

The Howellsian



16 Louisburg Square, Boston: Howells Residence January-July 1882. Photo by Rob Davidson.

A Note Concerning Dues

The minutes of this year's Howells Society annual business meeting (published later in this issue of *The Howellsian*) describe the ongoing problem of late or unpaid dues from the Society's members. Members of the Society and its executive committee who attended the annual meeting believe that in most cases missing dues payments result from an inefficient dues collection process rather than from any nefarious intent on the part of the Society's members. In an effort to improve dues collection and thus guarantee the Society a more stable and predictable income stream, beginning this Fall the Society will make two significant changes to our dues collection procedures. First, instead of relying on "rolling" membership renewals, we will issue an annual call for dues payments for the upcoming year's membership. Second, we will begin accepting electronic dues payment via a Pay-Pal link on the Howells Society website. (Payment via check and mail will continue to be an option for those who prefer that method.) **Watch your mail** for a postcard dues reminder and announcement that the Pay-Pal link has been activated. And *thank you* for supporting and expanding the activities of the William Dean Howells Society by keeping your membership up to date.

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The William Dean Howells Society Essay Prize

Call for 2011 Competition Entrants— Announcement of 2010 Prize Winner

The Howells Society Essay Prize is awarded each year for the best paper on Howells presented at the annual ALA conference. The winning essay may have been presented in any session on the program of the conference, including but not limited to panels sponsored by the Howells Society. Papers are judged by members of the Executive Committee of the Society, who have the option of appointing additional readers as necessary. The prize includes a cash award of \$100 and an accompanying certificate. The winning essay is published in *The Howellsian*, a peer-edited newsletter indexed by the MLA International Bibliography.

2011 presenters wishing to enter their papers in this year's competition must submit them by **October 15, 2011** to the Society's President, Lance Rubin. You are welcome to revise your paper before submitting it, but please keep in mind that the essay should be a "conference length" paper and should not exceed 12-15 pages, maximum. Please send the papers as e-mail attachments, in MS Word format, to lance.rubin@arapahoe.edu.

Congratulations to this year's prize winner, Christine Holbo (Arizona State University) for her essay, "Moral Suspension and Aesthetic Perspectivalism in *Venetian Life*," which was presented at the 2010 ALA conference in San Francisco. A revised version of the essay appears below. Thank you to Professor Holbo for her permission to publish.

The 2010 Howells Essay Prize Winner:

"Moral Suspension and Aesthetic Perspectivalism in *Venice in Venice*"

©Christine Holbo, Arizona State University

Literary criticism naturally resists recognizing that aesthetic judgment hinges upon biographical interpretation. One reason for this, of course, is that the biographical frame remains one of the most powerful tools for analyzing not just particular novels but their place in the totality of an author's life and work. And acknowledging that the interpretation of the author's career can powerfully *inform* our understanding of literary form warns us that any given biographical interpretation can also distort or obscure our ability to address aesthetic questions. The easy disavowal of biography serves as a mark of its secret hegemony.

In the case of William Dean Howells, who was active as a writer for more than a half century, producing countless works in a wide range of genres, the attention of critics and biographers has centered on the connection of life and work in the decade of the 1880s. Critics have concentrated on Howells' work as a theorist of the realist novel and on a handful of novels he produced in the

course of the eighties, while biographers have contextualized those writings within a narrative emphasizing what many have seen as Howells' political radicalization in the latter half of that decade. Without contesting the importance of Howells' work of the 1880s, this paper seeks to approach Howells' career from a different perspective. In this paper, I would like to present a few suggestions about the aesthetic experience offered by Howells' earliest work, an experience which I believe has been largely overlooked by Howells scholars. My contention will be that taking seriously Howells' early aesthetics can offer us new insight not only into this early work, but into the dynamics of his later novels as well. The corollary to this claim is that a reconsideration of these aesthetic strategies may help us rethink the standard narratives of Howells' life. The paper begins with a few broad and necessarily speculative theses about Howells' literary biography as it is currently understood and as it might be rethought; halfway through it will turn to a second set of claims about the aesthetic strategies Howells developed in his first book-length publication, *Venetian Life*.

To begin, then, a few theses. One: the year 1881 was a watershed moment in both Howells' career and in American literary history because it marked the ascendancy of the novel over other modes of literary production. Two: this 1881 shift toward the novel was nonetheless not as important in defining Howells' overall aesthetic and political sensibility as it has later seemed to Howells scholars. Three: Howells was originally celebrated by his readers for his work not as a novelist, but as a poet, travel writer and journalist. Four: the aesthetic strategies developed in these early works continued to inform Howells' work in his later novels—to inform, that is, what Howells meant by "realism"—, and his reputation with his readers continued to rest on their appreciation of these aesthetic strategies.¹

If these theses are correct, how should we understand Howells' career in relation to the changing frameworks of American literary culture in the late nineteenth century? The narrative might read as follows. In 1881, at the age of 44, Howells left his position as editor of the *Atlantic* and headed out into the field of freelance. Over the next years, he would establish his reputation as the American champion of realism by producing a series of ambitious novels accompanied by critical writings proclaiming the genre of the novel, and realism in particular, as the international route of literary advance. Howells' work on both of these fronts had the effect not only of associating him with the realist novel, but of solidifying a broader development in American letters: the movement of the novel to the forefront of literary consciousness. During these years, an antebellum notion of "letters," understood in an expansive sense—letters as something that encompassed not only fiction but poetry, travel writing, essays, journalism, political writing and other rhetorical productions—was being displaced by a notion of literature focused centrally on the novel. This shift had

been long in the making. As editor of the *Atlantic*, Howells had presided in the 1870s over a series of valedictory celebrations for the great figures of this older literature—figures such as Emerson, Whittier, and Longfellow. Howells' departure from his editorial post, and from the quasi-filial responsibilities it implied toward the *Atlantic's* stable of aging poets and essayists, suggests, ultimately, an abandonment of the older generation's literary ideals.² Although Howells himself tended to characterize this moment of Oedipal revolt as the belated coming-of-age of a novelist, it may thus be read another way. A canny self-marketer, Howells was distancing himself from the older paradigm of literary production and associating himself with the novel as the new gold standard of literary success.

Howells' reinvention of himself as a novelist succeeded perhaps too well: it had the effect, for later readers, of effacing his work in other genres, of obscuring the style and the authorial persona that nineteenth century audiences first embraced and never forgot. Yet Howells had originally established his reputation by pursuing precisely the mixture of poetry, travel writing, essays, journalism, and political activism that typified the antebellum generation's ideals. Two very early publications say a great deal about how the young Howells first presented himself to a national public. The poem "Andenken," accepted by the *Atlantic* in 1859, marked him as a late Romantic literary man in the style of James Russell Lowell: dreamy, polyglot, euromophile, idealistically political, the man of letters as editor and linguistic scholar. The campaign biography of Abraham Lincoln, published in 1860, also located Howells in a familiar niche in American letters: the literary man as party man, placing journalistic talent at the service of practical politics.³

The combination of these two kinds of work won Howells, in 1861, one of the traditional prizes of American literary life: a consulship in Venice, which would afford the young writer four years of European leisure during the nation's crisis. This position was considered by Howells and his contemporaries both a reward and a form of training toward future contributions. Howells was being directly compensated for faithful party service, but he was expected to devote his Italian sinecure to developing the kind of cosmopolitan literary knowledge the older culture of letters valued: acquaintance with languages and literary traditions that was much in demand by an intellectual public that extended fluidly from lyceums to private clubs to America's newly professionalizing universities.

