

The Howellsian

Table of Contents

Message from the Editor.....	1
Editor Sought for <i>The Howellsian</i>	1
Update on the Howells Fellowship at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.....	1
Join the Howells Listserv	1
W.D. Howells Business Meeting.....	2
2008 American Literature Association National Conference	3
The Cowhiding in <i>The Kentons</i> : Late Howells and the Domestic Histories of Violence.....	3
Smiling Aspects: Howells and the Domestication of Realism	3
Consumption and Cannibalism in the Altrurian Romances of William Dean Howells.....	4
"Something Strange and Foreign": Integrating the Domestic Body in William Dean Howells's <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i>	5
"Well, we must stand it, anyway": Exploring the Reappropriated Images of American Women in Howells's <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i>	5
William Dean Howells's Narrative Instruction for Reading the Artificial Career Woman and the Authentic Domestic Woman.....	6
Call for Papers: Howells Panels at ALA 2009	7



A Message from the Editor

Among other items, this double-issue of *The Howellsian* includes: (1) an account of the two panels we hosted at the ALA this year; (2) information about the Howells Fellowship at the Houghton Library; (3) an invitation for members to subscribe to the Howells Listserv; (4) a call for applications for the position of editor of *The Howellsian*; and (5) a call for papers for the 2009 ALA Conference in Boston. The next issue (Vol. 12, No. 1, N.S.) of *The Howellsian* will be published in spring 2009.

—Rob Davidson, *Interim Editor*

Editor Sought for *The Howellsian*

The Executive Board of the William Dean Howells Society is now accepting applications for position of editor of *The Howellsian*, the bi-annual newsletter of the William Dean Howells Society. Applicants should either be able to format the publication for printing or have administrative/student assistant support for doing so. The position has a two-year term (which is renewable) and the editor is a vital member of the William Dean Howells Society Executive Board.

Applicants should send a brief cover letter stating their qualifications and a CV to Howells Society President Claudia Stokes at claudia.stokes@trinity.edu.

Update on the Howells Fellowship at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

A recent inquiry from the Howells Society regarding the status of the Howells Fellowship at Harvard has revealed that the Fellowship is no longer being offered. Roger Stoddard was the curator for the William Dean Howells Memorial, but when he retired in 2003, this responsibility moved to the Harvard University English Department. Interested parties are advised to contact the department (617-495-5055) for additional information.

Join the Howells Listserv

All members are encouraged to join the Howells-L email discussion list. Subscription instructions are available at:

<http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/howells/howells.html>

William Dean Howells Society Prize Essay

The William Dean Howells Society Essay Prize will be awarded at the 2009 ALA conference to Dr. Lance Rubin for his paper, "Consumption and Cannibalism in the Altrurian Romances of William Dean Howells." The Society hopes to reprint Dr. Rubin's prize-winning essay in a future issue of *The Howellsian*.

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

W.D. Howells Society Business Meeting ALA San Francisco—May 24, 2008

Submitted by Donna Campbell, Secretary WDHS

The William Dean Howells Society Business Meeting was held on May 24, 2008, at the American Literature Association Conference, which took place May 22–25, 2008 at the Westin Copely Place Hotel. President Claudia Stokes called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Other members present were Susan Goodman, Rob Davidson, Sandy Marovitz, Jay Jessee, Mischa Renfroe, Sally Daugherty, Claudia Stokes, and Donna Campbell. The order of business was as follows:

1. Claudia Stokes read the treasurer's report, which Elsa Nettels had provided before the meeting. As of April 30, 2008, the date of the last statement, the Society has \$1782.44 in the Wachovia bank account. Since January 1, 2008, 24 members have paid dues (a number of members also renewed in 2007). The only expenses since the Tavern Club bill (about \$2000) were the \$100 to Fred Wegener for the 2007 essay prize, and \$82.35 for renewal of the domain names for the Howells Society. Sandy Marovitz asked whether the WDHS has a method for asking people to pay their dues in a timely fashion, since people frequently need a reminder to do so. *The Howellsian* always contains a dues notice.

