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The Confidence-Man as Apocalyptic Vision

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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1972

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Epigraph

"We are not quite sure whether we have cracked it ourselves—whether there is not another meaning hidden . . . ."\(^1\)

INTRODUCTION
By 1856 Melville was deeply involved in the writing of *The Confidence-Man*. Any biographical assessment of Melville's situation at this time must take stock of the severe pressures and depressing conditions besetting him. The sustained intensity of his artistic efforts, for example, must have been exhausting. He had produced eight lengthy and difficult novels as well as several short stories in less than ten years. And these works were not light reading; most were marked by heavy symbolism and intricately developed themes of serious philosophical import. Melville's exertions, however, had not been repaid by literary reputation or even modest wealth. The romantic young novelist of *Typee* and *Omoo* fame, the suave, sought-after New Yorker, had become a struggling family man burdened with economic obligations and the care of a Massachusetts farm. Beginning with *Mardi*, moreover, Melville's artistic creations had successively alienated him from the audiences of popular literature. The public could not understand him, and the critics, especially after the publication of *Pierre*, became both condescending and scathing. Melville's work was regarded as somehow visionary or rhapsodic or obscure, but most of all, simply incomprehensible.

Melville's hopes of supporting his young family by his pen had faded into despair as years passed and royalties
dwindled. He had relied heavily on financial help from friends and family, especially his father-in-law, to back him through the rough times. During the five years preceding the publication of *The Confidence-Man*, income from magazine stories amounted to only about $240 per year, while dividends from novels were virtually negligible. The most strenuous efforts by friends to obtain a government position or diplomatic post for him had been consistently unsuccessful. As a writer, Melville faced the reality of failure, at least from the standpoints of critical acceptance and livable earnings.

By 1856, too, the physical strain had become evident. Elizabeth Shaw Melville had repeatedly mentioned in her letters to family and friends the rigorous schedule her husband habitually imposed upon himself. She worried about his lack of outdoor exercise, his eyestrain, his long unrelieved hours at his books, his morbid sensitivity.

By the early 1850's his vigorous health had broken, and he was suffering the pains of rheumatism and sciatica, as well as the threat of blindness. Family anxiety became so intense during the latter days of Melville's career as novelist that he was at length persuaded to undergo an examination by Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes.

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The examination was apparently intended to probe
Melville's mental balance as well as his physical health.
Fears for his emotional soundness were ironically accompanied
by vain efforts to sell the Arrowhead homeplace to the
Insane Asylum Commission as a location for a new mental
institution. As Foster remarks, the "malicious Devil" whom
Melville had said was "forever grinning" at him now "grinned
indeed." It was decided, at length, that Melville needed
an extended rest, and Judge Shaw, Elizabeth's father,
provided money for a winter trip to Europe and the Near East.

Melville was hurried away from his books and studies
even before The Confidence-Man could be seen through the
press. En route to the holy land, he met with his old,
close friend Nathaniel Hawthorne in Liverpool for a visit.
From that meeting we have a statement by the person perhaps
best qualified to understand Melville's mind. Hawthorne
wrote in his notebook:

Melville, as he always does, began to reason
of Providence and futurity, and of everything
that lies beyond human ken, and informed me
that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to
be annihilated'; but still he does not seem
to rest in that anticipation; and, I think,
will never rest until he gets hold of a definite
belief. It is strange how he persists—and
has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably
long before—in wandering te and fro over these

---

3Foster, p. xxi.
deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.4

As Ishmael might say, it was "these stage managers, the Fates" who engineered the time schedule of the novel's publication. That The Confidence-Man appeared on April 1, 1857, was one of the final ironies of Melville's public career. Considering the tone and existential themes of the novel, that irony was fitting. The Confidence-Man ended Melville's career as a professional novelist not only because he finally procured a time-consuming workaday job, but because the vision of reality elucidated by the book itself undercut the possibility of further artistic endeavor. The Confidence-Man is a searching, sardonic, despairing, and even terrifying novel to read and understand. It is, nevertheless, an intriguing and exciting experience. R. W. B. Lewis, for example, comments that Melville wrote it "in a mood oddly blended of comedy and controlled ferocity," but adds, "it is an almost irresistibly easy book to reread."5

An early review of the book concluded that it was the

work of "a March hare with a literary turn of mind." But recent criticism, perhaps by reason of mere respectful and painstaking reading, has been rather of the opinion of H. Bruce Franklin, who pronounces The Confidence-Man "Melville's most nearly perfect work." "In no other work--possibly excepting Bartleby /sic/," Franklin writes, "is his language under such careful control. Not a word is wasted or misplaced. I say to anybody who thinks he finds a wasted or misplaced word, 'Read the book again.'" The extraordinary attention required by this last prose composition published during Melville's lifetime repays the reader, however, not so much by satisfying or amusing his imagination as by devastating it. For The Confidence-Man produces neither a clear analysis of experience nor a delineation of character according to "fixed principles." It rather emphasizes the impossibility of knowing, much less analyzing or expressing, any kind of experience, and, in fact, ends by questioning the authenticity of existence itself.

Exploring the multiplying implications of Melville's artistic representation of human and cosmic reality here is akin to sharing those adventures that ensued from Alice's trailing the rabbit down into Wonderland. Nor will the fact that Alice's rabbit's color was white seem inappropriate later.

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6 Quoted by Elizabeth Foster in her Introduction, p. xxv. She cites only the Literary Gazette.

Yet following Melville's protean central figure through his guises, his swindles, his speculations, in short, all his fascinating subtleties, reveals certain facts about the con man's identity, his world, his significance to western religious faith, and his indirect comments on the nature of experiential ambiguity. This paper will seek to arrive at some conclusions concerning that identity, that world, that faith, these ambiguities.

The following interpretation will follow a topical organization in which the first chapter will deal with the identity of the confidence man, the second with the nature of his world, the third with the theological import of the novel, and the fourth with the inclusive theme of appearance and reality. All these chapters are controlled by an overall thesis asserting the novel's character as a kind of eschatological or, more properly, apocalyptic vision. Chapter Four will conclude the exclusive exploration of The Confidence-Man as novel. But that chapter does not end this paper, because fascination with the suggestive ramifications of the con man theme prevented me from resting satisfied with only an internal treatment of a single novel. The Confidence-Man was born on paper in 1856, but its conception lies in the years of the earlier novels. Probing back into Melville's imagination for the beginnings of the brilliant, murky, horrifying theme of the last novel published during his lifetime is not only an enticing, but
an astonishingly illuminating activity. Chapter Five is the result of that investigation. The theme of identity in Melville's work is a subtle figuration beckoning the critic from the late novels all the way back to Typee. Chapter Five attempts to show how Melville's final book and the books preceding it are mutually enlightening. The goal is a finer understanding and appreciation of the meanings of *The Confidence-Man* as consummate statement.

That long backward glance into Melville's mind as revealed in his works produces a kind of awed and horrified empathy with the writer and his protagonists. For the critic who has an eye open for aspects of the theme, that is, for assumed names, for idealistic spiels, for references to theatricals, game-playing, and fictitious roles, the task of spotting developments and ramifications is not difficult. The reader who Looks searchingly and sympathetically at that development will find an authorial psyche torn with deep emotion, too keen philosophical insight, and the revulsion of despairing recognition. The artistic effort seems appallingly gigantic and courageous; for its rewards were necessarily (given its place in history) financial and emotional self-destruction. And if the existential vision were not itself devastating enough, the artistic honesty was suicidal. Melville's last novel denied him even the possibility of publishing others.

*The Confidence-Man*’s own particular philosophy of experience
refused credence to the availability of a reality to be depicted. The curious fatality of Melville's work is that it is its own dead-end; its themes demonstrate its own pointlessness.

And so examining Melville through the framework of this paper will be a kind of immersion (as Conrad might say) in the "destructive element." The perspective here accordingly subordinates the figure of solely surviving Ishmael to all the "cosmic waifs" who appear and reappear in Melville, but whose absurd condition entirely defines the tones of *The Confidence-Man*. Obviously other perspectives are possible; this one has been helpful and enlightening for me.
Chapter I

The Identity of the Confidence Man
Probably the first obligation of any critical treatment of *The Confidence-Man* is to consider the available evidence concerning the identity of the confidence man. Determining just who the confidence man is involves ascertaining exactly which characters are his masques, what philosophical stance he assumes, what the intentions of his masquerade are, and how his actions support or deny his smooth professions of faith in traditional values. Although the purposefully vague and doubly qualified prose of the novel admits of little more than circumstantial evidence, close observation will demonstrate that this con man appears in seven distinct disguises, excluding that of the deaf-mute who occupies the earliest pages of the book, that the confidence man's imposture is a clever parody-by-reinterpretation of the ministry of the Christian savior, and that his ultimate function is eschatological. *The Confidence-Man* is, in fact, a complex allegory creating a kind of looking-glass world, a world where the unfolding of Christian history is inverted and subverted. The "vision" of the novel culminates in an apocalypse which invokes but does not share the assurances of those events prophesied in the book of Revelation. As a false prophet or anti-christ, the confidence man effects an ironic mimicry of Christ's ministry. Whereas Christ preached the sinfulness of all men and the necessity for salvation through submission to
divine love and sacrifice, the slick salesmanship of the confidence man offers the efficacy of human means and character—salvation through faith in mankind.

The significance of the confidence man's betrayal of his audience to unsalutary or, at least, falsely Christian, ethical allegiance, is bound up in the problem of his identity. I will seek to show the confidence man's hypocrisy, both his nearly convincing imitation of Christ and his finally visible departure from his saintly and ancient paradigm. The purposes of Melville's shifty protagonist may be shown to be anti-Christian, but the ultimate rationale behind that superbly unprincipled counterfeit is the real question at hand. Identifying the con man simply as the biblical anti-christ would place Melville among the ranks of traditional satirists who reveal and deride the imperfections of their fellow men. The confidence man would function as the unpleasantly effective tool of a divine force who weights and tests His earthly believers. In this case, the context of the novel would offer a Christian eschatology and Melville would join all the orthodox Jeremiahs of literary history. Unfortunately for the reader who prefers pat solutions, however, and fortunately for the reader who appreciates a richer complexity, the interpretive answers are not so easy. For the question of the confidence man's true nature is one with the
problem of the deaf-mute and the nature of the cosmic forces suggested by the novel. Exploring the personality of the protagonist as one not entirely explained away by reference to the book of Revelation permits satire on one level, but denies it on another. If, for example, The Confidence-Man is not merely an allegory, but a symbolic delineation of human reality—that is, if the protagonist is a representative of man as well as the bestial devil—then Melville not only becomes ironist rather than satirist, but moves from the religiously acceptable atmosphere of sermonistic raillery to the limbo of at least agnosticism, if not nihilism. The corrective intention, as well as the presence of artistic assumptions, are at stake. These and other questions will be treated in not only this chapter, but in subsequent ones. It is best to begin, however, with the more obvious and proceed to illuminate the less. Accordingly, the following remarks will garner the bits of factual evidence concerning the con man's identity first, and then build conclusions from those.

Much of the scholarly effort expended on the novel has concerned itself with the question of the deaf-mute's relationship to the confidence man, and many critics have concluded that the "advent" of this lamb-like figure is in fact the first appearance of the confidence man. The most convincing argument for this interpretation offers
the following evidence: the lamb-like man is the center of interest as the novel commences—hence the appropriateness of applying the title to explain his significance; he introduces the first statements concerning confidence; his chalked message seems to be the text for the speeches of later avatars; he is last seen on the forecastle and Black Guinea appears in the "forward" part of the boat; his white fleece hat suggests association with the "black fleece" and "bushy wool" of Black Guinea; his godlike boarding of the boat on April Fools' Day is commensurate with the preternatural and suspicious attributes of the other men; his travel-weary aspect is a fitting complement to his proximity to the wanted poster for an impostor from "the East"; and the boy of the last chapter who is associated both with religious sacrifice and the color black seems to embody some distinctive features of the lamb-like man and Black Guinea.

Other elements of characterization in the novel, however, both deny the nature of the deaf-mute as confidence man and explain the puzzling hints of his connection with Black Guinea. The deaf-mute is not a disguise of the confidence man, but he serves to dispense the literal situation for his impersonator, just as the biblical Christ

8 Franklin, pp. 155-7.
ordered events and made prophecies preparing the way for the anti-christ to come. The deaf-mute distinguishes himself from the confidence man by his alienated condition, his acquiescent attitude, his lack of bustling activity, and his failure to make financially profitable proselytes. The confidence man as we knew him in his characters of Black Guinea, the man with the weed, the man in the gray coat, the agent for the Black Rapids Coal Company, the herb doctor, the representative of the Philosophical Intelligence Office, and the cosmopolitan is notable chiefly for his incessant activity and volubility, his companionable ease in the all-too-human world of the Fidèle, and his intriguing ability to convey money from the pockets of his fellow travellers to his own. In no sense can he be said to be as the deaf-mute is thought by the crowd to be, "inappropriate to the time and place." Where the confidence man finds honeyed speech an easy performance, the lamb-like man's inability to communicate effectively isolates him from the crowd. If in Moby-Dick men found themselves voyaging solitary in the midst of the infinite deeps, here the divine is alone in the midst of the decidedly finite and human.

The deaf-mute's brief blackboard teachings associate him with the Christian savior who, at least in the terms set up by Melville's novel, appears as equally inaccessible

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and ineffective—and equally vulnerable to the subsequent manipulation of equivocal characters. The deaf-mute's bearding of the beat is described as an "advent." His aspect is "singularly innocent," and he is described as inimical to the spirit of an environment where the barber's "No Trust" notification does not earn for him "the repute of being a simpleton" (CM, p. 4). Unlike others aboard the Fidèle, the deaf-mute appears "neither courting nor shunning regard" (CM, p. 1), and seems "in the extremest sense of the word, a stranger" (CM, p. 1). He is "gentle," "jaded," and "lamblike." He endures "buffets," "unresented." Other passengers "flatten" his fleecy hat, and workmen swing their "burden" against him. His silent sermon on charity constitutes an abbreviated recapitulation of Christ's worldly ministry. Like the bey introduced in the final chapter, and like the Son of Man, the deaf-mute "hath not where to lay his head." He is an alien among the worldly walkways of the Fidèle. He sleeps like Jacob, the Old Testament figure of God's Chosen, at the foot of a ladder, for he has only deck-passage. That ladder is filled, however, not with the shapes of angels, but with the forms of boatmen discharging their duties. His chalkboard teachings are as little regarded here as the earlier Christ's message. Unlike Jacob's dream, the lamb-like man's dream (his blackboard witness, his vision of brotherly love) does
not portend multitudes of earthly descendants. The deafmute is intended as a genuine incarnation of Christ, but his ironic ineffectiveness is a suitable prelude to the subsequent effectiveness of the confidence man. That the deaf-mute seems to have been travelling "night and day" from "some far country beyond the prairies" (CM, p. 5) suggests a western origin rather than an eastern. He seems to have come a very great distance, but "he might not have a long way to go" (CM, p. 5), for, as the novel indicates, the conclusion of Christian history is at hand.

After a brief ministry, both this Christ-figure and the Christian Jesus make a kind of exit from human affairs. And the incomunicability and immediate disappearance of this Christ serve as a comment not only on the human response to him, but also on the extent of the traditional Christ's services to humanity. Melville's opening simile linking the deaf-mute and Mance Capac offers a like suggestion. If the lamb-like man is allegorically compared to the son of the sun, the implications correspondingly extend to the allegedly all-powerful Father of Christ. The sun imagery in the novel repeatedly refers to an ambiguous cosmic force whose surveillance of this world is not so much benevolent or retributive as it is "blank and pitiless," shining indifferently and implacably on both Black Guinea and China Aster. This "sun" is the "good baker" which heats the "oven" of this world, warming Black Guinea along with the "nice
white rolls" (CM, p. 10). The cosmopolitan speaks of federating with various men "under various suns" (CM, p. 151), and rejects the predicament of sober philosophers who find their position like that of "an old boot in a pie man's left, contracting there between sun and oven an unseemly, dry-seasoned curl and warp" (CM, p. 153). This sun, indeed, is "a golden huzzar," flashing his helm on the world" (CM, p. 56), where the confidence man glibly voices his salestalk unrestrained and ineffectively opposed. Whether his success is merely apparent, whether his ultimate doom is imprisonment in that brimstone area described in Revelation, whether, that is, his mission is a phase foreordained in the Christian scheme of things and therefore destined to failure, is not assured by Melville.

The confidence man, rather, smoothly operates among the pilgrims of his microcosm and slyly reveals himself in each of his guises. The attentive reader will note that his avatars vouch for, and refer to, each other. Each makes use of information obtained by predecessors and many insinuate their identity by means of double entendres. The deaf-mute is significantly excluded from this series of associations. Black Guinea himself offers the first hint by introducing his successors. In self-defense he tells the suspicious crowd:

"Oh yes, oh yes, dar is aboard here a werry nice, good ge'mman wid a weed, and a ge'mman
in a gray coat and white tie, what knows all about me; and a ge'm'man wid a big book, toe; and a yarb-doctor; and a ge'm'man in a yaller west; and a ge'm'man wid a brass plate; and a ge'm'man in a violet robe; and a ge'm'man as is a sedjer; and ever so many good, kind, honest ge'm'men more abed what knows me and will speak for me, God bress 'em; yes, and what knows me as well as dis poor old darkie knows hisself, God bress him!" (CM, pp. 12-13).

The black cripple's concluding remark that these "ge'm'men" "knows me as well as dis poor old darkie knows hisself," is, like many of the statements of the confidence man, truer than his audience realizes. The good-hearted merchant betokens his confidence in Black Guinea by offering him money, and financial contribution henceforth symbolizes

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10 Several critics have attempted to account for the discrepancies in Black Guinea's list (the cosmopolitan seems to be omitted, and the "ge'm'man in a yaller west" and the "ge'm'man as is a sedjer" do not appear as avatars of the confidence man). Miss Foster (CM, p. lxxi) conjectures that "It seems most likely that Melville changed or forgot his earlier intention regarding some of the subordinate arrangements of the story. It will be remembered that Melville did not see this novel through the press. Ill and sorely troubled with his eyes, perhaps he did not even read through the whole manuscript before or after Augusta copied it." Franklin suggests that the "ge'm'man in a yaller west" may refer to the lamb-like man and the boy of the last chapter, since "cream-colored" may possibly be construed as "yaller" and the boy seems clearly like the deaf-mute in character. Miss Foster's conclusions seem to me dubious, considering the apparently careful attention devoted to imagery patterns and other formal elements of the novel. Franklin's statements are the more credible, if only because they apply the attributes of the confidence man to characters other than plainly recognizable avatars; for it seems likely that Melville intended to generalize the confidence man's character and personality. Every character in the novel partakes, in a sense, of the con man's character.
the kind of charity the confidence man preaches and accepts. During the encounter Mr. Roberts' business card, "unobserved, dropped to the deck," and "as unconsciously," Black Guinea's "one advanced leather stump covered the card" (CM, p. 17). The card is shortly thereafter used to verify the acquaintance of Mr. Roberts with the man in mourning, Mr. Roberts' "faithless" memory notwithstanding. "You do not recall my countenance?" the confidence man asks, and continues, "why yours I recall distinctly as if but half an hour . . . had passed since I saw you" (CM, p. 19). Mr. Ringman proceeds to support the authenticity of the black cripple's affliction and cunningly enlarges on that connection by asking "whether the circumstance of one man, however humble, referring for a character to another man, however afflicted, does not argue more or less of moral worth in the latter?" (CM, p. 19). The representative of the charitable organization for the benefit of Seminole widows and orphans subsequently also defends Black Guinea's character to the one-legged cynic and the young Episcopal clergyman. Here the confidence man boldly challenges, "Does all the world act? Am I, for instance, an actor?" and concludes that "the devil is never so black as he is painted!" (CM, p. 35).

After the unsuccessful encounter with the sophomore by the man with the weed, the travelling agent of the
Black Rapids Coal Company accosts the sophomore and inquires about "a gentleman with a weed . . . rather a saddish gentleman" (CM, p. 51). The sophomore replies to his questioner that the person sought has disappeared "just in the direction from which you came"; and the confidence man comments, "Then the man in the gray coat, whom I just met, said right: he must have gone ashore" (CM, p. 51). In his guise as treasurer of the Black Rapids Coal Company the confidence man learns from Mr. Roberts "of a shrunken old miser, clad in shrunken old moleskin, stretched out, an invalid on a bare plank in the emigrants' quarters" (CM, p. 63), and subsequently confronts him both as Mr. Truman and herb doctor. Just as Mr. Truman prepares the miser for the ministrations of the herb doctor by commenting to him, "I wish, my friend, the herb-doctor was here now; a box of his Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator would do you good" (CM, pp. 82-83), the herb doctor retrospectively seeks to offer credentials for Mr. Truman by maintaining that he "makes people's fortunes for them--their everlasting fortunes, as the phrase goes--only charging his one small commission of confidence" (CM, p. 115). Hearing that the miser has exhibited confidence to the extent of a one-hundred dollar investment, the herb doctor exclaims, "My dear sir, how I congratulate you. You don't know" (CM, p. 116).
Except for the deaf-mute, the novel's respective common avatars are constantly linked and associated in a variety of ways. We discover, for example, as Mr. Roberts begins to narrate the story of Goneril to the fourth appearance of the confidence man, that the merchant has met all three of his predecessors. Mr. Roberts "ventured still a third case, that of the man with the weed, . . . as narrated by himself, and confirmed and filled out by the testimony of a certain man in a gray coat, whom the merchant had afterwards met . . . ." (CM, p. 64) In attempting to gloss over the philosophical implications of the merchant's story, a story which the confidence man had originally narrated himself, he considers the apparently unfortunate condition of Black Guinea. He maintains that "he knew nothing about the cripple, nor had seen him, but ventured to surmise that, could one get at the real state of his heart, he would be found about as happy as most men, if not, in fact, full as happy as the speaker himself" (CM, p. 64). Pitch likewise receives the attentions of several successive "metaphysical scamps," and one of them, in reference to Black Guinea, remarks, "I shouldn't wonder at all, if, in a very short time, he were able to walk almost as well as myself" (CM, pp. 112-23).

The purpose of all this complicity and shape-shifting is the conversion of the "multiform pilgrim species, man"
to a faith in itself; and this faith in man is pawned off on the confidence man's victims disguised in the rich tints of the orthodox religious message. Just as the confidence man's actions are a parody of Christ's, his doctrine is an ironic inversion of Christian teaching. His "confidence" is a shallow analogue for faith, just as his "charity," it becomes clear, is not self-giving love but rather an exchange of money and "geniality." He is, as we shall see, an adroit punster in words, ideas, and action.

In the gospel of Matthew Christ warns his followers against false prophets, saying:

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

The description of these latter days aptly fits the world of the Fidèle, for as Christ aptly put it to his listeners, here "as in the days that were before the flood they were

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11 Matthew 24:5, 10, 11, 12, 23, 24. The Bible referred to here in all citations is the King James version.
eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that 
Nēē entered into the ark. "12 Suggestions of the world's end are appropriate, since although the 
confidence man functions in his vanity fair with oily aplomb, the 
gaiety and bustle prevailing among the passengers are 
toned into an increase in "seriousness" as the novel 
concludes. In the last chapter the heavy-handed symbology 
and cryptic dialogue summon to mind the prophecies of the 
book of Revelation. An unseen man in his berth cries out, 
"What's that about the Apocalypse?" (CM, p. 275), and a 
retrospective numbering of the avatars of the confidence 
man associates him with the seven-headed beast who is to 
be given dominion over the earth in its last days. In the 
thirteenth chapter of Revelation we find the following:

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw 
a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven 
heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten 
crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

And they worshipped the dragon which gave 
power unto the beast: and they worshipped the 
beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who 
is able to make war with him?
And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was 
given unto him to continue forty and two months.
And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, 
and them that dwell in heaven.
And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was 
given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and

12Matthew 24:38.
nations.

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.\(^1\)

The number seven is not the only link between the con man and the beast; it is easy to interpret the dragon as the con man's preached faith in man. That the various avatars overcome whatever "saints" are available in the novel, moreover, is clear. The message of the lamb-like man is used for the con man's personal purposes, and the apparent Christians become easy dupes.

During his earthly tenure the confidence man is playing out his role of anti-christ. He accepts the widow's mite (he calls it "an inconsiderable sum"), and he demands that the miser (an ironic version of the biblical rich young ruler) give him money as an expression of confidence. He moreover appears to heal the sick, cast out devils, preach a creed, effect conversions, preside at a love feast, and rephrase Christian doctrine. As anti-christ the confidence man plays his role to the hilt, but his nature as anti-christ is consistent with all his natures in that it is no more than a role. The confidence man is clearly an anti-christ figure, but he is not merely that. Nonetheless, his acting here is as scrupulously precise as the temporal arrangement of the events within the novel. Edgar Dryden mentions

\(^1\text{Revelation 13:1-8.}\)
"the book's obviously Biblical structure." He writes that "it is clearly a spatial microcosm. But it is a temporal one as well. The events which occur on the decks of the ship in one day imply a period of time which stretches at least from the birth of Christ to the Apocalypse."\(^{14}\)

The confidence man's obvious echoes of Christ occur too often and are too aptly put to be entirely accidental. But the confidence man deliberately parodies Christ's teachings. The degree of departure from the biblical original defines the hypocrisy of the confidence man and the guilty ignorance of his dupes. His hypocrisy takes the form of parody, and the parody is the essence of his undermining of true Christian teaching. Christ taught that "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you."\(^{15}\)

The man in the gray coat exclaims to the man in white, "Obstacles? I have confidence to remove obstacles, though mountains" (CM, p. 47), and Pitch asks the man with the brass plate, "supposing that even I, I myself, really had this sort of conditional confidence, though but a grain, what sort of boy, in sober fact, could you send me?" (CM, p.


\(^{15}\)Matthew 17:20.
The New Testament tells us, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not;" and the confidence man tells the miser, "I live not for myself; but the world will not have confidence in me, and yet confidence in me were great gain" (CM, p. 83). Christ taught:

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day, And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

The cosmopolitan parodies Christ's offer to man of reconciliation with God by saying, "I came ambassador from the human race, charged with the assurance that for your dislike they bore no answering grudge, but sought to conciliate accord between you and them. Yet you take me not for the honest envoy, but I know not what sort of unheard-of spy" (CM, p. 157). The Christian prays, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief," and the convert of the confidence man pleads, "I confide, I confide; help, friend, my distrust"

16 John 1:10-11.
17 John 3:4-5.
18 Mark 9:24.
(CM, p. 84). The herb doctor warns the Missouri bachelor, Pitch, that in his coming times of physical decay and weakness he will "gladly seek the breast of that confidence beget in the tender time of . . . youth, blessed beyond telling if it return . . . in age" (CM, p. 125), and Pitch responds, "Go back to nurse again, eh? Second childhood, indeed" (CM, p. 125). In the gospel of John when Jesus tells Nicedemus that he must be born again, Nicedemus asks, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"\(^1\)

The herb doctor's healing is, like that of the Great Physician, salvation through faith. When the blind men came to Jesus, he asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" After a response of "Yea, Lord," "Then touched he their eyes saying, 'According to your faith be it unto you.'"\(^2\) To the doubting invalid the confidence man says, "Hope is proportioned to confidence. How much confidence you give me, so much hope do I give you" (CM, p. 91). The herb doctor's exhortation here is, furthermore, imitative of the Christian tradition that spiritual despair precedes and prepares for authentic experience of salvation. To the sick man the herb doctor urges, "How weak you are; and weakness, is it not the time for confidence? Yes, when through

\(^1\)John 3:4-5.

\(^2\)Matthew 9:28-29.
weakness everything bids despair, then is the time to get strength by confidence" (CM, p. 89). In the true spirit of the pulpit evangelist the herb doctor emphasizes the necessity of timely action. He admonishes, "This may be the last time of health's asking. Work upon yourself; invoke confidence, though from ashes; reuse it, for your life, reuse it, and invoke it, I say" (CM, p. 89). In this case rhetoric wins the day. Eloquence makes a "proselyte" of Pitch, too, and as in the case of Paul on the road to Damascus, the audience in the ante-cabin experiences conversion: "the scales of indifference or prejudice fell from their eyes" (CM, p. 98).

As herb doctor the confidence man not only offers to restore the sick and injured to health, but he appears to restore a "demonic unfortunate" to a "more soothed" mood. The crippled soldier who is a victim of the judicial system which imprisoned him in "the Tombs" finds his biblical counterpart in the man with an unclean spirit "who had his dwelling among the tombs." The soldier "grinned" upon the confidence man "with his unshaven face like an ogre" (CM, p. 106). The herb doctor responds, "Come, come, be sociable--be human, my friends. Don't make that face; it distresses me" (CM, p. 106). The herb doctor shrinks from

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21 Mark 5:3.
the "strangely startling" laugh of the soldier and later "would, perhaps, have run, but once more the hyena clawed him" (CM, p. 107). The soldier is cured by new hope and by confidence in the three boxes of liniment he buys. Like the cured demoniac of the Bible who goes forth witnessing "how great things Jesus had done for him," the soldier testifies by saying to his doctor, "stay, stay! You have made a better man of me. You have borne with me like a good Christian" (CM, p. 113).

But not only does the confidence man seem to work miracles of healing by faith; he also exposes his pharisees, warns his proselytes against false teachers, and preaches his creed. Whereas Christ proclaimed himself representative of supernatural authority and preached salvation through faith in divine love and the efficacy of God, the confidence man represents humanity and preaches salvation through confidence in the essential goodness and efficacy of man. The hypocrites he exposes are not those who pharisaically profess to believe in God, but those who publicly express their trust in their fellow man.

Thus Frank Goodman coolly proceeds to unmask Charlie Noble and to expose the heartlessness of Mark Winsome's philosophy. Noble assents with apparent fervor to the

22Mark 5:20.
cosmopolitan's principles concerning human nature and human geniality. "Yes," Noble says, I always speak a good word for man; and what is more, am always ready to do a good deed for him" (CM, p. 179). Here Goodman's request for a loan is a revealing test of Noble's sincerity, as it proves also for Egbert. Winsome and Egbert plead their confidence in self-reliant and transcendental man. But the cosmopolitan discovers that their ostensible valuation of human friendship as sublime actually means that they find response to real need a petty, earthly activity beneath the attention of a highly spiritual "friend." As Mitchell remarks, they rest "complacently in inhuman mercilessness." The confidence man himself makes a grand display of scorn for this "inhuman philosophy" and in his most attractive moment stalks out of the cabin. Yet immediately following his confrontation with these shining examples of human nobility, he turns his persuasive charm on the barber in an attempt to convince him that men have goodness and should be trusted. The confidence man's verbal spiel has little basis in his own experience.

In an earlier episode, the herb doctor had warned his new convert, the invalid, against "certain contrivers" who sought to sell spurious imitations of his medicine. He

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seeks to protect the best interests of his flock by adopting the "precautions" of placing special identifying marks on the true product. Paul enjoins the Thessalonians to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." The herb doctor, not to be outdone, says, "Prove all the vials; trust those which are true." (CM, p. 93).

The obvious inconsistency of the cosmopolitan's advice to beware of imposters with his continued exhortations to love and trust one's fellow man raises serious doubts about his sincerity. Christ's violent denunciation of the whitened sepulchres of his age did not constitute a logical refutation of his teaching, because his faith was in a power beyond the human. But when the cosmopolitan blithely ignores the implications about human wholesomeness which arise from his experience with human hypocrisy, he is either blind or hypocritical himself. Nor will his glib reliance on Christian values as support for his own well-spoken principles (to the man in white he exclaims, "For a Christian to talk so!" (CM, p. 47)) bear strict examination. The Bible tells us, "No man can serve two masters: for either he hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Yet preaching mammon and giving scant lip service to God

\(^{24}\) I Thessalonians 5:21.

\(^{25}\) Matthew 6:24.
is precisely the confidence man's mode of operation. Jesus taught, "with men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."  Paul writes in a similar vein. To the Romans he says, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and "There is none righteous, no, not one . . . They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; there is not one that doeth good, no, not one."  The confidence man, however, carefully subverts Christian teaching by substituting man for God and himself for Christ. Tuveson notes, for example, that "Where a Christian missionary would bring home the necessity for conviction of sin, and the dangers of relying on one's self and this world for salvation, the Confidence-Man preaches absolute trust and faith in this world. The unpardonable sin is to believe in sinfulness."  

At least in biblical terms, then, the confidence man urges commitment to delusion. Progressing through his guises, he pleads for sympathy for himself as member of suffering humanity, as defender of human means and environment, and as justifier of humanity per se. As Black Guinea and

26Mark 10:27.
27Romans 3:23.
28Romans 3:10 and 12.
Mr. Ringman, he solicits pity for, and confidence in, himself. As agent for the Seminole Widow and Orphan Asylum, treasurer for the Black Rapids Coal Company, and herb doctor, he maintains the curative effects of worldly charity, big business, and the natural world in an effort to prove man's ability to alleviate his own poverty and suffering. As purveyor of employable servants and as cosmopolitan, the confidence man urges the upright nature of mankind. His self-applied title of "citizen of the world" is exactly appropriate, and his doctrines are correspondingly this-worldly and limited.

The cosmopolitan identifies himself to Pitch as "One who has confidence in nature, and confidence in man, with some little modest confidence in himself" (CM, p. 121), and, as Pitch recognizes, this statement is his "confession of faith." If Christ besought men to love him as representative of their god, the confidence man asks men to love him because of his thoroughly human nature. "Trust me" is his oft-repeated imitation of Jesus: "Believe on me." Of the sophomore Mr. Ringman asks, "Could you new, my dear young sir, . . . simply have confidence in me?" (CM, p. 30), and of the pious widow he asks, "Could you put confidence in me for instance?" (CM, p. 49). The herb doctor tells the miser that he may make repayment for charitable service "By giving me your confidence" (CM, p. 82), and to the
invalid he likewise emphasizes, "I told you, you must have confidence, unquestioning confidence, I meant confidence in the genuine medicine, and the genuine me" (CM, p. 93).

Just as confidence is a superficial version of faith, so is Christian love here replaced by geniality and the Christian eucharistmocked in a human drinking party where wine and cigars are extolled as the perfect complement to true friendship. Christ preached, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend," and, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me." The confidence man substitutes for both a business transaction. From the widow, the miser, Charlie Noble, and Egbert he asks not self-giving love, but the financial pledge that, in this world, is a reliable sign of good faith. The True Book the treasurer of the Black Rapids Coal Company replaces with a business ledger; and the New Jerusalem for which he sells stock is not celestial, but located in Minnesota. When asked by the collegian if the marginal lots on his map were water-lots, he replies, "Water-lots in the city of New Jerusalem? All terra firma . . ." (CM, p. 56). The treasurer of the Seminole Widow and Orphan Asylum proudly

31 Matthew 16:24.
states that he is in the charity "business" and that he aims to "quicken" missions with "the Wall Street spirit."