Howells' participation in this antebellum style of public literary production continued into his Venice years. It is a fact rarely commented upon that Howells, so widely understood to be the most prosaic, and the most American, of American realists, began his career with an extended sojourn abroad, in poetic, unreal Venice. Yet Howells published two books on the basis of his Italian experiences, *Venetian Life* and *Italian Journeys*, the first

of which was serialized during the war in the *Boston Advertiser*, maintaining Howells' presence before American readers even from abroad. The reputation for linguistic expertise and cosmopolitan reading established by these publications, along with a scholarly article on Italian comedy published in the *North American Review*, would win him invitations to professorships for decades thereafter. And it was largely on the basis of these literary and scholarly accomplishments that Howells was hired as assistant editor of the *Atlantic* after his return to America.⁴

While Howells' Italian days allowed him to create a literary identity on the old model, in his Italian writings Howells developed a style that struck readers as fresh and new—a style that was popular with ordinary readers, and yet which also impressed writers of his generation as "literary." Late in life, while Howells was serializing the Italian sketches to be collected as *Roman Holidays*, he commented in a letter to Henry James that "[t]he only thing that pleases me wholly is that the stuff seems to have been so much liked... The success has brought back my sense of success in the Venetian Life letters printed forty odd years ago in the Boston Advertiser."⁵ At a point in his career in which his sales as a novelist had long been in decline, Howells felt great nostalgia for the early book. For his part, James, a good friend but often a quite critical reader, approved of the Italian Howells, declaring in an 1868 review that *Venetian Life* belonged "to literature and to the centre and core of it."⁶ In 1886 he would reaffirm this judgment with the back-handed compliment that Howells had "produced nothing since of a literary quality more pure."⁷

What was the "literary quality" that James so admired in *Venetian Life*? *Pace* James, there was nothing "purely" literary about the volume's technique: the book is saturated with the political and theoretical concerns of the Civil War era and of Howells' generation. Precisely because of this, however, the book marked a moment of departure, articulating a distinctive postbellum sensibility even as it continued antebellum models of literary production. Deeply grounded in republican notions of political virtue, it also engaged with more recent, Romantic and Victorian aesthetic theories concerned with translating questions of moral judgment or political virtue into the realm of aesthetic education. And it expressed skepticism about both, cultivating a stance of quizzical doubt about attempts to interpret experience from any single perspective. The characteristics of this Howellsian stance, which would become definitive for his generation as they entered the era of the novel, can be briefly summarized under three headings: first, an ironic double-gesture of embrace and rejection of "sentimentalism"; second, an aesthetic sensibility informed by resistance to Ruskin; and third, a historical sensibility informed by a reconsideration of American exceptionalism.

Let us consider each of these headings in greater depth, beginning with "sentimentalism." The term plays a

large and complex role in Howells' Venetian vocabulary, and it is useful, in approaching this keyword, to start with James' somewhat peculiar tribute to Howells' "sentimental" qualities in his early review of the volume. According to James,

Mr. Howells has an eye for the small things of nature, of art, and of human life, which enables him to extract sweetness and profit from adventures the most prosaic, and which prove him a very worthy successor of the author of the "Sentimental Journey" . . . Mr. Howells is in fact a sentimental traveller. He takes things as he finds them and as history has made them; he presses them into the service of no theory, nor scourges them into the following of his prejudices.⁸

For James, "sentimental" means, essentially, the opposite of what one might expect it to mean. It signifies a preference for prose over poetry; for direct perception over abstraction or theorization; for realism over Romanticism. Howells is, as James would put it in "The Art of Fiction," "one of the people on whom nothing is lost."⁹ James' association of these qualities with the legacy of Sterne, however—with a writer hardly known for modest reporting of direct perceptions—, warns us that here is no naively mimetic definition of realism. The key to James' odd if astute appreciation lies in the phrase "he takes things as he finds them and as history has made them." The moment of perception has two dimensions. On the one hand, there is what the observer brings to the moment, including both imagination and a capacity for perception. On the other hand, there is what "history has made" of Venice: and this includes not only the voluminous political and social history of the place, but also "history" in the other sense, of representation—Venice, storied city, as the sum of its depictions.

James' emphasis on the pleasurable interplay between perception and representation (or, as one might more broadly put it, between perception and apperception) speaks to Howells' own opening chapter, entitled "Venice in Venice," which welcomes the reader to Venice by recounting an evening in bad seats at the theater, during which he recalls having seen both the play and all the mechanics of its staging—and enjoyed both. This chapter invites the reader to enter a scene that is at once theatrical and anti-theatrical, to participate in an illusion while cultivating a stance of disillusionment. In the rest of the book, Howells pursues the differential between the "Venice" of previous generations of writers—of Romantic inspiration, poetry and scholarship—and what he calls "Venice in Venice": the hidden world of everyday life, the trivia of uninterpreted experience. The extraordinary record of everyday existence in Austrian-occupied Venice presented by the volume is intended not to purify the city of its imaginative accretions, but rather (as the self-reflexive title suggests) to reveal the dynamics of an ex-

perience of both "Venice" as literature and "Venice" as life. While Howells takes aim at the "sentimental errors" of earlier writers, he thus dedicates a good portion of the book to describing his own "sentimentalizing," his persistent habit of perceiving the place in terms of its literary inscription and enjoying it for its myths.

Contemporaries such as James delighted in the sensitive depiction of the interplay between perception and representation in Howells' argument with "sentimentalism." Even more important for them was the way Howells used his exploration of sentimentalism to test out several important theoretical frameworks within which their generation had come to maturity. The first of these was Ruskinian aesthetics. Growing up a printer's son in Ohio, Howells had ample exposure to world literature, but considered himself something of a visual illiterate when it came to art and architecture. Ruskin's recently published *Stones of Venice* became a main resource in Howells' education and a lasting influence. Particularly important for Howells was Ruskin's concept of the picturesque, which Ruskin defined in both *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice* in terms of a "parasitical sublimity," and which occupied an ambivalent but central place in Ruskin's thought.¹⁰ For Ruskin, the picturesque was an aesthetic quality that, in contrast to either the beautiful or the sublime, was not inherent to the thing itself, but was the product of irregularity, association and history. The picturesque was the perfect category for appreciating a place like Venice, so many of whose attractions derived either from physical decay, from the juxtaposition of effects, or from historical and literary associations. But the picturesque was also, for Ruskin, a problematic and corrupt mode of appreciation. As Frances Connelly observes, Ruskin came to argue "that proponents of the picturesque had settled for sentimentality at best, and at worst, had indulged in a perverse delight in decay and human misery."¹¹ Howells shared Ruskin's misgivings about an aesthetic pleasure derived from the suffering of others; yet he hesitated to embrace the essence of Ruskin's system, the claim that objectively valid statements of "the true and beautiful in art" could be tied to a grand historical narrative of Venetian history. The longer Howells lived in Venice, the more familiar he became not only with its art and architecture but also its contemporary life, the more suspect became "the methods by which [Ruskin] pretends to relate the aesthetic truths you perceive to certain civil and religious conditions"¹²: moral, economic, historical and aesthetic judgments increasingly seemed to Howells to pull apart from each other. While Ruskin found Venice the perfect object for a unifying theory, in which aesthetic judgment offered the key to all other judgments, Howells encountered the opposite: a direct challenge to unified perception. Venice was a beautiful city full of beggars, a place of marvelous architecture and art, of poverty and cold and unemployment. While Ruskin attempted to rec-

oncile these contrasts within a historical framework, Howells, focusing on the contemporary world, discovered the picturesque of moral and aesthetic indecision.

