

# PUBLISHING THE FAMILY



JUNE HOWARD

## Publishing the Family

—❧— New Americanists *A Series Edited by Donald E. Pease* —❧—

# THE WHOLE FAMILY



A NOVEL BY  
TWELVE AUTHORS

→❁ June Howard ❁←

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# Publishing the Family

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For Jim, Nick, and Alex



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## ❧ Introduction ❧

Each month from December 1907 through November 1908, one chapter of a novel titled *The Whole Family* appeared in *Harper's Bazar*,\* accompanied by a list of its twelve authors and an invitation to readers to guess which one was responsible for that month's contribution. Book publication by Harper & Brothers followed immediately after the final chapter appeared. The idea for this composite novel originated with William Dean Howells, who established its opening scenario in a chapter focusing on the father of the family; the project was coordinated by Elizabeth Jordan, editor of *Harper's Bazar*, who wrote a chapter as well. Other contributors included Henry James, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Mary Heaton Vorse, and writers widely known at the time but rarely remembered today, such as the prolific humorist John Kendrick Bangs and Mary Stewart Cutting, author of *Little Stories of Married Life*, *Little Stories of Courtship*, and *The Suburban Whirl*. Jordan devotes an entire chapter of her autobiography to an entertaining account of this collaboration; Alfred Bendixen corrects and publicizes the story in his introduction to a 1986 reprinting of the novel. Both Jordan and subsequent commentators write of the contributors as themselves constituting a sort of literary family—an extremely quarrelsome one.

Each author was asked to contribute a chapter from the point of view of a particular member of the family. Building on but contesting the characterizations Howells had sketched out, each wrote as an advocate

\*The Harpers originally named the magazine after the German fashion magazine *Der Bazar*, and its title was not spelled with two *a*'s until 1929.



for the virtues and views of that individual—and therefore frequently countered the claims of earlier chapters. Is the unmarried aunt (the role assigned to Freeman) a pathetic, man-hungry spinster or a charming modern woman? Is the “artistic” son (played, unsurprisingly, by James) an ineffectual dilettante or the book’s true center of consciousness? The reader begins to wonder—will one of the daughter’s suitors be capable of sustaining the role of hero, and can the multiplying tensions of the novel be contained by the narrative resolution of a marriage?

More questions arise for the literary critic and historian. How do we interpret a text that does not have a single author? Why would workers in the culture industry undertake such a collaboration, and does this assemblage of writers usually sorted into very different categories change our view of the relation between “high” and “low” culture in early twentieth-century America? What can we learn about the gender-inflected nature of writing and reading from a project in which eight female and four male writers worked together to produce a text for a women’s magazine? What about this historical moment led the contributors to try to define the American family, and what do their pitched battles over gender roles and family values tell us about contemporary attitudes? Why did the project become so contentious and charged, and why does it engage the imagination with such persistence?

The story of *The Whole Family*—by which I mean both the series of events through which the novel was created and the tale it conveys—affords an extraordinary point of entry for an examination of print culture and social life in the early twentieth century. My approach may be described as “microhistory”—a term borrowed from European historians who use it not simply for any small-scale investigation, but specifically for those that begin with the particular in order to enter into the interconnections of things. Giovanni Levi suggests that to understand the simple act of buying a loaf of bread one must study the world’s grain markets. Similarly, to read this composite fiction I reconstruct a complex landscape of literary institutions and ongoing struggles over meanings and values. Thus this is not a book “about” *The Whole Family*. (I hope that my work will prompt some readers to turn to the novel to assess my claims and reach their own conclusions about its significance, but I provide enough information in my exposition to make it unneces-

sary to know that book in order to read this one.) Neither is it about the stack of magazines containing the novel's separate chapters, or the authors who contributed to it, or even the response of its readers. My object of study is a historical process refracted through an episode.

