

The Metafiction of Melville's *Confidence Man*

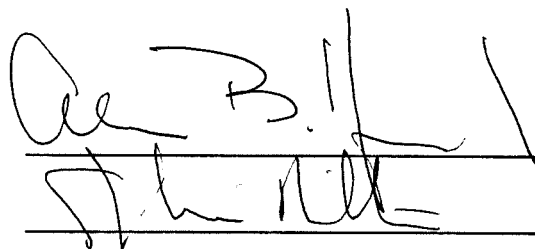
Scott Eric Atkins
San Diego, CA

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The present essay is an adaptation of an on-line master's thesis--a hypertext of Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man*. Completed for the American Studies program, the full thesis can be found at its World Wide Web site:

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA96/atkins/cmmain.html>. The on-line version includes an appendix of relevant material, notes interlinked with the full text of *The Confidence-Man*, and an Introduction which sets forth the background and critical context for Melville's work, presents my own interpretive approach toward *The Confidence-Man*, and explains why the book is particularly suited for the medium of electronic text. What follows is the print version of this Introduction.

Background and Critical Context

By the time he finished *The Confidence-Man*, Herman Melville had written all the novels he would finish and, with the exception of *Billy Budd* (which would not be published until 1924), he was done with prose in general. Born August 1, 1819, he had first flashed upon the literary scene in 1846 with the publication of his narrative of South Pacific adventure, *Typee*. He soon followed this with another work in the same vein, *Omoo* (1847). Both drew on his own experiences as a sailor--especially the first, which recounted and embellished how he and his shipmate Toby Greene jumped ship for an island in the Marquesas, and lived among a tribe virtually untouched by the Western world. These works were well-appreciated by his audience, and they gave him an initial recognition and popularity that would give him the confidence he would need in developing his more serious later work. *Mardi* (1849) marks the first of the more evident departures that would lead Melville away from the fairly uncomplicated but entertaining genre of travel narrative, toward the more metaphysical and symbolic Romance which would culminate in his masterpiece, *Moby Dick or, The Whale* (1851). Yet philosophy and symbolism were not necessarily what his audience preferred or even wanted, and Melville was plagued throughout the rest of his career by critics and reviewers who urged him to return to what they all thought he did best, writing simple adventure yarns. As Portland's *Daily Advertiser* would put it in a review of *The Confidence-Man*: "We prefer the earlier works of Melville, when he gave us fascinating and simply-drawn stories, without the obtrusion of personal theories" (8 April 1857).

Market pressures compelled Melville--ostensibly, at least--to return after *Mardi* to a more straightforward *Typee*-like narrative, in which mode he produced *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850). As rich as these works are at times, Melville himself seems to have thought of them as little more than ways to make money, relatively inconsequential

compared to the kind of book that would follow with *Moby Dick*. The reception of *Moby Dick* would only help clarify the problem he had described to Hawthorne earlier in 1851: "What I feel most moved to write, that is banned.--it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches." In Melville, economic pressures seem to have come against his own self-directed pressure of achieving artistic greatness or at least originality, so that his work would become a crucible for his re-defined, *literary* self. As he writes later in the same letter, "What reputation H.M. has is horrible. Think of it! To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as a 'man who lived among the cannibals!'" (Letter to Hawthorne, June 1851). Earlier, in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850), he had written of the fictional roles and ventriloquial measures an artist was forced to take in realizing his work as "the great Art of Telling the Truth." He had also pointed out that there was a difference between "Shakespeare" and "only master William Shakespeare of the shrewd, thriving business firm of Condell, Shakespeare & Co..."; that is, a great author would be defined by nothing else but the greatness of his work. His readers would recognize no special quality in the historical figure himself, but would instead *read* that quality into the author. For Melville, then, fiction was increasingly becoming a medium not only of hidden and only partly glimpsed "Truth," but of self-definition and at times perhaps even self-transcendence. Always in his fiction, as Edgar Dryden states, his "narrators are, in some way, portraits of the artist at work".¹

If fiction and its author were indeed as co-creative as Melville seemed to suppose, one could hardly fault his frustration at having a public which only accepted the kind of work that he himself saw as flat and uncomplicated--and thus which only accepted him as a flat and uncomplicated author. One might even have been able to see coming his economically disastrous act of rebellion, *Pierre* (1852). In a way, for a man looking to get at the "sane madness of vital truth," the popular response to *Pierre* could hardly have better proven his artistic point; one New York periodical gave the headline "Herman

Melville Crazy." In any event, *Pierre* was a tortured attempt to put into Gothic form the kind of heights and depths he'd reached with *Moby Dick*, but by most critical accounts, it was out of control, draining irrevocably Melville's reputation as a popular author.

Beginning in 1853 Melville started writing a number of shorter works for *Harper's* and *Putnam's* magazines, the second of whose stories--including "Bartleby the Scrivener" and *Benito Cereno*--were collected as *The Piazza Tales* (1856). *Israel Potter* (1855), his Revolutionary historical fiction, was also initially published in serial form for *Putnam's*. Newton Arvin has pointed out the thematic "homogeneity" of this period, identifying "two or three motives" that suggest an interrelation of biographical concerns with Melville's "fictional," authorial identity: "ideas of failure, bankruptcy, anticlimax, the miscarriage of hopes, and a willful withdrawal from the life of men; . . . the closely related motive of exile, desertion, forlornness, or sterility; and . . . the motive of treachery, fraudulence, and falsity."² If this hints at perhaps an overly *Moby*-centric view of Melville's later fiction, critics also have often noted the heightened stylistic control that Melville achieved during this phase of his career. Even if Melville could not regain the romantic grandeur of *Moby Dick* or the deep psychological extremes of *Pierre*, he seemed continually to be developing his use of narrative structure and, in general, his awareness of language. With *The Confidence-Man*, it was precisely through this heightened control of language and style, and through his developed sense of narrative as a communicative and transactive skill, that Melville would add one of the true master strokes to his aggregative portrait of *self*-defining work.

Melville's publishers, Dix & Edwards, had enough of a sense of humor that they published *The Confidence-Man* on April 1st, 1857. This was an April's Fool's referent that meshed better with his work than Melville could have anticipated, as the joke shifted from text to publishing house itself a few weeks later, when Dix & Edwards folded.³ For this reason, in America, there were relatively few reviews, while only a few of these could

be considered favorable. The *Exeter News-Letter, and Rockingham Advertiser* (6 April 1857), saw the novel as "another of [Melville's] pleasant stories, written in his own peculiarly graphic and unique style," while the Boston *Evening Transcript* (3 April 1857) had this as its most specific comment: "We commend this book as a unique affair." Many of the reviews, however, were less pleased with the book, their comments ranging from bemusement to hostility, often with a seemingly puzzled disappointment that Melville persisted in choosing to write material so different from *Typee* and *Omoo*. The Troy *Budget* (20 April 1857) claimed that *The Confidence-Man* "is not a novel. It wants the connection, the regular plot and great part of the machinery that is found in the regular novel"; the New York *Journal* (July 1857) wrote that, through the "innumerable shapes" of the Confidence Man, "dogmatizing, theorizing, philosophising and amplifying upon every known subject are 'piled up' for forty-five chapters in the most eccentric and incomprehensible manner"; the Cincinnati *Enquirer* (3 February 1858), stated, "'Typee,' one of, if not the first of his works, is the best, and 'The Confidence-Man' the last, decidedly the worst. So Mr. M's authorship is toward the nadir rather than the climax...."

The reviews in England were generally more charitable, perhaps because many of them largely saw it as a satirical attack on what the *Saturday Review* called the American "money-getting spirit" (23 May 1857). The *Spectator* (11 April 1857) noted the satirical quality, but argued that it "stops short of any continuous pungent effect; because his plan is not distinctly felt, and the framework is very inartistical; and also because" no one outside of Melville's U.S. could appreciate "what appear to be local allusions." The *Athenaeum* (11 April 1857) while calling the book "not exceptionally meritorious," expressed some appreciation for Melville's work: "although his style is one, from its peculiarities, difficult to manage, he has now obtained a mastery over it, and pours his colours over the narration with discretion as well as prodigality." The London *Illustrated Times* (25 April 1857), however, demonstrated what seems to have been the most prevalent contemporary feeling about *The Confidence-Man*, when it stated that "the book

belongs to no particular class, but we are almost justified in affirming that its *genre* is the *genre ennuyeux*." But for the modern-day literary critic, the *London Critic* (15 April 1857) provided a more prescient and valuably cautious commentary:

...there is a vividness and an intensity about his style which is almost painful for the constant strain upon the attention; and *The Confidence-Man* is that of all his works which readers will find the hardest nut to crack.

We are not quite sure whether we have cracked it ourselves--whether there is not another meaning hidden in the depths of the subject other than that which lies near the surface. ...

