the confession form: an approach to the tycoon

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In the half century following the Civil War industrial capitalism gave to America a new ruling plutocracy and to American writers, especially those committed to the socially critical tone of serious realistic fiction, a challenging new subject. That the business tycoon was a natural, indeed necessary subject for realistic fiction seemed obvious; but just how he could be approached was far less clear. In the history of the search for a form adequate to dealing with the tycoon, the extremes in both technique and chronology are perhaps Howells' choice of the moralistic novel of manners in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and Dreiser's use of the naturalistic chronicle, quite equivocal morally, in *The Financier* and *The Titan*. In the years between Howells' early effort and Dreiser's twenty-seven years later, however, appeared the very interesting work of three novelists who turned to a traditional form, the confession, to present their new material. Moreover, two of them gave an unusual twist to the old form to produce what may be called the ironic apologia —a variation on the confession in which the autobiographical point of view is used consciously and consistently for satiric ends by allowing the "I" to reveal unconsciously his own baseness. In the four years from 1902 to 1905 Henry K. Webster, David Graham Phillips and Robert Herrick all used the confession form to present their portraits of the tycoon, and in the case of Herrick, to produce the best work of his career and as good a treatment of the subject as American literary history offers.

Explanations for this flurry of interest in the confession form are not difficult to find. First, as Northrop Frye points out, the confession form is especially attractive to the novelist of ideas who is unwilling or unable to embody his ideological interests completely in terms of personal relationships, so that its history as a form is one in which "nearly always some theoretical and intellectual interest in religion, politics, or art plays a leading role."[1] Second, the confession allows the novelist to be highly selective in his choice of incident without losing the air of

verisimilitude: since his subject is his own life, what the "I" chooses to report *must* be most important, at least to him, and thus in itself revealing. Third, because the "I" may convincingly present himself as a literary novice, structural looseness, whether feigned or actual, may be tolerated as a sign of appropriate realism—an advantage of the confession which must have been attractive to such slapdash technicians as Webster and Phillips. In practice the great selectivity and structural casualness which the form can tolerate—Phillips goes so far as to present his text as an unfinished manuscript—meant that Webster, Phillips and Herrick could ignore at will the sometimes intricate and inevitably repetitious details of the business affairs that must have taken up most of their heroes' lives and focus instead on matters more accessible to them and their readers, primarily the moral posture and emotional life of the tycoon. The form, in short, freed them of the obligation to create the illusion of a complete naturalistic account (not to mention the obvious dangers of such fullness, evident particularly in *The Titan*), and, in turn, their primary interests were appropriately expressed in the confession form. Finally, in the work of Phillips and Herrick, the modification of the confession into the ironic apologia yielded more effective satire than the voice of the outraged outsider, all too common by 1900, could possibly provide.

In *Roger Drake, Captain of Industry* (1902), Henry K. Webster uses the memoir of the tycoon not as a means of unconscious self-satire, as D.G. Phillips and Robert Herrick were soon to do, but as a vehicle for implying a vision of reconciliation of key elements of American myth and experience—democratic agrarianism, monopolistic capitalism, and modern technology. A popular turn-of-the-century novelist now remembered, if at all, for the many works in which he glorified businessmen, Webster provides generous portions of romance and business adventure, but they by no means account for all of his novel, and certainly not for what is most interesting and suggestive about it.

Roger Drake, like his successors in the works of Phillips and Herrick, decides to tell his own story because he wants to leave behind a truthful record of his life that will refute the lies he knows have been told about him, as about other tycoons of national prominence.

