

Commerce, Exchange and Interaction in “The Confidence-Man : His Masquerade.”

التجارة والتبادل والتفاعل في «رجل الثقة: تنكره»

Commerce, échange et interaction dans «L'homme de confiance : sa mascarade»

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‘Then you have not always been in the charity business ? (Herman Melville 1857, 47)¹

[L]ike an elephant for tossed apples at the menagerie; when, making a space before him, people would have a bout at a strange sort of pitch-penny game, the cripple’s mouth being at once target and purse. (Melville 1857 19)

Predicated upon the social life of human beings, commerce, exchange and interaction constitute a list of interdependent words that help characterise, organise and determine human relations. The first word, commerce, alludes to many different forms of exchange in society. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, there are three possible meanings attributed to “commerce” : 1) in social intercourse, it means an “interchange of ideas, opinions, or sentiments.” 2) “The exchange or buying and selling of commodities on a large scale involving transportation from one place to another.” 3) “Sexual intercourse,” somehow archaic. As we can notice it, the second word “exchange” is present in the definition of “commerce.” To some extent, the two are synonymous. Exchange is defined as “the act of giving or taking one thing in return for another” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary online*). This definition could be applied to commerce as well. Whereas “interaction,” supposing “mutual or reciprocal action or influence,” constitutes the framework in which “exchange” or “commerce” takes place (*Ibid.*). In other words, an interaction between two persons might entail a relation of commerce and exchange in the sense that they are both involved in the intercourse of giving and taking. Be it commerce or exchange, the basis for any human interaction is trust. Without trust there is

1. All subsequent citations are from the Norton Critical Edition (2nd edition) by Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer (2006).

no commerce; without trust there is no exchange; without trust all interaction is doomed to give rise to suspicion, fear and misgivings². In *The Confidence-Man : His Masquerade* (1857), Herman Melville, grounding his work deeply in the American experience, problematises the inter-relation between charity (a metonymy for religion) and business (a signifier for capitalism) through this question that reveals an oxymoron : “Then you have not always been in the charity business ?”

Physical and verbal interactions of characters in *The Confidence-Man : His Masquerade* occur on board of the steamboat *Fidèle* where almsgivers meet with charity seekers, the Confidence Man preaches confidence to either catch off guard the incredulous or exploit the empathy of credulous Christians, and his different masquerades transform the ship into a “floating theatre” engaging all passengers in a role play (Ronan Ludot-Vlasak 2003, 333). Therefore, concerning the tricks that the Confidence Man plays on his victims, commerce suits best to describe the situations when he proposes to sell a service as an herb-doctor (chapters 16 and 17) or offers an investment opportunity as he makes others believe they are conducting an actual business transaction with the President of Black Rapids Coal Company (chapters 9 and 10). On the other hand, exchange describes well all interactions engaging benevolence, geniality or charity. For instance, the “plump and pleasant person” who exchanges twenty dollars with the Confidence Man for the satisfaction of a Christian-charity like contribution to the cause of the Widow and Orphan Asylum “recently founded among the Seminoles” (53). Through these interactions with the imposter, *The Confidence-Man : His Masquerade* criticises what the text calls “the pitch-penny game” (19) as hypocritical form of charity and questions also the notion of confidence based on physical appearance and artefacts like a transfer book. Confidence and charity constitute two major themes that the novel deals with by analysing social relations under three closely related categories : commerce, exchange and interaction. Is the Black Rapids Coal Company transfer book a metaphor for the Bible ? Is charity a purely merciful action or does it hide an economic investment ? Are not charity and business mutually exclusive ?

In the following analysis, the first part will ponder how, in the American context, charity and business present a religious discourse and a Wall Street spirit that compete one another. It will also reveal the hypocrisy of the charity

2. In “Misgivings: Melville, Race, and the Ambiguities of Benevolence” (2000), Susan M. Ryan argues that the American national discourse there is a “common injunction that one ought to be self-supporting” (593). And disability would then be a proved incapacity of realising self-reliance.

game. If the lie is part and partial of the truth, looking for authenticity is a "wild goose chase." And finally, the third part will consider the novelist as the Confidence Man *par excellence*.

