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An Imperative Duty: Howells and White Male Anxiety

SARAH B. DAUGHERTY

An Imperative Duty is a puzzling novel. It seems to adhere to a familiar paradigm of Howellsian realism: the flexible man marries the anxious woman, thus saving her from social prejudice and from her own hysteria.¹ “As tragedy the whole affair had fallen to ruin,” comments the narrator when Dr. Olney reconciles Rhoda to her partially black ancestry. “It must be treated in no lurid twilight gloom, but in plain, simple, matter-of-fact noonday.”² Yet readers have discerned thematic confusion, not clarity. One perceptive reviewer complained of being “exhausted in the effort to keep up with the author’s intensely self-conscious key”; and another remarked, with some justice, that Howells had “bitten off more than he [could] easily masticate.... His knowledge of the [race] question has been derived from books, newspapers and magazines: of actual experience with it he has had none, or he would not write of it as he does.”³ Predictably, the novel has since provoked controversy among critics, both black and white, as to whether it undermines racial stereotypes or covertly reinforces them.⁴

The most insightful of the debaters is Henry B. Wonham, who has argued persuasively, in two recent essays, that *An Imperative Duty* deals not with black subjectivity but with the fears of whites as they entertain images of blackness.⁵ I would add, however, that for Howells race was more than “a metaphor for psychology,” and blackness more than “an enabling background against which to test images of consciousness and selfhood” beyond the usual scope of realistic representation.⁶ Indeed, racial difference was an all too literal threat to a writer who could not assume the self-confident political stance of his abolitionist predecessors. Seeking release from his own sense of duty, Howells experimented with the idea that providence, in its unfolding, would secure racial harmony, civilizing blacks while saving

whites from the scourge he called “puritanism.” But the experiment failed, because the very existence of blacks undermined his faith in a benevolent natural order. The result is a novel in which human comedy is shadowed by cosmic tragedy, the narrator’s hopes notwithstanding.

Howells’ admirers have sometimes overestimated his radical sympathies. In *Young Howells and John Brown*, Edwin H. Cady has argued for the strong influence of the author’s father, an anti-slavery activist⁷; but the son’s autobiographies record the distance between himself and his elders. During the Howellses’ years in Hamilton, writes the novelist in *A Boy’s Town*, he and his friends “knew vaguely that his family helped runaway slaves”; yet between the youths and their black neighbors — including a “Dumb Negro” whom they held “in almost superstitious regard” — there existed “an impassable gulf.”⁸ And during his adolescence in Jefferson, Howells resisted political involvement when (despite the tutelage of the abolitionist senator Benjamin Wade) he chose a literary career instead of a legal one. Cady himself cites Howells’ *My Literary Passions*:

I was living in a time of high political tumult, and I certainly cared very much for the question of slavery which was then filling the minds of men; I felt deeply the shame and wrong of our Fugitive Slave Law; I was stirred by the news from Kansas ... ; but I cannot pretend that any of these things were more than ripples on the surface of my intense and profound interest in literature.⁹

In *Years of My Youth*, which deals with his subsequent experience as a journalist in Columbus, Howells states the case even more emphatically:

I ... was always trying to make my writing literature, and after fifty-odd years it may perhaps be safely owned that I had mainly a literary interest in the political aspects and events which I treated. I felt the ethical quality of the slavery question, and I had genuine convictions about it; but for practical politics I did not care.... [T]hrough my whole youth the din of meetings, of rallies, of conventions had been in my ears; but I was never at a meeting, a rally, or a convention; I have never yet heard a political speech to the end. For a future novelist, a realist, that was a pity, I think, but so it was.¹⁰

Even the poems cited by Cady should not be misread as evidence of Howells’ commitment to radical — or racial — activism. His youthful ode to John Brown (1859), reprinted in *Echoes of Harper’s Ferry*, was anomalous rather than typical. Significantly, he refused to join Emerson, Thoreau, and Whittier in supplying an autograph for the anthology. “I do not seek notoriety in any but a purely literary way,” he explained to his family. “What I said

of Brown came from my heart; and was never intended as a literary achievement."¹¹ In later years, the pacifist Howells regretted even his limited association with the John Brown "cult." Brown, he conceded, was a martyr who died a sublime death, but he was also a murderer and a "Puritan" fanatic in the tradition of Oliver Cromwell.¹² Howells' real political hero was Abraham Lincoln, whom he praised for his tolerance and whose cautious approach to emancipation won his approval. "Perhaps," Howells speculated in a review of an 1872 biography, "... [Lincoln] may even intimate that Divine Providence still concerns itself with human affairs, and selects its instruments by tests which the sciences do not know."¹³

