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Special Issue:
Age and Gender: Aging in the Nineteenth Century

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**Masculinities in Distress: Aging and Gender Trouble
in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Caxtons***

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<1>When the Victorian writer Edward Bulwer-Lytton published the first novel of his popular domestic trilogy in 1849 under the title of *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*, he was well into his forties and had to bear a series of tragic events that would exert an important influence on the remaining days of his life. Among these events were the tempestuous aftermath of his marriage to Rosina Wheeler, the demise of his beloved mother Elizabeth Barbara, and most unexpectedly, the premature death of his young daughter Emily. Despite these appalling incidents which befell the author at this stage, *The Caxtons* would unpredictably come to be considered one of Bulwer-Lytton's most optimistic novels, as if he was attempting to retreat into fiction in order to create the blissful picture of domestic life that he had bitterly been denied. In fact, upon envisioning *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton stated in the preface to the novel that he intended to devote himself to "the completion of a simple family picture" (3), choosing to portray amiable characters and ordinary life, in addition to extolling "common household affections [and] the sympathies of the human heart" (3). The narrative framework of *The Caxtons* clearly underlines the Victorian ideology of hallowed domesticity, and yet, as Peter Sinnema claims, at the core of Bulwer-Lytton's domestic novel still lies "the promise of a resolution to various anxieties" (184), in particular related to personal issues relevant to the author's life, but also to emerging conceptualizations of masculinities and femininities in Victorian society. Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Caxtons* underscores the process of aging of its author as a result of his experience in the domestic context as a husband and as a father, aiming to accomplish a twofold purpose, as his novel was envisioned both as a way to escape from the bleak picture that his family presented at the time, as well as a cathartic literary exercise that unveiled Bulwer-Lytton's worries about family life. Having been recently deprived of his roles as a family man – as a father, a son, and a husband – he began to face a period of gradual weakening and increasing emotional disempowerment, which came hand in hand with the process of aging and the need for readjustment to new emerging masculinities.

<2>The narrative of *The Caxtons* unfolds the everyday life of a married couple, Augustine and Kitty Caxton, following the birth of their only son, Pisistratus, and even if it is the young

Pisistratus who narrates the story, Augustine Caxton, in his role as an aging father figure, presents important points in common with the author of the novel at this later stage of his life. As a keen scholar, Augustine Caxton devotes his entire existence to study, and also remains, for the most part, detached from worldly affairs and household matters. As a family man, he believes he rules over his home, and yet, he remains deeply committed to his wife, Kitty, who, despite her docile appearance, exerts a dominant influence on his decisions. Given his occupation as a scholar, Augustine Caxton faces his aging process as the stage in which he will accomplish his ultimate goal, which involves publishing the philosophical treatise that has taken him a lifetime to complete. In contrast with Augustine Caxton's general unconcern about old age owing to his sole commitment to intellectual endeavors, some of his contemporaries, more concerned with worldly matters, display an utter dread for the aging process and its expected effects. As a case in point, after a long span of time, Augustine Caxton meets his old friend, Sir Sedley Beadesert, who achieved fame in youth for his good looks and his inherent talent at socializing, but who, at this stage, reveals his fears about old age:

I do dread to be old. All the joys of my life have been the joys of youth. I have had so exquisite a pleasure in the mere sense of living, that old age, as it comes near, terrifies me by its dull eyes and grey hairs. I have lived the life of a butterfly. Summer is over, and I see my flowers withering; and my wings are chilled by the first airs of winter. (Bulwer-Lytton, *The Caxtons* 132)

