

New Series  
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# The Howellsian

## A Message from the Editor

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- In the next issue:
- Howells Prize Essay
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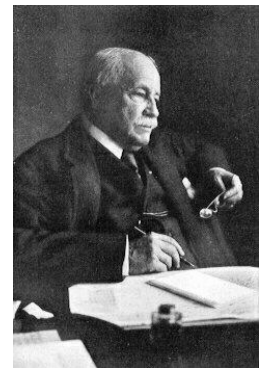
The William Dean Howells Society gratefully acknowledges the support of the University of Delaware in publishing *The Howellsian*.

At this moment of writing, your editor is stewing in W. D. Howells' home state, where the current temperature is in the low 90s with high humidity—it's better than slipping and sliding on winter ice but less than ideal even in the dog-days of summer. By the time you read this issue of *The Howellsian*, though, the temperature will be back at a more comfortable level, the leaves will have turned to red and gold, and the new academic year will be well on its way. We hope that many of you who are teachers will be assigning or reading Howells' fiction and other works, especially the novels and stories with titles that too rarely appear on the syllabi. Only by assigning them in class and requesting publishers to bring them out in modestly priced editions will our Dean of American Letters be able to regain some of the recognition he has lost over the years. Let's make it a point this semester and in the coming ones to try that.

We hope that you have all enjoyed the past summer and devoted part of it to reading some of those less-familiar works by Howells, chiefly for the pleasure of it but also with the thought in mind that we are already planning for our two W. D. Howells Society sessions at the 2007 American Literature Association conference. Scheduled for the last long weekend of May, it will be held again in Boston at the Westin Copley Place Hotel. Claudia Stokes, our program chair, has already identified the topics for next spring's panels; they will be listed below with a Call for Papers that will include all the information necessary for you to submit proposals by next January 8. Please put a handle on one of those ideas you have been considering while reading or teaching Howells' work, shape a proposal based on it, and send the proposal to Claudia before the deadline. The Society values each submission whether it is finally selected for the program or not. The more proposals we receive, the better our program will be, and please remember that *our* program is *yours* if

you are a member of the ALA and especially the William Dean Howells Society. Thanks much for thinking about it and acting on it. We look forward to seeing you at the conference.

Following our editorial message, this issue of *The Howellsian* includes: 1) a review of the Society's activities at the American Literature Association conference last May in San Francisco with abstracts of the papers presented at our two sessions and an account of our business meeting held



William Dean Howells in 1907

during the interim between them; 2) a Call for Papers with session topics, the address to which they should be sent, and the deadline for receiving proposals for our panels at the 2007 ALA conference; 3) an announcement of a dinner sponsored by the Society to be held at the Tavern Club in Boston on May 25, 2007; and possibilities for a symposium at Kittery Point on one day during the ALA weekend; 4) information on the recipient of the inaugural William Dean Howells Society Prize; 5) a review by Elsa Nettels of an illuminating new book by Rob Davidson, one of our panelists last spring, *The Master and the Dean: The Literary Criticism of Henry James and William Dean Howells* (2005); 6) recent criticism on Howells; 7) Howellsian queries, a new feature for the giving and receiving of scholarly assistance on matters related to Howells; and 8) a dues notice for 2007 with a membership form.

Sanford E. Marovitz,  
Editor

## W. D. Howells Society Meeting at the American Literature Association Conference 2006

The William Dean Howells Society business meeting was held again this year in conjunction with the American Literature Association conference, May 25-28, in San Francisco, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Embarcadero Center. It was called to order on May 26 at 12:40 p.m. Susan Goodman presided as president of the Society; other members present were Donna Campbell, secretary; Sally Daugherty; Rob Davidson; Elsa Nettels, past-president and treasurer; Lance Rubin; and Claudia Stokes, vice-president and program chair. Sanford Marovitz, editor of *The Howellsian*, sent regrets that he would be unable to attend the conference this year.

1. Donna asked for approval of a new feature at the web site: placing the back *Howellsians* online. At present, the back issues are available in a password-protected space so that only Howells Society members have access to them. Her request was unanimously approved. However, at least one sample issue will be placed in the main part of the site so that visitors can see it, but the rest would remain in the password-protected directory. This gives members of the Howells Society a valuable advantage for their dues.

The *Howellsians* are available at this site: <http://www.howellssociety.org/howellsians/index.html>

Username:howellsian

Password: lapham

2. Elsa reported that we have \$2027.24 in our treasury. There has been only one minor expenditure since last year chiefly because the University of Delaware generously covers the costs of producing and mailing *The Howellsian*. Susan confirmed that the same arrangement will hold true for next year (2006-07). The only expense this year was for an additional 100 W. D. Howells Society flyers, some of which were handed out at the first Howells session.

3. Claudia spoke about the WDHS essay prize, and the following rules were confirmed:

- a. Anyone who presents a paper on Howells at ALA, even if that paper is not presented in a Howells session, is eligible.
- b. Submissions should be e-mailed or mailed to Claudia by September 1.
- c. The prize is not limited to junior scholars.
- d. Because a question arose about the permitted length of papers, we decided to allow the full version of papers—i.e., papers of publication length. Some discussion ensued about whether we should post a page limit to these, and a double-spaced 20-page limit was suggested. [That restriction may not apply this year, however, since it was not previously announced.]

Exactly when and where the prize will be awarded was also discussed. The winner will be announced in the fall *Howellsian* and at the ALA conference each spring. Whether it will be presented at a session or at the business meeting remains to be decided. Notice of this decision will be published in the fall *Howellsian* when the winner is announced.

Also discussed was the amount of the prize, now less than the \$100-250 given by the Wharton Society, the Dreiser Society, and other author literary associations. The consensus was that the amount of the WDHS prize should approximate that of the other associations in order to encourage submissions and emphasize the commitment to reward scholarship on Howells' life and work. A motion was made and seconded to raise the prize amount to \$100; the motion passed unanimously.

