

The Howellsian

Howells Essay Prize— Call for Submissions

The Howells Essay Prize is awarded annually by the Howells Society for the best paper on Howells presented at the annual ALA conference. The winning paper may have been presented in any session on the program of the conference, including but not limited to panels sponsored by the Howells Society.

Presenters of Howells papers at this year's ALA conference in Boston are strongly encouraged to submit their essays by September 1, 2009 to the Society's Vice President and Program Chair, Dr. Lance Rubin, who will coordinate the judging. Dr. Rubin's email address is lance.rubin@arapahoe.edu. Please send your document as an MS Word attachment or PDF file only. Essays may be revised prior to submission but should not exceed "conference length," or roughly 7-10 pages, double-spaced.

Papers will be judged by members of the Executive Committee of the Society, who have the option of appointing additional readers as necessary. The prize will include a cash award of \$100 and an accompanying certificate. The winner will be announced in the Fall issue of *The Howellsian*, and the prize awarded at next year's ALA conference. The winning essay will be published in *The Howellsian*, a peer-edited newsletter indexed by the MLA International Bibliography. (The winning essay in last year's Howells Essay Prize contest appears later in this issue of *The Howellsian*.)

Join the Howells Listserv

All members are encouraged to join the Howells-L email discussion list. Subscribe to receive news about events, calls for papers, and queries, and to participate in discussions about W.D. Howells. Subscription instructions are available on the Howells Society website: www.howellssociety.org

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The William Dean Howells Society Prize Essay

The William Dean Howells Society Essay Prize was awarded at the 2009 ALA conference to Dr. Lance Rubin for his paper, "Consumption and Cannibalism in the Altrurian Romances of William Dean Howells," which he presented at the 2008 ALA conference in San Francisco. The Society thanks Dr. Rubin for his permission to reprint the following version of the prize-winning essay.

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Consumption and Cannibalism in the Altrurian Romances of William Dean Howells

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Throughout William Dean Howells's Altrurian Romances – the novels *A Traveler From Altruria* (1893) and *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907), as well as a series of *Letters of an Altrurian Traveler* that appeared in *Cosmopolitan* between 1893-94 – Aristedes Homos, the traveler from the mythical Altruria, expresses shock and sadness at what he sees as the barbaric state of American culture at the turn of the 20th century. Noting consistently the incongruity of its "devotion to the spirit of Christianity amid the practices which seem to deny it," Homos' Altruria has, as he explains to the Americans who are hosting his research visit to the United States, evolved beyond competitive capitalism to a perfectly functioning, Biblically-inspired socialist utopia where poverty, crime and want have become cultural memories (*Through* 268). Coming from a land that models itself as "a country where people love one another as the first Christians did" (*Through* 348) – one marked by complete equality and a shared sense of duty to all – Homos is dismayed at the predatory ethos that dominates American life. Seeing the indentured status of farmers, the rapacity of the banks and financial machinations, the fanatical adherence to principles of individuality, the self-serving notions of patriotism, the attitude with which physical labor is frowned upon, the education of women, and the caste-like approach to class distinctions, Homos attempts to make Americans recognize the grotesque gap between their democratic and religious ideals and the manner in which both are manipulated for the enrichment of an exclusive cultural elite.

To be sure, I am not breaking new ground in rehearsing the politics of Altruria as Howells's imagined solu-

tion for the inequities of the Gilded Age.¹ What has been neglected in the critical discussions of the Altrurian texts, however, is how he positions the role of food and eating practices as sites of political, economic and class struggle.² As Homos tells his Altrurian correspondent Cyril in the opening of *Through the Eye of the Needle*, he is stunned not only "how the Americans live in the spirit, illogically, blindly, and blunderingly, but how they live in the body" (277). Indeed, eating customs serve as a starting point for Homos' questions about the voraciousness of unchecked capitalism in which the poor are, in a sense, devoured by the rich.

