DR. SMILES AND THE "COUNTERFEIT" GENTLEMEN: SELF-MAKING AND MISAPPLICATION IN MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

By Daniel Matlock

ON THE MORNING OF 15 MAY 1855, career criminal Edward Agar and his associate, William Pierce, walked away from the London Bridge Station of the South-Eastern Railway Company with over £14,000 in stolen gold. The bullion was the property of the City of London merchants, whose intention had been to ship the bars via train to Dover and then on to Calais by ferry. Security was comprehensive and the success of Agar's en route interception was made possible only through labor-intensive planning and meticulous execution. It was the type of job in which the thief specialized. Even before what would become known as the "Great Bullion Robbery," Agar's criminal diligence and self-drive had provided him with the monetary resources to establish himself in the wealthy, middle-class suburb of Cambridge Villas, where he enjoyed a reputation as a consummate gentleman. Throughout Agar's planning of the bullion heist, his neighbors remained entirely unaware that his home was headquarters to an extensive criminal ring.

The "sensational" train robbery provoked widespread interest. One firsthand account comes from the young secretary whose own diligence at the railway company had earned him a position overseeing the bullion's safe passage. He recollects, "A great deal had to be done to improve matters. The poor South-Eastern seems to have been regarded as a great milch cow. [And the robbery] originated in [a] desire for having a tug at the great milch cow" (*Autobiography* 198; ch. 13). The secretary's name was Samuel Smiles, the same man whose soon-to-be bestselling *Self-Help* (1859) would become a definitive text of the period, buttressing a market economy of ambitious, upwardly mobile businessmen through its encouragement of energetic individualism and the power of self-made gentlemanliness. Of course, Agar's particular brand of "helping himself" was not exactly what Smiles had in mind as he composed his seminal work.[1]

And yet, while the above episode certainly appears to undermine Smiles and his regimen of self-making, here I want to suggest just the opposite – that the exploits of sophisticated criminals such as Agar in fact reinforced self-help's ideology of gentlemanly capitalism.[2] More specifically, I will argue that a rhetoric of "misapplication," used by proponents of self-help in the cases of Agar and like criminals, was a crucial means of countering a central

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complication in Smiles's work – namely, a conflict between the text's rhetoric of self-making and its figuration of the gentleman-capitalist as heavily dependent on others for his validity. By using the biographical intersection between Agar and Smiles to begin investigating "points of continuity and contact"[3] between two figures occupying polar ends of the Victorian social spectrum, I locate criminality at the origins of modern, industrial capitalism.

To overestimate the rhetorical power of *Self-Help* would be difficult. The book sold 20,000 copies in its initial year, and surpassed a quarter of a million sales within the author's lifetime (Sinnema iv). "Self-help" was adopted as a catchword in social, political, and artistic discourse of the day. New "improvement" journals were built around the phrase; the self-made man appeared in the popular novels of Dickens, Ainsworth, and Eliot; even William Gladstone adopted the term, advising his son at Oxford, first and foremost, to "cultivate self-help" (Morley 206). The author himself achieved "celebrity" status, receiving invitations to lay foundation stones, sit for portraits, and give public speeches (A. Smiles 94). Such pervasiveness registers the profound impact the book had on cultural thought and practices of the day.

Despite *Self-Help*'s mainstream popularity, though, potential overlap with Agar's brand of illicit self-making registers within its very pages. Defining his gentleman-capitalist as a man of "character," Smiles very quickly warns his readers to steer clear of "counterfeits of character" (317; ch. 13). This is no easy task, however, given that Smiles defines character itself as a persuasive tool, what he calls a kind of "money value." He writes, "Every man is bound to aim at the possession of good character" (317; ch. 13). This is because it "carries with it an influence that always tells; for it is the result of proved . . . qualities which . . . command the general confidence and respect of mankind" (314; ch. 13). Smiles's currency metaphor, accentuated by the goal of "possession," places character outside of the self as a seemingly acquirable object. In doing so, Smilesian character departs from lines of thinking that saw the trait as deeply personal. Here, it acts as rhetorical capital, primarily important for its utility in the public sphere. The move from "influence" to "command" suggests just how much this utility lies in gaining a persuasive advantage over others. Although "confidence" as in *confidence artist* was not prevalently used in England until the late nineteenth century, the term had permeated trade vernacular in America as early as 1849 (Braucher and Orbach 250–51). Smilesian character thus became interwoven into a schema of exchange and profit that paralleled the very market economy whose volatility allowed for Agar's heist.

