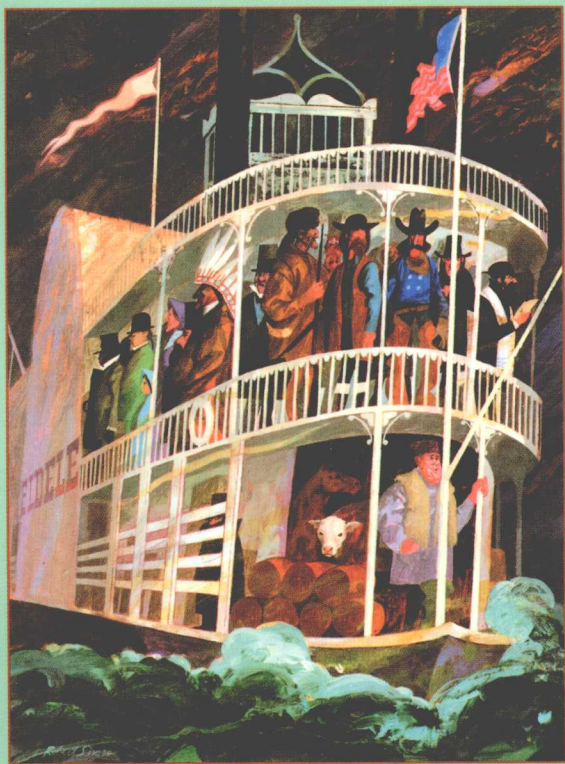


THE
CONFIDENCE-MAN:
HIS MASQUERADE

HERMAN MELVILLE



EDITED BY HERSEL PARKER
AND MARK NIEMEYER

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION
SECOND EDITION

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Herman Melville
THE CONFIDENCE-MAN:
HIS MASQUERADE



AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS
BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEWS
SOURCES, BACKGROUNDS, AND CRITICISM

SECOND EDITION

Edited by

HERSHEL PARKER

EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

MARK NIEMEYER

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Preface

A sentence from the preface to the 2001 Norton Critical Edition (NCE) of *Moby-Dick* applies to this volume, with only a change of book title and date: "This Second Norton Critical Edition of *The Confidence-Man* embodies the transformation of knowledge about Melville that has occurred since the original 1971 edition, particularly about his life." The Northwestern-Newberry (NN) Edition of *The Confidence-Man* (1984) reported some new biographical discoveries, but in the next decades scholars, amateurs, and book dealers made many more discoveries, the most startling of which revealed for the first time Melville's extreme poverty in the years after *Moby-Dick*. His disastrous indebtedness underlies all of *The Confidence-Man*, most painfully Chapter 40, "The Story of China Aster." This grim new story is told in Hershel Parker's second volume of his *Herman Melville: A Biography*. The gist of the new evidence is in his "Damned by Dollars," the final article in the 2001 NCE of *Moby-Dick*. Here, in a new section called "Biographical Overviews," that essay is condensed, but also augmented by new paragraphs on 1856, the year *The Confidence-Man* was finished. In that section we print a wide-ranging new introductory article by Parker, "The Confidence Man's Masquerade," and part of Johannes Dietrich Bergmann's discussion of his 1969 discovery that the term *confidence man* was an American invention coined in 1849 to identify a particular crook whose inventive ploy was to demand that his victims entrust to him a watch or other token of their confidence in him. Among the several new articles in the section, an essay by Dennis Marnon shows how very wealthy Melville's Boston family had been before his profligate father threw away his part of the family fortune. Another article by Stephen D. Hoy places the financial struggles of Melville's youth in the context of the national economy. The section also includes a salutary reminder by Jonathan A. Cook of how profoundly Melville steeped himself in the Greek and Roman writers during a decade of personal and national disaster.

Beginning in 1954 with Elizabeth S. Foster, in the first scholarly edition of *The Confidence-Man*, all editors have acknowledged that in this book Melville was commenting mordantly on many contem-

porary movements—religious, political, social, physical, psychological, and medical. We deal with these diverse themes in “Backgrounds, Sources, and Criticism,” which begins with a section titled “Utopias, Sects, Cults, and Cure-Alls.” Throughout this edition, new headnotes and new articles (some freshly commissioned) help establish specific contexts for social experiments and augment the articles carried forward from 1971. Using brief passages from Melville’s early works and Melville’s own testimony that he was sought out by Fourierites for advice, we demonstrate that Melville was more than just another commentator on social experiments: some of his contemporaries took *Typee* as a textbook on the superiority of “savagery” to “civilization.” (Thomas Low Nichols, who read *Typee* in manuscript, became one of the most conspicuous social and sexual reformers of the 1850s.) This NCE for the first time links tightly the motley array of what Melville called “new-fangled” social experiments by their one common feature—rejection of the harsh account of God’s curse in Genesis, rejection, that is, of the theological concept of Original Sin.