Astonished by the gluttony and waste associated with the spectacle of the dinner tables and restaurants – coupled with a dismissive ignorance of how food gets to the tables – Homos registers the callousness with which the upper class rationalizes a dog-eat-dog ethos that forces people to prey upon each other to survive. Rather than imagining themselves as part of a collective body through which food and goods circulate to the benefit of all its members, as in Altruria, American capitalists support a model that sets the various parts of that body politic against one another, undercutting the nation's ideals, identity and promises. Noting consistently the striking difference between countries "where people live *upon* each other as the Americans do, instead of *for* each other as the Altrurians do" (267, Howells's italics), Homos identifies the conspicuous consumption of the upper classes as inseparable from their cannibalistic social, cultural and political policies.

In suggesting that Homos sees American economics a modern form of cannibalism I am working from

Priscilla Walton's insightful claim that "the cannibal, as the devourer of human beings" is often "projected onto other discourses, be it a discourse of disease, eating habits, consumer practices, or everyday activities (such as shopping)" (4). Howells implies that the upper classes practice a metaphorical system of inequitable cultural appropriation and consumption, but the fact that we are only talking about "metaphoric cannibalism should not be greeted as a positive development [because] it is precisely its metaphoric character that protects it from having to admit its gruesome excesses, empowering it in ways that the original form of cannibalism could not imagine" (20). The suggestion that modern practices of consumption detach cannibalism from the body while retaining the craving for absolute power and hegemony by devouring Otherness is helpful for understanding Homos' belief that the "monstrous conditions" of America legitimate in its citizens barbaric "inducements to rapacity" (*Letters* 194, 186). The mode of consumption and desire to dominate and incorporate others, while allegorical, is still savage and, even worse, encouraged as the national ideal.

Howells establishes the connection between eating practices and Gilded Age capitalism in the first paragraphs of *A Traveler From Altruria* as Homos' host, the romantic novelist Mr. Twelvemough, attempts to hurry the two from the train station to their New England resort because "we shall not stand so good a chance for supper if we are not there pretty prompt" (9). Confused at this idea of not being fed because the train was late (and because Homos, in a move that bewilders his host, helps the porter load all of the suitcases), Twelvemough explains to him, "first come, first served, you know. That's human nature." This is only the first of several times that the competitive logic of "first come, first served" is positioned as human nature in answer to Homos's questions about American customs, so contradictory to the traveler's ideas about democracy.

Later in the novel, for instance, asking about the high interest rates that keep farmers enslaved to the banks who own their land, Twelvemough casually tells Homos, "I suppose that man likes to squeeze his brother man when he gets him in his grip. That's human nature, you know" (83). Likewise, Mrs. Dorothea Makely tells Homos that his account of a cooperative, socialist Altrurian society "is opposed to human nature" because it abolishes "incentive, and all the motive for... advancement and enterprise" (92). When he tells her of the familial relationship among all citizens of Altruria, she refuses to believe him, insisting on its "nonsense" by proclaiming, "*I know human nature!*" (70, Howells's italics). This repeated explanation

exposes the plutocratic idea that competition and division are essential biological or psychological characteristics, not ideological constructions of those accustomed to see aggressive consumption as the proper functioning of the body politic. As Homos quickly learns, the American acceptance of competition in which some will not be served applies not only to the biological body, but the social body.

Arriving at the resort's dining room, Homos repeats his actions at the train station by helping a waitress struggling with an overloaded tray of food meant for him and Twelvemough, much to his host's horror: "To my dismay I saw... the Altrurian enter into polite controversy with her" before carrying the tray to his own table, while the other diners "were simply aghast at the scandal" (35). Confused as to why these events are considered unacceptable, he is told that, despite the American belief in the honor of work, "a certain social slight does attach to [domestic] service... [S]ome occupations are more degrading than others" (38). Asked why any would choose to be waiters or servants, Twelvemough admits, "It is a question of bread and butter" (38). Indeed, it is the fundamental need to eat that dictates most of the political and economic subsumption of the poor by the rich. As the plutocrats admit, the basic need to keep oneself and one's family fed is the foundation upon which those at the bottom of the food chain sustain the consumption of those on top.