2. The next item of business was the Howells Essay Prize. A discussion of the rules followed, with agreement on the following items:

- The deadline is September 1.
- People are encouraged to revise their essays before submission.
- Since the winning submission is published in *The Howellsian* and authors may want to publish a longer version elsewhere, the submissions should be conference length, with a maximum of 10 pages.
- Submissions should be sent to Rob Davidson, the vice president of the WDHS. As before, he will send them to the other executive board members for judging, gather their responses (executive board members should take no longer than two weeks to respond), and announce the prize.
- Although having a separate prize for graduate students had been discussed by email, there was general agreement that the WDHS will not sponsor a separate prize. The reasons given were as follows:
 1. A single prize is more of an honor, and a "graduate student essay prize" would not have as much impact.
 2. Graduate students need to meet publication standards as part of the learning process.
 3. Having a single essay prize provides graduate students with something that they can keep on their curriculum vitae even after they have completed their graduate studies.

3. The topics for next year's ALA conference were discussed, with several suggestions being offered:

- Howells and the canon
- Howells and his contemporaries
- Reading Howells and reading in Howells
- Howells and periodicals
- Howells and religion
- Teaching Howells
- Howells and daughters
- Howells and the city
- Howells and the critics

Claudia Stokes and Rob Davidson noted that topics such as "the domestic Howells" and "Howells and marriage" have drawn many more proposals than those such as "Howells and reviews" or "the international Howells," so some topic that allows for a discussion of the topic of domesticity might be preferable.

4. The discussion then turned to possibilities for Howells-related activities in Boston, the site of next year's ALA. Suggestions included a walking tour or other tour of neighborhoods associated with Howells in Boston and Cambridge, or a visit to an exhibit at the Houghton Library, where Howells's papers are located.

5. Susan Goodman reminded members that the Howells Fellowship, administered by Harvard University, is available.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

2008 American Literature Association National Conference

Panels Sponsored and Organized by the William Dean Howells Society

"The Cowhiding in *The Kentons*: Late Howells and the Domestic Histories of Violence," Sarah M. Kennedy, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

In a late memoir, Howells describes a "forever to be unwritten novel" about the Civil War with a scene in the Ohio capital when the volunteering fervor began. The novel remained unwritten, and Howells never did write a novel that foregrounded the war or Ohio's role in it. *The Kentons* (1902) seems an unlikely place as any for a sustained consideration of the Civil War. Indeed, the war seems an increasingly distant memory for the "shabbily aging veterans" of Colonel Kenton's regiment, whose personal recollections of the war Kenton must rescue "from perishing in their faltering memories." When not manifesting irreverence for history of any sort, the novel's younger generation regards the war as an ever-receding episode of national history, irrelevant to the demands and concerns of modern life.

The Kentons follows a decade during which Howells wrote a number of letters and memoirs about Ohio in the years directly preceding the Civil War. Howells recalls the Ohio of his youth as a state with a Democratic, pro-slavery majority, comprised not only of transplanted New Englanders but also Virginians and Kentuckians who were Southern in allegiance if not in geography. In writing of his lecture tour and journey down the Ohio River near the turn of the century, Howells evokes a primitive American West that seems trapped in an historical time warp. *The Kentons* draws on this sense of regional stasis in its representation of the Kenton family's inexplicable compulsion to exact violent revenge upon their daughter's upstart suitor. In an event that suggestively revives the nation's violent past and that has curiously eluded critics of the novel, Richard Kenton violently lashes his sister's suitor with a cowhide obtained from a member of his father's regiment. The Kentons collectively attempt to bury this act as it stands in direct opposition to their belief of themselves as committed to non-violence and to their belief of Tuskingum, Ohio as a place of "the highest civilization," where "life is simplest and purest and kindest."

This paper argues that *The Kentons*, rather than being a nostalgic departure from Howells's socially conscious fiction, takes as its central problem a family's difficulties in reconciling their beliefs about themselves with their involvement in the most violent episode of the nation's history and with their collective responsibility for the infliction of violence upon another individual. Disentangling Howells from Judge Kenton provokes us to question Colonel Kenton's belief that Ohio's record in the Civil War stands as "the high-water mark of the greatest achievement in the greatest war of the greatest people under the sun." The novel asks us to understand antebellum Ohio as Howells's letters and memoirs do, as an ideologically, politically, and sectionally divided state whose celebrated record in the Civil War is the product of a caesura of memory. The novel, which ends in the pragmatic failure of the Kentons to reevaluate their beliefs about themselves when faced with evidence of their own complicity in violence, critiques a refusal of the nation to reevaluate its understanding of itself in light of both past and contemporary histories of violence.