Almost as startling as the new evidence about Melville’s poverty are the recent discoveries detailed in both volumes of Parker’s biography about the concerted attacks on Melville by, especially, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Methodist reviewers, and (in the second volume) about Melville’s horror at the implications of Unitarian attitudes toward poverty in America. Melville agreed to expurgate his criticisms of missionaries in Polynesia from his first book, *Typee* (1846), but the “low church” Protestants (those who rejected more of the Roman Catholic beliefs and practices than the “high church” Episcopalians) were not appeased. (See the section “Before *Moby-Dick*: International Controversy over Melville” in the 2001 NCE of *Moby-Dick*.) They renewed their onslaughts on his next book, *Omoo* (1847), and continued to attack him for what they called blasphemy in later books, particularly *Moby-Dick*. As he was finishing *Moby-Dick* Melville was so financially and emotionally damaged by the reviews that he identified with victims of European witch hunts in the seventeenth century. (We know this from Geoffrey Sanborn’s 1992 discovery that words Melville jotted down in the last volume of his set of Shakespeare—puzzling to earlier scholars—were simply his reading notes on an article about the persecution of witches, “Superstition and Knowledge,” in the July 1823 issue of the London *Quarterly Review*.) After having suffered through the reviews of *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* (1852) and having seen his next book, *The Isle of the Cross* (which he finished in late May 1853) fail to reach print at all, in 1856 Melville thought of dedicating *The Confidence-Man* to victims of auto da fe, those tortured and burned alive by the Spanish inquisition.

Although Presbyterians and other low church reviewers had condemned him since 1846, Melville was at home with their Calvinist theology rather than currently fashionable alternatives, particularly Unitarianism. He read with a critical eye an abridgment of *The Light of Nature Revealed* by Abraham Tucker, a philosophical father of English Unitarianism. We include a section of Tucker's "Benevolence" as well as part of Melville's oblique commentary on Tucker and other Utilitarians and Unitarians, the Plinlimmon pamphlet in *Pierre*. Melville knew the history of the double revolt in the 1770s and 1780s in which Bostonians, among them his grandfather Thomas Melvill, first freed the city of British secular rule then seized the principal Anglican church, King's Chapel, not for an old Protestant sect that believed in the Trinity but for the new American Unitarians. (This Melvill grandfather himself owned a pew at the Brattle Street Unitarian Church, known as the "Manifesto Church.") *The Confidence-Man*, and some of Melville's stories, notably "Bartleby, the Scrivener," embody Melville's critique of contemporary American Unitarianism, especially as promulgated by Orville Dewey, who baptized three of Melville's children and preached his father-in-law's funeral sermon.

In "Utopias, Sects, Cults, and Cure-Alls," background pieces by Melville himself as well as pieces by Orville Dewey suggest just what Melville thought of the coolness with which leading Unitarians responded to Jesus's saying "The poor ye have always with you." In New York, Unitarians contrasted their views on begging with those of the reforming newspaper editor Horace Greeley, who, as Scott Norsworthy shows, was determined to use his New York *Tribune* to help the poor of the city. In a major new historical and critical essay Susan M. Ryan examines "the ambiguities of benevolence" in the context of antebellum debates over race, slavery, and citizenship. The chronology of Melville's knowledge of Emerson and Thoreau printed in the 1971 NCE is revised as "The Latest Heresy: Melville and the Transcendentalists." Printed immediately following the items on Unitarianism, this section now makes fuller sense, for Melville, like many others, understood some of Ralph Waldo Emerson's extreme opinions as those to be expected from a former Unitarian minister.

A newspaper writer in 1855 identified the re-arrested rogue (who had been briefly notorious in 1849) as the "Original Confidence Man." For Melville, the Original Confidence Man was the snake in the Garden of Eden, Satan, the source of Original Sin. In 1857 the reviewer in the London *Critic* sensed what Elizabeth S. Foster first traced out in detail: a pattern of devil imagery associated with the Confidence Man. In 1971 Parker, perhaps too confidently, delineated a "standard interpretation" of *The Confidence-Man* according

to which Melville puts the Devil on a Mississippi steamboat in a series of disguises designed to test the quality of contemporary Christianity. We approached this new edition prepared to place less emphasis on the devil allegory, but we found that Melville's use of the Devil in *The Confidence-Man* was thicker and more complicated than previously noticed. Among the newly annotated devil allusions is the one to Robert Burns's "Tam o'Shanter," where Satan takes the shape of a big rough-coated black dog—perhaps a way of tying the last avatar of the Confidence Man to one of the earliest, the Black Guinea, who is compared to a (presumably black) Newfoundland dog. In "Melville and the Devil in the Bible and Popular Literature" we retain Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad" and a shorter piece to identify the current conventions of devil allegory within which Melville was working. In new items we quote the notes Melville made for a story in which the Devil as a gentleman moves confidently in Manhattan's high society and we use part of Stubb's devil allegory in *Moby-Dick*. Concluding this section is Thomas McHaney's essay on the way Melville built into *The Confidence-Man* some of Satan's disguises in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Here we provide new editorial footnotes identifying passages cited by McHaney that Melville marked and annotated in his recently discovered copy of Milton's poems.