The Doctor³, for example, notes the way the term "laid off" reifies the reality of workers and their families not knowing how to procure their next meal; the euphemism is "so different from...having to face beggary or starvation" (53). The Banker, trying to explain the social gulf between the rich and the poor tells Homos, "A man does not care much to get into society until he has something to eat, and how to get that is always the first question with the workingman" (56). Horrified at the idea that the Manufacturer has the ability to arbitrarily take away a man's living, Homos tries to comprehend the idea of willingly (almost happily, if they were unionizing) causing a worker and his family to go hungry:

"If you shot your fellow man, as you say, the law would punish you; but, if for some reason that you decided to be good, you took away his means of living, and he actually starved to death—"

"Then the law would have nothing to do with it," the professor replied for the manufacturer, who did not seem ready to answer. (68)

That the first chapter makes the consumption, serving and necessity of food the focus of the novel's initial discussions of class, politics, and economics reinforces the first-come-

first served mentality that Americans have taken as “indestructibly based in human nature itself” (38). The idea of consuming food, that is, is registered as metonymous with the underlying assumption of American life as a whole. The eat-or-be-eaten ethos of citizens preying upon one another in a system that turns people (waiters, servant, cooks, and farmers) into objects that help to nourish the well-fed bodies of the upper class can be seen as a modern but no less dehumanizing form of cannibalism.

Space prevents me from fully developing the more suggestive and metaphorical cannibalism that characterizes the first novel, but in the sequels Howells makes a more direct connection between predatory socio-economic practices and eating. The “Letter,” entitled “The Selling and Giving of Dinners” (July 1894), provides a clear example of this. Homos writes, “Nothing seems so characteristic of [New York]...as the eating and drinking constantly going on in it” (447). He focuses on this “both for the sake of the curious spectacle it affords, and for the philosophy it involves” (448). He sees the logic of capitalism in the constant performances of disparity between the rich and poor, the fed and the hungry; so much so that Homos sees how “a famishing man must suffer peculiarly here from the spectacle of people everywhere visible at sumptuous tables” (447). Aside from the sight of overeating and overdrinking, what shocks him is the way all classes accept the division of wealth and nourishment as natural. Rather than being troubled or made guilty by the sight of the hungry gazing into the windows of restaurants, “the Americans are so used to their perpetual encounter of famine and of surfeit in their civilization, that they do not seem to mind it” (447). Even those who can afford to eat do not do so with healthy foods. The butchers and grocers in the immigrant neighborhoods are stocked with “revolting and unwholesome” goods, “pieces of loathsome carnage, and bits of decaying vegetation” (450). More confounding to Homos is the staggering waste of food as he sees hotels and restaurants dump their unused and half-eaten food into boats “so that even the swine may not eat of it, much less the thousands of hungering men and women and children, who never know what it is to have quite enough... Every comfortable family in this city throws away at every meal the sustenance of some other family” (450). Homos sees this display of waste and want as proof that the “predatory instinct is very subtle” among “people who live upon each other, instead of for each other” (450). The “spectacle of their contradictions” undermines America’s self-conception, for Homos realizes that the visible show of surfeit and starvation reveals the hollowness of the nation’s cherished ide-

als: “they have no such thing as individuality here, and that in conditions where one man depends upon another man for the chance of earning his bread, there can be no more liberty than there is equality” (“Letter 1” 195).

Needle centers on Homos’ re-entry into the social circle of Mrs. Makely. In the first half of the novel, Howells goes into great detail about the lavish tables and gluttonous behavior of the upper class who feed to excess while “within five minutes’ walk of their warmth and surfeit” is “the actual presence of hunger and cold” and “houselessness” (332). Seeing “how hardened people became to such things,” Homos likens the average American to “a savage who has killed a deer and shares it with his starving tribesman, forgetful of the hungering little ones who wait his return” (332, 276). However, while walking the city and watching New Yorkers shop, Homos gets a glimpse of how easily one can become forgetful of the pressing social inconsistencies that mark everyday life as he is nearly hypnotized by the spectacular displays of food at the markets. Anticipating Guy Debord’s analysis of the spectacle, Howells reveals an understanding of how the omnipresence of commodities distracts and depoliticizes by turning individuals into passive consumers. Homos, so very critical of the monstrous gap between ideals and reality in American life, becomes a momentary casualty in what Debord calls “a permanent opium war” (130) as he finds it hard to resist surrendering to the aesthetic display of the very food that is out of reach for so many walking the streets:

The display was on either side of the provisioner’s door and began on one hand with a line of pumpkins well out on the sidewalk. Then it was built up with the soft white and cool green of cauliflowers, and open boxes of red and white grapes, to the window that flourished in the banks of celery and rosy apples. On the other side, gray-green squashes formed the foundation, and the wall sloped upward with the delicious salads you can find here, the dark red of beets, the yellow of carrots, and the blue of cabbages. The association of colors was very artistic and even the line of mutton carcasses [sic] overhead, with each a brace or grouse, or a half dozen quail in its embrace, and flanked with long sides of beef at the four ends of the line, was picturesque... (309)

Aesthetically removed from its growth and production by the hands of laboring farmers through layers of colors and texture, the display of foodstuffs as commodities temporarily hypnotizes Homos, who awakens from the spectacular

display with an effort, admitting “there are so many things in this great, weary, heedless city to make one forget” (309). The display momentarily lulls Homos, the most adamantly attuned to social inequalities. The commodification of culture transforms a basic need for survival like food into an aesthetic, pleasurable presentation to render consumers passive to commercial manipulation and to obfuscate the nature and effects of capitalism’s power and deprivations.

Indeed, it is the system, more so than individuals who come under Howells’s scrutiny; the elite are victims, in their own way, of a system that makes barbarism attractive and predatory ideology seem natural. The spectacle of the meals Homos describes to Cyril reinforces the barbarism. Particularly suggestive is the Thanksgiving dinner. Homos relates how the holiday was established to express thanks for America’s continued prosperity,” but which seems incongruous with the sight of “hordes of men and women of every occupation [who] are feeling the pinch of poverty” (307). Homos also notes how Thanksgiving is “devoted to witnessing a game of football between the Elevens of two great universities,” after which “there is always a heavy dinner at home” (308).

Mrs. Makely’s Thanksgiving meal is “abominable for its extravagance, and revolting in its appeals to appetite” to Homos (315). The “simple” meal includes oysters served with “French wine,” followed by soup, fish, with sliced cucumbers dressed with oil and vinegar,” a course of sweetbreads with green peas” accompanied by champagne, immediately followed with “a remove, a tenderloin of beef, with mushrooms...stewed terrapin...stuffed peppers” accompanied by “one or two side-dishes” (315). Time between all this and the main course is spent drinking several glasses of wine and passing “plates of radishes, olives, celery, and roasted almonds.” After a palate-cleansing “water-ice flavored with rum,” the servants bring in “a roast turkey the size of an ostrich” and a platter of “Canvasback duck,” accompanied by cranberry sauce and “currant jelly.” Knowing how this display of gorging must appear to his correspondent, Homos nonetheless adds, “there was a salad with the duck, and after that there was an ice-cream, with fruits and all manner of candied fruits, and candies, different kinds of cheese, coffee, and liqueurs to drink after the coffee” (316). Noting that Homos drinks almost no wine, one of the guests tells him “that he did not think I could make that go in America, if I meant to dine much. ‘Dining, you know, means overeating,’ he explained, ‘and if you wish to overeat, you must overdrink’” (324). The gentleman also confesses to love dinner at the Makely’s, though he complains of the late hour he was forced to eat the previ-

ous week. The meal – “blue-point oysters, consommé, stewed terrapin...lamb chops with peas, redhead duck with celery mayonnaise, Nesselrode pudding, fruit, cheese, and coffee, with sausages caviare, radishes, celery, and olives interspersed wildly, and drinkables and smokables” – causes him, tellingly, to miss church (324).

Homos, however, is not alone in his disgust with the spectacle, as well as his own participation in it. At this dinner he becomes further acquainted with Eveleth Strange, a widow whose husband left her a fortune, but who seems as uncomfortable as Homos at the excess and gluttony of the plutocracy. She asks the crowd “how many people we supposed there were in this city, within five minutes’ walk of us, who had no dinner to-day” (325). Homos recognizes her anguish over the contradictory system in which she exists, and indeed, she later confesses to him of a deep dissatisfaction. While not suffering “a hunger of body,” she reveals a “hunger of soul. If you escape one, you suffer the other, because if you *have* a soul, you must long to help, not for a time, but for all time” (335). Through several discussions about the incongruity and absurd gulf between America’s nationalistic and religious ideals and their actual practices, Mrs. Strange agrees to marry Homos and return with him to Altruria.

