

The Howellsian

A Message from the Editor

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

We hope that all our readers have had a pleasant and perhaps even a productive summer. From our perspective, it passed too quickly, but autumn, too, is a beautiful season, not only in the Midwest where W. D. Howells lived before setting out for Italy, but also along the eastern seaboard, where he resided after his return. This fall, however, leads us to think westward, toward San Francisco, where the William Dean Howells Society will next meet again to present a program now in its initial stage of preparation. We look forward to seeing you all there.

Following our editorial message, this expanded issue of *The Howellsian* includes: 1) a review of the Society's activities at the American Literature Association conference last May in Boston with abstracts of the papers presented at our two sessions and an account of our business meeting held during the interim between them, with emphasis on the election of officers for 2005-2007 and the announcement of a prize to be awarded annually by the Society beginning next year; 2) an essay by Jerome Loving, "Twain's Whittier Birthday

Speech and Howells," revised from his presentation at the ALA conference last spring; 3) a Call for Papers, with the topics selected and the deadline for submission of proposals, for the 2006 ALA conference to be held in San Francisco next May; 4) a review by Sarah B. Daugherty of the new biography by Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson: *William Dean Howells: A Writer's Life*, published earlier this year; and 5) a dues notice for 2006 with a membership form.

Sanford E. Marovitz, *Editor*



William Dean Howells in 1907

Notes from the Howells Society Business Meeting at ALA 2005

On Saturday, May 28, the William Dean Howells Society met on three occasions during the ALA conference at the Westin Copley Place Hotel in Boston, May 26-29; a business meeting was held between two panel sessions, one each in the morning and afternoon. The meeting was called to order at 12:30 with a sizable agenda to cover, but time was insuffi-

cient to allow for full discussion of all the items listed. Elsa Nettels presided as outgoing president of the Society, and the following members were present: Donna Campbell, secretary; Don Cook; Sally Daugherty; Susan Goodman, then vice-president and program chair; Claudia Stokes; and Sandy Marovitz, then interim editor of *The Howellsian*.

1. The first order of business was the **election of officers** for the coming term, June 2005-June 2007. On a slate prepared by the ad hoc election committee and recommended by the president, the candidates proposed were Susan Goodman for president, Claudia Stokes for vice-president and program chair, Donna Campbell for



W. D. Howells
Picture courtesy of Mark Goodburn

secretary, Elsa Nettels for treasurer, and Sandy Marovitz for editor of *The Howellsian*. The slate was approved, additional nominations were invited, and when none were forthcoming, the nominees were elected by acclamation.

2. At last year's business meeting, a between-year for elections, Elsa agreed to serve as interim treasurer until a new one was officially elected; consequently, because she had been overseeing the Society's finances for several months beforehand, she opened a bank account in the name of the Society near her home in Williamsburg. In her **treasurer's report**, she announced that nearly \$1,700 exists in that account (\$1696.24) after a few necessary expenses had been met, including payment for the domain names

<www.howellssociety.org>, <www.howellssociety.net>, and <www.howellssociety.com>.

When Donna was asked to

Howells Society Meeting at ALA 2005, continued

explain the purpose of "domain names," she said that they allow the site to shift to different servers while retaining a single, easy-to-remember name—the Howells Society. She pointed out that the site has recently changed servers, and this payment for domain names will allow researchers to find us easily. Moreover, if someone else takes over the web site in the future (personally, I hope the very-distant future [SEM]), these domain names would allow a smooth transition.

Annual **dues** of the Society will remain \$10 for next year. Elsa has requested that they be mailed to her at her home address: 211 Indian Springs Rd., Williamsburg, VA 23185. She pointed out that the dues will regularly help defray publication and distribution costs of *The Howellsian* and additional mailings by the Society, such as publicity and membership brochures, published notices and announcements, and occasional letters to the membership and others. Prize moneys (see #5 below) and other Society expenses considered necessary by the executive committee will also be covered by the dues; these will be duly recorded and included in the Treasurer's periodic reports.

3. Elsa praised the revitalized *Howellsian* and thanked all the contributors. Sandy announced that the next issue (i.e., the current one) will feature an essay by Jerome Loving and expressed hope (since fulfilled) that it would also include a review of Susan and Carl's new biography, *William Dean Howells: A Writer's Life*.

