

New Series  
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# The Howellsian

## A Message from the Editor

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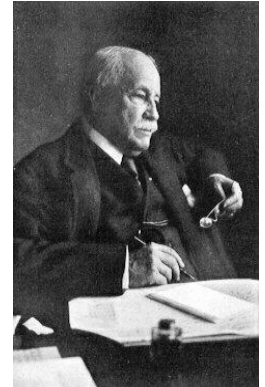
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It is a typically unseasonable October and preparations for the 2008 ALA conference have already begun. Two sessions, arranged by Rob Davidson, will be held: "The International Howells," and "The Domestic Howells." Included in this issue are the calls for papers.

Among other items, this issue of the *Howellsian* includes (1) the presentation of the second annual prize for best paper presented at the ALA conference (2) a reprint of prize-winning essay, by Frederick Wegener (3) an account of the Kittery Point excursion to the Howells Memorial Home (4) an essay by Riccarda Saggese on Howells' *Venetian Life* (5) abstracts of papers delivered at the 2007 ALA conference Howells sessions.

The next issue (Vol. 11, No. 1, N.S.) of *The Howellsian* will be published in spring 2008.

— Alex Feerst, Editor



William Dean Howells in 1907

## Call for Papers: Howells Panels at ALA 2008 in San Francisco

The William Dean Howells society will sponsor two panels at the 2008 American Literature Association conference in San Francisco on May 22-25, 2008. The conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency Embarcadero Center. For more information, visit the ALA site at <http://www.americanliterature.org>.

### The International Howells

The William Dean Howells Society invites paper proposals addressing "The International Howells" for the 2008 ALA Convention in San Francisco (May 22-25, 2008). Paper topics are invited on any aspect of Howells's work that touches on the international: fiction; criticism and reviews; travel writing, etc.

### The Domestic Howells

The William Dean Howells Society invites paper proposals addressing "The Domestic Howells" for the 2008 ALA Convention in San Francisco (May 22-25, 2008). Paper topics are invited on any aspect of Howells's work touching on the "domestic": fiction set in the U.S.; fiction examining domestic life; criticism and reviews; autobiography; reportage and non-fiction, etc.

For either topic, please send a 500-word abstract and a brief c.v. (separate MS Word attachments) by **January 7, 2008** to Rob Davidson: [rgdavidson@csuchico.edu](mailto:rgdavidson@csuchico.edu). Or post to:

Dr. Rob Davidson, Dept. of English, Taylor Hall, California State University, Chico, Chico, CA 95929-0830

- In the next issue:
- Recent Criticism on Howells
- ALA Information

The William Dean Howells Society gratefully acknowledges the support of Washington State University in publishing *The Howellsian*.

## WDHS Events at ALA 2007: A Banner Weekend in Boston

**Sanford E. Marovitz, Department of English, Kent State University**

The two dozen or so Howellsians with dinner reservations at the Tavern Club last May 25 in Boston and bus reservations for the Kittery Point excursion to the Howells Memorial Home the following day knew that the air was “promise-crammed” long before the time for the 2007 ALA conference arrived. The opportunity was there for a special weekend to be enjoyed by all with an interest in nineteenth-century American literary history and especially in the life and work of William Dean Howells himself. Susan Goodman, our estimable past-president, arranged both events, a commitment that she had undertaken late in 2006 and executed since then to perfection, from the cocktail-hour before dinner on Friday evening to the bus ride back from Kittery Point on Saturday afternoon. The Society is very grateful to her and to its trustworthy treasurer, Elsa Nettels, who kept an account of the figures so well all spring. No more appropriate place for the dinner could have been selected than the Tavern Club at 4 Boylston Place downtown with its aura of Old Boston. W. D. Howells was the inaugural president of the Club, elected to office in 1884, the year in which the publication of his most widely-acclaimed novel, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, commenced in the November issue of the *Century*.



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

It was pure delight to socialize as trays of hors d’oeuvres were passed around by servers while diners took advantage of an open bar for drinks poured to order. The ambience put everyone into a congenial frame of mind. For a few hours at least all were members of the Tavern Club, examining the array of paintings and graphics on the walls (most of which were a century old or more) and taking pleasure in the dark woodwork and antique furnishings dispersed throughout the rooms on the ground floor. The dinner itself was superb, and it was served with the gracious hospitality one would expect of such an establishment. Recalling the menu makes this writer hungry again for the perfectly prepared beef tenderloin as well as all the delectable dishes that accompanied it. Excellent wines, white and red, were served with the meal, and the table-talk was high-spirited, as well it had to be under such conducive circumstances. We are pleased to express our gratitude to the management and staff of the Tavern Club for their outstanding cuisine and service. After dinner, those who walked back to the hotel had much to chat about on the way, which included not only where they had just been but where they would be going on the next day because most would participate in the excursion to Maine.

The chartered bus to Kittery Point met the travelers at 9 a. m. in front of the conference hotel. It was a large vehicle, and most of the seats were taken. Why not? The ride would be pleasant, the weather was cooperative, the destination was a splendid estate on the seacoast, and all expenses were covered. Yes, everything was gratis for the travelers; all they had to do was sign up for the excursion a few days in advance. The College of Arts and Sciences at Harvard funded the whole conference thanks to Dean David Fithian and to Susan, whose power of persuasion can be remarkably effective. The William Dean Howells Memorial Committee is situated at Harvard, and the Memorial House at Kittery Point is under its jurisdiction; we are happy to acknowledge with gratitude their generous support that day. In addition, we are deeply grateful to Ms. Julie Dunfey, of the renowned Northeast restaurateurs, who catered the delicious luncheon; the chowder was scrumptious as were the different kinds of gourmet sandwiches and various seafood salads. Those who were not there but could have been missed a memorable yet comfortably casual buffet and picnic, for the many who chose to sit outside on the patio of the Howells family’s lovely home.