No doubt those Wall Street denizens of "Bartleby" would appreciate his Protean easy-chair, which was designed to ease "the most restless body" and "the most tormented conscience" (CM, p. 43).

By assuring his audiences of the thoroughly salutary effects of nature, of legal justice, and of the journalistic press, the confidence man proclaims man's ability to eliminate his own sicknesses, to rehabilitate himself, and to discover truth. Ignoring the natural origin of the fruit tasted by Eve and the theological assumption that nature is cursed for man's sake, the herb doctor evangelizes, "Trust me, nature is health; for health is good, and nature cannot work ill. As little can she work error. Get nature, and you get well" (CM, p. 91). The American court system and the human law it executes, according to the herb doctor, are also absolutely beneficial. Rather than operating imperfectly, he asserts, this law is like the divine, governed by unsearchable wisdom. To the soldier who sarcastically suggests that in "free Ameriky" defending one's rights may prove "above" one's strength, the herb doctor calmly explains:

"Grant, for the moment, that your experiences are as you give them; in which case I would admit that government might be thought to have more or less to do with what seems
undesirable in them. But it is never to be forgotten that human government, being subordinate to the divine, must needs, therefore, in its degree, partake of the characteristics of the divine. That is, while in general efficacious to happiness, the world's law may yet, in some cases, have, to the eye of reason, an unequal operation, just as, in the same imperfect view, some inequalities may appear in the operations of heaven's law; nevertheless, to one who has a right confidence, final benignity is, in every instance, as sure with the one law as the other. (CM, p. 111)

The press the cosmopolitan likewise considers a "dedicated principle of beneficent force and light" (CM, p. 188). For the confidence man, "the voice of the people is the voice of the truth" (CM, p. 185).

Although it becomes increasingly apparent to the reader that virtually none of the passengers aboard Melville's microcosm (least of all the confidence man himself) really believes his sophistry concerning the nobility and spiritual purity of men, the cosmopolitan still preaches and preaches. His immediate predecessor, the Philosophical Intelligence Office agent, maintains that men "upon the whole--making some reasonable allowances for human imperfection--present as pure a moral spectacle as the purest angel could wish" (CM, p. 135). The cosmopolitan, boldly glossing over the outstanding inconsistency of his avowedly Christian philosophy, contends that:

"misanthropy, springing from the same root with disbelief of religion, is twin with that."
It springs from the same root, I say; for, set aside materialism, and what is an atheist, but one who does not, or will not, see in the universe a ruling principle of love; and what a misanthrope, but one who does not, or will not, see in man a ruling principle of Kindness? Don't you see? In either case the vice consists in a want of confidence" (CM, p. 170).

But the spurious Christ is here an equally spurious philanthropist. As Pitch comprehends, the cosmopolitan is "Diogenes in disguise." The cunning veracity of the confidence man, for example, may be found in his comment to Pitch "about having no confidence in nature." "In reality," says the cosmopolitan, "You have just as much as I have" (CM, p. 122). Another revealing admission occurs when he assures the old man of Chapter 45 that "in Providence, as in man, you and I equally put trust" (CM, p. 285).

Certainly the confidence man's experiences with that "mankind" he praises so generously do not substantiate his panegyrics. The crowd throws buttons to Black Guinea, the miser cheats the herb doctor with fake coins, and Charlie Noble is clearly preparing the cosmopolitan for some sort of financial harvesting (as the cosmopolitan's switch from "boisterous hilarity" to "restrained good nature" reveals he understands). The only two genuine frontiersmen confronted by the herb doctor deny his assertions concerning the beneficial effects of nature in curing
men's diseased bodies and confused minds. The confidence man, however, continues to talk up his trust in the American dream, the bright future, the coming millenium, without ceasing. The date of his appearance, however, is not December 25, but April 1, the anniversary not of Christ's birth, but of that of the Fool, the celebration of tricksters and the Practical Joke. The irony of making a request for trust on that day is comic. The reader has the persistent sense not only that some gigantic joke is being enacted, but also that there is someone there to laugh at it. When the herb doctor confronts the titan, "a cynical-looking little man, with a thin, flaggy beard, and a countenance ever wearing the rudiments of a grin, seated alone in a corner commanding a good view of the scene, held a rusty hat before his face" (CM, p. 99). There is no clear proof that the con man will not make good his promises; but we do not see any positive results, either.

Indeed, there are certain damning inconsistencies, suggestive descriptions, and disturbing afterthoughts which combine to associate the confidence man with that "father of liars" who "was a murderer from the beginning." The defender and justifier of this world, it appears, is the "prince of this world" who is promised that he will

32 John 14:34.
Although, for example, the herb doctor refuses to reduce the costs of his medicine for the miser ("Can't," he declares, "Am pledged to the one-price system, only honorable one" (CM, p. 116)), the reader finds that he is careful to fit his prices and the extent of his supply to the pocketbooks and needs of his customers. The miser swindles the herb doctor even of his two dollars by paying him with pistereens rather than true coins. Yet to Pitch the herb doctor defends his association with the miser by saying, "I am never ashamed of honesty, whatever his coat" (CM, p. 122). The cosmopolitan produces ten half-eagles to "disenchant" Charlie Noble; but to the barber's request for a cash deposit he replies, "fifty dollars is nothing, and I would let you have it cheerfully, only I unfortunately happen to have but little change with me just now" (CM, p. 268).

The confidence man wears the mask of piety; but there are alarming serpentine elements in his character, as several of his victims uncomfortably notice. To Mr. Roberts he exhibits "a writhing expression" (CM, p. 22), and the

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33 Th 12:31.

34 The herb doctor sells his medicine for 50¢ on pp. 92, 95, and 113, but quotes a $2 price to the miser on p. 118 and offers the medicine free to Pitch on p. 124. Although, moreover, the herb doctor states that he sells his last three boxes ("Luckily I have just that number remaining. Here they are," on p. 113, he still has a supply to vend to the miser (in fact, he proposes that the miser take a large quantity and sell them himself) and Pitch.
Episcopal minister, "caught by something in his companion's expression," eyes him "inquisitively, almost uneasily" (CM, p. 37). After succumbing to the persuasions of the man with the brass plate, Pitch contemplates how the man had "warmed into him" (CM, p. 148). Immediately, then, "he couples the slanting cut of the equivocator's coat-tails with the sinister cast in his eye; he weighs slyboot's sleek speech in the light imparted by the oblique import of the smooth slope of his worn bootheels; the insinuator's undulating flunkyisms dovetail into those of the flunky beast that windeth his way on his belly" (CM, p. 148). The titan responds to the herb doctor with violence, striking him down and exclaiming, "Profane fiddler on heart-strings! Snake!" (CM, p. 100). As the cosmopolitan and Mark Winsome discuss the rattlesnake, the cosmopolitan appeared "as unconsciously to wreath his form and sidelong crest his head, till he all but seemed the creature described" (CM, p. 213). Pitch, furthermore, makes a fitting comment on the confidence man's transformations by commenting to the cosmopolitan, "The butterfly is the caterpillar in a gaudy cloak; stripped of which, there lies the impostor's long spindle of a body, pretty much worm-shaped as before" (CM, p. 141).

The true nature of the confidence man's identity is a question second only to that concerning his true aims.
Although he functions perfectly in the finite world, we suspect him to be no more mortal than money-hungry. The few dollars he swindles from his dupes are scant remuneration for his complicated wiles, and we think with Pitch that "Was the man a trickster, it must be more for the love than the lucre" (CM, p. 148). His preternatural attributes are hinted at not less by his equivocal conversation than by his extra-human powers of necromancy and fascination. He informs the barber, for example, "don't be too sure what I am. You call me man, just as the townsfolk called the angels who, in man's form, came to Lot's house; just as the Jew rustics called the devils who, in man's form, haunted the tombs. You can conclude nothing absolute from the human form, barber" (CM, p. 254). Frank Goodman "charms" Charlie Noble from his disagreeable outburst with a "seemle murmure of cabalistical words" (CM, p. 204) and a display of that all-powerful psychic remedy, cold cash. The sophomore finds it necessary to make a physical retreat from Mr. Ringman, because "Somehow, the stranger fascinated him" (CM, p. 30). Pitch's inexplicable and sudden about-face is a dramatic testimony to the powers of hypnotic speech over reliance on the wisdom of experience and logic. The worldly-wise barber, too, proves equally subject to his opponent's spellbinding. Here the cosmopolitan begins addressing "the barber in a manner different, singularly
so, from his previous one. Hard to say exactly what the manner was, any more than to hint it was a sort of magical; in a benign way, not wholly unlike the manner, fabled or otherwise, of certain creatures in nature, which have the power of persuasive fascination—the power of holding another creature by the button of the eye, as it were, despite the serious disinclination, and, indeed, earnest protest, of the victim" (CM, pp. 264-65).

Yet another problematic and disturbing series of suggestions concerns what Rosenberry calls "allusion to the devil as gourmet." Here the humor relies on the gustatory implications of such remarks as the cosmopolitan's "Life is a pic-nic en costume." The cosmopolitan enlarges on the metaphor when he exclaims to Pitch:

"Is the sight of humanity so very disagreeable to you then? Ah, I may be foolish, but for my part, in all its aspects, I love it. Served up à la Pêle, or à la Meur, à la Ladrone, or à la Yankee, that good dish, man, still delights me; or rather is man a wine I never weary of comparing and sipping; wherefore am I a pledged cosmopolitan, a sort of London-Deck-Vault connoisseur, going about from Teheran to Natchiteches, a taster of races; in all his vintages, smacking my lips over this racy creature, man, continually." (CM, p. 151).

To Charlie Noble the cosmopolitan admits that he finds Pitch's heart an "inviting oyster in a forbidding shell" (CM, p. 177), and the representative of the Seminole Widow and Orphan Asylum describes frozen pagans in Hong
Kong as "so many nipped peas in a bin of peas" (CM, p. 46).

That the confidence man's colorful exterior conceals the character of a satanic tempter is suggested by the language of the novel. Black Guinea, for example, was "a singular temptation at once to diversion and charity" (CM, p. 10), and the merchant admits that he has heard "rather tempting information" (CM, p. 61) about the Black Rapids Coal Company. The spiritual blackness of the confidence man is concretized in the color of Black Guinea and the name "Black Rapids Coal Company." Coal, in the context of the novel, is associated with natural depravity or knowledge of evil. Black Guinea's tambourine is "an old coal-sifter," and stock in the confidence man's coal company represents trust in security from the "fall" or loss of innocent goodness by man. The agent who sells the stock tells Mr. Roberts that "confidence will be more than restored; there will be a reaction; from the stock's descent its rise will be higher than from no fall, the holders trusting themselves to fear no second fate" (CM, p. 24). The confidence man's eagerness to write the names of those who contribute to his charity in his memorandum book also takes on significance as the reader considers suspicions concerning the registry of the damned.

It is difficult to determine whether the confidence man is the devil walking to and fro upon the earth, masquerading as one of its inhabitants, or whether he is rather a fleshed-out aspect of human nature—an imaginative embodiment of the Old Adam or natural depravity. Be he Satan pleading for his own character as it manifests itself in the human creature, or be he man demonstrating the qualities of his radically "fallen" condition, he is in either case Christianity's doom. In this novel the Christ figure is both inaccessible and ineffectual. His chief function is to prepare the world for the harvest of the confidence man; and the confidence man concludes his day of husbandry by extinguishing the light in the cabin and leading an old man into darkness. If Christ came into the world to be the light of the world, and if the sun here has associations with divine cosmic force, then the solar lamp is an appropriate symbol of Christian illumination. Its shade is "fancifully variegated" with images of the Christian god's original and revised covenants with his people, that is, the "horned altar" of the ark of the covenant and the "robed figure" of Jesus. As Dryden notes, "It is significant that the images are not the sources of the lamp's light but merely filters which refract and color it as it passes through them. To change the quality and meaning of its illumination one only has to
change the shade.\textsuperscript{36} The lamp, moreover, is surrounded by other "barren planets" whose illumination has been likewise exhausted or quenched. If the confidence man's primary identity is the devil representing the principle of darkness in the Christian scheme of things, then his putting out of the already malodorous light assumes awesome eschatological import. If the confidence man's primary identity, however, is thoroughly human, his darkening of one lamp among others already defunct diminishes the significance of Christianity to a level with that of the other "barren planets" and serves as a comment not so much on the religion of Jesus and Paul as on the nature of man as a religious being.

In either of the two cases, the reader notes that all the planets are now barren and the confidence man's final occupation (at least within the scope of the novel) is the guidance of an old man who clings to a chamber pot as a life preserver. We can note, too, that the tone of the biblical account of the Apocalypse is changed. The second coming of the Lamb, which in Revelation follows the darkness and suffering on the earth, is not mentioned. The confidence man appears to retain his confidence, although the uneasy reader may recall the cynic who had said of the \textit{Fidèle},

\textsuperscript{36} Dryden, p. 185.
"Why, you green ones wouldn't know if she were unseaworthy; but still, with thumbs stuck back into your arm-holes, pace the rotten planks, singing, like a fool, words put into your green mouth by the cunning owner, the man who, heavily insuring it, sends his ship to be wrecked . . . " (CM, p. 135). The protected, inland, finite world of the Fidèle, too, is nearing its confrontation with the infinite. For the ship is headed downriver toward the measureless expanses of the ocean. Whatever will "follow" of this "masquerade" is uncertain, and the fate of the microcosmic ship is, like nearly everything else in the novel, ambiguous. In spite of these uncertainties and portents, however, there are still some at least conjectural or tentative conclusions left to be made concerning the identity of the confidence man. We have seen that his imitation of Christ is hypocritical. He is in this sense an anti-christ figure. Especially considering his preternatural attributes and powers of fascination, we may suspect him to be more than human. The beast prophesied in the book of Revelation has seven heads; the con man has seven avatars. This association should not be overlooked. But a supernatural anti-christ needs a supernatural divine force against whom to contend. The too-human world of the Fidèle does not offer a convincing characterization of such a force. Viewing the con man as purely supernatural leaves him virtually alone
in the arena of contention. For it is important to remember the curious depiction of divine forces by Melville (the same forces who seem too disinterested to sanction a program ultimately designed to return sinning men to the good graces of a loving god). The con man, too, makes insistent reference to himself as "citizen of the world." Melville seems to intend this largely-proportioned figure as a representative of a certain cosmic and/or human reality. He is somehow the embodiment of his world, whatever we may find that "world" to be. In view of the severely circumscribed and this-worldly realm of the novel, taking the confidence man at his word cannot mean regarding him as a purely supernatural creature. If he is, as he claims, that world's "citizen," he is a symbolic creature, like Moby-Dick, of many meanings, but primarily a man. That is, the symbolic ramifications of his character arise from his humanity, rather than his humanity emerging as an aspect of some other existential nature. As a literary or imaginative creation, then, the confidence man is a complex comment on, or vision of, the major reality available to Melville—his fellow man.

From this conclusion or from this framework of interpretation there arise several implications which will be further explored in following chapters. First we may observe that if this cosmopolitan figure represents mankind,
then man is pictured as hypocrite, deceiver, and demonic swindler. He practices, moreover, on other men, and thus, effectively, on himself. Man dupes and lies to man. He is a hypocrite whose effectiveness is made possible by the universality of hypocrisy—and what hypocrisy is the best test of the pervasiveness of hypocrisy. His dual nature of religious or idealistic creature and naturally dishonest or radically fallen creature makes him first, both introducer and subverter of spiritual absolutisms and institutions, and secondly, anti-christ to his fellows and himself. Concerning the truth or authenticity of these spiritual absolutisms the novel offers nothing but veiled inklings of their inherent contradictoriness, their unprovability, their unlikelihood. We are given the confidence man to contemplate, and, in the world of the novel, we can see no higher or more spiritual reality beyond him. In a sense, the con man makes both god and devil superfluous. Or he represents them to the degree of revealing their gratuity. The con man is exceeded in mystery only by that symbol of the implacable sun (an ironically irrelevant cosmic presence) and by the lamb-like man, a character notable chiefly for silence, withdrawal, strangeness, and incommensurateness with his immediate environment. If the deaf-mute is a representative of divine being and rulership, his chalked communications are,
nonetheless, appropriated by the confidence man for quite worldly purposes. These religious issues will be treated in a later chapter, as will the matter of the confidence man's resemblance to his fellow passengers.

For the present, it would be well simply to keep in mind the confidence man's primary and obvious characteristic of changeability. His protean personality and the reader's totally frustrated inclination to discover the reality behind the masks are the clearest facts defining any experience of the novel. Apparently endless and uncontrollable metamorphosis, a conception of hidden, ungraspable (and possibly nonexistent) identity, Melville's refusal to articulate certainties of any kind—all these delineate the problem of experiential ambiguity governing The Confidence-Man.
Chapter II

The World of the Confidence Man
The Confidence-Man comprehends the entire human race and its tangible and imaginative achievements. The novel expands to encompass the religious and ethical orders, the social values, and the psychological depths of the human creature—including his cosmopolitan and confident representative, the con man himself. The setting or physical world of the novel, however, is much more severely circumscribed. Its limitations are not only spatial, but qualitative. The Fidèle is a microcosm afflicted with pettiness, sickness, injury, injustice, and frighteningly predatory attitudes. The world of the confidence man is, then, a place desperately in need of the very values and hopeful programs he seems to preach. But the con man as social or religious savior is a fake. Rather than initiating any sort of new or salutary plan for reorganization of society or renewal of conscience, he indirectly praises the status quo and mouths the same wornout rationalizations which have failed to relieve human misery throughout its history. He preaches the already-existing cultural, religious, and philosophical optimisms, but with a new twist. Whereas he embodies the cultural and philosophical beliefs of his age (but carries them to their logical absurdity), he violates the Christian ethic in practice (while proclaiming perversions of it to his listeners). As a spurious satirist
par excellence, he exposes American, Christian, and Transcendentalist corruptions of genuine ideals, without intending correction. He is opportunist man deceiving and swindling himself.

The atmosphere on the decks and inside the cabins of the *Fidèle* itself is claustrophobic, polluted by the smoke of cigars and the fetid odors of its dying lamps, its chamber pots, its passengers. The *Fidèle* is a clear contrast to that other ship-microcosm, the *Pequod*. In *Moby-Dick*, for example, the ship-microcosm cast off from land for a solitary voyage into the infinite. Vast expanses of water dominated the scenes of the novel. The *Pequod* and its single-willed crew were isolated from the organized societies of men; they were surrounded by, and at the mercy of, ocean violences. The situation of the *Fidèle* is exactly opposite. Its voyage occurs not in the ocean, but in the Mississippi, hemmed in by land. The ship hugs the shore, and its world is truly inland. In *Moby-Dick* characters progressively reject their "humanities" for mechanistic obsession. On board the *Fidèle*, however, people are all too human. Eating and drinking, smoking and conversation, transacting business and exchanging money, are primary concerns. In the world of *Moby-Dick* isolation was a central problem. Loss of self through extreme assertion of self was the ultimate danger. The world of the *Fidèle*,
however, is not lonely, but crowded. "Wolfishness" is not a prevalent trait. Here the wolves have been replaced by foxes. The egotists do not dominate, but rather the tricksters. There is, moreover, no example of Ishmael-like progression from alienation to communion; virtually the entire action results from cunning manipulation and exploitation of vulnerable humanity. The Confidence-Man is filled with crowds and doubles. The major concern here is not the too-strong identity, but the lack of identity. We need to ascertain identity, to discover who is behind all the masks. Since there is no autobiographic narrative center in the novel, we do not even have an identifiable experiencing consciousness with which to deal. The world of The Confidence-Man, finally, is not one gripped by exploits of strength and daring. It is a sick, confused, frightened world. The passengers aboard the Fidèle stand in obvious need of that healing and spiritual cleansing the confidence man affects to offer.

And it is clear that the confidence man fully recognizes the physical and spiritual maladies afflicting his universe. For in his successive guises he not only confronts but shares the unwholesome conditions of his fellows. He impersonates a black cripple who experiences hypocrisy, unprovoked hostility, and narrowly-avoided assault. As Mr. Ringman he narrates a tale whose implications are unflattering to any optimistic assumption concerning the
operations of Providence. As the man in the gray coat he represents a society purporting to relieve the needs of those widowed and orphaned by American imperialist expansion. As the man in the travelling-cap, he views the greed and accompanying lack of compassion exhibited by a collegian who asserts, "No appearances can deceive me" (CM, p. 53). As herb doctor he ministers to crippled bodies and to spirits recoiling in disgust from other confidence men masquerading as physicians and lawgivers (here it is worth remarking that the final mention in Black Guinea's list of confidence men--"ever so many good, kind, honest gentlemen more abroad"--is not an insignificant inclusion). As herb doctor, too, the confidence man must reassure the miser, an unattractive example of humanity in himself, who worries about needing a "guardian" and about "everybody fleeing" him in his illness. As Frank Goodman, the confidence man has his attention directed by Charlie Noble to "the figure of a pale pauper-boy on the deck below, whose pitiableness was touched, as it were, with ludicrousness by a pair of monstrous boots, apparently some mason's discarded ones, cracked with drouth, half eaten by lime, and curled up about the toe like a bassoon" (CM, p. 184). Here the cosmopolitan must witness unalleviated misery complemented by the heartless laughter of his "boon companion." The confidence man's response is an unvaryingly promising
diagnosis and prescription. Glossing over the implications of unmerited suffering, he enlarges on the necessity for hope, vends his Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator and his coal stock, and urges the unfailing imminence of the rosy future.

The old miser is absorbed by his fear of being swindled and by his need to obtain a responsible "guardian." But the possibility of his solving either of his related and pressing problems seems negligible. In a world from which a benevolent divine principle is absent, the rule is dog eat dog. The Fidèle is a predatory economic realm where the major concern of each "pilgrim" seems to be not arrival at the celestial city, but the padding out of his own private pocketbook. The language of the novel, in fact, emphasizes the character of the Fidèle as a floating Vanity Fair where the first law is "No Trust" and the animal natures, not the spiritual natures, of men predominate. The deck of the boat is described as "built up on both sides with shop-like windowed spaces" (CM, p. 3), like "some Constantinople arcade or bazaar"; and the cosmopolitan responds to Pitch's "Hands off!" by exclaiming, "Hands off? that sort of label won't do in our Fair. Whoever in our Fair has fine feelings loves to feel the nap of fine cloth, especially when a fine fellow wears it" (CM, p. 149). As Shroeder aptly summarizes, "The world of this book is a great Vanity Fair, situated on an allegorical steamboat
which, presumably sailing for New Orleans (on the symbolic level, for the New Jerusalem of nineteenth-century optimism and liberal theology), is inclining on its course dangerously toward the pits of the Black Rapids Coal Company." 37

The animal imagery which pervades the novel implicitly compares the self-protective voraciousness of these pilgrims to that of the creatures which prey upon each other in the kingdom of amoral, rapacious nature (not quite the same "nature" the herb doctor praises). The methodist minister calls the one-legged cynic a "wolf" (CM, p. 16), and the cynic compares himself to a "lion" (CM, p. 36). The agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company deplores the effects of "bears" (CM, p. 53) whose "hypocritical growling" depresses the value of his stock, and the young sophomore scornfully criticizes the "ravens" (CM, p. 54) who attempt to undermine other people's confident attitudes. Our narrator compares his characters to those "duck-billed beavers" (CM, p. 77) produced by nature and likens the beds in the migrants' quarters to the nests of the "penguin and pelican" (CM, p. 60). The miser's flesh "seemed salted codfish," and his mouth was "nipped between buzzard nose and chin" (CM, p. 62). The Fidèle moves away from the shore with a "mighty, walrus wallow" (CM, p. 115). Pitch not only calls himself a "coon" and labels the herb doctor a "fox" (CM, p. 126), but subjects all mankind to animal metaphor.

37 John W. Shreeder, "Sources and Symbols for Melville's Confidence-Man," PMLA, 66 (June, 1951), 368.
in his conclusion that, "boy or man, the human animal is, for most work-purposes, a losing animal. Can't be trusted; less trustworthy than oxen; for conscientiousness a turn-spit dog excels him" (CM, p. 132). If the generalized animal imagery suggests the prevalence of inhuman viciousness among those who swindle, intend to swindle, or are swindled, at least one animal metaphor receives more purposeful treatment.

Elizabeth Foster writes that "'dog' is meant to be symbol for cynic"; but that her conjecture is dubious becomes apparent from a careful scrutiny of the appearance of "dog" associations in the novel. The militant Methodist challenges the assertions of the one-legged cynic while "still conscientiously holding back the old Adam in him, as if it were a mastiff he had by the neck" (CM, p. 14). That "dog" suggests "old Adam" or animal nature or human depravity is made clearer when we consider that the confidence man (whose attributes identify him in at least one aspect of his character as an imaginative embodiment of human depravity) is time and again described in canine terms. Black Guinea calls himself "der dog widout massa" (CM, p. 9), and "In short, as in appearance he seemed a dog, so . . . in a merry way, like a dog he began to be treated" (CM, p. 10). The man with the brass plate has

38 Foster, p. lxiii.
"a sort of canine deprecation," and "in his obsequiousness" seemed "to wag his very coat-tails behind him" (CM, p. 129). He vents himself "mostly in plaintive dissent of canine whines and groans" (CM, p. 134), and Pitch calls to him "as if to his pointer" (CM, p. 129). The treasurer of the Black Rapids Coal Company "looks animatedly about him . . . as much as to say, 'Oh, boys, would that I were personally acquainted with each mother's son of you, since what a sweet world, to make sweet acquaintance in, is ours, my brothers, yea, and what dear, happy dogs are we all!" (CM, p. 58). The confidence man listens to Mr. Roberts' narration of the story of Generil, a story which uses marriage as metaphor for the inescapable bond between depraved nature and victimized experience within the human personality. Comprehending the philosophical implications concerning the existence of undeserved misery and unmotivated viciousness, the confidence man seeks to gloss over the suffering described. He concludes that the unfortunate man was a "lucky dog . . . after all." In discussing the morally debased condition of Augustine prior to his religious conversion, the Philosophical intelligence Office agent tells Pitch that "saint Augustine confesses that, until his thirtieth year, he was a very sad dog . . ." (CM, p. 143). The confidence man's use of the epithet "dog" stresses the moral irresponsibility inherent in animal nature; but it
also conveys an element of comic absurdity. With his carefully phrased "lucky dog," "sad dog," and "dear, happy dogs" the confidence man is, in effect, clicking his tongue and smiling over the amusing antics of those natural rogues, human sinners.

When the herb doctor speaks to the old miser about confidence the miser says, "Don't say that word again. Makes my head spin so. Oh, I'm so old and miserable, nobody caring for me, everybody fleecing me, and my head spins so—ugh! ugh!—and this cough racks me so. I say again, I ought to have a guardian" (CM, p. 117). The predicament of the miser who senses that he is being swindled and who yearns for a protector extends to nearly every inhabitant of Melville's microcosm. Here true friends and true guardians are in great demand. But Pitch tells the miser, "go lay down in your grave, old man, if you can't stand of yourself. It's a hard world for a leaner" (CM, p. 126). And indeed, these characters in the novel who are "leaners" or who need to be "leaners" find their world "hard." Here whoever needs a friend, whoever attempts to rely on a friend, whoever places trust in some power beyond his own ability to deal with the double-dealing world, finds that on this earth human friendship does not quite measure up to those standards for Christian charity found in the Bible.
The theme of friendship is introduced by the narrator who interpolates early in the novel an anecdote concerning "the truly warning spectacle of a man hanged by his friends" (CM, p. 12). From the crippled soldier's story we learn that although friendship intervenes to rescue the guilty from just punishment, the innocent man suffers because "steady, hard-working cooper hadn't no friends" (CM, p. 108). Charlemont's understanding of human friendship leads him to exile himself from his friends when he loses his worldly fortune and only upon regaining it to devote himself again "to genial friendships." The "friendship at first sight" existing between Frank Goodman and Charlie Noble proves a fascinating game of mutual artificiality. China Aster's friend Orchis not only deserts China Aster in his time of need, but also becomes the willing instrument of his financial and physical collapse. China Aster's ironic discoveries about friends reveal that:

as in the world, much as some may hint to the contrary, an honest man in misfortune still can find friends to stay by him and help him, even so it proved with China Aster, who at last succeeded in borrowing from a rich old farmer the sum of six hundred dollars, at the usual interest of money-lenders, upon the security of a secret bond signed by China Aster's wife and himself, to the effect that all such right and title to any property that should be left her by a well-to-do childless uncle, an invalid tanner, such property should, in the event of China Aster's failing to return the borrowed sum on the given day, be the lawful possession of the money-lender. (CM, p. 241).
It appears that only the confidence man himself achieves any kind of success in gaining profitable friends. To the merchant he says, "I want a friend in whom I may confide" (CM, p. 22), and from the widow in mourning he elicits, "Can I any way befriend you?" (CM, p. 49). Both respond to him with a sympathy verified by cold cash. We must conclude that either the confidence man is able to choose his "friends" more carefully than can China Aster and the crippled soldier, or else he has a superior understanding of the uses of friendship.

The Confidence-Man assumes the indisputable existence of "mortal interdebtedness" among men, but its tone is not very assured concerning either the ability or inclination of men to respond to the needs of each other. Melville describes, for example, the beds in the emigrants' quarters:

Four ropes, secured to the ceiling, passed downwards through auger-holes in the corners of three rough planks, which at equal distances rested on knots vertically tied in the ropes, the lowermost plank but an inch or two from the floor, the whole affair resembling, on a large scale, rope bookshelves; only, instead of hanging firmly against a wall, they swayed to and fro at the least suggestion of motion, but were more especially lively upon the provocation of a green emigrant sprawling into one, and trying to lay himself out there, when the cradling would be such as almost to toss him back whence he came. In consequence, one less experienced, essaying repose on the uppermost shelf, was liable to serious disturbance, should a raw beginner select a shelf beneath. Sometimes a throng of poor
emigrants, coming at night in a sudden rain to occupy these oriole nests would—through ignorance of their peculiarity—bring about such a rocking uproar of carpentry, joining to it such an uproar of exclamations, that it seemed as if some luckless ship, with all its crew, was being dashed to pieces among the rocks. (CM, pp. 80-81).

The conclusion of this description changes course as it proceeds from consideration of human interaction to suggestion of cosmic responsibility. The beds, Melville writes, were "devised by some sardonic foe of poor travelers, to deprive them of that tranquillity which should precede, as well as accompany, slumber.—Procrustean beds, on whose hard grain humble worth and honesty writhed, still invoking repose, while but torment responded. Ah, did anyone make such a bunk for himself, instead of having it made for him, it might be just, but how cruel, to say, You must lie on it!" (CM, p. 81). The reader will recall the unfortunate man's woeful tale of totally unmerited persecution and the irony of China Aster's moral uprightness serving only to amplify his troubles. If human friendship in this novel proves undependable, reliance on consistent adherence to a personal ethical standard seems to produce equally deplorable results.

The confidence man's creed with which he responds to a physically and spiritually needy world is an inclusive brand of optimism compounded of national confidence in the
American dream, Christian hope for the Millenium, and
Transcendentalist faith in man and nature. The confidence
man is, however, first and primarily Mr. Spirit of America.
His glittering expressions of cultural faith define
America as it thinks it is (the panacea for the world's
ills, the true home of freedom and justice, the "melting
pot" of nationalities and races, the happy hunting ground
for the economically deprived), but his actions reveal
him as representative of the cultural character America
dislikes to recognize as itself (the cynical predatory
trickster, the imperialist bully, the Wall Street Principle
rationalizing its brutalizing and dehumanizing qualities).
For the confidence man partakes of the personality of
historian George Bancroft no more than of those of Simon
Suggs and P. T. Barnum.

Walter Dubler writes of "Melville's criticism of
American values" that "He is finding fault with the country's
easy optimism, its excessive and illogical faith in science,
business, and nature, its distortion of the real meanings
of charity and benevolence, and, above all, its smug
complacency and overconfidence." Melville begins his
satiric comments on the American spirit by clearly defining
the passengers on board the Fidèle as the kind of racial

39Walter Dubler, "Theme and Structure in Melville's The
Confidence-Man," American Literature, 33 (November,
and cultural mixture inherent in the American background and the confidence man in his guise of cosmopolitan as their true spokesman. On board the Fidèle there was, as Melville writes, "no lack of variety"; the passengers were:

Natives of all sorts, and foreigners: men of business and men of pleasure; parlor men and back-woodsmen; farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heiress-hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo-hunters, bee-hunters, happiness-hunters, truth-hunters, and still keener hunters after all these hunters. Fine ladies in slippers, and moccasined squaws; Northern speculators and Eastern philosophers; English, Irish, German, Scotch, Danes; Santa Fe traders in striped blankets, and Broadway bucks in cravats of cloth of gold; fine-looking Kentucky boatmen, and Japanese-looking Mississippi cotton-planters; Quakers in full drab, and United States soldiers in full regimentals; slaves, black, mulatto, quadroon; modish young Spanish Creoles, and old-fashioned French Jews; Mormons and Papists; Dives and Lazarus; jesters and mourners, teetotalers and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs; hard-shell Baptists and clay-eaters; grinning negroes, and Sioux chiefs solemn as high-priests. In short, a piebald parliament, an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim spádes, man (CM, p. 8).

And the cosmopolitan is precisely appropriate as resplendent embodiment of the collective personality of Melville's microcosm. His appearance is as variegated as that of the crowd he represents. Melville describes him sharply:

In short, the stranger sported a vesture barred with various hues, that of the cochineal predominating, in style participating of a Highland plaid, Emir's robe, and French blouse; from its plaited sort of
front peeped glimpses of a flowered regatta-shirt, while, for the rest, white trousers of ample duck flowed over maroon-colored slippers, and a jaunty smoking-cap of regal purple crowned him off at top; king of traveled good-fellows, evidently. Grotesque as all was, nothing looked stiff or unused; all showed signs of easy service, the least wonted thing setting like a wonted glove. That genial hand, which had been laid on the ungenial shoulder, was now carelessly thrust down before him, sailor-fashion, into a sort of Indian belt, confining the cherry-stem, a Nurembergh pipe in blast, its great porcelain bowl painted in miniature with linked crests and arms of interlinked nations—a florid show (CM, pp. 149-50).