4. Because the Society **brochures** (which also include a membership form) are out of date, Donna has agreed to update them. The revision will then be sent to Susan for printing and distribution. Susan will send a list of out-of-date addresses to Donna so that the membership list on our database can be brought up to date.
5. *The Howellsian* will probably continue to be printed and mailed at the University of Delaware for the next two years at least, although the Society may have to assume the responsibility for postage. Sandy suggested that a tear-out membership form be included in the next issue, and Donna said it could easily be done. (It has been done; see page 11 of this newsletter.)
6. Several topics for the Howells panels at the **2006 ALA conference** were suggested. They included the following: Howells and Women, Howells and Poetry, Howells and Race, Literary Friendships, and Howells and Late-Nineteenth-Century Periodicals. The final decision on the topics will be made by Claudia Stokes, program-chair elect, and the call for papers will (i.e., does) appear in the fall issue of *The Howellsian*, on the Call for Papers list on our web site, and in a mailing to the membership.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50 P.M.

Donna Campbell
Secretary

Abstracts from the W. D. Howells Sessions at ALA 2005

Abstracts I

The first panel, "Howells and Others," with Susan Goodman chairing, met on May 28 from 9:50-10:30 A.M. and included three papers. The first, "Twain's Whittier Birthday Speech and Howells," by Jerome Loving (Texas A&M), is presented in its entirety following the abstracts. The Society is grateful to him for permitting us to publish it here.

1. "Twain's Whittier Birthday Speech and Howells"

Jerome Loving (Texas A&M)

Howells was not to blame for Twain's alleged guilt about his performance in the Whittier Birthday Speech of 1877. At the time of the speech Twain was stalled in writing *Huckleberry Finn* and frustrated that he was honored in literature only as a humorist. Even though he publically accepted the opinion (not formed until days after the speech) that he had acted in bad taste, he privately considered the speech one of the funniest things he had ever written. His secretary Isabel V. Lyon recorded in her journal for 1906 that he was laughing about the incident and privately hoping to see the speech published in his lifetime. (See page 5 for the full article.)

2. "The Portuguese Among Other Ethnic Minorities in Some of Howells' Fiction"

Renalda Silva (Univ. de Aveiro)

Howells portrays ethnic minorities in several novels, including *Their Silver Wedding Journey* (1899), *An Imperative Duty* (1893), and *A Foregone Conclusion* (1875), among others. In these novels he depicts African Americans and Italians, for example, but this paper focuses on his representation of the Portuguese in *A Woman's Reason* (1883) and *April Hopes* (1888) to ascertain why in both titles he stereotypes the Portuguese as cooks or associates them with food.

When writing my 1998 dissertation, *Representations of the Portuguese in American Literature* at New York University, I was unaware of the presence of this ethnic minority in Howells' fiction. Most of the canonical and non-canonical authors analyzed in this study took a prejudicial look at the Portuguese; they were drawn to issues dealing with race, sexual license, violence, filth, alcoholism, bootlegging, opium trafficking, and stupidity. To my mind, Howells' stereotype of the Portuguese opens up unexplored terrain.

In this essay, I trace the origin of this stereotype in his fiction. Was it the result of his traveling abroad when, presumably, his ship – like most American ships bound for Europe – called at the seaport of Fayal (Faial), on the Azores Islands, as is the case in Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad*? Or is this a reflection of this author's possible contacts with Portuguese immigrants in New England, who came from the Azores to work in the Nantucket and New Bedford whaling industries? Or is this, instead, his own rendition of the impact of Portuguese immigration on America and his attempt to reveal how Portuguese immigrants were received, how their culture was transmitted to America, and how it was transformed there? This paper explores the fiction for answers to these questions.

The October-December 2005 (volume 21, numbers 5-6) issue of *Timeline*, a publication of the Ohio Historical Society, has an article about Howells: "Dean of American Letters: William Dean Howells," by Victoria Nelson. The piece includes photographs of William Cooper and Mary Dean Howells, the young Howells family (WDH, Elinor, and the children), an architectural sketch of "Red Top," and pictures of Howells and his contemporaries.

W. D. Howells Sessions at ALA 2005: Abstracts, continued

3. “Is There a Place for Genius in Literary History? Howells and the Editing of an American Anthology”

Claudia Stokes (Trinity Univ., San Antonio)

In 1886, William Dean Howells began a very public skirmish with his friend Edmund Clarence Stedman, the renowned poet and stockbroker who spent the better part of the 1880's and 1890's editing voluminous literary anthologies of various kinds. In a round-up review of recent contributions to literary history, Howells took issue with Stedman's most recent anthology, *Poets of America*, praising its core while grouching about its less than stringent standards of inclusion. Howells criticized the liberality with which Stedman seemed to pronounce every other American poet a genius and his inclination to depict writing less as serious and arduous labor than as the passive channeling of divine inspiration. Stedman responded with the essay “Genius,” published several months later in the *New Princeton Review*, and the published exchange between the two men produced a brief media sensation, with such periodicals as *The Critic*, the *Boston Gazette*, and the *Penny Post* publishing articles that summarized and commented on the arguments presented by both men. They both downplayed the significance of their published exchange; Howells, for instance, somberly remarked years later that this quarrel had given him a total of fifteen minutes worth of distraction. Similarly, Stedman's published retort lavished praise on Howells, commenting, “It must be nothing short of conviction and a sense of duty that could move [Howells] to discredit that [genius] of which many would select himself as an exemplar.”

