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The Praise of Cosmopolitanism: *The Confidence-Man* by Herman Melville

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This article is the first entry in a debate on "The Praise of Cosmopolitanism: *The Confidence-Man* by Herman Melville" (https://www.connotations.de/debate/herman-melville-and-cosmopolitanism). If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to editors@connotations.de

Abstract

This essay is an attempt at reconstructing the logic underlying *The Confidence-Man* by Herman Melville. Its main focus will be on the function of the Cosmopolitan who represents a key dimension which has sadly been very little studied. The novel will be seen as the locus of a philosophical experiment in which Melville tries to determine how far an individual can go in order to be fully free and fulfill his or her inner potential as much as possible. Among the numerous manners of approaching *The Confidence-Man*, the essay will choose an anti-idealistic tradition going from Heraclitus to Deleuze through Spinoza, Nietzsche and William James and stressing the radically immanent nature of the world in which we live and the problems raised when one wishes to invent a new conception of faith or confidence.

Herman Melville's Cosmopolitan is strangely neglected and regretfully unloved in the literature devoted to *The Confidence-Man.* Yet, there is no denying that the novelist invented an extraordinary character. In point of fact, the Confidence-Man with his avatars must be seen not as a character in the usual sense of the term, but rather like some sort of theoretical concept. This essay will consider the Cosmopolitan as the locus of a philosophical adventure with all the implications it involves. In that

respect, it could be argued that there are two Herman Melvilles: on the one hand, the individual eking out a life of genteel poverty in New York with his wife and four children, and, on the other hand, a daring critic and thinker using fiction in order to conduct an experiment and try to determine how far a human being can go in order to discover and exploit all his or her potential. The first Melville is only of interest for his friends, some of whom were always ready to help him whereas others were (sadly) not. He is of no concern to us. The second Melville is a more abstract figure that can be seen as a "Road Not (yet) Taken,"[1] to use Robert Frost's phrase, that is to say as a series of "possibilities of life" (Friedrich Nietzsche's phrase this time; see Pearson), or possibly as a Message in a Bottle hopefully to be found by unknown readers from another century and another continent. Maybe some of these readers will not be interested and will quickly dispose of the bottle, while others will discover that it is going to change their lives. The second alternative is what motivates the approach followed in this essay.

The "road" that could be taken by the passengers of the *Fidèle*, and more generally by Americans, not to say humanity, implies making ours a vision of man that stresses accepting the full richness and complexity of life without any exclusions. It is radically anti-idealistic in so far as it is an invitation not to restrict our identifications to the values of a single given community and accordingly not to reject the potential offered by other human groups around us. More specifically, it urges us not to follow and repeat models—always the same models—whose origins are obscure and very often alleged to belong to some hypothetical otherworld. There is only one world, it is immanent, and it is the concrete world in which we live. One essential consequence is that the future, our future, is largely as yet unwritten, that is to say that it is full of open possibilities and always to be invented. We should thus continually construct who we are, adding and never subtracting, in a process of infinite becoming and variation. Such is Melville's idea of cosmopolitanism. Before studying the ways in which *The Confidence-Man* articulates that vision, it is first necessary to investigate the technical conditions of its emergence and in particular how it depends upon a certain

conception of time. The essay will then determine to what extent the Confidence-Man can be defined as a function aimed at revealing the evil and the narcissism men hide in their hearts, which will lead us to ask ourselves what went wrong with American history. Once these false values have been eliminated, the essay will start unfolding the essential components of the concept of cosmopolitanism. The theoretical vision conveyed in the novel, however, should be regarded as some kind of abstract ideal, and the essay will conclude with an assessment of its practical, pragmatic nature.

Before we start reconstructing the logic of cosmopolitanism, it is important to ask ourselves a number of technical questions having to do with the specific conditions under which the notion can make sense. From a theoretical point of view, if we simplify and consider only extreme positions, there are fundamentally two manners of understanding Melville's experiment. The first is the majority approach which posits that it consists in an allegory, in other words that the novel should first and foremost (and very often solely) be referred to another text, which frequently is the Bible—as was the case in medieval hermeneutics. The Confidence-Man and his avatars have in this way often be seen as Christ and/or Satan figures, and that has usually been the last word about the novel. In particular, the final chapter is sometimes said to reenact the Book of Revelation when darkness envelops the ship, heralding, one supposes, the end of the world and the Last Judgment.[2] This approach could be called the Procrustean school of criticism as what does not fit the bed—or the Bible—is ruthlessly ignored. Melville himself was perfectly aware of the problem (see the allusion to Procrustes and his bed on 78). In brief, interpreting a text in an allegorical way consists in imposing upon it a series of patterns belonging to other texts. The text is accordingly turned towards the past and linked to a logic of repetition as one looks, above all, for something that belongs to what could be called the category of the Same.

This essay will adopt the other alternative: Melville's exploration is directed towards a future which is deemed to be largely not written as yet and therefore made up of elements that cannot be recognized or

represented. It has nothing to do with a logic of repetition. In that regard, it may be recalled that, at the end of *Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust explains that good books are like those glasses anyone can buy in a store.[3] They enable you to see things in yourself and in the world which had been present all the time but which you could not perceive. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari warn us: "There is nothing to understand in a book but a lot that one can use. Nothing to interpret and to signify, but a lot with which one can experiment. A book should be like a machine interacting with something else, it should be a small tool turned towards what is outside it" (*Rhizome* 72; my trans.). In even more simple terms, one could similarly say: "Book! you lie there; the fact is, you books must know your places. You'll do to give us the bare words and facts, but we come in to supply the thoughts" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 360-61).[4]

Our starting point will be that, technically speaking, *The Confidence-Man* is doubly linked to time—inside itself and outside itself—and, in order to determine the ultimate implications of the novel and elucidate the notion of Cosmopolitanism, it is necessary to be aware of the conceptual framework that this temporal conundrum poses for us. It should first be noted that the beginning of the novel is somewhat misleading: "At sunrise on a first of April […]" (9), which may suggest that the whole journey possibly takes place on that particular day. If, however, one looks at the meeting of the Cosmopolitan and the old man, one notes that it happens some thirty minutes after the scene with the barber ("But what was told me not a half-hour since?" 241). Only readers having paid attention to the wording of the contract between the cosmopolitan and the barber become aware of the time of the last scene: "Done, in good faith, this 1st day of April 18—, at a quarter to twelve o'clock, p. m., in the shop of said William Cream, on board the said boat, *Fidèle*" (234). They discover that the date is now April 2nd, 15 minutes past midnight, and they then conceivably understand that the Confidence-Man (the character) and *The Confidence-Man* (the novel) are taking them into the future. By definition, one cannot know objectively what the future will be like. One can only hope that it will not be of the

order of the Same, but radically different from the present. One is reminded at this juncture that, twenty-five years later, Friedrich Nietzsche began his *Dawn of Day* with the following epigraph borrowed from the Hindu *Vig Reda*: "There are many dawns which have yet to shed their light" (4). Melville, as for him, ends his novel with the words: "Something further may follow of this Masquerade" (251). What comes—and there must be something coming next, for us, in our lives—will be purely unwritten as yet. It will have to do with life and health, and above all with new possibilities of life which are always to be invented and reinvented. The question we should then ask ourselves is: can we imagine a new conception of faith and confidence for a purely immanent world? Put differently, this essay will endeavor to show that, for Melville, such a conception means becoming a Cosmopolitan with all that implies.

The Confidence-Man is also bound up with time in a second manner. It is as if it can only make sense and transform people's lives in the future. The first editions published in 1857 in Britain and in the USA remained confidential. The book was not reprinted until Michael Sadleir's *Standard Edition of the Works of Herman Melville* (1923), which, to say the least, did not spark off an abundant critical literature. Things began to change with Elizabeth Foster's 1954 edition, and of course, her invaluable introduction and notes. Most of the studies of the novel belong in fact to the second half of the twentieth century, and they include a fair number of contradictory interpretations. Will there be a twenty-first century *Confidence-Man*? Once again, one is reminded of Marcel Proust and of what he wrote in *Remembrance of Things Past*, this time about Auguste Renoir. When they were first exhibited, his paintings were strongly rejected by the general public, but twenty years later people had started to look at the world as if it were a painting by Renoir (see *The Guermantes Way* 257). In other words, writing about what is potentially inherent in a literary work (which also means writing about my own or your own potential) will have to be a work in progress. Just like Jacques Derrida's conceptions of democracy, justice or hospitality, Melville's Cosmopolitanism is a highly complex notion. It cannot be represented in

terms of our present and above all it is always to come ("*à venir*") and will have to be continually (re)constructed.