One nineteenth century reviewer of the novel remarked with sarcastic scorn that "We need not say to those who have read the book as a picture of American society, it is slightly distorted." But his comment is as good an example of American pride in its own character as are the panegyrics of the man with the brass plate. The confidence man's faith in big business and the economic spirit also finds its match in that of the magazine writers of the day. One of Melville's contemporaries, for example, argued against criticism of the money ethic by writing:

But we are told that the American people worship the "almighty dollar." Waiving the exaggeration, we do not deny it; but it should be remembered that wealth, in this country, has to be acquired chiefly ab initio, and that, in the consequent struggle for its attainment, sagacity is gained, thought is necessitated, and indeed a regular course of education is evolved.

40 Fitz-James Obrien, "Our Authors and Authorship," Putnam's Monthly, 9 (April, 1857), 500.
Moreover, many or the offensive features of the pursuit of wealth, attaching in other countries, are here, to some extent, removed,—as honesty is by far the best policy where all are politic. Hence the possession of wealth, in this country, is an evidence (not, however, in any particular case conclusive) of talent and morality; and thus in part, arises the high estimation in which the possessor is generally held, and this, in turn, is expressed in the strife for its attainment. Believing, then, that this respect for wealth is founded in a laudable regard for honour and talent, we can find some extenuation for that abuse of it, which, it is confessed, is very general, but which is the less flagrant, inasmuch as the principles, on which it is properly entertained, are not entirely overlooked.

The confidence man's rationalizations are really no more convincing. To the crippled soldier he defends the beneficent effects of his government's laws, and as the man in gray he appeals to charitable Americans for funds to relieve the situation of those widowed and orphaned by that same government's imperialistic Indian wars. In outlining to the man in white his spectacular program for converting the world to Christianity, moreover, the confidence man is merely assuming America's traditionally self-appointed role as authoritarian dispenser of rightness and goodness to her neighbor-nations.

The confidence man, then, provides a perfect example

of American slickness and complacent double-dealing. His "picked and prudent sentiments" are not only as high-toned and self-protective as any of the patriotic abstractions which traditionally fill the editorial sections of American newspapers, but also as cunning as those of the tricksters and dishonest peddlers who thrived on the edges of the American frontier. The confidence man as Jeremy Diddler is thoroughly American, and his many literary manifestations were abundantly available in the literature of the day. As Rosenberry writes, for example, "Johnson Hooper's famous anti-hero, Simon Suggs, whose adventures appeared in 1845, would have required only a little grooming to have served as a working model for Melville's confidence man. His philosophy, at least, is impeccable: 'It is good to be shifty in a new country.'"

In Clarel Melville described "a den / Worse for Christ's coming, since His love / (Perverted) did but venom prove." The Confidence-Man seems an illustration of the truth of this statement, for here professed Christian ethics seem to produce little constructive effect. The confidence man

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42 Rosenberry, p. 175.
43 Clarel, Pt. II, Sect. XXI, l. 254ff.
is able to exploit Christian values in order to gain his ends, but nobody really seems to believe in practicing the Christian ethic. The deaf-mute's chalking of verses from 1 Corinthians 13 earns for him only pity, suspicion, and contempt. He makes virtually no impression on the minds of his fellow passengers, for only a very few moments are required for the vanishing of "the last transient memory of the slumberer" (CM, p. 7). The wooden-legged man is obviously disdainful of what he believes to be the ignorance of the crowd when he snaps, "To where it belongs with your charity! to heaven with it! . . . here on earth, true charity dotes, and false charity plots. Who betrays a fool with a kiss, the charitable fool has the charity to believe is in love with him, and the charitable knave on the stand gives charitable testimony for his comrade in the box" (CM, p. 14). The irony of the name Fidèle becomes apparent not only as its pilgrims reveal their hypocrisy, but also when the reader finds Melville's description of it as a "great white bulk with two tiers of small embrasure-like windows," a "bulk" which "might at distance have been taken by strangers for some whitewashed fort on a floating isle" (CM, p. 7). Many of the "coins" tossed at Black Guinea prove buttons, the methodist minister who defends him is "militant," and the narrator says of Black Guinea that the "Newfoundland-dog face turned
in passively hopeless appeal, as if instinct told it that the right or wrong might not have overmuch to do with whatever wayward mood superior intelligences might yield to" (CM, p. 11). The old man who appears in the final chapter seems innocent and claims to place his trust in Providence. It becomes clear, however, that his goodness is, like that of the man in white, not a righteousness resulting from successful conflict with evil, but only the questionable innocence born of ignorance and evasion. He professes agreement with the scriptural passage "Jehovah shall be thy confidence," but only after he has purchased a money belt and a patented traveller's lock. The two characters who seem truly to practice Christian Charity are Mr. Roberts and the pious widow. Both, however, are swindled for their pains, as is the prickly Missouri bachelor who decides once more to try thinking no evil, enduring all things, and believing all things. If we add to these examples the cases of the unfortunate man and China Aster, we must conclude that, in this novel at least, the attempt to act nobly and uprightly earns only pain and impoverishment. In spite of the need for Christian charity in The Confidence-Man, the Christian ethic is here perverted for personal profit, the exact opposite of its real, practical value.

The confidence man represents not only the Christian
and cultural values of mid-nineteenth century America, but also the optimistic philosophical orientation of the day. Elizabeth Foster discusses his verbal promotion of Shaftesburyan, Utilitarian, and Evangelical humanitarianism. But the confidence man as philosopher is chiefly Emersonian transcendentalist. That the confidence man has read Emerson is apparent from his assertion that trust in the creator implies trust in the creature, his discourses concerning compensation, his attempt to demonstrate the beneficial effects of nature on body and soul, and, above all, his generally "confident" attitude. The confidence man even argues according to Emersonian technique. "Man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects," Emerson writes; and the man with the brass plate is a living example for the assertion. E. S. Oliver and others have made convincing arguments concerning the parallels between the statements and physical appearances of Mark Winsome and Emerson. Certainly, if Mark Winsome is intended as a parody of Emerson, The Confidence-Man makes

44 Foster, liii-lv.


46 See, for example: E. S. Oliver, "Melville's Picture of Emerson and Thoreau in 'The Confidence-Man," College English, 8 (October, 1946), 61-72; Rosenberry, pp. 165ff; Foster, pp. lxxiiiiff; Merton M. Sealts, Jr.,
some harsh statements concerning the hypocrisy and irresponsibility of transcendentalist man. Emerson's vulnerability to satiric criticism is increased, too, by his attempt to reconcile proper theological commitment with self-seeking individualism. Stressing the necessity of expressing and satisfying inner impulses, Emerson says, "I would write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim." But when Orchis pursues the "free development of his inmost nature" (CM, p. 244), Old Plain Talk, hearing that Orchis had joined the Come-Outers, crustily comments that "if some men knew what was their inmost natures, instead of coming out with it, they would try their best to keep it in, which, indeed, was the way with the prudent sort" (CM, p. 245). Both the confidence man (applying Emerson's principles) and Mark Winsome teach us, moreover, to believe appearances reveal reality. The irony, however, of the master masquerader preaching reliance on appearances is the height of comic absurdity. Here again, the confidence man proves himself a powerful satirist. He becomes not so much object as agent of satire as he embodies


transcendentalism in its ultimately dangerous falseness. Bidding men ignore the misery before their eyes and trust that correction of ills and abuses naturally proceeds from the workings of some vaguely defined benevolence, he inhibits constructive action and blinds his listeners to possible imperfections within themselves. To the barber the cosmopolitan declares, "I am Philanthropos, and love mankind" (CM, p. 261). But to evaluate the import of this statement the reader should recall that the angel Bright Future who in China Aster's dreams promised him prosperity and happiness seemed "some beautiful human philanthropist" (CM, p. 239). Avowed or apparent philanthropy, whatever professions of altruism it makes, is in The Confidence-Man not to be trusted; for here both Bright Future and the confidence man demonstrate to their victims with devastating aptness the necessity for self-reliance.

Developing an analysis of Melville's satiric treatment of Emersonian transcendentalism should be preceded by some sort of proof of Melville's familiarity with Emerson's essays. The scholarly detective work in this department has already be completed by Elizabeth Foster. In a note to

48 R. W. B. Lewis writes, "This man of many masks is after all the great unmasker; this customarily bland mock-optimist is a great satirist in action."—p. 71.
the Hendricks House edition she writes:

Until recently, the only evidence that Melville read Emerson before he acquired the Poems in 1859, the Essays, first and second series, in 1862, and The Conduct of Life in 1870 (Sealts, Nos. 206, 204, 205, 203) has been internal evidence in his short stories and novels, particularly Pierre and The Confidence-Man; but this testimony can hardly be gainsaid. Now the publication of a letter from Mrs. Nathaniel Hawthorne to her mother provides the external evidence: speaking of Melville's visits to the Hawthorne home in the summer and early autumn of 1850, she says that 'one morning he shut himself into the boudoir and read Mr. Emerson's Essays in the presence of our beautiful picture' (an engraving of the Transfiguration presented by Emerson).

In her introduction Foster provides additional evidence for Melville's satiric aims by suggesting that the herb doctor's advice to the invalid to "prove all vials; trust those which are true" is a "satiric arrow" pointed at "Emerson and the New England transcendentalists." She explains, "The verse from Thessalonians which this parodies had become a motto of New England transcendentalism; thus the Confidence man again links one arm with Saint Paul and one with optimistic philosophy." 50

The cosmopolitan indicates to the old man of Chapter 45 his belief that to "distrust the creature" "would

49 Foster, Note 212.2, pp. 353-4. On Emerson and Melville see also Davis and Gilman, Letters, February 24, 1849 (p. 77) for Melville's statement that he had been to hear Emerson lecture. See March 3, 1849 (p. 79) for Melville's statement concerning his glancing at a book of Emerson's in Putnam's store.
imply distrust of the Creator" (CM, p. 281). His association of human nature with divine nature is founded, however, not on biblical doctrine, but on Emersonian. The Bible tells us: "there is none good but one, that is, God"; 51 "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"; 52 and "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 53 But Emerson asks, "Who is the Trustee? What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded?" 54 and answers himself, "Bid them take the shoes off their feet, for God is here within." 55 For Emerson, self-reliance was a form of God-reliance, and the confidence man does not fail to catch the point. Inverting Christian theology, he substitutes confidence in human nature for trust in Jehovah; and, clearly in the spirit of "Self-Reliance," asks men to worship not Christ, but themselves.

50 Foster, p. lx1.
51 Mark 10:18.
52 I John 1:9.
53 I Corinthians 2:14.
Emerson wrote in *Nature* that "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says, --he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me." The confidence man, too, describes the effects of nature as replacing "impertinent griefs" with "wild delight." Chiding the crippled soldier for his pessimism, the herb doctor says:

"To mere reason, your case looks something piteous, I grant. But never despond; many things—the choicest—yet remain. You breathe this bounteous air, are warmed by this gracious sun, and, though poor and friendless, indeed, nor so agile as in your youth, yet, how sweet to roam, day by day, through the groves, plucking the bright mosses and flowers, till forlornness itself becomes a hilarity, and, in your innocent independence, you skip for joy" (*CM*, p. 112).

Pitch finds himself the object of a similar lecture. The herb doctor declares that "Through her regularly authorized agents, of whom I happen to be one, Nature delights in benefiting those who most abuse her" (*CM*, p. 124). In a series of rhetorical questions he challenges

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56 *Nature*, pp. 7-8.
distrust of the beneficence of nature by suggesting her
universally kind and maternal character:

"Now, can you, who suspect nature, deny,
that this same nature not only kindly brought
you into being, but has faithfully nursed
you to your present vigorous and independent
condition? Is it not to nature that you
are indebted for that robustness of mind
which you so handsomely use to her sandal?
Pray, is it not to nature that you owe the
very eyes by which you criticize her?"
(CM, p. 123).

The herb doctor's emphasis on the gracious disposition
of nature is paralleled, again, by Emerson's. In Nature
we find the following:

Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only
the material, but also the process and the
result. All the parts incessantly work
into each other's hands for the profit of
man. The wind sows the seed; the sun
evaporates the sea; the wind blows the
vapor to the field; the ice, on the other
side of the planet, condenses rain on
this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant
feeds the animal; and thus the endless
circulations of the divine charity nourish
man.57

But Pitch can challenge the herb doctor as we cannot
Emerson. Pitch asks, "Nature is good queen Bess; but
who's responsible for the cholera?" (CM, p. 120). Here
Melville causes his Emersonian disciple to face some very
probing questions.58 The herb doctor manages in reply


58 Of course the con man is not giving Emerson full justice,
since by self-reliance Emerson meant reliance on the
godliness in man, not on man alone. Emerson himself,
too, takes account of Pitch's objections to the herb
a good deal of fancy evasion. But at last he must exit unvictoriously and take up the argument again only by returning in his guise of Philosophical Intelligence Office Agent. And finally he discovers that again he cannot construct arguments superior to Pitch's, but wins the day by "outcharming" his opponent.

After the confidence man listens to Mr. Roberts' narration concerning the unfortunate man he objects that "if the conviction of a Providence, for instance, were in any way made dependent upon such variabilities as everyday events, the degree of that conviction would, in thinking minds, be subject to fluctuations akin to those of the stock-exchange during a long and uncertain war" (CM, p. 72). Basing his remarks "less on experience than intuition" (CM, p. 72), he concludes "that such a doctrine admitting "the apparent license temporarily permitted sometimes, to the bad over the good" "was but tantamount to the one which should affirm that Providence was not now, but was going to be" (CM, p. 73). Maintaining his refusal to recognize the existence of any sort of injustice within his human world, he later rebukes Pitch for his unflattering description of nature as embezzler by asking, "But have you no confidence that by a reverse shifting the soil will come back after many days?" (CM, p. 122).

In spite of the confidence man's adept rephrasing of the doctor in "Fate" and in the "Discipline" section in Nature. But satire is traditionally exaggerated, and
biblical "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days,"\(^{59}\) we must look not to the Bible but to Emerson to discover the philosophical source of the confidence man's principles of compensation. For Christ promises his followers not that they will receive justice in this world, but rather that they will be despised and persecuted. In the gospel of Mark, for example, he warns his disciples, "But take heed to yourselves; for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them"\(^{60}\) and "ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved."\(^{61}\) Like the confidence man, however, Emerson in "Compensation" deprecates "the fallacy" inherent in "the immense concession that the bad are successful; that justice is not done now."\(^{62}\) Referring to the "soul," Emerson writes, "It is eternal but it enacts itself in time and space. Justice is not postponed."\(^{63}\) Later in the

\(^{59}\) Ecclesiastes 11:1.

\(^{60}\) Mark 13:9.


\(^{63}\) Essays, "Compensation," p. 73.
same essay he continues:

Men suffer all their life long under the foolish superstition that they can be cheated. But it is as impossible for a man to be cheated by any one but himself, as for a thing to be and not to be at the same time. There is a third silent party to all our bargains. The nature and soul of things takes on itself the guaranty of the fulfillment of every contract so that honest service cannot come to loss.

Both Emerson and the confidence man, then, seek to soften the sternness of Christ's "take up thy cross and follow me." Reconciling right living with comfortable and self-expressive living, both preach not an other-worldly, but a this-worldly, religion.

In *Nature* Emerson writes that "Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts," and the representative of the Philosophical Intelligence Office applies this principle to prove that spiritual maturity parallels physical maturity. Pitch reduces to absurdity his complicated argument by simply asking, "is analogy argument? You are a punster" (*CM*, p. 140). But Pitch's opponent, Emerson's man as analogist, is here making an assumption of very serious import. His logic which attempts to show that men's ethical natures develop in correspondence with their physical natures is actually

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64. *Essays, "Compensation,"* p. 86.
spurious demonstration that physical appearances are a trustworthy indication of spiritual reality. Mark Winsome, Emerson, and the confidence man, all three, in fact, try to persuade us that outward beauty is dependable evidence of ethical uprightness. Emerson writes in Nature, for example, that "Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue." Mark Winsome, after mentioning the "Quite beautiful conceits" of the cosmopolitan, tells him that "yours, sir, if I mistake not, must be a beautiful soul—one full of all love and truth; for where beauty is, there must those be" (CM, p. 213). Although his responsive example of "that beautiful creature, the rattlesnake" (CM, p. 213), obviously exposes the fallaciousness of Winsome's argument, the cosmopolitan defers explicit disagreement. Instead, with apparently as little regard for consistency as has Winsome, he proceeds to the barber shop with Winsome's argument on his lips. Earlier in the novel the cosmopolitan had used the doctrine of appearances to deplore the seedy dress of the man with the brass plate. "Grief to good minds," he says in his maddening habit of paraphrasing scriptures to undermine theological teachings, "to see a man of superior sense forced to hide his light under the bushel of an inferior coat" (CM, p. 152). In the barber shop he likewise argues

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that one should make certain mental transferences—by means of which apprehension of outer respectability automatically leads to conviction of inward respectability. He tells the barber:

"For look now, setting business views aside, regarding the thing in an abstract light; in short, supposing a case, barber; supposing, I say, you see a stranger, his face accidentally averted, but his visible part very respectable-looking; what now, barber—I would put it to your conscience, to your charity—what would be your impression of that man, in a moral point of view; being in a signal sense a stranger, would you, for that, signally set him down for a knave?" (CM, p. 257).

But in both cases, the confidence man's dressing in an unhandsome suit and his posing the example of a man whose face is averted, we detect an element of equivocation. The cosmo-politan, like Winsome, again does not care to be consistent. Emerson had written, "What is a day? what is a year? what is summer? what is woman? what is a child? what is sleep? To our blindness these things seem unaffected." Winsome parodies Emerson by saying to the cosmopolitan, "What are you? What am I? Nobody knows who anybody is. The data which life furnishes, towards forming a true estimate of any being, are as insufficient to that end as in geometry one side given

67_Nature, p. 35.
would be to determine the triangle" (CM, p. 216). To the barber the cosmopolitan mimics, "Don't be too sure who I am . . . You can conclude nothing absolute from the human form" (CM, p. 254). Winsome and the confidence man are in agreement, then, in emphasizing, first, that material appearances reveal spiritual actuality and, second, that appearances provide absolutely no final evidence concerning reality. They are, moreover, in agreement on one other point. They both intend their philosophies to provide them with all available comforts. Winsome declares that "any philosophy that, being in operation contradictory to the ways of the world, tends to produce a character at odds with it, such a philosophy must necessarily be but a cheat and a dream" (CM, p. 223). From observation of the confidence man's avowals and actions, we can be certain of his complete concurrence.

The world of the confidence man, however, is not simply the habitation of a set of cultural or philosophical entities. It is a world of people, or at least of imaginative representations of people, who interact with each other, feel emotions toward each other, and adopt certain kinds of relationships with that "revolving Drummond light," the central figure of the confidence man.

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68 This comparison is suggested by E. Oliver, "Melville's Picture of Emerson and Thoreau in 'The Confidence-Man,'" College English, 8 (October, 1946), 68.
Classification of these characters, moreover, is more complex than division into the two categories of victims and nonvictims. Among the victims we find not only the greedy and cynical, but also the tenderhearted and sincere. Those who escape swindling are, unfortunately for the critic who would like to establish patterns and discover some attitude or response receiving recognizable authorial approbation, no more attractive or apparently "redemptive" than those who believe the confidence man's sweet words. The characters who foil the confidence man seem, if anything, more morally disreputable than those who cannot. This category includes, first, a group of cynics who avoid being duped for the very same reason that they are ineligible candidates for any ranking as "redemptive" or "salutary." Their bitter suspicions and violent misanthropy lead them at the same time they reject the advances of the confidence man, to reject what he represents, that is, men in general. A second element included among those who elude the confidence man is even less lovable. This group is comprised of Charlie Noble, Mark Winsome, and Egbert. Its outstanding collective quality is the ability to outcon the con man. In two successive scenes in which con man confronts con man and transcendentalist confronts transcendentalist we

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69 The reader will note the parallelism of Goodman" with "Noble" and of Goodman's ability to be "Very Charming" with the name "Winsome."
are left to the disturbing conclusion that not even the devil himself can excel some men in heartlessness and duplicity.

Many of the characters who meet the confidence man seem to have some sort of protective knowledge about him, or at least a satisfying antagonism toward him. Those who exhibit distrust of the confidence man, moreover, all seem to possess some unaccountable quality of resemblance to the biblical Christ. However much they impress the reader as unpleasant, they do resist fleecing and recognize the confidence man as, at best, apocryphal. The one-legged man labels Black Guinea a "painted decoy," succeeds in planting distrust among his fellow passengers with a speech uncomfortably analogous to Christ's parable of the seed.

He says:

"look you, I have been called a Canada thistle. Very good. And a seedy one: still better. And the seedy Canada thistle has been pretty well shaken among ye: best of all. Dare say some seed has been shaken out; and won't it spring though? And when it does spring, do you cut down the young thistles, and won't they spring the more? it's encouraging and coaxing 'em. Now, when with my thistles your farms shall be well stocked, why then--you may abandon 'em!" (CM, p. 15).

The man in white, although he does give him money, says that the confidence man's program "seems all reasonable enough, but with mankind it won't do" (CM, p. 45). His trip downriver to attend a wedding recalls Christ's first
miracle at the marriage in Cana. The titan who strikes
the confidence man is the only character who enters accom­
panied by a child, and we are reminded of Jesus' saying,
"And whoso shall receive one such little child in my
name receiveth me."\(^70\) The auburn-haired man who says of
the herb doctor to the hook-nosed gentleman, "I can't
conceive how you, in any way, can hold him a fool. How
he talked--so glib, so pat, so well" (CM, p. 102), sees
him as malicious rather than blind. In the gospel of
John it is recorded that when Jesus rebuked the mob who
intended to stone the woman taken in adultery, Jesus
"stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground."\(^71\)
In the novel we find, "Bending over, and looking down
between his knees on the floor, the auburn-haired gentle­
man meditatively scribbled there awhile with his cane" (CM, p.
101). The only other character in the novel who seems
immediately to suspect the confidence man is the boy who
appears in the last chapter. When the cosmopolitan declares
that he has no interest in the "blacksmith's wares" for
sale, the boy replies, "Those who give the blacksmith
most work seldom do" (CM, p. 279). And he tips the cosmo­
politan "a wink expressive of a degree of indefinite
knowingness, not uninteresting to consider in one of his

\(^70\) Matthew 18:5.

\(^71\) John 8:6.
years" (CM, p. 279). The boy has the aura of a scapegoat, for "All pointed and fluttering, the rags of the little fellows red-flannel shirt, mixed with those of his yellow coat, flamed about him like the painted flames in the robes of a victim in *auto-da-fe*" (CM, p. 277). The boy is doubly Christlike, for he is not only a scapegoat, but a sample of suffering, displaced, and rejected humanity. Christ had said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." The boy has "no allotted sleeping-place" (CM, p. 277).

Each of these characters poses a significant challenge to the confidence man, but not one is adequate as an example of redemptiveness or right attitude. All fail, that is, to resemble Christ in a truly striking manner. The links to Christ, moreover, are balanced by associations with blackness and demonism. The one-legged man's statement subverts Christ's parable as much as it imitates it. The man in white, in spite of his immaculate dress and apparent goodness, is clearly undercut when Melville compares him to Pontius Pilate. The titan has "a voice deep and lonesome enough to have come from the bottom of an abandoned coal-shaft" (CM, p. 97), and the boy's face "wore such a polish

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72 Matthew 6:20.
of seasoned grime, that his sloe-eyes sparkled from out it like lustrous sparks in fresh coal" (CM, p. 277).

Just as the coal imagery associates these last two with Black Guinea and the treasurer of the Black Rapids Coal Company, so also do the qualities of the other seemingly knowledgeable characters link them with the confidence man. The one-legged man merely adopts the confidence man's own habit of quoting scripture for his personal purposes, and the auburn-haired man is, like the confidence man, so circumstantial and equivocal as to be virtually impossible to evaluate. That the characters here who seem to partake of the qualities of Christ partake equally of the qualities of the confidence man is only another tribute to the excellence of the confidence man's imitation of Christ.

Other, more attractive characters are either disappointingly ignorant or, in spite of knowledge, incapable of dealing with our slick and sly masquerader. The merchant's "natural heart" causes him to exclaim:

"Ah, wine is good, and confidence is good; but can wine or confidence percolate down through all the stony strata of hard considerations, and drop warmly and ruddy into the cold cave of truth? Truth will not be comforted. Led by dear charity, lured by sweet hope, fond fancy essays this feat; but in vain; mere dreams and ideals, they explode in your hand, leaving naught but the scorching behind!" (CM, p. 74).

But his realization occurs only after he has made himself
easy prey for the confidence man; and the outburst is immediately discounted and apologized for. Pitch manages to marshal his arguments in all the cogency of their logic and substantiation in experience. But his apparently inexplicable about-face forces recognition that more than logic and determined resistance are required to defeat the confidence man; and Pitch's later, unlikely conclusion that he has not been apolgetic enough does little to raise him in the esteem of the reader.

Finally, we have the attractive and worldly-wise barber who, although he is swindled of the price of a shave, is at least an unwilling victim. He makes, moreover, some very convincing arguments for his "No Trust" lifestyle. "Sir," he says to the cosmopolitan, "I hope you would not do me injustice. I don't say, and can't say, and wouldn't say, that I suspect all men; but I do say that strangers are not to be trusted, and so, ... no trust" (CM, p. 259). But his exemption of "strangers" from the kind of people he would trust is damning. For the description of virtually every character appearing in the novel involves repetition (often multiple) of the word, "stranger." The confidence man, then, is fully supported by the language of the novel when he replies, "look, now; to say that strangers are not to be trusted; does not that imply something like saying that mankind is not to be trusted; for the mass of mankind, are they not necessarily strangers to each individual man?"
However unlikely a misanthrope the barber seems; he must, theoretically at least, join the ranks of the one-legged man.

A thorough investigation of the characters of the novel, then, turns up no character with a completely pleasing philosophical position or lifestyle. The confidence man is beaten at his own game only by selfish, human shysters. Here again it is difficult to determine who imitates whom—whether these characters are vicious men imitating the devil or the confidence man is the devil imitating vicious men. Whatever the truth of that matter, the confidence man seems made-to-order for the world he inhabits. Melville is not satirizing him so much as he is satirizing through him the habits, attitudes, and actions of a world which seems created for the confidence man's amusement. R. W. B. Lewis described the Apocalypse envisioned in the novel as "the self-extinction" of a world "characterized by deceit and thronging with impostors and masqueraders, and the image of the supreme tempter (the 'super-promiser,' as the West called him) on the prowl through that world, assisting it towards its promised end."73 Tuveson comments, too, that "the faith of Confidence appears to be in essence a confidence-game played on the human race and especially

73 R. W. B. Lewis, p. 63.
on the American segment of it: a confidence-game played, as it were, by mankind on itself. If the confidence man is, then, an appropriate representative of the human race, those he fleeces are, by extension, swindled by human nature, victims of themselves. Thus there is little escape for anyone caught in this terrifying and terribly familiar world. The practicing Christians are simply easier victims than the hypocritical knaves, no more. The implication seems to be that Christian charity survives only as aid equally to the demonic and the genuinely suffering.

The implicit comment on the Christian religion and effect of Christ's ministry made by this recognition is only the beginning, however, of The Confidence-Man's disturbing theological suggestions. The grimly comic ramifications of the novel's theological assumptions will provide the topic for the following chapter.

74 Tuveson, p. 269.
Chapter III

The Theology of The Confidence-Man
One magazine writer of Melville's day, championing American literature, pointed out qualities exemplified in *The Confidence-Man* which established its superiority to the fiction being produced in England at the time. "And here it may be well to remark," he writes, "that one of the distinguishing traits of the Young American literature is its perfect decency. You can read any of these books aloud to your grandmother or your daughter, which is more than can be done by the majority of British books." But had this patriotic critic understood the theological import of his ace exhibit, perhaps his eagerness to let it represent American "decency" would have been somewhat modified. For *The Confidence-Man*, if not the vehicle of outright atheism, is at its midlest a suggestive comedy at the expense of the Christian religion. Here, indeed, the reader can pay his money and take his choice of ambiguities, futilities, and insulting insinuations concerning his carnal nature, his chances for immortality, and the dubious character of the orthodox worship upon whose efficacy he depends. The significance of the temporal setting of the novel, the introduction of the deaf-mute, and the spurious ministry of the confidence man all operate to undermine the religious faith

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of Melville's contemporaries. The confidence man's masquerade functions as a quasi-satiric exposure of Christian credibility, and the allegorical fables within the novel, while permitting Melville to disclaim responsibility for their implications, at the same time present those implications in their gravest light. Melville's eschatology, moreover, suggests not the triumph of the Lamb of God, but rather his replacement by a new and less promising scapegoat figure. The theological framework of The Confidence-Man, finally, subverts its own paradigm by elucidating the insoluble dilemma and accompanying absurdities inherent in doctrinal Christianity.

The first noteworthy theological comment made by The Confidence-Man occurs simultaneously with Melville's selection of a temporal setting. Perhaps he was merely taking advantage of the irony that the annually observed week celebrating the Resurrection coincides with the traditional commemoration in honor of fools and tricksters. Whatever his motivation, Melville presents a conception of cosmic reality by equating it with an April Fools' Day joke. The multiple implications of the choice are all unpleasant. The reader may conclude that the allegorical recapitulation of Christian history occurs on All Fools' Day because the novel judges that men, especially in their religious orientation, deserve characterization as fools.
But the comedy may be differently directed, namely, at the expense not of the creature but of the creator. In this case Christian history is seen as an eternal April Fools' Day because Christianity itself is an enormous joke resulting from God's ineffectual attempt to reconcile perverse men to Himself. Here the ironies focus on the ability of the finite to resist the infinite, to reject the God who is inexplicably seeking the approbation and acquiescence of those creatures who are technically under His authority, if not actually beneath His attention. From another perspective, however, we may recognize Christianity as a jest for which the responsibility belongs not to men, but to the powers or Power of the universe. That is, apparently God is not dead, but simply too busy laughing to occupy Himself otherwise.

In any event, certain allegorical correspondences suggest themselves. The normal joke is effected in terms of certain indispensable elements: the trickster-perpetrator, the victim, and the laughable incongruities intrinsic to the prank. Identifying these elements as they appear in The Confidence-Man is itself a tricky job. If we ignore the above possibilities and recognize a fourth by beginning with the obvious choice of the confidence man as diddler, we must conclude that the victim is man in his collective condition and that the substance of the joke consists of
his being induced to place trust not in God, but in himself, his environment, his material means, his ability and desire to "save" himself. Here the humor resides in the fact that men are gulled into commitment to what, in the terms set up by the novel, is obviously at best an unreliable and at worst a pernicious ethical force, that is, themselves. The problem with this allocation of roles is that the novel pretty clearly turns the tables on the confidence man by also subjecting him to the penalties of the jest and, in fact, revealing his efforts as gratuitous. For the con man is embarrassingly excelled by those whom he represents and with whom he partakes of human nature. Charlie Noble, Mark Winsome, and Egbert seem tailormade to show that the confidence man does not have all the swindling to his own advantage. If the confidence man represents or embodies the human personality, he must also share in its comic humiliation. If the confidence man is recognized not as manipulator but as puppet, then the focus shifts from him to some superior force. Again we are confronted with the necessity of identifying whatever cosmic or divine powers that be as originators of the wit. Divinity, then, may be complacently laughing at the fools on earth, or may be maliciously engineering fate so as to frustrate the wisest and most humane efforts to deal with it. Whatever the identity of the joker, that is, the earthly
inhabitants bear the brunt of the irony. There is, however, a "little lower layer." The "powers that be" suggest their nature not only as purposeful malice or concealed indifference, but also as blank nonentity. And in the latter case, the jest assumes the most gigantic absurdity of all. According to this possibility, both the victims and their laughable situation are gratuitous, since there is No One out there to be amused. By extension, the suffering, the mortification, and the counter-efforts of the dupes are also gratuitous. The immense purposelessness of a painfully ironic existence is the last and ugliest suggestion of the confidence man's masquerade.

From this thorny topic we may proceed to a fictional device whose implications here are no more conducive to comfort or optimistic outlook than is the Fidèle's departure date. Melville's introduction of the deaf-mute as Christ figure, his appearance and disappearance, is a lucid allegorical comment on the futility of Christ's ministry on earth. From the fact that the crowd, or representative assemblage of "pilgrims," views this Christ figure as suspicious, contemptible, pathetic, or mentally deficient, it may be inferred that in his passivity and ethical purity he is simply inimical to the depraved world to which he offers salvation. In this event, the scorn of his audience serves as both renewed crucifixion and enforced
realization that his mission is in vain. He does not exit willingly from his ordained sphere of activity, but is rather exiled or eliminated by the refusal of sinners to accept him, to believe his message, to recognize their own precarious existential situation. In reinforcement of this interpretation of Melville's opening incident, it is worth remarking that whereas the deaf-mute is rejected, the confidence man is universally accepted as a basic element of society. His success is a striking contrast to the inhospitable reception given the deaf-mute.

While attending to the implied assumption that Christ does indeed disappear from the physical eyes and spiritual vision of men after his few brief expressions about charity, we may consider another possible implication of the deaf-mute's actions. That alternative is that Melville is suggesting that Christ, rather than men, is responsible for the estrangement existing between himself and them. The deaf-mute seems voluntarily to choose the oblivion of sleep, and there is no divinely benevolent principle or manifestation of Providence operative within the novel. Hence it can be deduced that Christianity is by nature inefficacious or even malicious when practiced in this world. Christ staged two thousand years ago a few "miracles," issued what, in view of the morally debased nature of men, were impossible or self-defeating commands,
and then withdrew, taking with him the supernatural powers necessary for implementation of his program. The deaf-mute's enigmatic and emblematic display and disappearance, then, would emphasize his self-chosen alienation and inaccessibility equally with his negligible effect on his uninterested audience. The reason for his deafness and muteness, moreover, is a question whose answer lies hidden in his inscrutability. Investigation here is hindered by the fact that only appearances, rather than inner reality, are available to the perception of the reader.\(^{76}\) The evidence shows simply that the lamb-like man goes to sleep; the confidence man's contrasting wakefulness is another one of the facts that can be noted, but not satisfactorily analyzed.

The ambiguity of the novel, moreover, expands to include the evidently insoluble predicament imposed by Christianity upon its converts. Here the believer is confronted with two mutually exclusive but equally required attitudes toward his fellow man. Edgar Dryden's interpretation of the Christian predicament concerns the advisability of attempting to follow the guidelines found in the Bible. About that book he writes:

> On the one hand it advocates man's cultivation of charity and confidence (1 Corinthians 13)

\(^{76}\)Leon F. Seltzer in his "Camus's Absurd and the World of Melville's Confidence-Man," *PMLA*, 82 (March, 1967), 160, notes that "inner reality is not available to the observer."
and asks him to believe that "the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken" (Proverbs 3:26), while on the other hand it cautions that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night . . . when [people] shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them . . . . therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch: and be sober!" (I Thessalonians 5:2-6).