My paper reexamines this curious episode, for it generated a very public discussion about the requirements and criteria for the newly popular genre of American literary history, which flourished in the decades following the first American centenary of 1876. Howells' contribution to the establishment of American literary history cannot be underestimated, not only because he reviewed and personally encouraged many important literary histories of the turn of the century but also because he used the 1886 review of Stedman's anthology to articulate a series of assumptions about literary history: it is a form of literary criticism, and a primary function of the literary historian is to assign value and help steer the reader. This public dispute exerted considerable influence on the methods and function of literary history, for it communicated to literary historians the high stakes of failing to conform with Howells' demands, and many important literary historians of the period—among them Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Brander Matthews, Barrett Wendell—courted favorable reviews by complying with Howells' standards. Just as this review had a lasting influence on the up-and-coming field of literary history, it also continued to rankle Stedman, who throughout his life defended his embattled belief in poetic genius, even organizing his momentous eleven-volume anthology *Library of American Literature* (1888-90) to lend credence to his belief, going out of his way to excerpt and reprint texts that shared his views.

Abstracts II

The second panel, “Representations of Masculinity in Howells' Writings,” with Donald Vanouse (SUNY Oswego) chairing, met from 2 - 3:20 P.M. on the same day and also included three papers.

1. “Who's Your Daddy?: Paternity, Paternalism and Patriotism in William Dean Howells' *An Imperative Duty*”
Lynn Jennings (Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison)

The last lines of William Dean Howells' novella *An Imperative Duty* misspeak the *partus sequitur ventrum* statutes that ruled that children must follow the social status of their mother. The passage reads:

He [Olney] represents to her [Rhoda] that it would not be the ancestral color, which is much the same in other races, but the ancestral condition which their American friends would despise if they knew of it; that this is a quality of the despite [sic] in which hard work is held all the world over, and has always followed the children of the man who earns his bread with his hands, especially if he earns other people's bread too.

W. D. Howells Sessions at ALA 2005: Abstracts, continued

The slippage occurs when it suggests that the quality of hard work “has followed the condition of *the man* [emphasis mine]” in referring to Rhoda’s “ancestral condition.” In fact, Rhoda inherited the “ancestral condition” of her black slave mother not her white father. Like her mother, Rhoda marries a white man who is a doctor and, as a consequence, must leave her birthplace to find a home that will accept her and her marriage to a white man. She is indeed “sin-born and slave-born,” and it is this condition that her American friends would “despise,” not the condition of her paternal ancestry. *Might this slip reveal an anxiety about the role of white male citizens in preserving the nation?*

While the threat of the past on the present seems to occur most urgently in *An Imperative Duty* when black women are considered the romantic partners of white, naturalized, male citizens, the closing lines suggest that white paternity was important to Howells because he was concerned with the maintenance of the nation-state. The rule of hypodescent prescribed that the status of the mother determined the condition of the child, but it was also a silent acknowledgment of the sexual exploitation of black women by white men as well as the possibility of cross-racial desire. As such, the law stigmatized black women as unfit for reproducing citizens and, consequently, unsuitable marriage partners for white male citizens, while also calling into question the reliability of white men as guardians of the nation. The slippage from Rhoda’s black mother’s lineage to the unspeakable lineage of her father underscores Howells’ concerns about paternity, white male patriotic duty, and civic legitimacy. *Might Howells’ narrative reveal an anxiety about middle-class, naturalized male citizens losing the civic authority to shape the future of the nation during the Progressive Era?*

2. “The Literary Heroine and the Epistolary Hero in Howells’ *Indian Summer*”

Robert Klevay (Delaware)

William Dean Howells’ 1886 novel *Indian Summer* burlesques the epistolary novel. The young heroine, Imogene Graham, creates a self-consciously literary letter more for herself than for its pseudonymous recipient, “Diary.” Her much older fiancé, Theodore Colville, becomes the “grand, unselfish” hero of her sentimental epistolary work. A 1902 essay on Samuel Richardson revisits Howells’ concerns about the sentimentality of epistolary fiction, but also expresses admiration for Richardson’s morality. The essay provokes a reevaluation of Imogene’s character: although Howells parodies her self-deceiving sentimentality, she is not completely naïve in her literary taste. She believes literature can encourage moral improvement, something the reflexively ironic Colville dismisses. Imogene’s moral character draws Howells’ sympathy even as he winces at her attraction to melodrama, a stance which foreshadows his later opinion of Richardson’s novels.