Another name for my approach—centered in literary scholarship and history but drawing on other disciplines as well—is American studies. Conversations in that broad field have been central to my intellectual life during the years in which this book was researched and composed, and it may be considered a contribution to the famously frustrated “search for a method.” In my view, that search need not be imagined as a quest motivated by yearning for a permanent procedure—for some sort of methodological grail that would end doubt and struggle by providing infallible access to knowledge. Rather, the value of American studies is precisely that it is such a well-established site for relentlessly experimental and self-reflective dialogue. Continuing the conversation, this volume suggests an alternative to the strategy of many influential American studies books—from Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* through Eric Lott's *Love and Theft* and Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts*—that track one complex and consequential idea through many sites. I greatly admire those works and recognize that they find different things in different places; but an increasing wariness of sweeping narratives has led me to choose a more stubbornly empirical approach. I examine one complex site traversed by many ideas and forces.

My strategy does not eliminate such narratives, of course; I could not eschew them even if I wanted to, for any powerful category that purports to describe social life at any level—from “author” and “literature” to “public” or “private” to “American” and “modern”—implies at least one immense system. Each of the chapters that follow takes a distinctive shape in response to its topic; yet each undertakes some common tasks. Each at some point examines the conceptual categories that define its object of study, self-reflectively investigating the social maps and narrative traces embedded in its vocabulary. Each also selectively surveys relevant scholarship in several fields, sketching the intellectual landscape that is the condition of possibility for my work. Each offers thick description of some aspect of the historical period. Each puts the story of *The Whole Family* and materials associated with it, such as the lives and works of its authors, articles that appeared with it in *Harper's*

*Bazar*, and other closely contemporary publications and events, into dialogue with those discussions. The separation of these tasks from one another is only heuristic; each involves the others in a thoroughly recursive process. Nevertheless, if I interrogated all of these elements all the time, it would become impossible to write comprehensible sentences; I have tried to be rigorous without becoming overly involuted. Similarly, writing for an interdisciplinary audience entails explaining matters well known in one field but not in others; I have done my best to provide expositions that are at once thought-provoking and accessible.

Another crucial reference point for my approach is the tradition of Western Marxist cultural criticism. Here too, even more urgently, I am engaged with—that is, I both draw on and resist—powerful, sweeping narratives. I take for granted not only the possibility but the vitality of a nonreductionist, nondeterminist historical materialism that attends seriously to culture and agency, in which no outcomes are known and an ethical commitment to social transformation has been separated from any putative science of society. I think this is best called, in Stuart Hall’s expressive phrase, “a marxism without guarantees.” Marxist thought, whether upper- or lowercased, has constantly offered an important alternative to the disciplines, providing an impetus and framework for integrative thought that is one of the wellsprings of the current efflorescence of interdisciplinary scholarship.

Because this book generates its critical space by moving between close study of a moment and narratives of historical change, periodization emerges as an especially salient methodological problem. The story of *The Whole Family* demonstrates that ideas and habits usually depicted as following one another in sequence actually coexist. Historical actors circulate through a variety of unevenly developed institutions; and they think syncretically, creating constellations of attitudes that enable them to live through changes without starting over. A microhistorical approach allows me to treat this single episode as an untidy conglomeration of practices, each showing the traces of many past moments. Periodization represents diachronic process by a synchronic figure; its basic gesture is to create a time line divided into labeled sections (with more or less prominent acknowledgments of blurring at their boundaries). I visualize what I do instead as unraveling and following threads of disparate materials and varied lengths braided into a

particular historical “moment.” In some sense, then, what I offer is a diachronic account of the synchronic.

This effort to capture the irregular complexity of historical process follows a multitude of others, of course. It especially shows the influence of Raymond Williams’s argument in *Marxism and Literature* that cultures include dominant, residual, and emergent elements. A history braided of those three strands still seems to me too regular, and the narrative of a fixed sequence of modes of production lingers in the offing. Yet Williams makes it clear that residual practices not only persist but are remade for current situations, that the dominant is always a partial system, that not all innovations are oppositional—and so on, until the relations of the elements are satisfyingly tangled. Also, *emergent* avoids the teleological term *progressive* (found so often in Marxist and other committed criticisms), which with its embedded notion of progress toward a better future strongly implies the racialized story of advancing “civilization” that is a recurring topic in the chapters that follow.