"Smiling Aspects: Howells and the Domestication of Realism," Bruce Plourde, Rowan University

In his reviews of the literature of his day, William Dean Howells advocated a new form of art which would reflect the vitality and singularity of American culture. The debt to European artists would be nullified, and the obligation to dead traditions severed, so that a fresh approach could be nurtured. "The time is coming, I hope, when each new author, each new artist, will be considered, not in his proportion to any other author or artist, but in his relation to the human nature." Howells sanctioned realism as a conduit of that nature, and as the antidote to the stagnant state of the arts in late nineteenth-century America.

Accordingly, Howells chose works of fiction, poetry and drama to review for the most widely read journals of his day—*The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *The Century*—in order to advance his literary agenda. While critics claim that his review of Henry James initiated a "realism war," his many other reviews of such writers as Stephen Crane, Abraham Cahan, and Paul Laurence Dunbar were equally as prejudiced for realism, and against that "contemptible" kind of literature which remained "something apart from life," romanticized, dramatic, unnatural. Selecting those artists who shared his vision, he lent them the power of his pulpit with his favorable reviews, and created both audiences and literary fortunes.

But the realism that Howells championed was not an unblinking examination of real life. Rather, Howells wanted American realism to limit itself within a certain range of human experience. Though he claimed that he solicited a literature which could portray all

Panel 1: Thursday, May 22, 2008

**William Dean Howells and
the Domestic, Part 1**

**Chair: Rob Davidson,
California State University, Chico**

the grittiness of life, he also insisted that it not transgress the boundaries of common decency. “Decency,” for Howells, covered a host of criteria which would make common sense to most of his middle-class readership, including “certain facts of life which are not usually talked of before young people, and especially young ladies.” That host of criteria also included the common assumptions of the day regarding ideas of race, the performance of roles within communities, and the values of middle-class America.

When he reviewed Abraham Cahan’s *Yekl*, he qualified his assessment for his audience, making of him an example of the “Hebraic race” who is sufficiently naturalized to see life through “American eyes.” Stephen Crane, in the same article, becomes a man whom Howells endorses reluctantly because of “much that is dreadful” in *Maggie*. His review of Paul Laurence Dunbar established the poet’s reputation, but it also cast him into a mold which Dunbar would grow to resent. The voice of the literary Everyman focused more on Dunbar’s hair texture, skin color, and lip size, claiming that his representation of “these people” was valued as much for the physical as the literary. In his maneuvers in shaping the tastes of the American reading public, Howells gained the trust of the middle-class reading public by writing in its idiom and expressing its deepest convictions. Both a progressive thinker and a man tied to his moment, he interpreted a new and invigorating art for mass consumption, while also domesticating it for that mass audience which had limits to what innovations it could tolerate.

“Consumption and Cannibalism in the Altrurian Romances of William Dean Howells,” Lance Rubin, Arapahoe Community College

Throughout William Dean Howells’s Altrurian Romances—*A Traveler From Altruria* (1893), *Letters From an Altrurian Traveler* (1893-94), and *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907)—Aristedes Homos, the traveler from the mythical Altruria, expresses shock and sadness at what he sees as the barbaric state of American culture at the turn of the twentieth century, noting consistently the striking difference between countries “where people live *upon* each other as the Americans do, instead of *for* each other as the Altrurians do” (267). But what consistently fascinates the Altrurian about Americans of the ruling classes are their eating practices. As Homos tells his Altrurian correspondent in the opening of *Through the Eye of the Needle*, he is shocked not only “how the Americans live in the spirit, illogically, blindly, and blunderingly, but how they live in the body” (277). Pointing out the incongruity in the American “devotion to the spirit of Christianity amid the practices which seem to deny it,” Howells’s Homos critiques the nation’s domestic policies by exploring its seemingly mundane domestic practices: eating and drinking.

