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THE EXTREME MAINSTREAM

Consuming Heteroscripts: The Modern Wedding in the American Imaginary

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Review Essay

Consuming Heteroscripts: The Modern Wedding in the American Imaginary

Stephanie Harzewski

Elizabeth Freeman. *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture*. Duke University Press, 2002.

Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H. Pleck. *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding*. University of California Press, 2003.

Feminist and queer scholars on both sides of the Atlantic have begun to defamiliarize the wedding industry, most recently estimated in the United States at exceeding forty billion dollars annually.¹ Chrys Ingraham's *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture* revealed how this sector positions the wedding as a familial-consumer event to market whiteness, particularly white beauty norms. Jaclyn Geller's *Here Comes the Bride: Women, Weddings, and the Marriage Mystique* expanded Ingraham's survey of the wedding's increasing commodification and argued that with the unprecedented cost of living in the United States, gifts and cash received at wedding-related festivities serve as powerful incentives to heteronormativity. A variant of National Organization for Women founder Betty Friedan's "feminine mystique," the "marriage mystique" signifies not an unnamable

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suburban malaise, but the idea of marriage as a fetishized relief to all psychological or economic insecurity. Sociologist Sharon Boden's *Consumerism, Romance and the Wedding Experience* marked the first book-length study of wedding consumption in Britain since the 1994 Marriage Act, legislature which licensed approved premises for civil ceremonies in England and Wales. The first empirical study of wedding consumption to engage fully with sociological consumer culture literature, it presents data on the beliefs and actions of brides and grooms as well as exposes the rhetoric circulated in popular culture that renders the wedding experience meaning (150). Though divergent in tone and methodology, these three pioneering studies engage the white wedding as what Boden has termed "a within-reach consumer fantasy" and interrogate the ideologies the industry works to bolster (46).

Two new book releases on the sociology of the modern American wedding continue to challenge and demystify the politics of this national obsession and perhaps quintessential heterosexual ritual. More importantly, by divorcing the wedding as an event from marriage as a state-sanctioned institution, they signal a shift in conceptualizations of love and American love of spectacle. Boden begins to articulate this point when she notes that given the statistical likelihood of divorce, having a wedding today becomes celebrated for the romantic, feast-like pleasures of the day itself. The image of the wedding as a luxury consumer item dissociates itself from marriage and particularly the married life it presages (19). Elizabeth Freeman's *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture* and Cele Otnes and Elizabeth Pleck's *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding* both work to detach the wedding from marriage. Instead of a portal to "happily ever after," the wedding serves for Freeman as an unreliable guarantor of narrative and social closure as neither its popular version nor state-sanctioned contract can ensure a marriage, or, as we will see, qualify its members to two. Approaching the wedding as market analysts and historians of consumer culture, Otnes and Pleck do not so much critique what has become, they argue, *the* major ritual of the entire life span, but instead show how the lavish wedding increasingly functions as powerful mechanism for the communication of social prestige (4, 6).

A Duke "Series Q" title, *The Wedding Complex* offers an alternative paradigm for understanding the work of the wedding in literature and media culture. Scholars have typically assessed the wedding as lending narrative closure, even if forced or problematic. While critics have long linked the dominance of "wedlock" with narrative "deadlock," Freeman insists that the wedding often produces anything and everything but a successful endpoint of a courtship teleology (xiii). Instead of narrative closure or acquiescence to a dominant social ideology, the wedding grants its participants various kinds of transitivity: the ability to be both black and white, both child and adult, both male and female, or the desire to travel somewhere else in space and time (xiv). In this way, weddings, Freeman argues, "made forbidden (or forgotten) alliances tangible—as points of resistance to marital supremacy, and as figures for a different social order" (xiv-xv). In her gathering of texts from a diverse body of antebellum literature, film, and social history, Freeman finds that the wed-

ding serves to illuminate and critique the power of marriage law to maintain structures that do not seem immediately related to it, such as the nation-state and racial taxonomies. The selected weddings, then, perform cultural work analogous (or slantwise) to that of marriage law (xiv). The contradiction between what weddings can do and what marriage law really does, Freeman playfully muses, might be one reason people cry at weddings (44).