The luncheon was followed by a mini-conference that opened with presentations by Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson, each of whom discussed the biography on which they had collaborated, *William Dean Howells: A Writer’s Life*, published by the University of California Press in 2005. Their different perspectives as co-authors made their presentations fascinating enough to generate more questions than could be fully entertained in the time available. To a large extent, the time was limited by the general desire to discuss the future of the Memorial House because the Committee has been seeking a satisfactory way to shift elsewhere the responsibility of its upkeep without, however, undermining its role and significance as a memorial to Howells, a legacy of the family, and a repository for artifacts and books once owned, read, and used by the Dean himself.

## WDHS Events at ALA 2007: A Banner Day in Boston, continued

Fortunately, three knowledgeable and sociable representatives of the family were on hand to comment and respond to questions. Polly, Dean, and Gurdon Metz Howells all helped to foster the discussion and keep it on track. Many suggestions were made as the discussion continued, and good points were quickly transformed into possibilities for action. Once again we thank those members of the family for being with us on that day and helping to make our conference a productive, meaningful one. Too soon an announcement was made that the bus was ready to depart, and once again the participants had much to converse about on the return trip to Boston. The excursion was a success in every way.

Let's hope that we'll meet again for dinner soon at the Tavern Club and that this year will not mark the Society's last visit to the Howells Memorial Home at Kittery Point. Your support may be needed before long to help convince the Committee at Harvard of the Home's value to scholarship on the life and times of W. D. Howells and his milieu.

### Minutes from the ALA Howells Society Business Meeting

The William Dean Howells Society Business Meeting was held this year on May 24 at the American Literature Association conference, May 24-27, in 2007 at the Westin Copley Place Hotel. President Susan Goodman called the meeting to order at 1:15 p.m. Other members present were Elsa Nettels, Donna Campbell, and Sanford Marovitz.

1. Elsa Nettels gave the treasurer's report. As of May 20, we have \$3,394.74 in the bank and checks to deposit for \$590 (dinner checks), which makes \$3974 in all. Our only expenditures have been for the Howells Essay Prize.
2. President Susan Goodman had a certificate made and sent to Michael Anesko, the essay prize winner, and Elsa Nettels sent him the check since he could not attend ALA.
3. The next item of business was the elections. Since Elsa Nettels (Treasurer) and Donna Campbell (Secretary/Webmaster) were up for reelection, Susan Goodman made a motion to accept Elsa and Donna in their roles; Sandy Marovitz seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.
4. Elections were then held for the new positions; they included formal nominations.
  - A. Outgoing editor of *The Howellsian*, Sanford Marovitz, nominated Alex Feerst as the new editor; Susan Goodman seconded the nomination, and Alex was elected. The question of institutional support arose, but if the University of Delaware cannot cover the costs and Alex Feerst's institution cannot do so, the Howells Society has sufficient funds to continue its printing and mailing.
  - B. The elections for vice president and program chair were then held. Sanford Marovitz nominated Rob Davidson, with Susan Goodman seconding. Donna Campbell nominated Lance Rubin, with Susan Goodman seconding.. After a brief discussion, the election was held, and Rob Davidson was elected.
5. Thanks were given to officers whose 2005-2007 terms had just ended: Susan Goodman, Sanford Marovitz, Elsa Nettels, and Donna Campbell.
6. Sandy Marovitz indicated his willingness to help Alex with the fall issue, or Alex can take it over completely beginning in the fall. Donna Campbell suggested that this would be a good time to transition to having a different person doing layout, either Alex or possibly a graduate student hired for the purpose. Susan Goodman mentioned that the fall issue will contain review of the translation of *Venetian Life*, among other items.
7. The deadline for the Howells Prize Essay will be September 1, 2007, and submissions will be sent to the new president, Claudia Stokes. It was decided that if current members of the board may submit their papers if they presented on Howells Society panels at ALA but must recuse themselves from voting in the contest. [Note: No officers submitted papers to the contest in order to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. In subsequent discussions, the officers decided that a change in the contest rules will be discussed at a future meeting, since excluding officers from the contest may prevent such conflicts of interest.]
8. Sandy Marovitz then moved to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

## Howells Prize Essay: Marriage and the American Medical Woman in *Dr. Breen's Practice*

### William Dean Howells Society Prize Essay

The William Dean Howells Society Essay Prize will be presented at the 2008 ALA conference to Frederick Wegener for his paper, "Marriage and the American Medical Woman in *Dr. Breen's Practice*." The Society thanks Dr. Wegener for his permission to reprint the following version of his essay.

#### **"Marriage and the American Medical Woman in *Dr. Breen's Practice*" Frederick Wegener (California State University, Long Beach)**

Not surprisingly, the question of marriage—so often a vexing one to members of the first two generations of women physicians in the United States—recurs frequently in the wealth of imaginative representations of women as doctors that circulated in the second half of the nineteenth century (the period coinciding with the emergence of women in the American medical profession). As Regina Morantz-Sanchez observes in her now-standard history of medical women in the United States, "the decision to marry was not always an easy one to make," given the fact that "when a woman decided to study medicine in the nineteenth century . . . she challenged conventional definitions of women's role" (129), and given the widespread supposition in Victorian America that women, "unsexed" by medical education and training, would thereby disqualify themselves for marriage. Such conflicts inevitably generated various modifications of the traditional marriage plot in the abundant novelistic response to the advent of women doctors in the United States. It seems therefore revealing that William Dean Howells should have placed this tension between the pursuit of medicine and the prospect of marriage at the center of *Dr. Breen's Practice* (1881), the first American novel to make its title character a woman doctor (or to name a woman doctor in its title). Equally striking is the fact that a novel about a woman doctor should have involved, as Allen Stein remarks, one of "Howells's first significant treatments of marriage," launching in his output a series of "fictions [that] concern women who are torn between the attractions of marriage," in John Crowley's words, "and their desire (or need) to work . . ." (Stein 22; Crowley 182).