Grounded in such a notion of character, the Smilesian gentleman-capitalist's identity gets its validity from a type of negotiation between self-fashioning performer and potentially-affirming receiver. Taking my cue from rhetorical hermeneutics, I would suggest that Smiles's gentleman-capitalist be seen as an emergent form of thinking about identity as "interpreted being" – identity as a combination of how we interpret ourselves, how others interpret us, and how we interpret ourselves based on how others have interpreted us (Mailloux, *Disciplinary Identities* 85). The Smilesian model looks something like this: identifying as a gentleman, the capitalist performs with character so as to be interpreted by others as a gentleman, which interpretations (assuming the performance is successful) validate his initial identification.

Akin to any complex negotiation, Smiles's model leaves room for exploitation, a possibility which, as I will demonstrate shortly, the Agar case actualizes. Of equal significance, though, are Smiles's attempts to downplay such possibility. For these attempts ultimately necessitate the rhetorical incorporation of con artistry that I mean to expose. Having grounded his idea of performative identity in "character," Smiles quickly works to

legitimize that identity by turning character's associations with valuable inner/moral qualities into presentational behavior. In other words, the Smilesian gentleman practices a form of what Regenia Gagnier has called the "pragmatics of self-presentation," picking up on the "values, expectations, and constraints" associated with character in order to represent himself adequately in the "concrete circumstances of everyday life" (3–4). In 1850s Britain, the moral qualities of character were, of course, largely bound up in Christian virtues, and Smiles references that line of thought, initially naming "truthfulness, integrity, and goodness" as the "essence of manly character" (316; ch. 13). However, he quickly moves on to discuss character as an outward manifestation. He writes that "So little things will illustrate a person's character. Indeed character consists in little acts, well and honorably performed" (321; ch. 13). The sentence demonstrates the high level of significance that Smiles places on the enacting of character. According to Smiles's syntax, the actions that "illustrate" character promptly become character's very make-up – the things of which it consists. Of equal (if not more) importance to character's moral qualities per se is action that demonstrates those qualities. Thus Smiles later specifies his use of *integrity* as "integrity in word and deed" (317; ch. 13). Taking into account integrity's etymological roots in *integritas*, denoting "something undivided," and Smiles's construction of character as performance, we might specify the "consistent conduct" of the Smilesian gentleman to mean a repetition of like self-presentations, each promising the continuation of the same behavior and thus guarding against deceit.

Smiles clarifies the nature of these like self-presentations when he names "little courtesies [as that] which form the small change in life [and] acquire their importance through repetition and accumulation" (322; ch. 13). Again using his money metaphor, Smiles suggests that character as a "money value" is based not simply upon demonstrated and accepted courtesy, but, more specifically, upon the consistent demonstration and acceptance of repeated courtesies. Generating a trust that one's "gentleman performance" is, whether temporally or spatially, always the same, character lends legibility to that performance. This legibility then works to convince others to accept the performed gentleman as a valid identity.

The idea of repeated courtesies does additional work towards deemphasizing the possible overlap between the gentleman-capitalist and the con artist. Because courtesy taps into traditional notions of the gentleman bound up in an aristocratic social structure, it works to naturalize a gentlemanly identity based on repeated performance. A long tradition of courtesy as a form of benevolence shown by superiors to those of a lower rank connected behavior to notions of innate identity. While referencing the old aristocracy (*courtesy*'s etymological root being *court*, as in *court*ly life) may seem an odd choice for a program that essentially wishes to replace it by adopting courtesy within a system that does not recognize rank, Smiles infuses the actions of his gentleman with naturalness, while preserving his openly inclusive model. He is then able to state with a certain level of plausibility that "counterfeits of character" can be distinguished from "the genuine article" (317; ch. 13). Such a move also tied Smiles's argument to a prevalent Victorian desire to see gentlemanliness as patent and intrinsic. Thus, the notion of repeated courtesies acts as a form of insurance, meant to safeguard from manipulation those validating Smiles's gentleman-capitalist.

