



Hazard of New Fortunes

William Dean Howells , David J. Nordloh , Everett Carter (Introduction) , Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (Introduction)

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Centering on a conflict between a self-made millionaire and an idealistic reformer in turn-of-the-twentieth-century New York, **A Hazard of New Fortunes** insightfully renders the complexities of the American experience at a time of great social and economic upheaval and transformation. In its depiction of wealth, poverty, and New York City life, it remains a strikingly contemporary work.

Reproduced here is the authoritative Indiana University Press Edition edited and annotated by David J. Nordloh, with full scholarly commentary and extensive textual apparatus.

Hazard of New Fortunes Details

Date : Published 2002 by Modern Library (first published 1890)

ISBN : 9780375759277

Author : William Dean Howells , David J. Nordloh , Everett Carter (Introduction) , Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 572 pages

Genre : Classics, Fiction, Academic, School, Literature, American

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From Reader Review Hazard of New Fortunes for online ebook

Heather says

This book was one of the most dense I have ever read. The complexities of the characters coupled with a story line rife with social commentary made it difficult, at times, to read. But, despite this, I found it to be enjoyable and at times very compelling.

It is important to note that this book was Howells's answer to the Haymarket Riots of Chicago in 1886. While Howells agreed with the striking workers, he did not agree with how they handled the affair. And how the workers were subsequently treated was even worse in his eyes. He wrote *The Hazard of New Fortunes* as an answer to it all. So, in his Realistic style, he portrayed each side, from Capitalist to Socialist; from anti-abolitionist to humanitarian, drawing upon the recent happenings to guide him. When the historical significance is understood, it is far easier to see why his book was so complex and dense, and why I feel it is one of his best works.

Jefferson Fortner says

This is the third novel by Howells that I have read, and I have enjoyed it the most. It grabbed my attention immediately, and overall was quite interesting. It is the longest one that I have read, but it was much better than *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, which is significantly shorter. The final chapters are a bit weak, but not to any great detriment to the overall tale.

Kevin Bradshaw says

It is not Howells's work that has aged poorly. No, the reading habits and tastes of educated Americans have died a slow and painful death. Imagine if the lovers of classical music lost their hearing, so that highbrow opinion became middlebrow opinion, only for middlebrow opinion to mingle with and become indistinguishable from the lowbrow. That is what you get here on goodreads, where merit is treated as a democratic question. Merit, however, is not a human right. Not all can recognize it. Most cannot. If you do not like this book, or at least cannot recognize its superiority, you simply do not have any taste in serious fiction. That's okay. I do not even pretend to care for classical music or jazz. But, then again, I would not assign a star rating to symphonies or jazz records. My music is lowbrow, but at least I know it.

Unlike children's books, like Harry Potter, or trashy works that suit those who would rather watch a movie than read, such as Stephen King's books, this book is subtle and complex. Because the serious novel has been relegated to college classroom force-feedings to students who have no idea how to approach a novel that lacks gore and sex, Howells has joined Lewis, Galsworthy, Sinclair, and Dos Passos in the bin of novelists whose journalism and sociology make them easily understood by lazy readers and literature professors alike. Hence, Howells's most commonly available and most well known work is the *Rise of Silas Lapham*, a weaker work than *A Hazard of New Fortunes*; the former is short and straight forward. If there's one thing our fellow readers can tolerate less than subtlety it's length. (Unless of course the long book is full of self-indulgent nonsense and literally meaningless phrases- for examples see, Rushdie, Salman.) There is, as some readers who apparently failed to get past page 70 have noted, there is a somewhat tedious account where the protagonist and his wife search for an apartment in New York. This takes up about 30 pages, and

seems to mar the books otherwise symmetrical structure. Howells is almost always dismissed today as prude and a prig because his stories refer to sexual desire and sexual impropriety in the most oblique fashion imaginable. He is more circumspect than then even the stodgiest Victorian writers. However, is he is neither a overly modest school marm nor a member of Granny's Bible study class. He is a critic as sophisticated as any of the great European writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although one will find a literary analysis by a professor of literature that will likely tell you that Hazard simply recalls the political tensions that that boiled over into violence, and Lit Prof, whose name will be Leonard Tancock or Dick Morris (real intro writing lit profs, mind you), will tell you that Marsh and his wife are Bostonians thrown into and force to confront a harsher and more sophisticated reality. Or perhaps a sociologist named Kazin or whatever will tell you about identity, politics, class, and economic disparities. And then, if this is an intro and not an afterward, you will decide that what you are about to read is nothing but a dry exposition on such subjects. Well, the literature classroom is all too often the place where the joy of reading of reading goes to die; great fiction was not meant to be the subject of formal study; we owe that late innovation to the literature professors who we ought to call fictionologists.

