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- 44 Wyndham Lewis, *The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), pp. 231, 235.
- 45 Jane Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1912), p. 43.
- 46 Ibid., p. 471.

VERIBLY A PURPLE COW: *THE WHOLE FAMILY* AND THE COLLABORATIVE SEARCH FOR COHERENCE

SUSANNA ASHTON

We have all, unconsciously become a "family." We have our general loyalty and particular preferences. We have said we were a purple cow and the result is that we veribly "be" one . . . I await the developments with an interest bordering on insanity.

—A letter from Alice Brown to Elizabeth Jordan (Feb. 27, 1906)

As attested to by its very name, *The Whole Family* was a project concerned with coherence. Published serially in *Harper's Bazar* from 1907-1908, this collaborative novel was a remarkable instance of narrative structure assembled by editor Elizabeth Jordan. Featuring chapters by William Dean Howells, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Henry James, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Mary Stuart Cutting, John Kendrick Bangs, Henry van Dyke, Alice Brown, Mary Heaton Vorse, Edith Wyatt, Mary Shipman Andrews, and Elizabeth Jordan herself, the novel garnered considerable attention when it first appeared, with the acclaim usually citing *The Whole Family's* surprisingly coherent qualities as key to its success. ("The uniformity of style is remarkable" remarked one wondrous reader.)¹ And, despite Jordan's own recollection of it as "a mess," *The Whole Family* engaged the very idea of coherence as criterion for artistic success in a manner which marked a particular historical moment.² The appearance of *The Whole Family* during a period characterized by the rapid professionalization of authorship brought together an assessment of coherency with a troubled assessment of artistry. The idea of artistic coherence as necessarily made up by representations of shifting subjectivities offered a provocative alternative to a fixed understanding of coherence as seamless. With the idea of the autonomously inspired Romantic author under siege, the production of *The Whole Family*

provided a forum for demonstrating how authorial integrity might be asserted and singularly re-invigorated in a collective enterprise.

Harper's Bazar as Family Circus

As with any family, *The Whole Family's* particular pathology may forever remain elusive, but we can track how the project was initially imagined and coordinated. *The Whole Family* was part of a project to invigorate and garner some excitement for the newly revamped *Harper's Bazar*. In 1900, Elizabeth Jordan, who had previously been working at the *New York World*, took over editorship of this woman's weekly magazine. She promptly began to instigate and shepherd its transformation into a livelier, and yet more serious, literary monthly. *The Whole Family* project, therefore, was part of her vigorous efforts to generate excitement and publicity for the magazine as a literary forum. Intended as a "showplace for Harper's family of authors," Jordan designed it "to bring together what P. T. Barnum would have called the greatest, grandest, most gorgeous group of authors ever collaborating on a literary production."³ The provocative juxtapositioning of so many disparate writers certainly garnered much attention, but it further succeeded as a showplace for vigorous discussions over the meaning of authorial integrity.

William Dean Howells sketched out the initial plot, which Jordan was then left to supervise and entwine. As envisioned by Howells, the novel was to be about the process of marriage and its ramifications for the family circle. As the "father" of the project, he duly took on the first chapter. Howells's narrator, Ned Temple, is actually the neighbor of the Talbert family and in conversations between him and Mr. Cyrus Talbert we learn that the middle daughter, Peggy Talbert, has just become engaged while away at college. The family doesn't yet know Peggy's fiancé, Harry Goward, but they are all hoping for the best. Everything seems to be proceeding well until Chapter Two when Howells turns over the story to Freeman who introduces her character, the Old-Maid Aunt. Freeman's "Old-Maid" Aunt Eliza is an intensely attractive and sexually aggressive thirty-one year old woman who drops a bomb on the family by confessing to an amorous entanglement with Goward, her young niece's fiancé. Goward arrives in town but before he can answer any questions about where his loyalty lies, he disappears to New York, throwing the family into an uproar. A letter from Goward soon arrives but the "School-Boy" brother, created by Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, accidentally obliterates the name of the addressee on the front of the envelope. Nobody dares open it until it can be established whether the letter was intended for Peggy or Aunt Eliza. In the meantime, Aunt Eliza also disappears and everyone fears an elopement with Goward has taken place. Charles Edward, Henry James's "Married Son," after lengthy musing on the situation, goes to New York to break Peggy's engagement for her. Other

characters also converge on New York, variously trying to distract Aunt Eliza with other suitors and to sort out numerous loose ends and minor plot lines. In the penultimate chapter, Alice Brown hastily introduces a stable new suitor, aptly named "Stillman Dane." In a desperate *deus ex machina*, the troublesome Old-Maid Aunt Eliza suddenly discovers she has psychic powers and leaves the family to begin a professional career working with a "Mediumistic Divulge" and the novel draws to a close when Stillman Dane finally whisks young Peggy off to Europe as his bride.

Although most collaborative texts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tend to be light romances, *The Whole Family* defies such easy labeling. The machinations of the narrative reformulate and subvert generic romance parameters. Aunt Eliza's erotic volubility quite forcibly reminds readers that a sentimentalized marriage plot is sufficient neither to explain nor to represent human experience. The romances of eighteen year olds, Freeman suggests, are often less interesting than the romances of Old-Maid Aunts. The requisite happy ending in *The Whole Family* that successfully marries Peggy off does not suffice to banish memories of the Freeman chapter, a chapter in which the idea of a clichéd marriage plot most certainly demands reconsideration. Furthermore, Aunt Eliza poses a threat to the family precisely because of her curiously unattached state. Her individuality is so extreme that she has not managed to establish a codified or respectable "relationship." This unfettered female eludes the family's vision of her behavior.

More than one author asked if they could simply declare Aunt Eliza insane and thus be done with her. "Who would have thought that the maiden aunt would go mad in the second chapter?" asked van Dyke.⁴ Or, as Brown wondered: "If she is mad, she can be grappled with. We can pack her off to a symbolic asylum and let the erotic fervor that follows her tracks die with the fancy that created it. Or is she sane?"⁵ The ten inheritors of the Aunt Eliza problem did their best to pack her off. Nonetheless, her startling presence renders her by far the most memorable character in the novel. Freeman defended her chapter as necessary impetus to a hopelessly prosaic start, stating: "To tell the truth such an innovation in the shape of a maiden aunt rather frightened me, but the old conception of her was so hackneyed, and I did think some plot ought to be started, and I could see no other way."⁶ Freeman's individualized vision of both the character and the project caused the collaborative venture, inasmuch as it reflected a shared conception of coherence, to effectively collapse.

Its collapse, however, left a great deal in its wake. For *The Whole Family* proved to be a case study of how the conditions of textual production were seen by readers, critics, and writers as relevant to the text's success or failure as an artistic creation. In one such instance, the *North American Review* observed:

Just as a game of chess, if perfectly played, proves in the end to be a complete, organic structure, despite the fact that it is born anew with every move of the players, so this story, which is created afresh by each author in turn, develops into a consistent and artistic form, because it obeys throughout the basic laws of fiction and of life.⁷

The *North American Review* describes the success of the project as "despite" its curious production. Yet this review also describes the production in positive terms. The story is "created afresh" and by implication, it is this freshness which actually contributes to the consistency of its "artistic form." Life is equated with consistency and—by extension—coherency. The underlying assumption is that life itself is unified enough to be representable, and that such representation is the goal of art. This assumption was not, however, shared by the writers who composed this particular work of art. Indeed, this may be one of the rare cases in which authors might have disagreed with their own good review. Unified representation of a unified life was, in fact, an idea directly confronted by the many authors. They used their chapters as forums from which to muse upon the unity of a collaborative text and, indeed, upon the unity of any text.

This interest in literary self-analysis, which in the case of *The Whole Family* took the form of a collaborative assembly and stabs at metafictional grandiosity, was part of a larger cultural questioning over literary realism at the turn of the century. By better understanding the propensity for such musings in texts which make no claim to literary realism, much less artistic coherence or unity, we can better see how the play of such collaborative texts manifests genuine concern over the relationship between literary unity and the reality of the social world.