Rejecting Ruskin's faith in aesthetics as a moral science, Howells developed a working method that was almost explicitly anti-Ruskinian in its emphasis on the division of perception. He did not suppress his moral and political reactions in order to appreciate Venetian beauty, nor did he attempt to correlate disparate modes of judgment, but instead focused on representing a consciousness capable of perceiving the world in its dividedness. This interest in the suspension of judgment was, I believe, important to Howells' generation for two opposing reasons. First, while Howells' anti-Ruskinian aesthetics rejected the possibility of elevating aesthetics to a unifying science, Howells was not rejecting aesthetics altogether. Rather, his method liberated aesthetic perception from moral judgment and thus allowed it to come into its own. This move was crucial to post-bellum writers such as Henry James: its message was aesthetic freedom. Fifteen years later, in one of his own essays on Venice, James would echo Howells by criticizing Ruskin's moralizing aesthetics as childish and effeminate. *The Stones of Venice*, James charged, "is pitched in the nursery-key, and might be supposed to emanate from an angry governor."¹³ James' critique merely amplifies Howells' point: to demand that an aesthetics be moral is to produce both a bad aesthetics and an infantile moral theory.

Modernist aesthetics imply self-alienation, a bifurcated attitude toward the naturalness of truth and the morality of moralism. The anti-moralism of Howells' anti-Ruskinian aesthetics was indeed modern, but it was not amoral; it was rather an art of moral suspension. If Howells suggested the possibility of aesthetic emancipation to readers such as James, for other readers, Howells proposed a route out of American exceptionalism and toward a more adventurous, self-reflexive mode of moral engagement with the world. Howells' attitude toward Italy has often been described by critics as judgmental, the projection of an American patriot predisposed to find European society decadent and corrupt. Certainly Howells did not ignore Italian misery. But *Venetian Life* is hardly the jingoistic pronouncement of an unreflective patriot. On the contrary: the volume is deeply informed by a sense of doubling between the Italian and American experiences, between the mother of republics and a young republic brought to fratricide by the sin of slavery. Military uniforms were as familiar a sight in occupied Venice as they were in war-torn America, serving as a constant reminder not only of the fate of decadent republics but of the duties Howells had evaded by coming abroad. And while Howells might view the city's unemployed with the moralistic eye of an American Protestant, it was impossible to ignore the fact that he bore a "share of the common indolence," that he had himself "forsaken wholesome struggle in the currents

where I felt the motion of the age, only to drift into a lifeless eddy of the world, remote from incentive and sensation."¹⁴ The book's narrator loaf and watches others loaf, observes the apparently perverse modes in which the Venetians' intense patriotism expresses itself and notes the Venetians' limited comprehension of the American war. Patriotism is always provincial; to understand the Other requires a certain decadence.

In this doubling of American and Venetian experience, Howells narrates a process of relativization of judgment that leads toward the recognition that America may not be the best of all possible worlds, and which bears as its corollary the question of how the modern individual should understand his place in the world. *Venetian Life* is a deeply moral book, but the question it asks is not that of how to reform the world, but of how the moral observer should come to terms with an ambiguous experience. Recording his admiration, repulsion, sympathy, identification, enjoyment and confusion, he records as well the way the outside observer, by the official fact of his government position and the sheer fact of his foreignness, remained merely an observer, not attempting to intervene in another nation's life. The foreigner has no right to tell others how to live their lives; the foreign functionary has no business doing so. The corollary to complex perception is passivity, Howells recognized: the divisions in the self that allowed the world to be perceived from multiple perspectives grew out of socially necessary divisions of the self that inhibited immediate action to remedy perceived wrongs. Far from the line of fire, yet in a place curiously akin to America, Howells developed a writerly persona appropriate to this interest in the pairing of sophistication of perception with inhibition of action. Just as the volume is theatrical and anti-theatrical at once, so it cultivates a combined sense of moral sensitivity and moral reserve.

Venetian Life was published as a volume in 1866. A product of the antebellum era's republic of letters, it had been made possible by a conception of literature in which aesthetic connoisseurship mingled with patriotic duty. But it circulated in a very different world. Returning from Italy with a relativized sense of American virtue and an expanded sense of cosmopolitan pleasure, Howells's self-alienating moral intelligence spoke to readers who felt themselves adrift from the moral certainties of the Civil War as they entered the perpetual bafflement of the Gilded Age.

The technique of aesthetic double vision and self-alienation would remain centrally ingredient to Howells' work. The Howellsian couple who appear as tourists in Venice would return to America as suburban *flâneurs* in *Suburban Sketches* and reemerge in the guise of the Marches and other observers in his fiction. The displacement of Howells' post in Italy, as a government functionary who frequently felt himself in the role of the draft dodger, anticipated the questions of divided social

responsibility that would haunt the characters in Howells' novels. The position of the American abroad, fearful of pronouncing upon a world not fully understood, suspending judgment while enjoying an aestheticizing perception, became the model for a middle class alienated from its own responsibilities by America's vertiginous diversity, its divisions of rich and poor. In *Annie Kilburn*, for example—one of the novels written during what has canonically been considered Howells' "political" phase—the career of the eponymous heroine traces out a comically inverted version of the tourist's education. Returning from a long sojourn in Italy, Annie finds herself trapped in the role of the ugly American at home, attempting to impose outdated notions of local virtue and responsibility on a small town grown into a manufacturing center, and must learn to restrain her judgment and accept the world as it is before she can work, in a limited way, for its good. From *Venetian Life* on through his late work, the interplay between aesthetic perception and aestheticization of others, moral freedom and moral responsibility animate Howells' plots, define his characteristic mode of humor, inform the distinctive pleasure of his prose.

"Pleasure" is a term not much used in relation to Howells, whose major novels have often seemed tuned to the keyword "responsibility." And it is worth asking, in conclusion, what other facets of Howells' life and work might become visible if one were to focus on the way Howells' first published book anticipated the contribution of his major phase. Clearly, the continuities of Howells' suspensive and aestheticizing strategy for framing moral concerns might invite a reexamination of Howells' much-discussed "political turn" of the mid-1880s; at the same time, the moral perspectivalism and relativism of *Venetian Life* might lead us to reconsider the state of self-satisfied naiveté out of which he is supposed to have experienced his sudden political awakening. This reconsideration of politics and aesthetics requires, ultimately, a reconsideration of Howells' realism: to tell the story of a writer who was politically engaged from the first, but who taught his generation to relativize their moral commitments, is to ask how a mimetic project might be grounded in an aesthetic one, how insistence on the multiplicity of aesthetic, ethical, and political judgments might inform a sense of literary responsibility. *Venetian Life*, a pleasure in itself, extends beyond itself in encouraging Howells' readers to approach the real world in terms of the irreducibility and interconnection of facts and myths, perception and representation, experience and its sources in literature.

Notes

¹The biographical facts supporting this set of claims can be found in any of Howells' biographies, and the timeline I suggest here diverges only slightly from that established by the most influential study of Howells' life, Edwin Cady's two-part *The Road to Re-*

alism and The Realist at War. The difference is one of emphasis: while Cady and most of those who followed him have implicitly or explicitly interpreted Howells' career in terms of a "road to realism," and have valued or discounted his work in proportion as it seems to have served that telos, I am interested in framing a broader view of his career, one that takes into account the discrepancy between a chronology centered on the novels of the 1880s and the longer chronology of his literary fame. The fact, for instance, that Howells occupied a very prominent place in American letters for well over a decade before producing *A Modern Instance*, the earliest of the "major" novels for which Howells is now remembered, cannot very satisfactorily be explained in terms of the story of the making of a realist. The chronology I propose has something in common with the account of Howells suggested in Richard Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 81-103. However, while Brodhead emphasizes Howells' career as an editor, I believe that there is more to be learned about Howells' place in American literary culture by considering the full range of Howells' own writing in a variety of genres.

²On Howells' tenure at the *Atlantic*, see especially Ellery Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 113-160.

³On Howells' early career in the partisan world of printing, see especially Edwin H. Cady, *Young Howells and John Brown: Episodes in a Radical Education* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985).

