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AUTHORIAL AFFILIATIONS, OR, THE CLUBBING AND COLLABORATING OF BRANDER MATTHEWS

SUSANNA ASHTON

Both the friends and enemies of Brander Matthews attested to his sociability. Clayton Hamilton wrote in 1929 that Matthews had a “genius in the gentle art of friendship” (86). Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, observed that Matthews “knew everybody and everybody knew him” and Mark Twain even jokingly inscribed one of his books, “To B. M. From his only friend.”¹ Although Matthews counted among his friends many prominent critics, writers, and politicians, (especially notable was his intimate friendship with Theodore Roosevelt), his congeniality and relentless socializing was not part of a program of professional networking. For Matthews, the ability to socialize was part of his identity as a specific kind of cultural figure, that of a professional man of letters. As the cultural prestige accorded the romantic and solitary author waned, Matthews came to embody a phenomenon that assigned cultural prestige to the practice of authorship as an activity most suited for men who could “mix.” Through his collaborative fiction, critical essays, indefatigable socializing, and, most importantly, his exchanges with other writers and literary figures, Brander Matthews drew together conflicting theories about the practice of writing in order to bolster the vision of romantic authorship for what he saw as the new and resolutely unromantic twentieth-century literary marketplace.

Brander Matthews was seen as one of the last Genteel literary critics in America. His life and work epitomized the last stand of

¹Both quoted in “Brander Matthews, Educator” (10).

writers who sought the cultural status of “the artist” even as they participated in the marketplace. In response to the Progressive era’s emphasis upon professionalization, many writers such as Matthews tried to place the nineteenth century “man of letters” into a more modern context, creating, in effect, a “professional” man of letters. The clubbing, conversing, and collaborating that Matthews engaged in throughout his life were all part of an attempt to promote authorship as the natural outpouring of an almost spiritual commonality between individuals. Writers of this period who embraced the collaborationist paradigm, managed to retain a romantic understanding of authorship as solitary, even though the solitary nature of their vocation paradoxically lent them commonality. In contrast, writers more commonly identified with this period of American letters such as Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, or the many authors who went on to join the more radical factions of the Authors League of America, did not share the literary or social values of the “genteel” establishment. They exemplified a literary individualism, one that gave them a different kind of commonality. These writers saw that they had in common an identity predicated upon a particular kind of marketplace status.

The tensions between these two visions of literary identity eventually created the great schism that split the Authors League of America in 1916 over whether or not to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor. While the Progressive writers saw affiliation as a logical expression of commonality with other groups of writers whose identities also were constructed by marketplace relations, the genteel writers (led by Brander Matthews and his Authors Club cronies) opposed such affiliation because they saw authorial identity as predicated upon a shared reverence for romantic individualism. The collaborations of the 1890s attest to a sociability of authorship promoted to reap the advantages of a collective identity without sacrificing the patrician individualism of the nineteenth-century writer. Matthews’ participation in collaborative writing was part of a concerted effort to promote a vision of authorship that would allow the romance of inspiration to be well paid.

Being “well paid” was a relative term. Matthews was the only son of a millionaire who lost his fortune during the panic of 1873. Enough money remained, however, so that Matthews never had to rely on income earned as either author or professor. As his old friend Clayton Hamilton put it, Matthews “could practice the profession of a man of letters without ever being required to earn his living by his authorship” (84). Matthews, moreover, “was able to flourish his profession of authorship as a sort of cane—an ornamental instrument of elegance which was not required seriously for support” (84). Matthews’ spectacular success as a “Man Of Letters” well into the

twentieth century, demands a careful understanding of just how “authorship” was involved in such a title, for Matthews was no romantic essayist of the early nineteenth century tradition. He may have “flourished” authorship as an accessory but he was able to do so precisely because of his professionalism. He lived, by choice, as a professional man of letters—a fact his friend Hamilton fails to appreciate. By conducting his life as a professional man of letters, Matthews’ career marks a curious development in the cultural understanding of authorship. Professional men of letters used their skills to participate in the marketplace, but their marketplace activity consisted in the trade of symbolic capital as much as it did in monetary exchange.

To be a man of letters was, for the writers who aspired to such a role, to possess a loyalty to conservative traditions and a certain cultural versatility. In 1908 Barrett Wendall defined the “Man of Letters” as a man who specialized in not specializing in anything: “It is the privilege of the man of letters that he may venture on occasion to discuss matters in which he makes no pretense to be expert” (3). Expertise, at the turn-of-the-century, was an idea weighted down with significance. Declaring oneself an expert was to partake in a modern marketplace culture—one in which expertise was equated with professionalism. According to Wendall’s definition, to be a man of letters was almost precisely the opposite of being a “professional.” To be “professional” has historically meant that one defined and honed a sphere of knowledge that would then become increasingly esoteric and specialized. A man of letters, with his broad knowledge and vague authority, would necessarily elude any professional status.

While Christopher Wilson has demonstrated in his study *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era*, that a “professional” writer at the turn of the century defined himself in relation to marketplace forces, Wilson does not fully account for how symbolic capital was exchanged in this marketplace. To be a professional man of letters, as men such as Brander Matthews sought to be, meant that one was professional inasmuch as one took part in a discourse essentially inaccessible to the mass public. A doctor, for example, is understood as professional in part because he has attended medical school and can employ incomprehensible medical jargon. For a man of letters to professionalize, therefore, he needs to make sure the “letters” appear difficult to master. The professionalizing of a man of letters assumes, moreover, that there are other professional men of letters who have created standards by which the professionalizing task can be judged. As Thomas Strychacz explains in his study of the relationship between early twentieth century literature and professionalism, if to become professional is to master an esoteric knowledge, it “presupposes the formation of a

‘community of competence’—a group of experts distinguished by their shared competence in a particular body of knowledge” (24). Professionalizing demands the grouping of individuals as much as it demands the grouping of knowledges.