But as an author, Howells paid a price for his passivity and detachment. Such protagonists as Olney, like their creator, find it difficult to pursue meaningful careers in a world dominated by more active men. Another poem, "The Pilot's Story" (1860), indirectly foreshadows Howells' method of plotting his later novels. In this narrative, modeled on Longfellow's "Evangeline" and other popular hexameter pieces, a mulatto woman commits suicide after her master, the father of her child, gambles her away in a game of *monte*.¹⁴ When Howells entered his realist phase, he could easily convert domestic tragedy to domestic comedy, replacing rogues with respectable suitors. Inevitably, however, he became aware that the marriage plot was an inadequate vehicle for larger, more masculine themes. Just as his early reading gave him "no standing among the boys," he wrote in *My Literary Passions*, he later found "that literature gives one no more certain station in the world of men's activities, either idle or useful."¹⁵

The next stage of Howells' career heightened his insecurity while cementing his hostility to Puritan self-righteousness. During his first visit to New England in 1860, he was received so coldly by the authors he admired that the title of his memoirs, *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, is largely ironic. Especially crucial was the snobbishness of those most involved in the abolitionist movement. Thoreau remained in a reverie, seating his young visitor in "a chair not quite so far off as Ohio, though still across the whole room," and speaking abstractly of "a John Brown ideal." Remarkably, Howells, "It was not merely a defeat of my hopes, it was a rout." Emerson, who "had lately stooped from his ethereal heights to take part in the battle of humanity," had obviously failed to read "The Pilot's Story" yet advised Howells condescendingly to devote "a pleasant hour" to poetry. ("A pleasant hour to poetry! I was meaning to give all time and all eternity to poetry....") Whittier lacked interest in topics other than abolition and kept strangers at a distance: "the Quaker calm was bound by the frosty Puritanic air." Thereafter, Howells' concern for racial justice was partly eclipsed by his personal animus toward "the intense ethicism that pervaded the New England mind for two hundred years, and that still characterizes it."¹⁶ A further irony is that Howells, like the authors he criticized, lost interest in the problem of racism during the era of Reconstruction. In 1876, after

watching a dramatized version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he wrote home to his father, "One thing struck me: how, slavery being gone, the life had gone out of the tragedies it produced. The sorrows of people 2000 years ago, would have affected me more than those of people so lately slaves."¹⁷

In short, the subject of black Americans did not serve Howells' literary ambitions. It was too remote from his experience, and it had been appropriated as a political issue by the elders he hoped to supersede. Yet black culture did have its appeal, especially when he moved to Massachusetts and lived among the "Puritans" he distrusted. "Mrs. Johnson" (1868), the first of the suburban sketches he wrote for the *Atlantic*, is a lyrical paean to the family's cook, and indeed to black women in general.¹⁸ The "young ladies of this race" he describes as "the black pansies and marigolds and dark-blooded dahlias among womankind" (100), while the mature Mrs. Johnson personified "something warmer ... than in ourselves, and something wilder, and we chose to think it the tropic and the untracked forest" (104). Here is another theme Howells would develop in *An Imperative Duty*: the erotic attractiveness of women free from moral strenuousness and sexual repression.

Simultaneously, however, his acquaintance with Mrs. Johnson provoked his own scrupulous Puritanism. Her son Hippolyto or "Hippy," for whose sake she eventually left her employers, is presented in the sketch as the living embodiment of hypochondria: "a heavy and loutish youth, ... looking forward to the future with a vacant and listless eye"; "a monstrous eidolon, balanced upon every window-sill" (105). And in Howells, guilt and fear triggered metaphysical doubt.¹⁹ According to the sketch, Mrs. Johnson herself believed in black racial superiority, viewing whites with pity as descendants of lepers: "nothing but leprosy bleached you out" (103). But to Howells, such a preposterous theory signaled cosmic injustice:

It afforded a glimpse of the pain which all her people must endure, however proudly they hide it or lightheartedly forget it, from the despite and contumely to which they are guiltlessly born; and when I thought how irreparable was this disgrace and calamity of a black skin, and how irreparable it must be for ages yet, in this world where every other shame and all manner of wilful guilt and wickedness may hope for covert and pardon, I had little heart to laugh. (103)

