BACHELORS, MANHOOD, AND THE NOVEL
1850–1925

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Trouble in paradise: bachelors and bourgeois domesticity

"The Bachelor in Fiction" was hardly news when Percival Pollard published his review essay of that title in 1900. An 1859 Wilkie Collins sketch entitled "The Bachelor Bedroom," published anonymously in the English periodical *All the Year Round*, indicates that as early as mid-century the bachelor in fiction had long been a conventional topic: "The bachelor has been profusely served up on all sorts of literary tables; but, the presentation of him has been hitherto remarkable for a singularly monotonous flavour of matrimonial sauce. We have heard of his loneliness, and its remedy, or his solitary position in illness, and its remedy; of the miserable neglect of his linen, and its remedy."[1] Deploring the monotonous insistence on marriage as the sole remedy for the ills of bachelor life, Collins asserts that there is "a new aspect of the bachelor left to be presented . . . a new subject for worn-out readers of the nineteenth century whose fountain of literary novelty has become exhausted at the source":

> But what have we heard of him in connexion with his remarkable bedroom, at those periods of his existence when he, like the rest of the world, is a visitor at his friend's country house? Who has presented him, in his relation to married society, under those peculiar circumstances of his life, when he is away from his solitary chambers, and is thrown straight into the sacred centre of that home circle from which his ordinary habits are so universally supposed to exclude him? (p. 355)

The topic proposed as an antidote to the hackneyed representation of bachelorhood is not so innovative as he would have it. This "new subject for worn-out readers" falls short of newness, for one thing, because Collins shares with his literary predecessors the assumption that married life is a crucial frame of reference for bachelorhood, if not simply its remedy. This sketch, like the profusion of written representations of bachelorhood before it, concerns itself primarily with the bach-

elor's vexed "relation to married society," and to conventional familial and domestic life more generally.

It was precisely the bachelor's ambiguous distance from or, rather, his ambiguous proximity to "that home circle from which his ordinary habits are so universally supposed to exclude him" (p. 355) that made this figure a "fountain of literary novelty" to nineteenth-century readers. Whether staying in other people's homes, residing in homes of their own, or occupying indoor or outdoor spaces that were anything but domestic, bachelors were represented primarily in terms of hegemonic marital, familial, and domestic ideologies, practices, and spheres. Bachelors were seen as both proper and improper to conventional married, bourgeois domesticity, much as the remarkable bedrooms and other spaces with which they were so insistently associated were often located either dangerously close to or threateningly far from, sometimes even simultaneously within and beyond, the "civilised residences" (p. 355) of married people and families.

The conceptual incoherence produced by the figure of the bachelor is particularly vivid against the background of domestic life. Bachelors were often thought to be the antithesis of domesticity yet they were also sometimes seen as its epitome. This paradox results in large part from the self-contradictory status of the private sphere itself within bourgeois domestic ideology. That is to say, the private was both the center of meaning for bourgeois domestic life and also marginal to it, trivial in comparison to the "real world" of the public sphere. By the mid nineteenth century, the private, domestic household was defined as ideally beyond the marketplace and market relations, yet the household was itself the very type, or imaginary origin, of economy, a term that derives from the Greek "oekonomia" which refers to household management.

For bourgeois men, the conflicted relation of the private household to the public marketplace was particularly perplexed and perplexing. *Patresfamilias* were, in theory at least, the kings of their castles and yet they were often dispossessed within "the empire of the mother."[2] Men, moreover, were defined and were expected to define themselves in relation to subcultural contexts – work and home, public and private – whose explicit values were often opposed. That these spheres were not always so separate as their nineteenth-century constituents and twentieth-century commentators assumed – neither so different in ethos nor so spatially distinct as the ideology of separate spheres would suggest – only compounded the confusion. Under hegemonic domestic ideologies,

home may have been idealized as a haven from a heartless world or even a veritable heaven on earth, but there was trouble in paradise. The presence of bachelors *within* bourgeois homes and the existence of paradises of bachelors – versions of domesticity and quasi-domesticity enacted by bachelors in chambers, men's clubs, and bachelor apartment buildings – only meant more trouble.

THE TROUBLE WITH BACHELORS: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The figure of the bachelor was not invented in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the bachelor appears as a stock character in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writing, a figure that partakes of other contemporary types of eccentric manhood such as the rake, the beau, the fop, and, somewhat later, the sentimental man of feeling. But the genealogy of the bachelor goes back even further. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives "bas chevalier" as the conjectural etymology of the term: "a young knight, not old enough or having too few vassals to display his own banner, and who therefore followed the banner of another... Hence knight bachelor, a knight of the lowest but most ancient order." This meaning, which holds from the fourteenth century through to the sixteenth, overlaps with another denotation of the term, used from the fourteenth century through to the nineteenth. This slightly later denotation refers to "a junior or inferior member, or 'yeoman,' of a trade guild or City Company" or to "one who has taken the first or lowest degree at a university, who is not yet a master of the Arts."[3] The *OED* also records that bachelor was used in the seventeenth century to refer to an inexperienced person or novice. Only in the mid eighteenth century did the current primary meaning arise: an unmarried man of marriageable age. The pre-eighteenth-century uses of the term – knight, guildsman, student – all have a primarily vocational register with connotations of youthfulness. These early uses register the centrality of an apprenticeship system in which the bachelor serves a master in hopes of later assuming a position of authority himself. While unmarried status may be necessary for these pursuits, bachelorhood here primarily refers to the man's vocational status.