Challenges to “master” narratives have arisen both as methodological resistances and through the recognition that they are inadequate to the perspective of subordinated groups. The story of civilization is not just changed but invalidated by the counternarrative of the color line, and by asking if women had a Renaissance. Feminist scholarship—another indispensable interdisciplinary reference point for my work—has been particularly rich in critiques of periodization (see J. Kelly; Warren and Dickie). I have generally reacted skeptically to the assertion that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”—not so much to Audre Lorde’s original and devastating critique of academic feminism as to the way the phrase has been taken to mean that existing approaches are hopelessly contaminated—because I believe that the engaged critic cannot afford to discard levers like logic. The ensuing twenty years have perhaps sublated that disagreement, as the basic conceptual constructs of intellectual work—the tools of the trade—have been transformed in our hands. The far-reaching, ongoing recovery of the history and culture of communities of color has fundamentally changed what scholars mean by “American.” In a postcolonial and globalizing world, the institution of national literature has become the object of our study rather than its assumed grounding. Masculinity,

whiteness, the nation appear not as obvious facts but as hegemonizing maneuvers in complex systems. This book is a contribution to metropolitan literary history focused through a publication of the New York-based house of Harper's, one of the most powerful commercial cultural institutions of the Empire City, and it depends at every point on a broader—even less easily plotted and periodized—understanding of cultural history in which official “America” is no longer the center. It is a feminist literary history that contests both canonical ignorance of women's work and the claim that there is a separate women's tradition. I first became interested in *The Whole Family* years ago because it shows the literary marketplace as gender-inflected but not segregated. Again, it no longer seems necessary to argue this question; both the gendering of authorship and female authors' engagement in mixed discourses are well established.

Let me say clearly that I am not opposing periodization. Again, a retreat from historical argument only mires one in unexamined narratives: apparently arbitrary divisions using round numbers and the assumption that materials with the same date are connected are underpinned by a notion of empty, abstract time that is itself distinctively modern. What I am doing is taking periodization very seriously—as a cognitive enterprise difficult enough, and consequential enough, that we should consistently question not only its claims but also its categories. Like genre criticism, it realizes its power as a practice of interpretation and explanation, not classification. I would argue that this is so across the historical disciplines, but most confidently that it is an indispensable recognition for literary history. The claim that language and literature not only reflect but also shape experience and events—implicit in everything I have said so far, and fundamental to what follows—scarcely needs to be argued these days; yet it is more often asserted as a principle, or assumed as a truism, than demonstrated in detail. I use the method of microhistory because I have found both the precision of a close focus and the breadth of a long perspective necessary for making rigorous arguments about that impress of culture on history. The social agency of the literary is not exerted within any single instant or on an era in general; yet it can be pressed into visibility by constructing a dialogue between historical particulars and periodizations of various kinds.

My sources and my methods are eclectic, within the broad and contested field of historicism. My effort to write criticism that neither reduces history to a setting nor reduces literature to an effect follows Roy Harvey Pearce's affirmation, in his 1958 defense of historicism against the dominance of formalism, that "[l]iterature is not an expression of (or above) history, but rather an expression *in* history" (35). I have been influenced by Fredric Jameson's injunction in *The Political Unconscious* to "Always historicize!" (9), and by his compelling accounts of the relations of cultural forms and modes of production; but most important for my topic here is his magisterial "Marxism and Historicism." That essay frames the philosophical problems of identity and historical otherness, the possible connections and estrangements of past and present, as I will not begin to do here; it has made historicism thinkable again after the poststructuralist assaults on it. The "new historicism" has also, in a very different way, demonstrated that criticism can be both historically oriented and informed by poststructuralism. In many versions it shifts attention from artifacts to practices and posits the discursive and material as reciprocal; in Louis Montrose's account, its concern with the relation of synchrony and diachrony, with "the historicity of texts and the textuality of histories" (410), is congruent with my own.