The second half of the novel is also written in epistolary form, letters from Eveleth to Dorothea Makely as she describes Altrurian life. Gradually, she allows herself to abandon her old habits and ideologies but it is around food where she has the most difficulty letting go of her old ideals. While respecting the openness with which all citizens treat each other, Eveleth cannot initially bring herself to eat at the same table with those who cook and serve her food. “I instinctively drew the line at cooks and waitresses,” she writes: “In New York, you know I always tried to be kind to my servants, but as for letting one of them sit down in my presence, much less sit down at table with me, I never dreamed of such a thing in my most democratic moments” (382). Upon learning that the girls who served their first meal upon arriving at Altruria “had drawn lots” to do so and “were proud of having the honor of waiting on us,” she realized the preposterousness of adhering to predatory hierarchies (382).

But the more daunting obstacle for Eveleth is the fact that Altrurians are vegetarians. And though she is surprised at the satisfaction of the “different kinds of mushrooms which took the place of meat” in the Altrurian diet, her craving for meat remains (382). She confesses, “I was hungry for *meat* – for roast, for broiled, for fried, for hashed” (383). Homos blames himself for not considering

how her old tastes would linger, but feels hopeless since “nobody since the old capitalist times [in Altruria] has thought of killing a sheep or cattle for food” (383). That the desire to consume flesh is the hardest cultural trait to let go of is telling, but logical if we understand meat-eating as metonymous with the metaphorical cannibalism practiced in America. The diet of the individual body in both cultures corresponds to that of the body politic. Cooperation, equality and co-existence is dominated by a motivation to find sustenance without relying on the aggressive devouring of other living things. Eveleth’s periodic craving for meat, despite the vegetables and mushrooms abundant on Altruria, registers the difficulty she has in completely re-imagining a way of life where insatiable consumption and the devouring of others is accepted and encouraged.

The amnesic spectacle of American markets, as well as the connection between Eveleth’s meat-eating and America’s cannibalism, is made even more explicit as she tells Dorothea, “You are so used to seeing [animals] in the butcher’s shop, ready for the range, that you never think of what they have to *go through* before that” (384). Still, she pleads with Homos to find her, at the very least, a chicken to eat, and though he procures one, the two are forced to kill and dress it themselves. Used to others laboring for her meals, Eveleth is horrified when they perform “the murderous deed” and after killing it, she does not have the heart to consume it: “We buried the poor thing under the flowers of the guest-house garden, and I went back to my mushrooms” (384).

In imagining the diet of Altruria, Howells is almost certainly working from Leo Tolstoy, whose influence on Howells’s thinking at this time is immeasurable. One of Tolstoy’s beliefs was that dietary reform was necessary for larger political and ethical reform. As Ronald LeBlanc documents, Tolstoy believed that the “conditions of luxury, idleness, and epicurean indulgence under which the ‘parasites’ from the privileged classes live” prevented them from thinking and behaving ethically, with a shared sense of duty and obligation to each other (150). This is, of course, the organizing principle in Altruria, and the disappearance of Eveleth’s desire for flesh corresponds to her acceptance of a social and political ethos so opposite from the capitalism upon which she was nourished her whole life.

The grounding of an American yacht on the Altrurian shore allows Eveleth to truly understand the barbarity of her former ways. Seeing how the survivors “provisioned themselves from the ship,” she notices how some “seemed to serve the others, but these appeared to be used with a very ungrateful indifference, as if they were of a different

race” (408). The castaways turn out to be two plutocratic families Eveleth knows from New York, the Thralls and the Moors, and she shamefully recognizes the absurdity with which they immediately establish class hierarchies and customs on the shore of Altruria. Mrs. Thrall, fearful of being left with what she calls “these natives” without Eveleth’s assistance, refuses to adopt Altrurian customs in exchange for help. When told of the need for everyone to do light physical labor in exchange for food and hospitality, Mrs. Thrall claims, “We can pay our way here as we do elsewhere” (411). Aghast at being told her money and status are worthless, she jeers, “You want us to be Tolstoys, I suppose.” Not denying the charge, Cyril answers, “Your labor here will be for your daily bread, and it will be real,” (423).