Followed within a year by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Doctor Zay* and then by Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* shortly thereafter, *Dr. Breen's Practice* was also the first of three 1880s novels about medical women to be produced by prominent fiction-writers in the United States—ample evidence that "[l]iterary gates had . . . swung wide open by the late nineteenth century," in one historian's words, "to enable the woman doctor to enter a number of novels," which "all recognized this new phenomenon in American medicine" (Walsh 180). As Unitarian minister Celia P. Woolley indicated at the time, "It was regarded as a rather daring experiment among some of the critics," to a degree now perhaps no longer recoverable, "when Mr. Howells . . . selected a woman physician as his heroine" (293). Soon regularly discussed in tandem with *Doctor Zay* and *A Country Doctor*, Howells's novel may thus be said to have initiated a series of works that each revolve not only around a medical woman but also around a number of interrelated questions helpfully summarized by Jean Carwile Masteller: "Is the woman strong enough to be a doctor? Can she combine her career with a marriage? If she must choose between marriage or [sic] career, which will she choose?" (136).

The handling of such matters in *Dr. Breen's Practice* would appear to be inauspicious, to say the least. As noted by more than one reader, its title is ironic in that the eponymous heroine's medical practice seems to be limited to a single patient, Louise Maynard, an ailing former schoolmate whom Grace Breen is caring for at the northern-New-England summer resort where the novel is set not long after the completion of her medical studies. Once Mrs. Maynard contracts a serious case of pneumonia that does not respond to treatment and exclaims, "I want a *doctor!* . . . I want a *man doctor!*" (64)—as if to say a "*real*" doctor—Grace relinquishes the case to Dr. Rufus Mulbridge, a gruff, unrefined local country doctor whose intervention saves her friend's life. Having lost all confidence in her own abilities as a healer in the meantime, Grace decides that she is not cut out to be a physician after all and marries Walter Libby, a cultivated idler whom she meets at the resort and who is preparing to take up a position that awaits him at the southern-New-Hampshire textile mill owned by his father. It is not out of a genuine vocation, in any case, but out of a morbidly conscientious New Englander's sense of duty that Grace sought to become a doctor in the first place, while rebounding more-

## Howells Prize Essay: Marriage and the American Medical Woman, continued

over from a traumatically failed romance—what Sophia Jex-Blake, surveying a number of woman-doctor novels a decade or so after she famously became one of England's first women physicians, later dubbed "the time-honoured 'disappointment,' which most masculine minds seem to consider the essential preliminary to the study of medicine by a woman" (265).

No wonder, then, that Masteller contends that "Howells depicts his female physician unsympathetically," that "Grace Breen should never have become a physician, since she lacked . . . the necessary . . . temperament to succeed in her rigorous career," and that "[t]he result of Howells's examination of the female doctor . . . is a hardly subtle reinforcement of the view that women are unsuited for the rigors of medicine" (136, 137). Likewise, another study of contemporaneous imaginative representations of medical women in the United States finds in *Dr. Breen's Practice* "the single most negative portrait of a female physician from the entire period," arguing that "Grace Breen is not fitted by personality, inherited abilities, or even desire to be a physician" (Bardes and Gossett 137-38). According to Bert Bender, even more categorically, it is "the question . . . of woman's *unfitness* to succeed in the medical profession" that Howells addresses in *Dr. Breen's Practice*, "one of the most heavy-handed performances of his career," and a novel in which "Howells shrilly denounces the woman's 'fitness' to be a doctor" (50, 159).

That she marries soon after deciding to renounce her profession lends weight to Stephanie Browner's recent description of Grace as "a lovely woman better suited to the world of romance and marriage than the rigors of medicine" (160). Emphasizing "the fact that both the protagonist's career and the story itself ends [*sic*] with a marriage," Cynthia Davis has neatly observed that Grace's "initial exchange of the role of beloved for the role of doctor . . . is offset at the end when she trades the role of doctor for the role of wife"—implying that, for Howells, "[t]he two roles . . . cannot be simultaneously undertaken; one must come at the expense of the other" (111, 109). In Judith Fryer's dismissive summation, "Whatever [Howells's] intentions, his question—can a woman have both professional satisfaction and marriage?—can only be answered in the negative in this novel" (234). Refinements of this sort of reading offered by scholars like Crowley and Stein, or by George N. Bennett before them, have done little to re-orient the critical consensus on *Dr. Breen's Practice*, in which Howells is typically thought to have expressed a number of then-common misconceptions about women's aptitude for medical study and practice, about the irreconcilability of marriage and a career in medicine, and about the likelihood that a woman doctor would exchange her profession for marriage if given the chance. The treatment of such matters in *Dr. Breen's Practice*, however, turns out to be a good deal more ambiguous and nuanced, considerably complicating the novel's engagement with the question of marriage in the life of a medical woman in Gilded-Age America.

Certainly Henry James, reporting to Howells in September 1880 that Grace Norton "speaks of your writing a story about a 'lady-doctor'!", would have had good reason to declare, "I applaud you that subject—it is rich in actuality" (qtd. in Anesko 154). By the time Howells began work on *Dr. Breen's Practice*, three decades after Elizabeth Blackwell had become the first member of her sex to receive a medical diploma in the United States, over two thousand women were practicing medicine despite frequently vituperative opposition and resistance, making the woman doctor one of postbellum America's more conspicuous and controversial figures. As Grace herself admits to Libby at one point, "I know very well that there is a prejudice against women physicians" (86), and various carefully placed details in the novel reflect, on Howells's part, a greater knowledge of the "actualities" of medical women in the United States than is usually appreciated. It would not have been at all implausible, for instance, to say of Grace that "she planned going to one of the great factory towns, and beginning practice there, in company with an older physician [whom she later identifies as "a woman physician older than myself" (223)], among the children of the operatives" (13), at a time when numerous women doctors in the United States practiced together, when members of the first generation of American medical women routinely mentored their juniors, and when children formed a large (although far from exclusive) portion of the female doctor's clientele. Declaring to Mulbridge, late in the novel, "It seemed a shame for me to be of no use in the world," Grace explains her career choice with a reason—"I hoped that I might do something in a way that seemed natural for women"—that in fact echoes one of the era's chief arguments in support of the education and training of women physicians, who "believed . . . that medicine was naturally suited to female talents and abilities" (Howells 219; Morantz-Sanchez 129). When Grace seeks to consult Mulbridge on Mrs. Maynard's condition, and he observes, "You must . . .

## Marriage and the American Medical Woman in *Dr. Breen's Practice*, continued

have found that the study of medicine has its difficulties" (96), Howells knowingly understates how difficult it would have been for members of her sex, barred at the time from admission to nearly all medical colleges in the United States.