Indeed, Christ himself forewarns his disciples that before his Second Coming "many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many . . . . But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. . . . Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there Black Guinea's "Dar he be"?; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:11-12).

But Dryden's statements concerning the Apocalypse comprehend only one aspect of the Christian quandary. First, the Christian is told that he must truly love not only his neighbor, but even his enemy. The New Testament is adamant on this point. In the gospel of Luke, for example, we find the following:

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Bless then that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and

77Dryden, p. 168. Brackets are Dryden's.
of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.
   And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.
   For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.
   And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

But on the other hand, the Pauline or Calvinist Christian is also explicitly impressed with the totally depraved condition of human nature and the fact that all men are sinners with evil hearts. Especially if we consider that the diabolical confidence man is presented in the novel as perfectly appropriate representative of mankind, we conclude that the Bible admonishes Christians to love, in all the fullness of their hearts and souls, a creature who is a minor replica of the confidence man and thus a very poor candidate for membership in a loving mutuality. It is worth recalling that the only practicing Christians portrayed in the novel are either swindled by the confidence man, abandoned by their friends, or destroyed in spite of honorable ethical orientation.

But not only is the Christian required to regard other men sympathetically. He is also told to purposefully neglect his own worldly security. The gospel of Matthew, 78

for example, reveals Christ preaching:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

In the world of The Confidence-Man, however, a secular anxiety for one's economic status and protection is clearly indispensable, not as a matter of comfort, but as a matter of survival. The trust placed in Providence by the old man in the final chapter is liable to charges of insincerity; but his prudence, in view of the fate of China Aster and the depiction in the novel of pitifully impoverished individuals, is, from a knowledgeable perspective, not unpraiseworthy.

Matthew 6:25-30 and 34.
Clearly certain arbitrary authorial devices in *The Confidence-Man* work to challenge the validity or efficacy of religious practice. But the most thoroughly satiric comment is made by the total masquerade of the confidence man. The application of the term "satire," however, is scarcely defensible here. For satire implies a corrective intention, whereas *The Confidence-Man* seems merely a sly, irresponsible delineation of certain inescapable and afflicting ironies. What the novel accomplishes, nevertheless, is diminution of Christian history by means of satiric parody. Christianity, for example, demands "confidence" in Christ without presenting any more logical basis for belief than does the confidence man himself. In effect, both Christ and the confidence man say simply, "Trust me." Both teach inconsistent principles, both claim to be solely efficacious, both make inapplicable and ambiguous warnings against impostors, and trust in neither yields positively recognizable results.

Christ promises his followers immortality and eternal happiness; and Mr. Truman says he makes fortunes, "everlasting fortunes, for those who will invest confidence in him. And the difference is not merely Mr. Truman's requirement of a cash pledge; for Christ himself bids his would-be imitator, "go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven . . . ."\(^{80}\)

\(^{80}\)Matthew 19:21.
What each demands of a proselyte is evidence of genuine commitment. In Mr. Truman's world the most respected and desired possession is money. Hence his request for that item. Of course, however, the reader might note who receives the cash. In the case of the rich young ruler the poor were to be the beneficiaries. Here the con man would pocket the money. Nevertheless, the point remains its validity with respect to the prospective convert.

The church founded on Christ denies full or specific explanation of many uncertainties arising from Christ's actions, teachings, and attitudes. Consider, for example, the controversies concerning the suffering on earth of the innocent, the possible damnation of the unenlightened pagan, the fate of the unbaptized stillborn infant, the present condition of the undying souls of men who perished physically previous to Christ's initiation of the new covenant. Like Christ, the confidence man, when too closely questioned, enigmatically refers to "A secret, a mystery" (CM, p. 83). To his doubting invalid, the confidence man says:

"You ask not much; you are wise; not in vain have you suffered. That little you ask, I think, can be granted. But remember, not in a day, nor a week, nor perhaps a month, but sooner or later; I say not exactly when, for I am neither prophet nor charlatan. Still, if, according to the directions in your box there, you take my medicine steadily, without assigning an especial day, near or remote, to discon-
continue it, then may you calmly look for some eventual result of good. But again I say, you must have confidence" (CM, p. 93).

Christ likewise practices the evasion of omitting clearcut substantiation of his professedly salutary interference in earthly affairs. Who, for example, can with absolute conviction credit the answer of his prayers to Christ rather than to temporal contingencies or human effort— or who explain the number of prayers which are apparently ignored by God? Even the authenticity of ecclesiastical canons is questionable. Mr. Roberts' remark to the treasurer of the Black Rapids Coal Company might with justice be applied to the Bible. With Mr. Roberts, a Christian might say to a Bible salesman:

"Doubts, may be, it might suggest, but not knowledge; for how, by examining the book, should I think I knew any more than I now think I do; since, if it be the true book, I think it so already; and since if it be otherwise, then I have never seen the true one, and don't know what that ought to look like" (CM, p. 62).

The confidence man's fanatical demands for faith, finally, really are no less logical than the evangelist's. Nor are the Christian assumptions more believable than the confidence man's. Whereas the confidence man preaches that men are absolutely good, the Calvinist minister must teach them that they are absolutely bad. It may be argued that the con man's contentions are inconsistent with the moral
realities of his world and that the Christian assumption is at least more conducive to constructive attempts at self-improvement. But it may also be argued that original sin is nothing less than cosmic injustice universally applied, and that the apparent absence of divinity in this world does little to prove divine presence in the next. Immortality, like Christianity, and The Confidence-Man itself—may be the supreme fiction.

The allegorical fables or parables within the novel, moreover, have the effect of denying not only the confidence man's assertions concerning the rosiness of the future, the purity of human ethics, and the unfailing justice dominating man's world, but they also contradict Christian faith in Providence. They do thoroughly support the Christian conception that complete reward for devotion to moral principles will not occur in this life. That that reward is not withheld, but only postponed, does not, however, receive acknowledgement. The tales about Goneril and Moredock, for example, make mention of trials, courts, and justice; but no judgment is forthcoming within the context of the story. Justice here, like faith in the Christian schemata, is "the substance of things hoped for" but "not seen." 81 Though in the action of the novel the

81 Hebrews 11:1.
dupes of the confidence man are not very seriously
victimized, in the fables told here for amusement the fates
are decidedly painful. The reader may feel very little
sympathy for the miser or the sophomore; even Mr. Roberts
and the widow seem able to afford their losses. But
response to China Aster and recoil from Moredock occur on
a deeper emotional level. And perhaps precisely because
of the unusually forthright statements the stories make
and the devastating fortunes they depict, the origin of
these moralities is obscured, responsibility for them is
effectively disclaimed by all involved, and the factual
accuracy of their content is consequently cast into doubt.

The story of the unfortunate man and his wife Goneril
is allegorically a lesson concerning the actual slavery
of the rational, moral principle to the "anomalously vicious"
forces within the human personality. Mr. Ringman practices
Christian forebearance towards his wife, but receives in
return the contempt of a totally self-seeking and unloving
enemy. Goneril's malice is unmotivated and she utilizes
the preternatural powers of extra-human perception and the
evil touch to satisfy herself and humiliate her husband.
To add to his psychological torture, she persecutes the
beloved innocent and hypocritically arrays the powers and
sympathies of the world in her defense. Resorting to
flight for self-preservation, the husband yet refrains from
"one-sided reflections upon human goodness and human justice" (CM, p. 71), and in fact evidences his persevering faith in human nature by soliciting help from a virtual stranger. Although the confidence man as Mr. Ringman is a fine example of unshaken devotion to the faith he preaches, and although as audience to the story he seeks to alleviate the implications of undeserved suffering and unaccountable malice, the facts of the tale stand for themselves. The justice of Goneril's actions is one with the justice of inborn depravity or original sin. To demonstrate the unfairness of Goneril to her husband is to challenge not only the confidence man's optimism, but also the rectitude of the Calvinist's or Pauline Christian's order.

The story of Moredock insists again upon the presence of evil in the universe and the human victim's inability to deal with it. Elizabeth Foster observes that "In this Indian of Melville's readers will have recognized a type of the Confidence Man." Mocmohoc's action, indeed, parallels the confidence man's method of effecting the annihilation of the unsuspecting by a specious application of a covenant to which the victim agrees. Mocmohoc slays the surviving Wrights and Weavers. The confidence man betrays his dupes into fatal ethical allegiance. "Indian," furthermore, functions here in the same way "white whale" functions in Moby Dick. Rather than recognizing that "Indian" nature as he conceives it is widespread and inherent, Colonel
Moredock, like Ahab, makes an "intolerable allegory" and pursues its justification with implacable vengeance. Although Shroeder declares of the Indian-hater that there "is no distortion in his vision of spiritual reality" and Parker writes that "The Indian-haters are dedicated Christians," the contrasting interpretation given by Pearce is the most cogent. Pearce writes:

Now I submit that there is nothing but distortion in the Indian-hater's vision of spiritual reality, that the price he pays for resisting the confidence-man is exactly as high as the price he would pay for surrendering to him. For the Indian-hater can see nothing but the dark side of life. In that darkness he loses sight of his human self. The issue of blind confidence and blind hatred is in the end identical. But, in the Melville of The Confidence-Man, there seems to be no way to avoid either one or the other.

That Melville intended to blacken the Indians and not the Indian-hater is contradicted both by logic and by Melville's personal attitudes as revealed in print. His

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82 Foster, p. lxxvii.
83 Shroeder, p. 379.
84 Hershel Parker, "The Metaphysics of Indian-hating," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 18 (September, 1963), 166.
lack of antagonism or contempt for any of the races of man is demonstrated by his published statement:

We are all of us—Anglo-Saxons, Dyaks, and Indians—sprung from one head and made in one image. And if we regret this brotherhood now, we shall be forced to join hands hereafter. A misfortune is not a fault; and good luck is not meritorious. The savage is born a savage; and the civilized being but inherits his civilization, nothing more.86

Concentrating the confidence man's qualities into a single race is, furthermore, contrary to the purposes of the novel. The Indian is as supremely moral as the confidence man and no more so than any other human.

Before permitting Charlie Noble to commence his history of Moredock, the confidence man had declared, "Never heard of such a thing. Hate Indians? Why should he or anybody else hate Indians? I admire Indians" (CM, p. 159); and after listening to the tale's conclusion he comments, "As for this Indian-hating in general, I can only say of it what Dr. Johnson said of the alleged Lisbon earthquake: 'Sir, I don't believe it.'" (CM, p. 178). Like Dr. Johnson, the confidence man is prevented by his professions of ethical belief from admitting the occurrence of undeserved and apparently undirected tragedy. In particular, the confidence man cannot afford to admit

86 Quoted by Pearce, p. 943. He cites Literary World, 4 (1849), 291.
Indian brutality. For the Indian represents precisely what the confidence man aims to defend and encourage: human nature in its basic, uninhibited, rapacious condition—the Old Adam in its natural state. And that "Indian" nature is well distributed throughout human society, civilized and uncivilized, is indicated by the language and imagery of the novel. Goneril, it will be recalled, had an "Indian figure," "health like a squaw's," and other qualities "such as pertain to the women of savage life" (CM, p. 66). The herb doctor claims to be a "true Indian doctor," and the cosmopolitan wears an "Indian belt" and smokes a "calumet." Representing the Seminole Widow and Orphan Asylum, the confidence man succeeds in obtaining a contribution from the charitable widow who exclaims, "Poor souls—Indians, too—those cruelly-used Indians" (CM, p. 50). The child of the titan is wrapped in an "Indian blanket" and is "evidently of alien maternity, perhaps Creole, or even Camanche" (CM, p. 96). When Charlie Noble and Frank Goodman order wine it arrives in "a little bark basket, braided with porcupine quills, gaily tinted in the Indian fashion" (CM, p. 181). Later the two satisfy their "humanities" further by ordering cigars, and "They were brought in a pretty little bit of western pottery, representing some kind of Indian utensil . . . ." (CM, p. 190). Included in the arrangement of cigars were "two accessories," perhaps suggesting the source and sting of a
pervasive "Indianness." The accessories were "bits of pottery, but smaller, both globes; one in guise of an apple flushed with red and gold to the life, and, through a cleft at top, you saw it was hollow. This was for the ashes. The other, gray, with wrinkled surface, in the likeness of a wasp's nest, was the match-box" (CM, p. 190). That the Indian, moreover, is only an example of, and not an exception to, human perfidy and bloodthirstiness, is revealed when Noble quotes Judge Hall as stating:

"It is terrible that one creature should so regard another, should make it conscience to abhor an entire race. It is terrible; but is it surprising? Surprising, that one should hate a race which he believes to be red from a cause akin to that which makes some tribes of garden insects green? A race whose name is upon the frontier a memento mori; painted to him in every evil light; now a horse-thief like those in Moyamensing; now an assassin like a New York rowdy; now a treaty-breaker like an Austrian; now a Palmer with poisoned arrows; now a judicial murderer and Jeffries, after a fierce farce of trial condemning his victim to bloody death; or a Jew with hospitable speeches cozening some fainting stranger into ambuscade, there to burk him, and account it a deed grateful to Manitou, his god" (CM, pp. 165-66).

Mocmohoc in another comment is regarded merely "almost" as dishonorable as Caesar Borgia. Apparently the savages, like the confidence man himself, have difficulty surpassing in infamy the atrocities of other human predators to whom they are so carefully linked and twinned.

If the stories of Goneril and Moredock began a series
of philosophical confrontations by proposing for consideration the problem of natural depravity, the story of Charlemont is a continuation. Here again the religious positions of both the confidence man and the Calvinist are challenged. There is no direct comment concerning the human capacity for friendship, but the expectations entertained by Charlemont are clear, as is the degree of success achieved of his adventure in sacrificial scapegoatism. For Charlemont, who sold all he had and withdrew from the world, returned a more sorrowful, but wiser, man. The efficacy of salvation through the efforts of a suffering substitute is questioned. Charlemont, for example, says:

"If ever, in days to come, you shall see ruin at hand, and, thinking you understand mankind, shall tremble for your friendships, and tremble for your pride; and, partly through love for the one and fear for the other, shall resolve to be beforehand with the world, and save it from a sin by prospectively taking that sin to yourself, then will you do as one I now dream of once did, and like him will you suffer; but how fortunate and how grateful should you be, if like him, after all that had happened, you could be a little happy again" (CM, p. 210).

The confidence man is narrating a tale which implies that experience with social geniality does not breed confidence in its strength to endure through financial embarrassment. He is careful to stipulate that the story is pure fantasy, told merely for amusement. But his obvious intent is to both inform and confuse Charlie Noble, a "friend" who seems to need some education in the ideal nature of friendship.
The philosophical import of the story, then, stands; for its living illustration exists not only in the character Charlie Noble, but also Egbert. Both practice friendship only with those whose wealth prevents them from exacting proofs of love.

China Aster's history functions as an allegorical statement demonstrating, once again, the futilities and pitiless forces besetting the human condition. The story is essentially that of Job, and its flavor is more of the European folk tale than of the American, just as the book of Job is prechristian and precedes the age of the new covenant. The unconverted state of China at the time the novel was written has a similar connection with the story. China Aster is unconverted but morally upright man. Like Job's, his sorrows seem to have little relation to his sins. His occupation is "shedding some light through the darkness of a planet benighted" (CM, p. 234), whereas that of his friend Orshis is defending "the understandings of men from naked contact with the substance of things" (CM, p. 234). Hoffman, moreover, tells us that "China Aster is as delicate as the flower whose name he bears. A modest bloom of fringed, fragile petals, the chinese aster grubs its living from the stony northern soil. The name

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has further associations, too: 'star' and 'orient' hint at the candlemaker's idealism; also, they faintly suggest his distant kinship to the hero of another tale of sacrifice, whose birth was heralded by a star in the Eastern sky."\(^{66}\)
The name Orchis, on the other hand, suggests luxuriance and, in its Greek etymology, has sexual overtones. Yet in a world where Conscience and Old Honesty are dead and only Old Prudence and Old Plain Talk survive to aid China Aster, Orchis is enriched and China Aster is impoverished. The moral of the tale seems to be that disaster results when men trust each other. For the story emphasizes the fact that "had China Aster been something else than what he was, he would not have been trusted, and, therefore, he would have been effectually shut out from running his own and wife's head into the usurer's noose" (CM, p. 242). That is, although Orchis when demanding repayment of the loan makes reflections "upon the unstableness and deceitfulness of the human heart" (CM, p. 244), it is China Aster who suffers the most from his own moral respectability. The story can be paralleled with that of Job even in the detail of China Aster's three hypocritical advisors, Old Prudence, Old Plain Talk, and Orchis; but there is one significant deviation. God fails to appear in an act of

\(^{88}\) Hoffman, p. 146.
reconciliation, and the sun shines unperturbed as China Aster collapses in "such a light and heat as only the midsummer banks of the inland Ohio know" (CM, p. 246). This fable, like the others, seems clear in its assertion of inescapable human fallibility and implacable divine indifference.

Pitch's advice to the miser concerning the necessity for self-reliance, then, seems in keeping with the moral and material realities of the world of The Confidence-Man. Each of these stories within a story presents a lifestyle which is actually a method of dealing with prevailingly severe environmental conditions. The unfortunate man seeks justice from legal authorities. Moredock, naming himself judge and jury, passes sentence and proceeds to execute. Charlemont voluntarily sacrifices himself without even bringing his society to trial; China Aster simply attempts to live as an honest man caught in a predatory economic ethos. China Aster's inability to survive is the most disheartening; for he depends not only upon his earthly friends, but also upon his information from the spiritual realm. That all these approaches produce only dismal failure is the more discomforting because not only is justice not executed, but no explicit judicial decision is ever made. China Aster indeed owes his debts to his creditors, and he merely happens to die before Orchis
clearly reneges on his promises by prosecuting for repayment. Charlemont waives the test situation, and the effects of judicial procedure in other areas, in their character as allegorical hints concerning the Last Judgment, are shrouded in ambiguity.

The Confidence-Man, in fact, has more than its share of intimations concerning legal charges, trials, and high courts. The suggestions of legal conflict and judgment serve as allegorical hints of eschatological matters. The agent for the Black Rapids Coal Company has been summoned with his transfer book "as witness in a stock case on the docket in Kentucky" (CM, p. 23). Goneril and her husband go to court where the husband hopes to plead the mental derangement of his wife. He barely escapes, however, having that charge recoil upon himself, and flees before sentence is passed. The husband had urged that "to hold that such a being as Goneril was sane, this was constructively a libel upon womankind" (CM, p. 68). If, however, Goneril's female sympathizers do not construe the disclosures about her nature as a "libel" upon themselves, the Indians of the Moredock story react differently. Judge Hall notes that "The Indians, indeed, protest against the backwoodsman's view of them; and some think that one cause of their returning his antipathy so sincerely as they do, is their moral indignation at being so libeled by him . . ." (CM, p. 166). And the narrator continues, "But whether, on this
or any point, the Indians should be permitted to testify for themselves, to the exclusion of other testimony, is a question that may be left to the Supreme Court" (CM, p. 166). The confidence man objects to Tacitus's views of human nature, and he argues to the sophomore that truth cannot be "got at by libel." When Pitch criticized his Chesterfieldian servant, the boy "fired up; threatened to sue for libel" (CM, p. 134), and Pitch later rejoices that he forebore sending the boy "to jail." The novel, then, suggests that some sort of judgment is at hand, but that the accused are pleading innocence and defamation. Concerning the nature or consequences of that judgment, however, Melville offers no explanations.

All the implications of the pseudo-religious parables, moreover, are undercut by the unreliability of their sources and the suspicious circumstances surrounding their narration. The reader will find the problem of the credibility of the shorter tales one with that of the larger narrative. The impossibility of ascertaining the source and accuracy of the anecdotal allegories parallels the narrative evasiveness of the novel as a whole. The confidence man tells the story of Goneril to Mr. Roberts with the obvious purpose of procuring a sympathetic response and a cash contribution. But whatever the true story of Goneril, the version presented to the reader is corrupt.
The man with the gray coat had modified the information concerning Goneril by adding to it, the merchant necessarily shades its meaning by paraphrasing it, and the reader is prevented from hearing it even in its second-hand condition. For the tale is introduced with the remark, "But as the good merchant could, perhaps, do better justice to the man than the story, we shall venture to tell it in other words than his, though not to any other effect" (CM, p. 64). Certainly the reassurances offered here are to be dubiously regarded; for if the narrator changes the words, he inevitably produces variations in the meaning. It will be recalled that the confidence man objects to the form of the story as it is told to him (a form we do not know, since we read a version different from Mr. Roberts') and probes the attitudes of the the original teller. Whether the man with the travelling cap, moreover, is with his commentary revising the story yet again or restoring to it the meaning actually intended by Mr. Roberts, is impossible to determine.

The history of Moredock is likewise recounted by an untrustworthy character whose intentions are unclear. Charlie Noble as con man may intend merely to attract the interest of a stranger by way of introducing himself, or he may be exploring the philosophical position of a prospective dupe. Again, however, the narrator admits to presenting the account not in his own words, but in those of a person
unavailable to vouch for its factual accuracy. In this confrontation between equivocal characters, the purpose of the listener's questions and protests is equally suspicious. Charlie Noble, however, does claim some degree of historical authenticity for his story about Moredock, although the cosmopolitan's anecdote describing a "gentleman-madman" is followed by disavowals of attempts at reality or realism. The story of Charlemonst, nevertheless, appears confirmed in its adherence to psychological realities by the actions of its auditor. Its "truth," then, lies somewhere in a nebulous realm compounded of the declared philosophical position of its narrator, what we suspect to be his actual attitudes, the immediate circumstances of its introduction, his disclaimers concerning its conformity to real events, its relationship to its audience, and the reader's conclusions concerning its consistency with the realities of the imaginative world constructed by Melville.

Egbert's account of China Aster is subject to similar qualifying observations. Although Egbert approves the "main moral," he admits that "unhappily the original story-teller here has so tyrannized over me, that it is quite impossible for me to repeat his incidents without sliding into his style" (CM, p. 233). Whatever interpretations of the fable are possible, the opposing responses of the confidence man and Egbert can be assigned to the influences of their professed philosophical orientations, both
spurious. Egbert's intentions are no less pure in presenting the tale than are the cosmopolitan's in refusing to believe it.

What the reader is left with, then, are four fictional creations whose import seems significant to the larger fiction in which they are included, but whose authorial approbation is negligible, to say the least. Melville's intentions, like those of Charlie Noble, Egbert, and the confidence man, are suspiciously ambiguous. The fables, like the chapters occupied with the art of novel-writing, are finally "Worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering." The religious and philosophical import of the stories as they stand seem clear. Melville's disinclination to accept responsibility for that import seems even clearer.

But if the truth of Melville's interpolated parable-moralities is questioned here, so is that of the religious canon they imitate. When the confidence man tells his aged acquaintance of the lat chapter, "you have good news there, sir" (CM, p. 273), the mysterious voice from the berth asserts, "Too good to be true" (CM, p. 273). Indeed, virtually every event and comment found in that final chapter, while summoning to mind the biblical apocalypse, at the same time cryptically challenges the truth of the prophecies made in the book of Revelation. The cosmopolitan's
extinguishing of the lamp with symbolic decorations suggests, for example, not the conclusion of human history so much as of Christian. Whereas Christ entered finitude announcing, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world,"89 The Confidence-Man implies not only that he is no longer in the world, but that the illumination offered by his church can be eliminated by such a creature as the cosmopolitan. The apocalyptic event, it seems, affects humanity less than it does Christ and the Christian god. That is, the human race is not terminated, but Christianity is.

Along with the already-darkened "barren planets," the appearance of the boy selling protective devices for travellers can be interpreted as an indication of the cyclical nature of religious faith. According to that reading, all faiths are equally undercut as successive, temporary vagaries of the human thirst for the infinite. In any event, the second coming of the Lamb predicted by Christian prophets is neither noted nor explicitly expected. Instead, the boy comes as a scapegoat figure whose qualities make him inimical to orthodox Christianity. Like his predecessor, the deaf-mute, he is not only an alien in his society (he, too, hath not where to lay his head), but also a victim of the religious allegiance characterizing the world he enters. Like Christ, too, he is a sacrifice to the effects of institutionalized

89 John 9:5.
religion—which in The Confidence-Man means organized hypocrisy. But if the child's rags are a poor testimonial to the workings of Christian charity, the grime on his face, according to the correspondences set up by the novel, is no comforting intimation of his own ethical purity. The child, we discover, has achieved a profound, if unembittered, knowledge of, and ability to cope with, the evil pervading his culture.

This savior, however, despite his awareness, is thoroughly unredemptive. Not only does the reader lack a sense of the existence within the novel of a cosmic or divine power available to accept his suffering, but that suffering is clearly unwilling, unmarked by self-giving love, and unproductive of a salutary ethic or creed. This Christ figure, for example, neither preaches love nor initiates a program for a new social or religious order. He rather aims to aid men with the schemes they already pursue—implementation of distrust and self-protectiveness. Since his tools are material rather than spiritual, his intentions regressive rather than progressive, and his doctrine this-worldly rather than other-worldly, the encouragement felt by the reader is slight. On the other hand, the boy's advice may prove more beneficial to a sojourner in the land of The Confidence-Man than would Christ's (or the deaf-mute's), for the boy resists the friendly advances of the cosmopolitan as the old man does not, and his ability to
survive, however minimally, is apparent.

It is no more appropriate, moreover, that an ironic savior should appear to a hypocritical Simeon than that the confidence man should question the validity of only the apocryphal portion of the Bible. The confidence man has managed to challenge and subvert the entire Christian religion and, hence, the truth of its officially authorized canon, but now he even evades a clearcut disagreement with the text itself. Like the verse he rejects, the confidence man can be strictly proven neither better nor worse than apocryphal. Only circumstantial evidence condemns him in any sense, and the beliefs he undermines seem no more genuine or constructive than the ones he propagates. The boy is just as dubious as his opponent and, furthermore, purports to be no nemesis for the con man. He is either unable or uninclined to prevent the old man's departure with the cosmopolitan, and he teaches only what most of the pilgrims aboard the Fidèle already seem to know.

The confidence man's masquerade, then, promises to continue uninhibited. The final scene, indeed, does not bode well for what "may follow," either for the old man or for mankind in general. The conclusion of the novel even further restricts the already claustrophobic setting and atmosphere, and depicts not an expansion but a reduction of the powers of perception and awareness. The action moves away from the restricted confines of the ship of faith to
one small cabin filled with the odors of a commode and a
dying lamp. The area at first dimly lit is finally left
in complete obscurity. The characters involved are not
awakening, but rather pausing on the outer borders of sleep
and of unconsciousness and plainly receding into oblivion.
The confidence man confronts a fully human and pitiably
enlightened savior figure who is yet an ineffective boy
and serves as guide to an old man who not only represents
absolutely unprogressed human nature (at least in regard
to the two thousand years of Christian effort), but also
is absolutely blind concerning his own spiritual condition.
For the old man first reveals his lack of trust in God and
man and then submits himself to one of the very impostors
Christ warned against. But the reader may conclude, on
the other hand, that the old man is not so much hypocrite
to his religion as its dupe. He merely suspects the persons
he is supposed to love and trusts the person he is supposed
to suspect. Perhaps the fine distinctions required of its
followers by the Christian religion cannot be made with
the insufficient vision and information possessed by the old
man. But this example of innocence is not so important to
the last chapter as is the deaf-mute of the first. For
whereas the novel opens with an ineffectual and isolated
Christ figure and concentrates its primary action on a
spurious Christ figure, it concludes with a replacement
Christ figure. All three of the characters (the con man, the
old man, the boy) who occupy the last attentions of the reader, moreover, receive without objection the epithet "divils" as applied to them by the man "awake in his sleep."
The development of the novel, as well as Melville's eschatology, apparently, was not designed to comfort the hopeful, but to undercut the faithful: and deny optimism or hope of escape to all.
Chapter IV

Appearances and Reality in *The Confidence-Man*
The Confidence-Man, by virtue of its nature as artistic construct, presents a certain view of, or perspective on, cosmic and human reality. But the statements concerning reality made by the novel are not simply socially and theologically pessimistic. They develop the theme of self-defeating or insoluble dilemma in their suggestion that reality is both unknowable and unreal. That is, the conclusions regarding reality undercut their own assumptions by demonstrating that the spiritual and physical realms are just as fictitious as the imaginative or artistic. The mask-snifing of the confidence man is frustrated to a certain degree by the falsity he encounters in other characters; and here even sincerity discovers it does not know itself. Counter-deceit and self-deceit, however, do not function as a corrective to the cunning lies and hypocritical action of the central figure. Rather, all three operate to conceal an ambiguous and nondiscoverable "reality" beneath increasing layers of unreliable appearances. In effect, then, the impossible reversal occurs, and appearances become the accurate representation of the realities of the confidence man's world, whereas, on the other hand, "reality" has no place of residence except in false appearances. As Shakespeare notes, all the world's a stage, and as the one-legged man asserts, "to do is to
act; so all doers are actors" (CM, p. 35). Role-playing, Melville complexly implies, is the only way of living available to humans. True knowledge of others is not only impossible by reason of the limitations of perception (we can only see appearances), but self-knowledge is equally unattainable. The Confidence-Man, finally, is not a representation of real experience so much as it is a representation of speculation concerning real experience. Even the form of its narration and the style of its prose reflect the absurdity of attempting to analyze experience, the apprehension of which is as dubious as the experience itself.

The confidence man himself, as central focus of the novel and as appropriate representative of humanity, defines the chief reality of Melville's imaginative world (and, by implication, of the reader's "real" world) as metamorphosis. That the confidence man's performance is truly convincing is shown not only by his irreproachable success in financial and spiritual swindling, but also by the existence of a recent critical article seriously interpreting his actions as fully honest and even ideologically humane. But the stagecraft of the confidence man is merely the predominant example of, and not the striking

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exception to, the kind of masquerading characterizing the population of the Fidèle. The crippled soldier, for example, confides what he claims to be his "true" story to the herb doctor; from other passers-by he solicits aid on the basis of a different account of himself. Orchis displays to China Aster first his generosity and commiseration and then his self-pity, his reproachfulness, his outright antagonism. Goneril tortures her husband and child, but shows to the world such a pathetic face of suffering that she elicits the deepest sympathy. Charlie Noble assures Frank Goodman of his esteem and philosophical compatibility. But when he discovers that Goodman actually intends to ask him for money he exclaims, "go to the devil, sir! Beggar, impostor! --never so deceived in a man in my life" (CM, p. 203). Goodman in reply administers a cash cure-all and murmurs, "Reappear, reappear, reappear, oh, my former friend. Replace this hideous apparition with thy blest shape . . . ." (CM, p. 204). After Goodman, then, plainly lies to Noble, and Noble betrays to Goodman the extent of his "friendship," both return to their originally-assumed roles, mutually agreeing that "this little episode of fictitious estrangement will but enhance the delightful reality" (CM, pp. 204-05). Mark Winsome and Egbert declare their admiration for, and trust in, the natural nobility of the human creature. But their optimistic
philosophical orientation is too soon understood as disguised and inhuman self-protectiveness. The sophomore first mildly retreats from the confidence man and later, to the same man in a different guise, expresses his contempt for Mr. Ringman and his interest in coal stock. Asserting, "No appearances can deceive me" (CM, p. 53), he exchanges his collegiate passivity for aggressive selfishness. Apparently he believes that only his own appearances are uniformly convincing. The Indians of the Moredock story covenant for peace and interpret the treaty as an excuse for murdering their new allies. Charlemont switches from affability to coldness at the signal of fortune's latest vagary. To Mr. Truman the miser says, "you look honest," and his ability to discern character is scarcely inferior to the reader's. Aboard the Fidèle the passengers are distinguished chiefly for their crafty ability to don whatever mask is most convenient, most profitable, or most self-assuring.

The cosmopolitan tells Pitch that "life is a pic-nic en costume," and his fellow pilgrims seem especially created to illustrate his remark. The language of the novel, moreover, develops the theme of equivocal or suspicious appearances not only by means of double and triple qualifications making use of variations of "appear," "seem," "might," and "perhaps," but also by multiplying apparently casual references to the theatre and dramatic performance.
The placard warning the passengers of the operations of "a mysterious impostor," for example, drew attention "As if it had been a theatre-bill" (CM, p. 1). Black Guinea's audience, "finding themselves left sole judges in the case, could not resist the opportunity of acting the part" (CM, p. 12). Mr. Ringman refrains from "heartfelt protestations" for Mr. Roberts' benefit, "because the world, being earnest itself, likes an earnest scene, and an earnest man, very well, but only in their place—the stage" (CM, p. 26).

It is worth pausing to comment on this passage. Not only, Melville suggests, do individuals prefer pretense, but their society also abhors sincerity, whatever society or the individual may conceive that sincerity to be. In particular, society regards with distaste those who "flame out in Irish enthusiasm" "to a benefactor, who, if a man of sense and respectability, as well as kindness, can but be more or less annoyed by it; and, if of a nervously fastidious nature, as some are, may be led to think almost as much less favorably of the beneficiary paining him by his gratitude, as if he had been guilty of its contrary, instead of only an indiscretion" (CM, pp. 26-27). Society, indeed, by means of universal standards of decorum, severely restricts emotional expression, but society's lack of relish for "Irish enthusiasm" may be interpreted otherwise. To permit florid expression, Edgar Dryden writes, "Would be
to reveal the dramaturgic nature of human relationships
and thereby to destroy the foundation for the confidence
man's game of charity, as it depends on a concept of
absolute identity which can be neither denied nor altered.  
Collectively-held attitudes penalizing gaudy emotionalism,
then, may be based on a desire to avoid exposure of human
artificiality equally with a desire to prevent offense
to delicate or modest tastes. Offhand justification for
repressing outbursts of feeling may here suggest that
sincerity or emotional reality actually underlies conven tion al falsification. But it may also suggest that the con ventional falsities only purport to circumscribe or taste fully channel true response, while actually restricting
the more extravagant role-playing which would occur, were it permitted.

The wooden-legged man's assertion that all men
necessarily perform dramatically is, then, a comment on
social requirements as much as on individual inclination.
The confidence man would have us believe in appearances,
but his consistent inconsistency leads him explicitly to
recognize the intentional adoption of masks which occurs
in his world. With the sophomore, for example, he discusses
pessimists, saying:

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91 Dryden, p. 169.
"and do you know whence this sort of fellow gets his sulk? not from life: for he’s often too much a recluse, or else too young to have seen anything of it. No, he gets it from some of those old plays he sees on the stage or some of those old books he finds up in garrets. Ten to one, he has lugger home from auction a musty old Seneca, and sets about stuffing himself with that stale old hay; and, thereupon, thinks it looks wise and antique to be a croaker, thinks it’s taking a stand way above his kind." (CM, p. 54).