By constructing a career around clubbing and collaborating, Brander Matthews assembled individuals in much the same way that he assembled ideas. Tacitly open, yet tautly elite, the circles Matthews involved himself in perpetuated a discourse of literary authorship fraught with anxieties and hopes about what a professionalized literary world could be. The many literary collaborations that Matthews initiated underscored his belief that by banding together one might define a practice of writing. Even if collaborative writing or even cooperative socializing wouldn’t necessarily create art, it would define the practice in which art could be created. This view was proudly elitist. The extents to which late nineteenth-century individuals and organizations went to exclude anyone they saw as different is indicative of the extreme pressures these groups felt themselves to be under. By assembling together in order to exclaim how they didn’t really need to do so; men such as Brander Matthews created a vision of authorship that was, in its own contradictory manner, unique to the turn of the century.

Disappearance of the Enemy

Matthews wrote several major critical works including *French Dramatists of the Nineteenth Century* (1881), *The Development of Drama* (1903), *Molière, His Life and His Work* (1910) and *Shakespeare as Playwright* (1913). He was a Professor of Dramatic Literature at Columbia University from 1892-1924 and was generally acknowledged to be the foremost expert on dramatic theory and criticism in the United States in the last part of the nineteenth century. Matthews’ position at Columbia was created especially for him and he used that Professorship to teach creative writing and to promote the, then radical, concept of dramatic literature as a legitimate field of study.

For an individual who later came to represent all that was stodgy and genteel in academic life, he was somewhat rebellious in his early career. His *Introduction to the Study of American Literature* (1896) sold a quarter of a million copies and was one of the very first textbooks in the field of American Literature. His essay on the “Philosophy of the Short-Story” (1901) is generally agreed to be the first significant analysis of the short story as a literary genre and his other essays on a wide range of literary subjects (including “The Art

and Mystery of Collaboration”) reveal a broad-based knowledge and expertise in a huge variety of fields from theories of plagiarism, speechmaking, clowns, bookbinding, and simplified spelling, to Hippolyte Taine, Edgar Allen Poe, Cervantes and the popularity of Molière. His story collection, *Vignettes of Manhattan* (1894) was frequently acclaimed as the one of the best urban local color studies written up to that time. By one scholar’s count Matthews wrote 65 books (which included three novels, many collections of short stories and a number of plays). Eight of his plays were produced and he managed to find the time to edit fifteen volumes of poetry, biography, and literary criticism (Westbrook 272-280). His literary scholarship earned him the French Legion of Honor in 1907, and he was promoted to honorary officer of the Legion in 1922. His critical writings on an immense variety of topics led William Dean Howells to praise Matthews’ work as “better than that of any other critic of your generation among us” (qtd. in Oliver, 95).

His play, “The Gold Mine,” written with his friend George Jessop, supposedly sparked Sister Carrie’s first interest in the theater. The narrator in Theodore Dreiser’s novel *Sister Carrie* (1901) observes with some rancor that “the play was one of those drawing-room concoctions in which charmingly overdressed ladies and gentlemen suffer the pangs of love and jealousy amid gilded surroundings. Such *bon mots* are ever enticing to those who have all their days longed for such material surroundings and have never had them gratified” (248). Dreiser’s use of Matthews and Jessop’s play was but a passing reference in *Sister Carrie*, but it spoke volumes. Carrie’s appreciation for “A Gold Mine” was a testament to her own naiveté and intellectual limitations. Thanks to the work done by Theodore Dreiser, H. L. Mencken, George Santayana, and Randolph Bourne, even an oblique reference to Brander Matthews immediately conveyed the image of an effete, posturing, and outdated understanding of literature and its construction. For these critics and many other early twentieth century pundits, Matthews came to embody all that was wrong with literary culture. Yet even as villain, he hasn’t aged well. Contemporary scholars overlook even his straw-man status but their very neglect actually testifies to the singular weight Matthews held during his lifetime.

This rather extraordinary “absence is presence” argument is predicated upon an understanding of what precisely it was about Matthews that so irritated the group of writers Matthews’ friend Stuart Sherman referred to as attacking like “Mohawks” and what is gained by the effacement of Matthews’ career (251). Matthews’ cultural roles as professor, pundit, agitator, stick-in-the-mud and irritant worked together to consolidate considerable power. The phrase “working together” is key here because I see Matthews’

conception of the role of the intellectual as intimately related to the cultural consolidation of various literary institutions of the period.

Figures of far less consequence than Matthews appear throughout scholarship of the Progressive Era. The major books of American literary history that chronicle the turn of the century omit Matthews even from their canon of genteel conservatives. In *The Literary History of the United States*, Spiller utterly ignores Matthews. Larzar Ziff, in *The American 1890s*, devotes a chapter to genteel writers titled, "Being Old Fashioned," but he never notes Matthews' fame in the field—a man whose front page NY Times obituary called him "One of the last of the 'eminent Victorians' of American origin" ("Brander Matthews, Educator" 10). Thomas Bender's *New York Intellect* makes only passing references to Matthews and tellingly refers to him as a "Columbia professor-about-town": evidence of just how hard it was to pin down what Matthews ever did to make himself notable (223). Even Lawrence Oliver's excellent study of Matthews, *Brander Matthews, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Politics of American Literature, 1880-1920*, attends more to the tradition of genteel progressivism and politics than it does to the internecine relationships which characterized literary authorship of the period.² Matthews has essentially disappeared from the literary and historical canon.