At the same time, however, repeated courtesy points to what I noted as the central problem that Smiles's conceptualization of the gentleman's identity poses for his self-making scheme, for it puts heavy emphasis on the second part of rhetorical hermeneutics' identity paradigm: identity as how one is interpreted by others. The implications of Smiles's notion

of courtesy are quite different from that of a rank system. Rather than bestowals from one who is already unquestionably a gentleman, courtesies become an appeal to others to validate one's gentlemanliness. To frame it in terms of Smiles's money metaphor, the "courtesies" of the gentleman might be thought of as investments whereby one gives over one's self in the expectation of a greater return (a return that is, essentially, a self "coined" as a gentleman). Such a paradigm of courtesy, while protecting against the threat of counterfeit, makes the gentleman's a rather passive identity, determined almost entirely by forces outside the self. In this regard, Smiles's rhetoric of gentlemanliness seems a potential hamper to his notion of self-help and its idealization of self-making through one's "own free and independent individual action" (18; ch. 1).

Smiles's victimization in the infamous gold robbery provides a useful segue into understanding how a particular type of criminality served as a fruitful means to contest the central dilemma of the self-help guru's scheme. In the portion of this article which follows, I will show how a notion of misapplication, propounded in discussions of illegalities such as Edward Agar's gold heist, rhetorically incorporated aspects of Agar's brand of unlawfulness into the identity of the self-made gentleman. Specifically, I will argue that the effectivity of Agar's criminal diligence (and that of like criminals) was circuitously co-opted in order to buttress an ideology of active, self-made gentlemanliness even as that ideology energetically worked to disavow such a relationship.

On the surface of it, the Great Bullion Robbery of 1855 seems to substantiate the precarious dilemma of legibility in the Smilesian gentleman – a difficulty which Smiles's incorporation of courtesy was, I have suggested, meant to address. The mastermind behind the heist, Edward Agar, had been a professional thief since the age of eighteen with at least two warrants to his name (Kingston 107), and by his late thirties had become adroit at defrauding the credulous by passing himself off as a gentleman capitalist. His ability to come across as genuine was largely due to a successful exploitation of the very *character*-based identity that Smiles's work rhetorically constructs.

The bullion-robbery scheme was a complicated one requiring months of meticulous planning – and Agar capitalized upon the professed correlation between consistency and gentlemanliness in order to execute effectively its various details. Firstly, he established himself on cordial terms with his neighbors in the well-to-do suburb of Cambridge Villas, Shepherd's Bush two years ahead of the robbery attempt (Thomas 207). The recurrent civility of his behavior over such a long period of time gained him credit as a gentleman, allowing him to operate unsuspected while he studied security timetables and acquired imprints of various keys – elements crucial to his success. After the robbery, Agar's house served as a base to convert the bars into a usable currency. His regularized manner of living there was so typical of a young gentleman – "under the name of Adams, with Fanny Kay, a young woman, who passed as his wife; and they also had a female servant" (Evans 495; ch. 10) – that no one suspected he was involved in crime. In this sense, the notion of consistency-as-gentlemanliness deflected attention from his plotting.

