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Bulwer-Lytton, Braddon, and the Bachelorization of Legal Bloomsbury

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<1> Beginning with the medieval period, the study of jurisprudence and the practice of law in England took root around Holborn and Chancery Lane, while one of the four Inns of Court, Gray's Inn, lay in Bloomsbury's southeast tip.(1) For all of London's lawyers, including those whose professional base was further south in Lincoln's Inn, Middle Temple, or Inner Temple, Bloomsbury's squares, built in the main between 1770 and 1830, provided an eminently suitable residential location. John Cordy Jeaffreson's 1867 text, *A Book about Lawyers,* describes the bounds of the "law quarter" of Bloomsbury, as its streets and squares spread over the Bedford and Foundling estates in the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century:

> Notwithstanding many gloomy predictions of the evils that would necessarily follow from over-building, London steadily increased, and enterprising architects deprived Lincoln's Inn Fields and Great Queen Street of their rural qualities. Crossing Holborn, the lawyers settled on a virgin plain beyond the ugly houses which had sprung up on the north of Great Queen Street, and on the country side of Holborn. Speedily a new quarter arose . . . all the region lying between Gray's Inn Lane (on the east), Tottenham Court Road (on the west), Holborn (on the south), and a line running along the north of the Foundling Hospital and 'the squares.' (37)

Jeaffreson here treats the legal world as a spatial phenomenon rather than a discursive institution, tracing the mark lawyers made on the evolution of the city through their residential activity. He focuses on their effect on society through their acts of everyday consumption (including residency) rather than on their much-discussed roles in the linguistic machinery of the law proper. As such, he goes against the grain of the bulk of the "law and literature" work that has developed since the 1970s in nineteenth-century studies. Critics such as Kieran Dolin have often focused on the relationship of law to literature in terms of discursive or epistemological divergences and convergences. While this approach has proved amply fruitful in addressing the relationship between the two disciplines, it unconsciously prioritizes the public over the domestic aspects of the legal world, which is a restrictive perspective for scholars of gender and the law, who must recognize the crucial role of the home in the formation of both masculine and feminine identities within this period. For middle-class Victorian women, after all, while the law could not be one's own chosen career, through marriage it could be experienced as an everyday material reality, determining the part of town one's husband lived in, and, by extension, the kind of life

one enjoyed. As a result, the location of the lawyer's home within the metropolis has bearings upon both social identities, the husband's and the wife's.

<2> Here, by taking an approach that draws upon historical geography, I stress the everyday domestic aspects of a lawyer's life in order to interrogate afresh the relationship between gender and the law in the middle-class form of the mid-Victorian novel. The crucial coordinates of a career in the law for the lawyer's dependents, his wife included, lay not only in his use of language or his manipulation of power *in court*, but in the material fruits of his labour *at home*; the location of a lawyer's house and the kind of domestic social life he could sustain were among the most significant aspects of a legal career for the barrister's wife.

<3> Writing in 1867, Jeaffreson fixes the heyday of legal Bloomsbury a few decades previously; he cites recent high-profile moves out of the region by barristers and judges of great eminence as evidence of a shift. Though he admits that even after the shift there are still a lot of lawyers to be found in Bloomsbury, he describes the pioneers that initially conquered the "virgin plain" as explicitly superior to their mid-century equivalents. Jeaffreson's prose registers a certain respect for the metaphorical virility of the previous legal residents of Bloomsbury, and the rhetoric of the passage likens their professional endeavours to the city "steadily increasing." By comparison, the passage suggests that the Bloomsbury lawyers of the time as a disappointing bunch, with the successful and more (re)productive of them located westwards. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Jeaffreson asserts, the Bloomsbury barrister had undergone a change. In this article I explore this change by considering the way that mid-Victorian novelists locate anxieties about domestic masculinity in Bloomsbury. In doing so, I establish how evolving constructions of this part of London were connected to the ideological work of gender. Turning to novels by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, I show that the marital status of the lawyer in his Bloomsbury home was being actively problematized in the cultural production of this period. By the late 1850s, Bloomsbury was being clarified in novelistic cartographies as a place more associated with the bachelor than with the happily married man; Bloomsbury was becoming "bachelorized."

<4> After situating this phenomenon within the field of Victorian fiction gender studies, I elaborate upon two novels' endorsements of the intimately related cultural geographical trend: the evacuation of upper–middle-class married couples and families from Bloomsbury. While neither of the main male characters in the novels I discuss is *de jure* a bachelor, each nevertheless align himself with bachelordom *de facto* by living in the West Central part of town, while the wife of each insists on its unsuitability for married residency. Thus these novels play with the idea of Bloomsbury's bachelorization not statically by simply locating the bachelor species in his native habitat, but by staging dynamically the allergic reaction of wives to their bachelor-husbands' geographically produced hybrid identity. The fictionalized complaint of the Bloomsbury barrister's wife, misogynistically relayed in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and then sympathetically revised in Braddon's text, performs a multilayered form of cultural work. By announcing her determination not to live in Bloomsbury, the barrister's wife reinforces the separation of domestic and professional spheres, amplifies distinctions between different forms of masculinity, and contributes to the ongoing production and reproduction of urban space,

whose crucial relationship to dominant class and gender ideologies has yet to be fully appreciated.