By locating economic, class, and political structures within eating habits, Howells, through his Altrurian mouthpiece, critiques the plutocratic elite and their belief in their supremacy at the top of the food chain. The descriptions of the indulgent meals which the upper class regularly partake becomes symbolic of their consumption in a more general sense and, from the Altrurian perspective, their parasitical feeding off of the lower classes. Pointing out the gluttonous behavior and the thoughtless wastefulness at the dinner tables and restaurants of the ruling class in America, Howells makes it clear that their “conspicuous consumption” (to borrow from Veblen) is inseparable from their cannibalistic governance and political policies; their frequent insistence that the dog-eat-dog, life-as-battle worldview is fundamental human nature belies the economic system that transforms people into cannibals. Howells’s plutocrats thus illustrate Priscilla Walton’s claim that “the cannibal, as the devourer of human beings” is often “projected onto other discourses, be it a discourse of disease, eating habits, consumer practices, or everyday activities (such as shopping)” (4). Throughout these texts, food and dining practices are linked to power and class politics; the flow of food that nourishes the American upper classes consumed the resources and energies of the poor. Revealing how Americans believed they were inherently superior and civilized, Homos, coming from a socialist utopia, likens their social and economic system to a bloodless form of cannibalism.

Howells’s trope of the cannibal is motivated by his critique of Gilded Age capitalism and the social Darwinism that characterized American economics at the turn of the century. We are what we eat—not just literally, but figuratively as well, and Howells establishes the conflict between carnivorous diet of Americans, delivered, prepared, and served by servants and workers whom the consumers would never think of sharing the table, with the vegetarian Altrurians for whom cooking and service does not place them on a lower social hierarchy. That is, he uses food as a metaphor for illustrating turn-of-the-century conflicts and attitudes between the social classes. In an economic sense, the eaters are socially empowered capitalists; those required by economic necessity to surrender their bodily autonomy are the consumed. In the increasingly industrial world, the strongest not only survive, but also maintain the integrity of their bodies. Howells’s Altrurian voices his astonishment at the callousness with which the poor and the workers are reduced to “hands”—as dissected factors of production—by those who “devour” their labor, as well as an urban environment portrayed as a cannibalistic feast of capitalist consumption. Through his socialist/Altrurian worldview, Homos analyzes turn-of-the-century America and sees its eventual destruction. Rather than imagining themselves as part of a single body through which goods circulate to the benefit of all its members, as in Altruria, American capitalists support a model of cannibalism that sets the various members of the body politic against

one another, undercutting the nation's ideals, identity and promises. In other words, through its representations of eating and dining, Howells suggests that America is devouring itself.

This relatively ignored phase of Howells's long career is rich with textualities that deserve taken seriously one hundred years later. As a 2006 USDA report indicated, 38 million Americans live in food-insecure households, a symptom of what Loretta Schwartz-Nobel calls in *Growing Up Empty* the "hidden epidemic [of hunger] in America" (5). Howells's stories of the visiting Altrurian locate many of twenty-first century America's political tensions at the dinner table, an intimate space that is not freed of public discourses and agendas. What is on American plates, how that food got there, and how it is consumed proves, for the Altrurian, a fascinating archive of cultural practices. Howells has followed us to our own contemporary hungers, informing Americans of how what seems temporary, unimportant, or transient—the dinner table or restaurant—may prove to be profound spaces from which to witness of the complexity that surrounds satisfaction on an individual and societal level.

Panel 2: Friday, May 23, 2008

**William Dean Howells and
the Domestic, Part 2**

Chair: Rob Davidson,
California State University, Chico

**"Something Strange and Foreign': Integrating the Domestic Body in
William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham*,"
Rebecca Bechtold, University of Illinois**

As current scholarship suggests, America's investment in the imperialist project during the late nineteenth century emphasized the importance of the domestic sphere.

For example, in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002), Amy Kaplan asserts that America's foreign policy "domesticated" the nation in order to combat American's fear of foreign integration. Significantly, this alignment of the nation with the domestic became intricately bound to the body. While traditionally feminized, the domestic, now in its national framework, first became disembodied only then to become re-embodied in the masculine figure, forming a domesticated national manhood. In *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, William Dean Howells discloses the difficulty of integrating the foreign other into the domestic sphere. While focused around social and cultural distinctions that frame nineteenth-century American discourse, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* also enters into an imperialist conversation through its configuration of the domesticated, yet foreign, body.