Although, apparently, in his role as a writer, Bulwer-Lytton might have felt more closely associated with his scholarly character, Augustine Caxton, Sir Sedley Beadesert seems to respond faithfully to an aged version of the young protagonist of his early popular novel *Pelham* (1828). In fact, through the inclusion of an aging dandy figure in his later novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton was recollecting his own dandified youth and envisioning it at a later stage, to the extent that Sir Sedley Beadesert's words emphasizing the decline of physical vigor and youthful looks in old age ultimately unveil Bulwer-Lytton's latent anxieties about his own process of aging. The presence of characters typifying the figure of the dandy in *Pelham* and *The Caxtons* also gives rise to displays of gender trouble in both novels, to the extent that the protagonist of Bulwer-Lytton's novel of youth, *Pelham*, is subtly haunted by the specter of effeminacy, while the haunting threat of emasculation gradually pervades *The Caxtons* through the aging character of Augustine Caxton, in contrast with other characters in the novel who exemplify rougher kinds of masculinity. According to Christopher Lane, drawing on Ellen Moers' seminal study on dandyism, after the publication of Bulwer-Lytton's early novel, the dandified character of Henry Pelham was subtly associated with effeminacy (49), and as an author, Bulwer-Lytton had to bear harsh criticism for having endowed his dandy figure, Pelham, with too many effeminate traits. Correspondingly, in subsequent editions of this silver-fork novel, Bulwer-Lytton felt compelled to exorcise these veiled markers of effeminacy, transforming the aesthetics of dandyism in the novel into rather moralistic displays with an eminently edifying purpose. Nonetheless, as Lane further asserts, despite Bulwer-Lytton's efforts to minimize the effeminate features characterizing his young hero, these excisions seemed insufficiently effective to cause them to be totally eradicated from the text (53). Hence, if in his novel *Pelham*, Bulwer-Lytton's attempts to adjust the ways of his hero in order to defy the haunting menace of effeminacy seemed unsuccessful, *The Caxtons* also reveals Bulwer-Lytton's will to conceal the specter of symbolic emasculation as a result of a personal crisis upon the advent of old age, although his efforts to

repress this menace also involved the inevitable invocation of this discourse, which, as will be shown, remains latent throughout the novel.

<3>In this sense, by means of the presence of aging aristocrats, such as Sedley Beaudesert, and aging scholars, such as Augustine Caxton, Bulwer-Lytton aimed to pay tribute to a sort of masculinity – mostly represented by the figures of the dandy and the sage – which he perceived was in decline at the time, and began to be increasingly associated with a symbolic threat of emasculation that appears to come hand in hand with old age in the novel. Emerging discourses at the time such as the precepts of muscular Christianity, the ethics of self-help, the values eulogized in imperialism, and the increasing attention attached to the so-called ‘woman question’ exerted a significant influence in giving shape to the association of a favored sort of masculinity with youth. This was reflected in popular novels published at the time, as is the case of Bulwer-Lytton’s much renowned domestic novel *The Caxtons*, which tackles the difference between a former sort of masculinity that is being left behind and a new emerging type of manliness mostly associated with youth. This article aims to show how tenets related to these discourses, as identified in Bulwer-Lytton’s domestic novel *The Caxtons*, helped give shape to the increasing interaction between old age and a symbolic process of emasculation. Nonetheless, from a biographical perspective, this article also intends to show how Bulwer-Lytton managed to reflect in his fiction his anxieties about growing old as a man, but also to portray this stage in an optimistic way, especially in response to the bleak picture his family life presented at this later stage of creativity. In this respect, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton also envisioned *The Caxtons* as a pedagogical novel aimed to advise his son Robert, who had just turned eighteen, about the right way of aging and to pay homage to his young daughter Emily, who had passed away recently.

Aging and the advent of new masculinities

<4>According to Kay Heath, contemporary conceptualizations of masculinity adopted new meanings which had significant repercussions for the understanding of aging (25). In former times, masculinity was mostly understood in terms of gentlemanliness, and was correspondingly connected with values such as rank, property, manners, and social conduct. Conversely, subsequent ideals of masculinity rather became linked to personal qualities like, to use John Tosh’s words, “physical vigour, courage, and independence” (94), which were traditionally associated with youth. In his novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton shows some nostalgia towards traditional perceptions of masculinity, while he also underscores some anxiety posed by emerging conceptualizations of manhood that were increasingly associated with roughness and strength. The later, gradually rendered former ideals of masculinity a matter of the past. As Al-Yasin argues, for the most part Bulwer-Lytton’s interests lay in the figure of the country gentleman – with whom the author felt identified – while, at a later stage of his life, he assumed that Great Britain was necessarily a country with an imperial destiny (174), and he wished his son would fulfil the role of the man of the colonies. In the novel, Augustine Caxton represents a former embodiment of masculinity, which, in the light of the new assumptions about manliness, is gradually left behind. Conversely, in contrast with Augustine Caxton, who, in clear parallelism with Bulwer-Lytton, is eminently a man of letters, his brother, Uncle Roland, is a soldier, who describes himself as a man of action, and shows that his doctrines about masculinity are much in tune with those precepts that allied manliness with rough physicality, to the extent of stating that