1. Charity as a commercial transaction

Throughout *The Confidence-Man*, the persistent theme that keeps coming back in the foreground is the relationship between charity and confidence. One needs to be convinced that the person who receives one's charity deserves it. In the same way that the believer must devote his worship and address his prayers to God only, not to the Devil; the almsgiver then ought to make sure not to support the enterprise of the impostor. Early on, in the first page of the narrative, the narrator mentions a placard just about the captain's office "offering a reward for the capture of a mysterious impostor, supposed to have recently arrived from the East; quite an original genius in his vocation, as would appear, though wherein his originality consisted was not clearly given; but what purported to be a careful description of his person followed" (9-10). This announcement epitomises the difficulty of understanding and interpreting the significance of Melville's narrative³. First of all, the expression "quite an original genius in his vacation" prefigures chapter 44 where there is a pause in the narration to voice out the narrator's considerations on characterisation, fiction and reality. I will explore these considerations in the second part. For the time being, let's just focus on the complex and intricate meanings of the announcement. The narrator does not reveal the exact text as it appears on the placard, but it paraphrases its content and integrates it in the main body of the narrative. In addition to offering a reward to the capture of the impostor, the text sounds like an invitation to be cautious. Passengers must be careful of an impostor present on board. Who could it be? Where is he? What does he look like? What does he wear? Without clue, all passengers must be suspected, but no one should be wrongly accused.

The announcement contributes undeniably to the heightening of the suspicious atmosphere on board of the *Fidèle* and arouses thus a feeling of suspense. The more characters suspect one another in their interactions, the less opportunity there will be for commerce and business. Charity will even be granted only after a tough process of assessing the authenticity of the needy. Indeed, confidence may inspire charity, but doubt leads to denial. Accordingly, Susan M. Ryan underlines this correlation between charity and suspicion: "The

3. See Elizabeth Renker, "A...! Unreadability in *The Confidence-Man*," Robert S. Levine, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 114-134. The author cites many reviewers who deemed the book a failure for lacking purpose.

suspicion that donors and charity workers faced derived not only from the possibility that they might be lazy, dishonest, or racist, but also from the ever present danger that they might do good incorrectly and thus contribute, however unintentionally, to the moral and social decay of the populace” (690). She observes more rightly “thus charity experts worked hard to present themselves as trustworthy donors, largely by elaborating on the widespread notion that the poor could be divided into the worthy and the ‘vicious’” (*Ibid.*). The novel entertains such a categorisation in the sense that it plays with characters’ false convictions and the question of the practicality of Christian charity. In chapter 8, the Confidence Man comes across a “charitable lady” whose only “weak point,” if she has one, would only be “her excellent heart” (52). She is reading the Bible, precisely “the xiii. of 1st Corinthians.” About this particular section of the testament, the narrator comments: “to which chapter possibly her attention might have recently been turned, by witnessing the scene of the monitory mute and his slate” (*Ibid.*). This observation points out the remorse the Christian lady may have after being a witness of a person seeking charity but she was not to prove herself charitable. Reading again the Corinthians may give her strength and confidence in helping the needy. In the first place, when the Confidence-Man plays the role of a beggar, no passenger, the Christian lady included, had tried to relieve him. According to David Lapoujade, there are eight characters impersonated by the Confidence Man and the deaf-mute stranger is the first of them (Jarowski and Lapoujade 2010, 1215). Indeed, in the first chapter 1, just beside the placard announcing the presence of an impostor, there stands a stranger holding a small slate on which he has written for display, successively: “charity thinketh no evil,” “charity endureth long, and is kind,” “charity endureth all things” (11), “charity believeth all things” and finally “charity never faileth” (12). Passengers have dismissed all this appealing for charity. Clearly, either they are suspicious of the stranger’s worthiness or maybe they do not find any interest in helping him. Charity, in *The Confidence-Man*, even if it is inspired by a religious discourse needs to be motivated by a vested interest.