Further demonstrating Howells's familiarity with his subject, Mulbridge then remarks that "[s]ome of our ladies take up the study abroad," where "between six and eight hundred American women," according to one historian, found postgraduate clinical and laboratory training more readily available in France, Austria, and Switzerland throughout this period than at home (Howells 97; Bonner 27). Significantly, another medical historian cites Mulbridge's observation as a leading example of how "[w]omen physicians in late-nineteenth-century American fiction often were portrayed as having European experience," and of how "study abroad came to be represented . . . as an unremarkable step" (Warner 327-28). When Mulbridge "went on to speak . . . of the eminent woman who did the American name honor by the distinction she achieved in the schools of Paris" (97), Howells clearly knew that such a phrase would give his readers in 1881 all they needed to be able to identify Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi, then perhaps the nation's most renowned woman physician, who had been awarded a bronze medal for her graduate thesis and "passed her examinations with high honors" at the *École de Médecine* around a decade earlier (Morantz-Sanchez 193). Learning that Grace has in fact not studied in Europe, Mulbridge remarks, "I suppose you have your diploma from the Philadelphia school" (97)—an understandable assumption, since the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania (attended, as Howells would of course have remembered, by the young Philadelphian Ruth Bolton in *The Gilded Age*) had been for some time the leading institution of its kind in the United States.

Informing Mulbridge that she has in fact graduated "from the New York school—the homœopathic school of New York" (97), Grace's response evokes other aspects of the rise of women physicians in the United States with which Howells was also obviously conversant. Founded in 1863 by Clemence Lozier, herself a physician and a health-reform activist, the New York Medical College and Hospital for Women had matriculated around two hundred students by this point, enjoying considerable success at a time when sectarian or "irregular" branches of medicine like homeopathy were often more receptive to female aspirants and practitioners than the allopathic, or "regular," medical profession in the United States. According to Naomi Rogers, "The last half of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of as many sectarian as regular women's medical schools"—to the consternation of pioneering women doctors like Blackwell and Jacobi, who were all too aware of the American medical establishment's hostility to irregular medicine, and who "were careful," as Morantz-Sanchez puts it, "not to allow their activities to be tainted with accusations of sectarianism" (Rogers 293; Morantz-Sanchez 73).

Such vigilance would seem to have been extremely prudent, judging from the reaction that Grace Breen's disclosure provokes in Mulbridge, an orthodox physician who instantly retracts his acceptance of her invitation: "We belong to two diametrically opposite schools—theories—of medicine. It would be impracticable—impossible—for us to consult. . . . Have you never heard that the—ah—regular practice cannot meet homœopathists in this way?" (Howells 99). Mulbridge is here invoking the notorious "consultation clause" adopted in 1847 by the recently organized American Medical Association as part of its code of ethics designed to regulate physicians' professional interaction. Forbidding orthodox or allopathic practitioners, on pain of expulsion from county or state chapters of the AMA, to consult with homeopaths or even to "come to the aid of a patient whose doctor was a homeopath," as Martin Kaufman observes, "unless the homeopath was first dismissed from the case" (53), the consultation clause had begun to be enforced with renewed vigor in the late 1860s. Mulbridge would thus have had no choice but to assure Grace, "If you had told me—if I had known—you were a homœopathist, I couldn't have considered the matter at all" (Howells 99).

As he persists in his refusal, Grace's indignant response—"I had heard that you made some such distinction. . . . But I couldn't realize anything so ridiculous," adding that she "was curious to know how far superstition and persecution can go in our day" (100, 101)—would have been very much consistent with popular opinion, which "was clearly on the side of the persecuted homeopaths," in Kaufman's words (80), and which assailed orthodox physicians' intolerance of homeopathic practitioners. Further countering her objections, Mulbridge cites the very example that represented what Kaufman calls "[t]he height of absurdity" reached by "the lengths to which the orthodox profession would go in their denunciation of homeopathy" (90). In his own defense, Mulbridge informs Grace, "A little while ago one of our school in Connecticut was expelled from the State Medical Association for consulting . . . with his own wife, who was a

## Marriage and the American Medical Woman in *Dr. Breen's Practice*, continued

physician of your school" (101)—presumably the case of Dr. Moses B. Pardee, "a Norwalk[, Connecticut] physician . . . expelled" in 1878 "from the Fairfield County Medical Society for having consulted with his wife, Dr. Emily V. D. Pardee, a homeopath" (Kaufman 90).

Yet what is striking about this initial exchange—and typically overlooked by Howells's readers—is the fact that Mulbridge declines to consult with Grace because of the style of medicine in which she has been trained, not because of her sex. As he stammeringly explains to Grace, "Personally, I—I—should be—obliged—I should feel honored—I—I—it has nothing to do with your—your—being a—a—a—woman—lady. I should not care for that. No" (98). Howells later emphasizes once again that "nothing less than her homeopathy would have made him withdraw his consent to a consultation with her" (118)—remarkable at a time when it would still have been almost as uncommon for any orthodox physician of his sex to consult with a woman doctor at all. If anything, before he discovers that she is a homeopathic physician, Mulbridge tells Grace, "Of course, I shall have pleasure in consulting with you in regard to your friend's case, though I've no doubt you are doing all that can be done," further remarking that "I should have inferred a scientific training from your statement of your friend's case" (95, 95-96).