> They will say that I quarrelled with my best friend and made war on him, and finally, after years, ruined him, and that is true, though not the whole truth. They may also say that I bought men's consciences; that I lied to men and cheated those who had put themselves in my hands; and those things, I thank God, are not true. But I will tell my own story.[2]

Though he is long a reluctant participant in a fierce business "war," Roger's ultimate business aim is peace among the mine owners, a peace that will come when he persuades them to join the trust he dreams of

forming. A highly successful competitor, Roger nonetheless dislikes the wastefulness of competition and longs for the efficiency of cooperation. "What I wanted to do was incorporate that industry throughout the entire district, into an economical, efficient system; to bring it up to the level of its highest capability . . . [narrow self-interest] had nothing to do with it" (188). Once the opposition of Stanley, his chief foe, is broken, Roger is able to form his trust—and there is no hint that his motives are other than those he states. The novel thus endorses monopoly as the way to a peaceful, efficient economic future, not merely for copper barons, it would seem, but for the entire country at a time when fear and resentment of trusts were at their peak in America.

Justified by his hope for a pacific future, if not always in his deeds in the imperfect present, Roger is also redeemed by the company he keeps, moving as he does among positive characters whose mutual harmony and whose approval of Roger portend a reconciliation of temporarily antagonistic aspects of American experience. These characters not only give Roger perspective on the evils of economic individualism, but also provide an implied vision of the future which supplements Roger's hope of economic cooperation through monopoly. The most conspicuous of these characters is Christian Jansen, Roger's father-in-law, whose way of life and values represent pre-industrial America. A believer in "republican and altruistic ideals," he came to America because he thought he saw there, "if not the actual realization of them, at least the promise soon to be fulfilled." The description of his farm is yet another expression of the pastoral dream, which so long influenced the American imagination.

> It was carpeted with a patchwork of the clear emerald-green of young wheat and the rich golden brown of freshly ploughed land, and the righthand cliff, which had been white at noon, was pink as coral in the sunset. The great barns and stables scattered over it told of its prosperity, and a one-story, rambling limestone house . . . seemed ready to make us welcome. (92)

Here Christian lives a life of agrarian simplicity, in harmony with nature and with his beloved daughter Barget. Unfortunately the discovery of copper in the region has threatened his peace so that he has a keen hatred of the new order: " 'This place, as God made it, was paradise. You see the hell that men have made here' " (88). Yet he takes to Roger instinctively, seeing that Roger is superior to the other entrepeneurs who have desecrated his valley; and when Roger is down on his luck, Christian simply gives him some land which contains rich deposits of copper. Roger arranges for them to be co-owners, and a little later, when he marries Christian's daughter, the symbolic alliance of the old and new economic orders is completed—the agrarian and the industrialist are in harmony, the Jeffersonian and monopolist reconciled.

Another element in the synthesis which Roger's life represents is

embodied in Fletcher, who seems to be the very type of the disinterested scientist. Yet his research is by no means pure, for he sees it as the means to a new technology which will allow the realization of his social ideals. The wide use of electricity, he hopes, will return the urban poor to the country and get the farmer out of debt, eliminate the stuffy factory and restore the cottage industry—a utopian dream that seems closer to Christian's agrarian ideals than to any possible reality. A fascinating instance of the power of the Jeffersonian ideal to recruit support from unlikely quarters, Fletcher's practical argument is that electricity, unlike steam, allows for decentralization because the user of the power need not be anywhere near the source of power. Fletcher is also explicitly opposed to economic individualism, despising the way it makes a "battle-ground of society." He stands instead for the humane use of technology, a hope for the future which supplements Christian's traditional humanitarianism; and he, like Christian, sees in Roger something better than "the other men I've known who were devoting their lives just to piling up—piling up the fortunes." Roger, he feels, has the "mind" and "heart" for higher aims, which portend a happier future for the nation.