4. Claudia and others suggested topics for next year's ALA:

- a. Sex, Sexuality, and Marriage (including its discontents) in Howells' fiction and drama.
- b. Howells' Reviews: Reviews by or about Howells; this was expanded to include his literary essays or nonfiction criticism
- c. The literary marketplace
- d. The Howells Revival

Claudia will choose two of these or some variation of them by early September and send the Call for Papers to the CFP list, to Sandy for placement in the fall *Howellsian*, and to Donna for placement on the web site.

## Howells Society Meeting, continued

reviews are a good type of material to include, and Donna mentioned that we have one book to review already, a translation into Italian of *Venetian Life*. Susan volunteered to ask a colleague who teaches Italian if she might want to review the book for us. Mention was also made of the new novel *Lapham Rising*, a modern novel that responds to *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. Susan mentioned another possibility for *The Howellsian*: extracts from primary sources, letters, and other archival materials that people might be working on. Also, members may be invited to submit or propose essays for publication, as has been done for recent issues.

6. For next year's ALA, Susan suggested that we try to put together a Howells event beyond the panels at the conference. This would not be a separate conference with papers; it would be a luncheon or dinner. She proposed that we try to meet at the Tavern Club as we did at the Kittery Point symposium a few years ago. We also will try to select a speaker or perhaps more than one speaker for the dinner or luncheon. Susan agreed to contact both the Tavern Club about this and Leslie Morris, Roger Stoddard's successor.

7. Also discussed were the Howells Fellowships at the Houghton Library and the need to publicize them. To this end a link may be entered at the site and a notice placed in *The Howellsian*, for example.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Campbell  
WDHS Secretary



San Francisco in 1906

## Call for Papers: American Literature Association Convention in Boston, 2007

Claudia Stokes has announced the topics selected for the next ALA conference, to be held in Boston in spring 2007. Please send paper proposals no longer than 500 words and a cv to Claudia Stokes at [Claudia.stokes@trinity.edu](mailto:Claudia.stokes@trinity.edu) or by post to Claudia Stokes, Trinity University, Dept. of English, 1 Trinity Place, San Antonio, TX 78212 by **January 8, 2007**.

### 1. Howells' Reviews

For a panel in the program of the 2007 American Literature Association annual convention, the William Dean Howells Society invites paper proposals that examine the work of William Dean Howells in reviews. Possible topics may include Howells' own publications as a book reviewer, other critics' reviews of Howells' work, or Howells' responses to the work of other reviewers.

### 2. Howells and Marriage

For a panel in the program of the 2007 American Literature Association annual convention, the William Dean Howells Society invites paper proposals that examine marriage in Howells's life and work. Possible topics may include his literary depictions of marriage, his writings about marriage in literary criticism and reviews, Howells' own marriage, or his engagement in contemporary marital controversies.

You cannot be at perfect ease with a friend who does not  
joke. —W. D. Howells

## Howells Society News and Events

### Inaugural W. D. Howells Society Prize Awarded

For the first time, the W. D. Howells Society has awarded a Prize for the best paper on Howells read at the annual American Literature Association conference. For the 2006 conference, the Prize was given to "Guilt by Dissociation; or, The Merciless Quality of *The Quality of Mercy*," presented by Michael Anesko, Penn State University; he is the author of *"Friction with the Market": Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (Oxford UP, 1986) and *Letters, Fictions, Lives: Henry James and William Dean Howells* (Oxford UP, 1997). Congratulations and thanks to you, Professor Anesko, with our best wishes for continuing success in your scholarship on W. D. Howells and American Realism.

A slightly revised version of Michael Anesko's winning paper will soon be published in *American Literary Realism*, where it had been accepted prior to his learning that it had received the Prize. We are pleased, however, to inform you that he, *ALR*, and the University of Illinois Press will generously permit us to reprint it under the same title in the Spring 2007 issue of *The Howellsian*, so you will have the rare privilege of being able to find his essay in either of two venues a short time after reading this notice.

### Dinner at the Tavern Club and Trip to Kittery Point at ALA 2007

At the American Literature Conference in Boston next spring, the William Dean Howells Society will sponsor a **dinner at the historic Tavern Club on Friday, May 25**, at 7 p.m. Located at 4 Boylston Place, the Tavern Club counts W. D. Howells among its past presidents. The full dinner includes cocktails, appetizers, and wine; gratuities are included. The cost is \$80 per person in advance. Information about reservations will appear in the spring issue of this newsletter, in *The Howellsian*, and at the Howells Society site, <http://www.howellssociety.org>

The Howells Society will sponsor a **day trip to Howells's house at Kittery Point on May 26, 2007** in conjunction with the American Literature Association conference in Boston. Activities at Kittery Point will include a tour of the house, brief remarks on Howells by Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson, followed by discussion, and a light lunch. A bus to the site will leave the conference hotel at 9 a.m. and return at 2 p.m. Advance registration is required.



## Book Review: *The Master and the Dean* by Rob Davidson

**Rob Davidson.** *The Master and the Dean: The Literary Criticism of Henry James and William Dean Howells.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. 289 pp.

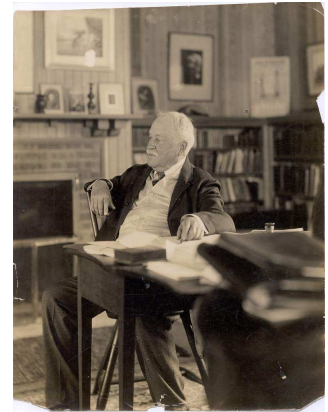
The importance of Howells and James in each other's careers has been well established. Rob Davidson's excellent book is the first full-scale comparison of the entire body of their literary criticism.

