantley places Welty in this group, suggesting that she advances feminism, although she refuses to call herself a feminist (8).

Daphne Athas suggests that "[t]o enter the South at the end of the thirties from New England was to experience that dead air space between the legend of the Fall from Glory and the New Era about to begin" (295). She maintains that Northern stories of that period are "focused on the abilities and characters of single heroes or heroines, individuals whose society is the hostile setting for their lonely struggles and ambitions, while Southern stories operate on a social, rather than personal scene, families and communities in a time and geography heavy with past and future." She continues that this South was the "socially conscious, New Deal, WPA, TVA-dominated, post-Depression, pre-World War II Rooseveltian wave of the future" (296). Athas observes that this was the period when "Southern scions . . . Richard Wright, Tennessee Williams, and Carson McCullers . . . found themselves together in a boarding house in Brooklyn forging the new social South," which led to the socially conscious fiction of the 1940s (298-99).

This is the point at which Lumpkin's The Wedding, Welty's Delta Wedding, and Childress's Wedding Band fit into the Southern literary tradition. Lumpkin's and Welty's texts were written in, respectively, 1939 and 1945, and I have previously discussed their identifications with some of the social movements Athas identifies. Although Childress wrote her play in 1966, it shares the cultural sensibilities of Lumpkin's and Welty's texts. Primarily, these three wedding texts represent the time period and the tensions, especially the gender-related ones between
"the legend of the Fall from Glory" and "the New Era," although, as the complex class, race, and gender issues address in the wedding texts indicate, the cultural climate was the polar opposite of "dead air space."

Margaret Walker identifies several other genres that developed in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries that are pertinent to this study: the folk genre which originated in the oral tradition of spirituals, work songs, and ballads; southern humor that creates an outsider figure, such as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1883); the Black folk expression of Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles W. Chesnutt, James Weldon Johnson, James Russell, Joel Chandler Harris, and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet; the sentimental tradition of "moonlight and roses, magnolias and mockingbirds"; and the violence of the Gothic novels written by Poe, McCullers, O'Connor, and Alice Walker (29-32). Walker says that the works of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Richard Wright, all modern American writers from Mississippi, differ widely, but "have certain verities in common": "They deal with the southern scene; they deal with a violent South, too, but they also work within the framework of a humanistic tradition." Most important, they "[rise] above time and place, struggling beyond the racist limitation of their society "into the truly rarified world of the artist, a world in which human values and universal truths. . . . lift up the human heart in order for the human spirit to struggle to prevail, to triumph over all" (33-34).
In the Introduction to *Women Writers of the Contemporary South*, Peggy Whitman Prenshaw indicates that writers since 1945 depict a South which is more "urban than rural" and create characters who are "more mobile and transient than rooted in the Southern past." The South portrayed by this younger generation of writers generally has little to do with the agrarian life, except by way of memory through parents and grandparents and through recollections of cherished country places of childhood[,] yet their fiction maintains a "strong sense of place" which continues to inform their characters' "consciousness of being 'Southerners'" (vii).

Like their foremothers Lumpkin, Welty, and Childress, the current generation of female Southern writers continues to critique:

> the time-honored roles for women: the Southern lady, the belle, the sheltered white woman on a pedestal, the pious matriarch, the naive black girl, the enduring black mother, . . . depicting them frequently as constraining, artificial, simplistic, often something of a sham, but occasionally as ennobling.

(Prenshaw, Introduction viii)

Perhaps because Lumpkin, Welty, and Childress are a generation closer to these confining roles, they seem to represent them more negatively than do their younger counterparts. Although each of the brides represented in the wedding texts to be discussed in the chapters which follow seeks to be "ennobled" in her impending role as wife, I will demonstrate that the self-effacement she has experienced in moving through the stages of the sexual economic process has instead left her "unnabled" to do more than to enact the economy's prescribed gender roles into which she has fashioned herself.
Notes

1. Morgan's *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization* was published by Macmillan and Company in 1877.

2. Using Morgan's classification system, Engels analyzes the development of marriage and the family in subdivisions of three over-arching historical epochs: 1) savagery, a transitional stage in the evolution of man from the animal kingdom in which man appropriates food products in their natural state; 2) barbarism, which "[d]ates from the introduction of pottery," in which man increased the supply of natural products by domesticating animals and cultivating plants; and 3) civilization, in which man's application of work to natural products has developed to the point of industry and art (19-24).

3. For the origin of the terms use value, exchange value, and surplus value, see Karl Marx's *Das Capital*, Section 1, Chapter 1. For feminist applications of these terms is discussing the commodification of women, see Rubin, 160-64, and Irigaray, "Women on the Market," in its entirety.
CHAPTER 2
DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY:
THE SOUTHERN LADY AND SEXUAL ECONOMICS
IN GRACE LUMPKIN’S THE WEDDING

Grace Lumpkin’s Life and Works

Grace Lumpkin’s *The Wedding* (1939) is a highly autobiographical novel in setting and characters, especially in its depiction of the culture of the southern planter class that lost land and money in the defeat of the Civil War. Because the novel is so deeply rooted in Lumpkin’s plantation heritage and childhood, detailed biographical information will augment many of the novel’s attitudes and assumptions.

The chief sources of biographical information on Lumpkin are Lillian Barnard Gilkes’s Afterword to the 1976 edition of *The Wedding*, and an autobiography by Grace’s younger sister, Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The Making of a Southerner*.¹ There are a number of discrepancies between information provided by Gilkes, a writer who was Grace Lumpkin’s friend in New York in the 1930s, and information in Katharine’s autobiography.² I have rectified these discrepancies as much as possible with information from such other sources as *Southern Writers: A Biographical Dictionary* and *Twentieth Century Authors*. A biography of Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin being prepared by Jackie Hall of the University of North Carolina’s oral history program will no doubt shed light on many of these biographical issues.

Grace Lumpkin was born in 1892 in Milledgeville, Georgia, one of nine children of William Wallace Lumpkin of Lexington, Georgia, and Annette Caroline Morris of Meriwether, Georgia (*CA* 388; *MS* 51-52, 108; Smith 287). Grace’s
father was descended from a distinguished Georgia family which included physicians, Baptist preachers, and teachers, but which comprised mostly planters who also became lawyers and entered politics (MS 10). The Lumpkins' oldest known paternal ancestor, Jacob (1644-1708), had a plantation called Newington on the Mattaponi River near the small Virginia town King and Queen Courthouse, where he is buried at the old colonial church (Gilkes 311).

In the 1760 to 1790 period, three of Jacob's descendants, most likely grandsons George, Joseph, and Anthony, moved to Oglethorpe County, Georgia (Gilkes 312, MS 6). Joseph, who was Grace's great-great-grandfather, became the first Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court and the first professor at the University of Georgia's Joseph Henry Lumpkin School of Law, which was named for him (Gilkes 312; MS 6, 10). Joseph's grandson and two other Lumpkin relatives also became Chief Justices of the Georgia Supreme Court, and another relative, Wilson Lumpkin, became Governor of and United States Senator from Georgia (MS 10). A number of other Lumpkin men also distinguished themselves in "lesser political office" (MS 10).

One of Grace and Katharine's female relatives also became briefly famous. Katharine says that "so the tale ran, the city of Atlanta was named" for Wilson Lumpkin's daughter, and the family folklore is correct: the phoenix city was named for the former Governor's daughter, but in its 1843 commission as Marthasville, having been previously called The Terminus and Whitehall. The name was changed two years later to the feminized version of Atlantic in honor of the railroad whose
promise transformed the provincial frontier town into a civilized small city (MS 10, Shavin and Galphin 17-20).

Grace Lumpkin’s father, William, an only child, was born in the old "family homestead," the moderate-sized plantation his grandfather, William Senior, had built twelve miles outside Lexington, a small town near Augusta, Georgia (Hine viii; MS 7, 15). Little, or Young Will, as Grace and Katharine’s father was called, enjoyed an idyllic childhood on the plantation until his twelfth year, 1861, when the Civil War began (MS 23, 37-47). After seeing numerous male relatives off to the war, including eleven sons or sons-in-law of his grandfather William Senior, Young William, accompanied by Pete, the slave who had been assigned as his body servant in Will’s infancy, joined the Confederate army at fifteen (MS 37, 47-49). His grandfather, whose land had been depleted by years of cotton production with no fertilizer and whose foreman slave, Jerry, had recently died, boarded up the plantation buildings and moved the family to Union Point, Georgia (MS 31, 48-49).4

Although William Senior had hoped to return to the plantation after the war, he was unable to raise the capital to do so. Instead of embarking on his expected career of plantation master, Young William studied law (MS 76). However, the 1870s and ’80s were not a good time "to make a financial success of law" in Georgia; after a brief stint as Register in Bankruptcy, Grace and Katharine’s father took a post with the railroad. This position moved the family to several Georgia towns, and, ultimately, sometime between 1890 and 1900, to Columbia, South Carolina (Hine xi; MS 76, 99-100).
In 1908 or 1909, William Lumpkin bought a 200-acre farm in the "poor farming country" of Richland County, South Carolina. This move was significant for two reasons: first, William died while on a business trip only three months later; and, second, the farm was near the Sand Hills, a "desolate area" inhabited by poor white mountain people like those seen in the novels of Elizabeth Madox Roberts (MS 151-53). While living on the farm, Grace and Katharine were heavily influenced by both their own poverty and by their exposure to those even less well-off. This exposure mitigated the planter-class culture passed down from both their mother and their father; as a result, both girls were to move into liberal and left-wing activities in young adulthood and later to write about this dramatic change in novels (Grace) and an autobiography (Katharine).

Grace Lumpkin completed high school in Columbia, South Carolina, and graduated from Brenau College in Gainesville, Georgia in 1911 with a Bachelor of Divinity degree (Smith 287). She had begun to write as early as her teen years and published stories in "school" magazines, most likely at Brenau (Gilkes 313). Katharine, who attended Brenau from 1912-15 and who tutored there in 1916-17 describes the "little Georgia institution" as "more of a finishing school than a place of learning" for the socially elite girls who attended the college (173, 177, 187). Nevertheless, Katharine notes that the group of intellectual girls of which she was a part at Brenau "all were planning to ‘do something’ after college," and Grace was certainly of the same ambition (187).
After graduating from Brenau, Grace worked in France for a year and then returned to South Carolina to teach (Smith 287, C4 388). Her concern for less fortunate people was already evident in her organizing a night school for farmers and their wives (Gilkes 313). In 1913 or 1914, Lumpkin became a home demonstration agent for a county in North Carolina, living with poor mountain people who worked in cotton mills (C4 388, Gilkes 313).

About 1915, Grace Lumpkin began a two-year job as industrial secretary of the South Carolina Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) (C4 388, Gilkes 313, Smith 287). Katharine, who worked with the YWCA at the same time at Brenau, observes that during this period both the YWCA and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) were beginning to make "tentative excursions" into the field of "'interracial co-operation'" (MS 180). By 1914 and 1915, these student Christian organizations were issuing a contemporary call to "discipleship" for their members to practice the "new social Christianity" by promoting brotherhood between the races (MS 187-89). While the YWCA was a liberalizing agent for Katharine in terms of race relations, it seems to have had an even greater effect on Grace, who would soon participate in peripheral activities of the Communist Party, in terms of labor relations and class consciousness. 

The YWCA seems to have been a liberalizing force also on Grace and Katharine’s attitudes regarding women’s rights in sexuality and marriage. In the two decades leading up to their association with the organization in 1914 and 1915, the YWCA had been active in the "social purity" movement. The movement, which had
originated in opposition to proposed state regulation of prostitution in the 1870s, had
been appropriated by nineteenth-century feminists and suffragists such as Susan B.
Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to draw parallels between the sexual economics of prostitution and of marriage, both relationships in which women exchange sex in return for economic support (D’Emilio and Freedman 149, 153).⁶ Apparently neither Grace nor Katharine Lumpkin felt comfortable with this sex-for-support exchange: Katharine never married, Grace married only briefly, and the topic became the central focus of Grace’s third novel, The Wedding.

By the time she was twenty-five, Grace Lumpkin had saved enough money to go to "the capital of Dreamland, New York City" (Gilkes 313, CA 860, Smith 287).⁷ The third day after her arrival, all her money was stolen, but Lumpkin quickly obtained an office job which she kept for three years while taking night classes in writing at Columbia University (Gilkes 313, TCA 388, Smith 287). She resigned the office job and became a chamber maid in order to have more time to write, but found that "fifty beds to make and rooms and bathrooms to clean [left] not much time for writing" (TCA 860, CA 388). She eventually went back to office work, and, at some point during this period, borrowed money and wrote her first novel between jobs (Gilkes 313-14).

In 1931, Grace Lumpkin married Michael Intrator; the relationship was brief and "seems to have ended unhappily" (DuBose, Gilkes 314); it is likely that the anxiety about sexual economics and marriage seen in The Wedding stems from the unhappiness of this union. An incident of the wedding ceremony itself seems to
have been an omen of future unhappiness: Lumpkin and Intrator waited three hours for the best man to arrive at City Hall for the small ceremony. Lumpkin reflects that she thus began her marriage feeling "like a bride kept waiting at the church" (TCA 860). A modified version of this incident occurs in The Wedding when the bride and her large wedding party are kept waiting while the church rector, who has been asked not to participate in the ceremony, imposes himself into it despite vehement objections from both the bishop and the bride's father (292-99).

In addition to writing classes and a brief marriage, Lumpkin became involved in left-wing political activities during her time in New York (Smith 287). Although she wrote tracts for the Communist Party, her friend, writer Whittaker Chambers, testified at a hearing that this activity was performed under pressure and that Lumpkin never joined the party (Gilkes 318). In Witness, Chambers describes how Lumpkin, who had long been a friend of his wife's, loaned him all her savings so that he could break with the Party (Gilkes 318). C. Michael Smith attributes Lumpkin's disaffection with the Party and her return to "a conservative political position and renewed religious conviction" to Chambers' influence (287). Whatever the case, Lumpkin did abandon the liberalism of her young womanhood and shift "all the way across the . . . spectrum" to earlier political and religious convictions (Mellard 354). In donating her papers to the University of South Carolina in 1971, she wrote the Director of the University Libraries, Kenneth Toombs: "I would like to make it clear that there are two distinct 'phases' to consider. First the Communist, and second, the return to God" (quoted in Gilkes 318).
Grace Lumpkin's first novel, and the one for which she is best known, *To Make My Bread*, was published in 1932 to wide reviews of "high praise" (Gilkes 314). Like all of Lumpkin's novels, *To Make My Bread* has many autobiographical elements of setting, character, and cultural background. Gilkes suggests that "place" is the most important of these elements, the one which "is important in all of her work, as a voice, a motivating influence on character" (312). Recalling Lumpkin's experiences as a home demonstration agent, the novel is about the hard conditions of mill work which forced many Appalachian mountain people to strike against the textile mills in Gastonia, North Carolina in 1929 (Gilkes 312, Smith 287). Winner of the Maxim Gorky Award for "best labor novel of the year" in 1932, the novel was adapted for the stage by Albert Bein as *Let Freedom Ring* and enjoyed a six-month successful run in 1935 (CA 388, Gilkes 312-14, Smith 287). Lumpkin later sold the movie rights to MGM, which produced *Let Freedom Ring* in 1939 starring Nelson Eddie and Lionel Barrymore (Maltin 686).

Lumpkin's second novel, *A Sign for Cain* (1935), returns to the place she knew best from her childhood and her parents' stories, the "landscape and plantation area of central Georgia" (Gilkes 312). Like her first novel, this story of racial injustice and union activity in the South reflects Lumpkin's commitment to Marxist ideology from her twenties through her forties (Smith 287). However, Gilkes observes that the novel is "marred by patches here and there of leftist didacticism," a judgment which she says Lumpkin shares (315).
In *The History of Southern Literature*, James Mellard contends that Lumpkin’s first two novels characterize her work in the school of "socially committed fiction writers" between the 1929 Wall Street crash and the 1939 beginning of World War II. This group included, most notably, Erskine Caldwell and Lillian Smith, and it aimed to "reform . . . historical conditions" by writing about "agrarian reform, industrial change, social deracination, and racial relationships." Nevertheless, this fiction retains "traditional images, themes, and values" from earlier southern fiction such as principled landed gentry versus evil plantation owner, and good farmer versus degenerate poor white trash, elements certainly seen in Lumpkin’s second and third novels (351).

Mellard describes Lumpkin as part of a subset of social commitment writers called "proletarian women novelists," a group including Olive Tilford Dargan (aka Fielding Burke) and Myra Page. He suggests that these three writers, who were influenced by the American Communist Party, protested social conditions more directly connected with the Great Depression than did other writers of social commitment, although these women also sought to transform "the values of agrarian life into a set of parallel values suitable to a more urban, industrial future"—"local-color fiction performed with a radical purpose" (Mellard 351-54).

Although I agree with Mellard’s assessment that Lumpkin was protesting social conditions in her first two novels, I disagree that she sought to transform the values of agrarian life into values suitable to urban, industrial life. Her third novel, *The Wedding*, is a testament to the fact that the agrarian values which Lumpkin does
critique, those of the southern planter class, endured so strongly into the second
generation of defeated southern nationals in the early twentieth century that
transformation was unlikely without the renunciatative remaking Katharine Lumpkin
describes so well in The Making of a Southerner. Grace Lumpkin was simply doing
what most good writers do: using her insider's knowledge of people, places, and
events, first, to bring to life and, second, to critique a culture in which she had
become other/outsider.

During her time in New York, Lumpkin also published short stories in
magazines and journals such as the North American Review, Virginia Quarterly
Review, and New Masses (CA 388). Her short story "The Treasure," which is, like
The Wedding, more an examination of culture in the novel-of-manners tradition than
an exposition of leftist social theory, is included in the O. Henry Memorial Award
Stories of 1940 (Smith 287).

In 1952, Lumpkin moved to King and Queen Court, Virginia, home of her
seventeenth-century paternal ancestor, Jacob Lumpkin (Smith 288, Gilkes 311).
Although she initially intended to stay only one or two years, the time stretched to
twelve years, and she completed a novel called God and a Garden, which was never
published (Gilkes 311, 318). Her arrival in Virginia is recounted in Full Circle, a
fictionalized autobiography which was published as her fourth novel in 1962 (Gilkes
311, Smith 288, CA 388). Gilkes observes that the novel, which is critical of
Communism in its description of the "[e]xposure of an international Communist
'conspiracy,'" is not a good one (318, Smith 288).
Lumpkin returned to Columbia, South Carolina in 1974, where she died in 1980 (Smith 288, DuBose). She continued to write; in a 1976 letter to Lillian Gilkes, she wrote that she had two more novels "in the typewriter," but neither has been published (319). Lumpkin's papers, which were destined originally for Boston University based on simply that university's request, were instead donated to the University of South Carolina at the behest of a nephew on that faculty. The flagship institution of higher learning of one of the two states which shaped Lumpkin's early life and which later so dramatically permeated her fiction seems a much more appropriate resting place. The Grace Lumpkin Collection at the University of South Carolina's Caroliniana Library houses published and unpublished "manuscripts . . . scrapbooks, book reviews, and correspondence" (Gilkes 317).

Autobiographical Nature of The Wedding

Both the conservative and radical extremes of Grace Lumpkin's life are omnipresent in her third novel, The Wedding. The conservative years of Lumpkin's early life in Georgia and South Carolina are reflected in the novel's setting of time and place, in its characters, and in its emphasis on the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. Lumpkin's commitment to Marxism is seen in the novel's materialist feminist deconstruction of the ramifications of the marriage exchange. Although Lumpkin would hardly have called herself a materialist feminist, the author of the jacket cover synopsis of the 1976 edition of The Wedding observes that Lumpkin is "a member of the group of writers who emerged in the 30s, one of the group of notable women who are the precursors of today's feminists" (Southern Illinois
Lumpkin's subtle but sophisticated presentation of the dynamics of sexual economics in what on the surface seems a lightweight historical romance certainly qualifies her as a materialist feminist.

The jacket cover writer also notes that "[i]n spite of excellent reviews, [The Wedding] had only one printing in 1939, and soon dropped from sight" (Southern Illinois). Although most reviews were favorable, some ultra-leftists criticized Lumpkin for having abandoned the class struggle. The Wedding had a small resurgence in 1976, when, at Gilkes' urging, Matthew Bruccoli reissued the novel in his Lost American Fiction Series published by Southern Illinois University Press. Gilkes had read the manuscript when Lumpkin finished the book in the 1930s and remembered its beautiful structure, "its charm and freshness of characterization, its quality" forty years later (309-10).

Mellard also praises The Wedding, calling it "[t]he best of the novels" written by the proletarian trio of Dargan, Lumpkin, and Page (353). Gilkes, Mellard, and Smith categorize the novel in the romantic comedy and comedy of manners literary traditions evolving from Shakespeare through Jane Austen to Edith Wharton and to Lumpkin's immediate southern female predecessor Ellen Glasgow (Gilkes 316, Mellard 353, Smith 287). Gilkes notes that The Wedding follows the tradition of romantic comedy in that the "central entanglement in all of its spiralling relationships [is] finally resolved in a happy outcome" (316).

In the brief postscript to the 1976 edition, Lumpkin describes the inspiration for The Wedding, a summary which makes clear the basis for the novel's anxiety.
about the losses women incur in marriage. Lumpkin says that after *To Make My Bread,* retitled *Let Freedom Ring,* had run on Broadway successfully for six months, she "had promised a novel to a New York publisher, and was distressed because the fountain of inspiration remained dry as a desert." One evening, while she was washing dishes after two dinner guests had departed from her small apartment on East Eleventh Street in New York, "a certain memory presented itself" (321-22).

The memory was of the wedding and home reception of Lumpkin's "beloved elder sister," Elizabeth. Although Lumpkin remembered that, as a twelve-year-old in a beautiful new dress, she had enjoyed the compliments with which wedding guests had showered her, she also remembered a "keen breath of . . . anguish" from the wedding eve when her mother had explained that Elizabeth would be moving out of the house "forever." Anxiety about the self-for-security aspect of the marriage exchange is also present in Lumpkin's memory of mother's explaining that Elizabeth would now "belong to" her new husband (321-22). Lumpkin's masterful transference of the strength of these remembered feelings into the tale of Jennie Middleton's wedding eve and day is what makes *The Wedding* a compelling novel. Lumpkin's recalled anguish, focused into a penetrating analysis of the sexual economics of marriage, can be experienced once again by the reader who identifies with Jennie Middleton's anxiety about giving up her independence and her close relationship to her family in her forthcoming marriage exchange.

*The Wedding* is autobiographical not only in the basis for the story described above, but also in setting of era and season. The novel is set in 1909, "the period of
the South when there was little money but considerable compensatory pride" (Southern Illinois). This phrase aptly describes the Reconstruction situation and attitude of *The Wedding*'s Middleton family and of the Lumpkin family on which they are clearly based. The Middleton wedding is set at Christmas, a time which William Lumpkin had often described to his daughters as the "chief time of celebration. . . . full of pomp and ceremony, gaiety and gifts" on the plantation where he was raised. Christmas was also a favorite time for weddings, particularly slave weddings, an event which Katharine Lumpkin mentions four times in her autobiography (40, 122, 18, 41, 58, 20).

*The Wedding* is also autobiographical in setting of place. Gilkes notes that readers familiar with Columbia, South Carolina, will recognize "the wide street abutting on the Capitol," the hotel where Drs. Gregg and Greve are staying, and Trinity Episcopal Church, where the ceremony is held (313). However, Lumpkin calls the growing city of the novel Lexington, Georgia, after the town closest to her great-grandfather's plantation (MS 10). Of the Columbia elements, Trinity Episcopal Church is especially important in the Lumpkin ancestry. When William Lumpkin moved his family to Columbia, attending the "socially elite" Trinity Episcopal Church helped the family, in spite of its modest means, merge into upper class Columbia society, where payment on a family pew at Trinity was "[a]s prime a necessity as bread" (MS 102, 106).

*The Wedding* contains several characters modeled on people from Grace Lumpkin's life. The most notably autobiographical character is the bride's father,
Robert Middleton, who is clearly modeled on Grace and Katharine Lumpkin's father, William, in details including a plantation childhood, teenaged service in the Confederacy, loss of land and money in Reconstruction, railroad clerk's job, brief foray into politics, and unregenerate devotion to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. The bride, Jennie Middleton, is fashioned after Grace and Katharine's older sister, Elizabeth, whose wedding was the inspiration for the novel and whose allegiance to the Confederacy matches or even surpasses her father's. Lumpkin even borrows Jennie's first name from a Georgia cousin who is mentioned twice in Katharine's autobiography.

Lumpkin also models minor characters in the novel on people from her past. Episcopal Bishop Allison of The Wedding, who had been a Captain in the Confederate Army, is molded in the image of "'warrior-Bishop'" Capers, who had become a Confederate General at twenty-eight and who had made veterans attending a 1903 Confederate Reunion feel that their Lost Cause was "blessed when so noble a man could tell them [it was] one of the noblest chapters in our history" (TW 178, MS 118). The ladies of the Lumpkin family's Columbia, South Carolina neighborhood, whose custom it was to call on newcomers, are represented in Jennie's concept of an afternoon at home (TW 44, MS 102). Lumpkin even picks up the ancestral name Du Pre, her sister Katharine's middle name, as a last name for one of the bridesmaids in The Wedding (TW 102-103, 133).

Although the December 1909 wedding of the novel's title is scheduled almost forty-five years after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox, the Civil War is
omnipresent in the novel not only in the characters mentioned above, but also in the wedding ceremony itself. Jennie Middleton and her father, Robert, have planned a Confederate wedding with veteran officers in uniform serving as groomsmen and with bridesmaids carrying small Confederate flags rather than floral bouquets. The Confederate wedding is so unusual that it attracts a large, openly curious crowd, which has come to see not only the bride, but also the Confederate officers in uniform—"the whole pageant" (TW 283). Rather than waiting for the bride to appear, the crowd rises to its feet as the Confederate officers process to the altar (TW 300). In gray uniforms with gold braid and red sashes, the veterans provide a strange contrast to the evening clothes of the ushers, but set against the gray and red peeling stone walls of the church and next to the bridesmaids' flounced antebellum-style dresses, they seem "like a picture of the days before the Civil War. . . . fitted into a frame that had been built for them" (TW 286-87).

Several of the images in this depiction of Jennie Middleton's wedding invoke the pageantry of the 1903 Confederate Reunion in Columbia, South Carolina, which is described in detail in Katharine Lumpkin's autobiography. Katharine, who was only six that year, remembers being "dipped deep in the fiery experience of Southern patriotism" at the 1903 reunion (MS 112, 114). Grace, who was an even more impressionable eleven-year-old, participated in the chorus of school children and listened to a thirteen-year-old brother make a speech (MS 120). Katharine emphasizes that "[a] child would never forget [the] particular moment" of the reunion's opening night speech by a Daughter of the Confederacy: a stage crowded
with uniformed veterans and Confederate maids of honor who are a "bevy of the State's most beautiful young ladies," and "[s]omewhere among them the slight figure of a young woman," their elder sister Elizabeth, who gave an eloquent speech interrupted "[t]ime and again . . . by thunderous applause" and receiving a standing ovation (MS 115, 119-20).

Jennie Middleton is, like Elizabeth Lumpkin, a "passionate" attendee and speechmaker at Confederate reunions. At one reunion Jennie is elected "'Daughter of the United Confederate Veterans,'" a special position which only she is to hold and which is distinct from the United Daughters of the Confederacy, who are any female descendants of Confederate veterans (TW 36). The day of her wedding, Jennie mirrors the image of Elizabeth at the 1903 reunion: she is also a slight figure moving toward a stage of uniformed veterans and antebellum-clad maids of honor as her father escorts her to the altar (TW 300-305).

Grace Lumpkin's memories of Confederate reunions stemmed from her father's active participation in the "Lost Cause movement," which had the "paramount aim of preserving the South's old foundations" (MS 112). Col. William W. Lumpkin had been only twelve when the Civil War started and was only fifteen when, with "Sherman before Atlanta," he and his body servant Pete (who never left him, even after emancipation) had reported to Wheeler's Cavalry (MS 118, 47-50, 74). Riding home from Atlanta to Greene County, Georgia, after Lee's surrender, the sixteen-year-old William Lumpkin was deeply affected by the "rampant destruction" he saw and by the stories he heard of stolen and wrecked silver, jewels,
clothing, books, and furniture. He was particularly affected by stories of insults to helpless women and old men (MS 72-73).

In 1874, William Lumpkin’s Third Georgia Regiment held its first regimental reunion in Union Point, Georgia. This event launched the twenty-five-year-old Lumpkin upon "his career in behalf of Confederate veterans." He actively participated in future reunions and became a favorite orator when Confederate monuments were erected in Georgia and later in South Carolina, giving his "usual patriotic speech," which valorized Confederate soldiers, noble Southern womanhood, and the desolation of the past from which the South had risen by the bravery of its men (MS 111-12, 144).