At the end of the story Roger admits that the "long struggle" has left its "scar" on him. He feels trapped in the "web" of present economic practices, frustrated in his desire to live as Christian lived, "to heal the hurts of the world as he did." But if Roger feels some regrets, his reader surely can have none, for Roger's story has calmed his every anxiety, satisfied his every wish. The reader's suspicion of the trusts has been dispelled—they mean "peace"; his guilt about the spoilation of nature has been eased—the pastoral dream can be lived next door to a copper mine; his faith in modern science has been affirmed—it is the product of high-minded, humane men who want to restore the good old ways; his scruples have been satisfied—Roger is not *completely* happy; his personal hopes have been underwritten—ambition and love, success and happiness need not be in conflict. Webster, in short, used the autobiographical form to reassure an uneasy America; the ominous figure of the tycoon turns out to be a very decent fellow, much like you and me, with a lovely wife and admirable friends, too. Yet for all his ingenious effort to humanize the tycoon and to associate him with positive values, Webster never obscures what is surely his essential point—that the tycoon is a temporary phenomenon, the product of an ignoble but potentially fruitful phase of historical development.

A sharp contrast to Webster's essentially decent Roger Drake is another business tycoon who also was given to autobiographical utterances. In David Graham Phillips' *The Master-Rogue: The Confessions of Croesus* (1903), James Galloway unconsciously reveals himself as a monster of ruthless self-seeking. Whereas the low moral tone of business sometimes forces Drake to actions which momentarily obscure his noble nature, the same morality provides nearly ideal conditions for the full

expression of Galloway's brutal lust for power. Conditions distort Drake's moral nature but allow Galloway to fulfill his—a contrast which makes clear the quite different attitudes Webster and Phillips display in their efforts to portray the new rulers of the country. Best known for his muckraking *Treason of the Senate* and his novel *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise,* Phillips concentrates on exposé, not dreams of reconciliation.

At the very beginning of his "confessions" Galloway frankly acknowledges that one ambition governed his life.

> From earliest boyhood I had seen that the millionaire was was the only citizen universally envied, honoured, and looked up to. I wanted to be in the first class, and I knew I had only to stick to my ambition and to think of nothing else and to let nothing stand in the way of it.[3]

And very shortly Galloway does indeed make his way: with a false report on the financial condition of the firm he persuades his partner to sell out to him and so gains his first million, "the first step toward a Croesus." "I was filled with the passion for more, more, more. I felt myself, in imagination, growing mightier and mightier, lifting myself higher and more dazzlingly above the dull mass of work-a-day people with their routines of petty concerns" (29). Years later, as he writes his autobiography, he confesses that his ambition remains unsatisfied though he has long since become rich: "Each day my power grows—and my love of power and my impatience of opposition" (189).

Dissatisfaction, however, is not the burden of his self-portrait. Quite the contrary. He delights in the visible signs of his success: "The great hall of my house, with its costly tapestries and carpets and statuary, is a source of keen pleasure to me . . . all the luxuries and comforts which wealth gives me are a steady source of gratification" (93). Yet Galloway's greatest source of satisfaction is not his possessions; it is himself—for his egotism is boundless. As he sees it, his superiority of "mind and judgment" has placed him among "the great men who play large parts on the world's stage." He is in fact a benefactor, largely unappreciated, of the entire country.

> Instead of being respectful to the great natural leaders and deferential to their larger vision and larger knowledge, the people regard us with suspicion and overlook our services in their envy of the trifling commissions we get—for, what is the wealth we reserve for ourselves in comparison with the benefits we confer upon the country? (48)

Generous to the community, he is downright self-sacrificing "for my children, for my family, ultimately. I have the thankless, misunderstood toil; they have the enjoyment" (51). Nonetheless he regularly quarrels with his wife over the household accounts.

Often denied the approval of the community and his family, Gallo-

way and his vanity are sustained by his faith in the ethical standards implicit in Social Darwinism and the inspiring popular conception of Nietzsche's superman. From the start of his career, he is aware that "this is a world of grab," not of "By your leave," and he is impatient with his partner who acts on "principles of politeness rather than of strict business." For the young James, those who stand between him and a million are "aggressors to be clawed down and torn to pieces," so that he must forego "those feelings which the ordinary run of mankind may indulge without harm." Later in his life he knows that he is resented for "having elbowed and trampled my way into power too vigorously," but he cannot take his critics seriously because their standards of behavior do not apply to such as himself, "one of that small class of beings created to possess the earth and to command the improvident and idealess inhabitants thereof how and where and when to work" (31). The only trouble is that sometimes his morality is too advanced for times which have a "contemptuous disregard for the rights of private property," and so he must act underhandedly "in order to exercise my plain rights—yes, and do my plain duty" (138). His ethics of course are appropriate only for the masterful few, not for average humanity, and convinced of the rightness of his every act and feeling, Galloway is firmly opposed to having others follow his example; the few are meant to run Standard Oil, the rest to attend Sunday School.