The eighteenth-century shift of the primary denotation of bachelorhood to unmarried status moved the definitional context of bachelorhood into a world and a set of relations – the private sphere, the family, marriage – from which bachelors themselves were nominally excluded. This striking shift to a meaning more or less parallel to our contempor-

ary usage occurred at roughly the same time that middle-class masculinity itself was coming to be equated with the emerging concept of occupation.[4] Bachelorhood was not an occupation, yet such phrases as the "freedom, luxury, and self-indulgence of a bachelor's career" suggest something like a substitute or alternative vocation, even while gesturing towards the bachelor's violation of the norms of bourgeois masculinity, especially with respect to an ideal of male productivity.[5] The larger cultural and historical context of the emerging concept of occupation is, of course, the formation of the middle class itself and its attendant ideology of separate spheres.[6] Bourgeois domesticity as an ideology was not based on marriage *per se*, but on the gendered division of labor and the construction of a private realm as the locus of true selfhood, a realm separate from that of the marketplace.[7] Although home and marriage were not literally synonymous, their ideologies were so intricately interwoven that they were virtually interchangeable, at least rhetorically. Alterations in nineteenth-century marriage patterns were understandably considered to have an inevitable impact, either immediate or delayed, on domestic ideologies and practices.

During the second half of the nineteenth century in England and America, there was a decline, probably real and certainly perceived, in the "popularity" of marriage. In America, the marriage rate declined until the turn of the century.[8] Moreover, between 1890 and 1920, the proportion of American men over age fifty-five who had never married was actually increasing, even while the overall marriage rate was beginning to climb again. There was no overall decline in the marriage rate in England, but the unequal numbers and uneven distribution of men and women there and elsewhere contributed to concerns about the future of domestic life. The 1851 census showed 405,000 more women than men in England, an imbalance famously addressed in W. R. Greg's now notorious 1862 essay, "Why Are Women Redundant?" By 1871, there were 593,000 more women than men in England, and by 1901, there were over a million more.[9] By contrast with the increasingly skewed sexual proportions in England, the sex ratio in the United States remained essentially even, at 51 men per 49 women, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.[10]

While bachelors were in short supply in England, there was a "surplus" of them in Canada, Australia, and the United States. The effects of these imbalances were exacerbated by uneven local and regional distributions of single men everywhere. "Bachelor subcultures," which often included married men, a problem of nomenclature that I will

discuss later, were found in cities and frontier areas, on land and at sea. Proposed solutions to the so-called redundancy problem included female emigration and bachelor taxes, solutions meant to boost the marriage rate, not to provide alternatives to traditional marital domesticity.[11] A 1907 editorial in *The North American Review*, "Why Bachelors Should Not Be Taxed," comments:

> From time to time, special taxes have been imposed upon single men in Great Britain and Ireland, but only, it was always carefully stated, for the purpose of increasing revenues. In France, on the other hand, fear of depopulation is said to be at the root of the present movement, unsuccessful thus far, to exact toll for celibacy. It will be seen, then, that the actuating causes have varied widely; but, generally speaking, the discrimination has rested upon the Spartan principle that it is the duty to the state of every citizen to rear up legitimate children, although there is room for suspicion that, in some instances, the hen-pecked married men who made the laws felt that bachelors should pay well for happiness that seemed to them exceptional.

This anti-tax writer appears to question the "Spartan principle" itself, but he concludes that there is no real "danger of matrimony itself falling into disfavor as an avocation," and hence no need for a bachelor tax.[12] By contrast, a 1908 bachelor-tax advocate argues in *The Westminster Review* that the bachelor does indeed shirk his civic duty since "[o]wing to his not being a householder the single man escapes another burden – the Inhabited House duty, levied upon all houses rate at £20 and upwards." Noting the practical difficulty of redressing the bachelor's unfair economic advantage through income taxes and other indirect taxation, this writer argues that a special tax "levied at age 25 or 30" on bachelors "possessed of a certain income" would make these unmarried men "bear their fair share of . . . the national and local burdens."[13]

Anxieties about what this 1908 writer solemnly referred to as "the strength and security of the State" were also provoked by a late-century rise in marriage age.[14] Like so-called old maids, "old bachelors" were not necessarily elderly, just older than the normative marriage age. In the late nineteenth century, a man merely in his early thirties might be labeled an old bachelor. The average British and American marriage age is estimated to have been lowest at mid century. Sometime between the 1850s and the turn of the century, people began to marry later than previous generations had or than later generations would.[15] This graying trend peaked slightly earlier, sometime between 1890 and the 1900s, in the United States than in England, where the turning point came around 1910.[16] The anxieties elicited by the rise in marriage age were

compounded by the dramatic decline in fertility rates which began early in the century.[17] The later marrying age alone did not account for the nineteenth-century decline in fertility; Banks, among others, has persuasively demonstrated that the use of contraception and other methods of family planning made significant contributions to this decline. Both smaller families and families started later in life augmented anxieties about the future of domesticity.

