Introduction

Percival Pollard's "The Bachelor in Fiction," a review essay that appeared in *The Bookman* in 1900, begins by asserting the relative rarity of English literature which "concerns itself directly with bachelors."[1] Pollard admits that certain well-known examples of the literature of confirmed bachelorhood do spring to mind, counting among these Israel Zangwill's *The Bachelors' Club*, J. M. Barrie's *When A Man's Single*, and the "famous book" of "Ik Marvel," the 1850 bestseller *Reveries of a Bachelor*, which was apparently so famous that, even in 1900, its title could be left unspecified. But Pollard, in keeping with his persona of the bibliophilic connoisseur, abjures discussion of these obvious instances: "My purpose here is to point not so much to the familiar, famous writings on the state of single blessedness, but to dally rather with certain volumes which the general public either forgets or passes by" (p. 146). The ensuing catalogue brings to light an impressive number of lost or lesser-known bachelor fictions of the 1890s, including Richard Harding Davis's *Van Bibber*, George Hibbard's *The Governor*, F. Hopkinson Smith's *A Day at Laguerre's* and *Colonel Carter of Cartersville*, Robert Grant's *A Bachelor's Christmas*, Edward Sandford Martin's *Windfalls of Observation*, Eugene Field's *The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac*, and K. M. C. Meredith's *Green Gates: An Analysis of Foolishness*.

Most of these bachelor books rate only a passing mention, but the last novel in the series, which Pollard lauds as "the most captivating story of bachelordom ... of recent years" (p. 147), receives fuller treatment. Pollard's plot summary of *Green Gates* details the story of a "vain, fastidious, sentimental" bachelor of forty who is roused from his inveterate "thought habit" by a sudden and unrequited love for a girl many years his junior. This ludicrous old bachelor manages to "become fine for one moment of his life, at any rate, when he meddles with the girl's intention to do a foolish thing": "When it is all over, when his meddling has saved the girl from disrepute, if not from death, he goes home to his

books – his books, that in the days of his perversity had become perverse themselves and were now in the direst confusion" (p. 148). Although the bachelor preserves the girl's virtue, he can neither save her life nor save himself from his own perversity, which is apparent in the promiscuous mixing upon his library shelves of authors of diverse nationalities, historical periods, and genres. The presence amidst this "unruly jumble" of "that madman Nordau, who, along with the help of Lombroso, has succeeded in classifying himself!" (p. 148) makes the bachelor's very attempt to classify his books seem itself doomed to degeneracy, perhaps even to criminality and madness.[2] He can no more "bring order into his life" (p. 148) than he can successfully bring order to bookshelves that support such depravity.

My study, too, takes as its topic "The Bachelor in Fiction." My reading list and critical aims, however, are worlds apart from Percival Pollard's and, for that matter, from those of the bachelor of *Green Gates*. My selection of texts does not, as Pollard's does, form a subcanon or even a countercanon of literature about bachelors. Rather, I focus upon an array of bachelor texts which are firmly ensconced in our current canon of pre-modernist, proto-modernist, and modernist fiction, a canon that includes such novels as Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880), Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900), Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Nor do I aim, like the *Green Gates* bachelor, to taxonomize or otherwise enforce a normalizing order on the "perverse" fictions that I read here. Rather, I mean to demonstrate how the order of normativity, the proper regulation of boundaries both gendered and cultural, is crucially at issue in these canonical bachelor texts themselves. Much as these fictions of bachelorhood are proper to our current modernist canon, the figure of the bachelor was also at the heart of the bourgeois domestic world that was often the norm for, and a normalizing force in, the novel.[3]

I am concerned here not simply with fiction featuring bachelors, the broader category that Pollard identifies in his study, but with bachelor-*narrated* fiction. Bachelor characters do double duty as first-person narrators in a startling number of texts of the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet bachelor narrators seem to have blended into the background of canonical, British and American fiction, perhaps because of the very familiarity of their voices. The bachelor narrator is a "figure" in the double sense conceptualized by Roland Barthes – both an imaginary subject or character and a narrative device or trope[4] – but this peculiar bridging of the thematic and the formal has virtually

escaped critical notice. One aim of this book, then, is to defamiliarize the consummately familiar voice of the bachelor narrator. What does it mean when a bachelor tells the story in a novel? How does narration matter?