Freeman complicates Ingraham's appraisal of the wedding as the archetypal heterosexual event by assessing the weddings of her study as fundamentally queer in their "doubled work of wild fantasy and rigorous demystification" (xv). Further, the wedding offers not only a queer sensibility but also one deeply femme in its hyperfemininity and "improper, delicious self-aggrandizing dramatization" of what is ostensibly a common social rite (xv). Freeman is justifiably hesitant to label every non-marital or even failed wedding as queer, yet she asserts that the social alternatives exposed by the excessive and/or failed weddings in her sample dovetail with a queer politics, one that in the widest sense engenders the ongoing production of shared meanings and unanticipated constituencies (xv). The volume operates in a Foucaultian mode in that Freeman views "queer" as neither identitarian nor anti-identitarian, but socially constructive, imaginative, or reparative. Freeman qualifies this arguably too broad characterization of "queer" with the assessment that the label is relatively useless unless it encompasses social forms beyond hetero- or homo-normative couplehood. This bold yet perhaps too democratic treatment of "queer" is balanced by a careful historical grounding of marriage itself. While Freeman's wielding of terminology may be faulted, *The Wedding Complex* succeeds in utilizing fictional texts as a means of imagining, enacting, or even extracting lost or new possibilities of social engroupment.

Consisting of a preface, six chapters, and a coda, *The Wedding Complex* employs close readings of fiction, film, and wedding custom to carve out new territory in the study of the wedding as a cultural phenomenon. For example, in chapter 1, "Love Among the Ruins," Freeman presents highly original but historically-grounded readings of early modern wedding law and ritual. Here we learn that during the 1660s elaborately iced and marzipanned hard-shelled cake began to substitute for the breaking of bread or showering of grain over the bride's head, gestures that had once symbolized her fertility. This period, more specifically the mid-1660s with the emergence of bridal white, marked the long historical process of distinguishing the bride's body from that of her groom and her peers. The separating and enclosing of the bridal body operates metonymically in the form of the white casting covering the grain cakes. Freeman interprets the cake's material history as a symbolic acquiescence to the Catholic Church's previous efforts to appropriate and spiritualize the wedding's more carnal elements. Yet, she posits, the converse is equally plausible: the showcasing of the bridal body may have been symbolically resisting the church's standpoint on marriage as a sacred lateral bond between relative equals (19). The cakes, as symbolic miniatures of the bride's body, may have encoded earlier views of marriage as a communally sanctioned transformation of the bride's status, and partaking of the cakes symbolically upheld the ability of the community to participate in her fertility. Freeman throughout does not

eschew complexity or potentially competing readings. She instead maximizes such entanglements to their advantage as she successfully makes the chapter's larger argument that such customs most likely both acknowledged emerging forms of controls over marriage while reanimating earlier ones (20). Each chapter serves to situate and amplify the larger social argument that the queerness of the wedding lies in the kinship and quasi-kinship possibilities embedded in it as residues of various institutional controls over marriage.

While Freeman works to elucidate the thematic and social connections among the fictions in her archive, several chapters operate as stand-alone essays as they devote attention to a single author or text. This method enables Freeman to achieve extraordinarily detailed, original, and incisive readings, but ones whose density sometimes impairs readability, at least for non-specialist readers. This aside, chapter 2, "The We of Me: *The Member of the Wedding's* Novel Alliances," stands as arguably the most trenchant close reading of Carson McCullers's novella. Earlier critics interpreted the 1946 novella as a *bildungsroman* in which tomboyish Frankie Addams trades her childhood imaginings for feminine excess and then for a proper young adult social life (43). McCullers employs the wedding to connect Frankie to World War II, as her brother Jarvis's wedding enables his sister to transform the imperialism of U.S. heterosexuality—its defense and expansion of its borders—into a "vision of safe space expanding to enfold an entire (queer) planet" (56). As the text ends with a displacement of the African-American characters from the household, the visually white wedding becomes a racially whitening marriage with Frankie's earlier challenges to the Jim Crow racial order checked in its conclusion (71).² Yet Frankie's assertion that her brother and fiancée Janice represent "the we of me" begins to formulate a queerer social bond than that of the family, nation, or dyadic couple.