“man is a rude, coarse, sensual animal” (Bulwer-Lytton, *The Caxtons* 67). In his process of coming of age, Pisistratus Caxton becomes acquainted with these opposing discourses of masculinity, which are reflected in the outstanding differences separating his father, Augustine, from his uncle, Roland, who appear to exemplify opposite ends in the spectrum of manliness which Pisistratus portrays as follows:

All in my uncle was stern, rough, and angular; all in my father was sweet, polished, and rounded into a natural grace. ... Their persons corresponded with their natures. My uncle’s high aquiline features, bronzed hue, rapid fire of eye, and upper lip that always quivered, were a notable contrast to my father’s delicate profile, quiet, abstracted gaze, and the steady sweetness that rested on his musing smile. (Bulwer-Lytton, *The Caxtons* 71)

The description above on behalf of Pisistratus brings to the fore two contrasting embodiments of masculinity. Uncle Roland’s strong physique and instinctive nature exemplifies as sort of masculinity that places emphasis on physical toughness and imperialistic ideals. Alternatively, Augustine Caxton is characterized through a more refined and delicate appearance that represents a discourse of masculinity, mostly personified through the figure of the country gentleman, which was being displaced at the time, rendering Augustine – both literally and figuratively – gradually aged, undergoing a symbolic process of emasculation. As a young man, Pisistratus is thus exposed to these two alternative embodiments of masculinity, which, in Kay Heath’s view, exemplified former and new assumptions of manliness, as values such as birth and polished manners were gradually replaced by possessing an energetic temperament and an acute potency which was considered more in tune with the spirit of the new age (27).

The precepts of muscular Christianity and their influence on the aging male

<5>A new focus placed on physical vigor – mostly, as a result of the ideas lying behind the contemporary discourse known as muscular Christianity – contributed to determining physical strength as an important attribute underlying masculinity, thus increasingly connecting manliness with youth and further disassociating masculinity from aging. As Donald Hall argues, the eminently social movement of muscular Christianity, which became significantly popular in Victorian times, highlighted the need for energetic Christian evangelism in conjunction with an ideal of vigorous masculinity, which defended male bodily strength and an active pursuit of Christian values. Through his domestic novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton aimed to display pedagogically what, in his view, was the rightful way to come of age for his own son Robert by means of precepts that are subtly related to those of the religious movement of muscular Christianity, and it was through the depiction of his character Pisistratus Caxton that Bulwer-Lytton mapped out the specific type of masculinity that he wished his son would emulate. Bulwer-Lytton’s close supervision of his son through a series of letters – as Robert was mostly educated in Germany, and he was then appointed secretary to his uncle in the United States of America – responded to his need to regain power and authority as a father at a moment of acute personal crisis. It was also aimed, as Leslie Mitchell notices, to correct the profligate ways that began to characterize his son’s conduct as he came of age (78). Bulwer-Lytton identified his son’s misbehavior as the vicious quality marking the loss of innocence that comes along with aging. In fact, in a letter to his friend John Forster, Bulwer-Lytton claimed that his son’s

naughtiness was not the result of “the excess of youth, but [rather, of] the morbid miserable vileness of a debauched old age” (quoted in Mitchell 78), even going as far as to argue that Robert’s dissolute ways should be attributed to the Irish origins and liberal upbringing of his mother, Rosina. In his novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton unveils his anxieties about a sort of tough and rough masculinity that he could identify in his son owing to a reprehensible upbringing on behalf of his mother and that could only lead to degeneracy. It can be argued that Robert’s reprobate conduct at the time finds its literary counterpart in the character of Francis Vivian, both in terms of the influence of his parental origins as well as his extravagant ways. In *The Caxtons*, Francis Vivian is the son of Uncle Roland and his wife Ramouna – daughter of a wealthy gypsy man and a Spanish woman – whom Roland met in youth while he was fighting in a battle in Spain as a soldier. When Uncle Roland gains insight into his son’s mischievous character as he comes of age, he takes for granted that it is Ramouna’s blood which is coming out in his son Francis, thus blaming his wife’s liberal temperament for his son’s dissipated spirit. Ramouna’s story in *The Caxtons* inevitably brings to mind that of Bulwer-Lytton’s wife, Rosina, not only because of the striking similarities between their names – Ramouna and Rosina – but also in terms of the parallels their lives present, and the pernicious influence that Bulwer-Lytton believed that Rosina had exerted upon their son Robert.