This study focuses, moreover, not simply on bachelor-narrated fiction, but mainly on *high-cultural* and *modernist* fictions narrated by bachelor figures. I am concerned here to map the intersections among the historical figure of the bachelor, the use of the bachelor as narrator in pre-modernist and modernist fiction, and a tradition of novelistic authorship which sometimes crossed but more often helped to widen the "great divide" between high and low culture that developed during this era.[5] Not coincidentally, this cultural divide occurred along lines strongly marked by gender differences.[6] The gendered differences – between men and women, and also between men – which were fundamental to the construction of the highbrow/lowbrow split also contributed to the classificatory troubles embodied by the figure of the bachelor.

Bachelors were a necessary resource for the domestic institution of marriage, yet they were often seen by their contemporaries as disruptive to domestic life or sometimes merely extraneous to it. They were thought to be both admirable and contemptible, enviable and execrable, dangerous and defanged. The contradictions evident in and among these pairings evoke the conceptual and practical challenges that bachelorhood presented to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conceptions of bourgeois marriage, family, and domestic life. A variety of demographic shifts in the United States and Great Britain over the course of the "long nineteenth century," and especially in the latter half of this period, including a rise in average marrying age and a decline in the rate of marriage, contributed to contemporary interest in and worry about bachelors.[7] The fascination with bachelors is evident, for example, in the boom in novels, stories, poems, and essays about bachelorhood published in mass-circulation periodicals during this period.[8] This explosion of popular bachelor discourse attests to the uneven developments that cultural ideologies and institutions of marriage and domesticity were undergoing during this era of rapid urbanization, industrialization, and modernization.[9] Bachelors were a troubling presence within and beyond the already troubled world of the bourgeois family home.

Bachelor trouble was, fundamentally, gender trouble.[10] While they were often seen as violating gendered norms, bachelors were sometimes contradictorily thought to incarnate the desires and identifications of

hegemonic bourgeois manhood. The late nineteenth-century figure of the bachelor was thus conceived as "*at the same time* an aspect of a particular, idiosyncratic personality type *and also* an expression of a great Universal": both a separate species of man and a representative modern man.[11] This contradictory status indicates the instability of and competition between different models of manhood. Such uneven developments in gender identities encompassed, but were not limited to, the late nineteenth-century transition from a middle-class ideal of civilized manliness to one of primitive masculinity.

A concomitant of the emergence of new styles of normative and counternormative bourgeois manhood, and of the attendant shifting of the boundaries of what constituted proper bourgeois manhood, was a change in the definition of bachelorhood itself. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has theorized a late nineteenth-century transition from bachelorhood understood as a lifestage to bachelorhood understood as a character type. The contest between the character type and the lifestage definitions of bachelorhood – both of which also remained simultaneously in play for the male bourgeois subject – contributed to the paradoxical definition of bachelors as both different from *and* also the same as other, "normal" men. Sedgwick clarifies the homophobic potential of each understanding of bachelorhood, as well as the contribution of the conceptual incoherence of these concurrent definitions to the constitution of the intrinsically homophobic system of homo/heterosexual definition. This system, which is itself based on a conceptual incoherence generated by "minoritizing" and "universalizing" models of sexual identity, was reinforced by the incoherent coexistence of minoritizing and universalizing views of bachelorhood.[12] Sedgwick argues that the mid-Victorian emergence and late Victorian development of the bachelor as a character taxonomy based on "sexual anaesthesia" strategically "desexualized the question . . . of male sexual choice," effecting a homophobic erasure of the specificity of male–male sexual desire.[13]

Although the homophobically panicked, sexually anaesthetic bachelor type does appear in some of the texts that I consider, this type is not typical, as my survey of popular writings on bachelorhood in the next chapter shows. Indeed, a rich and polymorphously perverse range of fantasmatic identifications and desires are palpable, though not always explicitly or consciously asserted, in narrative discourse uttered from the gendered subject position of the bachelor. To the extent that such homophobic erasure *is* at work in the bachelor narratives I discuss, I do try to make such panicked occlusions visible by attending to the