Establishing Inequality

When Howells originally conceived the project, he planned to make co-education, of all things, one of the primary themes. "[Y]oung people ought to know at least the workings of the male and female mind as fully as they can," he wrote. "Their natures are diverse enough, though not so diverse as we like to pretend, and the difference is exaggerated by the separate training."⁸ Howells's aim was to abolish such ideas of separation. For Howells, the driving theme of *The Whole Family* was certainly gender issues, but only in order to demonstrate how better mutual understanding of gender issues could create a harmonic state. Despite Howells's disgust with the way in which Freeman's chapter changed the tenor of the entire novel, the situation posed by Freeman's Aunt Eliza chapter was in keeping with the general premise Howells had set. And, as might be expected, the "problem" of Aunt Eliza has intrigued many critics because she so clearly raises compelling questions about representations of women. Dale Bauer, for example, forcefully argues that the Freeman chapter radically challenged

patriarchal premises of narrative structure as much as they challenged dominant assumptions about women.⁹ Bauer points out that what she terms the politics of collaboration or the battle for control of the plot, "determines in large part the form and ideology of the text" (p. 120). In her analysis, Freeman's chapter succeeds in "establishing the terms of the subsequent debate," thus rendering *The Whole Family* a text which enacts challenges and defenses to essentializing notions of the family. John W. Crowley assesses *The Whole Family* as a narrative experiment in variable points of view. He too analyzes the gender politics informing the project. In addition to the problems posed by the Freeman chapter, Crowley persuasively argues that when Edith Wyatt contributed an unpopular chapter (one which Jordan forced her to significantly re-write), the ensuing discussion among the other eleven writers reveals an attempt by men to maintain masculine narrative predominance.¹⁰

With this in mind, both Bauer's and Crowley's analyses are productive and persuasive, but somewhat incomplete. They fail to address the tensions within each author and among the various authors over the idea of multiplicity and the production of art. Although *The Whole Family* certainly addresses competing strategies of gendered representation, it is able to do so because of the willing cacophony and the open engagement with the idea of inequality on the part of all the writers. Dissecting attitudes towards the representation of women as markers for how inequality was constructed in *The Whole Family* is a useful project, but it does not account for the other manifestations of inequality which reveal much about how literary workers of the time invoked differences to different ends. Inequality was a basic premise and an intrinsic part of the creative risk in writing *The Whole Family*. The gender issues, the conflicting professional rivalries, and even the conflicting views on the role of art (the realists pitting themselves against, say, the genteel traditionalists) were all part of the tension which was willingly embraced in order to collectively come up with a shared coherence. The success of the project was dependent upon acknowledgment of cacophony as harmonic. Coherence was achieved because of competing visions, not despite them.

The contestatory nature of *The Whole Family* was manifest from the beginning. No installment was accompanied by its author's name. The readers of *Harper's Bazar* were instead invited to guess who might be responsible for any given chapter. By the third month, Harper's was regularly publishing letters from readers venturing preliminary guesses, although they received neither denial nor confirmation from the editors.¹¹ Not until the last installment in 1908 were the chapters attributed. While the point is that the contestatory nature of both the infrastructure and superstructure of this text underscores the tensions between dominance and collaboration, even more significant here is the choice to openly represent and play upon such anxieties. By marketing the competition and using the mysterious outcome

as a device to encourage sales, Elizabeth Jordan relied upon the contrast between the valuation of coherence as a literary standard and the readerly activity that might be invoked to disassemble such coherence. While *Harper's Bazar* touted *The Whole Family's* coherence, it also encouraged readers to nonetheless disassemble and reconstruct the novel. The marketing plan for *The Whole Family* sought to exploit its contradictory nature, however coherent that nature actually turned out to be.

Readers eagerly embraced such dissection. One writer foresaw "endless discussion," but saluted the project by saying "let the good work go on, I say, if it makes us read good books."¹² Scrutinizing difference was seen as a method to gain a coherent sense of literary art. Another reader, a self-professed member of the "big BAZAR Family," suggested that women's clubs could benefit from dissecting *The Whole Family*: "Tell each woman to read the chapter, and, when she has had her guess as to its author, to read some stories by that author and study out the reasons why she came to her decision—the elements of literary style which point to the writer. What better study in current literature could she have?"¹³ As the writer who imagined the "big BAZAR Family" recognized, interrogating the communality of readership could lead to personal growth of an individual. *Harper's Bazar* was selling communality, a family of readers, with the premise that within such a family better understanding of the individuality of interpretation could be embraced.

Emphasizing the dissecting possibilities offered by *The Whole Family* was in keeping with the very premise that underscored the entire project—that of inequality. By encouraging readers to rank or identify their favorite writers, the editors at *Harper's Bazar* encouraged inequalities and differences to be highlighted. Since Howells had originally established the very idea of co-education and the manner in which collaborative learning might foreground gender differences, he managed to set the basic terms of the discourse within and surrounding the text. Tacitly searching for differences in the text would, in effect, highlight inequalities in the text. Now, the premise that collaboration is based upon inequality is not a particularly radical one. Collaborative writing emphasizes that an exchange is always taking place within the act of reading or the act of writing. So it is the invocation of collaboration as a premise founded upon equality and yet dependent upon inequities, which is telling. The teasing out of this tension, by marketing *The Whole Family* as a shared contest or some other such oxymoronic product, highlighted a contradiction that promised revelation. What it delivered was a contradiction subsumed. The threat of dissolution became itself a unifying factor.

Constituting Inequality

Any sense of disjunction and separation between the participants troubles critics who reason that the success of a collaborative effort is measurable not by the resultant product but instead by the equity of the production process. In a study of different collaborative writing techniques, critic Laura Brady decisively ranks *The Whole Family* as a failed collaborative text because it was assembled in defiance of any co-operative principle that would ensure conversation and dialogue among the writers. Instead, she sees it as "a composite portrait of competitive family members."¹⁴ Brady's argument, which is compelling inasmuch as she points out the ways in which the writers refused to listen to one another and the ways in which competing visions of the work clashed, does not allow for an idea of coherence as anything more than a shared sensibility. And by her admission that the writers were part of a "family"—albeit a squabbling one—she undermines her portrayal of them as intrinsically unconnected.

To begin with, although much of the extant correspondence indicates frustration and irritation among the writers, the letters indicate that the various writers were in closer touch than Jordan's memoirs suggest. Jordan repeatedly states that she tried to keep everyone's responses confidential, but she evidently did a poor job of it. In her letter of 10 Feb. 1907, Alice Brown begged, "How I wish I could know what Mr. Howells says and what Mr. James says and what 'they all say.' Do let me hear anything I may know." Edith Wyatt wrote knowingly, "I am perfectly willing to take my turn after the mad seizure Mr. James anticipates from re-reading the words of the grandmother and the aunt."¹⁵ Clearly, some of the writers were in touch with one another and well attuned to literary gossip.

While Brady's taxonomy of models of collaborative writing may or may not be apt, her equation of a monologic project as a failed collaborative process, if not necessarily a failed collaborative product, is indicative of the problems that *The Whole Family* explores. Both the participants and their characters repeatedly attest to the pleasure of chaos, the intrinsic definition of self that arose from dissension. Lorraine, the Daughter-in-Law created by Mary Stuart Cutting, introduces herself as a product of difference: "I have never identified myself with my husband's family, and Charles Edward, who is the best sort ever, doesn't expect me to."¹⁶ This sort of dissent is typically portrayed with loving exasperation. Lorraine complains about her mother-in-law but admits that she is "very fond of her" (p. 84). Even when family members gripe about one another, it emphasizes their relative standing. Failed harmony highlights the exchange and motion that make up a text, and thereby calls attention to a kind of coherence after all.

The thematic concern for inequality among the characters was mirrored in the correspondence of the various writers who brought to bear upon the

question of participation a host of concerns about how such participation would be shaped by different patterns of literary inequality. Many of the lesser-known writers were delighted at the opportunity to work with such venerated masters. Mary Wilkins Freeman, for example, wrote: "I have read Mr. Howell's [sic] chapter with great interest and admiration, as I read always the chapters of that Past Master of his Art, and I feel very small and incompetent tagging directly after him, but I will tag for my life, since I am so honored as to be given the chance."¹⁷ Despite Freeman's clear hesitation on the word "Past," she seems genuine enough in expressing her admiration for his work. Of course, her own career as a pre-eminent American writer was already well established at that point and it may well be the avowal of her own insignificance that is disingenuous.