<6>In his pedagogical purpose to warn his son about the right way to come of age, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned the character of Francis Vivian as the embodiment of an unrestrained sort of masculinity. As a case in point, Francis is symbolically associated with a kind of unfettered sexuality, which comes to the fore most noticeably when he is depicted in analogy with a threatening wild dog:

He has an expression of countenance very much like that of Lord Hertford’s pet blood-hound. . . . Very sleek, handsome dog, the blood-hound is certainly well-mannered, and I dare say exceedingly tame, but you have but to look at the corner of the eye, to know that it is only the habit of the drawing-room that suppresses the creature’s constitutional tendency to seize you by the throat, instead of giving you a paw. (Bulwer-Lytton, *The Caxtons* 359)

The suspicion of an untamed masculinity inferred from Francis Vivian’s portrayal above is finally confirmed as the plot of the novel unfolds. In fact, on his way to make a name for himself in society, Francis Vivian commits himself to seducing Fanny Trevanion, and in order to accomplish his purpose, he plans to put Fanny’s virtue in jeopardy so that she will feel ultimately obliged to join him in marriage. Following Francis’ instructions, Fanny is made to believe that her father, Lord Trevanion, is ill, and betrayed by her servants, she is handed to Francis and is left entirely to his mercy. As soon as Pisistratus gains insight into the gravity of the situation, he comes to Fanny’s rescue in time to prevent Francis from achieving his wicked aim, and thus, defend Fanny from losing her virtue. Uncle Roland’s resentment as a father following this reprehensible episode and Francis’ corresponding embarrassment as a son are not entirely unlike those of Bulwer-Lytton and his son Robert as revealed in the letters they exchanged after some of his frequent rows, particularly given Robert’s misbehaviour and dissolute habits in his youth. In his moralistic determination to educate his son, through the character of Francis Vivian, Bulwer-Lytton aimed to illustrate the type of masculinity he wished his son would disregard,

while he envisioned Pisistratus Caxton as the representative of the sort of masculine values that he particularly extolled.

Aging through imperialism and the ethics of self-help

<7>Of special significance for the discourse underlying Bulwer-Lytton's *The Caxtons* and represented by young Pisistratus, the connection between masculinity and physical strength often replicated contemporary ideas about colonialism and the belief that a strong empire was the reflection, to use Kay Heath's words, of a "nation's virility" (30). Accordingly, the imperialistic discourse came to be strongly associated with a sort of masculinity related to domination and strength, which gradually reinforced a connection between manly values and youth, as youngsters were encouraged to settle in colonized countries in search of success to emerge as self-made men. As happens in earlier novels as is the case with *Paul Clifford* (1830), in which its protagonist makes a name of his own upon leaving England and becoming a self-made man in the United States of America, *The Caxtons* also defends a type of masculinity that was extolled within the discourse of imperialism. As Bulwer-Lytton claims in the preface to *The Caxtons*,

Pisistratus ... becomes the specimen or type of a class the numbers of which are daily increasing in the inevitable progress of modern civilisation ... he is the representative of the exuberant energies of youth, turning, as with the instinct of nature for space and development, from the Old World to the New. (4)

As a symbolic way to reform himself and leave behind his dissolute ways, Francis Vivian migrates to Australia, where he becomes a successful man of the colonies, in the company of his cousin Pisistratus, who turns into a prosperous self-made man in a foreign country. In this sense, according to Peter Sinnema, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Caxtons* "recalls young men to colonial duty" (197), and unveils its author's partiality towards imperialistic discourse, as finally shown by his parliamentary position as Secretary of State for the Colonies during Lord Derby's government.