In The Wedding, Grace Lumpkin uses her father’s memories of the Civil War and allegiance to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy as a context for examining conflicts regarding class status, the value of tradition, and behavioral expectations based on gender roles. Each of these types of conflict will create anxiety for Jennie Middleton and her family members as Jennie moves toward the marriage altar because each represents a part of the self Jennie must leave behind to meet the expectations of her future husband.

Allegiance to the lost glory of the antebellum South juxtaposed to the harsh economic reality of Reconstruction creates anxiety for Jennie’s father, who experiences an inner class conflict in planning his daughter’s wedding. Robert Middleton is a descendant of upper-class plantation owners from tidewater Virginia. He had "expected to rule as a master of slaves" and had fought, at age fourteen, in
the last eight months of the Civil War. He is unreconciled to the fact that he has lost his land, money, and law practice during Reconstruction and that he has become a middle-class railroad clerk with a "meager salary." Middleton has projected his lost ambitions onto his children, especially his favorite child, Jennie, and he wants her to have the wedding she desires (TW 16-19).

Robert Middleton also maintains a romantic attachment to the courtly love ideals of the antebellum South and believes that everything should be sacrificed for great love, which Jennie and her fiancee, Dr. Shelley Gregg (hereinafter referred to by Lumpkin's term, "the Doctor"), have demonstrated by falling in love at first sight and by refusing to listen to warnings about their unsuitability for each other (TW 117). Middleton allows these sentimental attachments to his past privileged status to overcome his present fiscal reality, and he is forced to borrow $900 for the wedding from friends as well as from the bank and to ask his sons to give up their college and marriage plans to help him repay the debt (TW 85, 113-114).

Robert Middleton's inner class conflict is grounded in a larger conflict that prescribes behavior patterns for his family and for virtually all other characters in The Wedding save the Episcopal Church's rector from the North, Dr. Grant. Middleton is still committed to the ideals and ideology of the South's antebellum planter class with its stringent codes of conduct for southern ladies and gentlemen, but he no longer has the plantation infrastructure of land, money, and slaves to support the lifestyle of the southern gentleman. In Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region, Richard Gray describes this essential link between the southern
gentleman’s code of conduct and the plantation lifestyle: the southern gentleman is a chivalric "feudal planter" whose plantation home is "an extension and material expression of its owner’s nobility, an architectural emblem of his moral achievement" (49-50).

Katharine Lumpkin draws the same parallel in *The Making of a Southerner*, when she says that the tradition fostered by ancestral Lumpkin planters in Virginia and Georgia fostered "almost a cult of family role, which in its completeness embraced the conception of planter lawyer-in-politics gentleman" (10-11, emphasis mine). She observes that in her father's generation, "being gentleman was counterpart to being master—these were two sides of the same man," and she describes the pervasiveness of the planter-gentleman role even, perhaps especially, after the defeat of the Civil War:

[The plantation owner] would know he was master in all things on his plantation, everything, nothing excepted, including the life of his slaves. With it he would know that his station was secure as a Southern gentleman. It would seem it left a special stamp on men who lived this life. But more particularly in a special way it stamped their sons, who were reared to expect it and then saw it snatched away. (44)

Robert Middleton, like Grace and Katharine Lumpkin's father, is one of those sons who saw his plantation lifestyle "snatched away," "one of that large group of Southerners who had many traditions behind them, but no promise for the future," and he is "[un]reconciled to the loss of past glory" (MS 44, TW 18-19). Because all he has left is those traditions and his good name, Middleton is, like William Lumpkin, "meticulous . . . in his conduct," meticulous in "observ[ing] his code of 'Southern gentleman'" (MS 144).
John Crowe Ransom links the code of the southern gentleman to dress and culture as well as personal conduct. He describes "[t]he arts of the section . . . were the eighteenth-century social arts of dress, conversation, manners, the table, the hunt, politics, oratory, the pulpit" (12). Stark Young also describes the southern gentleman in terms of manners, as a man possessing elegance, sincerity, politeness, hospitality, affability, friendliness, affection, and a love of family. However, Young says the southern gentleman also had a distinct connection to land and culture and "certain ideas of personal honor . . . an innate code of obligations":

what made your position was not power necessarily or any eminence in the country's history, but rather your settled connection with the land; it was the fact that your family had maintained a certain quality of living and manners throughout a certain period of time, and had a certain relation to the society of the country.

The aristocrat implied with us a certain long responsibility for others; a habit of domination; a certain arbitrariness; certain ideas of personal honor, with varying degrees of ethics, amour propre, and the fantastic. And it implied the possession of no little leisure. . . . This way of life meant mutuality of interests among more people, an innate code of obligations, and a certain openness of life. . . . You controlled yourself in order to make the society you lived in more decent, affable, and civilized and yourself more amenable and attractive. (345-50)

In The Making of a Southerner, Katharine Lumpkin's description of acquiring her family's cultural codes demonstrates—like that of William R. Taylor and W. J. Cash—that the code of conduct for the southern lady is an outgrowth or reflection of the code of conduct for the southern gentleman: "No one ever sat us down saying, 'We will teach you about family.' The meaning of 'family' was warp and woof of our heritage of ideas, and with it, of appropriate actions" (103). Nevertheless, Grace and Katharine Lumpkin knew what "'Southern statesmen' and 'public
servant[s]' should be": "solid, ambitious men, conscious of responsibilities of rulership . . . pious and God-fearing . . . with an acutely developed sense of duty" (MS 11-12). And as daughters of such men, they knew their appropriate roles as southern ladies: "In my head I carried the picture of the Southerner which we cherished, and whose likeness we had been reared to aspire to—of a courteous, kindly people, swift to sympathy, hospitable, gay, affectionate, withal proud, and of noble spirit and high ideal (MS 178).

Initiate and Marriageable Women/Ladies

Women characters in The Wedding represent five of the six stages of the sexual economic process. Susan, the nine-year-old sister of the bride, represents the initiate. There are no girls of self-fashioning age in The Wedding, but the four bridesmaids are at the marriageable woman/lady stage of the sexual economic process. Jennie Middleton is, of course, the bride, and her mother, Carrie, is the wife/mother figure of the novel. Cousin Fannie depicts the married mentor preserving her personal stake in the sexual economy by enforcing the economy's code of conduct. Because Jennie's mother Carrie is such an ineffective mentor, and Cousin Fannie does not arrive until the day before the wedding, male figures also provide mentorship to Jennie. Her father, her brother Christopher, and the Doctor's friend and best man Dr. Greve help her plan the wedding, monitor her conduct, and convince her to reconsider after she breaks her engagement with the Doctor. The female servants Louisa and Annie May also provide mentorship to Jennie's younger sister, Susan.
Nine-year-old Susan is a self-starter when it comes to learning about the sexual economic process. She does not wait to be instructed about how to enter the process, but she has absorbed the economy’s code of conduct lady from her surroundings at home and from her companions at school (TW 237). She doesn’t want to miss anything, so she also hides in corners to observe and listen, and she frequently asks questions as well (TW 276, 237). Susan learns a great deal from the four girl cousins who are serving as bridesmaids. They let her sit in their rooms while they dress and chatter about men and love, allow her to assist in the ceremonial process of delivering the bride’s bouquet to her as she is sequestered in her room (TW 51, 131-32). Susan even takes a beauty nap with them the afternoon of the wedding (TW 178). She becomes especially interested in the relationship of Cousin Lucy with General Stephens, one of the much older Confederate veterans who is serving as a groomsman in the ceremony, and she asks her parents about the nature of the relationship (TW 55).

Susan also learns several lessons from her sister Jennie, the bride. Susan is so fascinated with the beautiful clothes in Jennie’s trousseau that Jennie gives her some of her old petticoats to wear. They become Susan’s most prized possession; her skirts now sound like those of the older girls when she walks, a symbol that she will soon be able to participate in what seems to her the exciting world of courtship and marriage (TW 50, 111). Both Susan and her counterpart, India, of Delta Wedding, will accompany the bride on significant visits. Jennie initiates Susan into

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the lady's virtues of piety and charity by taking Susan with her to communion and to visit the beloved dying family retainer Old Rosin (TW 70-74).

Susan is also being trained in domestic, artistic, and behavior skills. She helps her mother count bedclothes and make sure there are no bugs in them (TW 99). She assists the cook Louisa in plucking chickens and drying dishes and uses the opportunity to ask her if the male servant, Ed, who tends the fires and provides other heavy physical labor, is sweet on the maid Annie May (TW 101-104). She is thrilled when she is asked to assist the bridesmaids in arranging their hands and arms in an elegant fashion to hold the prayerbooks they carry instead of bouquets (TW 280). Susan is taking piano lessons, but is not a dutiful student; when her piano teacher describes the "perfect little girl" who always knows her lesson, Susan immediately hates the poor little Russian girl (TW 129).

Susan is generally in a state of bliss in the days leading up to the wedding because several people give her a tantalizing glimpse into her future as marriageable woman/lady. The young ushers tell her that when Jennie has become Mrs. Gregg, Susan will become "Miss Middleton" and will be the next to marry (TW 50-51). Susan is especially thrilled when she is ushered into the wedding like a grown girl and when General Ireland, one of the Confederate veteran groomsmen, gives her a kiss (TW 288, 301). However, in keeping with the novel's general anxiety about the female self-sacrifice required in the marriage exchange, there are some negative aspects of the glimpse into the future. Her father indicates that there is a financial as well as a personal cost in participating in the sexual economy when he says that she

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should elope so her wedding won't cost as much as Jennie's (TW 95). He also disrupts her excitement when he tells her that marriage is a struggle like a war (TW 57). Finally, she will learn the restrictive nature of the gender role lady; when her family observes her exuberance at the wedding, they say that she must be reigned in the day after the ceremony, for she is not displaying the "restrained elegance" of a proper young lady (TW 60; Fox-Genovese 213).

Jennie's marriageable woman-age cousins do exhibit the "restrained elegance" of a lady in their performance as bridesmaids. They exhibit proper reverence for Jennie's exalted position of bride when they deliver her bouquet to her (TW 131). They also emulate her piety by holding their arms and hands in the same position as hers during the wedding, which gives them a demure, religious appearance (TW 280, 289). However, each of them chafes against the restrictions of the gender role lady by transgressing the role's code of conduct in some way. Pamela exhibits too much familiarity with men when she jokes with the groomsmen (TW 144-45). As Dabney will in Delta Wedding, Janie displays an eagerness for maternity which is inappropriate before one becomes wife by during the wedding rehearsal holding her arms not like Jennie's, but as if she were holding a baby (TW 279).

Both Nancy and Lucy illustrate how the constructed persona lady can clash with a young woman's natural tendencies. Nancy is too practical to display the requisite coquettishness which a marriageable woman needs to market herself (TW 273). Lucy, who has already had one unfortunate love affair, is beautiful enough to be desirable—enough to have attracted General Stephens—but she is too prim to
display the sexual desirousness which a marriageable woman must exhibit to indicate that she will be a sexually-satisfying wife (TW 55, 126, 144). The unnatural aspect of the socially-constructed persona lady is symbolized by the bridesmaids' physical carriage at the wedding; although it symbolizes the piety and submissiveness of a True Woman/lady, they are also described as walking stiffly, with their elbows bent in an absurd "affected manner" and their wrists "curved unnaturally" (TW 277).

Self-Sacrificing Wife/Mother and Mentors

Carrie Middleton, the mother of the bride in The Wedding, is a heightened symbol of the anxiety about marriage created by the self-sacrifice required in the marriage exchange and afterward in the abandonment of one's self to the care of the home and children. The representation of the southern lady's fragility carried to an extreme, Carrie is a weak mother, a woman who is always anxious and who always trembles in a crisis (TW 272-73, 288). She cannot even help with the wedding plans, which are left up to her husband and oldest son.

Carrie, who should be Jennie's chief example in how to be a lady is completely ineffectual in getting the strong-willed Jennie to act in accordance with the southern lady's code of conduct. She tries to stop Jennie from going carriage riding with Dr. Greve, but is unable to; when her husband Robert arrives home, he cannot understand why she could not prevent Jennie from leaving, and Carrie is resentful that he does not understand that she cannot control Jennie (TW 226).

Carrie also neglects her mother's duty to inform her daughter about female sexuality
before the wedding; her husband has to once again take over what is normally a mother’s role (TW 65).

Perhaps one reason for Carrie’s weakness and ineffectiveness is the state of the Middleton’s marriage. She thinks to herself that they are happy, except for: their lack of money—and, also, no doubt, social status—because he had to give up his law practice, her rebellion when Robert does want to impose his will on her, his temper when she rebels, their children who have died, his drinking and adultery in the past, and her dread of sex (TW 57-60). She remembers her own wedding as "like dying and waking up into a new life" (TW 63). Unfortunately, it seems that Mrs. Middleton has passed her legacy of worry, anxiety, and hysteria on to Jennie now that Jennie is about to similarly sacrifice herself in the marriage exchange.

One of the most dominant enforcers in any of the three wedding texts is Cousin Fannie, who steps into the breach caused by Carrie’s weakness and tries to control the behavior of everyone associated with the wedding. Ironically, her son Saint Johns will create one of the biggest disruptions of the week when he convinces the male servant, Ed, to help him bury one of the silver wedding gifts in the back yard. Fannie completely overpowers Carrie and Robert, who goes next door to escape Fannie as Battle Fairchild will to escape the equally domineering Aunt Tempe in Delta Wedding (TW 231, 233). Fannie, like Tempe, is also a busybody in her efforts to insure that everyone in her world is abiding by the correct code of conduct; when she arrives at the house, she has already heard and been disgusted by the fact that Carrie and Robert let Jennie go with Dr. Greve (TW 231). Miss Lizzie,
the spinster headmistress of Jennie's former school, is also a dominant code enforcer. When she is scheduled to come to the house to inspect and approve or disapprove of Jennie's trousseau, the whole house is thrown into turmoil in preparation for her visit.

Iconized, Deified Bride

Katharine Lumpkin remembers that people described her older sister, Elizabeth, as "Daughter of an eloquent father, reared in a home where the Confederacy is revered as a cause, holy and imperishable" (MS 112). Elizabeth's fictional representation in Grace Lumpkin's The Wedding, Jennie Middleton, is also the "daughter of a ruined aristocratic family who live by the code of the Confederacy" (Southern Illinois). Jennie, like her father, clings to the genteel traditions of the past, most materially symbolized by the Confederate veteran groomsmen at her wedding.

In The Southern Lady, Scott notes that "[f]rom earliest childhood girls were trained to the ideals of perfection and submission" and that boarding schools "emphasized correct female behavior more than intellectual development." She observes that by the time they became teenagers, "most girls had absorbed the injunctions of the myth" of the ideal southern lady (7). Scott also asserts that "[t]he mythology assured every young woman" who had developed "the power of manner, charm, 'accomplishments,' and virtue" that "she was a belle, endowed with magic powers to attract men and bend them to her will" (23). The message of the southern lady mythology was: "[B]e a lady and you will be loved and respected and
supported. If you defy the pattern and behave in ways considered unladylike you will be unsexed, rejected, unloved, and you will probably starve" (21-22). Scott's description of the way southern girls acquire the traits of the southern lady is a dead match for the stages of increasing self-effacement required by the sexual economic process: initiates trained "from earliest childhood"; self-fashioners who have "absorbed the injunctions of the myth" by their teen years; marriageable women with the southern belle's constructed persona whose "magic powers . . . attract men"; and women who have achieved the financial security and social respectability of marriage, who are "loved and respected and supported" as bride, wife, and mother (7, 23, 21-22).

Jennie Middleton has successfully moved through the first three stages of the sexual economic process, fashioning herself into a southern lady so appealing that her future husband has fallen in love with her at first sight (TW 14-15). She has developed the "manner, charm, 'accomplishments,' and virtue" that Scott says assure success in marketing one's self as marriageable woman (21-22). Her southern lady "manner[s]" are manifested in the clean handkerchief she carries every day, an object which reminds the Doctor of his revered childhood teacher, whom he put on a pedestal almost as high as a princess. Jennie's "charm" is revealed in her daintiness and fragility and especially in her "brilliant dark brown eyes" (TW 15). Jennie is especially "accomplished" for a small town Georgia girl; she has taken a six-month acting course in New York, attends a dramatic school every summer, and teaches "dramatic expression" at a woman's college (TW 21). She also exhibits the
"reserve" of a virtuous southern lady, and she is chaperoned by friends of her father's when she attends summer school away from home (TW 15, 21).

In the process of fashioning herself into a southern lady, Jennie has been more overtly guided by her father than by her mother; she has always been aware of his "watchful eyes" and "oppressed by a consciousness of his opinion." She especially feels "a sense of guilt and fear" if a young man tries "to touch her except in the most formal manner." Lumpkin makes this containment of female sexuality especially ominous by equating the watchful presence of Jennie's father with a lurking assassin Jennie imagined in childhood when her father received a mild threat during a heated political discussion (TW 19-20). This early link between female sexuality and death foreshadows Jennie's problematic enforcement of sexual boundaries in several key scenes in The Wedding.

As the novel opens, however, Jennie is eagerly anticipating her role as wife and mother. She especially anticipates serving as a helpmeet to the Doctor, feeling that she will be exalted by assisting him in his "holy work," and she visits the church for communion the Sunday before her wedding to "spiritually" prepare herself for marriage (TW 72). Jennie has also been practicing her parenting skills on her younger sister, Susan, passing down her old petticoats and taking Susan to communion with her.

As Robert Middleton's daughter, Jennie has been raised in the courtly love tradition of the Old South. She has upheld her end of the sexual economic exchange by fashioning herself into "a true woman of the South," and she expects her husband
to worship and revere her as do her father and the former soldiers who have elected her "Daughter of the United Confederate Veterans" (TW 68-70, 36, 41). The "shadowy being. . . .  the imaged" future husband she "conjured" when taking communion to dedicate herself as his helpmeet would certainly acknowledge the superior sensitivity and spirituality of the "fine woman" she has become (TW 68-73, 81).

Jennie has made two mistakes, however, in moving through the sexual economic process. The first is that she has, unwittingly, become somewhat a New Woman, a persona whose autonomy is incompatible with the submissiveness of the southern lady. Her "accomplishments" as an acting student and dramatic expression teacher have become a double-edged sword because they have given her unusual independence for a woman in 1909.

Jennie’s second mistake is that she is marrying a man with a different class background who does not value tradition as she does. Like Thomas Sutpen in Absalom! Absalom!, Shelley Gregg has descended from a lower-class family in the mountains to claim a bride from an upper-class lowland family like the Coldfields. Sutpen embraces the genteel values of his bride’s family because those traditions are signifiers of the upper-class to which he aspires, and Mr. Coldfield accepts him for the promise of wealth his ambition brings to the impoverished family. Gregg, however, has achieved upper class status before he met Jennie through his and his father’s hard labor and through his choice of a medical career, and he has no use for genteel values and traditions unless they make his life more comfortable (TW 11-13).
Whereas Gregg's upward mobility provides the "promise for the future" the Middletons have lost in the Civil War and Reconstruction, their attachment to the past and to tradition seems to him outmoded and financially extravagant (TW 18, 45).

Jennie's unusual independence and differing class background from the Doctor give the couple different expectations about gender roles, and this conflict causes a quarrel that cancels the wedding for much of the novel. The conflict is a classic clash between old money/antebellum and nouveau riche/twentieth-century attitudes toward tradition and gender roles. As a southern lady raised in the tradition of bygone plantation life, Jennie has expected that she will manage the couple's home and social life—the domestic sphere where "[a] woman knows" what is best—individually (TW 11-12). When the Doctor rebuffs her idea for "an afternoon at home," a salon-like meeting over tea, she is hurt and angry that he is trespassing on the wife's sphere by interfering with her social plan and by buying and furnishing their home without consulting her.

The Doctor is confused and angry that Jennie is rejecting the gift he has lovingly prepared in what he views as his role as provider and protector. When the argument broadens and intensifies to include finances and cultural sophistication, Jennie breaks the engagement. Although the initial cause of the dispute is that Jennie and the Doctor have differing views regarding tradition and their gender roles as wife and husband, and that each is planning "our life" without consulting the
other, the real conflict is about how submissive Jennie will be when she and the Doctor have a clash of wills (TW 42-26).

When the Doctor curses Jennie's household plans and the wedding itself, she realizes that it is locally-mythologized persona "the Doctor"—whom she has virtually deified in her reverence for his "holy work"—that she has agreed to marry and that the actual person Shelley Gregg is a stranger to her. Remembering the instances of transgressive sexuality that have clouded and extended their engagement, she thinks that all along he has wanted not the "fine woman" she has fashioned, but only her body. As Jennie comprehends the reality of her relationship with Gregg, her eager anticipation turns to anxiety, then to rebellion. She wants to retrieve the "splendid life" she had on her own in place of the submissive one she sees before her in marriage (TW 73).

The night Jennie breaks the engagement, a chill wind blows in and coats Lexington with ice. This cold front is a metaphor for the moral/social code of the sexual economy in two ways. First, like limbs which become so heavily coated with ice that they break, the relationship of Jennie and the Doctor has been so heavily burdened with their differing expectations of what the economy's code of conduct requires of them as husband and wife that the relationship snaps.

The "icy current" also represents the chill reception Jennie receives from family and friends when she breaks the engagement. This departure from the economy's social code is far more serious than the couple's sexual transgressions which have stretched the boundaries of the economy's moral code: this deviation
literally affects Jennie’s whole family and the fabric of the society in which they live (TW 48-49). Jennie’s father, in a scene which links the public/private spheres for men and women with the mind/body dualism introduced by Descartes and popularized in the Enlightenment, urges Jennie to move from the woman’s sphere of emotion to the male sphere of reason and “be sensible” (a phrase used six times) about breaking the engagement (TW 76-81). But it will take the detachment of an outsider not affected by this breach of conduct, the Doctor’s friend and best man, Dr. Greve, to renegotiate the verbal contract for marriage which Jennie and the Doctor have rescinded in their stubborn battle of the sexes over gender role expectations.

As a natural outgrowth of their differing views regarding tradition and gender roles in marriage, Jennie and the Doctor have differing views regarding appropriate premarital sexuality. The inexperienced Jennie naively equates sexual indoctrination with mystical knowledge of how to be a good wife, and she thus confuses sexual passion with her passion to help the doctor in his “holy work.” Because of this confusion, she allows the Doctor more sexual intimacy than the moral code of the sexual economy allows for an engaged girl, a liberty which creates anxiety about her need to retain sexual purity for the marriage exchange.

The sexual transgression occurs one evening when Jennie accompanies the Doctor to attend to the broken leg of a friend’s son in the mountains. As they drive to Black Creek, a tremendous storm begins, and the Doctor, protectively drawing Jennie to him, gives her a caress. Excited by the prospect of helping in the Doctor’s
work, by the storm, and by the caress, Jennie thinks that their love is exalted above "that of all other beings" (TW 28). Although the Doctor, intent on his work, forgets her once they arrive, she reminds herself that he holds "the power of life over death" and that he is "a triumphant being" (TW 30).

Once the boy's leg is set and his parents leave the engaged couple alone, the Doctor, sensing Jennie's excitement, pulls her to his lap and moves his hands over her feet to warm her, then to her shoulders, her face, and her breasts. The Doctor's intimate caresses are highly transgressive sexual behavior in 1909, but Jennie feels so protected and secure because of their exalted love that the caresses seem "natural and right" (TW 32). However, when the Doctor's fingers move to her thigh, she "struggles from his arms, angry—and terrified—that he is attempting to "cheat" her "out of [the] great and valuable possession" of her virginity before she has received security and respectability in exchange for it at the marriage altar (TW 33).

This transgressive sexual behavior and its anxiety-producing results are augured in the violence of the storm through which the couple drives to the mountain house. As the Doctor's carriage descends into the darkness of a ravine, the horses are forced to swim a ford, and the Doctor almost loses control of the carriage because the river is raging out of bounds. This scene equates unrestrained female sexuality with overflowing water and death: Jennie's confused passion is as out of bounds as the deadly, raging river, and the behavior to which it leads almost causes the death of her relationship with the Doctor. Although her anger at his taking the sexual liberties is resolved a week later, both Jennie and the Doctor retain a
resentment of the mountain incident that is similar to the way "the bed of a stream" retains "trash washed from the banks of a swollen torrent" (TW 26-34).

The stormy night in the mountains is not the first time Dr. Gregg has initiated intimate behavior which creates anxiety for Jennie because it is "not . . . on the proper basis" (TW 23). Before their engagement, as he and Jennie returned late from a party and lingered on her parents' porch, they bent over a flower tub to examine the night-blooming cereus which was just opening. The Doctor slipped his arm around Jennie's shoulders, then drew her to him and kissed her.

Jennie, whose sexual energy has been contained in order to preserve the flower of her virginity, the fetishized emblem of possession she will offer in the marriage exchange, has, like the cereus, accumulated "amazing energy" to produce "this one flower after so many years." In a metaphor reminiscent of Dylan Thomas's "The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower" (which predates The Wedding by five years), Jennie trembles from the force of her pure, untapped sexuality as dramatically as the flower quivers with the opening of its brilliant white petals (TW 22-24). When Jennie returns the Doctor's kiss passionately, he literally runs away and does not return for many days. 10

The Doctor knows he has breached the sexual economy's code of moral conduct in giving Jennie a passionate kiss not "sanctified by a promise of marriage" (TW 23). Although he has loved Jennie from the moment he met her, he is not yet ready to propose marriage, the consequence such a kiss requires from the sexual economy's code of conduct (TW 14-15). As Jennie "wait[s] anxiously for some
word" from the Doctor, she is "torture[d]... and consumed by a strong anger and impatience against him" (TW 23).

A great deal of the anxiety and anger seen in both the storm and cereus episodes points to a divergence in Jennie's and the Doctor's concepts of what is "natural" in an intimate relationship. Having had his first sexual experiences at age sixteen in a daisy-covered mountain meadow with a slightly older former prostitute, the Doctor views sexual intimacy as a natural outgrowth of desire. When he meets Jennie, he senses that, in spite of her cultured reserve, she is as passionate as his first partner (TW 13-14).

Although the cereus kiss's expression of mutual sexual expression is "most natural" to the Doctor, who understands, but does not necessarily abide by the sexual economy's code of conduct, to Jennie, whose economic and social future depends on her abiding by the code, the kiss disrupts the natural chain of events in courtship. Because the Doctor has stolen the kiss without an accompanying marriage proposal, she feels that he has soiled her reputation and thus "robbed her of the natural right of a woman" to choose her marriage partner (23-24). Although the Doctor understands this no proposal/no passion restriction, he chafes at this high price for satisfying desire. When he returns to do the honorable thing, he is "looking ashamed." With a "strained smile," he asks Jennie to marry him, "quickly, sharply, almost angrily as if he did this against his will" (TW 24).

In the months leading up to her wedding, Jennie Middleton has experienced anxiety about the self-effacement cost of fashioning herself into the marriageable
southern lady, anxiety about the submissiveness required of the gender role wife, and anxiety about the episodes of transgressive sexuality she has experienced with the Doctor. This anxiety is reflected in Jennie’s experiencing altering emotional states of joy and hysteria which lead to altered corporal states such as temporary or simulated blindness or deafness, some of which are associated with death.

The night of the wedding rehearsal, Jennie is so excited "with all the attention she had received" at the party that she seems a "joyful and radiant being" more than herself (TW 41, emphasis mine). However, after breaking the engagement, she becomes so hysterical that the word is used four times in three pages to describe her emotional state the following morning (TW 63-64, 67). Although her father attempts to reassure the Doctor in explaining that Jennie’s agitation is simply a case of pre-wedding jitters, he actually discloses the severity of Jennie’s anxiety by describing her as "wrought up to a fine pitch" (TW 178).

Jennie’s joy and hysteria seem conjoined in the scene where she coaches the bridesmaids on how to hold their hands when carrying prayerbooks rather than the small Confederate flags the northern Dr. Grant has banished from the ceremony. Now that she has refound her life’s purpose as helpmeet in her reconciliation with the Doctor, Jennie finds herself "strong and purposeful" in the flag crisis: "Now she was needed and could love people and give herself to them and do for them and tell them what to do," roles she will fulfill as wife and particularly as mother (TW 275). She is also "happy and joyful once more" because she has regained the pride and confidence of her parents (TW 278).
However, twice in this scene, Jennie flings her hands to her head, shaking her hair until the pins fall out and the hair stands on end. Although at both junctures she is frustrated by the bridesmaids’ performance in this spontaneous wedding rehearsal, the hand-to-hair movement seems hysterical and uncontrolled at a time when Jennie is supposedly in "command" of herself and her attendants. She also "shrieks" and "scream[es]" in this scene, eruptions which indicate hysteria beneath her surface of joyful control (TW 279-80).