Others, however, felt that the inevitable inequality among participants might well tarnish their reputations. Howells wrote Jordan at an early stage of the project—"I think that if you find the scheme does not commend itself to the more judicious and able among the writers to whom you propose it, you had better drop it. I should not like to appear in cooperation with young or unimportant writers, and the affair would be a failure unless it were made to succeed brilliantly" (4 June 1906). Like Freeman, many of the contributors were pleased to be considered equal to those with whom they felt themselves unequal. Their willingness to consort with their supposed betters (or their inferiors) demonstrates an engagement with the facade of equality, perhaps in hope that the appearance of equality would move everyone closer to such a reality. Alice Brown wrote some twenty years after the fact, "Henry James! I think he's the funniest figure possible among us amount-to-nothings, like Dr. Johnson at a village sewing circle . . . Why did he go picnicking with us!"¹⁸ Brown, even if she privately saw the conglomeration as somewhat odd, obviously took pleasure in such disparity. If, like Howells, the authors were themselves wary of reckless associations, they overcame such unease for a greater and totalizing goal. Inequality was construed as the factor that would make or break the success of the project.

Selling Collaboration

Egos were not the only issue informing decisions to participate in the project. Many authors located their concerns elsewhere. Confident in their own marketability, but not necessarily concerned with craft or reputation, they felt that the project posed problems of an altogether different nature. Holistic collaborative production posed less of an artistic problem for Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, for example, than it did for many of the other writers. Her hesitation about participating in the project stemmed from financial and health concerns, not artistic differences. And with the querulous confidence of a woman who claimed to have collaboratively produced one of the best-selling novels of the nineteenth century (she claimed to have written *The*

Gates Ajar [1868] as stenographer for an angel), Phelps told Jordan that she would be happy to collaborate with her husband on a chapter for *The Whole Family*: "We work together with remarkable ease, although we do not often do it, and although in this case he has no especial wish to do it, since you did not ask him, and would only consent to help you and me out of the difficulty in case I should fail."¹⁹

Although her husband's literary reputation was slight, Phelps justified his inclusion because of his skills in assembling plot lines. She wrote, "He is a much better plotter than I am, and some of the best work that I have ever done has been done with him."²⁰ Phelps saw plot, rather than psychological motivation or aesthetic exploration, as the most significant aspect of literary production for a collaborative novel. The ability to make connections and forward a storyline was derived from logistical abilities. For Phelps, collaborative projects were necessarily plot driven. Phelps's eagerness to forward her husband as an inter-collaborator indicates a conception of artistic craft that was in keeping with her broader ideas about the role of literature. "I never work for Art's sake," she elaborated, "I don't believe in it. I work for life's sake, and for truth's sake; for God's sake when I can."²¹ For Phelps, questions of artistic integrity were irrelevant—moral integrity provided a sufficient coherence.

By contrast, it was the logistics of collaboration which deterred Kate Douglass Wiggin, author of the best-selling *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903), from participating in *The Whole Family*. She had participated in a similar venture, *The Affair at the Inn* (1904), written with her friends Mary Findlater, Jane Findlater and Allan McAulay and had strong opinions about how collaborative production could go astray. She recognized that the marketplace, geared as it was to the literary products of individuals, had few stratagems to cope with the fiscal complications of joint authorship. She wrote Jordan:

how about royalty on the book. Is it to be distributed in twelfths? If (a large "if" in this case) the majority of the authors did really clever work and produced anything like *solidarity and cohesive work*, growth & development,—the book ought to have a handsome sales, appealing to the twelve author's [sic] particular adherents and admirers.²²

Wiggin's concern for the mechanisms of finance was valid. The situation was tricky, and in order to simplify matters, Jordan appears to have dealt with the copyright issue by paying the authors a one-time assignment fee and allowing all book royalties to remain with Harper's. Yet Wiggin's analysis of the relationship between sales and what she terms "solidarity and cohesive work" is revealing. Her implicit assumption is that the appeal of the work would not rest on its unity. This demonstrates a very particular understanding of both the commodity and the audience. While the novelty of *The Whole*

Family project was clearly part of its attraction, it was evident to Wiggin that the work must demonstrate some "solidarity" and "cohesive work" in order for the respective authors to benefit from each other's marketplace value.

The niche in the marketplace occupied by each author is difficult to gauge. *The Whole Family* project featured authors at the end of their careers, such as Howells and Phelps, as well as much younger and lesser-known figures such as Jordan and Cutting. While van Dyke received \$600, and Phelps received \$750, James commanded only \$350 for his chapter, and Howells—because he was already under contract to Harper's and Brothers—received nothing outside of his regular salary. The variable rates each author commanded speak to the perception of their marketplace clout and also to the nature of American book and periodical culture at the time.

Although the secret contract negotiations demonstrated Jordan's canny readings of each participant's marketplace worth, the design for the 1908 bound edition demonstrated just how secret that assessment was to be. For in keeping with the premise of equality, the names of the authors are imprinted in a circular design, with no name taking precedence over another. The variability of authorial clout is well illustrated by a comparison of this version with the reprint edition of 1986. In the reprinted edition of 1986, James, Howells, and Freeman are listed above the title, while the other writers are listed in the order of their chapters: Phelps, Vorse, Cutting, Jordan, Bangs, Wyatt, Andrews, Brown, and van Dyke.

Jordan saw herself as part of a new literary management system, one which was overturning the genteel tradition of her predecessors. One of the most well-known female journalists of her time (she had come to prominence with her coverage of the Lizzie Borden murder case), Jordan had left Joseph Pulitzer's *Sunday World* to accept the editorship of *Harper's Bazar* after the massive bankruptcy and reorganization of the Harper's firm at the end of the '90s. It was quite a change for both Jordan and Harper's. "I had been living in an atmosphere where the news of the world broke over me like pounding breakers," she remembered, "The contrast of the academic calm of Harper's sometimes depressed me."²³ By assigning a newspaper journalist as editor of what had been a relatively sedate women's magazine, Colonel George Harvey of Harper's made a statement about the changing literary marketplace in which the nuances of marketplace clout would be assessed by the editor and publisher, rather than the authors themselves. This was not, in itself, a particularly new idea. But in giving Jordan, a relatively young woman, complete control of such an important magazine, Harper's was making a statement about what it took to be able to make that kind of assessment. Unlike the editors who had, in their proverbial studies, overseen the great nineteenth-century magazines such the *Atlantic* or *Harper's Monthly*, Jordan had little literary clout of her own. She had published many short stories and articles in newspapers, to be sure, and at the time of her resignation had been

a major editor at Pulitzer's *Sunday World*, but her reputation was negligible compared with that, for example, of the aged William Dean Howells. Jordan's journalism had been largely confined to "women's issues" and even her famous coverage of the Lizzie Borden case marked Jordan as an important "female journalist" rather than as simply an important journalist. Jordan's authority was in part derived from her youth and energy. This may have lent her authenticity or given her value in the eyes of those such as Colonel George Harvey, who sought a professionalized workplace, but it did little to give her clout in the eyes of the older and more famous writers. Although there is no evidence that she was undervalued or ignored by these writers, her lack of strong literary credentials placed her dealings with them in a different light.

In one instance, for example, she tried to persuade Mark Twain to write the chapter on the small boy. She was turned down, and looked to Howells, as both an old friend of Twain's and as a man of tremendous literary heft, for assistance in cajoling Twain into changing his mind. Howells refused, saying: "A Friend of his youth should not afflict him in his age."²⁴ This may have been a sensitive response on Howells's part, but it was also the response of a man personally entwined with a literary associate. Although a supporter of Jordan, Howells was part of a different professional tradition: one that used such clout more charily. On the other hand, when Jordan overruled Howells in the Aunt Eliza controversy and went forward with the offending chapter, she effectively asserted the primacy of modern literary management, as well as a different standard of literary taste. She sought other opinions about the Aunt Eliza chapter but ultimately asserted her professional abilities and confidence in making the final decision herself.

In contractual negotiations, Jordan's professional confidence was called upon continually. She had to juggle demands for personal attention with demands for consistent treatment. She could not allow literary stars to threaten either her own editorial power or her cohesive vision of the entire piece. In *Three Rousing Cheers*, Jordan claimed in some frustration that the fame and literary distinction of some of the authors rendered editorial criticism "impossible" and even financial discussions tricky (p. 280). Much of the extant correspondence pertaining to *The Whole Family* involves lengthy offers and counter-offers regarding the commissioned prices. These clashes stemmed from more than just the expected tensions over who was to fix the price of a given article. They arose from differing viewpoints over who was competent to assess the labor that went into a piece and whether the labor should be part of a price at all.