In this passage we witness the pessimism that would disrupt the comic plot of *An Imperative Duty*. An undercurrent of doubt also runs through *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*: despite his critique of the New England mentality, Howells failed to escape his own concern about the "moral government of the universe."²⁰

He found a measure of reassurance in the doctrines of John Fiske, a

Cambridge neighbor who became a lifelong friend. Fiske's first major book, *Myths and Myth-Makers* (1872), was dedicated to him — an appropriate tribute, since Howells had commissioned the original articles for the *Atlantic* and had asked Fiske to contribute regularly to the journal.²¹ Among Fiske's later efforts was a "series on the development of races" (1881–82) to which Howells alluded in his 1901 obituary.²² These scholarly articles attempt to explain the emergence of the Aryans as "a dominant race, which long since overran Europe and is now spreading over the Atlantic." Fiske concluded optimistically that this dominance resulted primarily from peaceful inter-marriage and natural selection: "We cannot but suppose that ... man was slowly but surely *acquiring* that intellectual life which was at last to bloom forth in history, and which has made him 'the crown and glory of the universe.'"²³ Howells may not have taken these theories at face value; but given his own pacifist sympathies, he was probably drawn to Fiske's prediction that Anglo-American hegemony would end "the wretched business of warfare ... all over the globe." Significantly, Fiske also advanced the Lincoln-esque view of the Civil War shared by many Northern liberals: the growth of federalism, he contended, was even more crucial to human progress than "the emancipation of the Negro."²⁴

During the 1880s, Fiske turned from history to metaphysics as he lectured at the Concord School of Philosophy. *The Destiny of Man Viewed in the Light of His Origin* (1884) argues for the positive implications of Darwinian theory, which shows, he said, that "the creation and perfecting" of the human race is the primary goal of "Nature's work." Fiske added that imaginative literature had a unique role in promoting sympathy among disparate peoples.²⁵ A second volume, *The Idea of God as Affected by Modern Knowledge* (1885), makes a bold prediction which Howells quoted in his Editor's Study review of Fiske's works (1886): "a stage of civilization will be reached in which human sympathy shall be all in all, and the spirit of Christ shall reign supreme throughout the length and breadth of the earth."²⁶ Though Howells admitted that Fiske had proved "nothing very conclusive," he praised him for offering comfort and encouragement to anyone whose "heart is not altogether at rest in orphanage and nonentity."²⁷ In particular, Howells may have been grateful to Fiske for providing an alternative to the doctrines of Tolstoy, whose treatise *My Religion* was reviewed in the same column. Despite his admiration of *Anna Karenina*, Howells could accept neither Tolstoy's activism nor his literal reading of the New Testament.²⁸ Fiske's philosophy, in contrast, was undemanding — and indeed friendly toward those who embraced literature rather than politics.

Howells later drew on Fiske's ideas as he tried to recast the themes of sentimental fiction in a more progressive mode. Two novels he reviewed in 1887, Margret [sic] Holmes' *The Chamber Over the Gate* and the anonymously written *Towards the Gulf*, develop the motif of the tragic mulatto

woman: especially in the latter, miscegenation produces calamity. Although Howells acknowledged the “immensely pathetic” effect of such narratives,²⁹ he wrote *An Imperative Duty* as a comedy of reconciliation. Ultimately, however, he was defeated by his own agnosticism, which marked his divergence from Fiske no less than from Tolstoy.³⁰ As he hinted wryly in his Editor’s Study review, Fiske, despite his scientific pretensions, could hardly escape from old-fashioned Biblical paradigms, being “unable to language his thoughts of infinity at supreme moments except in the words of the old Book of those Semitic tribes so remote from Darwin.”³¹ And so Howells’ Fiskean experiment was doomed by his disbelief in the divinity he sometimes evoked.

An Imperative Duty begins on a promising note. In the opening chapters, as Wonham has observed, blackness appears to be a counterforce to white “over-civilization.”³² Surveying the Boston crowd, Olney comments that blacks “seem to be the only people left who have any heart for life here” (19) and the only ones whose “sweetness and good-will” may fulfill the promise of Christianity (21). The “young colored girls,” in particular, display a sensuous beauty that makes Olney homesick for Italy (8)—no doubt a reaction inspired by Howells’ return to New England following his consular service in Venice (1861–65).