These demographic shifts and their attendant anxieties were particularly great for the middle and upper classes. Since there is some evidence that many working-class demographic trends ran in the opposite direction, the situation in the higher socio-economic reaches may have been more pronounced than the statistical record shows.[18] In both countries, middle-class men married later on average than working-class men, remaining at home longer or living in lodgings often until their late twenties or even early thirties.[19] Moreover, new educational opportunities in the second half of the nineteenth-century had a particularly pronounced impact on the lives of middle- and upper-class women; the marriage rate of female college graduates was strikingly lower than that of the general population of women, a trend that contributed to fears about the future of bourgeois marriage.[20] Also fanning the flames of fear, changes in the legal and economic condition of married and single women of all classes heightened awareness of the multiple and sometimes conflicting definitions of marriage as a religious sacrament, a legal contract, and a private union. While not everyone took the situation so seriously, a distinct sense of urgency is evident in the words of one 1880s commentator: "our present marriage customs set at defiance all the rules which ought to be followed in order to secure that the race shall not deteriorate."[21] The double threat of extinction and degeneracy, that is, the risk of ruining both population quantity and "quality," are suggested by this image of racial deterioration, a variation on the class- and nation-centered specter of "race suicide."[22]

The high cost of living, especially of married living, was commonly believed to be the chief cause of the feared deterioration of the bourgeois family. The middle-class standard of living rose rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century, as did expectations that newly married couples would live in the same comfort or luxury they had enjoyed in their parental homes.[23] Bachelors often delayed marriage in order to develop their careers and to accumulate the capital necessary not merely to support their wives, but to keep them in comfort. Indeed, the emergence in the 1840s of the idea of the "proper time to marry" signals

an acceptance of and even a desire for prudent delay. As this trend intensified, it gave rise to new worries.[24] Young women often were criticized for their materialistic expectations and the marriage-postponing or marriage-eliminating effects thereof. They were chastised, for example, in pieces as diverse as a 1910 survey of 500 bachelors published in *Good Housekeeping* and plaintively entitled "Bachelors – Why?"; an 1877 *Temple Bar* essay "On the Excessive Influence of Women, by an Old Fogey"; and an 1859 *Harper's* piece, "Single Life Among Us," which argued that

> so far as our women are concerned, the standard of average expectation rises far beyond the standard of wealth, and society is full of young ladies whose tastes are wholly out of keeping with their domestic condition and prospects. Their evident desire for a delicate way of life at once alarms the unpretending class of suitors, and discourages the very habits of thrift and self-reliance that might make them helpers of worthy young husbands through years of modest frugality to years of peaceful independence… We must set down a false feminine fastidiousness as a very prominent cause of celibacy.[25]

Just as often, the unreasonable desire of bachelors for luxury before or instead of marriage bore the brunt of popular criticism. Thus an 1893 article claims that "To marry … means a terrible falling-off in the standard of comfort, and the one luxury which these pleasant fellows religiously deny themselves is that of a wife."[26]

The influence of the high cost of living on both the marriage rate and marriage age was magnified by the rise of the professions. Certain occupations were linked to prolonged bachelorhood, particularly those professions which required years of training and then a protracted period for establishing a practice. Thus, in the popular fiction of the era, bachelor medical and law students appear with predictable frequency, as do bachelor doctors and lawyers.[27] Doctors seemed to their contemporaries to be in special need of the respectability of marriage since their work, like that of clergymen, brought them into the female-coded space of the home and sexually charged space of the bedroom. Yet some writers argued that there were valid reasons for doctors and other professionals to avoid married life. An 1861 letter published in the *British Medical Journal* put the situation in these terms:

> It has often occurred to us, that most medical men would be the better if they remain single… [I]n the present state of society, in which expensive luxury forms a constant element, it is next to impossible for a general practitioner to support a proper appearance in the world from nothing more than the proceeds of his professional exertions… [I]t is owing to the cares of matrimony

that many, who would otherwise have been philosophers, devoted to their profession, end by becoming nothing better than routineers or professional tradesmen. In moments of real illness and danger the public do not ask whether the doctor rides or walks, is married or unmarried. All they require is that he should be at hand when he is wanted, and should be capable of performing all that is required of him.[28]

Both the health of the doctor and the well-being of his patients are endangered by his marrying. While the author of this last piece is willing to excuse some medical men from the obligation to wed, his self-consciously extreme position, braced against the current of popular opinion, suggests that the ideological web that bound marriage to bourgeois manhood, and especially to professional manhood, was tightly woven indeed.

Middle-class manhood was not an uncontested ideal, a static backdrop against which the figure of the bachelor stood out as an aberration. There was no single ideal of normative manhood, but multiple models that were continually changing over time, and also overlapping and competing with other models at any given time. For example, historians of British culture describe a shift from an early nineteenth-century intellectually and emotionally earnest "Christian manliness" to "a more spartan, athletic, and conformist 'muscular manliness' at the close of the century"; they link this shift to such national conditions as imperialist and industrial expansion.[29] American historians describe a comparable shift from mid-century "civilized manliness" to turn-of-the-century "primitive masculinity," a new style of bourgeois manhood modelled on ideals of independence, physical roughness, and sexual expressiveness previously associated with non-white and working-class men.[30]

However useful such descriptions of broad shifts in dominant styles of manhood are, they tend to obscure the presence of competing ideologies and practices within and between styles of manhood throughout the period. For example, Timothy Gilfoyle and others demonstrate that a "sporting male subculture" with its attendant ideology existed in New York and elsewhere in America as early as the 1820s. This male subculture

displaced older rules and traditions governing sexual behavior for young, married, and "respectable" men. By the age of the Civil War, the writer George Ellington could conclude that many "fashionable bloods and old fogies, known rakes and presumedly pious people, wealthy bachelors and respectable married men, fast sons and moral husbands" consorted with prostitutes. If this became widely known, Ellington feared, it would "convulse society."