To the many young moderns who railed against Matthews' literary, social, and cultural politics, Matthews' wealth of friendships meant that his powerful connections allowed him to promote a conservative and outdated understanding of literature. His friendships gave him the social legitimacy that allowed him to promote a fundamental disdain for literature as what Bourne called a "comprehension of life" (235). This is a complex accusation. In his essay "On Working Too Much and Working Too Hard" (1916), for example, Matthews admits that the pace of composition is no measure of a writer's skill but he does say,

There are now, there always have been and there always will be, men who write too fast and who write too much, because they are writing chiefly with a desire to make money. These men write themselves out and they write themselves down; and there is no need to waste words over what they do and how they do it. They are beneath criticism, not because they write too much and too fast or chiefly for money, but because they are what they are.

²Oliver (1992). I would like to call attention here to the great debt my essay owes to the careful research and analysis found in Oliver's writings.

Their failure is not due to a defective method; it is due to a deficient character. (214)

With sweeping statements such as this one, which essentially correlates journalism with corruption, Matthews no doubt alienated both the writers who considered themselves journalists and the many writers who had been journalists at one point in their careers.

In his essay "Literature as a Profession" (1899), Matthews observed: "the boundaries of the profession of literature are not a little vague. Is a college professor a man of letters? Is a lecturer? Is an editor? And, more particularly, is a journalist a literary man?" (194). He generously concluded that editors, college professors and lecturers were all literary men—not because they wrote more than journalists, or even because the quality of their product was intrinsically better than that of a newspaper hack. Rather, it was the intent and attitude held when they sat down to write that really mattered. The product of their intent was less significant than the intent itself: "the work of the journalist, as such, is for the day only; the work of the man of letters, as such, is for all time" (196) purred Matthews. While Matthews admitted that there was occasionally literary writing in newspapers and non-literary writing in what were supposed to be literary books, to him the medium of publication mattered less than the temporal goals a writer had for each word he wrote.

As Matthews' reasoning went, the product a man of letters produced was less significant than the manner in which he produced it—an idea quite in keeping with Matthews' formulation of the "professional man of letters." For another common standard by which to measure professionalism was production. To be a professional in the late nineteenth century meant that your labor did not result in tangible or easily quantifiable products. Creating a literary reputation based upon witticisms and unpublished satirical poems, for example, would be a perfectly respectable "production" of a professional man of letters. A professional man of letters might well die with little to show for his life in literature, but during his lifetime he would have the moral and cultural clout that journalists or non-literary writers would lack.

Thus to the young moderns, Matthews was a formidable enemy. Their dismissals of him are fraught with the realization that their own cultural clout was very directly threatened by his presence. Burton Roscoe, for example, believed Matthews wrote "with the crabbed generalities of the merely garrulous and disgruntled" and that Matthews often sounded like a "provincial editorial writer engrossed in another 'Wither Are We Drifting?' lamentation" (223). One of Matthews' major offenses was, for Roscoe, that he made

pronouncements about contemporary literary culture without reading “the columns of the more progressive reviews and newspapers,” papers which were the bread and butter of critics such as Roscoe (223).

Not all young writers felt threatened by men like Matthews. Ellen Glasgow, for one, characterized the grand old literary men who had survived into the twenties as genial buffers, unaware of their waning status: “the more I saw of these agreeable authors, the more I liked them. The trouble was that I thought of them as old gentlemen, and they thought of themselves as old masters” (141). This sort of bemused but friendly tolerance was likely a common assessment of Matthews and his crowd during the 1920s. The professionalized men of letters were viewed as ineffectual genteel writers of the nineteenth century rather than as the relatively savvy chameleons they often were. While shored up in universities and clubrooms, these “agreeable authors” nonetheless managed to dominate prize committees and popular magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*. Crowing over their demise was thus an important rhetorical move for the many younger writers who could, in part, bring about such demise by pronouncing it prematurely.

It is perhaps this feeling of unacknowledged hubris that causes the nervous petulance apparent in the writings of many of Matthews' critics. Even Mencken begrudgingly acknowledged Matthews' status. In an attempt to get Matthews' signature on a petition protesting the censorship of Dreiser's novel, *The Genius*, Mencken wrote, “the signature of such an old ass as Brander Matthews would be worth a great deal” (Riggio 25). One must recall too, that Randolph Bourne's assured acerbity spouted from a thirty-two-year old critic while Matthews, who was in his eighties during the 1920s, was busy collecting honorary awards and giving public lectures right up until his death in 1929. In short, Matthews was part of a literary and cultural phenomenon that was tremendously powerful well into the 1920s. When Sinclair Lewis, in accepting the Nobel Prize for literature in 1930, railed against both academism and the genteel writers who had previously dominated American life and letters, he was quite directly attacking men like Matthews.³ Yet Lewis' railing

³Lewis recounts meeting an unidentified Brander Matthews-ish professor who was a famous member of the American Academy of Letters and a much published essayist of the old school. Lewis recalled with disdain, “from these essays I learned, as a boy, that there is something very important and spiritual about catching fish, if you have no need of doing so” (10). Brander Matthews may well have been on the committee to award the Pulitzer Prize in the 1920s. Membership was kept secret but the members were largely drawn from Columbia University. Lewis, who had turned down the Pulitzer Prize in 1926 as a public show of disgust for the values and taste

was done from the safety of the Nobel platform. The fact that Lewis felt the need to devote his Nobel acceptance speech to attacking the professionalized men of letters stands as testament to the tremendous power of men such as Matthews, shored up as they were in universities, literary societies, and club rooms.