Because Phillips' anatomy of the business tycoon appropriately emphasizes his mental life, not his business activities, the novel is largely without plot, offering instead episodes calculated to reveal Galloway's psychology. The reader in fact hears little from Galloway about his financial operations—only here and there does a corrupt ward boss or senator, a railroad rebate or a dummy corporation enter the narrative. By the time Galloway is writing these fragments of an autobiography his principal concern is not making more millions—he does that easily as required—but establishing his family socially, chiefly through prestigious marriages for his children. But if the world at large seems to bend easily to his will, Galloway has great difficulty controlling the lives of his wife and four children, whom he had completely neglected during the years he was making his millions. Galloway is willing to grant that "the duties of people in our position do not permit indulgence in the simple emotions and pastimes of the family life of the masses," yet he feels that it was unnecessary for his wife to become "a cold and calculating social figure, full of vanity and superciliousness," and his children "selfish, heartless, pleasure-seekers, caring nothing for me except as a source of money" (32). The reader soon learns that this characterization of his family is another of Galloway's gross distortions, his response to their reluctance to surrender their wills entirely to his domination.

Galloway's contempt for his family, however, does not lessen his ambition for the children, or more precisely, his dynastic dreams; if he

is to be the founder of a great family, they are the material he must work with. Forced to look upon the weakling Walter as his "hereditary principal heir," he sets about getting a socially prominent wife for the boy. When Walter fails as a wooer, his father takes over and buys the girl with the promise of an annual income of a quarter of a million, a verbal promise he later repudiates. He bargains in the marriage market with equal vigor in the interests of his daughter Aurora. Displeased with his choice, the girl looks "wretched" at her wedding. But her father is exultant.

> It was, indeed, an hour of triumph for us all. As she and Kirkby came down from the altar, I glanced round the church and had one of my moments of happiness. There they all were—all the pride and fashion and established wealth of New York—all of them at my feet . . . here was I, enthroned, equal to the highest, able to put my heel upon the necks of those who had regarded me as part of the dirt under their feet. (213)

Phillips later redeems this exercise in moral melodrama (tearful bride, gloating parvenue father) when he has Aurora return from her wedding trip looking very happy because in obvious and complete control of her "short and fat and sallow and amazingly ordinary-looking" husband. Galloway then turns his attention to building a "palace" on Fifth Avenue, which will be "the seat of my family for many generations" (245).

In short, measured by his own standards, the only ones he considers, James Galloway is as gloriously triumphant in domestic matters as he is in business. Even the discovery that he was mistaken in his quarrel with the best of his children confirms his belief that he was "born under a lucky star," for he is sure that had they been reconciled, the boy's good nature would have undone all his plans for the family. Ultimately Galloway's concern with his family's future is Phillips' way of saying that the pernicious influence of such as James Galloway is likely to continue well beyond death. In other words, though Phillips is primarily interested in the psychology of the tycoon and sometimes merely in the exposure of his brutal selfishness, he is aware from start to finish that Galloway's success is not only the result of current economic conditions in American society, but also a force powerful enough to influence greatly the future state of that society. Naive neither in thought nor manner, his novel is a worthy attempt to deal critically with the new America of rampant economic individualism, its success dependent largely on Phillips' choice of the confession form, and especially, his uncommon alteration of it into an ironic apologia.