The book moves chronologically back and forth between James and Howells to compare the development of their views on a number of issues: e.g. the function of criticism, the relation of the critic to the mass market, propriety in fiction, America as a literary subject, and the relation of esthetics and morality. The first of the three time segments into which the book is divided, 1859-1884, comprises James's early reviews, *French Poets and Novelists*, *Hawthorne*, and "The Art of Fiction," and Howells's ten years as editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, for which he wrote dozens of reviews, and two years later, his most controversial essay, "Henry James, Jr." (1882). The second section, 1885-1897, begins with the failure of James R. Osgood, the publisher of both writers, and includes Howells' essays for the "Editor's Study" in *Harper's Magazine* (1886-1892) and James's "The Science of Criticism," *Partial Portraits*, and his carefully calibrated praise in "William Dean Howells," his longest essay on Howells (1886). During the final period, 1898-1920, when both writers suffered declining demand for their work, Howells enjoyed continued security under contracts with Harpers, for twenty years producing a monthly column for the "Editor's Easy Chair" of the magazine, while James wrote his monumental work of criticism, the eighteen Prefaces to the New York Edition of his fiction.

Davidson's study shows that James and Howells were closest together in their views at the beginning of their careers in the 1860s, but drew apart as James placed increasing emphasis on the form of a novel as the measure of its excellence, while Howells after the Haymarket riots increasingly valued the social conscience of the writer above matters of form and style. After failing in popular success, James sought to construct a readership of those "interested in high culture, or refined literary art" (205), while Howells remained faithful to "a democratic ideal of an art that could appeal to all" (237).

Davidson traces the differences between Howells and James to their different positions. As editor of the *Atlantic* for a decade, and then under contract to the Harpers for more than thirty years, Howells recognized the need to address the interests and tastes of his readers, and he willingly accepted the constraints his position imposed upon him. Although James was never indifferent to the demands of the marketplace, as a free-lance critic he could write according to his own dictates and was free to create his own audience rather than cultivate a readership already formed. He came to believe that criticism should be an expression of personal taste and feeling; as early as *French Poets and Novelists*, he embedded his principles in long essays about individual writers, illustrating by his example the way he wished to be read. As a critic, Howells was always more didactic than James, more concerned to educate his readers, to inculcate principles and broaden taste through direct statement. According to Davidson, Howells valued "scientifically objective criticism" (81) over personal impressions and saw the critic "as a sort of broker between an author and his audience" (85).

Does Davidson favor one writer over the other? He gives equal space to Howells and James and analyzes the important works of each with equal care. But he seems more sympathetic to Howells' point of view than to James's, more sympathetic to the "market-oriented compromise" (124) that Howells made than to James's "quest to write a unique and personal brand of fiction" (137), pursued with "haughty disdain" (129) for the public that failed to appreciate his work. More words of favor are bestowed on Howells than on James. In a single paragraph, Davidson



W. D. Howells in his study  
Picture courtesy of Mark Godburn

## Book Review of *The Master and the Dean*, continued

describes the "Editor's Study" for November 1891 by a "fully matured Howells" as "one of [his] most important essays," which contains "an interesting proposition" and "strong and clearly defined social and aesthetic beliefs" (140).

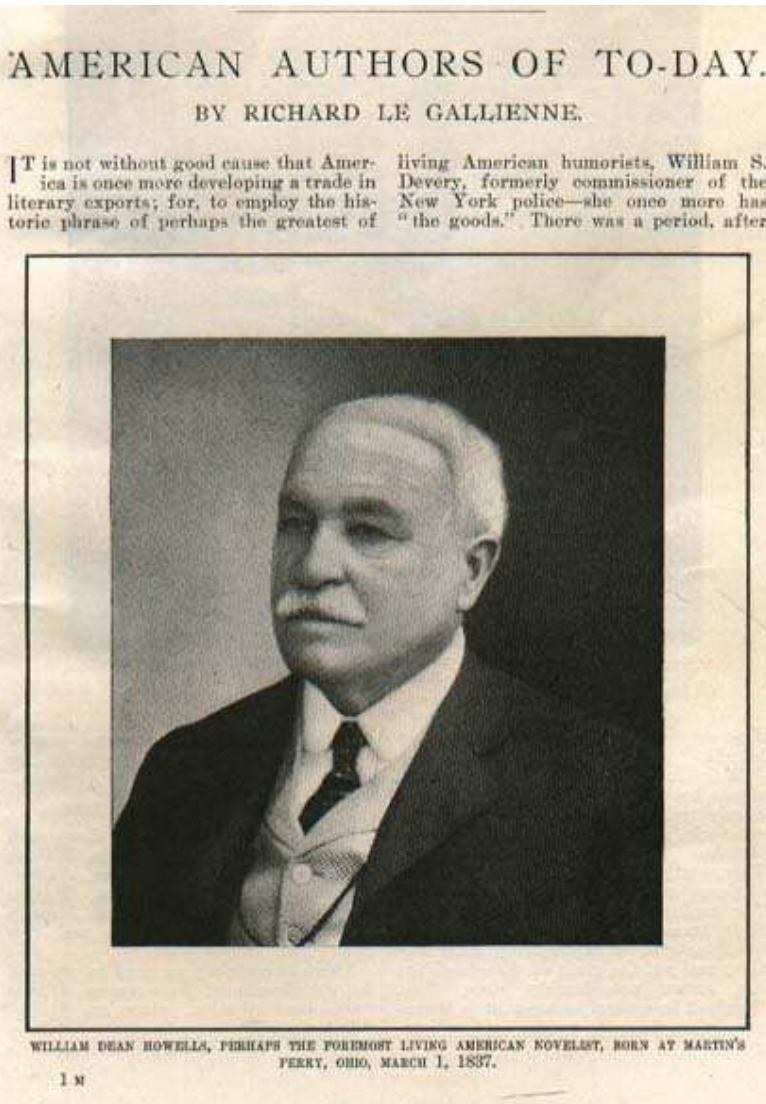
Davidson is not blind to Howells' deficiencies. He calls Howells naive in declaring "the smiling aspects of life" to be typical of nineteenth-century America but advises that this most troublesome of Howells' statements be read in light of his later pessimism about the state of American society. He defends Howells against the charges of prudery and moral timidity leveled by later writers and makes a stronger claim for Howells' influence on literary history than James's. Howells' essays for the "Editor's Study," Davidson writes, "would forever change the course of American letters" (48).