Throughout this part of her encounter with Mulbridge, Grace herself feels that, "With a great show of deference, he . . . betrayed something of the air of one who humors a joke," while "[s]he . . . believed that he was laughing at her, and that this was a mock" (95, 96). And Dr. Mulbridge indeed exhibits the same peculiar blend of condescension and acknowledgment after Grace surrenders Mrs. Maynard's case to him, and he agrees to have her assist him as a nurse. In the course of collaborating with Grace, Mulbridge "had known how to appreciate her scientific training, which he found as respectable as that of any clever young man of their profession. He praised, in his way, the perfection with which she interpreted his directions and intentions in regard to the patient. 'If there were such nurses as you, Miss Breen, there would be very little need of doctors,' he said . . ." (119). True, when his mother later complains, "I don't see why you call her doctor," Mulbridge replies, "Oh, I do it out of politeness. Besides, she is one sort of doctor. Little pills" (195)—referring sardonically to the infinitesimal dosages for which homeopaths had become famous in their departure from "heroic" therapies, like excessive dosing, associated with orthodox medicine. Even when he later tells his mother that Grace is "a very fine girl," his praise is once again diluted as Mulbridge characterizes her as "cool and careful under instruction, and perfectly tractable and intelligent" (200). At the same time, however, a certain respect on his part is clearly signaled when Mrs. Maynard's husband, reporting that Mulbridge "seems to think it will be the best thing for her" to travel out west for the climate, asks Grace, "I suppose you agree with him?" When she responds that "his opinion would be of great value" and that "[i]t wouldn't be at all essential that I should agree with him," Maynard demurs by replying, "I reckon he thinks a good deal of your agreeing with him . . ." (212).

The value that Mulbridge attaches to Grace's professional judgment is underscored in their next lengthy exchange, when he unexpectedly requests her advice in asking her what she thinks of him as a physician, of his management of her friend's case, and of his chances of success if he were to open a medical practice in Boston. Here Mulbridge also admits that he was in fact, like so many of his male colleagues, initially skeptical of women physicians, a skepticism overcome by Grace's skill in assisting his treatment of Mrs. Maynard: "I had never seen a lady of our profession before. . . I always had my doubts about the thoroughness of women's study, and I should have liked to see where your training failed. I must say that I found it very good,—I've told you that" (222). When Grace protests that her mishandling of Mrs. Maynard's case at the start has convinced her of her own inadequacy as a physician, Mulbridge replies, "You are no failure," praising what he calls "the endurance and the discretion you have shown in the last three weeks" (226).

Even more extraordinary than such testimonials, on the part of a conservative and essentially misogynist physician who confesses, "Of course I felt the prejudice against women entering the profession which we all feel" (224), is the fact that Mulbridge makes such remarks in the process not only of persuading Grace to continue in medicine but also of proposing marriage. Asked by Mulbridge, "Are you going to throw away the study you've put into this profession?" (222), Grace initially misunderstands him when he offers to advise her if she pledges to maintain her career. "I mean that I ask you to let me help you carry out your plan of life," Mulbridge explains, "and to save all you have done, and all you have hoped, from waste—as your husband," adding that "[w]hat I meant was that I might make your plans my own, and that we might carry them out together" (225, 228). The medical and the marital thus become inseparably

## Marriage and the American Medical Woman in *Dr. Breen's Practice*, continued

intertwined toward the end of *Dr. Breen's Practice*, as Mulbridge offers Grace the vision of both a domestic and a professional partnership, willing to unite their lives and practices even should she defiantly choose to remain a homeopath: "If you have any scruple about giving up your theory of medicine, you needn't do it; and the State Medical Association may go to the devil . . ." (228-29). The fact that Grace is at once a physician of the other sex and of an opposing, professionally dubious therapeutic orientation obviously does not prevent Mulbridge from taking such an astonishing step, at least a decade before medical husband-and-wife couples begin to be depicted—and then only sparingly—in American fiction.

Nor is the possibility of combining marriage with the practice of medicine invalidated by the fact that Grace, on the grounds that she neither loves him nor agrees with him about her own medical abilities, ultimately rejects Mulbridge's dual proposal and subsequently marries Walter Libby instead. Much as Mulbridge declares, "You were a revelation to me; you have put ambition and hope into me," Libby has already confided to Grace, "When I first saw you I was hesitating about letting my father make use of me" by agreeing to manage his textile mill, until her example galvanizes him as it does Mulbridge later in the novel: "I assure you I felt small enough when I heard what you had done, and thought what I had done. It gave me a start; and I wrote my father that night that I would go in for it" (227, 147, 148). When Grace states her original plan of "going to a factory town . . . to begin my practice there among the operatives' children," Libby's response is enthusiastically supportive: "Come to my factory town, Miss Breen! There ought to be fevers there in the autumn, with all the low lands that I'm allowed to flood" (148). Indeed, it is at Libby's behest, within a year after she marries him and moves to the mill town in New Hampshire, that Grace reconsiders her decision to abandon a medical career, "turning her professional training to account by treating the sick children among her husband's operatives" (269). Not only is it *not* the case, therefore, that "Howells' Dr. Breen rejects her career in order to marry" (Masteller 136), as one representative reading of the novel puts it; it also cannot be said that "she abandons physicianhood altogether," in one medical historian's words, "when she marries Libby" (Burns 43-44).

While it is "[u]nder the shelter of her husband's name" that she is said now to enjoy "the benevolent use of her skill" (270), the remarkable fact is that Grace, by the end of the novel, has attracted not one but two proposals of marriage neither of which obliges her to give up a medical career, as she succeeds in harmonizing two roles—those of wife and physician—considered mutually exclusive by the received wisdom of the day. If anything, that wisdom proved to be less in accord with the facts of women physicians' lives at the time than Howells's novel, published in the same year in which two-thirds of the respondents to a survey of alumnae of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania reported that they were practicing medicine while married (Morantz-Sanchez 91). Perhaps most notable, however, is the fact that the issues both of the consonance of marriage and career and of the suitability of women for the medical profession are left deliberately undisentangled at the end of *Dr. Breen's Practice*. The somewhat inconclusive note on which it takes leave of Grace—stating that "the conditions under which she now exercises her skill certainly amount to begging the whole question of woman's fitness for the career she had chosen" (271)—would seem to present the novel not as an expression of doubt but as one entry in an ongoing debate about a matter still very much open or unresolved in the United States at the time. Far from a reactionary, contemptuous satire of medical women, as it is still often regarded, *Dr. Breen's Practice* may be situated in the vanguard of literary representations of the figure of the woman physician, challenging (however tentatively or uncertainly) the period's conventional assumptions that women were both innately unsuited to the practice of medicine and rendered unmarriageable if they nonetheless pursued it.

