

Tribhuvan University

Critiquing the American Values in Herman Melville's *The Confidence-*

Man: His Masquerade

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by

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Abstract

Herman Melville's *Confident-Man: His Masquerade* presents the 19th century American society, where dacoits flourished in the name of service, kindness, religion and charity. The religious and transcendental ideals are devoid of essence, motive and compassion. All these have caused further discrimination as well as the marginalization of the African American community and the Native American community. Melville makes a satire on the American society through irony in order to lead the American society towards righteousness and humanity from the prevailing fraud activities under the cloak of optimism, kindness and charity.

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I. Difference between Appearance and Reality in *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*

Harmon Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857) presents the American social life of the mid nineteenth century. It presents the American values with ironic dictum. Though Melville portrays the characters as deaf, mute and crippled, they try to be benevolent just to cheat the credulous people. They appear to be more optimistic, but in reality they are guided by excuses for achieving practical charity and business. They are guided by spiritual blindness in their pursuit of material assumption. So, this study seeks to argue how and why the differences lie between their actions and practice. Thus, depicting such discrepancy between the American pretension of being superb and benevolent and their core motive of deception in reality, Melville mocks and makes a bitter irony on the American values and thus he intends to direct them to right and good path.

In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville ironically wreaks havoc on two major targets, nineteenth-century optimism and liberal theology. The novel's title refers to its central character, an ambiguous figure, who sneaks aboard a Mississippi steamboat on April Fool's Day. This stranger attempts to test the confidence of the passengers, whose varied reactions constitute the most of the text. In this work, Melville illustrates the human masquerade. The reader is forced to confront that in which he places his trust. *The Confidence-Man* uses the Mississippi River as a metaphor for those broader aspects American and human identity that unify the otherwise disparate characters. Melville also employs the river's fluidity as a reflection and backdrop of the shifting identities of his 'confidence man.'

The novel is written as cultural satire, allegory, and metaphysical treatise, dealing with themes of sincerity, morality, religiosity, economic materialism, irony and cynicism. Many critics have placed *The Confidence-Man* alongside Melville's *Moby-Dick* and "Bartleby, the Scrivener" as a precursor to 20th-century literary preoccupations with nihilism, existentialism, and absurdism. Melville's choice to set the novel on April Fools Day underlines the work's satirical nature and potentially reflects Melville's worldview, once expressed in a letter to his friend Samuel Savage:

It is--or seems to be--a wise sort of thing, to realize that all that happens to a man in this life is only by way of joke, especially his misfortunes, if he has them. And it is also worth bearing in mind, that the joke is passed round pretty liberally and impartially, so that not very many are entitled to fancy that they in particular are getting the worst of it. (12)

The Confidence-Man, published on the eve of the American Civil War, caused uproar. Perhaps Americans saw the novel as inappropriate, or even an insult to the unsettling issues the nation was then confronting, a swift and satirical discourse on a variety of moral and political concerns, the novel was an oddly structured comic allegory. Melville introduces characters who change identities so rapidly that the reader is confronted with a portrait of the American frontier as perceived through a series of disguises. The novel operates on many levels, with Melville playing clever games with both fact and fiction.

Although *The Confidence-Man* played a significant role in European history, it would ultimately take a stronger hold on the American imagination. As Stephen Matterson claims, "There is actually a peculiarly American delight in confidence tricksters, on the novel. In part such affection has to do with America's emphasis on and admiration for individual enterprise and ingenuity, which are considered notably

'Yankee qualities'" (qtd. in *Courier* 15). Since he flourishes best in a country where it is natural to trust people, he goes against the grain of liberal pieties that if we trust men, they'll naturally be true to us. The role of 'confidence man' as played out in Melville's book is much more adversarial.

The Confidence man is blind, flab, and hypocritical. Richard Chase argues that this elusive, eponymous figure is "the inveterate understrapper of the wicked man. You may be used for wrong, but you are useless for right" (54). "Surely," Chase continues, drawing a parallel between the Confidence Man and the fellow traveler, "these words strike as surrender its responsibility because so many of its proponents have become 'understrappers' to Soviet foreign policy and the American Communist Party" (207). Chase further elaborates:

If the 'Confidence Man as false' Prometheus corresponds to the popular-Front liberal, the other false Prometheus, in all his single-minded fury and apocalyptic grandeur, resembles the Third period Communist. The true Prometheus, of course is the anti-Communist liberal. What Chase has done in this study is to recast the Melvillian canon in terms of the Cold War "crisis" in liberalism: Ishmael/America may disastrously choose either of his false fathers on the political left, Ahab/Stalin or the Confidence Man/macabre Henry Wallace; on the other hand, he may be wise enough to embrace his true father, the Handsome sailor, who bears a striking resemblance to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr: sans bowtie and glasses. (16)

Chase implies that the New York Intellectuals were in a unique position to appreciate Melville. The progressive, "Christian" school represented by Matthiessen was blind to the fact that Melville was a critic of progressive liberalism, while the New Critics,

“who have not subscribed to the progressive doctrines,” have largely ignored him (ix). Matthiessen is cited only twice in the index, but Chase’s study is clearly a rebuttal to Matthiessen’s interpretation of Melville in American Renaissance. In order to deflate what he takes to be the piety and solemnity of Matthiessen’s religious approach, Chase turned, ironically enough, to another progressive Americanist, Constance Roarke, and approach, Chase turned, ironically enough, to another progressive Americanist, Constance Roarke, and approached *Moby-Dick* as a comedy rather than a tragedy: “Melville, we must remember was a humorous writer as well as a lyric and epic writer” (67). Chase discovers cultural issues in the folkloric popular traditions in *Moby-Dick*. He adds:

The former were colossal hoaxes, dressed up in pseudo-scientific and didactic trappings, pulled on a cooperating public; similarly, *Moby-Dick* was a literary-scientific extravaganza, a whale hunt in the tradition of the tall tale. Its narrator, Ishmael, was a highbrow relative to Sam Slick, the Yankee peddler, but he was also a blank mask, elusive and impersonal, like the typical yarn spinner. Ahab, too, is something of a two-dimensional comic figure since his overweening boasting and colossal rage have affinities to the screamer and ring-tailed roarer. (96)

In many respects, *The Confidence-Man* presents a seemingly mysterious puzzle. Exactly how much one is able to understand of the structural and thematic complexities of *The Confidence-Man* depends upon both the particular critical presumptions which he brings to the work as well as his familiarity with the background and critical debate regarding it. At present, no one has discovered any single approach that has resulted in a 'definitive reading' of the work. Instead, the variety of critical approaches to *The Confidence Man* is more often contradictory than complementary, a situation which has

resulted in the absence of critical consensus concerning either the structure or the meaning of the book. One of the approaches most prevalent among critics of *The Confidence Man* is to view the work as “an allegory which traces the progression from the ideal Christian charity and brotherhood, to Emersonian individualism and the extinction of the Christianity” (Jones 194). From this perspective, *The Confidence Man* in the all of guise represents the primal force of evil in the universe, and the book itself comes to imply the myth of the devil’s temptation of man. Other critics, such as Newton Arvin and Edger Dryden, stress what they view as

the pervasive sense of nihilism and pessimism in the confidence man
Leon Selzer and Richard Hauck, on the other hand ,are two critics who explore, through an application of Albur Camus’ existentialistic theories, Melville’s metaphysical and epistemological concern with man’s situation in and absurd universe. In the vain, Elaine Barry traces the 'changing face' of Melville's comedy and compares the dark comedy of *The Confidence Men* to twentieth century concepts of the 'Theatre of Absurd.' (qtd in Jones 194)

Finally, there are those critics, who are struck most by the recognition of the modernity of 'confidence men' and who examine the book in light of its resemblance to modern and contemporary literature. Perhaps foremost among these is R.W.B. Lewis, who feels the necessity of defining a new genre for this complex book and its literary descendants:

It [*The Confidence-Man*] is the recognizable and awe-inspiring ancestor of several subsequent works of the fiction in America: Mark Twain’s . . . *The Mysterious Stranger* . . . Nathalian West’s *The Day of the Locust*, Fouckner’s *The Hamlet*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, John Barth’s

Sot-Weed Factor, Thomas Pynchon's *V. Melville* bequeathed of the works . . . the vision of the apocalypse that is no less terrible for being enormously comic, the self extinction of the world characterized by deceit and thronging with imposters and masqueraders, and the image of the supreme temper . . . on the prowl through that world, assisting it toward its promised end. (190)

Lewis continues asserting that *The Confidence-Man*, along with these books and others, represents the 'continuing antiface' of the American dream, the continuing imagination of national and even universal disaster that has accompanied the bright expectancy of the millennium. The wide divergence of critical opinion outlined above, however only serves to emphasize the seeming inaccessibility of the work, although they tend to illuminate only portraits of this perplexing book. However, Dale Jones reads *The Confidence-Man* as the darkest comedy in the American literature as "comic apocalypse" (195). All this suggests the possibility of another critical avenue from which to approach this work. In this respect, the pervasive sense of absurdity, structural ambiguity, demonic comedy and purposeful inconsistency in characterization in *The Confidence-Man* ironizes the prevailing American socio-cultural values in the mid nineteenth century America.

Although above mentioned critics have examined grotesque, puzzle and comic elements in *The Confidence-Man*, they have not analyzed the novel from the perspective of irony, which the present research seeks to do. So, as it depicts discrepancy between the American's fake pretension of being superb and benevolence and their core motive of deception in reality, and thus illustrates how Melville mocks and ironizes American values so as to direct them to the right path.

The research aims to put irony in conversation with appearance and reality of Melville's discourse in *The Confidence-Man*. This research involves social correctness of irony in the mid-nineteenth century American society, when America was implementing the exclusive policy. It is about the social imbalance of America, where Melville wants balancing through his characters but to some extent he hides his intention. The notion of irony lets us see how the novel criticizes the American transcendentalism. It also presents the pre-civil war mentality of the white puritans who have not totally accepted the multicultural identity. The insights about irony derived from the critics like Linda Hutchison, D.C. Muecke, Paul de Man and Edmund L. Wright's have been used to analyze Melville's *The Confidence-Man*, as the novel ironizes the nineteenth century pre-civil war spectrum. Linda Hutchison says that

[by] 'function' here, I mean what I can only rather awkwardly express as inferred operative motivation: inferred because irony is not necessarily a matter of intention or implication (though it may be both) and because I want to put the emphasis on the interpreter as much as on the ironist; operative because I want to look at how irony "works"; motivation in the straightforward sense of a purposeful attitude toward the act of ironizing.
(220)

Irony has motives either intentional or implication or though it may be both. But it is socially applied discourse either verbal or written. It functions with interrelated ideas. It aims to reject the social stereotype and ironized for improving through social works. Motivation is the key words of society and discourse for progressing as well better human life which takes social forwardness is the one of the purposes of irony. Further, Hutcheon claims it may differ according to stage (world) actor (irony) and audience (social values and norms):

My premise is a simple one: that different attitudes generate different reason for seeing (interpreting) irony or using (encoding) it, and that the lack of distinction between these different functions is one of the causes of the confusion and disagreement about the appropriateness and even the value of the trope. It may well be true, as Henri Morier argues, that the range of irony depends on the ironist's temperament –from oppositional to conciliatory – but it seems to me that it takes two to ironize (even if ironists are the only ones to get their own ironies). (220)

So, the function not only depends upon social behaviours but as well as depends upon cultural interpretation of the irony than only what resulted would be outcome. Encoding which lays at irony applied by the motivator and its decoding functions on the society but what is function and resulted depends upon using as well as provoking the interpretation of irony. Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* is about the stereotypical pre-civil war society where puritan, post-Napoleon doctrine ruled, where society are one sided. Melville's main character in novel presents the social values of America which was looking as if good but intentions are vice versa caused irony which brings the social change issue from encoding as well as decoding preferring interpretation method.

It represents the ideas about the exclusiveness of society which cause fraud, deception, inhumanity, and fake and naiveté possession of spirituality and acting co-ordinates of characters. In the novel, Melville's characters are deaf-mute and cripple, which reflect the society of that time. Thus, the entire intent of crippling society shown in Melville's *The Confidence-Man* was motive to change the society as Patricia Waugh notes that the novel "provides the characters with escape routes from the endless

permutations of system which might continually change their surface forms but which retains their inherent structures" (47).

The nineteenth century American society is as ridiculous, one-sided, exclusive and rooted in the naïveté ideas as well as functions as presented in *The Confidence-Man*. Melville's idea about hiding truth is the synonymous function of mid-nineteenth century American society. They are naïve, corrupt and hypocritical.

Melville's *The Confidence-Man* provokes not only single phenomenon of society rather it opens the Pandora's Box of American hypocritical world. It represents negative ideas of character, vivid portrayal of society, improper and imbalanced characterization, cunning behaviours of socially and physically disabled people. Inadequacy rules over the name of stereotypical hypocrisy. So, Melville uses the soft irony to improve the society as David Worcester takes irony as "a manner worn as a protective garment by a dissociated and neurotic personality" to correct the anomalies in society (107). He further adds, "No condemnation is intended. To the extent that the modern world has destroyed our sources of sublimation and reduced us all to dissociated personalities, we are happy to grasp at irony in order to preserve our sanity" (107). Thus, Melville uses the irony for the sake of American society. Irony is the guard of values and ethos which is practiced by writer to protect from naïve hypocrisy of existing society. It preserves the human sanity as well as makes the society healthy.

The Confidence-Man portrays the American multicultural melting pot embryo among American puritan European as well as the Afro-American. It was the time of Europeanization in America where natives were processed in Christianization and the Negro slaves were hunting for their freedom from the South. The whole story setting also ironizes the American values. Mississippi, Missouri and Kentucky delta are the place of aborigine but later it gets by the puritans for their pervasive motto of America.

So, The American contemporary society at that time led to the Liberalization of economics but it heavily affected the whole system. But Melville ironizes the whole existing behaviour of the society. According to Muecke, "The positive version of this last function would likely be the corrective use of irony in satire, for at least it suggests a positive set of values that one is correcting towards arguably all irony has some corrective function" (4). So, Muecke prefers that the irony carries the positive vision for the sake of correction of society. Irony works not only to point the complexities of historical and social reality but also has the power to change that reality.

So, the subversive function of irony, according to Linda Hutcheon, is the "mode of unsaid, the unheard, the unseen relishing them power in its verbal and structural forms" (4). Hutcheon's irony, as she elaborates in her book *The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History*, is a discursive strategy operating at the level of language which has intrinsically subversive, self questioning and internally dialogized mode that can and does function tactically in the service of a wide range of political positions legitimating or undercutting a wide variety of interests as Hutcheon clarifies:

Irony is often connected to the view that it is the self-critical, self-knowing, self-reflexive mode that has the power to challenge to the hierarchy of the every 'sites' Of discourse, a hierarchy based in social relations of dominance and overturn, is said to have 'politically transformative power.' (30)

To see the relevance of the irony to the text of Melville, we notice that the text examines a satire on the transcendentalism. It deals with the behaviour of hiding truth of American capitalization that leads Americans to the hypocritical thinking. So, *The Confidence-Man* treats it as an act to the American correction on their naiveté capital behavior as Muecke says, "Irony is an act, not simply significance" (219).