In a previous scene, Jennie’s hysteria leads to a temporary simulation of blindness. As she looks in the mirror to adjust her coat and hat before going riding with Dr. Greve, an odd blindness becomes a metaphor for her diminishing identity. Her sense of self is dying in the sexual economy’s requirement that she subdue her individuality in marriage as surely as if it were being strangled by the fur stole given to her by the Doctor:

And though she put the hat on the correct angle, tipped toward the front, high in the back, she did not see herself, did not meet her own eyes in the mirror. And the same thing happened when she adjusted the stole of brown fur which the Doctor had given her the Christmas before about her neck and stood at the mirror again with the large flat muff in her hands, ready to go. Although she saw herself, she did not look into her own face, and her eyes did not meet the eyes in the mirror. (204-205)

Even Jennie’s mother thinks that her face says "I am going away, I am going away" in this scene. Mrs. Middleton believes the expression reflects Jennie’s determination to defy convention and go riding alone with Dr. Greve. But when the ride ends in Jennie’s capitulation to go ahead with the marriage, it becomes clear that "I am
going away" also further reflects the diminishing self Jennie can no longer see in her reflection in her girlhood mirror (TW 205).

For a brief moment during her meeting with Dr. Greve and the Doctor at the end of the outing, Jennie feels that she has not capitulated in reconciling with the Doctor, but that she has won the battle of the sexes she has enjoined in defying the Doctor, her father, and Dr. Greve: "She knew without saying it that she was in control of the situation, that they would do what she said, and be what she said, and this feeling gave her a peculiar joy (263). However, moments later, when Dr. Greve whispers "Got your way, didn't you?", Jennie has a moment of diminished hearing similar to her simulated blindness: "Jennie heard the words that he said. But she did not understand them, and smiled at him radiantly" (268, emphasis mine). Her vacant smile verifies that the independent, strong-willed Jennie has been subsumed into a Stepford Wives kind of bride, one whose former self has been replaced by a replica programmed to look and act the role of submissive wife.

Jennie’s anxiety about losing her individuality in marriage also appears in several representations of her regressing into a childlike state and then returning to womanhood, ricochets which make her seem suspended between her old single and new married lives. In fact, she feels suspended throughout the engagement, which lies fallow more than a year as she wavers between “dread[ing] to give up her independence” and finding it “impossible to do without [the Doctor]” (TW 25-35).

When she and the Doctor quarrel, Jennie moves in the space of a moment from being a “woman [who] knows” “what is good” for her husband to being a
petulant, willful child who taunts the patriarchally parental Doctor to "slap me for doing wrong." She remains in this childlike state much of the following morning (TW 46-47). Jennie also reverts to a childlike state because her parents are not supportive of her breaking the engagement: she feels "like a little girl who . . . has been punished unjustly" (TW 64). As her father closes the door "sharply" after she rebuffs his appeal to be "sensible" and go through with the marriage, Jennie feels completely in stasis and liminality:

The sound of his feet going down the hall and the stairs seemed to represent the steps of her old life going away and leaving her alone stranded in a middle place where she had neither the old life nor the new, but some indeterminate position which was empty of all joy and hope. And it was intolerable to her to be in this neutral position. (83)

The strength of her normally deferential mother's disapproval of her going riding with Dr. Greve makes Jennie seem to both her mother and Dr. Greve "like a small child who has been terribly hurt" (TW 200). However, at the end of the ride, she is portrayed not only as a woman, but as a wayward one. When Robert Middleton discovers that she is at the hotel with the Doctor and Dr. Greve, he thinks that Jennie may not be as trustworthy as he has thought she has been when studying and teaching away from Lexington. Despite the fact that Mrs. Greve's presence abates the impropriety of a young girl's being in a hotel room with two men, Middleton thinks that, although "[h]e had liked to think of her as an innocent child," now that Jennie has broken the engagement and demonstrated this additional lapse in propriety, he suspects that she is no longer innocent, but an "abandoned . . . shameless . . . vicious woman" (TW 265).
The loss of self Jennie is experiencing in approaching her marriage is evident in repeated representations of her as in exile from her family and even from herself in ways which make her seem already absent from her previous life. Because she is the bride, she has been given the only room alone in the house, which is crowded with the bridesmaids and ushers staying with the family (TW 67). Although this honor gives her an elevated status befitting a bride, it also removes her from the festive nature of the wedding preparations in a type of liminality.

Jennie was similarly separated from family closeness the evening the Doctor finally returned to propose. When her brother Hugh announced the Doctor's arrival, Jennie was unable to rise from her chair at the supper table, "a stranger" to the family that stared at her unfathomable immobility (TW 24). Jennie is also portrayed as a stranger, even to herself, when Greve takes her to the hotel to speak to the Doctor. Greve leaves her alone for a few moments, and "[s]he felt that she was not herself, not Jennie Middleton who was to be married that evening, but a stranger who was sitting in a room which she had never seen before, and she was as strange to herself, as the room was strange to her" (22).

Most of the representations of Jennie in an exiled state are directly connected to some kind of transgressive behavior on her part, a juxtaposition which emphasizes how individuality is lost in the confinement of the gender role woman. After receiving her parents' disapproval for breaking the engagement, Jennie retreats to her room in self-imposed exile. When the bridesmaids and Susan take her the recently-arrived bridal bouquet to make Jennie feel more cheerful, they find her corporally
present, but mentally absent, staring into the fire "with a look as if she did not live in the room, but was a long way from it living in some other place" (TW 138). This self-imposed exile in her room makes Jennie feel that "[a]ll day she had been so dull in her prison," but she sees the opportunity to escape the anxiety and pressure of the sexual economy's bridal code of conduct in her ride with Dr. Greve (TW 96).

Ironically, their destination is a prison, "The Penitentiary" where the family's dying mattress maker, Old Rosin, is incarcerated for accidentally killing a man while illegally selling him liquor (TW 207, 211).

Paradoxically, the escape ride with Dr. Greve becomes the vehicle which transports Jennie back within the boundaries of correct bridal behavior. In a scene which repeats the intense emotional experience Jennie had when spiritually preparing herself for marriage by taking communion, Old Rosin's deathly consumptive blood on a cloth reminds Jennie of the communion wine which symbolized Christ's blood. She and her younger sister, Susan, are being kind to Old Rosin this day as they were kind to the old beggar woman whom they helped up the chapel steps at communion.

Jennie knew that "[i]t was very significant that this had happened twice. . . . it seemed to be a sign, if she could only find the meaning of the sign. And again the blood seemed very significant" (TW 217).

The significance, of course, is that in Christian theology, Christ, whose first miracle is turning water into wine during a wedding at Cana, will sacrifice his blood for the redemption of mankind. In parallel fashion, Jennie, in her superior female sensitivity and spirituality, will turn the the "water" of the Doctor's everyday life
into the "wine" of significance, and she will have to sacrifice her individuality to do
so. It seems that Lumpkin is intentionally mixing the wine/water and blood/sacrifice
metaphors to reiterate how complete the sacrifice of woman's individuality is in
marriage. Although Greve tells the Doctor that he must "give in" and make Jennie
"feel that she is everything," Greve says that the reward will be that she will turn
"your blood into wine." But since it is Jennie's blood that is compared to the
sacrifice of Christ, the implication is that her sacrifice in miraculously transforming
the Doctor's life will be so complete as to subsume even her blood into his (TW
257).

This image of Jennie's sacrificing herself, which represents the loss of self
she is experiencing in the marriage exchange, appears repeatedly in The Wedding.
As her parents attempt to persuade her to go ahead with the marriage, they remind
her of the financial and other sacrifices they have made to prepare for her large
wedding. Quivering with anger and self-pity, she cries that it is she who is being
sacrificed and that she never wanted to marry, but was forced into the engagement
because her parents wanted to be rid of financial responsibility for her (TW 63-64).
When she hears the bridesmaids and ushers laughing and talking outside her bedroom
door the morning of the wedding, she restrains herself from telling them the
ceremony is cancelled so that "all should be suffering as she was suffering" (TW
74). As Jennie's father tries a second time to reason with her, she accuses him of
wanting her to "be sensible" and to "sacrifice [her]self so that everyone else can be
happy" (TW 79).
Jennie ties self-sacrifice to marriage and particularly to motherhood when she charges her father with wanting her to sacrifice herself as her mother has done. Jennie says that she wants to be a mother, "but not that only . . . I want to be a person. But you want me to be a slave . . . to a man who is coarse" (TW 80). Later in the day, as her former teacher arrives to see the trousseau, one of the bridesmaids helps Jennie wash the tears from her face; although Jennie knows she will not be married that evening, she feels that for the moment she must "go on . . . as if everything was just as it should be. I must smile and not let anyone know how I am suffering" (TW 148). Finally, when Dr. Greve comes to the house to urge Jennie to reconcile with the Doctor, woman's self-sacrifice in marriage is referred to five times as Jennie realizes she must "giv[e] up her individual life and . . . her energies must be used for her husband." In return, he must "carry out her life in the world as well as his own . . . because she was giving up her individual life for him" (TW 202).

All of these allusions to Jennie's pending self-sacrifice imbue a casual comment made by Jennie's father with ominous meaning. When Mr. Bell, Jennie's summer chaperon who introduced her to the Doctor, describes how the Doctor fell in love at first sight of Jennie, Middleton replies, "It must be a great love, and I believe everything should be sacrificed for such a love" (TW 117). Although Middleton is referring to his own sacrifice of financial resources and pride as he borrows $900 to pay for the wedding, the ultimate sacrifice will be his independent, strong-willed daughter's individuality on the sanctified, subsuming altar of marriage.
The sacrificial nature of marriage for women is reinforced by numerous references which link Jennie and her wedding to death imagery. In the imagined assassin of Jennie's childhood and the dying Old Rosin, Lumpkin invokes death imagery by comparing the crowd at Jennie's wedding to "the crowd . . . when the editor and owner [of the largest newspaper in the state] was shot and killed." The editor's murderer even walked to meet his victim from behind the walls of the Episcopal church in the same manner that the Doctor will walk from behind the walls of that church's chancel to meet Jennie in marriage (TW 9, 293).

When Miss Lizzie, owner of the finishing school Jennie attended and recognized arbiter of good taste for Lexington, comes to view the trousseau, Jennie's holding her wedding dress against her temporarily lifts her despair over the disapproval of her breaking the engagement, and for a moment she feels "joyous and helpful" as the sexual economy would dictate she should feel in anticipation of becoming the Doctor's wife and helpmeet. However, as Jennie admires herself in the mirror and imagines herself walking down the aisle "in this shimmering gown with the veil drifting behind," she suddenly thinks her joy is "improper . . . just as a person who is at a funeral feels that he has done something improper when his mind goes forward . . . to . . . a pleasure trip" (TW 149-50).

The bridesmaids' rehearsal scene also ends with a terrifying image which Susan has of Ed, the black servant who has run away because he was accused of stealing a silver wedding present, as "a dark form . . . frightened and alone" running in a desert from a ball of fire which threatens to consume him (TW 282). This
deathly effigy is the last image presented before the representation of the wedding, where Jennie will appear as a similarly undefined dark figure in the carriage which brings her to the church (TW 291).

Because the self-effacement required in the self-fashioning and marriageable woman/lady stages of the sexual economic process is so complete, once the young woman reaches the stage bride, she is the completely objectified commodity of the sexual economy’s marriage exchange. As a result, she is no longer her former self as daughter, sister, cousin, or friend, but the iconized figure “bride,” a mysterious, radiant, figure in white—a shining light whose substance is imperceptible. The fact that her dress is not described (not even in the stage directions of Childress’s play), where the clothing of the bridesmaids and groomsmen is described in detail, only adds to her ghost-like, impenetrable quality.

Jennie’s representation as bride is even more iconized than that of Dabney or Julia because it is analogous to her representation as the Daughter of the United Confederate Veterans. In this honored position, she is the ur signifier of the Lost Cause, an “ornament of the south,” a static symbol of a dead past. She is the southern lady reified to its highest cult status—to what Cash calls gynelatry. Jennie is not merely the objectified, iconized commodity of the sexual economy, but is so deified that she stands not on the pedestal of southern ladyhood, but floats above it with an ethereal quality.

In The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender, Lee Ann Whites observes that, ironically, women rather than men created this deified image of the southern lady as
the embodiment of the Lost Cause. Whites maintains that, as men went away to war and women took over their duties in the world of work, women's "newfound autonomy threatened to undermine the very basis for the social construction of white manhood that they were supposed to be propping up." White women of the elite class began to realize that this situation could entail a loss of status for their class. This created a "domestic reconstruction of southern white manhood [that] would take place in the war's aftermath." In Augusta, Georgia, for example, "the Ladies' Memorial Association not only rehabilitated the tattered honor of dedicated Confederate men but in doing so made a vital contribution to the redefinition of the Civil War itself":

Rather than taking their men's participation in the war as a militant assertion of "free manhood" or as the defense of slavery, the ladies redefined it as dedicated in the first instance to their own domestic defense. Here Confederate men, rather than having fought the war in defense of their right to dominate those household dependents—the slaves—who were now lost to them, were reenvisioned as having loyally stood for the defense of those household dependents—their women and children—who in the postwar era continued to stand loyally by them.

They could be reconstructed as a simple extension of their commitment, their relationship to their women and children. The self-asserting warrior of the war's outset, militant in defense of his prerogatives in relation to other men, white and black, could reemerge in the postwar memorialization of the Confederate Dead as a dutiful husband or son who sacrificed his life for the defense of his home and motherland, or as one grave decoration put it, "A Martyr for a Noble Cause." (13-14, 168)

Because of her strong association with this Noble Cause, Jennie's arrival at the church for her Confederate wedding invokes the hallowed reception given to Grace and Katharine Lumpkin's sister, Elizabeth, at the 1903 Confederate Reunion in Columbia, South Carolina. The perfect embodiment of the "slight," fragile,
delicate southern lady, Elizabeth gave an eloquent speech interrupted "[t]ime and again . . . by thunderous applause" and receiving a standing ovation (MS 115, 119-20). Jennie is similarly honored as she steps from her bridal carriage into the vestibule of the church—treated as royalty. One is reminded of Lady Diana Spenser’s arrival at the church for her marriage to Prince Charles.

Someone at the door said, "The bride is here," and the words were repeated by others. Christopher heard them and swung away from Hugh toward the front door. Hugh followed him. They (Jennie’s brothers) ran down the steps to the carriage and stood on the sidewalk. They saw the mysterious white figure in the dark interior of the carriage, and each of the brothers took a place at the side of the carriage door, waiting for the mysterious figure to come out into the light and become their sister Jennie. Robert Middleton stepped out of the carriage first and stood aside. Jennie smiled at her brothers as they helped her to step down to the sidewalk. She held her long train and the veil carefully from the ground as they passed up the walk between the crowds of people and mounted the steps of the church. In the vestibule the dressmaker who had been waiting for this moment came forward and knelt down to arrange Jennie’s train and the veil. All the Veterans left their place and bent over Jennie’s hand . . .

Jennie did not know that her father had left her. She did not notice when he and Christopher slipped out of the side door of the church. The gray-uniformed Veterans crowded close to Jennie, each one trying to be the first to pay her courtly and exaggerated compliments. Everyone in the vestibule was looking at her. She was the center of attention. A warm and loving emotion of gratitude came up in Jennie. Her smile was bright and there were unshed tears of emotion in her eyes. She received all the attention with gravity and dignity. And though she was grave and sedate, on her mouth at the corners of her lips a loving smile trembled. She was the daughter of the Veterans and they were proud of her and she knew they were proud. She was not only herself but a symbol of their past. (290-92)

* * * * *

When Jennie and the Doctor had fought, and she had broken off the engagement, Dr. Greve had been an effective intermediary because he understood what Jennie and the Doctor expected from each other in terms of gender roles, and
he demonstrated that they could meet each other's expectations. By telling Jennie about the brain surgery the Doctor recently performed, he rekindled her excitement for her role as helpmeet (220). By tenderly placing, with a mischievous mock vow, the wedding ring which the Doctor had given him that morning on Jennie's finger, Greve demonstrated to the Doctor the warmth with which Jennie responded to love and respect (260-61). Greve's actions made the Doctor remember his early feelings for Jennie, and the couple reconciled with a kiss as passionate as their first over the night-blooming cereus (258, 261-62). Greve's negotiating skill had brought both of these passionate, angry transgressors of the economy's moral and social codes back within the boundaries of acceptable behavior for brides and grooms. The Doctor was once again the confident, protective master of his and Jennie's destiny, telling Jennie "[t]hen behave so" when she reconciled to becoming his wife (261). Jennie was once again the "radiantly" smiling, submissive bride (268).

During the wedding ceremony, Greve thinks the marriage will be different sources of joy for Jennie and the Doctor—she wants the romance; he wants the pragmatic relationship. He wonders if Jennie and the Doctor will be able to fuse his pragmatism with her unrealistic expectations and the fact that she wants the kind of joy that comes from imagination. Her desire for such an abstract satisfaction in marriage is only appropriate in light of the fact that she has sacrificed herself in order to become the abstract ideal of the self-fashioned, constructed persona of the southern lady. The irony is that the Doctor, like Thomas Sutpen, has gotten what he bargained for: not a real woman, but a signifier of a heritage that he could never
make his own. As Jennie and the Doctor leave on the train, the novel’s anxiety about the female self-effacement required in the sexual economic process and the tension created by the differing expectations of women’s and men’s gender roles is reflected in Dr. Greve’s thoughts about the couple’s future happiness:

But in spite of himself the little doctor wondered again as he stood with the others at the train looking up into the faces of the bride and groom. He saw that Jennie was exhilarated. "She is feeling holy," he said to himself impatiently. He saw that his friend, on the steps of the train just above Jennie, was looking down with a kindly, steady good-natured smile. "Perhaps it will be right," he told himself. . . . Someone said, "Well, they’ve gone." One of the girls wiped her eyes with her handkerchief. . . . The little Doctor sighed and turned away from the empty tracks.

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Notes

1. Katherine, born in 1897, was five years younger than Grace and the youngest child in the family (MS 128, 130).

2. Gilkes, who taught creative writing at New York University and elsewhere, was a short story writer, book reviewer, and author of Cora Crane: A Biography of Mrs. Stephen Crane (TW jacket cover).

3. The brothers’ move to Georgia is the first discrepancy between information from Gilkes and that from Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin. Gilkes, quoting from August 3 and September 11, 1974, letters from Grace, says that all three brothers moved to Georgia together about 1768 (312, 319). Katharine places the date twenty-five years later, noting that George and Robert moved to Georgia ten years before Joseph joined them, which was one year before Georgia gave Eli Whitney a patent for the cotton gin (1794); this scenario would place George and Robert in Georgia in 1783 and Joseph there in 1793 (6).

4. References to Grace and Katharine’s paternal grandfather, Young William’s father Adoniram Judson, are oddly absent in The Making of a Southerner. He is only mentioned once, in a reference to his and William Senior’s being “pious, God-fearing men, with a Baptist conviction about salvation” (MS 34). Grandfather William Senior was clearly the family patriarch and the primary influence in Young William’s life.
5. Katharine Lumpkin demonstrates the powerful effect this "new social Christianity" had on her by quoting Revelation 21:1: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (188). In an interesting parallel, 1970s philosopher/theologian Mary Daly used the same verse to title her book about the effects of feminism on Christianity, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*.

6. Social purists argued that regulating prostitution would penalize female prostitutes, many of whom had been forced into the trade by economic necessity, while providing men "unlimited sexual access outside of marriage." The movement promoted a single sexual standard for men and women, and organizations such as the YWCA, the YMCA, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Travellers Aid, and the Society of Friends worked to keep women's sexual standards high and to "uplift" men to those same standards. By the 1890s, social purity had become a national movement which attacked "all forms of male sexual privilege" and which was effecting changes regarding age-of-consent and divorce laws, women's education and working outside the home, involuntary motherhood and contraception, sex education, and the spiritualization of married sexual relations (D'Emilio and Freedman 145-56).

7. The year of this move is also in dispute. Smith sets the move in the "mid-1920s" (287), but both Gilkes and *Twentieth Century Authors* set the time as Lumpkin's twenty-fifth birthday, which would be 1917 (313, 860).

8. Katharine Lumpkin followed Grace to New York in 1918, where she also attended Columbia and increased her liberalism by "stud[y]ing the South" (201). However, unlike Grace, she never renounced her liberalism, and her autobiography is "largely a tale of personal reconstruction, of her remaking herself into a southerner free from old biases and lies" (Hine xii). Katharine Lumpkin's liberal attitudes continued even into the later years of her life; her 1980 Afterword to *The Making of a Southerner* is a catalogue of major incidents of the Civil Rights Movement, knowledge which she says lifts her spirit whenever it surfaces from memory (252).

9. Lumpkin also reproduced moments from the 1901, 1903, and 1906 Confederate reunions in *To Make My Bread* (3).

10. Although there is not a cereus in *Delta Wedding*, Ann Waldron indicates that Welty was also familiar with the flower, "an exotic houseplant that was all the rage during the Depression in the South." Waldron describes the cereus as "a form of cactus that supposedly bloomed only once in a decade ... would sport one marvelous white bloom late at night and then almost immediately turn brown and droop pathetically. Residents of Jackson would put a notice in the paper when their night-blooming cereus was due to blossom and invite everyone to come by and watch it." Welty and some friends organized the "Night-Blooming Cereus Club," although Welty imbued the plant with comedic rather than overdetermined sexual power. The
The club’s motto was “Don’t take it cereus, life’s too mysterious.” They once stayed up all night at someone’s house to watch the flower open (Waldron doesn’t indicate whether it did or not) and were delighted at one plant owner’s description that “tomorrow it’ll look like a wrung chicken’s neck.” Waldron indicates that the word became such a part of Welty’s vocabulary that she sometime opened letters to friends with “You night-blooming cereus, you,” apparently a reference to the fact that she and her friends liked to party late (62). Welty does mention the plant in *Losing Battles*. 

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The rocky homemade altar at the wedding of Dabney Fairchild in *Delta Wedding* sets the scene for the two levels of marriage exchange which occur in most twentieth-century American wedding ceremonies. On the material level, in a symbolic holdover from the exchange of women in primitive and ancient times, Dabney is "given" to her groom, Troy, by her father. This literal exchange of the bride from the arm of her father to the arm of her groom represents the transfer of caretaking responsibility for Dabney from one patriarchal male to another.

In *Delta Wedding*, this male-to-male exchange also signifies what Sedgwick describes as male homosocial desire "to consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females" (38). Sedgwick traces the origins of this type of exchange from nineteenth-century gender arrangements as seen in the Victorian bourgeois family back to medieval courtly traditions, in which the chivalric code exalted or "privileged" women as passive objects of men's social and political intercourse with other men (124). The marriage exchange in *Delta Wedding* incorporates these elements of male partnership and passive female object in spite of the fact that Dabney seemingly instigated the relationship between her and Troy. Although Welty does not directly state that Dabney "went after" Troy, the girl's unflinching flirting with every male in sight until she literally walks down the aisle and Troy's constant behavioral acknowledgment of his status as an outsider and
employee hint that the initiator of the relationship was the headstrong seventeen-year-old.

Once Troy has contracted to marry Dabney, an exchange which has apparently occurred between the two of them rather than between Troy and Battle, as one might expect in this family obsessed with the past, Troy does use the coming marriage to consolidate his partnership with the Fairchild family if not directly with his employer Battle, whose authority over the large extended Fairchild family certainly represents the Lacanian Law of the Father in symbol if not in practice. (It is the women who, historically, have really run things in the various houses of the Fairchild plantation). And it seems that the mere fact of becoming engaged has shifted Dabney's status from daughter to passive object "bride." Everyone in the family, including Dabney herself, describes her in this objective form; and, as the week progresses toward the marriage ceremony, she becomes increasingly represented as late, absent, and in altered mental and physical states.

These altered states represent anxiety over the loss of self Dabney is incurring in the second level of exchange which occurs in the marriage ceremony in *Delta Wedding* and in most other twentieth-century American marriage ceremonies: the bride's exchange of herself as fashioned into "the marriageable woman" for the financial security and social respectability of marriage. Anxiety about the loss of self, or of individual identity, which Dabney has incurred in fashioning herself into the marriageable woman commodity required by the sexual economic process is delineated, in similar fashion to Lumpkin's text, in a narrative of bridal anticipation,
disruption of anticipation, altered mental and corporal states, suspension between old and new lives, and, finally, self-sacrifice on the marriage altar represented in the loss of a significant person or object and in imagery of violence and death surrounding the bride.

Welty's Life and Work
Leading to Delta Wedding

When Eudora Welty completed Delta Wedding in 1945, she had been a serious writer for ten years. According to Ann Waldron, in her unauthorized biography Eudora: A Writer's Life, Welty knew by the time she was twenty that she wanted to be a writer. She had been writing fiction and essays since she was in high school, but in the summer of 1929, when she had completed an undergraduate degree in English with a minor in art, she applied to several publishers in Chicago and New York, stating that she was "'desirous of getting a position in a publishing house which will serve toward stimulating and finding a field for my own writing'" (42). This naive application letter telling the publishers what they could do for her rather than what she could do for them—although she had excellent letters of recommendation from two prominent professors at Wisconsin—garnered no results, and she was soon back in Jackson, Mississippi, which would remain her life-long home.

Welty was born in Jackson on April 13, 1909, to Christian Welty from Ohio and his wife, Chestina, from West Virginia. They had moved to Jackson five years before Welty was born, where her father took a job with the Lamar Life Insurance Company, a long-established, well-respected Jackson-based corporation and rose through its ranks until he became vice president and general manager when Welty was
in high school. Although Chestina Welty stayed at home to raise Welty and her two younger brothers, Edward, born in 1912, and Walter, born in 1915, she was also the New Woman of the 1920s. She was active in the PTA and a study club, helped found the Garden Lovers Club, and, most significantly, was a "charter member of the Woman's Club," one of the national reform organizations which helped create the New Woman. As the Jackson club’s chairman of service for two years, she worked for enforcement of child labor laws and an increase in minimum school requirements (Waldron 11ff). Her mother's liberal political activism was an important influence on Welty, who became a New Woman herself and gave Robbie Reid Fairchild of Delta Wedding characteristics of one as well.

Welty finished Central High School in Jackson when she was only sixteen and attended Mississippi State College for Women in Columbus, "the first state college for women in the country," where she was active in theatre, published short stories and poems, assisted in editing the campus literary magazine, and helped found a humor magazine. In 1927, she transferred to the University of Wisconsin, where she read widely in English literature and was "heavily influenced" by an eighteenth-century literature course taught by Ricardo Quintana, a Harvard Ph.D. No doubt the sexual economics she encountered in the works of the marriage plot writers discussed in the introduction to this study had a later influence on Delta Wedding.

Welty's father was concerned that she be able to support herself, so when she and three friends from Jackson broached the idea of going to graduate school at Columbia University, her parents, who "'believed in the value of new experiences'"
financed the move. Welty studied advertising and typing, but mainly the culture of New York, where she attended the theatre and went to museums, jazz clubs, and just about anything else the city had to offer (Waldron 43-45). She returned home quickly in 1931 when her father was diagnosed with leukemia, and he died within weeks at the age of 52. His life insurance and stock shares in Lamar Life left Chestina comfortable, but Edward was in school at Georgia Tech, and Walter was still in high school. Although Welty says her mother never put any pressure on her to stay in Jackson, "'there weren't any jobs in New York,'" so she decided to remain (Waldron 47-48).

Welty began a series of varied jobs which included working at a radio station, for the Mississippi Advertising Commission and state archives, and serving as a part-time correspondent for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* (Waldron 49, 64, 67, 97). One of the stories she covered for the *Appeal* may have been slightly reincarnated in *Delta Wedding*. She covered a Junior Auxiliary Style Show where "'[b]efore 300 persons passed the cream of society in the cream of fashion. And certainly the old fashioned wedding dresses were the loveliest things ever seen'" (Waldron 67). Although the shepherdess bridesmaids' ensembles in *Delta Wedding* are more likely a conscious effort to invoke the pastoral, as much of life at Shellmound does, perhaps Welty saw an inspiration for them at the 1933 style show.

In 1935, Welty began her most interesting job, which would provide the foundation for much of her work. She became a junior publicist—not a photographer, as is commonly thought—for the five-person Jackson staff of the *Works Progress*
Administration. She wrote feature stories on WPA projects from building juvenile courts to paving farm-to-market roads to running bookmobiles to teaching the blind Braille. Most significantly, she traveled to every county in the state, absorbing geography, characters, and local stories which would form the basis for much of her fiction. She worked for the WPA until the Jackson office was closed in 1936 (Waldron 70-71). She did begin to take pictures during this period, and the WPA and local newspapers to which she sent her releases used some of them. Photography would become a serious hobby, and she was talented enough to have one-woman shows in North Carolina and New York (Waldron 73). In 1971 she published a collection of her photographs in *One Time, One Place*.