Ironically, before disappearing, the stranger advances a few steps away from the captain’s office to let appear the sign on the door of the barber’s shop, where it reads: “no trust” (*Ibid.*). The juxtaposition of these two signs (the slate of the beggar and the barber’s inscription) problematises the coexistence between a benevolent religious discourse on charity and capitalist distrust of future payment. Inserted between the story of the appearance of the stranger in cream-coloured suit” with his charity slates and the encounter between the

widow and the Confidence-Man, posited as an interlude like a story within a story, the barber's sign of "no trust" reinforces the economic drive or the Wall Street spirit that generates interest in helping the poor. The Christian lady "with an excellent heart" symbolises this denial of charity to a seeker who does not guarantee interest on investment. To the effect of suspecting the pure religiosity of charity giving, Melville places the encounter between the Confidence-Man and the widow right at this moment she has ignored the plea for charity from a deaf-Mute stranger. The text gives the widow some time to pause and reflect on her own deeds through the reading of the Bible. "Madam, pardon my freedom, but there is something in that face which strangely draws me. May I ask, are you a sister of the Church?" (52). Thus, pulled back from her introspective reading of the Bible, the woman cannot properly respond, "Why—really—you—" (*Ibid.*). He then pretends to be a solitary brother, a sad soul unable to force himself to "mingle with the people of the world" (53). Being a widow, she may feel that same solitude. Moreover, being Christian, she could be tempted to help a brother in need. So, after activating the mechanism to generate empathy, the impostor asks, as if in passing: "By the way, madam, may I ask if you have confidence?" (*Ibid.*) In whom or what should she have confidence? He does not specify. "Could you put confidence in *me* for instance?" he continued, emphasising on the first-person pronoun. They exchange a few lines, and at some point, the widow shows enthusiasm: "'You interest me,' said the good lady, in mild surprise. 'Can I any way befriend you?'" The excellent conversation she enjoys having with the Confidence-Man has made her concede that she has some "interest" in her interlocutor. Therefore, her interest comes only after she realises that she can gain something (be it knowledge, pleasure or insight) from the stranger. But the dramatic irony of this scene consists in the fact that the widow does not know she has fallen in the trap of the "mysterious imposter." Entrapped in the devil's snare, the twenty dollars she gives for the Seminoles is an investment wrongly placed. So, the only interest she might get from such a badly calculated investment is her own interest in befriending a trickster who passes for a brother.

In *Herman Melville: The Confidence-Man* (2018), Mark Niemeyer argues that the Corinthians, verses from the Bible, may be to blame for weakening the mind of the widow: "have they weakened her mind and made her an easy prey for the man in the gray coat who asks her to have confidence in him as he collects money for Indians who may, as allegorical figures, be themselves representatives of the Devil" (56). The Christian lady pities the Indians and wishes to contribute to their relief, but Christian belief carried out in the Manifest Destiny of the

United States of America was the cause of Indian Wars in the nineteenth century. In the 1840s, white American expansion to the Pacific happened at the expense of Native Americans and Mexicans⁴. The story of Colonel John Meredock the Indian-hater constitutes a testimony to the atrocities Native Americans suffered from when white Americans attacked them (chapters 25–28, pp. 147-164). How would the widow react if the Confidence-Man had told her the story of Moredock? Interestingly, Melville exposes the myth of American innocence by retelling the extermination of Native Americans, but he preserves the sensitivity of the nation by placing the story in the encounter between the Cosmopolitan and a sophisticated intellectual who invites him to smoke the calumet and have a drink. After all, Melville could have deemed the widow so simple-minded that she would not be of any interest to the storyteller if they had met.