⁴The crucial importance of the Italian years in the making of Howells' career has been emphasized in Richard Brodhead, "Strangers on a Train: the Double Dream of Italy in the American Gilded Age," 1-19 *Modernism/Modernity* 1, no. 2 (1994): 6-11. However, while Brodhead interprets what Howells gained from Italy in terms of the structures of aesthetic prestige in the Gilded Age, I am suggesting, on the one hand, that the way an Italian education opened doors for Howells represented a modified continuation of antebellum conceptions of literature, and, on the other hand, that it was the Italian experience itself which originally inspired the characteristically divided consciousness whose exploration ultimately defined Howells' fiction.

Brodhead's interpretation, and my own, stand in contrast to a more dominant strand in interpretations of Howells, which labels him (often in contrast to James) a kind of literary nativist. This tradition takes as its touchstone the oft-cited witticism from his contemporary George Moore, made in 1886, that "Henry James went to France and read Tourgueneff. W. D. Howells stayed at home and read Henry

James." (See: George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man* (New York: Brentano's, 1920), 194.) As an Irish novelist living in Paris, Moore may or may not have known anything about Howells' first publications, or even of his time in Italy, yet he has been echoed by later critics seeking to explain away Howells' early years abroad. Writing almost exactly a century later, John W. Crowley (for example) would sum up his account of Howells' Venetian experience as follows: "He had found much to admire and to enjoy in Europe but, unlike Henry James, little to engage his imagination." See: John W. Crowley, *The Black Heart's Truth: the Early Career of W.D. Howells* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 60.

⁵Howells, cited in Michael Anesko, *Letters, Fictions, Lives: Henry James and William Dean Howells* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 423.

⁶James, cited in *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷James, cited in *Ibid.*, 394-395.

⁸James, cited in *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Library of America, 1984), 53.

¹⁰John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. III (New York: John B. Alden, 1885), 134.

¹¹Frances S. Connelly, "John Ruskin and the Ethics of the Picturesque," in *Twenty-First-Century Perspectives on Nineteenth Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2008), 107.

¹²William Dean Howells, *Venetian Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 112.

¹³Henry James, "Venice," *The Century*, November 1882, 3.

¹⁴Howells, *Venetian Life*, 22-23.

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WANTED

Ideas for a proposed series of Howellsian columns dedicated to the thoughts of established Howells scholars about the state of Howells studies.

The editor welcomes . . .

- 1) Suggestions for potential interviewees: Howells scholars with scholarly track records sufficient to enable significant length and depth of perspective on the past, present, and future of the reading and study of W.D. Howells. Whose ideas about the status of and prospects for Howells studies would you most like to read?
- 2) Suggestions for provocative questions about the state of Howells reading and study to be asked of interviewees.

Send your ideas to Paul R. Petrie, editor of *The Howellsian*, at petriep1@southernct.edu

MINUTES**William Dean Howells Society Business Meeting**

ALA Boston—May 27, 2011

Submitted by Mischa Renfroe, Secretary

The WDHS Business Meeting was held on May 27, 2011 at the American Literature Association Conference, which took place May 26-29, 2011 at the Westin Copley Place. Outgoing President Rob Davidson called the meeting to order. Other members present were Sally Daugherty, Sanford Marowitz, Elsa Nettels, Paul Petrie, Mischa Renfroe, and Lance Rubin.

Treasurer Elsa Nettels reported that the WDHS had \$1,395.23 in its account as of April 2011. Only two members have paid dues so far this year. Expenses included \$100.00 for the Howells essay prize, \$68.00 to Donna Campbell for Howells Society web hosting, and \$218.69 to Paul Petrie for newsletter expenses. Nettels also indicated that she would like to resign as treasurer, and members decided to combine the secretary and treasurer positions.

Paul Petrie provided an update on *The Howellsian*. In order to save money, the newsletter went from two issues to one issue per year. Members revisited this decision, with some wondering if two issues per year might be more effective than one for reminding members about upcoming events, collecting dues, and facilitating active engagement among members. For now, we will continue with one issue.

Members once again discussed the possibility of issuing the newsletter in electronic form to eliminate printing and mailing costs. Petrie reported that a query in the *Howellsian* about this issue elicited about 10 responses. Half of the respondents wanted to keep the print version while the other half preferred the print version but would use an electronic version if necessary. Sanford Marowitz suggested soliciting donations and/or offering different levels of WDHS membership (eg., interested members could pay higher dues to receive a print edition) to offset newsletter expenses. The society also will consult other author societies with all-electronic newsletters.

Members discussed the impact of membership dues on the budget. As of this year, the WDHS raised the dues from \$10 to \$15 per year, but with only a few members paying dues, this increase has not significantly affected the overall budget. Members decided to send postcard reminders to encourage members to pay dues. Mischa Renfroe will mail postcards this fall, and the society will revisit this issue at its next meeting.

The topics for next year's ALA conference were discussed. Members decided on an "open" topic to encourage a wide range of approaches. To encourage proposals that focus on Howells's lesser-known texts, the newsletter will include a reminder about online versions of many of his works. Lance Rubin will generate a call for papers based on this discussion.

The WDHS would like to thank Rob Davidson for his service as president and Elsa Nettels for her service as treasurer. Lance Rubin is the new president, and the society will elect a vice-president/program chair. Until this position is filled, Rubin will cover the duties of the vice-president/program chair. Mischa Renfroe will take over the duties of treasurer.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Howells Society Panels at the American Literature Association Conference,
San Francisco, May 24-27, 2012

The William Dean Howells Society will sponsor two panels at the 2012 ALA conference in San Francisco:

Panel I: Late Howells

The William Dean Howells Society welcomes submissions for a panel that focuses on Howells's late work. Though scholarship on his novels through *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is abundant, Howells remained prolific until his death in 1920. Why has his work after 1890 gotten relatively little attention? What works deserve another (or even a first) look? What of Howells' work as a playwright? Or his work in the short story genre? How does ignoring the late Howells alter his position in American literary history, or perhaps even complicate American literary history?

Please send your 200-250-word abstract and a current CV as Word attachments to Lance Rubin at lance.rubin@arapahoe.edu by November 1, 2011. Inquiries are welcome.

Panel II: Open Topic

The William Dean Howells Society welcomes submissions for a panel of papers that touch upon any topic in Howells's work. We are especially keen to hear about new directions in Howells scholarship and/or texts that often get overlooked.

Please send your 200-250-word abstract and a current CV as Word attachments to Lance Rubin at lance.rubin@arapahoe.edu by November 1, 2011. Inquiries are welcome.

WANTED

Writer to review the new (March 2010) Broadview Press teaching edition of Howells' *An Imperative Duty*, the review to be published in the next edition of *The Howellsian*.

Send inquiries or letters of interest with current CV to Paul R. Petrie, editor of *The Howellsian*, at petriep1@southernct.edu

ABSTRACTS

Howells Papers Presented at the ALA
Conference, Boston, May 2011

Program Chair: Lance Rubin, Arapahoe Community College

Panel: Business and Ethics in William Dean Howells

1. Agency, Irony, and the Ethics of Reading in Howells's Poverty Fiction, Benjamin Sammons, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

William Dean Howells's long essay *Criticism and Fiction* synthesizes his campaign for a literary realism that would "tend to make the race better and kinder" (85), and his hope of this moral influence focuses especially on economic inequality. He sees a "humanitarian impulse" already sweeping contemporary literature and claims that "Art [. . .] is beginning to find out that if it does not make friends with Need it must perish" (85). But Howells critics know that, despite his optimism here, the author entertained serious doubts, if not outright despair, about literature's capacity to transform readers. His skepticism begins with himself, a reader profoundly convicted by Leo Tolstoy's radical social vision but unwilling to enact it himself. Hence, in his fiction of the late 1880s and the 1890s, which tends to position characters around the spectacle of poverty and ask what would be a just response, his most sophisticated readers are not obviously "better or kinder" than the rest. Indeed, they are often the most evasive. They typify the Victorian intellectual variously described by T. J. Jackson Lears, George Levine, Phillip Barrish, Andrew Miller, and Amanda Anderson: a figure for whom epistemological and moral skepticism has given rise to a crisis of agency, a paralysis or atrophy of the will.