Instead of the Fictionologists dull world, a careful reader will find a humanizing work that brings to life members of opposing political worlds in a way that no modern author is capable of. It is quite the difficult thing to do. Consider: how many among the fictionologists and their fellow deconstructionists would care for Howells's treatment of the anti-labor billionaire, which is equally sympathetic to his portrayal of the socialist crank? Well, very few. In fact, the fictionologist labors to deconstruct literature, which, according to their untested assumptions, conveys the ideological trappings of false social consciousness. And the fictionologists wonder why they labor in obscurity. Moreover, like the his European counterparts, who Howells was responsible for familiarizing the American public with, Howells humanizes his subject. There are no easily decided moral questions in his universe, contrary to the liberal paradigm of the fictionologist, which is intellectually shallow. Instead, the primary characters are forced to compromise and make terms with the external world. Neither fictionologists nor movie-watching-Harry-Potter-reading dullards can appreciate.

Loes M. says

The book basically sets two completely different people against one another: a rich self-made man called Dryfoos and Fulkerson, a social revolutionary. We experience the story mostly through the viewpoint of a third, and neutral man called Basil March. We first meet Basil and his family in Boston. A friend of the family, the idealistic Fulkerson, has made himself quite wealthy and has the idea to start a new literary magazine in New York. He wants Basil to come to New York and be the editor for this magazine that he will be leading. The Basils do not jump at the opportunity. Mr and Mrs Basil go to New York where they spent the first few chapters looking for the perfect apartment. Once they've settled for something, Mrs Basil goes back to Boston to prepare the family for the move while Basil stays behind, having decided to take the job as editor of the magazine.

Fulkerson, being the idea-man, doesn't really concern himself much with the magazine, named Every Other Week. He is happy to leave it in the capable hands of Basil who used to work in insurance but always had literary ambitions. The publisher of the magazine is Conrad, son of the rich self-made man Dryfoos who is funding this magazine as a way to keep his son out of politics. Dryfoos found gas on his farm and used it to get rich - further ensuring his wealth on Wall Street afterwards. They have also hired an artist to be the artistic director and Lindau, an old friend of Fulkerson and American Civil War veteran, who will be translating German war stories for the literary magazine. The way that they will be funding the magazine is

quite ground-breaking: they plan not to pay the writers with huge guaranteed sum, but they let the writers share in the publication's proceeds. March's editorial prowess and the art director's work make the magazine a success and in the beginning everyone is happy.

But then March starts clashing with Dryfoos who, together with his friends, is trying to have a bigger say in what should and should not be published. They interfere in such a way that the original editorial ideas behind the magazine are threatened and things escalate. On top of that, Fulkerson and March start spending more and more on editorial costs in order to attract writers that will make them stand out - which makes the writers earn less and less. Combined with Dryfoos' meddling, the magazine is in trouble.

More in-depth reviews on my blog: www.owlshbooks.com

Kim says

A Hazard of New Fortunes is a novel by William Dean Howells first published in the U.S. by Harper & Bros. in 1890. It has been called *one of the first major novels about New York City* and many critics considered it his best novel.

I'd have to re-read a few to decide if I thought it was his "best" novel", but I did enjoy it. I was thoroughly entertained the entire time I was reading it. Because he portrays so many different characters from so many different backgrounds the novel has been called one of the most important examples of American realism. Is it one of the most important examples of American realism? Beats me, but it certainly had its share of enjoyable, wide ranging characters. We had businessmen, millionaires, society girls, artists, editors, a German born advocate for Socialism, and a publisher who really wants to be an Episcopalian priest.