An Eminently Clubbable Man

Even a partial list of Matthews' club activities is numbing. He helped establish the Player's Club, the Dunlap Society, and the Author's Club, while he was an enthusiastic member of the Kinsmen, the Grolier Club, the Century Club, the Nineteenth-Century Club, the Savile Club, the Rabelais Club and the British Athenaeum.⁴ His work with professional associations often overlapped into his clubbing activities. He helped develop the National Institute of Arts and Letters and served as its president from 1912-1914. He worked to organize the National Institute's offshoot, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and served as its chancellor from 1920-1924. From 1910-1911 he served as President of the Modern Language Association.

This kind of elite standing distressed Bourne and his crowd. It not only gave Matthews' pronouncements tremendous clout, but it also put him in the position of defining a profession which seemed to exclude the iconoclastic, independent writer who came to dominate American Criticism in the twenties and thirties. These later critics didn't object to his clubbing; they objected to the way in which his clubbing excluded what they saw as their profession. It was common, for instance, for the larger New York Society clubs such as the Metropolitan, to include in their charters a formal prohibition of any journalists or newspaper writers on the premises, much less as members (Porzelt 4). The prohibition was ostensibly to prohibit gossip columnists from gaining access to high society events, but had broader implications as well. Even if they were not on the premises in a formal capacity, journalists were not of an acceptable social standing to mingle with the elite. This was no surprise, of course, for membership in these social clubs was highly elite and expensive. But for clubs which were supposedly organized around professional

promoted by the Pulitzer committee, would likely have known Brander Matthews and his circle quite well.

⁴There was great inconsistency about the use of an apostrophe "s" at the end of Author's Club, even in the publications authorized by the club. I have standardized all references to the club throughout this essay.

affiliations, such as the Author's Club which Matthews helped found in 1882, excluding reporters and journalists became a much more controversial act and indicated much of the tension surrounding the ways in which the burgeoning profession of writing was being defined.

The club scene in New York was not one to be negotiated by the unwary. The late nineteenth century was the boom period for New York clubs, and the intricate social hierarchies of these clubs constantly shifted. Clubs could be formed and dissolved very suddenly and the competition to belong to the most prestigious clubs was tremendous. The changing landscape of the Club scene is well illustrated by a look at the roster of names listed in *Rossiter's Club Men of New York*, a book first published in 1893 which was the "Who's Who" of the fabulously rich. Rossiter's listed 119 clubs in its first issue, and in 1901 it listed 157 clubs with over 38,000 members (Porzelt 3).

The clubs springing up all over New York were part of the world in which Brander Matthews had been raised. He had the social connections and certainly the cultural leanings to have made himself quite at home in the wealthiest clubs of New York. He was, after all, the ex-millionaire who Lionel Trilling reports "rode a shining coupe drawn by two fat horses" to Columbia from his luxurious West End Avenue home (24). Yet the clubs Matthews was a member of and helped found were, on the whole, not the most exclusive clubs of the upper society set. They were, rather, the most exclusive "intellectual" clubs founded upon shared interests rather than mere wealth and bloodline. The Century Club, for example, probably the most prestigious of his New York associations, was predicated upon an appreciation of arts and letters. Founded in 1847 by William Cullen Bryant, the Century Club quickly developed into what Mark Twain called "the most unspeakably respectable club in the United States, perhaps" (88). This excruciatingly elite Club counted most of the prominent male writers and painters of New York as its members, but even among such glitterati, Matthews held a special role. One account of The Century during this era, for instance, described Matthews as "almost the professional jester of the Club" competing for this title with John Kendrick Bangs, Henry Van Dyke, Edward Eggleston, and the many other genteel humorists who regularly dined together (Commager 70).

Most of the other clubs Matthews belonged to were considerably less posh and well established than The Century. Some, like the Rabelais Club in London were just drinking and dining groups that would regularly gather in restaurants, while others, like the Author's Club during its early years, borrowed other club's facilities. The "floating" clubs obviously didn't have as much social cachet as the

more established ones, but these forums for networking and socializing were nonetheless elite. Dues were tendered and members needed to be voted upon. The more open atmosphere of his “floating” clubs, especially the theatrical ones such as The Players, gave Matthews the cachet of Bohemia without really forcing him to mingle with the masses. More than any individual club, however, it was the accumulation of clubs and his ability to move among them all that marks Matthews’ spectacular success at negotiating and consolidating the most powerful cultural circles of the both the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

Brander Matthews and the Author’s Club

In 1882, when Richard Watson Gilder, the editor of *Century Magazine* and a prolific poet, decided to invite several friends over to his house in order to discuss the formation of an Author’s Club, Matthews was one of his most important guests. With the launching of the Author’s Club, Matthews became part of a series of pronouncements about what his circle would recognize as the practice of authorship.⁵ The original policy of the Author’s Club restricted membership to individuals who were either “author of a published book proper to literature or held a recognized position in other kinds of distinctively literary work” (Osborne 5). While “Technical books and journalism” were barred, editors of literary periodicals and authors of periodical literature were still eligible for Author’s Club membership. Although literary editors and periodical writers never joined in significant numbers, the club itself did increase from 25 members in 1882 to 239 members by 1913.