Davidson claims that "each author exerted a profound influence on the other" (6). What emerges more clearly, however, are the effects upon their criticism of their different relations to the literary marketplace and the reading public. But, as Davidson shows, not only were James and Howells attentive readers of each other's work; on occasion they responded to it in their published criticism. For instance, the English critics' fierce attacks on both Howells and James provoked by "Henry James, Jr." moved James to assume "an uncharacteristic pose of humility" (52) in "The Art of Fiction" and to distance himself from Howells in "William Dean Howells." Howells took sharp issue with James only once, when he rejected James's view in *Hawthorne*, of America as a barren field for the novelist. Otherwise, he was an unfailingly wholehearted supporter of James's work, according to Davidson, "as sensitive and careful a reader as James could ever hope for" (282).

Much in *The Master and the Dean* will be familiar to scholars, but it gives new insight into the well-known texts and makes the first case for the importance of a substantial but neglected work, Howells' two-volume *Heroines of Fiction* (1901)--"a deliberate act of revisionist literary history" (239)--which constructs the history of the Anglo-American novel as "a narrative of the evolution of realism" (247), in which even Hawthorne has a place. Davidson charts the long careers of Howells and James with great thoroughness. His book is also exemplary in its clarity, integrity, and mastery of its subject.

Elsa Nettels

College of William and Mary



## Abstracts from W. D. Howells Sessions at ALA

### W. D. Howells Sessions at ALA 2006—Abstracts I: *The Unexpected Howells*

May 26, 9:30-10:50 a.m., Claudia Stokes, chair

**1. "Guilt by Dissociation; or, the Merciless Quality of *The Quality of Mercy*"; Michael Anesko, Penn State U.**

Although criticism has largely neglected *The Quality of Mercy* (1892), no other novel by Howells offers such devastating insights into the psychodynamics of the author's immediate family—especially in the aftermath of Winifred Howells' death (from *anorexia nervosa*) in 1889. While inquiring readers (beginning with Edwin H. Cady) have focused almost exclusively on the book's economic themes and social implications—as an exemplum of a modern American businessman, John Milton Northwick is much better realized than Silas Lapham—the retributive nature of the story's family dynamics deserves fuller scrutiny. It might even be said that the pecuniary crime for which Northwick must answer constitutes the least interesting aspect of the broader theme of paternal guilt that reverberates throughout *The Quality of Mercy*.

**2. "The Gifted Women: Realism, the Canon, and Howells' Heroines of Fiction"; Rob Davidson, California State U.**

*Heroines of Fiction* (1901) is one of the most frequently overlooked works in the Howells canon. A study of female protagonists in the Anglo-American novel from Defoe to James, this lengthy work (serialized in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1900-1902) stands as something of an anomaly in Howells's canon of literary texts for reasons of style, rhetorical stance, and purpose. The nominal thesis of *Heroines of Fiction* is a study of the nineteenth-century heroine in the Anglo-American novel. But the careful reader of *Heroines* quickly realizes that Howells is not merely concerned with documenting and explicating his thesis that "a novel is great or not, as its women are important or unimportant." At the deepest level, he is championing, or "selling," his realist aesthetic as the driving force of the Anglo-American novel. The unstated claim of *Heroines* is nothing short of radical: to compose a critical history of the Anglo-American novel in the context of realism. *Heroines* is a deliberate act of revisionist literary history; it is also an attempt to educate, or to "indoctrinate," its audience. (In this regard, it is quite as deliberate, in its own way, as James's Prefaces to the New York Edition.) Consequently, Howells' strategy is, at least in part, market-driven: in the face of the popular romance novel, Howells promotes his own aesthetic, educating his audience and promoting his product.

With these thoughts in mind, Howells' decision to focus exclusively on the female protagonist in fiction warrants closer examination. How does making such a seemingly arbitrary choice affect his sense of the Anglo-American canon? Which major writers and major works are included? Excluded? Deliberately ignored? How aware is Howells of the benefits or limitations of his approach? Just how radical does his argument become? And does it ultimately stand up to rigorous examination? This paper offers a close analysis of the rhetorical focus and "mission" of *Heroines of Fiction* and considers issues of audience, gender, the literary marketplace, and whether Howells is, ultimately, successful in his campaign to revise the literary canon in the context of realism.

**3. "Tears (not so) Idle Tears: Empathy and Imagination in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*"; Darrin Doyle, U of Cincinnati**

Wai-Chi Dimock's 1990 article "The Economy of Pain: The Case of Howells" argues that one of the social functions of the novel at the end of the nineteenth century was to broaden the public's perception of human interconnectedness, and as a result, to cause "cognitive conditions for moral responsibility." In other words the novel, as an art form, could influence behavior by showing that each person had a responsibility to ease the sufferings of others. Dimock centers specifically on Howells' definition of the novel's virtue: "(It) lives in its formal amplitude, its ability to encompass all things and connect all mankind." The resulting sense of connectiveness, according to Dimock, would inspire those of the leisure class to "treat the welfare of the poor and weak as their own responsibility." By reading novels, society would find a moral solution to the problem of suffering—the fortunate would understand that helping the less fortunate would ultimately benefit the whole.