This section offers thematic continuity with Freeman's analysis of Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* (chapter 3) in which Freeman reads the novel's wedding as giving form to the possibility of a multiracial economy engendered by forces beyond cross-racial, heterosexual reproduction. *Absalom! Absalom!*'s wedding works as a vortex to spin out narrative and social economies in opposition to the marriage plot, as the wedding operates as a vexed but productive site for negotiating race. The close reading of the novel proper is extended into a judicious observation of the problematic legacy of marriage in the U.S.: *Absalom! Absalom!* clarifies how the civil ceremony derives its meaning from religious and folk forms, yet these are culled from models of belonging that challenge the hegemony of couple-centered marriage itself (100). Both novels use their respective weddings to forge alternative paradigms of temporality and to make visible affective ties between individuals denied legal sanction for their sexual longings and conduct (66). Attributes identified in the wedding at the center of Faulkner's novel carry over into Freeman's discussion of Joseph Kirland's *Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County* (chapter 4). In this nineteenth-century fiction the wedding operates as a centrifugal force, with Kirland employing the Puritan wedding to inquire what makes a marriage "real," whether its sexual consummation, civil contexts, or community approbation (131).

The kinship possibilities that glimmer through the weddings in Freeman's archive are the very ones policed by church and state: same-sex relations, polyamory, cross-racial liaisons, and adult-child relations beyond parenting. The last is treated in chapter 5, "Honeymoon with a Stranger: Private Couplehood and the Making of a National Subject." This chapter begins by offering a cultural history of the honeymoon, in which the U.S. landscape takes on the role formerly occupied by the extended family as by 1840 newlyweds increasingly traveled alone. It then surveys man-girl honeymoons from Nabakov's *Lolita*, Poe's prose sketch "Three Sundays in a Week," to the Irish-American writer Captain Mayne Reid's *The Headless Horseman*, generically classified as what Freeman terms the "pedophilic picaresque." Such narratives consist in part of honeymoon journeys in which the child bride has an explicitly tutorial relationship with the male that is not only sexual but also geographic as well as cultural and whose directionality is inverted such that the girl dominates the show (150). The child bride is responsible for making the U.S. intelligible and available to the male protagonist, who can no longer depend upon frontier logic, Romanticism's cult of nature, or familial sentimentalism to mold his relationship with "America" (154). Freeman concedes that this mode has more to offer the male than the female whose role in the honeymoon actualizes his fantasy, but the man-child bride relationship in its mingling of the roles of parent/child and husband/wife undermines the very relationships the honeymoon was designed to separate. This attribute, coupled with the honeymoon's historical shift as an occasion for visiting people to visiting places, indicates a crisis in kinship itself.

The Wedding Complex adopts a cyclical chapter structure as its first and last units feature analyses of wedding-related cinema. The final chapter, "The Immediate Country, or Heterosexuality in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," presents a serial analysis of classic twentieth-century Anglo-American filmic, televisual, and theatrical weddings, such as *The Godfather* and *Father of the Bride*, as well as recent performance forms, such as the off-Broadway interactive dinner play *Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding*. These primary texts are linked by their status as "productions of situational ethnicity" for the white middle class (185). They afford opportunities for an ethnic group to experience themselves as keepers of tradition and producers of uncommodified culture without resurrecting the Anglo-Saxon and racial paradigms of the earlier part of the century. While the readings of individual staged weddings are incisive, the chapter suffers from structural disjointedness. Greater attention was needed to maximize the connections between moving portraits and the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839, the year historians cite as the emergence of the couple-centered honeymoon among the American middle class. This quibble emanates, I suspect, from the work's general challenge to the reader in its jump cuts from twentieth-century to nineteenth-century to contemporary texts, with various permutations. Yet those willing to follow its non-chronological structure will find reward as the canonical and non-canonical juxtapositions render a fierce originality. Freeman apparently completed her manuscript just as Ingraham's *White Weddings* came to press. Freeman amplifies (or misses the opportunity to) the theses of Ingraham, specifically the latter's concept of "the wedding industrial complex" that she uses to structure and title chapter two. This term refers to the