Still, even such respectful puzzlement was lost to the Melville revival of the 1920s, when the Melville of *Moby Dick* came to be seen for the literary marvel he was. Raymond Weaver, in his 1921 *Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic*, called *The Confidence-Man* (CM) "a posthumous work," while both Van Wyck Brooks and John Freeman, in 1923 and 1926 respectively, referred to it as "an abortion." While Carl Van Vechten did praise it in 1922 as "the great transcendental satire," he was basically alone in the sentiment, and the next few decades saw little improvement in its reception. Such harsh denouncements as those of Brooks and Freeman abated, but CM still had trouble getting much critical attention, and on the whole it was still considered to have failed. Lewis Mumford's 1929 biography of Melville discussed CM as a product of Melville's disturbed mental state, while Yvor Winters in 1938 concentrated on its thematic affinities with *Pierre*--both works propounding a "truth" of "absolute ambiguity"-- but wrote that CM is "tediously repetitious as narrative." In 1950 Newton Arvin's critical biography, like Winters, echoed the remarks of London's *Illustrated Times* almost a hundred years earlier, exchanging for the "*genre ennuyeux*" a "monotone of blackness."⁴

Richard Chase's 1949 essay on *The Confidence-Man* provided an important turning-point for literary critical treatment of the work, which Chase called Melville's

"second-best book." From about this point, critics were more willing to take it seriously as an important and accomplished work, so that books and articles dealing with it began to grow--steadily at first, then seemingly exponentially up through the 1980s, as Melville criticism sought less-charted imaginative territory beyond the canonical *Moby Dick* and *Billy Budd*, as more attention was paid to *CM*'s explorations of representation and epistemology, and to its seemingly deconstructive tendencies, and as interest has taken hold in the con-man as a peculiarly American trope.⁵ Elizabeth Foster's was the first critical edition (1954), providing a valuable and thorough Introduction, as well as a full explicative set of Explanatory Notes, helping establish a textual foundation upon which later critics and critical editions would build. After the late 1950s, a range of interpretations of and critical perspectives toward the book developed, along with such new editions as those by H. Bruce Franklin (1967), Hershel Parker (1971), Harrison Hayford, Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (the Northwestern-Newberry edition, 1984), and Stephen Matterson (1990). Among the modern critical appraisals of *The Confidence-Man*, still one of the most striking is that of H. Bruce Franklin, who makes the notable claim that it is "Melville's most nearly perfect work."⁶ As controversial as the statement was at the time, and as contrary as it was to the previously dominant view of the book as an "abortion," Franklin's comment does focus on the *richness* of the work. What is more, and more fitting, is that the depth and variety of subsequent interpretations have mirrored the potential infinitude of meanings that is dramatized through the book's metafictional theme of narrative and interpretation. The uncertainty that echoes through the text also echoes in the voices of its interpreters. Assumptions about even some of the most basic elements of plot become investments as equivocal as any act of "confidence" within the book.

But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion.

--1 June 1851, Melville to Hawthorne.

The Metafiction of *The Confidence-Man*

With a self-referential mode of narrative, Melville provides an important thematic structure of metafiction to *The Confidence-Man*, arranging stories and frames in mirror-like relation to one another, almost endlessly qualifying *what* is conveyed in the work as it calls attention to *how* it is conveyed. Edgar Dryden's *Melville's Thematics of Form* has mapped a trajectory through Melville's fiction from a search for metaphysical "Truth" to a (non)conclusion of chaos and contingency.⁷ With such a focus on self-reflexivity, one may yet see how Melville develops in *The Confidence-Man* a kind of truth of *uncertainty*, where interpretation becomes an unreliable and increasingly serious enterprise, the failure of which reveals a disjunction between subjective and intersubjective--individual and societal--meaning. This, in turn, suggests that any idea of transcendent truth would only be partly decipherable and inadequately articulable, even as it does not at all necessarily disavow the existence or possibility of that truth. Religion, history, science, philosophy: all are either explicitly or implicitly posited as epistemological systems by which one may be guided and from which one may attain both a method for understanding one's world and an explanation of deeper truths beyond it; so too, all are seen as failing in some measure, subverted by the multiple meanings of their uncontrollable truths.

The focus of *The Confidence-Man* shifts from the object of understanding, to the means by which understanding is conveyed. It is through the use of *language* that certainty has been defeated. For Melville, it is the inevitably paradoxical, malleable, and polysemous nature of language which threatens to make *fixed* meaning almost a contradiction in terms, which subverts the assumptions behind the very ideas of doctrine and method, and which leads to a cognitive system that can no longer handle its own

antithetical uncertainty. It is thus the requisite *credibility* of any meaningful knowledge that the Confidence Man calls attention to. He joins knowing and believing in an interpretive dialectic exemplified by the act of reading, whose meaning is in the act. The devil of this text--making it an even question whether or not he even is such--is then less a spiritual than an epistemological threat, presiding over what A. Robert Lee calls a "narrational echo-chamber of metaphysics and language."⁸

The devil comes citing Scripture, as the saying goes, but his genre is by no means limited; rather, Melville employs shifting rhetorical modes so that expression is read and re-read through Platonic dialogue, historical narrative, political speech, drama, sentimental-tale within a drama, and on, a dynamic between text and interpretation. To look at it from a slightly different angle, Gustaaf Van Cromphout has written that "*The Confidence-Man* problematizes the cognitive relationship of the subject (the reader, the narrator, characters-as-perceivers, Melville) to others."⁹ The Confidence Man is not only an authorial producer of texts, but a critic, a reader himself--sometimes even of his own narrative. Made textual, even one's own words and meanings become open to interpretation, as one's dictional, syntactic, and generic forms work to create a fictional-authorial self that is "other" even to oneself.

For all the seemingly nihilistic possibilities of the work, it is the sheer possibility of the Confidence Man himself which suggests a latent depth even here: it is the indeterminacy of the shape-changing figure, the inscrutability of his intention, the imperviousness of the *what* and *why* of his very presence, that make him after all a symbolic correlative to what in *Moby Dick* is the "whiteness of the whale." If the power of the whale had largely been in the meaning one projects upon it, the Confidence Man presents a text which absorbs every meaning that the reader attempts to set beyond his or her own understanding. The meaning of the Confidence Man is neither his nor his reader's alone, but rather in the willing engagement between the two, in the possibility of expression and the choice of interpretation. It is only the unqualified language of

conviction that is found untenable, not that ineffable quality which is its object; not the meaning of *Truth* which, for Melville, is expressed by fiction's self-conscious expressiveness.

A useful approach to Melville's work is to locate his theory of fiction in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," an essay in which an idea of literary genius is developed in order to place Nathaniel Hawthorne among the ranks of the greats. Specifically, there is the well-noted statement Melville makes in reference to Shakespeare:

Through the mouths of the dark characters... he craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things, which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them. Tormented into desperation, Lear the frantic King tears off the mask, and speaks the sane madness of vital truth.... For in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a sacred white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth,--even though it be covertly, and by snatches (HM, 985-986).

To Edgar Dryden this suggests that Melville's idea of "fiction, paradoxically, puts man in touch with Truth while protecting him from it" (MTF, 26). Truth, a "sane madness," is meaning encased in what only *seems* to be nonsense, only whose context of historical facticity *makes* it nonsense. Truth, in other words, must be re-mediated by both a fictional context and a fictional voice, offered "covertly"--with ambiguity, with irony, with the potential fluidity and indeterminacy of meaning that symbolism allows.

In arguing that Hawthorne's greatness is equivalent to Shakespeare's, Melville argues that "in his own life-time, Shakespeare was not Shakespeare, but only master William Shakespeare..." (HM, 987). That is, his literary genius was only fully recognized *after* the actual man was gone, and had been given over into his literary work. Here

Melville makes the distinction between the historical and literary identities of great authors--between a factual "world of lies" and the "enchanted landscape" of imaginative fiction. He suggests the ventriloquial *role* of the author, a primary theme of *The Confidence-Man*: where the cosmopolitan, Frank Goodman, claims that "Shakespeare has got to be a kind of deity," he accepts the 'Shakespeare' who has been refracted through the profound truths that his fictive creations speak and manifest. Informing Melville's (meta)fiction is an awareness of the *co-creative* relation between creation and creator, each existing only in relation to the other. Thus the profound author is a "fictitious" one, is the one whose effort of imagination has, in the understanding of his audience, disengaged him from the societal 'real world' and connected him with his work through what H. Bruce Franklin calls "fictive reality": "In this world [of *The Confidence-Man*] a character creates his author by creating other characters who speak words formed by both of them."¹⁰

In these terms, the text refers to something beyond itself, a *context* akin to the Heideggerian paradox where, in attempting to identify the nature of art, one finds that "art is the origin of the artwork and of the artist." Evoking "The Origin of the Work of Art" brings out the inherent self-referential quality that marks Melville's idea of fictional Truth. Heidegger states that, "to create is to let something emerge as a thing that has been brought forth. The work's becoming a work [of art] is a way in which truth becomes and happens. It all rests in the essence of truth."¹¹ For Melville, the voice of truth speaks *only* within its constructed fictional context, in its being Art. The author in his fictive character is able to say what the 'real' author, "in his own proper character," cannot, because fiction sheds the demand of other forms of communication, which is a kind of principle of *utility-as-reality*. With the communicative license of fiction, the author speaks a meaning that determines his analogical self through a self-justifying act of ventriloquism.¹² He replicates himself into and as text, giving his fictive world over to the indeterminate logic of its own analogical cosmos, and making *readership* the means

through which he himself is reconstituted. As Dryden points out (in regard to "Mosses"), "the value of fiction is, then, dependent upon the reader's recognizing and approaching it as fiction" (MTF, 27). This point helps explain Dryden's method--and that of the present approach, in emphasizing narrativity--as it suggests "that all of Melville's narrator's are, in some way, portraits of the artist at work" (29).