I am, of course, emphasizing the common ground rather than the ample disagreements of these approaches. What I seek on that terrain is the ability to apprehend both the past-ness and the present-ness of the past. The fundamental contention of historicism is that no human phenomenon can be adequately understood apart from its place in history; the people of even such a recent past as the early twentieth century were *different* from us, and a concerted effort is required to imagine them and their world. Yet historicism in the sense in which I mean it is not antiquarianism, collecting obsolete otherness for its own sake. Nor can it be merely empirical—history as the proverbial "one damned thing after another." When we study the past we recursively double and redouble our involvement in it; for we too can be understood only in history, yet we exercise agency within it. It is not—precisely not—that we recognize ourselves in the past, but that we learn to tell a story that links past and present and shapes our future.

In some sense these are the same goals I have pursued in all my pub-

lished work; I have written before about the irrevocable openness of the historical moment, about the challenges of periodization and our own placement in the narratives we create. I have become more skeptical of grand narratives, replacing History with histories, but also more confident of our ability to achieve a more limited knowledge. These problems of historical alterity now seem to me continuous with those of particularism and universalism, cultural relativism and ethical commitment, community and cosmopolitanism—oppositions that occupy the foreground of American intellectual debate at the turns into both the twentieth and the twentieth-first centuries and which I will pursue elsewhere. In *The Whole Family* (I have realized somewhat belatedly) I have chosen a topic that foregrounds precisely such questions of the relation between the part and the (possibly) whole—between the chapter and the novel, the moment and the story.

In the early twentieth century, the gesture of equating a publishing enterprise and a family evoked powerful fantasies of wholeness and fears of fragmentation. These fabulations both turn on the most basic dilemmas of modern identity and social organization, and depend on particular historical circumstances such as the workplace culture at Harper's. Sometimes tensions are explicitly thematized. Howells specified the conflict between individuality and family life as the novel's theme and wanted to engage the controversy over coeducation then current in the periodicals—thus doubly invoking changes in the position of women, although he was dismayed when the “New Woman” entered the scene as the independent spinster rather than the college girl. Sometimes tensions are played out at the level of form—Howells probably envisioned the novel as realistic, but the chapters deploy wildly various literary conventions. Henry James was so distressed by what he called the sentimentality of the chapters following his that he wrote to Jordan wishing he could have “saved” the novel by finishing it single-handed. One reviewer observed at the time that as one “turn” followed another, “characteristic and amusing” but disconnected, *The Whole Family* became a kind of literary vaudeville performance. Yet in the first decade of the twentieth century vaudeville itself conjured a potent solidarity, forging a national audience by appealing to highly diverse and dispersed audiences through a booking system centralized

in New York. The composite novel too embodies a deeper dynamic of unity and disunity.

The early twentieth-century writers and readers of *Harper's Bazar* would have taken it for granted that a family consisted of blood relations residing together. Although cross-cultural observation shows clearly that kinship and household are not necessarily combined, vernacular and much expert discourse of the present day makes the same conflation. Similarly, the fact that the English royals and the family farm continue (however tenuously) to exist somehow fails to remind us that the separation of kinship from state, and household from economy, is a relatively recent historical phenomenon. Such forgetfulness itself entails the naturalization of the family, as an apparently inevitable yet perpetually endangered institution that provides both the forum of politics and the economic marketplace with "individuals" as participants. The progressive concentration of emotional bonds into the home and the loss of other identifications amalgamates intimacy as a third element in the deceptively self-evident, self-sufficient wholeness of the family—and all this common sense requires a great deal of storytelling.

