

# THE CONFIDENCE-MAN: His Masquerade

## Herman Melville

(1857)

### Overview

While not one of his more well-known novels, Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* is every bit as philosophical and profound as *Moby Dick*, although it lacks the unforgettable and larger-than-life characters, Captain Ahab and Queequeg, and the quiet and observing narrator, Ishmael. *The Confidence-Man* is the story of a stranger who goes onboard a steam engine-powered paddleboat that makes its way down the Mississippi, starting at St. Louis. The journey starts on April Fool's Day, a day of pranks, and the timing sets the stage for what is to happen. Once on board, the stranger writes on a slate tablet and shows the words to the passengers: "Charity thinketh no evil." And, from that point on, anyone who fails to think evil of the stranger (that is to say is skeptical rather than being credulous), is likely to be tricked into donating money or providing insider information. The stranger assumes a number of disguises, but Melville never tells the reader which character is the stranger in disguise, and which one is not, although a few of the characters, such as the cosmopolitan, reveal themselves by their rather tendentious speeches on the need to have faith, or "confidence" in him. As a virtual shape-shifter, and with the camouflaged presence of evil, it is clear that he may be considered a force of evil. However, that rather simplistic interpretation is subverted by the fact that the stranger (in all his guises) does not really do any evil, but he does cause people to reveal the evil within. The riverboat and its inhabitants create a microcosm of the world, and also reflect the nature of the rapidly changing frontier of the United States, fully in the transformations wrought by the Industrial Revolution in England, and the gathering tides of the U.S. Civil War.

### Story

In contrast with the sea-going whaling ship, *Pequod*, in *Moby Dick*, the *Fidèle* is a steam engine-powered river-going paddleboat on the Mississippi River. However, in both cases, the boat becomes its own cosmos where the interactions of the people with each other and with nature reveal underlying ideas about reality and morality. In both cases, a major character is deeply flawed. In the case of Captain Ahab, his monomaniacal pursuit of revenge endangered everyone. In the case of *The Confidence Man*, the shadowy confidence man un.masks people, while he gives them opportunities to believe in the goodness of people, or to take advantage of their own avarice or mendacity. The fact that the confidence man assumes many different disguises results in the introduction of a great deal of ambiguity. As in the case of the great white whale, *Moby Dick*, the confidence is rarely clearly visible for what he truly is.

The story begins on April Fools' Day when a deaf-mute man enters the steamship, the *Fidèle*. The ship is ironically named "the Faithful" just as the ship in *Moby Dick* was ironically named *Pequod* which evokes associations with American Indians and also the whale "pod" or herd of whales. The deaf-mute writes messages on his tablet, and he is roundly abused. He is accused of being a fraud, mainly because there was a widely publicized scam by a con artist posing as a deaf mute. The deaf-mute writes "Charity suffereth long and is kind," implicitly asking people to trust him, as he writes "Charity never faileth." But, the passengers do not trust him. Instead, they heap opprobrium on him, and ultimately reject him.

Ironically, even though he may have been an imposter, the ship is full of thieves and imposters, and they seem to take turns trying to trick each other, even as others are constantly preaching to have faith in one's fellow human being and to be generous and give to charity.

Some of the passengers are generous and trusting. Others are not. Melville goes into great detail about all the different individuals. The trusting passengers include the country merchant, who gives money to a poor black man named Guinea, who cannot walk, and encourages people to give money in exchange for his repartee and antics. Another trusting passenger is a widow, who gives money to an unctuously flattering snappily dressed man who claims to be raising money for widows and orphans. He takes her money, although in theory, he should be giving her money since she's a widow.

Other passengers, such as Mr. Roberts, the man who believed in Guinea and gave him a coin, wants to know the secrets of all the people on board. The first person he discovers is Goneril, the wife of the "unfortunate man," Weeds. It's hard not to think of Goneril, the cruel daughter who wants to usurp her father, King Lear, in Shakespeare's play, *King Lear*.

The herb-doctor appears. He promotes his "Samaritan Pain Dissuader" and his other products, and he is mocked. People do not like the fact that he asks people to have faith in what they think is yet another snake-oil medicine. They hate the way he exaggerates.