eroticized activity evident in these figures' narrative utterances. The excesses and occlusions of these first-person narratives often reveal homoerotic desire and its panicked erasure, but they also disclose a wider range of desires and identifications, both transgressive and normative. One could argue, for example, that the unrequited love of the *Green Gates* bachelor for a woman half his age is a coverup, or a displacement, or an expression, of closeted homoerotic desire and homosexual identity. But one might equally well argue that the old bachelor's feelings are based on his identification with and desire for the woman's youth; the difference in age that apparently comes between him and his female object is a salient axis along which his emotional investments travel.[14] Such an age differential is normative in cross-gender relations of the nineteenth century; after all, the marital union of a forty-year old bachelor and an eighteen-year old woman is standard novelistic fare. Yet this bachelor's desires also seem to verge upon the perversely counternormative; in addition to homosexuality, some other unspeakable names for his unrequited love might include pedophilia, incest, and masochism. The key point here is that, both before and after the eruption of his ultimately unconsummated desire, this bachelor does not suffer from an absence of feeling.

The bachelor narrators whom I consider are, similarly, far from anaesthetic in their erotic identifications and desires. In fact, the wide variety and sheer intensity of their erotic and identificatory energies might lead one to describe these figures as voyeuristic, fetishistic, and/or masochistic, psychoanalytic classifications which carry a negative, pathologized valence. The intrasubjective and intersubjective relations by which these figures define themselves and others can be understood as "deviations" from or "perversions" of normative masculine desires and identifications. As such, these relations can be revalorized as gesturing toward alternative, counternormative, or "queer" masculine sexualities and genderings. But the intrasubjective and intersubjective relations by which these figures define themselves and others also signal, perhaps to an even greater extent, the presence of the perverse *within* what has been conventionally demarcated as masculine heteronormativity.[15] What is alternative often turns out to be proper to the mainstream, if necessarily disavowed by its proponents. My primary concern here, then, will be with the paradoxes of the bachelor's relationship to normative domesticity and normative manhood, and with the ways that these paradoxes make this figure so enigmatic as a speaking and/or writing subject of novelistic narrative discourse.

The ambiguities of the bachelor narrator's relation to domestic and gendered norms also make this figure particularly expressive of the ambivalences of male, high-cultural, pre-modernist and modernist literary authorship. Just as the cultural boundaries that defined bourgeois domesticity and hegemonic manhood were permeable and shifting in this period, so too were the boundaries which separated high culture from culture defined as low, mass, or popular and also, as one century segued into the next, the boundaries which separated modernist writing from nonmodernist writing.[16] All the authors considered in this book shine, more or less vividly, as stars in the firmament of current academic literary canons. Yet all struggled, albeit to different degrees and with varying strategies, with what they experienced as competing desires for popular and critical success. These struggles were simultaneous with the historical rise of the popular woman writer and the vast and rapid expansion of literary markets. Correspondingly, many of these male writers experienced their struggles on and against the literary market as "melodramas of beset manhood," in which they performed the part of the long-suffering victim, and sometimes the scrappy survivor, of a debased mob of female readers and writers.[17] One subtlety which this psychic melodrama tends to elide is the fact that economic success and aesthetic success were marked not only by the gendered difference between female and male authorship, but also by the gendered differences between different styles or models of male authorship. Popular writers were not all women; high-cultural writers, and writers who were merely unpopular, were not all men. The male high-cultural authors discussed in the following chapters were not so consistently beset, nor were they beset always by the same people, nor always for the same reasons, as they typically represented themselves.

Another detail which the melodrama of beset high-cultural male authorship tends to obscure is the fact that the trials to which these writers were subject, or to which they subjected themselves, were nuanced by pleasures and privileges. High-cultural literary authorship, like hegemonic bourgeois manhood, exacted sacrifices but it also conferred rewards. While immaterial rewards – prestige, self-esteem, collegiality, the life of the mind – are obvious perquisites of high-cultural artistry, material rewards were not always or entirely ruled out. And when the sacrifice of material comforts and other attainments of normative bourgeois manhood were unavoidable, such asceticism could be re-envisioned by its male subjects as an alternative mode of attaining an exemplary manhood. The self-sacrifice of the artist thus enables that

artist to experience the ultimate in self-fulfillment. Ironically, in order to transform the anxieties and hardships of true artistry into sources of emotional satisfaction, male high-cultural writers often psychically enlisted the supposedly low-cultural genre of melodrama, a genre whose queer excesses are seemingly beyond the pale but which exist as a disavowed component within many mainstream cultural narratives.[18]