Even in *The Confidence-Man*, supposedly the darkest and most pessimistic of Melville's novels,¹³ Melville writes, "It is with fiction as it is with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie" (CM, 218). The "tie" or "connection" is likewise stated explicitly in "Mosses," when Melville describes the greatness of (the literary) Hawthorne: "He is immeasurably deeper than the plummet of the mere critic. For it is not the brain that can test such a man; it is only the heart" (HM, 985). The *heart* is the tie, for Melville--but it is simply not a "connection" that can be rationally determined or at last, even reduced to cognitive experience alone. Hawthorne's greatness is the Truth that he, like Shakespeare, sets forward; neither does that Truth emerge (as evanescently as it may) by itself, nor reside simply self-contained in the work without a reader to appreciate it. It is "intuitive Truth" that reveals the "very axis of reality" (985)--truth which is produced by a living, thinking, feeling author, and which is in turn sensed by feeling, *tested* only by the "heart" of its reader. Again, "we *feel* the tie." We feel it because for Melville "reality" exists not just in Hamlet or Lear or any literary text in itself, but in the artistic *context* that includes its audience. It is then shared by those who approach the words of Hamlet and Lear with some "seriousness" (the cosmopolitan's final interpretive perspective), who at some level recognize within the words the resonance of deeper meanings--meanings whose sheer multiplicity the "brain" alone could not contain. This is how a truth of "sane madness" is possible. Melville's ideal reader maintains a kind of double consciousness--or to use *Pierre's* terms, a dual "chronometrical" and "horological" awareness--which sets an understanding of the real "world of lies" in relation to the fictive world of truths. A good reader, it would seem,

would have *brain* enough to know what sets truth apart from mundane factuality, and would have *heart* enough to adhere to the truth, even when faced with the contradictory certainty of cognitive 'fact.' Or as Richard Boyd Hauck remarks in regard to interpretation in *The Confidence-Man*, "if there is a progression, it is from confidence to cognition, not from cognition to confidence."¹⁴

The reader engages in an act of interpretation that is itself a part of the creative process, completing the work's "fictive reality." Melvillean reading (re)creates the fictive author by attempting to determine for itself the meanings of his ventriloquial words, even as it carries over the reality of fiction into the 'real world,' interpreting the speaker beyond the speakers. Melville writes, "no great author has ever come up to the idea of his reader" (HM, 982), and in so doing suggests that authorial identity is a pluralistic and indeterminate one, bound only by the number of readers the author has--which is to say, never bound at all. At the same time, this dimensional infinitude of fictive reality is a way of balancing the dominance of physical fact, because "that dust of which our bodies are composed, how can it fitly express the nobler intelligences among us?" This will be an important point in avoiding a strictly nihilistic view of *The Confidence-Man*, where the lack of communicative and epistemological certainty might be seen as an indication of hopelessness. Dryden himself is led to conclude that "Melville's theory of fiction is based upon a vision of life as an empty masquerade" (MTF, 21). "Masquerade" is of course a reading informed by *The Confidence-Man*, and would be in itself a fair deduction from it of both the fictional project and the act of living in a "world of lies"; but to declare life "empty" at the same time, is to conflate a true "reality" gauged by the "heart" with the unreliable "facts" only vaguely discerned by the "brain," so that the failure of the latter is mistakenly seen as the erasure of the former.

If *The Confidence-Man* stands as a dramatization of the creative process, it also suggests a larger interpretive framework where writer and reader, speaker and listener engage one another through a world where everything is textual. Here everything and

everyone either has or is a message, and all messages contain their own latent anti-meanings. If one is then left to interpret the meaning and decide how a text speaks for its author, one must also then re-create that fictive author (or speaker), and, in so doing, invest oneself in the contextual fictive reality. A *transactive* sense of textuality permeates the book, evincing itself at moments of ambiguity in syntax and diction, and at times when a communicative genre is evoked and subverted, its underlying meanings revealed as the effect of rhetorical conventions.¹⁵ So too, two larger structural features manifest this thematic of reading: the narrator's direct addresses to the reader, where he directs his self-(re)creation by providing suggestions for interpretive method; and the texts-within-the-text which dramatize fictive and communicative engagement as a sub-reader encounters a sub-narrator. Texts, then, are transactive, while their meanings are interactive. And if *The Confidence-Man* denies interpretive certainty, it nevertheless points toward creative (albeit unsettling) potentiality.

The book's first narrative interpolation comes with Chapter 14, when the narrator defends the "inconsistency" of a character, arguing that "if reason be judge, no writer has produced such inconsistent characters as nature" (CM, 104). It is the example of the caterpillar's change to butterfly that leads into the point, calling for an interpretive perspective which does not presume that being "faithful to facts" necessarily exempts one from being "untrue to reality" (104). The distinction here is thus a familiar one--between "reality" and *factuality*--and it suggests that the assumed fixity of the latter makes it prey to what by observance seems itself a rule of "nature"--mutability. Of course, this is the primary strength of the Confidence Man, whose own changeability mimics the rhetorical indeterminacy of his meanings, and whose project then is to convert his auditors to an only transient certainty that would deny multiple meanings and hidden intentions. Certainty, a trust in "the revelation of human nature on fixed principles" (CM, 106), is a trust so deeply-ingrained, and so easily-argued by the empirical "facts" of one's "experience," that

it even buries its own subjective basis, denies that it *is* trust. Chapters 9 and 40 both ironically suggest this point, when the sophomore states, "Experience, sir, ...is the only teacher," as Orchis later will claim that experience is "the only true knowledge" (76, 327). Seeing that the first speaker is in the process of being duped, while the second is about to unwittingly destroy his friend, the supposedly certain knowledge of the world upon which both claim to be acting is shown too easily to undermine the intentions of its proponent.

The narrator in Chapter 14 argues first of all the mimetic correspondence between the 'real world' and his own fiction, a fiction "faithful" not so much to "facts" as to the seemingly anti-mimetic inconsistency of "reality." But with his advice for reading fiction, the narrator suggests an interpretive caution for one attempting to cull through facts and understand reality. The key point of this caution *is* its interpretivity; after all, for the narrator to "raise a degree of surprise" among his imagined readers in the first place, to directly engage his reader and by indirection cause him or her to question the narrative itself, is to underscore the importance of the role of reading not just as the passive receiving of information, but as the assimilating of what should seem new, or different, or "inconsistent." The advice simultaneously undermines the stability of the 'factual' world and grants a new importance to fiction itself, not so much in what fiction is capable of saying, but in its very *saying* it--in the *expressiveness* of its narrative, and in the active, questioning reader it demands.

This is much of the genius of the Confidence Man. Even if one does not take the *narrator* to be a manifestation, the Confidence Man as literary critic recurs throughout the book, providing a model for active readership that equalizes all narratives as it identifies the inherent metaphoricity of all formulations of language. That is, words are *created* as designations of things, but are not essences in themselves. They are both constructed and arranged for human, subjective purposes, and however much they represent factuality, it is always a question of degree. In a communicative sense, content is then almost indistinguishable from style. Both have equal bearing on *meaning*, and are seen as

rhetorical means to an intentional end, which is a reading or a hearing that is less an assimilation of facts than an understanding of what the facts should mean. For this reason, the herb-doctor can deny the plausibility of the bitter story of the "soldier of fortune," disregarding its truth value because "it so jars with all, is so incompatible with all" that he understands to be "the system of things" (149, 150). He is no different in this regard from the man in gray, who, in reaction to the one-legged man's sarcastic tale, claims, "even were truth on his tongue, his way of speaking it would make truth almost as offensive as falsehood" (47). Paradoxically, both of these supposed proponents of "faith" are led by their *confidence* to a qualified interpretive skepticism. On the one hand, the "truth" of a story can be considered an aesthetic question, especially for the man in gray. Recognizing that "many men have many minds," and so, that any story may be told through any number of perspectives with any number of intonations all to differing effects, he rejects the subjective slant that does not square with his own.

On the other hand, the herb-doctor can praise a story that he has just been told is a lie, because he can appreciate the cripple's "way of speaking it," and recognize a different truth in its pragmatic effect. The initial tale of the cripple moldering in jail for no reason may have factual basis, but it is so darkly absurd, so arbitrary, that as a narrative it becomes meaningless. Few will accept it because senselessness is an affront to personal interpretation, to whatever faith one has in the same "system of things" that has put them in the position to afford to be charitable; its author they would re-creatively understand as a threat to that system. This the herb-doctor as much as admits. But, unlike the other observer who would expose the lie, he has *faith* enough to buy into the subsequent fiction (of the war wounds) as a *truer* representation of the truth, because it has the effect of gaining the cripple the sympathy he deserves. This sympathy, the interpersonal connection that narrative achieves, is the most important truth, because the most meaningful. For the herb-doctor, a misrepresentation of facts is then simply a more effective communication, a creative response to "Fortune."