Elaborating the footnotes to biblical references required us to call attention to Melville's repeated allusions to biblical shape-changing and cosmos-traversing passages, where Satan walks on earth and in heaven and where angels and demons appear on earth in human form and are dangerously mistaken for men. Many new annotations document Melville's complex use of the shape changing in the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as well as his thickly strewn allusions to other historical and literary shape changers. There is room for controversy, for instance on the role of the mute at the start of the book (the first disguise of the Confidence Man or not?), but Melville's highly conscious and sophisticated use of devil allegory as well as other shape-changing or subhuman and extra-human sources runs throughout *The Confidence-Man*.

Ever since Foster's edition appeared, the most fervent and diverse interpretations (except perhaps those centering on the identity of the Confidence Man) have involved Melville's recasting of the Ohio writer James Hall's account of "Indian hating." Because the topic of allegorizing Indian hating is, by its nature, politically sensitive and emotionally charged, Parker, a party to the history of criticism on this section, contributes a fresh personal account of his ambivalence, as an American with close Choctaw and Cherokee ancestors, toward responses to his "The Metaphysics of Indian-hating" in 1961 (when it was delivered as a talk) and afterward. We

have divided the treatment of Indian hating into two parts. The first, "Historical Background" includes Hall's chapter and new pieces that document the long-lived and disturbing reality of Indian hating, sometimes as expressed from within the circle of Melville's relations and acquaintances. We also make clear Melville's own stance on racism as unambiguously expressed outside of *The Confidence-Man*. A disturbing piece from the *New York Times* in 1972 is followed by the novelist Margaret Coel's devastating updating of the topic, a personal testimonial written especially for this edition. In "Political Background" we print Foster's pioneering analysis of Melville's use of Indian hating as religious allegory and follow it with the elaborations and clarifications made shortly afterward by John W. Shroeder and Parker.

The biographical portions of the NN "Historical Note" to *The Confidence-Man* are superseded by discoveries Parker made during his expansion of Jay Leyda's *The Melville Log* (1951 and 1969) in the process of writing his two-volume biography of Melville (1996 and 2002). The NN section on contemporary reviews stands up well, but more reviews have been discovered, mainly by Parker and by Richard E. Winslow III, and many of these are available in full in a collection edited by Brian Higgins and Parker, *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews* (1995). A sample of both English and American reviews is offered in this volume, enough to show that it was the English who paid, at best, scrupulous attention and who came very close to penetrating Melville's theological allegory.

The Confidence-Man waited long for fit readers. The first was a distant cousin of Melville's, Carl Van Vechten, whose 1922 comments on the book as a satire of Transcendentalism are infused with joyous discovery. In the 1940s a handful of academic critics exhibited comparable excitement as college teaching of American literature spread and professors began to publish readings of the book for the first time. Until the end of the 1940s the only texts were the 1857 American and English editions and the 1923 volume in the Constable set (published in London). In 1948 a new edition was published in England by John Lehmann and the next year Grove Press published one in the United States. Thereafter, no critic had to reenact Richard Chase's writing on the basis of one hasty devouring of a library copy that could not be checked out, although for a carefully introduced and annotated text critics had to wait until 1954, when Elizabeth S. Foster published her edition.

We dare to hope that a sense of joyous discovery informs that most humble of genres, the footnotes to the text, for in writing them we experienced many hours worth marking with a Melvillean white stone (to use a phrase from Chapter 25). Some identifica-

tions of Melville's allusions, it developed, could hardly have been made before the age of the Internet, when, if one catches a browser on a good day, one can find, using only key words from the last chapter, that a reference to Napoleon is to a particular 1830 engraving of the ghost of Napoleon standing at his tomb in St. Helena. This was a then-famous example of "hidden art," appreciated (the Internet may also reveal, on a good day) by the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard as well as by Melville. In *The Confidence-Man* Melville refers to Heraclitus, who knew that all things were a-changing; in that spirit we confidently advise that on a good day a student may immediately summon up a reproduction of the Napoleonic engraving or an inferior copy of it produced in 1831. Melville's allusion to a popular example of hidden art is a happy one, for *The Confidence-Man* itself may be perceived as a great work of hidden art, one in which the reader at first glance may fail to perceive the central figure (or theme, or implication) in one scene or another, then may experience, repeatedly, the shock of joyous perception and appreciation.

Hershel Parker
Mark Niemeyer

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The Text of
THE CONFIDENCE-MAN



Dedicated to victims of
Auto da Fé.

(Dedicated to victims of Auto da Fé)

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