ROBERT HERRICK: A CHICAGO TRIO

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> Chicago is an instance of a successful, contemptuous disregard of nature by man. Other great cities have been called gradually into existence about some fine opportunity suggested by nature, at the junction of fertile valleys, or on a loving bend of a broad river, or in the inner recesses of a sea-harbour, where nature has pointed out, as it were, a spot favourable for life and growth. In the case of Chicago, man has decided to make for himself a city for his artificial necessities in defiance of every indifference displayed by nature.[1]

Robert Herrick came westward to the University of Chicago in the fall of 1893, drawn thither by the vigorous recruiting of William Rainey Harper, who had raided the Harvard faculty the previous spring and had picked up young Herrick in the process.[2] Herrick could have had no idea that he would remain in Chicago for thirty years, for he was a New England Mugwump at heart; and the burgeoning city on Lake Michigan was in all senses an alien landscape to him. Through the years he never really learned to love his adopted city, though tolerate it he might. And in his Chicago based fiction he carried on a long war of attrition with the city, getting hostile reviews in the local press with each subsequent novel that escalated his attack on Chicago's *systematic* ugliness. Particularly in a trio of novels — *The Web of Life* (1900), *The Common Lot* (1904), and *The Memoirs of an American Citizen* (1905) — did Herrick work out his two reflexive themes treating Chicago life: the city itself was made by the wrong sort of men for the wrong reasons, and the wrong sort of men continued to be made by the humanly unhealthy influence of the city.

In nearly every novel he wrote, Herrick stressed the need for individual ethical initiative, personal freedom, direct opposition to the dehumanizing tendencies of industrialization. Perhaps in other circumstances he might have taken another city for his scene, but Chicago was at hand and Chicago fascinated — however much an outsider he may have felt himself in its relentless hurly-burly. When Herrick arrived in Chicago, it was the height of the Fair-fever, a distemper that was promoting all manner of optimism about the future of Chicago and America; and, as Blake Nevius has noted, he was caught up in the expansive mood of the day:

> For Herrick, the Fair, no less than the new University, gave expression to an emerging cultural vitality that promised well for the future of Chicago: "The Fair in a way was Chicago, its dream, its ideal, its noblest self

incarnated . . . ." He was moved, as Henry Adams and so many other visitors were moved, by its spiritual significance. "It was the fete day of our world, the big backbone of America, when it proclaimed to everybody that in spite of all the waste and ugliness and makeshift character of its civilization it had preserved its love of the ideal . . . ."[3]

Yet the Fair was ephemeral and evanescent; its plaster-board palaces would begin to vanish after the last visitor had passed out through the turn-styles. But would the impressive "spiritual significance" prove more durable, or was the infectious idealism as transient as the flimsy White City itself?

Herrick answered this question to his own satisfaction in the Chicago novels he wrote over a period of almost two decades following the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. There is in all of this work a forceful ethical strain, akin to the popular social fiction of the first Roosevelt era, but finer and more reverberant because Herrick was a better novelist than the popular Progressive writers. He scrupulously avoided the "formulas for reform" that were so central to the novels of Joseph Medill Patterson, Booth Tarkington, Brand Whitlock, and others. He was perhaps the last gifted American novelist to study the changing national society in the manner of William Dean Howells — the last, that is, to study the subtleties of viable individual movement within a middle-class milieu that was by 1893 turning out to be more complex and more artistically suggestive than had previously been apparent. In one of the last of his Chicago novels, Herrick was to have his spokesman proclaim, at the end of the period of social hopefulness engendered by the Fair, "The great end cannot come through political action, by theory or programme, by any division of the spoils, and readjustment of laws, but only by Will — the individual good will . . . ."[4] For Herrick the question of America's spiritual health depended on the quality of the individual persons nurtured within her astonishing environments. And it is the City, in the Chicago novels, that supplies the ground for a kind of "American test case": whither the Will? In the three novels to be considered Herrick follows the Will first with hope, then with doubt, and finally with undisguised sarcasm — the final attitude born of years of watching in Chicago's untrammelled growth something he could never affirm.

The Web of Life (1900)

The sub-title of this novel, Herrick's first Chicago-centered fiction, might have been "after the Fair is over." The book traces the moral development of Howard Sommers, a young physician who

quickly becomes disgusted with the venality and class-pandering of his profession and opts for a life of service and personal freedom. Sommers' ethical choices involve a conscious rejection of "his own," and Herrick injects a large amount of social criticism in the novel. But the distinctive achievement of *The Web of Life* is its remarkable integration of the action with the Chicago scene. Sommers' alienation from his class follows the course of Chicago's general disillusionment: the magnificent promise of the Fair is tested against the real deprivation of the depression of late 1893, wavers in the face of mass human need, and is annihilated in the Fourth of July (1894) rioting at Pullman. Howard Sommers acutely observes these momentous events, even participates on the periphery, and from them he gains spiritual insight: the social disintegration of Chicago is proof of the "big lie" character of the Exposition and all it symbolized, for the Fair was nothing more than a gaudy extrapolation of the status quo, and only of certain of its more pleasant features at that. The dramatic structure of *The Web of Life* is based on this pattern of an individual moral rise amidst the social decay of an entire city.

Several chapters into the novel, Howard Sommers says farewell to Louise Hitchcock, proud daughter of wealth and the woman he *should* be courting, at his last country-club party: he is going back into the heart of the city, back to the vital drama of Pullman, the workers, and Alves Preston — a woman who will love him lucrative practice or no, love him the more because love is all they shall have. This casting-off of class is the climactic scene in a series of encounters with the privileged classes that convince Sommers there is something fundamentally wrong with the social contract, in so far as it applies to the huge majority of Chicagoans. He had first got into trouble among the managers and the financiers and their polite wives by asking an inopportune question about the Pullman situation at a Hitchcock dinner-party: "Is it so . . . that the men who had been thrifty enough to get homes outside of Pullman had to go first because they didn't pay rent to the company?"[5] Sommers shows his temerity in probing the motives of the plutocrats, whose first-generation wealth has not yet had the leisure to liberalize itself and instead remains wholly predatory. Brome Porter, a "director" of the Pullman Palace Car Company, is quick to catechize Sommers in the dogmas of the neo-feudal American business philosophy:

"The laborer has got some hard lessons to learn. This trouble is only a small part of the bigger trouble. He wants to get more than he is worth. And all our education, the higher education, is a bad thing . . . . That's why I wouldn't give a dollar to any begging college — not a dollar to

make a lot of discontented, lazy duffers who go round exciting workingmen to think they're badly treated. Every dollar given a man to educate himself above his natural position is a dollar given to disturb a society." (p. 34)

This anti-democratic cant comes from the same Brome Porter who near the end of the novel forces a stock market panic — seriously harming the Hitchcocks in the process — through one of his huge speculative swindles. Sommers recognizes in himself a smoldering hatred of this sort of exploitative success. "I feel that way," he observes to Louise Hitchcock (who herself "hates views" in just the way a young woman of leisure ought), "pretty much all the time in America" (p. 40). Even so he chooses to join the fashionable medical firm of Dr. Lindsay and charge fat fees to suitably rich and suitably hypochondriac women, as an alternative to a country or hospital practice among the people. But it is a foregone conclusion that he will not be happy in his choice.

During his internship, Sommers had become friends with Alves Preston after operating on her husband, and their intimacy grows toward love as she becomes the audience for his acrid expressions of personal dissatisfaction. He tells her, ". . . I am a coward and conventional. I have learned to do as the others do. Medicine and education . . . . They are the two sciences where men turn and turn and emit noise and do nothing. The doctor and the teacher learn a few tricks and keep on repeating them as the priest does the ceremony of the mass" (p. 99). The earnest young doctor is in the untenable position of needing very much to exercise his critical intellectual faculties in a society that does not recognize the critical instinct (or, as Thorstein Veblen put it, the instinct of workmanship) as a viable substitute for the acquisitive. On the Chicago scene of the 1890's how, exactly, does a man with no inclination for the predatory money game express himself? Even early in the novel Sommers has an intuition that his only hope lies in a personal devotion to the medicine of healing and a rejection of the medicine of affluence. The events of the novel help push him ever closer to the radical commitment. He had taken his degree in a springtime of promise. Now, as he makes his way up the North Shore to that last country club affair portending the conclusive break with the polo set, Sommers observes Chicago in the throes of a stifling summer, a correlative both of its economic depression and his own oppressed spirit:

These days there were many people on the streets, but few were busy. The large department stores were empty; at the doors stood idle floorwalkers and clerks. It was too warm for the rich to buy, and the poor had no money. The poor had come lean and hungry out of the terrible winter

that followed the World's Fair. In that beautiful enterprise the prodigal city had put forth her utmost strength, and, having shown the world the supreme flower of her energy, had collapsed. There was gloom, not only in LaSalle Street where people failed, but throughout the city, where the engine of play had exhausted the forces of all. The city's huge garment was too large for it; miles of empty stores, hotels, flat-buildings, showed its shrunken state. Tens of thousands of human beings, lured to the festive city by abnormal wages, had been left stranded, without food or a right to shelter in its tenant-less buildings. (p. 135)

This sort of social situation is pregnant with potential reaction, and Howard Sommers, too, is ready for some fundamental change in his unhappy life. "Capital was sullen, and labor violent. There were meetings and counter-meetings: agitators, panaceas, university lecturers, sociologizing preachers, philanthropists, politicians — discontent and discord. The laborer starved, and the employer sulked" (pp. 135-36). No sooner is Sommers arrived in the suburbs than the threshold of his tolerance for the Dr. Lindsays, the Brome Porters, even the Louise Hitchcocks is reached and passed. Herrick allows Sommers to discover at this point that Chicago, despite the human horror of its depression, is life; the North Shore is simply the ultimate deracination, though it is but a short hour's ride *by train*. But what if the trains no longer run? This is precisely what happens, of course. The trains are stalled by Eugene Debs and his American Railway Union, leaving the deracinated either helplessly in or out of the city. Chicago, Sommers realizes, was made quickly, badly. Get out of it, yet keep on returning to gouge from it the continued means of getting away — the felt power of this cultural dilemma, so familiar for so long in urban America, sweeps Sommers back into Chicago, and not just into the Loop (he resigns from Lindsay's clinic) but into the heart of the city's neighborhoods. Very soon he is resonating with all the variegated overtones of the real Chicago:

Decay, defeat, falling and groaning; disease, blind doctoring of disease; hunger and sorrow and sordid misery; the grime of living here in Chicago in the sharp discords of this nineteenth century; the brutal rich, the brutalized poor; the stupid good, the pedantic, the foolish, — all, all that made the waking world of his experience! It was like the smoke wreath above the lamping torch of the blast-furnace. It was the screen upon which glowed the rosy colors of the essential fire. The fire, — that was the one great thing, — the fire was life itself. (p. 167)

And on 4 July 1894, just before the Pullman rioting begins, the abandoned buildings of the White City go up in flames. Sommers and Alves Preston are two of the observers of this last ritual extinction of the Fair's idealism before the holocaust of the

embattled strikers against the Pullman management and the troops of the United States government. In the ensuing conflict of them and us, Sommers finds himself squarely among the ranks of the despised *them*: "He was not sorry for the change, so far as he had thought of it. At least he should escape the feeling of irritation, of criticism, which Lindsay so much deplored, that had been growing ever since he had left hospital work. The body social was diseased, and he could not make any satisfactory diagnosis of the evil; but at least he should feel better to have done with the privileged assertive classes, to have taken up his part with the less Philistine, more pitiably blind mob" (p. 194).