industry's virtually recession-proof constitution and reflects the nexus of associations among weddings, marriage, the state, religion, media, and popular culture (Ingraham 26). Ingraham offers an overview of the various components that comprise this complex to reveal the historical and material foundation upon which this exemplum of the heterosexual imaginary relies.³ Freeman's "wedding complex" signifies both the totalizing nature of the industry, as Ingraham has dexterously shown,⁴ and the narrative and psychoanalytic movement toward closure through marriage, which feminist literary critics such as Rachel Brownstein have well established.⁵ Yet she shifts her focus to the wedding complex: "the tangle of icons, semiotic transformations, and temporal rearrangements through which social being becomes tangible, if not strictly legalized" (43). A creative endeavor, certainly, but one in which Freeman occasionally gets carried away or sacrifices clarity. For example, phrases such as "English political collectivity" and statements like "[p]erhaps, in exiling the personification of coverture, Endicott becomes a protofeminist 'marriage protester' like Lucy Stone, far avant la lettre" reveal an abused penchant for original phrasing, alliteration, and assonance (119).

It is unclear how the initial chapter title, "Love Among the Ruins," connects to the subsequent content. Because it implicitly references the eponymous 10,000 Maniacs album, a recent Robert Clark novel, George Kukor's classic film starring Laurence Olivier and Katherine Hepburn, and a Robert Browning poem, it ultimately falls vague. In this forty-four-page chapter too many readings, however lucid, of other texts, such as Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, and Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, compete with her analysis of Su Friedrich's experimental film *First Comes Love*. While the paragraph units are structurally sound, there is too much going on as an individual chapter, though the sections themselves are excellent. It would have benefited from returning more often to Friedrich's film to ground the reader or perhaps including the film's analysis in her last chapter. Finally, the assertion that the honeymoon "easily outdoes" the cost of the wedding is hyperbolic as the average American honeymoon is presently around \$4,000, albeit no small sum by most, with \$22,000 as the wedding with honeymoon mean cost (Freeman 146; Otnes and Pleck 2).

Despite these relatively minor shortcomings, *The Wedding Complex* stands as our most original and theoretically sophisticated work to date on the American wedding. It establishes Freeman as an exciting and important scholar not only in popular culture, but also in American literature, queer studies, antebellum history, and race theory. It is a dense work, which, especially its preface, is best read more than once. The interdisciplinarity of the study reflects not only the variety of methodologies and optics the wedding lends itself to, but also testifies to Freeman's dexterity in these terrains.

Though distinct in tone and devoting greater attention to the wedding's commodified aspects, Otnes and Pleck's *Cinderella Dreams* works according to Freeman's concept of "queering": to "queer" something is "at once to make its most pleasurable aspects gorgeously excessive, even to the point of causing its institutional work to fail, and to operate it against its most oppressive political results" (xv). Far more than a tiara and cake topper vendor, the wedding industry

must be perceived as a complex media, lifestyle, and retail network. Structured in ten chapters, *Cinderella Dreams* meticulously documents the cultural history of the rituals and icons surrounding primarily North American weddings. While the authors date the growth of the lavish wedding to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's wedding in 1840, the study focuses on weddings since World War II, as the wedding industry began to boom with the introduction of *Bride's* magazine in 1934. This undertaking was no small task, as weddings have exponentially grown in elaborateness and scale since the New England colonial period when most brides married in their best clothes at home, declaring consent before a justice of the peace (Freeman 20). The work examines then not only traditional customs like the proposal and bouquet toss, but also new forms such as the bachelorette party as the reemergence of the engagement party, the latter diminishing in popularity for several decades and revived as the average engagement period has grown to thirteen months. The analysis of various prenuptial traditions is unified by their attempt to cultivate the perception of the engagement period as a "magic, liminal time" (80). We learn wedding factoids, such as the history of one of the most successful advertising slogans: De Beers's mantra "A Diamond Is Forever" was coined one night in 1947 by Ayer agency copywriter Frances Gerety, a high school graduate from Philadelphia who had been working for the company for four years (66). This "Life Passages" series title synthesizes a tremendous amount of research, as the work doubles as a reference book. Otnes and Pleck have achieved a crossover book suitable for academic readers and wedding aficionados, as it also features thirty black and white reproductions of wedding paraphernalia, film clips, and industry advertisements. It would be no surprise if an excerpt appeared in one of the major bridal magazines, which I suspect will keep the book in-house for its compendium quality.