During this time period, Welty had a group of friends—"a remarkable group of talented people with literary interest"—with whom she participated in the Little Theater, formed the Night-Blooming Cereus Club, and had dinners and picnics. Since it was during the Depression when no one had much money, picnics at places such as the ruins of Windsor outside of Port Gibson, Mississippi, the town too beautiful for Sherman to burn, were a favorite activity (Waldron 56-62). These happy experiences are no doubt a source for the family picnics in *Delta Wedding*. Welty frequently cooked for the group of friends (Waldron 59). She is a good cook and a gracious hostess, a fact to which several interviewers attest. She got one of her favorite recipes for an onion tart from Katherine Anne Porter, with whom she became close friends (Waldron 59). Welty's love of cooking and gardening also appear throughout *Delta Wedding*.
Welty began to seriously write short stories in 1935, many inspired by her WPA travels (Waldron 71). She began to send them to small literary magazines and got her first important publication in 1937, when Robert Penn Warren bought "A Piece of News" for the Southern Review. Waldron notes that it might have been Katherine Anne Porter's husband Albert Erskine, business manager of the review, who took note of her stories before Warren (Waldron 91). In 1939, John Woodburn, an editor from Doubleday traveling the South looking for new writers, heard about Welty in Baton Rouge and visited her in Jackson, taking a collection of stories with him to New York. He was unable to convince his colleagues to buy it, but their meeting would be fortuitous. A few months later, when he heard that Diarmud Russell was opening a literary agency, he suggested that Russell contact Welty (Waldron 97-99).

In June 1940, Russell wrote Welty, offering to be her agent, and she accepted immediately (Waldron 99). By the year's end, Russell had "placed 'A Worn Path' and 'Powerhouse' with the Atlantic Monthly; and in the following three years, he arranged contracts with Doubleday, Doran, and Harcourt, Brace to publish two collections of stories and the novella The Robber Bridegroom." Between 1940 and 1943, she received invitations to the Bread Loaf Writers Conference at Middlebury, Vermont, and the Yaddo writers' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York; won three O'Henry Awards, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and invitations to write for Saturday Review, Mademoiselle, and other national magazines. Albert J. Devlin, who writes of these awards in "The Making of Delta Wedding, or Doing 'Something Diarmud
Thought I Could Do," says that, "[m]ore importantly, Welty had bucked the 'novel first' rule of commercial publishing with collections in 1941 and 1943 and a novella steeped in Mississippi fantasy in the intervening year" (229).

Welty had become a good friend of Katherine Anne Porter as the Southern Review published Welty's stories. Porter recommended Welty for the fellowships at Bread Loaf and Yaddo, and the two shared a house at Yaddo in the summer of 1941. Carson McCullers was a fellow at Breadloaf and Yaddo the same summers Welty was, and Welty did not like her, according to Waldron, "for her pretension and poses" (103-104, 122-24). McCullers' Member of the Wedding was published in 1946, the same year as Delta Wedding, and comparison of the two novels, according to Waldron, "drove Eudora to fury" (163).

At Yaddo, Welty was working on a manuscript which would become Delta Wedding. In 1933, through her circle of friends in Jackson, Welty was introduced to John F. Robinson, a Jackson native who was in graduate school at Louisiana State University (Waldron 57). Robinson, who was also an aspiring writer, became a lifelong friend. He was born in the small Delta town of Sidon, where his father had inherited large landholdings from his mother and stepfather Governor James K. Vardaman (Waldron 57). He had taken Welty there to visit, which inspired the short story "The Delta Cousins." Devlin indicates that Welty's continued visits to Robinson's family, even while he was away in World War II, gave her a feeling for the Delta which caused her to turn from the "small-town setting of earlier stories to the relatively unfamiliar Delta" ("The Making" 234).
When Welty sent "The Delta Cousins," which is about the night light incident, to Diarmud Russell, he suggested that it was chapter two of a novel. Robinson suggested that Welty use the diary his great-great-grandmother kept from 1832 to 1870, which opens with a horseback honeymoon trip, as a source for turning "The Delta Cousins" into Delta Wedding (Waldron 92). Welty did so, and when the novel, which she dedicated to Robinson, came out in 1946, the first printing of 10,000 copies "sold out in less than a month" (Devlin, "The Making" 227; Waldron 162). The novel received mixed reviews. Charles Poore gave it a "glowing review" in Book Review, but Time and Diana Trilling, who had earlier attached The Wide Net, criticized the novel for not indicting racist southern aristocracy (Waldron 163).

Devlin suggests the novel is reminiscent of plantation fiction, of which "marriage is also a staple," although Welty may have paid little attention to that genre of literature. Devlin quotes her from a 1986 interview saying she feels revulsion for the Civil War: "I just hate it, all those hideous battles and the terrible loss. I never have read Gone with the Wind." ("The Making" 244).

The novel is filled with autobiographical elements from Welty's life. Marmion is based on Waverly, an antebellum mansion outside Columbus, Mississippi, where Welty and other MSCW girls would frequently have picnics. The house, which had been empty for twelve years when Welty attended the W, had twin circular staircases and a piano just as in the novel. To cross the Tombigbee to get to the house, the girls had to either "take a ferry operated by a man who raised bees or walk across a railroad trestle." The river, the railroad trestle, and the "bee man" all appear in the
novel, although Welty renamed the river the Yazoo, which means death, in order to add death imagery, a key feature of the novel which I will discuss subsequently. Additionally, the girls flagged down the Columbus and Greenville train, as the Fairchilds do, to return to Columbus at night (Waldron 31-32).

The link between water, death, and female sexuality in the novel are also rooted in autobiographical sources. In 1927, the Mississippi overflowed and left parts of the Delta flooded for months. Welty wrote an April Fool’s Day society column for MSCW’s campus newspaper in which she described a young woman drowning on the Tombigbee (Waldron 30). When Dabney and Troy return from their honeymoon, in the last scene of the novel, they are at a family picnic on the banks of the Yazoo, and Dabney is so in love she is "lying in Troy’s bared arm like a drowned girl" (DW 244-45). In 1937, Welty took a trip to Mexico with Robinson, his sister, and another friend, where a young Mexican girl ran out in front of their car, and they hit her (Waldron 92). The Lost Girl’s being hit by the train could be based on this incident, although the Lost Girl dies whereas the little Mexican girl did not.

Like Lumpkin’s *The Wedding*, *Delta Wedding* has war—the Civil War—as a context for the sexual economic conflicts which will occur. Both *Delta Wedding* and Childress’s *Wedding Band* have World War I as a context for conflict. In *Delta Wedding*, the Fairchild’s revered Denis was killed in World War I. This element may have been based on Welty’s concern for John Robinson, who was taking part in the invasion of Sicily as she was working on the novel in 1943 (Waldron 144). Since the novel is set in 1923, World War II does not appear in *Delta Wedding*, but the anxiety
caused by the rapidly changing "brave new world, following the Great Depression, the war," and "the monstrous fact . . . of the atomic bomb" appear in the novel as anxiety about Shellmound's having to move from the Old South plantation culture into the New South of the 1920s and '30s (Kreyling 52; vande Kieft, *Eudora Welty* 109).

Welty indicates that, since she did not know the Delta except from her visits and Robinson's manuscript, she made the person observing the events in the novel, Laura, a nine-year-old from Jackson, who would not know the Delta well, either (*JGJ* 330). She had known people named India, Bluet, and Battle, names which appear in the novel (*AJD* 11). Waldron indicates that Laura and India discuss the books Welty read as a child and have white dresses with blue waist panels like the ones Welty's mother made for her. Laura's mother, Ellen, has come to Mississippi from Virginia, whereas Welty's mother came to Mississippi from West Virginia. Even Battle's breaking the children from being left-handed is autobiographical; Welty's father did the same to her (Waldron 144, 158). Like Laura, Welty also had a dress spoiled by someone's pulling a woodpile down on her during a game (Waldron 83).

The anxiety about young women's having to fashion themselves into the socially-constructed persona marriageable woman/lady *may*--a very qualified *may*--be based on Welty's personal experience with the romance and marriage market; it may just as easily be based on what she saw in the eighteenth-century novels she read at Wisconsin. However, Waldron indicates--far too many times, almost to a cruel degree--that Welty was not a "pretty little girl" and that the outsider status which gives her such keen powers of observation may be based on her looks as well: "It seems
logical that these stories of isolation [in *The Wide Net*] grew from the experiences of her own life, when she was not always but often the outsider—the unpretty toddler, the dateless teenager, the college girl in exile in a single room in a Wisconsin boarding house" (83, 148). While I admire the accumulation of facts in Waldron's biography and have obviously relied on them in this study, I absolutely resent the proprietary tone she uses in referring to Welty as Eudora throughout the text, and I find this kind of unfounded speculation to be the most grievous error a biographer can commit.

It is far more likely that if the anxiety about marriage in *Delta Wedding* is based in Welty's personal experience, it is based on a feeling that a woman should not have to give up her identity through self-fashioning in order to gain the financial security and social respectability of marriage. It seems unlikely that Welty would have been willing to give up her intellectual pursuits in order to fit a socially-constructed paradigm such as marriageable woman just to attract a man. While most critics speculate, and Welty even hints in interviews, that Laura is the autobiographical figure in *Delta Wedding*, I suggest that the intellectual Shelley, who is also a writer, a keeper of a journal, and who is ambivalent about giving up her identity and independence for marriage because, as a keen observer, she understands the drastic nature of self-effacement required to become marriageable woman, is a much more autobiographical figure.

The violent nature of the death imagery in *Delta Wedding*, which I suggest represents the self-effacement required for women to fashion themselves into the commodity marriageable woman/lady, may be based on two experiences with death.
The first was that, as a child, Welty found "two shiny buffalo nickels in her mother's bottom bureau drawer and asked if she could have them." Her mother said no, explaining that, before Welty was born, she had had a boy, who had died soon after he was born because she had almost died in the birth and the doctors had neglected him in order to save her. The nickels had been used to weight the baby's eyelids after his death. Welty's discovery of the nickels was the first she had heard that her parents had had a previous child, and it was a shock, for Welty indicates that her mother had told her "the wrong secret—not how babies could come but how they could die, how they could be forgotten about" (Welty, One Writer's Beginnings 17). Also in a much more horrifying incident, when Welty's father was dying of leukemia, Welty's mother gave him blood. In those days, transfusions were given directly from one person to another, and doctors were unaware of the need to match blood types. Although he was already so seriously ill that Welty believes he was unconscious, as Chestina Welty lay on a cot next to his with a tube running from her arm to his, "his face turned dusky red all over," and he died. She says with dramatic understatement that her mother "never recovered emotionally" (Welty, One Writer's Beginnings 93).

Additionally, Waldron observes that Welty's photographs indicate a "consuming interest" with tombstones (79). The interest is likely from her photographer and art historian's eye for composition, but the interest in cemeteries and tombstones may also stem from the need for the comfort we all seek in visiting cemeteries—to be close to the loved ones we have lost.
Death Imagery Surrounding the Wedding

As in Lumpkin's *The Wedding*, death imagery in *Delta Wedding* symbolizes the loss of identity the women in the novel are experiencing as they fashion themselves into the socially-constructed persona lady and move through the increasingly self-sacrificial stages of the sexual economy. In “Water, Wanderers, and Weddings: Love in Eudora Welty,” Noel Polk also links death and prison imagery with love and marriage. He suggests that "denying all that togetherness [of the Fairchild clan] and all those protestations of love is a rather grim substructure of violence and imprisonment," and he backs up the claim with a substantial list:

The head of the family, you will recall, is named Battle, and the interloper, the outsider come to take away their Helen, is named Troy. There are other examples: a Drowning Lake on the place, and a field called The Deadening. We are told that "Yazoo," the name of the river that runs by the Fairchild plantation, means "River of Death"; brother Roy, knowing that Laura can't swim, nevertheless throws her into that very river. Orrin bats a helpless bird against the wall with his father's hat, and Maureen pulls wings off of insects. Troy is threatened by a field hand with a knife; and a young girl, not connected with the family, is run over and killed by the train, the same train that had nearly run over George and Maureen. Finally, even though they are largely teasing, violence is implicit in much of their conversation. Dabney, sending Shelley to fetch Troy: "Tell him we're all mad and we'll break his neck if he's not here in a minute"; and Battle, yelling out the window to Laura and Maureen: "will you obey me and come to the table before I skin you alive and shake your bones up together and throw the sack in the bayou?" . . .

And there are complementary images of prisons and cages—little ones and big ones—of prisoners escaped from Parchman and being hunted down by the dogs, of birds trapped in houses. . . . (99-100)

Polk's list is impressive, but he has barely scratched the surface of the death imagery connected with the women in the novel, who are the ones being sacrificed in the sexual economy.
The most obvious death image in *Delta Wedding* is the Yellow Dog story of George's risking his life to save the mentally impaired Maureen from being run over by a train. Elizabeth Evans indicates that the story is repeated seven times in the novel, and that makes seven associations with marriage, because immediately after the incident, Troy and Dabney walk on down the track and get engaged. The Yellow Dog incident is also linked to the marriage of George Fairchild, the family's demigod, and his class-inappropriate wife, Robbie Reid, whom the family does not accept because she is from such a poor family that she used to work as a cashier in the plantation store and wear Shelley's hand-me-down clothes. Robbie is so incensed that George would risk his life for someone else when she feels he would not do it for her that she temporarily leaves him.

George and Robbie's separation is a bad omen for the happiness of Dabney and Troy, who also have a class-inappropriate marriage because Troy is the overseer on the Fairchild plantation. The situation of George and Robbie is a mirror image of the Doctor and Jennie from *The Wedding*, for here the man has married down rather than the woman. The result is the same in both cases, temporary separation which is soon resolved just before a wedding. Although everyone in the Fairchild family is concerned about the class differentiation causing problems for Dabney and Troy, it does not, at least in the weeks before and after their wedding.

Shellmound, the Fairchild family house where Dabney will sacrifice herself in the marriage exchange—although she will not be gaining additional financial security, and she is sacrificing social respectability by marrying down—represents death and
imprisonment in this week before the wedding. Ruth D. Weston notices that when the minister comes for the rehearsal, he cannot make anyone hear him at the door, so he knocks on a windowpane, causing the bridesmaids to scream in terror. She suggests that this scene represents the Fairchild clan's self-sufficiency and sense of community, which views anyone "from outside" as an intruder (99). However, this family closeness can be restricting in its requirement that its young women adhere to the gender code lady, and it is, symbolically, the women who are imprisoned within the domestic space, while the male Mr. Rondo is free to go about his business. Michael Kreyling observes that Laura thinks of the house and family as resembling the cage of tropical birds she saw in a zoo; the birds were beautiful, but they broke her heart because she realized they "'were caged all the time and could not fly out'" (56). John Edward Hardy suggests that Mary Lamar Mackey's constant piano playing "proceed[s] from an all but invisible source," which gives the house a haunted quality ("Delta Wedding" 35).

John Alexander Allen suggests that George, who is the "demigod" of the Fairchild family, like other demigods in Welty's fiction, has an "intimacy with death." He is a stand-in for "the incomparable Denis," who was killed in World War I, and, as such, "is both the family hero and something like its sacrificial beast" ("The Other" 129). Carol S. Manning points out that George was in the war, too, and he suffered a wound serious enough that he cannot swim well because of it, something the family ignores in the selfishness of its demands from him (With Ears 74).
George is closely linked with the two most significant death images in the novel, both of which relate directly to the wedding and thus to Dabney’s sacrificing herself. The first is the Yellow Dog incident, where George is willing to sacrifice himself to save Maureen. George also sleeps with the Lost Girl, the beautiful homeless adolescent Ellen encounters in the woods, and she is later killed by the Yellow Dog. As the photographer takes the family photograph at the wedding, he tells them of the tragedy and says he has pictures of her body in his bag, just as he will soon have a photograph of the self-sacrificed bride Dabney in his bag as well.

George has been linked with death for quite a long time, as Dabney remembers an incident when, as a young girl, she saw Denis and George emerge naked from swimming in the bayou, and George broke up a violent fight between two wrestling black boys, one of whom flung a knife at him. George is obviously fated to live; he catches the knife in his hand, just as he survives the war wound and almost being run over by the train. All his associations with death portend the self-sacrifice Dabney will make in marrying, for he is the Fairchild she most loves and identifies with.

Troy, the other man Dabney loves, is also represented by death imagery. Louise Westling indicates that when Dabney and India are riding to the Grove to see Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen, Dabney sees Troy "as a distant figure riding across her path on his black horse, his arm raised in greeting like a gun against the sky. She shuts her eyes and sees 'a blinding light, or else it was a dark cloud—that intensity under her flickering lids'" ("The Enchanted" 81). Troy is also the reason Dabney breaks the Fairchild night light.
The loss of self and loss of place in the Fairchild family which Dabney will experience in the marriage exchange are marked by the loss of a significant object, the Fairchild family night light, which is given to Dabney as a wedding present by her old maid aunts Primrose and Jim Allen. The night light, a small lamp which, when lighted, warms a teapot on top through a chimney which displays the great fire of London, is a Fairchild family totem in several respects. Because of its primary use as a bribe to get the Fairchild children to visit the aunts at the Grove, Dabney’s taking possession of the night light indicates her transition from childhood to adulthood now that she is to marry. A comfort to the aunts when their Uncle George did not return from the Civil War, it signifies the importance of ancestors in the Fairchild family, and the aunts say that it will be company to Dabney when she is alone in Marmion. Passed from spinster aunts to the first-married daughter of their brother, the night light’s fire represents passing the torch of the Fairchild family lineage; this representation is confirmed by its link to sexuality and motherhood: when the aunts present the light to Dabney, India asks her if she will take it on her honeymoon, and Dabney announces she wants to have a baby right away (DW 44-49).

Dabney’s breaking the night light is as portentous as her receiving it. Returning home from the Grove, she breaks the totemic light while running to see George, the only Fairchild who has left the clan. It is not until the night of the rehearsal dinner that Dabney belatedly sheds tears for shattering “this cherished little bit of other people’s lives,” meaning not so much the night light as the family’s hopes for her in marriage (DW 193). In marrying beneath her and in so openly flaunting,
her sexual anticipation, she has broken both class and sexual taboos of the Fairchild social code and has thus, like her Uncle George, cracked the family's pride and sense of community.

Initiates, Self-Fashioner, and Marriageable Women/Ladies

Elizabeth Kerr indicates that, in her fiction, Welty is most interested in exploring the "crucial stage of initiation in the lives of girls and young women, a time when the paths they will follow is determined by their own choice or by force of circumstances" (133). Barbara Ladd also suggests that Welty is "most interested in" these "characters who ponder such questions as what it means to be human and what it means to have a 'place' with respect to the community" (550).

There are five initiate characters in Delta Wedding, Dabney's younger sister India; visiting cousin Laura; Aunt Tempe's granddaughter Lady Clare; Maureen, the daughter of the dead Denis; and Pinchy, one of the family's black servants. In contrast to Teeta and Princess, the initiate figures we will see in Childress's Wedding Band—who are guarded from seeing the romantic activity around them because it is miscegenous and, therefore, illegal—like Susan in The Wedding, the initiates in Delta Wedding are excited about the wedding and eagerly emulate the older women who are participating in it. Also, like Susan, they learn about the sexual economy by observing and emulating the women around them, as well as by being directly instructed in the proper behavior of a lady.
Nine-year-old India is the most precocious of the initiates in any of the wedding texts. Like Susan, India acquires knowledge of the sexual economy from her surroundings, but where Susan had to observe and ask questions, India acquires her knowledge mysteriously, "just like magic" (DW 105). India also comments to herself on the things she has learned, just as Susan does. Susan also accompanies the bride on two significant visits; India goes with Dabney to visit Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen at the Grove, where Dabney receives the night light. Since Dabney has gone to talk with the aunts about her impending marriage, India, the young lady still in training, thinks they should be asking her questions about love and sexuality, subjects which the proper Victorian spinsters consider taboo subjects.

Whereas Susan of The Wedding gets to participate only in the rehearsal for the ceremony, India will be allowed to serve punch with Aunt Jim Allen, who will be teaching her proper etiquette in the process (DW 205). Susan is told by the young ushers at Jennie's wedding that she would be the next to marry, and India wants to cut the ring that is hidden in the wedding cake, a sign that one will be the next bride (DW 201). Ann Romines observes that the Fairchild women have directed "that their traditional fortune-telling symbols, thimble and ring, be baked inside the cake," whose "towering height makes it a phallic structure" and thus a symbol of patriarchal traditions. Although Romines mentions but does not make a link between the two, it is symbolic that the phallic cake is "demolished by eager virgins with knives" ("Reading" 606). Although Dabney will completely accede to the role of submissive wife by the time she and Troy return from the honeymoon, up until the wedding, she
alternates between being a True Woman, sacrificing her desires to properly enact the
gender role lady, and being a New Woman, an independent girl who does what she
wants. India shows the same streak of independence. In the 1923 time period of the
wedding, the independent New Woman is threatening the patriarchal order in the
United States, so it is appropriate that these two examples of it bring down the cake.

India is very precocious about insinuating herself into the romance and
sexuality she sees going on around her, although she is too young to really understand
either. Kreyling says that she "trumpets the news" that Cousin Mary Denis Summers
has had her baby to the maiden aunts, and then "as loudly exclaims that Dabney looks
as if she had eaten a batch of green apples" when the shock of India's action registers
on her face (67). When India accompanies Shelley to visit Partheny, Partheny gives
Shelley a magical cake to mend George and Robbie's relationship. Shelley, who
wants nothing to do with anything related to the sexual economy, doesn't want to
touch the cake, but India takes it eagerly (DW 131). In her naivete about the
charm's magical sexual powers, India gives it to Troy rather than to George, but Troy
passes it on to Robbie, so it has the desired effect of reuniting them.

As interested as she is in learning about the sexual economy, India is a bit
resistant to making herself into its product, lady. Her mother wants her to wear curls
in her hair, but India is resistant (DW 203). Nevertheless, India, who has a
plantation full of mentors to teach her how to be a lady, is more ladylike than
motherless cousin Laura, who has only her father to take care of her. When Laura
arrives at Shellmound, India is bathed and dressed and watering verbena out of a
doll's pitcher; her hair cascades down her back and is combed correctly and has a ribbon in it. In contrast, Laura has already thought on the train that her Buster Brown haircut is not a good hairstyle and that her clothes, which her father packed incorrectly, will be wrinkled when she arrives. In a move which foreshadows the nature of their relationship, India tells Laura to wash and gives her a drop of water; since Laura has had no mentors, India will pass on the knowledge she has received from her mentors (9).

Laura, is one of four motherless girls and women in Delta Wedding. This shared status will create an instant bond between Laura, whose mother has died, and her Aunt Ellen, whose mother ran away when Ellen was a child. Ellen will develop a similar instant bond with the Lost Girl she meets in the woods, another motherless child. Ellen has also taken Maureen to raise after her mother, Virgie Lee, the dead Denis's wife, had a mental breakdown and wanders the streets because, when Maureen was a baby, she dropped her on her head (DW 61). Laura will undergo several initiation rites as she is absorbed into the large extended Fairchild family.

On her first night at Shellmound, Ellen initiates Laura into both the domestic arts and the family secrets by allowing her to help bake a coconut cake from dead Aunt Mashula's secret recipe. When Laura accompanies Shelley and India to visit Partheny, Shelley also takes Laura by the cemetery so she can see her mother's grave. They run into Dr. Murdoch, who counts the number of graves in the Fairchild family plot and talks about who will be buried where when they die. Murdoch, who has delivered all of the Fairchild babies except Ellen's first one, thus symbolizes a link
between female sexuality and death, and Shelley and Laura decide on the spot not to marry. When Roy takes Laura to visit Marmion, the house which she has inherited, they encounter the old black servant Studney. This encounter is a real initiation into the mysteries of sexuality, for "Stud"ney, whose name symbolizes male sexual potency, carries a sack which the Fairchild children believe is where babies come from, and Roy shares this information with Laura. Immediately afterward, Laura will see a dead bird, and Roy will push her into the Yazoo, whose name means death. Thus Laura will get an early initiation into the link between female sexuality and death, which symbolizes the loss of self she will experience if she proceeds to fashion herself into marriageable woman and participate in the marriage exchange.

Two other female initiates are Lady Clare, Aunt Tempe’s granddaughter, who is to be a flower girl in the wedding, and Maureen. They both emulate the older girls by dancing with the bridesmaids’ dresses when the gowns finally arrive from Memphis. Lady Clare also emulates the bride by dressing up in a lady’s dress and Dabney’s pink satin shoes (DW 150). When the family gathers for the rehearsal, Lady Clare, Maureen, and even the young Fairchild boys emulate the wedding (DW 180). The fifth initiate is Pinchy, one of the family’s young black servants, who is initiated by "coming through." Although Welty indicated in an interview that the phrase means to have a religious experience, many critics have given it a sexual connotation as well. Barbara Ladd suggests that Pinchy’s appearance at the wedding dressed in white like a symbolic bride indicates that she has had some kind of sexual initiation (548), and Peggy Prenshaw suggests that "Dabney pursues marriage with the
same relish and sense of celebration that Roxie, Vi’let and Little Uncle show in announcing young Pinchy’s entry into the ranks of womanhood” (“Woman’s World” 54).

The only self-fashioner in any of the wedding texts is Shelley, the older sister of Dabney, the bride. Shelley’s journal entries reveal that she understands the self-effacement cost of participating in the sexual economy better than almost any other character in the wedding texts. At nineteen, she should have completed the marriageable woman/lady, if not bride, stages, but she repeatedly resists completing even the self-fashioning stage. The juxtapositions of childish and adult clothes in her closet and accoutrements on her dresser symbolize her ambivalence about abandoning the individual freedom of childhood in order to assume the constructed identity of the marriageable woman.

Ann Romines suggests that Shelley is “restlessly individual. She is the only Fairchild who shows any interest in reading and writing, and at a particularly hectic moment in the prewedding week, she closets herself to inscribe her own name on her trunk.” Romines also indicates that, as eldest child, Shelley is “presumably heir to all it can mean to be a Fairchild woman. But she is wary of this inheritance and of her own fertile physicality.” Ellen worries that Shelley is not “warm,” which implies “a willingness to surrender self.” Ellen feels that, if Shelley does lack warmth, she has somehow failed to mother her appropriately (Romines, The Home Plot 215).

Romines also suggests that “the ritualized plantation life” aims to get Shelley involved in the sexual economy and, at the appropriate stage of marriageable woman,
"to get her eating cake, going to dances, eroticized (in the wedding party, Shelley alone is dressed in 'flesh' color), and married" (The Home Plot 216). Shelley's cedar chest, like Julia's in Wedding Band, is filled with items anticipating marriage, although Shelley's were high school graduation presents foisted on her by her family in an effort to get her involved in the sexual economy, where Julia has eagerly and carefully gathered her own.

Albert Devlin accentuates the fact that Shelley has somehow managed to hold her body back from developing the marriageable woman's enticing curves. He says the "'hipless'" Shelley remains the antithesis of the traditional belle. She refuses to attend any more female bridge parties, is beginning to find the renowned dancing of the Delta equally tedious, and as a bridesmaid resists the conformity of ritual by holding her shepherdess crook at the wrong angle." He also calls her a New Woman ("Delta Wedding" 107-108). While Dabney exhibits New Woman tendencies up until her wedding by going to dances with old beaus when she should be preparing herself for her role as wife, the fact that she will eventually submit to the socially-constructed role wife of a plantation overseer makes her an example of the Old South True Woman, where Shelley represents the New South New Woman.

The reason Shelley is so resistant to completing the fashioning of herself into lady and going on the market as marriageable woman is that, as a close observer and more than any other character in all three wedding texts, she understands the negative ramifications of self-effacement and self-sacrifice. Kreyling notes she once ran into Robbie crying in the Fairchild store, and as Shelley made a hasty retreat with the
children she had with her, she had to step across "'an old mother bird dog . . . her worn teats flapping up and down as she panted.'" The dog seems to Shelley a symbol of the self-sacrifice required by "her mother's life of seemingly endless pregnancy" (Kreyling 70). The night before the wedding, Ellen entrusts her keys, "emblem of a housekeeper's authority"—and a mother's responsibility—to Shelley as she sends her on an errand. Shelley said, "'Mama, they're the heaviest and most keys in the world.'" Ellen replies, "'I know it! Some of them are to things I'll never be able to think of or never will see again'" (Romines, The Home Plot 220-21). With these examples of what the sexual economy promises, it is no wonder that Shelley is reluctant to participate.