In a similar fashion was Agar able to obtain the second key necessary to unlock the safe in which his potential lucre was stored. In his 1890 text *Celebrated Crimes and Criminals*, Sir Willoughby Maycock details how Agar, under the false name of Archer, went to the Folkstone station to receive a fake package delivered by his associate, William Pierce (86). The purpose of this ruse was simply to make Agar (Archer) a familiar face at the booking clerk's office where the key was being kept. Agar's concerted effort to acclimate the station to his presence

is confirmed in another source, Arthur Griffith's 1884 *The Chronicles of Newgate*, which describes Agar as "hanging about the Folkstone office for some time" (392). The thief even went so far as to frequent the Rose Inn, a nearby tavern where two Folkstone station clerks, Mr. Ledger and Mr. Chapman, spent time. The former describes meeting Agar on several occasions, having supper with him once, and even being invited to "go to the Pavilion and take wine with him" ("Theft"). Agar confirms Ledger's account, adding that he socialized with both men, occasionally "having a game of billiards or a drink with [them]" ("Police"). Agar's extended presence at the station under apparently licit circumstances, along with his courteous acquaintance with the clerks, offers a plausible explanation for the fact that Mr. Chapman eventually opened the station safe in his presence, unwittingly revealing the hiding place of the key. It also helps to explain why Agar was left alone with the key when a tidal train unexpectedly arrived, thereby affording him the opportunity to make a wax impression (Evans 488–89; ch. 10). That Ledger and Chapman and the other employees at the station mistook him for the gentleman Mr. Archer is but a logical outcome of Smiles's system. For the performances to which they were privy looked consistent. Agar had given them a cohesive, repeated performance. The fact that such repetition was limited to a small timeframe is one for which Smiles's system cannot fully account.

Agar's success in this regard registers the contextual difficulty of discerning between a gentleman of character and someone who is merely acting "as if" a gentleman, the difference being that the former always enacts the gentleman while the latter only plays the gentleman temporarily. Faced with increasing urbanization and modernization in everyday life, Victorians were highly aware of an increasing diversification in social interaction. As Raymond Williams notes, the thoroughly metropolitan environment of Victorian London was a place of brief glimpses, quick expressions, and crowds (154–55). In such an environment, absolute certainty in the consistency of another person's behavior was nearly impossible, because no one could track the entirety of another's social performance. Ostensibly, then, Agar's case undermines Smiles, exposing a problematic lack of legibility in his paradigm, despite the author's relatively persuasive attempts to add reliability to his hermeneutics of gentleman-reading.

However, the rhetoric surrounding the crime in the dialogue of the trial and in subsequent assessments of the case reconfigures the event into one that, I suggest, ultimately benefits the self-help ideology. Specifically, such discourse separates both Agar's gentlemanly behavior and his active energies from his iniquity, and then appropriates those traits in order to perpetuate a notion of the gentleman as, one, legible, and, two, an active figure suitable for self-making. To begin with, the concluding remarks of the judge at the criminal case:

> That man Agar is a man who is as bad, I dare say, as bad can be, but . . . it is obvious, as I have said, that he is a man of extraordinary talent; that he gave to this and, perhaps, to many other robberies, an amount of care and perseverance one-tenth of which devoted to honest pursuits must have raised him to a respectable station in life, and, considering the commercial activity of this country during the last twenty years, would probably have enabled him to realize a large fortune. (Dilnot, *James the Penman* 264)

By defining Agar's "gentleman" role as criminally fraudulent specifically because of his misapplication of his talents, the judge's speech separates his deeds and the energy behind those deeds, effectively discounting the possible indivisibility of Agar's energies and his

"badness." Agar's success, then, is transformed from evidence of the power of crime and deceit to evidence of the power of self-driven energy in general. It can then be (and in this case is) grafted onto the notion that "honest pursuits" lead to gentlemanly status: redirected, Agar's energies (since they've proven themselves effective) "must" have gained him that "respectable station" which he had only feigned. The judge's speech thus exploits the criminally fraudulent "gentleman's" success as evidence of a direct correlation between self-driven energy and becoming a true gentleman. Further, by alluding to the "commercial activity of the country," the speech locates the rhetorical correlation between self-making and gentlemanliness at the heart of capitalist ideology, thereby working to secure its justifiability.