The cultural work that creates the image of the family as a haven in a heartless world is powerfully aligned with that which, as the reach of the culture industry expands, figures art as a realm of value above commerce. Works of cultural studies have argued that the novel serves as a school for selves, occupying a privileged position in the formation of modern interiority and gender identity. Other works have shown that those reading experiences are incorporated into racialized narratives of the nation. Yet others have asserted that the very concept of the aesthetic is made possible by the detachment of expressive culture from concrete social relations in a world of commodity production. Both the family and literature are imagined as realms that form subjectivities and provide arenas for a satisfying affective life—and in both cases the very gesture that forms a protected enclave also surrounds it with forces that constantly threaten invasion. It is perhaps still useful, but certainly not sufficient, to observe that the home is no haven, and art no ivory tower; we need to go on to investigate the nature of these institutions' permeability, the significance of their imputed isolation,



the puzzle of their profound affinity. Lines drawn between private and public, between culture and commerce, are—like racial categories and national borders—divisions that can never divide. That does not stop them from having effects. They project bounded entities, set the terms of connectedness, and are woven together in circuits of reciprocally stabilized instabilities with real consequences. It is this process that I examine in the pages that follow.

The chapters of this work are organized topically. Each frames broad conceptual questions and offers a historical and interpretive argument that can be read independently, while meshing with the other chapters to develop an expansive reading of *The Whole Family*.

The first chapter lays the groundwork by telling the story of the novel's production and reception, and considering the nature of the "composite novel" and its challenge to commonsensical understandings of authorship. Chapter 2 takes the publishing house as its unit of literary-historical analysis. It demonstrates what a powerful and pervasive presence Harper & Brothers was in American cultural life of the nineteenth century and reexamines the striking story of the house's modernization in the early twentieth century. I conclude that the family business Harper & Brothers in a real sense "authored" *The Whole Family*, and that close attention to its history requires us to revise our understanding of the literary marketplace at the turn of the century, balancing the current emphasis on "culture" as the site of distinctions between popular and elite with more attention to mixed and middling readerships.

Chapter 3 turns directly to the topic of the family, offering a critical account of the category and sketching the invention, in the early twentieth century, of the family as an object of sociological study and the location of a crisis. Howells mingles perceived problems and proposed solutions into his chapter's apparently celebratory portrait of middle-class domestic life, and subsequent chapters mount emphatic critiques of the institution. This concern with changing gender roles continues in chapter 4, which reconstructs the renewed controversy over coeducation during the first decade of the twentieth century and considers the versions of female modernity mapped out in the life and works of Mary Wilkins Freeman and Elizabeth Jordan. Those in-

stances, some examples drawn from Jordan's *Bazar*, and a few drawn from the late twentieth-century magazine *New Woman* demonstrate how persistently women reinvent themselves by synthesizing tradition and innovation.

Chapter 5 takes up a question that arises from the controversies of the contributors to *The Whole Family* and has also been much debated in American literary history. It places the concept of "sentiment" in terms of recent work on emotion in the social and biological sciences, and argues for reclaiming the category's link to eighteenth-century "sympathy" and against the conflation of domestic ideology and literary sentimentality. This chapter makes a long circuit away from and back to the composite novel itself, yet the issues it engages refract, in terms of form, those that concern the others: the relation of art and commerce, the individual and the social, the private and the public. Its perspective on sentimentality allows us to appreciate both the literary-historical ironies and the cultural purchase of some of the latter chapters of the novel. Throughout, but here especially, the story of the heterosocial undertaking of *The Whole Family* demonstrates that notions of "separate spheres" are forces within social life, not descriptions, and certainly not analyses.

The final chapter considers how the collaborators' disparate understandings of the relation of culture and commerce, and their affiliations with disparate genres, are played out in the latter part of the novel. Its last two chapters mobilize not only the marriage plot but the power of professionalism and nationalism to achieve narrative closure.

Taken in its entirety, this volume calls on a wide range of scholarship in literary, cultural, and social history and theory. Assuming an interdisciplinary audience unevenly familiar with those knowledges, I provide conceptual maps of issues and thick descriptions of the period that often synthesize what is known, and sometimes innovate. Such investigations are of interest in themselves, and—as is no doubt clear already—they frequently lead me far from *The Whole Family*. Yet the microhistorical perspective counters any temptation to find at the local level only the working out of a general narrative known in advance (whether of possessive individualism, consumer culture, or another of the marvelously powerful paradigms of contemporary scholarship). I return regularly to the novel, and I do not take it as an allegory of the

dialogic nature of the text or of any set of social contradictions, any more than spots are a metaphor for measles. It is, rather, an index—a sign that is an integral part of the formations to which it points. My goal is to apprehend both the detail and the horizon, and to contribute both to the understanding of a particular moment in American history and to the development of our frameworks for critical analysis of culture and social life.