The book's central argument concerns the democratization of the lavish wedding, once typically only for royalty or the upper classes. Now, except on the lowest strata of the socioeconomic ladder, the decision to plan and execute an elaborate wedding is seldom questioned. Further, the lavish wedding, the authors maintain, has attained the status not only of a rite but also a personal right as access to credit cards and loans have become more egalitarian (3). It functions as one of the most visible means by which couples and families can showcase and augment the quantity and quality of their social network (5). After delineating and challenging explanations for the growing popularity of the lavish wedding (e.g. a fancy affair as "divorce insurance"), the authors identify the lavish wedding as possessing the ability to achieve four major functions, and more so than any other occasion: 1) "marry" consumer culture with that of romantic love, 2) enact magical transformations, 3) offer memories of a "social and singular" event, and 4) legitimate luxury consumption through an "ethic of perfection"—the desire for flawless beauty and a perfectly orchestrated performance enjoyed and recognized by guests and hosts (7-8). While earlier wedding historians such as Geller, a NYU English doctoral student and self-proclaimed spinster by choice, have condemned the wedding as a bastion of patriarchy or a me-fest for the bridal couple, Otnes and Pleck opt to recognize and explore the mixed messages of the wedding day: an odd but riveting

composite of patriarchy, sex-role conformity, egalitarianism, and individuality. The latter is increasingly significant as its cousin, distinctiveness, is now of equal importance to luxury and as much or more so a marker of class as money (6, 113).

Otnes and Pleck offer a large-scale investigation of Boden's observation that while *Cinderella* is a childhood story, it has become symbolic of the commodified romantic images of weddings (Boden 121).⁶ Indeed, the fairy tale has inspired countless adaptations and respective consumer paraphernalia. The study details how the wedding enables the betrothed not only to consume, but also to produce their own rendition of the tale (132). The couple commissions a cast of professionals to videotape, cater, and decorate the event, typically set to music, yet the crew often attempts to impose scripts and a schedule on the performance, evidenced in a photographer's checklist of shots or a master of ceremonies' standardized reception timetable. In light of staged performances, the chapter "Hollywood Hosts a Wedding" surveys silver screen wedding movies, particularly those of the 1990s, a record decade for weddings in film. Films of this period generally endorse the lavish wedding but not without debating its merits (168). Also, the class distinction regarding who is entitled to such a wedding, a major concern of 1950s films such as *Father of the Bride* and *The Catered Affair*, had vanished by the 1990s (186). Otnes and Pleck argue that the Cinderella fantasy is more detached from dreams of marriage (Cinderella's "Some day my prince will come . . .") and more connected to the self-fashioning and escape afforded through shopping for the "big day" (274, 278). The chapter reflects the larger thesis that weddings can be consumed as spectacle apart from a marital context and have become more closely aligned with the world of entertainment, as evidenced in the popularity of *Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding*, which premiered off-Broadway in 1988 and has since run continuously. Genuinely entertaining, this chapter would make a fine contribution to a film and popular culture anthology.