So, it is about the progressive action which leads the society toward positive direction. It uses the “decorative subsidiary, non essential and may hinder in the clear speech” (Hutcheon 221). Its gentle function operates the positivity of the characteristics which Hutcheon says that “positive term lucid and playful” (Hutcheon 224). It is more about personal inherited cheating behaviour which is soft ironized in Melville’s text. According to Hutcheon, “Irony offers an escape from mental pain as morphine offers an escape from physical pain” (qtd. in Worcester 224). So, *The Confidence-Man* deals the American attitudes of Mid nineteenth and the irony make the communicative community that brings strategic for a in front of society. Hutcheon claims:

However, it may well be that it is less that irony creates communities than that communities make irony possible. If irony is seen as a communicative strategy, in other words, it is something than can be learned; it is accessible to anyone (as ironist or interpreter). Irony is perhaps best seen, therefore, as a trope dependent on context and on what I would like to call discursive communities. We all belong simultaneously to many such communities of discourse, and each one has its own restrictive (and enabling) communication conventions. I can at one and the same time belong to communities constituted by the fact that I am a woman, a teacher, a writer, a consumer, a Canadian. (230)

So, irony exists in multiple communities as well. Hutcheon claims, “Irony doesn’t create communities but: communities make irony possible” (216). *The Confidence-Man* is not creating society rather than contemporary existence. Furthermore, it intends to promote the American values of nineteenth century. It is an inclusionary process used by the “multi communities” (qtd. in Wright 229).

The Confidence-Man by Melville ironizes the whole suffocated and sophisticated at the fore for their naiveté, naked behavior. It is a social irony. Wright argues, “Both conformers and rebels use irony at each other, and both suffer from it” (qtd. in Smith 226). So, ironic objectives are dominant cultural matters followed by either state or rebel. The novel has used irony for the betterment of whole multiple capital society of America. Irony is not only a medium of discourse but it is more than that which leads the society in right path.

It shows link between society, discourse, and naiveté of American hypocritical society. So, for ethnic Native Americans and African Americans, the white puritan attitudes and behaviors of contemporary existing norms and values of New World are regressive.

The research has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents a brief introduction including the literature review and discussion on the propriety and significant of topic and its hypothesis. It also deals with the discussion of theoretical tool that shall be applied to the text. The major tool is the postmodern notion of irony. YThe second chapter analyses the text in the light of the theoretical ideas developed in the chapter first. Finally, the last chapter concludes the entire study.

II. The Dark Side of the Pre-civil War American Society in

The Confidence-Man

After the Waterloo stage, America raised its voice at the shore of transatlantic region, which made it a powerful roaring nation in socio-politico-economy. It was the beginning era of United States' economic power. The Eurocentric economic policy was heavily influenced in America at the mid of nineteenth century. The American society at that time hackneyed with its new arrival of 'invisible hands' policy. Fraud, bribery, and corruption were the symbol of hypnotic nineteenth century America, that's why they were in search of transcendental way of life which is too far from their daily business. The whole society was highly affected by transcendental ideas. This was the Emersonian age. Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* is one of the critical voices of the pre-civil war society of America. The American society of nineteenth century was full of corruption, greed, and flattery so Herman Melville ignites the irony upon American greed, self delusion, and lack of charity. The book is about 'confidence man' deft, fraudulent, and constantly shifting notion. It ironizes such evil nature of society. It aims to lay down the good ideas of progress for society and abolish the hypocritical nature of society. So, Melville uses irony as a tool to criticize the nineteenth century American society. According to Worcester, "Irony offers an escape from mental pain as morphine offers an escape from physical pain" (142). He presents the irony in Melville's *Pierre*, where character Charlie Millthorpe says: "Plus

Heart minus head Now, by heaven! The god that made Millthorpe was both a better and a greater than the god that made Napoleon or Byron.—Pah! The brains grow maggoty without a heart's the preserving salt itself, and can keep sweet without the head" (4). Where Melville shows the power of head upon heart, minus head lead the American people toward the blackmail in the name of charity, it presents against the social values of contemporary society of America. Plus heart means ignorance and minus head means less critical and creative. So, Melville rejects the transcendental type of society which is not suitable for America.

In the very beginning of the novel, the writer describes the characters of the novel, perhaps he is one of 'confidence men' among two. It is Melville's intense style supplies the poles between which the novel moves "a man in cream-colors" (7). Here, he describes the ideas of colors, which symbolizes the discriminated society of text or America. And, he analyses the body structure of characters:

His cheek was fair, his chin downy, his hair flaxen, his hat a white fur one, with a long fleecy nap. He had neither trunk, valise, carpet-bag, nor parcel. No porter followed him. He was unaccompanied by friends.

From the shrugged shoulders, titters, whispers, wonderings of the crowd, it was plain that he was, in the extremist sense of the word, a stranger.

(1)

The description of first 'confidence-man' images of whiteness, brings the lamb-like figure which is related to the innocence and ignorance of the character, but at the same time the writer presents the inscription of charity carried by the crowd, where five statement about charity written 'charity thinks no evil', 'charity endureth all thing', 'charity suffereth long and is kind', 'charity believeth all things', 'charity never faith', have been ironically mentioned. That reveals his deafness and dumbness which is

criticized in the society. The deaf and mute character reflects the act of a white puritan Americans who wants to possess charity. But Melville ironizes the deafness and muteness of white persona. The nineteenth century American societies' social leaders were like the 'first confidence man' who were only thinking about their own self. The general rule of charity is that it offers for social benefit rather than personal. So, Melville ironizes nineteenth century charity system of America which was dominated by personal exclusiveness of white puritan. Hutcheon believes that "irony, an evasive trope is to associate it with equivocation, hypocrisy deception and duplicity" (224). The stranger's muteness opens the doubt of charity. This singularity of the stranger was heightened by his muteness and also by the contrast to his moves found in his actions.

The novel also introduces the second 'confidence man', who is conceived in the images of blackness:

In the forward part of the boat, not the least attractive object, for a time, was a grotesque negro cripple, in tow-cloth attire and an old coal-sifter of a tambourine in his hand, who, owing to something wrong about his legs, was, in effect, cut down to the stature of a Newfoundland dog; his knotted black fleece and good-natured, honest black face rubbing against the upper part of people's thighs as he made shift to shuffle about, making music, such as it was, and raising a smile even from the gravest. It was curious to see him, out of his very deformity, indigence, and houselessness, so cheerily endured, raising mirth in some of that crowd, whose own purses, hearths, hearts, all their possessions, sound limbs included, could not make gay. (7)

He is grotesque Negro crippled with knotted black fleecy hair, jet black face and steer like appearance. Melville presents the two contrary images for ironizing the society's

evil. Both the whiteness and blackness represent the evil. The muteness and deafness of white represents the gullibility of charitable person and cripple, lameness of black represents inadequacy in charity. This atmosphere of pervasive evil is further sustained by the elaborate imagery of sickness and disease.

Furthermore, when the *The Confidence-Man* opens, its first chapter introduces the sign “No Trust,” which is the beginning of the charity monger’s work and the reality of the character which hides the intention of 'confidence man' who searches and tries to pull down that No-Trust board (3). Charity is Melville’s first target where the first confidence man is dealing the ideas of charity from the perspective of Euro-zone based London. The American society, as 'confidence man' explains in the chapter II,

is to be a society whose members self comprise deputed from every charity and mission extend, the one object of the society to be the methodization of the world’s benevolence; to which in, the present system of voluntary and promiscuous contribution to be done away and the society to be empowered by the various governments to levy, annually, one grand benevolence tax upon all mankind,This tax; according to my tables . . . would result in the early rising of a fund little sort of eight hundred millions; this fund to be annually applied to such object, and in such modes is the various charity and missions, in general congress represented, might decree; (51)

'Confidence-man' is a practice shape shifter; his existence is a succession of pious disguises. James Miller, in his *A Reader’s Guide to Herman Melville*, argues that

'the confidence man' is a confidence trickster reduces the other characters with whom he convers by asking them to trust him and then betraying their trust in this his behavior verges on the Satanic. He is as

sanctimonious as pecksniff and as predatory as Volpone. If he does a good act it is done for an evil reason” (135).