# 1

## ❖ “A Strangely Exciting Story” ❖

### How It Began

In the spring of 1906 William Dean Howells suggested an unusual idea for a serial to Elizabeth Jordan, the editor of *Harper's Bazar*. “He thought it might be interesting,” Jordan wrote many years later, “to publish a novel of twelve chapters, to be written by twelve authors, under the title *The Whole Family*. Of these, eleven would write their chapters as supposed members of that family, while a twelfth, the Friend of the Family, would ‘sum up’ in the final chapter.”<sup>1</sup> Howells disclaimed any intention of asking the contributors to conform to his conception of the characters, writing to Jordan that they “must be left in entire freedom.” But he worked out the plan of the book in some detail, specifying that the family should consist of a grandmother, who would “open the affair,” a father, mother, son and daughter-in-law, daughter and son-in-law, a little girl and boy, a maiden aunt on either the father’s or mother’s side, a young girl, and the female friend who was to sum up. He also suggested eight writers (including himself, Samuel Clemens, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Jordan) and proposed that “[t]he family might be in some such moment of vital agitation as that attending the Young Girl’s engagement, or pending engagement, and each witness could treat of it in character. There could be fun enough, but each should try seriously to put himself or herself really into the personage’s place. I think the more seriously the business was treated, the better.”<sup>2</sup>

Howells clearly understood the impossibility of retaining control over such a collaboration but could not resist the temptation to try. He closed his letter with “Excuse the meddling,” only to add after his sig-

nature, “P.S. The note of the whole might be confidential, but kindly criticism, reciprocal, among all the characters, but especially leaving open the Young Girl and her betrothed.” He seems to have envisioned *The Whole Family* as an amusing, circulation-building novelty for the *Bazar*; yet also to have cherished the hope that it would be a substantial work of literature. It would provide a forum for discussing issues of the day—Howells specifically mentioned coeducation—and presumably model the sort of literary realism he had long advocated; he envisioned a family “in middling circumstances, of average culture and experiences,” and wrote when he sent his chapter to Jordan that he had been “feeling for the great American average in the situation.” He took the project “seriously” enough to be dismayed when other members of the fictional family actually took liberties with his design.

Jordan was enthusiastic about the idea of producing what she calls in her autobiography a “composite novel,” and set to work lining up contributors at once. She had high aspirations: “[W]ith Mr. Howells making the first drive from the literary tee, and the cooperation of Henry James and Mark Twain practically assured, my ambition was to bring together what P. T. Barnum would have called the greatest, grandest, most gorgeous group of authors ever collaborating on a literary production” (258). Those invited to participate were linked to Harper & Brothers Publishers by varied avenues: several were closely associated with the house as editors and authors, several were linked to those by friendship, some regularly published books with the firm, some published elsewhere but contributed to Harper’s periodicals, especially the *Bazar*; Alfred Bendixen writes in his introduction to the 1986 reprinting of the novel that the project was “designed to be a show-place for Harper’s family of authors” (xiii), which describes Jordan’s desire although it exaggerates the coherence of the final list (see appendix 1). As Bendixen points out, only an enormous and prestigious publishing company like Harper’s, with the aid of an influential writer and critic like Howells, could possibly have succeeded in mounting such a collaboration.

