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## The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade (Penguin Classics)

*Herman Melville*

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*The Confidence-Man*

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#504189 in Books Herman Melville 1991-07-02 1991-07-02Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.70 x .63 x 5.00l, .72 #File Name: 0140445471400 pagesConfidence Man | File size: 46.Mb

**Herman Melville : The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade (Penguin Classics)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade (Penguin Classics):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Mississippi Boat RideBy Paul Howard MillerEmbarking from St Louis on a Mississippi riverboat named Fidèle (Faithful) two hand written signs are on display. On one a Christ like deaf mute writes lines from Corinthians like "Charity thinketh no evil" and "Charity believeth all things" and on the

other a barber not wishing to give credit writes "NO TRUST". A line from *The Merchant of Venice* comes to mind "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" because the deaf mute holds up his sign filled with scriptural tolerance right beside a placard offering a reward for the capture of the Confidence man. The deaf mute "went forward, seating himself in a retired spot on the fore-castle, nigh the foot of a ladder there leading to a deck above, up and down which ladder some of the boatmen, in discharge of their duties, were occasionally going." and he goes to sleep. This Jacob's ladder signals us to possible otherworldly access to the boat and as we know angels ascend and descend Jacob's ladder a fallen fellow of their kin might have made his way onto the boat via this ladder and now this Jacob sleeping at the foot of it is ready to assume successive avatars of the Confidence man. Jacob in Genesis was a trickster and it being April fools day the Confidence man takes on many a masquerade as he tries to persuade people on the riverboat to have confidence. At minimum Melville in this novel has given us a comedic Mississippi boat ride on the nature of illusion and trust and a scathing critique of mid nineteenth century America. The Confidence man as the crippled slave, Black Guinea, catches pennies in his mouth he assumes complex disguises as representatives of various charities--the Seminole Widows and Orphans Fund--the inventor of the Protean Chair that relaxes all infirmities by its flexibility, including infirmities of the tormented conscience, a naturopath herb doctor, and a representative of the Philosophical Intelligence Office. Through all of this his profits are minuscule--a dollar or three, a shave on credit, and so forth. His triumphs are the granting of confidence in him, not the money. At the close of the novel the last avatar of the Confidence man, the Cosmopolitan, is talking to an old man but the old man is trying to find a life preserver something he has never seen. The Cosmopolitan gives him a wooden stool chamber pot and tells him that it is a life preserver. He humorously tells him "I think that in case of a wreck, barring sharp-pointed timbers, you could have confidence in that stool for a special providence." In a book rife with symbolism this penultimate symbol typifies the main theme of the novel: Look to what you place confidence in or you might be left holding a chamber pot believing it to be a life preserver.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. his greatest. By Hassan CHOP Most people say that *MOBY DICK* is Melville's masterpiece. And they'd be right. But anyone who's read *THE CONFIDENCE MAN* knows that within its pages is hidden a concept text 100 years ahead of its time. Scholars have argued that it is *THE FIRST AMERICAN MODERNIST NOVEL*. Melville was so disheartened at the indifference it was met with upon release, he retired from writing altogether. Yes, this was Melville's final novel, and, if not for *Moby Dick*, his greatest.

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. "The Confidence Man" by Herman Melville By Alexandra Chace After Herman Melville's tales of mountainous waves, disease, apparitions, murders, suicides, cannibalism, tropical storms, tsunamis, hallucinations, lightning strikes, hangings, volcanic eruptions, starvation, giant whales and every form of terror possible on the high seas and land, "The Confidence Man" is Melville's most violent work. It begins with an April day, the first, "April Fool's Day" on a paddle-wheeled river boat heading downstream from St. Louis, Missouri to New Orleans, Louisiana. The river is wide, 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) at certain points, but a river boat is generally thought to be a reassuring form of travel. This is not the case, not once in the 45 chapters which follow. The concentration of psychological violence is so intense that the reader is unaware of its insidious presence which manifests itself continually in its different disguises. In Chapter 14, in a brief aside, Melville gives the reader a kind of *passepartout* to his novel, when he describes the first stuffed platypus from Australia, the so-called "duck-billed beaver", which many naturalists refused to recognize as a separate species and preferred to conclude that the bill had been ably glued on. In a letter to his friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in 1851, Melville writes: "Let any clergyman try to preach the Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit, and they would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit bannister." Obviously for many this is a totally unacceptable view of the human race. Incomprehension and denial are natural defensive reactions. But considering that 153 years have passed since the publication of "The Confidence Man" and considering the accumulated evidence we have at hand, this prophetic novel provides the ONLY credible conclusive appraisal of the human condition.

Onboard the *Fidèle*, a steamboat floating down the Mississippi to New Orleans, a confidence man sets out to defraud his fellow passengers. In quick succession he assumes numerous guises - from a legless beggar and a worldly businessman to a collector for charitable causes and a 'cosmopolitan' gentleman, who simply swindles a barber out of the price of a shave. Making very little from his hoaxes, the pleasure of trickery seems an end in itself for this slippery conman. Is he the Devil? Is his chicanery merely intended to expose the mercenary concerns of those around him? Set on April Fool's Day, *The Confidence-Man* (1857) is an engaging comedy of masquerades, digressions and shifting identity, and a devastating satire on the American dream. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

"The great transcendental satire." —Carl Van Vechten From the Inside Flap "In "The Confidence-Man," writes John Bryant in his Introduction, "Melville found a way to render our tragic sense of self and society through the comic

strategies of the confidence game. He puts the reader in the game to play its parts and to contemplate the inconsistencies of its knaves and fools." Set on a Mississippi steamer on April Fool's Day and populated by a series of shape-shifting con men, "The Confidence-Man is a challenging metaphysical and ethical exploration of antebellum American society. Set from the first American edition of 1857, this Modern Library paperback includes an Appendix with Bryant's innovative "fluid text" analysis of early manuscript fragments from Melville's novel. From the Back Cover Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* was the tenth, last, and most perplexing book of his decade as a professional man of letters. After it he gave up his ambitious effort to write works that would be both popular and profound and turned to poetry. The book was published on April 1--the very day of its title character's April Fools' Day masquerade on a Mississippi River Steamboat.