Equally crucial is the professional fulfillment Olney seeks from his involvement with Rhoda. His vocation as “a specialist in nervous diseases” parallels that of the realistic novelist; but like the youthful Howells, he is rejected by the New England culture he wants to cure. “[T]he sight of all those handsome houses on the Back Bay ... struck a chill to his spirit; they seemed to repel his intended ministrations with their barricaded doorways and their close-shuttered windows” (10). Rhoda, however, presents a potential case. Despite her exotic beauty and her “personal gayety” (14), she is endangered by her aunt, Mrs. Meredith, who personifies “morbid sympathy with the duty-ridden creatures” of sentimental fiction (24). (Remarks Rhoda, “I believe I’m turning out quite a slave of duty. I must have ‘caught it’ from you, Aunt Caroline” [47].) When Mrs. Meredith expresses her fear of atavism, Dr. Olney offers Fiskean reassurance: “... sooner or later our race must absorb the colored race; and I believe that it will obliterate not only its color, but its qualities. The tame man, the civilized man, is stronger than the wild man” (27). And when she tells him the secret of Rhoda’s birth, he dismisses the aunt’s “hypocondriacal anxieties” (31). Significantly, Olney’s foil and rival is Bloomington, a blond, conventional clergyman whose good intentions lack the weight of scientific authority. (Noted Howells in *Years of My Youth*, “the maturer men” of his early acquaintance “were oftener doctors of medicine than doctors of divinity.”³³)

But Olney is a limited character, infected with the doubts that plagued Howells himself. His revulsion against the Irish — a prejudice shared by the author³⁴ — signals his persistent concern over atavism, notwithstanding his

belief in racial progress. Even more disturbing is his status as an “agnostic” unable to respond when Mrs. Meredith wonders whether the world is governed by “moral law” (20, 16). At a critical juncture, she asks him whether Rhoda should be informed of her ancestry, since Bloomington has become her suitor. Olney answers, “I don’t know” (34)— and gains a new respect for the woman he first despised as “a morbid sentimentalist” (36).

Howells then uses his narrator to suggest that providence may, after all, be ordering human affairs. Originally he had planned to write the novel as a first-person narrative by Olney³⁵; but at the initial moment of crisis, we hear the voice of a more reliable commentator:

It would be crueler to leave [Rhoda] unarmed against the truth until the moment when her heart was set upon a love, and then strike her down with it. Mrs. Meredith now saw this; she saw that the doubt in which she was resting was the very moment of action for her; and that the occasion was divinely appointed for dealing more mercifully with the child than any other that could have offered. (48)

Likewise, Rhoda’s instant “divination” of the truth of her aunt’s account seems almost supernatural:

The materials of knowledge accumulate from innumerable unremembered sources. All at once, some vital interest precipitates the latent electricity of the cloudy mass in a flash that illumines the world with a shadowless brilliancy and shows everything in its very form and meaning. (54)

Wonham has noted the peculiarity of this narrative technique, especially when Howells refuses to portray “mental processes” whose “swiftness” cannot be captured in words (54). Such diffidence, I believe, arose from metaphysical uncertainty more than from the psychological timidity that Wonham regards as Howells’ greatest weakness.³⁶ The novel offers powerful representations of characters confused by their own desires and fears but becomes more tentative in suggesting the place of these motives in a benevolent design.

Indeed, Howells perversely constructs a plot that undermines its Fiskean premises. When Rhoda demands the truth from Mrs. Meredith, the girl’s “sudden fierceness” seems — to the aunt and perhaps to readers — like an “outbreak of ... ancestral savagery” (49). And despite the narrator’s reassurance, Rhoda’s hysterical reaction prompts the aunt to lie (she denies that Olney also knows the story) and then to take an overdose of the sleeping medicine that the doctor prescribed for her. Her subsequent death confirms her fears that neither “Providence” nor Olney can assume her

burden (14). Comments the narrator, “So men die who mean to take their lives; but it is not certain that death even is an escape from ourselves” (56). Irrational guilt, at first a mere figment of the feminized Puritan imagination, now appears to be the fate of humanity.