The correspondence of Mary Stewart Cutting, who wrote the Daughter-In-Law chapter, is an important case in point, for it reveals the manner in which a relatively minor writer of the period sought to control the recompense accorded her work.²⁵ Even more significantly, Cutting addresses the issue of

collaborative composition, what kind of labor collaboration entails, and how it differs from and yet draws upon her previous experiences. The situation was as follows: although the letter is not extant, Jordan seems to have made Cutting an initial offer of less than \$300. On June 6, 1907, Cutting responded that in previous correspondence with the editors at *Harper's Magazine*, "The price I stipulated for, \$300, for a story anywhere from 4000 to 5000 words (I have seldom made my price by the word as it is often harder to write a good very short story than a longer one) was accepted without question."²⁶ Furthermore, Cutting wrote that she had received so many opportunities to publish elsewhere that Jordan would have to make *The Whole Family* chapter a more appealing venture in order for Cutting to set aside the time to participate, particularly in a work which she would never be able to republish in her own collections or in any other form. Cutting's letter continued:

in spite of the company of geniuses in which "*The Whole Family*" is [ILLEGIBLE] itself, an individual like myself is swamped in the Whole, and can't get any particular credit for it, or use it in her own works—in consideration of all this (though indeed I feel the honor) it seemed to me that the higher price was amply justified. (6 June 1907)

When Cutting points out that she is swamped by the "Whole" she is arguing that her minor reputation actually makes her work more valuable. Her labor will be that much more laborious simply because her reputation is more slight. It is difficult to write well enough so that your work will "stand up" alongside the products of more highbrow or prestigious writers. She doesn't need to be paid on the same level as the other authors were just because her chapter will be equal in length to theirs; rather, she needs to be paid in accordance to the labor involved. Her price isn't calculated in comparison with other writers. Indeed, there is no evidence that she is aware what other writers were offered for their chapters. It is comparative labor that interests her. Because of her reputation as a less popular author, Cutting argues that she will have to work much harder to stand out and avoid being swamped. For Cutting, talent doesn't demand recompense, but labor does.

Finally, Cutting pulls out the ace from her sleeve by revealing that she has had previous experience with collaborative writing:

And now after all this explanation, dear Miss Jordan, I will come down to the original \$300 for the present story, and for that will guarantee to try and do my best. I am supposed to be able to cater to another person's idea and carry it out — [ILLEGIBLE] a little serial for *Good Housekeeping*, "Treasure Cottage," written in the same way, and begun by me. They came to me frantically at the last moment to write the final chapter also as Mrs. Briscoe Hopkins had altered hers three times and was further off from the original plan at each trial. (6 June 1907)

With this note, Cutting points out that not only has her especial expertise been sought for similarly collaborative ventures (finishing the "Treasure Cottage" serial), but that the burden of relying upon someone else's inspiration and ideas is such that her labor increases. The inspiration of an individual author lessens the labor involved. The absence of one's own inspiration increases the labor. The more labor required, the more recompense it demands. And since Cutting's labor was especially skilled (she had been "frantically" contacted to clean up whatever sort of mess Mrs. Briscoe Hopkins had made of the *Good Housekeeping* serial), it seemed logical to her that her labor be especially well-compensated.

The negotiations Cutting went through with Jordan are somewhat nebulous. Jordan's side of the correspondence does not exist and although jottings in Jordan's personal papers suggest that Cutting was eventually offered \$300, it is not entirely clear how successful Cutting was in raising her market price by the above-cited arguments. Nonetheless, Cutting's letter demonstrates how the particular problems and challenges raised by collaborative composition provided opportunities for discussing not only how writing should be paid, but also what it was about writing that made it worthy of payment at all.

This interest in compensating labor over the product would not be remarkable in the history of any worker/management relationships, but the figuration of writing as a specific form of labor was constructed at a period of time when writers felt especially defensive about their practice. Many shared the opinion of William Dean Howells that often readers are of a "wholly unliterary sort, who do not know apparently how books come to be, or how they differ in origin from products of the loom or plough."²⁷ In order to remedy this sort of ignorance, the Author's League of America, Inc., which was organized in December 1912, explored affiliating itself with the American Federation of Labor. Freeman, who served as Honorary Vice-President of the Author's League from 1913-1921, expressed support for this affiliation in a letter of 1916:

It certainly strikes me that it might be very desirable if authors can thereby convince people that authorship is labor. I have never been able to accomplish that. Perhaps affiliation may protect authors from being levied upon by the press for unpaid symposiums, etc. Also from demands to write one's life history and a truthful confession of one's soul's aspirations for a paper to be read at a woman's club. Also for an account of one's ancestors unto the third and fourth generation. Also from the possible preferment of oversea performances to those of our native land.²⁸

Freeman's list of protections are somewhat tongue-in-cheek, to be sure, but her concern for impressing upon the world just how much labor went into composition (indeed, so much labor that writers don't have time for unpaid

symposiums) was more than just the classic complaint of a bitter writer. In the case of Freeman and many other turn-of-the-century authors, emphasizing labor was one of their few bargaining chips in a transaction with the powerful magazine conglomerates they saw, rightly or wrongly, as communicating on an impersonal basis. The communal and family feel that Jordan had used to make *The Whole Family* proposal appeal to both readers and participants effectively glossed over the issues of individualized labor compensation which dominated the actual *The Whole Family* correspondence.

Assembling a collective novel was such a tremendous undertaking in merely logistical terms that it is incredible it was managed at all. The manner in which *The Whole Family* was put together illustrates how the turn-of-the-century marketplace was perceived by different individuals. For Phelps it was a site where she could make money and, upon occasion, do God's work. If that involved using her husband to achieve this end, that kind of coordination was completely legitimate and no particular emphasis upon "authorship" one way or the other mattered. For Wiggin, copyrights and royalties were complicated enough without involving eleven other parties. For Cutting and Freeman, contract negotiations were necessarily predicated upon a shared understanding of how much labor went into any writing, and especially projects which demanded shared inspiration. And for Jordan, who was at the center of it all, these differing perceptions had to be catered to equitably. Jordan's success in guiding her project to final publication was due to her skillful management of the logistics underlying the project and her ability to balance the tradition of genteel literary mentoring with modern literary hectoring.

Leaving the Family

The great charm of *The Whole Family* lies in its self-referential nature. Almost every character takes time to muse upon his or her own status as a character and such reflections indicate a variety of understandings about textuality itself. As Crowley argues, *The Whole Family* "strains against its own inscription in the codes of popular romance" by repeatedly calling attention to its own fictionality (p. 109). He sees this pattern as "a conspiracy of the literary order to keep the novel in place within conventional boundaries." Crowley's point is that the metafictional aspects and the often coy references within the text to its status as a collaborative novel draw attention to the inevitable failure any text will have in defying its own limited status, even while bravely trying to assemble itself collectively.²⁹ It is true that the metafictional aspects of *The Whole Family* necessarily comment upon the idea of fiction itself; yet the ultimate effect of self-referential moments in *The Whole Family* is not to highlight its failure, but rather to highlight, in yet another manner, how coherence demands visible scar tissue.

As Mark Currie has laid out in his examination of metafiction as a genre, there are three basic problems in the very idea of metafiction which make it difficult to talk about. To begin with, if metafiction is defined as fiction which is self-conscious, it thus presumes a kind of self or agency for a text which many contemporary critics are not willing to allow authors, much less texts, to have. How can we claim a self-consciousness for *The Whole Family*? If it is conscious, can't it make that claim for itself? Second, if it is able to make such a claim, it must therefore be aware of itself as metafiction that falls into a spiraling logic that renders the idea almost meaningless. And most difficult of all, in my mind, is imagining metafiction as a literary object which can, as Currie writes, "perform a critical function."³⁰ There is, therefore, a profoundly disturbing illogic in metafiction, even in a text that makes such breezy gestures towards it. *The Whole Family*, by invoking metafiction on a number of different levels, normalizes such illogic in the name of coherence. This has the convenient effect of normalizing other "illogics." Hence the self-referentiality in the novel comes across as no stranger than the fact that several authors collectively wrote the novel. As Patricia Waugh has argued, metafictional novels imply conventional forms in order to force a reader to "draw on his or her knowledge of traditional literary conventions when struggling to construct a meaning for the new text."³¹ In this case, with its coherent facade and its cheery dramatizing of its own dismantling, *The Whole Family* masquerades as a singly-authored novel, while making sure everyone knows it is only wearing a costume.