Yet the Confidence Man's interpretive sense works the other way as well. The transfer-agent demonstrates this when he interprets the story that presumably he himself has told in another guise. Here the Melvillean fictional "transaction" is more overtly represented, where attributing meaning to the text becomes equally a matter of interpreting the author/teller of the text. In this case, it is immediately complicated by the strange preface to the tale, in which the over-narrator takes control of this sub-narrative: "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" (88). First of all, this sub-narrative resonates with the "ventriloquy" of fiction that "Mosses" describes, the narrative intrusion reminding one that every word spoken comes only with the sanction of this over-arching story-teller, that the entire text is in its a way one great authorial intrusion whose art is in hiding its intrusiveness. As Egbert will point out about his own tale to tell, "the original story-teller" had "tyrannized over" him, so that his own voice had become the voice of the one whose narrative meaning he speaks (323-24). The re-created author is thus more than an origin that the reader or listener seeks for the text, more than an explanation of where the text come from. In an important way, these passages underscore, the author *is* the text--no matter whether the text is overtly fictional or allegorical, as in the case of Egbert's "China Aster" tale, or historical or biographical, as "the unfortunate man" story supposedly is. The stories suggest Van Cromphout's point concerning "Melville's radical doubt about the possibility of one's knowing others,"¹⁶ because as each text reflects and manifests its author, and so, becomes a document of "human subjectivity," so too it disperses both that subjectivity and its own linguistic quality through the rhetorical shadow-play of narrative. The herb-doctor is right to de-emphasize the epistemological implications of the cripple's changing story, because even behind supposedly objective 'facts' there will always be further interpretive levels leading to and through a decidedly subjective organizing perception.

In viewing the prefatory remark for the story of the man with the weed, one also notices in the "other words" the narrator's replication of the same confidence-logic evinced by the herb-doctor. *Effect* is once again the controlling principle, but then if the narrator's intervention is "not to any other effect" than the merchant's telling, why bother changing the words? The question draws attention to the equivocality of this introduction, and at the same time refers one to a consideration of audience. For one thing, effect is yet another potentially infinite quality, changing with each interaction of text and reader. The question become how the narrator would preserve effect if he cannot control who reads his text. If the merchant's version's effect is on the transfer-agent alone, the narrator then would need to re-present the story to his own audience--to us, the readers--and in so doing elicit the same response as the Confidence Man has to his own story. This is why, in a book otherwise full of dialogue, both story and response lack it entirely. The narrative third-person gives the same effect of distance that the transfer-agent has. The transfer-agent in hearing the narrative, has the foreknowledge that it is a *story*, and that he can by no means accept it at face value; the narrator presents it to us with a series of qualifications that underscore a point we should already have been keeping in mind, that this is the story of an *equivocal* man. The narrator's version of the tale begins, "it *appeared* that..." (emphasis added), while he concludes it with a deeply ambiguous tone of his own: "Now all of this, from the beginning, the good merchant could not but consider rather hard for the unfortunate man" (89, 94). The narrative distance reminds one that it is only the merchant who considers things to be "hard" for the man with the weed, while the narrator himself makes no such commitment. Instead, in summing up what would *appear* to be the horrible misfortune of the unfortunate man, he employs a phrase such as "rather hard" to suggest into the story a subversive strain of irony. Since the narrator is the agent who ultimately directs the words of this text, he is here (as elsewhere) the authority, and one is led to, if not invest oneself in the same narrative distance, at least be aware of it.

The narrative irony suggests what Hauck calls Melville's "double vision,"¹⁷ in that it hints at a relentlessly qualifying refusal to accept any one perspective as definitive. The transfer-agent dramatizes this same point, as both he and the narrator draw through the passage a parallel theme of interpretation. At every level, narrative is given scrutiny informed by a reapplication of genre, where the text we read and the inter-text the transfer-agent hears are each approached as a kind of legal testimony. Chapter 13 opens with a warning to the reader not to judge the transfer-agent too easily or too soon, lest one be "betrayed into any surprise incompatible with their own good opinion of their previous penetration" (96). Similarly, the transfer-agent warns the merchant that "one should not be hasty in judging" the story of the unfortunate man. The narrator indeed appears to make good on his promise about equal *effect*, as his qualifications blend with what seem to be those of the transfer-agent's reaction--but since it is the third-person, one has no way of knowing what exactly were the transfer-agent's words or tone, and one must take *on faith* the indirect discourse as his, that twice in one sentence applies "alleged" to the circumstances of the story. This multilayered *allegedness* transposes the transfer-agent's interpretive caution to a meta-textual level, but in so doing transforms his "calm and impartial view" into--should we begin to think that *we* finally have an objective view--an ironically self-referential commentary (97). These echoes of uncertainty give a kind of wry portrayal and extension of what Plato considered a problem of mimetic art, that it is "concerned with something at a third remove from the truth"; the narrator's is a representation of a representation of a representation of what originally was perceived to be the truth.¹⁸ As has been discussed above, it is such a question of mimesis that informs (or concerns) the digression of Chapter 14.

H. Bruce Franklin writes in his 1967 edition that Chapter 14 provides another model for interpretation, when dramatized through Chapter 22, ironically titled "In the Polite Spirit of the Tusculan Disputations." Franklin notes that when the "Philosophical

Intelligence Office" man incorporates into his argument (that seemingly bad boys are part of a natural progression into good men) the example of the caterpillar's transformation into the butterfly, it mimics the earlier "argument and metaphor used by the authorial voice in Chapter 14": "This is the last chapter in which crawls what we might call the Confidence Man as caterpillar, who is to be replaced by the gaudy-colored Cosmopolitan. So the argument between Pitch and the PIO man is an argument about how to read the book."¹⁹ So too, it may be said, it is an argument about how to *read* in general. This point becomes clearer when one takes into consideration another point of Franklin's, that this entire chapter seems to be modeled after a Platonic dialogue, that the PIO man's humility suggests a kind of reworking of Socrates. In a sense, by once again aligning himself with his Confidence Man, the narrator correlates this dialogic genre with the self-conscious narrative mode of Chapter 14 and with his overall fictional project as contained within the book. In so doing, he reinforces the activity of reading. But then reading takes on another dimension, because here, as Chapter 14 itself hints at, the 'author' responds, and elicits responses in turn--the reader is explicitly seen as *committed*.

The conversion of Pitch may then be seen as instruction in interpretation, where the specific genre employed illustrates the dangers of a too-certain (and so, distorting) perspective. In the chapter before, Melville provides a clue to Pitch's perspective, where his otherwise healthy distrust of nature, while keeping him safe from the influence of the herb-doctor, is nevertheless seen as an extreme of *vision*: "for the privilege of vision I am indebted to an oculist.... Nature made me blind, and would have kept me so" (CM, 169). The next manifestation of the Confidence Man is then ready to argue against this indebtedness to technology, against Pitch's "machines." How he does this is to offer only a more subtle version of the herb-doctor's argument for "nature," shrouding his "doctrine of analogies" in terms of "reason," and offering his "state of boyhood scientifically viewed" (187). "Scientifically viewed" is of course a phrase which directly evokes and exploits Pitch's "privilege of vision," and it is with this phrase that the PIO man turns the dialogue.

In having already elicited Pitch's own views on the subject of boys, the PIO brings to mind what Bakhtin writes is a crucial technique of Socrates, "anacrisis": "he was able to force people to *speak*, i.e. to put into words their hazy, but stubborn, pre-formed opinions."²⁰ Such a move may then be seen as a more dramatic version of what has already been considered the transactive sense of textual engagement, where reader bears some responsibility for the context through which the re-created fictive author develops. Here, textual *effect* echoes back and forth and does not end with the reader's primary interpretation of meaning. Pitch, instead, makes his ideas words, and his words the text for the PIO man, first to infuse with meaning and then, to re-present back to him. Pitch himself is then re(-)presented much as the fictive author is. He is translated from the reader's "idea" of him, as the PIO man says to him most Socratically, "permit me ... to speak for you" (188).

But Socratic "truth" is not what develops out of the dialogue; instead the PIO man elucidates his "strictly philosophical principles" which only temporarily replace a "general law of distrust systematically applied to the race" (186-87, 202). What the Confidence Man offers is a "dialogue" whose result is an inversion of what Pitch has previously said, hidden within a seeming recapitulation of what Pitch already thinks he knows. Chapter 14 has already indicated the danger of what are only "sallies of ingenuity, having for their end the revelation of human nature on fixed principles," so that the PIO man's "principles" throughout his strictly analogical argument stand with the qualifying "contempt from the ranks of the sciences" (106). One of the pseudo-scientific modes to which the "sallies" refer ("physiognomy, phrenology," etc.) is even specifically employed by the PIO man, who 'proves' that the boy he offers Pitch is "honest" by referring to a "phrenological chart of his head" (199). This comes at the end of a chain of bad logic, where the rationale for Pitch's now "hitting a good" boy is that he has previously "struck upon a peculiarly bad vein" of them; it is the fallacious reasoning of a 'law of averages.' As Pitch responds, without conscious irony, "that *sounds* kind of reasonable" (198, emphasis added). At one

level, this suggests that Pitch's "vision," provided for by the "oculist"--and so, one may say, by a kind of "science" itself--is by this time shaded over by the opaque "scientific" perspective offered by the PIO man, so that *hearing* is all Pitch has left to him, leaving him to the mercy of the Confidence Man's speech. But most important here, is the *rhetoric* of reason that the "Philosophical Intelligence Office" man represents. Earlier, in the midst of the layered uncertainties of Chapter 13, the blended narrator/transfer-agent had warned the reader/merchant against abandoning the "secure Malakoff [fortress] of confidence" for "hazardous skirmishes on the open ground of reason" (99). One begins to see what he means by "*open ground*," because, even with supposedly rational discourse, once again rhetorical *effect* holds the force of truth. The "calm and impartial view" is no more definitive here than it had been with the transfer-agent, otherwise he would not, with the paradoxically deceptive honesty of all the confidence men, warn against "hazardous skirmishes" over the "mischievous conceit[s]" that such "open" discourse would engender. Reason here is no free-floating entity; rather, it is a mode of communication from one person to another. As the Platonic form itself exhibits, its meaning demands not simply a way to convey some essential message of truth, but an *artful* articulation whose effect *is* the meaning. Reason, as the Confidence Man demonstrates, is inseparable from expression.