The evil psyche of the confidence man is ironized by Melville for progressing and promoting the good ethos of human being in American mid 19th pre-civil war society. Sigmund Freud, in his analysis of irony *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, proclaims “discrete against people and objects which lay claim to authority and respect” (200). Irony embedded in Melville’s *The Confidence Man*’s heroes are the part of society, community. They only caricature despite their seemingly innocent humour. Melville brings the charity as objective and the confidence man as a character to dig up the social ideology of mid nineteenth century America. It is historical satire upon whole contemporary system. Linda Hutcheon believes “true irony, humble irony base upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him within, being consubstantial with him” (229). Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* in chapter twenty eight opens the secret of stranger and his indebted characteristics on the society:

“Charity, charity!” exclaimed the cosmopolitan, “never a sound judgment without charity. When man judges man, charity is less a lee-way of human fallibility. God forbid that my eccentric friend should be what you hint. You do not know him, or hut imperfectly. His outside deceived you; at first it came hear deceiving even me. But I seized a chance, when, owing to indignation against some wrong, he laid himself a little open; I seized that lucky chance, I say, to inspect his heart, and found it and inviting oyster in a forbidding shell. His outside is but put on. Ashamed of his own goodness, he treats mankind as those strange

old uncles in romances do their nephews-snapping at them all the time and yet loving them as the apple of their eye (135-36).

Charity and economic aids are related with benevolence gift of human being, and human community. It is well funded by different people in different time and place. But in 1850s decade, America was flooded on such kind of social enigma; resulted the charity goes to the foul people as well as they corrupt when they make a great mass of property. Miller says that “as a corollary to point two, those characters who trust the confidence man are fools, while those who distrust him are wise” (42). Miller’s revisiting the text proves that the American society of mid nineteenth century was totally guided by corrupt nature of uncirculated with benevolence ideas. Barbers: -'NO TRUST.' An inscription which, though in a sense not less intrusive than the contrasted ones of the stranger, did not provoke any corresponding derision or surprise much less indignation; and still less, to all appearances, did it gain for the inscriber the repute of being a simpleton.

If the two characters have a symbolic status and that the personages of the ship are to be taken as representing some larger society, points which do not seem worth debating, it can be concluded that Melville wishes in this first chapter to make some comment on the fate in this world of the man who professes Christian ethics. If we adopt the orthodox view of the book, we must suppose that Melville agrees with the general verdict of the passengers, that he writes without irony about the barber, who is an admirable man of the world, and that his references to the "singularly innocent" (25) aspect of the mute and to his "lamb-like figure" (13) are ironically intended, since his appeal for charity furthers the devil's ends, if he is not indeed the devil himself. If on the other hand we rely purely on the tone of the first chapter it must be apparent that the inoffensive mute, with his cream-colored suit and his simple texts from Corinthians, is

the touchstone by which the barber and the other passengers are to be judged. Professor Miller admits this, but asserts, "Details such as the flaxen hair which suggests the eunuch, or sterility, indicate the major and recurring theme on which Melville is about to embark in the *Fidèle*: the inapplicability to this world of heaven's law" (21). The exegesis, here flaxen hair, suggests eunuch, sterility suggests inapplicability rests on very slight ground indeed. Yet this chapter provides us with no other reason for supposing that Melville in *The Confidence-Man* wants us to regard the Mute as "drastically inadequate" (23) or to forget as we read the book his unambiguous message "Charity thinketh no evil" (2). But if we are to interpret the book with this as our guiding principle what are we to make of the next episode, that of Black Guinea? Here, a Negro Cripple appeals to the passengers for charity. Some of them give him money, though only when he humiliates himself. While this game of charity was yet at its height, a limping, gimlet-eyed, sour-faced person-it may be some discharged custom-house 4920

officer, who, suddenly stripped of convenient means of support, had concluded to be avenged on government and humanity by making himself miserable for life, either by hating or suspecting everything and everybody-this shallow unfortunate, after sundry sorry observation of the negro, began to croak out something about his deformity being a sham, got up for financial purposes, which immediately threw a damp upon the frolic benignities of the pitch-penny players. . . . (11)

Melville presents the 'shallow unfortunate' or he intends the reader to suppose that Black Guinea is undeserving of charity. Indeed, the narrative seems to suggest the reverse, since the negro's cause is immediately taken up by a young Episcopal clergyman, in a long, straight-bodied black coat; small in stature, but manly; with a

clear face and blue eye; innocence, tenderness, and good sense triumvirate in his air, "and a Methodist minister, a tall, muscular, martial-looking man, a Tennessean by birth, who in the Mexican war had been volunteer chaplain to a volunteer rifle- regiment" (18-19). The latter severely rebukes the limping man, who walks away lamely, shouting as he goes:

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! (15)

This refers to the spirit of mistrust. The limping man is certain that after he has gone, the seeds of suspicion which he has sown will bear fruit. That this truth is borne out by the subsequent behavior of the bystanders and even of the Methodist in *The Confidence-Man*, all of whom are infected by the Limping man's accusations that the Negro is "a white operator, be twisted and painted up for a decoy" (62), who can really "walk fast enough when he tries" (123). One of the passengers, for example, says, "I tell you what it is, Ebony yonder churl . . . is, no doubt, a churlish fellow enough, and I would not wish to be like him; but that is no reason why you may not be some sort of black Jeremy Diddler" (16).

Black Guinea's appeals for charity and confidence are almost universally disregarded and indeed become matter for fresh doubt, while those few who trust him fall under suspicion themselves. This is because the wooden-legged man has scattered his seeds of caution and mistrust broadcast through the boat. We have a repetition then

of the situation in Chapter I, where the untrusting barber is regarded as sensible, while the mute who appeals for charity is mocked and assaulted. That Melville does not himself approve of the situation he described seems obvious, but a diametrically opposite interpretation is possible. It is a matter of convenience to treat them as a single continuum, because they appear successively, never together, and perform a similar function in the book in spite of their differences of name and costume. The immediate question is whether the composite character, with his perpetual plea for trust and charity, is an agent of the devil, the means by which Melville exposes and analyzes the skepticism and hypocrisy of society. To decide this we must examine the Confidence-man's behavior, bearing in mind that when we do so we have no warrant to exclude from the continuum the mute of the first chapter. The crucial step in the argument is to ask whether we can accept the Confidence-man at his face value, and, if so, whether there is any reason for not doing so. The usual objection is that he in fact deceives many other characters.

Similarly, years before Roberts did not deny this detail, which Ringman could hardly risk inventing. He also knows that Roberts is a mason and has a family. There is no positive reason for supposing that he was not previously acquainted with Roberts. He borrows money from the merchant, and acknowledges this favour by advising him to buy stock in the Black Rapids Coal Company. So far we cannot state with certainty that he has done anything more Satanic than extract a loan from a distant acquaintance. He then leaves Henry Roberts, and Melville, after an unmistakably ironic passage praising the lack of effusive gratitude in the world, speaks of Ringman as "throwing off in private the cold garb of decorum, and so giving warmly loose to his genuine heart" (27). It presents the ironic stress on the behaviour of the American community of the

nineteenth century. Ringman next talks to the collegian about Tacitus, an ambiguous passage, which can be read so as to satisfy either argument. When Ringman talks

the immorality of Ovid, Horace, Anacreon, and the rest, and the dangerous theology of Aeschylus and others we may be fairly sure that Melville is writing satirically, but we can be sure by no means when Ringman says, though the sorrows of the world are great, its wickedness -that is, its ugliness-is small. Much cause to pity man, little to distrust him. (28)

Again, the man in grey collects twenty dollars from the charitable widow, and thanks her in the following terms: "This is an inconsiderable sum, I admit, but, taking out his pencil and book, though I here but register the amount, there is another register, where is set down the motive" (45). These do not seem to be the accents of Satan. One may, of course, simply dismiss the speech as arrant hypocrisy, as one may, with precisely as much justification, apply the same description to another comment on another charitable widow: "Of a truth I say unto you that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all showing how even the most dubious of the Confidence-man's transactions are susceptible of an innocent explanation and requiring those who affirm his diabolic nature to produce unequivocal evidences" (48). But it is quicker to take the opposite path and point to a number of incidents, some major, some minor, where it seems clear not only that Confidence- man's conduct is technically irreproachable but that his actions and sentiments carry the weight of Melville's sympathy.