In the heat of the labor battles and amidst the ruins of the White City, Sommers and Alves Preston consummate their love. But common-law marriage and people's medicine do not constitute the end of the moral development of the doctor. The two of them suffer through a couple of years of subsistence, she teaching, he taking whatever cases offer. In Alves Preston Herrick created an intensely romantic character who gives her all for love in a credible way and, when love does not prove to be all, just as believably withdraws from Sommers' life through suicide. She had lived their experiment in bohemian idealism to the fullest — love and love alone in the rent-free Greco-Roman ticket booth, a forlorn vestige of the White City occupied by squatters' rights. Her uncompromising commitment to the romantic ideal serves to reveal Sommers' own reactive position. He had come to her as he had come to the "people": on the rebound from an inarticulate and impotent rage against privilege. She realizes this much sooner than he, and it is she who breaks the bond between them: "I ruin the world for you. Love is not all, — at least for a man, — and somehow with me you cannot have the rest and love. We were wrong to rebel — I was wrong to take my happiness. I longed so! I have been so happy !" (p. 306) For Sommers her suicide

> was the end of his little personal battle with the world, the end of judging and striving, the end of revolt. He should live on, strangely enough, into many years, but not as they had tried to live in self-made isolation. He should return to that web of life from which they had tried to extricate themselves. She bade him go back to that fretwork, unsolvable world of little and great, of domineering and incompetent wills, of the powerful rich struggling blindly to dominate and the weak poor struggling blindly to keep their lives: the vast web of petty greeds and blind efforts. He should return, but humbly, with the crude dross of his self-will burnt out. (pp. 315-16)

Herrick does not accuse his protagonist of having been wrong about the essential nature of American society; rather he indicates that Howard Sommers has misconceived his own place in

it. In his headlong initial reaction against the evils of unenlightened wealth, Sommers had rushed past, without noticing it, that crucial middle ground of American life. Now the average was all that was left him, the extremes having been ruled out through painful experience. This is Robert Herrick at his closest to the Progressives, but closer yet to Howells, who had his Basil Marches and Silas Laphams seek out their rightful province the hard way, and always located that province somewhere in the vast land of the average. In the aftermath of love, social turmoil, and suicide, Sommers finds that "Already Alves had bequeathed him something of herself. She had returned him to his fellow-laborers with a new feeling toward them, a humbleness he had never known, a desire to adjust himself with them" (p. 330). *Adjust* is the important word. The doctor is re-entering society, and though he will be as ethically charged as before, the abstract ethic will be subsumed in his fuller participation in the life around him.

As the physician heals himself, so does the country revivify after the debilitating bout with labor strife and economic depression: "During the next two years the country awoke from its torpor, feeling the blood tingle in its strong limbs once more, and rubbing its eyes in wonder at its own folly" (p. 331). America had not, to be sure, solved its excruciating problems, but had merely shuffled them anew and was in the process of dealing a new hand for even bigger stakes. The point, as regards the ethical universe of *The Web of Life,* is that Howard Sommers is working and not stewing, doing his part to alleviate those problems by healing. The part is a modicum, certainly, but it is also taken in the novel to be the only sure thing an individual may do for his society, though no assurance may be given that even a million modica will be enough for a place like Chicago. When Howard Sommers, inevitably, comes again to Louise Hitchcock, it is to find that she has learned as much as he. They marry, declining her father's proferred dowery; Sommers buys an unassuming neighborhood practice from a retiring physician; and they end the novel standing together firmly on the same middle social landscape. The lesson has taken, like an inoculation, and the implication is that neither the doctor nor his wife will require another.

It is fair to say that the nineteenth-century urban novel in America, given such a fine start in Howells' *A Hazard of New Fortunes,* never developed any strong sense of locale, despite the obvious peculiarity of cities and neighborhoods within cities, and despite the ubiquitous use of naturalistic overkill — that is, the use of masses of emotionally negative detail about the urban environment, in graphic representation, to develop a pessimistic world-view. Yet there is another sort of localness — beyond

dialect, parochial mannerisms, and setting — which might be termed the localized symbolic landscape; and for Herrick in *The Web of Life* it is an effective artistic mode. The Fair and the Pullman Strike were American, as well as regional and local events. Herrick's triumph in his first Chicago novel is the investiture of these events and their scenes with meaning, meaning — translated into ethical dilemmas — for his characters. One of the most stringent formal requirements of the serious action, or development story, is a richly problematic ethical unverse; and symbolism, however tentative, can contribute greatly to the enrichment. Though Herrick is inordinately fond of large concepts like Will and Life, he is generally able to embody them in his action. Ultimately, Howard Sommers' initiation is that of all modern Chicagoans, though it is his individuality with which Herrick is primarily concerned. The "social significance" in the novel is a significance refracted through his eyes; the local flavor, to the extent it is there in *The Web of Life,* is dependent upon Herrick's symbolic use of events like the burning of the Fair buildings and the desolation of the Loop in a depression summer. And if Chicago continued to be the setting of many of Herrick's best novels, it was because Chicago was the very best *place* to study his version of the emerging American character.

The Common Lot (1904)

> The difference between the artist and the mind that works otherwise is that the artist must externalize his emotions, must objectify his moods, must express them in terms of human beings who are struggling with each other. And so in my case. My obsession with this phrase [sic] of spiritual abnegation and desire for forgiveness very soon expressed itself concretely in the figure of a young man, who having gone astray in the mazes of our modern high-keyed life and suffered some enormous shock, finds himself at springtime upon the bare earth, face to face with himself and his maker, with the power within him to rise once more and take on his shoulders the burden of living . . . . The repentant young man would be an architect . . . . And his temptation should be dishonest work . . . .[6]

These words constituted the germ for Herrick's *The Common Lot,* which appeared (in book form) in the fall of 1904. Attention has been paid to the author's manifest puritanism in this novel, especially in the vicarious conscience of Helen Spellman Hart, the young architect's wife.[7] But there is another moral thrust in *The Common Lot*: to be sure, Jackson Hart sins, and that sin requires redemption. But are sin and redemption best explained in quasi-religious terms (Blake Nevius calls Herrick a Christian who is also a "pan-mystic") or in terms of Thorstein Veblen's dichotomy between the instinct of workmanship and the preda-