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### Howells Memorial House in Danger of Being Sold

A message from Polly Howells: "Harvard University is considering selling the Howells Memorial house at Kittery Point; the university feels that it is a financial drain and that there might be better ways to honor William Dean Howells. I know the few scholars I have contacted about this -- the ones on the Howells Memorial Committee at Harvard, which is now seemingly defunct -- are upset about it. If you would like to put the word out on the Howells website, people could email me with their feelings about it, and I could send them on to the man who is temporarily in charge of this business at Harvard."

If you would like to contact Polly Howells with your thoughts about this issue, her e-mail address is [Phows@aol.com](mailto:Phows@aol.com).



## Book Review

**William Dean Howells, *Venetian Life*. Boston, Mass: Houghton-Mifflin & Co, 1892. Ed. Albert Gardin. Editoria universitaria Venezia. Editoria Universitaria-San Paolo, 2199-30125. Venezia Licenciato dall'editore il 1 ottobre 2005. Traduzione dell-edizione del 1895 (Boston).**

**Reviewed by Riccarda Saggese, University of Delaware**

We find ourselves in front of a "journal," or to be more exact, a "reportage" that plunges us into the fantastic lagoon of Venice under the domination of the Austrians. The author, both spectator and actor of a world that does not belong to him, but within which he is fortunate enough to be catapulted, speaks to us in a simple, familiar, realistic way. There is not a plot; neither there are characters, only a protagonist, unique and undisputed, who dominates the scene from the beginning to the end: Venice, which is to other cities like the pleasant improbability of the theatre to every-day, commonplace life, to much the same effect as the melodrama... ". Howells opens his first chapter with a description of a scene in which Venice is immersed into its ancient past, populated with famous people, like Doge, Byron, and Cooper. In the silent and mysterious air of the night, we hear the frustrated sighs of the condemned people crossing the Bridge and the noise of the chopping blocks of the pozzi (wells); we see the facades of the buildings that reveal their secrets together with their intrigues. Always ready to listen, to scrutinize, to register, the alert mind of the narrator does not let anything escape, and becomes both an accomplice and a witness to an incredible story so true that it surpasses any fantasy. These pieces of history, filtered through the conscience of the author, would be cryptic ruins, undecipherable symbols, if our narrator did not turn them into the subject of his story, mediating between the reader and the city.

In this way, through the story the reader enters the alleyways, goes into ecstasy in front of the Giant's Stairs, admires the masks of the Carnival representing the pleasure of the past and the sadness of the present and suddenly he finds himself in a tight alliance with the Venetians who loathed the Austrians and were frustrated by "the defeat of patriotic hopes." At this point our mind goes back to another author, Ippolito Nievo, whose novel, *Le Confessioni*, also delves us into the nineteenth century city. However, Nievo becomes one with the protagonist, Venice, and narrates from within his city with the love and the bitterness of a person who sees it plagued by those who should have defended it. The suffering of the defeat is added to the burning bitterness of the betrayal.

Nostalgia, wisdom, and irony perfectly coexist in the *Confessioni* where the story mingles with the narration; the narrator is in fact the protagonist. And we feel it. W. Dean Howells tells the story with less passion, without a doubt, but with great admiration and delighted astonishment. To inform us about the beauty of Piazza San Marco, he simply says: "Whatever could please, the Venetian seems to have brought hither and made part of his Piazza, that it might remain forever the city's supreme grace..." without superfluous words or overstatements. And to help us enter the magic world of the architecture and the laces, he presents the Goldoni's Venetian atmosphere of the Barruffe Chiozzotte, in which the women appear joyful and coquettish with their embroidered laces and with their fans, behind which they hide curious and winking looks, and gossip with slight arrogance and malice. With the same realism, the author inserts us into the Venice of the Inquisition, during which time the city was able to stand up to the Pope, eliciting his admiration. His expression "Brave Sarpi and brave Republic!" sounds like a scream of a patriot towards other patriots who share his ideals and ideologies. Howells does not dwell too long on this subject. How could he? Venice is the sea, the sun, and the life. Talking about his first day in Venice, he says: "It was not in the presence of the great and famous monuments of art alone that I felt at home, [...] but wherever I wandered through the quaint and marvelous city, I found the good company of 'The fair, the old.'" This book could actually be defined as an essay on the history of the Serenissima. In fact, it seems that the same old buildings, the same narrow streets, the same folk festivities are ready to talk about their past along with their present as soon as they are perceived by the author and that the entire city is waiting for the curiosity of this foreigner to be explored in its innermost parts and narrated in the way in which they are perceived.

Even the Adriatic becomes the bluest sea in the world with the purple and yellow fishing sails. And it is not important if now that sea is not longer blue, because whoever reads these pages can imagine its old beauty through the writer's eyes. Howells describes with simple, but salient words the transition from the gloomy and cold winter to the light and warm spring: "There is a pleasant bustle in the streets, a ceaseless clatter of feet over the stones of the square, and a constant movement of boats upon the canals". Suddenly Venice becomes the House for all Venetians; no one re

## Book Review, continued

mains under a roof: every street is full of walking, selling, gossiping people. The result is a section of Venice's real daily life: on one side a city that with its monuments remains sculpted and rooted in its history, on the other side a city swarming with life that while highly-civilized and modern, has not lost its traditions and proudly lives with its glorious past.

The author progressively demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the city's secrets; however, between him and the places, people, and shops, there is a breaking point due to a different culture and a different historical background. He shows a contemplative, astonished attitude, but he is never enthusiastic and never participates to the city's hectic life. He observes within the city, but he keeps his distance from it. But isn't this attitude what makes his book interesting and realistic? Certainly yes; in fact, this is the perfect emotional condition that is needed to perceive the whispers, the sighs, the murmurs of ancient Venice that otherwise would have been confused with the shouting of the Venice of the nineteenth century.

It is only thanks to this attitude that we are able to relive and participate in these ancient festivities of the Serenissima: to be among the people who performed gymnastic games while " the Doge and the Senators attacked and destroyed with staves, several lightly built wooden castles, to symbolize the abasement of the feudal power before the Republic," or to walk up and down the Merceria (street of shops) where the noise reaches its highest point, or read Petrarca, or visit Othello's house and meet a character like Bettina who believed that America was located a little bit south of Vienna and that the skin color of the Americans was black with a few exceptions. Howells's attention is not just geared towards history alone, but it is ready to take on any approach, any kind of daily life, even if with some irony, tenderness and naivety.