In this paper, I argue that *The Rise of Silas Lapham* stages its interest in social and cultural integration around the novel's symbolic domestic center, the feminine body. At the novel's start, these bodies are imagined as having transparent, adaptable boundaries. Largely imagined in economic terms, the novel depicts this feminine transparency as particularly profitable. Indeed, Lapham's wife, Persis, becomes a brand name for his paint: mass produced and marketable. However, in the figures of Irene and Penelope Lapham, Howells problematizes this desire for easy integration. Disrupting the vision of an all-inclusive domestic sphere, the novel instead projects the domestic outward, into the foreign: Irene travels west while Penelope moves to Mexico. Crucial to this transplantation of the feminine domestic is the novel's portrayal of the body. Turning toward Pierre Bourdieu's work on social distinction and the body, I suggest that the novel's portrayal of bodily failure demonstrates the habitus's regulation of bodily boundaries that refuses a transparency narratively homologous to the novel's vision of social and cultural integration. In fact, I argue that the novel's reassertion of bodily boundaries demonstrates the ultimate transformation and rejection of the inclusive feminine domestic as well as the rejection of the possibility for social and cultural integration.

While this narration of the feminine body suggests a critique of American foreign policy, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*'s interest in the domestic body also taps into contemporaneous discussions about the body and its relation to artistic creation. Focusing on the narrative's interest in the body, I contend that the novel also contains an inherent critique of the realist project: Howells's description of a non-transparent body ultimately interrupts the realist project's attempts at pure mimesis, challenging the vision of the "transparent" realist author. This critique extends to the realist novel itself as that which problematically should become a living "body."

"Well, we must stand it, anyway': Exploring the Reappropriated Images of American Women in Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham*," Elizabeth Hermans, Purdue University

A careful observance of contemporary American culture reveals that essentialized images of women are as much a part of American society as they ever have been. Numerous feminist movements have attempted to shatter the traditional images of women as submissive keepers of the home. Yet instead of moving beyond stereotypes, these movements have merely created different ones. It is this sort of essentialism that Judith Butler argues against in her landmark work *Gender Trouble*, saying that "the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections

in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed” (Butler 19). Here Butler points out that many early feminists, especially the French feminists, relied on the idea of inherent womanhood, as if it were a natural state that could be identified and defined. The idea that there exists an identifiable or true type of womanhood is and has been a hotly contested point in feminist theory and gender studies for several decades.

But how did these stereotypical images of women become so ingrained within American culture? Although there are doubtless many factors, the purpose of this essay will be to examine one of ways through which essentialized images of woman were sold to the American public: the novel. I will look at William Dean Howells’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham* as a representative novel of the nineteenth-century, paying close attention to its positing of two type of women: the true woman and the New Woman. Howells is an example of an American author who attempted to go beyond limiting his portrayals of women to either angels or whores but he, too, ended up creating types. And though he provided more nuanced depictions of women than many of his contemporaries, as Martha Banta observes, more nuanced images of women do not necessarily mean that those images have escaped from the realm of stereotype. I will look in particular at Persis Lapham as a character who exemplifies the qualities of the true women, and at Pen Lapham as a symbolic shift from the true woman to the New Woman.

Ultimately I find that even though Pen is clearly put forth as a “new” sort of woman, she is still essentialized, and not allowed the freedom to define herself outside of the guidelines of the available types of American woman. Howells’s novel, perhaps inadvertently, implies that Pen’s type—while newer—is just as limiting as her mother’s. I will explore the way these two types are used in order to demonstrate how one type of women has historically been reified by another. My goal is to prove that newly developed categories of women are just that—new categories. Most importantly, the idea of one hegemony replacing an older hegemony is a construct that has broader applications than Howells’s novel alone. Ultimately, the novel is a microcosm of the essentializing and reification of female types that continues to manifest itself in American culture.