tory urge? Veblen had first advanced his idea of the instincts in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) and later elaborated it in *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914).[8] In the latter essay Veblen described the features of this instinct: "The instinct of workmanship . . . occupies the interest with practical expedients, ways and means, devices and contrivances of efficiency and economy, proficiency, creative work and technological mastery of facts. Much of the functional content of the instinct of workmanship is a proclivity for taking pains."[9] And in the *Theory of the Leisure Class* he indicated that when expediency and economy are stressed at the expense of the "creative work," the instinct of workmanship degenerates into the predatory emulation of wealth.[10] This happens to be nearly paradigmatic for Herrick's story of Jackson Hart, the ambitious young architect whose enthusiasm for building Chicago is corrupted by the race to make money rather than workmanlike edifices. And it is no exaggeration to say that buildings actually dominate the symbolic landscape of *The Common Lot*: it is the shoddy workmanship of the Glenmore Hotel that makes it easy prey for a disastrous fire, and it is the derivative and aesthetically barren design of the Jackson Industrial Institute that points up the dessication of the artisan's soul. Herrick's irony in the novel is unmistakable. Jackson Hart's most damning moral failure is his association with the crooked contractor Graves and his corner-cutting, and therefore money-making projects, including the ill-fated Glenmore; but Hart's most egregious artistic betrayal is the fiasco of the Industrial Institute — a building endowed by his uncle *to glorify the instinct of workmanship in America*. Hart's design is a *Beaux Arts* imitation "straight from the Hotel de Ville."[11] The materials and actual building specifications are of the flimsiest and cheapest. In short, the monument to the instinct of workmanship turns out to be one of the most poorly crafted buildings in Chicago. Midway in the novel, Jackson Hart is made aware that he is guilty of self-betrayal and social irresponsibility; and his subsequent "redemption" involves a revitalization of the creative impulse within him, which in turn is the principal cause for his final understanding of the ethical dimension of being an architect.

The initial instability in the novel is Jackson Hart's failure in his considerable expectations from his uncle's fortune. At the outset his notion of being an artist — the one inculcated both by his training and the social circles in which he moves — is to have sufficient means and leisure to create. He is worried lest his impressive *Beaux Arts* training be wasted, as it should be were he forced to go "into the ranks."[12] But, without the inheritance, work he must; and Hart is soon caught up in the predatory competi-

tion for status: "His two years' experience in Chicago had taught him something about the fierceness of the struggle to exist in one of the professions, especially in a profession where there is an element of fine art. And his appetite to succeed, to be some one of note in this hurly-burly of Chicago, had grown very fast. For he had found himself less of a person in his native city than he had thought it possible over in Paris . . ." (p. 29). The young architect errs badly, as do most of Herrick's protagonists, in formulating his personhood in social terms rather than individual; and this mistake precipitates many more as the novel unfolds.

Hart sees the same soul-deadening commercialism in architecture that had troubled Howard Sommers in medicine, but the protagonist of *The Common Lot* is attracted, not repelled, by the magnetism of social and economic competition. Was not the Chicago building climate the most favorable in the nation? Was not the need for housing never greater? And although Chicago boasted perhaps the most dynamic "school" of architecture in America — represented by the firm of Adler and Sullivan, with their disciple Frank Lloyd Wright, and by Burnham and Root, who had wrought the Fair — the important thing was not what to build or how to build but simply to build and get a firmer grip on the main chance. Hart begins his career in the offices of Walker, Post, and Wright (the latter a kind of rough-hewn, native American builder who gives Hart a lot of good advice which the Paris-trained young man scorns), but quickly decides to go it on his own. No sooner does he determine to set his own course than he hears a speech at his club on the rottenness of the contemporary professions: " . . . the pity of it is that it ruins the professions. You can see it right here in Chicago. Who cares for fine professional work, if it don't bring in the stuff? Yes, look at our courts! look at our doctors! And look at our buildings. It's money every time. The professions have been commercialized" (pp. 54-55). This Mugwump discontent is put in perspective by a man named Pemberton — the same man who later uncovers Hart's shortcomings in the matter of the Jackson Industrial Institute. He speaks the Progressive line with hopeful fervor and penetration into Jackson Hart's motives:

"Time has been when it meant something of honor for a man to be a member of one of the learned professions. Men were content to take part of their pay in honor and respect from the community. There's no denying that's all changed now. We measure everything by one yardstick, and that is money. So the able lawyer and the able doctor have joined the race with the mob for the dollars. But "— his eye seemed to rest on the young architect, who was listening attentively —" that state of affairs can't go on. When we shake down in this modern world of ours, and have got used to our wealth, and have made the right adjustments between

capital and labor, — the professions, the learned professions, will be elevated once more. Men are so made that they want to respect something. And in the long run they will respect learning, ideas, and devotion to the public welfare." (p.55)

While speeches like this one make it clear that Hart's desire to be a "money architect" is a problematic one within the value universe of the novel, there are potent naturalistic influences in Chicago that are difficult to resist: "The noise, the smell, the reek of the city touched the man, folded him in, swayed him like a subtle opiate. The thirst of the terrible game of living, the desire of things, the brute love of triumph, filled his veins .... He, Jackson Hart, would show the world that he could fight for himself, could snatch the prize that every one was fighting for, the supreme prize of man's life today — a little pot of gold" (pp. 63-64).

Of course, he must discover how wrong he is. Herrick's characterization of Jackson Hart is a careful one: he is cast as no mere business predator, no incarnate Will-to-power, but rather as a Chicago man, different from the masses only by virtue of his artistic gifts, one who flows with his times without being conscious of the crucial ethical ramifications of his life's work. Hart has an ambition to build profitably that leads him first to opportunism, then to expediency, and finally to the verge of criminality. Yet the whole course of his decline he but dimly discerns, so adrift is he in the welter of tremendous forces that constitute his competitive life in the city. For the reader two things objectify the change in him which Hart cannot see, but which is visible to everyone else. One is the austere conscience of his wife, Helen Spellman Hart; the other, his design-model for the Industrial Institute.