<8>On his way to become a man of the colonies and join the sort of manhood mostly promoted through the colonial discourse, Pisistratus is exposed to different sorts of masculinities through a process that Peter Sinnema names "homosocial mentoring" (194), whereby Pisistratus acquires his male identity by means of associating with different male mentors personifying different types of masculinities. Those male characters acting as counsellors to Pisistratus are, for the most part, his aging male relatives: the three Caxton brothers, his father Augustine, and his uncles Roland and Jack. As representatives of different male types, Augustine Caxton devotes all his time to the pursuit of knowledge and his foremost interest lies in the world of thought, Uncle Roland praises the values of courage and honor as a military man, whereas Uncle Jack aspires to become wealthy through a stroke of luck and hopes to reap the profits of any business that may come to hand. Pisistratus is thus presented with these alternative types of masculinities, like Bulwer-Lytton's son, Robert, who also grew up in the shadow of his aging male relatives, mostly his father and his uncles.

<9>The Caxton brothers appear to embody the different masculinities that Bulwer-Lytton and his brothers apparently adopted. Since childhood, Bulwer-Lytton showed a precious interest in literature and metaphysics, which would lead him to become a highly-acclaimed man of letters,

in analogy with Augustine Caxton in the novel, as he presents a lifetime vocation to study and complete his philosophical work. Alternatively, Bulwer-Lytton's elder brother Henry began a prosperous career as a diplomat, in clear resemblance to his fictionalized counterpart in *The Caxtons*, Uncle Roland, who also travels around the world on behalf of his country. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton's eldest brother, William, and his concern about money find their reflection in the character of Jack Caxton, who is portrayed as a zealous businessman eager to make profit. Also, like Pisistratus in the novel, who rejects his father's intellectual vocation in order to become a man of the colonies and begin a new life in Australia, Bulwer-Lytton's son Robert finally had to relinquish his ambition to pursue a literary career – as his father always viewed his literary vocation with displeasure – and instead, he began a successful career as a diplomat, achieving distinction as an ambassador, and ultimately becoming Viceroy of India.

<10>Together with the notion of the 'self-made man,' another important change in the perception of masculinities that particularly affected aging involved new emerging implications attached to the concept of work. As is well-known, Thomas Carlyle was responsible for the quintessentially Victorian coinage of the notion of 'self-help,' which first appeared in *Sartor Resartus* (1831), and was, later on, reworked in Samuel Smiles' homonymous volume *Self-Help* (1859). In the light of the principles of the ethics of self-help, masculinity was partly defined by the capacity to work, whereas idleness and the sense of weakening strength that were perceived to come along with age were increasingly regarded as threats to manliness. Owing to the importance that was increasingly attached to the ethics of self-help, masculinities were also defined by the profession that man possessed, to the extent that some vocations and occupations were perceived as more or less masculine. Through the rise of the figure of the entrepreneur at the time, manliness was also defined in economic terms, to the extent that, as Anthony Rotundo claims in his study of masculinities in America, it was alleged that "if a man was without business, he was less than a man" (168). As is shown in *The Caxtons* and as Bulwer-Lytton admits in the preface to the novel, the prototype of the new man that was being encouraged at the time in Victorian England and that set an example for young men was the figure of the man of the colonies – exemplified by Pisistratus in the novel – as individuals could turn into self-made men, make a name for themselves, and spread the values of the British Empire. Conversely, in *The Caxtons*, a career that was associated with the arts was generally considered eminently feminine according to emerging discourses of masculinity, as men pursuing a literary career often found themselves trapped in a domestic scenario and failed to match the traditional role they had been assigned as bread-winners. According to Michael Kimmel, definitions of nineteenth-century manhood remained in a state of tension coincident with separate spheres, and in this sense, literary men were often caught between the gentility of a domestic setting and market expectations that emphasized profit and money-making. As representative of this type of masculinity, Augustine Caxton devotes his time to write a philosophical treatise, and even if he turns into a successful scholar, in his old age he gradually undergoes a symbolic process of disempowerment as a man. By contrast, his wife Kitty plays a more dominant role in their marriage, while his young son Pisistratus arises as representative of the sort of energetic masculinity coming hand in hand with the new times.