As herb doctor, moreover, the confidence man views the soldier appealing to the charitable "like a fellow in the pit of a sixpenny theatre" (CM, p. 111) and subsequently opposes another, more indignant observer desirous of exposing the cripple’s con game. The confidence man, in spite of his ostensible credulity, is far from blind to the possibility that personality may be counterfeit. Pitch, recognizing the cosmopolitan as the performer he is, makes a suggestive comment concerning "the African pantomime." in a remark which emphasizes the cosmopolitan’s assumption of animal or carnal natures as much as his falsity, Pitch tells him that Signor Marzetti "plays the intelligent ape till he seems it. With such naturalness can a being endowed with an immortal spirit enter into that of a monkey. But where’s your tail? in the pantomime, Marzetti, no hypocrite in his monkery, prides himself on that." (CM, p. 150).

All of Melville’s Chapter 16 is devoted to a verbal
investigation of the confidence man's claims to authenticity. But neither the auburn-haired man nor the hook-nosed gentleman can offer substantial or convincing evidence in proof of his falsity or sincerity. Nor, indeed, can they agree on his motivation. But if characters here find it impossible to pierce the ambiguities shrouding the true nature of others, they also discover the difficulty of attaining self-knowledge. Mr. Roberts tells Mr. Ringman, "I hope I know myself," but later reveals inconsistencies which astonish himself. After cheerfully regaling himself with the confidence man's attractive personality and philosophy he suddenly exclaims:

"Ah, wine is good, and confidence is good; but can wine or confidence percolate down through all the stony strata of hard considerations, and drop warmly and rudderly into the cold cave of truth? Truth will not be comforted. Led by dear charity, lured by sweet hope, fond fancy essays this feat; but in vain; mere dreams and ideals, they explode in your hand, leaving naught but the scorching behind!" (CM, p. 74).

Amazed at the "queer, unaccountable caprices of his natural heart," the merchant "stammeringly confessed, that he was almost as much surprised as his companion, at what had escaped him. He did not understand it; was quite at a loss to account for such a rhapsody popping out of him unbidden" (CM, pp. 74-75). Pitch, too, finds that self-reliance can be fatal. Confronting the representative of
the Philosophical Intelligence Office with arguments born of a lifetime's experience with men, boys, and nature, he finds himself succumbing to logic contemptibly feeble. Like the merchant, he is soon restored to himself and left to reflect on an inner fickleness less puzzling to his audience than to himself. He ponders that:

He thinks he perceives with Crossbones, his favorite author, that, as one may wake up well in the morning, very well, indeed, and brisk as a buck, I thank you, but ere bed-time get under the weather, there is no telling how—so one may wake up wise, and slow of assent, very wise and very slow, I assure you, and for all that, before night, by like trick in the atmosphere, be left in the lurch a ninny. Health and wisdom equally precious, and equally little as unfluctuating possessions to be relied on (CM, pp. 147–148).

Apparently we may conclude that Egbert's elaborate defense of Orchis' disloyalty to China Aster is not so spurious as at first it seems. For if men cannot control their own responses or know their own hearts, they are no more responsible for their breaches of trust than is the man who foolishly places confidence in their immutability. Egbert explains to the cosmopolitan that

true friendship, like other precious things, is not rashly to be meddled with. And what more meddlesome between friends than a loan? A regular marplot. For how can you help that the helper must turn out a creditor? And creditor and friend, can they ever be one? no, not in the most lenient case; since, out of leniency to forego one's claim, is less to be a friendly creditor than to cease to be a creditor at all. But it will not do to
rely upon this lenity, no, not in the best man; for the best man, as the worst, is subject to all mortal contingencies. He may travel, he may marry, he may join the Come-Outers, or some equally untoward school or sect, not to speak of other things that more or less tend to new-cast the character. And were there nothing else, who shall answer for his digestion, upon which so much depends?" (CM, pp. 250-51).

Whereas the passengers aboard the Fidèle demonstrate their inability to discern the "real" natures of either themselves or each other, and whereas other evidence indicates that these "real" natures are, in fact, nonexistent, the language of the novel suggests that the totality of existential or experiential "reality" is simply a dream. However "reality" may be construed, it resides only in the imaginations of those who conceive it and in the appearances which entirely occupy the vision of all. Goneril's husband, for example, believes he perceives his wife's bestowal of mysterious touches; but when he chided her she replied that "it was witless to be telling one's dreams . . . ." (CM, p. 67). The merchant cries out concerning confident expectations that "mere dreams and ideals, they explode in your hand, leaving naught but the scorching behind!" (CM, p. 74). The herb doctor's invalid responds to offers of help by saying, "The name of doctor, the dream of helper, condemns you" (CM, p. 89). The rhapsodical beggar confronting Frank Goodman and Mark Winsome is rejected by Winsome for
his "one glimmering peep of reason, insufficient to do him any lasting good, but enough, perhaps, to suggest a torment of latent doubts at times, whether his addled dream of glory were true" (CM, p. 219). In Chapter 16 Melville writes, "Speeds the daedal boat as in a dream" (CM, p. 266); and the old man of the last chapter says to the cosmopolitan, "and you—you seem to be talking in a dream" (CM, p. 273). James Miller remarks that "The slow but steady flow of the river, the constant coming and going of the people, the stopping and starting of the boat in its long journey—all suggest not only the flux of life but also the world of fantasy and dream."92 The Confidence-Man, it seems, is a dream world inhabited by dreamers. Each pilgrim aboard the Fidèle has a certain conception of "reality," and all those conceptions, Melville suggests, are dreams. The individual perceives his world and makes conclusions concerning its spiritual and material truths on the basis of those perceptions. But perception, as Melville indicates, is a necessarily individual act, an act which automatically isolates the perceiver from his fellows and defines the nature of his world as product of himself and ultimately fashioned by himself. Not only

does he apprehend confusing and unreliable data, but he interprets those data by a process native only to himself and ultimately fashions his environment, his companions, and even his gods out of himself. The conflicting attitudes and philosophies of men result, then, from the dissimilarity of their inner worlds; for as Melville indicates, there is no verifiable or "real" external world.

_The Confidence-Man_, too, as Melville's representation of "reality," is liable to the same inescapable restrictions. The novel is an imaginative construction and thus a more or less inexact transcription of the world perceived only by Melville's eyes and heart. The central "reality" conveyed by the novel, moreover, is the con man himself, a representative of humanity whose most striking attribute is his adeptness at role-playing and the creation of fictitious characters (he is both impostor and artist). The "reality" of the novel, then, is unreality, and Melville is, in effect, describing both himself and his readers as sleep-walkers in a realm of false appearances. Both are like the concealed man who speaks from a darkened berth in the last chapter; he is "awake in his sleep," and no description of the human condition is more appropriate than that.

Melville's dream imagery suggests that apprehension of reality automatically modifies and thus, in a sense, annihilates. But the chapters occupied with the art of
fiction proceed to stronger statements, implying that the eccentricities of perception are not the most serious problem in the attempt to explore "reality." Rather, these chapters direct our attentions outward from ourselves toward the Nature that art seeks to imitate. Here Melville's comments regarding art have the effect of questioning even the existence of a "reality" to be perceived. Art, religion, and experience are ultimately arranged on a level of equal fictitiousness, and the individual's conception of "reality" is revealed as truly a dream.

Melville's chapters 14, 33, and 44, by frankly discussing the goals, techniques, and rationale of prose fiction, serve to emphasize for the reader of the novel that he experiences not actual reality, but only a representation of reality. As Dryden notes, too, "The narrator's discussion of technical matters would seem to remind the reader of the story's fictitious nature, of its unreality, and to imply a solider reality occupied by both narrator and reader."93 That reassurance, however, is not in fact permitted the reader, for Melville's comments operate to underline, first, the thoroughly counterfeit character of his representation and, second, its absolute fidelity to "nature" or objective reality. The truthfulness of art,

93 Dryden, p. 153.
he finally maintains, lies exactly in its artificiality.

Chapter 14 defends the author's depiction of inconsistent character as a "hara avia" (CM, p. 76). While labelling artistically conceived characters "those mere phantoms which flit along a page" (CM, p. 76), the chapter at the same time insists on the verity of their delineation. "Nature" herself produces creatures "incongruous in their parts" and developments. The flying-squirrel, the duck-billed beaver, and the metamorphosing caterpillar are all presented as examples of the natural or "real" inconsistency dominating the human environment. Mr. Roberts and even the confidence man himself are true-to-life precisely because they mimic the role-playing found in external reality.44

Melville next seems to undercut his entire preceding argument in favor of a mimetic theory of fiction and in exposition of its achievements in realism by asserting that human and material reality is actually unavailable to those who would copy it:

Upon the whole, it might rather be thought, that he, who, in view of its inconsistencies, says of human nature the same that, in view of its contrasts, is said of the divine nature, that it is past finding out, thereby evinces a better appreciation of it than he who, by always representing it in a clear light, leaves it to be inferred that he clearly knows all about it (CM, p. 77).

44Dryden, p. 156.
It will be noted that this admission not only identifies those "great masters" who "challenge astonishment at the tangled web of some character, and then raise admiration still greater at their satisfactory unraveling of it" (CM, p. 78) as spurious realists, but also denies the assumptions of both Melville's art and all artistic endeavor. For while justifying the accuracy of his fictional creation, he also asserts the impossibility of ascertaining the qualities of those essences which the artist must know in order to portray and illuminate and to which the critic must refer for comparison. "Nature" conceals herself behind shifting masks as carefully as does the confidence man.

Melville, however, in his usual slippery evasiveness, avoids taking sides. "Nor will the claim be here disputed," he writes, that "revelation of human nature on fixed principles" (CM, p. 78) is indeed possible. But he does cunningly note that fictional modes have been excluded from "the ranks of sciences" and proceeds to exemplify "science" in its most dubious or experimental branches, "palmistry, physiognomy, phrenology, psychology" (CM, p. 78). Thus fiction which analyzes character is finally regarded as less reliable or "true" than those "sciences" which are not sciences at all, but rather intuitive attempts to explore uncharted psychic regions.

The truth of his argument, he further maintains, will be illustrated by the inadequacy of art as a competent
guide for those who stray among the crooked twistings of this human world. Nevertheless, the perplexing explication continues, "The grand points of human nature are the same today they were a thousand years ago. The only variability in them is in expression, not in feature" (CM, p. 78). The reader may feel that he has been abandoned in a maze of absolutely incomprehensible logic. For the chapter has suggested that "nature" does not vary, that it is past finding out, and that its distinctive characteristic is its inconsistency. But the attempted reconciliation of these points arrives at the inference that objective reality is unknowable chiefly because its eternally unvaried feature is its unintelligible fictitiousness. The countenance of "nature" is merely one mask or another; the true portrait is actually an infinite succession of portraits; for the masquerade, like that in Melville's novel, is endless. Since only false faces are available for posing, and since the features are infallibly inconsistent, the artist, like every experiencing consciousness, must content himself with an unreal reality. It is typical, moreover, of the author that, at this point, he endeavors to qualify and undermine his entire complex of argument by labelling it merely a "comedy of thought."

Chapter 33 opens by making what seems to be an argument contradictory to that of Chapter 14, leads the
reader a merry chase through the fun-house of its reasoning, and at last leaves him pretty much in the same swamp created by Chapter 14. Here again the narrator-creator replies to charges of unreality, exonerating himself in a tricky transformation of previous logic. Our novelist begins by reflecting that:

Strange, that in a work of amusement, this severe fidelity to real life should be exacted by any one, who, by taking up such a work, sufficiently shows that he is not unwilling to drop real life, and turn, for a time, to something different. Yes, it is, indeed, strange that any one should clamor for the thing he is weary of; that any one, who, for any cause, finds real life dull, should yet demand of him who is to divert his attention from it, that he should be true to that dullness (CM, p. 206).

This discourse on the writer's obligation to amuse suggests that his florid imagination is more important than his attention to verisimilitude. It is hinted, moreover, that the entertainment offered by fiction is the result of its purposeful departure from the monotony of reality. In daily life the restrictions of decorum "will not allow people to act out themselves with that unreserve permitted to the stage" (CM, p. 206). But the windings of artistic justification have not changed their course. For here the reader of fiction is presented with a world different from his own only because more human; the audience is permitted to experience the uninhibited role-playing restricted by the proprieties of society. Thus "in books of fiction they look not only for more entertainment, but, at bottom,
even for more reality, than real life itself can show" (CM, p. 206). Fiction ministers to the excessive love lavished by humans on dramatic performance. It indulges them in expression of inner realities repressed in ordinary life.

But the reader's painstaking attention to this series of inductive statements is brought up short with the argumentative capstone—"It is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie" (CM, p. 207). For we are informed not only that art is more real than life because more permissively and extravagantly expressive of harlequin nature, but also that religion is more real in the same sense. The implication is that the spiritual world is also a region where masquerade is the focal occupation. Here the most cogent explanation is given by Dryden:

Fiction and religion are linked not because they both serve as bridges between the shadows of this world of appearances and the divine reality above or behind it but because they both imply purely artificial realms. The realization that the greatest fiction is the highest reality negates the possibility of an essential identity and destroys all connection between a legitimate authorization to play a role and one's capacity for playing it. In the fictive and religious realms the actor, man, released from the restrictions of social decorum, may give himself up to his dramaturgic instincts and play both archetypal roles at once.95

95 Dryden, p. 167.
Demonstration that appearances are false, then, includes no reassurance that the falsity is determined by means of a comparison with some self-existent "reality." Rather, appearances are adjudged false because of their successive supplanting of each other in the same creature—that is, because of their inconsistency. Reality, on the other hand, never appears, or rather, appears only in the falsity of appearances. The truth of reality is either its falsity or its nonexistence; it is either negative or self-negating.

Chapter 44, ostensibly an adventure in definition, actually defines only by exemplifying and functions merely to underline the aesthetic and existential implications of Chapters 14 and 33. For the narrator maintains the realism of fiction by remarking that characters are not conceived, but perceived. "Where does any novelist pick up any character?" he asks, and answers himself, "For the most part, in town, to be sure" (CM, p. 270). As for the fictional phenomenon of the "original character," "it cannot be born in the author's imagination—it being as true in literature as in zoology, that all life is from the egg" (CM, p. 271). Which only suggests that the confidence-man, the supremely artificial and fictitious personality dominating the world of the novel, is deemed the most absolutely realistic character of all. The source of "original characters," we are told, is not the
author's imagination at all, but rather the biological womb of nature. And this is only to repeat more blatantly what the novel implies throughout, that is, that the polymorphic disguises of the confidence man are the truest representation of objective and spiritual "reality."

The narrative voice and the prose style of The Confidence-Man serve to reinforce the conclusion that experience is notable chiefly for its ambiguity and falsity. Here the reader is denied an identifiable experiencing consciousness, just as he is denied verification of the truth of the "reality" in which he believes he exists. The narrator is as nameless and perplexing as the characters and circumstances delineated by the novel. This spokesman is not comfortingly personable. His personality is, Melville suggests, like that (or those) of every other creature in the novel—perhaps merely concealed, perhaps nonexistent. His limitations, at least, are familiar. He sees what we see: the sham of appearances and nothing more. Nor does his voice evince assurance. His "seems," "appears," "perhaps," "might," "as:if," and "probably" reflect his inability to analyze, his sense of unreality, and his self-doubt. Yet his nebulous personality and his vocabulary are also, in a sense, the marks of his honesty. He foresewers illegitimate assumptions and conclusions for the sake of simple conveyance of features and events,
including their indefiniteness and suspiciousness. For The Confidence-Man can afford neither the enormous implicit assumptions of the omniscient voice nor the reassurance of unqualified statement. To permit the narrator to probe inner realities is to admit not only that inner reality is discernible, but that it actually exists. And to relieve the speaker of his qualifiers is to suggest that what he sees is reality rather than merely appearances. R. W. B. Lewis, observing that "the comic technique serves to draw us on through intellectual laughter to something like intellectual panic," uses the description of Goneril and the gentleman dressed in white to show that "The whole tone, purpose and strategy of The Confidence-Man are in those sentences, with their parade of notations and counter-notations, and the final flurry of phrases that modify, hesitantly contradict, and then utterly cancel one another out, leaving not a rack of positive statement behind."96

In The Confidence-Man description of material reality is virtually purified of the influences of strong or frankly admitted interpreting personality. The consequence of eliminating illegitimate analysis, however, is acceptance of directly-apprehended experience, with ambiguity intact. The less objectively verifiable the experience, the greater

96 Lewis, p. 65.
the conveyance of ambiguity. The reader will recall, that when dealing with absolutely unverifiable material, namely the spiritual and ethical realms elucidated by the allegorical fables, the speaker disclaims responsibility entirely. Perhaps Melville is indicating the unreliability characterizing the sources of the religious canon these pseudo-parables imitate. In any case, the nonvisual receives no more than its due from the honest speaker.

The Confidence-Man derives its tone of vaguely fearful uncertainty not only from the fact that its speaker glimpses abysses of nothingness behind the false appearances which fill his physical eyes, but also from the hypothetical nature of its content. It is a novel of talking, not acting, of argumentative examples, not practical experience. Everyone has a theory, but no real-life application is pursued to its actual results. The final ambiguity of The Confidence-Man is that it is not so much a representation of experience as a representation of speculation about experience. After, all it is suggested, the most serious kinds of experience, that is, religious, moral, philosophical, and psychological, are not "authentic" in any verifiable sense. What Melville gives us is an accurate realism insofar as it is true to our limitations; we conjecture, but we do not know, and we cannot know.

The boy who appears in the last chapter makes a
comment on religion through his apparent introduction of the newest phase of a cycle as old as the human psyche. His "reality" and the "reality" of the salvation he offers are by insinuation no more and no less than those he succeeds.

Of The Confidence-Man Dryden writes, "Melville dramatizes a theory of human history which sees human progress as the successive swallowing up of one fiction by a new and more artificial one." The ugliest theological suggestion of The Confidence-Man is not that the controlling cosmic forces are disembodied malice, but that they are sheer nonentity, that human religious faith is a cyclical succession of temporary self-abasements to humanly-created divinities whose imputed concern and power are neither logically believable nor visually apparent. But the novel negates itself not only by illustrating the human condition as insoluble dilemma. It most fully negates itself by denying its own fictional necessities; it implies that reality is non-existent and representation is futile. It admits that it portrays only a fraction of an endless masquerade, and that it is impotent to capture anything but the masks. The Confidence-Man, then, is at last simply a painful exploration of its own vanity.

97Dryden, p. 195.
Chapter V

The Confidence-Man as Terminal Development: The Theme of Identity from Tynee to Israel Potter
In The Confidence-Man, as we have seen, the central problems are the quest for personal identity and the nature of the objective world. The primary reality of the confidence man’s realm is metamorphosis. The individual and his environment are thoroughly and equally unreal. And the ontology of The Confidence-Man is not new in Melville’s novels, since conditions of fictitious identity and counterfeit cosmos dominate all Melville’s novels from Typee to Israel Potter. Attempts by protagonists to discover, achieve, or assert an ideal or genuine identity result in miserable failure and threaten death. In Typee the narrator assigns himself the alias "Tommo" in a desperate claim to candidacy for citizenship in a society he believes is ideal, idyllic, paradisical, ultimate. But "Tommo" is only the first expression of the devilish con man transforming himself as often and as profitably as prudence permits and pleasure prefers. The quest in Melville is always for a true selfhood or manhood. It is doomed to failure, because the quester is seeking to realize absolute spiritual integrity in this: unspiritual and ever-changing earth of finitude and limitation. The quester is a congenital masquerader trying to tear the masks from his face. Invariably he succeeds only in placing yet another disguise over the ones he already wears. Ironically, his urgent
effort toward actual and unified identity is the act of a con man; he belies his true identity of nonentity. The escape from a theatre of false faces into a perfect spiritual realm where the self is born pure and whole is never managed, except in death. The assumption of any particular name and face is a falsification, for it is a symbolic denial and murder of the kaleidoscopic metamorphosing self.

The theme of the confidence man in Melville, in fact, really develops very little. It governs Typee almost as rigidly as it does The Confidence-Man itself. What does happen between Typee and The Confidence-Man is increasingly ironic allocation of responsibility. Typee, Omoo, and Mardi blame the quester. He chooses his own fictitious name ("Tommo," "Toby," "Typee," "Long Ghost," "Taji") and casts himself out into the ocean-places of suicidal solipsism. In Redburn and White-Jacket, however, the hostile and impersonal world, the jostling, inane, anonymous crowd, compels the questers to play certain roles and accept nicknames. But here society is acting to control and repress the more flamboyant theatrics of the self-indulgent idealist. In Moby-Dick and Pierre there is, at last, the discovery by the quester that his intended sincerity is a self-hoax. Fatalities and innate duplicities are recognized. The Powers that Be and the concealed Creator are implicitly brought to the bar of judgment.
Israel Potter, finally, expresses a new quality of nihilism and futility. The patriotic hero of this work is frantically occupied with flight, concealment, disguise, and violence as means to mere survival. Clinging to life itself requires playing the con man desperately and constantly. For Melville the human dilemma is a horror-show where suicide is redundant. Assumption of, or search for, selfhood is a form of self-immolation; and the ability to live exactly corresponds to the ability to assume a false part.

Melville's prototypical protagonist is the quester who symbolically voyages and fishes. Traditionally, the assumption of a quest signifies recognition of incompleteness, of inadequacy in maturity or knowledge. Melville's sea-adventurers are no different, for they pursue selfhood, manhood, potency, identity. Their objects are their own reflections in the mirror. Yillah, for example, is Tajū's double in appearance, in racial ancestry, in spiritual inclination. Redburn begins an initiatory voyage which is a search for his father, for his cultural heritage, and for the romantic, novelistic self of his dreams. White-Jacket's equivocal garment is the symbol of his unsullied manhood, his commitment to pure, integral personality. All these figures are descendants of Narcissus gazing into the waters.

Identity is a spiritual or intangible quality. Melville's
novels all indicate, however, that the spiritual realm is a nebulous dream kingdom individualistically conceived, a sphere which humankind are incapable of realizing or even testing. It is, moreover, dangerous to act on assumptions of correspondence between the material and ideal worlds, as the young Platonist in Moby-Dick discovers. And Melville's questers make the mistake of defining their quests (and hence themselves) in terms of externals, of the physical world, the only world available to them. Tommo wants to enter a primitive paradise, Redburn wants to explore foreign lands, Ahab wants to slay the white whale. They are trying to interpret experience symbolically, trying to extract spiritual potency from finite objects, acts, and circumstances. The futility of this mode of action renders the protagonist a solipsist, a suicide, a confidence man. And it renders his condition empty and meaningless.

As Ahab discovers, filling a spiritual cypher with objective quantity is ever unsuccessful. No amount of artificial domination and possession can satisfy his inward cravings. Ahab can say to his crew, "Ye are not other men, but my arms and legs;" but his soul-emptiness

causes him to start from his dreams and shun the loneliness of his cabin. Taji gives himself a godlike name; but assertion of divine identity does not constitute its validation. Wellingborough Redburn already has a pretentious name to support his identity, but his raucous shipmates choose to rechristen him "Buttons."

The quester's spiritual orientation and incompleteness make him inimical to the natural world, to the green arcadias of his birthplace. His lack of identity is symbolically expressed in a lack of manhood and potency. He is figuratively unmanned, castrated, dispossessed. His self-idealization is inhibited by his imprisonment in finitude, in his own mortality. Objective reality or the natural world, especially his own body, restricts him and affronts him. Tommo is jailed by the Typees; his desperate need to flee the luxuriant valley for the open sea is denied. Ahab finds in the white whale a wall "shov'd near," the incarcerating principle of his own existence. The annihilation of Moby Dick means for Ahab both destruction of limitation and capture of deific potency. Like God, the whale is inscrutable, ubiquitous, immortal, infinitely and creatively powerful. Moby Dick is not only an enormous phallic symbol, but also a whitely unfathomable emblem of divinity. Because, then, physical being and material world are construed by the idealist as life-
denying affronts, he repudiates the one and attacks the other. An early symptom of this frustration and defiance is the questor's punishment of his body. Sleeplessness, cessation of eating and drinking, and a horror of sexuality characterize Melville's protagonists. Suicide is often the ultimate, however unconscious, goal. Ironically, the teleology of the identity seeker looks toward the nothingness of total dehumanization of the self, complete disengagement from his world and his fellows, and the perfect stasis of death.

The problem virtually simplifies itself into the terms of a deadly body-soul conflict. The soul's desire to idealize itself in fullness and purity is abridged by the random catastrophes, imperfections, and injustices of the material world. The questors seek to identify soul with body, immediately superimposing the mask of unified self upon the fragmented existing self, and transferring the unavoidable injuries and defects of the physical self as affronts to the pure, inwardly conceived self. The idealist is hence both a con man and a despairing suicide. He is Pierre-Enceladus hurling himself up against a whitely decked mountain-obelisk whose earthy core constrains the lower parts of his body. He is Taji seeking Yillah and trying to elude Hautia. In the early novels the focus is on the idealist who is consequently a masquerader. By 1856 the
focus is on the confidence-man-masquerader who is, fittingly, the supremely idealistic character of his circumscribed, cigar-smoke-clouded world.

The body-soul conflict expresses itself also in the land-sea antithesis which prevails in Melville's novels. Land, society, culture to the spiritual idealist mean historical, finite conditions. The sea, with its infinitude, its blankness, its dangers, its mysteries, is the quester's destination. As Ishmael admits, going to sea is an alternative to more explicit and conscious self-destruction. The ocean is also the silent depository of the secrets whose unraveling will confer spiritual mastery. The Ishmaelite voyager is prying into the hidden secrets of his origins; he is attempting to confront his mythical past; he is searching the face of his mother; he is attempting to draw up that Leviathan the Lord taunted Job about. Ishmael, out of his misanthropy and self-despair, went to sea to find the whale which haunted his dreams and foreboded disaster. He was scorning his physical self and grasping for knowledge to satisfy his spiritual self. When he claims a whale ship for his Yale College and classifies his whales into bookish degrees of size, he is referring to his true education, the philosophical wisdom he gained first-hand. Ishmael is probing the preconscious darkness of undifferentiated Being-Itself. Tommo, telling the Typees
that he wanted to return to "home" and "mother," meant that he sought the bosom of his archetypal mother, the sea. The sea, then, means pre-birth and post-death stasis as well as natural violence. As avenue to death, the ship it bears is a microcosm afloat upon the cosmic deeps, a communal consciousness momentarily surged up from oblivious darkness, a vehicle for a crew of spiritual questers fishing for that Leviathan Answer, the means of a solipsist seeking to fill his world-wide emptiness, the cradle of infantile egotism rejecting its limitations and trying to burrow back into the mother. The sea as undifferentiated Being means both death (loss of personal identity) and life. It releases the quester from his finitude, but denies him individuality.

In Typee the land-sea antithesis is defined, and the land is ultimately rejected as possible habitat for the idealist quester. Here the protagonist ventures away from his watery wasteland into what he originally conceives as a prelapsarian realm of idyllic purity and beatitude. The Marquesan culture represents to Tommo heavenly paradise, mythical past, and revelatory illustration of primitive origins. Typee valley actually demonstrates, however, only various modes of physical gratification and spiritual naïveté. Tommo enters Typee valley under false pretenses, for he identifies himself by a fictitious name. But he
discovers he is not willing to play precisely the role
he had unwitting assigned himself; and the Typees decline
to release him. As Hautia's relentless surveillance of
Taji also shows, the physical world consistently refuses
to relinquish the spiritual quester. Tommo's wild terror
at his detainment in a carnal society results from injury
to his spiritual selfhood and is expressed in his leg wound,
his symbolic castration. His desperation to escape the
land and return to the sea requires yet more subterfuge
and deceit. He again becomes a confidence man in order
to correct his first mistake in objectifying ideality. The
irony is that Tommo never really escaped the world of
treachery and bodily satisfaction. Both he and the hospi­
table Typees duplicate the falsity characterizing life
aboard the Dolly. Tommo's attempt to revert to Adam
residing in Eden results in an uneasy, mutually suspicious
and individually calculating confrontation of civilized
masquerader with perfidious savages.

When Tommo deserts his ship, he is opting out from
a world of boredom, failure, despotism, and falsity.
The voyage for the sperm (note the ironic sexual overtones)
whale—symbolically, too, Job's leviathan—had been dismally
unsuccessful. Hence the references to sterility and weari*
ness. Besides being spiritually inadequate, moreover, the
crew are stultifying themselves into a nearly hypnotic state
of physical indulgence. Tommo says, "We abandoned the
forepeak altogether, and spreading an awning over the
forecastle, slept, ate, and lauged under it the livelong
day." 100 Other features of the microcosmic ship are its
prevailing conditions of tyranny and treachery. The
conduct of the captain was "arbitrary and violent in the
extreme," and the crew "was composed of a parcel of dastardly
and mean-spirited wretches, divided among themselves, and
only united in enduring without resistance the unmitigated
tyrrany of the captain" (Typee, p. 21).

To Tommo-to-be the islands the ship visits seem to
offer a striking contrast to his present circumstances.
They are the embodiment of his bookish fantasies, the
dream-places "the olden voyagers had so glowingly described," "a scene of enchantment . . ." (Typee, p. 5). Tommo's
justifications of his actions are legally illegitimate and
personally irrelevant. He is simply choosing one realm
over another, adventuring into an unknown and inviting
region where a shade of knowledge and potency beckons,
and rejecting a petty world of small betrayals and contempti-
ble gratifications. Since the ship fails to provide Tomme
with spiritual fulfillment, he abandons it for a more
promising environment.

100 Herman Melville, Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life, eds.
Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas
Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University
cited simply as Typee.
In Toby Tommo finds the perfect companion, in character and inclination they are doubles. Toby is an Ishmael, "one of that class of rovers you sometimes meet at sea, who never reveal their origin, never allude to home, and go rambling over the world as if pursued by some mysterious fate they cannot possibly elude" (Typee, p. 32). "Toby," the narrator informs us, "was the name by which he went among us, for his real name he would never tell us ..." (Typee, p. 31). Toby, then, travels under a fictitious name, is an "isolato," is obscurely intellectual and culturally refined, practices silence as a retrospective and emblematic destruction of his past self, and is tried-and-true soulmate to Tommo-to-be. Once in Typee Toby, too, desires immediate withdrawal, experiences difficulty in leaving that valley of bodily delight, sustains a symbolic spiritual injury (his head wound) while there, and takes to sea again at the earliest opportunity.

Tommo and Toby experience during their trip into the interior all the traditional hardships involved in crossing thresholds to other-worldly domains. Their neglect to provide food for their bodies is the fitting oversight of spiritual questers. Entrance into Typee valley is marked by two events: the valley is wrongly apprehended as an unfallen Eden, and the narrator introduces himself to his hosts with an alias. Tommo's description of his first
sights in the valley imparts a sense of delicate innocence; the language and conception associate Typee with the pre-civilized charm of Milton's paradise. Tommo and Toby are brought at last into the presence of Mehevi, and Tommo writes, "thinking that it might be difficult for him to pronounce my real name, [I] . . . with the most praiseworthy intentions intimated that I was known as 'Tom'" (Typee, p. 72). "Tom" becomes "Tommo," and his spiritual frustration finds solace in a regressive infantilism. Chase remarks, for example:

'Tommo' admired himself; his own beloved image appealed to him with persistent eroticism. He came to feel that he was quite "the belle of the season, in the pride of her beauty and power"; and the charming, naive natives, who reacted as surely as reflexes to his impulses, became less real external objects than extensions of his own personality. When he had first joined the household of Marheyo, Kororo-Kory had insisted on feeding poi to the young hero with his own fingers, it was an appropriately symbolic act, for the hero, with a sad gaiety, was reliving his childhood in terms of the entrancingly fitting symbolic objects, of which Typee Valley so expertly consisted.

Tommo's hints of a sexual relationship with Fayaway are inoffensive chiefly because unbelievable. Fayaway is a shadowy representative of primitive womanhood, not a vivid, memorable personality. Tommo's obsession with escape and

his concern for his leg injury render Fayaway's charms subordinate to his own androgyny and childlike regression.

Tommo casually attributes his lameness to the bite of "some venomous reptile," although he admits that "all the islands of Polynesia enjoy the reputation, in common with the Hibernian isle, of being free from the presence of any vipers . . . " (Types, p. 48). The obvious connection with the biblical snake in the garden is perfectly appropriate. Typee is uninfested with serpents because it is, in a sense, genuinely unfallen; it has not tasted of the tree of knowledge; it cannot respond to Tommo's spiritual craving. And that is precisely the problem. Tommo's "snakebite" is his wound of mortality, his imprisonment in unconsciousness, his thwarted hunger for cosmic enlightenment.

The Typees, on the other hand, are associated with intellectual darkness and earthly immurement. Kory-Kory's difficulty in "striking a light" suggests his very occasional and hardly-won experiences with spiritual illumination. Kory-Kory dwells in an unending Eden where the "little viper" of curling smoke is seldom seen; his European counterpart is compelled to post-Edenic exertions, but has his "Lucifer" at hand easily. The Typees, too, seldom venture out to the sea, in spite of their love for seafood and their proximity to the coast. The sea represents for them the path to other-worldly and post-death realms. Yet,
as Kory-Kory reveals, they are not anxious to seek those heavenly places.

The Typees are simply uninterested in the objects of the spirit. Their contentment in their valley arises from their completely physical orientation. Tommo's curiosity is aroused by some Stonehenge-like structures he discovers on the island. He gazes, too, with deep fascination and sympathy upon the sea-going effigy of a departed chieftain. But the Typees are ignorant concerning their "massive stone foundations," the antique stone-images of mystery which so intrigue Pierre in a later novel. Kory-Kory's culture has a very small degree of religious sophistication. Their highest god is a child's toy which affords them the entertainment of game-playing and enacted fantasy. Their woodland idols are disrespectfully tossed about and heedlessly permitted to rot. Tommo finally remarks:

I am free to confess my almost entire inability to gratify any curiosity that may be felt with regard to the theology of the valley. I doubt whether the inhabitants themselves could do so. They are either too lazy or too sensible to worry themselves about abstract points of religious belief (Typee, p. 171).