It is not just that the PIO man can carry the point by such isolated incidents of persuasiveness, but that in so doing he can contradict the very basis of his previous 'logic'. That is, in following his "analogical theory," the PIO man employs a number of empirical facts, first from the "horticultural kingdom" (147), and then from the animal kingdom, with the example of the caterpillar's transformation. By analogy, these provable phenomena are used to justify the same principle in human beings--it is the precedent of experience which validates the expectation. Pitch is wise enough an interpreter and still skeptical enough of nature not to accept such an argument as anything but a "pun with ideas" (150); after all, his own punning with "accommodate" makes similar idea/word-play

recognizable. His force as a character and his ability to withstand the Confidence Man for as long as he does is largely because of this linguistic consciousness, because of his ability to see ambiguities of meaning at even the smallest level. But when the PIO man uses human examples in figures such as Loyola and St. Augustine, Pitch fails to recognize within its ostensibly historical perspective the same analogical foundation. The turning point comes when the PIO man appeals to Pitch's "subjectivity." Pitch's appreciation of Augustine ("excellent genius!") allows the PIO man his entry point, through which he reinserts yet another analogy, the "ear of Indian corn," which only completes what seems to be a confirmation of Pitch's own experience (196). Once again, Chapter 14 has anticipated this pitfall of interpretation, stating that "as no one man's experience is coextensive with *what is*, it may be unwise in every case to rest upon it" (104). It points to the paradox of interpretation, that one *learns* in terms of what one already knows; that it is "experience" which lets one recognize difference, and at the same time limits one's understanding of it. "Philosophy, knowledge, experience"--all become modes of expression for the message that appeals to one's "genial" side, to uncontrollable "human subjectivity" (202).

Pitch's "general law of distrust" toward the human "race" suggests simply another variation of the fallacy of "fixed principles," and his mostly unreflective absolutism mars his interpretation of the PIO man's "principles." His susceptibility is a deeply-buried and at heart irrational *conviction* in what he knows, a pure faith in distrust evidenced by what is almost a mantra, "my name is Pitch; I stick to what I say." Such certainty undermines his self-preserving (even if self-limiting) awareness of ambiguity, and a recurrence of the exact phrase directly precedes the moment when he begins "softening" to the PIO man's persuasion. Until it is too late, his certainty reflects his 'unnatural' vision, and blinds him to a "human" nature qualifying the creed of "Original Sin"--"human subjectivity." It is because of this, that his momentary fall to the Confidence Man suggests an ironic account of spiritual conversion, in what M.H. Abrams traces from St. Augustine to Wordsworth as

"crisis autobiography." Of course, fairly early in the argument Pitch uses Wordsworth's well-known line "the child is father of the man" to reflect a decidedly anti-Wordsworthian sentiment of pessimism and distrust. Such a use only makes explicit the inversion indicated by Pitch's absolute suspicion of nature, which for Wordsworth and other Romantics was an ultimately benevolent source of spiritual rejuvenation and communion. As Abrams writes, the Wordsworthian "idea" of personal growth exemplified by *The Prelude* began with the innocence and natural communion of early childhood, then developed at the beginnings of maturity into the kind of spiritual "crisis" experienced by a figure such as the Pedlar in *The Ruined Cottage*, whose "'mind became disturbed'" and who "turned 'in vain.../To science for a cure'" before he had once again regained spiritual harmony and "discovered his role in life" (emphasis added).²¹ The crisis of spiritual disjunction from nature is, as Abrams points out, coded in terms of a "theodicy of the landscape," so that the act of interpreting "the symbolic language of the landscape," of discovering some sense of divine purpose and spiritual meaning in nature, provides one with the path of reconciliation, of inner resolution (NS, 104). Abrams then goes on: "far from denying the reality of pain, terror, and suffering," Wordsworth's "optimism" "insists not only that they are humanly inevitable but that they are indispensable conditions for developing the calm, the insight, and the power that is ours when, as Wordsworth put it, we are worthy of ourselves....In *The Prelude*, then, the justification of seeming evil turns on a crisis and inner transformation, parallel to Augustine's agony and conversion in the garden at Milan" (NS, 113).

Viewed through this lens, then, not only the quote from Wordsworth, but the fact that what finally begins to 'convert' Pitch is the example of St. Augustine himself, suggests that the PIO man's argument is a kind of quasi-scientific 'theodicy' of (human) nature--a seemingly rational explanation and excuse in empirical, historical, 'natural' terms, of youthful immorality and all-around rottenness. Growth itself is invoked as a justification for the "natural state of rascality" that boyhood is to Pitch (CM, 181); and where Abrams

writes that an "important distinction" between the Romantic and Augustinian transformations lies in the gradualness of the former and the suddenness of the latter, the PIO man takes further the Romantic mode of conversion, prolonging it by *hypothetically* suckering Pitch: "supposing that... the lad should, after all, evince some little undesirable trait, do not, respected sir, rashly dismiss him. Have but patience, have but confidence" (200). Having engaged Pitch with St. Augustine and a "text" (on "Original Sin") which seemingly confirms Pitch's point of view, the PIO man thus gets Pitch not only to abandon his distrust, but affirm the reverse, a "perfect and unquestioning" faith. And as it relies upon nature, it is a faith antithetical to Pitch's 'un-natural' vision.

The chapter immediately following then gives a final ironic twist, for which the title almost says it all: "In which the powerful effect of natural scenery is evinced in the case of the Missourian, who, in view of the region round about Cairo, has a return of his chilly fit" (156). With the PIO man having removed himself, declaring that it is for Cairo he is disembarking, the "scenery" around Cairo and the evening gloom stand alone as an explanation both of nature and of the Confidence Man.²² The importance of the "twilight" of this chapter has been noted: for one, Cairo, Illinois is the final free (non-slave) port on the *Fidele*'s journey south, so that the transition between light and darkness becomes suggestive of the two dominant social conditions of antebellum U.S.;²³ also, it represents the transition between the two halves of the novel, the first dominated by the plurality of forms of the Confidence Man, the second by the cosmopolitan alone. Even the steamboat "lies" still at this point. In effect, it would seem to be a kind of liminal moment which Pitch occupies, granting him a restored vision and a kind of intuitive realization that, if only for an instant, is one of the most lucid-seeming insights of the book. He "eyes through the dubious medium that swampy and squalid domain," and thereby begins to "suspect" the PIO man (201). Strangely, the "morass" inspires him with a sense that seems almost of a debased or veiled sublime, so that the experience culminates when he "half-divines" the truth: "To what vicissitudes of light and shade is man subject! He

ponders the mystery of human subjectivity in general" (202). Pitch briefly becomes a model for the reader, in that his understanding itself is a *reading*. He had invested himself, via his (ostensibly misanthropic) meaning, in the dialogue with the PIO man, where Nature was the primary subject of the text. Having lost his meaning in the dialogue, it is then when he re-reads Nature (as "scenery") that he begins to recover himself, so that he comes to recognize *himself* as a part of the text. It is in turning his interpretive focus on himself as a part of the world that he gains what insight he does.

Uncertainty and "mystery" dominate his understanding, suggesting thought itself as a hopelessly inadequate means of controlling a seemingly infinite spectrum of "vicissitudes." But Pitch will not accept this paradox of *knowing*--that it attempts to determine meanings in the world even as it is somehow a part of that world, and thus is "subject" to what it claims to determine. No sooner has he reached his awareness of uncertainty than he implicitly rejects it by putting unqualified faith in it, and, through his analysis of "where was slipped in the entering wedge," is led back again to an affirmation of his "general law of distrust" (157). Once again he methodizes interpretation, the only difference now being his resolution, that he would "be a little splenetic in his intercourse henceforth" and so, deny the future possibility of any kind of meaningful dialogue; by using antisocial behavior as a defense against new or challenging voices, he would in a way abandon communication entirely. And yet in attempting to assimilate the Confidence Man into his unilaterally interpretive scheme of distrust, "he revolves, but cannot comprehend, the operation, still less the operator" (202). Logic will make no sense of it, as "two or three dirty dollars" deny money as cause. Nature, too, can go no further than only to provide an impression of the "villainous" quality of the man who defended and then disappeared into it. Pitch is left with an indeterminable identity the only expression for which is a religious and poetic metaphor, whose fictive truth at least resists the contradiction of either "reason" or reality: "the beast that windeth his way on his belly" (203).

As Hauck writes, "understanding [in *The Confidence-Man*] reveals the absolute ambiguity underlying all phenomena, including understanding itself."²⁴ Pitch's response seems in this case to have been a dizzying fear that (in Hauck's term) his own "double vision"--his ability in Chapter 21 to see the good and bad in nature, his awareness of "punning" in Chapter 22--would encompass even itself, and would thus duplicate its view interminably into an ultimate meaninglessness. In attempting to remove himself from "open" discourse, Pitch would then be attempting to remove himself from the scope of both his own and others' interpretive understanding. If his resolution is hopeless and inadequate because it threatens to isolate him radically from society, it at least does not sever him completely from a sense of personal meaning, which is solipsistic and overly self-confident, but is the only 'truth' he has left. Perhaps to his credit, of the characters whom the Confidence Man re-targets, he is the only one who is not taken twice.