But what causes the most conflict between the Thralls and the Altrurians, aside from their initial refusal to work for food, is their carnivorous diet. The crewmen raid the villages for meat, but are captured (or “rescued,” from the Altrurian perspective) and immediately put to work after “the chickens they had killed in their midnight expedition were buried” (414). Gradually, they become accustomed to their new conditions, and are even allowed “to catch shellfish and crabs” until their craving for meat diminishes, but only if they cook on the beach “during an offshore wind, so that the fumes of roasting should not offend the villagers” (415). The sickening smell that comes from the fires of cooked meat is metonymous with what, for the Altrurians, is a savage politics. The selfishness and self-importance of families like the Thralls is as odious as the stench of burning flesh, and indeed, their capitalist assumptions that they can simply purchase their way out of any situation mirrors their overall aggressive consumption. Their power over their servants and others is at odds with the communal ethos of Altruria, whose unwillingness to harm or consume any living creature reveals a spirit of communion lost on the meat-eating Americans.

Gradually, though, these men, upon whose bodies the Thrall’s live, come to prefer this new life, especially the Thralls’ chef Anatole. He jumps at the opportunity to begin cooking with the herbs and vegetables, and actually expands the dietary options for the entire society, confessing that he “always had a secret loathing for the meats he stooped to direct the cooking of among the French and American bourgeoisie” (429). Even the Thralls and the Moors find that their carnal appetites change with their eventual acceptance of the new socio-economic tastes of Altruria. Though Mrs. Thrall is allowed to cook with “the canned meats brought ashore from the yacht,” the physical

activity and fresh air take away “any taste for such dishes” (434). Everybody thrives in Altruria, developing parts of themselves that were kept hidden in the rigidly defined public roles they are forced to play in America and realizing that the system they were trained to despise is actually more palatable than the plutocratic conditions they have left.

Ultimately, what Howells reveals in his stories of Altruria is the trite but true cliché: you are what you eat. Food is the overarching metaphor for illustrating turn-of-the-century conflicts and attitudes between the social classes, the socially empowered capitalist consumers and those required by economic necessity to surrender their bodily autonomy, the consumed. These relatively ignored late works are rich with textualities that deserve taken seriously one hundred years later, as they locate many of 21st-century America’s political tensions right at the dinner table, a space that is not freed of public discourses and agendas. What is on American plates, how that food got there, and how it is consumed proves, for the Altrurian, a fascinating archive of cultural practices. Howells has followed us to our own contemporary hungers, informing Americans of how what seems temporary, unimportant, or transient – the dinner table or restaurant – may prove to be profound spaces from which to witness of the complexity that surrounds satisfaction on an individual and societal level.

Notes

¹ Though several of Howells’s scholars and biographers insightfully note the increased attention to politics beginning in the 1880s, Clara Kirk’s *W.D. Howells, Traveler From Altruria* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1962) is still the most thorough study of the personal and social history behind Howells’s conception of the utopia. Also extraordinarily insightful in regards to Howells’s surprisingly radical political thoughts is Robert L. Hough’s *The Quiet Rebel: William Dean Howells as Social Commentator* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1959).

² The idea that food’s function in literature goes beyond sustenance is indebted to the groundbreaking work of Margaret L. Arnott’s *Gastronomy: The Anthropology of Food and Food Habits* (The Hague: Mouton Press, 1975) and Peter Farb and George Armelagos’s *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980). Both, of course, are working from Roland Barthes’s observations in “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption” that “food, aside from being a ne-

cessity, is also “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviors” (167).

³ With the exception of the novelist Twelvemough and Mrs. Makley, the rest of the elite social circle from whom Homos learns about America are identified only by their professions.

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**William Dean Howells Society Meeting Minutes, ALA Boston
21 May 2009**

William Dean Howells Society
Meeting Minutes, ALA
21 May 2009

The meeting was called to order at 4:20 p.m. by Claudia Stokes, with eleven members present.

1. Elsa Nettels gave the treasurer's report. The WDHS has \$ 1892.44 dollars in its account, and so its financial situation is healthy. The only expenditures have been for the William Dean Howells Society Essay Prize. It was suggested that perhaps the amount of the prize could be increased from \$100 to a higher amount.