While concentrating on North American weddings, Otnes and Pleck devote a chapter to the globalization of the lavish Western wedding. In varying degrees, brides across the globe are increasingly appropriating the interdependent elements of fantasy, magic, and romantic love permeating Western popular culture and Hollywood films. Attributes of the Western wedding, particularly the white gown, embody not only the cross-cultural appeal of the Cinderella fantasy, but also modernity, sophistication, and status. It is particularly popular in the Pacific Rim, where in Japan the average cost of a wedding is the highest in the world (\$66,000 in 1996). The adoption of Western wedding features is a function of the global wealth divide, but Otnes and Pleck note that this division is further demarcated by a spatial dimension: in most countries the location of the lavish wedding is typically the largest city in the nation, such as Cairo, Tokyo, Mexico City, Taipei, Beijing, or Kampala. While partly due to an alacrity for the pleasures of consumption, there is also a strong correlation between the spread of the wedding and the decline of arranged marriage (225). Further, the importation of the Western wedding is not always a one-way route. The Japanese, for example, minimized the time expenditure of wedding planning by introducing the concept of the wedding package, which has been widely adopted throughout much of the Pacific Rim as well as in the West,

where it serves as the model for the destination wedding (224).

In *The Commercialization of Intimate Life* sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild draws an analogy between the Reformation and the sexual revolution of the last thirty years: what the former did to the hegemony of the Catholic Church, the latter has done to romantic love (123). The ideal of heterosexual romantic love, which the modern first-time wedding strived to embody, is now a slightly smaller model with a growing pantheon of love, each with its respective supporting subculture. For instance, while still denied the right to a legally binding marriage in 49 states, gay and lesbians are beginning to receive positive acknowledgment through greater media exposure (e.g. *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*) and in some cases access to health coverage in the form of partner benefits. Though heterosexual marriage as the proper place of romantic love has been challenged by the queer liberation movement and the sharp increase in heterosexual cohabitation, the ideal of romantic love, Hochschild argues, seems to be retaining its stronghold by extending and adapting itself to more populations (123). Otnes and Pleck in their chapter "Variations on a Theme," an analysis of the politics of gay marriage, pregnant brides, and interfaith couples, offers a complement to Hochschild's thesis. This penultimate chapter considers not only same-sex marriage as "alternative" weddings, but also vow renewal ceremonies and encore marriages, the latter one or both members' second (third or fourth) marriage. These weddings also reveal more often than not a penchant for luxury and consumerism, legitimated by the rules of etiquette's accompanying relaxation.

Continuity between alternative weddings of the earlier century is established with those of the latter. For instance, the hippie wedding has become this generation's environmental or "green" wedding: both ceremonies value the outdoors and endorse an ethic of voluntary simplicity. Green weddings, while incorporating a much higher level of consumption than their predecessors, do away with disposable and single-use items, set up recycle bins for bottles, reduce fuel consumption by holding the ceremony and reception in one location, and serve organically grown vegetarian food. The section devoted to jumping the broom, while immensely interesting, is out of place in this chapter, especially as it has become relatively commonplace in African-American weddings, which are ill-grouped under "alternative." An old tradition that was revived with the 1977 airing of Alex Haley's *Roots* television adaptation, the custom was a slave-devised form of self-marrying by jumping over an ordinary broomstick. Witnessed mostly by other slaves, jumping the broom appears to have been borrowed from Welsh neighbors who lived among slaves in the South, but after the Civil War it was relegated to a game as ex-slaves desired a type of wedding once denied, one legal and lavish.

Cinderella Dreams is indisputably our most honest account of how the wedding industry controls and shapes the subjectivity of real or aspiring brides. An eminently readable study, it strives to convey the wedding's intense affective dimension and achieves this brilliantly. Yet Otnes and Pleck are at times overzealous in rhetorically conjuring the wedding's appeal:

[T]he lavish wedding allows participants to experience unabashed magic in their lives and to spend freely to achieve that magic, without a guilt hangover the next

morning. It does so within the framework of a very famous fairy tale. Cinderella's dream was one of enchantment and escape, two goals often impossible to achieve in the real world. But under a lace veil, behind a twenty-pound beribboned cake, in the reflection of a flawless two-carat round diamond solitaire, or hand in hand on a beach in Aruba, the lavish wedding may be the one time when true transformation and transcendence of the ordinary seems not only possible but also, to those who embrace the tenets of romantic consumer culture, well deserved. (279-280)