Furthermore, one example is to be found, rather unexpectedly, in Chapter VII, just before the short scene with the widow. The man in gray, a persona of the Confidence-man, talks to a gentleman described by Melville as looking as though he had scarcely known ill, physical or moral, "tall, rosy, between plump and portly, with a

primy, palmy air, and for the time and place, not to hint of his years, dressed with a strangely festive finish and elegance" (39). His coat-skirts are lined with white satin, and his gloves and his hands are also remarkably white. They remain so because "a certain negro body-servant, whose hands nature had dyed black did most of his master's handling for him" (40). It is to this spruce gentleman that the man in gray discourses so volubly about his scheme for 'the World's charity', by which, for example, the Chinese are to be converted en masse in six months and the poor of the world are to be fed: "Of a frosty morning in Hong Kong, pauper pagans are found dead in the streets like so many nipped peas in a bin of peas. To be an immortal being in China is no more distinction than to be a snow-flake in a snow-squall" (43). It is easy to dismiss this as Melville's ironic version of a swindler's story combined with a satirical parody of the grandiose projects of visionaries. The man in gray reckons that 800,000,000 dollars a year could be raised by the peoples of the world and devoted to good works. He exclaims:

Eight hundred millions! More than that sum is yearly expended by mankind, not only in vanities, but miseries. Consider that bloody spendthrift, War. And are mankind so stupid, so wicked, that, upon the demonstration of these things they will not, amending their ways, devote their superfluties to blessing the world instead of cursing it? Eight hundred millions! They have not to make it, it is theirs already; they have but to direct it from ill to good "Your sort of reasoning," said the good gentleman, adjusting his gold sleeve-buttons, "seems all reasonable enough, but with mankind it won't do." (44-45)

This is the first and only mention of the gold sleeve-buttons, to which Melville draws particular attention in his heading to the chapter. The whole society moving through the

inner hypocrisy and outer ideal tit-bits cause the irony of so-called superficial and transcendental world.

It is not, of course, suggested that this episode is unambiguous. What is disputed is the view that the rich man is entirely admirable and the man in gray entirely false, for it is at least equally possible to maintain that the ideas of the man in gray is not impracticable and that the real sin is that of the rich man, who dismisses them as enthusiastic, over-confident or audacious, and behind his facade of 'pleasant incredulity' is unmoved by his companion's eloquence. He is on his way to a wedding. He is prepared to pity the man in gray, and even to humour him, but not to take seriously any proposal for actually spending money to relieve the misery of the world instead of squandering it in war: "This gentleman, therefore, there is reason to affirm, was one who, like the Hebrew governor, knew how to keep his hands clean" (40).

Again, as Roy Pearce has pointed out, the inserted story of Colonel Moredock weakens the case of those who argue that Melville wishes to commend an attitude of uncompromising mistrust. The violence of its episodes and the harshness of its language make it quite plain that Moredock's way is no recommended way. Mr. Pearce concludes that Melville leaves the reader the impossible task of choosing either Moredock's obsessive distrustfulness or the kind of foolish credulity encouraged by the Satanic figure of the Confidence-man. It does not, however, follow that the two alternatives are equally unacceptable for, it has not yet been demonstrated that Melville regards the placing of trust as an act of folly.

The curious career of Colonel Moredock occupies the opening chapters of the crucial section of the book. Here is a conversation between an ordinary confidence-trickster, Charlie Noble, and an extraordinary man who is genuinely concerned to encourage in the world a spirit of confidence and charity. Since anything that might

settle the matter out of hand would be destructive of his method in the book the two men are presented with only the faintest shade of difference in tone and matter. As the cosmopolitan remarks, "Our sentiments agree so, that were they written in a book, whose was whose, few but the nicest critics might determine" (135). Yet the point must be determined, however nice the distinctions, if we are to assess the novel at all.

In fact it is Noble who flatteringly brims up the cosmopolitan's glass while dallying with his own or taking a moderate sip; later he fills the cosmopolitan's glass with 'clandestine geniality'. The cosmopolitan in- deed at one point examines the bottle and complains that Noble has not yet drunk one glass while he is himself consuming his fourth or fifth, to which Noble replies, "You have not noticed it, but I have drunk my share. Have a queer way I learned from a sedate old uncle, who used to tip off his glass unperceived" (198).

It can scarcely be denied that Francis Goodman has the measure of Charlie Noble: he is always in command, relaxed, consistent, undemonstrative and undisturbed, whereas works feverishly to maintain his standing and in so doing reveals his own, inconsistency and shallowness. A good example of this occurs in Chapter XXIX, ironically entitled "The Boon Companions." Goodman observes, apparently without particular reference "that a man of humor, a man capable of a good loud laugh-seem how he may in other things-can hardly be a heartless scamp" (184).

The ineptness of Charlie Noble's attempt to establish himself as a good fellow at the expense of the pauper-boy is too obvious to need comment. The cosmopolitan succeeds in drawing from Noble a little later a similar revelation of his character as depicted in the following conversation:

"I remember it is related of Phalaris, the capricious tyrant of Sicily, that he once caused a poor fellow to be beheaded on a horse-block, for no other cause than having a horse-laugh."

"Funny Phalaris!"

"Cruel Phalaris!" (185)

The conversation reaches its climax in a similar display of Goodman's mastery. He pretends to be in urgent want of money and asks his dear Charlie to lend him fifty dollars:

None of your dear Charlies," cried the other, springing to his feet, and buttoning up his coat, as if hastily to depart upon a long journey. " Why, why, why? " painfully looking up. " None of your why, why, whys! " tossing out a foot, " go to the devil, sir! Beggar, impostor!-never so deceived in a man in my life." While speaking or rather hissing these words, the boon companion underwent much such a change as one reads of in fairy-books. Out of old materials sprang a new creature. Cadmus glided into the snake. (203-204)

As soon as Goodman reveals that he is not in fact in need, Noble pretends that he had realized this and was merely 'humoring the thing.' That Goodman does not believe this is emphasized by his immediate narration of the tale of Charlemont, a rich merchant who, foreseeing bankruptcy and fearing that his friends would prove uncharitable, determined to forestall them by avoiding their company before they began to shun him. Goodman pointedly asks Noble whether he would turn the cold shoulder to a friend whom he suddenly learned to be penniless. At this Noble retires in confusion.