As a satirical novel, *The Confidence-Man* invests highly on the theme of Christian charity in order to emphasise the hypocrisy of a giver who is responsible for the plight of the receiver. Looking back at colonial America, on board of the Mayflower (1620), the Pilgrim Fathers felt deeply for religious matters. A decade later, a remarkable puritan preacher, John Winthrop, on board of the Arbella, sailing to the New England territories in the spring of 1630, composed a sermon entitled “A Modell of Christian Charity.” Winthrop gave a particular interest to charity because he viewed it as a regulatory element and purifying force in any given society. Based on the principle that in all societies, there are poor and rich individuals, the latter must give a little of their money to the former to relieve them of financial hardship. According to Winthrop, the poor and rich antagonism is part of God’s plan. Charity exists in order that:

[God] might have the more occasion to manifest the work of His Spirit: first upon the wicked in moderating and restricting them, so that the rich and mighty should not eat up the poor, nor the poor and despised rise up against their superiors and shake off their yoke; secondly in the regenerate, in exercising His graces, in them, as in the great ones, their love, mercy, their faith, patience, obedience, etc. (Quoted in Mitchell and Snyder 2006, 45)

This seemingly symmetrical relationship between the rich and the poor is necessary to the stability of an organised society but a more piercing glance

4. In *Herman Melville: The Confidence-Man* (2018), Niemeyer reminds of the historical context of America during the time Melville was writing his novel. He discusses the presence on the *Fidèle* of many types of characteristic of the American West in relation to the westward expansion in the aftermath of the Mexican Cession (30-31), and the Indian Removal Act of 1830 (32).

reveals an asymmetry. There is no equal standing between the two: the poor is inferior because the rich occupies the position of Providence. Showing mercy to the needy, the rich proves him/herself merciful, one of the names or titles of God. To analyse the complexity of such an implied interaction, Melville resorts to the representation of the Confidence-Man as a trope for the grand narrative of America that promotes charity as a universal good. In other words, going beyond the petty treachery of the Confidence-Man, the narrative reveals a more exciting game. To some extent, the Confidence-Man is comparable to an illusionist. The earlier instances of the Confidence-Man have relied a lot on the credulity of the simple-minded interlocutor to deceive his victim. But with the advent of the cosmopolitan, there is a transformation in the narrative: The confidence game becomes a true work of art that can be analysed by considering the pursuit of pleasure in a game of masks.

2. The confidence game is a work of art

The chapter 45, entitled "the Cosmopolitan increases in serious" connotes a change of paradigm in the narrative. In many chapters, the novel has questioned the practicality of Christianity, as the previous part has shown, but only few chapters have dealt directly with the Bible as a book of signs that awaits a philosophical hermeneutic. A diligent search for truth occupies many characters almost in all the chapters of the novel. For instance, the four first paragraphs of chapter 45 the word lamp is repeated three times to reinforce the sense of the philosophical antagonism of light and darkness: "In the middle of the gentleman's cabin burned a solar lamp swung from the ceiling" and "the light of his lamp [...]" (238); "the remaining lamp would have been extinguished as well," "keeping his lone vigils beneath his lone lamp" (239). The presence of the light hides darkness but does not suppress it; the minute the light goes off, darkness will invade. In the gentleman's cabin sits an old man whose "countenance like that which imagination ascribes to good Simeon" who saw the "Lord's Christ" before he died, as he was promised in revelation (239 see also the footnotes). The use of the comparative gives authority to the old man in religious matters and announces an activity of Bible interpretation.

The Cosmopolitan, with the ability of a sophist, pleads to be puzzled by someone who has told him that the Bible preaches distrust: "I have confidence in man. But what was told me not half-hour since? I was told that I would find it written—'Believe not his many words—an enemy speaketh sweetly with his lips'—and also I was told that I would find a good deal more to the same effect, and all in this book'" (241). A voice from the berth asks "Who's that describing