The marriageable woman figures in Delta Wedding are Dabney's friends with whom she goes to the dances virtually every night the week before her wedding. "Dressed in jade and flamingo," they are exotically sexy and seemingly doing a good job of marketing themselves (DW 9). Dabney's best friend, Mary Lamar Mackey of the symbolically named Lookback Plantation, has been exhibiting her artistic skills throughout the week by playing the piano (DW 11). Unlike the bridesmaids in The Wedding, these characters are not developed enough for us to see any anxiety they may have about participating in the sexual economy.

Wives, Mothers, and Mentors

The wife figure in Delta Wedding is Robbie, lower-class wife of the family's demigod George. John Edward Hardy indicates that the family has never accepted her not only because of her class status, but also because she is not a lady. She dresses
inappropriately, is vulgar, does not have good taste and manners, and is willing to make a scene when confronted ("Marrying Down" 74). Romines suggests that the family doesn't like her because she is a New Woman. She has rejected their antiques, a symbol of their obsession with the past, and bought modern furniture. She is also attempting to revise gender roles. Romines notes that "when she leaves George, she throws pots and pans out the window, wrecks the car, and returns on foot" (The Home Plot 228).

The representative of the self-sacrificing mother stage of the sexual economy is Dabney's mother Ellen, pregnant with her tenth child. The completeness of Ellen's self-effacement and self-sacrifice in the marriage exchange is represented in her association with death imagery. When Robbie comes back, she inadvertently lets a bird in the house, which one of the servants says means death. The family's frantic efforts to kill the bird remind Ellen of a night years before when the cotton gin caught fire and she miscarried a child. Ellen faints, and when she comes to, the bird has been killed. It is a female brown thrush, which symbolizes Ellen's complete self-sacrifice as wife and mother.

Ellen's most significant association with death is her encounter with the Lost Girl in the woods. Ellen had gone to the woods to look for her lost garnet pin, which Battle had given to her as a present early in their marriage. In the shape of a rose, the pin represents the freshness and beauty Ellen had when Battle gave her the pin. Ellen has a dream about finding the pin, which turns out to be a warning, for when Ellen goes to the woods to look for the pin, she finds the Lost Girl instead. The Lost
Girl represents Ellen before she married Battle, when she had the individuality to read, daydream, and sing with a choir of unmarried ladies (Prenshaw, "Woman’s World" 7). At that point in her life, Ellen was like the Lost Girl—unstoppable. However, years of self-effacement and self-sacrifice have robbed Ellen of her individuality, and she seems to have reverted to childhood, as both the Lost Girl and Laura mother her at various points in the novel.

That the Lost Girl leaves and sleeps with George suggests Ellen’s desire to be intimate with him, but on an emotional rather than a physical level. Later, the girl is hit by the Yellow Dog and killed. Laura, another motherless girl like Ellen and the Lost Girl, finds the garnet pin, which represents the ladyhood to which she aspires, but Roy pushes her into the river, and the pin falls from her pocket and sinks to the bottom of the river. Thus, the Lost Girl, symbol of Ellen’s single life, and the garnet pin, symbol of her life with Battle when they were in the first blush of love, before the self-sacrifice of ten pregnancies wore her down, are, like the things they symbolize, gone forever.

There are several mentors in Delta Wedding. The black retainers Partheny and Studney have been discussed earlier. Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen represent the spinster mentor’s ironic enforcement of the sexual economy’s code of conduct, for which they receive nothing but a bit of social approval. It is even more ironic that these spinsters are the keepers of the patriarchal family’s traditions, passing down the family history, keeping the ancestral diaries, and passing on the signifier of all the Fairchild generations, the night light (Romines, The Home Plot 217).
One surprising mentor-in-absentia is Troy's mother. Because Troy and Dabney have decided to marry in haste, Troy's mother has not had time to make them their own quilts, so she sends them hers. Romines indicates that this gesture invokes "two legendary nineteenth-century domestic traditions: the twelve (or more) quilts with which a bride was expected to start housekeeping and the spectacularly celebratory 'bride's quilt.'" The contrast of the brightly colored quilts to the refined needlework of Aunt Primrose and Jim Allen symbolizes Troy and Dabney's class differentiation, and Aunt Tempe looks askance when Troy tells Dabney not to write his mother a thank-you note until after she has tried the quilts, the kind of frank sexual talk not appropriate in upper-class plantation society.

Bossy Aunt Tempe, like cousin Fannie in The Wedding, represents the married woman who enforces the sexual economy's code of conduct because it is in her interest to preserve the security she receives from it. In similar fashion to Fannie, she blows into the house like a storm and takes over the wedding preparations in such a bossy fashion that she runs Battle out of his own house next door to the Grove. Like Fannie in The Wedding, Tempe is having to take over for an ineffectual mother, Ellen, who is not a hysteric like Carrie Middleton but simply exhausted from self-sacrifice and too many pregnancies. Both Romines and Westling suggest that Tempe is an "aging belle" who, while strictly enforcing other women's adherence to the sexual economy's code of conduct, somewhat transgresses it herself by refusing to give up the coquettish manner of the belle, symbolized by her love of dancing, that she should have left behind when she married (Romines, The Home Plot, 214;
Westling, "The Enchanted" 79). Tempe is also an ironic figure because, while her strict enforcement of the sexual economy's code of conduct ensures the successful production of the economy's objectified commodity "bride," Tempe will describe the result of Dabney's self-effacement. Coming down the aisle on Battle's arm, Dabney, like Jennie Middleton in The Wedding, is the inhuman, iconized, ethereal bride whom Tempe describes as looking dead.

**Iconized Bride**

Seventeen-year-old Dabney Fairchild is the most naive and the most eager of the three brides in anticipating her roles as bride, wife, and mother. Refusing to postpone her wedding "till cotton picking's over," she happily plans the details of bridesmaids' costumes and even makes the obligatory engaged-girl visit to her maiden aunts with "a sort of pleased mournfulness," all the while practicing a "new, over-bright . . . married smile" (DW 13, 42-43, 28, 56). She looks forward to the housekeeping aspect of her role as wife by obtaining a house on the Fairchild plantation from her nine-year-old retarded cousin Maureen, who will never be competent to inherit it (DW 31). She forecasts her wifely caretaking of Troy by gravely announcing that she will have him shave his mustache after they are married (DW 44). And she looks expectantly toward motherhood by practicing parenting skills on her baby sister Bluet: tucking her in, bathing her, and coaching her on appropriate little girl behavior (DW 17, 208). Dabney is especially eager to experience married sexuality, which she expects to mystically transform her from girl into woman, both in terms of sexuality and in functioning in the gender role wife.

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Dabney's eagerness for sexual initiation also appears in the scene in which she rides her horse to the house where she will live as a married woman. The morning before her wedding, she sneaks out of the sleeping household to "ride out by herself one time" before she moves from her father's to her husband's protection and control. As she is returning to her father's house, she gallops under Troy's window and taunts him with a wake-up ditty, then riding home, realizes how hungry she is. Since her riding destination is Marmion, where she will enter her "real life" with Troy (as if childhood and adolescence had been only rehearsals), the implication is that the ride makes her hungry for the passion she anticipates in married life rather than for breakfast (DW 119-23).

Dabney has, of course, an idealized vision of marriage. She thinks that now that she is about to marry, now that she has fallen in love, everything is suddenly clear to her (DW 35). Now that she is about to embark on "her real life . . . with Troy," she thinks "[h]ow sweet life [i]s" and that she "will never give up anything" in it, not even to her husband (DW 119-22). This naivete is based on the fact that nobody in her family has ever told Dabney "anything very true or very bad in life," such as the fact that her idolized Uncle George is separated from his wife Robbie (DW 122, 106).

As enthusiastic as Dabney seems in assuming the gender roles of bride, wife, and mother, her anxiety about the limits they will place on her is displayed in her repeated resistance to the boundaries these roles require in the sexual economy's code of social/moral behavior. Most significantly, she is marrying beneath her social class,
and she is not even hiding the shame by going out of the Delta to do it: her fiance, Troy, is the overseer on her father’s plantation. She further stretches the boundaries of appropriate behavior for an engaged girl by telling the preacher who is to perform the wedding that she is “not much of a Sunday School girl”; and she scandalizes her maiden aunts by announcing that she wants to have a baby right away (DW 57, 48-49). Although she professes eagerness to assume the duties of wife, she fails at her premarital practice run, forgetting the groceries she is sent to Greenwood to get (DW 152).

Dabney’s anticipation of married sexuality is disrupted in a scene in which night symbolizes the paradoxical nature of the virgin bride’s sexuality and in which water represents both the possibilities and the suffocating power of marriage. In the scene, Dabney wakes in the middle of the night to look out the window of her childhood bedroom and contemplate her soon-to-be married state. Like the night, which is simultaneously clear and moonlit and mysterious and foreboding, Dabney is both “serene, unlooked-on” in her virginity and “agitated and rustled” by the disquieting nature of deferred desire.

Looking toward the bayou, Dabney cannot see the water, the unknown depth of which represents the possibilities of married sexuality, yet she believes that experiencing that sexuality will make her strong and serious and will alleviate loneliness with love. In contrast, the night sky seems to suffocate the earth as it closes “over . . . and around it” like flood water. Dabney, soon to be bride as “radiant” as this water-like sky, seems to be suffocating as she contemplates her
marriage. "Breathing in a well" and "breathless," she is as ghost-like as the "silver night," "drenched with . . . whiteness" and clothed in a "filmy" nightgown which is an additional metaphor for the paradoxical nature of the virgin bride’s sexuality. Clinging to the chair "like a sleeping moth," the nightgown suggests the cocoon-like nature of the bridal dress and veil which encompasses the bride’s unnaturally rapid metamorphosis from virgin to sexually satisfied and satisfying wife. The suffocating power of marriage is also reinforced in Dabney’s thoughts near the end of the scene; imagining herself walking out into the night as a married woman, her own thoughts link marriage to death when she reflects that it is "angels, though" that "walk on the clear night" (DW 89-90).

Dabney’s morning ride to Marmion also disrupts her anticipation of married sexuality and gender roles through images linking female sexuality with water and death. The house has been empty since the year of its completion because its builder, Dabney’s paternal grandfather, was killed in a duel and his wife died soon after of a broken heart. Marmion sits on the bank of the Yazoo River, which is associated with violence and death throughout the novel, its white tower and wings rising from its watery reflection like some inverse vampire castle.

The Yazoo waters evoke sexuality as well as death in memories of George and Robbie’s sexual display in the river at an earlier family picnic, and the river seems to Dabney to flow swifter in front of her marriage house than it does at her childhood Fairchilds. As she rides home, Dabney thinks that when she is living at Marmion, she wants violent storms to assail the house at night while she sits inside "in dignity
with her cheek on her hand" (*DW* 120-22). Ironically, if this vision comes true, Dabney will be suspended in Marmion as her cousin Laura's doll Marmion is horizontally suspended in her traveling case: like a person in a coffin (*DW* 5). These associations of water, female sexuality, and death with Marmion are particularly disturbing, for the house should represent the appropriate containment of female sexuality within the boundaries of marriage rather than the devouring nature of unchecked female sexuality which is represented by violent storms here and in Lumpkin's text.

This vision of her married house and self as the calm within a storm is, like Dabney's early assumptions about marriage, interrupted, not only by the violence of her imagined storms, but also by her stop at the swamp whirlpool on the ride home. One of the most graphic symbols of death in the novel, the pool is "so creepy and scary" that Dabney almost never looked into it, but this time "something made her get off her horse and creep to the bank." Parting entwined vines, she peers into the "dark, vaguely stirring water" to see snakes churning across each other and the gray and red vines and roots, some of which floated like the hair of the many people alleged to have drowned there. Seized by a sudden attack of vertigo, she swoons and almost falls in, but regains her composure by recalling her childhood bravado in the face of this evil place. Counting to a hundred, she runs away from it and rides "flying home" to her family and wedding plans (*DW* 122-23). Although the vivacious Dabney would not wish for the permanent escape implied by the deathly snake churnings of the whirlpool, she seems to want an escape from her impending marriage.
while protesting too much that she does not. While at Marmion, she thinks, "If they
didn't say anything to [me] now, or try to stop [me], it was their last chance. . . .
And let them try!" (DW 122).

Dabney’s anxiety about the confinement of marriage is also evident in her
reluctance to abandon her single life. She is especially reluctant to relinquish the
positive aspects of the marriageable woman role: beautiful dresses, parties, and
attentive suitors. The week before the wedding she attends dances in Glen Alan and
Clarksdale without Troy, whose lower class upbringing in the Mississippi hills did not
include dancing lessons. On both occasions, she behaves as if she is still in the
marketing mode of the marriageable woman stage rather than engaged. The night of
the Glen Alan dance, though she appears "radiant," as a bride should be, she
interrupts her mother and Laura’s cake baking to seek reassurance that she is
beautiful, primarily a marketing concern (DW 27). The night of the Clarksdale dance,
though she says an extended, clinging good night to Troy, she nevertheless allows
former suitor Dickie Boy Featherstone to put her into his convertible and escort her to
the dance, and she excuses this behavior by telling Troy "I have to go . . . I have to"
(DW 86).

Dabney’s relationship with her family also conspires to keep her suspended
between her old and new lives. Most notably, her family treats her as a child even as
they place dress, cake, and flower orders, order servants, bake, and sew for her
wedding. Her family also overprotects her in hiding the news of George and Robbie’s
separation. Only practical Aunt Tempe thinks that if Dabney is old enough to marry,
"she's old enough to know what George and every other man does or is capable of doing" (DW 51, 106).

In contrast to Tempe, Dabney’s father wistfully attempts to keep her single and under his protection; he waits until the afternoon of the wedding to confer his blessing on her, and then suggests would not a trip to Europe or a return to college be better than a wedding (DW 104-105). Dabney is equally ambivalent to unravel her place in the Fairchild family tapestry; the night of Laura’s arrival, although she idly wonders “if Troy is in from the fields,” she remains on a settee with her feet childishly tangled in Shelley’s hair rather than assuming the adult responsibilities of checking on his whereabouts or on the myriad of wedding details (DW 18-19).

Dabney also displays altered mental states that more directly reflect the anxiety she is experiencing in the self-effacement of the sexual economic process. Shelley says she is “madness on earth,” India calls her “crazy as a June bug,” and Dabney confirms those diagnoses when she says her “brain isn’t working” and when she forgets the groceries (DW 7, 32, 16, 152). She also describes herself as “a wreck,” and she is emotionally very fragile: when Laura says that she cannot be a flower girl because her mother has died, Dabney cries “as if Laura had slapped her” (DW 28, 17).

Altered corporal states also reflect the loss of self which Dabney is experiencing in the sexual economy’s exchange. The night of Laura’s arrival, when she finally arrives at the table, she tells Roxie that she "just can’t swallow" (DW 17). Both her vision and hearing are also impaired. "Her eyes seemed to swim in some
essence not tears, but as bright—an essence that made the pupils large," and, on the way to the Grove, she rides "[b]lindly and proudly . . . her eyes shut" against her too-bright vision of her future (DW 23, 34). In the scene where Ellen is recovering from fainting, Dabney dances with her "Point Valenciennes banquet cloth. . . . spreading behind her like a peacock tail" (or a bridal train), seeming "to see nobody in the room" (DW 168-70). And when her wedding dress finally arrives from Memphis, Dabney dances with it held to her, her newly-washed hair obscuring her vision and sending scattered drops everywhere except onto the white dress, the sacrosanct symbol of her virginal purity (DW 100). Her hearing also seems to be impaired on the night of the rehearsal dinner, when, waiting for Troy at the gate, she is unaware of India and Laura's conversation as they pass her (DW 179).

Portrayals of Dabney as suspended between old and new lives and in altered states reflect the fact that Dabney's loss of self in the marriage exchange will also mean the loss of Dabney from the Fairchild household. Numerous references to her absence or lateness for family gatherings and to the family's telling her goodbye represent both her and her family's anxiety about the change marriage will evoke in their relationship. She is absent when the family greets Laura at the train and when most of the Fairchild children gather for late afternoon games (DW 5, 74). When Ellen is walking to Partheny's house midweek before the wedding, she broods about the impending loss of Dabney to Troy and suddenly feels that the cotton fields he manages "had opened and swallowed her daughter" (DW 69).
Dabney's frequent absences or lateness at family gatherings also present her as a phantom-like presence hovering only in the margins of her own wedding preparations. Several of these apparitional absences are directly linked to her status as a bride when they are excused because "she was going to be married" (DW 5). Both her absence when the family meets Laura at the train and her lateness at dinner that evening are explained with the "going to be married" phrase (DW 12). On Wednesday before the wedding, the "sigh of the compress" reminds Laura of Dabney, who is again enigmatically "gone somewhere" (DW 76). That evening, Ellen has to hold supper for her because she is "late now at some bridesmaid's party" (DW 77). And the next morning, Troy has to help Ellen polish the silver because the bride, of all people, has gone go Greenwood for groceries (DW 92).

Three of Dabney's absences or late arrivals are at mealtime, when the extended Fairchild family's gathering makes her noticeably absent from the community. The night of Laura's arrival, she arrives for supper distracted and drying tears when the table is being cleared (DW 12). The night of Mr. Rondo's visit, she leaves the table when Battle teases her about her marriage, and she has to be called three times before reappearing after the guest has left (DW 62). The night of the Clarksdale dance, she misses supper altogether because of a bridesmaid's party (DW 77).

These depictions of Dabney as distanced from and lost to her family presage the death-like quality she will emanate on her wedding day. She already feels "[s]ometimes . . . not so sure she was a Fairchild," and her family already feels "the loss of Dabney to Troy Flavin" (DW 32, 25). A portrait of her Great-Grandmother

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Mary Shannon makes Dabney think about her coming separation from her family—
"What if you lived in a house all alone and away from everybody with no one but
your husband?"—and she tells her younger brother Orrin, "I hate (or is this have) to
go off and leave you and everybody!" (DW 41, 206).

Even though Dabney will be living still on the plantation and not "going out of
the Delta" after her marriage, the family anticipates the event as if Dabney will be lost
to them forever (DW 48, 101). They are "impelled to speak to her, to say one last
thing before she wave[s] good-bye" (DW 47). When Dabney tells Battle that George
has given her a horse as a wedding present, Battle says that she cannot ride it across
the river without a bridge and is thus "going away from us and never coming back."
Although he is teasing Dabney, Ranny, and Bluet in this scene, the exchange does
reflect his anxiety that he will have "to let her go" in terms of "his restraining power"
as a father (DW 91, 33).

The impending loss of Dabney from the Fairchild household is also expressed
in references to her being exiled from the family community. Throughout the novel,
she is multiply associated with the other exiles in the family, Laura, Ellen, and,
especially, George. Knowing that the rest of the family does not approve, she asks
Laura, the newly-arrived outsider, for approval of her marrying Troy (DW 17). She
also bears the family name of her mother, who has come into the Delta from the
foreign Virginia and who still feels an outsider though carrying her tenth Fairchild
baby. Like Uncle George, who has left the family enclave to live in Memphis,
Dabney is portentous and greedy about life: she does not hold back her feelings, she
realizes that there is a world outside the Fairchild family, and she seizes that other world by marrying beneath her, as George seized it by marrying the Fairchild store clerk, Robbie Reid (DW 15, 68, 33-34, 80, 24).

Dabney is already somewhat exiled from the family, perceiving that no one in it really knows how she feels about marrying Troy. Even the Yellow Dog incident shows her growing distance from the family; while the Fairchilds repeat the story obsessively, she dismisses it as soon as it is clear that it is not fatal, and she "[goes] on up the railroad track and [gets] engaged" (DW 88-89). Ironically, she should be paying attention to the incident, because it illustrates a husband’s not meeting his wife’s expectations in marriage, something that could easily happen to her.

Anxiety about the loss of self Dabney is undergoing in the sexual economic exchange is most vividly illustrated in images of death surrounding the wedding. In three different scenes, birds represent death in connection with the bride (note the similarity of the two words). The night she looks out her window imagining herself as a married woman, the birds, including the mourning dove, are asleep, but their presence is felt ominously as the night shadows dart about in imitation of flight (DW 89-90, emphasis mine). When Laura and Roy visit Marmion, where Dabney will live after her marriage, they find a dead mockingbird, still hot, lying on its side "like [dead] people" (DW 174).

Images of death and marriage converge surrounding a bird in the house, a situation which both family retainer Roxie and family outsider Troy say means death. In the scene where Ellen rebukes George for making Robbie wish she were dead, she
bears the bird's frantic death flight "fluttering in the house like a bodily failing," feels a similar "quality of violation . . . quivering alive in Robbie," and faints. Battle equates Ellen's white face with dying because the last time she fainted, she lost a baby. Orrin catches the bird, a female brown thrush, and shows its stunned or dead body to Ellen just as she is rousing to hear Dabney ask "Mama! Do you want me to get married?" Tempe announces that she "nearly died" when her daughter was married and "could scarcely be revived." Ellen has just as scarcely been revived from fainting over George and Robbie's separation, which makes her worry about Dabney's future happiness in similarly marrying a lower class mate (DW 165-68).

Anxiety about the loss of self Dabney is undergoing in the sexual economic exchange is most vividly illustrated in portrayals of her in a ghost-like state not only during her wedding ceremony, but throughout the novel. She is always wearing a "filmy" or "floating" dress, and, on the night of the rehearsal, in a white net dress with a gold kid gardenia emblazoned on the chest, she resembles a corpse laid out with flowers clutched to its chest (DW 86, 179, 183). When the wedding dresses arrive from Memphis, she and her younger sister and cousins perform an impromptu dance that is not only spirited in its enthusiasm, but seemingly performed by spirits as well: with the nine-year-olds hidden behind the dresses they are displaying, Dabney, holding her bridal gown to her chest, appears to be dancing with three headless bridesmaids (101). Moments later, she appears headless herself, as her "disembodied" face laughs over the rail of the upstairs landing (DW 103).
Dabney is depicted as sacrificed on the altar of marriage through two associations. Like her Uncle George, whose identity is sometimes clouded by his being the family's "sacrificial beast," Dabney is experiencing a loss of identity in becoming Mrs. Troy Flavin (DW 63). In the second association, Dabney's younger sister Shelley wanders onto the back porch during the wedding reception, thinking about how Dabney’s wedding is like a door through which she has walked into the "remote . . . unreal world" of married life. Wondering what is behind that door for Dabney, she opens the porch door, and her cat lays his hunt at her feet. This juxtaposition suggests that "Behind the closed door [of marriage], what?" is death, and that the Dabney Shelley has known as a sister has sacrificed herself to Troy on the marriage altar as surely as Beverley the cat has sacrificed his dead mole in offering it to Shelley (DW 220).

The day of the wedding, Dabney is described as as dead as any virgin ever offered in sacrifice to a demanding god. Aunt Tempe, the family's expert regarding the marriage exchange, notes that brides are always described as beautiful when, in reality, "they all look dead, to my very observant eye, or like rag dolls—poor things? Dabney is no more herself than any of them" (DW 214). Indeed, when Troy drives Dabney away for the honeymoon, it seems that he is transporting her on a dark barge across the river Styx. "Unlike the mayor's car that had come up alight like a boat in the night," Dabney's car "went away dark" down the same road, with her family waving handkerchiefs and crying in its wake (DW 219).
The completeness of Dabney's self-effacement is especially evident following the honeymoon. At the family picnic which ends the novel, Dabney, the portentous, greedy, spoiled daughter has been completely eclipsed into Dabney the dutiful, obedient wife and future mother. The purpose of the picnic is, in fact, to tell George good-bye and the new(ly-wedded) Dabney hello (DW 241). When Ellen suggests the picnic, Dabney "gravely" responds that Troy likes barbecue (DW 238). In contrast to George and Robbie's sexual display at the earlier family picnic and to Dabney's single "kiss[ing] as quick as anything," Troy all but asks permission to kiss Dabney in front of her family, and she beams "maternally" in response (DW 244). She also acts maternally toward India, gently criticizing her tacky appearance, but also hugging her to "the softness of her breast," a maternally-linked body part which has not been associated with Dabney before the wedding except in the death-like gardenia gown (DW 247). Dabney is also clearly now under Troy's authority; when he rebukes her for being glad George doesn't want Marmion, he speaks sharply, and she quiets immediately (DW 246).

This self-effacing Dabney is described in death-like terms in yet another conjunction of female sexuality, water, and death. In falling in love with Troy quickly, she had seen love as a rushing river; as in the night window scene, she could see both banks, but not "the way down" into the river. On her honeymoon, she had been pressed against "uncertain dark-green doors"—the same closed door of marriage Shelley imagines—by streetcars named "Desire." Going through the marriage door, she had found death—the death of her identity as Dabney Fairchild in the depth of her...
sexual identity as Mrs. Troy Flavin. Now, having experienced that larger death in the little deaths of (implied) orgasmic married sexuality, she lies "in Troy's bared arm like a drowned girl" (DW 244-45).

Finally, the married Dabney is associated with two ghosts during the family picnic, the ghost that inhabits Marmion, and the bayou ghost that cries at weddings. When Shelley remarks that the bayou ghost did not cry even once at Dabney's wedding, George replies that "If she held back, us Fairchilds consider that as lucky as you'd want." Shelley thinks she hears the ghost crying now, but the sound is some kind of bird, the harbinger of death in three other instances in the novel (DW 239-40). Perhaps the crying was never a bayou ghost mourning the loss of the current Fairchild bride, but was always some kind of bird, warning the Fairchild brides of the death of the individuality they will experience in the self-sacrifice of the marriage exchange.

Notes

1. Welty was a good comic actress at both the University of Wisconsin and the Jackson Little Theatre, frequently appearing in farces. Peggy Prenshaw indicates that she also had dreams of writing for the theatre, which "has to date [1983] been realized only once, in a one-act farce entitled 'Bye-Bye Brevoort." The comedy was staged in 1949 at the Red Barn summer repertory theater in Westboro, Massachusetts, and as part of an Off-Broadway production called The Little Revue at the Phoenix Theatre in New York in 1956 ("Sex and Wreckage in the Parlor" 8).
CHAPTER 4
"NAME AND PROTECTION":
SEXUAL ECONOMICS IN ALICE CHILDRESS'S
WEDDING BAND: A LOVE/HATE STORY IN BLACK AND WHITE

Childress's Life and Works

_Wedding Band_ and other works by Alice Childress deserve critical examination because Childress is one of the United States' most accomplished American dramatic and literary professionals. In only her fourth year in professional theatre, 1944, she won a Tony nomination for playing the role of Blanche in the original Broadway production of _Anna Lucasta_, which also featured Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and Sidney Poitier (BK 67, Jennings xv). In 1950, her _Just a Little Simple_ became the first play by an African-American woman to be "professionally produced, i.e., performed by unionized actors" (Brown-Guillory 29). In 1952, she became the first African-American woman writer to have a play produced on the New York stage when _Gold through the Trees_ was produced at the Club Baron Theatre in Harlem (Harris 67, Jennings ix). In 1956, her _Trouble in Mind_ won the first Village Voice Obie award "for the best original off-Broadway play" of the 1955-56 season and was subsequently produced in London by the British Broadcasting Company (Brown-Guillory 29, Harris 67, Jennings 7). Her adult novel _A Short Walk_ (1979) was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize (Bryer 49). Most significantly, she is the only African-American woman whose plays have been professionally produced for four decades (Jennings ix). Childress has also won a host of other distinguished awards and honors.

In spite of these awards, critics' agreement that she is "an excellent playwright," and her "consistent productivity" in directing, lecturing, and writing...
plays, fiction, and critical scholarship, Childress’s plays have been underproduced. Harris suggests that Childress’s work "during her groundbreaking years" in the 1950s and ’60s was overshadowed by the popularity of "integrationist" plays such as Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and Langston Hughes’s *Mulatto* (68).

Childress’s politics may have contributed to her plays' underproduction. Like Grace Lumpkin, she was linked to communism because her 1950s Mildred sketches were written for Paul Robeson’s *Freedom* magazine, and Robeson was accused of having connections to the Communist Party. More likely, however, was the fact that her plays, which provide accurate portrayals of African-American life, were not popular with white audiences and were thus commercially risky (Harris 68-69, Jennings xi). She "concentrate[d] on portraying have-nots in a have society" rather than on the "racial uplift" themes which were popular with whites (Childress, "Candle" 112; Jennings 2-3).

Childress was born October 12, 1916, in Charleston, South Carolina, the setting for *Wedding Band*. When her parents separated, she moved to Harlem to live with her grandmother, Eliza Campbell White, the daughter of a former slave, who exposed her to "art, community events, and other cultures" and who encouraged her to observe and write from an early age. Her formal education ended after two or three years of high school when her mother, Florence, and her grandmother died, and Childress had to go to work (Brown-Guillory 30, Jennings xv-2). Like the characters in *Wedding Band*, Childress held mostly working-class jobs: "machinist, photo retoucher, domestic worker, saleslady, insurance agent" (Harris 69). Although
Childress declines to discuss her first marriage, she does acknowledge the birth of her daughter Jean in 1935 (Jennings xv).