Differing models of womanliness and symbolic emasculation for the aging male

<11>The discourses of sexuality prevailing at the time also had an important effect on the increasing belief that associated masculinity with youth and disentangled manliness from old age. As Kay Heath claims, it was thus assumed that virility was increasingly threatened by the negative effects of industrialized living, which were thought to cause early aging, as Max Nordau argues in his popular text *Degeneration* (1892), thus contributing to spreading fear about the weakening of male sexual potency in old age (30). Likewise, as Heath further explains, according to prevailing medical discourses, the onset of impotence and male sexual decline was usually perceived as beginning at the age of fifty, as William Acton asserts in his well-known volume *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life* (published from 1857 to 1875), thus unleashing the symbolic challenge of emasculation and of the ‘feminization’ of aging men (33). Drawing on the Victorian discourses of sexuality and their effect on the perception of male aging, critics like Linda Hamilton and Teresa Mangum claim that, in the light of these precepts, it was alleged that “to be a man in decline was to become like a woman” (Hamilton 75) and that aging manliness implied “a lapse into a state akin to helpless femininity” (Mangum 99). It can be argued, though, that the close association of male aging with emasculation in prevailing discourses of sexuality was clearly influenced by gender ideology and women’s increasing gains at the time, to the extent that, according to Kay Heath, masculinities were approached “in opposition to a powerful sense of the feminine other” (31), which contributed further to establishing a connection between male aging and emasculation.

<12>Displays of masculinities in distress in the novel are also significantly influenced by portrayals of femininities that can be considered, even if subtly, highly subversive by the standards of traditional femininity. Being a domestic and an eminently pedagogical novel, *The Caxtons* presents different models of womanhood, and among them, that for which Bulwer-Lytton certainly showed a preference and which he had tried to inculcate into his young daughter Emily. In order to promote a particular type of masculinity – exemplified through the character of Pisistratus as a model that his son Robert should follow – Bulwer-Lytton also deemed necessary to encourage a particular kind of femininity as a counterpart. Given his wife Rosina’s continuous defamation against him after their failed marriage, Bulwer-Lytton considered it important to differentiate a model of femininity pertaining to female socialites – that his wife Rosina mostly exemplified – from that type of femininity belonging to women whom he truly perceived to be morally upright ladies – mostly represented by his mother, Elizabeth Barbara, and his daughter, Emily.

<13>In *The Caxtons*, the first woman that Pisistratus ever falls in love with is Fanny Trevanion, with whom he becomes acquainted while he is working as a secretary for her father, Lord Trevanion. As Augustine Caxton reveals, Fanny is the daughter of Ellinor Trevanion, the first woman that Augustine ever courted, even though he finally married his wife, Kitty. Both Ellinor and Fanny illustrate a certain type of womanhood that Bulwer-Lytton himself felt attracted to in his youth, but that he gradually learned to dismiss. As a young, wealthy heiress of outstanding beauty, Fanny Trevanion’s character is endowed with a mixture of innocence and insolence that often puzzles Pisistratus. Fanny’s coquettish and playful manners as a socialite reveal an acute capacity to deceive and the artful ability to have her own way. It is as follows that Pisistratus describes what he perceives as Fanny’s whimsical nature:

Fanny, indeed, perplexed me horribly. Sometimes I fancied she liked me; but the fancy scarce thrilled me with delight before it vanished in the frost of a careless look, or the cold beam of a sarcastic laugh. Spoiled darling of the world as she was, she seemed so innocent in her exuberant happiness, that one forgot all her faults in that atmosphere of joy which she diffused around her. (Bulwer-Lytton, *The Caxtons* 158)

In spite of Pisistratus' attraction towards the young coquette, Fanny Trevanion finally marries Lord Castleton, just as, in former times, her mother, Ellinor, had also married Albert Trevanion instead of her other suitor, Augustine Caxton, Pisistratus' father. Hence, neither Augustine nor Pisistratus marry coquettish women, such as Ellinor and Fanny Trevanion, but instead, both father and son espouse women who exemplify a very different kind of womanhood. Kitty and Blanche, the respective wives of Augustine and Pisistratus, are depicted as perfect companions for their husbands, and their characters clearly differ from those of female socialites. Kitty becomes the epitome of the homely wife, and as her name indicates rather sarcastically, it is assumed that she stands as the symbolic reification of a 'little kitten' living contentedly in quiet domesticity. Also, as the wife of a scholar, Kitty's discreet but practical-minded personality complements that of her husband, who spends most of his time committed to thought and study. In clear resemblance to Kitty, Blanche, Pisistratus' prospective wife, also shares the same qualities pertaining to a domestic type of femininity. Being the daughter of Uncle Roland, Blanche is also Pisistratus' young cousin, and by nature, the opposite in terms of character of her dissipated brother, Francis Vivian. As her name also indicates, Blanche becomes the embodiment of purity and truthfulness, as shown through the letters that Pisistratus receives while he is in Australia, whereby he learns of her cousin's "forethought and tender activity, of her warm heart and sweet temper [as well as of her] charitable visits to the village, instructing the young and tending the old" (Bulwer-Lytton, *The Caxtons* 467). Blanche thus illustrates the values of tenderness, sweetness, dutifulness, and devotion to others, which characterize the traditional female figure of 'the angel of the house.' The compliant and even submissive ways that Blanche displays are strongly remindful of those of Bulwer-Lytton's daughter Emily, and in this sense, his pedagogical novel about domestic life can also be regarded as the personal homage of a father to his late daughter.