The hypothesis behind this essay is that Melville's novel is not only a nineteenth century text, but also a twenty-first century text, as well as for instance a sixteenth century philosophical treatise that could very well have been written by the good Master François Rabelais. In other words, one makes sense of a literary work by means of juxtapositions in our minds with other works, older or more recent. Texts throw light upon one another and in this way reveal problems we would not have been aware of otherwise, which powerfully helps us unravel their various implications. For us, the meaning of a text can only be part of the culture we have constructed with all its networks of correspondences, and one of the main objectives of the reading activity is to produce a greater semantic complexity in ourselves and hopefully take risks and change our lives, something for instance neither Pitch nor the barber are prepared to do in the novel. Making sense of Melville's novel will thus be a question of choice, of inscribing it in an intellectual tradition. Some readers will always want to find the Same in a novel. Others will prefer to look for suggestions helping them to embark upon new roads and invent novel possibilities. This essay is for them and it will rely on a red thread coming from François Rabelais, M. D. (novelist, philosopher and physician), passing through Spinoza and Nietzsche, two philosophers who are so difficult to separate, William James, and of course closer to us with Gilles Deleuze whose two "gods," as it were, were Spinoza and Nietzsche, and who also wrote a well-known essay on Melville and was wont of discussing *The Confidence-Man* in his lectures at the University of Vincennes. In that long line of anti-idealistic, anti-platonic thinkers, Heraclitus should obviously also not be forgotten.[5]

A Confederacy of Frauds

Before discussing the Cosmopolitan proper, it will first prove helpful to take a look at the avatars of the Confidence-Man in the first half of the novel. Highly critical of their interlocutors and dressed in black and/or white, they pave the way for the affirmative power of Melville's

great Original with his motley costume in the second half. They are not full-fledged characters but empty shells without any psychological depth. They are only a name plus usually a single item of clothing. Above all, they represent a formula and a function. In that respect, they are in the same class as Bartleby who is also an empty character who keeps repeating his own formula: "I would prefer not to," that is an unfinished sentence without a subordinate clause ("if you don't mind"?), meaning neither *no* nor *yes*, with the anaphora *to* being a kind of mirror sending back his requests to the lawyer: copy, read, go to the post-office, etc. The structural function of the formula is to force the lawyer-narrator to reveal the hidden values underpinning his identity. Readers are thus able to discover that in his case he has inherited a certain vision of American history as he keeps alternating between considering firing his employee (in the spirit of capitalism) or trying to succor him (in the spirit of Christian charity). It is easy to understand that Melville is here addressing what originally went wrong in America, beginning with those Puritans who could not choose between God or Mammon, the salvation of their souls or worldly financial success as a sign of God's approval.

The avatars of the Confidence-Man in the first half of the novel all address their various interlocutors with their formula: "Do you have confidence in me?" Their objective is the same as that of Bartleby: reveal what secretly matters to the cross-section of American society gathered on the *Fidèle*. The narrator even provides the metaphor we need to understand the specific *modus operandi* of the avatars: they are like those revolving Drummond lights (see chapter 44) which send forth their powerful rays, never showing anything about themselves (obviously), but revealing even the smallest details of the objects around them. It should be noted that the lamp invented by Thomas Drummond produced a very strong white light by projecting oxygen and hydrogen onto a mass of lime and was quickly adopted by theaters, hence the term *lime-light*. One now understands better the role played by Melville's confidence-men—they show us that American society is a stage: "And one man in his time plays many parts." Jaques said it famously

in *As You Like It* (2.7.143), and Melville's narrator duly repeats the quotation at the end of chapter 41.

Alternatively, the avatars could be seen as trickster figures.[6] The trickster is also and only a function: he uses all sorts of means both fair and more often than not foul to force the people he encounters to change. What needs to be noted is that the trickster does not know what he wants. He is not a character with a sense of self and beliefs of his own. He only wants people to change, and he does not tell them in what manner they should change. In fact, he could not represent to them what the future would be like if they agreed to change. All he knows and all he requests is a future non-written and qualitatively different from the present. In Western culture, one of the traditional figures of the trickster was of course the court jester who had the right to criticize everybody with impunity including the king. Is that why the Cosmopolitan appears in chapter 24 in a multicolored costume which will surely remind readers of the jester's motley coat? ("O that I were a fool! / I am ambitious for a motley coat," says Jaques, Shakespeare's would-be trickster in *As You Like It;* 2.7.42-43).

It would be wrong to assume that the interlocutors of the avatars are victims. *They* are the crooks. It is them that need to be investigated by the scholarly critics of the novel, as there is literally nothing to say about the Confidence-Man apart from the fact that he is only a formula and a function. He does not have any convictions of his own about society, morality or medicine. If he chooses to defend nature in front of Pitch, for instance, that does not mean that he harbors some sort of religious faith in it. Like a mirror, he fashions his discourse after the beliefs of his adversaries. He has guessed that for a number of reasons Pitch hates nature and all that is associated with it. He has also noticed that Pitch's favorite figure of thought is analogy: "the child is father of the man; hence, as all boys are rascals, so are all men" (123). As a consequence, he will ply Pitch with a series of various analogies until the Bachelor gives in and contradicts himself.

At this juncture, readers of Melville are perhaps reminded of Gilles Deleuze's pronouncement when he explains that writers are (like) physicians in his *Essays Critical and Clinical*, especially in the first chapter, "Literature and Life" (11-17). Deleuze briefly gives some examples: Thomas Wolfe, Franz Kafka, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, and of course Herman Melville. The term '*diagnosis*' means collecting symptoms and establishing distinctions between them (*dia*), and then producing a body of knowledge (*gnosis*) that can later be used critically to understand the illnesses of a given society and also, it goes without saying, in order to enhance our possibilities of life (that will be the function of the Cosmopolitan in the novel). In the essay he devotes to Melville in the same volume,[7] Deleuze suggests in his own words along what lines one could today understand the logic of Melville's social critique. According to the highly original interpretation put forward by the French philosopher, the novelist must have felt that the first half of the nineteenth century represented a complete betrayal of the ideals of the American Revolution, and more specifically of its dream of a republic of "brothers." That fraternity should have been founded on the spirit of universal immigration, with the brothers settling stochastically on the seemingly limitless surface of the continent and building complex networks of mutual relationships between them, somewhat like islands in an archipelago. The logic at work could be described as a logic of addition, "and … and …," stressing equality between its various elements. In 1857, however, Melville knows that America has become a post-Jacksonian universe in which nature is being steadily destroyed, and cities and factories proliferate in the north just like slave plantations in the south. The "father" is back asserting his power upon the "brothers." Put differently, man has become a "stranger" to man, a word which is repeated time and again in the novel.[8]

Through his attacks on his successive interlocutors, the Confidence-Man gradually reveals that the illness at the core of the United States is made up of three components. Chapter after chapter, the novel reveals a generalized process of selection excluding those who are below or outside a white elite which goes on repeating itself and getting richer

and richer. The first disease is slavery or, more precisely, the exploitation of men by other men. It is denounced through the interactions of the Confidence-Man with two characters: a Southerner, the Man with the Gold-Sleeve Buttons, and a Northerner, Pitch, the so-called Missouri Bachelor, who tells us that he actually came from "the east" (120). There is no need to comment on the first, who is a cliché which would be amusing if we didn't know the nature of the ruthless reality behind it. The second is more interesting. He says that he is not a slave-holder and that he in fact objects to the Southern peculiar institution, but he also confesses that he lost a huge ("ten thousand dollars' worth") "plantation" in Missouri when it was flooded by the Mississippi (113), and the way he calls his employees ("boys") is strangely reminiscent of the manners of speech of overseers on more classic plantations. The fact that he is between the north and the south seems, however, to imply that he understands that slavery is fundamentally a structure. From the perspective of exploitation, there is not much difference between being a worker in the north or a slave in the south. It should be pointed out that Pitch has directly inherited the logic of "Benito Cereno," a story with its white slaves (when Babo is their master) and its black slaves (when Aranda was master, and even before in Africa when they already were the slaves of an African king), and of course when, at the end, Delano (from Boston, Massachusetts!) returns them to slavery in Lima. Melville knows it and Pitch sums it up: slavery has nothing to do with the color of a person's skin. In addition, Pitch is aware of what the future holds in store and Melville's novel seems to have been written to be read and understood in the twenty-first century: economically speaking, the future belongs to machines.