Childress began to act in 1940, appearing as Dolly in John Silvera and Abram Hill's *On Striver's Row* (Jennings xv). In 1941, she began an eleven-year association with the American Negro Theatre in Harlem, where she worked in all phases of play production except stage-managing—acting, coaching, directing, sets, props, make-up, costumes, personnel, mailouts, door-to-door ticket sales—and where she appeared in four plays, most significantly, *Anna Lucasta*, for which she won the Tony nomination (Bryer 51, Jennings 3-4). In the 1950s, she continued to write and act, and in 1957 she married a musician, Nathan Woodard, with whom she has collaborated on several projects (Jennings xvi). In the 1960s, Childress spent time "in communities of writers and scholars" such as the MacDowell Colony and the New School for Social Research (Harris 71-72). On the recommendation of Tillie Olsen, Childress was appointed playwright-scholar in residence at the Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study from 1966-68 (Jennings 10). In 1971 she traveled to Russia and in 1974 to Ghana, West Africa. Both Childress and her daughter Jean died of cancer, Jean in 1990 and Childress in 1994. Childress was still living in New York at the time of her death, whether in Queens or Manhattan is disputed by LaVinia Deloise Jennings and Sheila Rule (Jennings xvi, Rule C15).

Childress began to write in the 1940s because the theatre in which she was working did not adequately reflect her gender and racial concerns; she also wrote *Florence* because the American Negro Theatre needed scripts written for black actors.
Childress's work, like Grace Lumpkin's, is highly autobiographical and political. Like Welty's, her texts have a strong sense of place, particularly those set in South Carolina or Harlem, where she lived most of her life. La Vinia Delois Jennings, who has written the only book-length study of Childress's life and texts, divides her work into three phases: 1) the plays of 1949 to the mid-1960s, which focus on interracial conflict, particularly black women resisting white domination both in and out of the theatre; 2) the plays at the close of the 1960s, which examine intraracial white acculturation, classism, and sexism; and 3) the young adult fiction of the 1970s and '80s. Jennings asserts that the plays of phase one prefigure the revolutionary black power dramas of the 1960s and '70s by writers such as Sonia Sanchez, Ntozake Shange, Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), and Ed Bullins (x-xi, 18).

The American Negro Theatre's production of the one-act Florence, named for Childress's mother, launched Childress's writing career in 1949 (Harris 66-67, Jennings ix). She followed Florence with a dramatic musical review, Just a Little Simple, written in 1950 and produced in 1952, which was based on Langston Hughes's satirical conversations serialized in the Chicago Defender, Simple Speaks His Mind. Gold through the Trees, a historical musical review in which blacks in America and South Africa "struggle to free themselves from racial oppression," was the first play written by an African-American woman to be professionally produced on the New York stage, at the Club Baron Theatre in Harlem in 1952 (Harris 67, Jennings 5).
Following the success of these three plays, Childress began what Jennings describes as a "direct attack [on] falsely romantic stereotypes of black women" by creating aging black female protagonists based on "empowering women" from Childress's life such as the grandmother who reared her and her third- and fifth-grade teachers (Jennings 2, 6, 29, 33). Wiletta of Trouble in Mind (1955), which won the first Obie in 1956, was based on Georgia Burke, who had acted in Anna Lucasta with Childress (Jennings xv, 6). Also in the 1950s, Childress wrote a weekly column called "Here's Mildred" for, first, Paul Robeson's Freedom and, later, the Baltimore African-American; the feisty maid, who talks back to her white employers, is based on Childress's and her Aunt Lorraine's experiences as domestics. The sixty-two conversations, which reflect the influence of the black oral tradition of signification and of Langston Hughes's Jesse B. Semple, were collected in Like One of the Family. . . Conversations from a Domestic's Life in 1956 (Harris 70, Jennings 7-8). Also in the 1950s, Childress, who was "a long time Broadway and off-Broadway actress . . . was instrumental . . . in initiating advanced guaranteed pay for union off-Broadway contracts in New York City" (Brown-Guillory 29, Curb 57).

Jennings posits Wedding Band as the play which "concludes the first major phase of [Childress's] playwriting and production," and the drama does reflect the interracial theme of African-American women rebelling against white domination in Julia's relationship to Herman and his family (18). However, Wedding Band serves as a bridge between phases one and two, for it also represents Childress's concern with white acculturation, classism, and sexism in intraracial situations in the character of
Fanny Johnson, the landlady of Julia the bride, who tries to ingratiate herself with the racist mother of Julia's white fiance Herman.

*Wedding Band* was first produced at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in December 1966 in a production which featured Ruby Dee, Abbey Lincoln, Clarice Taylor, and Moses Gunn (Harris 70, Jennings 9, Rule C15). In an interview with Betsko and Koenig, Childress describes this production as "our greatest success" (*BK* 65). In 1972, Joseph Papp and Bernard Gersten produced the play at the New York Shakespeare Festival with James Broderick as Herman and Ruby Dee as Julia (Jennings 9-10). This was significant exposure for Childress's work because the Festival, which sent *Hair* and *Chorus Line* to Broadway, was the most important of off-Broadway groups (Brockett and Hildy 572). Childress initially directed the play, but Papp appropriated the role of director from her on "the third night of standing ovation previews." In 1973, Papp produced ABC's Public Theatre teleplay of *Wedding Band*, but eight of the network's 168 local affiliates declined to carry the show "because of its theme and earthy dialogue," and others aired it only after midnight (Brown 57, Jennings 9-10, Rule C15). The play was produced again in Atlanta in 1975, where Childress was made an Honorary Citizen in celebration of its opening, and at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater in 1989 (Harris 73-74, Dillon 129). The only production of *Wedding Band* which garnered "widespread black appeal" was a 1971 Chicago production (Jennings 10). Childress says this production was "sold out the whole six weeks, standing room only; you couldn't get tickets" (*BK* 65).
Several Broadway producers held options on *Wedding Band* in the 1960s (as some also had for *Just a Little Simple* and *Trouble in Mind*), but none ever activated the option or gave a reason why *Wedding Band* was not produced (Harris 70, Jennings 9). Harris says that "Childress herself guesses that the content was unpopular" (70). Harris also suggests that "*Wedding Band*, like most of Childress's plays, contains more dialogue and quiet action than startling movement" and thus "is not a sensation play":

... it was doomed to be passed over in the sensational sixties and early seventies because it offers an unbloody plot with unglamorous characters, in an unfashionable setting, in an unflinchingly realistic style. ... It is a down-to-earth presentation of the love between a man and a woman, who, but for circumstances of nature, might have been happy. (70-71)

Jennings suggests that *Wedding Band* may have been unpopular with whites because it is "commonly classified as an integrationist drama" which treats what Brown-Guillory identifies as the four inconsistencies in American society that occupied Childress and her female African-American playwriting predecessors: 1) the dichotomy between Christian doctrine and the manner in which white Christians treat blacks; 2) whites' depriving black soldiers who fought in World War I of their constitutional rights; 3) "the economic disparity between black and white Americans"; and 4) miscegenation (Jennings 42, Brown-Guillory 5). Joseph Papp conceded that *Wedding Band* would have gone to Broadway if not for the race and gender biases of predominantly white audiences who were uncomfortable with a play that was a black woman's story more than a white man's (Jennings 9-10).
Reviews and academic criticism of *Wedding Band* have been mixed. Loften Mitchell wrote in a 1967 review for *Crisis* that *Wedding Band* was an "exceptionally well-written" play that had not yet received a "first-rate production" (221). Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* positively compares the play's "star-cross'd lovers" to Romeo and Juliet, but suggests that "whereas Shakespeare's lovers had a fighting chance, there is no way that Julia and Herman are going to beat the system" (30). Rosemary Curb calls *Wedding Band* Childress's "finest and most serious piece of literature [which] deserves comparison with the most celebrated American tragedies," suggesting that its greatness lies in the fact that Childress represents Julia and Herman not as martyrs or innocent victims of racism, but as complete human beings with weaknesses as well as strengths (65). Writing in 1989, John Dillon praises the 1973 Public Theatre production of *Wedding Band* as so "powerful" that it "is still with me today" (129).

Many black critics scorned the play because they felt that Julia should not have loved a white man (*BK* 64-65, Jeanings 9). John O. Killens called the drama a "deviation" from Childress's other work, which was totally relevant to the black experience in the United States (131). Barbara Mollette, writing for *Black World*, suggests that *Wedding Band* closed early in its Atlanta run because "white folks were not ready to deal with the issue" of interracial marriage (33). Some white critics wrote that Julia and Herman should have gone north earlier in their relationship, but as Childress notes in her interview with Betsko and Koenig, "walk[ing] away from
Feminist critics have neglected Childress’s work for several reasons, according to Patricia Schroeder: 1) the earliest feminist scholars who examined her work concentrated "on her acting career and the dearth of good roles that led to her playwriting"; they saw her as "a liberal feminist interested in creating good roles for African-American actresses and providing a role model for aspiring African-American female playwrights," and they "often overlooked the potentially revolutionary content of her work"; 2) "most feminist drama theorists are white . . . and have not always acknowledged that race is a component of gender"; 3) "Childress' plays most often rely on stage realism, a dramatic form that many feminist theorists see as antithetical to feminist goals. . . . [because] its fourth-wall division between actor and spectator, its domestic focus, its linear inevitability, and its illusion of objectivity, conceals a system which works against women." Schroeder suggests that this reliance on stage realism has particularly discouraged material feminist drama critics from analyzing Childress’s work. She asserts that there is "profound irony in this lack of attention," for "Childress is a materialist feminist herself," and her plays reflect "attention to material culture, to unequal power relations, to the relationships between race, class, and gender, and to political activism" (323-24). Schroeder reads Wine in the Wilderness as an example of Childress’s material feminism, but Wedding Band critiques material culture, unequal power relations, and the relationships between race, class, and gender even more than Wine.

Jennings marks the publication of Childress's most recognized work, the novel *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich*, in 1973 as the opening of phase three of Childress's writing career, when she specifically set out to write for young adults. In 1977, New World Pictures produced a film of *Hero*, which starred Cicely Tyson and Paul Winfield and for which Childress wrote the screenplay (Harris 66-67, 73). Childress also wrote two plays for children: *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* (1975), based on the life of abolitionist Harriet Tubman, and *Let's Hear It for the Queen* (1976), written for her granddaughter Mary Alice Lee's eighth birthday (Harris 73, Jennings 13). Childress published a second novel for adolescents in 1981, *Rainbow Jordan* (Jennings 98).

Childress returned to her South Carolina roots in 1977 with *Gullah*, an hour-long musical which celebrates the Gullah dialect—a mixture of "many African tongues mixed with English and German"—and other Africanisms of blacks who live on the coastal islands of Georgia and South Carolina (Jennings 13). Childress's stepfather
was born on one of the Gullah islands and died on Edisto Island, South Carolina, which appears in *Wedding Band* as the site of Mattie and October’s religious but not legal marriage ceremony (*BK* 70, Jennings 13).

In 1979, Childress published her first novel for adults, the highly autobiographical *A Short Walk*. In the late 1980s, Childress completed a last play and novel. *Moms: A Praise Play for a Black Comedienne* (1987), is based on the life of African-American comedienne Loretta Mary Aiken, who used Jacki “Moms” Mabley as a stage name. *Those Other People* (1989) is Childress’s third novel in which an "alienated and lonely" teenager is searching for identity.

When Childress died at age 77 (1994), she was at work on an adolescent novel based on both her Scotch-Irish paternal great-grandmother and her African, former slave, maternal great-grandmother Ani of *A Short Walk* (*Rule* 15C). She had also worked on an unpublished novel about the turbulent four-year marriage of Alice and Paul Laurence Dunbar (*BK* 68-69). She leaves an impressive legacy: fourteen plays, four novels, a collection of anthologized vignettes, an edition of scenes from plays about black experience, a film, and numerous critical and expository essays on African-Americans’ experience in the United States theatre. A fairly complete listing of publication information on her plays, essays, and reviews of her work can be found in Christy Gavin’s *American Women Playwrights 1964-1989: A Research Guide and Annotated Bibliography* (107-122).
Literary Contexts of Wedding Band

When Childress completed *Wedding Band* in 1966, she was writing in an American theatrical tradition 300 years old. However, as Margaret Walker Alexander notes in her Foreword to Brown-Guillory’s *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in American*, American drama in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was "glorified minstrels, farces, and melodrama," and American drama did not "come of age" until the twentieth century (xiii). Genevieve Fabre observes in *Drumbeats, Masks, and Metaphor: Contemporary Afro-American Theatre* that "from the time they boarded ships, slaves provided shows for the entertainment of whites." Fabre asserts that these "[m]imed songs that had all the appearance of praising whites" used sarcasm, joking, rhyming, melodies, and dance to actually satirize whites (4).

Fabre theorizes that the blackface minstrel set a pattern of relations between blacks and whites which "appropriated and vulgarized" African-Americans' participation in theatre, "stripp[ing] it of its satirical effect and of its symbolic language" (5). It was not until 1921 that Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake’s *Shuffle Along* moved away from the negative characterization. Childress briefly resurrects and revises the minstrel stereotype by having *Wedding Band*’s white traveling salesman the Bell Man do a "minstrel walk-around" as he shows his wares to Julia and her neighbors (*WB* 269).

Brown-Guillory indicates that the movement from the oral to the written tradition in African-American theatre was a gradual one (2). There were no black dramatists, black producers, or black audiences until 1821 when William Wells
Brown, author of *King Shotaway* (1821), the first known play by an African-American, established the first company of African-American actors, who gave public readings at the African Grove outdoor tea garden in New York (Brockett and Hildy, Fabre 6). Brown, a three-time runaway slave, was also the author of the oldest extant play by an African-American author, *The Escape; or a Leap for Freedom* (1858), which "marks the beginning of the impetus from dramatic oral tradition to formal playwriting" in black theatre (Brockett and Hildy 404, Brown-Guillory 2, Fabre 31, Hatch 21). By the end of the nineteenth-century, several black artists had a production network which gave them "at least minimal artistic control" (Fabre 6).

African-Americans were cast in Broadway plays in 1910 and "welcomed into" a Broadway audience in 1917 to see white playwright Ridgely Torrence’s *Three Plays for a Negro Theatre*, one of the first plays to avoid stereotyping blacks (Brockett and Hildy 494). However, a "wave of xenophobia overtook the United States and hit blacks before it touched immigrants. Discrimination became institutionalized across the country and had grievous effects on theatre" (Fabre 6). Black artists fell back upon their communities for support and soon produced the Harlem Renaissance.

Brown-Guillory cites two occurrences which "marked a revolution in black theater in American and ushered in the Harlem Renaissance." First, the newly-formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began publishing *Crisis* magazine in 1910, in which W.E.B. Du Bois "insisted that there should be a theater by, for, about, and near Negro people." The NAACP sponsored annual playwriting contests and formed a Drama Committee in Washington, DC,
which helped to establish 157 black-owned theatres which flourished from 1910 until
the depression in 1930. Second, Torrence's *Three Plays for a Negro Theatre* (1917)
interested other white dramatists such as Eugene O'Neill in writing plays about blacks.
African-American playwrights began to write in order to counter the whites' "well-
meaning" but stereotypical representations of blacks whose "primitivism and
exoticism" had relegated blacks "to the musical rather than to the serious dramatic
stage" (Brown-Guillory 2-3).

Dramas by African-American women flourished in connection with the Harlem
Renaissance. Between 1916 and 1935, several black women "captured the lives of
black people as no white or black male playwright could" (Brown-Guillory 5, Jennings
27). Five of these African-American women playwrights, Mary Burrill, Alice
Dunbar-Nelson, Angelina Weld Grimke, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Myrtle Smith
Livingston, were "unwelcome in the commercial theat[re] of the period" because they
wrote protest plays about lynching, the disenfranchisement of the black soldier,
miscegenation, and the disparity between blacks' and whites' economic conditions
(Brown-Guillory 5, Jennings ix). All of these themes would reemerge thirty to fifty
years later in Childress's *Wedding Band*. Grimke's *Rachel* "is said to be the first play
of record by a black, excluding over 800 musicals, to be produced and publicly
performed by black actors" (Brown-Guillory 2-3, 5-6). Fabre contends that "[w]hite
cultural paternalism," like that of patrons such as Carl Van Vechten, "rapidly drove
the Harlem movement to its demise" (5-6).
In the 1930s, the Federal Theatre Project was an important milestone in developing an African-American theatre movement. By 1935-36, the Project had established "units" in 25 cities, hired more than a million African-Americans, and produced works such as Langston Hughes' *Mulatto*, which broke all records for a black play on Broadway and Zora Neale Hurston's *Mule Bone* (Brockett and Hildy 494, Fabre 9-10). After Congress stopped funding the Federal Theatre project for its "subversive" activities (fighting discrimination), new community theatres were founded in Harlem, such as Langston Hughes' Harlem Suitcase Theatre (1937), the Negro Playwrights Company (1940), and the American Negro Theatre (1940), which Childress joined that year, in order "to revive local theatre and to produce plays that treated black culture fairly," such as Childress's *Just a Little Simple* (Fabre 9-11).

In the 1950s, theatre professionals sought to integrate the acting ensembles in Greenwich Village theatres. This move was met with indignation from many blacks in the theatre, who saw it as an effort "to take the actor out of his culture and community." Fabre also observes that "more than ever before the audience for black theatre was white" (Fabre 12). Nevertheless, Childress's *Trouble in Mind*, which had previously been performed only in Harlem, was presented at the Greenwich Mews. The "most significant event of the decade for black theatre" occurred in March 1959 when Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* won the Critics Circle Award. However, Hansberry was honored as if there had been no black playwrights before, perpetuating "the myth of the lack of black dramatists" (Fabre 13).
When Childress wrote *Wedding Band* in 1966, American theatre was changing rapidly and radically. As Brockett and Hildy observe, "protests against obedience to authority, unquestioning patriotism, and accepted codes of behavior and dress had been increasing since the late 1950s," and "by 1970 almost all previously accepted standards were under attack" (568-69). They call 1968, the year which first produced nudity and obscenity in *Hair*, a "watershed year." It marked: 1) a movement toward postmodern drama, which broke with modernist drama’s ideal of achieving unity by adhering to the convention of a certain style; 2) the appearance of a number of "new and significant dramatists" such as Sam Shepard, David Rabe, Terrence McNally, and Horton Foote; 3) "greatly increased acceptance" of female playwrights; and 4) and the beginnings of drama by Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and gays and lesbians.

Although Greenwich Village and Broadway had usurped Harlem’s influence in the early ’60s, 1968 also marked the "reemergence of a strong African-American theatre" seen in the works of more than forty African-American repertory groups and the emergence of important dramatists such as Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, Childress, Hansberry, Ntozake Shange, Adrienne Kennedy, James Baldwin, August Wilson, and George C. Wolfe (Brockett and Hildy 574-81, Fabre 14). Fabre notes that this resurgence of black theatre was part of a "second black renaissance of the 1960s, the Black Arts Movement, which "translated into artistic terms the political and economic precepts formulated by advocates of Black Power" (29, 26).

Fabre divides black American theatre into two types: 1) militant theatre, which is didactic and "demonstrates and prescribes action"; and 2) the "theatre of
experience," which "rather than advocating change in the conditions of blacks . . . proclaims the existence of black culture" (2-3). "Both can be found within the repertory of a single company, of an individual playwright, or even within the same play" (197). She further describes theatre of black experience as drama "created from the most fundamental aspects of Afro-American life," whose "goal is to show not the merchandise of exploitation but the common feature of black life and perspectives" (Fabre 106, 109). Both militant theatre and the theatre of experience can be found in *Wedding Band*, for it advocates changes in laws which rob blacks and women of autonomy, and it accurately represents black culture.

Fabre also suggests that in the theatre of experience, "the life of the ghetto is organized around the poles of the home and the street," with characters such as "bad nigger[s]" and "bad [men]," with pimps, hustlers, and tricksters presenting the "semiotics of the street" (143-58). This dichotomy is seen in *Wedding Band*, where the Bell Man represents life on the street. He both literally and figuratively penetrates the home of Julia and her neighbors, first, by crossing the picket fence boundary into their common backyard and, second, by entering Julia's house uninvited and making unwanted sexual advances to her. This home/street dichotomy is the split between private/domestic and public/work spheres which became heavily demarcated in the nineteenth-century Cult of Domesticity revised for lower-class and working-class black neighborhoods where pimps and hustlers are conducting their business on the street. This separation of spheres was also an issue in *The Wedding*, where Jennie and the Doctor fought over who would have control of the home sphere. Separation of
spheres is less an issue in *Delta Wedding* because in plantation culture, as Fox-Genovese indicates, the household is the site of economic production, and the plantation master has governance over all. The last scene of *Delta Wedding* represents this power dynamic well; as their wives lie, for the time being, at least, silently in their arms, George and Troy discuss how they will diversify the plantation's products to keep it economically viable.

Brown-Guillory lists Childress's *Wedding Band* (1966) and Hansberry's *The Drinking Gourd* (1960) as important examples of the 1960s "radical, militant theater" associated with Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). These plays, like other dramas of the revolutionary theatre movement, "accuse whites of persecuting or victimizing blacks but [also] chastise blacks for facilitating their own victimization," issues which are expressed in "violent verbal and/or physical confrontation between blacks and whites" (27). In *Wedding Band*, Childress certainly accuses whites of persecuting blacks, especially black women, through divorce and miscegenation laws and racist treatment and remarks. She also portrays Julia as facilitating her own victimization by allowing Herman to delay their move north for ten years. *Wedding Band* contains several violent verbal confrontations between blacks and whites, including those between Julia and the Bell Man, between Julia and Herman, and between Julia and Herman's mother. Brown-Guillory suggests that, although Childress's and Hansberry's plays are "less overtly violent" than Baraka's, they "are an outgrowth of the militant tradition in that their black characters are atypically assertive, brutally caustic, and unyielding to the demands of whites" (27). Although Julia is not
assertive, caustic, or unyielding to whites in the opening scenes of *Wedding Band*, she becomes increasingly so as she fights with Herman and his mother and feels empowered by her growing relationship with her African-American women neighbors. However, at the end of the play, she will forgive Herman, capitulate to the submissive role of lady, and symbolically accede to the iconized status bride.

Jennings observes that because much of Childress's work is "set in and influenced by Harlem and her native Charleston, it seems inappropriate, if not impossible, to classify her definitively as a northern or a southern writer" (13). However, in an introduction to a *Southern Quarterly* special issue on Southern women playwrights, Milly Baranger identifies "a singular theatrical tradition" emerging in the South in the nineteenth century which produced a generation of important playwrights between the 1930s and 1950s: Lillian Hellman, Tennessee Williams, and Carson McCullers. Barranger describes a "second generation of southern playwrights" which emerged contemporaneously with and subsequently to "the contemporary regional theatre movement which began in the late 1950s," which includes such familiar names as Childress, Ossie Davis, Beth Henley, Marsha Norman, and Sandra Deer.

Although many of the second-generation playwrights such as Childress left the South, they have maintained themes and writing conventions central to the southern literary tradition: sense of place; conflict between rural and urban values; an attraction to the eccentric, mystical, humorous, and grotesque; an emphasis on familial or other emotional bonding; and conflicts based on racism and the violation of taboos regarding incest and miscegenation which often have violent resolutions (Barranger 6-
Wedding Band touches on all these themes: sense of place in the references to Charleston, South Carolina, where Childress was born and lived as a child, and Edisto Island, South Carolina, where her stepfather died; the conflict between rural and urban values represented by the fact that Julia has recently moved from the country, where she was ostracized for having a white lover; an attraction to the mystical and the grotesque in Julia’s getting drunk, putting on her wedding gown when she has just fought with her fiance, and eventually symbolically marrying a dying man; an emphasis on emotional bonding seen in the relationships of the women who share the communal backyard; and conflicts based on racism and the violation of taboos regarding miscegenation which often have violent resolutions, seen in Julia’s verbally violent fights with Herman and his mother and in Herman’s eventual death.

Barranger adds that these second-generation southern dramatists have rejected racial and gender stereotypes such as the southern matriarch and "the black domineering companion/servant" and have focused on feminist concerns such as female bonding or emotional deprivation. Their heroines assert their individualism "in violating taboos, rejecting dependency, committing suicide, maiming the male, [and] casting out social, racial and gender stereotypes in favor of a creative, autonomous individual" (9). Wedding Band certainly provides "alternative cultural images of blacks and women," concentrates on Julia’s emotional deprivation, and violates both miscegenation taboo and law in 1918 South Carolina. While all of the female characters in Wedding Band display creativity and autonomy in their work and in their relationships with each other, in their relationships with men, they represent the
socially-constructed personas women must create to successfully participate in the sexual economy's marriage market.

In her impressive study *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction*, African-American feminist Ann duCille analyzes black women writers' revision of the traditional marriage plot described in the introduction to this study. DuCille maintains that until the late nineteenth century the marriage plot—which she defines as "a fictional formula that foregrounds romantic relationships, focuses on courtship (wanting, wooing, and winning, one might say), and generally culminates in marriage or at least betrothal,"--was generally "coded as white, female, and European" (13, 3). She asserts that African-American women (and one male) novelists writing at two "pivotal point[s] in the shifting representations and meanings of marriage, sexuality, and black womanhood" began to revise the traditional marriage plot, which she calls the "coupling convention" in African-American fiction because of "the freedom it gives [her] to move outside the traditional legal and social meanings of marriage" (13). Coupling convention is certainly a more apt phrase to describe the two would-be marriages between Julia and Herman and Mattie and October in Childress's *Wedding Band*.

DuCille indicates that marriage was especially important "for nineteenth-century African Americans, recently released from slavery and its dramatic disruption of marital and family life." She notes that because marriage had been predominantly denied to African-Americans under slavery, "marriage rites" became signs of "liberation and civility," a symbol of newly-freed blacks' "entitlement to both
democracy and desire" and, for some in the early twentieth century, a symbol of their "entrance into the realm of bourgeois American society" (14, 8). "Freedom to desire," to sexually love and, more importantly, to not sexually love whom one pleased was "perpetually in jeopardy" under slavery, in which African-American men and women were what Harriet Jacobs called "articles of traffic" (duCille 5, Jacobs 199).

DuCille effectively charts the changing nature of the coupling convention over more than a century. In many nineteenth-century sentimental novels, marriage represented "rescue and protection" for financially and socially disenfranchised female protagonists. As Childress's Wedding Band will more than a century later, William Wells Brown's Clotel, Harriet Wilson's Our Nig, and Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl deconstruct the sentimental novel's ideology which judges black and mixed-race women by the same true woman/lady standards as white women and which fails to examine the loss of identity women experience in the sexual economic exchange. The black women novelists of the 1890s, Emma Dunham Kelley, Pauline Hopkins, Frances Harper, and Anna Julia Cooper, introduce the name and protection trope later seen in Wedding Band, which represents the social respectability and financial security which women gain, and death imagery, which represents the identity they lose in the sexual economic exchange of marriage. Nella Larsen and Jessie Redmon Fauset, writing in the late 1920s and early '30s, introduce the concept of fashioning one's self into the sexually commodified marriageable woman, including the way patriarchal ideology almost forces women to participate in their own
objectification/commodification, concepts which will also be seen in *Wedding Band*. By the late 1930s and the '40s, African-American women novelists were representing marriage as "a seat of emotional confinement, sexual commodification, and male domination," all issues Julia Augustine will confront in her relationship with the white baker Herman (duCille 112).

The necessity of a woman's having the economic and sexual protection of a man is a very important theme in Childress's *Wedding Band*, where four characters—Mattie's husband, October, Julia, Mattie, and Herman—emphasize that women need the "name and protection" of a husband (*WB* 277, emphasis mine). Even though Mattie and October's marriage is not legal under white patriarchal law, in the eyes of her African-American community, Mattie has October's name and protection because their marriage has been validated, "dignified" as duCille calls it, by a minister (*WB* 321, duCille 15).

**Sexual Economics in Wedding Band**

In what duCille terms the "romantic mythology" of marriage, weddings are supposed to be a time of celebration and joy. The weddings in Lumpkin's *The Wedding* and Welty's *Delta Wedding* contain elements of celebration—special costumes, flowers, music, and, in *Delta Wedding*, food—in spite of the death imagery which surrounds them and their brides. In Childress's *Wedding Band*, however, the symbolic wedding which takes place on Herman's deathbed at the end of the play contains no celebratory elements. Several scenes earlier, the normal celebratory elements of wedding cake, dress, silver goblets, and wine have been subverted into
signifiers of Julia’s failure to get him to close the deal of their sexual economic exchange by taking her north where they can be legally married. It seems appropriate, then, that Childress describes writing *Wedding Band* as not “a joyous experience,” but “a trial, a rough journey,” “like being possessed by [the] rebel spirits” of the characters who kept calling to her while she was writing something else (*BK* 63).