If, then, by Howells's own admission, reading Tolstoy hasn't compelled him to do much of anything about the poor, and if Howells's exemplary fictional readers remain passive spectators of social problems, how might his fiction act on real readers? How does it tend to position them in relation to that "Need" which literature, he claims, must make friends with or perish? This paper analyzes the work of irony in *Annie Kilburn* and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* and shows how these novels turn a literary device traditionally reserved for purposes of critique into a tool for building sympathy between the reader and Howells's ambivalent protagonists. Irony maintains its critical function, but reader and protagonist become the objects of their own critique and experience solidarity in this shared and complex position. Through this manipulation of irony, *Annie Kilburn* and *Hazard* tend to reproduce in readers the strangely pleasurable and quintessentially Victorian crisis of agency that Howells and his favorite characters perpetually inhabit.

2. The Crime of Books: William Dean Howells's *The Quality of Mercy* and the Taxonomy of Nineteenth Century Commercial Ethics, Daniel Mrozowski, Trinity College

In this essay, I consider William Dean Howells's *The Quality of Mercy* (1891), a novel that follows an embezzler in exile from

New England to Canada, describing the impact on his company, community, and family. This novel is the only one by Howells to appear first as a newspaper serial, running in 1891 in the *New York Sun*. As its first appearance jostled for space with often more sensational journalistic accounts of real cases of embezzlement, I use Howells's fiction to foreground questions about the novel's cultural authority and corporate policing. Embezzlement was a subject of deep cultural anxiety in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, one that suggested to many observers the absence of commercial ethics under the corporate form of business. The embezzler became the most discussed type of business criminal, a free radical element in a system whose extollers were tying its cultural legitimacy to precise managerial control and bureaucratic oversight. Through a reading of Howells's novel alongside extraliterary discourses, including newspaper accounts and legal theory, I position various attempts to account for this new type of criminality—enabled by the corporate structure of removed ownership and managerial control—as a problematic pressure on cultural stories about business, while suggesting the space of fiction as a narrative device able to explore the psychological pressures attendant to handling other peoples' money in a system in which that money looks and feels exactly like your own during the day-to-day experiences of the business corporation. I argue that Howells creates a new sense of ethical economy as his characters debate and interact with each other in relationship to the corporation. In particular, he describes the influence of the corporation on three professions invested in forms of public ethics—the law, the newspaper, and business. Howells' vocabulary relies on the commonplace-ness or typicality of corporate crime as a means to ask some key questions: who are the victims of corporate crime? Where does the fault lie, in the individual or the system? What constitutes a theft in a credit economy? This essay investigates Howells' own answers to these questions, as well as how issues of corporate ethics played out in the newspapers of the 1890s, particularly in the context of historical reports of book-keeping fraud.

3. The Awakening: H.D. Lloyd Sounds the Alarm for Howells in the Gilded Age, Sanford Marovitz, Kent State University

This essay appears in its entirety elsewhere in this issue.

Panel: The Overlooked Work of William Dean Howells

1. William Dean Howells: Realist Poet, Elizabeth Renker, The Ohio State University

George Santayana's derogatory vision of the "genteel tradition" in 1911 became the ideological lens for thinking about postbellum American poetics for most of the twentieth century. This ideological vision, I argue, obscured the *actual* history of American poetry in the latter part of the nineteenth century, including the importance of Howells the poet. The hegemonic narrative in our field portrays American verse between Whitman and Dickinson and the modernists as a wasteland, but

the historical record presents a substantially distinct picture. Scores of poets published during this era, in a broad array of styles, genres, and venues. My larger argument is that post-bellum poets themselves, including Howells, provided a counterpoint to genteel poetics in their own time, that is, long before the modernists. The poetry of the period is in fact replete with conflicting impulses about what Edmund Clarence Stedman would call, in a course of lectures he gave at Johns Hopkins in 1891, “the nature and elements of poetry.” It is in this reconsidered context that I place the poetry that Howells published in the 1890s.

His dark 1895 volume *Stops of Various Quills*, whose affect is despair, irony, and doubt, puts to rest summary judgments such as this 1979 assessment by Bernard F. Engel: “It is fair to say that, like the other romantic idealists, Howells wrote nothing memorable in verse.”¹ By contrast, Edwin Cady remarks that in his poetry of the 90s Howells “joined poetry now to his realistic positions.”² Its content included recognizably realist topics like social class, and its form ranged on a spectrum from what Cady aptly calls “lawful to outlaw.” Focusing closely on two poems, “The King Dines” and “Society,” we see that part of their artistic polemic inheres in a bifurcation of perspective—a formal innovation often attributed to modernism—and, more specifically, a bifurcation of perspective between a genteel and a realist aesthetic. Howells flags, and rejects, stock genteel tropes of fantasy kings and “beautiful women and lordly men, / Taking their pleasure in a flowery plain.” And while both poems readily lend themselves to interpretation as important realist social critique, my point instead is one about poetic history: Howells the poet here, in the 90s and well before the modernists, critiques genteel poetics in a way that Americanist literary history has erased from memory.

¹Bernard F. Engel, “The Genteel Poetry of William Dean Howells,” *Midamerica: The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature* 6 (1979), 45.

²*Pebbles* xxvii, xxix.

2. Rhetorics of Invisibility: Anaesthetized Landscapes in Howells’s *Suburban Sketches*, Maura D’Amore, St. Michael’s College

As railroads cemented metropolitan corridors and bedroom communities throughout the northeast and suburbanization spread south and west during the latter half of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of American intellectuals began to critique the whitewashed ethos that had emerged in tandem with the earliest suburban communities of the 1840s and 1850s. While mid-century authors typically overlooked ethnic and class issues in their representations of the ideal white-collar, proto-suburban home, continued industrialization, immigration, and urban development in the post-Civil-War era magnified poverty and discrimination in ways that had become increasingly impossible for writers and social critics to ignore. By the late 1860s and early 1870s, individuals such as Edward

Everett Hale, Frederick Law Olmsted, and William Dean Howells were calling for a more comprehensive consideration of the fate of lower-class Americans in the new domestic order. My paper will explore the ways in which *Suburban Sketches* (1871), Howells’s episodic fictionalization of life in the suburbs around Boston (originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly*), summons popular descriptions of “country life within city reach” even as it raises the curtain on elements of suburbanization that previously had escaped notice. Applying his personal experience with suburban life (in childhood and adulthood) to depictions of the suburbs by the periodical industry he knew so well, he calls attention to the individuals whose labor supported early suburban growth and problematizes the position of the white male suburban homeowner.

Howells’ narrators act as hidden observers of the suburban landscape, residents with knowledge of Boston and its surrounding communities. They commonly voice descriptions of country and city life that could have come straight out of architectural pattern books, as when the narrator of the first sketch characterizes his neighborhood in Charlesbridge as “a frontier between city and country,” a unique borderland whose virtues had begun to be recognized by many former urban dwellers.¹ Such statements become mere truisms, though, as the plots move forward, and readers are left wondering at the impulse to describe a space that is fraught with ethnic and class tensions as a paradisiacal dreamscape. In a passage that ostensibly attempts to convey suburban Charlesbridge as an ideal combination of city and country, for example, Howells toys with the depiction:

The horse-cars ... went by the head of our street; while two minutes’ walk would take us into a wood so wild and thick that no roof was visible through the trees... The trains shook the house as they thundered along, and at night were a kind of company, while by day we had the society of innumerable birds. ... All round us carpenters were at work building new houses; but so far from troubling us, the strokes of their hammers fell softly upon the senses, like one’s heart-beats upon one’s own consciousness in the lapse from all fear of pain under the blessed charm of an anaesthetic. (SS, pp. 10-11)

By making palpable the noise of construction, he reminds readers that the suburbs did not simply appear; they were built by laborers. As he takes readers alongside a narrator and his wife to procure a new cook from the Boston “intelligence office, which is in one of those streets chiefly inhabited by the orphaned children and grandchildren of slavery” (SS, p. 13), Howells invites us to consider the morality and repercussions of a white married couple’s desire to satiate their “Libyan longings” (after their Irish girl left them and their “hearts sang of Africa and golden joys”) within the suburban home (p. 13).