Having reduced the doctor to an impotent spectator, the novel focuses on Rhoda. As she wanders toward the black neighborhoods of Boston, the language of the narrative hints that there might be a natural resolution to the conflicts tormenting her: “out of the turmoil of horror, which she whirled round and round in, some purpose that seemed at first exterior to herself began to evolve” (57). But — like Howells in “Mrs. Johnson” — she is repelled by the appearance of the people she encounters:

She never knew before how hideous they were, with their flat wide-nostriled noses, their out-rolled thick lips, their mobile, bulging eyes set near together, their retreating chins and foreheads, and their smooth, shining skin: they seemed burlesques of humanity, worse than apes, because they were more like. (58)

Once more, racist fear shatters liberal ideology.

The next episode of the novel was inspired by Howells’ personal quest for religious consolation. In 1889, following the death of his daughter Winifred, he had visited “the colored Methodist Church” of Boston “in a bath of primitive Christianity.... On the whole,” he added in a letter to his father, “I felt softened and humbled among those lowly and kindly people.”³⁷ Yet despite its evasions, *An Imperative Duty* exposes the powerlessness of religion to solve human problems. When Rhoda, guided by a mulatto woman, attends a meeting at a black church, she is again repelled by the worshippers with whom she wants to identify herself: “these poor people, whom their Creator has made so hideous by the standards of all his other creatures, roused a cruel loathing in her ...” (64). The “goblin” face of the black preacher appears to her as “only a wavering blur” (63) — an image opposed to the “shadowless brilliancy” of realism.³⁸ And his words seem ironic not just to Rhoda but to the narrator as well:

“... if our white brethren could only understand — and they’re gettin’ to understand it — that if they would help us a little more, they needn’t hate us so much, what a great thing,” the lecturer lamely concluded — “what a great thing it would be all round!” (65)³⁹

After hearing the sermon on love, Rhoda admits that she nonetheless hates her aunt — only to discover the woman’s lifeless body (66). Another biographical context is likely here: Howells’ lingering guilt over the death of his mother, which was deepened (says John Crowley) by “his sense of having been liberated.”⁴⁰

Religion and science having failed, Olney is deployed to save the comedy. His patient courtship of Rhoda signifies her rescue from “dutiolatry” (89), as he persuades her to forgive her aunt and to forego her sentimental plan to live among the blacks, whom she still finds “hideous” (97). But the novel reveals the flimsiness of its own rationalizations. Olney concludes that economic prejudice — “the despite in which hard work is held all the world over” — is more powerful than racial bigotry (101); yet this conclusion is belied by his wife’s reactions. And his assurance that “The way to elevate [blacks] is to elevate *us*” (96) draws attention to the issues evaded by him and Rhoda when they move to Italy. Rhoda’s “hypochondria of the soul” is ascribed by the narrator to “the Puritanism of her father’s race” (101), but it seems the logical result of her constricted life in a society of gossipy expatriates. She does effect the sexual revitalization of Olney, in whom she awakens an indefinable passion. The narrator insists, however, that Olney’s love has no larger ethical consequences: “The mood was of his emotional nature alone; it sought and could have won no justification from his moral sense, which indeed it simply submerged and blotted out for the time” (90).

Although Howells had intended to write a longer novel,⁴¹ *An Imperative Duty* had to end when he failed to conceive more active roles for his characters. In self-defense, he presented “passivity” — like its antithesis, dutiolatry — as a typically feminine weakness. When Rhoda hesitates to accept Olney’s proposal, we are told that “to take any positive course must be a negation almost of [women’s] being; it must cost an effort unimaginable to a man” (92). Yet passivity is the flaw that characterizes Olney no less than Rhoda — and equally, Howells, his narrative persona, and the culture that shaped them.

The most astute of Howells’ critics was a black woman. In *A Voice from the South* (1892), Anna Julia Cooper distinguished him, approvingly, from the “preachers,” who caricatured blacks for the sake of a political argument. Nonetheless, she continued, *An Imperative Duty* betrayed a distance from his material incompatible with his professed realism, especially in the scene at the church:

It is just here that Mr. Howells fails — and fails because he gives only a half truth, and that a partisan half truth. One feels that he had no business to attempt a subject of which he knew so little, or for which he cared so little.⁴²

Indeed.

But for all their differences, Howells and Cooper shared the nineteenth-century view that ethical commitment required a firm religious foundation. The final chapter of Cooper’s book, “The Gain from A Belief,” contains a blistering indictment of doubters:

Agnosticism has nothing to impart.... As in an icicle the agnostic abides alone. The vital principle is taken out of all endeavor for improving himself or bettering his fellows. All hope in the grand possibilities of life are [sic] blasted. The inspiration of beginning now a growth which is to mature in endless development through eternity is removed from our efforts at self culture.⁴³

Such exhortations may help us understand why Howells portrayed characters who panic when they start to question the “moral government of the universe”—or even when they find a sermon less than instructive. For Howells as for many of his contemporaries, the loss of faith entailed the threat of a paralyzing nihilism.