The second component takes us one step further: genocide. As, for some obscure reason, the Indians cannot be exploited, they should be exterminated. The way the Man in Grey approaches the widow in chapter 8 soliciting alms for his Widow and Orphan Asylum is particularly ironical, as it was that very tribe which had been largely wiped out by the US army in two wars (a third was on the way) in which a lot of women and children had been ruthlessly killed in Florida in the name

of progress. The main thrust of the argument however concerns Colonel John Moredock, or rather an ideal representation of the Colonel, the Indian Hater "*par excellence*" (155). That colonel is not a real person, but a character in an interpolated story, becoming in this way one of the numerous fictions that make up our culture in our minds, exactly like the personality of the real Moredock was shaped by the stories he heard when he was a child. The ideal Colonel thinks in terms of platonic essences. Readers who are not careful are, however, liable to forget that, no more than a white person, an Indian can be said to be 'pure,' a most meaningless word if there is one when applied to humans. We are all admixtures of good and evil (if one insists on thinking in moral terms), just like a slave (or a slave-owner) can be black or white or any unspecified combination of skin colors. The problem then is Moredock's statement: "There is an Indian nature. 'Indian blood is in me,' is the half-breed's threat" (155). Terms like *nature*, *race* or *blood* are ideologically constructed categories which were then used for purposes of social classification, in fact of exclusion. It is the logic of *them* vs. *us*, and *them* have to be exterminated. Thinking in terms of platonic essences becomes here an instrument of mental confusion, as when people pretend that society is like nature (with the concrete conclusions that one surmises): "Surprising, that one should hate a race which he believes to be red from a cause akin to that which makes some tribes of garden insects green?" (151).

Finally, the Confidence-Man's questions reveal America's third illness: imperialism. There is never enough territory to conquer, and it is thus 'logically' necessary that America's sense of superiority should be imposed upon other countries. It is almost as if literally the sky was the limit. Passing from one interlocutor to another, the avatars ironically map out an inexorable movement forward, foreshadowing our modern conceptions of a global economy. There is always a noble pretext, but what matters is the relentless extension of power or economic domination of the United States. It is possible to distinguish eight stages and aspects: (1) the pioneer penetrating the wilderness: "the backwoodsman would seem to America what Alexander was to Asia—captain in

the vanguard of conquering civilization" (150); (2) "the emigrants' quarters [on the *Fidèle*], […] owing to the present trip being a down-river one, will doubtless be found comparatively tenantless" (77): these are the exception, as potential pioneers were not attracted by the south as a result of the competition of slavery; (3) the allusion to the Seminoles slaughtered by General, then President, Jackson of course recalls the same Jackson's 1830 Indian Removal Act; (4) the Soldier of Fortune admittedly did not take part in the 1847 war against Mexico which led to the annexation of Texas and California, but the stories he invents convince passengers that giving a few coins to a cripple is not too high a price to pay for an enormous increase of space; (5) industry takes over with the coal mines of the Black Rapids Coal Company (the novel does not mention that, in the nineteenth century, most coal mines were situated in the south and accordingly manned by unpaid slaves); (6) the next turning point is the advent of the "Wall street spirit" (49), meaning that you can speculate on stocks and shares and achieve that ultimate miracle of earning (a lot of) money without actually working; (7) the description of the new city called The New Jerusalem is not an aberration but the logical continuation of the free development of capitalism, showing that people like our Bernard Madoff were already alive and kicking. The Collegian is not as stupid as he seems and he does ask the right questions: "And are all these buildings now standing? […] These marginal squares here, are they the water-lots?" (59). The answer is of course no, there aren't any buildings, only water (and diseases …); (8) imperialism is a movement that nothing can stop, as frontiers will be abolished, and anything can be bought or sold, including people's consciences. Melville has never been as serious as when he speaks of "the World's Charity": "I am for sending ten thousand missionaries in a body and converting the Chinese *en masse* within six months of the debarkation. The thing is then done, and turn to something else" (50). Of course, we are not talking of *bona fide* charity, but of trade, and more precisely of one-way trade. Each and every one of the billions of Chinese people will contribute one American dollar, and the Man in Grey

is then planning to expand to Africa and Borneo. The twentieth century has already begun.

This is the social backdrop against which the interlocutors, frauds all of them and certainly not victims, of the Confidence-Man thrive with their overriding obsession: the logic of the Same which cannot be separated from a refusal of others. At the beginning of the journey, money is the obvious motive, though it quickly becomes clear that it is the least interesting. These characters are at that stage prey to a single obsession, always the same, that is a compulsion to get richer and richer. It has become almost a reflex action for the Collegian and the Good Merchant: they cannot resist trying to buy shares whose value they suppose will soon increase. It follows that that nice widow with her Bible in chapter 8 must one way or another pose a problem to the reader: why would she be an exception to the rule that all the interlocutors have only their turpitude to reveal? Isn't she too perfect in our post-lapsarian world? It should probably be noted that the passage is full of echoes to other similar passages of the novel. She is reading from Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians (as chance would have it), as if she alone aboard the *Fidèle* attached any importance to what the deaf-mute kept writing on his slate in chapter 1. It is not mentioned whether she is actually reading it, but her finger is on chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians. Is she really interested in Paul's words? Maybe, the problem is the finger. If she is a crook, she certainly masters one of the basic tricks of her trade, which is going to betray her in our eyes: she drops the book. The reader will perhaps remember that detail when later the President of the Black Rapids Coal Co. "accidentally" "forgets" his book. In the scene with the widow, the Man in Grey seizes the Bible on the floor: in front of a confidence-woman, he immediately becomes an authentic confidence-man, and, needless to say, a better one. The Cosmopolitan will later act in a similar manner with Charlie Noble, asking him for $50 before his opponent does. In chapter 8, the Man in Grey uses the same technique, beating the Widow at her own game.

More importantly, the logic of the Same manifests itself as a resilient form of narcissism which cuts off the subject from his fellow humans.

Melville usually describes each of the interlocutors by means of a single object: gold-sleeve buttons, plantation cigar, Bible; or through a role they have assumed: bachelor, rich southern collegian, widow with Bible (again), etc. These characters have identified with an image, and the word *identify* is meant to be understood as in *identical*: it is always the same object and always the same role. The Gentleman with Gold-Sleeve Buttons is certainly an extreme case with his immaculate cleanliness, to which should be associated the Collegian who tells us that he is never happier than when "smoking my plantation cigar" (57). Their white identity and their sense of superiority are made possible by the slaves who wear out their bodies for them "by deputy" (44), as it were, and charity is another ploy white people use in order to feel that they are above the other men they humiliate. Chapter 3, showing Black Guinea catching coins (and buttons) with his open mouth, is perfectly explicit in that context, implying that he is not a man, but a dog; or, if that is not sufficient, so is the scene in which Egbert agrees to play the part of Charlie Noble and reveals the extent of the selfishness hidden in Winsome's mystical theories. The Cosmopolitan's "Help, help, Charlie, I want help!" (207) never elicits the slightest answer from him. Meeting another person will never change anything in the identity these frauds have constructed for themselves. The logic of the Same is the contrary of the logic of (true) Charity.