Indications of the difficulties ahead appeared immediately when some of Howells’s and Jordan’s first choices declined to participate and the planned order of the contributions had to be altered to accommodate the schedules of those who agreed. Jordan takes, throughout the chap-


ter of her autobiography she devotes to *The Whole Family*, a comically rueful tone. "Several authors were tied up and could not write a chapter till their contracts had been carried out. Others could not begin the work for two years. My daily mail was made up of large problems. Many authors preferred to write chapters other than those assigned to them—often chapters already assigned to some one else. The mother selected yearned to contribute the chapter of the married daughter; the selected son-in-law passionately preferred to be the friend of the family. Every author except Mr. Howells desired to write a final chapter" (261). Nevertheless, by December 1906 *The Whole Family* was being advertised as forthcoming in *Harper's Bazar* (see fig. 1), with Mark Twain, who eventually declined, listed among the contributors.

The troubles of this early period were a mere intimation of what was to follow. In the event, Howells opened the novel with a chapter on the father of the family. Jordan sent proofs to all the contributors, who read it, she reports, "with the interest and respect due to the work of the Dean of American Literature." Among the other contributors only Mary Wilkins Freeman, who was to represent the maiden aunt, was free to write her chapter immediately, and it was when Jordan sent out the proofs of the second chapter that "the epoch-making row of *The Whole Family* began!" (263). The authors speedily constituted themselves as advocates for the characters they represented and began to engage in "reciprocal" criticism notably lacking in the "kindly" tone Howells had suggested.

Freeman did not think Howells had treated her character very well; Jordan, concurring, writes that he "had relegated Elizabeth to the chimney corner. He was not interested in her" (263). Freeman makes her single by choice, "as pretty and as up-to-date" (in Jordan 266) as a young girl, and deposits her squarely in the middle of the action by revealing that the young man to whom her niece Peggy has just become engaged is actually in love with Elizabeth (see fig. 2). "This wholly unexpected twist of the tale proved to be the explosion of a bomb-shell on our literary hearthstone," Jordan writes. "Every author on the list dropped all other interests to write me about it. They all knew me well, and many of them were my friends. They wrote intimately and in a state of high excitement" (264). Some approved, feeling that the first chapter had been slow moving and that the second offered more possibilities for

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The Married Son:  
The Married Daughter:  
The School Girl: Elizabeth Jordan.  
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## **HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS**





2. Illustration for *The Whole Family*,  
ch. 2, "The Old-Maid Aunt": "Elizabeth."  
*Harper's Bazar* 42.1 (January 1908): 2.  
By Alice Barber Stephens.

action. Others, particularly Howells and Henry Van Dyke, were horrified—Howells, in a letter that “almost scorched the paper it was written on,” actually asked Jordan not to publish Freeman’s contribution. Jordan’s own opinion of the chapter and the necessity of avoiding offense to any of Harper’s family of authors prohibited that: “I had to remember that, like Mr. Howells, Miss Wilkins was one of Harper’s most valued and successful authors. To reject her chapter was impossible” (264).<sup>3</sup> In her perplexity Jordan turned to Henry Mills Alden, editor of *Harper’s Monthly*, for guidance and mediation. Indeed, the authors’ discussions “grew so fiery” (267) that she eventually also sought the support of both Frederick Duneka, the general manager of Harper’s, and Col. George Harvey, its president.

The battle over Aunt Elizabeth (or “Lily” [34], or “the deadly Eliza” [176], as she is variously called) continued, both in letters and in the text of the story, through the entire collaboration; the different authors interpret her character and behavior quite differently. A second explosion took place over Edith Wyatt’s chapter on “The Mother,” which caused Duneka to “break into the discussion” with a letter that calls the chapter “confused, dull, stupid, vapid, meaningless, halting, lame . . . cruelly incompetent drivel” (Jordan 273). Henry James called that chapter “a positive small convulsion of debility” and lamented: “Does your public *want* that so completely lack-lustre domestic sentimentality?” (Edel and Powers 52). Virtually every chapter occasioned discussions, debates, and discontent. Jordan wrote later, “If I had realized the possibilities of the situation I would not have sent to any one of those twelve authors any part of that novel until the time came for him or her to write a chapter. Then I would have sent all the preceding chapters together, and the waiting author would have had the cumulative effect of them. He would also have had the inevitable literary spasm caused by the collaboration to date—but it would have been only one spasm instead of eleven—and his mind would have been promptly diverted by the need of writing his own chapter at once” (263). As it was, the correspondence was voluminous, and gossip about *The Whole Family*’s problems spread quickly; according to Jordan, at least, “all literary New York discussed it” (268).