However, Dimock fails to acknowledge another, perhaps more important, consequence of such increased social consciousness: that of allowing those of the lower class to actually enter into the leisure class. If the novel can show the leisure class that they are connected to the bourgeois, then logically the same could be said for the reverse. Novels could provide the lower class with a window into high society and essentially "teach" them how to embody "upper-class character."

For more than a century, critics (including Howells himself) have positioned Howells as disdainful toward romantic and sentimental fiction. However, a close reading of his most durable work, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), reveals that distinguishing between modes of fiction is not Howells's greatest concern, at least with respect to the effect of either upon an audience. In late nineteenth-century America, this effect was, namely, change within the common, non-aristocratic reader, who was more than likely female. This hypothetical woman, through novel-reading, would view herself among the upper classes, thus giving her license to move freely to a higher social status—not in a monetary way, but in a deeper, socio-psychological sense. As Cathy Davidson writes,

## Abstracts from ALA 2006

“Novels allowed for a means of entry into a larger literary and intellectual world and a means of access to social and political social events from which many readers would have been otherwise largely excluded.”

By examining the very different fates of Penelope Lapham, whose novel-reading provides her with class mobility, and Irene Lapham, who fails to ascend the social ladder despite beauty, my essay highlights two aspects of *Silas Lapham* that have been overlooked or misrepresented by critics: first, that Howells understood class mobility to be an inevitable result of novel-reading in general, not of realism specifically; secondly, that *Silas Lapham* positions the true artistic “debate” not between realism and romanticism, but between novels and the visual art forms: namely, painting and architecture.

1. Dimock, Wai-Chi. “The Economy of Pain: The Case of the Howells.” *Raritan*. 9.4 (Spring 1990): 99-120.
2. Davidson, Cathy. *Revolution and the Word*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.

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### W. D. Howells Sessions at ALA 2006—Abstracts II: *Howells and Women*

May 27, 8-9:50 a.m., Susan Goodman, chair

#### 1. “What gountry has a poor man got?': Inequality and Individualism in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*”; Jason Potts, Johns Hopkins U.

In his contribution to the *New York Times* huge 2005 multipart series, “Class Matters,” Charles McGrath argued that the current tendency in television and cinema to represent America as a “classless, homogenized American Never-Never Land” is a “repression.” “Pop culture,” he claims, has “succeeded to a considerable extent in burying something that used to be right out in the open.” For “there is an un-American secret at the heart of American culture,” the *Times Book Review* editor writes, “For a long time, it was preoccupied by class.” This was “particularly true in the years before World War II, when you couldn’t go to the movies or get very far in a novel without being reminded that ours was a society where some were much better off than others, and where the class divide—especially the gap separating middle from upper—was an inescapable fact of life.” In his conclusion, however, seemingly unable to summon a *tour de force* example from American literature, McGrath instead closes with an example from nineteenth-century British literature in his effort to draw out the particularly national dimension of the American class system. But instead of establishing that class is, as he puts it, “an inescapable fact of life” in America, this example instead leads him to realize that most Americans believe class is, in fact, escapable: “If you believe the novels of Dickens or Thackeray, say, the people who feel most at home in Britain are those who know their place,” McGrath writes. “That has seldom been the case in this country, where the boundaries of class seem just elusive and permeable enough to sustain both the fear of falling and the dream of escape.”

In this light, the “preoccupation with class” that McGrath identifies as part of pre-WWII America might better be understood as a preoccupation with the way in which liberal individualism undermines the formation of class consciousness in America. Importantly, this failure to represent the poor as a class is not, as Brook Thomas suggests, a consequence of the genre’s “demand[ing] a plot generated by individual characters” (149), but rather a consequence of a lack of class consciousness that, as McGrath’s and Bartlett’s exchange elucidates, makes it impossible in the American novel for there to be any class identities for characters to represent. This is why in a *Hazard of New Fortunes* (1885), faced with the dilemma of having to represent the class dynamics in which the Haymarket riots took place, the character that William Dean Howells uses to catalyze the violence struggles to represent herself properly in class terms. Trying to explain her support for the strikers, Margaret Vance, the altruistic socialite, tells Conrad Dryfoos, the son of the industrialist who also sympathizes with the workers, that she doesn’t blame the poor for striking in order to earn a living; instead, she blames herself. Or, rather, she blames her class. “It’s *we*--people like me, of my class--who make the poor betray each other,” she tells him. But as Margaret’s slipping from “we” to “me” to “my class” indicates, she cannot refer



## Abstracts, continued

to her class without also referring to her membership in it because her class identity is not readily discernible. And she cannot be certain that Conrad understands himself as a member of her class—even though the Dryfoos's social standing in New York should ensure his membership in it—because he instead chooses to identify with the poor, whom, as we have already seen, have no class with which to identify.

From Margaret's perspective, the effects of this unfolding drama manifest themselves at the level of the individual. But as Lindau, the German immigrant and war hero explains, the real stakes of this conflict are national. "What gountry has a poor man got" says Lindau sharply to his old friend Basil March after the two men are reacquainted in New York. Rejecting March's claim that America is "his country too," Lindau argues that the poor fall outside the parameters of the nation. America, he claims, turns even individuals sympathetic to the poor into "ploated aristocrat[s]" who are "nodt like these people down here [in the ghetto]" (165).

My central claim in this essay is that in imagining America as the nation committed above all to the primacy of the individual, the nationalism that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century (and that Lindau identifies in *Hazard*) undid the possibility of class politics by making any individual's identification as a class subject not just tenuous, but anti-American. In much of the literature that popularized this form of nationalism—Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* being exemplary—America is not imagined as committed to equalizing the gap between rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, but as the nation in which inequality is an inevitable and not altogether undesirable consequence of individualism.