The same rationale explains the behavior of the Missouri Bachelor and that of the Barber. They will never take any risks. As Pitch aptly puts it: "all boys are rascals, so are all men" (123). There are strictly no exceptions for him. This logic also accounts for the importance of sick characters in the novel. It is clear that Melville is not concerned with the physical dimension of their complaints, which is never in doubt in the case of the Sick Man (chapter 16), the Miser (chapter 20), or Thomas Fry (chapter 19). Psychologically speaking, however, it looks as if these individuals are in love with their symptoms. They want to retain them as they both need them and the recriminations that accompany them in order to bolster their sense of self. Accordingly, the Confidence-Man tries to suggest to them that they should believe in hope and of course

never stop trying new types of remedies, even if one is never assured in advance that they will cure them. As the Cosmopolitan says, speaking of the Lady of Goshen (who does succeed in changing): organic disease is always associated with "a certain lowness, if not sourness, of spirits" (139). Thus, it should be recognized that Fry in the end makes an effort, which leads him to confess to the Confidence-Man: "You have made a better man of me" (106).

Sticking to the logic of the Same and refusing to change, mentally speaking, is the highest form of illness. In that respect, the Methodist Clergyman is probably right when he remarks:

> "I have been in mad-houses full of tragic mopers, and seen there the end of suspicion: the cynic, in the moody madness muttering in the corner; for years a barren fixture there; head lopped over, gnawing his own lip, vulture of himself; while, by fits and starts, from the corner opposite came the grimace of the idiot at him." (24)

The Advent of the Cosmopolitan

Melville's novel starts with a cross-section of contemporary American society, stressing that the general evolution of the nineteenth century has led to a general process of exclusion in which the ruling group has discovered limitless possibilities of indulging in the logic of the Same, at the same time identifying with a stable image of itself and rejecting other human beings who are seen as different. Melville unquestionably knows that there is nothing new under the sun. He is actually describing the worst tendencies of human nature, which explains why his novel still speaks to twenty-first century readers and will continue to make sense to readers in an infinity of communities present and future. Yet Melville's greatest invention is the Cosmopolitan, who embodies a spirit of assertion following the negative critiques conducted by the first avatars of the Confidence-Man. Interestingly, without having been aware of Melville's novel, Nietzsche used a similar formal structure in

part IV of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Zarathustra is the German philosopher's great Original.[9] He comes down from his mountain to destroy in order to rebuild the world upon new values. It could also be said of him that he is "a new law-giver, a revolutionizing philosopher, or the founder of a new religion" (definition of the "original" in *The Confidence-Man* 237). Curiously (such is the power of chance), he encounters seven "Superior Men," the same number as that of the avatars of the Confidence-Man. That term is deeply ironical, as these so-called superior beings embody the old beliefs linked to death, that is to say precisely the hidden values of the Confidence-Man's interlocutors. Their minds are full of resentment and nostalgia for the past. On the contrary, Zarathustra will preach the need for new values taking into account the richness and complexity of life, and looking towards an as yet unwritten future.

In Melville's novel, the emphasis on positive values begins in chapter 24 with the sudden arrival of the Cosmopolitan. These values are developed through the use of two semantic fields: clothes and wine. The Cosmopolitan appears with his multi-colored costume made up of items of clothing belonging to a large number of cultures from all around the world: "the stranger sported a vesture barred with various hues, that of the cochineal predominating, in style participating of a Highland plaid, Emir's robe, and French blouse" (136). He immediately stresses his philosophy of life:

> "Served up à la Pole, or à la Moor, à la Ladrone, or à la Yankee, that good dish, man, still delights me; or rather is man a wine I never weary of comparing and sipping; wherefore am I a pledged cosmopolitan, a sort of London-Dock-Vault connoisseur, going about from Teheran to Natchitoches, a taster of races; in all his vintages, smacking my lips over this racy creature, man, continually." (138)

By definition, the Cosmopolitan is a citizen of the world. Etymologically, his name is made up of *kosmos* (*world* in Greek) and *polis* (*city*). Combining definitions culled from contemporary dictionaries,[10] one could say that the term refers to a person *free from local, provincial, national, ethnic or religious prejudices, limitations and attachments*. He is a

man for whom no other man is a "stranger," to use one of the key words of the novel. More specifically, he changes and adapts all the time in an endless process of becoming and variation. As he himself puts it, he is "catholic" (137), that is to say that he literally rejects nothing and no one, as his acceptance of all the possibilities of life inherent in a human being is *universal* (the Greek meaning of *katholikos*).

In the culinary description he gives of his identity ("Served up à la Pole, or à la Moor, à la Ladrone, or à la Yankee"), he is perfectly explicit: he will not identify with a single human group, in other words with a series of habits, conventions and traditions. He does not say: I belong to community *a* or *b*. On the contrary, he explains that he would like to share in the experience of communities *a*, *b*, *c*, etc. He follows a logic of addition *a* + *b* + *c*, etc., and never a logic of subtraction: I don't want this or that characteristic belonging to *d* or *f*, etc. He is *par excellence* the man who experiments, who has espoused a process of infinite variation, that is who is always different from himself. He is thus a "taster of races" (138), which implies that he wants to live as much as possible and relish all the potential hidden in the hearts of his multitudinous fellow human beings. Even though it looks a lot more modest that the interminable enumerations favored by Walt Whitman, his small list needs to be analyzed closely. As a matter of fact, it should be noted that, as the four ethnic groups he mentions were then not officially recognized communities, they prove somewhat hard to characterize.

The "Poles" will help us understand the logic underlying the Cosmopolitan's way of defining himself. In the nineteenth century, Poland was divided between Prussia, Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and it is very tempting to remark that, at that time, the Poles were the Indians of Europe. A possible clue enabling us to understand the Cosmopolitan's identification with the Poles can be found in Chapter 89 of *Moby-Dick*: "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish": "What was Poland to the Czar? What Greece to the Turk? What India to England? What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-Fish" (334).

A minority human group that is neither a nation nor a state is full of possibilities as it is not the prisoner of any kind of orthodoxy or official

watchwords. (If it is, that implies that it is almost a nation and will possibly become an established state, losing in the process its creative potential). The narrator of *Moby-Dick* similarly notes: "What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? […] What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?" (334). The problem becomes thus the reader's problem. We are all of us part of usually one or possibly several communities, with their ideologies and obligations. At the same time, it is always an option with us to imagine what another life would be like in order to be able to start inventing a new future that is as yet unforeseeable and unrepresentable. At this point, one will perhaps recall what we said about the two worlds of Herman Melville: a bourgeois (albeit impoverished) existence and an artist's life dreaming of experimenting what it might mean to become more and more human.

Secondly, the "Yankees." On the face of it, they refer to the official majority in the United States. One should, however, remember that we are going down the Mississippi. Melville urges us to question the nature of the possible relationships between the north and the south. Once again, it is essential to try and imagine what the future might be like, especially as in 1857 a civil war had become a distinct possibility. One needs in fact to go even further ahead than that: What new America are we going to build? Is it still possible to envisage a new type of society now that the post-Jacksonian era has imposed industrialization and its ills, without forgetting slavery and imperialism?

Thirdly, the "Moors." The original meaning of the word in Roman times referred to the inhabitants of Northern Africa, today's Maghreb. Seen from Italy, their skin was perceived as especially dark, and, if one exaggerates a little, black. (Shakespeare's play is called *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, as its hero comes from Africa, Black Africa in his case.) Later, with the islamization of Northern Africa, the term started to refer to Muslim people. Becoming a Moor, the Cosmopolitan becomes even more complex and elusive. His identity is now at least twofold: he is a black person, and he is a Muslim. It follows that readers are now faced with two important implications. (1) So far he had been

a white person. Now, he is both black and white. The irony of that situation is all the more acute when one remembers that the steamboat is progressing both in space (towards New Orleans and the biggest slave market in the U.S.A.) and in time (towards the civil war). (2) The Cosmopolitan was first a "Yankee" Protestant (the majority religion in the north), then a Catholic (the majority religion among Poles). He is now a Muslim, without forgetting the many gods from Black Africa. In a book dealing with life and possibilities of life, it would seem that Melville is here suggesting that health consists not only in changing religions regularly, but also in possessing two and preferably more than two religions, which is the only manner in which one can truly be free and creative.