In 1896, ostensibly to limit numbers but clearly intended to retain the nature of the organization, the club’s constitution was altered. The eligibility clause now read that “the candidate must be the author of a published book proper to literature, or of credible literary work equivalent to such a book” (Osborne 21). Technical writers and journalists were still barred and editors or periodical writers were no

⁵The original seven were Matthews; Gilder (1844-1909); Charles de Kay (1848-1935), a poet and art critic; Noah Brooks (1830-1903), who although originally a newspaper and magazine journalist also wrote a popular boy’s book, *The Boy Emigrants* (1877), a local color collection, *Tales of the Maine Coast* (1894); Edward Eggleston (1837-1902), best known for *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), also wrote many melodramatic western romances and historical texts; Lawrence Hutton (1843-1904), a New York drama critic who wrote over 50 books on travel and the theater; and Edmund Clarence Stedman (1833-1908), a well known genteel essayist and poet as well as a successful Wall Street broker.

longer welcome in the Author's Club. This move was part of a campaign to identify itself as a craft organization, unlike, say, the Century Club. The new restrictions were still vague enough to allow loopholes for magazine essayists who had never managed to assemble their work into a book, but the restriction made clear that an individual who identified himself primarily as a journalist was not an author and by default, not welcome in the club (Osborne 27).⁶ Although this restriction in no way prevented journalists and reporters from associating, unionizing, organizing, and networking through other venues, it was indicative of a patrician premise about the definition of authorship held by many of the most powerful individuals in the field of letters.

By 1912 the Author's Club became even stricter about their admissions. Previously (in accordance with the 1898 revision) an individual needed to have written a literary book or "enough credible literary matter to constitute a book," but by 1912, members were concerned that these terms were dangerously vague (Osborne 36). Osborne writes: "it was felt that, while there had been no tendency to take improper advantage of such equivalents, and no abuses of the alternative clauses, there was, still a dangerous laxity in any that could be devised" (36). The problem was apparently not in the definition of literary matter, but in the idea of what might constitute "enough" and "credible." What might the threatening "equivalents" be? Could they include a series of essays that occasionally used an artfully turned phrase but were otherwise simply technical literature? It is difficult to imagine just what the danger might be, but the alterations of 1912 eliminated the phrase "or enough credible literary matter to constitute a book" and replaced it with a requirement that every candidate need to have published a book which was "proper to literature, science or art" (36-37). Work might be "credible" as literary, (as had been defined in the earlier charter) but according to the 1912 charter, that did not necessarily render it "proper to literature, science or art" To be "credible" was thus constructed as virtually the antithesis of being true and proper to literature. A book that was "credible" as a literary work, was not necessarily an actual literary work, and thus the writer of it had no business calling himself an author. To be credible was to be believable, not necessarily to be true. Thus the Author's Club in 1912

⁶Membership records are not entirely clear, but Harriet Beecher Stowe was the only woman awarded honorary membership before 1912, and I have not seen any other indication that women were included in the club. Explicitly ethnic names, with the exception of the Norwegian-American writer Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, are notable absent from the Author's Club roster, and there seems to have been little internal or external effort to alter this state of affairs.

further refined and restricted their notion of authorship: to be an author was to create a work that was genuinely literary. And to be literary defied specificity. The best definition the Club could come up with at this point was to demand “published book authorship of a work that involves the elements of literary construction and diction” (37). By refusing to categorize the aspects of a work which would make it credible or not literary, the club fortified its position as an organization that simply recognized authorship when it saw it: as an ineffable, transcendent phenomenon.

Understanding literary work as transcendent or simply of a quality that defied description did not mean, however, that the Author’s Club was promulgating a romantic view of authorship. The motivation for writing might be important, but it was nonetheless required that an individual publish a book in order to join. Essentially, the Club left it to the arbiters of the marketplace, the publishers and editors, to deem who was and who was not an author. The Author’s Club used its membership criteria to articulate an understanding of authorship as both romantically ineffable and precisely documented. The modern author was, to the Author’s Club, a professional man of letters. Professional both because he had recourse to other vocations, but also implicitly professional because he had successfully negotiated the literary marketplace.

Although the Author’s Club members organized many copyright lobbying activities and sought to regularize and normalize many publisher/author contractual relations—even to the point of keeping histories of author/publisher disputes on record for the public—their primary concern was socializing among themselves. Promoting an identity constructed around an affinity for literature, rather than a commercial dependence upon it may have been the factor that allowed the Author’s Club to survive. While similar author’s advocacy groups and organizations that focused upon specific legislation often fizzled out once their particular bill was voted for or voted down, the clubs and organizations based upon personal affinity, rather than professional affinity, tended to last far longer. Thus by making the “professional” aspect of a professional man of letters refer to extra-literary activities, Brander Matthews and his circle at the Author’s Club could ensure a continuity of association among like-minded men.

Admittedly, the Author’s Club was a small organization and it would be irresponsible to use their shifting membership criteria to argue for a broad-based national antagonism towards journalists. Even by 1912, the Author’s Club had only 239 members. But these 239 members were choice. Their influence on the national scene

cannot be discounted.⁷ Henry James, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Samuel L. Clemens, Frank R. Stockton, Charles Dudley Warner, and James Russell Lowell were some of the most prominent members. Matthew Arnold was an honorary member, as were Oliver Wendall Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier, and the only woman member as of 1913—Harriet Beecher Stowe. Andrew Carnegie, who was an honorary member and frequent guest at the club, donated a suite of rooms for their use as testament both to his own abiding interest in all things literary, and to the Club's cultural importance. This cultural importance was significant, for although there were other Authors organizations in the United States; the Author's Club represented something very special to the public at large. According to *Publisher's Weekly*, for example, members of the Author's Club were often sent complimentary copies of books or other "valuable gifts" as "bait for their own subscriptions or to bait hooks for the unwary public with their testimonials" ("Questionable" 976). The men who belonged to the Author's Club were, by virtue of their supposed disinterest in the market, perceived by at least some book marketers as having a special "authority" to pronounce the fitness of books to succeed in the literary marketplace. While the *Publisher's Weekly* article titled "Questionable Means of Selling Books" may have found this method of securing endorsements troubling, the practice reveals a popular understanding of how the cultural clout of the Author's Club could be marketed commercially.