Metropolitan Geography and Domestic Masculinity

<5> Through the centrality of questions about "domestic ideology" in critical debates in recent decades about nineteenth-century female identity, space has for some time been implicitly fundamental to our understanding of gender in Victorian studies. Although more often discussed conceptually than as a geographically situated actuality, the home has been one of the most prominent themes of scholarship about nineteenth-century culture since the 1980s. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall postulated in *Family Fortunes*, in a formulation that has become central to our appreciation of the period, between 1780 and 1850 the doctrine of separate spheres was mobilized in order to manage social class, confining the woman to a domestic arena that had nonetheless become newly suffused with political imperative. The home, in this narrative, is conceived of as a site located culturally apart from modern capitalism and the demoralizing and atomizing cash nexus. This cultural distance becomes increasingly marked throughout the period by geographical distance too, as the growth of the suburbs made the ideological separation of feminized home and masculinized work a physical separation. Literary scholarship has done much to show how the genre of the novel was complicit in this redefinition of the mid-Victorian home: most influentially, Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* and Mary Poovey's *Uneven Developments* established the productive paradigm of a pervasive disciplinary culture rooted in domesticity and propagated by the domestic novel, a persuasive critical scenario James Eli Adams has memorably called the "Foucauldian melodrama" (Adams 858).

<6> This influential research on domesticity and the novel initially sought to elucidate the way that women's role within society became simultaneously restricted and magnified through her association with the home. Since then, the project of theorizing domesticity in the Victorian period has expanded to include the analysis of men too. The nineteenth-century man's encounters with the domestic sphere have begun to receive significant attention, and the work of cultural historian John Tosh has been invaluable here. Tosh's *A Man's Place* shows that in the mid-nineteenth century the domestic domain was far more important to masculine identity than previous studies had implied. Failing to think through the effects of separate spheres on men, influential feminist accounts of the Victorian home were incomplete, Tosh suggests, eliding men from the domestic sphere in critical discourse and thus implicitly misrepresenting the home as a female-only cultural site.

<7> According to Tosh, rather than the man being absent from, or even marginal to the Victorian home, the domestic scene was a crucial (and indeed, fraught) site of masculine identity formation. Rather than there being a simple binary between feminized domestic and masculinized professional, for the middle-class man there was a difficult balance to be struck between work and home. Substantial absence from the home was necessary for him to earn enough money to provide for his wife. Excessive absence, however, threatened to disqualify him from a public affiliation with marital domesticity, which Tosh demonstrates through a plethora of cultural sources was a necessary component of full normative manhood. As Tosh says: to "form a household, to exercise authority over dependants, and to shoulder the responsibility of

maintaining and protecting them—these things set the seal on a man's gender identity" (108). How to achieve this goal, meanwhile, was a difficult matter. Delay in the marriage game (temporary bachelordom) was conventionally a matter of material necessity, not choice, at least in the middle decades of the century when the domestic ideal was most prominent in ideologies of masculinity:

> For most middle-class men the question was not whether to marry, but when. The answer usually erred on the side of caution. Material calculations were of the utmost importance. Young men could not expect to be earning much more than their keep until they were 22 or 23 at the earliest. It was several years more before they could accumulate enough to afford the outlay on a household, as a result of professional success, entering into a partnership or setting up an independent business. Middle-class couples did not begin married life in the equivalent of today's bed-sitter. They expected to enjoy amenities which were comparable to those of their parents—a point on which the bride and her parents were often adamant. For men this delayed marriage to the late twenties and beyond. (Tosh 108-9)

Following the avenues opened up by Tosh's work, studies of nineteenth-century fiction have begun to examine the intersection of domesticity and male professionalism. Laura Fasick, for instance, suggests that the domestic ideal came to affect the man's relationship to his professional career. In the Victorian novel, Fasick argues, masculine "work is best [or most endorsed by the narrative] when it most resembles and most incorporates the values of an idealized domesticity" (7). Martin A. Danahay has demonstrated, moreover, that the logic of the separate spheres doctrine meant that just as middle-class women were becoming restricted by their domestic duties, middle-class men were becoming overly dominated by their commission of onerous intellectual work. This meant that the domestic sphere had a vexed place in the lives of men whose professional careers, like the law, often involved bringing work home (15).(2)

<8> In this historical narrative, the figure of the bachelor emerges as a fascinating critical subject because of his counter-cultural awkwardness. Fully master of his own home, he nonetheless lacks the perfecting constituent of his domestic masculinity: the wife. For mid-Victorian commentators such as Henry Mayhew, this meant that he had no home at all: "the bachelor returned to his lair of an evening; only the married man dwelt in a home" (Tosh 29). But as Katherine Snyder has shown, bachelor homes could be rather more inviting and comfortable than the word "lair" proposes. Their representation in fiction often reveals them to be recognizably different from, but not always as obviously inferior to, the normative domestic ideal as might be expected (34).(3) Though Snyder's work suggests that the bachelor home is irreducible to one exact template or another, her analysis points to a range of ways it can be conventionally distinguishable from the married man's. A site both of hedonistic pursuit and carefree untidiness, yet at the same time, a retreat of extreme fastidiousness, the bachelor home also encodes an unbalanced attitude towards work, an issue of particular relevance to my argument. Making its presence felt throughout the domestic sphere, the bachelor's work is always legible and, therefore, his over-work or laziness is performed within the home to an excessive degree in either case.