Gilfoyle describes how sporting male culture, "resting on an ethic of sensual pleasure," cut across class boundaries and thereby "promoted a certain gender solidarity among nineteenth-century urban males."[31] Like Gilfoyle, Elliott Gorn in *The Manly Art* and George Chauncey in *Gay New York* emphasize that American bachelors who were sporting men were, or at least were perceived to be, anti-domestic. Chauncey, for example, argues that "many of the men of the bachelor subculture . . . forged an alternative definition of manliness that was predicated on a rejection of family obligations . . . [e]mbodying a rejection of domesticity and of bourgeois acquisitivism alike."[32]

This bachelor subculture, which "broadly equated sexual promiscuity and erotic indulgence with individual autonomy and personal freedom," offered men an alternative or complement to domestic culture.[33] "*Bachelor* subculture" is a misleading label, however, since both married and unmarried men actively participated in them.[34] While bachelor subcultures does seem apt in relation to American cities with their "surplus" of migrant and immigrant single men, "homosocial male subcultures" or even "sporting male subcultures" make even more suitable terms, given the homosocial climate of British and American cities and of nineteenth-century British and American culture more generally. The prevalence of men's clubs, associations, and secret societies in the last third of the nineteenth century is just one register of the continuing salience of homosociality during this period. Homosociality was both a social norm for all-male activities and the basis for culture-structuring bonds more generally, a larger continuum of gendered power relations in which, as Eve Sedgwick has so persuasively theorized, both male–female and male–male bonds ultimately serve the exchange and consolidation of power among men.[35] But the key point here is that middle-class men, unlike middle-class women, could with relative impunity shuttle between the world of the street and the world of the home.[36] W. R. Greg censoriously acknowledges that

> [A]mong the middle and higher ranks [men are not] compelled to lead a life of stainless abstinence . . . Unhappily, as matters are managed now, thousands of men find it perfectly feasible to combine all the freedom, luxury, and self-indulgence of a bachelor's career with the pleasures of female society and the enjoyments they seek for there.[37]

In Oscar Wilde's 1891 *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry essentially concurs with Greg's observation, though in a tone more amusedly blasé than aggrieved: "Nowadays all the married men live like bachelors and

all the bachelors live like married men."[38] English men, both married and single, like their American counterparts, could participate actively in homosocial or sporting male subcultures whose values departed from those of hegemonic domestic ideology, and still be considered respectable.

Although they were the beneficiaries of a sexual double standard, middle-class men were nevertheless subject to conflicting expectations under domestic and other, overlapping and separate, subcultural regimes. While home and work, private and public life, were supposed to be natural and mutually sustaining complements, their values frequently clashed. Stephanie Coontz observes that while secular vocation increasingly came to replace the old notion of a man's spiritual calling, the *means* of achieving success in the marketplace often ran counter to prevailing notions of virtue.[39] The marketplace asset of autonomy conflicted with the home virtue of uxoriousness. Similarly, the public values of independence, competitiveness, and aggressiveness ran counter to the private requirements of mutuality, reciprocity, and even deference to the moral authority of wives and mothers.[40] While fathers were the nominal heads of the household, and their homes supposedly their castles, the domestic empire was in many ways subject to a different sovereign.[41] Moreover, as the ideology of marriage late in the century shifted from a more communal ethos to a more individualist one, from social duty to romantic self-fulfillment, these conflicts surely intensified for many individual men and for middle-class culture more generally. There was increased pressure on men to spend their leisure time with their wives, as a more affectional, companionate style of marriage came to replace the more hierarchical, patriarchal model. Yet the fear that "too much" contact with women would feminize men, a fear exacerbated by the demands of the new style of primitive masculinity, put new pressures on men to find their identities and pleasures outside of marriage. Torn between competing ideals of marriage, between the competing demands of home and work, and between competing models of normative masculinity, it is no wonder that middle-class men sometimes felt that their lives were in crisis.

While the paradigm of a crisis in masculinity has been used by some historians to describe the impact of competing and shifting models of manhood, it has been questioned by others.[42] Gail Bederman skillfully adjudicates between the contributions of both "crisis-thesis" and "anti-crisis-thesis" historians, agreeing with the former that "[m]iddle-class men were unusually obsessed with manhood at the turn of the century,"

while concurring with the latter that "despite virile, chest-thumping rhetoric, most middle-class men did not flee to the Western frontier, but remained devoted to hearth and home." Bederman persuasively argues against describing this obsession with manhood as a crisis because "to imply that masculinity was in crisis suggests that manhood is a transhistorical category or fixed essence . . . rather than an ideological construct which is constantly being remade." Many late nineteenth-century men may well have been anxious about their own or others' manhood, but the notion of an actual, discrete masculinity crisis obscures the ways that manhood is always multiple, conflicted, and changing. As a corrective to the insufficient theorization of gender as "a collection of traits, attributes or sex roles," Bederman describes gender as an "historical, ideological process" which may serve a range of overlapping and not always consistent cultural functions.[43] While the process of gender may well have been particularly active at the *fin de siècle*, it is clear that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were roiled throughout with conflicting expectations of and by men. These conflicting expectations were generated within domestic ideologies, and also by tensions between these ideologies and rival ideologies of manhood.