For Tommo, then, the Typees are a fruitless study. The "hieroglyphics" tattooed on their bodies, like the hieroglyphical markings on Queequeg and Moby Dick, are to the quester the tantalizing, indecipherable formulas of
nature's secrets. The Typees' obliviousness to the mysteries they themselves represent is shown in a physical indulgence unmarked by the complications interposed by civilized mentality. Typee sexuality, for example, is free from jealousy, from romantic pangs, from worries about chastity or virtue. Their tattooing, moreover, is not only the indication of their participation in an unfathomable primordial enigma, but also symbol of blindness to the existence of that enigma. The strips of embellishment cover the eyes and mouth, the organs of visual apprehension and verbal communication. Tommo sees, understands, comprehends differently than do the Typees. Their mania to have Tommo marked like themselves is their desire to make him one of them, to capture the spiritual principle and domesticate it among themselves. Tommo's recoil is proof, however, that he, like the Typees, is not really a spiritual creature. Both judge character according to appearance. To Tommo his unblemished form and his refusal to completely adopt Typecan dress signifies his difference, his intellectual awareness, his separate identity. Both Tommo and his savage hosts are defining selfhood according to external, material features. Likewise, Tommo's horror of Typeean cannibalism is not so much a fear of their consuming his body as of a loss of his non-corporeal essence. Being "eaten" is less disturbing than being culturally assimilated. Stubb's supper in Moby-Dick partakes of the same signifi-
Eating the whale, especially his creative parts, is a symbolic domination and possession of his potency, mana, sacredness.

The Typees, in fact, think and act just like Tommo. He originally sought their society because he believed it heavenly in some sense; they desire him because they recognize his spirituality. Tommo says, "the natives multiplied their acts of kindness and attention towards myself, treating me with a degree of deference which could hardly have been surpassed had I been some celestial visitant." (Typee, p. 109). Old Marheyo wears Tommo's worn-out shoes for adornment, because "Every article, however trivial," belonging to Tommo "the natives appeared to regard as sacred . . ." (Typee, p. 146). And primitive man seems as skillful at role-playing and deceit as civilized man. Kory-Kory is apparently body-servant, but actually jailer. The Typees are extravagantly fond of theatrics, game-playing, and humorous pretense. Narnee, in climbing a coconut tree, makes "preliminary performances," "feigns astonishment," and displays "well-acted despair." (Typee, p. 214). The priest Kolory "seats himself on the mats as composedly as a juggler about to perform his sleight-of-hand tricks" (Typee, p. 175); and the company's regalement with Moa Artua reminds Tommo "of a parcel of children playing with dolls and baby houses" (Typee, p. 176).
Popguns delight even adult Typees, and the myth of a Happar assault lightens the disappointment of Toby's departure. Marnas gives voice to Tommo's most fearsome suspicions concerning Typee sincerity when he says, "He ne hear you talk any more; by by amana get mad, kill you and me too. No you see he no want you to speak to me at all? --you see--ah! by by no mind--you get well, he kill you, eat you, hang you head up there, like Happar Kannaka" (Typee, p. 24).

It is no accident that Tommo's head is what the Typees desire to possess. Tommo had believed the Typees were "outlandish," or unearthly. They "spirited up" "visions." They in turn regard him as the mentalized consciousness which would complete their existence. Tommo and the Typees are doubles. Pretense and disguise characterize them all. Tommo's remark that "appearances all the world over are deceptive" (Typee, p. 175) applies to typee valley as well as to the Dolly. His frantic urge to return to the sea, his violent response to Mow-Mow's brutality, and his expressed desire to reach "home" and "mother" all point to, first, his actual participation in Typee animalism, and, second, his refusal to face up to that animal nature. The Typeean womb is marred by its liveliness and sexuality. Tommo desires the more thorough blankness and darkness of the ocean-womb. Looking into the mirror-image of Mow-Mow's face, Tommo falls back...
in a faint. Escaping that terrible implicit assertion in the visage of one of "nature's noblemen," Tommo turns to the sea, beginning anew his fishing and questing, trying to annihilate his own reflection in the waters.

Omoo is the sequel to Typee in a very interesting manner. Omoo's narrator-protagonist abandons the spiritual quest in an effort to survive in the non-ideal, visual, objective environment of the physical self. Omoo is Typee's counterpart in a dualism of insoluble dilemma. For if in Typee the spiritual self desired destruction of and escape from the inhibiting carnal self, here the physical self tortures and denies the aspiring idealistic self. Omoo is pervaded by both animal gusto and psychological despair. A non-teleological series of picaresque adventures focuses on provision for the this-worldly needs of the body. Carnal satisfaction, however, is frustrated both by psychic disgust and the severities of the natural kingdom. Omoo is a narrative about submission to incarceration, starvation, deprivation, sickness, and death. Life in the world of appearance is a hardly-won subsistence requiring repression of idealistic disguise for the sake of clever, wary adeptness at evasive, less florid role-playing. Typee and his shipmates are compelled to don a variety of masks for self-protection and necessary counter-exploitation. The narrator signs the Round Robin with this name.
Julia and Tahiti are both inhabited by confidence men; and all personal relationships in Omoo are characterized by mutual falsity. Long Ghost's allegiance to Typee resembles that of Charlie Noble to Frank Goodman. His role as alter ego is a satiric parody of the traditional faithful servitor-companion to the quester-hero. The "Sydney bird" seems endowed with the ability to complete his pattern of spiritual suicide, whereas Typee must finally return to the sea.

The perspective governing the novel, the attitudes of Typee, the tone of suppressed contempt for perceived sordidness, ultimately culminates in expressed recoil. The questing personality survives bodily domination. Omoo presents an attempt at life no less futile than those seen in Typee. and Mardi. Immersion in physical gratification is as fatal to the spirit as devotion to spiritual quest is to the body. Melville's novels are nearly all epics of some form of suicide; the body is annihilated in a process of dehumanization, or the spirit is smothered and drowned by disgust at its animal counterpart.

The sea in Omoo maintains the symbolic associations already seen in Typee. Poor nopey, for example, recounts how he once "over his fifth pot meditated suicide--an intention carried out; for the next day he shipped as a landsman aboard the Julia, South Seaman."103 But, as it

103 Herman Melville, Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel
develops, the Julia is no quest ship. Its crew is consistently depicted in terms of animal imagery, their "humanities" are abundantly displayed, and the ship itself is repeatedly described as unseaworthy. No sperm whales have been captured, the long voyage has produced severe illness and several deaths among the crew, the mate Jermin is specifically labelled as "landsman," and the captain is portrayed as an unmanly weakling. The Julia as microcosm, then, is an earthly, human domain unfitted for sea pursuits. The men yearn for the greenness and luxuriance of land. The intolerable sterility and deathliness of sea life are only horribly accentuated by their merely visual contact with the shores of Pacific islands.

Unlike Bembo, whose quest involves suicidal violence, Typee's other fellow crew-members are not really violent men. They are, however, capable of self-serving, petty violences. They are not idealists; they are very much practical confidence men. Signing the round robin indicates that "Few among them had any regular names; many answering to some familiar title, expressive of a personal trait; or oftener still, to the name of the place from which they sailed . . ." (Omoo, p. 74). Aboard the Julia, as aboard the Neversink, a degree of anonymity

is enforced by the practice of assigning identification according to appearances irrelevant to inward character. The universal tendency to masquerade is not denied, but controlled. The crew's penchant for game-playing, small deceits, and well-managed thievery is permitted by a communally-espoused unwritten law. Doctor Long Ghost, for example, perpetrates the prank of "hoisting the men aloft by the foot or shoulder" (Omoo, p. 41); Bungs and Chips secretly effect "a burlarious entry" into the hold for liquor; and all the men feign illness as convincingly as they can. And the crew's falsity and criminality are venial compared to the exploitive operations of their superiors—the captain, Jermin, Wilson, and Dr. Johnson.

Although "Typee" is an unspiritual alias, and the Long Doctor a devilish influence, the narrator is not really the happy-go-lucky renegade he tries to be. He has all the qualities of the idealist masquerader. He is given to reverie and meditation, ineffective efforts to go to sleep ("I made a bed... and tried to forget myself" (Omoo, p. 57)), unusually violent objections to "having one's foot pinned" (Omoo, p. 117) at the Calabooza Boretanee, undue concern for other people's opinions (especially those of the examining magistrates and pretty girls, about him, and feelings of repulsion for Lem Hardy, tattooed white man. His choice of Long Ghost as a
companion is both a natural gravitation toward an acquaintance of similar experience and a serious attempt to imitate the intellectual man capable of physical survival.

Long Ghost is the educated and culturally sophisticated man of the world. He is a desperado fallen from "high estate." Unlike Typee, however, he has an enormous appetite, is "no sailor," and is "unable to swim." His propensity for aimlessness and evasion of responsibility makes him a promising candidate for an indefinitely extended role as beachcomber. D. H. Lawrence calls him "a man of humorous desperation, throwing his life ironically away. Not a mere loose-kneed loafer, such as the South Seas seem to attract." Typee joins the Doctor in enacting Peter and Paul for the potato farmers; and Typee even permits at his own expense the Doctor's pretended illness. Typee accepts the Doctor's insincere friendship as cheerfully as he does that of Kooloo, his native "taye." But the narrator is not really successful in his imitation of reckless physical indulgence. He allows the Doctor to be the more gluttonous, the more lazy, the more sexually aggressive, the more adept at minor deceits.

Typee is plainly uneasy in his role as wandering fortune hunter. He constantly notes the squalor in which the Tahitians live and its contrast to the magnificent scenery forming its backdrop. He discusses the lost
grandeur of the Pomarees with a tone of deep regret. He dwells mostly on the denationalization of the Tahitians, their loss of integral, racial identity. Glossing over their ancient custom of giving nicknames, their tendency to tell anecdotal lies out of a desire to please, and their total inability to comprehend religious or spiritual matters, he depicts them as a people naturally generous and noble, unfortunately spoiled by foreign contact. Typee is projecting the source of his own despair to explain the sorrows of the Tahitians. His conception of nobility despoiled and identity denied complements his own despair, a condition born of momentary repudiation of ideal identity. Actually, the source of Tahitian suffering is the Christian attempt to impose upon them spirituality and idealism.

The Tahitians' most moving moment occurs when "Distracted with their sufferings, they brought forth their sick before the missionaries, when they were preaching, and cried out, 'Lies, lies! you tell us of salvation; and, behold, we are dying. We want no other salvation, than to live in this world'" (Omoo, p. 191).

Unlike the Tahitians whom he pities, Typee does not really want to live in this world. Discontented with land life, he "at last pined for the billows" (Omoo, p. 312).

It is a characteristically ironic touch by Melville that Typee chooses and judges his ship according to its captain’s physical appearance. Our narrator is, moreover, required to prove his identity before he is permitted to join the crew, and he must, as well, relinquish his friend, the Long Doctor. Giving up his companion-double is equivalent to stifling his inclination to value life of the body over life of the spirit. Like Tommo, he assigns his seaward impulse to "the prospect of eventually reaching home" (Omoo, p. 315), home being outward beyond the horizon, in the direction the Typees claim leads to heaven. But the novel’s shadow of futility is not removed by Typee’s turning homeward. The narrator knows beforehand that his voyaging will be unsuccessful. He admits that "The only bad trait about the vessel was this: she had been launched under some baleful star; and so, was a luckless ship in the fishery" (Omoo, p. 313). Melville’s protagonist remains in the grip of a deathly and insoluble predicament. He has only exchanged one form of suicide for another.

Mardi is Omoo’s dramatic and heavily symbolic followup. Here the quest theme is developed in a highly stylized series of patterns, oppositions, and thresholds. Again the narrator forsakes: a dreary, sterile microcosm (the Arcturion also fails at spearing whales) in order to strike out alone upon the deeps in search of something he himself
only dimly conceives. He brings as companion-double his
cshipmate Jarl, who represents Taji's own physical or bodily
existence. Encompassing a series of barriers between
the material and dream worlds, Taji is depicted in the
act of destroying and abandoning his earthly counterparts,
Jarl and Samea, in symbolic suicide. Samoa and Annattoo
are savage parodies of the etherealized Taji and Yillah.
Taji's loss of Yillah expresses the inability of mortality
to possess the ideal. His refusal to renounce the quest
for Yillah reveals his determination to clutch forever
at his own ideal self, while his repudiation of Hautia
is his disinclination to accept his own sexuality or earthi-
ness. Taji's companions during the hunt for Yillah represent
broadly inclusive perspectives on experience and reality.
They are also, in a sense, Taji's doubles. All four seek
realization of individualistic conceptions of ultimacy which
they identify with Yillah. Media is the most important.
Originally, like Taji, he is an idealistic confidence man
(that is, a masquerader-deceiver), claiming divinity and
disclaiming human and political obligations. As occurs
with Redburn and Harry Bolton, Taji and Media finally
switch roles, Taji rigidly asserting his godship and Media
learning the lesson of the quest. Entrance to Serenia, a
solution apparently acceptable in Mardi, is actually
subordinate to the moral growth of Media, the governor.
Serenia’s salutariness is a quality undemonstrated in Mardi and constitutes, hence, an evasive tactic unworthy of Melville.

As is by now typical of Melville, Mardi's opening is an exposition of the monotony and sterility of the ship microcosm, of the animalistic qualities of the crew members, of the sea as symbolic arena for questing, and of the hero's pressing needs for stirring adventure and self-expression. "Had we sprung a leak," Taji-to-be complains, "been 'stove' by a whale, or been blessed with some despot of a captain against whom to stir up some spirited revolt, whose shipmates of mine might have proved limber lads and men of mettle. But as it was there was naught to strike fire from their steel." The protagonist speaks of the "knighthood of a tar" (Mardi, p. 6) and compares his practical captain to "the turnkey" complimenting "the prisoner in Newgate, when he shoots the bolt on him" (Mardi, p. 7). Taji's physical immurement is made all the more intolerable by his yearning spirit. He wants wondrous and awesome adventure. His mind gropes vaguely for a dream world, for flight into splendid freedom and beatitude. Gazing at the horizon from his ship prison,

Taji exclaims:

In the distance what visions were spread! The entire western horizon high-piled with gold and crimson clouds; airy arches, domes, and minarets; as if the yellow, Moorish sun were setting behind some vast Alhambra. Vistas seemed leading to worlds beyond. To and fro, and all over the towers of this Nineveh in the sky, flew troops of birds. Watching them long, one crossed my sight, flew through a low arch, and was lost to view. My spirit must have sailed in with it; for directly, as in a trance, came upon me the cadence of mild billows laving a beach of shells, the waving of boughs, and the voices of maidens, and the lulled beatings of my own dissolved heart, all blended together. (Mardi, pp. 7-8).

Taji’s companion is Jarl, Skyeman and fairhaired descendant of the Vikings. Because of Jarl’s spiritual appearance, Taji deems him suitable partner. Judging by externals is a characteristic trait of Taji’s. “Now, at sea, and in the fellowship of sailors,” Taji says, “all men appear as they are . . . . You wear your character as loosely as your flowing trousers. Vain all endeavors to assume qualities not yours; or to conceal those you possess” (Mardi, p. 14). For all Taji’s assertions, however, Jarl himself is the perfect contrary example. He is not idealistic man at all; he is the practical, simple, diligent representative of ordinary humanity. He is “an aboriginal tar” and a “cosmopolitan.” Repeating the ‘Typees’ dog-like devotion to Tommo, Jarl loves Taji, the Skyeman’s “unbidden affection”
being accepted as "noblest homage." Jarl provides for Taji's bodily necessities. He is laundress, tailor, and cook. His practicality leads him first to oppose leaving the Arcturion (Taji says, "Verily, my Viking talked to me like my uncle" (Mardi, p. 17), and later to manage subordinate industries aboard the Chamois. Taji remembers that Jarl's fingers "would be plying at their task, like an old lady knitting" (Mardi, p. 46). It is Jarl's shoe that serves as drinking vessel; it is Jarl who makes notches in the wood of the boat as a way of marking time--of retaining their historical existence. To the dismay of indolent, dreamy Taji, Jarl suggests rowing during calms and is eager to greet the Parki. Jarl is an unintellectual and communally-oriented opposite to Taji. Taji is prone to perpetual mental activity; Jarl is so silent and thoughtless that Taji finally concludes, "in repose, his intellects stepped out, and left his body to itself" (Mardi, p. 36). Taji is loathe to pursue what the Parki represents, the world of humanity he believed he had successfully escaped; but Jarl "kept looking wistfully over his shoulder; doubtless, praying Heaven, that I might not escape what I sought to avoid" (Mardi, p. 57). Once in the dream world of Mardi, Jarl can neither fit in nor survive. In Mardi the earthman is the "isolato"; there Jarl's carnal nature exhibits itself in proneness to
"overmuch bibbling" and a series of unwitting crimes against Mardian social customs. His unhappy sojourn in a visionary realm is accentuated by his hostility to Yillah whom he saw, Taji says, "as a sort of intruder, an Ammonite syren, who might lead me astray" (Mardi, p. 147). Jarl's deepest sorrow, however, is his loss of Taji. Their parting, according to the allegorical correspondences of the novel, is the body's surrender of the soul. The separation forehodes death to both; for Jarl that is exactly what ensues, and although Taji is physically alive at the end of the novel, he is actively seeking his own suicide.

For Taji the rescue of the maiden and the search for her are happily construed, at least until his fears concerning her death become really frantic. Taji's character is recognizable from the beginning as that of the idealistic quester. His soul is wrapped in dreams, and his ruthless mentality aids him in assuming the proper mask of godship, specifically sun godship, and the fictitious name to go with it. While he is still a board the Arcturion, his indulgence in reveries and fascination with death are apparent. "And there is but little difference in the manner of dying," he proclaims, "to die, is all" (Mardi, p. 30).

In Yillah Taji at last finds the knightly conflict that obsesses his imagination. "Now, hearing of the
“Maiden,” he says, “I waited for no more. Need I add, how stirred was my soul toward this invisible victim; and how hotly I swore, that precious blood of hers should never smoke upon an altar. If we drowned for it, I was bent upon rescuing the captive.” (Mardi, p. 131). Taji endangers the lives of his companions with his own. The attitude is like that of Ahab toward his crew; it permits being to the companions only as bodily components of the hero. Taji’s capture of Yillah is first a snatching of spiritual absolute from the traditional possession of institutionalized religion and second a sweet realization of conceived identity. “In rescuing the gentle Yillah from the hands of the islanders,” he says, “a design seemed accomplished.” (Mardi, p. 142). Taji believes he has accomplished the passage from real world to dream world, from humanity to divinity. Reaching the island, he exclaims, “The transition from the grove to the sea was instantaneous. All seemed a dream” (Mardi, p. 167). “The garish sun” was “like some lackey in waiting,” (Mardi, p. 172), and Yillah seemed the key to all the mysteries he was determined to unravel. During his later search for Yillah he muses about “all the mysterious things by her narrated, but left unexplained” (Mardi, p. 307).

Taji loses Yillah. But he remains in his dream world, a habitation threatened by the limitations of his
mortality and the objective blankness of those domains which Melville despiritualizes by depicting. After all, Mardi and Yillah are both impossible concepts. Attempted delineation of dream places and dream objects is as foolish as Taji's search for objectified ideality. Taji's hunger for such a visionary land is evident when he cries, "Dreams! Dreams! golden dreams; endless and golden, as the flowery prairies... my dreams herd like buffaloes, browsing on to the horizon, and browsing on round the world; and among them, I dash with my lance, to spear one, ere they all flee" (Mardi, p. 366). This passage is a germ of Moby-Dick, conceived but not brought to birth. The phallic symbolism of the spear is as appropriate as Taji's subsequent forebodings about walls, bones, and whitenesses; he says:

But far to the South, past my Sicily suns and my vineyards, stretches the Antarctic barrier of ice; a China wall, built up from the sea, and nodding its frosted towers in the dun, clouded sky. Do Tartary and Siberia lie beyond? Dreadful, desolate dominions those; bleak and wild the ocean, beating at that barrier's base, hovering 'twixt freezing and foaming; and freighted with navies of ice-bergs,—warring worlds crossing orbits; their long icicles projecting like spears to the charge. Wide away stream the floes of drift ice, frozen cemeteries of skeletons and bones. White bears howl as they drift from their cubs; and the grinding islands crush the skulls of the peering seals. (Mardi, pp. 366-67).

Melville is trying to depict a dream world at the same time he implies the impossibly blank and empty nothingness
characterizing it.

Taji aspires to absolute purity. But he is no more innocent than Ahab. He is a deceitful masquerader, a murderer, and a liar. He illegally leaves his ship; he murders Aleema; he is responsible for the deaths of Jarl and Samoa; he lies to Samoa about his and Jarl's history; he lies to Media about the meaning of his pursuers, Aleema's sons; and he lies to Yillah herself concerning his ancestry and alleged former relationship to her. As confidence man, he deceives himself most of all, convincing himself that ultimate meaning and happiness can be realized in this material world.

Taji's passage from the Arcturion is illustrated by a series of thresholds which successively mark areas of increasingly spiritual atmosphere. The sunny seas upon which the Arcturion sails lull him into a dreaminess that "wrought upon /him/ so, that thenceforth /his/ desire to quit the Arcturion became little short of a frenzy" (Mardi, p. 93). As Stern notes, Taji's and Jarl's cry of "Man Overboard!" is their symbolic rejection of the real world. At sea in an open boat, the companions reveal their antithetical and complementary natures. The boat itself is an emblem of individual existence bearing the whole man,
Taji-Jarl, upon the waters of unconscious Being-Itself. The calm they endure in the boat increases the distance between them as components of fragmented manhood ("Sullenly we laid ourselves down; turned our backs to each other . . ."
(Mardi, p. 49)), and sighting the Parki gives expression to their different inclinations. Spiritualization is hinted, too, when Samoa and Annatoo take Jarl and Taji "for phantoms." And once aboard the Parki Taji's disengagement from physical necessities makes him the only voyager awake enough to steer the ship to the regions of the other world.

Annatoo and Samoa emerge as satiric types of Taji-to-be and the as-yet undiscovered Yillah. The native couple, originally apprehended by Taji and Jarl as spirits, are actually quite human. All this is parodic preparation for Taji's and Yillah's false claims to spirituality (they are also merely human). Samoa is something of a quester, fighting off devilish savages for possession of a seagoing vessel which he subsequently steers into the open waters toward an emblematic homeplace (Annatoo's "own, dear native island"). As Stern demonstrates, Annatoo's inscrutability prefigures Yillah's.\(^\text{107}\) Annatoo is humorously baffling, a petty thief, a would-be adulteress. Yillah is spiritually

\(^{107}\)Stern, p. 106.
mysterious, an unconscious masquerader, a disguised Hautia. The storm that kills Annatoo forces abandonment of the Parki and leads to Yillah. Samoa's matrimonial yoke to Annatoo is dissolved, and he offers a more humble affection to Yillah. With Taji he partakes of godship ("In a word, we were all strolling divinities" (Mardi, p. 166)), and with Jarl he partakes of death.

Like Moby Dick, Yillah is both an emblem of ideality and mirror reflection of the quester. She is associated with whiteness, silence, and the sea. She is an idealist like Taji, a death-seeker; "she verily believed herself a being of the lands of dreams" (Mardi, p. 158). Confronted with Hautia, her own double of sexuality and physical essence, she flies in dreams toward "the whirlpool! and "sweet mosses." She is a creature of dreams, the incarnation of Taji's dreams, an impossible being. When she vanished Taji "closed [his] eyes, and would have dreamed her back" (Mardi, p. 194). But Taji finds Yillah again only in the horror-image of Hautia, Yillah's earthly form of carnal existence. Taji rejects Hautia as he rejects his own corporeality. Taji sees himself and Hautia as "snake and victim," sexuality and spiritual purity. She is the "vipress" he desires to "slay," and he is expressing his intention precisely. To him the life of the body is deathly. Escape from the body can only be toward death, and Taji in recognition of that fact at last cries, "Taji
lives no more. So dead, he has no ghost. I am his spirit's phantom's phantom" (Mardi, p. 653).

The events of Taji's journey through Mardi provide, thanks to Melville's energy and the reader's patience, endless viewpoints parallel and opposite to Taji's. King Uhia dreaming of empire and swearing celibacy, the young religious idealist trying to climb the peak of Ofo, the imprisoned and impotent Donjololo thirsting for the sea and fleeing the life-giving sun—all duplicate Taji's personality. King Borabolla, on the other hand, devotes himself to physical pleasure. Abrazza, one of Melville's bachelor figures, is simply ignorant of the complexities in which he dwells. Uninvolved in the relationship to natural cycle conferred by sexual knowledge, and casually dabbling in philosophy, he is both spiritual and carnal dilettante. The religious and political realms visited by the roving companions are as empty of truth and beatitude as the individuals they meet. The land of avowed democracy is actually the land of slavery. The highest religious authority of the kingdom responds to Yoomy's intrusion by asking him what he sees. "Nothing," says Yoomy; and Hivohitoe returns, "Then thou hast found me out, and seen all!" Mardi, it develops, is entirely populated by confidence men; King Peepi, Donjololo's viceroys, and the Taparians, for example, all engage in artificiality and
metamorphosis. In *Mardi*, too, as in *Moby-Dick*, Nature herself "absolutely paints like the harlot" (*MD*, p. 170). Babbalanja enters a lengthy discussion to conclude that "the butterfly is not the larva" (*Mardi*, p. 210); and Rafona, about which Donjololo's messengers bring contradictory accounts, is found to be "of various hues."

the mutual quest of Yoomy, Media, Mohi, Babbalanja, and Taji, then, is doomed from the start. Babbalanja is the most philosophically acute and, hence, the most fatalistic. His speeches are, moreover, early articulations of the themes of *The Confidence-Man*. His conversation offers a stream of philosophical paradoxes, a gloomy recognition of the impossibility and inherent contradictoriness of other-worldly conditions and qualities. Revealing the existence of Azzageddi, Babbalanja admits his irreparable nature as confidence man and asserts that sincerity, integral identity, and ideality are unattainable. "We are only known," he says, "by our names; as letters sealed up, we but read each other's superscriptions" (*Mardi*, p. 394). "Alas," he cries, "do the fairies then wait on repletion? Do our dreams come from below, and not from the skies? Are we angels, or dogs? Oh, Man, Man, Man!" (*Mardi*, p. 433). To Media he exclaims, "My lord,—for the present putting Azzageddi entirely aside,—though I have now been upon terms of close companionship with myself for nigh five
hundred moons, I have not yet been able to decide who or what I am. To you, perhaps, I seem Babbalanja, but to myself, I seem not myself." (Mardi, p. 456). Gazing constantly into the ontological meaninglessness he sees so vividly, Babbalanja is the most comprehending figure of all. Foreshadowing Pierre's later dismaying scrutiny of his own motives, Babbalanja sardonically notes that "Our souls belong to our bodies, not our bodies to our souls. For which has the care of the other? which keeps house?" (Mardi, p. 505). He is confronting Taji with his selfhood as body, not as god. He is sneering at the necessity of divinity to seek for self-completion. In view of Babbalanja's characteristic subjection of his wistful desire for religious meaning to his piercing perceptions of futilities, Melville's portrayal of his Serenian conversion is strikingly inconsistent. Babbalanja's end is a sop to the hopeful, but a severe disappointment to the serious reader. He is made untrue to himself and contradictory to the meanings of Mardi.

It is Media who develops into the one wholly sympathetic figure of the book. Media is confidence man recognizing himself. He is false god admitting his humanity. Media learns to forsake a bootless quest, to return to responsibility, to act for this-worldly goals, not impossible dreams. Media's education is the one positive value offered
by Mardi: recognition of imperfection and resolution to focus on outward action rather than inward nothingness.

Redburn gives new direction to the confidence man theme. Here and in White-Jacket the idealistic masquerader is saved by the falsity of the world he inhabits. In both novels ideal identity is disallowed by society and the tendency to role-playing is channeled into less dangerous and more anonymous disguise. Outrageous and conspicuous role-playing is punished and identification according to external appearance is assigned. Society neither tolerates expression of inwardness nor attempts to determine essential personality. It accepts the individual on the basis of his material being and rejects him as spiritual creature.

Wellingborough Redburn has a fine-sounding name and a jacket native to upper regions of society. Both the name and the jacket signify the object of Redburn's search—selfhood commensurate with the refinement they suggest. He is searching for his lost cultural heritage, the realization of the self of his romantic, bookish dreams, and his own duplication of his father's elan. Redburn wants to be a fine, dashing world traveler. His shooting jacket and his gun are the accouterments of the manly quester. But he ships as a "boy" and the crew prefer to call him "Buttons." He is compelled to accept a disguise irrelevant to the self of his dreams. Redburn's initiation into the big world
teaches him a lesson entirely different from that he expected. He learns that survival requires anonymity, that his dream places do not match his expectations, that foreigners as well as Americans are con men, that death and suffering pervade his world. Redburn makes a new attribution of responsibility for masquerade. Jackson, as representative of the domains Redburn explores, is a new figure in Melville, both con man and victim, both Christ and Satan. His death is a "deliverance" precisely because "he never arose." Redburn's ardor to transform himself cools as he perceives the sordidness of the cultures aboard the Highlander, in Liverpool, and in London—and his jacket shrinks accordingly. Harry Bolton enters the novel and picks up Redburn's idealistic role-playing just where Redburn leaves off. Harry Bolton dies for Redburn as Septimus Warren Smith dies for Mrs. Dalloway. Caught in the old dilemma of objective world versus spiritual world, Harry Bolton is symbolically crushed between them, between a ship and the whale it spear.

Redburn associates voyaging with his revered father and with the exciting romances and guidebooks he reads. He consistently views his unfolding adventure in relationship to the way things are in books. To Redburn the nautical advertisements in the newspaper suggest "volumes of
thought and each crew member of the Highlander was a volume of Voyages and Travels around the World (Redburn, p. 46). Redburn is depending on the structure of the ideal world of art to conform to the actual world he confronts. But as the narrator warns the reader in The Confidence-Man, guidebooks, especially literary ones, inevitably fail in capturing the face of reality (CM, p. 78). And so Redburn discovers. The book given to him by Mr. Jones, from which Redburn hoped to learn "the true way to retrieve the poverty of his family" (Redburn, p. 86) proves as useless to him as the guidebook left by his father. The inadequacy of that old morocco book is particularly heartrending, for it is more than the picture of Liverpool; it is the picture of Redburn's dreams and the documentation of his lost heritage. It contains both the annotated scrawls of Redburn's childhood and the itinerary of his father's glamorous experiences in a foreign city. But the book is sadly inaccurate; its author is an incognito, an anonymous, self-deluded creature who made the mistake of believing he could depict his world. The "book full of fine old family associations," (Redburn, p. 157) the book with such a promising, rich-looking cover, the work of a poetic and spiritual soul, was inadequate. "Yes, the thing that had

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guided the father, could not guide the son" (Redburn, p. 157). Blunt's dream book is only another illustration of the sorrowful futility of conferring meaning onto, or gaining insight into, the external world by means of the internal or spiritual world. Blunt, humorous idealist, is a cheerful masquerader, trying to change his appearance by dyeing his hair, like Redburn, trying to become his dream-self.

Another object which stirs Redburn to begin his quest also belongs to the ideal realm of artistic conception. The glass ship brought from abroad by Redburn's father is a symbol of the imperviousness of the apparently transparent world, of the blankness of reality, of the necessity to destroy in order to recover inner essences. That is, destruction yields the nothingness of the void which is the only meaning that exists; and death, as destruction of the external world, is the only avenue for revelation of final mysteries.

Redburn begins his quest with an attitude of suspicion (he covers the keyhole at Mr. Jones' house, for example, while he undresses), as well as with hunger, sleepless, and excessive pride (he will not return to Mr. Jones and admit his mistake in attempting to board the ship on the wrong day). His pretensions aboard the Highlander and his early indulgence in truth-telling, he lets his shipmates know
he sees through their affectations, make him an isolate and threaten to make him as heartless as his fellows. He says, "at last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion; and I began to feel a hatred growing up in me against the whole crew—so much so, that I prayed against it, that it might not master my heart completely, and so make a fiend of me, something like Jackson." (Redburn, p. 62)

The society of Redburn's ship microcosm prohibits outlandish, spiritual role-playing. Redburn, renamed "Buttons," begins to become acclimated to his environment. His moleskin jacket, his dualistic emblem of first, his search for his idealized past and, second, his blindness and earthiness, begins to shrink and discomfit him as his illusions of grandeur are dissipated and his expectations about traveling are disappointed. What Redburn discovers is that the world is both constantly changing (his father's guidebook is useless) and is the same in all ports and cities (the warehouses along the Liverpool docks look exactly like those in New York). Metamorphosis is the essence of uniformity. Yet Redburn finds that the social customs and language of the shore will not serve aboard ship. Different times and places each require different naming of objects and different usages. But the modes in all times and places are the same in that they
arc rigidly enforced, personally meaningless, and constantly changing. Redburn is surprised and angry to discover that falsity and disguise govern the society of the Highlander. Captain Riga sports different clothes, graying sideburns, and tyrannical attributes at sea (he is "Janus-faced" and a "gay deceiver"); the sailors affect lordly attitudes (they are "so false-hearted and insincere" (Redburn, p. 51)); Max pretends complete fidelity to two separate wives; and even the steward, Lavender, poses as a worldly profligate whose "bewitching person turned all heads and subdued all hearts." (Redburn, p. 84)

Foreign places are bitter disappointments to Redburn, because they are not delightfully spectacular. They are not splendid and glamorous (even the whales at sea belied the magnificence attributed to them in Redburn's imagination); they are blandly concealed pits of depravity and unimaginable suffering. The first foreigner Redburn sees is occupied in gulling the Highlander out of a substantial amount of rope; the docks are populated by starving beggars and vicious knaves; the mundane warehouses hide the vulnerable, dying victims of a heartless society. In Liverpool there are criminals and foulnesses "not to be matched by anything this side of the pit that is bottomless." (Redburn, p. 130). But here Captain Riga finds the theatres that he likes to frequent, and the sailors "find their paradise." Liverpool
represents the foreign excitements Redburn had hoped to locate and investigate, the undistinguished face of this apparently painted and changing, but actually blank and eternally empty, world, the enchanting appearance that conceals desperate distress and incredible corruption, the reflection, both external and inward, of the voyagers who seek it. Redburn's confrontation with these realities leads him to conclude in terrible revulsion that the human condition is an imprisonment in absurdity and death. Looking at the shocking contents of Lancelot's hey, he reflects:

Ah! what are our creeds, and how do we hope to be saved? Tell me, oh Bible, that story of Lazarus again, that I may find comfort in my heart for the poor and forlorn. Surrounded as we are by the wants and woes of our fellow-men, and yet given to follow our own pleasures, regardless of their pains, are we not like people sitting up with a corpse, and making merry in the house of the dead? (Redburn, p. 184)

Redburn repeats the animal imagery (the sailors are "witty dogs," Redburn is a "silly sheep," Jackson's friends cringe and fawn like "spaniels"), the theme of fictitious names (Redburn only "choose[s]" to call "Mr. Jones" the friend who helps him begin his first voyage by lying to the captain about his circumstances), the portrayal of mysterious incognitos (the cabin passenger about whom the crew speculate) found in earlier and later novels. Jackson, Blunt, and Harry Bolton exemplify the victimized confidence
men who inhabit this earthly domain; and all Redburn's dream places are the residences of false appearance and hideous vice. London, the ultimately magic city, is home of Aladdin's Palace, where snakes and lizards ornament the walls and pretentious lords indulge in game-playing and carnal pleasure. Jackson is the apt representative of the con man society of the Highlander, just as Harry Bolton is the product of inland artificiality.