As bastion of Victorian gentility, their club rooms gathered publishers and writers who willingly embraced and promulgated a highly charged definition of what it meant to be an author. The threats that caused the Author's Club to work over their membership criteria so many times were clearly coming from a powerful cultural movement. Despite what the elite authors of the club might say, the mere fact that the gentlemen of the Author's Club had to resort to the rhetoric of the marketplace, (say, the judgment of publishers rather than to the historical survival of greatness), meant that writers who identified themselves as literary workers, were making their presence known. And even though the younger generation of writers in the early twentieth century were excluded from the kinds of clubs

⁷Prominent members may have lent their name to the Club, but it is hard to say if they regularly attended meetings. Although most mentions of the Author's Club testify to the lively encounters of prominent writers, I have come across at least one account that was not impressed. After attending one of his first gatherings of the Author's Club, popular novelist Paul Leicester Ford wrote in a private letter to his mother "... it seems to me that the men were for the most part of small calibre minds, and there were painfully few men one had ever heard of before. But that may be my painful ignorance of the new poets and authors."

Brander Matthews helped form and support, Progressive Era writers forced the traditionalists to engage with them in terms that would have been anathema to the Romantic writers of an earlier era.

Although predominantly a social organization, the spectacular cultural clout wielded by the Author's Club circle was illustrated in 1916 when another group, the Authors League of America (ALA), sought to affiliate itself with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The proposed affiliation between the ALA and the AFL was to protect writers against contractual exploitation and generally show support for the labor movement. Unlike the patrician Author's Club, many of the people involved in the ALA were young radicals. Muckraker Ida Tarbell, for example, was one of the earliest members. The ALA though, was a broad centrist organization and Brander Matthews signed on to the ALA as an honorary Vice-President as did several of his close friends, including Theodore Roosevelt and Hamlin Garland. When the vote to affiliate with the AFL came up, the old-guard writers—many of whom were Author's Club members—campaigning hard against the proposition. Former radical Hamlin Garland was firmly opposed to the affiliation. He wrote to Matthews: “[Our Opponents] may call us all Old Foagies but I don't feel any call to line up with engineers and cloak makers” (qtd. in Oliver, 176). This observation was quite probably anti-Semitic, as well as genuinely disdainful of trade, and is indicative of the general disdain the Foagies seem to have felt for the working classes in general, and for the writers who identified with them in particular. Matthews, who wrote petitions, solicited letters, and threatened to resign from the ALA if the vote went through, used his Author's Club friends and connections to successfully beat down the proposed affiliation. The ALA, in various formations, survived far longer into the 20th century than the Carnegie-sponsored Author's Club, but was for many years controlled by a group of self-professed “Old Foagies.”

The hullabaloo raised over the 1916 affiliation vote swung the ALA so far to the right that the ALA's 1919 Program Committee action plan set goals that read more like the Author's Club's charter than like a labor federation's. The ALA wished to raise “the standards of literary criticism” and to secure “for American Books the attention undoubtedly due them.” It even proposed that “admission to the League itself should be in the nature of an honor conferred on those who have ‘arrived’ or who have done notable and pridesworthy work in literature or art.” Although the ALA's pendulum was to swing left again, the networking promoted by the Author's Club circles kept organizations such as the ALA from disseminating a vision of authorship as trade for quite a long time.

With His Friends

Matthews' continual musings on collaboration (he published several variations of his essay on the theories of collaborative composition) need to be understood as part of a discourse seeking to identify, if not regulate, the rules for the art of fiction.⁸ Matthews' position was that the individuality of authorship leads to art. Collaboration was valuable only inasmuch as it led to the personal relationships that fostered the individual practice of writing. Matthews wrote:

Collaboration has always been very attractive to me; and it has always been the result of the intimacy of friendship with its corresponding sympathy of interest . . . It is a fact that the "artistic temperament" is jealous and touchy . . . It may be that I am lacking in the "artistic temperament," since my varied associations only cemented the friendships which preceded them. (*These Many Years*, 252)

With this rather coy approach, Matthews admits that it may have been his own limitations that forced him to understand writing in such a way, but his artistic limitations let him hone his true talent, that for friendship.

Matthews' essay, "The Art and Mystery of Collaboration" was written in 1890 and to this day it is still one of very few scholarly treatments of the principles, history, and significance of literary collaboration. In it he sets forth an analysis of collaboration that is largely anecdotal and often contradictory. He details some of his own experiences in co-authoring literary works and ultimately assesses collaboration as a marginal and, with the exception of dramatic collaboration, light literary game. As Matthews explains: "no great poem has ever been written by two men together, nor any really great novel" (162). Yet Matthews' interest in collaboration was not simply to justify or explain his own collaborative ventures. His essay reveals a series of assumptions about authorship that combine to paint a picture of it as an activity demanding contradiction. Despite being somewhat of a game, Matthews saw that collaboration could

⁸Matthews was evidently pleased with his collaboration essay for his thoughts on the subject were reprinted in a number of different forms. It originally appeared in a 1890 issue of *Longman's* magazine, was reprinted in his 1891 collection of collaborative fiction *With My Friends: Tales Told in Partnership*, and was later included in his 1896 essay collection *Aspects of Fiction*. None of this, of course, is surprising for an author who also wrote an essay titled "On the Right of a Author to Repeat Himself" (1926).

nonetheless tap into deep-seated issues surrounding the mythology of authorship.