This dialogue is of first importance and repays detailed study. Its immediate narrative function is to confirm the dominant position of the cosmopolitan in the action

of the novel by virtue of his moral and intellectual balance: his combination of acuteness and tolerance gives him a comprehensive understanding of the other characters. The function of the encounter in the larger scheme of the book is also crucial. The one-legged misanthrope in Chapter III had snapped out, "Here on earth, true charity dotes, and false charity plots" (11). The effect of Chapters XXV-XXXV is to show that while false charity may plot there is no reason to suppose that true charity dotes. It is important for Melville to concede that there is such a thing as 'false charity', since he might otherwise be accused of advocating a confidence so blindly credulous as to be without value. In these chapters, masterpieces of sustained equilibrium, he therefore presents true and false charity simultaneously in operation, as if to say, "See how hard it is to distinguish between them. And yet there is a difference" (19). To my ear the voices of the two men are always just distinguish- able, even for example when Charlie Noble is talking about Polonius and Francis Goodman about Autolycus. I think that Goodman deplores Autolycus' roguery as an oblique hint to Noble that his own dishonesty is perceived and that Noble attacks Polonius as part of his routine preparation for borrowing money, but the difference in tone is so slight that it is perhaps imaginary. Melville's triumphant control over these eleven chapters is exerted solely by means of his comic power and his ability to indicate subtle variations of speaking voice:

"Fill up, up, up, my friend. Let the ruby tide aspire, and all ruby aspirations with it! Up, fill up! Be we convivial. And conviviality, what is it? The word, I mean; what expresses it? A living together. But bats live together, and did you ever hear of convivial bats? " "If I ever did," observed the cosmopolitan," it has quite slipped my recollection." (198)

This is indeed Melville's only method of indicating discriminations between speakers. Everything else, such as descriptions of incidents or of a person's demeanor, is presented by means of what Yvor Winters has, in another context, called 'the formula of alternative possibilities.' This device is the modulus or basic pattern of the book, to be found in details and structure alike, but perhaps most obviously in Melville's accounts of the way a speech is delivered and of the reactions to it: "There was a pause, both looking downward on the table as if mutually struck by the contrast of exclamations and pondering upon its significance, if any. So, at least, it seemed; but on one side it might have been otherwise" (185-186). The effect of this deliberate refusal to provide signposts for the reader is to convert the novel into a dialogue, a form whose quality is to permit the writer to avoid committing himself to a definite point of view, each character in the dialogue being allowed his say without any overt indication that the author endorses one opinion rather than another. It is my contention that Melville adopted this form because of its inherent ambiguity, but that the total effect of his work is not ambiguous, because Melville seizes on the fact that his novel-dialogue is formally reversible and uses it to drive home an unequivocal lesson in charity.

Moreover, with the important distinction made between the true and the false charity and with the further point established that true charity is not blind, Melville takes his story to its last major episode-the cosmopolitan's encounter with Mark Winsome and Egbert, which is the complement of his meeting with Charlie Noble. Having demonstrated that the charitable man is not necessarily a dupe, the cosmopolitan is now defined on the opposite boundary by contrast with two professional skeptics. Much of what is to be said about Winsome and Egbert is so obvious that it would not need stating at all had not Professor Miller located in them the ultimate source of value-judgments in the book, declaring that "Winsome does not let

his mystic vision obscure his steady view of this world and its practical demands, while his disciple Egbert is living proof of the reconciliation of the ideal and the actual which his philosophy achieves" (191).

This seems to me to be the reverse of the truth. Once again we are presented with nothing but dialogue: each party is provided with plausible and ingenious ideas: to determine where Melville's sympathies lie is again initially a question of tone. Winsome offers to begin with a platitude-"Where beauty is, there must [love and truth] be" an idea whose worth the cosmopolitan adroitly examines by applying it to the rattlesnake (214). Soon the main opposition appears that between the warmth and frankness of the cosmopolitan and the unnatural chill of Mark Winsome. This is conveyed partly by the imagery."Is a rattle-snake accountable?" asks the stranger [Mark Winsome] with such a preternaturally cold, gemmy glance out of his pellucid blue eye, that he seemed more a metaphysical merman than a feeling man (217). The cosmopolitan turned a mild glance upon the speaker, who, now occupying the chair opposite him, sat there purely and coldly radiant as a prism. It seemed as if one could almost hear him virtuously chime and ring. That moment a waiter passed, whom, arresting with a sign, the cosmopolitan bid go bring a goblet of ice-water, "I hold to the metempsychosis; and whoever I may be now, I feel that I was once the stoic Arrian . . ." (217-218). Mark Winsome's behavior and his arguments are similarly frigid: "He has much of the oracular pattern of the mystic, but he prides himself that he is in fact a man of serviceable knowledge, and a man of the world" (224).

An instance of his practice is given. A crazy beggar, of striking appearance, approaches and offers a tract. The cosmopolitan accepts it, gives the man a shilling, and speaks to him considerately. But the stranger sat more like a cold prism than ever, while an expression of keen Yankee cuteness, now replacing his former mystical one,

lent added icicles to his aspect. His whole air said: "Nothing from me. When the cosmopolitan reproaches him for -his want of charity Winsome says, 'I never patronize scoundrels . . . I take him for a cunning vagabond, who picks up a vagabond living by adroitly playing the madman" (305). This short scene seems to me sufficiently explicit to place Winsome's philosophy with some accuracy. Apart from the fact that this interpretation involves an element of the supernatural for which Melville nowhere furnishes the slightest hint, it suffers from the disadvantage that the only evidence in its favor comes from an a priori decision about Melville's view of life while Winsome is essentially uncharitable. Winsome now introduces his disciple, Egbert, "a practical poet in the West India trade", offering him as an embodiment of his doctrines (215). He, who approves [Egbert], approves the philosophy of Mark Winsome. The debate thus continues with a change of interlocutor. At this point Melville complicates further the disguises of his characters: to discover the practical application of Winsome's philosophy the cosmopolitan proposes that he and Egbert shall enact some common case in real life:

The case is this: There are two friends, friends from childhood, bosom-friends; one of whom, for the first time, being in need, for the first time seeks a loan from the other, who, as far as fortune goes, is more than competent to grant it. And the persons are to be you and I: you, the friend from whom the loan is sought-I, the friend who seeks it; ' Was you, the disciple of the philosophy in question-I, a common man . . . Mind, now, you must work up your imagination, and, as much as possible, talk and behave just as if the case supposed were a fact. For brevity, you shall call me Frank, and I will call you Charlie. (226)

The cosmopolitan exerts all his persuasiveness in the succeeding chapters, not of course to borrow money, since the loan is purely imaginary, but to expose the philosophy of Winsome in all its meanness. Egbert provides a consistent demonstration, firmly refusing in the name of friendship to acknowledge that his friend has any claim on him.

Finally, the Cosmopolitan exclaims, "When all is said then, what good have I of your friendship, regarded in what light you will?" (230). To which Egbert revealingly replies, "The good which is in the philosophy of Mark Winsome, as reduced to practice by a practical disciple" (230), which is as much as to say, "No good whatsoever" (231). When Egbert continues in his inflexible refusal the Cosmopolitan comments energetically: "Humanity, inwardly feeling how subject it is to straits, and hence how precious is help, will, for selfishness' sake, if no other, long postpone ratifying a philosophy that banishes help from the world" (233).

Melville is here hardly concealing his contempt for the cold-blooded Egbert, and, as a corollary that his sympathies are with the simple human pleas of Francis Goodman. We have therefore some standards by which to assess Egbert's story of China Aster, which succeeds in the narrative. Egbert naturally suggests that the moral to be drawn from it is that China Aster was at fault in freely indulging in confidence and in persisting in "an ardently bright view of life, to the exclusion of that counsel which comes by heeding the opposite view" (248). Yet to an impartial reader of the story it seems clear enough that China Aster's downfall was caused not by his own credulity-on the contrary he was properly unwilling to accept the original unnecessary loan-but by the rapacity of his creditors, who were notably reluctant to show their trust in the poor Candlemaker.