<14>Nonetheless, Bulwer-Lytton's preference for this type of traditional womanhood as displayed in the novel also comes hand in hand with the haunting threat of symbolic emasculation that the author was facing upon the advent of his old age, especially through his wife Rosina's continuous challenging demeanor. In fact, even if in *The Caxtons* there is a traditional sort of womanhood that is mostly extolled by the presence of female characters such as Kitty and Blanche, there is also a more subtle discourse that unveils a subversive type of femininity, which remains latent in a symbolic way. In the novel, there are different instances in which young women are seen in the company of their pet dogs as a sign of femininity and social position. Pet dogs also play an important role in promoting social interactions that lead to the establishment of sentimental relationships. In fact, when Augustine Caxton refers to his first encounter with Ellinor Trevanion, he recollects that, the first time he ever saw her, she was in the company of her pet dog, and it was owing to the fact that her little dog started running towards him, that Ellinor's attention was ultimately drawn to Augustine. In *The Caxtons*, when female characters make their appearance in the company of pet dogs, they usually unveil a sort of femininity pertaining to sociable women and belonging to the highly-born. If there is a character

that best exemplifies the transformation into this sort of femininity, when she appears in the company of her dog Juba, it is precisely that of Blanche. In order to prevent his cousin Blanche from indulging too much in thought, Pistratus decides to give her a dog as a present, and it is in the company of her pet dog that Blanche comes of age, grows into gender, and acquires her feminine ways. Nonetheless, Pistratus' action meets an unexpected end, as he gradually grows jealous of the affection that Blanche increasingly places in her pet dog. When he returns from Australia, Pistratus realizes that Blanche has left behind her moody ways, and instead, she has acquired a sort of coquettish womanhood. Even though Pistratus feels attracted towards her, he cannot help finding something reprehensible in his cousin, as he notices that Blanche has acquired the womanly ways of a socialite, and she is permanently accompanied by her pet dog Juba as a sign of social splendor. In a highly symbolic scene, Pistratus is eager to see Blanche after his long absence, but her dog Juba persistently gets in the way, preventing him from setting eyes on the woman that will eventually become his wife. These are Pistratus' thoughts before he approaches Blanche after many years in her absence:

Come near – nearer – my cousin Blanche; let me have a fair look at thee. Plague take the dog! ... Shall I not yet see the face! It is buried in Juba's black curls. Kisses too! Wicked Blanche! To waste on a dumb animal what, I heartily hope, many a good Christian would be exceedingly glad of! (Bulwer-Lytton, *The Caxtons* 468)

While Pistratus gives evidence of his romantic feelings towards his cousin, he also confirms his disapproval of Blanche's capricious ways and exaggerated displays of affection to her pet dog. Nonetheless, when she is the company of her cousin, Blanche regains her former meek and docile manners, marries Pistratus, and soon thereafter, she becomes the mother of their first child. Symbolically, Blanche leaves behind her manners as a socialite and she exchanges the 'motherly' ways she displayed towards Juba for a truly motherly affection towards family life.

<15>The pervasive presence of female characters such as Ellinor Trevanion and Blanche Caxton in the company of their pets ultimately underscores a sort of latent defiant femininity, in spite of its compliant appearance, which Bulwer-Lytton found particularly contemptible and threatening, mostly because he often associated it with his domestic life with his wife. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton's connection of Rosina and her pet dogs with an idealized vision of domestic life had begun to take shape before they got married. Through their correspondence during their courtship, Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina made a recurrent use of distinctive endearing terms, and Bulwer-Lytton constantly addressed Rosina affectionately through nicknames related to pets, as shown in a letter, dated 26th February 1829, which opens with the appellation of "my own dearest, darling love and dearest poodle" (quoted in Devey 374-5). However, ironically, the early loving memories that Bulwer-Lytton associated with these appellatives would turn into reminders of his misery, when, in the course of his marriage, Bulwer-Lytton noticed that his wife would remain detached from him and preferred the sole company of her pet dogs, to the extent that, as biographer Leslie Mitchell claims, Rosina would often show her affection more openly to her dogs than to her own children (67). Given the sort of femininity that Bulwer-Lytton would associate with his wife, the recurrent portrayal of this sort of womanliness pervades his novel *The Caxtons* through symbolic depictions of young and coquettish female socialites in the company of their pets.