Over the span of the stories, it becomes clear that people are dreaming in the sense that they are asleep to the realities of other people’s lives, and to the effects of their words and actions on the world around them. As characters transport themselves between work and home on horse-cars, steamships, and trains, Howells anesthetizes his language in an effort to mirror the suburban experience. At the same time though, he begs readers to stop and read more carefully, as if the process

of outlining the apparatus that perpetuates the vision will enable the erstwhile invisible elements of the landscape to attain the status of visibility. For Howells, this involves a reassessment of the narrator's position as well as the recognition of readers' own domestic acts of appropriation and colonization.

¹Howells, William Dean, *Suburban Sketches* (1871. Reprint Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2006), p. 10.

3. Discovering Howells's *The Undiscovered Country*, Susan Goodman, University of Delaware

In *The Undiscovered Country*, Howells offers—for those who cannot believe in God or religion or practices like spiritualism—what might be seen as two undiscovered countries: the first resides within ourselves and concerns the inchoate drives and desires we have a way of formulating into truisms. The second is relational and posited in the concept of “family,” which, in this novel, provides security, order, and peace. Howells' plot has an evolutionary trajectory to the extent that each protagonist must stumble through his or her own psychological undergrowth before coming to the gates of community. Egeria must free herself from her mesmerist-father, who uses her as a medium; her father must accept the consequences of his obsession; and her scientifically-minded suitor, Ford, must learn the limits of reason. The challenge for these characters is to feel a sense of belonging in a world that is not only unstable but perhaps devoid of meaning. If Howells offers a way to proceed, it is perhaps best exemplified in the novel's community of Shakers, which provides a qualified model for ethical, socially responsible behavior.

If we accept George Bornstein's contention that venue influences interpretation, then publishing *The Undiscovered Country* in a magazine that defined its mission as nothing less than the transformation of American society underscored its visionary strain. Founded as both a literary and an antislavery magazine in 1857, the *Atlantic Monthly* promised readers that it would “be the organ of no party or clique, but will honestly endeavor to be the exponent of what its conductors believe to be the American idea. It will deal frankly with persons and with parties, endeavoring always to keep in view that moral element which transcends all persons and parties, and which alone makes the basis of a true and lasting prosperity. It will not rank itself with any sect of anties [naysayers]: but with that body of men which is in favor of Freedom, National Progress, and Honor, whether public or private.” Below this statement, printed on the first issue's back cover, readers found a list “of persons interested in the enterprise”; they included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, joined by England's Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell. Heralding “a new era in the history of civilization,” the editors pledged to be “fearless and outspoken.” When viewed in the context of *The Atlantic*, *The Undiscovered Country* participates in a discussion about issues ranging from religion to education and literary history that extends the

novel's boundaries to reflect its embrace of the liminal. In his 1896 essay, “On Coming Back,” Howells would express his vision of the self's mutability anticipated in *The Undiscovered Country*: “If we come back,” he writes, “it is as ghosts . . . though it is generally supposed there is but one ghost, actual or potential, to each personality, my experience is that there are at least a dozen to each of us, formed of our cast qualities and forces.”

¹*The Atlantic Monthly* 1 (November 1857), back cover. Also see Ellery Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1909, Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 35.

²W. D. Howells, “On Coming Back,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 78 (October 1896): 563-564.

ABSTRACT

Howells Paper Presented at the ALA Conference, San Francisco, May 2010

Panel: Poe & Reputation

“The Jingle-Man: Poe, Emerson, Howells, and Reputation,” Stephen Rachman, Michigan State University.

Taking its title from an encounter between William Dean Howells and Ralph Waldo Emerson a little more than a decade after Poe's death, this paper addresses the question of reputation in general and Poe's reputation in particular, by way of Emerson's epithet. Rather than dismissing it merely as slander (which it was undoubtedly intended by Emerson to be), I see it as cruel but accurate, both part of the thrust and parry of antagonisms between the Transcendental circle and Poe's critical agenda, and also an assessment of what popular literature, especially poetry, might be: a succession of jingles. In recasting, Howells' account in this way, I explore the ways in which the cruelty of Poe's criticism was interconnected with the commercial nature of his literary productions. This becomes crucial for Howells as he began to imagine himself as a magazine editor and wished to avoid the controversies that Poe courted; it is also crucial for Howells, as a realist, seeking to position himself between the figures of Emerson and Poe, and between Emerson's disparagement of Poe and “the world's” (as Howells describes it) admiration of Poe. In theorizing this encounter over Poe's reputation I draw on and engage recent work on reputation by Meredith McGill, who has argued that we best think of these matters in terms of anonymity, print and reprint culture of the 1830s and 40s. The paper then takes up the way the problem of Emerson's belated assessment of Poe as “jingle-man” had been figured in Poe's lifetime in the long view of his reputation over the course of the 150 years since his death.

The Awakening: H. D. Lloyd Sounds the Alarm for W. D. Howells in the Gilded Age

©S. E. Marovitz—Kent State University

Toward the end of August 1859, in Titusville, Pennsylvania, then a small lumberman's village in the northwestern corner of the state about forty miles south of Erie, one Edwin L. Drake struck oil from an artesian well. He had expected to drill it the preceding year but had to wait because the coming of winter held him back. Further delayed when warm weather returned the following spring, the well that locals called "Drake's Folly" finally brought up petroleum in the late summer. In that the only oil produced by wells before that was secondary to the brine or water being sought, people thought that Drake's mind was a little touched. Until then no one had drilled specifically for petroleum. Nonetheless, no sooner had oil been spotted in Drake's well than the inhabitants and others in and around Titusville began to acquire leases on sections of land and commence drilling for themselves. The Pennsylvania oil boom had begun! Thousands of barrels of oil were suddenly coming onto the market every day to the extent that prices were altogether unstable. In many if not most places in the region pumps were unnecessary because gas pressure in the oil bed sufficed to bring the petroleum up, but required immediately were the means to store, transport, and refine it. Hence was an industry born.

As this dramatic event and its immediate aftereffects were unfolding, the twenty-two year old William Dean Howells, aspiring poet and budding journalist, was busily occupied with both disciplines while becoming socially cultivated in and around Columbus, Ohio. A few months after "Drake's Folly" proved to be anything but "folly" in 1859, Howells' collaborative collection of Poems by Two Friends, composed of his own work and that of John J. Piatt, was published around Christmas that year, and his successful campaign biography of Lincoln appeared the following summer as the oil boom took hold in Titusville amid its expanding surroundings. It is worth noting that Howells based the biography on notes taken by a friend who interviewed Lincoln in Springfield as he himself remained in Columbus writing poems. Although the biography sold, the poetry collection did not. Nonetheless it served him well because he took part of the money he received from the publisher, who had genially recommended that he travel east and northeast through several states and research their major industries for a book while touring them. While on the move, "he contributed fourteen travel letters to the Ohio State Journal and the Cincinnati Gazette that trace his journey through July and August 1860" (G&D WDH 50). Unfortunately, nothing I have seen in his published letters from those fascinating weeks on the road shows an awareness of the tremendous oil boom occurring in parts of the region through which Howells had to pass during his memorable tour. He left for Venice the following year to assume the post of U.S. consul there for a two-year term of office.