If in Chapter 14 the narrator creates his fictive reader as he ventriloquially questions his own seeming "inconsistency," in Chapter 33 he does so even more dramatically. Here, there is even a direct portrayal of the reader's voice: "How unreal is all this! Who did ever dress or act like your cosmopolitan?" (285). It is a kind of forced dialogue, a defensive in which the narrator appropriates and then answers a "certain voice" in his projected audience, and, by representing a question of representation, thus pre-empts any challenge that may be made to the work's seeming lack of mimetic faithfulness. The argument here is for "novelty" in art--for "nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed" (286). It becomes a case for a fiction which "should present another world, and yet one to which we should feel the tie" (286). In this last step, the narrator takes up a case for something like the PIO man's "analogical theory"; the key difference comes in what again Dryden has pointed out in regard to Melville's idea of fiction in "Mosses," that fiction is important only if it is recognized as such.

The cosmopolitan suggests the very same thing, when he characterizes the powerful "strangeness" of his own story about Charlemont: "if it seem strange to you, that strangeness is the romance; it is what contrasts it with real life; it is the invention, in brief, the fiction as opposed to the fact" (292). And yet this "fiction," even though "opposed to the fact," is what most incisively reveals the truth about his opponent con-man, the "Mississippi operator" Charlie; it is, in effect, one of the truest things the Confidence Man says throughout the novel. The "doctrine of analogies" then, in standing as a corollary of fiction, dramatizes the importance of how fiction must be taken if it is to have meaning beyond the "sham" (to appropriate a usage of Dryden's) of absolute realism. Where the PIO man made figurative and metaphoric expression the core of a "scientific" and supposedly 'rational' argument applied to "nature" and the "real world," the narrator's position indicates that metaphor must be read and understood differently. Fiction demands not the verifiability of "real life," but a fluidity of expression where *expressiveness* is an underlying message, whose overtly creative form is able to portray "more reality, than real life itself can show" (286). Fiction does not hide the fact that it is language, and so, metaphoric. The role of the reader is then once again suggested by the narrator, who is not just defensively "vindicating" himself, but providing further instruction in how to read, in how to find what 'truth' one can in a text--which, again, is a truth of experiential effect. The problem that one should keep in mind is what Chapter 14 had raised, which is "how unreal" the world itself can be to an epistemology that has only experience to go on. And if the seeming 'unreality' of the world is the ultimate indeterminacy of its forms of "expression," then so does a fictive-interpretive approach benefit one's reading of *anything*. Such a consideration helps qualify how one relates "reality" to the "real world," and helps clarify one's understanding of potentially any literary or communicative genre.

This is the kind of critical reading that the Confidence Man himself dramatizes in regard to the story of Moredock, when he claims that "some parts don't hang together"

(245). Besides the relation to the quasi-Platonic dialogue of the PIO man, then, the narrative interpolation stands in marked contrast to another genre incorporated into *The Confidence-Man*, the "history," as shown in the account of "Indian-hating." In *Billy Budd*, Melville would comment with some irony upon a presumed objectivity of the historical perspective, supposedly a relation of 'facts' as they occur in "real life." He quotes one British historian's phrase, that "impartiality forbid[s] fastidiousness," but then questions it in reference to Britain's "Great Mutiny" of 1797, remarking that "national pride along with views of policy would fain shade it off into the historical background. Such events cannot be ignored, but there is a considerate way of historically treating them" (BB, 1046). With the "history" of Indian-hating, this critique of a self-deceptive certainty of events is implicit in the way that the narrative frame is established. Because it is the narrator giving the account of a "stranger" giving the account of "Judge Hall" giving the account of Col. Moredock, the 'facts' of the story are undermined by a thickness of mediation, evoking the layers of "human subjectivity" which the story of the "unfortunate man" had suggested, and about which the example of Pitch has already provided a warning. Similarly, as with Chapters 14 and 33, issues of narrative style and of audience are brought forward, explicitly presented as characteristics of the judge's narrative: "in every company being called upon to give this history, which none could better do, the judge at last fell into a style so methodic, you would have thought he spoke less to mere auditors than to an invisible amanuensis" (CM, 222). The judge's "style" is described as "methodic," as a mode of narrative whose objectivity is indicated by its not being spoken to any audience, but rather spoken *through* a copyist which, being "invisible," is indiscernible except in terms of his function as a transcriber of the story. In a sense, the "stranger" is precisely the "amanuensis," whose "almost word for word" rendition frames the story as a self-contained whole, as though unrelated to subjective telling. At the same time, the judge's account is seen as an act of ventriloquism no different from the other texts in the book, where the presence and control of the author is in every word his

narrative speaks. As the stranger says, "none could better" tell the story--a point which undercuts any supposed objectivity by asserting a primacy of "style." As would be stated in *Billy Budd*, there is a "way of historically treating" a story (emphasis added); even "history" has an effect, the power of which directly reflects *how* it is told. Part of the judge's rhetorical strength is then to deny his own rhetoricity, to deny that he speaks to the interest of an audience rather than through a means of transcription, whose adherence to the details of his story and whose very reproduction of them give the narrative its 'historical' quality. Through this, "history" is revealed not so much as what happened, but as the *account* of what happened, whose historicity depends more than anything upon narrative intention.

That the "stranger's" own account is presented as transcribed from the seeming original source of the judge, helps conceal that the judge's own story is by no means a first-hand account--especially in regard to the "Indian-hater *par excellence*," whose biographical "impenetrability" allows only "surmises" (234, 235). The "surmises," which provide much of the frame for his narrative proper--the specific story of Moredock--are elements of the story formed out of the judge's interpretation, out of his "philosophy" (222). The narrative takes on a circular meaning, as the facts from which the "philosophy" is deduced, are then in turn 'explained' by the deduction. Even in a "history," facts do not stand on their own, but rather are arranged and contextualized by the indeterminacies that lie behind and between them. The implication is that behind or surrounding every "history" is a "metaphysics" through which the order of facts make sense, and which so gives meaning to its historical effect. History is a rhetoric, and insofar as its underlying assumptions are shared or accepted by the reader/listener, the rhetoric will deny itself and become *fact*.

As Chapter 14 has pointed out, even attempting to be "faithful to facts" is hazardous enough an enterprise to understanding: "if reason be judge, no writer has produced such inconsistent characters as nature herself has" (104). The first phrase here--

"if reason be *judge*"--stands out when one considers the central theme of the judge's "history": the "passion" of Indian-hating as a measure of how isolated the Indian-hater has become, of how far he has committed himself to the most basic manifestation of *nature*, to the "forest primeval" (234). As the PIO put it, "if passion is to invade, surely science must evacuate" (187), and this is precisely the way in which the "backwoodsman" is converted to Indian-hating *par excellence*. In that case, the "passion" that is merely a part of the assumptions and expectations of the backwoods "community" is intensified by a "private passion," the combination of which develops a power beyond "reason," beyond any societal means of containing it, where a "vortex" of unqualified "hate" draws the individual into a strange obsessive union with the hated "race," even as it divorces him from the "community" which bore the responsibility for him and his passion in the first place. Insofar as "science" suggests 'civilization,' it does "evacuate" from the Indian-hater's existence; but so too, in the sense that it represents human 'knowledge,' science suggests the problem of narrative relationship to the Indian-hater, about whom so little is and can be known. Historical understanding, as supposedly an objective--and so, in a sense, "scientific"--knowledge of events, is then inadequate in attempting to communicate a "primeval" realm, a sphere of existence whose isolation and inarticulability deny the language of a societal framework. While it may be reasoned that "events... must have happened... the powers that be in nature have taken order that they shall never become news" (234).

The point is both that "reason" can be no "judge" of "nature," and that the judge (Hall) himself can not fairly account and give a *reason* for the "passion" of Indian-hating--not while attempting to convert it in terms of a rational "philosophy," whose explanation relies on demonstrable cause and effect, the context of "community" hatred set off personally by "some signal outrage" (179). For one thing, reason has already been shown to be an "open ground," whose truth is, like those of other communicative modes, a result of experiential effect. If the effect is one of cognitive clarification, then its attempt to

explain the unknowable would necessarily be self-defeating. Whatever clarifying effect it has, develops out of a double-negative: its 'explanation' is only a mystification of its own mystification. In describing the result of the "outrage," the judge can only do as Pitch had done, and use religious imagery. The employment of metaphors such as that of "Spaniard turned monk" indicates the dissolution of the judge's supposedly rational, causal account of Indian-hating, because it reveals only more "analogical theory." It may in some ways be that the passage as a whole reflects a descent into what Hershel Parker calls "the darker side of Christianity," where religion too fervently and one-sidedly enacted takes the form of "Devil-hating."²⁵ But more important is that only such overtly poetic--or, say, figurative--speech can approximate the indeterminate meaning of Indian-hating at its core. The Indian-hater is seen *as* "a Leather-stocking Nemesis" (in reference to Cooper's hero), is *likened to* a "deep sea denizen," is, in his total isolation, *contrasted with* an idyllic naturalness with which the rest of the world continues: "suns and seasons fleet; the tiger-lily blows and falls; babes are born and leap in their mothers' arms..." (234). And at this point the "stranger" even provides his own indirect commentary on how one should react to it all, relating how the judge "would pause" after such a dramatic contrast, "not unaffected." The cause and effect of "explanation" is, at the center of the explanation, converted from 'factual' or "biographical" into overtly *rhetorical* terms. It becomes a pure effect upon the audience, among whom the judge both portrays himself--in that he "would" intentionally do this as part of a "methodic" performance--and is, by his interlocutor, portrayed. What this does is to re-route the causal chain, so that the next effect which would otherwise come of such "hate" becomes a kind of side-effect; the massacre of the "guilty race" can then remain for the most part unrevealed, a buried footnote to the Indian-hater's own "epitaph" of "'Terror.'"