This correlation is reinforced by language that diminishes the fraudulence of Agar's "gentlemanliness." Throughout the case, Agar was contrasted favorably against his various co-conspirators. Introducing him to testify against William Pierce, the prosecution made the following statement: "[He] had property of his own, and having been reconciled to Fanny Kay, or entertaining a kindly feeling for her as the mother of his child, he arranged, when he was arrested that Pierce should take possession of all his property, and should provide for Fanny Kay and his child" (Dilnot, *James the Penman* 154). Here, Agar is cast in a noble light, selflessly thinking of the welfare of others in his final moments as a free man. The counselor emphasizes the notion with pathetic appeal, drawing attention to Agar's kindness and role as a father. While the motivation for narrating this incident on the part of the prosecution was primarily to legitimize Agar's testimony against Pierce, it soon became a recurring motif. Accounts of the trial, including those in the *Times*, and subsequent ones such as the above mentioned works by Evans (498; ch. 10), Maycock (91), and Griffith (394) all relate the story. Newspaper reports reinforce the positive portrayal by stressing Agar's refined manner. An article in the *Times* of 26 October 1855, for instance, calls attention to him as "a genteel looking young man" ("Central Criminal Court"). Later editions describe him as "quick and determined in his manners, and possessing some intelligence" ("Great Bullion Robbery"); "in the very prime of his days" ("It is the Fashion"); and "well-dressed" at the time of his capture ("Great Bullion Robbery"). Such descriptions lend him a gentlemanly aura notwithstanding his having been exposed as a fraud.

The concluding remarks of the judge at sentencing, which rehash the Fanny Kay incident, demonstrate more specifically how it was utilized to downplay the fraudulence of Agar's performance of gentlemanliness. Judge Baron Martin:

> No doubt [Agar] deserves [condemnation], but let it be said that he remained true to you [Agar's associates, Burgess and Tester], that he said not a word about this robbery until he heard of Pierce's base conduct. As he gave his evidence he did not appear to feel towards you that bitter animosity which was so clearly manifested in him, and, I must say, not unnaturally, under the circumstances, towards Pierce. (*James the Penman* 268)

The speech offsets Agar's culpability as a criminal with an allusion to constancy – the fact that he "remained true" until he found that Pierce had failed to provide for Fanny Kay. His culpability as a turncoat is similarly offset, for he is shown to have been disloyal to his associates only because of a greater loyalty to Fanny Kay. The judge thus uses the Fanny Kay incident to fix Agar's seemingly inconsistent behavior as consistency. As a result, Agar appears to gain that trait which Smiles's paradigm defines as the deciding element of gentlemanliness. The speech also disavows his inscrutability by describing his state of

mind as "clearly manifested." By depicting him as both gentlemanly and legible, the speech works to diminish his effective deceit. Rather than a powerful tool for wickedness, Agar's "gentleman-counterfeiting" can be seen as the result of a corrupted potentiality as a real gentleman, a potentiality which the judge's concluding remarks tie to his self-driven energy. The trial, then, underpinned the ideology of the Smilesian gentleman, because it was able to diminish the danger which Agar represented as a "counterfeit" while simultaneously using him to disguise the problematic dissonance between self-making and gentlemanliness as evinced in Smiles's thought. In doing so, it turned the criminal into a viable instrument of gentlemanliness.

Utilizing one of the strengths of rhetorical hermeneutics, I have borrowed "misapplication" as a theoretical term from a contemporaneous usage in another prominent Victorian trial, the 1873 prosecution of Austin Bidwell, George MacDonnell, George Bidwell, and Edwin Noyes for the Bank of England Forgery. Here, Sir Harry Poland, Counsel for the Prosecution, used the term to describe the crime as "a capital instance of misapplied genius" (Dilnot, *The Bank of England Robbery* 11). The case involved an elaborate fraud scheme in which the brothers Bidwell (professional thieves who operated in Britain, Europe, and the Americas) robbed the Bank of England of some £102,000. Their design involved passing forged bills of exchange back and forth between two fictional gentlemen, "Mr. Warren" and "Mr. Horton," bills that the unwitting bank changed into gold. In his autobiography, Bidwell later explained the plan as originating from the fact that "the banks discounted the paper without making any inquiry as to the genuineness of the signatures, relying entirely on the character of the customer who offered the paper for discount" (189). Significantly, Bidwell here attributes the viability of the crime to its exploitation of the cultural capital that Victorians associated with character. In fact, the plan seems based exactly on the idea expressed in *Self-Help* that "if [a man's] character be of sterling worth, he will always command an influence" (315; ch. 13).