the confidence-man?” But pretending the man was speaking in his sleep they have dismissed his remark. According to this comment the Bible has provided a moral description of confidence-man that can complete the physical description the placard has given. On the other hand, the old man who seems to possess an authoritative competence to interpret the Bible does not recall reading in the book this sceptical portrayal of the impostor. For seventeen years that he has been reading the Bible, he has never read the section the *Cosmopolitan* is quoting from (*Ibid.*). Does he lack full knowledge of the book he has been reading since childhood? No, not at all, the section is apocrypha, “something of an uncertain credit,” not worthy of reading (242). This representation raises a sense of paradox because the inclusion in the holly book of a text that does not have credible source is difficult to grasp. Since the conversation between the old man and the *Cosmopolitan* is often briefly interrupted by shouts from the berth, a third voice intervened and yelled “What’s that about the Apocalypse” (242). The voice from the berth can be considered in the communication channel as a “noise” or “parasite.” Drawing extensively from communication theory, Michel Serres has published a theoretical book entitled *Le Parasite* (1980) to apply the notion of parasite to the relation between host and guest⁵. This notion of parasite applies clearly to the Confidence Man in the sense that he lives on the benevolence of others and never gives away anything for the sole benefit of others. In one occasion the Confidence Man has given his herb-medicine for free, pitying “the soldier of fortune” but the latter is touched. He finally believes that the herb-doctor has taught him true Christianity by making him a better man. He therefore insists on paying back the money for the medicine—not to receive it as charity (106). The irony of such a conversion resonates in the fact the “soldier of fortune” who considered himself a trickster is tricks in return without knowing it. He makes revelation of his treachery while the Confidence-Man maintains his game hidden. The confusion between the two words apocrypha and apocalypse, revelation and hiding, plays with the uncertainty of the revelation: How can we know that Paradise exists for sure? There is no definite answer to the question but believers must learn to live with it. The God/believer relationship does not place the two entities on the same footing, in the same way that the Confidence-Man does not stand on the same footing as his victims. As the believer does not know everything about the world of God, the victim of the Confidence-Man never knows how the trick works.

5. I have not found the English translation, so I am quoting from the French text the definition of parasite in Serres’s book: “L’homme est un pou pour l’homme. L’homme donc est un hôte pour l’homme. Le flux va dans un sens, jamais dans l’autre. J’appelle parasitaire cette semi-conduction, cette valve, cette flèche simple, cette relation sans inversion de sens » (19).

Melville reinvests the motif of intertwining uncertainty and search for truth so intricately that when characters probe the minstrelsy of Black-Guinea the outcome is failure. In chapter 6, "the wooden-legged man," because of or despite his limping, persistently denies the authenticity of Black-Guinea (40). He refuses the naivety of his interlocutors: "You two green-horns! Money, you think, is the sole motive to pains and hazard, deception and devilry, in this world. How much money did the devil make by gulling Eve?" (41). According to the wooden-legged man, it is possible to ponder the case so as to get to the bottom of the truth, but the narrative never permits true revelation to the characters. To go further, the wooden-legged man is short-sighted: the search for truth is doomed to fail because of the dual presence of apocalypse and apocrypha, of God and the devil. After leaving the group of people looking for a reliable gentleman to testify on Black-Guinea's authenticity—knowing that all the gentlemen mentioned are different personalities of the Confidence-Man—the wooden leg observes without grasping the full meaning "wild-goose chase!" (chapter 3). The Confidence-Man repeats the same expression with a little twist "silly goose!" when referring to the old man trying his *Counterfeit Detector* to check two bills" (247). Looking at the old man struggling with the bill and the *Counterfeit Detector* without any success, the Confidence-Man calls his endeavours "a wild-goose chase" and recommends him to throw away the *Detector* and keep the good bill (248). By analogy, would the Confidence-Man suggest to "throw away that book which claims to be trustworthy and teaches distrust?" The genius of the characterization of the Confidence-Man resides in this allegorical representation of reality. We never know if he is a cynic exploiting the weakness of his victims or a philanthropist trying to teach people how to live a cautionary life.