The contested status of bachelors as figures of luxurious self-indulgence and/or of disciplined self-abnegation made them well-suited to articulate the melodramatic vicissitudes of male, high-cultural authorship. Like the male authors who deployed them, bachelor narrators are themselves given to recasting abjected manhood as manhood triumphant, and to disavowing melancholically the sentimentality that stands both as their own defining trait and as that of the significant others with whom they identify. Bachelor narrators are thus particularly fitted for symbolic use by authors who reinforced, sometimes in the very act of crossing, the borders of the cultural milieus in and against which they defined themselves as writers. Indeed, bachelors often served in cultural and literary discourse more generally as threshold figures who marked the permeable boundaries that separate domesticity, normative manhood, and high-cultural status, from what was defined as extrinsic to these realms.[19]

The liminal function of the bachelor becomes even more pointed when considered through the critical lens of the bachelor as narrator. The first-person bachelor narrators whom I consider are for the most part narrators of the sort Gérard Genette designates "homodiegetic," or present as characters in the stories they tell, as opposed to "heterodiegetic," absent from the stories they tell.[20] As tellers who also appear as characters in their stories, homodiegetic narrators are located both within and beyond the fictional worlds of their stories, serving as intermediaries between diegetic levels within the narrative and also between author and reader. Simultaneously present in separate diegetic spaces, these narrators might also be conceived as divided, or multiplied, within themselves; such a split, or doubling, is most evident between the "I" of the narrative past and the "I" of the narrative present. Saying "I" as a homodiegetic narrator can thus verge on speaking in synchronic and diachronic chorus or call-and-response with oneself, occasioning a spatial and temporal multiplication of subjectivity which would seem to challenge the unitary or monolithic self. Yet homodiegesis is far from an essentially or intrinsically radical form, either aesthetically or politically. The effects of homodiegesis as a

narrative technique depend upon the specific uses made of its potential for confirming or confounding the boundaries within, and also between, individuals.

Authors are not the only ones upon whom the containing and/or subverting effects of homodiegetic narrative depend. Readers also make vital contributions to the aesthetic and political meanings of homodiegetic narrative. As a reader who is a narratological critic, Genette assumes the impermeability and hierarchical grounding of individual subjectivity, an assumption evident in his further narratological distinction between two varieties of homodiegesis:

> one where the narrator is the hero of his narrative (*Gil Blas*) and one where he plays only a secondary role, which almost always turns out to be a role as observer and witness: Lockwood [in *Wuthering Heights*], the anonymous narrator of Louis Lambert, Ishmael in *Moby Dick*, Marlow in *Lord Jim*, Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, Zeitblom in *Doctor Faustus* – not to mention the most illustrious and most representative one of all, the transparent (but inquisitive) Dr. Watson of Conan Doyle. It is as if the narrator cannot be an ordinary walk-on in his narrative: he can be only the star, or else a mere bystander. For the first variety (which to some extent represents the strong degree of the homodiegetic) we will reserve the unavoidable term *autodiegetic*.[21]

One glance at my Table of Contents will reveal that my bachelor narratives are mostly of Genette's second variety: non-autodiegetic homodiegetic narrative in which the bachelor narrator tells someone else's, often another man's, story. But the distinction Genette asserts between the autodiegetic narrator who is "the hero of his narrative" and the homodiegetic narrator who "plays only a secondary role ... as observer and witness" is not so clear. Indeed, the ideological stakes, and particularly the gendered stakes, of this so-called "secondary role" are already suggested by Genette's labelling of the first variety as the "strong degree." We might surmise that not only the narratives told by non-hero narrators are of the "weak degree," but also the non-hero narrators themselves who are weak, unheroic, not fully manly. Genette's evaluative descriptor betrays the ideological bias that is intrinsic to but disguised by the formalism of traditional narratology.

The bachelor narrators I consider in this book are for the most part well described as observers and witnesses, yet I do not accept Genette's assumption that he who is not the hero of his own narrative is automatically and uncomplicatedly a "mere bystander," diminished by the full measure of inconsequentiality that phrase implies. (I am puzzled, I admit, by Genette's distinction between an "ordinary walk-on" and a

"mere bystander," although in his hierarchy the former does seem preferable to the latter.) In the chapters which follow, I call attention to the heavily freighted relations between the bachelor narrators and the significant others whose stories they tell. Enacted in the space and time of narration, these relations repeat but also revise the gendered relations that construct the main plots of these fictions. The bachelor and his narrative thus effect discursive supplements which destabilize the texts' dominant fictions of manhood and domesticity.[22] The activity of the bachelor narrators in both the novels' story and their discourse constitute alternatives to hegemonic masterplots and hegemonic manhood.