The manner in which Bidwell and his associates gained the fictional Misters Warren and Horton social acceptance links the plot even more specifically to Smiles's conceptualization. Bidwell recalls that "On the 2nd of December, 1872, Austin . . . opened an account at the Continental Bank in the name of C.J. Horton, depositing 1,300 in bank notes. . . . The next day I had a Warren cheque deposited to Horton's account, and the operation repeated . . . from day to day, in order to give the affair an air of genuine business" (Bidwell, *Autobiography* 191). Performed consistency – the same act repeated day after day – worked to convince the bank to credit the characters of Horton and Warren. That the Bidwells presupposed repetition (as opposed to one legitimate deposit) as necessary to establish their fake characters suggests the cultural weight of such a notion. Moreover, we get the sense that such repetition was linked to what Smiles specifies as a gentlemanly variety, for Bidwell writes how he took "advantage of the confidence placed in me by gentlemen who received me courteously" (146). The line places Bidwell's actions within a system of interaction wherein the "reception" of one's performed identity is based upon exchanged civilities. The success of the Bidwell bank robbery, then, much like Agar's bullion robbery, relied heavily upon the gentlemanly ideology of Smiles.

The above use of the term "misapplication," like the judge's comments in the Agar case, figures the close association between the criminal and the gentleman in a manner that grafts onto the latter the attributes of effective energy that the former exhibits. In describing Bidwell's self-driven energy as "misapplied," Poland fixes it as presupposed, an a priori

asset unrelated to its illicit usage. At the same time, further inflections of the adjective rhetorically appropriate that a priori drive on behalf of the self-made gentleman. Application as "appeal" (used primarily in legalese of the time) aligns Bidwell's self-drive with the system of rhetorical performance and reception that validates the Smilesian gentleman's identity while, simultaneously, the prefix *mis-* separates the fraudulence of his performances from such drive by limiting them solely to the idea of poor usage. Similarly, the term's meaning as "assiduous effort," to which Smiles devotes an entire chapter of *Self-Help* (chapter 4), evokes the diligence of self-making, while again the prefix restricts the "badness" of Bidwell's diligence to its erroneous direction. *Misapplication*, then, was used in this mid-century context as a means to conflate the criminal's energy with self-made gentlemanliness, while disavowing its association with the very crimes through which it was evinced.

Poland's classifying of Bidwell's successful energies as a form of "genius" develops upon such conflation. In the mid-nineteenth century, traditional usage of the term was closely related to "talent" (the term used in the Agar case) and denoted a quality that required cultivation and practice. Thus, for instance, Bulwer-Lytton in *My Novel* (1853) describes the Squire's "active genius [as] always at some repair or improvement" (175; bk. 2, ch. 10). At the same time, a newer sense of the word, which gained prevalence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, saw, as Thomas De Quincey wrote, "talent and genius . . . in polar opposition to each other" (194). David Minden Higgins describes this viewpoint as a "'Romantic' emphasis on innate genius as an unpredictable gift" (130). In *Self-Help*, Smiles wavers between these definitions. At times he aligns genius with self-making, maintaining that "all men have an equal aptitude for genius, [which is] what [all] are able to effect . . . who, under like circumstances, apply themselves" (91; ch. 4). Here, genius equals perseverance and practice. Yet he also uses the term oppositely, as when he writes, "Energy . . . carries [a man] onward and upward in every station of life. It accomplishes more than genius, with not one-half the disappointment and peril" (190; ch. 8). When genius implies no need for cultivation, Smiles unsurprisingly figures it as treacherous. He thus uses the term both positively and pejoratively in order to buttress his system on both ends.