By the time he returned from Italy in mid-1865, having married Elinor Mead, who had sailed to Europe a year after his arrival there, Howells had acquired a more circumspect understanding of reality in terms of both life and writing. Still an aspiring poet, he was once again a journalist, settled in New York instead of Columbus and earning a living for his family, which now included his nearly three-year-old daughter, Wini-

fred, whose deep feeling for her Venetian birthplace never flagged as her father's did. For about two months he wrote for the Nation as "a critic of sensitive conscience" (Cady RR 119) but one who could also create short light essays that satisfied its editor, Edwin L. Godkin. As Edwin H. Cady puts it, Howells already "knew how to flay the robber baron callousness and corruption of Gilded Age business practices" (119). Among the victims of his pen during his limited stay with the Nation were "the officers of the Bloomfield and Newark Railroad," whom he implies should be convicted of manslaughter for their alleged role in the numerous fatal accidents of that line, and in particular he charges the Governor of the state for refusing to renominate a judge who would not support the monopoly of a railroad line in New Jersey (119). Although he was with the Nation for only a short time, Howells' perception of the unjust practices of railroads during the post-war years remained active when he moved to Boston in February and took office as assistant editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* on March 1, a fine birthday gift. As early as his first novel, *Their Wedding Journey* (1872), he lambastes in language that anticipates Henry Demarest Lloyd's "the swindling railroad kings whose word is law to the whole land," and Cady points out that later as editor Howells "saw to it that railroad arrogance and dirty machinations were exposed in the Atlantic, most effectively by Charles Francis Adams, [Jr.]" (RR 180), the son of Lincoln's minister to England, who had become sharply critical of the railroads' unethical practices. Everett Carter also notes that under Howells' editorship in December 1872, the *Atlantic* published "The Fight of a Man with a Railroad," by J. R. Coleman, denouncing the railroad whose "arrogant employees" allegedly injured him for life following an argument (*H & Age* 178). According to Carter, this article was "the most searing reproach to laissez-faire commercialism to appear before Henry D. Lloyd's attacks on the Rockefeller monopoly" (178).

Carter's reference to Henry Demarest Lloyd's hostility to railroads applies particularly to "The Story of a Great Monopoly," an essay that Howells accepted less than a month before his resignation as editor from the conservative *Atlantic* but only after gaining assurance from Adams that the author's allegations in it were accurate (Cady RR 181). "I accept your paper with pleasure," Howells wrote to Lloyd on Dec 6, 1880, and will give it the first place in the *Atlantic* [sic] for March. What shall I call it?" he asked the author, then a journalist with the *Chicago Tribune* (*Sel.Let.*, 2: 270; *NewEncycBrit.* 7:423). Howells also "officially resigned" as editor "on his birthday," March 1, 1881 (G&D WDH 212-13), but by then he had been out of office in effect for at least a month, and his intention to leave had already been revealed to the publisher by early that year, possibly even before that. On its publication, the essay had an immediate and unprecedented effect, not only in the U.S. but in England as well, having provoked several printings of the issue and "thousands of pirated reprints." Cady asserts that with its publication, "the decisive Muckrakers' movement was begun" (RR 181). The essay is indeed a powerhouse of condemnation. From it evolved Lloyd's *Wealth against Commonwealth*, his dynamic book of 1894 on the destructiveness and inhumanity of capitalism manipulated by uninhibited greed

in the Gilded Age. That was also the year in which the bound volume of *A Traveler from Altruria* was brought out, although the serialized version of Howells' romance, or "fable" as he also labeled it, had already appeared in the *Cosmopolitan* from October 1892 through November 1893—and Lloyd alludes to it near the end of his book (Harper 1894, 533; "Biblio," *Altrur-Rom* IUP 3).

More important here, however, is "The Story of a Great Monopoly" because of its focus not only on control by the railroads but on the sudden evolution of the oil trade in full cooperation with it. By the time Howells became assistant editor at the *Atlantic Monthly* early in 1866 only six and a half years had passed after those first 25 barrels of oil were produced in Titusville late in 1859; by then, John D. Rockefeller, in partnership with an inventive genius named Samuel Andrews, was already on his way to enormous wealth, and by 1870 he and Andrews owned the biggest oil refinery in Cleveland, which was, according to Ida Tarbell, "the largest refining center in the country" (Tarbell 50). In June of that same year, 1870, about thirteen months before Howells became editor-in-chief of the *Atlantic*, Rockefeller combined the oil-refining and sales companies in which he held a stake; still in 1870, he, Andrews, and three other collaborators then established the Standard Oil Company (Tarbell 44).

Not long after that, late in 1871 and the beginning of 1872, these Standard owners joined several refiners from Pennsylvania who proposed a scheme to collaborate in persuading the railroads that ship the oil to give special rates and rebates to members of their group. Obtaining an open-ended charter in Philadelphia, the investors established the South Improvement Company in which each member acquired a number of shares ranging from ten to 450; the five affiliated with Standard Oil received 180 each, giving them together majority control. Representatives of the South Improvement Company met with officers of chosen railroads and persuaded them to cooperate in the illegal scheme of reducing charges selectively and providing rebates so that all involved would benefit at the expense of unaffiliated refiners and shippers. Rockefeller then went to independent refiners in the Cleveland area attempting to convince them to sell out to Standard Oil in exchange for shares in the Company, encouraging them to take the loss of selling for less than their land, structures, and equipment were worth in dollars because the stock they would receive for it soon would make up for the loss many times over. In this way, Rockefeller's aim to consolidate ownership of the refining industry in Cleveland under one corporate owner—the Standard Oil Company—was accomplished, and he could oversee both the procedure and the corporation. Those who cooperated benefitted from arrangements made by the South Improvement Company, and in the process shared for a time in the increasing wealth and power of Standard Oil. Indeed, most of Standard's competition was wiped out with the support of the railroads, particularly the uncompromising policies of Cornelius Vanderbilt, who gained and maintained control of one major line after another. This monopoly of the railroads in collusion with Standard Oil constitutes the basis of H. D. Lloyd's vituperative essay.

To comprehend why Howells was so deeply affected by Lloyd's essay that he reacted to it with such immediacy and decisiveness, one should consider not only the monopoly's overriding effect on industry and general commerce but also and particularly its cost to individuals, families, and small busi-

nesses. In addition to and no less important than the worldly matters that he read and often wrote about as editor of the *Atlantic* was the precarious state of his own mind, which often had been subject to undue pressure, internal and external, since childhood. Also telling were the heavy workload that came with his office, the contractual writing commitments he had made to supplement his income, and his financial obligations to his family, not only to Elinor and the children, but also to his sisters and brothers back in Ohio. Beyond these was the inexplicable ailment suffered by his eldest daughter, Winifred, which seemed more puzzling than threatening at the time although it would kill her before the end of the decade despite his heart-rending efforts to identify the cause and overcome it. By the time Lloyd's manuscript landed on his desk, Howells, no longer the youthful novice with romantic inclinations toward poetry, was in a frame of mind that prepared him to receive the essay as its author intended, and in it Lloyd shows no restraint. Howells' acceptance and strong support of it clearly mark his awakening to the overwhelming problems faced by countless individual Americans and their families through no fault of their own. In consequence of the corrupt practices of a few extremely wealthy citizens in control of the monopoly for their own aggrandizement, practices supported by government legislators and bureaucrats as well as the courts, Lloyd's exposé awakened Howells among tens of thousands of other readers to the unjustifiable extent their economic lives were being strained and drained by the illegal restraints imposed on them by Standard Oil.