Helen Hart is her husband's most uncompromising critic, and his behavior ultimately drives her to a separation. She began by loving Hart for the artist in him; and it was — like Alves Preston's love for Sommers — an idealizing passion. Gradually, however, she discovers in him the drive antithetical to artistry. As Helen is characterized as having an "instinct to transform all that she knew and felt into something finer than it actually was" (p. 80), so is her husband endowed with *his* instincts. Helen's at first causes her to see only the nobler instinct of workmanship in Hart. Then as she knows him better, she perceives his "instinct for luxury" (p. 109) — an analog of Veblen's idea of "pecuniary emulation" — increasingly qualify and eventually dominate his instinct for workmanship. It is her dissatisfaction over his involvement with the crooked contractor Graves and her indignation upon hearing of the cheating on specifications and materials for the Institute that force the separation. For Helen is far

too scrupulous to stay when her husband will not hear the truth about himself. Rather than expostulate with him she abruptly leaves, a stern and insistent woman whose conscience requires her rejection of his culpable behavior. She is a Puritan, but she is right.

Yet it is not Helen who sees deepest into Hart, but, ironically, his old boss Wright, who gazes upon the model for the Industrial Institute on display in the Art Institute and sees that the emptiness of the design reveals the emptiness in the designer:

> The design was splendid, in a sense — very large and imposing: an imperial flight of steps, a lofty dome which fastened the spectator's eyes, and two sweeping wings to support the central mass. Nevertheless, the architect had not escaped from his training; it was another of the Beaux Arts exercises that Wright used to "trim." Years hence the expert would assign it to its proper place in the imitative period of our arts, as surely as the literary expert has already placed the poet Longfellow. Though Hart had learned much in the past six years, it had been chiefly in the mechanics of his art: he was a cleverer architect, but a more wooden artist. For the years he had spent in the workshop of the great city had deadened his sense of beauty .... He had never had time to think, only to contrive, and facility had supplied the want of ideas. Thus he had forgotten Beauty ....
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> So Wright read the dead soul beneath the ambitious design. (pp. 261-62)

This indirect reading of the artist in the art is worthy of Henry James, and Herrick develops the relation further by contrasting the grandiose plans for the Institute with the actual construction, with the skimpings on foundations and grades of steel. Hart can rationalize the result: "It was not a bad piece of work, after all, as Chicago building was done .... Even if Graves had cut the work in places . . . the edifice would answer its purpose well enough, and the architect had no special interest in the everlasting qualities of his structures. Nothing was built to stand for more than a generation in this city. Life moved too swiftly for that" (pp. 280-81).

This sort of justification, of course, is as flimsy as Hart's buildings themselves; and Herrick has prepared the way for the shock that will initiate his regeneration: the appalling fire at the Glenmore Hotel. Many of the tenants at the hotel, owned jointly by Hart and Graves, die because the contractor had put no steel whatsoever in his "fireproof" building. Herrick brings the architect to the scene of the blaze in time to see the south wall of the hotel collapse, "shaking off the figures on the fire-escape as if they had been frozen flies .... He put his hands to his eyes and ran. He could hear the crowd in the street groaning with rage and pity"

(pp. 320-21). As he does with the burning of the White City in *The Web of Life,* Herrick uses the fire to represent not only death and destruction but also purification by flame of the impulses within his protagonist which led to shoddy artistry and the shrivelling of the soul. From the fire as well comes the relief of an admission of manifest guilt beyond rationalization, which in turn is the basis for spiritual rebirth. Hart is rejuvenated by the inexhaustible healing power of the earth, after he finds himself alone in a field on the outskirts of the city, and realizes that for a long time "the earth had not spoken to him, alone, personally, out of her abundant wisdom, garnered through the limitless years" (p. 335). The transformation he undergoes by the agency of nature involves the necessary loss of self: "The moist, crumbling soil beneath the man's body was opening itself — stirring, awakening, preparing, for the gigantic tasks of renewal, of re-creation, of conception and birth. An immense, powerful, impersonal life, the greatest Life of all, was going forward all about him. In the midst of this large mystery he felt that he was but an atom — an accident which counted for nothing" (p. 336). To be sure, this is the substance of what Nevius calls Herrick's "pan-mysticism," but the important thing about Hart's experience is that it prepares him not for a life of contemplation in nature but for re-entry into the vortex of Chicago. He will not withdraw but will seek his redemption among the very people he has wronged: his wife, those for whom he built, and the huge, amorphous Chicago public. Self awareness comes to him through some transcendental means, but for Herrick it is necessary that self-knowledge be used toward the end of re-establishing a particular kind of ethical relationship with society — that of the Howellsian good citizen.

The trials, literal and figurative, to which Herrick subjects his protagonist after catastrophe and regeneration are excruciating, designed to fit the unethical enormity of his past life and to test the mettle Hart has so recently found within himself. Before the coroner's jury investigating the Glenmore fire he publicly admits his culpability in Graves' "skinning" on the hotel's specifications. In these days, too, his infant son is stricken with pneumonia and his life hangs in the balance. To Hart, perhaps mindful of his wife's Puritanism, the illness seems a piece of Old Testament justice: "The old idea of retribution, that barbaric conception of blood sacrifice, tormented him, as it torments the most sceptical in the hour of crisis. It appeared to him that for his cowardice of nature, for all his weak and evil deeds, for the unknown dead in whose death he had connived, he was about to be called to pay with the life of his own child" (p. 391). Yet the dispensation in Herrick's ethical universe is finally more merciful than exact-

ing: the infant is spared, and Jackson Hart escapes the full legal penalties for his weaknesses.

It is noteworthy that in this novel, as in the others, Herrick has no illusions about the ameliorative effect upon Chicago society of tragedies like the Glenmore Hotel fire and its public investigation:

> So the case against the men held to the Grand Jury for the hotel disaster was quietly dropped. The mayor put another man in Bloom's place as chief building inspector, and very soon things went merrily on in their old way. And that was the end of it all! The seventeen human beings who had lost their lives in the fire had not even pointed a moral by their agonizing death. For a few summer months the gaunt, smoke blackened pit of ruins in the boulevard served to remind the passers-by of a grewsome tale. Then, by the beginning of the new year, in its place rose a splendid apartment building, faced with cut stone and trimmed with marble. (pp. 396-97)

