

The William Dean Howells Society welcomes submissions for two panels at the 29th Annual American Literature Association Conference to be held in San Francisco, May 24-27, 2018.

Panel 1: William Dean Howells and Democracy

Historically, the question of Howells's politics has been a matter of dispute. For some—most notably H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis—Howells evinced a contemptibly timid conservatism that was an impediment to political progress. Whereas for others, like Timothy Parrish, Howells stands as the Gilded Age's "most politically radical writer." What is incontestable, however, is that politics remained a constant concern for Howells, from his early days as a legislative correspondent, to his time as consul, and finally as the nation's preeminent critic and novelist. In his polemical criticism, for example, he framed Realist aesthetics as a means to actualizing America's democratic ideals. In his column of July, 1887 he writes, "Democracy in literature is the reverse of [aristocratic aesthetics]. It wishes to know and to tell the truth...it does not care to paint the marvellous and impossible for the vulgar many, or to sentimentalize and falsify the actual for the vulgar few. Men are more like than unlike one another: let us make them know one another better, that they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity." Late in his career, political matters took center stage for Howells. Alone among his peers, he famously risked his reputation and position by defending those accused in the Haymarket Affair. However, though he'd become an avowed socialist and outspoken opponent of economic inequality who sided with workers in labor disputes, Howells was critical of strikes and direct action. In *The World of Chance* (1893) he writes, "the right way to universal prosperity and peace is the political way...we must have the true America in the true American way, by reasons, by votes, by laws, and not otherwise." Throughout his career, Howells's political sensibilities evolved, but his preoccupation with democracy was unwavering. For this panel, we invite proposals for presentations that examine the subject of democracy in Howells's work.

Potential topics could include but are not limited to:

- Howells on the American presidency
- Howells on protectionism vs. cosmopolitanism and globalization
- Howells on the American nation, nationhood, citizenship
- Howells on American exceptionalism
- Howells's critique of the Spanish-American War
- Howells on foreign and / or domestic policy
- Howells on social organization, utopianism, class struggle, direct action, etc.
- Howells's politicized aesthetics
- Howells on American pluralism and diversity
- Howells's relation to political figures like Henry Adams, Henry George, John Hay, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., among others

Panel 2: Open Topic

For this session, we invite proposals for presentations concerned with any aspect of Howells's life and work.

Please submit 300-500 word abstracts to Andrew Ball (ajball79@icloud.com) by January 8. The subject of the email should be "Howells ALA 2018" and the proposal should include any A/V needs you will require.