If married men had difficulties in coordinating these conflicting demands, how did the bachelor fare in the morass of proscriptions and prescriptions enjoined upon him by normative bourgeois definitions of manhood? Not surprisingly, nineteenth-century writers usually portrayed bachelors, both confirmed and temporary ones, as diverging from the admittedly conflicting norms of bourgeois manhood. The polymorphic variety of negative bachelor stereotypes reveals no single trajectory of aberrance, but any number of ways in which bachelors, especially those "old bachelors" who seemed to have run permanently off the rails of the marriage track, were seen as veering away from an acceptable performance of manhood. The binaries by which bachelors were stereotyped are most notable for their contrariness: superannuated and boyish; worldly and callow; gregarious and reclusive; overrefined and coarse; sophisticatedly decadent and atavistically primitive; clingy and remote; self-indulgent and miserly; unfeeling and oversensitive; fastidious and slovenly; errant and unbudging; inconsistent and rigid.

Popular representations also posed, and attempted to answer, a host of questions about the nature and meaning of bachelorhood: Was the bachelor born or did he acquire his bachelor traits? Was bachelorhood chosen as an act of conviction or imposed by an accident of fate? Was the bachelor's behavior volitional or nonvolitional, an issue of will or defect,

badness or weakness? Was he like or unlike other men? Was he normal or abnormal? Indeed, was there such a thing as a "normal bachelor"? Was bachelorhood a justifiable or an illegitimate condition? Were bachelors useful and if so how? Was there an intrinsic connection between bachelorhood and high achievement in political, intellectual, aesthetic, or spiritual arenas? Did society benefit from the existence of bachelors? What were their uses or contributions? And did these uses or contributions justify their bachelorhood? Could anything justify bachelorhood? Clearly, these questions are all over the map, and the answers given to them are equally multiform and often incoherent. But the list of questions *does* give a sense of how and also why popular writers were troubled by bachelors.

Some contemporary trouble-shooters created their own typologies of bachelorhood as a way of managing the trouble with bachelors. There is little or no consistency in the ways these popular typologies were organized. For example, an 1853 *Southern Literary Messenger* article, "On Old Bachelors," presents us with four types of bachelors: Involuntary, Sentimental, Misogynistic, and Stingy; an 1898 article, "Famous Bachelors," which appeared in the British journal *The Woman at Home*, surveys five kinds: the misogynist, the sentimental, the irresolute, the timid, and the hopeful; and a 1913 *Good Housekeeping* article, entitled simply "Bachelors," makes a tripartite division of bachelordom into "men who are born bachelors," "men who achieve bachelorhood," and others who "have bachelorhood thrust upon them."[44] These three "nonfiction" pieces make their taxonomizing particularly explicit, although similar and disparate taxonomies implicitly obtain in other examples and other genres. While certain motifs appear throughout the period, there is no clear pattern, no clear sense of continuity or development across time. This lack of clarity results in part from the same taxonomic labels, such as "misogynist" or "sentimental," being used to describe different traits; to indicate cause or effect; to defend bachelorhood or to mark it as indefensible. The very incoherence of these troubled taxonomies registers the difficulties that bourgeois writers and readers experienced in attempting to account for a group that they described as a class, a race, a tribe, and even a species.

Within and beyond these troubled taxonomies, economic explanations were frequently offered as a way of accounting for bachelorhood:

> Therefore, if marriage be a man's object, let him not forget that a sufficient income – not pleasant badinage, nor fluent speaking, nor a good seat – is the first essential condition.

"Cupid has definitely located his arch enemy: he is the High Cost of Living," observes a Boston investigator of the allied subjects of economics and romance.[45]

As often, economic considerations were seen as rationalizations for the bad characters of bachelors:

In coming to this important decision [i.e., marriage], the bachelor is often influenced by selfish or pecuniary decisions.

Is the hesitation of so many bachelors before the problem of matrimony owing wholly, or mainly, to the high cost of living?[46]

To this rhetorical question, the answer was invariably "No."

[Bachelors are] unsocial beings who would selfishly live for their pleasure alone.

To read of themselves would be infinite pleasure/ As they loved their dear selves they knew beyond measure/ And themselves, their own selves, were their heart's greatest treasure.

[S]ome of the most artistic, luxurious and beautiful rooms in New York are the bachelor quarters where members of my selfish class lead their not always useless and selfish lives.

A bachelor must be, to a certain extent, selfish; he cannot help it; he thinks of himself in some shape or another from morning till night; and selfishness begets self-indulgence and hard-heartedness.[47]

This sampling of pronouncements, which span the long nineteenth century and which I have selected primarily for their brevity, demonstrates the tight conceptual fit between bachelors and home economics. Far from being insulated from market relations, the marital home was the marketplace's *sine qua non*. Hence, "selfishness" was seen as the principal defect of bachelors. Self-centeredness, the wish for luxury, the desire to evade responsibility, stinginess, the love of comfort, the longing for glory – all these and more are considered under the rubric of bachelor selfishness. One might say that in the Victorian era, "selfish bachelor" was a redundancy.