Far superior to the work of Webster and Phillips, indeed a minor classic of American literature, is *The Memoirs of an American Citizen* (1905), one of the best works of Robert Herrick, whose realistic treat-

ment of social themes from a Progressive point of view characterized his long and prolific career as a novelist. Herrick, too, adopts the first person and allows Edward Van Harrington, another successful tycoon, to tell the story of his struggle to get rich, by hook or by crook, in the Darwinian world of Chicago meat packers. Through his portrayal of Harrington's unshakable confidence in his own worth and his value to society, despite the litter of broken lives around him, Herrick makes the ironic apologia a forceful mode of social criticism. Herrick's theme in brief is the slow death of a soul, the inevitable result of its coming to epitomize the highest aspirations of a grossly materialistic society. Like James Galloway, Van Harrington does not struggle against the low moral tone of his environment, nor finally rise above it, nor reluctantly come to terms with its deficiencies; rather he adapts to it magnificently, the record of his successful adaptation serving as ironic social criticism of the society that makes such a career not only possible, but the expression of its characteristic values.

The Memoirs of an American Citizen focuses its most obvious critical attention on the ethics of business and, in addition, on the nature and role of law in a capitalistic society. Decent ethics once prevailed, but they have given way to increasingly shoddy practices, the result in part of the drive to establish monopolies in every phase of production and distribution: " ' . . . it's dog eat dog in our business, as all over nowadays . . . . It's in the air. There's a change coming over business. . . . It's a harder work fighting to live now than ever before. . . . The big dog will eat up the rest.' "[4] The choice between an outdated, quixotic honesty and current practices is not difficult for Van Harrington.

> That beautiful scheme of things which the fathers of our country drew up in the stage-coach days had proved itself inadequate in a short century. . . . But we men who did the work of the world . . . could not be held back by the swaddling clothes of any political or moral theory. Results we must have: good results: and we worked with the tools we had at hand. (246)

If the way in which the results are "good" remains obscure, the "tools" are obvious enough, including preferential shipping rates for the most powerful firms and illegal agreements to fix prices, agreements which the parties then violate secretly to steal each other's trade. Involved in almost comically intricate scheming, the thieves have no honor even among themselves.

Yet the thieves set the moral tone of the society, and the law is unable to control them, if indeed it does not exist to protect and encourage them. Severely punished in his youth for stealing fruit from the orchard of the local judge, the precocious Van draws a perverse lesson from the experience.

> I came to the conclusion that if I wanted what my neighbor considered to be his, I must get the law to do the business for me . . . how wonderful is that system which shuts up one man in jail for taking a few dollars' worth of truck that doesn't belong to him, and honors the man who steals his millions—if he robs in the legal way! Yes, the old judge knocked some good worldly sense into me. (20)

His final view of the legal and political system is expressed just before he takes his seat in the Senate: " . . . nor do I know a man conversant with the modern situation of capital who believes that with our present system of government any effective check upon the operations of capital can be devised" (308). Here, as elsewhere, the irony is perfect, the smug, secure voice of the tycoon conveying to the reader the most revolutionary of implications. Sometimes corrupt, the instrument itself of social injustice, the law is always impotent to check the practices which have made ethical standards seem irrelevant not only among businessmen but in society at large; law is at best the ineffectual witness to the moral degradation of a society. The awe that the idea of justice might once have inspired has become attached to the great accumulations of wealth. While Van is still poor, he and his friends enjoy standing outside a fashionable church to watch "the people who were so much talked about in the papers," for example, Strauss, the great meat-packer, whose name "is as well known as that of the father of our country." The mystique of riches fascinates Van's circle, to the exclusion of all aims save one: "Whatever was there in Chicago in 1877 to live for but Success?" (52).