The "Ladrones." The word is familiarly used to designate the natives of the Mariana islands in Micronesia, and readers know fully well that natives have always had pride of place in Melville's novels. The Cosmopolitan becomes ever more a "stranger," being now a member of one of the numerous minorities ignored by the advent of modernism in the nineteenth century. There is unquestionably a progression: the novel at present asserts the value of paganism and polytheism. Melville's discovery is that religions can become richer and more complex. In fact, structurally, they can be considered as multiplicities in progress, with the consequence that adopting several of them will, as a consequence, make of us processes of becoming. It is important to add that the Spanish word *ladrón* was used to talk of a rascal (to speak like our Missouri Bachelor). Magellan, who discovered and plundered these far-off islands, started using the term when he considered that the natives were too prone to stealing from his ships. It means that one is either on the side of orthodoxy and honesty (like Magellan), or on the side of Melville's Confidence-Man whose function is to reveal the corruption under the veneer of honesty and orthodoxy.

In addition, the Cosmopolitan praises the virtues of wine in his allusions to the docks of London where hundreds of varieties of wines from all over the world were stocked (see 138). Just like the other human beings we encounter in our lives, wines are all different from one another.

In fact, the number of wines is practically infinite, and Melville here proves to be a true disciple of the great François Rabelais who not only proclaimed that "Laughter's the property of man" (*Gargantua* 204, "To the Reader"), but also that wine is the property of man (cf. *The Fifth Book of Pantagruel* 1013). As a matter of fact, the *Fifth Book*, which is about the quest for the Divine Bottle, always refers to wine, or rather to wines, by means of lists: "Falernian, Malmsey, Muscadet, Tabbia, Beaune, Mirevaux, Orleans, Picardan, Arbois, Coussy, Anjou, Graves, Corsican, Verron, Nérac and others" (984), the important term being "*and others*," as the list could, one imagines, go on for ever. One does not choose and reject, but on the contrary, just like the Cosmopolitan is a "taster of races" (138), one should adopt a logic of Addition and taste one wine after the other.[11]

Rabelais ends *Pantagruel* with the following words: "And if you desire to be good Pantagruelists (that is, to live in peace, joy and health, always enjoying good cheer) never trust folk who peer through a hole" (164). Laughter, wine and health, these three things cannot be separated. Need we remind ourselves that Friedrich Nietzsche used to define himself as *Arzt der Kultur*, the physician of civilization?[12] *The Confidence-Man* preaches the same wisdom, which also includes a clear condemnation of people who look through what Rabelais calls a "[key]hole." In his denunciation of judgment (judging others, but also judging yourself in the name of illusory values), Melville is part of the tradition chosen in this essay, that is a tradition which goes from Rabelais through Spinoza and Nietzsche.

In order to understand what is maybe the driving question behind Melville's novel, it is essential to go back to Spinoza's famous pronouncement in *Ethics*: "*Quid Corpus possit? Nemo hucusque determinavit*" (III, scolium of proposition 2)—What can a body do? As yet, no one has determined it.[13] The quotation summarizes the Cosmopolitan's essential function: in order to be fully human, one needs to experiment with all the potential which is inside our bodies and our minds (in other words, accept no censorship or self-censorship), which symbolically means enjoying as many different wines as possible and trying to wear

all the clothes of the world and of course giving the utmost freedom to all the parts of our bodies. Nietzsche will say the same thing in his own words: "If only someone could rediscover '*these possibilities of life*!'"[14] He more specifically believed that the main purpose of a work of art was to point to a healthy (the only healthy?) way in which one should approach our lives and invent a new future. He added (and nobody will deny that going down the Mississippi in a steamboat was a highly dangerous enterprise both physically and philosophically, as the last chapter avers): "There is as much invention, reflection, boldness, despair and hope here as in the voyages of the great navigators; and to tell the truth these are also voyages of exploration in the most distant and perilous domains of life" (2-3).

A brief theoretical detour should help us apprehend the fundamental choice offered to readers of *The Confidence-Man*. One remembers that the classification offered by Spinoza of our activities into two passions, gay passions and sad passions, is also *mutatis mutandis* to be found at the heart of Nietzsche's philosophy: on the one hand, some readers will choose to transpose into their lives what they discover in the novel and invent new relationships with the world and with other people, as well as of course with themselves, whereas, on the other hand, other readers will prefer to "react" rather than "act," their actions will depend on a model or a norm usually of obscure origins, with the consequence that there will never be anything remotely personal or individual about their lives. The logic of what Rabelais called the "keyhole" is part and parcel of the second alternative: there is always someone who will try to induce you to stick to sad passions, a someone who will often be yourself, and that will "judge" you and reproach you with ever renewed moral arguments for not respecting some model or other. The "keyhole" is another name for the logic of the Same: according to it, one should always identify with the same community and its norms and conventions.

The novel shows that it is a question of power, except that the term *power* possesses two contradictory meanings, as does *Macht* in the title of Nietzsche's *Der Wille zur Macht* ("The Will to Power"). Spinoza used

potentia and *potestas* in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and then in *Ethics*.[15] *Potentia* refers to one's potentialities, and the fundamental problem it raises is how far one can go on developing the possibilities of our minds and bodies if one really wants to be free; whereas *potestas* concerns the power institutions, religions, political ideologies, etc., hold (often in a subliminal manner) upon our minds and bodies. It is the contrary of freedom, as our lives are, as it were, 'written' for us. In this connection, one remembers that, in Book IV of *Ethics*, Spinoza conjures up three theoretical characters to illustrate what *potestas* really consists in: it is what is hidden behind the sad passions of the slave, the tyrant and the priest. The tyrant obviously wants power, the priest convinces the slave to submit and the latter loves and needs his symptoms to which he is used exactly like Melville's invalids, such as the Man with the Wooden Leg (chapter 3), the Sick Man (chapter 16), the Kentucky 'Titan' (chapter 17), Thomas Fry (chapter 19), etc.

This essay would like to contend that, fundamentally, when he created the extraordinary theoretical character of the Cosmopolitan, Melville was primarily thinking in terms of life and potentialities. As Gilles Deleuze, the last member of our tradition, puts it in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*: "The truthful man [an ironical term here, the man who believes that he possesses the truth] in the end wants nothing other than to judge life; he holds up a superior value, the good, in the name of which he will be able to judge, he is craving to judge, he sees in life an evil, a fault which is to be atoned for: the moral origin of the notion of truth" (137). He then immediately adds: "There is no value superior to life, life is not to be judged or justified, it is innocent, it has 'the innocence ·of becoming', beyond good and evil" (138). John Steinbeck, who adopted a similar approach, would have maintained that life is "non-teleological."[16] There is no denying that this is the harsh lesson discovered by Charlemont in Melville's novel. His story is important as it is the only long inset narrative related by the Cosmopolitan and not by one of the opponents of the Confidence-Man. The character has understood that life is not a long succession of events following a straight line going from a beginning to its end. It first and foremost depends upon chance and,

after having been virtually destroyed, Charlemont will become strong again and reconstruct himself: "No, no! when by art, and care, and time, flowers are made to bloom over a grave, who would seek to dig all up again only to know the mystery?—The wine" (144).

One may very well imagine that, when he was writing *The Confidence-Man*, Melville was thinking of the novel published by his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne seven years before. Philosophically speaking, Hester Prynne is a distant cousin of the Cosmopolitan, and that on two accounts. Firstly, in chapter XVIII, "A Flood of Sunshine," she discards her letter and the cap hiding her hair.

> O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight until she felt the freedom! By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair, and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. (*The Scarlet Letter* 138)

The young woman symbolically feels strong and full of joy as she rejects the power (*potestas*) the clergymen/magistrates of Boston had been holding upon her body and her mind. What should be noted is that the magistrates are adepts of the logic of the Same (always the same uniform, always the same sad grey clothes and the same grey life for women), as well as of the logic of Subtraction (your hair does not belong to you and you have no right to show it). *We* know what is good (right?) for you.