The study is in part self-reflexive as its tone at times borders on a wedding industry publication. This is the risk any scholar faces in conveying a compelling, empirical treatment of the wedding's allure. However, the imperialist aspects of weddings—conditions and treatment of diamond miners, grossly underpaid Asian bridal garment workers—are barely acknowledged. Far more space is devoted to the brilliance of DeBeers's marketing campaigns or the "magical" quality of consumption. The study would have also benefited from even a nod at wedding-related debt—not only a testament to the allure of luxury goods, but also for millions of Americans a serious and growing concern. Granted, a significant treatment of the wedding's exploitative features would be counterproductive to the project's aims, if not simply jarring, and the authors from the get-go inform us that they strive neither to praise nor condemn the lavish wedding. In the end, Otnes and Pleck's prose succeeds in holding the reader under their authorial spell as the nearly 400-page book, like a good wedding reception, never lags. The bibliography is a testament to their passion for the subject and an outstanding resource for inclined scholars or wedding enthusiasts. The index's detail is also exemplary.

Both studies reflect the development in the past decade of what we can call critical heterosexuality studies, though this growing body of work has its origins in the early years of American feminism's second wave. In the late 1960s radical lesbian feminists began to mount an attack on heterosexuality as a patriarchal institution. Classic feminist polemics such as Luce Irigaray's "Women on the Market" and Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" protested the phallogocentric order in which women function as transferable circulating commodities of exclusively male consumption. Adrienne Rich's landmark "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" posited heterosexuality as a non-choice for women and an institution through which male power is manifested and maintained. Monique Wittig's *The Straight Mind* furthered Rich's call to question "unexamined heterocentricity," denouncing it not as an institution but a "political regime" that "rests on the submission and appropriation of women" and the political-philosophical categories of "men" and "women" (Wittig xiii-xiv; Rich 203).

It took until the early- or mid-1990s for heterosexuality as a conceptual category to receive sustained theoretical debate as one of several sociological components in the "race, class, gender, sexual orientation" feminist scholarship checklist. Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger's introduction to their *Feminism and Psychology* special issue on heterosexuality begins by asserting that heterosexuality has been largely untheorized within both psychology and feminism and that feminist theory too often assumes heterosexuality as a given, producing analyses in which it occupies a "taken-for-granted, but never explicitly addressed, substrate" (1). in

In *New Millennium Sex Styles* Carol Siegel contends that with scant exceptions feminist theory of sexuality relies on a dichotomy between lesbianism and heterosexuality, with the latter “always complicitous with the systems of male supremacy we usually refer to as patriarchy” (10). In the largest sense, critical heterosexuality scholarship strives to challenge common representations of heterosexuality as a coherent, stable monolith and to investigate the diversity of meanings, social arrangements, and hierarchies within this category.

Jonathan Ned Katz’s groundbreaking study *The Invention of Heterosexuality* arguably catalyzed the proliferation of critical heterosexuality texts in the past half-decade. Katz traces the transition of “heterosexual” from a stigmatizing clinical diagnosis for non-reproductive, pleasure-oriented perversion to a normative socio-sexual identity label.⁷ The making of the urban middle-class and the construction of heterosexuality occurred simultaneously as this sector sought to distinguish itself from the decadent upper class and sensual proletariat via the development of a sexual ethic that validated different-sex desire apart from human reproduction. According to Katz, the process of normalizing heterosexuality was fostered by Freud in his “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” first published as a brochure of sorts in 1905 and expanded up until 1924, where “heterosexuality” comes to denote the healthy endpoint of sexual maturation. Freud’s developmental model coupled with his concepts of the pleasure principle and individual libido detached heterosexual desire from its supposedly innate link to the acceptable arena of species propagation. Katz contends that the discourse on heterosexuality had “a protracted coming out” not completed in American mainstream culture until the end of the 1920s (83). By the 1930s “heterosexuality” appeared in mainstream English dictionaries, such as *Webster’s Second Edition Unabridged*, where instead of signifying a morbid medical term as in its previous edition it was defined as “normal sexuality” akin to current conceptions of heterosexuality (Katz 92).⁸