“William Dean Howells’s Narrative Instruction for Reading the Artificial Career Woman and the Authentic Domestic Woman,” Margaret Jay Jessee, University of Arizona

Because William Dean Howells saw the domestic as a space for the ethical and moral superiority of women, Howells’s career women characters play the role of the professional only until they can enter into a more authentic position in the home. Howells often associated the romance novel with the stage, with performing. As a performance, the romance sought to perpetuate artificiality and to create unrealistic situations, characters, and outcomes all for the sake of entertainment. Howells’s fiction often links women characters with the romance by displaying their actions as role-playing, their work as a performance. In his novels with career women as main characters, Howells’s narrative stance requires readers to assess women’s roles both in and outside of the home. The reader is positioned to see these career women as artificial and thus romantic. By attempting to create a dynamic relationship between the reader and the text, Howells presents his career women as actresses and then attempts to train the reader to assess their artifice as unrealistic and artificial. Then, by ending his career women novels with marriages, he positions the reader to read the domestic role as authentic and responsible and the career merely a performance.

Several of Howells’s novels contain professional actresses, but even in works that deal with women entering other types of careers, Howells still represents professional women as performing their careers as an actress would a role. Howells’s career women enter their professions for romantic reasons, and Howells uses their romantic idealism as the reason for their ultimate lack of success in their careers. Grace Breen in *Dr. Breen’s Practice* becomes a physician as a self-sacrificial punishment for a failed romance. The narrator reminds us to not to focus on her “fitness” for her career as much as her irrational motivation for playing the role of a doctor. Charmian’s desire to be play the role of a bohemian painter is all artifice as she lacks any authentic talent in *The Coast of Bohemia*, a novel about seeing the romantic through the point of view of the real. The female professor in *Miss Bellard’s Inspiration* attempts acting on the stage at first, but decides to pursue performing lectures when she grows weary of the “perpetual pretence” of acting, yet Howells’s narrator clearly conflates the two.

This paper will argue that Howells’s narrative stance attempts to train the reader to see the artifice of career women who attempt their professional success based on an idealized, romantic notion of progress. The Howellsian notion of romance as performance for profit is identified and corrected in these novels as the women who enter careers for romantic reasons all fail to become the notion of the profession they attempt to perform. By inscribing his career women with romantic artifice, Howells’s novels attempt to retrain the reader of the romance to be able to accurately read the “real” role for women, which he most often associates with the domestic.

**THE WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS SOCIETY
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which most computers with Adobe Acrobat Reader
installed can read.**

**Calls for Papers:
Howells Panels at ALA 2009**

1. Howells and His Contemporaries:

The William Dean Howells Society invites paper proposals addressing the topic of Howells and his contemporaries for the 2009 ALA Convention in Boston (21–24 May, 2009). Paper topics are welcome on any aspect of Howells’s career and his relation to contemporary writers, artists, critics, public figures, and so forth. While the connections may be well-known (Twain, James), essays on lesser-known connections are especially welcome.

2. Howells: Open Session

The William Dean Howells Society invites paper proposals addressing any aspect of Howells and his work for the 2009 ALA Convention in Boston (21–24 May, 2009).

For either panel, please send a 500-word abstract and a brief c.v. (separate MS Word attachments) by January 5, 2009, to Rob Davidson: rgdavidson@csuchico.edu. Or post to:

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

Application for Membership or Renewal: Dues Notice for 2009

The dues for 2009 will remain \$10, which we all know is a bargain.

At \$10 annually, our membership dues remain among the lowest of all single-figure societies in the American Literature Association, and we shall attempt to keep them that way. To do this, however, requires that they be paid in a timely manner. The money recieved helps cover the cost of printing and distributing *The Howellsian* and such other documents as publicity brochures and announcements; it also funds the annual prize offered for the best paper on Howells presented at the ALA conference, established in 2008; also, the committee has been discussing methods of using accrued dues to strengthen the Society and expand its membership by promoting the reading and study of Howells’s work regionally as well as at the ALA meetings.

Please help make your Society a stronger, larger, more effective one by sending your check for \$10 promptly to our treasurer, Dr. Elsa Nettles, at 211 Indian Spring Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185. Thank You.

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

New Membership Renewal

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Please make your check out to the *William Dean Howells Society*, and send it to:

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