The term works similarly in Poland's speech, and, in doing so, is able to register both congruence and incongruence with the criminal's energies. If interpreted primarily in its first sense as compatible with self-making, Poland's use of "genius" reinforces the work that "misapplication" does. Namely, it incorporates the energies of the criminal as evidence of the power of self-drive, while implying that Bidwell's particular energy was wicked simply because it was wrongly practiced. Meanwhile, because of the concurrent sense of the word which lingers in the background, such energies gain something of that naturalness which *Self-Help* attempts to graft onto its gentleman. If, in contrast, the innateness of Bidwell's genius is foregrounded, his energies become more closely tied to his wickedness, but, in this case, seem to have little relationship to self-making. Further, because this form of genius was commonly accepted as a rarity, such an understanding implies a low incidence of sophisticated criminals, thereby downplaying the dangerous opening that the Smilesian hermeneutics of "gentleman-interpretation" entails. Contextualizing Poland's definition of Bidwell's criminality within the mid-nineteenth-century cultural conversation of self-making thus reveals how the phrase worked to resolve complications regarding the Smilesian gentleman on multiple levels.

The idea of misapplication, misapplied talent, misapplied genius, and close variants thereof, became something of a cultural trope in the years between 1837 and 1877. Major criminals of the period such as James Townsend Saward ("Jim the Penman"), William Palmer

("The Rugeley Poisoner"), and Thomas Caseley (a safecracker) were described respectively as having a potentially "successful ingenuity" had it not been turned in "a criminal direction" (Dilnot 123); as "a man of genius [without] scruples" (Trollope 542; vol. 2, ch. 51); and as one to be pitied because he "could have obtained success in any walk of life" (qtd. in Price 105). Of course, opportunity to employ this trope was ample, given that the same market forces that were facilitating the rise of the self-made gentleman were also opening new and increasingly complex avenues for the practice of fraud. Henry Mayhew's well-known *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861–62) registers this idea, depicting young criminals as "keen," "shrewd and acute," with "quickness of perception" and "highly enterprising" natures (369–72).

Another, less-known work, David M. Evans's 1859 *Facts, Failures, and Frauds*, similarly explores a shift from thinking about criminality as the work of the idle and unsuccessful to thinking about it as the province of vibrant but dishonest entrepreneurs – skilled practitioners of what the author calls, "'high art' crime" (1–2; ch. 1). Published in the same year as Smiles's work, *Facts, Failures, and Frauds* serves as something of a cultural counterpart to *Self-Help*. Structurally, the text mirrors *Self-Help*, beginning with a general principle and then following with a detailed series of anecdotes meant to support that principle. In this way, it participates in the rather Smilesian assumption that repetition and character building are fundamentally intertwined. Just as Smiles attempts to habituate his readers to recognize character as consistent action by shirking the incredibly popular conduct book format in favor of repetitive case studies,[4] so too *Facts, Failures, and Frauds* adopts case studies as its persuasive model for outlining a convincing account of "astounding frauds" (iv). That it does so to address the criminal, rather than the gentlemanly entrepreneur, not only obliquely undermines Smiles's schema of consistency, but also hints towards the tenuity by which entrepreneurship claimed status as a laudable trade of the day.

The convergence of criminal and gentleman capitalist, though, is never accepted in Evans's work; like Smiles, Evans's goal is ultimately to distinguish between these identities. His attempts to do so, however, lead to contradiction, in the end exposing an underlying cognizance of similarity. For example, the primary distinction that Evans makes between criminals and legitimate entrepreneurs depends on the fact that the former desires success through ease. He explains that "all the incentives to commercial crime may be brought under the one common rubric – the desire to make money easily and in a hurry" (1; ch. 1). Of course, this statement is impossible to maintain in the face of numerous anecdotes outlining the extensive planning and meticulous operations of well-known criminals. Given the general tenor and purpose of the book, the statement reads as remarkably artificial. Unsurprisingly, Evans never fully returns to this claim.