Jennings asserts that Childress’s African-American literary foremothers who were writing between the two world wars, Grimke, Johnson, Livingston, Dunbar-Nelson, and Burrill, followed the lead of many of their African-American predecessors in putting race before gender as a concern in their work (Jennings ix). Jennings maintains that Childress did not “distance her art . . . from her sex,” and that she wrote about “ordinary black female characters . . . [to] reverse white and black male stereotyping of black women . . . [as] carefree, sensual, immoral reprobates driven by the directives of their sexual instinct” (x). In an interview with Betsko and Koenig, Childress says she wrote *Wedding Band* to counter “all the stage and screen stories about rich, white landowners and their ‘octoroon’ mistresses” and the old plantation formula of the colonel’s black sweetheart never knowing any men of her own race that were not “slack-kneed objects of pity” (*BK* 63, emphasis mine).

Critic Rosemary Curb notes that *Wedding Band* dealt with a black woman and a white man, but it was about black women’s rights. . . . The play shows society’s determination to hold the black woman down through laws framed against her” (59). Indeed, Childress says that her purpose in writing *Wedding Band* was not to advocate
interracial romantic relationships, but to indict laws such as those prohibiting marriage and divorce which deny women control of their lives (BK 63). In an article entitled "The Negro Woman in American Literature," which was published in 1966, the same year Childress wrote Wedding Band, she attacks the continuing presence of laws in states such South Carolina which forbid miscegenation and interracial marriage (75-76).

Wedding Band is based on a true story Childress heard from her mother and grandmother about a black woman neighbor in South Carolina who had a relationship with a white butcher; Childress changed the profession to baker because she though a butcher would be offensive to audiences. The play questions the United States' white, patriarchal definitions of wedding and marriage much more directly than does either Lumpkin's The Wedding or Welty's Delta Wedding. The chief conflict in the drama places the relationship of African-American Julia Augustine and her white lover Herman in confrontation with the miscegenation laws in 1918 South Carolina. In a similar secondary plot development, Julia's neighbor Mattie and her Merchant Marine "husband" October, both African-Americans, also cannot legally marry because state laws prevent African-Americans from divorcing, and Mattie has left a first husband because he beat her. The marriage license is especially important in Mattie and October's relationship because Mattie cannot receive October's Merchant Marine family allotment without it (WB 320). Both of these long-term, deeply committed love relationships—ten years for Julia and Herman, eleven years for Mattie and October—question the implications of marriage under white patriarchal law for
interracial couples and for people of color by juxtaposing the economic and social benefits of legal marriage to the emotional benefits of a voluntary conjugal union, the only form of marriage allowed African-American couples before emancipation and allowed interracial couples before the mid-twentieth century in the United States (WB 321). 4

Both couples have weddings which revise the Victorian United States' definitions of wedding and marriage while celebrating the couples' conjugal unions. Mattie has accepted the legal constraint on her ability to get a divorce and new marriage license, and she considers her religious ceremony and her eleven years and a child with October what make her married, not a legal license (WB 321). In contrast, Julia, who has functioned as Herman's wife emotionally, sexually, and somewhat domestically for ten years, and who has a wedding dress and silver goblets for a toast waiting in a hope chest, will not consider herself married until Herman takes her north where he can marry her legally.

As proof of his commitment to take Julia north, Herman makes a small wedding cake each year to celebrate their "anniversary." On their tenth anniversary which is the focus of the play, Herman presents Julia with a wedding band strung on a chain to wear around her neck as a symbol of the seriousness of his intention to legally wed her. Seeing the ring on a string as another delay, Julia fights with him bitterly, he agrees to get the boat tickets to New York on Monday, and Julia allows him to spend Saturday night with her (WB 293). On Sunday morning, he is ill with influenza, and Julia sends Lula to get his sister Annabelle (WB 299). Annabelle and
his mother Frieda arrive, but his mother decides not to get a doctor or move him until nightfall to avoid the embarrassment of being seen in a black woman’s house. This decision leads to a vicious racial argument between Julia and Frieda, and Julia throws everyone, including the neighbors who have arrived to see what the commotion is about, out of the house (WB 313-19).

The following afternoon, in angry despair that Herman will never make her a bride, Julia goes to her hope chest, gets the wedding dress which has been stored there for several years, puts it on, and gets drunk from wine she sips from one of the silver goblets (WB 320). Herman, sweating heavily, arrives with two boat tickets to New York, but it is too late. He has contracted influenza in the 1918 epidemic which left eleven million dead, and in the play’s tragically ironic final scene, Julia finally pledges her marriage vow of “Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . .” to Herman as he dies in her arms (WB 337). This tragic final scene only accentuates Julia’s failure to successfully negotiate the sexual economic exchange. Herman has at last activated his promise to marry her only to die before fulfilling it. Julia has at last become a bride, but to a dead man, whose name and protection signify nothing.

The play takes place in three houses and the common backyard they share. Julia lives in the center house, which is “newly painted and cheery-looking in contrast to the other two, which are weather-beaten and shabby” (WB 259). Julia has just moved in and is still unpacking; she moves often in an effort to hide her relationship with her white fiance. The house to the audience’s left is occupied by Lula Green, a
motherly forty-five-year-old African-American woman who supports herself by making paper flowers for weddings and funerals. Her adopted son Nelson is on leave from the army and working in a coal yard. The house to the audience’s right is rented by Mattie, whose husband October is away in the Merchant Marines; Mattie makes a living by caring for a white child Princess, age six, who plays with Mattie’s eight-year-old daughter Teeta. The houses are owned by Fanny Johnson, a 50-year-old busybody who prides herself on being the self-appointed standard bearer for her race. Fanny’s house is offstage.

Although South Carolina’s miscegenation laws have prevented Herman and Julia’s marriage, the couple’s commitment to each other has endured because Herman has promised to legally give her the "name and protection" (Childress uses the term five times) which marriage affords (WB 277, 318, 333, emphasis mine). Ostensibly, Herman has not made good on the promise because of class issues. He is heavily influenced by his mother, who has crossed class lines from poor white farm trash to lower-middle class city dweller and who has mortgaged her house to loan him three thousand dollars to set up his bakery (WB 289-90). Even though the refined Julia is Herman’s class equal by virtue of owning her own sewing business (she has contracted her services to a store), Herman’s mother, who conflates class with race, considers Julia to be just a “[n]igger whore” after his money (WB 311-12, 318). Herman is also reluctant to sell the bakery and to give up his class status as a business owner in order to face an unknown financial future in New York.
Although Julia understands these bases for Herman's delay, she feels that the real reason he has not married her is the fact that she is already serving as what would now be known as a common-law wife. In the sexual economy of 1918, the gender role lady, which is clearly the standard by which Julia judges herself, required a woman to withhold sex until after she received the man's name and protection in marriage (WB 312). Julia has already given Herman everything women are required to offer in the marriage exchange: her pleasing looks and personality; her domestic and artistic skills; and, the primary signifier of a woman's exchange value in the marriage market, her virginity. In doing so, she has already assumed the gender role wife, and she fears that Herman has no incentive to give her legal claim to that title.

In Childress's depictions of Julia and of other women and girls in *Wedding Band*, the playwright makes it clear that a man's name and protection are not a gift, but what materialist feminist critics such as Rubin, Irigaray and Sedgwick call an exchange, where a woman exchanges herself, both literally and figuratively, both body and identity, for social respectability and financial security.

Perhaps Julia would not have made the mistake of exchanging herself "for free" if she had had the name and protection of a patriarchal caretaking male such as Robert Middleton and Dr. Greve were to Jennie Middleton and as Battle and George Fairchild were to Dabney. In those brides' marriages, the sexual economic exchanges are, like Julia's, chiefly the twentieth-century exchange as opposed to the exchanges of earlier centuries when marriages were more often arranged. In the twentieth-century exchange, a young woman fashions herself into the marriageable woman/lady, then
markets herself, then barters herself as commodity/product to a man in exchange for name and protection—social respectability and financial and sexual security. However, as manifested in the symbolic trade from father to groom at the wedding altar, both Jennie and Dabney are being exchanged from one patriarchal caretaking male to another—from the name and protection of their fathers, male relatives, and adult male friends—to the name and protection of their husbands. The name and protection of their families and friends provide Jennie and Dabney with many mentors to help them navigate the potentially treacherous waters of the sexual economic process, especially mentors which monitor their sexual behavior to ensure that each retains her chief commodity value, her virginity.

In contrast, Julia Augustine is a woman without the name, protection, and mentorship of anyone; her parents are dead, and she is without friends and mentors until the members of the backyard community of Fanny’s rental houses, especially Mattie and Teeta, become her family (WB 335). This isolation and the sexual legacy of always already available which the plantation system left to black women make her almost completely vulnerable to exchanging herself for the emotional and financial security of Herman’s protection without receiving the legal and social security of his name. Nelson sums up Julia’s vulnerability as a solitary black woman in graphically distressing terms:

You ain’t most [white] folks. You’re down on the bottom with us, under his foot. A black man got nothin’ to offer you. . . .

. . . and he’s got nothin’ to offer. The one layin’ on your mattress, not even if he’s kind as you say. He got nothin’ for you . . . but some meat and gravy or a new petticoat . . . or maybe he can give you meriny-lookin’ little bastard chirrun for us to take in and raise up. We’re the ones who feed and raise ‘em.
when it's like this . . . They don’t want ‘em. They only too glad to let us have their kin-folk. As it is, we supportin’ half-a the slave-master’s offspring right now. \(\text{(WB 306-307, emphasis Childress’s)}\)

Nelson, October, and Uncle Greenlee, the black male characters in *Wedding Band*, are not only not the "slack-kneed objects of pity" stereotype which Childress wanted to revise, but Nelson and October are objects of pride for African-Americans in 1918: they are soldiers in World War I. Nelson is home on leave from the army; and October is at sea with the Merchant Marines. Just as the omnipresent Civil War serves as a background for conflict in Lumpkin’s *The Wedding*, and the Civil War and World War I serve as background in Welty’s *Delta Wedding*, World War I will serve in *Wedding Band* as a context for racial, class, and sexual conflicts.

The racial climate created by the war serves as a context not only for the racial tension between Julia, Herman, and Herman’s family, but also for African-Americans’ hope that their service for their country will improve the racial climate once the war is over. Nelson foreshadows the disappointment black Americans will face when returning soldiers are disenfranchised, a subject which also occupies Childress’s literary foremothers Angelina Weld Grimke, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Myrtle Smith Livingston, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Mary Burrill (Jennings ix). He asks Julia: "can you look me dead in the eye and say you believe all-a that?" He is doubtful because a few days before some "white folks threw a pail-a dirty water on him" when he went out in his uniform while on leave (\(\text{WB 263}\)). Julia replies, "If you gotta believe somethin', it may’s well be that" (\(\text{WB 327}\)).
Childress also uses the iconography of the wartime enemy as "the other" to foreground the hypocrisy of Herman's mother's racism toward Julia. Herman's mother, who had been "boastin' 'bout her German grandfather" when it was "fashionable," has put a sign saying "'We are American citizens'" in the window of her family's house because someone has written "'Krauts . . . Germans live here'" in paint on the side of the house (WB 283-84). She also tells Julia's landlady Fanny that her name is Thelma, when it is really the obviously German-derived Frieda (WB 309, 317). In spite of the fact that Frieda herself has been the object of ethnic discrimination, she has the nerve to tell Julia "[Herman's] better off dead in his coffin than live with the likes-a you . . . black thing! . . . Black, sassy nigger! . . . Nigger whore . . . he used you for a garbage pail . . . Dirty black nigger . . . Dirty black bitch" (WB 317-18).

War also serves as a context for sexual conflict; Julia's confrontation with the Bell Man foreshadows her confronting Herman with the fact that he hasn't married her because she has loved him "for free" (WB 332). The Bell Man approaches singing the patriotic "Over There," with American flags painted on both sides of his large suitcase, and he asks Lula if she is "[g]oin' to the servicemen's parade Monday."

When he follows Julia into her house and propositions her, the exchange he offers is a stereotypical wartime one: "I got no money now, but ladies always need stockin's," a commodity, along with cigarettes and chocolate, that soldiers trade for favors in foreign countries. Julia throws him out of her house with another wartime analogy;
she tells the Bell Man "I wish you was dead, you just oughta be dead, stepped on and dead," like soldiers will be on the battlefield (WB 269-72, emphasis mine).

Race, sex, the law, and war are conflated in Mattie's inability to receive October's Merchant Marine benefits because state laws prevent her divorcing and legally marrying him:

Man at the office kept sayin' . . . "You're not married to October" . . . and wavin' me 'way like that. . . .

We was married. On Edisto Island. I had a white dress and flowers . . . everything but papers. We couldn't get papers. Elder Burns knew we was doin' best we could. . . .

What if your husband run off? And you got no money? Readin' from the Bible makes people married, not no piece-a paper. We're together eleven years, that oughta be legal. . . .

October's out on the icy water, in the wartime, worryin' 'bout me 'n Teeta. I say he's my husband. Gotta pay Fanny, buy food. Julia, what must I do? (WB 320-21)

Trudier Harris notes that the "backdrop," or context, for Wedding Band was "war and influenza"; oddly enough, it is influenza rather than the war which brings about what Milly Barranger would call a characteristically southern "violent resolution" to the play, Herman's death (Harris 70, Barranger 8).

Childress's representations of Julia and Mattie expose the fact that white patriarchal culture forces black women to function under two contradictory codes: even though they are legally prevented from marrying the men they love, Julia and Mattie are judged by white culture's moral standard for women, lady, under which they are expected to withhold sex until they have the name and protection of marriage. In her representation of Mattie, Childress demonstrates that blacks can create an alternative to white culture's standards of judgment. In having Mattie's African-
American neighbors respect the fact that October has given her his name and protection by having their relationship, to use duCille's term, "dignified" by a minister, Childress implies that when white patriarchal law infringes on the civil rights of blacks, they should find a way to circumvent it. However, the backyard community's recognition of Mattie and October's marriage only heightens the anxiety that Julia, who judges herself by the white patriarchal moral code of lady, feels because Herman has not given her his name and protection except somewhat financially. In fact, as Jennings points out, Childress did not give Herman a last name because she saw it "as pointless since Julia could not have it" (9).

Childress's representation of Lula's adopted son Nelson points out that the sexual economic exchange can be difficult for black men as well as women under white patriarchal culture. Nelson proposes to "the prettiest girl in Carolina... Merrilee Jones," and she refuses him, saying, "I'm sorry, but you got nothin' to offer" (WB 294). Nelson, who sees his only option after the war as going back to work in the coal-yard, which he does not want to do, says, "She's right! I got nothin' to offer but a hard way to go. Merrilee Jones... workin' for the rich white folks and better off washin' their dirty drawers than marryin' me" (WB 266, 294-95). Nelson, who has one foot in the white world by virtue of being in the army, also questions whether Mattie and October's voluntary conjugal union, which provides little material benefit to Mattie during October's war absence, is really worthwhile. Although October sends ten dollars in a letter, he cannot assign the more significant family allotment to Mattie and Teeta. Nelson expresses his frustration that white
patriarchal culture puts back men in the position of not being able to provide well for
their families: "Merrilee ain't no liar. I got nothin' to offer, just like October" (WB
273, 320, 295, emphasis mine).

Initiates, Marriageable Woman/Lady,
Wife and Mother, and Mentors

In order to successfully make the marriage exchange, a woman must participate
in the sexual economic process which begins in childhood to fashion herself into the
sexual economy's chief commodity, the marriageable woman/lady. *Wedding Band* has
two initiates who are beginning the process, Teeta, 8, the daughter of Julia's neighbor
Mattie, and Princess, 6, a white child whom Mattie babysits. Teeta and Princess are
not old enough to be aware of the sexual economy, but they are affected by it. In
contrast to Susan of *The Wedding* and India and Laura of *Delta Wedding*, who are
both instructed in and ask questions about the sexual economy, Mattie and the
neighbors protect Teeta's and Princess's innocence about race and sexuality by saying
Herman is Julia's light-skinned husband.

The community of women is also training Teeta and Princess how to be ladies,
which will make them marriageable women (WB 283, 292). In *The Wedding* and
*Delta Wedding*, Susan, India and Laura are taught that a lady is always well-groomed;
likewise, Mattie makes sure Teeta's sash is tied properly (WB 280). A lady is always
kind, so Mattie scolds them for teasing the Chinaman down the street (WB 319). A
lady always acts with decorum and politeness, so Fanny tells the girls to "show" or
"mind" their manners (WB 261, 329).
Both girls have learned when manners are appropriate; when Princess tries to get Teeta to say "'Yes, ma'm'" to her, Teeta replies, "No... You too little" (WB 281). A lady has a pleasing personality, which both girls seem to have mastered; Nelson describes them as "[s]weet little Teeta . . . [and] the merry little Princess" (WB 328). The brief social exchange between the Bell Man and Teeta as he angrily leaves Julia's house signifies the nature of the sexual economic exchange for which Teeta and Princess are being prepared. He tells Teeta, "Here, little honey. You take this sample. You got nice manners[,]" as he hands her a strainer (WB 272). The message is clear: be a little honey with nice manners, and you'll receive a material reward. Like, Susan, India, and Laura, the initiates Teeta and Princess practice packaging and marketing themselves under the close supervision of the neighbor women and in the confines of the backyard the three houses share, where mistakes amuse rather than embarrass or ruin marketability.

There are no girls of self-fashioning age in Wedding Band, but Annabelle, Herman's sister, represents the third stage of the self-fashioning process and a contrast to the marriageable women bridesmaids of The Wedding and Delta Wedding, who are in the appropriate age range for this stage, their late teens or early twenties. Annabelle has skillfully constructed herself as a marriageable woman—particularly in the arts; she is a concert pianist—and she has met a sailor from Brooklyn who is interested enough to have come to her family's house in South Carolina to have dinner. However, she apparently has received no type of commitment from Walter, and, in her thirties, she is in danger of becoming too old to complete the marriage
exchange (WB 301, 305, 310). She reflects anxiety about two crucial aspects of the
sexual economy: first, a woman receives no return in the economy's exchange until
she has completed stage four, closing the deal in marriage; and, second, skillfully
completing the first two stages of initiate and self-fashioner is no guarantee that a
woman will be able to complete stage three by successfully marketing herself to an
appropriate male.

Mattie is the wife and mother who has successfully negotiated stages five and
six of the sexual economic process. She offers advice on how to achieve the same
success she has: "I wouldn't live with no man. Man got to marry me. Man that
won't marry you thinks nothin' of you Just usin' you" (WB 277). In contrast to the
ineffective Carrie Middleton and Ellen Fairchild, Mattie represents what Jennings calls
a "strong and emergent female identity" (x). Mattie enters the play "carrying a switch
and fastening her clothing," helping Teeta look for a quarter she dropped. When
Fanny confronts her about making noise, and Julia, awakened by the noise, comes
onto her porch, Mattie curses all of them and threatens to tear down Julia's porch to
find what is her last quarter (WB 259-61). She is feisty, hot-tempered, and willing to
fight to protect her child and her money.

This characterization of Mattie as strong may seem at odds with my theory that
women lose their identity when they fashion themselves into the socially-constructed
persona lady required by the sexual economy. However, Mattie has become strong
because of the situation Lee Ann White describes in The Civil War as a Crisis in
Gender, when Mattie's husband went to war, she had to assume what Whites calls
men's public duty, work. However, Mattie has assumed domestic, women's work—child care. Mattie may be strong in her interactions with her women neighbors, but in her interactions with men and the world at large, she remains submissive: she did not pursue getting divorced from her first husband, she did not argue with the official who denied October's Merchant Marine benefits, and, now that she has vented her anger to her neighbors, she "[b]reaks down and cries" because, without October's allotment, she is barely surviving financially (WB 261).

Also, in a reversal not usually seen in the stages of the sexual economic process, Julia the bride also acts as mentor to Mattie the mother. She reads October's letter to Mattie, and Mattie asks her for advice on what to do about getting October's allotment (WB 274-77, 320-21). The two women gain strength from each other as the play progresses and think of each other as family: "You and Teeta are my family. Be my family," says Julia; Mattie responds, "We your people whether we blood kin or not" (WB 35). Just before the symbolic wedding on Herman's deathbed, Julia gives Mattie the wedding band on a chain and the boat tickets to New York. At least one of them can go north (where Mattie can get a divorce) and be legally married (WB 335).

There are three mentor figures in Wedding Band, Lula, Fanny, and Herman's mother Frieda. Like Cousin Fannie in The Wedding and Aunt Tempe in Delta Wedding, Lula, now a widow, is a mentor who has passed through all six stages of the sexual economic process. Lula, whose experience with the marriage market was not a good one because her husband cheated on her, suggests Julia stay away from the
sexual economic process altogether. Since Julia is mostly self-supporting through her sewing business, Lula says she doesn’t need a man for financial security: "No, no, you got no use for 'em so don’t take nothin’ from 'em. . . . I couldn’t stand one of 'em to touch me intimate no matter what he’d give me" (WB 268, 279). Like Carrie Middleton and Ellen Fairchild, Lula is an ineffectual mother; years before, she was "in a neighbor’s house tellin’ [her] troubles" about her husband’s adultery, and her little boy "wandered out on the railroad track and got killed" (WB 268). This situation has an eerie parallel to Delta Wedding. When Ellen became distracted from her motherhood duties by looking for the lost garnet pin that represented her pre-motherhood life, the Lost Girl, who momentarily became Ellen’s child in the woods—and, for a moment, her mother, too—ran away into the woods and was later killed by the Yellow Dog. In these characters, Childress and Welty are demonstrating how difficult and draining motherhood is and how severe the consequences of even a momentary lapse in duty can be.

Analogous to Miss Lizzie in The Wedding and Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen in Delta Wedding, Fanny Johnson represents the spinster mentor who enforces the sexual economy’s code of conduct despite receiving no return for her efforts except an interesting judgmental moral kinship with Herman’s mother (WB 259). Both Frieda and Fanny try to hide the fact that Herman has become ill while visiting Julia. Frieda and Fanny’s plotting the deception of how to sneak Herman out while they sip tea from Fanny’s silver service symbolizes their haughty but unwarranted feelings of class superiority over Julia and the other neighbors (WB 309-10). Fanny behaves toward
her neighbors much the way the feisty Mildred of Childress's *Like One of the Family*.

... *Conversations from a Domestic's Life* behaves toward her white employers, telling them, "when she disapproves of their attitudes [and actions]. . . . tell[ing] them how to raise their children . . . and what the boundaries of their social interactions should be" (Harris 70). She is a "do as I say but not as I do" mentor, for she looks down on Julia for her illicit and illegal relationship with Herman, but invites Nelson to move in with her for "food, fun and finance" (*WB* 300).

The most unyielding enforcer mentor in *Wedding Band* is Herman's mother Frieda. She has already played patriarchal policewoman in enforcing the sexual economy's code of conduct on Annabelle's relationship with Walter. Because Walter is just a "common sailor" and not an officer, Frieda views him as class-inappropriate for her would-be concert pianist daughter. She was so rude to him when he visited the family's home for dinner that he went back to Brooklyn and has not returned. Annabelle still holds out hope that if she can cut her ties to this dominating mother and go to Brooklyn, she can rekindle the relationship, but doing so seems an unlikely possibility (*WB* 289, 301, 305, 310). Frieda also attempts to play patriarchal policewoman in arresting the progress of Herman and Julia's relationship. She and Annabelle have tried to no avail to interest Herman in a white widow named Celestine, who no doubt could enhance the family's financial situation (*WB* 290, 305). And, in spite of the fact that Julia has been kind to her, Frieda rebukes her for taking Herman’s money and for sleeping with him when Julia has been virtually forced into...
this transgression by Herman's owing Frieda the three thousand dollar mortgage on
the bakery (WB 311-15, 289-90).

*Wedding Band* also has an absent mentor like the ones in *Delta Wedding*. The
Fairchilds constantly refer to their dead relatives whose pictures hang everywhere at
Shellmound and the Grove, thinking what they would have done in certain situations,
using their old family recipes, and passing down the night light that the ancestors
passed down to them. Julia's absent Aunt Cora is a particularly interesting absent
mentor. She was not a good substitute mother when Julia was young; Aunt Cora sent
her to a horrible live-in domestic job. However, because she is the only relative Julia
has, Julia keeps her photograph on a table. Symbolically, when Herman puts the
wedding cake on the table, he has to move the photograph of the absent mentor out of
way to place this year's wedding cake, the symbol of his relationship with Julia—of
which Aunt Cora would not approve — in the picture's place.

All of the mentorship in *Wedding Band* takes place in the private women's
space of the communal backyard and houses as opposed to a public, male-dominated
setting. This privatization of the mentoring process indicates that while young women
such as Teeta and Princess need training and older women such as Julia and Mattie
need support in negotiating the sexual economic process, such instruction and support
should be concealed to make the movement from one stage of the sexual economic
process to another or the movement within a stage seem an effortless, natural
occurrence.
Much of the female mentoring occurs not only in women’s spaces, but through what I call women’s wisdom: through psychic and intuitive knowledge that only women have. Petticoats in *Wedding Band* are signifiers of the sexual economy, just as they were in *The Wedding*, where Susan wore Jennie’s old ones as a symbol of entering the process. Here, Mattie tells Julia that she can get Herman to marry her if she sews a piece of his shirttail onto her petticoat (*WB* 278). Fanny reads the leaves in Julia’s tea cup twice. The first time, she sees a devil in Julia’s cup, but also prosperity; the devil is, of course, Herman, the prosperity Julia’s economic self-sufficiency (*WB* 263). In the second reading, Fanny sees Julia "on [her] way to Miami, Florida, goin’ on a trip," which is perhaps a premonition of where Julia will go after Herman dies, on a real rather than imaginary honeymoon without him (*WB* 297). But first, Julia must become a bride.

**Iconized Unwed Bride**

Like Jennie Middleton and Dabney Fairchild of Lumpkin’s and Welty’s texts, Julia has done well in the first stages of the sexual economic process. She has fashioned herself into marriageable woman/lady and has attracted a class-appropriate though not race-appropriate male, partly through adopting her culture’s standard for beauty: she is "an attractive brown woman, about thirty-five years old"; Nelson describes her as "the best-lookin’ woman I ever seen in my life"; and Herman loves even "the palms of [her] hands and the soles of [her] feet" (*WB* 260, 267, 286). The Bell Man propositions her in a scene reminiscent of a plantation master’s inflicting his sexual dominance on one of his female slaves. He propositions her by saying, "But
talkin’ serious, what is race and color? Put a paper bag over your head and who’d know the difference.” However, he wants her enough to “[pant] and [wheeze] out his admiration”: “Wouldn’t take but five minutes. . . . Wouldn’t nobody know but you and me. . . . Um clean. . . . as the . . . Board-a Health. . . . I got no money now, but ladies always need stockin’ s” (WB 270-71).

Julia has also fashioned her personality to fit her culture’s standard of demeanor, which is that of the lady. She is much more refined than any of her neighbors, including Fanny, who sets herself up as the standard bearer for the black race. Julia is embarrassed by Fanny’s discussion of Mattie’s former employment as a laundress of "joy-towels" in a whore house (WB 262). Julia and the men around her recognize that she is a lady, except for having loved “for free.” The beginning of the vicious verbal argument between Julia and Herman’s mother begins with barbs that describe Julia’s dichotomy of being a lady, but a sullied one. When Herman’s mother insults her by saying “I’m sure you know what he wants,” Julia replies, “I’m not gonna match words with you. . . . I’m too much of a lady.” Herman’s mother replies with a slap at Julia’s virtue: “A lady oughta learn how to keep her dress down” (WB 312). The Bell Man, even as he offers his racially condescending proposition, calls her a lady when he offers stockings in exchange for sex, and Herman called her “‘Little lady’” the day he got the courage to approach her on one of her visits to the bakery (WB 271, 305).

When Herman and Julia plan for her to go to New York alone ahead of him, Herman takes the chivalrous, protective stance toward Julia one takes toward a lady,
telling her, "Stay with your cousin and don’t talk to strangers" (WB 291). Julia even shares her wisdom of how to be a lady with Lula. When Lula describes crying on her knees before a judge to get Nelson out of jail, Julia says, "O, Miss Lula, a lady’s not supposed to crawl and cry." Lula knows this, but she played the stereotypical submissive black before the white judge to save Nelson’s life (WB 326). However, when Herman says he can’t go "to Philadelphia or wherever the hell you’re saying to go," Julia become so angry that she drops the submissive, genteel femininity of ladyhood. When she screams, "Oh damnation! The hell with that!", Herman rebukes her by saying, "All right, not so much hell and damn. When we first met you were so shy" (WB 289). Julia later attempts to regain the piety of the True Woman/lady by attending church with her neighbors.