The world of E. V. Harrington is essentially the same as that of Phillips' James Galloway: democracy is a dated myth; a plutocracy rules, and its self-seeking ways have spread to every segment of society, corrupting the moral and spiritual lives of all but a resolute few individuals. Finding himself in such an environment, Van Harrington becomes a roaring success, the unrepentant embodiment of the highest aims of his society. In the hands of an author less estranged from the dominant values than Herrick, his story would be simply another contribution to the Horatio Alger myth, a fairy tale of capitalistic society. Overcoming obstacles of every kind, from shortages of capital to labor disputes to the fierce hostility of Strauss, the biggest of the packers, Van at last arrives at a position of such strength that he can sell out to Strauss at his own terms. Though offered a share of Strauss's now unchallenged monopoly, he prefers running for the United States Senate. Undaunted by the loud opposition of the press, he wins the support of the Illinois legislature, and at the end of the novel he proudly takes his seat in the Senate, the epitome of success in business and politics and the generous donor of land for the construction of a reform school. From rags to riches and honor—this is the archetypal American success story in familiar outline, which Herrick's use of the ironic apologia con-

verts into a tale of luck and cunning, of moral expediency and spiritual emptiness.

Perhaps the most obvious ingredient of Van's success, even as he tells his own story, is the series of underhanded acts he commits in the course of creating his great trust. In reply to the protests of his friend Slocum and others, Van's answer is always the same: he is simply doing what is necessary in the business world in which he must function. Harrington is perfectly sure of the supreme importance of his own ends; they are the only thing of absolute value in his life, and so any means he uses to accomplish them seem to him perfectly justified. As long as his first assumption remains unchallenged, the logic of his defense is perfectly sound: he indeed must bribe on occasion to achieve his ends. His rejection of dishonesty would require an evaluation and modification of his aims, and that is quite beyond Van. On the other hand, he is, like Phillps' tycoon, quick to condemn in others the deeds he excuses for himself—their ends, obviously, are not of supreme importance. For example, he is piously outraged when he finds that an old friend and employee has taken a bribe from a competitor to reveal—of all things—the details of Van's use of bribes. As well, Van sometimes waxes eloquent about the great contributions he and his kind have made to the growth of the country or refers piously to his responsibility to all the "little people" who have invested their mite in his enterprises; yet in essence his system of values consists of one proposition: what serves his ends is good and what gets in his way is bad.

Van's success, however, depends finally not on dishonesty or luck or nerve, but on the unwavering support of a neurotic woman. Frustrated by the limitations her sex imposes on her, Jane Dround is fascinated with the world of men and the power they exercise. In the aggressive young Harrington she sees an opportunity for a vicarious experience of the life that has been denied to her. The vicarious satisfaction Van gives her, she repays, in her own way, quite handsomely. In his moments of ethical uncertainty brought on by the squeamishness of other associates, she offers confirmation of his views: "'. . . Despots—the strong ones—have always really done things. They do to-day—only we make a fuss about it and get preachy. No, my friend, don't hesitate! The scrupulous ones will bow to you in time'" (258). Jane, moreover, gives Van much more than moral and emotional support; indeed it is her unstinting financial support that finally saves Van's enterprise from failure and puts him in the position to name his own terms to Strauss. The final cause of the great Van Harrington is then the peculiar emotional need of a deeply frustrated woman; in comparison, his luck, amoral cunning and personal courage are decidedly less significant.

Herrick, however, is not content with merely placing Van's capitalistic fairy tale in ironic perspective through a revelation of the dubious bases of Van's success. Aware that the sophisticated reader would

hardly be surprised to discover that luck, dishonesty and powerful backing, as well as ability and initiative, are apt to underlie the success of the great tycoons, Herrick calls Van's success into question most compellingly through his portrayal of the human wreckage strewn along Van's "golden road" to wealth and power. At the end of the novel nearly all the people who have been most closely associated with Van are either suffering from the moral and spiritual taint their relation to him has produced or have turned away from him in order to preserve the remnants of their self-respect. These morally compromised, spiritually maimed people are Herrick's principal way of suggesting what, after all, Van's success amounts to, if it is measured in human rather than monetary terms.