Jackson's ruthless cruelty, intolerable hopelessness, and death result from his acceptance of sea values and his use of them to dominate others and exalt himself. His demonic face is the reality of the Handsome Sailor Redburn had envisioned; and it reveals knowledge as well as heartless despair. Jackson is a Christ figure whose suffering is meaningless, whose victimization is unredemptive. Before death he issues "unexpectedly from his dark tomb," (Redburn, p. 295) looking like "a man from the dead." His blood falls below upon his shipmates "His blood be on us and our children" \(^\text{109}\); and "his death was their deliverance" (Redburn, p. 297) precisely because "Jackson never arose" (Redburn, p. 296). But "he must have been dead, ere he struck the sea" (Redburn, p. 296). That is, physical death is a redundancy for Jackson. Anonymous falsity and disguise are soul suicide; and Jackson, like all human creatures, \(^\text{109}\) Matthew 27:25.
was compelled to his own sacrifice.

Redburn gives up his garb of a ludicrously unattainable ideal and dons the drab, inexpressive, unassertive cast-off clothing of his alter ego, Harry Bolton. Redburn's lost Arcadia is symbolized in the green courtyard of the fort he glimpses as the ship leaves New York; Harry's home environment is Aladdin's palace. Harry's home culture is the place of swindling, game-playing, and pretension. On the return trip to New York he assumes Redburn's relinquished role as refined member of high society, as seeker for foreign places of new fortune and glamorous future. Now he is the green one, the wearer of inappropriate clothing, the scorned scapegoat of the crew. Sneering at worldly necessities and petty sums of money, he is a hopeless idealist con man (Redburn cannot trust him any more than the barber can trust the cosmopolitan), an uneducable suicide.

The poignantly humorous, because childishly ignorant, parody of all these men is Blunt, who naively colors his hair and consults his dream book. He is a slightly ridiculous portrait of Ahab, trying to interpret experience symbolically, trying to wrest meaning from the events of his life, trying to make correspondences between a spiritual world (a world he dreams) and the objective world he lives in. He is like the figure on the label of his hair oil,
arising from his dreams, still caught in a realm of inner illusions, to apply his hair oil, to don his disguise, to console himself with the belief that he can be what he appears, that he can paint over his own inward void of nothingness.

Redburn prefigures, more than any previous novel, the blind role-playing and cosmic meaninglessness governing the imaginative realm of Melville's last creation. Most explicitly Redburn begins the themes of the futility of literary expression and the enforced demonism of non-idealistic survival. But Redburn is emotionally moving because it is written with a tone of poignant regret and grief, whereas The Confidence-Man marks Melville's final emotional point of sardonic viciousness. White-Jacket, Melville's fifth novel, continues the themes and perspectives of Redburn with a slightly increased artistic distance, thus prefiguring the unsympathetic portrayals found in The Confidence-Man.

White-Jacket is a sequel to Redburn, because both novels develop the theme of ideal identity as a quality suppressed by the idealist's culture which demands anonymity. White-Jacket, moreover, demonstrates that selfhood or manhood is not a quality driven underground, but a quality denied entirely. Dehumanization is inescapable. In White-Jacket "the people" of a microcosmic world are subjected
to an inane and bumbling authority (representative of the powers that be, both political and spiritual) which strictly prohibits and relentlessly exterminates identity or manhood. It permits, rather, a restricted and brutalized form of self-expression in games and theatricals. It indulges "the people" in artificial and meaningless role-playing, but quashes serious acting by means of degrading and unmanning punishments. The jacket worn by the protagonist is a symbol of his spiritual self, of his innocence (his dangerous lack of knowledge about his universe), of his unsullied manhood. It is his act of self-expression, his rebellion against the world of appearance, his genius-stroke of making, his appearance represent his inner self, his flamboyant costume of distinction. The jacket that gives life to his spiritual being, however, is deadly to his physical existence. It renders him an "isolato," a scapegoat for authority, a victim of the natural environment. White-Jacket escapes with his life only because he discards the garment. The question here is whether that is an act of survival or an act of suicide. We can at least conclude that it is a communal gesture, an abandonment of isolation and claim to innocence, a signification of knowledge accepted, a transition to more sinister and less sincere masquerade. White-Jacket, like Redburn and the multitude of other Melvillean protagonists, learns the
nature of his world as false appearance and habitation of con men. The ideal of the novel, in fact, is the con man par excellence, Jack Chase. Jack Chase manages so magnificently and rescues others so handily only because he shifts faces so easily. His starring role in the theatra­icals is also his role aboard the Neversink.

White-Jacket's spiritual inclinations are illustrated by his position as main-top man (his proximity to heaven), his approach to cooking (he wants to put the "very soul of art" into it), and his unwarrantedly hopeful nature (he says, "the Future is both hope and fruition," 110). His jacket expresses his inward orientation and his originality. Redburn inherited his jacket; White-Jacket makes his. It is, moreover, an inner garment converted to an outer one, it claims his creativity, self-sufficiency, and fullness of inward being. It is his means of providing himself with the storage space normally unavailable to the man-of-war's man, a cupboard of delicacies and reading matter, a warm, outer house. "Yes," says White-Jacket, "I fairly hugged myself, and reveled in my jacket . . . " (WJ, p. 37).

The garment needs but one addition to make it perfect: a coat of paint. The jacket, like the whaling career, must be disguised in order to be harmless. Paint would not

only make it impervious to bad weather, but would make
White-Jacket himself inconspicuous to authority and
undistinguished among his fellow tars. But White-Jacket
has made his choice. He lives in a world which endows men
with identity according to external function and appearance
(the captain of the paint-room is "Brush," the drunken
commander is "Claret," the smiling master-at-arms is "Bland,"
the boisterous midshipman is "Mr. Pert," the genteel
lieutenant is "salvagee," and the redemptive Jack Chase has
suggestive initials); and White-Jacket's self-created and
self-expressive coat stamps him as artistic, spiritual
loner. Its whiteness is not only its owner's claim to
undespoiled manhood (White-Jacket would rather die and
murder than be "unmanned" at the mast, but also his
unconscious admission of the emptiness and blankness
of his inner self. The jacket's whiteness carries the
same implications as Moby-Dick's all-color of no-color.
The coat causes White-Jacket, in the midst of a Platonic
reverie, to be mistaken by his shipmates for a ghost and
very nearly shaken out of the maintop. The jacket, as
evidence of spirituality, makes White-Jacket an outcast
from a world of natural violence and protective anonymity.
Blinding him in the maintop, it results in his being
tossed overboard into the sea, the watery counterpart of
the jacket's deathly blankness, and the magnetic home of
the self-idealizing personality. The garment alienates
White-Jacket, moreover, from the society in which he dwells. He is black-balled from his mess and universally regarded as suspicious and unlucky. And finally, the jacket renders its wearer far too visible to authority. It compels him to perform above average (and, hence, further alienates him from fellow toilers) and makes him an easy target for punishment.

White-Jacket himself attains the same realization reached by Redburn. The jacket becomes soiled and shrunken as White-Jacket becomes educated to its effects. As always in Melville, the assumption of spiritual identity annihilates physical existence. In recognition of this, White-Jacket at length cries:

Jacket, ... You must change your complexion! you must hie to the dyers and dyed, that I may live. I have but one poor life, White-Jacket, and that life I cannot spare. I cannot consent to die for you, but be dyed you must for me. You can dye many times without injury; but I cannot die without irreparable loss, and running the eternal risk (WJ, p. 78).

The jacket, nevertheless, is not dyed. White-Jacket's culture will not afford him paint which will permit him to retain a symbol of identity by concealing it. White-Jacket's garment is not disguised, but abandoned. Identity is not merely hidden; it is lost altogether. The guilt of White-Jacket's society would be greater, were it not that the blankness of the symbol's color suggests its
original, inherent meaninglessness. Wearing his white coat, White-Jacket was a masquerader, pretending to a spirituality whose obverse aspect, in Melville, is nothingness. Without the jacket, the narrator is made anonymous. His previously-hidden body is his symbol of identity, which makes him like everyone else.

The Neversink is established as metaphor for the reader's inland world by comments comparing it to a large city, a nation, this whole earth. A microcosm, then, it defines, by implication, the world of the reader as place of masquerade, death, vice, despotic authority, and inescapable dehumanization. The officers aboard the Neversink are examples of inhumanity and falsity. The captain is an incompetent drunkard, the spiritual advisor is incomprehensible, the healer is an impersonalized fiend, and the master-at-arms is a cunning criminal. In a storm encountered while rounding the Cape, Captain Claret "was hurried forth from his disguises . . ." (WJ, p. 111).

He and his men are saved only because his unwise orders are overruled by Jack Chase. Cadwallader Cuticle, as his name implies, is a callous scientist who appears human only by means of cosmetic appurtenances. His beloved wired skeleton is his alter ego. The chaplain preaches sermons irrelevant to the needs of the crew and accepts his share of bounty money, blood money accruing from the destruction
of other human beings. He is parodied in the figure of the devout gunner, a man who, "with those hands . . . begrimed with powder" broke the "peaceful and penitent bread of the Supper" (WJ, p. 324). Viewing him, White-Jacket declares that "those maxims which, in the hope of bringing about a Millennium, we busily teach to the heathen, we Christians ourselves disregard" (WJ, p. 324).

Bland, the master-at-arms, is found guilty of having smuggled liquor which he subsequently punished "the people" for drinking. Deposed from his position, he briefly makes himself at home among the lesser con men of the Neversink; shifting faces abruptly, he cajoles the men he had flogged. And it is according to the logic of absurdity ruling the Neversink that he is soon restored to his old office of policeman.

The crew imitate their superiors. They are proficient at smuggling, gambling, and pickpocketing. The craft itself, White-Jacket concludes on the last page of his narrative, "is a lie; for all that is outwardly seen of it is the clean-swept deck, and oft-painted planks comprised above the waterline; whereas, the vast mass of our fabric, with all its storerooms of secrets, forever slides along far under the surface." (WJ, p. 399)

The Neversink is a realm of falsity manned by a collection of brutalized ruffians who are manageable only
because they are indulged in limited role-playing—their skylarking, their games and contests, their theatricals, and, above all, their grog, a means to the dream world that makes their wretched conditions tolerable. Their urgent need for this role-playing is revealed when Captain Claret is nearly murdered after prohibiting checker playing. Their games are virtually the only thing the men will kill for; and the captain knows it. The captain gives permission for "skylarking," a totally uninhibited time of practical joking, in order to save the men's lives while enduring the severe cold of the Cape. But this unleashing of restraints results in brutality ending in minor injuries, one serious head-wound, and a punishment at the gangway. "Single-stick," "sparring," "hammer-and-anvil," and "head-bumping" are forms of "fun in a man-of-war" which satisfy the captain's sadism and grant the men participation in sham heroism, a degraded form of knightly jousting, a brief pretense of self-assertive conflict. Real conflict, however, is punished at the gangway. Captain Claret enjoys seeing Rose-Water and May-Day bump heads. But when Rose-Water defends his honor against May-Day's insults, both are dragged to the gratings. Says the captain, "I'll teach you two men that, though I now and then permit you to play, I will have no fighting" (WJ, p. 276). The July Fourth theatricals serve the same purpose. The men momentu-
ly gratify themselves in heroic illusion and shared companionship with their officers. But afterward the men are abruptly reduced to subservience and the officers "[ship] their quarter-deck faces again" (WJ, p. 95). Grog is another and the most important, avenue to comfortable delusion. In defense of his drunkenness the tar says, "Let them bear down upon me, then, before the wind; any thing that smacks of life is better than to feel Davy Jones's chest-lid on your nose" (WJ, pp. 176-77). The man-of-war is a life-denying prison made livable only by induced delusion and drunken insensibility. If delusion is the only means to any kind of life at all, that implication suggests the deathliness and meaninglessness of reality.

The issue of flogging and the problem of beards illustrates the captain's implacable denial of identity, of self-expression, of manhood. Flogging is the captain's ritual murder of any man who dares to attempt escape from the dehumanizing effects of the articles of War. Fighting, drinking, and isolation are all punishable by flogging. It is inevitable that White-Jacket, who wears for all to see an emblem of manhood, should be condemned to flogging for an offense he did not commit. White-Jacket's response is commensurate with the identity his jacket proclaims. He says:

I can not analyze my heart, though it then stood still within me. But the
thing that swayed me to my purpose was not altogether the thought that Captain Claret was about to degrade me, and that I had taken an oath with my soul that he should not. No, I felt my man's manhood so bottomless within me, that no word, no blow, no scourge of Captain Claret could cut me deep enough for that. I but swung to an instinct in me—the instinct diffused through all animated nature, the same that prompts even a worm to turn under the heel. Licking souls with him, I meant to drag Captain Claret from this earthly tribunal of his to that of Jehovah, and let Him decide between us. No other way could I escape the scourge (WJ, p. 280).

White-Jacket's redeemers are Colbrook and Jack Chase, the two Handsome Sailors of the novel. They are effective as White-Jacket's saviors principally because they are such consummate con men, romantic figures and men of the world, capable of cajoling the captain, leading the men, and carrying the day with their agreeableness.

The "great massacre of the beards" (WJ, p. 355) makes the same point. Although temerious old Ushant triumphantly braids his beard with strips of red bunting while in irons, and although he declares to the master-of-arms who flogs him, "'tis no dishonor when he who would dishonor you, only dishonors himself," (WJ, p. 366) White-Jacket knows that to the eyes of the world Ushant has been degraded.

And aboard the Neversink appearance is what counts. Jack Chase, in contrast, submits to the barber. And Jack Chase knows the meaning of the operation. To the barber he says, "you are about to shear off my manhood ..." (WJ, p. 361).
The Neversink authorities countenance no actions or symbols expressing manhood. They also prohibit artistic expression. Emsford's box of poetry is cannonaded into the sea, and a journal entitled "The Cruise of the Neversink, or a Paixhan Shot into Naval Abuses" is confiscated, nailed through, and "committed to the deep." (WJ, p. 43) These literary portrayals are suppressed; and White-Jacket laments the lack of a "public printed directory" of the crow and a guidebook for touring the mazelike intricacies of the ship. What White-Jacket is saying is that no guidebooks, literary or otherwise, are available, and no attempts at making them are allowed by the powers that be of this domain.

White-Jacket shipped on the Neversink because he wanted to get home. Echoing the sentiments of Typee and Typee, he says, "Life is a voyage that's homeward bound." (WJ, p. 400) but nothing we have seen in his man-of-war encourages this hopeful viewpoint. The reader can only conclude that it is White-Jacket's baseless optimism that leads him to make such a statement.

Moby-Dick, in contrast to White-Jacket, develops as Melville's first expression of some hope concerning man's ability to become a unified self, to achieve and maintain a fullness of being, a true identity. The one real example in all the novels from Typee to The Confidence-Man of a
character who is saved from any form of suicide, who manages a healthy marriage of body and soul, is Ishmael. His "heart's honeymoon" with Queequog is his participation in communion, his self-completion, his redemption of himself. He ceases to be an Ishmael, a role taken over by Ahab, the most powerfully tragic figure in all Melville. Ahab is the consummately idealistic quester, resenting a cosmic affront to his manhood, chasing over the world an emblem of himself and his universe, actively attempting to tear the masks from the faces of Nature and God, defiantly immolating himself in solipsism. Ahab's failure is inevitable; his quest defeats itself, for it is an expression of an identity which Ahab himself is not sure is his own, and it projects a particular meaning onto the objective world rather than discovering one. Ishmael's occupation in Moby-Dick is self-education, leading to the repose not of knowledge, but of ambiguity, a form of survival attained by clinging not to a symbol of ideal identity but to a symbol of mortality. Ishmael is the first Melville character who retains both physical life and inward beatitude. He is left with his wholeness because he learns to content himself with ambiguity; Ahab finds death because his imposed meanings leave him no alternative; the reader inherits his own contemplation of the futility of seeking absolute meanings. The reader may note, too, that in Moby-Dick only Ishmael
"Call me Ishmael" has an assumed name. He is both artist and impostor; he is his own character, the self-made idealist who changes himself. But Ahab "did not name himself" (MD, p. 77). Beginning with Moby-Dick, the idealist is depicted as an unguilty victim, not making his own false face, but finding it inherent within him. Dark prophecies and vague fatalities shape a struggling hero, helpless before a future predestined in his own character.

Ishmael begins the novel as Melville's typical quester, caught in a body-soul conflict, bitterly misanthropic and despairing. Fully aware of the meaning of the sea ("that story of Narcissus . . . the image of the ungraspable phantom of life . . . the key to it all" (MD, p. 14)), he passes into the foreboding threshold area of New Bedford on a "very dark and dismal night, bitingly cold and cheerless," (MD, p. 17) and he is knowingly traveling toward suicide ("This is my substitute for pistol and ball" (MD, p. 12)). He speaks of his "wolfishness," he is uncommonly repulsed by the prospect of sleeping two in a bed; he is conscious of "an everlasting itch . . . to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts" (MD, p. 16).

Queequeg is Ishmael's redemption. Ishmael meets him at the moment of Queequeg's own precarious passage between two worlds. He is half-civilized savage, carrying
heads on a string like onions and putting his boots on privately under the bed. His entrance into the novel is attended by imagery of light ("the landlord came into the room light in hand" (MD, p. 37), animal imagery referring to Queequeg (he is "like a Newfoundland dog"), and suggestions of matrimonial togetherness. Queequeg embodies the meeting of two worlds; he is primitive becoming mentalized, and he is the effective figure of reconciling relationship between those two worlds. "This soothing savage" redeems Ishmael, he rescues a drowning greenhorn with a shrug implying his sense of "a mutual, joint stock world," and he symbolically delivers Tashtego from "Plato's honey head." Queequeg is Ishmael's double, a sensuous self integrating itself with an otherwise fatally idealistic and spiritual self. Unfortunately, the relationship does not operate both ways. Queequeg continues his process of mentalization and whole-heartedly joins Ahab's quest. His dangerous inclinations to carve his own god and punish his body in Ramadans become dominant. His own gloomy threshold is his sickness aboard the Pequod. Asserting the primacy of his spirit, he rejects his mortality; he prefers not to die. Willing his symbol of mortality to Ishmael, he is bestowing his final gift for survival. Ishmael inherits what Queequeg denies. The coffin, with Queequeg's enigmatic tattooing copied onto
it, is also the symbol of mystery accepted, ambiguity as saving vision.

Ahab's confrontation with Fedallah is a parallel situation. As John Halverson writes, "The principal characters, Ishmael and Ahab, both setting out on journeys of the soul, encounter their 'shadows' and are saved and damned by results of these encounters." For Ishmael, Queequeg is a brother; for Ahab, Fedallah is a tool. Accordingly, the one escapes, and the other pursues, solipsism.

The "prodigious bed" of Ishmael's "marriage" prefigures the fertile spaciousness of the oceans where he reveals his new communal attitudes. There he recognizes his "mortal inter-indebtedness," he takes a learner's approach to nature, he recognizes that whale oil is an article of "sweetness and light" as well as that the spiritual realms were formed "in fright." Ishmael calls the whaling ship his Yale College and makes his cetological classifications as if he were collating books, because he is a student of meaning rather than an imposer of ready-made meanings. The whale is his Book of Nature. The sun, life-giving principle of heat, receives, like Moby-Dick, different interpretations from Ahab and Ishmael. Ahab regards it as the destructive element of fire. He worships it with defiance and in death turns his body away from it. But fascination with fire is dangerous, as Ishmael under-
stands. Viewing the tryworks, he says:

Look not too long in the face of the fire, 0 man! Never dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will snow in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, glad sun, the only true lamp—all others but liars! (MD, p. 34).

Whale oil, product for illumination, is the incarnation of the sun's gladdening light. And just so is sperm oil the symbol of erotic (not Platonic) communion. While squeezing sperm Ishmael "forgot all about [his] horrible oath." "Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling" came over him that he exclaimed:

Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness" (MD, pp. 348-49).

And he abandons the death-threatening reveries of the Platonist in order to revel in an inner beatitude of wholeness—wholeness begetten of communal feelings.

Using the land and sea as symbols of integration and alienation, Ishmael advises the reader:

Consider all this; and then turn to this green,

gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea, and the land; do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti; full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return! (MD, p. 236).

Ishmael speaks of the "rare virtue of a strong individual vitality"; he responds to the whale not with hatred, but with sympathy. With a sense of the bond of primal creativity between himself and the natural world, he views the "Grand Armada" with a salutary appreciation. Joyfully comparing himself to the community of whales, he says:

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternation and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concerns; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy (MD, p. 326).

In contrast, Ahab's desperate, vicious attempts for whole selfhood, for manly potency, are strokes of murder, not communion. His conception of the sun's light as fire defines the hellishness of his condition. His progression toward death is Melville's classic demonstration of the questor-solipsist murdering himself. The whale he pursues is the inclusive symbol of the natural world he wants to
capture, unmask, and destroy, the god who has affronted
and unmanned him through His works, the fertility and
potency he desires, the whitely blank image of his own
soul.

Ahab's beginnings are blatantly those of the idealist
impostor. He starts with deception, concealing his
purposes from the owners and "mask/ing/ himself" "behind
those forms and usages" of the captain's role. (MD, p. 129)
He is an "isolate," an orphan who cannot define his origins.
His search for the whale-god is thus a search for the
father. He is seeking his own completion, an emblem
of his being. Consequently, his unfulfilled, incomplete
being is an emptiness that drives him from his cabin
and makes "the very throbbing of his life-spot...in-
sufferable anguish" (MD, p. 174). He proceeds to physical
suicide by ceasing to eat, drink, or sleep. His desire
for complete self-dehumanization and disengagement from
the external world is revealed in his conception of the
ideal man. From the carpenter (a man chiefly notable for
his impersonality) he requests:

a complete man after a desirable pattern.
Imprimus, fifty feet high in his socks;
then, chest modeled after the Thames
Tunnel; then, legs with roots to 'em, to
stay in one place; then, arms three feet
through the wrist; no heart at all, brass
forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of
fine brains; and let me see—shall I or-
der eyes to see outwards? No, but put
Ahab's model for himself is a standard of perfect stasis, total mechanization, completely egotistic orientation, and a heartless ferocity of potency. These qualities are attainable only in death—and that is what Ahab seeks in Moby Dick.

The whale is Ahab's double, his own Narcissus image reflected up from the waters. The Pequod, Ahab's outer shell, is the counterpart of its prey. Repeatedly referred to as "the ivory Pequod," she is "a cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies" (MD, p. 67). Ahab himself is consistently described in terms of resemblance to his foe. Moby Dick has "a peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidal white hump" (MD, p. 159) and "he have one, two, three,--eh! good many iron in him hide ..." (MD, p. 142). Ahab has "a ribbed and dented brow," and he muses of the whale, "Forehead to forehead I meet thee ..." (MD, p. 461).

Stubb is "taken all aback with Ahab's brow ... It flashed like a bleached bone" (MD, p. 114). Stubb dreams of Ahab as an "old merman, with a hump on his back," exhibiting "his stern ... stuck full of marlinspikes,

See also MD, p. 171 ("his wrinkled brow"); and p. 321 ("Ahab's brow was left gaunt and ribbed").
with the points out" (MD, p. 115).

Stubb's dream not only sharpens the identification between Ahab and Moby-Dick, but it also suggests the phallic conflict between the two. Stubb learns not to be affronted by being kicked with Ahab's bone leg, because "it's not a real leg, only a false leg" (MD, p. 115).

Ahab's "dismasting" is a symbolic castration, like Tommo's leg wound. Ahab is left helpless, impotent, limping around on the dead bone of the creature which unmanned him. His kicking of Stubb with a "dead" phallus is thus quite different from Moby Dick's offense. The reader learns, too, that:

it had not been very long prior to the Pequod's sailing from Nantucket, that he had been found one night lying prone upon the ground, and insensible; by some unknown, and seemingly inexplicable, unimaginable casualty, his ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had snake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin; nor was it without extreme difficulty that the agonizing wound was entirely cured. (MD, p. 385).

The voyage of the Pequod is a phallic quest. Ahab is obsessed with spearing Moby-Dick with a phallic harpoon—and with capturing the live embodiment of creative nature. It is no accident that Moby-Dick is a "sperm" whale, that Ishmael includes the "Unicorn" whale in his cetology, that the harpoon rests in a "trotch" in the whaleboat, that Ishmael celebrates the whale's tail as the source of his power, that Ishamel's eye is caught in the Spouter Inn by.
a portrait of a whale "in the enormous act of impaling himself upon . . . three mastheads" (MD, p. 21) — a grotesque foreshadowing of Ahab's meeting with Moby Dick. The impius costume of the mincer is the "dark pelt" of the whale's "grandissimus," and the garment represents human domination and exploitation of the whale. Moby-Dick himself is described as the embodiment of natural and divine creative potency. When Ishmael sees Moby-Dick he says:

A gentle joyousness—a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his loving, leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching flectness, rippling straight for the nuptual bower in Crete; not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he do divinely swam (MD, p. 447).

Ishmael's phallic jokes, moreover, serve the purpose of associating the whale with sexual qualities. In passing he jests about the Unicorn whale, for example, that "the Earl of Leicester did . . . present to her highness another horn, pertaining to a land beast of the unicorn nature" (MD, p. 125). Ishmael evasively chuckles over the traditional practice of presenting the tail of a captured Leviathan to the queen, and recounts a matrimonial dispute in which the lady is metaphorically harpooned by both husband and lover. He wades through mythology to identify the whale with
the archetypal dragon, sea-monster, or serpent which threatens the virgin and is heroically subdued with sword or spear. Ishmael even associates his own creative act with sexuality, suggesting a unification of intellect and sensuousness in artistic expression. "For small erections," he says, "may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity" (MD, pp. 127-28).

"Stubb's Supper" is the most dramatically illustrative of the multiple meanings of the whale and the hunt for him. Stubb eats a virtually raw steak from the whale's "small," orders the black cook Fleoce (a parody of the Lamb of God) to preach a Christian sermon to the sharks, introduces the theme of the "universal cannibalism of the sea," deflates heaven to mean "our maintop," and finally dismisses the old cook after demanding "whale-balls for breakfast."

Stubb's meal is reminiscent of the Mypoee's cannibalism. he exercises control over his antagonist; he consumes the potency of his slain enemy. But commanding Fleoce to preach to the animalistic heathen places Stubb in the position of a cannibal god, as well as humanly fraternalizing him with the voracious sharks below. Fleoce says, "I'm bressed if he ain't more of shark dan Massa Shark himself . . ." (MD, p. 254). Ahab had proclaimed himself lord of the roquod as God was ruler of the earth. Stubb is likewise
defining the quest as self-endowment with divinity.

Hunting Moby-Dick, agent in residence among God's works
and thus representative of all-powerful deity, is religious
rebellion. It is significant, then, that Fleecce finally
says, "Cussed fellow-criffers! Kick up de damndest row
as ever you can; fill your dam' bellies 'till dey bust--
and den die" (MD, p. 252). Depicting a satiric god-figure
speaking thus to his carnal creations is a vicious commentary
on the human condition. Bereft of spiritual meaning,
voyaging and fishing become a participation in chaotic
savagery. Ishmael himself says, "Your true whale-hunter
is as much a savage as an Iroquois. I myself am a savage,
owning no allegiance but to the King of the Cannibals;
and ready at any moment to rebel against him" (MD, p. 232).
Ahab, then, like Stubb, is engaged in a gruesome cannibalistic
feast, devouring his fellow creature, the image of himself.
Like the whale, whose bodily parts feed the try-works
fire that boils his blubber--and about whom Ishmael reads
through whale spectacles--Ahab is actually participating
in his own destruction.

Moby-Dick is a symbol of divinity, then, as well as
a symbol of nature herself, a representative of all the
brutes who populate the world's wastelands. To Ishmael
he is the pathetic brute pointlessly tortured by Flask
in the chapter "The Pequod Meets the Virgin." "It was a
terrific, most pitiable, and maddening sight," Ishmael says (MD, p. 298). But to Ahab the whale is a wall shoved near, an embodiment of all the limitations that obstruct his realization of ultimate knowledge, the "pasteboard mask" worn by nature, the restrictions interposed between self and the ideal spiritual realm of absolutes, that is, his own mortality. The whale bears the indecipherable "hieroglyphics" also worn by Queequeg and the Typees, the untranslatable formula to a theory of earth and heaven, a "devilish tantalization of the gods" (MD, p. 399), the original but meaningless word.

In view of Ishmael's early remarks concerning Moby-Dick's ubiquity, immortality, and power, his later conclusions regarding the whale's physical structure amount to an equivocal portrait of the god who reveals Himself through His works. Ishmael's lengthy investigation indicates that the whale is faceless and inscrutable, that he is exceedingly long-lived, that his head is a "dead, blind wall," that he has no voice (cf. the deaf-mute in The Confidence-Man), that too close observation of his spout or breath "will blind you," that his phrenological development suggests that he has "no self-esteem, no veneration," (MD, p. 293) that his skull is similar to man's: "So God created man in his own image" (Gen 1:27), and that his front is "a false brow."
The whales horrifying whiteness also associates him with divinity and religion. But as Ishmael sees, that whiteness is his blankness, his badge of nothingness and ghostliness, "not the cheerful greenness of complete decay," but "the rigid pallor of an apoplexy that fixes its own distortions" (MD, p. 160). The whale's nothingness, his spirituality, combined with his physical existence, makes him the symbol of an "all deified Nature" who "absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel house within . . ." (MD, p. 170). Nature, then, represents God insofar as she is like Dovewallader Cuticle and the common man himself. She is a collection of "living, breathing pictures painted by the sun"; (MD, p. 144) and Moby-Dick's coloring is that all-color of no-color, a mask which is both an amalgam of objective appearance and a denial of any objective reality at all. Furthermore, the conferring agency of this appearance is the sun, the life-giver, the symbolic god-presence, "the great principle of light," which "for ever remains white or colorless in itself . . ." (MD, p. 170). The agent of deception is actually the agent of illumination. The glad, glorious light of the natural day Ishmael had delighted in is the colorless masquer of "the palsied universe" that "lies before us a leper . . ." (MD, p. 170).

The whale, then, is a copy of Ahab's own emptiness,
his physical and spiritual alter ego. The whale is also the picture of Ahab's mind because he is Ahab's own projection of meaning onto the universe. Moby-Dick is "the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung" (MD, p. 160). Ishmael's differing perspective on whales and the varied responses of other ships to Moby-Dick reveal Ahab's conception of him as imposed, not perceived. Ahab sees in Moby-Dick what he sees in the doubloon—his own egotistic self. Looking at the coin, Ahab says, "the firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self" (MD, p. 359).

Ahab's quest is ironically a search for identity that is a process of dehumanization, a hunt for a Narcissus image that is blank and empty. Ahab is consequently confidence man to himself, denying himself existence in the act of attaining it, believing he is spiritually questing while engaging in animalistic savagery. To his crew he offers the same fate. Queequeg, for example, is a redemptive character who becomes destructive by giving
his allegiance to Ahab. He is assigned a correspondingly fictitious and animalistic name when he joins the crew. In the ship's articles he is put down as "quohog." The other men are degraded to "tools," "painted sailors in wax," Ahab's "arms and legs." Pip, the only character who resists dehumanization, is thereby isolated. Because he can feel fear, he has the most terrifying conversion to the quest. He finally becomes lost to himself when he is forced to share Ahab's vision by confronting the emptiness of the universe. Ever afterward he searches for his missing self; he is a pathetic child-copy of Ahab. "Seek out one Pip, who's been missing long," he says, "I think he's in the far Antilles" (MD, p. 327). At the same time Pip pleads for communion with Ahab, he casts his judgment with the crew and repudiates himself. Like Ahab he is compelled to become his own destroyer while seeking for himself. "Pip?" asks the black child, "whom call ye rip? Pip jumped from the whaleboat. Pip's missing. Let's see now if ye haven't fished him up, here, fisherman. It drags hard; I guess he's holding on. Jerk him, Tahiti! Jerk him off; we haul in no cowards here. Ho! there's his arm just breaking water. A hatchet! a hatchet! cut it off—we haul in no cowards here." (MD, p. 427) Ahab finally cannot bear Pip's companionship, for the little black boy is another double who too clearly illustrates Ahab's own
fate.

But Ahab can be blamed for Pip's tragedy no more than for his own. Like Pip again, he is more victim than villain. He is surrounded by fatalities, doomed by his own character, which he did not make, and predestined by his name—in spite of the fact that "Ahab did not name himself" (MD, p. 77).

Ishmael opens the novel by mentioning "those stage managers, the Fates," (MD, p. 16) and apprehensively notes a series of portents, omens, and prophecies in New Bedford and Nantucket. Ishmael weaves away at the Fates while making a sword mat, but the call to lower for a whale makes "the ball of free will" fall from his hand. Pip jumped from the whaleboat into a process of self-alienation because "we are all in the hands of the Gods..." (MD, p. 346). Ahab is driven to ask, "Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?... By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike" (MD, p. 445). And in a final statement that denies his volition and equates him with the blank-faced whale, god, nature, and fate, Ahab says to Starbuck:

But in this matter of the whale, be the front of thy face to me as the palm of this hand—a lipless, unfeatured blank. Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant: I act under orders. Look
thou, underling! that thou obeyest mine (MD, p. 459).

Ahab is simply recognizing the fatal construction of his own character, which betrays itself. He is a creature of warring selves, "a centipede, that moves upon a hundred legs," (MD, p. 459) placed in deadly conflict with himself and his fellow beings. An unholy yoking of physical and spiritual selves makes his spiritual quest into a cannibal hunt. Like Pierre, his intended sincerity is blocked and twisted by his own nature. The terrible irony is the gratuity of the struggle; for Ahab and Moby-Dick are both cyphers, meaningless tools, masqueraders disguising individual and universal voids. Like Rodburn's Jackson, Ahab is a Christ-like victim as well as a demonic maniac. He sails on Christmas Day, wears "a crucifixion in his face" (MD, p. 111), and "sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his palms" (MD, p. 174). Every quester in Melville is in this sense a Christ figure, spirituality being destroyed by humanity, and vice versa. To respond to his cosmic predicament he can only become a non-responder like Plotinus Plinlimmon, a blank face warning of the futility of endeavor, a recognizer of universal negation.