While these narratives can be construed as offering a rhetorical challenge to the predominance of protagonists, whether individual or paired, and their plots, the very rhetoric of the "challenge" predisposes the critic to read the bachelor narrative as a story of contest in which the bachelor ultimately reveals himself as a better man than the nominal hero. Such a reading practice would merely invert the ideology of Genette's narratological model, recasting the "mere bystander" as the hero of his own narrative. Were a critic to proclaim Dr. Watson the true mastermind of Baker Street, for example, this inversion would merely transform weak homodiegesis into strong autodiegesis, and the implicitly weak homodiegetic narrator into an implicitly strong autodiegetic narrator, without questioning the ideological valences of those categories. While competition between the homodiegetic narrator and his narrative's significant others, or even between narrative and plot, is far from irrelevant to the bachelor narratives I consider, I believe it is crucial to attend to the other modes of relation, real and especially imaginary, that animate these narratives.

Therefore, in attending to the figure of Oedipal plotting which emerges from the domestic and familial carpet of many of the novels considered here, I look beyond the classical account which identifies the son as a murderous competitor with the father for possession of the mother. In so doing, I take my cue from Eve Sedgwick's influential account, following Gayle Rubin, of the traffic in women effected by erotic triangles consisting of two men and one woman, a configuration that holds a place of privilege in Freud's psychoanalytical theory, Lévi-Strauss's anthropological theory, and René Girard's literary theory in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*.[23] Because it heeds the differentials of power and gender at issue in mediated desire, Sedgwick's theorization of a homosocial continuum of male desire disrupted by homophobic panic allows us to see disavowed homoerotic energies at work in hetero-

sexual rivalries between men. As other critics have pointed out, however, Sedgwick's emphasis on homosocial desire between men obscures the potential for female trafficking (where women occupy one or more of the points of erotic triangulation) and for male trafficking which does not involve women (where men occupy all three points of erotic triangulation). To redress the latter elision, I attend in some of my readings to a story which we might call the "other Oedipus": the Oedipus of loving brothers rather than, or as well as, patricidal sons. Desirous and identificatory collaboration, rather than sibling rivalry, crucially defines such fraternal relations. This "other Oedipal" plot and the classic homosocial Oedipal plot together make up a multilayered story of masculine subject formation based on mutuality as well as hostility; reciprocity as well as manipulation; equality as well as hierarchy.[24]

My readings of the triangulated dynamics of desire and identification are complemented by attention to other multilayered mythic paradigms, including the myriad myths of Orpheus which figure in James's "The Aspern Papers" and the manifold figure of the Medusa's Head in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. The utility of these mythic paradigms resides in their explicit emphasis on the visual, on seeing and not-seeing as ways of knowing, having, or being. They make newly and differently visible the basis of mediated desire in systems of exchange, especially those that involve the trading of gazes, looks, and glances. For example, the performance of bachelor narrators as onlookers at the triangulated love plots which are the stock-in-trade of novelistic fiction reveals mediated desire as not merely triangulated, but as fundamentally *quadrangulated*. In *Wuthering Heights*, for example, Lockwood assumes, among other subject positions, that of a "third man" who observes the male-male-female triangles consisting of Heathcliff, Edgar, and Catherine in the first generation, and Hareton, Linton, and Cathy in the second generation. In this text and others, the bachelor onlooker is a figure of surplus value, one who is apparently in excess of the requirements of a homosocial market in Oedipalized desire. The specular relations of the bachelor creates a speculative market, one whose value depends upon the interest invested in it by a figure who is not a primary producer, consumer, or even an object of consumption, within this economy. The bachelor narrator as witness is invested in what he sees and tells, yet his identity within the narrative *mise en scène* is not solely constituted in terms of his competition on the marriage market of the novel's plot. Bachelor narration thus might be said to represent an alternative economy of manhood, even while it also participates vicariously and, one might