The term "high art crime" itself subverts the idea of supposed ease and, further, registers the permeability of the line between criminal and gentleman capitalist. Early in the text, Evans sets high-art crime alongside legitimate high art: "It is no wonder that [in] the last twenty years . . . many have arrived at a 'high art' in guilt, while 'high arts' of a more innocent kind have been manifestly on the decline" (1). By explicitly comparing criminal to legitimate high art, this statement foregrounds the implications of such a term – namely, the connotations of skill and loftiness that necessarily get grafted onto criminal actions. Further, Evans's syntax, wherein high art crime seems to grow in proportion to legitimate high art's decline, would seem to cast the process as a zero-sum game wherein the practice of high art ebbs and flows between the legitimate and the illegitimate. This understanding of criminality and entrepreneurship on a continuum, paired with Evans's ostensible attempt to distinguish

between the two, manifests the complexities of understanding identity within a new market system – complexities which, as I have shown, allowed misapplication to work as a rhetorical trope.

While never fully developing the concept of misapplication himself, Evans writes from a similar framework. This shows most clearly in his understanding of the reasons behind the rise of high art crime. He argues that the crimes he illustrates "do not represent the simple perverseness of individual natures, but are so many indices of a depreciated, and apparently bad, moral atmosphere that has of late pervaded the whole of the commercial world" (5; ch. 1). Akin to the judge in Agar's criminal case, Evans works to place the energy of the individual beyond culpability. Instead, he gives agency to a vague "atmosphere" in which all entrepreneurs either have been or have the potential to be turned towards crime. Thus he follows with the assertion that "unless the extravagant and pretentious habits of the age are brought within more restrained limits, the volume now presented to the public . . . will only be a single page in a vast and ever increasing history" (5). Evans, then, separates the criminal from the legitimate entrepreneur, but only by a thin layer of potentiality. Fundamentally – as in the idea of misapplication – they remain products of the same energies.

The self-help trend and its ideology of gentlemanliness in an age of increasingly complex market forces, then, fostered a complicated intercourse between capitalist and criminal. The performative nature of Smiles's theory of identity, the weaknesses contingent upon its legitimization, and Smiles's attempts to incorporate it into a schema of active, dynamic agency led to a radical incorporation of otherness among his proponents. Because of an ability to navigate and exploit the dynamic market environment that was the self-made gentleman's supposed purview, successful criminals became subject to symbolic dissection, their viable components harvested, their unviable ones rejected. Dissection, however, is a messy process, and the idea that self-makers could so selectively associate with certain criminal traits while appearing to remain entirely detached from others is perhaps unfeasible. This article has meant both to analyze the skill by which self-help proponents rhetorically gleaned and disposed of criminal energies as well as to uncover the traces they left behind.

University of California, Irvine

NOTES

1. For a detailed account of this incident, see *The Victorian Underworld* by Thomas.
2. I use a rhetorical view of ideology: "We can think of ideologies as defining positions within the cultural conversation. Ideologies . . . are sets of beliefs and practices serving particular sociopolitical interests in a specific historical context, and these sets appear in the cultural conversation as strategic arguments and rhetorical figures" (Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power* 60).
3. My study is influenced by the work of James Eli Adams. In *Dandies and Desert Saints*, Adams explores "unexpected points of continuity and contact between normative and transgressive masculinities" (19). The kinds of "transgression" that Adams investigates, however, are quite different from those which hold my interest. Gender based, they center on a paradigm of "manly" versus "unmanly."
4. Instead of prescribing a set of rules for becoming a gentleman, Smiles presents a series of case studies which he "leaves . . . in the hands of the reader; in the hopes that the lessons of industry, perseverance, and self-culture, which it contains, will be found useful and instructive . . ." (8). The conduct book was

incredibly popular at the time, and Smiles was taking a financial risk in shirking that format. Well-known publisher John Murray even suggested that he pare down the anecdotes, offering to publish *Self-Help* in abbreviated form on a half-profits system. Smiles promptly rejected the offer, not wanting his anecdotes cut (A. Smiles 87–88).

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