Morals are not pointed for societies like America's, only for individuals capable of receiving them or of being changed through experience so they have little choice in the matter. If there is a possible salvation for society, Herrick reiterates, it must be through socially saved individuals like Helen and Jackson Hart. She needed only a better balance on the head-heart scale, and by the end of the novel there is no doubt about Jackson's thorough ethical regeneration. He plunges, eyes open, "into the ranks." He returns to the position with Wright which he had scorned and goes literally back to the drawing board. That wise old-schooler's view is the final judgment of Hart both as architect and man:

> As to Wright, who knows more of the man's real story than the others, he treats his old employee with a fine consideration and respect, realizing that this man is doing handsomely a thing that few men have the character to do at all. His admiration for Hart's work has grown, also, and he frankly admits that the younger man has a better talent for architecture than he himself ever possessed, as well as great cleverness and ingenuity, so necessary in an art which is intimately allied with mechanics. For it is true that after sluggish years there has revived within Hart the creative impulse, that spirit of the artist, inherent to some extent in all men, which makes the work of their hands an engrossing joy. The plans of a group of buildings, which the firm have undertaken for a university in a far Western state, have been entrusted very largely to Hart. As they grow from month to month in the voluminous sheets of drawings, they are becoming the pride of the office. And Wright generously allots the praise for their beauty where it largely belongs. (p. 420)

This passage is *about* the revitalization of the instinct of workmanship, a revitalization of the deepest morality of the "creative

impulse" made possible by a commitment to decent dealing on the level of the social ethic. Hart is not only given another chance with Wright's firm: he is also given another (symbolic) chance to be the artisan. Where he failed in the design and construction of the Jackson Industrial Institute, he admirably succeeds in the master-plan for a new "far Western" university. These buildings-to-be are praised by Wright for their "beauty," a word which the master-architect uses sparingly, and which he had not used at all as he had pondered the plans for the Jackson Industrial Institute. It was Helen Hart who convinced her husband he should resume his old position: "We are all trying to get out of the ranks, to leave the common work to be done by others, to be leaders. We think it a disgrace to stay in the ranks, to work for the work's sake, to bear the common lot, which is to live humbly and labor!" (p. 402) Her entreaty inevitably calls to mind Howells' words in *Criticism and Fiction* (1891): "We are all . . . struggling to be distinguished from the mass, and to be set apart in the select circles and upper classes . . . . We are really a mixture of the plebian ingredients of the whole world; but that is not bad; our vulgarity consists in trying to ignore 'the worth of the vulgar,' in believing that the superfine is better."[13] And in *The Common Lot* Herrick wrote one of the American novels which comes closest to fulfilling Howells' program for American realism. This program demanded serious treatment of everyday life and contemporaneity with the society to be depicted. Its germ was always the moral development of a protagonist whose acts were dramatized on the American scene. The American novel in the manner of Howells did not so much describe a national character as it specified the conditions necessary for *any* enduring and positive American ethos to emerge. The main movement of the action in such a novel was the process of accommodation of the individual to his society, and the way of this accommodation was decent, highly ethical behavior in the commonwealth. This was the *sine qua non,* the basis upon which a character could build meaning in his life, and the foundation which made possible the teleological fulfillment of man's best instincts — including the instinct of workmanship — and the fruition of a progressive society the likes of which became dearer and dearer to Herrick and Howells in fiction as it retreated from possibility in fact.

The Memoirs of an American Citizen (1905)

Both as a novelist and as a literary critic, Herrick was drawn to the tradition of the non-objective novel. Though he wrote realism in a time of realism, he often wished to comment *in propria persona* on the ethical universes he was fashioning; but he usual-

ly avoided the first-person viewpoint. "Its limitations," he told one of his university classes, " . . . are obviously that only what the narrator has seen or been informed of can be told, that it is egotistic and narrow in point of view."[14] Yet in his most ambitious Chicago novel, *The Memoirs of an American Citizen,* he experimented with the first person and used it to bring off a vigorous satire and an incisive social portrait of an American businessman. The book is the success story of E. V. "Van" Harrington, a country boy who comes to Chicago from Jasonville, Indiana, and storms the city in one business triumph after another, until by the end of the novel he is the country's most powerful meat-packer and has bought himself a seat in the U. S. Senate (by bribing the State Legislature in those old, pre-Progressive reform days when senators were not popularly elected). Harrington tells his own tale, to be sure, but it is a life-story the very fabric of which is ironically undercut at every crucial point.

In *Memoirs* Herrick wrote an impressive piece of ironic imitative autobiography, centrally in the tradition begun by Defoe's *Moll Flanders.* If the book is Harrington's *apologia pro vita sua,*[15] the apology is not intended to be morally acceptable to the reader, as it was not to the author. Throughout, Herrick keeps his business-hero at an ironic distance, much as Swift had done with Gulliver in Part IV of the *Travels* and as Twain had deftly managed with his protagonist at important points in *Huck Finn.* Manipulating ironic distance in first person narative is no easy task, and Herrick does very well indeed with Van Harrington: he flows "with the procession," to use another Chicago novelist's term (Henry Blake Fuller's), as do Sommers and Jackson Hart, but the difference in this case is that Harrington *does not* learn the "Progressive Lesson" that ultimately saved the others. And the technical distinction of *Memoirs* from *The Web of Life* and *The Common Lot* is also important. By virtue of its viewpoint *Memoirs* develops both its social criticism and its judgment of the protagonist largely by implication, a function of the distance between Harrington and Herrick. The more pride Harrington displays over his depredations in the Chicago meat-packing industry, the more the reader (with Herrick) demurs over the businessman's uncritical acceptance of the *modus operandi* of finance capitalism. No doubt Herrick knew that one of the formal requirements for an effective ironic autobiography, was that Harrington not be drawn as a "monster": he was creating, after all, an "American Citizen," a capitalistic Everyman who had to be a believable generalization of the ethical dilemmas faced by all pursuers of the main chance. The resulting critique of the self-made man is thus more an attack on the process of making than on the thing made, for Harrington is no Mugwump professional,

no man of superior parts or training — not one, in short, who should naturally "know better" than to exploit American society the way he does.