Cyrus Talbert, the Father created by Howells, defended the propriety of placing his daughter's wedding announcement in the local paper. He remarks pointedly: "I consider the reader of the *Banner* a part of the family" (p. 29). This decisive pronouncement, which ends the opening chapter, sets the stage for exploration throughout the rest of the text as to where the family does indeed begin or end.

As John Kendrick Bangs's Son-in-Law discovers, establishing familial parameters is a formidable task. He remarks:

On the whole I am glad our family is no larger than it is. It is a very excellent family as families go, but the infinite capacity of each individual in it for making trouble, and adding to complications already sufficiently complex, surpasses anything that has ever before come into my personal or professional experience. (P. 124)

When these types of quasi-independent reflection occur, and the novel is rife with them, they are not merely defying the parameters of the story and making modest claims on readerly attention. Instead, these moments force upon us what seems to be an inventive artistic vision of a limitless text. In its concern for defiance of narrative limitations and its attempt to expand its narrativity into the infinite world of symbolic meanings, this attention to

metafictionality induced by multiple authorship nonetheless reveals a desire for coherence. Even at their most expansive, the reflective metafictional moments ultimately need to reassert meaning as relational. Meaning demands context and framing. In order to break boundaries, the text needs to recognize that there are boundaries at all.

Thus when Charles Edward, the Married Son created by James, muses upon his disaffected state, his thoughts demonstrate a threefold process. His sly reflections draw attention to his individual position among relations, his status as a fictional character, and finally his status as part of an inescapable whole:

The aspects of our situation multiply so in fact that I note again how one had only to look at any human thing very straight (that is with the minimum of intelligence) to see it shine out in as many aspects as the hues of the prism; or place itself, in other words, in relations that positively stop nowhere. I've often thought that I should some day like to write a novel; but what would become of me in that case—delivered over, I mean, before my subject, to my extravagant sense that everything is a part of something else? (P. 167)

Charles Edward is able to speculate about expansion of subjective existence. He imagines an individual experience able to “shine out” in “relations that positively stop nowhere.” When he queries: “What should we do if we didn’t hold out, and of what romantic, dramatic, or simply perhaps quite prosaic, collapse would giving in, in contradistinction consist for us?” his answer is implicit (pp. 147-48). The infinite potential of such an expansive vision is thwarted, like metafiction itself. This meditation leaves the reminder that once denied parameters, individuality and meaning cease to exist.

Metafiction in a collaborative text is an extreme case of extension and inward collapse. The parameters of the text will draw even the most independent aspect back in. If an individual’s chapter is invariably drawn back into a fictive world, then so, we are forced to realize, will any bid for independence. Every voice, every word, and every image in the text is relational. Just as the writers cannot escape their status as collaborator, so can the mechanisms of the text do nothing but remind us that they are meaningless without the relational trajectory of meaning that readers give them. Forced to be especially aware of the infinite or especially aware of the threat posed by an untrammelled text, the metafictional moments in a collaborative text necessarily reassert textual parameters.

Literature as practice necessitates an examination of it as responding thematically and stylistically to the specific set of problems surrounding its construction at a given time. *The Whole Family* presented a complex interplay among thematic and stylistic elements, all of which grapple with questions about production and result. The self-reflexive aspects of *The Whole Family* are a distinct manifestation of this. These moments function

as a response to the collaborative idea itself and its attendant anxieties. Collaboration highlights the exchange and motion which characterizes literature and art; it highlights the shifting meaning of symbolic forms. But by doing so it also implies that such shifts are graspable and manageable—indeed, part of an organic whole. Metafictional musings embedded within any text imaginatively extend the parameters of a text, but only inasmuch as they remind the reader that it is indeed a text they are reading. Metafiction does not succeed in allowing unfettered imaginative expansion.

David Lodge sees metafiction as a technique that allows modern writers to express unease at being weighted down by literary antecedents.³² When a text is commenting upon its own fictionality it is, by extension, commenting on the idea of fiction itself, its own history. This history might be the millions of books that have preceded it, or as in the case of a chapter in *The Whole Family*, it might be a very immediate predecessor that seems especially threatening to textual authority. Thus it should not be surprising that metafictional techniques mark *The Whole Family*’s production. When self-conscious asides appear in a collaborative text they quite effectively disarm criticisms by anticipating them. These asides are part of a concerted effort to strengthen connections within the text.

When the Grandmother in Mary Heaton Vorse’s chapter observes that Aunt Eliza “is one of those women who live on a false basis,” the reader is reminded that the entire novel is structured around the question of the validity of individual interpretations and the relationship of individual interpretations to “the real” (p. 68). Was Aunt Eliza vain and hysterical or were men continually chasing after her? There is never a definitive answer. The proposition that events are inseparable from their interpretations is thus enacted on a number of textual levels. Since metafiction is essentially a “borderline discourse” informed by fictional and “real” discourse, and making the boundary itself the subject of issue, metafiction highlights the fundamental premise of *The Whole Family*: that there is a blurring between reality and representation and that this blurring is what *The Whole Family*’s coherency is all about.

In the private correspondence of many of these writers, playful dramatic metaphors further underscored the question of textual parameters and how the parameters could frame or define coherency. Many of *The Whole Family* writers, for example, quite consciously referred to themselves as their characters. Van Dyke wrote to Jordan, “if the Friend of the Family comes to town next week, Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, will you take tea with him . . . ?”³³ The familial identification was even a comfortable move for critics: “out passes Mr. Howells in the middle of a sentence, with a mild glance of wonder at the gay figure which brushes by him and gains the middle stage,” wrote the *Nation*’s reviewer who then extended the image by remarking: “This is Miss Wilkins, who has conceived the old maid aunt as a belated

siren, and so plays her."³⁴ Not surprisingly, when discord arose, the temptation to translate it into familial terms was overwhelming. Jordan wrote in *Harper's Bazar* that one participant threatened "If — brings about any more complications, I shall complain to father!"³⁵

Invoking Howells, the Dean of American Letters, as patriarchal arbiter was hardly facetious. Even though Jordan overruled him after he urged her to not publish the Freeman chapter ("Don't, don't let her ruin our beautiful story," he implored), his opinion still held weight for the other writers (quoted in Jordan, *TRC*, p. 264). "What will Mr. Howells say?" exclaimed van Dyke in horror after reading the Freeman chapter.³⁶ But the tensions that ran through the familial relationships in the story do not mirror a simple pattern in which the lesser-known writers were cringing under the reputations of the better-known ones. As we have seen, Cutting had tried to work her lesser status to her own advantage in bargaining. And Phelps, for one, was quite direct about her dislike of James's chapter ("I have read the James proofs. Entre nous, and if you will never tell, I think it long and heavy.")³⁷ Fissures ran along a variety of fault lines, fissures marked out by the metafictional moments in the text.

The collaborative endeavor forced writers to re-think and assert their respective positions both artistically and professionally. Self-pronounced "Realists," such as James or Howells, both of whom had crafted elaborate literary philosophies regarding the responsibility of a text to reflect the real, were in a position of participating in a project which in its very form repeatedly called attention to itself as an artifice. The writers who had literary loyalties elsewhere (such as Henry van Dyke, who was known for his genteel fiction and criticism) had also to deal with a form that defied strictures romantic or even modernist.³⁸ For whatever genre *The Whole Family* might fit into, its authorial conceits would undermine its own status. As a venture, *The Whole Family* was successful in the fundamental goal it set for itself. By mirroring "the laws of fiction and life," as the *North American Review* had commented, *The Whole Family* defied categorization in its variable views on just what those laws might be. Although Howells might rail at its failure, and James describe himself as "very red in the face" at having participated, the text itself demonstrates a witting interaction between artifice and truth telling.³⁹ The self-referentiality that characterized *The Whole Family* lent it an air of bemused indifference. It called attention to the "artificial" nature of the project. Implicitly, it relaxed any claims *The Whole Family* might have had to being great art. *The Whole Family* "knew" it wasn't great art.