2. Claudia Stokes brought up the idea of having *The Howellsian* be issued only in electronic form and asked for discussion on this point. Among the benefits that members brought up for an online-only publication were the following: this would cut down on costs and make the information accessible to members. Also, photographs are in color in the online *Howellsian*. Among the negative points were these: people pay less attention to an online publication than they do to a print publication and are less likely to read it; also, it would be more difficult to collect dues from members with an online-only version. Another factor to consider is that we have email addresses (and some of them are very old) from only about half of our members. Moreover, we have published scholarly articles and have had them indexed in the *MLA Bibliography*, and the scholarly credibility of online sources is not as yet on a par with that of print publications.

Members present decided to continue with the print version for at least the next issue, with the option to go to an online-only format after that. Thomas Wortham suggested that members could be polled to see which version they would prefer.

The discussion then turned to the distribution of *The Howellsian*. As Susan Goodman had done at the University of Delaware in previous years, Donna Campbell sent it out last time using the resources from Washington State University. However, given difficult budget times, she suggested that paying for printing and mailing out of WDHS funds would be more sustainable, since WSU cannot pay for these costs in the future.

3. Lance Rubin is the new Vice President and Program Chair; Paul Petrie is taking over as editor of *The Howellsian*. The WDHS is grateful to them both for taking on these duties.

4. The discussion then turned to topics for next year's ALA panel. Members present agreed that one of these topics should be chosen and the remaining panel should be left as an open session in the call for papers so that we can leave room for new approaches.

- Howells and the city
- The weird Howells
- The short fiction
- Howells as a critic of capitalism
- The reviews
- Howells and religion
- Prospects for studying Howells
- New approaches to teaching Howells
- Howells and politics

Lance Rubin will generate a call for papers based on this discussion.

5. Members then moved to a more general discussion about how we could bring more people into the society and into studying Howells.

• The bibliography on the web site and its inclusion in *The Howellsian* was mentioned. There are actually two bibliographic resources, one that lists publications on Howells, and one started years ago by Terry Oggel, in which various members agree to take one journal and to provide abstracts of the material on Howells published that year. Alex Feerst was responsible for editing this some years back.

Another possibility is to have someone responsible for keeping abreast of Howells in the news; the Cather Society, for example, has a “Cather in the Mainstream” column. Actually, the Howells Society has been doing this for several years at its Howells in the News site (<http://howellsinthenews.blogspot.com/>), but there has not been much news about Howells.

- There is continuing interest in Howells from historians, and listservs such as H-SHGAPE could be informed of some of our activities. We could place an ad in some history-based periodicals.
- Sally Daugherty announced that she has an essay coming out in *Prospects* on future directions for Howells study, and that this could serve as a good place to encourage studies in Howells. Thomas Wortham suggested that we have different levels of membership, since it would be easier for some people to pay for several years at once or to contribute more to support the aims of the WDHS.

After a round of applause for outgoing president Claudia Stokes, the meeting was adjourned at about 5:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Campbell



W.D. Howells Slept Here

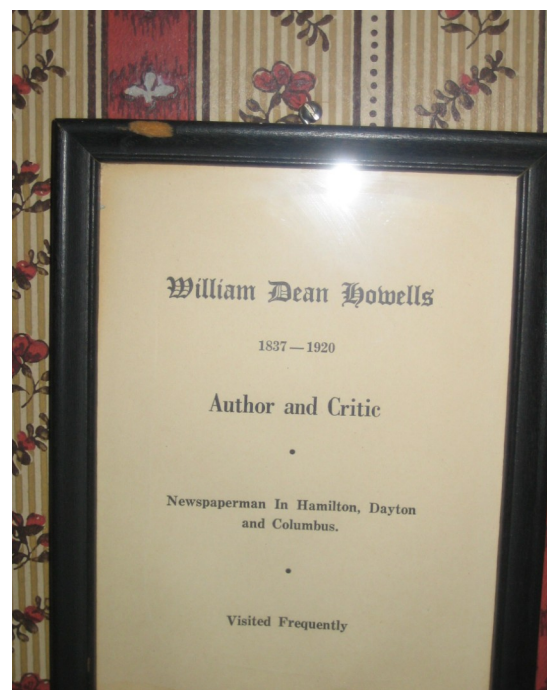
Howells Society member Richard Ellington writes from the UK: “On a recent visit to Ohio, to follow the spoor of WDH, a friend took me to *The Golden Lamb* in Lebanon simply to see the ancient inn, where so many VIPs had stayed. We were pleasantly surprised to find that one of the rooms had a ‘WDH slept here’ type of notice outside it—and I had my picture taken sitting inside in a chair.”