It is telling that the judge's "metaphysics" began with a similar eclipse of the object of the "hating." Adding almost parenthetically to the "explanation" of the hatred--which wryly begins as "a curious point"--the judge remarks that "as for what manner of man the

Indian is, many know, either from history or experience" (224). Such a reliance upon the supposed facts of "history or experience" bring to mind, first of all, the warning of Chapter 14, that it "may be unwise" to confuse "experience" with "*what is*" (104). The judge's own "history" suggests how far one can count on it as a basis for "knowing." Indeed, in supposedly giving the "history" of Indian-hating, and out the outset "explaining" half the equation (the simplified "Indian") by "history" as self-evident fact, the judge's account is seen as a dangerously circular method of narrative control, whose rhetorical facticity provides a screen for his own interpretive metaphors. This becomes even more apparent when the judge glosses over the Indian's own supposed perspective of the "injustice" done in "Indian-hating." First of all, in framing the perspective, the judge's terms of "injustice" itself are string of qualifications: "the charitable *may think* he does them *some* injustice" (228, emphasis added). It is seen as only a partial injustice, limited in scope and occurrence by the adjective "some"; it is only further qualified, in that only the "charitable"--and thus, one is led to assume, unreasonably sympathetic--would even "*think*" it an injustice in the first place; and it is not even sure that the charitable *will* think it so, as "may" puts even that in doubt. But the judge goes on, in describing the perspective of the Indian converts to Christianity, to use the Christian idea of a 'fallen' world against them: "he will not conceal his enlightened conviction, that his race's portion by nature is total depravity; and, in that way, as much as admits that the backwoodsman's worst idea of it is true" (229). The ambiguity of "race" here is suggestive, because of Pitch's earlier "law of distrust systematically applied to the race" (202). For Pitch, "race" meant *human* race, because for him the "text book" for understanding all of humankind was the key *Christian* doctrine, "St. Augustine on Original Sin" (195). Likewise for a "genuine proselyte to Christianity" (Indian or otherwise) this same doctrine of inherent "depravity" is very likely to apply--to whites, Indians, or whomever.²⁶ As the "stranger" puts it later in the account, this time in regard to the Indian-hater, "the judge found him expression for his meaning" (233). *Whose* "meaning" is made something of an issue by the

potential ambiguity of "his" --a problem which only underscores the agency of expression in narrative, that no matter what form it takes, *what* is said must always be said *by* someone.

A story will involve its teller's "usual judgment," a point ironically suggested by the title of the "Metaphysics" chapter, with its "views of one evidently not so prepossessed as Rousseau in favour of savages" (224). And the "judgment" is perhaps revealed most fully with the judge's dramatic flourish, "Gentlemen, let us smoke to the memory of Colonel John Moredock" (235, 237). At one level, such a moment employs the symbolic working of "smoke," which, from the appearance of the pipe-smoking cosmopolitan to the waning candle-light at the end of the novel, stands as a recurrent metaphor for deception.²⁷ The cosmopolitan's own critique of the tale indicates this, when he cites "the pall of smoke and ashes" as a shroud over the uncertainties and terrible "alleged" possibilities of the "Lisbon earthquake," and suggests that the same "pall" hides the truth of "Indian-hating in general" (245, 246). The judge's "smoke" then, seems only a metaphor for the rhetoric of "history," which, as it employs poetic imagery and religious expression, reveals how the images and expressions, when offered under the guise of factual reality, become tools of subjective "judgment" and even ideological control. There is still the matter of Indian-hating, of course; nor can it be explained away by the cosmopolitan's ironic "ruling principle of kindness," which evoke (as had the PIO man) again the danger of "fixed principles" from Chapter 14. But the last thing one can do is be satisfied with an "explanation" of it. The dark poetry of the seemingly sadistic "passion," the religious connotations in its "devout sentiment" (243) are important, perhaps even crucial for some kind of understanding or acceptance of the matter, but only if one accepts them in more fictive terms, as signifying the ultimately immeasurable depth of "another world" (286).

This depth is finally the question in interpreting the Confidence Man himself. The problem of motive is recurrently posed in the novel, as those who encounter the

manipulations and deceptions of the confidence game attempt to reach some kind of explanation, and try at some level to re-create the author of it. The answer that Pitch reaches at Cairo is one that is expressed earlier, by the "one-legged man": "Money, you think, is the sole motive to pains and hazard, deception and devilry, in this world. How much money did the devil make by gulling Eve?" (42). Once again, to account in some way for the actions of the Confidence Man, one is forced to resort to a precedent which can set forward a realm different than one of evident, demonstrable facts. Cause and effect would rely on something like "money" or material gain as an impetus for deception. But invoking the "devil" allows a plurality of meanings whose power is a tension of ultimate indeterminacy; there is no "explaining" the Christian devil, at least, not without also attempting to explain the text of "Original Sin," and thus of humanity itself, and of course, of God. To know the devil is then to *know* nothing. One's 'proof' comes in failures of understanding, unbreachable gaps in knowledge, uncertainties that hold no chance of resolution--not the least of which is whether or not he even is a devil. So much of the power of the Confidence Man is that his scams are deceptively small, his "masquerade" so complete; and when a victim comes to a realization that he's been had, even then his understanding is like Pitch's, a sort of "half-divined" sense without any tangible proof. The action of the Confidence Man, like his identity, closes in on itself; an explanation for which is possible not as knowledge, but only as textual *engagement*, an effect of interpretative effort.

Discussed by the narrator (in Chapter 44) as "*quite an original*," the Confidence Man is explicitly set forward as part of a text to be read and interpreted within a spectrum of "originality." Likened to a "Drummond light," the "original character" is a kind of reflective and illuminating figure by which "everything is lit"--he has an "effect...akin to that which in Genesis attends upon the beginning of things" (373-74). An "adequate conception of such a character" leads its reader to a point where, through fiction (again, "like religion"), "another world" makes some kind of sense--where we more strongly "feel

the tie" to it. "Adequate" is an important qualification to make here, in that "original instincts," being unprecedented, and incomparable, are never rightly contained and controlled by a human "conception" itself bound by "vicissitudes of light and shade" (202). But if the original character--and so, we are led to consider, possibly the Confidence Man--has the effect of "light" upon his world, and if it is precisely in terms of "light and shade" that "human subjectivity" is seen to influence one's understanding of the world, the original character's power lies equally in his illumination of context and in his influence over and potential distortion of it. Herein one finds the "truth" of *The Confidence Man*, the basic artistic and metaphysical principle which is at the same time an anti-principle: paradox, an inverted mirror whose depth is concealed by its horizontal potentiality.

The first manifestation of the Confidence Man, the "mute" with his repeated assertions of Christian trust and "charity," comes aboard at the "sunrise" of this day-long novel--his appearance commanding something like the Biblical "let there be light" (7). And it is the cosmopolitan who closes out the final "light" of the novel, when he extinguishes the lamp and puts in (non)visible form the silence that will follow the close of interpretation. What sense this fictional "world" is to make must be made in terms of one's reaction to this figure. That it is *a* figure and not a repetition of correlative traits in different forms, is, naturally, never certain. But it is indicated generally by the "masquerade" of the title, and more specifically when the narrator writes that there can be "but one such original character to one work of invention. Two would conflict to chaos." This may first of all suggest an implicit critique of the conflictedness of Christianity: it has its "founder of a new religion" and its devil (as indicated by the reference to "Milton's Satan"), its doctrines of "charity" and of "Original Sin." Its meanings, when rigidified into dogmatic "principles," might lead to dangerously blind "faith" and "trust," or to the extremism of the "monk"-like Indian-hater and the "auto-da-fe," or through both extremes to "chaos" (289). But then Christianity and *The Confidence-Man*, both are analogous, in

that both "present another world." Hamlet, after all, is in his way correlative to the "founder of a new religion." One focuses on religion because it too is a text.

Franklin notes that the singularity of the "original character to one work of invention" seems to provide an instruction in how to read, where to make any sense of the work--for it to have any meaning--a "transcendent unity" must be resolved through one's interpretation.²⁸ With this understanding, one may pick up the seeming pun in "original," and read the author himself--the *origin* of the text--as both organizing principle and Confidence Man. Egbert had felt the tyrannical command of his "original story-teller," only stating outright what the merchant's narrative had already shown--that all textual speech is a ventriloquy that masks to one degree or another its authorial origin. Thus the narrator qualifies his own "dissertation" as "smoky," both a screen for his authorial persona in this chapter and a transitional blur for its movement through the next, so that his presence may again lose itself through the characters of his narrative, and he may once again seem to stand somehow beyond it.