Lloyd illustrates the disastrous effects on the nation and its commerce of strikes fomented by the duplicitous practices of the monopoly, specifically, the anarchistic "social disorders we hoped never to see in America" ("SGM" Atl 318). He refers here to the eight strikes that "culminated on July 16, 1877," at Martinsburg, WV, and "spread into the greatest labor disturbances on record." President Hayes sent troops to break the strikes, but they proved useless because the troopers socialized with the strikers instead (319). Such strikes occur, he says, because although Standard Oil produces but a fiftieth of our petroleum or less, he says, it "dictates the price of all, and refines nine tenths" (321). Despite laws and contracts requiring equal treatment and fees to all consumers, the monopoly simply disregards them. "Hundreds and thousands of men have been ruined by these acts of Standard and the railroads; whole communities have been rendered desperate, and the peace of Pennsylvania imperiled more than once" (327). And in "the South, the Standard's control is absolute. It has now stretched out its hands to grasp the turpentine trade" (329). Its "outrages . . . were proved before an investigating committee of Congress, says Lloyd, but Congress did nothing." Standard's wealth "defeated honest business men"; the "plundered found that the courts, the governor, and the legislature of their State, and the Congress of the United States were the tools of the plunderers, and were forced to compromise" (329). In concluding, Lloyd asserts that "the forces of capital and industry have outgrown the forces of our government. . . . The common people, the nation, must take them in hand. . . . When monopolies succeed, the people fail, . . . when a legislature is bribed, the people are cheated. . . . The states have failed. The United States must succeed, or the people will perish" (333-34).

By the time Howells read the manuscript he was nearly worn out physically and psychologically. When he

wrote to Twain on February 8 of his decision to leave the editor's chair, his uninhibited confidant responded that he was relieved to know it: "Mighty glad that you are out of that cussed mill, that gilded slavery," he told Howells with insight and empathy (S&G, eds. *MT-H Letters* ps to letter 2/15/81, 1:350n2,). Yet Howells had already over-committed himself again by signing a contract to provide new book-length manuscripts in the near future; this included completing *A Modern Instance*, which he had only recently begun. The pressure on him to write and meet goals continued, then, without a meaningful lapse, and he consequently suffered a breakdown later that year from the workload combined with health problems at home that kept him incapacitated for nearly two months.

Finally regaining strength and stability by mid-1882, he and the family traveled to recuperate in Europe while he continued to draft new works, including *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, which the *Century* began to serialize in November 1884. One of the first American novels with a businessman as protagonist, it became controversial because, like Lloyd's powerful essay, "it speaks directly to the condition of its time" (Cady *RR* 231), a state reflective of "the self-serving materialism rampant in the Gilded Age," as Kermit Vanderbilt puts it (xxi). During the early 1880s, then, Lloyd's influence was subtly motivating Howells toward perceiving the effect of unethical practices on society at large rather than on one or a few individuals. As Kenneth E. Eble suggests, although the "attention in *Silas Lapham* falls chiefly on the individual moral choice, the social class structure is also an object of Howells's scrutiny and satire" (97). This tendency becomes more pronounced after *Lapham's* publication in 1885, a year before the Haymarket trouble in Chicago that so strongly affected Howells personally and professionally; it would become still more evident still in his fiction later in the decade.

With this in mind, Mark Noonan evidently over-estimates Howells' view of the individual at fault for social wrongs: "throughout the 1880s," he says, Howells "believes that societal ills such as the rise in divorce rates, growing materialism, class unrest, and the decline in business ethics were largely due to a lack of self-control and weak character in the individual" (195). No, "throughout the 1880s" is not accurate. After the Haymarket trials, sentences, and executions, and his reading of Tolstoy late in 1885, Howells no longer believed that; instead, these events "merely accelerated the steady movement Howells' thought was taking," Eble observes (99), a view confirmed by Howells' 1888 memorial essay on Matthew Arnold in which, as Goodman and Dawson indicate, he "uses Arnold to argue his own political agenda," echoing Lloyd in remarking that "we are the prey of many vast and corrupting monopolies" (G&D 271). His more radical social perceptions are also evident in such pertinent novels of the period as *Annie Kilburn* (1889) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). To be sure, the latter title exposes the wealthy Dryfoos' arrogant treatment of those working for *Every Other Week*, but that is a local matter, not a societal one, which is more accurately illustrated by the violent strike, protesters, and tenement poor, the object of his slain son, Conrad's, charity.

Indeed, Howells' changing socio-economic views are reflected in "the deepening tone of the *Atlantic* after 1875," Cady says, adding that it was "almost as if, half-consciously, Howells felt himself to be presiding over a public inquiry into the economic disease of his society" (*RR* 180). He was then necessarily cautious about over-extending himself on such

points, of course, because the magazine, its publisher, and much of its readership were conservative Republicans like the editor himself, "who continued to serve the Republican cause and to benefit from it" (G&D 197). As Louis J. Budd surmised years ago, Howells' acceptance of Lloyd's essay, followed almost immediately by his resignation as editor, leaves one wondering if his "willingness to resign in 1881 was not partly motivated by a growing inner clash between political orthodoxy and the mild but stubborn radicalism which guided him after 1886, by a bewilderment or frustration possibly crystallized through reading and accepting for publication" this controversial manuscript (155). Soon after, Cady put it a little differently, seeing "a kind of prophetic symbolism in Howells' exploding Lloyd upon the nation as a sort of salute to his own departure from the editor's chair" (*RR* 181).

Let me conclude with reference to another explosive character in American literary history, Henry David Thoreau, who left his cabin at Walden Pond in 1847 three years before young Will Howells and his family began their year in a cabin in the woods at Eureka Mills, Ohio, in 1850, and ended it three years before Thoreau published *Walden* in 1854. The editor of what some readers call Thoreau's last book, *Faith in a Seed* (1993), chose a few words from Thoreau's essay on "The Succession of Forest Trees" as his epigraph for the volume: "Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed" (Thoreau, Epigraph). For Howells, H. D. Lloyd provided the seed that awakened him to the need of more forcefully supporting the strong ethical beliefs his father had taught him as a youth in Ohio (Cady *RR* 46). Tolstoy and other prominent influences notwithstanding, none but Lloyd proved dynamic enough to vitalize Howells' sense of right and move him to act accordingly in the face of the storms that threatened him afterward. The seed prevailed, first with Howells then nearly fifteen years later when it evolved into *Wealth against Commonwealth* (1894), which he admired fervently, saying that he could barely put Lloyd's "great book" down. "I have to stop from chapter to chapter, and take breath," he wrote the author shortly after its publication (11/2/94; M. Howells *LL WDH* 2:54). But that's a story for another time.

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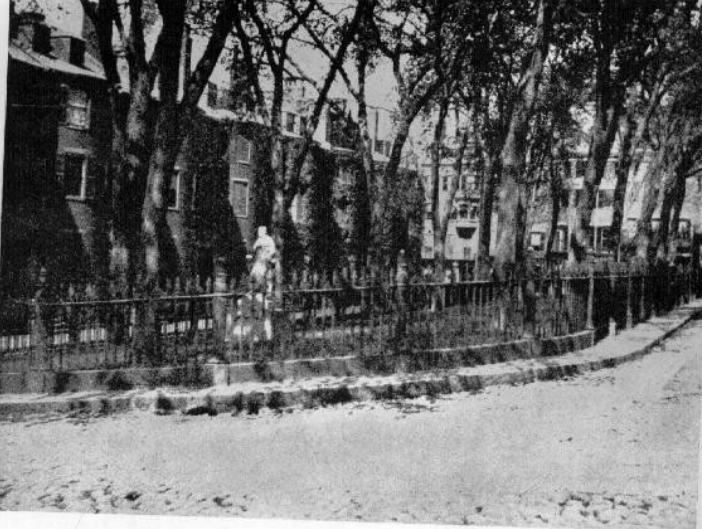
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Louisburg Square, with former homes of W. D. Howells and Louisa Alcott

Illustration from 1950 Dodd, Mead edition of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (uncopyrighted), available at Howells Society website. Caption reads: "Louisburg Square, Beacon Hill, where Howells, Alcott, Aldrich, and other successful people such as the Coreys lived. The statue is of Columbus."

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