Even *apologias* for bachelorhood conceded the inevitable selfishness of bachelors. Consider this defense of bachelorhood offered in an 1880s *Temple Bar* piece, "Why We Men Do Not Marry, By One of Us":

Each year I have some money to save or to spend. Shall I spend it on a wife and children; on millinery bills and boot bills; on doctor's bills and schoolmasters' bills[?] I prefer to dispose of it otherwise. I prefer to keep a horse; I prefer a

comfortable annual trip on the continent, or to America; I prefer pictures and china, shilling cigars and first-rate hock. Very selfish, no doubt. Yet not so altogether. I am a professional man, my work makes heavy demands on my nervous system. A glass of generous wine or the subtle enjoyment of a good Havana may save me from an opiate or a doctor's visit. So it is with my annual holiday. I am exhausted by a year's labour; my holiday is absolutely necessary... In the stress and strain of this tense civilisation, luxury has been drawn close to necessity. I might, it is true, dispense with these solaces, but I should break down the sooner.[48]

While many contemporary writers condemned the craving for luxury as a sign of bachelors' defection from the values of thrift and self-restraint, the psychological necessity of luxury is offered here as a moral justification for bachelorhood. "Very selfish no doubt. Yet not so altogether": given "the stress and strain of this tense civilization," this writer counts luxury as a necessity so basic that marriage itself comes to seem an imprudent, even dangerous, extravagance.

Profligacy and stinginess are flipsides of the same coin which bachelors were seen as reserving for their own selfish use. Bachelors were as often accused of miserliness as of extravagance: "John Bachelor Stingybones, Esq ... is excessively close and saving – and take my word for it, that is the reason why he has never married."[49] Thus, the bachelor was popularly imagined as a figure of improper expenditure, as one who either spends too much – "A bachelor who has been accustomed to spend all his income or wages upon himself will not have much to spare for a family" – or spends too little, hoarding his money in a miserly, antisocial fashion, as an 1839 poem describes "The Old Bachelor" who leaves behind nothing after his death "But wealth, and ill health, and his pelf and his self."[50]

Improper expenditure is not merely a matter of too much or too little, but of the particular uses to which spending is put. While the improper objects of bachelor spending include anything that is not within the purview of the familial or the marital, the most commonly conceived improper object of spending is the bachelor himself. Indeed, the selfishness ascribed to bachelors has primary connotations of both self-centeredness and dissipation. We see this double register in an 1869 *Temple Bar* poem, "The Bachelor: A Modern Idyll," in which a married man insists to a doubting bachelor that the "selfish joys" of bachelor self-indulgence pale beside the pleasure of seeing "contentment beam in six-and-twenty eyes," even though "we have to live without some things we'd like."[51] The double register of bachelor egocentricism and degen-

eracy also appears in the 1859 *Harper's* piece cited above, which claims that "Too many old bachelors abandon love and take to their bank-book and bill of fare – not to name baser indulgences – for their solace." Here indulgence at the dinner table goes hand-in-hand with miserliness, since eating and saving are both forms of acquisitiveness.[52] Significantly, the underspending of the bank-book and the overspending of the bill of fare are linked to unnamed "baser indulgences," a rhetorical indirection that nonetheless clearly alludes to nonprocreative and extramarital sexual activity.

These representations of bachelor economics can be understood as figures for bachelor sexuality. Specifically sexual bachelor "energies" or "resources" and those that were not specifically sexual were used as metaphors for each other.[53] Just as bachelors were imagined as spending their money on the wrong objects or for the wrong reasons, they were also imagined as channelling, or dissipating, their sexual energy in a variety of nonmarital "dead ends." Particularly in the first half of the century, bachelors were thought to be especially susceptible to masturbation.[54] The nonproductive, pleasure-driven, and self-oriented qualities of masturbation were thought to constitute a serious danger, a material and moral drain on a finite, bodily "spermatic economy" as well as a drain on the domestic economies of the nation, race, and class. Worse still, masturbation was regarded as a major cause of spermatorrhea or "bachelor's disease." This imaginary malady – the involuntary loss of seminal fluid in nocturnal emissions or through the urine – was, with the possible exception of masturbation, "the single most discussed problem in instructional books for boys and young men."[55] First diagnosed in 1836, spermatorrhea came in the later nineteenth century to be associated with neurasthenia and other forms of nervous exhaustion that seemed to plague the urban business classes. Thought to deplete the male body of its limited supply of vital forces, spermatorrhea was represented by many legitimate physicians as well as quacks as a scourge that would result in consumption, epilepsy, insanity, feeble-mindedness, or death, unless nipped in the bud. With the rise of social purity and social hygiene movements during the second half of the nineteenth century, male continence was increasingly prescribed as a treatment for spermatorrhea, especially for single men. But throughout this period and particularly with the turn into the twentieth century, there was a countervailing emphasis, especially in medical and psychiatric discourse, on the normal need for men to express their "pent-up" sexual energies.[56] Sexual intercourse within the bounds of marriage was con-

sidered the last stage in the treatment of spermatorrhea as well as the ultimate goal of the treatment.