If we hold at last to Melville's sense of reading, with its awareness of fictive context, and its implied re-creation of the authorial figure, the "author" of *The Confidence-Man* is as complicated and troubling as any of his equivocal characters. After all, whatever his "reality" may be, it is compounded both by the multi-formity of his audience, and by the multiplicity of meanings possible for any single interpretation. Of course, his is a *fictive* reality. The narrator--like his super-ventriloquial self, "Herman Melville"--resides *within* the text, which paradoxically both includes and is included by its context, and so, includes its readers as well. "Understanding" may be again what Hauck has suggested, a revelation of its own "absolute ambiguity." If the final chapter is as Peter Bellis writes, "a paradigm for all reading,"²⁹ then one is left with a reading whose meta-textuality insists upon its reader's *reality* as a textual effect. One *is* in relation to what one reads, because what one reads is everything. Nothing is simply out there, without needing to be translated to one's perception or understanding. The conflictive uncertainty of "the

good book" redounds outward. The sly "bedraggled" boy provides a "Counterfeit Detector," whose interpretation of a money-text only suggests confusion and uncertainty about all interpretive vision: "I don't see right," declares the old man in the last chapter, "--or else--dear, dear me--I don't know what else to think" (389). Precisely.

The cosmopolitan ruminatingly eyed him awhile, then said: "The best way, as I have heard, to get out of a labyrinth, is to retrace one's steps. I will accordingly retrace mine, and beg you will accompany me. ..." p. 303.

The Confidence-Man as Hypertext

If *The Confidence-Man* is so open-ended, then, as A. Robert Lee states, it "could with some justice claim to operate as the exemplary postmodern text, subversive of and at all times deconstructing, its own idiom and imagined world."³⁰ Or, to shift the focus a bit, Gustaaf Van Cromphout writes that "no characteristic of Melville marks his mind more clearly as modern than his profound engagement with questions of epistemology."³¹ Modern and *Postmodern* being arguably equivalent terms, one can see that either label for Melville's work designates its resonance even with understandings and critical approaches of today. In arguing its metafictional quality, the current treatment implies its affinity not only with such Shakespearian tactics as the play within the play, but also with techniques that have come to be associated with "postmodern" texts. If one would attempt to name the features of a (post)modern aesthetic, one would probably call to mind many which belong to Melville's book: a sustained level of ironic self-awareness; a use of disparate genres and textual forms; a "decentered," often non-linear narrative; an end without definite closure.

These last two features are also among those which have been argued as distinctive of hypertext. George Landow has stated that hypertext offers a medium in which the

bounds between reader and writer can become blurred, because it is--more than any traditional text is able to be--such an *interactive* form. Hypertext, Landow claims, questions basic Aristotelian ideas of plot, among them a "fixed sequence" of narrative, a "definite beginning and ending," and "the conception of unity and wholeness." With hypertext, the reader becomes far more active, in that he or she must be the one to bestow closure upon the text, to give meaning to the text by deciding where it ends.³² A hypertext has hyperlinks; one makes choices as to what direction the narrative takes, what meanings and definite organizational principle the text accrues and manifests. The text is there, while its narrative is left largely up to the reader.

The Confidence-Man is not fully a "hypertext" in this sense, obviously, in that its organizing principle is still very much its author's; or as Landow would say, its author still has far more *authority* than would a text written for the medium. Nevertheless, in explicating Melville's idea of fiction as evidenced in "Mosses," and then in exploring how it comes into play in *The Confidence-Man*, I have attempted to underscore the co-creative and interactive process that is here the combined act of reading and writing. That is, if features of *postmodern* fiction are seen to point toward hypertext, then Melville's portrayal of the fictive process anticipates both. Reading in and of *The Confidence-Man* is quite dramatically an *activity*: its internal "ungracious critics" (218) sift through the stories they are told and emerge with meanings that in a sense tell the stories back to their authors/tellers; its "real" readers are challenged at a meta-textual level to consider the process of reading as they themselves practice it, and are invited to engage in the book's indeterminacies and to make choices as to how they will effect meaning from it all. It is only fitting, then, that an edition be provided in a medium which so radically emphasizes an active readership.

There are other, less philosophical or theoretical reasons as well. *The Confidence-Man* is a book full of allusions, as the almost eighty pages of Elizabeth Foster's "Explanatory Notes" reveal. The benefit of hyperlinks becomes clear here, in that one can

both maintain an aesthetic integrity of the text by keeping such numerous notes in a separate file (much as do editions whose notes are found at the back of the book), and yet one can also access them as readily as one may glance at footnotes. The notes themselves are interlinked, so that cross-referencing becomes far more practicable, the relevance and complementarity of different passages made clearer. So too, materials located in the appendix are linkable from both the notes and from this Introduction, making all the textual apparatus more cohesive and again, more usable than the page-turning of a traditional text would allow. SGML as well makes this text searchable, so that one need only enter a keyword to find where the term appears in the book. What all this implies, is that *reading* here is provided the freedom of being able to follow tangents through variable paths, which can lead to variable perspectives and interpretations. At the same, reading is given potentially more critical structure, provided by the underlying system of links. While one may follow which links one chooses, those that are followed should provide a useful entrance to a complicated work. Finding a way *out* is the reader's own responsibility.

Texts Used

Melville, Herman. *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. New York: Dix & Edwards, 1857. Online Version: Scott Atkins, ed. 1996. Abbreviated--CM.

----. "Hawthorne and His Mosses." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Hershel Parker, ed. New York: Norton, 1989. 981-993. Abbr.--HM.

----. *Billy Budd, Sailor*. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Hershel Parker, ed. New York: Norton, 1989. 1038-1093. Abbr.--BB.

Notes

¹ Edgar Dryden, *Melville's Thematics of Form: the Great Art of Telling the Truth* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968) 29.

² Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957) 233.

³ Elizabeth Foster cites as the cause the "gathering financial panic of 1857" (Foster, xxxi) while John Seelye gives a reason I personally prefer to believe: that it was "due to the finagling of one of the partners" (Introduction, *The Confidence-Man*, 1968).

⁴ Raymond M. Weaver, *Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic* (New York: 1921). Carl Van Vechten, "The Later Works of Herman Melville." *The Double Dealer* 3 (Jan., 1922), 9-20. [Van Wyck Brooks], "A Reviewer's Notebook." *The Freeman* 7 (May 9, 1923), 214-215. John Freeman, *Herman Melville* (London: 1926). Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (New York: 1929) 247-255. Yvor Winters, *Maule's Curse* (Norfolk: 1938) 82-85. Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville*.

⁵ Two works of this sort are: Susan Kuhlmann, *Knave, Fool, Genius: The Confidence Man as He Appears in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1973); Gary Lindberg, *The Confidence-Man in American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982).

⁶ H. Bruce Franklin, *The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1963) 153-87.

⁷ Dryden, *Melville's Thematics of Form*. Abbreviated within subsequent text as *MTF*.

⁸ A. Robert Lee, "Voices Off, On, and Without: Ventriloquy in 'The Confidence-Man.'" *Herman Melville: Reassessments*. Ed. A. Robert Lee. (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1984) 157-175.

⁹ Gustaaf Van Cromphout, "The Confidence-Man and the Problem of Others." *Studies in American Fiction* 21 (Spr. 1993): 37-50.

¹⁰ Franklin, Introduction, *The Confidence-Man* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967) xix.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993) 182, 185.

¹² For a treatment of Melville's "ventriloquy," see Lee 157-175.

- 13 Newton Arvin, in his biography of Melville, refers to it as a "montone of blackness." *Herman Melville: A Critical Biography* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957).
- 14 Richard Boyd Hauck, "Nine Good Jokes: The Redemptive Humor of the Confidence Man and *The Confidence Man*." *Ruined Eden of the Present: Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe*. Eds. G.R. Thompson and Virgil Lokke (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue UP, 1981) 245-282.
- 15 Gary Lindberg writes in regard to the story of "man with the weed": "To give us our first lesson in what stories mean, the narrator omits the content and presents instead the transaction for which the story serves as instrument." *The Confidence-Man in American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982) 29.
- 16 Van Cromphout, 45.
- 17 Hauck, *A Cheerful Nihilism* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1971) 77.
- 18 *The Republic*. Trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1974) X, 247.
- 19 Franklin, ed., *The Confidence-Man* 172 n.
- 20 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Bakhtin's point is especially interesting because it comes in his treatment of the "serio-comic" genres--specifically the "Socratic Dialog" and the "Menippean Satire"--out of which, he argues, the novel developed. The "dialogic" and satirical form of the whole of *The Confidence-Man* would seem to suggest the fruitfulness of further study along these lines.
- 21 M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973) Chp. 2, 102-103. Abbreviated--NS.
- 22 The "mephitic breeze" around Cairo was, at the time Melville wrote, notorious, having been popularized most (in)famously as "Eden" in Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844).
- 23 Franklin notes, "From here on no avatar of the Confidence Man will appear as listed by the Negro 'widout massa,' Black Guinea...." 180, n.
- 24 Hauck, "Nine Good Jokes," 280.
- 25 Hershel Parker, "The Metaphysics of Indian-hating." In *The Confidence-Man*, Hershel Parker, ed. (New York: Norton, 1971) 323-331.
- 26 Peter J. Bellis makes much the same point in "Melville's *The Confidence Man*: An Uncharitable Interpretation." *American Literature* 59 (Dec. 1987) 553.
- 27 The use of "smoke as a mask" is pointed out by Franklin, 183n.
- 28 Franklin, 331n.
- 29 Bellis, 551.
- 30 Lee, 160.
- 31 Van Cromphout, 37.
- 32 George Landow, *Hypertext* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984).