<16>In the context of decadence, as Bram Dijkstra claims, in literature as well as in the visual arts, fantasies regarding women's intrinsic connection with animals increased in frequency and symbolically suggested women's animal nature (288). Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche made reference to the Dionysian quality of the feminine in *The Birth of Tragedy*, since, owing to the scientific context of Darwinism, it was held that, in times of decadence, women might return to their bestial nature, as it was believed that it was women who were especially driven by animal instincts. Likewise, as Dijkstra further argues, cultural portrayals of women in the company of their pets underscored a prevailing metaphorical fear amongst men of their feminine bestial nature and even of finding jaws suggesting the *vagina dentata* concealed within their brides (294). In this sense, the portrayals of Ellinor and Blanche along with their pet dogs in *The Caxtons* unveil this general fear among men of a subversive and liberal sort of womanliness that symbolically threatened men with emasculation. Likewise, worried about the fact that his son Robert would repeat the same mistakes he had made with his wife Rosina, through his pedagogical novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton also aimed to advise his son to marry wisely and disregard this sort of intimidating femininity that often led men to feel threatened.

Conclusions

<17>New popular conceptualizations of masculinity emerging at the time had important repercussions for the perception of aging, as manliness was increasingly associated with physical strength and independence. In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, young Pisistratus establishes a difference between his Uncle Roland, whom he describes through features considered eminently masculine, while he endows his father, Augustine, with qualities mostly regarded as feminine. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton's novel presents an important divergence between the masculinity represented by Francis Vivian, who is described as morally weak and thus less manly, while young Pisistratus, through his solid moral upbringing, is extolled as the representative of a strongly ethical manliness in tune with the prevailing discourse that equated vigorous masculinity with desirable principled values. Similarly, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, young men are encouraged to leave their country of origin and settle in the colonies to become prosperous self-made men, as discourses about imperialism became entrenched with the notion of a nation's potency and virility. As Bulwer-Lytton himself admitted, the protagonist of *The Caxtons*, Pisistratus becomes a successful man of the colonies, while his dissolute cousin, Francis Vivian, redeems himself and leaves his profligate manners behind. Through the importance attached to the ethics of self-help, masculinity was also defined through the capacity of work, but also, some professions became gradually considered more or less manly. As shown in *The Caxtons*, entrepreneurship and the ability to make a name for oneself in a foreign country, as symptomatic of imperial precepts, are regarded as highly esteemed professions and are considered in tune with these new masculinities. Conversely, though, a career in the arts, as represented by Augustine Caxton in the novel, contributes further to giving shape to a sort of masculinity in distress as a result of emerging conceptualizations of manliness. Likewise, a particular type of subversive femininity, exemplified in the novel by female socialites such as Fanny Trevanion, also plays a significant role in unveiling a gradual process of masculine disempowerment. In terms of aging, emerging sorts of masculinities are clearly associated with young men, while traditional types of masculinity are embodied by aging males, thus contributing further to allying old age with a sense of symbolic emasculation. In fact, Augustine Caxton is symbolically depicted as undergoing a process of disempowerment through his stage of old age. Conversely, as a man of

the colonies, endowed with physical vigor and moral strength, Pisistratus exemplifies the emerging discourses of masculinity. Nonetheless, the clash between traditional and new conceptualizations of masculinity, and by extension, the schism between youth and aging, as portrayed in the novel helped Bulwer-Lytton to come to terms with his personal circumstances at the advent of old age. As he admitted, *The Caxtons* involved turning the bleak picture of his family life into an optimistic portrait, which reflected his anxieties as a family man as well as exorcizing his fears. At the same time, the novel was aimed at advising his son Robert about the right way to come of age in the new times.

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