<9> In addition to the attributes of a bachelor's house gleaned from Snyder's work, we can add the specificity of its location within the city, a geographical consideration she in the main neglects. The bachelor, who, according to Snyder, was in "English cities" most often housed in chambers, was prominently placed in the work-oriented city center, residing, indeed, amidst his own and others' professional practice (36).(4) This contradicted a crucial aspect of the normative domestic ideal. The work/home split was fundamental to the gender identity of married men and women in the nineteenth century, and this had geographical ramifications. As Tosh says, "Away from one's place of work might mean no more than leasing a terraced house in a square or crescent adjacent to the commercial district, as in London's ever-expanding West End" (16), but it increasingly meant suburbs further away. Because of their different relationships to the home, the bachelor and the husband would increasingly live in different parts of town (Tosh 127).(5)

<10> If the city's continual expansion was thus related to the gendered split between work and home, and new parts of the city were being built partly in order to meet the demands of new gender identities that were contingent on this geographical separation, it is not surprising that areas in the metropolis associated with work would become reconstructed as unsuitable for the normative domestic ideal. Bloomsbury was one such area. Located in the centre of town and inclusive of a host of professional activities, in the middle of the Victorian period Bloomsbury underwent a change in cultural representation whereby it was reconceived as being unsuitable for upper-middle-class families, but appropriate for bachelors. The process of "decline" was a vicious cycle. The failure of Bloomsbury to make the grade as a fashionable place for the upper classes to reside meant that there was a concurrent failure in demand for the over-optimistically large family houses that graced its streets and squares. These became increasingly broken up into multi-occupancy housing, the typical residences of bachelors, but the bête noire of the married bourgeoisie. In 1886, Bloomsbury was identified by the magazine *Leisure Hour* as an ideal place for the single man to get reasonably priced lodgings ("London Bachelors" 349). The presence of the university and the teaching hospitals ensured that there was a ready local supply of unmarried young men to take up this accommodation. As a result, as E. V. Lucas's anatomy of the area in 1906 suggests, by the end of the nineteenth century Bloomsbury had a decidedly unsettled, and implicitly, unmarried feel to it: "Bloomsbury . . . is the adopted home of the economical American visitor and the Hindoo student. . . . Lawyers and law students live here, to be near the Inns of Court; bookish men live here, to be near the Museum; and Jews live here, to be near the University College School, which is non-sectarian" (Lucas 221).

<11> While Bloomsbury's bachelorization had been consolidated by the *fin de siècle*, the demographic change was still "live" in the middle decades of the century. In 1863, an article in *Punch*, repeating with glee a notice in the *Times*, fixed a cultural moment for the evacuation of Bloomsbury's professional married couples. Ascribing the spatial anxiety to the female partner, it asserted the general disgruntlement of upper–middle-class wives at their husbands' decision to take a house in Bloomsbury, which, in the minds of many commentators, was no longer inhabitable for married lawyers with aspirations to social success:

> Now, capitalists, now is your time to buy houses. There is the most awful commotion in what used to be thought the Genteel District all round the British Museum. All the inhabitants are

> moving. Half a dozen earthquakes couldn't have done it. . . . On Wednesday last, the *Times* explained that the district in question: —
>
> "Is now the economical quarter for Trading Respectability, as it was formerly the splendid quarter of legal eminence and mercantile wealth."
>
> The row at the breakfast tables that morning, when these lines were incautiously read out, was something appalling. If the writer of that paragraph values his life, and does not wish to encounter the fate of Orpheus, let him keep outside the radius of a mile from MR. PANIZZI'S bust over the reading-room door. "Trading Respectability." Many a wretched husband got, that day, a stormy breakfast and a frigid dinner. Many a domestic tragedy was enacted, the principal part by an enraged matron who "never thought" to have been struck down as a respectable tradesman's wife. Many a street door was slammed. ("Panic in Bloomsbury" 156)

<12> Anyone aspiring to "legal eminence" living in unfashionable Bloomsbury, within the radius of the famous bust of British Museum librarian, Anthony Panizzi, but on the fringes of respectably upper-middle-class London, found themselves the butt of socio-spatial jokes. The row at the breakfast table imagined in *Punch* echoes a scenario that circulated too in novels from the period, which dramatize the problem of being married in Bloomsbury when the area was becoming less associated with marriage and more with bachelordom. Focusing on the vexed position of the Bloomsbury barrister's wife, and her quasi-bachelor of a husband, fiction from the 1850s and 1860s implicitly articulates a definition of the West Central locality that is thoroughly gendered. Metropolitan geography thus reveals itself to be intriguingly implicated in the construction of domestic and professional masculinity.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *What Will He Do With It?* and the Wife's Fault