David Lapoujade argues indeed for the redemption of a corrupt world by Melville's novel. He writes, "*The Confidence-Man*, a superficial and artificial novel, is at the service of the most profound operation: to install a new form of relation between human-beings and the world" (1231)⁶. Lapoujade is right in his appraisal of the purport of the novel. It is not too ambitious to affirm that *The Confidence-Man* is a masterpiece in American literature. The key to understanding the purpose of the difficult narration of *The Confidence-Man* resides in the most surprising chapter 44 and quite unexpected chapter 14. In

6. My translation of Lapoujade's words : « L'escroc à la confiance, roman superficiel et artificiel, est donc au service de l'opération la plus profonde : instaurer un lien nouveau de l'homme avec le monde ».

both these two chapters, the extradiegetic narrator pauses to reflect on the state of the novel. Two elements caught his attention: the inconsistency of reality and how hard some wrongly try to create characters who demonstrate aptitude to a consistency test (chapter 18, pp. 74-77); and what is a true original character? (chapter 44, pp. 236-238). The questions pondered in these chapters offer a key to the novel by trying to explain the purpose of the book. Many critics have mentioned that the source for the narrative dates back to 1849 with the arrestation of William Thompson who later operated under the name of Samuel Willis (see Johannes Dietrich Bergmann 561; Niemeyer 46; Hershel Parker 297), but to me the most relevant reference relates to the man in 1850 who travelled to “remote parts of Georgia and North Carolina” claiming he was Herman Melville in person (Parker 297). How often does that happen? Melville must have been worried first and then amused by hearing of a man faking authorship his books. So, at the moment Melville sets to write *The Confidence-Man* he may wish to reconsider the concept of originality and imitation, authorship and plagiarism, writing and re-writing in the broader context of literature. Just by looking at the massive number of references, citations, and undigested integration of other external texts at play in *The Confidence-Man*, the reader will not be able to tell things apart (see footnotes from the Norton edition and Ludot-Vlasak). Melville’s text is the tissue of citations.

There is no doubt that Melville was original in his treatment of the story of the Confidence-Man arrested in New York City and all his avatars that emerged subsequently. However, what is worth pondering is success he may have attained according to the ambition he fixed initially. As an American writer, he admired Shakespeare with an unhidden wish of walking in his shoes. In chapter 44, he observes that Hamlet can be considered as a quite original character, an example to follow: “Mark how it is with Hamlet” (238). Ludot-Vlasak sees the nod and takes heed when she writes that Melville is saying in the same vein: “Mark how it is with the Confidence-Man” (346). The Confidence-Man is an original character in the sense that Melville defines the term: he is central to the story; a character around whom all the other characters gravitate. He is the only character whose presence guarantees the progression of the narrative and whose absence suspends the plotless plot. Without his presence in the book, we will be reading a totally different book with another title obviously. In the interaction between the reader and the protagonist, confidence is necessary for the validation and validity of the latter’s originality. A transaction is engaged between the two. What is important is not to determine beforehand if the Confidence-Man is an original character or not but to at least accept the confidence game, indulge

in the entertainment of his various masquerades and dive deep into the game of masks and dupes. Then, "something may follow of this masquerade" (251).

To conclude, Melville has accomplished a tour de force in retelling a petty crime of a New York City. He has weaved his story in such a way that the narrative constitutes a masterpiece. Appraising charity as a fundamentally Christian value, based on the confidence in the afterlife, the Confidence-Man tricks his victims by exploiting their greed. Even the most Christian devote does not give charity for the sake of it but this believer needs always to find what is of interest to him/her in this world or in the world above. Interactions are therefore based on the vested interest of conducting a business transaction (commerce) and the randomness of conversations does not purge the calculated profit to be gained from them. This view of charity as a commercial transaction symbolises the relationship between white Americans and Native Americans who were exterminated, dislocated and granted charity by the former. The charity game goes hand in hand with the confidence game.

And when the reader perceives that *The Confidence-Man* is a novel that sets a trap for its readers, the story becomes more appealing. To validated his status as an original character, the Confidence-Man needs to extend the confidence game to the reader. The reader may enjoy the show by admiring the trick of a double-talk that mixes up sophistry and sagacity, or disdain and deem the whole masquerade unworthy but by any rate, the stage is set, masks are on and the actors have played their part.

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Abstract

In *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857), Herman Melville, grounding his work deeply in the American experience, problematises the inter-relation between charity (a metonymy for religion) and business (a signifier for capitalism) through this question that reveals an oxymoron: "Then you have not always been in the charity business?"