3. “Howells and Heterosexuality” Axel Nissen (Univ. of Oslo)

As the preeminent chronicler of the mores of the American middle class in the second half of the nineteenth century and one of the leading editors and critics of the day, William Dean Howells contributed substantially not only to the reflection of current gender and sexual ideologies, but to their recirculation and empowerment in an ongoing cultural dialogue about masculinity, femininity, and the relations within and between the sexes. While Howells has been recognized as a keen observer of romantic love, the companionate marriage, and strong male same-sex bonds, much remains to be said about the role his fiction played in testing then current ideas about sex and gender in the fictional laboratory.

This paper focuses on two Howells novels as representations of, on the one hand, an increasingly beleaguered male same-sex affectionateness and, on the other, a cementation and privileging of affective and erotic bonds within the exclusive, monogamous, male-female marital relationship. Howells’ little discussed early novel *Private Theatricals* (1875-76; reprinted after his death as *Mrs. Farrell*) is a significant representation of male romantic friendship and its, at times, troubled coexistence with cross-sex love interests while *The Shadow of a Dream* is a prescient reappraisal fifteen years later of those same sexual and gender dynamics and limns a considerably darker picture of them. This analysis of the novels examines how the narrative structure contributes to what the queer theorist Judith Roof has called “heteroideology,” but also the extent to which it creates an opening for “alternative domesticities.” Ultimately, it asks how Howells may have contributed to what Jonathan Ned Katz has called “the invention of heterosexuality.” For an answer, Howells’ novels must be considered in contrast to contemporaneous fictional and nonfictional texts that focus on manhood, womanhood, the “cult of true love,” “friendship of the sexes,” and various forms of “perversion.”

TWAIN'S WHITTIER BIRTHDAY SPEECH AND HOWELLS

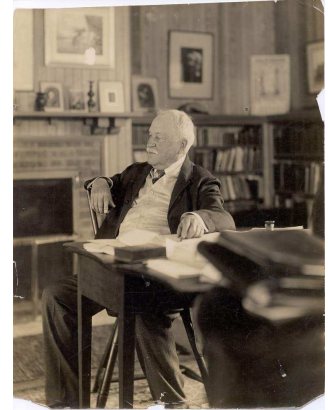
Jerome Loving (Texas A&M)

"A banquet is probably the most fatiguing thing in the world except ditch digging."

Mark Twain made this observation in his autobiography around 1905 when he was frequently being asked to speak at banquets in New York City. Yet the notion may have taken root not long after December 17, 1877, the date of the now infamous *Atlantic Monthly* seventieth birthday banquet for John Greenleaf Whittier. It is remembered today only for Twain's speech about three drunken hoboes named Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The entertainment, as it were, took place before fifty-eight distinguished male writers of the day as well as guests of both genders allowed entrance following this Last Supper for Mark Twain among the Brahmins. The diners included not only this noble trio of literary saints, but such dignified if now mostly forgotten writers as Charles Dudley Warner and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Present as well, of course, was the ex-Westerner William Dean Howells, now editor of the *Atlantic*. The description the following day in the *New York Evening Post*, written by Hawthorne's son-in-law, sounds like something out of James Russell Lowell's *A Fable for Critics* without the friendly satire: "Here robust and cheerful, with an expression of richly courteous dignity, stands Longfellow, a white-haired Hyperion. There, Emerson, himself beyond seventy, but to all seeming wonderfully well and wearing that incurious but searching inquiry which in a company like [this] gives him the air of one who does not suspect his own fame. . . ." The faces, we are told, included Holmes, and of course Whittier himself, "quietly talking with a group of friends at one side of the room" in the east dining hall of the Brunswick Hotel in Boston.¹

The seven-course dinner began at 7:00 PM and included servings of Sauterne, Sherry, Chablis, Claret, and Burgundy--objected to the following day in a formal resolution by the local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The speeches began at 10:15, when the doors were opened to the select public. According to Henry Nash Smith, who has written the fullest account of the evening and its aftermath, "Henry O. Houghton [publisher of the *Atlantic*] made a short address of welcome and introduced Whittier as guest of honor. Whittier excused himself from speaking and asked Longfellow to read a sonnet, 'Response,' composed by Whittier for the occasion. Houghton then introduced Howells as toastmaster, and Howells introduced Emerson, who . . . recited Whittier's 'Ichabod.'"² Howells himself made a short speech, Holmes read a new poem of his own, and Charles Eliot Norton responded to a toast to Lowell, who was absent as minister to Spain. Howells then read letters of those dignitaries unable to attend, after which he introduced Twain. As a humorist who had entertained the guests at an earlier *Atlantic* banquet, he was expected to offer comic relief to a program laden with high seriousness and sentiment. Smith, incidentally, concludes his lengthy analysis with the argument that the speech "expressed a deep-seated conflict" on Twain's part regarding the literary Brahmins of New England.