Egbert proceeds to argue, in tones in which we can detect the unmistakably the accent of casuistry, that it is folly to brow money, since your creditor's indulgence may be instantly converted to hostility by some chance tip of Fate's elbow in throwing her dice. He continues:

I will hear nothing of that fine babble about development and its laws; there is no development in opinion and feeling but the developments of time and tide. You may deem all this talk idle, Frank; but conscience bids me show you how fundamental the reasons for treating you as I do. 'But Charlie, dear Charlie, what new notions are these? I thought that man was no poor drifting weed of the universe, as you phrased it; that, if so minded, he could have a will, a way, a thought, and a heart of his own? But now you have turned everything upside down again, with an inconsistency that amazes and shocks me'. Inconsistency? Bah! (251-252)

At length the Cosmopolitan breaks off the argument and resumes his own character, saying disdainfully:

Enough. I have had my fill of the philosophy of Mark Winsome as put into action Apt disciple! Why wrinkle the brow, and waste the oil both of life and the lamp, only to turn out a head kept cool by the under ice of the heart? What your illustrious magian has taught you, any poor, old, broken-down, heart-shrunken dandy might have lisped. Pray, leave me, and with you take the last dregs of your inhuman philosophy. And here, take this shilling, and at the first wood-landing buy yourself a few chips to warm the frozen natures of you and your philosopher. (252-3)

This concludes the main argument: the character of the cosmopolitan is now virtually defined. The encounter with Charlie Noble has shown that true charity, if vigilant, is not necessarily duped, while that with Winsome and Egbert has shown the crucial difference between this necessary vigilance and the icy inhumanity of the philosopher and his disciple.

Similarly, the short scenes remain that with the barber and that with the old man in the cabin, in some ways the most enigmatic episode in the book. So far, irony has been the dominant mode of controlling the reader's attitude to events and opinions, while symbolism has been relatively little used. Admittedly, the whole concept of the ship of assorted passengers has implications of a far-reaching kind, but there is no thoroughly worked out system of symbolic equivalences, except perhaps in the first chapter. In his concluding chapter also Melville subtly alters the status of his narrative, so that every detail has a reference beyond itself and beyond the story. To decide the direction of these references is extraordinarily difficult: this is of course a notorious problem in the interpretation of Melville's other novels. When, as here, the tenor of the symbolism is complicated by a pervasive irony we are confronted by an equation with two unknown terms, that is, one which admits of more than one solution. The following interpretation is offered as one of several possible ways of taking the final chapter.

Like in myth, the old man, studying his Bible by the light of a single lamp, represents the modern Christian: he is in a sense the projection into a later day of the Christ-like mute of the first chapter, aged but still comely. On the lamp are engraved the figures of a horned altar and a robed man, presumably signifying the church and the priesthood. The old man appears secure in his solid un-impaired faith-the Bible rests upon a table of "marble, snow-white and round" (6), and he declares his belief that "to distrust the creature, is a kind of distrusting of the Creator" (276) . Yet when a self-

possessed young peddler enters the cabin the old man is persuaded to buy various appliances which demonstrate practically his mistrust of his fellow-passengers. The cosmopolitan draws his attention once more to the Bible and they agree that the man of true faith need have no concern for the perils of travelling:

"In short, I never forget that passage of Scripture which says, 'Jehovah shall be thy confidence.' The traveler who has not this trust, what miserable misgivings must be his; or, what vain, short-sighted care must he take of himself."

"Even so," said the old man, lowly. (284)

At once the same trick is played, for the old man immediately demands a life-preserver in case of shipwreck. As he prepares to retire, he says:

"Then, good-night, good-night; and Providence have both of us in its good keeping."

"Be sure it will," eying the old man with sympathy, as for the moment he stood, money-belt in hand, and life-preserver under arm, "be sure it will, sir, since in Providence, as in man, you and I equally put trust."

(285)

Of course, he speaks ironically here, realizing that the old man has in fact no trust in Providence. The implication is that the nineteenth-century Christian, although his religion enjoins love and trust, is similarly lacking in charity and faith.

As the cosmopolitan speaks, the single light, which was "to be kept burning till the natural light of day should come to relieve it" (272), begins to gutter. He offers to snuff the lamp 'for the good of all lungs'.

This may be taken to symbolize the final extinction of organized religion. Henceforth the latter-day Christian, deprived of the light of the church and unable to

trust in Providence, must learn to trust his fellow-man. This is not a complete account of the chapter-in particular it leaves unexplained the somewhat equivocal character of the young peddler and his relation to the cosmopolitan-but it is reasonably congruent with the text and with what has gone before.

According to previous analysis, the Missouri bachelor uncharitable though he was while some of the earlier manifestations of the Confidence- Man arouse a disquiet that cannot be easily allayed. In particular the Herb-doctor comes to mind, with his Omni-balsamic Reinvigorator and Samaritan Pain Dissuader. Although he gives away two dollars and presents the ex-soldier with a free box of ointment; it is not easy to take him as an honest dealer, much less as an unperfected picture of Melville's ideal man. This difficulty is especially acute in Chapter XVI, where he calls for a unique kind of confidence. The other members of the continuum require an act of personal trust in a fellow man, an act in which there is something meritorious even if the trust proves misplaced. He asks for confidence in the efficacy of his medicine, an act without moral implications.

It must be conceded that not all the 'disguises' of the Confidence-Man have the same status. If discrimination is made, a possible scheme is to classify the mute and Black Guinea, who simply appeals for charity, as deserving the reader's complete sympathy. The man with a weed, the man with a book, and the man in the gray coat are harmless, but behave in a way that provokes suspicion. The P.I.O. Man and the Herb-doctor are similarly placed, except that they are particularly easy to mistrust when they broaden their appeal and call for a general faith that the Universe is well-disposed. Francis Goodman, though he is not always wholly serious and occasionally indulges in an unattractive casuistry, is a much more comprehensive figure than any of these, and serves the function of relating their specific appeals for money to a consideration of the

basic principles which ought to govern human relations. This brief summary may suggest that Melville is most identified with the Confidence-man's arguments when he pleads for 'charity', that is loving trust between man and man, least identified when his pleas for 'confidence' bear a general sense, that is, recommend a Panglossian satisfaction with the state of the Universe.

One point should be remembered here. It is only in the first and last chapters that the ideas of charity and confidence are given theological associations. Although there are numerous Biblical references elsewhere in the book and one humorous allusion to the New Jerusalem, Melville is not concerned to develop the parallelisms. The central arguments of the novel are stated in financial terms, and there is no sign that the reader is intended to take 'trust' means 'religious faith'. On the contrary it seems plain that Melville is really writing about commercial confidence in quite a narrow sense. On one important level in the book 'charity' means 'alms-giving', and 'confidence' means 'giving credit'. When Melville satirizes men who won't trust another man with money this is not simply a figure for something else.

Nevertheless, even though Melville is not directly concerned with problems of Christian belief he is concerned with the question, "Can one live by Christian principles in the world today?" (156). There is a strong tendency in the book to use 'confidence' as a broad metaphor for "trust in one's fellows, especially in their honesty, such as a Christian ought to feel" (157). It is the determining of the precise direction of this metaphor which is so extraordinarily difficult. A major complication is that there are two possible responses to a man appealing for your confidence. You can mistrust him, even if this shows your lack of heart, or you can have faith in him, even if this shows your lack of sense. These responses are incompatible, and each may be wrong in certain circumstances.

Melville's method in this novel, as elsewhere in his work, is not to reject the dilemma as insoluble but to use it as the pattern for his book. In this sense the whole action of *The Confidence-Man* may be said to be symbolic, since its ambiguity reproduces a reality of man's ethical life. The dilemma is represented most clearly in our reactions to the Confidence-man himself, whom Melville in his penultimate chapter compares to the notoriously puzzling characters of Hamlet, Don Quixote and Milton's Satan. Yet, Melville implies, once such a character is adequately interpreted, the reader will find everything else lit up by it with an effect "akin to that which in Genesis attends upon the beginning of things" (271).