The book takes place in late 19th century New York City it tells the story of Basil March, who finds himself in the middle of a dispute between his employer, a self-made millionaire Mr. Dryfoos, and Berthold Lindau, an advocate for workers' rights and March's old friend and German teacher. The main character of the novel is Basil March. He resides in Boston with his wife and children, and working as an insurance man, a job he hates. He is persuaded by his friend Fulkerson to move to New York to help him start a new magazine called "*Every Other Week*" (any guesses why?). The writers for the magazine would benefit from a form of profit sharing, the more the magazine sells the more money you make kind of thing. The Marches who would never dream of leaving Boston under any circumstances, especially to move somewhere like New York City, move to New York City. They have a long and very entertaining search for the perfect apartment, it must have "steam heat, an elevator and be on the third floor". I didn't know there were elevators in 1890. Mrs. March finally gives up and goes back to the children in Boston and Mr. March ends up picking one of the first apartments they saw and rejected, an apartment full of "gimcrackery"—trinkets and decorations that do not appeal to their upper-middle-class tastes.

Now that the apartment is picked and the Marches are settled, work at the new magazine begins. The magazine is bankrolled by a millionaire named Dryfoos, who became wealthy after discovering natural gas on his farm in the Midwest, and moved to New York to make more money on Wall Street. Dryfoos gives his son, Conrad, the job of business manager for the magazine in order to try to stop him from becoming an Episcopalian priest. This is all Conrad ever dreamt of doing. Conrad has two sisters; Christine, a superficial, self-centered woman who expects to be admired because of her father's wealth, and younger sister Mela, much more likable, but still expecting everyone to look up to her family because of all the money they have.

An annoying artist by the name of Angus Beaton is chosen to head the art department. Beaton is good looking, at least he thinks so; and so selfish I spend most of the book wanting to slap him. He eventually falls in love, or thinks he's in love with a young woman, Alma Leighton who is an aspiring artist. I don't think Beaton ever really loves her, he's too busy loving himself. It would serve both of them right if Beaton would wind up marrying Christine, but I'm not going to tell you if that happens.

Berthold Lindau, an old friend of Basil March's and a veteran of the American Civil War, becomes the translator for the magazine. Lindau knows many languages, so he selects and translates Russian, French, and German stories to publish in the magazine. Lindau lost his hand in a Civil War battle, fighting for the North because he was a strong abolitionist and an idealistic American immigrant. He advocates for workers' rights and socialism and clashes with Dryfoos because of it.

The book changes for me and goes from being light hearted entertainment, mostly from the sarcastic comments that March makes or the silly situations involving the Dryfoos women, but then it turns sad. In fact I'm sitting there feeling sad for some of the characters before I even realize the book has changed. That's OK with me too. If you want to know what changes the mood of the novel for me, read the book, I'm not telling.

Now here's a part of the book that I found extremely interesting:

Miss Mela explained to the Marches: "Mother was raised among the Dunkards, and she thinks it's wicked to wear anything but a gray silk even for dress-up."

"You hain't never heared o' the Dunkards, I reckon," the old woman said to Mrs. March. "Some folks calls 'em the Beardy Men, because they don't never shave; and they wash feet like they do in the Testament. My uncle was one. He raised me."

"I guess pretty much everybody's a Beardy Man nowadays, if he ain't a Dunkard!"

Miss Mela looked round for applause of her sally, but March was saying to his wife: "It's a Pennsylvania German sect, I believe" something like the Quakers. I used to see them when I was a boy."

"Aren't they something like the Mennists?" asked Mrs. Mandel.

"They're good people," said the old woman, "and the world 'd be a heap better off if there was more like 'em."

Now, I was born in Pennsylvania, I was raised in Pennsylvania, and I'm still in Pennsylvania and I never heard of the Dunkards. From the description I thought maybe they meant the Amish although it didn't exactly fit and I never heard the Amish called Dunkards; so I looked it up and there they were; the "*Dunkard Brethren*", the name being derived from the Pennsylvania German word *dunke*, which comes from the German word *tunken*, meaning "to immerse" or "to dip". The majority of the churches are located in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio". And I didn't know who they were! So my husband came into the room and I asked him if he ever heard of the Dunkards and he replied something like, "sure there are pretty many of them down around Lancaster, they are alot like the Mennonites". So I'm starting to think I'm the only central Pennsylvanian who didn't know of the Dunkards.