I concur, but I also agree with Bernard De Voto that there was never any possibility that this Westerner from the South could have been fully welcomed by the Boston and Concord elite. To this group of the high and mighty, De Voto writes, "now entered



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

Twain's Whittier Birthday Speech and Howells, continued

a man who as a boy had played with Negroes and deckhands and raftsmen, who as a printer had been little better than a tramp, who had spent years on the decks of steamboats [or floating whore houses], who had gone soldiering with guerillas, . . . [and] had conversed with murderers [in Nevada]." To those fifty-eight writers, Howells perhaps excluded outside of his unconscious fear of being an outsider himself, Mark Twain represented anarchy. In his speech he only made it worse by deriding their culture. Indeed, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), De Voto ventures, was possibly a burlesque of Longfellow's travel books.³

James M. Cox notes that by 1877, as Twain's reputation as a humorist continued to overshadow any view of him as a writer as serious as those in New England, he was "growing more and more hostile to the literature and morality 'above' him."⁴ Only two months earlier, he had given the first version of "The Private History of the Campaign That Failed" in which he had dared to confess his less-than-noble military service in the Civil War as a Tom Sawyer adventure. But then to Twain, especially as a humorist, hostility was part of the game in which there had to be winners and losers. He was born a loser destined to win everything but the respect of his audience that evening. Irreverence was part of his protocol. "I never felt so fervently thankful, so soothed, so tranquil, so filled with a blessed peace" he had written in Chapter 27 of *The Innocents*, "as I did . . . when I learned that Michelangelo was dead." Ralph Waldo Emerson, another "Great Master" who had once observed that man "is the only joker in nature," would now become along with Holmes and Longfellow the latest butt of his irreverence that evening.⁵

In the part of his autobiography published in the *North American Review* in December 1907 in which he rehearsed the shameful story of his speech, Twain thought he remembered being preceded at the podium by William Winter, drama critic for the *New York Tribune* and nemesis of Walt Whitman for his "inappropriate" writings in *Leaves of Grass*. Winter had been among the drinkers with Howells during Whitman's days at Pfaff's saloon in New York in 1860, but he now remembered a rather disgraceful poet whose book would soon scandalize New England by becoming the first to be "banned in Boston" in 1882. We don't know what Winter thought of Twain's characterization of Emerson as "a seedy little bit of a chap," or for that matter his description of Holmes as "fat as a balloon" and Longfellow as having the physical build of "a prize-fighter." All Twain recorded was that the pleasure of the evening ended when Winter sat down and he followed with a memorized tale that turned the faces of his audience "to a sort of black frost."

Twain's speech was followed by a writer now completely forgotten in the annals of American literature. His first romance, entitled *Detmold*, was just beginning its serialization in the *Atlantic*. Twain remembered that the faces of his auditors, as he finished his performance, wore the "expression faces would have worn if I had been making these remarks about the Deity and the rest of the Trinity." Yet such remarks about "the rest of the Trinity" had already been literally made long ago in Emerson's own "Divinity School Address," after which he had become persona non grata at Harvard for thirty years. Only in recent years was he now hailed the new member of the (literary) godhead, whom Twain now seemingly disgraced. Twain recalled or claimed that the shock of his address was so severe that his successor at the speaker's platform lost his composure and could not complete his address. Having "burst handsomely upon the world with a most acceptable novel," Twain noted in his autobiography, he crumbled. "He was facing those awful deities . . . with a speech to utter. No doubt it was well packed away in his memory, no doubt it was fresh and usable, until I had been heard from."⁶

This was William Henry Bishop (1847-1928), who was coincidentally born in Hartford, Connecticut. He lived to see the publication of many other books, to teach Italian at Yale in the 1890s, and to occupy two different consulships in Italy. Indeed, he was made in the mold of his sponsor Howells, who himself had also enjoyed a consulship in Italy. Bishop also wrote in the mode of his sponsor who later endorsed him for admission to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Like many so-called realistic novels in imitation of the manner of Howells, however, Bishop's *Detmold* ran the risk of waxing sentimental. A cautionary tale to Americans who are trying to find themselves in Verona where they worship its ancestral history and lush landscapes, it features Louis Detmold, an architect, schooled in Ruskin, who has followed his love Alice Starfield abroad in the hope of persuading her to reconsider his proposal of marriage. Alice herself is a typically proud Victorian heroine who is headstrong in ignorance of the fact that she actually loves Detmold.