Physical and verbal interactions of characters in *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* occur on board of the steamboat *Fidèle* where almsgivers meet with charity seekers, the Confidence Man preaches confidence to either catch off guard the incredulous or exploit the empathy of credulous Christians, and his different masquerades transform the ship into a "floating theatre" engaging all passengers in a role play (Ronan Ludot-Vlasak 2003, 333). Therefore, concerning the tricks that the Confidence Man plays on his victims, commerce best describes the situations when he proposes to sell his services as an herb-doctor (chapters 16 and 17) or offers an investment opportunity as he makes others believe they are conducting an actual business transaction with the President of Black Rapids Coal Company (chapters 9 and 10). On the other hand, exchange describes all interactions involving benevolence, geniality or charity. For instance, the "plump and pleasant person" who exchanges twenty dollars with the Confidence Man for the satisfaction of a Christian-charity like contribution to the cause of the Widow and Orphan Asylum "recently founded among the Seminoles" (53). Through these interactions with the impostor, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* criticises what the text calls "the pitch-penny game" (19) as hypocritical form of charity and also questions the notion of confidence based on physical appearance and artefacts like a transfer book. Confidence and charity constitute two major themes that the novel deals with by analysing social relations under three closely related categories: commerce, exchange and interaction. Is the Black Rapids Coal Company transfer book a metaphor for the Bible? Is charity a purely merciful action or does it hide an economic investment? Are not charity and business mutually exclusive?

In the following analysis, the first part will explore how, in the American context, charity and business present a religious discourse and a Wall Street spirit that compete with each other. It will also reveal the hypocrisy of the charity game. If the lie is part and partial of the truth, looking for authenticity is a "wild goose chase." And finally, the third part will consider the narrator as the Confidence Man *par excellence*.

Keywords

The Confidence-Man : His Masquerade, interactions, the notion of confidence

الملخص

في (1857) *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*، الذي يعدّ عملاً تأصيلاً للتجربة الأمريكية، يشكك هيرمان ملفيل في العلاقة المتبادلة بين العمل الخيري (الكناية عن الدين) والأعمال (الدالة على

الرأسمالية) من خلال هذا السؤال الذي يكشف عن تناقض: «إذن لم تكن (أنت) دائماً في الأعمال الخيرية؟

التفاعلات الجسدية واللفظية للشخصيات في The Confidence-Man: تظهر تنكره على متن القارب البخاري Fidèle حيث يلتقي رجال الدين بطالبي الصدقة، ورجل الثقة يبشر بالثقة لإبعاد غير المؤمنين أو استغلال تعاطف المسيحيين السذج، وقد حولت تنكراته المختلفة السفينة إلى «مسرح عائم» يشرك جميع الركاب في تمثيل الأدوار (Ronan Ludot-Vlasak 2003, 333). وبالتالي، فيما يتعلق بالحيل التي يلعبها الرجل الموثوق به على ضحاياه، فإن التجارة تصف بشكل أفضل الحالات التي يعرض فيها بيع خدماته على أنه أعشاب (الفصلان 16 و17) أو يقدم فرصة للاستثمار بجعل الآخرين يعتقدون أنهم ينفذون صفقة تجارية حقيقية مع رئيس شركة الفحم الأسود Black Rapids Coal Company (الفصلان 9 و10). من ناحية أخرى، يصف التبادل جميع التفاعلات التي تنطوي على الخير والود أو الإحسان. وكمثال على ذلك، «الشخص اللطيف والمبهج» الذي يتبادل عشرين دولاراً مع رجل الثقة من أجل إرضاء مساهمة من النوع الخيري المسيحي في قضية لجوء الأرامل والأيتام «التي تأسست حديثاً عند قبائل السيمينول الهندية» (53). من خلال هذه التفاعلات مع المحتال، رجل الثقة: ينتقد تنكره ما يسميه النص «لعبة penny» (19) كشكل من أشكال النفاق للأعمال الخيرية، كما يشكك في فكرة الثقة القائمة على المظهر الجسدي والتماثيل مثل دفتر النقل. الثقة والإحسان هما موضوعان رئيسيان تتناولهما الرواية من خلال تحليل العلاقات الاجتماعية تحت ثلاث فئات وثيقة الصلة: التجارة والتبادل والتفاعل. ألا يعد كتاب تحويل شركة Black Rapids Coal بمثابة استعارة للكتاب المقدس؟ هل الصدقة فعل يدل فقط على الرحمة أم أنها تخفي استثماراً اقتصادياً؟ أليس الإحسان والتجارة متدافعين، ينفي وجود أحدهما وجود الآخر؟ في التحليل التالي، سيدرس الجزء الأول كيف، في السياق الأمريكي، تقدم الأعمال الخيرية والتجارة خطاباً دينياً وأجواء وول ستريت وهما يتنافسان. كما سيكشف عن نفاق اللعبة الخيرية. إذا كان الكذب جزءاً من الحقيقة، فإن البحث عن الأصالة هو «البحث عن الكنز». وأخيراً، سيعتبر الجزء الثالث الراوي هو الرجل الموثوق به بامتياز.