Among those who break with Van are his brother Will and Ed Hostetter, an "honest-looking young fellow" whom Van meets when he first comes to Chicago and whose kindness provides Van with lodging and a job. Once Van has begun his climb to the top, Ed becomes one of his employees, but the relationship ends abruptly when Ed takes a bribe to reveal the details of one of Van's shady deals. Hurt and angry, Van gives Ed a stern lecture on the value of honesty. The lawyer Slocum, however, draws the moral of the incident: " 'That's the worst of any piece of crooked business; it breaks up the man you work with. Ed is a rascal now—and he was never that before!' " (224). If Ed exits in disgrace, Van's brother Will and his sister-in-law May break with Van to preserve their integrity. When Van offers the impoverished Will and May an opportunity in the city, he apparently makes the terms crystal clear: " '. . . if you come to the city you'll no longer be your own man. . . Dround'll own you, or I shall. No doing what you want! . . . Can you stand taking orders from your junior?' " (130). What Will does not foresee, however, is that his work for Van will involve him in Van's attempt to bribe the Texas legislature. When Will protests, he finds Van unashamed and is forced to break with his brother. Several years later, still hoping for reconciliation, Van calls on May to try to persuade her to accept his help and escape the dreary life she and Will lead, if only for the sake of their children. But May stands firm, as she did three years before.

> "The very sight of men like you is the worst evil in our country. You are successful, prosperous, and you have ridden over the laws that hindered you. . . . You think you are above the law—just the common laws for ordinary folks! You buy men as you buy wheat. . . . It's pretty mean, Van, don't you think so?" (343)

Dismissing "this sentimental reflection," Van can do nothing but let Will and May continue on their own quixotic way.

Those who remain loyal to Van suffer in a different way, the most compelling example being his best friend and chief assistant, the lawyer Jaffrey Slocum. Although unhappy from the start with Van's willingness

to use bribery and blackmail, Slocum stays with Van, not out of desire for money but for the sake of friendship, the value Van appeals to whenever Slocum objects to his plans. Once he is successful, Van seeks some way to reward the lawyer for his services, but he discovers that "there was nothing in my hands that was worth his taking!" Slocum's great ambition has always been to serve on the "Supreme Bench," but his long association with Van's dubious practices precludes any such possibility because "a Federal judgeship" is one thing that "can't be bought in this country, not yet" (330). Richer than he ever expected to be, Slocum feels he has "no right to complain." "I went with you, Van, because I wanted to—just that. I saw then what it meant, and I am not kicking now" (332). But Van himself sees the case in a more severe light.

> I had needed him, and I had taken him—that was all there was to that. He had sold himself to me, not just for money, but for friendship and admiration. . . . For in all the world there was not enough money to pay him for selling himself —he had so much as said so to-night. (335)

Like Van's other personal relationships, that with Slocum ends in frustration and disillusionment.

As his troubled response to Slocum's plight indicates, Van himself is sometimes uneasy with the personal implications of his way of life. Once his success is complete, he feels momentarily that "there's no happiness in it": ". . . The work that I was doing seemed senseless. Somehow a man's happiness had slipped past me on the road, and now I missed it" (302). In such dark moods, he turns to Jane Dround for comfort and reassurance, which she invariably provides. Yet even this most intense relationship in his life has a sterile, unfulfilled quality. All their great passion is sublimated into efforts to make good their mutual ambition for power. Seeing Van largely as the source of vicarious satisfaction, Jane does not allow one romantic word or gesture to pass between them, so that at one point Van questions their relationship: "There was the joy we might have had, she and I, and we had not taken it. Had we been fools to put it aside?" (302). But she refuses to hear any talk of regret; instead she sends him off in quest of a seat in the Senate. In the novel's final ironic thrust, Herrick shows Van finding on his desk in the Senate a bouquet of "American Beauty roses" from Jane; the traditional symbol of passion and romantic love has become in its American version the memento of a relationship in which personal emotion has been completely subordinated to economic ambition. No less demanding than her medieval counterpart, the frigid lady of the knight of capitalism offers at best cold, bittersweet rewards for his mighty deeds. According to Herrick, sexual repression and business enterprise go hand in hand, an idea that was later to become a commonplace of American fiction. Moreover, the chief benefactor of all Van's efforts is Strauss, who buys, albeit at a high price, the financial empire Van has

built; yet Strauss—again the irony is compelling—is the one man Van hates intensely "as a cruel, treacherous, selfish, unpatriotic maker of dollars." The man whom he hates gets the spoils, while those who love Van are left to bear the bitter costs of his triumph.