Twain's Whittier Birthday Speech and Howells, continued

Detmold, however, has a skeleton in his closet. Long ago his father committed a vague financial crime not unlike the one Silas Lapham, Howells' most famous protagonist, is tempted to commit to save his business. By now the father has fully atoned for it, but the shame endures. When an Italian rival for Alice's hand reveals the ancient crime, it turns out that Alice, the adopted child of a wealthy American family, is actually the daughter of Detmold's father's partner in crime. This melodrama also bristles with the ideology of American individualism. "The self-made man is our cornerstone," Detmold declares, and blames American women (not invited to the Whittier banquet, we will remember) for perpetuating most of the American snobbishness and love for the undemocratic ways of Europe. Howells may have been also attracted to Bishop's defense of American humorists in the novel, who are, he states, "something more" than humorists--like Artemus Ward and his friend and guest that evening, Mark Twain, who "have a much better claim to statues than a great many who get them. . . . I go even further," Detmold exclaims. "I wish to see a bust of the Jumping Frog in Central Park."⁷

In fact, Bishop didn't crumble at all at the Whittier Birthday Dinner, but delivered his speech as planned. Furthermore, the rest of the speeches went forward as well. The *Post* the next day in its report of the dinner did not even mention Twain's speech, while the *Boston Daily Globe* of the same date noted that his speech had "produced the most violent bursts of hilarity." The negative response came about a couple of days later following the publication of the speech in the Boston and Chicago newspapers. Once the *Boston Transcript* pronounced the speech "in bad taste," similar newspaper verdicts followed. And for Twain this reaction was also probably fueled by Howells' statement to him in a letter on Christmas Day that "Every one with whom I have talked about your speech regards it as a fatality . . ." At Howells' suggestion, Twain responded by sending letters of abject apology to Emerson, Holmes, and Longfellow, all of whom with the possible exception of Emerson quickly dismissed the speech as generally harmless and even entertaining. Gradually, Twain forgave himself by declaring himself "God's fool," and a few weeks later told his friend Mary Fairbanks that it was one of the funniest things he had ever written. Even later--almost twenty-nine years after the event in 1906--his social secretary Isabel V. Lyon recorded in her diary that even though Twain took the blame for the Whittier speech in his autobiography, he was privately, in her words, "chuckling with delight over the speech . . . 'Oh [he exclaimed], it will do to go into print before I die' and the couch [shook] with him and his laughter." He subsequently insisted on reading the Whittier speech to Lyon, word for word.⁸

Some today insist that it *was* funny, and that no serious comparison or parody of greatness was ever intended. Emerson, for example, was tall and slender and hardly resembled the "seedy little bit of a chap" who calls himself Emerson in the sketch. From the point of view of the humor of the Old Southwest in which impersonation and pseudonyms were essential, the idea of three tramps impersonating the greatest writers of their day was hilarious.⁹ But it wasn't in Boston, where there would be no statue of the Jumping Frog on the Common because, as Howells remarked in his memoir of Twain, great reputations had been "trifled with." Nor would there be such a statue in Concord, where Ellen Emerson in answering for her father wrote (to Mrs. Clemens, incidentally) that the Emerson family was disappointed since "We have liked almost everything we have ever seen over Mark Twain's signature."¹⁰ In other words, they had regarded him merely as a humorist. Twain in spite of his developed or simulated contrition about the speech must have found Ellen Emerson's letter galling. For the last year, or when he put down the manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn* after running out of gas, as he often put it, he was having a hell of a time as a writer and probably at that low point could not have insisted that Concord take him for any more than a humorist.

Twain may have been at the top of his game financially in 1877, living in the lap of luxury in his mansion in Hartford and entertaining widely, but he was having little success in his writing. Between 1876 and the time he fully resumed work on his magnum opus, he was--as Walter Blair and others stress--essentially uncreative, writing burlesques such as "The Loves of Alonzo Fitz-Clarence" or "Mrs. McWilliams and the Lightning" that are downright painful to read today.¹¹ He would also write *A Tramp Abroad*, which today cannot be considered more than an unevenly clever medley. And he had conspired with Bret Harte in the writing of the play *Ah Sin*, which struggled at the box office. He tried to write another play, to be called *Simon Wheeler, Amateur Detective*, but it fizzled even when he tried to turn it into a novel. All these failures and more were rattling around in his subconscious when he was asked to participate in a dinner for the literary high and mighty.