Venetian Life could be defined as an autobiographical novel where the author reveals his ability to create inside his conscience a passage through which he can probe the mysteries of a civilization, of a story that is not found written in any book, but is directly told by the protagonists. Therefore, it is necessary for the author to turn everything into a written form, creating a type of surreal stage where, with different voices and different feelings, the characters reveal themselves to a distant public, as during the Carnival. Howells's characters keep their distance from the literary invention and use instead a real and appropriate language which gives truthfulness and topical interest to their eternal existence. They appear and disappear from the scene with discretion and elegance, under the wise guidance of the author, who lets them come into the scene and makes it appear as if he sees them for the first time as we do.



W. D. Howells's Study at Kittery Point, May 26, 2007. (Photograph by Jessica McCarthy)

## "Howells and Marriage": Abstracts from ALA 2007 Panels

### "A Grammar of Marriage: Love in Spite of Syntax in *Silas Lapham*"

William Rodney Herring, University of Texas

What does grammar have to do with marriage? In *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, the answer is *everything*. Old Bromfield Corey's expectations for a daughter-in-law include only a little "youth," "beauty," "good sense," and "pretty behavior," but he wants "her people" to be "rather grammatical." Silas is not this, as the narrator and Tom are both aware, though Tom claims that "in spite of his syntax I rather like him." In fact, the narrator, knowing the importance of grammar in the marriage of these two families of different classes, shares private jokes with the readers, mocking the way Silas says *does* ("He said *doos*, of course") and observing that sometimes Silas's "grammar failed him." So readers are guided toward loving Silas, if they do, in spite of his grammatical errors.

These errors themselves are functions of class, which is why "of course" makes sense when Silas commits an error: the first thing readers learn about Silas is that his success story begins with his growing up poor on a rural Vermont farm. Insofar as "the rise of Silas Lapham" may be seen as a rise in class, then, the rise is an effect of the implausible, but entirely propitious love between Tom Corey and Silas's daughter Penelope, a love consummated despite Silas's blundering attempts to spend his way into the Coreys' good graces. Thus, it's no accident that Penelope is more literate and language-conscious than her sister Irene.

This paper will argue that *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is a rich site for discovering how grammatical proscription and prescription are so largely a matter of applying class-markers and that William Dean Howells here demonstrates his awareness that even when Boston's elite are too tactful to publicly reveal their classism, their attitudes toward grammar reveal those biases anyway. Finally, the paper will try to reconcile the contradiction between Tom Corey's love for Silas in spite of Silas's grammar and his choice to marry the sister whose grammatical tastes most closely match his own.

### "The Art of Marriage: Taking the Woman Artist as Wife in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*"

Sherry Li, National Taiwan University

This paper looks at the analogy between the career of women artists and marriage in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. Alma Leighton, the illustrator/painter in training in the novel, declares herself "wedded to [her] art," and indeed matrimony—especially the contemporary notions of feminine qualities and wifely duties underlying this institution—provides a helpful reference to examine Howells's ideas of gender differences in career pursuits, with larger implications of the artist's relation to the business world. By comparing work to marriage, Howells shows how the doctrines of separate spheres and True Womanhood prevailed in the workplace and how sentimental and chivalrous language euphemized the exploitation of female workers.

Alma's characterization comports with society's expectations of a middle-class lady. Her professional pursuits are furthermore presented mainly as domestic occupation, while her relation to the magazine places her in a subordinate position. For all the Utopian talk of a cooperative of contributors, what Fulkerson has in mind is a very capitalist scheme to hire women illustrators in the capacity of amateurs and cut down their pay. Beaton, as art editor, also realizes his hoped-for companionate union professionally, since Alma must subject her work to his comments and revisions, while their "collaboration" is published anonymously with only recognition of his editorial duties.

Not only does this voluntary and imposed exclusion from business raise doubts about her professionalism, but it also excludes her from all the socio-ethical discussions in the novel. Alma's rejection of marriage, moreover, exempts her from the more traditional female ideals of moral inspiration or of moral touchstone for men, thus completely detaching her from Howells's moral scheme. For all the gibes at marital responsibility as a drawback to art, the novelist seems to view Alma's reluctance to enter marriage as a self-imposed exclusion from the (traditionally male) cares of the world and a refusal to take up moral responsibility. In that case her marriage to art at once conforms to Victorian ideals yet also falls short of Howells's ideals of marriage.

## Abstracts, continued

### **“Marriage and the American Medical Woman in *Dr. Breen’s Practice*”**

**Frederick Wegener, California State University, Long Beach**

That William Dean Howells created in *Dr. Breen’s Practice* (1881) one of his era’s most skeptical, unflattering portrayals of a medical woman is by now a truism in Howells studies. In his treatment of its eponymous protagonist, Howells is said to have expressed a number of then-common preconceptions about a woman’s unfitness for the study and practice of medicine, about the incompatibility of marriage and medical work for women, and about the likelihood that a woman doctor would exchange her profession for marriage if given the chance. The handling of such matters in *Dr. Breen’s Practice*, however, turns out to be far more ambiguous and nuanced. For one thing, it is not Grace Breen’s profession of medicine itself that so repels Dr. Rufus Mulbridge, the local male colleague to whom she appeals for help in treating her gravely ill friend Louise Maynard at a New England resort town, but the fact that she is a homeopathic rather than an orthodox or “regular” physician. Moreover, Dr. Mulbridge is so impressed by her skill and tact in nursing her friend under his care and direction that he is not only convinced of her abilities as a healer but falls in love with her, proposing both that they marry and that they practice medicine together even if she remains a homeopath. Ultimately marrying instead his chief rival, Walter Libby, owner of a textile mill where she then fulfills her original plan of working in a factory town and treating the operatives’ children, Grace thus receives not one but two proposals of marriage neither of which obliges her to give up a medical career. Contrary to the critical consensus on *Dr. Breen’s Practice*, therefore, Howells has his protagonist succeed in uniting two roles—those of wife and of physician—considered mutually exclusive by the conventional wisdom of her time.