Van's doubts about his relationship to Jane and about what he has done to those closest to him do not, however, last for very long. After enumerating the lost ones—"there was Hostetter, . . . and my best friend Slocum, and my brother Will, and May, and their little children," he dismisses them from his mind, and, heartened by his election to the Senate, he rests content in his achievement, turning his eyes toward a higher judge.

> There they [his enterprises] were, a part of God's great world. They were done; and mine was the hand. Let another, more perfect, turn them to larger uses; nevertheless, on my labor, on me, he must build.
>
> Involuntarily my eyes rose from the ground and looked straight before me, to the vista of time. Surely there was another scale, a grander one, and by this I should not be found wholly wanting! (346)

His doubts dispelled, his confidence in his merit once more intact, Van proudly enters the Senate to stand, as one of his supporters puts it, " 'as a bulwark against the populistic clamour so rife in the nation at the present time,' " a living refutation of "socialistic sentiments" and the "unrestricted criticism of the press in regard to capital."

The Memoirs of an American Citizen is a wonderfully effective piece of social criticism by virtue of the sharp, carefully worked-out ironies that characterize it and provide consistantly critical perspective on every aspect of the narrator's life. Herrick's social criticism and his concern with individual spiritual condition form an organic unity; for the final, most damning indictment of Van Harrington is not that he is a dishonest robber baron, but that he is spiritually dead. Incapable of love and of more than momentary remorse, he pursues a way of life that both encourages and obscures his emotional barrenness. He can do what he does because he is morally and spiritually deficient; and at the same time, what he does serves to increase his deficiency. Thus social criticism (what he does) is inextricably bound up with an exploration of individual spiritual condition (what he is). Commitment to the aims of capitalistic society is the antithesis of spiritual integrity and fulfillment; it leads inevitably to the death of spirit, to the death of what is best in humanity as it expresses itself in unselfish human relations and concern for the welfare of all men. In portraying in Van the embodiment of all he thought his society aspired to, Herrick also makes clear what he thinks such aspirations inevitably involve—a terrifying morbidity of spirit. The novel is thus an examination of both the social and spiritual consequences of submission to the values of a narrowly materialistic society,

a society in which what is most admirable in man is always in extreme peril.

For Herrick, as for Phillips and Webster, the ultimate concern is the spiritual quality of these new men who have become America's rulers; and on the evidence of *The Memoirs,* the confession form was a fortunate choice for exploring this concern. Moreover, as Herrick, following the lead of Phillips, modified the confession into the ironic apologia, it became a form superior in satiric vigor, subtlety, concision and moral vitality to the approaches to the tycoon of Howells and Dreiser which frame it in American literary history. Freeing Herrick from the temptation of explicit moralizing and from the bluntness of his muckraking contemporaries, the ironic apologia allowed him to present a convincing narrative voice, which continually compels the reader to examine critically not only the protagonist's values, but the reader's own assumptions about the condition of the American soul after a generation of rampant economic individualism.

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footnotes

1. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York, 1966), 308.
2. Henry K. Webster, *Roger Drake, Captain of Industry* (New York, 1902), 2. Subsequent page references are included in the text.
3. D. G. Phillips, *The Master-Rogue: The Confessions of a Croesus* (New York, 1903), 3. Subsequent page references are included in the text.
4. Robert Herrick, *The Memoirs of an American Citizen* (New York, 1905), 121. Subsequent page references are included in the text.