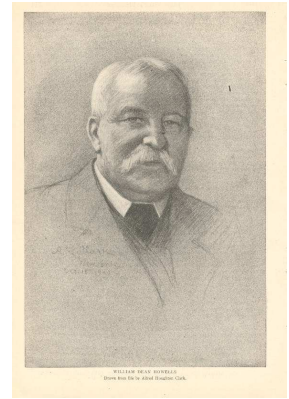
### 2. "Contractual Obligation and Necessity in William Dean Howells's *A Modern Instance*"; Alicia Mischa Renfroe, Middle Tennessee State U

This paper situates *A Modern Instance* in its legal context by focusing on a peculiar moment that dramatizes the clash between realist and naturalist accounts of subjectivity. During a party, Bartley Hubbard daydreams, and, when his wife Marcia later asks what he was thinking about, he mentions that the hostess did not serve food and says, "I was casting lots in my own mind to see which of the company I should devour first."

The paper investigates this striking image by situating *A Modern Instance* in its legal context. Read in light of this reference to cannibalism, Howells' novel does more than provide a realist account of divorce, as many critics suggest. Indeed, Bartley's cannibal fantasy complicates the novel's depiction of law, foregrounds a seldom-noted strain of naturalism, and highlights Howells' role as a transitional figure negotiating the divide between realist and naturalist accounts of subjectivity. By providing a metaphor for the way desire, particularly as it is figured in the marriage contract, works in the text, the cannibal trope pushes realism to its limits by privileging a naturalist world in which actions and intentions are based on instincts and desires rather than consciousness. Reading *A Modern Instance* in light of Bartley's cannibal fantasy foregrounds a seldom-noted strain of naturalism and highlights Howells' role as a transitional figure inhabiting the sometimes blurry boundary between realism and naturalism.

### 3. "The Ghosts of William Dean Howells: 'His Apparition' and the Spectre of Communism"; Lance Rubin, Arapahoe Community College.

With the exception of the oft-anthologized "Editha," scholarship on Howells's short fiction written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—particularly his ghost stories and tales of the supernatural—has been virtually ignored. The reason, no doubt, lies in the fact that stories like "The Eidolons of Brooks Alford," "Though One Rose >From the Dead," and "His Apparition" do not fit easily in the prescribed categories we have created for "the Dean" and his brand of "Realism." But despite the fact that even studies devoted to Howells' later years dismiss the short fiction, these stories deserve attention, particularly as they center on concerns over America's collective memory and identity. In Howells' short fiction, ghostly metaphors, ghostly figures, and hauntings are returns, recognitions, manifestations of memory, some willed, others involuntary. Such



Howells in *Outlook Magazine*, 1901

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*In Howells' short fiction, ghostly metaphors, ghostly figures, and hauntings are returns, recognitions, manifestations of memory, some willed, others involuntary.*

## Abstracts, continued

spectres remind us that, as Hamlet notes, “the time is out of joint,” that there is something wrong with the time we live in. Howells’ ghost stories tap into 20<sup>th</sup>-century America’s ambivalent desire to remember a past that was being threatened by a barrage of cultural, technological, and social forces ushering in an era of change, and simultaneously to forget those memories perceived as threats, burdens of guilt or excuses for resignation and inaction in an era that demanded new thinking.

The few scholars who acknowledge this phase of Howells’ career—e.g., Ruth Bardon, John Crowley, and Edwin Cady—typically situate the short fiction biographically within the framework of Howells’ personal introspection, the guilt over his daughter Winifred’s death, the creeping awareness of his anachronistic literary status, and an increased understanding of his own mortality. However, these stories must be considered in a less biographical, more social context, as they are engaging with a culture confused about its relationship with the past. Many Americans living through the turn of the century were also haunted with issues of lost time and mnemonic dislocation *without* the added impetus of personal tragedy. As Jackson Lears notes in *No Place of Grace*, turn-of-the-century forces of modernity “undermined a solid sense of self.” The “weightless culture of material comfort and spiritual blandness was breeding weightless persons who longed for intense experience to give some definition, some outline and substance to their vaporous lives.” Howells’ ghost stories and psychic tales articulate this collective sense of ghostliness with the subtle social criticism that marks his more canonical work. Though the spirits, ghosts, and psychic phenomenon assume “questionable shapes” from a shadowy world, these stories are firmly grounded in the literary, social, and economic issues haunting turn-of-the-century America.

“His Apparition” is an excellent example of how Howells uses the ghost story to address not just personal concerns, but narrative and cultural issues that he had been addressing throughout his career. The apparition Arthur Hewson sees early one morning triggers a series of revelations about himself and his social circle that cause him to reject the profoundly undemocratic, class-biased ideals of the leisure class, of which he is a part. By highlighting the connections between the epiphanies Hewson experiences in this tale, the story’s references to Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, Howells’ socialist leanings, Karl Marx’s notion of the “spectre of Communism,” and Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” I argue that this story—indeed, almost all of Howells’s late short fiction—is ultimately concerned not with Howells’ attempt to overcome personal tragedy and uncertainty, but with the need to discern between the social and economic requirements and conditions of the present versus the false memories of the past which perpetuate an aristocratic, unjust, undemocratic social structure.

## Annotated Bibliography of Recent Howells Criticism

Professor Alex Feerst edits the Annotated Online Bibliography of Howells Criticism. Contributors to the Annotated Online Bibliography volunteer to provide abstracts of any articles appearing on Howells in the journal they’ve agreed to monitor; the collected entries from the contributors are then edited and posted to the Howells Society site. If you would like to contribute to the annotated bibliography, please contact Alex Feerst [feerst@yahoo.com].

### *Nineteenth-Century Literature*

#### Annotations by Paul Petrie

Jarrett, Gene. "Entirely Black Verse from Him Would Succeed': Minstrel Realism and William Dean Howells." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 59.4 (2005): 494-525.