It would be gross hyperbole to claim that *The Wedding Complex* and *Cinderella Dreams* work together to return heterosexuality to its original etymology. Yet the studies’ level of defamiliarization casts aspects of wedding ritual as perverse. With varying degrees of intent, both titles function analogous to the effect of drag Judith Butler identifies in her reading of *Paris Is Burning*’s drag balls: a reflection on the imitative structure by which gender norms are produced and a dispute of heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality (125). The considerable, sometimes tremendous, amount of work expended to create a lavish wedding as a paean to romantic heterosexual love belies its vulnerability and exposes its increasingly media-made edifice.

In conclusion, Freeman adroitly dissociates the wedding from marriage as a regulatory norm and explores this fissure. Otnes and Pleck articulate a richly detailed perspective on this iconic heterosexual ritual and reveal the growing difficulty of separating such inquiries from those of American consumerism. We cannot help wonder if the trend of the “bigger and better” wedding reflects not only American ideals of optimism and progress, but also a fault line in heterosexuality itself.⁹

Notes

¹ According to a recent survey by the Condé Nast Bridal Group, the U.S. wedding industry annually totals nearly forty billion dollars. If honeymoon and gifts are included, wedding-related expense accrues to an additional ten billion a year. Such figures exceed not only the national revenues of McDonald's and Pepsi, but also that of the gross domestic product of Aruba (\$2 billion) and the Bahamas (\$5 billion), as well as many other island nations that are popular honeymoon locales (Mead 78).

² State laws against interracial marriage were not overturned in many states until 1967 (Freeman 23).

³ Ingraham appears to have overlooked Trudy Nicely Henson's sociological examination of the wedding industry in the 1970s, *The Wedding Complex: The Social Organization of a Rite of Passage*, from which Freeman borrows her title.

⁴ Ingraham's concept of "the wedding complex" is contiguous with a new fortress identified by journalist Kate Zernike as the "Dating-Industrial Complex." For example, in the first half of 2003 Americans spent 214.3 million dollars on personals and dating sites, almost three times what they spent in all of 2001 (Egan 66). Matchmaking services (It's Just Lunch!, 8minuteDating), on-line dating sites (love.com, eHarmony), and a growing number of reality TV shows (*Average Joe*, *Mr. Personality*) reflect and perpetuate what psychologists such as Bella De Paulo have termed a "fetishization of coupling" ("Just Saying No to the Dating Industry").

⁵ In *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels* Brownstein writes that the domestic novel's paradigmatic hero moves toward a goal, while the heroine tries to be it (82).

⁶ While Charles Perrault, a French poet and lawyer, did not write the first version of the *Cinderella* narrative, his *Cendrillon* (1679) became the best known.

⁷ "Heterosexual" made its first appearance, along with "homosexual," in 1868 in the private correspondence of German sex-law reformer Karl Maria Kertbeny (Katz 52). Though in the making since the 1860s, our modern conception of "heterosexual" as a sex-differentiated erotic category began to be constructed in late-nineteenth-century Western European and American medical discourse. Its earliest-known use in English occurs in an article by Dr. James G. Kiernan published in 1892 (Katz 19).

⁸ Though I concede with Mason Stokes that "[t]o imagine that the appearance of words like *heterosexuality* in medical journals exists in a causal relationship with people's sexual behaviors is to overestimate the popular currency of medical discourse and to underestimate the uncharitable complexity of sexual behavior" (15), I wish, like Stokes, to retain Katz's larger argument that this shift in the meaning of "heterosexuality" parallels the broader shift from what Stokes identifies as a "reproduction-based sexuality to a pleasure-driven heterosexuality," and 1930 approximately signals the endpoint of this paradigm shift (16).

⁹ From 1984 to 1994 the average cost of a typical American wedding quadrupled from \$4,000 to \$16,000 (Otnes and Pleck 2).

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