<13> A number of novels from this period employ the barrister as a figure whose professional work and domestic life in Bloomsbury rub up against each other, a "local" story produced by particular geographical and historical determinants. In the remaining part of this article, I will explore two such novels, written by authors who knew each others' writing very well: Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *What Will He Do With It?* (1857-9) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Lady's Mile* (1866). While the barristers featured in these two novels are married, they carry the ghost of bachelordom with them across the threshold with their wives into the conjugal domestic arena. In my readings of Bulwer-Lytton and Braddon, I address this spectral complication to these fictional lawyers' gender identities, teasing out the complex cultural implications of their wives' dissatisfaction with married residency in bachelorized Bloomsbury.

<14> *What Will He Do With It?*, the last of its author's Caxton trilogy, represents normative married domesticity in Bloomsbury as insufferable, specifically due to the inadequacies of the wife. The central figure, Guy Darrell, is a lawyer and statesman who has long ago retreated from public life. Eighteen years previous to the beginning of the shown narrative, Darrell was wounded by the news that his planned second wife, Caroline Lyndsay, had married another. This blow compounds the negative opinion he has accumulated of women since his first wife proved

unfaithful. Retreating from the fripperies of town in favour of long stretches of solitude on his country estate of Fawley, Darrell rejects marriage and vows instead to be a bachelor for the rest of his life, a determination he rather unconvincingly breaks at the end of the novel when Caroline's husband dies, leaving her free to return penitential to his arms. As a contemporary reviewer for the *Universal Review* noticed, "leaving the fields of romance and idealism," the Caxton trilogy represents a break from Bulwer-Lytton's more recent exotic or historical romances ("What Will He Do With It?" 17). This essentially realist novel in particular is quite topical, being especially wide-ranging in its anatomization of mid-Victorian London. The plot ranges over modern London, dissecting it comprehensively, portraying the newly built suburbs north of Regent's Park, the old court-land of St. James, the slum-land of St. Giles that has only recently been "improved" by the construction of New Oxford Street, and a number of other class-specific locations.(6) As the narrator says, "London is a wondrous poem, but each page of it is written in a different language; no lexicon yet composed for any" (385). The unfashionable quarter of Bloomsbury, which the book describes at one point as the "last bounds of Atlas" (385), hosts no less than three addresses in the novel, all of which occupy different places within the social hierarchy. Bloomsbury is constructed, uniquely within the novel, as a place of social diversity and, indeed, mobility. While one of the Bloomsbury addresses, "Podden Place, Upper" (191), belongs to Arabella Crane, the lover of the novel's villain Jasper Losely, the other two are previous addresses where the hero of the piece, Darrell, himself resided as a young man. The novel reveals Darrell's past of conjugal difficulty and professional endeavor through geographical means, employing the device of a walk down the proverbial "memory lane" into Bloomsbury, in order to justify unprecedented retrospective access into an unhappy marriage that ended decades before the text's diegetic temporal frame. As we shall see, the spectre of marriage here haunts the bachelor, even as that of bachelordom had implicitly haunted his marriage, to the point of its destruction.

<15> At one point Darrell wanders from his current London home in the fashionable West End to Bloomsbury, and lingers in a reverie outside the houses he used to live in, musing on his climb through the ranks of the law to become the most distinguished barrister in the land, and then to enter Parliament. Here the narrative form becomes very unstable, the tenses shifting between past, present and future, slipping sometimes into a kind of stream of consciousness, and enacting a sense of the character's agitation even as it discloses its source. Darrell's construction of Bloomsbury is entirely mediated through his bitter memories of his first marriage there, the novel thereby associating the area both with his prowess as a lawyer and his domestic difficulties as a husband. Darrell's wife, according to his recollection at least, always conceived of her life in Bloomsbury as a kind of exile from that more fashionable part of town, St. James. Darrell's wife is a ghost in the text, one that haunts the widower's imagination, for the houses of the past that he haunts are themselves haunted by his memory of her. Returning to their humble first home stirs up his memory of his wife's negligence, which originated in her dissatisfaction with the locale:

> Down that street had he come, I trow, with a livelier, quicker step the day when, by the strange good-luck which had uniformly attended his worldly career of honours, he had been suddenly called upon to supply the place of an absent senior, and, in almost his earliest brief, the Courts of Westminster had recognised a master;—come, I trow, with a livelier step, knocked at that very door whereat he is halting now; entered the room where the young wife

> sat, and at sight of her querulous peevish face, and at sound of her unsympathetic languid voice, fled into his cupboard-like back parlour—and muttered "courage-courage" to endure the home he had entered longing for a voice which should invite and respond to a cry of joy. (385)

The sense of claustrophobia intimated by that "cupboard-like back parlour" to which Darrell retreats is accentuated by the excess of misogynistic adjectives heaped upon his wife's visible and audible presence: "querulous," "peevish," "unsympathetic," "languid." The narrator exploits this imaginative tension in order to reproduce in the reader the character's unease at his remembered injury, and to imply the righteousness of Darrell's evaluation of the wife's insufficiency. Threatening the lawyer's own sense of married masculinity, by calling into question his present adequacy as a husband in the conjugal domestic sphere, the disgruntlement of the wife degrades Darell's muscular "livel[y] . . . step" and causes him to call for "courage, courage." The wife's rejection of the first Bloomsbury home appears to cast aspersions upon the barrister's husbandly manliness, implying that he has not yet fully graduated from the material (and geographical) insufficiencies of bachelordom, an imputation that curbs his professional confidence with domestic anxiety.