What he becomes is made most apparent in a passage near the end of the book, when Harrington pauses on the verge of the new career in politics to take stock of the old:

> Traffic, business, industry, — the work of the world was going forward. A huge lumber boat blocked the river at the bridge, and while the tugs pushed it slowly through the draw, I stood and gazed at the busy tracks in the railroad yards below me, at the line of warehouses along the river. I, too, was a part of this. The thought of my brain, the labor of my body, the will within me, had gone to the making of this world. There were my plants, my car line, my railroads, my elevators, my lands — all good tools in the infinite work of the world. Conceived for good or for ill, brought into being by fraud or daring — what man could judge *their* worth? There they were, a part of God's great world. They were done; and mine was the hand. Let another, more perfect, turn them to a larger use; 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![16]

Harrington speaks in the simplistic rhetoric of the Social Darwinist; he is awed in the presence of a vast physical transformation and feels that perforce he must have had much to do with it. Yet the logical leap from the observation "There they were" to the assertion "mine was the hand" is a dubious one to all but Harrington himself. It is clear that Herrick does not expect his antihero to show an exquisite moral sense, but he does emphasize the irony of Harrington's arrogant and facile belief that he is the prime mover behind Chicago's physical explosion. Just as Dreiser's Frank Cowperwood would do in *The Titan* (1914), Harrington in his rude way attempts a "Chicago apotheosis" of himself. When he thinks of his "plants and warehouses," he mellows; when his trampling upon society is brought to mind, he dismisses such thoughts as "sentimental reflection" (p. 343). When packing houses are raised in the name of "another scale, a grander one," then means *qua* means are inconsiderable, obscured in the long shadow of the glorious end. The final irony in *Memoirs* is that Harrington is so consumed by the money-madness of Chicago that he genuinely considers himself, in spite of the naturalistic evidence to the contrary, the heroic, neo-feudal lord of all he surveys. It is the logical and ironical outcome of the self-made model: he has never been beaten, so the game itself is rightfully his.

The beginning of *Memoirs* shows Van Harrington "learning the system" even before he leaves the farm:

> While I was sweating on that farm I saw the folly of running against common notions about property. 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. For the first time it dawned on 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! (pp. 20-21)

This is the right outlook for the modern business predator, but it does not accord with the romanticizing of Harrington's final apology several hundred pages and twenty-five years later. It is the need on Harrington's part to find a metaphysical significance in what is really pure exploitation, that opens the ironic distance between the businessman and the reader. Harrington even tries to intellectualize his search for "the golden road" during his early, scrambling years in Chicago. He reads Darwin, Spencer, Lecky, and "a lot more hard nuts" (p. 63) to find a rationale for what he is learning to do from watching the business adepts around him. Social Darwinism is the pseudo-science of the moment in Chicago (as in America), and it gives him precisely the ideology he needs to push relentlessly upward: "Whatever was there in Chicago in 1877 to live for but Success?" (p. 52)

An important sequence in *Memoirs* involves Harrington's participation in the trial of the Chicago Anarchists after the Haymarket bombing (4 May 1886). As he did with the Fair and the Pullman Strike in *The Web of Life*, Herrick again involves his protagonist in the drama of Chicago's social history as it is being enacted. He puts Harrington in the middle of things by having him selected to the jury which will "try" the anarchists — a jury which Harrington knows to be carefully picked for its "safeness" in returning the proper verdict, no matter what the evidence, a jury to which "No working man need apply; his class was suspect" (p. 88). The jury was safe, Herrick shows, the evidence that the defendants did the bombing non-existent, the verdict a foregone conclusion based on hysteria of fear and hate.[17] Yet the "American Citizen" accepts without question the course of events: it is "all a parcel of lies," their "one motive" is fear, but still one's "duty to society" must be performed. For Harrington the entire matter is reduced to "a struggle between sensible folks who went about their business and tried to get all there was in it — like myself — and some scum from Europe . . . " (p. 92). The rather laborious irony here derives from the fact that Van Harrington, by his own admission, is caught up in the most important event of the day in Chicago, yet is unable to exercise a single critical or individual judgment about either the trial itself or his role in it.

He finds himself on the right side of the issue, and his relief is enough to dispell any lingering doubts he might have had about his conduct: "It was comfortable to be of the strong. The world is for the strong, I said to myself as I left the court, and I am one of them!" (p. 97) This sort of "strength" never admits the moral strength of the anarchists, who faced death squarely for their principles. They had simply, in the jargon of the day, "lost their nerve."

Half a dozen years after the Haymarket incident came the World's Fair, which once again forms part of Herrick's scenery. By 1893 Harrington is accelerating toward the kingship of Chicago's enormous meat-packing industry. Herrick does not emphasize the squalor and human waste of "Packingtown" (though he probably had no inkling that this would be sensationally exposed by *another* novel about Chicago's meat-packing situation which appeared the same year as *Memoirs*).[18] But he does have Harrington take in the Fair. The prince of meat-packers, not surprisingly, discovers in the White City the embodiment of the best of American culture, which is to say American business culture, and he is moved to rhapsodize on his favorite theme, the triumph of the Business Will:

> The long lines of white buildings were ablaze with countless lights; the music from the bands scattered over the grounds floated softly out upon the water; all else was silent and dark. In that lovely hour, soft and gentle as was ever a summer night, the toil and trouble of men, the fear that was gripping men's hearts in the market, fell away from me, and in its place came Faith. The people who could dream this vision and make it real, those people from all parts of the land who thronged here day after day — their sturdy wills and strong hearts would rise above failure, would press on to greater victories than this triumph of beauty — victories greater than the world had yet witnessed! (p. 192)

If Harrington seems to be articulating the faith of a Whitman, it is really only a mocking echo of the old optimism, for it is a faith grounded not on American democracy but on the stock market. And, of course, one remembers, the Fair is not, after all, *real*; it is stucco and wood, not designed to endure more than the year of its planned tenure. Harrington's affirmations about the future of society are not intended to convince, for Herrick no longer believes in them himself: just as the stock market is no serious epitome for America's social problems or social progress, so is the Fair (after more than a decade's reflection on Herrick's part) only a sham ceremony in the manifestation on this earth of ideals. Dazzled by his own success, the "American Citizen" can still espouse a version of the outmoded idealism, though it is clear he should take his eyes from the zenith long enough to have a look at the muck

beneath him on the nadir. All Harrington's connivings, bribings, pre-emptions are executed in the name of the metaphysical "greatest good," while the immediate and imperative social needs of the greatest number are denied when they are recognized at all.