Here are some of my favorite lines:

"I don't see how you could talk to that girl so long, Basil, and make her laugh so."

"Why, there seemed no one else to do it, till I thought of Kendricks."

"Yes, but I kept thinking, Now he's pleasant to her because he thinks it's to his interest. If she had no relation to 'Every Other Week,' he wouldn't waste his time on her."

"Isabel," March complained, "I wish you wouldn't think of me in he, him, and his; I never personalize you in my thoughts: you remain always a vague unindividualized essence, not quite without form and void, but nounless and pronounless. I call that a much more beautiful mental attitude toward the object of one's affections. But if you must he and him and his me in your thoughts, I wish you'd have more kindly thoughts of me."

and also:

"I suppose," said March, "that nothing is put on us that we can't bear. But I should think," he went on, musingly, "that when God sees what we poor finite creatures can bear, hemmed round with this eternal darkness of death, He must respect us."

"Basil!" said his wife. But in her heart she drew nearer to him for the words she thought she ought to rebuke him for.

"Oh, I know," he said, "we school ourselves to despise human nature. But God did not make us despicable, and I say, whatever end He meant us for, He must have some such thrill of joy in our adequacy to fate as a father feels when his son shows himself a man. When I think what we can be if we must, I can't believe the least of us shall finally perish."

OK, one more and I'm done:

Children," said March, turning to them, "death is an exile that no remorse and no love can reach. Remember that, and be good to every one here on earth, for your longing to retrieve any harshness or unkindness to the dead will be the very ecstasy of anguish to you. I wonder," he mused, "if one of the reasons why we're shut up to our ignorance of what is to be hereafter isn't because if we were sure of another world we might be still more brutal to one another here, in the hope of making reparation somewhere else. Perhaps, if we ever come to obey the law of love on earth, the mystery of death will be taken away."

I liked the book. I'll read it again. Maybe I'll read all Howells in order so I can decide if I think that *"A Hazard Of New Fortunes"* was his best. It gets four stars anyway.

Rana says

I give this novel 3 stars because I did, indeed, like it, but it was nothing more than that.

I can easily say that I respect this novel for being so untypical in two main points that stood out to me: 1. The

central character is a city rather than a person and 2. Howells gives the people in the novel such distinct and refreshingly realistic views about the world and doesn't give our favorite characters romantic ideals that they claim to live by to please his readers.

Having New York be the central character was a bit weary to me; I couldn't relate to the feeling of a city being the force that moves people's motives and ideas, and it was a bit dense. Sure, people behave based on their surroundings, but the novel seemed to imply that it was New York, and not any other city, that could do this. But I must admit that this was an interesting way to note the realities of the American experience during that time period.

On the other hand, I loved how complex the characters were. Not a single character had only one trait to define them; nobody was just "good" or just "bad" and nobody was only "nice" or only "mean." Characters had realistic motives; some had families to look after while others had the freedom to act on their principles without a care for consequence. (People's principles, of course, was an interesting topic to explore in this novel--to compare what people thought they believed in versus what they acted upon.)

All in all, I'm not sure I would have read this if it hadn't been a class assignment, but I must admit that I thoroughly enjoyed the complexities of the characters and Howells' originality in examining the central themes of the novel.

Dusty says

Loosely, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is about the founding of a new literary periodical in late nineteenth-century New York City. The book begins with Basil March, a middle-aged insurance man in Boston who quits the company to pursue his old dream of a career in letters. March and his wife and children let a cluttered Manhattan apartment, and as they make their way in the bustling, alien metropolis, the author's scope opens and makes way for a legion of turn-of-the-century city types, amongst them the publicity man Fulkerson, the brooding, dandyish artist Beaton, the family of the lucky Indianan gas miner Dryfoos, the one-armed German immigrant Lindau, and so on. The periodical, which is financed by Dryfoos, managed by Fulkerson, and edited by March, is on a smaller scale very much the same kind of multicultural laboratory that New York City is, itself, and Howells writes a detailed and gripping slice of city life. Unfortunately, the corruption and social ills March and others note in their *flâneurie* around town are just as present in any American city now, a century and quarter later, as in 1890. A few bits I've read about William Dean Howells have conceded that he's not often read these days and rebutted this sad fact by acknowledging that he is, nevertheless, the father of American realism. Whatever the state of Howells's literary reputation, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is a hell of a book.