The notion that male sexual release was conducive to good health did not, of course, mean that any form of sexual activity was permissible. Indeed, the idea of healthy or therapeutic release made bachelors newly suspect since they had no sanctioned sexual outlet. While there had been a tacit recognition of the inevitability of male commerce with prostitutes, this form of sexual activity was increasingly associated with sexual deviance. In fact, one form of deviance linked to consorting with prostitutes, both female and male, was *the* paradigmatic turn-of-the-century perversion, which Christopher Craft has evocatively called "the perversion with a future": homosexuality.[57] This linkage resulted in part from the nineteenth-century prosecution under prostitution statutes of men who engaged in same-sex activities.[58] By the turn of the century, all forms of nonprocreative sexual activity including masturbation, bestiality, and pederasty, even the *absence* of sexual activity within or beyond the bonds of marriage, were coming increasingly to be seen as possible signs of homosexuality.

Not all bachelors were considered homosexuals, although "bachelor" came to be used often as an slurring insinuation against gay men or as an insider's codeword by them. But the epistemological indeterminacy of bachelorhood both preceded and postdated what Sedgwick describes as a "sudden, radical condensation of sexual categories" by which the gender of object choice emerged at the turn of the century as "*the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous categories of 'sexual orientation.'"[59] Whether as a specific type of sexual deviant or as a more generalized locus of trouble, the bachelor disrupted the proper regulation that defined home economics throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The disorderly potential of the bachelor may well indicate the susceptibility of this home economy to elements that many would have wanted to consider extrinsic to it. The insistent representation of bachelors in relation to conventional domesticity served partly to regulate, and thus to control, their disruptiveness, yet the very prevalence of such representations suggests a lack of control, or failure to contain, the trouble with bachelors. Representations of bachelors at home, living in or visiting other people's houses, or residing in homes of their own, did multiple and sometimes contradictory cultural tasks. While often deployed in order to contain the volatile manhood of bachelors, the discourse of bachelor domesticity itself provided opportunities for bachelors to go out of bounds.

BACHING IT: HOUSING AND THE QUESTION OF BACHELOR DOMESTICITY

Of all possible connotations that a verb derived from the noun "bachelor" might have, it is no accident that the primary one has to do with housing and home-making. The locution "baching it," like its close but now obsolete cousin "bachelorizing," arose in the context of early nineteenth-century emigration to frontier areas of British colonies and American territories; it referred specifically to the residences and living styles of single men who were making new homes in these new worlds.[60] The prevalence of stories, poems, and essays with titles such as "Bachelor's Bedroom," "Bachelor's Wing," "Bachelor's Den," "Bachelor's Hall," throughout the period attests to the fascination that "baching it" held for its observers and participants.[61] These popular texts, as well as many others that dwell on the living arrangements of bachelors, combine an eroticized fixation on the private lives of single men with anxiety about the future of domesticity in a rapidly modernizing, urbanizing and industrializing age. The question of whether true domesticity could be found in the modern era and especially in the modern city overlapped with the question of whether bachelors could or should make "real homes."

Both the image of the bachelor and the meaning of domesticity changed significantly during this era, in ways that are almost certainly correlated. While bachelorhood came to appear more compatible with domesticity during the course of the nineteenth century, domesticity itself came to look more like the bachelor version of it. Although still rooted in a notion of the home as the center of woman's life and feminine virtue, domesticity was changing to encompass a more self-expressive, pleasure-centered, consumer-oriented, even luxurious ideal by the beginning of the twentieth century, a shift associated with the larger cultural transition from a producer-based economy to a consumer-based one.[62] Although a home continued to depend, according to hegemonic domestic ideologies, on the presence of a woman, the appearance and behavior of this woman was changing. At mid century, the ideal domestic woman was the wife-as-mother; by the turn of the century, the wife-as-mother had been partially supplanted by the wife-as-companion. If a new companionate style of married "masculine domesticity" accompanied the expansion of the suburbs in the last third of the nineteenth century, then the rise of urban bachelor apartment buildings and the proliferation of men's clubs during this period also

created new opportunities for domesticity and quasi-domesticity practiced by single men alone, in pairs, or in groups.[63]

While bachelor domesticity may have increased in practice and accrued new ideological meanings toward the turn of the century, counter-discourses and alternative styles of bachelor domesticity existed *throughout* the century. Even in the early nineteenth century, as, for example, in an 1828 *Blackwood's Magazine* feature entitled "The Bachelor's Beat," bachelors were sometimes imagined as exemplars of domestic life. In one installment of this four-part series, bearing the highly conventional title "The Bachelor's Christmas," the old bachelor saves his nephew, and the nephew's marriage, from the dangerous influence of a party of "sportsmen" and "dashers":

> "Uncle," said Philip, in a tone of manly firmness, "you will assist me to get civilly rid of yonder host of idlers, and the false friend who hoped, by their means, to disgust me with my country, and estrange me from my bride. You shall make me an Englishman after your own heart."
>
> "Uncle," whispered Lady Jane, with the most insinuating softness' "you will invite us to your cottage, won't you, till a few more comforts are added to our home, to make it all that an English home should be?"