Thus it took courage, after all, for him to create novels in which doubt was written so large. Consider, as a counterexample, Frances Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, also published in 1892. As Kenneth Warren has noted, this novel reverses the plot of *An Imperative Duty*.⁴⁴ The fair-skinned black heroine, upon discovering her ancestry, refuses the proposal of a white physician, marries a member of her race, and works for the betterment of her darker-skinned friends and relatives. Unfortunately, conflicts melt away too quickly in the powerful solvents of Christian faith and loyalty to the maternal ideal. (Iola, indeed, becomes angelic as she preaches the gospel: “Her soul seemed to be flashing through the rare loveliness of her face and etherealizing its beauty.”⁴⁵) In his critiques of sentimental romance, as in his skeptical response to Fiske, Howells offered a crucial insight: we cannot expect providence to do the work of human beings.

Despite the conventionality of his opinions on race and gender, Howells was sometimes the “dangerous thinker” he hoped to be.⁴⁶ We should ponder his example as we grope our own way toward ethical criticism.

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Notes

1. For a discussion of this paradigm and its emergence, see Daugherty, “The Ideology of Gender in Howells’ Early Novels,” *American Literary Realism*, 25 (Winter 1992), 2–17.

2. Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, in *The Shadow of a Dream and An Imperative Duty*, ed. Martha Banta et al. (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970), p. 94. Parenthetical citations are to this edition.

3. “Fiction,” *Literary World*, 5 December 1891, p. 470; “An Imperative Duty,” *Critic*, 16 January 1892, pp. 34–35. See also Banta’s summary of contemporary reviews in her introduction to *An Imperative Duty*, pp. ix–xi.

4. Defenses of the novel include George N. Bennett, *The Realism of William Dean Howells, 1889–1920* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 96–102, and Judith R. Berzon, *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto in American Fiction* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 109–15. Negative critiques include Kenneth Eble, *William Dean Howells*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Twayne, 1982), pp. 134–35, and Jacqueline Y. MacLendon, *The Politics of Color in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen* (Charlottesville and London: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 17–22. Elsa Nettels, in *Language, Race, and Social Class in Howells's America* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1988), sensibly mediates between these positions: “Although Howells does not caricature his black figures he creates no fully realized black characters to replace the types” (p. 90).
5. Henry B. Wonham, “Writing Realism, Policing Consciousness: Howells and the Black Body,” *American Literature*, 67 (December 1995), 701–24; and “Howells, DuBois, and the Effect of ‘Common Sense’: Race, Realism, and Nervousness in *An Imperative Duty* and *The Souls of Black Folk*,” in *Criticism and the Color Line: Desegregating American Literary Studies*, ed. Wonham (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 126–39.
6. Wonham, “Writing Realism,” pp. 710, 719.
7. Edwin H. Cady, *Young Howells & John Brown: Episodes in a Radical Education* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1985), p. 3 and passim.
8. Howells, *A Boy's Town* (New York and London: Harper, 1890), p. 250.
9. Howells, *My Literary Passions* (New York: Harper, 1895), pp. 121–22, 124–26. Cf. Cady, *Young Howells & John Brown*, pp. 25–26, 27–28.
10. Howells, *Years of My Youth*, in *Years of My Youth and Three Essays*, ed. David Nordloh (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 137–38.
11. Howells, *Selected Letters*, ed. George Arms et al. (Boston: Twayne, 1979), I, 55.
12. Howells, *Years of My Youth*, p. 162, Howells, “John Brown After Fifty Years,” *North American Review*, 193 (January 1911), 26–34.
13. Howells, *Selected Letters*, I, 117–18; “Recent Literature” [Rev. of W. H. Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*], *Atlantic*, 30 (Sept. 1872), 366. Cf. Howells' campaign biography *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, which portrays Lincoln as a moderate and consigns the future to Providence (in Howells and John L. Hayes, *Lives and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin* [Columbus: Follett, Foster, 1860], pp. 63, 75, 94). See also Howells' later appraisal in his “Editor's Easy Chair” [Rev. of Eliot Norton, *Lincoln, A Lover of Mankind*], *Harper's Monthly*, 124 (April 1912), 796–99.
14. Howells, *Years of My Youth*, p. 154. The poem, originally published in the *Atlantic*, is reprinted in Cady, *Young Howells & John Brown*, pp. 74–79.
15. Howells, *My Literary Passions*, p. 14.
16. Howells, *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, ed. David F. Hiatt and Edwin H. Cady (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 54–55, 56, 58, 116–17, 101. See also “American Letter, Puritanism in American Fiction,” *Literature*, 14 May 1898, pp. 563–64.
17. Howells, *Selected Letters*, II, 125.
18. Howells, “Mrs. Johnson,” *Atlantic*, 21 (Jan. 1868), 97–106. Rpt. *Suburban Sketches* (New York: Hurd and Houghton; Cambridge: Riverside, 1871). Parenthetical citations are to the serial text.
19. For a penetrating analysis of Howells' hypochondria, see John W. Crowley, *The Black Heart's Truth: The Early Career of W. D. Howells* (Chapel Hill and London: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1985).
20. Howells, *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, p. 192.
21. Edwin H. Cady, *The Road to Realism* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1956), p. 147; Morton Berman, *John Fiske: The Evolution of a Popularizer* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), p. 82.
22. Howells, “John Fiske,” *Harper's Weekly*, 20 July 1901, p. 732.
23. Fiske, “Who Are Aryans?” *Atlantic*, 47 (Feb. 1881), 234; “The Arrival of Man in Europe,” *Atlantic*, 49 (May 1882), 609.
24. Fiske, *American Political Ideas Viewed from the Standpoint of Universal History* (New York: Harper, 1885), pp. 151, 135–36. These lectures, originally delivered in 1880, helped to ensure Fiske's popularity (Berman, pp. 136–39).