Twain's Whittier Birthday Speech and Howells, continued

Twain's anger at his second-rate treatment as a humorist was mounting, while his philosophical world view also grew darker as evidenced in the middle chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*. Here we are shown one river scene after another featuring the "damned human race"--from the feuding Grangerfords to the mean-spirited chicanery of the Duke and the King. Even though Howells had long ago made his peace with New England, which had accepted him, he was not to blame for Twain's apparently false sense of shame over the speech. For Twain knew in his heart that his humor that evening was fated to offend. Indeed, the offense was remembered eight years later when the Concord Public Library banned *Huckleberry Finn* for displaying the same bad taste. Like even Emerson, who after the "Divinity School Address" of 1838, was banned in Boston, or at least at Harvard, Twain, or his reputation today as a great writer, would have to wait a long time for acceptance in that part of the country and indeed throughout America. It would have to endure among other things the attack of Van Wyck Brooks in 1920, who argued that Mark Twain had sold Sam Clemens' genius down the river.¹² The first modern recognition of this literary giant would have to wait until 1932 for a fellow westerner named Bernard De Voto.

NOTES

1. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1940), 320; and G[eorge] P[arsons] L [athrop], "The Whittier Dinner," *New York Evening Post*, December 19, 1877.
2. Henry Nash Smith, "'That Hideous Mistake of Poor Clemens's,'" *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 9 (Spring, 1955), 145-80 [150-51]. See also Smith's *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 92-107.
3. Bernard De Voto, *Mark Twain's America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 194-95.
4. James M. Cox, *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 190n.
5. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Comic" in *Letters and Social Aims* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1884), 151-53.
6. *Mark Twain's Own Autobiography: The Chapters from the North American Review*, ed. Michael J. Kiskus (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 234-36.
7. William H. Bishop, *Detmold; A Romance* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, and Company, 1879), 175, 159. The novel was first serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1877-78.
8. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, ed. Henry Nash Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), I, 213, 215; *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, ed. Dixon Wecter (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1949), 217; and "Mark Twain in 1906: An Edition of Selected Extracts from Isabel V. Lyon's Journal," ed. Laurie Lentz in *Resources for American Literary Study*, 11 (Spring, 1981), 32.
9. James H. Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 342-43.
10. William Dean Howells, *My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1910), 63; and Henry Nash Smith, "'That Hideous Mistake of Poor Clemens's,'" 165-66.
11. Walter Blair, *Mark Twain and Huck Finn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 153-55.
12. Van Wyck Brooks, *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1920).



Picture of W. D. Howells in his study courtesy of Jim Zwick

Book Review

Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson. *William Dean Howells: A Writer's Life*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2005. xxvi + 519 pp. \$34.95.

This engaging biography offers the narrative interest of Howells' best fiction. Its comic episodes remind readers of the sense of humor the author shared with his friend Mark Twain. When Howells' mother sent a peacock from Jefferson, Ohio, to the household in Cambridge, he was moved to advise her, "If you have any thought of giving us Charles, the horse, please consider our unprepared state" (125). Then again, a family beset with medical problems experienced more than its share of tragedy. The story of Winifred's fatal illness remains a mystery because neither S. Weir Mitchell nor the hospital kept the case files. (Howells could hardly have known that the doctor had set fire to the bed of one recalcitrant patient and threatened another with rape.) The biography also chronicles the frustrations that bulked large in the life of an editor and family man who needed energy for his writing. He responded too sensitively to Twain's Whittier Birthday speech because it "exposed his own hypocrisies about [the *Atlantic*] and its patrons" (192), whose egos had to be massaged. His relationship with Elinor is captured in a dream in which she returned, after her death, to arrange a second marriage: "[t]he only second marriage I could imagine for myself," he explained to his daughter Mildred. "Mamma arranged getting a motor . . . but forgot the trunks, and we exchanged reproaches. All very realistic and probable" (429).

Howells emerges most vividly as a self-made man never at ease with his success. Cautioned by the example of his father (whose efforts at farming, observe the biographers, seemed to parody Tolstoy's back-to-basics message), Howells achieved prosperity but worried over his legacy. "I must give my daughter her chance in this despicable world, where I'm so much better for having had none," he wrote in 1885. "I must get my boy through school and college—where I'm so much wiser for not having been" (263). Like the fictive Marches, the Howellses moved restlessly into a succession of houses and apartments. The least satisfactory residence was the remote and expensive Redtop; the best, the house at Kittery Point, where Howells could observe the upwardly mobile hotel guests who figure in his novels. In constructing their biography Goodman and Dawson have drawn on an impressive array of sources, both published and unpublished, supplying excellent notes to guide other scholars. And while they acknowledge the work of their predecessors (notably Edwin Cady and John Crowley), their view of Howells as a pragmatic professional writer affords them a balanced perspective. Despite his bouts of depression, Howells' work served as an anodyne: the first installment of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* was published the day after Winny died. (He was certainly more robust than Henry James, morose and uncomfortable while a guest at Kittery.) As for Howells' "realism war," it might better be called a skirmish resulting from his temporary pique at the British. In the long run, as Goodman and Dawson explain, his aesthetics legitimized many new directions in literature.