Yet the impulse to referentiality is perhaps the clearest evidence we have for why the turn of the century saw a flurry of collaborative novels. *The Whole Family*'s very foolishness, its very unreal nature, made a statement by default about the nature of the real. Although, *The Whole Family* was not a project that had pretensions to "realism" per se, it was the product of a time

period in which questioning the value and nature of the real dominated literary culture. The writers who sought to make apparent their presence in the text implicitly underscored what they saw as their very real labor that had composed *The Whole Family*.

Fits and Starts: Collaborating in the Real

One of the traits most noticeable in texts traditionally grouped together as case studies of American Realism is their focus upon the presence of the writer. Howells's novels are rife with writer protagonists (Bartley Hubbard in *A Modern Instance* [1882], Basil March in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* [1890], etc.), as are stories by Sarah Orne Jewett, Jack London, Hamlin Garland, and many others. Although this observation has spurred many reflections upon the cause, Amy Kaplan's argument in the *Social Construction of American Realism* is especially compelling because she notes how these depictions enact the inherent contradictions in so much realist rationalizing. She notes that to position oneself as a writer of realist fiction implies that one has special access to the real. The prevalence of author/protagonists in realist fiction is a claim to referentiality that exposes both fictionality and a truth of fictionality—indeed a reality of the fiction of representation. Writing may create fictions, but it is, itself, real.⁴⁰ This understanding of the referentiality of realist writing at the turn of the century is crucial to understanding yet another aspect of collaborative fiction whether it has generic allegiance to "realist" fiction or not.

As I have argued, the metafictional musings throughout *The Whole Family* served to first assert individual subjectivity and then reassert the supremacy of meaning as inevitably relational or connected. In collaborative texts, even those such as *The Whole Family* which made few claims to seriously engage in representations of the real, the very self-consciousness of the text served to incorporate the reader into the text and hence make the text entwine itself with a kind of readerly reality.

For Howells, this reality was defined by its activity. A realist, to Howells, would find inspiration "wherever men are at work, from wherever they are truly living."⁴¹ As Kaplan explains, this kind of attitude equates reality with work "which is viewed not simply as an occupation but more importantly as a system of value which privileges industriousness and self-discipline as the basis of communal life" (p. 17). In his famous essay, "The Man of Letters as a Man of Business," Howells exulted that "It ought to be our glory that we produce something, we ought to feel the tie that binds us to all the toilers of the shop and field . . . as a mystic bond uniting us to Him who works hitherto and evermore."⁴² Howells both sacralized and normalized the labor of writing by comparing it with the labor of humanity and the labor of God. Situating labor at the foundation of reality means that art that had pretensions to the real could not be static. Movement might ultimately

make up a coherent whole, but the realist commitment to conveying that activity means that a whole is incomplete without recognizing its internal construction. In most cases, the realist commitment to recognizing labor took the form of focusing upon the lower classes (such as in the works of Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, or Abraham Cahan) or focusing upon the idea of class structure itself (exemplified perhaps by Edith Wharton). As a work that depends upon representing activity as production, *The Whole Family* shares a characteristic that shows evidence of itself as a product of writers engaged with questions about realism. It both commodifies and makes real its own self.

As commodity, though, wouldn't a text be more appealing to a consumer if it were whole and hid the traces of its own production? The answer to that question lies in a consideration of the fragmented nature of the text and how such fragmentation was related to its period of production. Peter Conn, in *The Divided Mind: Ideology and Imagination in America, 1898 - 1917* (1983), constructs his entire study of turn-of-the-century American culture on the premise that "a profound internal dialectic" marked an era which contained a "cultural contrariety of unusual intensity."⁴³ The dialectic he saw marking out the era was essentially an engaged acknowledgment of a kind of structured cultural fragmentation. The neatness of Conn's divide has been challenged by critics such as Kaplan, who asks, "Is realism part of a broader cultural effort to fix and control a coherent representation of a social reality that seems increasingly inaccessible, fragmented and beyond control?" (p. 8). Can Kaplan's question legitimately be posed to the collaborative projects of the period? I would think not. Collaborative texts were not a broad-based cultural exploration into the nature of art and life, in the way that realism was imagined to be. Admittedly, as Michael Davitt Bell has outlined in *The Problem of American Realism* (1993), realism was so variably invoked and inconsistently defined that it is almost as difficult to assess what is was not as much as what it was. The critical consensus, though, has consistently emphasized the inconsistent cultural patterns of the period. Walter Berthoff's reflective theory of literary realism that explained literary realism as awkward because the times that produced it were awkward would be one such example of that kind of critical appraisal.⁴⁴ Another would be Walter Benn Michaels's New Historicist position that realist and naturalist literature actively reshaped history as much as they were reshaped by it.⁴⁵

For writers of the period, the discourse of fragmentation was equally familiar. Invoking social realities as increasingly fragmented and beyond control would have been a common complaint known by all the writers involved in *The Whole Family*. Normalizing fragmentation was very much what this novel was trying to do. Through a medium that laughs at its own rigidity, *The Whole Family* authors mapped out a pattern of fragmentation that was neither threatening nor disconcerting.

Fragmentation is composed of beginnings and endings that do not fit into preconceived patterns of the totality that they fragment. There must be a shared understanding about how the stream of relationships from one segment of a whole to another connect, in order to establish just how a fragment may break up that whole. In *The Whole Family*, chapters were necessarily unresolved fragments with each writer openly dependent upon the next for development. "I cannot tell how it will end," remarks Freeman's Aunt Eliza in the final line of her chapter (p. 59). Wyatt's Mother ends her chapter praying "oh, how I hope everything will come right for them!" (p. 239). These sorts of parting words are more complicated than they seem. For although they mark the ending of a section, they nonetheless imply that as the story continues, the separate consciousness of the Mother character or the Aunt Eliza character will still exist outside of the text, hovering about it with good wishes. These moments mark closure but also continuity. They delineate a fragment and set it apart from the rest but they also use the expression of their hopes (such as the final lines of Mary Heaton Vorse's Grandmother, who remarks, "I shall be sorry for Elizabeth Talbert if she has been making mischief" [p. 79]) to project their fragment throughout the whole.

The fragmentation of *The Whole Family*, which simultaneously suggests a discrete individuality and a broader coherency, makes the irresolution at the end easier to understand. Van Dyke, who had the unenviable task of finishing up all that had been started, did a reasonably good job but left a number of plot lines unaccounted for.⁴⁶ It is telling, therefore, that van Dyke found it necessary to have his Friend of the Family remark in the last lines of the novel: "Your father and mother are going to lunch with me at Delmonico's—but we don't want the whole family" (p. 315). Even the happy ending of the novel had to call attention to the problems of entertaining a whole.

It is a commonplace that realist novels have rotten endings. Not only do the characters tend to die horrible deaths at an alarming rate, but the few who survive are often fated to lives that are banal at best and tragic at worst, even more frequently, tragic in their very banality. Worse for the critics, though, is that the endings seem drawn out, as in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), and often have an awkward sense of closure tacked on, as in Frank Norris's *The Pit* (1903). Kaplan, for one, explains the infamous endings of realist novels as evidence for their social construction and inherent contradictions. She sees the unresolved nature of these endings as demonstrating cultural desires for clean resolution—that is to say, stilted and gruesome endings not only reflect the true nastiness of the world, but their essentially unresolved nature highlights the fact that the desire for resolution is one of the most "real" things going. Lack of control, she suggests, may or may not be real, but the desire for control most definitely is.

The Whole Family ends happily enough with Peggy married off to her stalwart college psychology professor, Stillman Dane. There are no suicides to speak of, and while the future life of the family certainly promises to be banal, there is no implication that this banality is cause for sorrow. The tacked-on ending comes off as a nice try and the overall effect of the last chapter is amusing, if uninspired. A sloppy ending does not hold the same narrative or cultural significance as a deliberately open conclusion. Yet the messiness of endings in *The Whole Family* is not just coincidentally a trait of realist texts as well. In both cases these are narrative articulations of ideological problems.

Normalizing fragmentation and highlighting the self-referentiality of collaborative composition were traits shared by many realist texts during the period in which *The Whole Family* was assembled. The impulses that led to such traits in realist texts were not entirely different from the reasons that led to their appearance in *The Whole Family*. Most important in understanding the ways in which the seemingly frivolous *Whole Family* was connected to the realist discourse of writers during that time is the premise that it takes a community of writers to compose a book. No one works in a vacuum, and in its own erratic fashion, *The Whole Family's* community of authors demonstrated a truly social construction of reality.