There is a second similarity linking Hawthorne's protagonist and Melville's Cosmopolitan: Hester puts the letter and the cap back. She does so not only in the forest scene, but also at the end of the novel, when she returns as an old woman from Europe when everybody has forgotten about her punishment. She knows, however, that one cannot but live in a society and that figuratively it is the role of the letter on her chest to inscribe her in that society. In other words, she accepts reality and society as they are with their limitations, but at the same time she embroiders the letter, she becomes an artist, almost like a writer, and in

this way with her gold thread she goes as far as she possibly can trying to assert herself and her hidden possibilities (Spinoza's *potentia*). In what follows, this essay will analyze the last chapter of the novel and accordingly show that, just like Hester Prynne, the Cosmopolitan is fully part of society. The universe imagined by Melville in his novel is unquestionably immanent, which does not mean that it is disembodied. It is the concrete world in which we live with and only with what is materially possible in it. The remarks that follow will thus be not abstract, but practical.

The Critique of Practical Charity

> "Talking of alleged spuriousness of wines," said he, tranquilly setting down his glass, and then sloping back his head and with friendly fixedness eying the wine, "perhaps the strangest part of those allegings is, that there is, as claimed, a kind of man who, while convinced that on this continent most wines are shams, yet still drinks away at them; accounting wine so fine a thing, that even the sham article is better than none at all. And if the temperance people urge that, by this course, he will sooner or later be undermined in health, he answers, 'And do you think I don't know that? But health without cheer I hold a bore; and cheer, even of the spurious sort, has its price, which I am willing to pay.'" (167)

The Cosmopolitan is extremely explicit about the importance of always belonging to a given human group and more generally of being part of the here and now, that is to say: it would be wrong to imagine that there are other worlds from which our values would supposedly come or where we would hopefully "live" after our deaths. Just like purity, perfection does not exist. It is only an empty word misleading us, and that is also true of wines: they are just like human beings, neither good nor bad, in some cases more good than bad or more bad than good. That also applies to our standards of behavior, and in this respect the Cosmopolitan shows us that, even though "chronometrical" values should ideally be considered desirable (to speak like Plotinus Plimlimmon in *Pierre*, Book XIV), we only have "horological" values to live with. The

last scene of the novel in which the Cosmopolitan tries to come to the help of the old man is unquestionably modest and un-heroic as the two characters speak of money and of surviving a dangerous river trip. At the same time, it could be said that conceptually it is revolutionary. *The Confidence-Man* began with the Mute proclaiming the virtues of absolute charity with his slate. The novel ends with an exercise in practical charity.

It should be remembered that the approach chosen in this essay is always in terms of logic and problematics. Charity is indeed a problem, and the last chapter provides a reasoned answer to it. In the first half of the novel, charity is defined negatively through the reactions of the interlocutors of the Confidence-Man. It is what they don't possess in their narcissistic obsession with themselves. Charity is the contrary of the logic of the Same: meeting someone, anyone, should imply that you can no longer remain the same. Yet the Mute's list of quotations from 1 Corinthians is an invitation for readers to try to define what charity is, or at least what its essential properties are. Readers are meant, as it were, to continue writing on his board: "Something further may follow of this List." The list is indeed to be continued, not in the novel (the interlocutors are simply not concerned), but by an infinity of readers in their own lives across continents and across centuries.

The Mute quotes from the King James Version. *Charity* is a translation of *caritas* in Jerome's Latin *Vulgate*.[17] It means *dear* as in *my parents are dear to me* or *this merchandise is dear*. Basically, we once again encounter the ambiguous union of God and Mammon. The Mute obviously refers to the first alternative, *caritas* as a translation of the Greek *agapè*. The meaning of the term was spelt out without any ambiguities by Christ at the Last Supper: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (King James Version, John 13:34). Only one interpretation is possible: that, like Christ, you should give your life for the "stranger" (Melville's word) you encounter on your road. A slightly less 'chronometrical' meaning can of course be considered, as the Cosmopolitan points out: "You are so charitable with everybody, do but consider the tone of the speech.

Now I put it to you, Frank; is there anything in it hortatory to high, heroic, disinterested effort? Anything like 'sell all thou hast and give to the poor?'" (176, being an echo of Matthew 19:21).

In the last chapter of *The Confidence-Man*, the perspective is, however, different and things are now seen at a more "horological" level, which was foreshadowed in the following exchange: "'Charity, charity!'" exclaimed the Cosmopolitan, 'never a sound judgment without charity. When man judges man, charity is less a bounty from our mercy than just allowance for the insensible lee-way of human fallibility'" (161). The Cosmopolitan will now show us in a very practical manner what is meant by "allowance[s]." There is nothing exceptional about the old man and there will accordingly be nothing Christ-like about the Cosmopolitan, which does not mean that the elderly passenger concerned with his money and his life is not a symbol. In point of fact, he is first and foremost the embodiment of a problem. How old is he? May-be 68 years old? Maybe not? It is tempting to imagine that he could very well be the age of the country and that he was born with it in 1789. Melville's diagnosis is that politically and morally speaking the American Republic has failed. Who knows? "Something further may follow of this Masquerade," (251) the country may be reborn with new values together with the break of day on April 2nd. After all, historically, in the Middle Ages, April 1st was considered the beginning of the new year and of course it also coincides with the arrival of spring and the renewal of life.

The solution of the problem will consist in trying to figure out how a new faith and a new confidence are possible in a completely immanent universe. The passage is about "signs," as the old man keeps repeating, that is to say that it is about social phenomena. Two types of signs are analyzed in a critical manner. Firstly, dollar bills are compared with a series of models in a *Counterfeit Detector* (as in a detector of counterfeit money or as in a detector that is counterfeit?). The old man is told to look for a miniature goose hidden like the image of Napoleon on the bill. It is of course not so much the old passenger as the reader who is confronted with a real conundrum: why should there be a figure of the

French emperor on an American bill? The answer is that there may possibly be a figure of George Washington, but certainly not that of a foreign statesman! Besides, these figures can only be discovered if and only if "the attention is directed to it" (248), which implies that we know in advance that the said figure will be present on (in?) the bill. The Cosmopolitan is right to imply that it has become a real wild-goose chase, and that the goose is the old man or the old man's desire (or at least that it is in the old man's mind and not on the bill). The parallelism with the second type of signs is then unavoidable: trust or faith has nothing to do with what is supposedly inside the Bible and, just as there is no Napoleon on the bill, there is no God in the Bible whose very heart, as the old man graphically remarks, is symbolically made up of the apocryphal books which by definition cannot be trusted. Geese and gods are human creations, and looking for them inside a sign is a very good example of the type of allegorical readings this essay has consistently been trying to avoid.

Most of the religious content of the passage deals with the question of Providence. That notion posits that a transcendent God knows in advance everything which is going to take place in our human universe, and that He intervenes in these events as a "beneficent caretaker" so as to afford protection to our souls and our bodies. The Cosmopolitan is aware of the humorous dimension of the fears of the old man and reassures him that Providence is like a "Committee of Safety" (249), watching over us when we are comfortably asleep and unable to look after ourselves properly. Part of the humor is obviously that the real and original 1793 *Comité de salut public* led to the worst horrors of the French Revolution and opened the door to Napoléon Bonaparte's bid for power. In other words, it is impossible to separate Providence from the Terror (that is the word) it can create. The exchange between the two men reveals in fact an aporia: God as Providence will shelter us, while, on the other hand, as the Cosmopolitan stresses, steamships are often involved in horrible accidents with lots of victims. Does that signify that God is ineffective or more simply that He is a fiction and never

existed? This possibility seems borne out by the pathetically selfish motivations of the old man: what he requires from Providence is solely physical protection for himself. At bottom, providence is thus a matter of projection: rather than having transcendence intervening in the affairs of immanence, it is immanence that dictates to a supposed transcendence.