كلمات مفتاحية

الرجل الثقة: تنكره، تبادل، مفهوم الثقة، التفاعل

Résumé

Dans *The Confidence-Man : His Masquerade* (1857), Herman Melville, enracinant son travail dans l'expérience américaine, problématise l'interrelation entre la charité (une métonymie pour la religion) et le business (un signifiant pour le capitalisme) à travers cette question qui révèle un oxymoron : «Alors vous n'avez pas toujours été dans le business de la charité ?

Les interactions physiques et verbales des personnages de *L'homme de confiance* : sa mascarade se produisent à bord du bateau à vapeur *Fidèle* où les aumôniers rencontrent les demandeurs de charité, l'homme de confiance prêche la confiance pour prendre au dépourvu les incrédules ou exploiter l'empathie des chrétiens crédules, et ses différentes mascarades transforment le navire en un «théâtre flottant» qui engage tous les passagers dans un jeu de rôle (Ronan Ludot-Vlasak 2003, 333). Par conséquent, en ce qui concerne les tours que l'homme de confiance joue à ses victimes, le commerce décrit le mieux les situations où il propose de vendre ses services en tant qu'herboriste (chapitres 16 et 17) ou offre une opportunité d'investissement en faisant croire à d'autres qu'ils effectuent une véritable transaction commerciale avec le président de la compagnie charbonnière *Black Rapids* (chapitres 9 et 10). D'autre part, l'échange décrit toutes les interactions impliquant la bienveillance, la cordialité ou la charité. Par exemple, la «personne dodue et agréable» qui échange vingt dollars avec l'homme de confiance pour la satisfaction d'une contribution de type chrétien-charité à la cause de l'asile pour veuves et orphelins «récemment fondé parmi les séminoles» (53). À travers ces interactions avec l'imposteur, *L'homme de confiance* : sa mascarade critique ce que le texte appelle «le jeu du pitch-penny» (19) comme une forme hypocrite de charité et remet également en question la notion de confiance basée sur l'apparence physique et les artefacts comme un livre de transfert. La confiance et la charité constituent deux thèmes majeurs que le roman aborde en analysant les relations sociales sous trois catégories étroitement liées : le commerce, l'échange et l'interaction. Le livre de transfert de la *Black Rapids Coal Company* est-il une métaphore de la Bible ? La charité est-elle une action purement miséricordieuse ou cache-t-elle un investissement économique ? La charité et le commerce ne s'excluent-ils pas mutuellement ?

Dans l'analyse qui suit, la première partie examinera comment, dans le contexte américain, la charité et le commerce présentent un discours religieux et un esprit de Wall Street qui se font concurrence. Elle révélera également l'hypocrisie du jeu de la charité. Si le mensonge fait partie et est partiel de la vérité, la recherche de l'authenticité est une «chasse au trésor». Et enfin, la troisième partie considérera le narrateur comme l'homme de confiance par excellence.

Mots-clés

The Confidence-Man : *His Masquerade*, échange, la notion de confiance, interaction