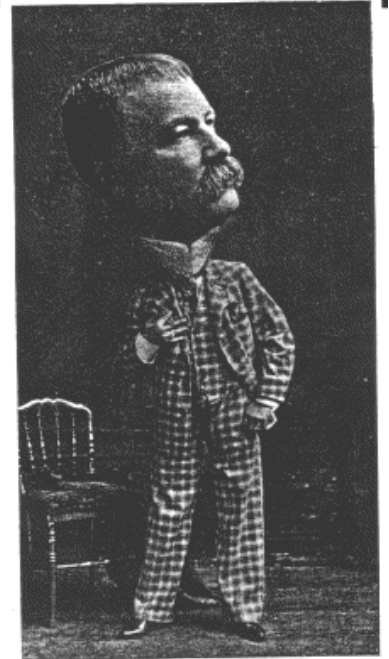
Jarrett argues that Howells’ review of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s *Majors and Minors* reveals the mechanisms by which white racist culture came to understand black minstrelsy’s essentially romantic and sentimental caricaturing of African Americans as a racially authentic realism. The culturally pervasive practice of minstrelsy, especially in its later black-performed versions, sold its repackaging of white racist stereotypes of blacks on the basis of its putative accuracy of representation of the reality of African-American life. An analogous phenomenon occurred in the transition from the plantation literature tradition to African American literary realism: recycled white racist stereotypes became the primary markers of putative authenticity in African American writers’ literary self-representation. Howells acted upon and reinforced these assumptions in his responses to Dunbar’s poetry,

## Annotated Bibliography, continued

which he reviewed for *Harper's Weekly* in 1896, in a column that eventually became the preface to Dunbar's *Lyrics of Lowly Life*. Reading the poems through the minstrel realism expectations set up for him by the earlier book's frontispiece photo of Dunbar, Howells found that Dunbar was "least himself" in those poems—constituting seventy-five percent of the volume—written in traditional (white) Western verse forms and standard English. He reserved most of his praise for the dialect poems, which confirmed Howells' cultural preconceptions about literary-racial authenticity: as Jarrett puts it, "Dunbar is most Dunbar when he is most Negro, Howells would have said." Thus, "while characterizing Anglo-American literary realism as the eschewal of romance and sentiment, Howells in particular defined African American literary realism in these very terms," derived from a "romantic racist" understanding of the essential characteristics of African Americans.

**Palmer, Stephanie C.** "Realist Magic in the Fiction of William Dean Howells." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 57.2 (2002): 210-236.

Palmer focuses on the prevalence of accident as "the means by which effective meeting grounds are formed" between members of the upper and lower classes in three Howells novels of the 1880s and 90s. Howells' uses of accident serve to "remind readers of the need for, and the difficulty of, maintaining cognitive and emotional connections in a heterogeneous society." In *The Undiscovered Country*, a relatively hopeful Howells posits the "accidental entanglements" enabled by modern systems of social circulation (transportation, commerce, mass communication) as productive if imperfect modes of establishing social interaction between people of unlike class and community identities. *Annie Kilburn* and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* are considerably less optimistic about the possibility of achieving a new common ground via the mechanisms of chance, identifying accidental entanglement with bourgeois characters who are well-meaning but largely ineffectual. Nevertheless, while the novels endorse the "theoretical viability" of the social ideas of "activist-theorists" like Peck, Lindau, Conrad Dryfoos, and Margaret Vance, they find what hope there is to be found not in socialist theories of comprehensive social change but in the opportunities afforded by the chaos of modern life for cross-class interaction "on a personal level." Howells' "resolutely unradical nature," Palmer concludes, has perhaps received too much condemnation by recent critics; his use of "realist accident" might be read "as the impulse toward conversation and concern in a nonviolent modern world."



WILLIAM HOWELLS, THE YOUNG AUTHOR OF PROMISE  
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN 1857.

**Rosenthal, Debra J.** "The White Blackbird: Miscegenation, Genre, and the Tragic Mulatta in Howells, Harper, and the 'Babes of Romance.'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56.4 (2002): 495-517.

Focusing primarily on competing representations of the stock romantic figure of the tragic mulatta, Rosenthal reads Howells' *An Imperative Duty* and Harper's *Iola Leroy* as parts of a "call-and-response literary conversation . . . about race, gender, and genre." According to Rosenthal, Howells designed his novel as a realist corrective to the overly melodramatic representations of race and sexuality in two miscegenation novels he had reviewed four years earlier in *Harper's* magazine: Margaret Holmes Bates' *The Chamber over the Gate* and the Alice Morris Buckner-attributed *Towards the Gulf: A Romance of Louisiana*. Howells's novel attempts to use the physician Olney's realist, "scientific" racial discourse to ironize and "flatten romanticism's stock storyline" but the presence in the text of the tragic mulatta figure, Rhoda Aldgate, "ruptures" the text's realist intentions, causing the novel to revert to racial stereotyping and Olney to assume the role of white paternalist savior of the "tainted" Rhoda. Howells, against his own apparent intentions, "unwittingly reinscribes the tragic mulatta stereotype" by subjecting Rhoda to a symbolic suicide, as she ultimately rejects both "her American identity and her black ancestry." By contrast, *Iola Leroy* responds to Howells by embracing its heroine's "acceptance of black womanhood" along with the very sort of "too melodramatic" ending that Howells had condemned in Bates' and Buckner's novels.

## Queries from the Howells Society Site

The Howells Society web site (<http://www.howellssociety.org>) receives many queries, but unfortunately a number of them have gone unanswered. The following is a selection of questions received at the site.