According to a December 8, 2008 article in the Cincinnati *Enquirer* (now unfortunately no longer available via the newspaper’s website), the 1801 hotel has just completed a multi-million

dollar restoration, whose goal was to modernize without disturbing the building’s historical features. The hotel, Ohio’s oldest business, has hosted other luminaries, including Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, and Henry Clay, as well as 12 US presidents. The inn’s website, alas, makes no mention of Howells—but the photographic evidence speaks for itself.

Ellington adds: “My trip was primarily motivated by a wish to see the places where WDH had lived and, secondarily, to visit places notable in the story of German immigration to Ohio. Despite asking around, I have got no information about his maternal forebears, including the grandmother to whom he reportedly spoke only, or mostly, in German.” Anyone with information germane to this topic is asked please to respond via the “Scholarship” > “Queries” links on the Society’s website.

If you should find yourself waking where Howells slept, or just passing by, take a picture and send it to the editor to achieve *Howellsian* immortality.





Richard Ellington sits where WDH slept.

Howells Society Executive Board

President: Rob Davidson, California State University, Chico

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Treasurer: Elsa Nettels, College of William & Mary

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Editor of *The Howellsian*: Paul R. Petrie, Southern Connecticut State University

**Archives of *The Howellsian* are available in color PDF format on the Howells Society website:
www.howellssociety.org**

Username: howellsian

Password: lapham

From the Editor

Having taken on, without previous experience, the job of editing *The Howellsian*, I have no doubt that—despite the fact that the newsletter's former (interim) editor, Rob Davidson, handed most of the issue's contents to me on a silver platter—you will find a few errors and infelicities in these pages. I can only plead inexperience and hope to do better next time.

Toward that end, I'd welcome any and all comments on the current issue and suggestions for future ones. Your contributions of Howells-related news items, queries, notes, reviews, etc will be happily received, as will ideas about future content items. Contact me via email at petriep1@southernct.edu.

Sincerely,

Paul R. Petrie

In the Next Issue . . .

- Abstracts of Howells papers presented at the 2009 ALA conference in Boston: new work by Nathaniel Cadle, Owen Clayton, Marcella Frydman, Joanna Levin, Kerstin Rudolph, Frederick Wegner.
- Book review of Lance Rubin's *William Dean Howells & the American Memory Crisis* (Cambria Press, 2008), by Rob Davidson.
- Call for papers for ALA 2010 (San Francisco) Howells panels.

Howells Society Membership or Renewal—Dues Notice

The dues for 2010 will remain \$10, which we all know is a bargain. Our membership dues remain among the lowest of all single-figure societies in the American Literature Association, and we shall attempt to keep them that way. To do this, however, requires that they be paid in a timely manner. ***If you have not yet paid your 2009 dues, please do so right away.*** Payment in advance for 2010 dues is also welcome.

Dues money helps cover the cost of printing and distributing *The Howellsian* and such other documents as publicity brochures and announcements; it also funds the annual Howells Essay Prize, awarded for the best paper on Howells presented at the ALA conference; also, the Society has been discussing methods of using accrued dues to strengthen the Society and expand its membership by promoting the reading and study of Howells's work regionally as well as at the ALA meetings.

Please help make your Society a stronger, larger, more effective one by sending your check for \$10 promptly. Thank you! And thanks, too, for your continuing interest and support of W. D. Howells scholarship, and the William Dean Howells Society. We depend on it!

New Membership

Renewal

Name:

Mailing Address:

Email Address:

Amount Enclosed:

Please make your check out to the ***William Dean Howells Society***, and send it to:
 Dr. Elsa Nettles, 211 Indian Spring Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185

The Fawcettian

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