Consequently, the Cosmopolitan extinguishes the solar lamp "with the image of a horned altar [and] with the figure of a robed man, his head encircled by a halo" (238), two symbols traditionally construed as referring to the Old and the New Testaments. The light has indeed become very weak, and we are told that the other lamps are "barren" (239). It is time to leave Christian allegories behind and enter a new universe endowed instead with as yet unwritten life-affirming values. The last touch of humor, or rather farce, concerns the life preserver the old man requests. The Cosmopolitan points to a "brown stool" (250). There are no life preservers onboard the *Fidèle*, the notion of a transcendent Providence is only an illusion, and a chamber pot will have to do, that is to say that there is no protection against accidents and no promise of everlasting life. Worse, there is no soul, just that "brown stool" (chamber pot or excrement?) conveniently present underneath one's backside. Rabelais, Melville's great ancestor, resorted to the spirit of carnival and a similar technique in order to deflate those official discourses that tried to give the illusion of seriousness and transcendence: he replaced all the forms of bogus solemnity with a reference to our low bodily functions inviting us look at the results. Readers of chapter XIII of *Gargantua* certainly never forget the pages devoted to testing the respective values of a long series of various "torche-culs" (arse-wipes). It could be said that Melville symbolically ends here his "Quarrel with God."[18] Put more radically, through the Cosmopolitan's action, the novelist seems to be telling us: "the 'true world' does not exist, and, if it did, would be inaccessible, impossible to describe, and, if it could be described, would be useless, superfluous" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* 137; the French text says "*l'être*" instead of "the true world," that is God, the [Supreme] Being).

The conceptual turning point of the chapter is reached when the novel stops being critical and starts offering positive, down-to-earth advice. The end of the passage deals with what should be called the Cosmopolitan's practical charity. It is both very modest from a factual point of view and daring from a theoretical perspective, as if Melville's intellectual experiment had led him to intuit what a pragmatist way of thinking could consist in. One is perhaps reminded that Deleuze confesses in one of his university classes that he deeply admired William James, and that for him pragmatism is part of a long philosophical manner of thinking going from Rabelais to Spinoza and Nietzsche.[19] Provided it is not unduly simplified, pragmatism is about patterns of behavior and problems to solve. Secondarily, it implies avoiding false questions and above all other-worldly solutions. Surprising as it may seem, the Cosmopolitan's pragmatic charity is once again best explained thanks to one of thinkers belonging to the intellectual tradition chosen in this essay: Baruch Spinoza and his theory of evil, a most pragmatist conception if there is one.[20] The Dutch thinker distinguished between morality (the opposition between good and evil) and ethics (the opposition between good and bad). The problem with morality is that it traditionally refers to obscure values supposedly revealed to us and possessing some dubious transcendent origin. On the other hand, ethics (from the Greek *ēthos*, habit, custom, the way you shape your life) is concerned with what is concretely good (with here a different meaning from the abstract *good* which is opposed to *evil* in morality) or bad for your body and consequently for yourself. It is basically about the relationships between an object and yourself: will the object enhance or diminish your *potentia*, or is it liable to poison your body or your mind? There is no metaphysics whatsoever involved here and an example will make clear the importance of the notion: "the bill is good" (248). The Cosmopolitan adds: "Throw it away, I beg, if only because of the trouble it breeds you" (248), referring to the *Counterfeit Detector* which prevents the old man from living his life fully. Life is the only value one must always choose. The old man, on the contrary, claims that "the bill is good" if there is a goose in it. He thinks in an allegorical way when

the Confidence-Man thinks in a pragmatist way. For him, the dollar bill, just like the Bible, are what Plato would have called *simulacra*, and it would be a mistake to look for a model, "idea" or essence (gold? God?) behind them. Simulacra and only simulacra proliferate in the world in which we live and we have to make do with them as best as we can.[21]

The problem has fundamentally to do with the production of faith as a human activity in a purely immanent universe. That, of course, was precisely the key question raised by William James in *The Will to Believe* (1896). Faith should be considered as an immanent type of behavior. It has nothing to do with gods or allegedly supernatural other worlds. One can have faith or not in a god or in a dollar bill. Maybe the bill is genuine or maybe it is false, it is only (for me) a matter of chance, but that should not be seen as the real problem. What matters is the possibilities offered to me by the bill. The only thing that should be taken into consideration is that it may well be accepted in a store even if it is counterfeit. I will only know the answer when I try to use it, and it follows that I should not poison my mind now asking myself metaphysical questions about it. It is also understandably important to have the same attitude concerning one's personal safety. Maybe there will be an accident during the night, or maybe not. It is useless to start worrying, especially if nothing happens, and it is definitely too early to panic should the ship run aground. The new faith to be invented should be directed at real possibilities of life, that is to say at what I can do with my body and myself in the future, and that should include sleep at night.

The importance of chance is thus the last notion that has to be considered in the light of the intellectual tradition that produced pragmatism at the end of the nineteenth century as well as Gilles Deleuze's philosophy in the twentieth. It began long before Rabelais, and most certainly before the tradition developed by Plato with his transcendent world beyond ours, and more generally by the idealism of monotheistic religions which shared the same dual-world structure. (As Nietzsche famously said: "Christianity is Platonism for 'the people'"; *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Preface 2.) Its earliest

known representative is the pre-Socratic thinker Heraclitus, still remembered today for two vital maxims. First, Fragment 21: "You cannot step twice into the same river; for other waters are continually flowing on" (Wheelwright 29). What we should understand is that men become alienated, they can no longer be truly human, if they choose the logic of the Same and identify with always the same mask and with the norms of a single community. Man's estate implies, on the contrary, a logic of Becoming, of constantly accompanying the unpredictability of life and consequently becoming different from oneself. In other words, it implies inventing and experimenting with ever new possibilities of life. Secondly, in Fragment 24, Heraclitus reminded us that "[t]ime is a child moving counters in a game, the royal power is a child's" (29). Our future is (largely) not written, and above all it cannot be represented since the only principle hidden behind it is chance. As a consequence, it is impossible to produce an allegory of the future, unless of course one prefers an idealistic approach to our lives limiting ourselves to repeating ready-made (when? where?) models.

When he wrote *The Confidence-Man*, it would seem that Melville in his own way had an intuition of that great tradition, largely similar to that of Nietzsche, when the latter composed his *Morgenröte*: "There are many dawns which have yet to shed their light" (4). It is then not overly surprising that structurally Melville's great novel should end exactly in the same manner as *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: ""This is my morning, my day beginneth: *arise now, arise, thou great noontide!*"— —/ Thus spake Zarathustra and left his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun coming out of gloomy mountains" (325).[22] "Something further may follow of this Masquerade" (*The Confidence-Man* 251).

Just as Erasmus wrote his *In Praise of Folly* in which he denounced the universal stupidity of man, Melville was justified in giving us his own praise of Cosmopolitanism in which, starting from a diagnosis of the ills of nineteenth-century American society, he offers a generalized vision of the possibilities open to man, a vision that can then be transposed and adapted to other places and other times across centuries and continents: how far can we go in body and mind in order to become

always more human? The novel's answer is that we should renounce the illusory belief that everything is already written, and that the only thing that is reassuring is the category of the Same. Instead of repeating passively what we are, judging others and judging ourselves, we should choose health, which is synonymous with a logic of addition. Just like Whitman famously wrote "I contain multitudes,"[23] it is important for us to recognize that we can share in several contradictory communities and also possess several religions. It is lethal to oppose social norms: I can be both *us* and *them*. Cosmopolitanism is thus presented in the novel as an experiment: what new road could / should we follow? Concretely, readers are invited to unfold the implications of a number of singularities, a costume, wines, Poles and Moors, a dollar bill, a chamber-pot, etc. In order to explicate the potential of these objects, they then need to complicate their vision of them, and, consequently, their vision of themselves. Being truly alive and accepting without simplifications the richness and the complexity of the only world there is, our immanent world, fundamentally implies embracing the principle of infinite variations along which life carries us, inviting us to invent tomorrow's ever new possibilities of life.

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NOTES

[1]It is here modestly proposed that the present essay could be seen as a belated contribution to the *Connotations* issue on "Roads Not Taken" (vol. 18). As Matthias Bauer writes in his introduction: "the road not taken may be the road we should take, in the author's view" (2).

[2]A key characteristic of most of the critical literature on *The Confidence-Man*, especially that of the second half of the twentieth century, is that it considers the novel within a Judeo-Christian framework, which, let us immediately add, does not mean that a lot of these studies are devoid of interest in other respects. The avatars of the Confidence-Man are usually immediately assimilated to Satan, sometimes to Christ, and, in some more sophisticated interpretations, a number of scholars have started to wonder (in Leslie Fiedler's phrase) "whether Christ is the Devil" (437). A list of these studies would be exceedingly long. Suffice it to say that this approach can be found in such "classics" as for instance Dryden's *Melville's Thematics of Form*,

Bellis's *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, Elizabeth Foster's introduction to the 1954 edition, and Miller's famous *PMLA* article "The Confidence-Man: His Guises." A few of these, as could be expected, seize upon the darkness that descends upon the ship at the end to claim that the novel should be read in conjunction with the Book of Revelation as it culminates with the advent of some kind of apocalypse, whether it is a "Comic Apocalypse" (see R. W. B. Lewis's chapter "Days of Wrath and Laughter" in *Trials of the Word* 184-235), or a "Satirical Apocalypse" (in Cook's *Satirical Apocalypse*, a long concatenation of all the possible allegorical interpretations of *The Confidence-Man*).