One of the most useful features of this biography is its suggestion of topics for further discussion. The author's three sisters warrant separate study: they had literary talents of their own, though Howells tried to forestall conflicts between their ambitions and his. Moreover, any account of the writer's life can only hint at the complexity of his writing. Although *The Rise of Silas Lapham* remains popular because it affirms "the force of the individual conscience" (257), the final line of *A Modern Instance* (spoken not by Marcia but by the lawyer Atherton) may be Howells' own last word as well: "I don't know."

Much more might also be said of a critic who shaped the present canon but who would broaden our ideas of canonicity. Too often, note the biographers, serious debates on art and politics have been relegated to the academy as the role of the man of letters has faded. Yet creative modes of teaching and scholarship—those that foster critical thinking—might extend the writer's life and rescue him from the stodginess of official culture. On his eightieth birthday Howells played truant from the honorary dinner at the National Arts Club; but a few days later, he engaged in lively exchanges with the teachers and students at an African-American school in Savannah, Georgia. We should be grateful to Goodman and Dawson for contributing to the ongoing work of revitalization.

Sarah B. Daugherty
Wichita State University

CALL FOR PAPERS: ALA 2006

Claudia Stokes has announced the topics selected for the next ALA conference, to be held in San Francisco in spring 2006. Here are the topics with her **deadline for submission, January 8, 2006:**

1. Howells and Women

We invite paper proposals that examine Howells' relationships with women, broadly defined. Possible paper topics may include Howells' own personal life, his fiction and criticism, literary friendships, writings on marriage and sexuality, or editorial work.

2. The Unexpected Howells

We invite paper proposals that examine instances of Howells' life and work that diverge from what we would normally expect of him, literary or otherwise. Possible topics may include politics, ghost stories and occultism, utopian fiction, poetry, literary criticism, sentimentalism, and sexuality, among others.

Please send proposals by January 8, 2006, paper proposals no longer than 500 words and copy of cv to Claudia Stokes at <Claudia.stokes@trinity.edu> or by post to Claudia Stokes, Trinity University, Dept of English, 1 Trinity Place, San Antonio, TX 78212.

DUES NOTICE FOR 2006

Because the Society was passing through a complex stage of transition attributable to administrative changes in 2003 and 2004, collecting and recording the dues was not the highest priority; consequently, some confusion occurred in our records. Because of this, the executive committee chose to preclude making a hopeless effort to track data and search for checks that may or may not have been received, by voting that all members in good standing on our data base in 2002 automatically held that status through 2005. Therefore, all members who receive this issue of *The Howellsian* are considered in good standing through the current year.

We wish to emphasize that 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 dues be paid in a timely manner. As pointed out earlier, the dues will help cover the cost of printing and distributing *The Howellsian* as well as a variety of other documents such as publicity brochures and announcements; they will also fund the annual prize to be offered for the best paper on Howells presented at the ALA conference beginning next 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 in U. S. funds promptly to our treasurer, Dr. Elsa Nettels, at: 211 Indian Spring Rd., Williamsburg, VA 23185.**

Thank you for your continuing interest and support of W. D. Howells scholarship and the William Dean Howells Society.

Name _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Country: _____ Postal Code: _____

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The William Dean Howells Society

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Selected Queries from the Howells Society Site

If you have answers for these any of these queries, please submit them to the Howells Society site at <http://www.howellssociety.org/queryform> or e-mail them to campbelld@wsu.edu. Thank you.

Howells' "mania for self-sacrifice" and Jane Addams

Two years before founding Hull-House in Chicago, Jane Addams wrote to Ellen Gates Starr about William Dean Howells' "tirade on the mania for self sacrifice."

I am interested to know what novel, short story, or essay Addams might have had in mind in 1887. The information will be included in an annotation in volume 2 of *The Selected Papers of Jane Addams* (eds. Mary Lynn McCree Byran, Barbara Bair, and Maree de Angury), to be published by the University of Illinois Press.

Ellen Skerrett
Consultant to the Jane Addams Project
ellen_skerrett_at_wowway.com 2/24/05

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

Question: I am researching the history of the children's story "The Little Engine that Could" (see: <http://tigger.uic.edu/~plotnick/littleng.htm>)

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

Roy Plotnick, plotnick@uic.edu 7/26/05

Howells and Theodor Fontane?

Can anyone tell me whether Howells had any connection with Theodor Fontane, the German realist? I am looking at similarities or comparisons in the way Fontane and Howells treated Engagements, Marriage and Divorce but I have been unable to find out whether either knew of, or had dealings with the other. Fontane died in 1898.

Richard Ellington, richardellington@yahoo.co.uk 3/27/05