The range and urgency of these disputes, coupled with the narrative creativity required to adjudicate them through the story line, are

what make *The Whole Family* so interesting. It seems appropriate to turn Ronald Dworkin's analogy between case law and the "chain novel" back on this fiction: "[E]very novelist but the first has the dual responsibilities of interpreting and creating. . . . This must be interpretation in a non-intention-bound style because, at least for all novelists after the second, there is no single author whose intentions any interpreter can, by the rules of the project, regard as decisive." A judge writing an opinion, Dworkin suggests, is similarly "a partner in a complex chain enterprise . . . [who] must determine, according to his own judgment, what the earlier decisions come to, what the point or theme of the practice so far, taken as a whole, really is" (192–94). (Or what it ought to be; some of the contributors to *The Whole Family* turned out to be judicial activists.) Cutting into this product of mingled interpretation and creation at any point reveals traces of a complex negotiation. Unraveling those traces sometimes entails a considerable work of historical reconstruction, and the artifact is revealing for that very reason.

The topics over which the battles were fought were important ones. To claim, as the *Bazar* "Books & Writers" department did in reporting the book publication of *The Whole Family*, that "[n]ever before has the American family, as an institution, been so subtly discussed" certainly overstates the case. Yet the urgent concerns managed in *The Whole Family* do consistently arrange themselves around and through the complex category invoked in its title. The early twentieth century was a period, like our own, of profound change and perceived crisis in the family. The novel rapidly becomes a debate over diverging models; what some writers consider domestic bliss, others see as claustrophobic misery. Both Peggy's coeducation and Elizabeth's unconventional spinsterhood involve the contributors with the controversial figure of the "New Woman." Would women willingly, could they legitimately, choose lives outside the marriage relation—and in doing so were they rejecting the family or redefining it? I will show that the very forms through which the contributors narrate their claims, sentimentality and realism, embed them in a gender-inflected literary history that constructs the social location of reading in relation to the family. And Harper & Brothers was a family business, publishing the works of its family of authors for readers in family circles all over the country.

The way these topics are worked out depends crucially on two aspects of the novel that I explore in the rest of this chapter: it was produced collaboratively, and its production was arranged through Harper & Brothers for *Harper's Bazar*. I offer an initial account (to be developed in later chapters) of what this particular site in the magazine world implies about the novel's place in the early twentieth-century's cultures of letters—that is, in Richard Brodhead's indispensable formulation, the “scenes of reading and writing” in which the project takes shape.

### Authorship and Collaboration

The powerful notion of the “social text” as a site of struggle over meanings applies fully to singly-authored works and guides my readings of the separate chapters of the composite novel. But one advantage of studying a composite novel is that it dramatizes that notion—indeed, *The Whole Family* almost literalizes it; the title proclaims a unity, yet both the contentious process of its writing and the novel itself persistently betray conflict and fragmentation. Despite contemporary reviewers' exclamations over the book's consistent style, the narrative is, in the strict sense, incoherent: it veers among different designs that cannot be contained within a single frame. This is not only a matter of the incompatible versions of Aunt Elizabeth. Toward the end of the novel, for instance, Alice Brown actually treats the chapter that immediately preceded hers as a hoax, so that none of the events recounted in it “really” happened. For the historicizing critic, such disjunctures are intriguing openings for analysis, and I make use of them in subsequent chapters; for the contributors, they constituted failures of craft. Elizabeth Jordan's final words on the subject in her autobiography—voiced, she writes, with the “accumulated zest” of many years of discretion—are: “*The Whole Family* was a mess!” (280). The last chapter of this study will consider the shape of the novel as a whole and ask where and on what terms it succeeds or fails. The questions that concern me here point rather toward the conditions of literary production: *Whose* craft are we talking about? What is the significance of this collaborative form for the institution of authorship?

From the perspective of the social text, individuals are as much