### **“Movement, Modernity, and the Marriage of Elinor Mead and William Dean Howells”**

**Elif Armbruster, Suffolk University**

This paper explores the relentless itineration that marked the lives of Elinor Mead and William Dean Howells who, between 1866 when the young couple arrived in Cambridge, MA, and 1910, when Elinor died, dwelled in no fewer than 40 residences. Specifically, I focus on those elements that involve Howells’s marriage to Elinor, and that, subsequently, help classify the pair as a very modern couple.

The family’s constant moves satisfied Elinor more than Howells—he yearned to stay in one place—but acquiescence did not necessarily mean he was a push-over. Rather, Howells came to see moving as a mark of modernity: each new locale (whether a dwelling or a city) provided him with material for his oeuvre. By relocating so frequently, Howells was able to keep his finger on the pulse of the late nineteenth century, trying out commodious apartments or rooms in brand-new buildings and hotels, meals on the go, novel forms of transportation, and so forth. Many of these novelties are recorded in the pages of his fiction, for example, when he details the upward mobility of the Laphams in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* or the relentless apartment-hunting of the Marches in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*.

I argue that Howells’s ability to tolerate—and eventually embrace—Elinor’s restlessness not only saved his marriage, but also benefited his fiction. While the family’s domesticity was challenged by their frequent upheavals, Howells turned the drama of each move into prose. Combining his love of writing about real life (especially the “new” and the “modern”) with his devotion to his wife and children, Howells became in the end a late-nineteenth-century rarity: a very modern husband.

### **“Love in Leisure Spaces: Tourism, Courtship, and Marriage in *The Coast of Bohemia* and *An Open-eyed Conspiracy*”**

**Donna Campbell, Washington State University**

In the middle of William Dean Howells’s *Their Wedding Journey* (1871), with its comic depiction of the rigors of tourism, Isabel March declares, “I’m tossed upon rapids, and flung from cataract brinks, and dizzied in whirlpools; I’m no longer yours, Basil; I’m most unhappily married to Niagara” (103). Quite apart from its humor, Isabel’s exasperated

## Abstracts, continued

comment signals the vital link between picturesque rural places and urban Bohemias, the “leisure spaces” of tourism, with the business of love in Howells’s courtship novels. Howells was not the only writer working with rural subjects, of course; as Carrie Tirado Bramen, Stephanie Foote, and Brad Evans have shown, the late nineteenth century taste for country settings manifested itself in local color fiction, which marketed rural America as a repository of the nation’s communal values through what Evans describes as a slickly commercialized aesthetic of cosmopolitanism. Yet Howells’s focus is not country folk at work, as in the stories of Sarah Orne Jewett or Mary Wilkins Freeman, but the middle class at play. In examining this seemingly ordinary spectacle, Howells maps the “leisure spaces” of tourist culture within two distinct yet interrelated forms of late nineteenth-century fiction, the vacation novel and the Bohemian artists’ novel. In *An Open-Eyed Conspiracy* (1897) and *The Coast of Bohemia* (1893), Howells uses stories of love in leisure spaces to approach satirically, and paradoxically to underscore, ideas that he more often treats with high seriousness: the value of authenticity, the dangers of romanticism in art, and the centrality of courtship and marriage not only to American life but to American realism.

Leisure spaces in Howells’s novels are not utopian; they come equipped with their own brand of tribulations, all related to suspicions about the authenticity of what one sees and experiences when far from one’s native ground. Class anxieties, fears about others passing for what they are not, and difficulties in discerning the “authentic” —in nature, art, and culture—pervade the experience of immersion in these spaces. Adding to this evocation of instability are the performances by racial Others, such as the all-black production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in *An Open-Eyed Conspiracy*, the Indian wedding of *A Chance Acquaintance*, and the encounters with the multitude of Irish, Cubans, French Canadians, and Native Americans whose habitats the tourists invade and inspect. As objects of what John Urry has called the “tourist gaze,” which inevitably inscribes class- and race-based superiority for those doing the looking, such performances provoke anxiety about, even as they provide an assurance of, whiteness and class boundaries. Finally, the excess of time and the absence of work that defines leisure creates its own kind of anxiety as characters experience time as something to endure through an eternity of boring amusements, an outlook suggesting the crisis of modernity that to which the escape to leisure spaces is supposedly an antidote. In his use of the vacation novel and the Bohemian artists’ novel, then, Howells tries to do more than give his readers a pleasant change of scene. The intricate shifts in perspective required within these “leisure spaces,” with their conventions of tourism and spectacle, their redefinition of work, their exploration of desire, and their unconventional heroines, suggests that within them Howells found the freedom both to invoke and to reject the classic courtship and marriage plots for which he was so celebrated in his own time.

### **“If You Liked That, You’ll Like This: Howells and Theodor Fontane on Marriage”**

**Richard Ellington, Independent Scholar**

Howells apparently did not know of his contemporary Fontane, although each was at his peak in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the time of the *Gründerzeit* in Germany and the *Gilded Age* in America and both have been called the foremost realist writers of their time in their own countries. There are extraordinary similarities in their personalities, their literary views and practices and in the subjects of their novels. Three papers presented to the Fontane Society in 2003–2006 compared *Indian Summer* with Fontane’s *Effi Briest*, compared their treatment of love and marriage and showed the influence of Heinrich Heine on both. Fontane said that ‘a knowledge of women represented a criterion of civilised behaviour’ and Howells was fascinated by the feminine psyche and the ‘illogical but often sagacious processes of feminine thought’. Both used marriage as the focus for an examination of behaviour in their ‘society novels’. However, each chose to emphasise a different part of courtship and marriage; Howells accented courtship and engagement whilst Fontane accented the reasons for the breakdown of marriage. Both excelled in the humorous reflection of the pleasures and pinpricks of marriage and the sort of amiable chaffing and semi-serious banter between Basil and Isabel March has its reflection in the von Briests in *Effi Briest* and the Treibels in *Frau Jenny Treibel*. Consideration is given to the question ‘If the status of Fontane is comparable to that of Howells, how is it that so few people have heard of him?’

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The dues for 2008 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.**

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