But what do we really learn from his theories of collaborative writing? Brander Matthews admits that he really had no idea how collaboration worked. His essay postpones the question until nearly the end of the essay in order to illustrate how a number of historically successful pairs (Dumas and Maquet, Besant and Rice) theorized and practiced their collaborations. By the time he moves into a discussion of “how it is done,” Matthews admits, “such an explanation is at best a doubtful possibility.” The vagueness stems out of what he sees as an essentially mystical relationship. He sets out as if to define a genre, but ends up engaging in a lengthy description of practice.

What can best be gleaned from his essay is a belief that two authors, in partnership, could be true collaborators and could create serious work, if not great art. Larger gatherings were merely “curiosities of literature.” Matthews’ disdain for such gatherings, if not already obvious, was made even more pointed by the financial metaphors he invokes to describe what has ceased to be an intellectual effort: “Nothing of real value is likely to be manufactured by a joint-stock company of unlimited authorship The literary partnerships whose paper sells on “Change at par [sic] have but two members” (“The Art and Mystery” 159). He describes the work of several authors on one piece as “a woeful waste of effort” (158). For the son of a millionaire who had lost his fortune in speculation, images of the Stock Exchange carried an especially heavy semiotic burden. By invoking the marketplace language, Matthews suggests that the whole point of collaboration can be lost when too many writers engage in it. If collaboration was supposed to be a vacation from the marketplace, it certainly shouldn’t have to be described in marketplace language. And even more significantly, if collaboration’s great virtue was to provide an opportunity to reinforce one’s faith in the individuality of the literary, the involvement of too many writers in a collaboration could cause chaos, rather than clarity.

The dispersal of literary activities over a broad sphere smacked of a Taylorist approach to literary activity: a virtual assembly line in which the minutia of tasks could be delegated with such efficiency that no single task would require much thought or effort. Matthews explains that despite whatever advantages collaborative writing might offer, collaboration should not be undertaken under the illusion that less work is required in the production of a given text:

Not the saving of labour, but the improvement of the work should be the reason of partnership. Two minds working upon the same idea, having the same object in view, and agreed upon the group of characters to carry out the plan of

the piece, ought to arrive, more certainly and more clearly than one mind alone, not only at the possibilities but also at the certainties. (207)

The point of collaboration was not, therefore, to reduce labor. Instead, collaboration served to generate a text that would be the result of “certainties.” Certainties might manifest themselves best in concise plot lines or vivid dialogue, but the final implication of Matthews’ point is that as valuable as certainties might be, they shut down possibilities. And it is the infusion of possibilities, the engagement with the truly imaginative aspects of literary work, which leads to the riskier work of creating art.

Because collaboration was, for Matthews, a method of asserting how individuality conceives genius, it would be reasonable to assume that the more participants, the better his point could be made. But that is not the case. As we have seen in his distaste for “joint-stock companies of unlimited partnership,” for Matthews, “combination ventures” were demonstrations of “intellectual poverty,” not extensive individualism (159-158). This is consistent with his belief that the exclusivity necessary to determine professionalized knowledge needs to be defended. Collaboration might be amateurish enough an activity to attract writers who recognize their own weakness, but it is not an activity in which the talentless man could make his way into the world of letters. Matthews fills his discussions of collaboration with cautionary tales. It might not be for the greatest authors, but it was not to be taken up by the masses.

The Documents in the Case

If the individuality of genius was to emerge in collaboration, writers needed to work together with an understanding that their joint labor would result in literature able to hide the specific traces of its assembly, but would never be able to entirely smooth over its intrinsic nature as a joint production. As his actual collaborative short stories illustrate, Matthews steadily exploited the gimmicks and goofiness of collaborative literature to demonstrate the method’s shortcomings as well as its virtues.

Although Matthews wrote many short stories with a variety of collaborators, one example best demonstrates my argument that he and his collaborators were interested in foregrounding the intrinsically unnatural state of collaborative merger.

After working with humorist H. C. Bunner on the short story “The Documents in the Case,” Matthews and his friend sent a copy of

their story to Emile Zola stating with juvenile disingenuousness, that Zola's interest in Naturalism as approached through the novelist's study of "human documents" had influenced the construction and theorizing behind their own collaborative piece.⁹ Zola, fortunately, wrote back that he was unable to read English and the stupidity of the joke had therefore been lost. The joke lay in the fact that Bunner and Matthews conceived the project as a series of documents that when juxtaposed would tell a story. The conceit in "The Documents in the Case," that a pile of newspaper clippings, pawn tickets, telegrams, and correspondence could single-handedly tell the tale of an American romance, was nothing particularly original. Both Gothic traditions of layered narration and the 18th century epistolary novel had long worked with similar ideas. "The Documents in the Case" merits examination though, because not only was it Matthews' first foray into collaborative composition and set a precedent for many of the concerns to appear in his later collaborative ventures, it also contains a number of particular features that play upon its collaborative origins. By highlighting its origins as a series of textual productions, "The Documents in the Case" presents an understanding of authorship and responsibility that became part of Matthews' broader theories about the cultural position of the writer for the late nineteenth century.