Imagining Multiplicity

James felt frustrated over the fact that other authors did not follow through with the possibilities he had set up for them in his chapter. Admittedly, James acknowledged the inherent unfairness of such an expectation. He wrote "One of course can't do such a piece at all without one's imagination projecting a coherent sequel and consequence (to one's own Part—as if one were to do it all one's self)."⁴⁷ In *Henry James and the Experimental Novel*, Sergio Perosa notes that, in his chapter, James "envisaged and at the same time checked all possibilities."⁴⁸ Despite being almost twice as long as any other chapter, in true Jamesian style very little actually happens to the plot itself.

Jordan also felt that a pull to project an individual vision of the whole was inevitable. In *Three Rousing Cheers*, she reflected that: "When it came to the point of considering the book as a whole, the authors were very much like members of a theatrical cast listening to the reading of a new play. Each judged it from the viewpoint of his own part and each had grave doubts of the abilities of some of his associates" (p. 280). This statement, much like that of James, illustrates a valuation of the attempt to control such imaginative projection. The activity of attempting to control one's own imaginative processes against the monumental draw of a unified, coherent art was an activity that invigorated, rather than undermined, the final product.

Crowley, with retrospective assurance, posits *The Whole Family* as inscribed "in the margins of pre-modernist discourse" (p. 113). For him the variable viewpoints prefigure modernist experiments in narrative perspectives. While the conjunction of disparate visions is superficially akin to much modernist discourse, I argue that the multiplicity informs a coherence but it is the attempt to understand the multiplicity that generates the coherent whole. The competition that energized *The Whole Family* served also to glue it together.

In the 1930s when Jordan told Brown that she was working on her memoirs and wanted to include an account of *The Whole Family* caper, the irrepressible Brown suggested "Why don't you write a parody of what it would have been if H. J. had done it all? . . . I think it would be 'excellent fooling' to do it—and might give our own little parochial world a merry moment . . ." (letter, n.d.). To imagine the paragon of artistic unity, the embodiment of the aesthetic vision, intentionally constructing a text that would mock and exploit disjunction and dissonance for comic effect was almost unfathomable. *The Nation*, for one, fancied that only hypnosis could have led James to such a project, causing him to "produce an excellent parody of himself, as if in spite of himself."⁴⁹ For both Brown and *The Nation* to hit upon the very same joke demonstrates a capacity for imagining a coherent strategy informing a collaborative work. James, of course, was no more responsible for the totality of *The Whole Family* than any other writer was, but that is precisely the point. By the end of *The Whole Family* project, "coherency" could be imagined in other ways. What Brown's "fooling" presumes, therefore, is a rueful recognition that all were culpable and none were responsible.

When Brown described her amazement at the transformation of the apocryphal purple cow from vision to reality, she was expressing precisely the anxieties manifest in varying conceptions of coherence and artistic process.⁵⁰ Invoking a purple cow as trope for collaborative authorship allowed her to indicate the over-determined nature of the scheme, while simultaneously lauding the success of the illusion.

Being able to imagine a purple cow may have been the trait that enabled these writers to participate in the project, but it was not what drew them to it. In every case, *The Whole Family* was in keeping with the interests of the authors who participated. While Perosa includes his discussion of *The Whole Family* in his book on Henry James and the "experimental novel," and many of the actual authors laughed at the seemingly incongruent gimmickry of the project, *The Whole Family* did not exist as a novelty project. It was disavowed as such but it could not have come into being if the novelty of it wasn't a shared value. As we have seen, imagining multiplicity was part of an impulse to find new metaphors for intersections as well as differences."

Towards Closure

The Whole Family's fame rests almost entirely upon the reputation of the contributors, rather than any critical acclaim. Yet the project brought together important ideas, as well as interesting writers, and it is both the friction and the occasional convergence of these ideas that tell us so much about literary culture of the time. From contract negotiations to retrospective musings, the writers who worked on *The Whole Family* shared a concern for what they saw as the inherent contradictions of reality. That is not to say that many, or any, of them agreed about what reality, much less realism, might be. Rather, they recognized that through their own juxtapositioning a shared capacity for imagining a new kind of coherence might be possible. Now, defining coherence as the combination of fragments is not a very exciting metaphor, but the mere fact that they saw such definition as necessary tells us something. It tells us that the consuming nature of a whole was culturally assumed and that this assumption did not reflect what they saw as their own experiences in the creation of art.

Thus when *The Whole Family* showed its seams in surprising places, it served to make a statement about how the consuming whole might be resisted. Seams and fissures were part of movement, part of the labor of writing. By making writing as active a verb as possible, and by never letting it fall into the past tense, *The Whole Family* as a text managed to keep moving. Characters could keep discussion going among themselves. By shamelessly calling attention to itself, this collaborative novel asserted its own reality and made that reality one of motion and productive labor. This effect was not part of a calculated effort to overthrow American narrative tradition, but instead was the logical outcome of a conglomeration of authors, all of whom were actively associating and competing with one another. Increasing professionalization meant that authorial identity was tied up into definitions of labor, definitions many of the writers felt uncomfortable about. On the one hand, writers wanted to explain their work and the labor it involved to the general public. On the other hand, the intense privacy and personal nature of writing as craft was still invoked in order to justify older images of the inspired artist as conduit for art. By identifying themselves with their characters, writers suggested that they had "naturalized" the imaginative experience so much that expressing that character's viewpoint would no longer be so difficult. After all, they "were" that character. The appeal of naturalizing the writing process and the appeal of professionalizing it were felt by all of *The Whole Family* authors, and through their chapters as much as through their other writings, we can see how collaboration allowed for such contradictions to circulate freely.

By examining collaborative texts such as *The Whole Family*, we can see how authors defined themselves in relation to others in the most immediate possible sense. And in those varying definitions we can see contradictory

impulses—such as the desire to simultaneously assert a sense of individualism and a group identity that would necessarily subsume such individualism. Cultural anxieties over the role authors were going to have in the new literary marketplace surfaced in collaborative fictions as well as in the fictions these authors created for themselves through their correspondence and scholarly writing. These texts, and the writing that surrounded their production, were sites for reconciliation and negotiation among individual ideas about the construction of authorship. Even more significantly, they served as terrain on which to navigate a path among the various ideas often concurrently held by each of the individuals in question. The motion and activity that characterize such negotiations are crucial to conveying why they occurred in the medium they did. Collaborative texts were, in a sense, a public proclamation of a self that was defined by its activity. Was the activity of writing essentially laborious? When it came down to assigning copyright or simply sending out checks, this question was not at all abstract. The turn-of-the-century's fascination with controlling, liberating, and locating what a labor force was had its parallel in literary production as much as in factory production. This search led many writers to their tremendously consequential explorations into collaborative writing, and only by examining the implications of such explorations can we understand the intensively composite nature of American literary culture.

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NOTES

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- 1 C. F. S., "Letter to the Editor," *Harper's Bazar* 41 (December 1908): 1182.
- 2 Elizabeth Jordan, *Three Rousing Cheers* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1938), p. 258; hereafter cited as *TRC*.
- 3 Ibid., p. 258. Howells suggested a number of authors who did not end up participating, some of whom were especially appealing candidates because they had previously participated in collaborative projects, among them, Brander Matthews and Robert Grant. Matthews declined, explaining that he was too busy to participate. No extant letters report Grant's reaction. See Matthews to Jordan, 12 June 1906, Jordan Papers, New York Public Library.
- 4 Van Dyke to Jordan, 31 December 1907, Jordan Papers.
- 5 Brown to Jordan, 10 February 1907, Jordan Papers.