For this reason, extracting religious meaning as Father Mapple does is ludicrous. Mapple says that man must disobey himself in order to obey God. But Ahab thinks
he has no choice in his actions. Mapple's advice is, moreover, based on the assumption that God reveals Himself through His works and the Bible. But biblical parallels prefigure Ahab's doom from the beginning. He has his lying prophet Fedallah who can only correspond to the lying prophets sent by the Hebrew God to deceive the ancient Ahab. The necessity of even the ancient Ahab to choose between authentic and inauthentic prophets, both sent by the same god, is an irony which Melville intends the reader to notice. The predicament is similar to that of the old man in The Confidence-Man who eventually puts his faith in the guidance of the cosmopolitan. For both Ahabs, the choice is apt to end, too, in a fatal decision. The reader who is not afraid to put himself in Ahab's place by making these dangerous symbolic interpretations between the spiritual and finite realms may note that Moby-Dick does act as if he is the agent of higher intelligence. All this can only point to the conclusion that God is a liar, sending lying prophets and leviathans "all magnet" to decoy His helplessly constructed creatures to their deaths. The materialist who reconciles these paradoxes by pointing out the error of assuming those correspondences between the spiritual and physical worlds is only denying the possibility of any optimistic ontological meaning. He is replacing the terror-show of fatality
with the negation of gratuity. He is rendering his condition absurd by imprisoning himself in animal domains, in the universal cannibalism of the figurative seas of life. Grasping for religious meaning in Moby-Dick (which is the only alternative the non-despairing reader has) leads to confrontation with Fleece-Jesus (con-man-Christ) saying to the sharks, "Kick up de damndest row as ever you can; fill your dam' bellies 'til dey bust—and don die" (MD, p. 252). That reader also sees Stubb characterizing the relationships between god, man, and devil by saying:

"Damn the devil, Flask; so you suppose I'm afraid of the devil? Who's afraid of him, except the old governor who daresn't catch him and put him in double-darbies, as he deserves, but lets him go about kidnapping people; aye, and signed a bond with him, that all the people the devil kidnapped, ne'd roast for him? There's a governor!" (MD, p. 277)

Ahab with the carpenter is no more promising. Ahab says, "Thou art as unprincipled as the gods, and as much of a jack-of-all-trades," to which the "man-maker" replies, "But I do not mean anything, sir. I do as I do." Ahab significantly returns, "The gods again." (MD, p. 432)

And so the unlucky quester is either like a despairing Omoo revulsed by his carnal existence or a stricken White-Jacket meditating self-murder as the only response to Captain Claret. Even in death Ahab is denied that same identity he dies in search of. His fiery spirit is
extinguished in the sea's floods of uncreated being.

Pierre is a more disturbing presentation of the themes of Moby-Dick. Pierre does not set himself against God; Pierre believes he is a "patriot to heaven" and a dissenter only from the proud hypocrisies of human society. The immobilizing discovery he makes, however, is that his supercilious righteousness is the arch hypocrisy. His attempt to escape the world of lies by acting generously is the largest lie of all. Pierre is Melville's first inland spiritual quester, he seems a social, selfless, loving man. But his selfless idealism of love is revealed as the familiar selfish idealism of carnal desire and masquerade of nobility. He typically begins with well-intended deceit and ends by destroying all he had thought to save. His quest is, as usual, for himself—for his origins (the meaning of his father, both spiritual and physical), for the realization of a knightly self, for spiritual knowledge (the mystery of Isabel and the imperviousness of his own being), for the salvation of the wronged innocent. His spirit has a horror of sexuality, but his carnal nature betrays his spirit (his marriage to Isabel is both an evasion of engagement in sensuality and a direct means to it). His avowed desire to keep his father's honor unsullied assumes from the first that that honor was not spotless. Pierre is crushed between two
worlds, by the jealous vengeance of this-worldly enemies and by inward recognition of personal motivation. Compelled at first by the spiritualist's unconscious urge to suicide, he opts out, at last, from existence with active awareness. He is paralleled by Plotinus Plinlimmon, the passive suicide who remains in stasis born of despair. Like Ahab, Pierre is also plagued by fatalities and insoluble paradoxes. His most striking portrayal is as a dream-Enceladus, struggling against a phallic mountain which significantly buries him from the waist down. A symbol of Pierre himself, the mountain is outwardly clad in flowery but sterile whiteness with an interior composed of impervious rock. Pierre, like Ahab, believes himself spiritual, but acts to capture phallic potency—and concludes with total frustration and death.

Pierre's residence in Saddle Meadows may seem the happily balanced life of a young intellectual wooing his lover in a natural arcadia. Pierre is "homo," and he is about to engage in sexual union with Lucy. But Pierre is already the incipient quester, and Saddle Meadows is both a false Eden and an other-worldly region of dreamy roveries. It is an illegitimate Eden, because it is intellectualized and romanticized by Pierre and because it is a place of feudal exploitation of the poor. Pierre on the first page of his story steps into "trancelike aspect of the
green and golden world"; he is "spiritualized by sleep,"
"touched and bewitched by the loveliness of this silence . . . ."
in his domain. He views his courtship of Lucy as
"profane," and his knightly spirit vows to her a non-carnal
love. "The audacious immortalities of divinest love are in me," he says, "and now I swear to thee all the immutable
eternities of joyfulness, that ever woman dreamed of, in
this dream-house of the earth" (Pierre, p. 36). to him
Lucy is not a lover, but a "holy angel." Pierre's spirit
really yearns not for marriage ("Marriage," he declares,
"is an impious thing!" (Pierre, p. 38)), but for a celibate
crusade of some noble form. he does not want a wife so
much as he wants a sister to defend--an opportunity to
make a knightly rescue of the virgin without having to
marry her. "On, had my father but had a daughter!" he
cries, "some one whom I might love, and protect, and fight
for, if need be. it must be a glorious thing to engage
in a mortal quarrel on a sweet sister's behalf! Now, of
all things, would to heaven, I had a sister!" (Pierre,
p. 7). Pierre's glimpse of Isabel begins in him all the
symptoms of the quest. He shuns Lucy, who is persistently
associated with light, greenness, and artistic creativity.
He begins to lie to his mother; he suffers insomnia; he

114 Herman Melville, Pierre or The Ambiguities, eds Harrison
Hayford, Herschel Parker, G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston
and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The
seeks the solitude of the forest because he associates trees with spirituality (Isabel herself is connected with the pine tree, inhabitant of cold, upland regions).

Pierre is concerned with living up to his heritage. His ancestors had acquitted themselves (at least, to Pierre's mind) bravely in warfare, and Pierre and Isabel are both repeatedly linked with martial qualities. Isabel, for example, says, "now I know that in her most exalted moment, then woman no more feels the twin-born softness of her breasts, but feels chain-armor palpitating there!" (Pierre, p. 160). Pierre carried to the city the "ancient dismemberable and portable damp-bedstead of his grandfather, the defiant defender of the Fort," and that bed to Pierre "seemed powerfully symbolical . . ." (Pierre, p. 270).

It is, indeed, the symbol of a rigorously celibate knighthood. Pierre is anxious to become the spiritual as well as physical scion of his forebears. But Pierre's family is really no more noble and spiritual than Saddle Meadows is a true Eden. His "valiant" grandfather was a portly, fleshly gentleman who killed men; his lineage is animalistically identified with their "cousins," their horses; Pierre's mother is a proud woman who defines herself in terms of worldly appearance; the spiritual pastor of Saddle Meadows is also its lady's wooer, alternately seeking her hand and her opinion. Falsgrave, as his name
suggests, is not concerned with moral rightness so much as with social contingencies and the pleasures of his lady fair. Mrs. Glendinning is especially interesting. Her "amarantiness" reveals her spirituality as disguise for materialism. She rebukes Pierre for his lack of decorum in dealing with servants. She is unduly concerned with dress; Pierre comes to believe she loves him out of pride in his handsome figure; she turns out her son because he disappoints her expectations; she kills herself because her son, in whom she realizes herself, degrades her in the eyes of the world.

Isabel means to Pierre what he means to his mother (he and his mother had also falsely named each other brother and sister). The Isabel-Pierre relationship is almost precisely similar to the Yillah-Raji relationship (except that here Melville is a little more realistic--Isabel does not vanish; Pierre only begins to recognize her physical nature as well as his own). Isabel leads Pierre to reject his past just as Raji had done when he leaped overboard from the Arcturion. Isabel is associated with spiritual mystery, with the sea, with sterility and death, and with infantile innocence. Lucy calls Isabel's face a "basilisk face," because Lucy instinctively realizes that their natures are antithetical, and that Isabel's effect on Pierre will be deadly. The irony is that Isabel is also darkly sexual.
As Barbara Blansett writes:

She represents the secret, passionate, undiscovered side of Pierre's father's life, as well as of Pierre's own life. Since she is the offspring of the father, she is representative of a side of the father's nature. As Pierre's real father becomes symbolic in his mind of the heavenly Father, so Isabel comes to symbolize to Pierre the dark, mysterious, elusive quality of human nature which although created by the Father, is denied by mankind. Isabel estranges Pierre from Lucy, who represents potential engagement in mortality; and involvement with Isabel also leads Pierre to the symbolic suicide of leaving home and burning all the sentimental relics of his past. Isabel is not entirely the guilty temptress, the spiritual absolute; she is what Pierre had been waiting for and dreaming of--the chance to develop his identity as a champion. Pierre's view of Lucy as bad angel and Isabel as good angel is ironic, for Isabel's lifelong nickname is Boll (the reader will remember Bildad warning Queequeg to "Spurn the idol Bel" (MD, p. 85)), and she brings with her her own double, Dolly Ulver, who is a sexual creature nearly killed by falsely spiritual forces.

Isabel, like the Typees, embodies in her person the mystery that Pierre wants to explore. She is that "strange" girl at the Ulvers whom "nobody knows." She

Barbara Nioveg Blansett, "From Dark to Dark': Mardi, a Foreshadowing of Pierre," Southern Quarterly, 1 (April, 1963), 221.
has no real knowledge of her mother, father, birthplace, nationality, cultural heritage, or even age. Her masses of dark hair "veil" and "muffle" her face; she is a creature of vague conjectures and bewildered dreams. She tells Pierre, for example, "Far sweeter are mysteries than surmises," and she etherealizes herself in her own haunting music, itself an expression of spiritualized enigma.

Her mystery is emphasized by her habitual environment of darkness. Pierre first sees her in the evening at the Miss Pennies'. Her messenger delivers her letter to Pierre at dusk, and he visits her at night. Later, she loves to sit with Pierre in his room at twilight. There she says to him, "Let us fancy ourselves in realms of everlasting twilight and peace, where no bright sun shall rise, because the black night is always its follower. Twilight and peace, my brother, twilight and peace!" (Pierre, p. 271).

Isabel's infantilism recalls that of the childlike types—she is the unconscious representative of the unknown, the incarnation of prelapsarian innocence. Her "infantileness" means to Pierre "that angelic childlikeness, which our Saviour hints is the one only investiture of translated souls; for of such—even of little children—is the other world" (Pierre, pp. 140-41). Isabel, indeed, desires to be other-worldly. Her infantilism is her compulsion to return to the womb, to escape consciousness, just as her
yearning for peace is a death wish, a desire for the oblivious stasis of death. She tells Pierre:

I pray for peace—for motionlessness—for the feeling of myself, as of some plant, absorbing life without seeking it, and existing without individual sensation. I feel that there can be no perfect peace in individualness. Therefore, I hope one day to feel myself drank up into the pervading spirit animating all things. I feel I am an exile here. (Pierre, p. 119)

Like Yillah and Tommo she longs to return to the primordial womb of the sea. Taken by Pierre on an outing to the seashore, she recognizes the rocking of the waves as the death-cradling she needs. "Bell must go through there!" she cries, "Sea! see" out there upon the blue! yonder, yonder! far away—out, out!—far, far away, and away, and away, out there! where the two blues meet, and are nothing—Bell must go!" (Pierre, p. 355).

Pierre's choice of Isabel as wife is his succumbing to the same allure that Ahab sees in Moby-Dick. Moby-Dick is a symbol of blankness and silence which is "all magnet" to Ahab. Isabel's home is near a lake which in its "blankness and dumbness" is Isabel's image. To Pierre Isabel seems "to swim in an electric fluid; the vivid buckler of her brow seemed as a magnetic plate. Now first this night was Pierre made aware of what, in the superstitiousness of his rapt enthusiasm, he could not help believing was an extraordinary physical magnetism in
Isabel" (Pierre, p. 151).

Pierre's pursuit of Isabel, like Ahab's of the whale, is the result of an attribution of meaning where none exists. By recognizing Isabel as a sister, Pierre is assigning a meaning to her, to his father, to his own destiny. And that act has all the marks of the act of a confidence man. Pierre is assuming the mask of nobility, attempting to validate Isabel's mask of absolute ideality, and placing a mask of dishonor on his father. So Pierre is really an egotistic spiritual rebel like Ahab, endowing himself with the role of righting the evils of the world. But the confidence man in Melville is ultimately a deceiver of himself. Pierre begins for himself a future of sterility, futility, and suicide. He is attempting to confer righteousness upon himself and to destroy in himself the bonds of the imperfect, fallen world. And he destroys them by actually annihilating that world and himself. He lies, kills, and breaks himself with frustration. His unraveling of mystery turns out to be a self-crushing assault against cold, deathly stone— the symbol of his own and his world's impenetrability.

Pierre's move to the city is an exchange of a false arcadia for a real tomb. There he is greeted by hard, jolting stones which serve as a metaphor for the hearts of the city's inhabitants. He dwells at the Apostles, a stone structure whose spiritual uses have passed from
those of religion to those of more secular idealisms. The Apostles is a place of mentalized occupations, of punishment of the body, of the crazed efforts of would-be saviors. And the non-existence or nothingness of the ideal worlds pursued there is matched by the emptiness and storility of the environment. Pierre has a bare room whose only window views the blankness of another wall; he expresses his repudiation of historical life by ignoring the holidays and merriments of men. In his room he makes enormous efforts with his mind and spirit in the interest of expressing an ideal Truth. But his Christlike endeavors are based on lies to his mother, Lucy, and the public world of men. His work is interrupted by the death of his mother, the news of his lost heritage in this world (that is, the loss of all hope of "home and mother"), and the arrival of Lucy—about whom he lies to Isabel. Lucy's transformation is similar to Pip's. Her sickness is her threshold to idealism, her conversion to Pierre's vision. She becomes to Pierre what he is to Isabel. She writes Pierre praising his "superhuman, angelical strength," and indicating her faith in his "mysterious, and ever-sacred being" (Pierre, p. 309). She says her illness caught her up in a "vacancy," "an utter blank"; it prepared her for "the superhuman office" of joining Pierre by "wholly ostranging [her] from this earth . . ." (Pierre, p. 310).
She arrives at Pierre's apartment "a slight, airy, almost unearthly figure," (Pierre, p. 325) and inhabits a cold, bare room. She is a new figure of unalterable, pale devotion to "celestial mission." Isabel, at first frightened of her, is at length brought to fall down before her in an attitude of worship, a recognition of Lucy's thoroughly dehumanized spirituality. Pierre writes his idealism; Lucy paints hers. Pierre is shocked to discover that the secret painting she toils over is a portrait of himself "in the skeleton."

Lucy's avengers are hateful responders to this world's concern with appearance, the worldly creatures who give Pierre the right name, the one he can least bear to hear, that of "liar." Glen Stanly and Frederick are the unpleasantly correct expressers of a morality that blames Pierre for what has happened to Lucy. Their justice exterminates the Christ figure (as Vore's does), but it is the only possible justice in a world where idealism is hopelessly unconstructive—as Plotinus Plinlimmon understands. Plinlimmon has written a pamphlet espousing hypocrisy as the only mode of survival, and he gazes down into Pierre's window, himself a counterpart of the wall's blankness, with a face that dispassionately pretends the uselessness of Pierre's effort. Pierre has his choice between visions: his own destructive one, the ignorant and selfish involve-
mont with the customs and artificialities embodied by
Glen and Frederick, or Plinlimmon's enlightened stasis--a
nonbenevolence born of knowledge. Pierrre learns by experi­
ence what Plinlimmon's pamphlet had failed to persuade
him to. The pamphlet was resting in his coat lining all
the while; he was ironically already possessed of the
knowledge he fought so hard to resist accepting, the
knowledge that left him with no alternative but to be a
Plinlimmon or drink poison. Glen and Frederick call
Pierrre a liar; his publishers express a similar opinion;
and Pierrre is a liar. He is trying to play a role which
is false; he is trying to persuade the world of a truth
which exists only in his dreams. Pierrre is one of the
most unfortunate of Melville's questers; he learns to see
the error of his ways—that is, he is brought to recognize
his own falsity and the emptiness of the universe he had
exulted in exploring. His view of two portraits in a
gallery confronts him with his nature as parricidal and
incostuous—and the dubiousness of the meaning he has
based his future on. He is finally crushed by his recogni­
tion of the stony imperviousness of life's secrets—of
the unattainability of meanings illustrative of virtue
and hope.

Isabel had spent her earliest days in a house with
cracked hearthstones; and, yearning for communion, she
had "sat down on a stone" whose "coldness went up to her heart" (Pierre, p. 116). Pierre's situation is the same. Intrigued with his Memnon Stone, another object of ancient mystery, he had implored it to crush him if his actions were wrongly directed. And eventually that "Terror Stone" does.

Plinlimmon's pamphlet had warned against trying to get "a Voice out of Silence" like "water out of a stone" (Pierre, p. 206). Pierre's residence in the stone-walled old church prefigures the stone mountain of his dream and stony ceiling of his prison cell which "almost rested on his brow." Even Pierre's name means "stone," but the associations with the stone on which the Christian church is founded are ironic. As earlier he had addressed the Memnon Stone, Pierre cries out to the walls of his chamber:

> if to follow Virtue to her uttermost vista, where common souls never go; if by that I take hold on hell, and the uttermost virtue, after all, prove but a betraying pandor to the monstrousest vice,—then close in and crush me, ye stony walls, and into one gulf let all things tumble together. (Pierre, p. 273)

But only a moment later he torturously says to Isabel,

"Look: a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow one way, and another the other way; and these two shadows cast from one nothing; these, seems to me, are Virtue and Vice" (Pierre, p. 274). "It is the law," he says, "That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am a nothing. It is all a dream—we dream that we dreamed we dream"
(Pierre, p. 274). As in The Confidence-Man, to "see through the first superficiality of the world" leads to the recognition that "it is found to consist of nothing but surface stratified on surface" (Pierre, p. 285).

Pierre's fate is just that—a fate, an inescapable predestination like Ahab's. The sardonic narrator who cynically illuminates Pierre's life, the narrator speaks of "the demon Principle" and "Fortune's knight" who is "alike ignorant of the palaces or Pitfalls" (Pierre, p. 175) serves both to distance the tragedy and reveal the fatalities. Our story teller keeps up a stream of remarks such as "we shall see if Fate hath not just a little bit of a small word or two to say in this world," (Pierre, p. 12) "Pierre felt the irresistible admonitions and intuitions of Fate," (Pierre, p. 62; and "Eternally inexorable and unconcerned is Fate, a more heartless trader in men's joys and woes" (Pierre, p. 105). And Pierre's Fate is like Ahab's innate character which implacably unfolds itself. Pierre "curses Fate; himself he curses; his senseless madness, which is himself" (Pierre, p. 181).

The narrator does not permit the reader to sympathize so painfully with Pierre as he can with Ahab. Pierre's absurdity is the absurdity of the human condition; the distance of narrative superior is increased to make the novel tolerable. Hence Pierre's ludicrous language
and cloying sentimentality. Pierre's case is hopeless; the laughter or cynicism is the only response that permits survival for the reader.

**Pierre is a figure whose painful moments of illumination are unrepeated in either *Israel Potter* or *The Confidence-Man*.** Except for the confidence man himself, Melville's remaining characters are unconscious slaves to a life of required masquerade. *Israel Potter* is a new figure who tries to survive alternately as idealist and materialist. In both attempts he is compelled to be a confidence man and in neither can he attain the slightest trace of happiness or knowledge. The novelette brings the con man theme to a new level of nihilistic expression, a development made all the more terrifying by *Israel Potter*'s pretense to historical accuracy. Here the main character is chiefly occupied with flight, incarceration, disguise, deprivation, and concealment as essentials to survival. He is a figure both real and archetypal: Israel slaving in the brickyards of Egypt and wandering in the deserts of sterility; the American patriot sacrificing his own welfare to further the cause of freedom. But he never reaches either the promised land or the tomorrows of democracy. He is compelled to be lifelong confidence man, running, hiding, changing disguises—and he is forgotten by both his God and his country. His unchosen sacrificial scapegoatism brings
him only an ironic, meaningless resurrection into a life of more desperate and more deluded role-playing and alienation. His illusions concerning the Canaan beyond the sea are balanced, complemented, and perhaps caused, by the dreariness of his attempts to engage in a relationship to the natural world—by his marriage and fatherhood. Empty, dead dreams are produced by eleven unnatural burials of eleven natural children of his body. Israel, with the Benjamin of his old age, at last manages to reach his "home" only to find that his name is unknown, all traces of his origins and heritage have vanished, and no reward is attainable. His life of disguise ends in the no-name nothingness of the unrecognized, undesired, and dispossessed. If the political authority here is inaccessible and unjust, the spiritual powers are suggested to be both unresponsive to need or merit and cruelly delusory.

From the beginning of the novel Israel Potter proceeds over successive thresholds to more and more outlandish role-playing and less and less choice about it—to more and more illusions of grandeur and less and less humanity. As his history commences, he is depicted attempting immersion in earthly cycles and reproductions; he wants to marry. But neither Israel's name nor his birthplace, the lonely wilds of the Berkshires, are very promising portents for his future. His father despotically forbids the match,
and the girl herself seems "mysteriously withheld." Israel responds by leaving home, by making himself an exile. In his new place his first employer proves "false to his contract," and Israel retreats farther into wastelands comparable to Ishmael's ocean. Israel becomes a wild, beastlike man, a creature of economic plots and roles. Although his business success enables him to return to the home he really yearns for, Israel is again met by a tyrant father and a refusing lover. Inevitably drawn by the sea, he experiences "to the extreme all the hardships and privations of the whaleman's life on a long voyage to distant and barbarous waters . . ." (IP, p. 12).

Israel Potter is a narrative depicting a man's constantly thwarted attempts to live close to the soil, to escape the idealist's suicide. The post-voyage Israel settles down to farming, but is immediately called by duty to war. The exigencies of warfare send Israel back to sea, "little as he fancied the new service" (IP, p. 16). Soon captured by the enemy, he becomes a prisoner of war—and henceforth is entirely and desperately involved in hiding and disguising himself. A time of enforced suspicion of others and adept masquerade at last leads him to a political sympathizer. Israel, however, is only briefly harbored before being transformed into a spy, a new role which is itself a function of role-playing.

As first a spy and later a disguised British sailor, Israel meets one confidence man after another, both savage idealists and crafty materialists. Ben Franklin, Paul Jones, Ethan Allen, and the multitude of betrayers and knaves who populate the novel explicitly introduce Israel to a world where metamorphosis is the first law.

In Paris Israel flies from the clutches of a suspiciously inquisitive bootblack to the chambers of Ben Franklin. There the good doctor wears a garment "like a conjurer's robe" (IP, p. 49), resides in a room that has "a necromantic look," and like Moby-Dick greets his guest "not with his face" but with his back. Franklin is a masquerader suggestively like the god who showed his "back parts" to Moses. Franklin had "weighed the world" and "could act any part in it." He is "Jack of all trades, master of each and mastered by none—the type and genius of his land" (IP, p. 62). Franklin is both poor Richard and suave man-about-town. He wears a luxurious robe, a lady's present, but he refuses Israel any comforts for his body. As oily a confidence man and god figure as could be imagined, Franklin presents Israel with Way to Wealth and Guide to Paris. But, like the heavenly guide book and Nedburn's guide book, these works are useless to Israel, for he is poor, and he is Franklin's prisoner.

Paul Jones is an idealistic quester reminiscent of Israel. He is described with imagery of savagery, he
wants to command the Indian, he is sleepless, he prefers not to share a bed, and he dreams of glory. Paul Jones' "Indian" nature easily assumes the mask of glamorous lady's man and gentlemanly Robin Hood. He charms the Chambermaid as easily as the Countess of Selkirk. Jones fights, too, like a confidence man, gliding in and out of ports "like an invisible ghost," (IP, p. 131; showing a false flag or none at all. His ghostly craft and flagless mast are simply duplications of the blankness and emptiness which characterize all Melville's idealists. And he meets a fitting fate; he is betrayed by his friends, confidence men of more materialistic orientation.

After Israel makes a solitary boarding of an enemy vessel and is sailed away with, he must assume the part of a British sailor. And during the ship's stay in a port, disguised Israel meets Ethan Allen, a patriot, an idealist, a vicious animalistic masquerader. Ethan Allen is a "tormented lion" viewed by an audience he calls "dogs"; he is "outlandishly arrayed in the sorry remains of a half-Indian, half-Canadian sort of dress"; his "whole marred aspect was that of some beast; but of a royal sort, and unsubdued by the cage" (IP, p. 191). Like old Ushant, he braids his beard, and like Paul Jones, has a soft spot for ladies. He determinedly remains a rebel, and "by assuming the part" (IP, p. 200) that will most protect him,
manages to maintain his unregenerate idealism. Like Paul Jones, like Ahab, like Pierre, he is carnal man indulging himself in a crusade.

Midway in his history Israel finds concealment and suffers entombment in a hidden closet in the manor of Squire Woodcock. There Israel is "buried alive" while his host is claimed by real death and burial. Israel's stay in a stone cell once used for punishing the misdemeanors of a monkish society serves its traditional purpose. It annihilates his carnal cravings and spiritualizes him into an idealist deadly both to himself and others. His resurrection is thus initiation into a new kind of life while at the same time a ironically meaningless birth into suicidal destiny. Israel must become a ghost to escape, and that disguise is a symbolically true one that he wears to his grave. His subsequent efforts as rebel are characterized by a new intensity. He is for the first time pictured killing another man. He declares he hates the British "like snakes," and he becomes so skillful at exterminating them that Paul Jones admiringly calls him "my yellow lion." Israel becomes more daring in masquerade; he cons a citizen of Whitehaven into lending the fire intended for burning down his own city.

Israel's inflexible patriotism seems more and more ridiculous as the novel unfolds. It is, in view of his
ontological condition, a dangerous complication, a luxurious indulgence he cannot afford. Alone in England he had experienced the terrible difficulties of surviving even on a subsistence level. Aboard the Ben Homme Richard he is involved in the results of idealistic commitment. Here the treachery of the Serapis effects the sea-battle that is an emblematic delineation of the body-soul conflict which annihilates the quester. The mutual destruction of the two ships "seemed more an intestine feud, than a fight between strangers. Or, rather, it was as if the Siamese Twins, oblivious of their fraternal bond, should rage in unnatural fight" (IP, p. 165). The "scene" is "witnessed by crowds" of viewers in a dim twilight. The presence of other-worldly Power is suggested by the narrator's conception of the "Man-in-the-Moon." The story teller says:

Through this sardonical mist, the face of the Man-in-the-Moon--looking right toward the combatants, as if he were standing in a trap-door of the sea, leaning forward leisurely with his arms complacently folded over upon the edge of the horizon--this queer face wore a serious, spishly self-satisfied leer, as if the Man-in-the-Moon had somehow secretly put up the ships to their contest and in the depths of his malignant old soul was not displeased to see how well his charms worked. There stood the grinning Man-in-the-Moon, his head just dodging into view over the rim of the sea:--Mephistopheles prompter of the stage (IP, pp. 162-63).
The theological implications of Israel Potter are no more pleasant than those of The Confidence-Man, but really no different from those of Moby-Dick. The author of Israel's circumstances and Ahab's character is consistent with the figure of Fleece perversely abandoning the sharks to their cannibalistic depredations upon the whale, each other, and even themselves. The Serapis-Richard incident with its accompanying picture of spiritual audience is merely a more vivid representation than any yet seen. Other obvious references to the deity are equally impious. Israel enacts the Hebrew god in the clay pits of a brickyard. There he seemed "some gravedigger, or churchyard man, tucking away dead little innocents in their coffins on one side, and cunningly disinterring them again into resurrectionists stationed on the other" (IP, p. 205). He is "carefree and negligent, with bitter unconcern," not pausing to consider whether "this recklessness were vicious . . . ." (IP, p. 206).

Israel toils in the Egypt of a brickyard; slaves at odd jobs for a pittance; learns to live with death, vice, and poverty. His heart leads him to marry and beget children. But marriage and fatherhood do not redeem Israel any more than his three-day entombment had. They do retard his progress to his promised land, but they do not cure him of his dreams. In his dreams he finds the exciting role-playing which replaces that which he had had
during the war. His fatherhood, an enforced and repeated involvement in death, drives him farther and farther into the solace of his illusions. Unlike Ishmael, Israel is not saved by his recognition of mortality. He is so horrified by it that he retreats into "a sort of hallucination" (IP, p. 217).

Israel is the one Melville voyager who does get "home." But his entrance into the visionary realm is an event more harrowing than the suicides of the other questers. Israel had sought an earthly home; he had seemed rightly oriented. Yet he is never permitted the earthly, simple life he wants, never allowed to return to the birthplace he had left. His homeland beyond the sea proves to be a vacant, meaningless reality where a true identity does not await him. He is not recognized and not rewarded. He reaches his native land only to find he is more a stranger there than in the land of the enemy. This is the horrifying presentation of the heavenly places patiently expected by all idealists, including the Christian ones.

After experiencing the stunning heaven finally won by Israel Potter, the reader may find the circumscribed domain of the Fidèle not unpleasant. It is at least true to the this-worldly deadends that reward Melville's earlier protagonists. By the time of The Confidence-Man the framework of the quest has become superfluous. Here
Melville presents not an idealist who is consequently a liar, but an archliar who is consequently a fiendish idealist. The failure of the search for identity which had made the other novels tragic is here replaced with a plain delineation of metamorphosis as controlling theme.

Tragedy gives way to irony. The dream world of an ideal self becomes the nightmare world of grinning falsefaces. Impassioned outbursts are succeeded by slick salestalk. Depiction of inscrutability and mystery is surpassed by a glimpse into the void. The Confidence-Man is not only a pessimistic, but an intolerably sardonic perspective on human, spiritual and objective realities. It is the last possible vision of them; because it denies them all, and leaves the writer nothing to represent.
CONCLUSION
The con man has been discussed here as an anti-christ figure, a representative of mankind, a satire upon the biblical Christ, and a nemesis for hopeful philosophical commitment. As all of these, he is a kind of devil's advocate to the real Christ, in his own way a sort of salutary evangelist precisely because of his falsity. For in Melville genuine Christ figures, sincere Christians, or practicing ethical idealists in general are profoundly destructive. The confidence man may effect financial swindles; but his victims are much less pitiable than China Aster, Pierre, Ahab, or even the Jackson of Redburn. If the con man operates to disillusion his fellow men, perhaps he is not doing them a disservice. He is an attractive figure, too, because he is in a strange sense an honest man. He preaches a more direct expression of what Pierre and Ahab really believe in--themselves.

Idealism or belief in spiritual absolutes has here been treated as a form of demonism. It is ironically in strict accordance with Melville's thread of metamorphosis--theme that the sincere idealist and the devilish trickster should ultimately switch roles, the one effecting falsification, murder, and suicide, and the other effecting a sardonic but saving schooling in worldly knowledge. Pierre and Ahab are the most obvious examples of the quester-idealists.
saturizes in the more conscious figure of the con man. Pierre believes he is a "patriot to heaven," an outlaw only from the hypocrisies of organized society. He places his alternatives in the light of a choice between Lucy and heaven. And in what seems to him a Christlike effort of self-denial (but what finally appears as a weak self-indulgence of his inclination toward crusading and an unconscious grasping for his darkly sexual Isabel) he chooses heaven. His results are a collapsible personal realm built of lies, the responsibility for the deaths of at least four loved ones, self-immolation, and a recognition that his ideals were mere shadows and cyphers, totally unproductive of good.

Ahab is more straightforward about his spiritual orientation. He is for man and against heaven; but he is assuming, nevertheless, the existence of a spiritual realm. He is acting on a kind of antagonistic faith, and that faith makes him as destructive as Pierre. Both lose themselves in the act of asserting themselves—rather than finding themselves by losing themselves, as the Bible recommends.

The con man offers a faith in mankind. His ardent speeches are a satire of the optimistic philosophical orientation of his day. But perhaps he is also a realist. For in the novel we can see no other, higher force in
which to trust; nor can we really find such a force in the earlier novels. Pierre's faith led him to nihilism, and Ahab's to death. Pierre and Ahab cannot find any spiritual realities, least of all their own psychic being. The con man, then, is not only an antagonist and satirist of Pierre, but also a double for Pierre. Actually, both Pierre and the con man begin and end at the same points: with faith in man (that is, themselves) and at despair, nothingness, a deadend. What the con man offers is a loss costly disillusionment and a more direct expression of self.

In this manner the ultimate and most oily shape-shifter is a more blatant and less self-deceived idealist-questor. He makes no bones about putting himself first; and he sees that the spiritual kingdom is a product and assertion of the finite self. Pierre, Tommo, Tajia and the others were imposing a structure of existential meaning where none existed. They were making correspondences between a finite world inhabited by men and a nebulous region existing only in their own imaginations. Their real quest was for themselves, because assertion of the existence of the spiritual absolute was only a means to self-validation. They were believing in the con man's religion of self.

Jackson is another convenient example of the demonic
Christ figure. He lived a code, and he inflicted misery upon himself and others for the code's sake. The deliverance of the crew was accomplished by his annihilation, not by any resurrection. His spiritualism, like Pierre's and Ahab's, was ultimately satanic. China Aster's case also suggests that acting according to spiritual intimations or strict codes, whether ethical or social, is outwardly and inwardly destructive. Thus Taji and his cohorts reveal themselves as con men not only because they have fictitious names and assumed roles, but because they duplicate the con man's function as anti-Christ. By assuming spiritual realities they end with spiritual despair; practicing belief undermines the foundation of faith.

All this leaves man trapped inside himself with no livable alternative except the con man's cajoling "trust me." And man's own unpredictability and changeability make him into his own sideshow and his own void into which he does not disappear, because he is not even real enough to disappear. He is already the invisible man supplied with an infinity of costumes with which to clothe and give material extension to his transparent formlessness.
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