Earlier in the story, this bachelor uncle laments the "cheerless meal and silent vigil of my own bachelor home." Yet his description of his bachelor home, especially in combination with the happy outcome of the nephew's marriage plot, defies any simple sense of domestic lack:

> And yet it is a beloved home, – hallowed by fond recollections, and rich in present enjoyments; endeared by the shelter it afforded to the green loveliness of a mother's old age, which had nothing of age save its sanctity; hallowed, as the scene of a transition which had nothing of death but the name; adorned by her own exquisite taste, and my solicitude for her comfort, with a thousand little refinements which few bachelor homes can boast.[64]

The assertion that these "thousand little refinements" are anomalous in a bachelor home is a stock gesture of nineteenth-century bachelor discourse, as is the implication that a "bachelor home" itself is a kind of oxymoron. When there are so many exceptions to the rule of the non-domesticity or even anti-domesticity of bachelors, the rule itself becomes questionable. Throughout the century, bachelors in their residences were imagined as embracing but also rejecting, adapting to but also transforming, conventional domestic ideologies and practices, which were themselves undergoing uneven developments.

For the vast majority of nineteenth-century middle-class British and American citizens, marriage and family meant home, and home meant

a single-family house. Although some bachelors resided in and/or owned such houses, they were not customarily associated with them. In English cities, "chambers" were the type of housing most often associated with bachelors, probably "because the best-known sets of chambers in London were those provided for the exclusively male entrants into the legal profession at Temple and Lincoln's Inns."[65] Chambers designated a range of accommodations that varied widely in cost, comfort, services, and space. The modest end of the spectrum may be represented by Dick Swiveller's "bachelor establishment" in *The Old Curiosity Shop*:

> By a . . . pleasant fiction his single chamber was always mentioned in the plural number. In its disengaged times, the tobacconist had announced it in his window as "apartments" for a single gentleman, and Mr Swiveller, following up the hint, never failed to speak of it as his rooms, his lodgings, or his chambers, conveying to his hearers a notion of indefinite space, and leaving their imaginations to wander through long suites of lofty halls, at pleasure.[66]

Whereas Dick Swiveller orders his meals from a nearby eating house, the mysterious "single gentleman" lodger in this Dickens novel cooks his meals on a remarkable, self-contained "cooking apparatus."[67] By contrast, well-established chambers offered dining in commons or in private dining rooms. This other end of the chambers spectrum is well represented by the "very perfection of quiet absorption of good living, good drinking, good feeling and good talk" enjoyed at one of the Inns of Court by the narrator of Melville's 1855 "The Paradise of Bachelors."[68] A mid-century London *Landlord's and Tenant's Guide* emphasizes the "independence" afforded by chambers to "young bachelors not yet wishing to be troubled with housekeeping, and old bachelors who have renounced all thoughts of it"; an 1876 letter to the editor of *The Builder*, England's foremost architectural journal, stresses their comfort and convenience: "There are few men who have lived in good suites of chambers who do not contrast unfavourably with them the houses they are compelled to occupy when they get married and settled."[69]

While *The Builder* correspondent looks to certain aspects of chamber life as a model for married domesticity, there was no thought that such accommodations should actually be inhabited by bourgeois English families. Flats were accepted as housing for the working classes and the unmarried, but for the middle classes they "continued to be associated with 'bachelor chambers,' such as those in *The Albany*."[70] Similar prejudices against multi-unit and multi-family dwelling existed in the United

States, although Americans ultimately proved more accepting of such housing. This acceptance was not, however, without reservation. Delores Hayden observes that while workers in the United States lived in crowded tenements with several families to a floor, before 1860 "it would have been unthinkable for a family of even modest social aspirations to live in anything but a private dwelling, however humble such a house might be."[71]

Since home-ownership was a bourgeois ideal, if largely an unfulfilled one, one minor objection to families lodging in chambers and, later, in flats in purpose-built apartment houses was that these residences were rented.[72] But the principal objection to chambers and flats was that they crossed lines, often imaginary but nevertheless highly charged, which separated middle-class from working-class residential styles, residential spaces from commercial ones, and different families from each other. Privacy *within* the family was not generally at issue in the first half of the century, although it became increasingly so later on.[73] But when individuals of different families or households shared exterior spaces including sidewalks and building entrances, and interior spaces such as lobbies and hallways, and sometimes even sitting-rooms and dining-rooms, the supposedly inviolable privacy *of* the family, a central tenet of bourgeois domesticity, seemed to be jeopardized. Just as working-class tenements required different families to share facilities for bathing and laundry, living arrangements that were shocking to middle-class sensibilities, chambers and flats also occasioned the unacceptable crossing of established social and spatial divides.[74] Elizabeth Cromley suggests that the gradual acceptance of boarding as a residential option for middle-class and married Americans made boundary-crossings of certain kinds even more likely:

> [By mid century], a broad cross-section of occupations and varied "family status" (married and single) could occupy a single house. Indeed, this "mix" was sometimes seen as volatile, not solely because of cross-class conflicts but also because of differences in marital status; for example, Junius Browne's 1869 guidebook *Great Metropolis* represents single men as threatening to married couples in boardinghouse settings through their double position as an example to the husbands of "freedom" and as potential seducers of the wives.[75]

The promiscuous mingling of individuals of different walks of life, sexes, and marital statuses, was particularly threatening because it took place across the boundaries of the family, supposedly the dwelling place of one's truest, most private, inner self.