Julia has also developed the artistic and domestic skills desirable in a marriageable woman. She has some education, "only . . . through eighth grade," but it seems to be more than her neighbors have, and it has given her an air of refinement (WB 277). She has the domestic skills necessary to be a good wife. She is such a talented seamstress that she has contracted with a store to do hand finishing for them, and she makes curtains and dresses for Herman’s mother (WB 262, 317). She has also knit Herman a sweater for their anniversary (WB 287). She has talent in decorating: the "odds and ends" on the porch of her house "[clash] with a beautiful, subdued splendor," words which might also be used to describe Julia before her arguments with Herman and his mother (WB 259). She has good taste; Herman remembers the outfit she wore the day he first approached her, and he trusts her to
buy not only his clothes, but presents for his mother (WB 291-92, 317). And she
knows how to care for the sick, tenderly nursing Herman until his mother and sister
take him away (WB 296-302).

Julia obviously functions as Herman's wife emotionally. She calls him
"honeybunch, dear heart," rubs his head and back, and kisses him; and, on two
different occasions, he tells her he loves her: at first, "Julia, I love you . . . you
know it . . . I love you"; and when he finally returns with the boat tickets, more
insistently: "You gotta believe I love you . . . 'cause I do . . . That's the one thing I
know . . . I love you . . . I love you" (WB 285, 288, 290, 293, 334). She also
functions as his wife sexually. Although there is no overt sexuality in the play, the
repeated references to Julia's lost virtue indicate that she has been sleeping with him
for quite some time. She also functions as his wife domestically, for she buys his
socks and shirts, has his suits made, has his watch fixed, and monitors when he
should wear his good suit; she has performed these services so long that he no longer
knows what size socks he wears (WB 283, 290-92). She even functions as a daughter-
in-law to Frieda, making her curtains and dresses, buying the presents Herman gives
his mother, and caring for her when she was in bed with rheumatism (WB 317).

Nevertheless, Julia wants the social respectability of legal marriage, and she
has anticipated it throughout their ten-year relationship. She already has a wedding
gown and a hope chest full of wedding day and married life accoutrements such as
silver goblets and linens. She anticipates having a "quiet reception" using her "cut-
glass punch bowl" and serving "little sandwiches" (WB 291). Herman keeps her
anticipation alive by making her a wedding cake to celebrate each of their
"anniversaries." He has also given her two rings as a pledge of his commitment. The
first was his college graduation ring, which she has lost. On this tenth anniversary,
he gives her a wide, gold wedding band which has "Herman and Julia 1908"
inscribed inside and which is strung on a chain "[t]o have until such time as. . . ."
He calls it "[a] damn fool present" (twice), but it is what Julia has been waiting for:
"It comforts me. It's your promise" (WB 287). He also promises her that "[w]e'll
grow old together both of us havin' the same name" like the old couple Mabel and
Robbie who live across from the bakery (WB 289).

Although she has been functioning as Herman's wife for ten years, Julia is
nevertheless anticipating attaining social respectability by becoming his wife legally
(WB 291, 319). The miscegenation laws in 1918 South Carolina not only prevent
Julia and Herman from marrying, but force them to conduct their relationship in
secrecy rather than in any social arena. Consequently, Julia has moved frequently to
guard their privacy. She speaks of at least five addresses before Fanny's rental house:
"Thompson Street. . . . Queen Street. . . . the country. . . . a lovely colored
neighborhood. . . . near sportin' people." She has chosen Fanny's house because it
is "hid way in the backyard so quiet, didn't see another soul." When the Bell Man,
who recognizes her from Thompson Street, asks, "Move a lot, don'tcha?", she finds
the memory of the moves, which are a sign of the illicit nature of her relationship
with Herman, painful (WB 269, 278).
As duCille notes in her analysis, marriage rites were signifiers of "liberation and civility" for nineteenth-century African-Americans (8). In Childress's *Wedding Band*, set in the early twentieth-century (1918), marriage still signifies civility. If, in the marriage exchange, "protection" means financial security and protection from sexual predators like Nelson and the Bell Man, then "name" means social respectability and "dignity." Julia describes dignity as "a feeling—It's a spirit that rises higher than the dirt around it, without any by-your-leave. It's not proud and it's not 'shamed . . . I don't know if it's us either, honey" (WB 288-89). It is not in the early scenes of the play, for both Julia and Herman are ashamed of their relationship. Julia says, "when you offend Gawd you hate for it be known. Gawd might forgive but people never will," and Herman "feel[s] shame" to be hiding in a backyard (WB 269, 288).

Herman suggests they try the "dignity" of New York or Philadelphia, which means the dignity of legal marriage (WB 290). When he says he's going to buy her "a Clyde Line ticket for New York on Monday . . . this Monday . . . As Gawd is my judge. That's dignity. Monday," Julia tells her neighbors, "I'm sorry for past sin—but from Monday on through eternity—I'm gonna live in dignity accordin' to the laws of God and Man" (WB 293-94). And when Herman's mother calls his relationship with Julia a mistake, Herman responds, "I'm gon' marry her. I'm gon' marry her . . . got that? . . . for the sake of herself . . . that's dignity—tell me, what is dignity—Higher than the dirt it is . . . dignity is . . . " (WB 313).
Julia’s anticipation of achieving pride and dignity through legally assuming the role of Herman’s wife is, like Jennie’s and Dabney’s anticipation, disrupted. As these disruptions to her being a bride occur, Julia, in similar fashion to Jennie and Dabney, will move steadily through a progression of anticipation, disruption of that anticipation, altered mental and corporal states, suspension between her old life of marriageable woman/fiance and her new life of bride, to self-sacrifice on the deathbed/altar of her symbolic marriage to the dying Herman.

One of the most interesting strategies Childress uses in *Wedding Band* to deconstruct the romantic mythology of marriage is to subvert the traditional celebratory elements of a wedding into disruptions of Julia’s anticipation of her role as bride. As these elements appear gradually through the play, the emergence of each is a foreshadowing of the various disruptions to come. The first traditional celebratory element to appear is the wedding cake, which, as Julia observes, is "the best one ever." It has "a bride and groom on top and ten pink candles... Tassels, bells, roses... daffodils and silver sprinkles" (*WB* 285). Soon after Herman has given Julia the cake, he unwittingly presages their argument by describing the order he has received for a wedding cake shaped like a battleship, no doubt for the nuptials of a soldier just shipping out to or just returned from action in World War I. Herman’s casually handing Julia a ring box as he tells her about the battleship cake and the rest of his day’s baking, his describing the ring twice as "[a] damn fool present," and, worst of all, his stringing the ring—the ur signifier of legal marriage—on a chain rather than putting it on Julia’s finger, signify how he really feels about marrying her:
embattled, a damn fool, and chained. As Trudier Harris suggests, both signifiers symbolize Julia's shame because both must be secret: "a wedding band, which she must wear on a chain around her neck, and from his bakery a cake, which no one else can share with them" (70).

In her essay on female southern playwrights discussed earlier in this chapter, Barranger describes how second-generation southern women playwrights equate hunger and food with emotional deprivation:

Alice Childress, Marsha Norman and Beth Henley embellish the familiar poverty of the South with the figurative starvation of heroines who hunger for nurturing, for control, for freedom and autonomy. Food—its preparation, consumption or rejection—for these writers becomes semiotic signs of psychological states. The struggle for female identity is symbolized by food imagery—associated with home, kitchen, family, and funeral wakes—that records . . . the "vanished story of female value and power." (8-9)

Julia's wedding cake has certainly become a sign of her "vanished . . . female value and power," as she has already given Herman the most valuable aspect of herself as a commodity in the sexual economy and thus her only power in negotiating a successful exchange.

The traditional celebratory element of wedding gown also disrupts Julia's anticipation of becoming Herman's bride and wife. After she and Herman argue about his inability to go north with her because he must repay his mother, Herman finally mends the argument by suggesting that Julia go to New York alone, and he will join her as soon as he can raise the money. With this promise, Julia begins to think about a wedding and "a quiet reception." She goes to her hope chest, gets her wedding dress, and holds it against herself: "Hope my weddin' dress isn't too small.
It's been waitin' a good while" ([WB 291). However, after they argue, Herman becomes ill, and Annabelle and Frieda take him away, Julia puts on her wedding dress and gets drunk.

A short time later, Herman arrives with not one, but two, boat tickets to New York. Julia, still dressed in her wedding gown, is also still bitter and lets them fall to the ground. She and Herman argue again, until he apologizes by saying, "You did all the givin' . . . I failed you in every way. . . . I didn't give my name. . . . After ten years at it--I never did a damn thing for you" ([WB 333). Julia forgives him, and a short time later, she is describing them waving from the deck of the boat, and she is vowing "Yes . . . Yes . . . " as he dies in her arms: "The weight has lifted, she is radiantly happy. She helps him gasp out each remaining breath. With each gasp he seems to draw a step nearer to a wonderful goal." In this tragic scene, her white wedding dress has lost its signification as a symbol of the virginity she should have exchanged for Herman's name and protection ten years before, and it has become the shroud of a woman married to a ghost.

The hope chest, which is the major signifier of a marriageable woman's anticipation of becoming bride/wife, is also subverted to disrupt Julia's anticipation of becoming a bride. Her hope chest contains furnishings for a wedding reception--a cut-glass punchbowl and silver cups for toasting--and for creating a beautiful and comfortable marriage bed--Irish linens, a bedspread, and quilts. But the hope which the chest signifies is short-lived. The day after Herman has promised to buy the boat tickets, Herman's mother calls Julia a "[d]irty black nigger... whore" and takes
the very ill Herman home for what will likely be the last time. The following afternoon, the hope chest is as disrupted as Julia's hopes. Items "are spilled out on the floor," and "a half-empty wine decanter" sits near them; Julia has gotten drunk and rifled through these remains of her failed anticipation (WB 291, 319).

The celebratory nature of the bride's bouquet is also disrupted in Childress's drama. Whereas in Lumpkin's The Wedding the bridal bouquet was treated with almost reverential quality, in Wedding Band the meaning of the bridal bouquet is subverted in several ways. As when the maid or matron of honor holds the bouquet while the bride takes her vows and receives the ring, Lula, Julia's flower-making friend and mentor, enters the symbolic wedding scene holding a bouquet which could serve as Julia's bridal one. It is made of paper, the signifier of legal marriage that Julia and Mattie do not have, and it is wilted, as Julia's and Lula's expectations of marriage are. The traditionally celebratory nature of the bridal bouquet, which the bride throws to a single woman as a lucky token that she will be the next to marry, thus becomes an iconographic symbol not of anticipation, but of disappointment and disillusionment (WB 335).

The silver toasting goblets lose their celebratory nature in a manner similar to the wedding gown and bridal bouquet, and they serve as a symbol of Julia's disrupted anticipation in two different ways. First, in an effort to drown her grief over her arguments with Herman and his mother and their subsequent departure—from her life forever, she thinks—she uses one of the goblets to get drunk. Some of the setting is correct: she is in her wedding gown, and she fills the goblet with wine; however, she
is home alone, and she is using only one goblet to drown unhappiness when the two should be used together to celebrate happiness. The celebratory nature of the goblets is subverted even more in one of the last scenes of the play, when Julia fills the cup and puts it to Herman's lips, not in the celebratory toast of marriage, but to quench his deathbed thirst (WB 337).

Perhaps because it is the point where the bride literally steps across the threshold of her home or church into her role as wife, the celebratory nature of the honeymoon departure is subverted in all three wedding texts. It is least so in Lumpkin's The Wedding, when Dr. Greve watches Jennie and the doctor wave from the steps of the train and hopes that their marriage "will be right" (TW 306). The honeymoon departure in Delta Wedding is more ominous; when Troy drives Dabney away for the honeymoon in the night, the car is dark, and her family is waving handkerchiefs and crying in its wake—as if Troy were transporting her on a dark barge across the river Styx instead of taking her to Memphis for three days (DW 219, 227). In Wedding Band, the honeymoon departure from the symbolic wedding is most ominous of all.

When Herman had promised to buy Julia a ticket to New York and follow her in a year, he suggested the train, but Julia wanted to go on a boat:

No train. I wanta stand on the deck of a Clyde Line boat, wavin' to the people on the shore. The whistle blowin', flags flyin' . . . wavin' my handkerchief . . . So long, so long, look here--South Carolina . . . so long, hometown . . . goin' away by myself--." (WB 291, emphasis mine)

This is the stereotypical honeymoon departure scene—bride and groom waving from the deck, with confetti streamers cascading around them like fireworks frozen in
frivolity. However, this scene is completely subverted because Julia is "goin’ away by
[her]self," without the groom who has promised to follow. This dream demonstrates
how desperately lonely Julia is for the social trappings which come with legal
marriage; she wants every part of the wedding celebration, even if she must complete
the honeymoon departure by herself. The scene becomes even more desperate when it
is repeated at the end of the play. This time, in her anticipatory dream, Herman is on
the boat with her:

We’re standin’ on the deck-a that Clyde Line Boat . . . wavin’ to the people
on the shore . . . Your mama, Annabelle, my Aunt Cora . . . all of our
friends . . . the children . . . all wavin’ . . . "Don’t stay ‘way too long . . . Be
sure and come back . . . We gon’ miss you . . . Come back, we need you” . . .
. But we’re goin’ . . . The whistle’s blowin’, flags wavin’ . . . We’re takin’
off, ridin’ the waves so smooth and easy . . . There now . . . . . the bakery’s
fine . . . all the orders are ready . . . out to sea . . . on our way . . .

(WB 336-37)

In reality, Herman is dying in her arms, and both the wedding and the honeymoon
departure are symbolic ones. But the emotion behind the words is completely real:
"gon’ miss you . . . Come back, [I] need you . . . But [you]’re goin’ . . . [You]’re
takin’ off, ridin’ the waves so smooth and easy . . . There now . . . . . on [y]our way."
It is not the family and friends waving goodbye to the couple, but Julia saying
goodbye to her chance at marriage and the man she has loved for ten years.

Like Jennie and Dabney, Julia has experienced a loss of identity in fashioning
herself into the marriageable woman. Like Jennie and Dabney, she has transgressed
the sexual economy’s moral code of conduct, although Julia’s miscegenation is far
worse than Dabney’s flirting and dancing with other boys the week before her
wedding and much worse than Jennie’s having allowed the doctor to kiss her

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passionately and to have wandering hands. Like the other two brides, Julia’s anxiety about this loss of identity and moral transgression is expressed in representations of her in altered states, first in her bitterness over her arguments with Herman and his mother, and later in her drunkenness.

While Julia is drunk, she will alter her corporal state even further by dancing with, what is for this refined lady, wild abandonment. Still dressed in her wedding gown, she is like some spectral puppet who has been lifted from a vaudeville trunk to dance to the rhythm of the puppetmaster’s music (WB 319-20). Like the black minstrels in her race’s theatrical past, Julia has put on a show for white patriarchal culture, and Herman has been her puppetmaster. However, where she has danced to Herman’s beat in the past, always moving with the subdued grace of a lady, today she will dance to the rhythm of a colored marching band and move with the proud strut of her ancestors (WB 319-20). Julia and Lula "strut [each other] right on down."

Childress’s stage directions indicate that the haughty strut, with "arms akimbo, head held high. . . . mock arrogance. . . . cold, hostile looks" is "[a] Carolina folk dance passed on from some dimly remembered African beginning," just the kind of dance Fabre describes slaves retaining as an act of defiance in their forced performances for whites (WB 324).

As Jennie of Lumpkin’s The Wedding and Dabney of Welty’s Delta Wedding move closer to the altar where the marriage exchange converts their previous identities as daughter/sister/niece/friend into wife, the loss of self they are experiencing in the marriage exchange is demonstrated by their temporarily appearing to be inanimate, as
if they are suspended between their old and new lives or in liminality. Julia is suspended in a similarly liminal fashion; however, whereas Jennie and Dabney are in this state of suspension only in the week or days leading up to their weddings, when they are put into bridal isolation, the suspension for Julia will be permanent. Because Julia’s symbolic wedding takes place on Herman’s deathbed, she will be frozen forever in the isolated, iconic state of bride, where she has neither the marketing potential of marriageable woman nor the name and protection security of wife. Once Julia has gone through an appropriate mourning period, she can reenter the sexual economy; however, at thirty-five, her marriageable woman appeal is limited, especially since she no longer has the most marketable aspect of her commodification, her virginity. She has quite literally given Herman the best years of her life.

Julia also briefly experiences the liminality of bridal withdrawal. After she and Herman’s mother argue, she throws everyone out of her house, telling Herman’s mother, "Out! Out! Out! And take the last ten years-a my life with you and . . . when he gets better . . . keep him home." In the same conversation, she shoos Lula and Mattie away, saying, "Stay out . . . out . . . out . . . out . . . out . . . and leave me to my black self!" She stays in isolation overnight, rifling through her hope chest. The next afternoon, when she reappears on her porch, she is wearing her wedding dress, which foreshadows that she will become at least a symbolic bride (WB 318-20).

At the weddings in Lumpkin’s, Welty’s, and Childress’s texts, the loss of self experienced by each bride in exchange for the security of name and protection of a husband is represented in images of sacrifice at the altar. The woman’s self-sacrifice
is represented in death imagery which attaches to the brides prior to the wedding. A loss of self is also symbolized by the bride's losing a significant object or person. Dabney breaks the Fairchild family night light, which symbolizes the generations of her family (DW 44-49). Jennie will soon lose Old Rosin, a beloved family retainer, who is dying of consumption (TW 217). Julia, will, of course suffer the most significant loss of all as Herman dies in her arms from influenza (WB 337).

Like Jennie and Dabney, the loss of identity Julia has experienced in the self-fashioning process is represented in her association with death imagery prior to her wedding. Her parents are dead, and she wishes the Bell Man were "dead... dead... stepped on and dead," like soldiers on the battlefields of World War I (WB 264, 272). When she lived in the country, it was "[p]retty but quiet as the graveyard; so lonesome" (WB 278). As she and Herman discuss moving north, he says he's heard that it's so cold in Philadelphia that "[p]eople freeze to death waitin' for a trolley car." In response, Julia tells him that the previous night "a big bird flew cryin' over this house," a death image that was also seen in Delta Wedding (WB 288). When the bird flew over the house, Julia "dreamed 'bout the devil's face in the fire... He said, 'I'm comin' to drag you to hell'" (WB 290). Another death image from Delta Wedding also appears in Wedding Band; when the wedding costumes arrive from Memphis and the girls whirl with excitement, Dabney appears to be dancing with three headless bridesmaids. Moments later, she appears bodiless as her head appears over the upstairs bannister (DW 101, 103). In similar fashion, Julia holds her gown
in front of her to see if it still fits, causing her to temporarily appear as a bodiless head (WB 291).

The death imagery which surfaces after Herman collapses on Julia's porch is even more ominous. Herman asks Julia to sing to him, and she chooses "We Are climbin' Jacob's Ladder," in which "Every round goes higher and higher" toward heaven (WB 303). Nelson tells Julia, "Don't have so much to say to me. . . . They set us on fire 'bout their women. String us up, pour on kerosene and light a match. Wouldn't I make a bright flame in my new uniform?" (WB 306). In discussing the war, Nelson tells Julia, "If I gotta die, I'm carrying' one 'long with me," to which his mother Lula replies, "Your mouth will kill you"--a distinct possibility in the culture of 1918 South Carolina, which does not tolerate this kind of assertiveness from black men (WB 307). When Julia and Herman's mother have a bitter racial argument, Fanny holds Julia back, but Frieda says "Leave 'er go! The undertaker will have-ta unlock my hands off her black throat!" (WB 317). Annabelle tells Julia to "Leave my mother alone! She's old . . . and sick." "But never sick enough to die," Julia snaps back (WB 318).

Herman surprisingly reappears with boat tickets, but he has "waited 'til [h]e was half dead" to do it (WB 330). Once Herman has told Julia twice that he never really wanted to go north, she becomes embittered and asks Lula the rhetorical question "Why we gotta be so good jus' for them?" Lula says, "'cause they'll kill us if we not," which leads Julia to say, "They doin' it anyway. Last night I dreamed of the dead slaves--all murdered black and bloody men silently gathered at the foot-a my
bed. . . . I wish the dead could scream and fight back" (WB 325). This ominous
dream foreshadows Julia's most tragic association with death. By the next nightfall,
the dead man at the foot of the bed will not be a murdered slave, but Herman.

*Wedding Band* exposes white patriarchal culture's dichotomous history of
placing white women on a pedestal and black women on the auction block and then
judging both by the Cult of True Womanhood/lady standard—piety, genteel
femininity, submissiveness, and, most importantly, purity, which slave women, forced
to sexually succumb to their masters, can never attain. The play exhibits how strong
that code of conduct remains in the second decade of the twentieth-century, even
though the abolition, temperance, clubwomen's, and suffrage movements have created
a measure of women's liberation.

*Wedding Band* also explodes what duCille calls the romantic mythology of
marriage—that legally receiving a man's "name and protection" will necessarily
provide social respectability, financial security, and personal fulfillment. Julia's
persistent anxiety that Herman will never marry her because she has loved him "for
free" demonstrates the self-for-security, material nature of the marriage exchange and
the power of the sexual economy's code of conduct to disrupt even a long-standing
love match. Through the happy, though financially strained, non-legal but religiously
blessed marriage of Mattie and October, and the family-like ties that Julia develops
with her women neighbors, *Wedding Band* provides alternatives for black women's
fulfillment outside the Law of the Father. Through the characters Frieda, Fanny,
Herman, and the Bell Man the play unflinchingly examines racism and classism and how they conflate to generalize, objectify, exoticize, and disenfranchise.

While the messages are important, a play is only as effective as its characters are real. Childress has written good theatre; Wedding Band's fully-developed characters move us to laughter, tears, hatred, and sympathy.

Notes

1. Critics disagree about Childress' birthdate. Although virtually all cite the month and day as October 12, Gayle Austin, Brown-Guillory, Rosemary Curb, and Harris show the year as 1920, while Jennings and Rule show it as 1916. 1916 is the more likely date for two reasons. First, Sheila Rule's obituary in the New York Times indicates that Rule talked with Childress's husband, Nathan Woodard; one would hope she checked all her facts with him. Second, if Childress were born in 1920, she would have been only fifteen when daughter Jean was born in 1935 and only twenty when she began to act professionally. Interestingly, in her interview with Betsko and Koenig, Childress says she was born in Charleston, but does not give the date (BK 63).

2. The date of Childress' move to Harlem is also in dispute. In her critical biography's chronological listing of dates, Jennings indicates 1925, which would have made Childress nine. However, on page one of the same text, Jennings indicates that Childress was five when her parents separated and she was sent to her grandmother in Harlem. Brown-Guillory says that Childress was five when she moved to Harlem.

3. Rosemary Curb cites the date as 1965.

4. Polly Holliday, who played Annabelle in the Public Theatre production, has written a short essay about that experience called "I Remember Alice Childress." One of the interesting things she mentions is that the "original reading" (as opposed to any production) of Wedding Band at New Dramatists, Inc., featured Ralph Waite of The Waltons and Abbey Lincoln. Holliday says that this reading was in 1963, three years before any other writers date the writing of Wedding Band. Holliday's date could be correct, however; she describes extensive rewriting, so the play could have been in development from 1963 to 1966.

In a 1993 interview with Jackson Bryer, Childress discussed the difference between the stage and television versions of Wedding Band. The stage version concentrates on the backyard community, where the television version concentrates on the relationship between Julia and Herman, as opposed to Julia's "finding her
'black self.' Childress indicates the rewriting was done at the request of Joe Papp (JB 53-54).

Bryer's interview also explains why Joe Papp appropriated the director's role from Childress. Childress said that Papp had always wanted to be a director, and he saw the Public Theater version as his opportunity. He turned down every director Childress suggested, saying he wanted her to direct the play: "Joe wanted to step in, and he figured — you'll still have the play." When the first three or four nights of previews received standing ovations, "[h]e said, 'If it's going to be like this, I want to be in it. So I'm going to direct.' Again, you've got a whole cast sitting there.

You can say, 'I won't allow it,' or you can keep plodding and open. It was not a mistake to go on and open" (JB 54).

5. In her essay "Black Women Playwrights: Exorcising Myths," a discussion of works by Childress, Hansberry, and Shange, Brown-Guillory notes that the disenfranchisement of the African-American soldier did not end after World War I: "the black male in search of his manhood, a product of the ambivalence fostered mainly by the continued disinheritance of blacks after World War II and the Korean War, is a major new image in contemporary literature" (229).

6. My thanks to Peggy Whitman Prenshaw for creating the term "voluntary conjugal union."

7. Thelma Shinn has another reading of why Julia chooses Fanny's rent house:

The black woman in this play, Julia Augustine, discovers her own need for kinship with other women, which has motivated her to move into her current house in a crowded backyard rather than stay in the relative safety of an isolated country home. "Any kind-a people better than none a'tall" ([WB] 288). (155)

8. In her article "The 'Blight of Legalized Limitation' in Alice Childress' Wedding Band," Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown observes that the year after the setting for Wedding Band, 1919, was an especially significant year in United States race relations:

Triggered in part by the return of black soldiers whose European experience in World War I had thrown into sharp relief the de facto and de jure segregation in the United States, the "red summer" of 1919 was so named for the more [than] twenty race riots in cities across the nation and the rampant lynchings of black men, several of them soldiers in uniform. (40)
CONCLUSION

As these readings of Grace Lumpkin's *The Wedding*, Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*, and Alice Childress's *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White* reveal, when a young woman moves through the initiate, self-fashioneer, marriageable woman, bride, wife, and mother stages of the sexual economic process, she experiences a loss of identity as she fashions herself into these socially-constructed personas. This loss of identity is represented in each bride's moving through a series of increasingly dehumanized representations—anticipation, anticipation disrupted, altered corporal and mental states, suspended between old and new lives, self-sacrificed on the marriage altar—and in her association with death imagery.

This loss of identity is additionally seen in the overall representation of each of the brides. For example, Julia is the central figure in Childress's *Wedding Band*, but she is the one character that is somewhat flat. Although I can analytically sympathize with her situation, I never get the mental picture of her that evokes emotion, as I do with virtually all the other characters. Likewise, in *Delta Wedding*, Dabney and Ellen Fairchild are less well-rounded characters than Shelley, who resists losing her identity in self-fashioning. Jennie Middleton of Lumpkin's *The Wedding* is not flat like Julia and Dabney, but hysterical, which represents the anxiety of self-effacement equally effectively.

What these representations of women indicate is that, in spite of the strides made by the now three different women's movements covering four generations of
women, the restrictions on the gender role marriageable woman/lady seen in the
texts in this study remain virtually the same. Women have gained the freedom to
have sex before marriage without being considered spoiled goods, but too many
previous lovers are still problematic. Women no longer must marry in order to
achieve financial security, but the trade-off is that now many marriageable women
are expected to bring a good income to a marriage, in addition to all previous
requirements of the gender role lady. Women may attain social respectability
without marriage, but it is still the expected thing to do, and those who don’t are
suspect in more conservative circles, where people think there must be something
wrong with them.

Hopefully, the fact that people are thinking, talking, and writing about the
sexual economy will continue to increase awareness about the restrictive nature of
the marriage market until women and men can meet and marry without having "to
play the game," as popular culture of the late twentieth century has called adhering
to codified gender roles and courtship conduct. A recent issue of Cosmopolitan,
Vogue, Harper's Bazaar or other woman’s beauty and lifestyle magazine will
describe the appearance and behavior fetishizations of the most recent version of the
marriageable woman product that is "selling" in "meat markets" such as singles bars
and trendy coffeeshops and restaurants.

Until gender roles are decodified to the degree that individual rather than
standardized appearance and behavior are the desired norm, women who wish to
participate in the marriage market will continue to experience a loss of identity in
fashioning themselves into the standardized product marriageable woman. And, as Katherine Anne Porter indicated in her description of Amy in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, conforming to that standard will continue to be a death of individuality, and the wedding ceremony, where most women still take their husband's last name, will continue to mark that loss of self:

"Amy's wedding dress," said the grandmother, unfurling an immense cloak of dove-colored velvet, spreading beside it a silvery-gray watered-silk frock, and a small gray velvet toque with a dark red breast of feathers. . . .

"She would not wear white, nor a veil," said Grandmother.

"I couldn't oppose her, for I had said my daughters should each have exactly the wedding dress they wanted. But Amy surprised me. 'Now what would I look like in white satin?' she asked. It's true she was pale, but she would have been angelic in it, and all of us told her. 'I shall wear mourning if I like,' she said, 'it is my funeral, you know.'"
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VITA

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