Bob Newman says

Several Sideshows Jell Into A Novel

A usual book review outlines something of the plot, not enough to give everything away, but at least something to catch a potential reader's fancy. I cannot assure you that this book has much of plot---some men come together to run a new bi-weekly magazine in New York in the 1880s, their financial backer has hickish, conservative tendencies and he opposes a certain impoverished writer who supports socialism (then

a wild-eyed fantasy.) This rich man's son, who abhors any form of business, is made into the managing editor. A crisis develops, takes a sudden unexpected turn, and the men buy out the backer, who leaves for Europe. Most novels have a main character whose moods and motivations are central to the work. Not *A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES*. Several people figure almost equally in this respect, none of them women, but women are developed more than in most male-authored novels of the time, even including a sympathetic view of a very independent female character. Basil March might be taken for the main character, but that would be mostly because he is introduced first. He is abandoned for long stretches while we follow the lives and personalities of others.

Yet, I must say, I admired Howells' novel very much. It is not for those who require action, sex, or dramatic events. Rather, it is a slice of life of the period, of the place, of family life and social repartee that may be unequalled. Though Howells claimed to be a "realist" and he is often spoken of, it seems, as one of such a school in American literature, the novel oscillates between extremely vivid descriptions of all varieties of life in New York, humanist philosophizing, and mild melodrama, thus, I would not class it as a truly realist novel in the same sense as say, "McTeague" by Frank Norris. Howells had the American optimism, the reluctance to dwell on the darker sides of human nature. This novel may draw accusations, then, of naivete. I think that would be short-sighted. Henry James and Faulkner might be deeper psychologically and Hemingway more sculpted, but Howells sometimes puts his finger right on the very essence of American ways of thinking and on American character. Some sections, like for instance the long passage on looking for an apartment in New York—over thirty pages—simply radiate genius. The natural gas millionaire and his shrewish daughter; the gung-ho, go-getter manager of the magazine; the dreamy, but selfish artists, the Southern belle—all these may be almost stock characters in 20th century American letters, but can never have been better summarized than here. Two statements made by Basil March, a literary editor married into an old Boston family, sum up the feel of *A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES*, a novel that takes great cognizance of the potential for change in people (always an optimist's point of view). First, he says, "There's the making of several characters in each of us; we are each several characters and sometimes this character has the lead in us, and sometimes that." And lastly, he says "I don't know what it all means, but I believe it means good." Howells was no doubt a sterling man and this, perhaps his best novel, reflects that more than anything else.

Illiterate says

A rather labored study of the challenges urbanism and commercialism pose to ethics and taste.

Jamie says

This is more or less a decent Americanization of a Trollope novel (though I'd hazard--har har--to say Howells is more heavy-handed in his social critique and not as subtle or, well, good a writer as Trollope). Inspires nostalgia, sometimes laughter, and a great deal of investment in the characters, who come to feel more like friends than fiction. I effing hated the German dude, though--plus, Howells wrote out his accent as if he were Polish or Russian & not at all German. Also his idea of the "country bumpkin" accent read like someone doing a hammy impersonation of Scarlett O'Hara. But all in all, this was a really cozy, enjoyable read. Not sure if I'd read more Howells, but who knows?

Quirkyreader says

This was just not my kind of book. At times it got bad and I just wanted to throw it at the wall. But I finished it. At this point in my life I don't think I will read another William Dean Howells book.

Katie says

The end is rather abrupt and doesn't quite work; there are aspects that were probably socially appropriate in 1890 that make us cringe today...which is of course to be expected in period literature. Still a rather engrossing urban novel, inhabited by often-archetypal but interesting characters. It is absolutely a study of the middle class, perhaps a bit too sunny and sentimental, though the echoes of the Haymarket Affair toward the end temper that a bit. Rather enjoyable. Probably an author that deserves to be read more than he is.