25. Fiske, *The Destiny of Man Viewed in the Light of His Origin* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1884), pp. 25, 99.
26. Fiske, *The Idea of God as Affected by Modern Knowledge* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1885), p. 163.
27. Howells, "The Editor's Study," *Harper's Monthly*, 72 (April 1886), 808.
28. See Daugherty, "Howells, Tolstoy, and the Limits of Realism: The Case of *Annie Kilburn*," *American Literary Realism*, 19 (Fall 1986), 21–41.
29. Margret Holmes, *The Chamber Over the Gate* (Indianapolis: Charles A. Bates, 1886); *Towards the Gulf* (New York: Harper, 1887; rpt. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972). Both were reviewed by Howells in "The Editor's Study," *Harper's Monthly*, 84 (April 1887), 824–29.
30. Cf. Crowley, *The Black Heart's Truth*, p. 108. Crowley refers specifically to Howells' skeptical treatment of Fiske's ideas in *The Undiscovered Country* (1880).
31. Howells, "The Editor's Study," *Harper's Monthly*, 72 (April 1886), 808.
32. Wonham, "Howells, DuBois, and the Effect of 'Common Sense,'" p. 129.
33. Howells, *Years of My Youth*, pp. 138–39.
34. Howells, "Mrs. Johnson," pp. 99, 100; *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, p. 185.
35. Banta, Introduction, p. vii.
36. Wonham, "Writing Realism," pp. 714–15.
37. Howells, *Selected Letters*, III, 264.
38. Cf. a key episode in *Annie Kilburn*, in which the face of the Tolstoyan minister becomes a blur to the myopic protagonist ([1889; rpt. New York: Harper, 1891], p. 59).
39. Edwin Cady completely misses the irony when he quotes the minister's speech — without the narrator's aside — and concludes that human problems can be solved "through good morals, common sense, and good will" (*The Realist at War* [Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1958], pp. 159–60).
40. Crowley, *The Black Heart's Truth*, pp. 57, 58.
41. Banta, Introduction, p. v.
42. Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, with an introduction by Mary Helen Washington (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 182, 202, 203. Recent African American critics have noted the strength of Cooper's arguments. See Houston Baker, *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 34; and Kenneth W. Warren, *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 67–68.
43. Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, pp. 286, 295.
44. Warren, *Black and White Strangers*, p. 67.
45. Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, with an introduction by Frances Smith Foster (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), p. 257.
46. Thomas Wortham, "Was There Ever a Foundation? or Literary Cult vs. Cultural Monument," W. D. Howells Memorial Conference, Kittery Point, Maine, 14–15 June 1996, p. 3.