<16> After they have moved to another, much grander place in a square nearby, still in Bloomsbury—perhaps Bedford, Russell, or Bloomsbury Square, all of which had notable, successful lawyers in them—their conjugal relations do not improve. Here, Darrell's memories conjure the Bloomsbury barrister's wife sitting alone "in that great barren drawing-room":

> Well, but the wife's face is not querulous now. Look again—anxious, fearful, secret, sly. Oh! that fine lady, a Vipont Crooke, is not contented to be wife to the wealthy, great Mr. Darrell. What wants she? that *he* should be spouse to the fashionable fine Mrs. Darrell? Pride in him! not a jot of it; such pride were unchristian. Were he proud of her, as a Christian husband ought to be of so elegant a wife, would he still be in Bloomsbury? (386)

Here Bulwer-Lytton's prose partially ventriloquizes the wife's voice, or rather Darrell's agitated recollection of it, mimicking what we are led to think are her bastardizing appropriations of puritanical religious discourse about "Christian" marital "pride." While Bulwer-Lytton's narrator leaves the reader little option but to accept Darrell's re-mediation of his dead wife's problematic religiosity, the reputation of Mrs. Darrell is skewered conclusively by the hypocrisy revealed when we learn of her final disgrace. The wife falls for some "Lothario" in the more fashionable circles of St. James (387), the locale she feels so far away from living in Bloomsbury. Pursuing a love affair, she is saved from absolute public ignominy only by the good fortune of falling into a fever and dying after catching a cold at one of the many balls she attends while her husband is studying briefs, "be[ing] parchment" (387), as the novel puts it.

<17> Geography is complicatedly implicated here in the work of gender. Though Bulwer-Lytton's novel is clearly intent on satirising the wife's fall from geographical fastidiousness to moral failure, the wife's behaviour and her complaint nonetheless articulate a clear sense that Bloomsbury might well be unviable as a location for a successful upper–middle-class home—a sense the author implicitly endorses. When Darrell remarries, after all, there is no question of a

return to bachelorized Bloomsbury for the lawyer and his new wife. Thus, this novel manages simultaneously to construct that part of London as suitable more for the unattached male professional than for the husband, and yet blame the wife for her unwillingness to put up with living there. As Peter W. Sinnema has suggested, the Caxton trilogy is suffused with worries about domestic masculinity, embodying what we might formulate as a tension between nostalgia for homosocial bachelordom and idealization of the normative, married hearth-and-home: "If Bulwer-Lytton's male heroes are homosocialized by being (to put it somewhat awkwardly) mentored into masculinity, the educational process itself presupposes that . . . the 'Battle of Life' is ultimately waged in defense of 'supreme domestic values'" (195). In my reading of it, the metropolitan location of the contested domestic scene to which Sinnema attends also plays a crucial role in Bulwer-Lytton's distinctively misogynistic exploration of masculinity and domesticity in *What Will He Do With It?*

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Lady's Mile* and the Wife's Complaint

<18> Bulwer-Lytton's literary reputation loomed large throughout the nineteenth century, and his ideas and generic innovations were disseminated throughout the contemporary cultural imaginary. One of the novelist's most unstinting admirers was Mary Elizabeth Braddon, a writer whose current vogue in critical circles stands in telling contrast to the neglect of her mentor. Bulwer-Lytton, indeed, is more likely to be encountered through Braddon's relationship with him than via his own fiction, which, barring the pioneering sci-fi novella *A Coming Race* (1870), is little read (Tomaiuolo 17). Braddon's letters to Bulwer-Lytton in the 1860s, many of which were sent from her Bloomsbury home at 26 Mecklenburgh Square, suggest that she knew his novels very well, and that they influenced her own writing greatly. Braddon's style is more fluent and less self-conscious than Bulwer-Lytton's, and this may be one of the main reasons why her work has undergone such a revival. Yet it is not difficult to perceive his influence in her attraction to melodrama, in her casual references to other quite exotic texts, and in her aesthetic emphasis on detailing the beauty of men as well as women. Also Bulwer-Lyttonian is her reading of London, which retains an element of court-land "silver-fork" hierarchies. Braddon, like Bulwer-Lytton, inscribed Bloomsbury into her fiction as a place characterized by its relationship to the social center of London, and her most sustained depiction of the area in *The Lady's Mile* is heavily influenced by *What Will He Do With It?*, a text she mentions as having particularly enjoyed in a letter to its author dated February 28th 1865:

> The third volume of "What will he do with it" lies open by my side, as I write, & I have been sitting reading it by the flare of three gas-burners until I am half blind. I cannot tell you how charmed I am, with this book, which is the first book of yours that I have read since I have been working very hard myself, and I fancy that much as I enjoyed your writings of old I have even a keener relish for them now. I suppose a cabinet-maker in Tottenham Court Road would have a sharper appreciation for a sideboard of Gillow's make than the most refined of purchasers. (Wolff 32-3)

In a nuanced analogy, she projects the literary mentor-mentee relationship as one of pliant apprenticeship, comparing herself to a cabinet-maker from a street on the other side of Bloomsbury from her address in Mecklenburgh Square. The local knowledge is apt: Tottenham

Court Road was throughout the nineteenth century the hub of London's furniture workshops and stores, while it was also a space peculiarly haunted by trainee novelists, as George Gissing's portrayal of the British Museum reading room, where Braddon often worked, records. But Braddon also appears to make a nod to the geography of Bulwer-Lytton's book she so praises, and in a novel she published the year following this letter, *The Lady's Mile*, Bulwer-Lytton's Bloomsbury is a clear intertextual trace. In this novel Braddon explores the relationship of the social stratification of metropolitan geography to domestic masculinity, constructing Bloomsbury, as Bulwer-Lytton had, as a part of London associated with the single man at the beginning of his legal career but inappropriate to upper-middle-class marriage. While Bulwer-Lytton had used the barrister's wife's geographical complaint in order simultaneously to reflect upon the bachelorization of legal Bloomsbury and to invest bachelordom with a misogynistic nostalgia, Braddon feminizes the issue, treating the geographically problematic conjugal home as a site of marital neglect on the husband's rather than the wife's part. While both perform a similar function in geographical terms, participating in the bachelorization of legal Bloomsbury in the mid-Victorian cultural field, Braddon's novel departs from Bulwer-Lytton's model by replacing his misogyny with a female-centered perspective, stressing the wife's everyday experience of her husband's work-filled domestic life. While in both texts, Bloomsbury is implicitly constructed as increasingly unsuitable for the married professional classes, in Braddon's *The Lady's Mile*, the wife's reputation remains intact at the end of novel, the marriage having been saved from disaster, and the couple evacuate the area for a more conjugally satisfactory residential part of London.

<19> While Braddon's 1863 novel, *Eleanor's Victory*, references Bulwer-Lytton's earlier legal Bloomsbury novel by naming one of its characters Lancelot Darrell, *The Lady's Mile* can be read as Braddon's most sustained engagement with *What Will He Do With It?* because it revisits the geographical dilemma experienced by Bulwer-Lytton's central character to inflect it with the woman's point of view. Braddon exploits the trope of the Bloomsbury barrister's marital status to the full, turning a magnifying glass on the conjugal difficulties that in Bulwer-Lytton's text form the back story of the narrative; in Braddon's novel, these difficulties make up the central predicament of her plot. In what is her first attempt at writing a "society" rather than a "sensation" novel, Braddon does not merely depict the wife's complaint, but instead takes time to trace its cause. The Bloomsbury barrister's wife emerges as a figure worthy of sympathy in lieu of Bulwer-Lytton's revulsion. It is perhaps not surprising, in light of her critical rewriting, that Braddon might be seen to try to put Bulwer-Lytton off reading it in an especially self-deprecating and flattering letter to him, dated October 1865:

> I am doing a light social life novel, "The Lady's Mile," but I doubt whether it will please you —though I shall bring to bear upon it all the force of yr kind advice, but the subject is flimsy —and can only be elevated by touches of domestic pathos which I fear may be beyond my reach. (Wolff 34)

When read in the hindsight that a crucial aspect of the novel's "flimsy" subject has been critically appropriated from her correspondent's earlier work, this letter's modesty seems less a meek admission and more a strategy of deflection or diversion, drawing attention away from her own subversive intertextual engagement with the misogyny of Bulwer-Lytton's *What Will He Do With*

It? While Braddon clearly did look up to the older male author, and borrowed much from his literary technique and imaginative capacity, in *The Lady's Mile* she would demarcate clearly her own fiction's gender ideology from his, not least in her attention to the very "domestic" scenes she claims to be "beyond [her] reach."

<20> In *The Lady's Mile*, Cecil is the young wife of successful barrister Laurence O'Boyneville, who, like Darrell, eventually "f[ights] his way into the House of Commons" (364). They live together "in the stately solitude of the northern side of Brunswick Square" (Braddon 163), the site Jane Austen had chosen over fifty years earlier in *Emma* for the address of her own apparently happily married, yet probably also workaholic, London lawyer, John Knightley. As Braddon describes it:

> Mr. O'Boyneville had no fashionable aversion to an unfashionable locality. He liked his big house in Brunswick Square, because it was big and stoutly built, like himself. . . . If he had known that there were fairer places than Bloomsbury within reach of the courts of law; if he had fancied that there was any spot in or near London which would have been more pleasant for Cecil, he would have been quick to move his goods and chattels. He loved his wife . . . but he knew about as much of a woman's tastes and prejudices as he knew of the habitudes and requirements of a white elephant (Braddon 163).