Kim says

I had to read this book for my Realism class at university and safe to say that this is one of my least favourite writing "trends" (sorry, can't think of a better words) These books just ooze boredomness with its long descriptions and unexciting themes. I do see why some people would like this, but it just is not my cup of tea.

This book was actually the one that I could get through without sighing every 10 seconds. In any other context I would have rated it no higher than 2 stars but compared to all the other books I had to read for this class, this one did not bother me as much.

The first part of the story focuses on a family searching for an apartment in New York after our main character has decided he wants to move there for a job opportunity. Even though he is not a very interesting character, you could kind of feel for him and he does meet a lot of other people from every slice of life, so that was a little interesting.

I think this book might have been very interesting at the time it was written since it does describe a lot of the city and makes it appear very modern. Of course, reading this today makes it very dated. In fact you could use these books to learn more about every day life near the turn of the century.

There might be a second reason why I like this book. It helped me answer my main exam question (something about transportation, I don't remember the detail) and since I did pass this class I do attribute my success partially to this book since it was my main go-to book for the answer ^_^.

Also, big shocker! I just found out that this is the second book in a series?! Not going to read the other books though :-)

Lucy says

I do enjoy a good long novel with lots of interacting characters. This didn't quite reach 5 stars for two

reasons: the main characters, the family who move to New York from Boston, didn't come to life for me at all, and secondly, I can't bear reading stuff written in accents, and here we have both a Deep South and a German example, urgh.

Fionnuala says

Howells--or rather his books--haven't aged well. Despite attempts to show a panorama of New York life, his perspective is blinkered by middle class, middle range male values and experiences. And his writing is so fussy and over detailed I put this short book down feeling suffocated, headachey and desperate for something cleanly minimalist (Any suggestions?)

It's interesting to compare Howells with Henry James (contemporaries bracketed them together as the great social realists of their generation). Where Howells retreats into provincial pieties--for example in having his protagonist refuse to countenance anything but a tourist-picturesque view of the slums--James dives in, obscurely and uncomfortably and dramatically, even if not always successfully. I got the feeling that Howells was taking no chances, that he was never straying from his comfort zone or from his mapped-out ideas of character, plot and setting. It may have made for a serene inner life for Mr. H., but it makes for a snory read for the rest of us.

Thomas says

Another classic for my American lit class that did not sit well with me. The first 100-150 pages centers on a couple's apartment shopping in New York. The rest of the book perhaps delves into social commentary on capitalism and class structure and commercialism, but the sheer inundation of unnecessary detail made it difficult to wade through the moss to get to the meat of the story. Maybe *A Hazard of New Fortunes* deserves to have several academic essays and commentaries written about it, though I would recommend skipping it as a leisure read unless you want to pick up a dense classic for the sake of reading a dense classic.

(I blame my finals-overloaded brain for the harshness of this review. I still got insight from class discussion, just not enough insight to compensate for the time I spent reading the book itself. A hazardous read with not enough fortune, one might say.)

Mickey Hernandez says

Classic example of why integrating politics into art is such a tough balancing act... ironic how an exemplary "realist" novel is basically propaganda for a political ideology.

Don says

Written in 1890, this is generally regarded as one of the best, if not the best, portrayals of middle class life in New York City in the late 19th Century.

What I found most interesting about this novel is Howells' principal female character; they seem quite modern to me. Isabel March is both fully supportive of her husband, and at the same time clearly his intellectual equal and influential in the decisions he makes. Although they clearly love and respect each other, the relationship is not portrayed as dreamily romantic but very much as a modern partnership.

Alma Leighton, a secondary character, is a refreshingly independent young women with artistic talent. Near the end, when her mother frets that she will become an old maid, she responds "Well, mamma, I intend being a young one for a few years yet; and then I'll see. If I meet the right person, all well and good; if not, not. But I shall pick and choose, as a man does; I won't merely be picked and chosen."

I have read very little of American literature from this period, but this book seems to me quite modern in its point of view.

Robert says

I gave up after 100 pages.

Jolien says

actual rating: 2.5 stars

not my cup of tea