- 6 Freeman to Jordan, 26 July 1906, Jordan Papers.
- 7 Clarence H. Gaines, review of *The Whole Family*, *North American Review* 188 (1908): 927.
- 8 Howells to Jordan, 4 June 1906, Jordan Papers; hereafter referred to as "4 June 1906" in the text.
- 9 Dale Bauer, "The Politics of Collaboration in *The Whole Family*," *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, ed. Laura L. Dunn (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 107-22.
- 10 James was particularly disgusted with Edith Wyatt's chapter. He wrote Jordan: "the Mother treated as she actually stands seems to me—I confess to you brutally—a positive small convulsion of debility!—without irony, without fancy, without anything! Does your public want that so completely lack-lustre domestic sentimentality?" See James to Jordan, 13 August 1907, Jordan Papers. For a fuller discussion of James's letter and its possible implications, see John W. Crowley, "The Whole Famdamny," *New England Quarterly* 60 (1987): 109-12.
- 11 The one exception to this editorial silence on the subject occurred when Jordan was clearly unable to resist responding to "S. F. of Brooklyn" who wrote: "even the most careless reader must recognize your first chapter as the work of Henry James." The editorial reply was "Our correspondent has handsomely cleared herself of the suspicion that she may be a 'careless reader.' The first chapter of '*The Whole Family*' was not written by Mr. James." See "As to '*The Whole Family*,'" letter, *Harper's Bazar* 42 (February 1908): 210 and Jordan, "As to '*The Whole Family*,'" reply, *Harper's Bazar* 42 (February 1908): 210.
- 12 Mary Brown, "As to '*The Whole Family*,'" letter, *Harper's Bazar* 42 (February 1908): 210.
- 13 H. B. A., "As to '*The Whole Family*,'" letter, *Harper's Bazar* 42 (February 1908): 210.
- 14 Laura Brady, "Collaboration as Conversation: Literary Cases," *Essays in Literature* 19 (1992): 303.
- 15 Wyatt to Jordan, 14 November 1906, Jordan Papers.
- 16 William Dean Howells, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Henry James, et al., *The Whole Family* (New York: Ungar Publishing Co., 1986), p. 80, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
- 17 Freeman to Jordan, June 1906, Jordan Papers.
- 18 Brown to Jordan, n.d. (1930s?), Jordan Papers; hereafter referred to as "letter, n.d." in the text.
- 19 See Phelps (Ward) to Jordan, 18 February 1907, Jordan Papers. Although she signed most of her correspondence with her married name, Ward, her professional writing was published under her maiden name, Phelps. Hereafter she will be referred to as Phelps.
- 20 Ibid. Although Phelps's *Whole Family* chapter was written alone, previous collaborations with her husband had been relatively successful. *Youth's Companion* selected their collaborative book *A Lost Hero* as the best juvenile story of 1890.
- 21 Phelps, letter to Richard Watson Gilder, 22 June 1887, quoted in Susan Coultrap McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 183.

- 22 Emphasis added. Katherine Douglas Wiggin (Riggs) to Jordan, 21 June 1906, Jordan Papers. The letter is signed "Katharine Riggs" but her professional writing was generally published under "Kate Douglas Wiggin." Despite her refusal to participate in *The Whole Family*, she later reprised her work with her friends from *The Affair at the Inn* (1904) and helped compose another collaborative novel, *Robinetta* (1910-11).
- 23 In her autobiography Jordan reports that her former employer, Joseph Pulitzer, heard her observe that once at *Harper's Bazar* she "felt as if I had died and gone to heaven." Pulitzer was angry at her ingratitude and Jordan claims he cut her out of a \$10,000 legacy because of her remark (*TRC*, p. 166).
- 24 Howells to Jordan, 8 August 1906, Jordan Papers.
- 25 Mary Stewart Cutting (1851-1924) published a series of short story collections about married life.
- 26 Cutting, letter to Jordan, 6 June 1907, Jordan Papers. Hereafter all reference to Cutting's correspondence is from this letter.
- 27 Howells, "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading," *Howells and James: A Double Billing*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (New York: New York Public Library, 1958), p. 12.
- 28 Freeman to the Author's League of America, n. d. June 1916, *The Infant Sphinx: Collected Letters of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*, ed. Brent L. Kendrick (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1985), p. 353. Freeman later publicly retracted this support presumably because of what she saw as the unseemly activities of labor unions. She wrote: "In view of the recent labor doings, I have changed my mind absolutely about the advisability of Affiliation of the Author's League with the Federation of Labor, and wish to go on record as opposing any such affiliation." Freeman to the Author's League of America, November 1916 (p. 355). In 1919 Freeman again voiced her frustration at how writing wasn't popularly understood: "Writing is very hard work, as you know, although nobody among the laboring ranks, or the resting ranks, thinks authors labor." Freeman to Fred Patee, 25 September 1919 (pp. 384-85).
- 29 The term "metafiction" is generally agreed to have been coined by William H. Gass. See *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (New York: Knopf, 1971), p. 25.
- 30 Mark Currie, introduction to *Metafiction*, ed. Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), p. 1.
- 31 Patricia Waugh, "What is Metafiction and Why Are They Saying Such Awful Things About It?," *Metafiction*, ed. Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), p. 42.
- 32 David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1992), p. 207.
- 33 Van Dyke to Jordan, 31 December 1907, Jordan Papers.
- 34 "Current Fiction," *Nation* 87, no. 2266 (3 December 1908): 553; hereafter referred to as CF.
- 35 Jordan, "With the Editor," *Harper's Bazar* 41 (December 1907): 1248.
- 36 Van Dyke to Jordan, 27 August 1906, Jordan Papers.
- 37 Phelps to Jordan, 18 February 1907, Jordan Papers. In *Three Rousing Cheers* Jordan quotes the observation by Phelps, but omits, however, the clause that asked her not to "tell."

- 38 Van Dyke's reputation as spokesman for genteel writer was seared into posterity by Sinclair Lewis, whose 1930 Nobel Prize acceptance speech attacked van Dyke for having stymied American literary achievement by his genteel posturing.
- 39 James to Jordan, 2 October 1907, Jordan Papers.
- 40 "To call oneself a realist means to make a claim not only for the cognitive value of fiction but for one's own cultural authority both to possess and to dispense access to the real." Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 13.
- 41 Howells, "Editor's Study," *Harper's Monthly* (April 1887): 825.
- 42 Howells, "A Man of Letters as a Man of Business," *Scribner's Magazine* 14 (October 1893): 430.
- 43 Peter Conn, *Divided Mind: Ideology and Imagination in America, 1898-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 1, 5.
- 44 Walter Berthoff, *Ferment of Realism: American Realism, 1884-1919* (New York: Free Press, 1965).
- 45 Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987).
- 46 The most egregious example of this occurs when Jordan hints that the Daughter-in-Law, Lorraine, had some sort of emotional entanglement with Lyman Wilde, an old suitor of Aunt Elizabeth's. This rather disturbing and incongruous plot line is never resolved.
- 47 James to Jordan, 18 February 1907, Jordan Papers.
- 48 Sergio Perosa, *Henry James and the Experimental Novel* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1978), p. 108.
- 49 CF, p. 553. Although *The Whole Family* was the only truly collaborative venture James is known to have participated in, he lent his name to "The Ghost," a play largely written by Stephen Crane in 1899. This play, for which there are no extant copies, was supposedly written in collaboration with James, H. G. Wells, Rider Haggard, George Gissing, Joseph Conrad, Robert Barr, H. B. Marriot-Watson, Edwin Pugh, and A. E. Mason, but was most likely written only by Crane who asked the authors "to write a mere word—any word 'it', 'they', 'you',—any word and thus identify themselves with this crime." Crane to H. B. Marriot, 15 November 1899, Berg Collection, New York Public Library. There is some indication that James once considered collaborating with his good friend, Constance Fenimore Woolson, on a play. Unfortunately, James burned most of their correspondence after she died in 1894 and hence there is little evidence the play was ever written. See Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Middle Years, 1882-1895*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1962), pp. 317-19. At this same time, around 1892, James wrote a short story, "Collaboration," which concerns the relationship between a French poet and a German composer who both reject their families, their lovers, and their national loyalties in order to compose an opera together. Whether or not James had seriously considered collaborating with Woolson, he was certainly interested in various permutations of the idea. See E. Duncan Aswell's analysis in "James' Treatment of Artistic Collaboration," *Criticism* 8 (Spring 1966): 180-195.

- 50 Brown is referring to the popular nonsense rhyme of 1895 by Gelett Burgess: "I never saw a purple cow, / I never hope to see one; / But I can tell you, anyhow, / I'd rather see than be one." Its very adaptability led Burgess to later write "Ha, yes, I wrote the 'Purple Cow' / I'm sorry now, I wrote it! / But I can tell you, anyhow, / I'll kill you if you quote it." Gelett Burgess, *The Burgess Nonsense Book* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes: 1901), pp. 24-25. Brown's quotation of Burgess was especially apt, for Burgess had earlier composed a short piece for *Munsey's* titled "A Collaboration; A Story." See *Munsey's* 26 (January 1902): 550-553.

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