O'Boyneville, whose domestic imagination is narcissistic, appears to have mistaken his wife for another of his collected "goods and chattels" that can be added to his Bloomsbury bachelor house without much fuss and bother. Having constructed his home as an extension of his bachelor identity, so that in many ways it resembles the gendered spaces Snyder has delineated, the lawyer has since failed to adjust to the new demands Tosh has argued are fundamental to married domesticity.

<21> O'Boyneville is, moreover, signally immune to the fluctuating hierarchies that socially map and remap the city for its married residents, or the attendant spatial anxieties ("tastes and prejudices") that appear to affect its female inhabitants in particular. So immersed is the lawyer in his work that it does not even occur to him that his wife might prefer to live somewhere further away from the courts of law and closer to the social center of town. As a result, O'Boyneville's profession suffuses this domestic sphere, in much the same way as it does in the bachelor chambers of Braddon's other legal characters. Braddon dramatizes this aspect of the house through fleshing out a typical day's worth of the couple's relations with one another at home:

> After breakfast Mr. O'Boyneville kissed his wife, and hurried out of the house. At half-past six he came home, washed his hands in a little dressing-room at the back of his study, and sat down to dinner in the dress he had worn all day, with the dust of the law-courts in his hair, and all the dreariness of the law in his brain. Sometimes he talked a little to his wife during dinner, telling her some scrap of public news in which she did not feel the faintest interest, or reciting some legal witticism, which to her uninitiated mind appeared unspeakably stupid. After dinner he read his papers for a quarter of an hour, and then laid himself down upon a gigantic crimson-morocco-covered sofa, which looked like the relic of a departed era, a

> fossilised mammoth in the way of upholsterer's work, and slept peacefully until nine, when a modest and almost furtive double knock announced the advent of his clerk, who brought the evening's batch of letters and papers. (165)

The neglected Cecil goes about trying to "make herself happy in her husband's house" (169), feminizing what is in the passage above delineated as an overtly masculine and residually bachelor space. She "arranges her favourite books in a little old-fashioned bookcase in the back drawing-room" (169) and forms "piles of new books" that she has taken out "from a mighty emporium in the neighbourhood" (170)—Mudie's Circulating Library on New Oxford Street—countering the hard utility of her husband's legal literature that pervades the place. She tries, moreover, to decorate the "two gaunt rooms with birds and flowers" and "scatter[s] pretty inexpensive nicknacks on the ponderous rosewood tables" (169-70). The material she has to work with proves itself resistant to her feminizing designs, however, its colour-scheme being retardant to the project: "Whatever elegance can be imparted in two great dreary apartments, furnished by general order on an upholsterer with all that is most solid in carved rosewood, and all that is most darksome in green damask" (170).

<22> Her aunt, Mrs MacClaverhouse, tactlessly comments on the "dulness of Mr. O'Boyneville's mansion" on one visit, concretizing a critique that the narrator clearly endorses:

> . . . from the first moment I entered your dining-room its effect upon me has been equally depressing. There's a something. I don't know whether it's the dark-brown curtains or that dreadful mahogany cellaret—and, oh, why do they make cellarets like sarcophaguses?—under that gigantic sideboard; but there is a something in your house that preys upon my spirits . . . this end of town always did depress me; while if you take me up towards Islington, past all those cheap photographers and dusty little gardens, you take me to despair. (171)

Mrs MacClaverhouse's critique exposes a slippage between the strictly aesthetic and the geographical. While her objection to the house finds expression initially in finding fault with individual items of furniture, it soon becomes a more generalized geographical critique; the house in Bloomsbury is constructed as depressing because it is too far from fashionable London—sufficiently far, that is, on a scale from perfection to Islington. Like Darrell's dead wife in *What Will He Do With It?,* the terrible circumstance of having to live in Bloomsbury almost leads Cecil to elope with Hector Gordon, a man she knew before she met O'Boyneville the barrister. In Braddon's rewriting of Bulwer-Lytton's plot, however, she allows the wife to survive her adulterous intention, and after a long illness, Cecil lives to prove her renewed love to her husband. At the end of the novel, these Bloomsbury-related conjugal difficulties are resolved through the barrister removing "his household gods from Bloomsbury to sunnier regions within sight of the verdant vistas of Kensington Gardens" (364). One strong implication is that O'Boyneville's attraction to Bloomsbury and its bachelor spaces can be held in some part responsible for his wife's moral wavering.

<23> In *The Lady's Mile*, Braddon can thus be seen to appropriate a misogynistic plot about the nagging fallible woman to propose instead a kind of mutual reformation, whereby the man too is cured of what the novel calls at one point his "bachelor-habits" (198), chief of which is his

intention to live in Bloomsbury. Eve M. Lynch has seen in Braddon's own description of her novel as an exploration of dangers faced by women who live in "unknown regions," a metaphor for the impenetrability of English domesticity *per se* (Lynch 72). In my reading, Braddon appears to have another more *local* target in mind: Bloomsbury itself. Still, while the Bulwer-Lyttonian motif of the Bloomsbury barrister as bachelor-husband survives in her own fiction, the fictional wife's reaction to the unsatisfactory 'position' in which she finds herself is critically rewritten by the female author. In constructing Bloomsbury as a bachelorised locality, Braddon's rejects the misogyny Bulwer-Lytton's novel disseminated via his depiction of the dissatisfied wife's geographically produced complaint.