The rest of this paper will offer an explanation of Melville's plain hint that the attentive reader may find even in ambiguity a means to illumination. Read in the opposite sense throughout, that is, as a satire against credulousness. It is important to my argument to accept that such a reading is formally possible. *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*.⁷ If it is objected that such a view of Melville converts him from a powerfully pessimistic to a weakly optimistic novelist, it is possible to reply that optimism is not necessarily weak any more than pessimism is necessarily powerful, and that in *The Confidence-Man*, for example, Melville takes such infinite pains to state both points of view with almost equal emphasis that he cannot be accused of an unthinking, unqualified optimism. If we are to read the novel as an affirmation, it is an affirmation which Melville has earned the right to make by his conscientious scrutiny of alternatives, a scrutiny which in effect constitutes the action of the novel, just as Johnson's examination of different ways of life constitutes the action of *Rasselas*. If necessary I am prepared to take as satirically intended the celebrated pamphlet of Plotinus Plinlimmon in Book XIV of *Pierre*, even though this entails following Melville across vertiginous crests of irony

This previous analogy, the applicability of his fable to his own society is clear enough. In the East at any rate, America in the nineteenth century was, like Britain, a nominally Christian country with an overwhelmingly commercial practical ethic. Melville situates his argument at the point where the nominal and the actual diverge, and shows how Charity as the supreme practical virtue has been superseded by Skepticism or Cynicism or Cuteness, so that any- one who ventures to ask for charity is at once dismissed as a simpleton or suspected of dishonesty.

He suggests that Melville was concerned to present a view of the world as an insoluble enigma and at the end of his book leaves the reader in a moral vacuum. Against this view tried to show that Melville does portray one side of the argument more sympathetically than the other. The difference is slight but significant. Far more important is the result of his leaving both point of views open. The reader who wishes to do so may interpret the events of the story, as he may interpret the events of real life, as teaching that caution is the primary virtue. Melville carefully leaves him the opportunity to do this but is equally careful to provide him with no evidence in support of his interpretation.

He represents mankind as passing, on April Fools' Day, from the charity of the Holy Innocent to the pathetic mistrust of the dotard in the final chapter. Suspicion, like the Canada thistle, has cast its seeds everywhere; yet the suspicion has its origin not in the book but in the reader.

The Seminole Widow and Orphan Asylum, for example, sound improbable, but Melville gives us no warrant for supposing that it does not exist. Similarly the Black Rapids Coal Company seems to the mistrustful eye simply an invention of John Ringman. The collegian confirms that the shares have in fact recently fallen in price reflects the greedy nature of American society which was controlled by lack of virtue personal

in the name of virtue. Again Francis Goodman bilks the Barber, what in fact happens is that he persuades the Barber to take down his 'No Trust' sign by undertaking to make good any bad debts. When he leaves without paying for his own shave it is admittedly tempting to suppose that the guarantee was merely a ruse. But we are given no reason to suppose that Goodman will not in fact honour his promise, unless that they share the Barber's mistrust of humanity. One small unstressed incident may serve to epitomize the method. The *Cosmopolitan* says to the Missouri bachelor:

They are to have dancing on the hurricane-deck to-night. I shall fling them off a Scotch jig, while, to save the pieces, you hold my loose change; and following that, I propose that you, my dear fellow, stack your gun, and throw your bearskins in a sailor's hornpipe-I holding your watch. What do you say? (154)

There is nothing in this speech to suggest that the *Cosmopolitan* has it in mind to make off with the watch. If the reader suspects that he has such an intention, the mistrust has its origin not in Melville but in the reader himself.

This is Melville's technique throughout the book. We may search in vain for the episode which establishes that any of the confidence-men is a swindler. Every incident narrated is innocent in itself and innocent to a trusting eye, but filled with dubious circumstance to the reader who is himself without confidence. In this sense the novel is ambiguous, and in this sense we are left free to determine for ourselves what it means to us. But if we decide that only a rogue or a simpleton asks for charity, this decision is our own, not Melville's. It is in ourselves that we must then locate the failure of confidence which is the subject of the text.

Melville's trap is sprung as soon as we realize that, confronted by a narrative which permits charity and mistrust more or less equal play; we have allowed our

charity to be overwhelmed with- out a struggle by our mistrust. When he realizes the truth and applicability of the merchant's observation a certain misty suspiciousness seems inseparable from most of one's private notions about some men and some things; but once out with these misty notions, and their mere contact with other men's soon dissipates, or, at least, modifies them he can see also the truth and applicability of its corollary. In the words of the Methodist:

Let us profit by the lesson; and is it not this: that if, next to mistrusting Providence, there be aught that man should pray against, it is against mistrusting his fellow-man. I have been in mad-houses full of tragic mopers, and seen there the end of suspicion: the cynic, in the moody madness muttering in the corner; for years a barren fixture there; head lopped over, gnawing his own lip, vulture of himself. (16)

Thus, by recapitulating in the course of the novel the processes of his own moral development, the skeptical reader is at last brought to see the force and finality of the cosmopolitan's rejoinder to Winsome: "Let casuists decide casuistry, but the compassion the heart decides for itself" (214). Therefore, from the above situation it can be derived that *The Confidence Man* presents the American naiveté values of the 19th century. At that time, the American society was going to the transcendental ethos of spiritualism and heavy influences of European market oriented economy.

To wrap up, the analysis of the text in the light of irony makes it conspicuous that the 19th century America was inwardly corrupt but tried to show itself outwardly as charitable, optimistic, innocent and benevolent.

III. Process of leading the American Society towards Progression in *The Confidence-Man*

On the basis of preceding analysis, we can conclude that the pre-civil war American society nurtured fraudulently, naively, treacheriously and with act of bribery. The whole American society was going on transcendental norms and values but at the same time they wanted to apply the European specially England's prosperous economic model. *The Confidence Man* is dealing with the inadequate behavior laden with materialistic individual greediness. It ironizes the American puritan optimistic society, which caused the exclusion of the other culture in multicultural society. The black and the native Indians were heavily marginalized due to the white puritan monopoly. The novel's title refers to the central character, an ambiguous figure, who boarded in Mississippi steam boat on April Fools Day. The main characters are physically unfit, mentally corrupt and ill, which represent the American social disease of the 19th century. It ironizes the power, property and benevolent activities of the American society. Herman Melville's intention was to bring the whole American society to the

right path by mocking its gullible ideals. So, he entirely satirizes the benevolent activities of the Confidence Man.

The 19th century American society was a developing society in terms of politics and economics. They adopted the cultural influence of Europe, especially Britain. *The Confidence Man* opens the secret of that cultural hybridity prevailing in the American society. Melville uses the image of the lamb, which stands for ignorance of public and cleverness of Confidence Man. The transcendental era especially took the breath of America. It caused spiritual right resulted charity where, deaf, mute and crippled could be heroic demonstration. Melville criticizes Emerson and his optimistic transcendental society, where loots were performed in the name of kindness and romantic philanthropy called 'charity'.

Melville presents his art for betterment of coming disaster. It raises the voice against the optimistic philosophy propounded for the cultural, social, and political domination of marginal voices of America. Charity is for right purpose and righteous service but Melville presents how his characters, out of greed and selfishness, misuse charity for gaining materialistic gains.

To conclude, Herman Melville's *Confident-Man: His Masquerade* presents the 19th century American society, where corruption flourishes in the name of service, kindness, religion and charity. The religious and transcendental ideals are devoid of essence, motive and compassion. All these have caused the further discrimination as well as the marginalization of the African American community and the Native American community. Melville makes a satire on the American society through irony in order to lead the American society towards essence, motive, righteousness, and humanity from the prevailing fraud activities under the cloak of optimism, kindness and charity.

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