The acute solipsism of the American business tycoon is by now a familiarly recognized part of the pathology of the type but Herrick deserves credit for giving us an interesting and an early case-study. Van Harrington at his pinnacle is denounced from the pulpit: all these social gospel preachers are "silk-stockings." He is excoriated by the press: the newspapers are nothing but political house-organs. He alienates his wife and his brother and sister-in-law: none of them "understand him" or his high purpose. The self is all that may be known. Harrington claims to know himself. He pleases himself. And he creates the industrial landscape around him in his own dreary image.

This world, which he does not feel is incommensurate with the White City, is a new feudal order, a necessary and desirable outcome of the march of finance capitalism and technology, and no longer subject to the democratic social contract. Democracy, Harrington says, "proved itself inadequate in a short century.... But we men who did the work of the world, who developed the country, who were the life and force of the times, could not be held back by the swaddling-clothes of any political or moral theory" (pp. 246-47). From their fiefdoms in the Chicago industrial districts, from the dark towers of LaSalle Street, these princes and Merlins unleash the fury of their stock corners, turn back the strike-sieges of the union which represent the "commons." And when Harrington is sent to the Senate, he goes as a guardian of his own and the other packers' interests — there is no question of any national perspective, no implication of any constituency beyond the Loop and Packingtown.

Herrick slips one final irony into *Memoirs*: Harrington, having bought his Senate seat, is forced to realize that he cannot buy a seat on the United States Supreme Court for his friend and legal counsel, Jaffrey Slocum. Slocum had for years done Harrington's dirty work in the courts, had been that manipulator of the law Harrington knew he needed even before he left Indiana. And no corporation lawyer who had muddied his hands to the extent Slocum was forced to could hope to sit on the "Supreme Bench," for here at least was one American institution that Herrick regarded as yet beyond purchase. It is consistent with Harrington's kind of character that the one check society is able to make on his career hurt not the financier himself but his most trusted lieutenant.

After *The Memoirs of an American Citizen,* Herrick altered his novelistic perspective toward Chicago and urban society in general. When he wrote subsequently about the problems of predatory capitalism, as he did in *A Life for a Life* (1910), it was in terms of an apocalyptic allegory of social disintegration; when he once again treated the recurrent theme of an individual's relationship to social institutions, it was from the inner psychological point of view, as in his examination of marriage in *Together* (1908). Thus the Chicago trio of *The Web of Life, The Common Lot,* and *Memoirs* stands today as Herrick's collective contribution to the phase of American fiction grounded in the drama of the "average" American's attempts to accommodate himself to the bewildering changes in the urban industrial society — trying to find the delicate ethical balance between "getting on" and pre-empting.

In his use of Chicago materials Herrick was not simply a local-colorist. He undoubtedly understood local-color as well as any other realist or naturalist, but he was striving to create the sort of richly complex ethical universe he admired in James and Howells. To this end local-color for its own sake would have been an impediment. He chose as a more effective means the localized symbolic landscape: the anarchist riot and trial, the Pullman strike and its aftermath, and, most symbolically suggestive of all, the World's Columbian Exposition. Herrick's patient dedication to Howells' program for American realism, adapted to fit the Chicago novelist's preoccupation with the organic social structure of the city, resulted in three novels among the best Herrick wrote. And they *are* the best Midwestern expressions of the Progressive impulse in American fiction.

NOTES

[1]Robert Herrick, *The Gospel of Freedom* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1898), p. 101.

[2]Blake Nevius, *Robert Herrick: The Development of a Novelist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 53-55.

[3]Nevius, p. 56.

[4]*A Life for a Life* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1910), pp. 427-28.

[5]*The Web of Life* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1900), p. 33. Subsequent citations, indicated in parentheses, are to this edition.

[6]From "Myself," quoted in Nevius, pp. 141-42.

[7]This is Nevius' interpretation not only of *The Common Lot* but of all Herrick's novels: see especially ch. 4, "The Puritan in Exile."

[8]Veblen is not mentioned in Nevius' biography, even though all three of the novels under consideration here were written while Veblen and Herrick were both at the University of Chicago and while Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* was spreading its provocative social message among the intellectuals of America. But there may very well have been an indirect influence. Because Herrick was so thoroughly a social novelist, he would surely have been aware of Veblen's

critical analyses of American institutions, manners, and mores. The notion of the instinct of workmanship and its betrayal by a society ruled by canons of predatory emulation and conspicuous consumption would seem to be ready-made for embodiment in the kinds of human dramas Herrick favored: those of man's natural proclivities denied or perverted by unhealthy social forces, then reclaimed in the moral regeneration of the principals. Beyond the question of whether they knew each other personally lies the fact of their mounting similarly conceived and similarly incisive critiques of American society — and doing so from the same place at roughly the same time.

[9]*The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914; rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1964), p. 33.

[10]*The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; rpt. New York: Random House Modern Library, 1931), p. 93.

[11]*The Common Lot* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1904), p. 260. Subsequent citations, indicated in parentheses, are to this edition.

[12]This was an early title for *The Common Lot* and survives as the heading for Part III (Nevius, p. 140).

[13]William Dean Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, eds. Clara and Rudolph Kirk (New York: New York University Press, 1959), p. 41.

[14]Quoted in Nevius, pp. 122-23.

[15]This is Nevius' interpretation; see p. 122.

[16]*The Memoirs of an American Citizen* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1905), p. 346. Subsequent citations, indicated in parentheses, are to this edition.

[17]Because of his fictional method, Herrick's anger at the injustice done at the trial is more controlled than the famous rage of Howells, who wrote his sister, "Annie, it's all been an atrocious piece of frenzy and cruelty, for which we must stand ashamed forever before history." *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*, ed. Mildred Howells (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), I, 404.

[18]Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was serialized (and reached a national audience about as large as Herrick's) in the *Appeal to Reason* during 1905 before it was brought out by Doubleday in 1906.