The story follows a missing British nobleman who is tracked to the American West. He dies and his young daughter is kidnapped by Indians and then later adopted by a troupe of traveling actors. The story chronicles attempts by lawyers and private detectives to follow a paper trail that will lead them to the missing heiress. Much of the humor derives from the juxtaposition of the formal British documents pertaining to the legal search for this man with the awkward language of the American frontier. An obituary from the *Illustrated London News* opens the story by announcing in the most dignified of language the "lamented death" of a Sir William Beauvoir, while later clippings from a newspaper in "Bone-Gulch," California, boast the arrival of the "Hon. Mr. Beaver" who "has come here to stay permanently and forever [sic]." The discord of such difference is sounded throughout for comic effect.

The naiveté embodied by the American vernacular is further highlighted by the many visual and typographical ploys Bunner and Matthews use to underscore the constructed nature of the text. Not only does the Bone-Gulch newspaper, *The Palladium*, lack a complete

⁹One of Brander Matthew's closest friends, H. C. Bunner (1855-1896) edited and wrote for *Puck* magazine through the 1880s and early 1890s, establishing himself as one of the foremost American humorists of the late nineteenth century.

set of type and hence must replace the letter “n” with “ñ,” but it also lacks a letter “w” and prints its the letter “w” using two “v”s instead, a move which the rival town’s newspaper notes with glee. “[T]he *Palladium*’s eleven unhappy readers . . . are getting very tired of the old type cast for the Concha Mission in 1811, which tries to make up for its lack of w’s by a plentiful superfluity of greaser v’s.” The contrivance of note here is the dissolution of the “w” (double u) which signifies the naturalized merging of two entities, two “u”s (YOUS) that is. No such facile glissance is possible for the Bone-Gulch newspaper. The naive readers of California, because of their limited cultural resources, force the separation of what should be a natural double u (w) into an awkward awareness of the two “u”s which actually compose the illusion of singularity (uu). The joke is rather simple really, but it is indicative of the emphasis the story puts on the distance between two individuals. The letters join and function effectively, but they necessarily make evident their forced construction. Collaboration in this story emphasizes the joints in joint activity.

Conclusion

Matthews’ mediocrity is surprisingly central to my argument. His inability to publish anything that was acclaimed as a great book or which radically changed the course of literary criticism actually indicates what was significant about his role in the transformation of the idea of author in the nineteenth century. Matthews’ identity and success was predicated upon the authority of his position as a Professional Man of Letters. His position at Columbia University was touted on the title page of virtually every one of his books, yet he wasn’t heralded as an academic. Matthews was the embodiment of a reactionary critic, but his reactions were well-enmeshed in powerful cultural tradition. When the critics of the nineteen twenties mocked him (“Professor Matthews was and is as naïve as Jackie Coogan” sneered an anonymous essayist for *The Bookman* in 1923), they mocked someone they thought of, with some justification, as an outdated Victorian (“The Literary Spotlight” 434). Yet despite his predilection for nostalgia, Matthews was more Rooseveltian than Victorian, as ably demonstrated by Lawrence Oliver, who devotes much of his book on Matthews to putting Matthews into a “Rooseveltian” tradition of practical idealism.

Yoking “practical” and “idealism” together was a specifically fin-de-siècle ideology, one in which the inconvenient incursions of the modern world, (women, Jews, journalists) could be ignored, while the

new opportunities the modern world presented for men of letters (professorships, and well-paid editorial soapboxes) could be exploited. It was a precarious pretense and did not survive in its pure state very long. But it was openly acknowledged as an innovative bridge spanning two worlds. Matthews recognized this precarious duality, which he saw as an outgrowth of the modern university system. He described himself when he noted that at Columbia a new kind of professor had emerged; one who “is both urban and urbane, who is not only a gentleman and a scholar, in the good old phrase, but also more or less a man of the world and even on occasion a man of affairs” (*These Many Years*, 411). Henry May, in his study of the period singled out Brander Matthews as the epitome of the Columbia professor. According to May, Matthews “brought to the campus a special New York flavor combining, as one could now do with caution, the gentleman’s club and the most respectable Bohemia” (63-64).

The need to yoke together these two worlds demonstrates that an increasing gap was seen between them. This void seems to fit what many critics have characterized as a prevailing anxiety of the period; an anxiety stemming from a nagging feeling that the restructuring of the Gilded Age had resulted in well organized spheres of knowledge, but these spheres only masked massive slippage of cultural assumptions. In the words of T. J. Jackson Lears,

As the rationalization of American economic and social life unfolded in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, professional groups arose to manage new corporate and bureaucratic structures of power, and in the process attained a powerful economic and social status. The authority achieved by professionals, however, was limited by their complicity with the structures of corporate capitalism they sought to guide and control. As supposedly expert guides to new and disorienting social structures, professionals were themselves subject to widespread fears of a “weightless” existence. (xi)

When Brander Matthews and his friends wrote together, they were doing so out of the same urges that led them to form clubs, rather than unions. The many collaborations of the 1880s and 1890s were part of an attempt to connect in a meaningful way; to form a chain or a link which would, in effect, prevent a man of letters from fully disappearing into the void of weightless professionalism.

The schism between a genteel understanding of authorship and a “professional” understanding of authorship was never really bridged by Matthews’ promotion of the professional man of letters. But Matthews’ attempts to build such a bridge with his tireless conversing, clubbing, and collaborating signifies the extent to which

the professionalization of authorship was seen as a threat to be combated on many fronts. Collaboration was, in many ways, a last stand against the increasingly hostile divide between the two visions of writing. By collaborating, writers who believed in inspiration and a vision of the writer as apart from the world could demonstrate an engagement with like-minded individuals.

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