[3]See Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Time Regained* 266.

[4]Starting from these premises, Gilles Deleuze explains, in an important digression in *Proust and Signs* (45), what a practice of close reading could consist in. He turns the family of the Latin term *plicare* ("to fold") into an operative concept. In our case, the various components of the figure of the Cosmopolitan will have to be unfolded ("dé-pliées") and *ex-pli-cated*, that is to say that we need to show how they are *com-pli-cated* and full of *im-pli-cations* at different levels (political, religious, psychological, philosophical, etc.) and, it follows, how they are liable to open new possibilities of life for us.

[5]It could almost be said that it is thanks to the concept of cosmopolitanism that Melville's novel will enter the twenty-first century. In the critical literature on *The Confidence-Man* between 1950 and 2000, very little has been written on the subject, and even less on the philosophical approach chosen in the present essay. A small number of books or essays, however, have proved to be real Drummond lights, even though the philosophical approach adopted here is of course entirely different. Pride of place should be given to those by Bellis, Brodtkorb, Dryden, Irwin, Sten, and Thompson. In his (unfortunately too brief) presentation in *Leviathan*, John Bryant proves especially illuminating. Christopher Sten's 1997 essay is also worth reading. He briefly touches on Melville's main novels and devotes four pages to *The Confidence-Man*, stressing the writer's "faith in humanity." It should be noted that it is Sten who writes that "one begins to wonder whether it [cosmopolitanism] is not as important a subject as confidence" (43). In addition, it is essential to add Martha Nussbaum's contribution in which she goes back to Diogenes, perhaps the first self-proclaimed "citizen of the world." She rightly stresses that the concept implies freeing oneself from the limitations of class, gender, lineage and city, etc. Finally, Mischke's study is mainly economic and political. He sees cosmopolitanism as deeply negative, which explains why this essay will not follow him on that subject.

[6]This is a stimulating line of inquiry initiated by Warwick Wadlington in *The Confidence Game in American Literature*.

[7]"Bartleby; or, The Formula," reprinted in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (68-90).

[8]The question of democracy has for some time now been slowly taking a greater importance in Melville studies. Using a different methodology from that chosen in this essay, Jennifer Greiman illuminatingly goes back to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, showing that democracy is a state of affairs which does not exist as yet,

but should be seen as a process of becoming, always to be redefined. In *The Confidence-Man*, it cannot be separated from Melville's vision of a multiplicity of life which keeps producing ever new networks of differences.

[9]The point is illuminatingly made by Gilles Deleuze in his class on "Cinema" of December 20, 1983. See http://www2.univ-paris8.fr/deleuze/article.php3?id_article=276.

[10]Mainly James Murray's *Oxford English Dictionary* published in 1884, and Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*.

[11]It is time to correct a common preconception shared by a number of people: alcohol is rumored to be dangerous and getting drunk is said to be the easiest way of opting out of our world. The objection is perfectly justified, except that it concerns hooligans, football supporters, (some) students and (very few?) academics, and that it always involves some cheap vodka or a similar substance that you drink very quickly in order to get drunk very quickly. This manner of treating alcohol fully belongs to the logic of the Same: always the same inferior vodka, always the same way of drinking it, always the same loss of consciousness. Rabelais and Melville, on the other hand, use wine as a metaphor: not only does it bring you a form of exquisite pleasure if you savor it slowly, enjoying its bouquet with your nose, then letting it linger on your taste buds before swallowing with a deep feeling of love. Melville has discovered all that: wine increases the sensitivity of our consciousness and permits us to understand how rich and complex our world truly is. Mr. Robert, the Good Merchant, has this intuition in Chapter 13: "Ah, wine is good, and confidence is good; but can wine or confidence percolate down through all the stony strata of hard considerations, and drop warmly and ruddily into the cold cave of truth?" (73), except that he is not a hero, just a merchant. He suddenly becomes afraid of what he has uncovered, he fears truth and trust, and he immediately goes back to his habits and his certainties. What a pity (for him …).

[12]See "The Philosopher as Cultural Physician" in *Philosophy and Truth*.

[13]Just like the present essay, Michael Jonik's extremely suggestive book, *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman*, celebrates what should be called a twenty-first century Melville. He rightly points out that, even though Melville never read Spinoza, he seems to think along similar lines as the Dutch philosopher. Understandably, Jonik also refers to Gilles Deleuze, making it clear that a literary text can only make sense for us today if it is placed in perspective with other works belonging to our culture, be they anterior or posterior to it. The present article adds Friedrich Nietzsche, an author inseparable from Spinoza in the essential implications of his method of articulating problems.

[14]Nietzsche, "The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom," *Philosophy and Truth* 144; see Pearson 245 and Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 101.

[15]In Italian, for instance, Antonio Negri opted to speak of *potere* and *potenza*, and French followers of Gilles Deleuze use *puissance* and *pouvoir*, which shows that a radical distinction between the two notions is indispensable.

[16]See Edward F. Ricketts's "Essay on Non-teleological Thinking" in John Steinbeck's collection *Sea of Cortez*. The word comes the Greek *telos*, goal. Steinbeck was

impressed by this conception that held that life never stops, but proliferates in a haphazard manner, always diverging, always inventing new forms and new relationships.

[17]The problem is of course that of the definition of *love*, that word being the translation commonly found today for *agapè* in modern translations of the Bible. The Authorized Version uses the archaic *charity*.

[18]Reference to Lawrance Thompson's 1952 classic *Melville's Quarrel with God*.

[19]Among other references, see session of December 13, 1983, "Cinéma Cours 49," http://www2.univ-paris8.fr/deleuze/article.php3?id_article=272.

[20]See the letters to Willem van Blyenbergh, XVIII to XXIV (republished in *The Correspondence of Spinoza*).

[21]Readers who would prefer a theoretical interpretation may look upon this reference to Plato as a more philosophical way of rephrasing the problem raised by Melville in this last chapter. In *The Sophist*, in order to offer a comprehensive description of reality as we know it, the Greek philosopher explains that one has to distinguish between two kinds of images: (1) the image-copy (*eikôn*), a necessarily imperfect reflection of the perfect, immortal essences; (2) the image-simulacrum (*fantasma*), always part of the infinite number of assemblages of images governed by chance that proliferate around us with neither origin nor goal. Plato was compelled to mention the latter as he could not deny that they actually existed, but understandably he strongly disapproved of them. Modern philosophy, especially in its anti-idealistic tendencies, has, however, reevaluated simulacra. Gilles Deleuze was especially instrumental in that respect with the Chapter "Plato and the Simulacrum" in the appendices of *Logic of Sense* (253-65). Simulacra, of course, make up the purely immanent and constantly changing universe in which we live, a universe about which we no longer think in terms of an opposition between essence and appearances: there are only appearances and the supposedly transcendent level with its models is only an illusion. Christianity inherited Plato's distinction when it insisted that man was made in the "image" of God (see Genesis 1:17). It follows that the very end of *The Confidence-Man* can be seen as an attempt at thinking outside that Platonic or Christian structure: life begins after the solar lamp on the horned altar has been extinguished. Humans stop being defined in terms of the logic of the Same in order to begin becoming ever different from themselves.

[22]The darkness that invades the ship in the last chapter need not be construed as an allegory of Christian apocalypse. It would rather seem that Melville has followed a similar intellectual evolution as that of Nietzsche, whose *Twilight of the Idols* (to quote the title of his 1889 book) shows how necessary it is to destroy all the false values that enthrall our minds before the advent of a new 'dawn' becomes possible.

[23]"Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" (Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" #51, *Leaves of Grass* 58).

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