Geographical Means? Gendered Ends? Or Vice Versa?

<24> Though much of this article has been devoted to delineating the differences in gender representation between the two writers in their engagement with domestic masculinity in legal Bloomsbury, in my concluding paragraphs it will be necessary to return to and stress the basic similarity of these novels. The motif the novels *share* is by far the most significant phenomenon for historians of mid-Victorian gender and domestic ideology, transcending the contrasting manners in which it is presented. In contributing to an urban discourse that reinforces the city's work/home divide, the Bloomsbury narratives perform an ideological function that arguably supersedes the superficial one of constructing masculine and feminine gender identities in relation to one another, via misogynistic or otherwise fictional characterization. Braddon's version of the story sympathetically attends to the barrister's wife's needs rather than simply satirizing her complaint, and appears to engage critically with her intertextual source. But, for all their differences, Bulwer-Lytton and Braddon, in their depictions of the Bloomsbury barrister in this period, diverge little in their essential implicit socio-geographical propositions: contemporary Bloomsbury is no longer the sort of place that any upper-class lady would like to live in for long, and any married barrister worth his salt should be attempting, at least, to leave its squares behind. As such, in hindsight, these novelists look very much as though they are participating, along with Jeaffreson and *Punch*, in one complex contemporary cultural task, connecting the production of space to the ideological work of gender and class. Through their representation of the metropolitan geography of domestic masculinities, these textual productions serve to clarify where certain classes and professions should live, to enforce the work/home split, and to try to iron out the socio-spatial incongruities of London that posed challenges to its comprehensible stratification.

<25> In thinking through the important distinctions between these two mid-Victorian texts, in terms of the treatment of the lawyer's wife's experience of a kind of metropolitan domesticity more associated with a world of bachelordom, we are led to recognize a more profound consonance that links them together. While the misogyny of Bulwer-Lytton's spectral characterization of the Bloomsbury-allergic wife, presented solely through the prejudiced memories of her husband, contrasts on one level with Braddon's overtly affectionate and compassionate account of the wife's behavior, the two authors are more fundamentally cultural co-workers. The cultural representation of the domestic arrangements of the quasi-bachelor husbands, Darrell and O'Boyneville, represents one trope in a much larger discourse, which attended to the continual production and re-production of the city in response to the ideological

imperatives of the age. The story of Bloomsbury's bachelorization, here reflected by the evacuation of the area's married couples, is but a small symptom of a much broader series of changes within the urban fabric and demographic of the metropolis whose relationship to issues of class and gender has as yet received insufficient critical attention.

Endnotes

(1)To learn more about the historical geography of Bloomsbury in the nineteenth century, explore the Bloomsbury Project website, which is the result of a four-year, Leverhulme-funded interdisciplinary investigation into the area's cultural and institutional history: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/. The seeds of this essay were sown in a paper I gave at a Bloomsbury Project conference in 2009.(^)

(2)Danahay writes: "Men who combine daily domestic tasks such as balancing the family accounts and managing servants were implicitly eroding the boundary between masculine work and domesticity. Writing or painting were 'work' while other activities were not according to conventional ideology because they were domestic and associated with women. Yet all men recognized that at some level all these activities could be thought of as 'work' and that the boundaries between work and domestic labor were for them blurred and unstable" (15).(^)

(3)Snyder's work traces a fascination with bachelor homes in popular culture that emerges in the middle of the century and accumulates towards the fin-de-siècle: "[Many popular texts] dwell on the living arrangements of bachelors, combin[ing] a 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'" (34).(^)

(4)Snyder points out that "in English cities, 'chambers' were the type of housing most often associated with bachelor. . . . 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'; and an 1876 letter to the editor of *The Builder*. . . . 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'" (36).(^)

(5)In reality, the same man frequently could occupy both roles, and managed to do so *through* the geographical separation of work and home: "For the wealthy husband who still valued his old friends, another option was to keep up a bachelor apartment in addition to the marital home. This was not necessarily concealed from the rest of the family, but the wife was emphatically excluded, though sons were sometimes allowed to visit. In the 1860s and 1870s the City merchant and bibliophile Henry Ashbee kept his formidable collection of erotica at his chambers in Gray's Inn Square, less than a mile from his main residence in Bloomsbury" (Tosh 127). In

this way, one can see that the gendered clarification of the city might have actually contributed to the construction of a distinct heterotopian site for bachelordom to flourish, in Foucault's terminology (Foucault 24-7)(^)

(6)See my "Erasure and Preservation: Bulwer-Lytton's *What Will He Do With It?* and the Politics of Improvement," http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/events/conference2008/ingleby.pdf.(^)

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