If the query has not been answered and you would like to answer it, could you send your response to me at [campbelld@wsu.edu](mailto:campbelld@wsu.edu) so that I can post them to the site? Thanks very much. —Donna Campbell

### Howells Quotation on Travel and Authorship: Reprised

I am looking for the source of a quotation attributed to Howells: "We were travellers before we were novellers". Any suggestions? — Charles Baraw

### Howells and Moorefield

Although well known throughout the world, WDH is hardly recognized by the historians in this area of Ohio in which he was nurtured. I am speaking about a little community in Harrison County Ohio called Moorefield. Moorefield is where his family moved and lived by an uncle for a while when he was growing up. I know that he had to have been given some education here because we did have numerous country schools during that time. One our teachers was George Armstrong Custer, who would have been about the same age as Howells, having been born in 1839. Howells was also an acquaintance and classmate of Edwin Stanton. I am researching his local early background at present, and wish to learn any information you have concerning that. —John Hurless

### Howells Family Genealogy

Hi, My name is William Howells Vinton and I was wondering if anyone knew William Cooper Howells and William Dean Howells' roots and if they have a family tree anywhere since then. The reason i am wondering is because obviously my name is Howells which apparently comes from my great-grandmothers maiden name. I was told that my great great grandfather was a writer so the timeline would be correct. This all could be coincidence but I was curious. Thank you. —William Howells Vinton III

[Note: We get a lot of genealogy queries at the site, and if anyone could provide a genealogical chart that would not violate the privacy of living members of the Howells family, it could be posted at the site.]

### Howells's Library (*Martin Faber*)

I am trying to find out if Howells ever owned a particular novel (\_Martin Faber\_, by William Gilmore Simms). Was his personal library preserved after his death, and if so, have the contents been kept together in a particular location? I would appreciate any suggestions! Thanks so much! —Elizabeth Ann Dietrich

### Howells's Dining Life in New York

Expanding on a past query, I would very much like to know if Howells, outside the novels, ever left evidence of his dining life in New York. He was obviously a keen eater, and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is sprinkled with references to, or extended scenes in, little Italian, Spanish and French restaurants. I would love to know what restaurant served as the basis for "Maroni's" in that novel, and where it was that Howells referred to "Claret's," a mythical NY restaurant based on the real-life Sherry's. I am writing a history of New York restaurants, hence the question. —William Grimes, [grimes@nytimes.com](mailto:grimes@nytimes.com)

### Howells's Voice

Is there any record of what Howell's sounded like--timber of voice, regional accent, etc.? I am quoting him in an informal talk and it would be nice to approximate his voice. Thanks [steve.botts@transamerica.com](mailto:steve.botts@transamerica.com)

## Queries, continued

### Howells's introduction to *The Swiss Family Robinson*

I am preparing a bibliography of all editions of THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON based largely on my own collection. I would be interested to know whether Howells's introduction to the 1909 Harper edition (BAL 9796) has attracted any academic interest in the way of articles or other studies as I cannot trace any secondary material relating to it.

### Howells's "The Pony Engine and the Pacific Express" as a source for "The Little Engine that Could"

I am researching the history of the children's story "The Little Engine that Could"

(see: <http://tigger.uic.edu/~plotnick/littleng.htm>).

One of the predecessors of this story was Howells's "The Pony Engine and the Pacific Express." Is there any scholarship on the writing by Howells of this story? It would also be useful to me know what church he belonged to ca. 1906 and if there any records of lectures he gave in Ohio, ca. 1909-1910. Anything else relevant (letters, etc.), organizations he belonged to that had elementary education as a focus, etc. would be very useful. Thanks. — Roy Plotnick

[Editor's Note: The lectures were actually delivered about a dozen years earlier than the date cited. An account of those lectures and their reception appear in a long article by Robert Rowlett, "William D. Howells' 1899 Midwest Lecture Tour," *ALR*, 10.2 (Spring 1977): 125-67; the Ohio lectures are described on pp. 142-54, 161-67. I don't believe that WDH lectured in Ohio or anywhere else in 1910, the year Twain and Elinor died.]

### Howells and Southern Fiction

I'm trying to determine how much southern fiction Howells had read and, specifically, whether he had read any novels by Augusta Jane Evans (Wilson). While I've found texts dealing with Howells' attitudes about the South, I'm still searching for a comprehensive list of texts in his library or a list of texts he had definitively read. Thanks! —Bradley Johnson

### Howells Criticism on Jack London

Does anybody know of any direct reference to Jack London by Howells, in either his letters or his criticism or? Seems a bit odd, as Earle Labor recently pointed out, that Howells would totally ignore London, especially during the younger writer's rapid rise to fame circa 1900-1904. —Jonathan Auerbach

### Howells and the "Recent Literature" columns in *Atlantic*

I would like to know if Howells wrote the unsigned "Recent Literature" columns that appeared in ATLANTIC MONTHLY. Specifically, I am interested in the reviews published in 1874. I suspect that he did not write these, but am not sure how to find out.

—Jonathan Daigle

### Howells, Owen Wister, and Cowboys

I wondered if someone might be able to direct me to a book that treats (or mentions) an exchange between William Dean Howells and Owen Wister. The exchange involves Howells cautioning Wister not to pursue writing a story referring to cowboys' sexual practice. Thank you. —Karen Chandler

The William Dean Howells Society  
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**Dues Notice for 2007**

The dues for 2007 will remain \$10, which we all know is a bargain.

At \$10 annually 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 that, however, requires that they be paid in a timely manner. The money received helps cover the cost of printing and distributing *The Howellsian* and such other documents as publicity brochures and announcements; they will also fund the annual prize offered for the best paper on Howells presented at the ALA conference beginning this year; and the committee has already been discussing methods of using accrued dues to strengthen the Society and expand its membership by promoting the reading and study of Howells' 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 to our treasurer, Dr. Elsa Nettels, at 211 Indian Spring Rd., Williamsburg, VA 23185. Please make the check out to The William Dean Howells Society. Thank you.**

Thank you, too, for your continuing interest and support of W. D. Howells scholarship and the William Dean Howells Society. We depend on it!

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