The confidence man moves through *The Fidele*, he encounters more passengers. Some are honest, and others have secrets, which could be financial or about their families and their pasts.

An herb-doctor manages to convince a miser, a sick old man, and a disabled day laborer to purchase his cure-all potions. The reader initially assumes that what he is selling has no efficacy, but then, it becomes apparent that the people who buy it will benefit because he has taught them how to have faith and to believe in something.

The riverboat makes its way down the Mississippi River, and the encounters with each other and the various manifestations of the stranger (the confidence man) lead the reader to an understanding of American society in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and, on a deeper level, the structure of morality and the ability of individuals to become self-aware of the degree to which they shape their own perceptions, and the difference between self-delusion and constructive self-fashioning of reality.

## Themes

**Trickery:** As the confidence man assumes different disguises, and as he moves from room to room in the boat, the *Fidele*, every encounter has either a lot or a little of trickery at its heart. He seems to be making a good-faith effort to encourage people to be more open-minded and to have faith and confidence. But, what he is really doing is bringing the greed, vanity, miserliness, and selfishness to the surface and making them aware of their own emptiness.

**The nature and limits of faith in society:** One cannot have faith in others until one has faith in oneself. One must know what their own values and convictions are. This is the message that is repeated in almost every conversation that takes place onboard the ship.

**Charity / Benevolence:** The Seminole Widow and Orphans' fund scam that was perpetrated onboard suggests that charities are nothing but vehicles to puff up one's ego and vanity.

**Materialism:** The miser and the fake lame beggar and the fake war veteran beggar were perhaps the most flagrant, but they were, at least, small time con artists. The most reprehensible were the ones responsible for the great railroad stock scheme / promotion gone terribly wrong, which resulted in great financial harm to widows, orphans, and others who owned the new railroad stock.

## Characters

**Francis Goodman, a.k.a the Cosmopolitan (the confidence man):** Primarily in Chapters XXV and XXXV, Francis ("Frank") immediately tips his hand that he connects friendship, confidence, and what will end up being shameless exploitation. "It is," was the placidly pleased reply: "and the same may be said of friendship at first sight as of love at first sight: it is the only true one, the only noble one. It bespeaks

confidence. Who would go sounding his way into love or friendship, like a strange ship by night, into an enemy's harbor?"

**The Herb-Doctor:** In Chapters XVII and XVIII, there is a quack medicine purveyor on board. He is the "herb-doctor" and he has a product for whatever a person most desires to cure. In spite of his natural desire to save money, he spends one hundred dollars for the Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator and "Confidence!" he squeaked, with changed manner, while the pallet swung, "little left at my age, but take the stale remains, and welcome." The Herb Doctor responds: "Such as it is, though, you give it. Very good. Now give me a hundred dollars."

**The Country Merchant, Mr. Roberts:** In chapter IV, we see the way that people are manipulated if they are perceived to be a part of the same secret society. The stranger asks Mr. Roberts, the forwarding agent for a loan, and a shilling. The stranger says, "If I remember, you are a mason, Mr. Roberts." And then Mr. Roberts responds, "Yes, yes." Then the stranger continues: "Ah, Mr. Roberts, I trust you are not one of those business men, who make a business of never having to do with unfortunates. For God's sake don't leave me. I have something on my heart—on my heart. Under deplorable circumstances thrown among strangers, utter strangers. I want a friend in whom I may confide. Yours, Mr. Roberts, is almost the first known face I've seen for many weeks." After the stranger tells his story, and then concludes reminding them that they are both masons. Mr. Roberts gives him a bank note. Later, the stranger gives him insider information about the Black Rapids Coal Company. It is not certain that this information is reliable, but it reminds the reader of the advantage that people who belong to the same secret societies have.

**Goneril -** In Chapter XII, we are introduced to the Unfortunate Man's wife, has "one of those natures, anomalously vicious." She is young, but cold and cruel, and "like an icicle-dagger, Goneril at once stabbed and froze." The reader has sympathy for her, since she is a Native American who was kidnapped and forced to be a wife. Goneril is one of the con people (rather than the conned), but she does so out of revenge, which is understandable. Goneril has "the intention to procure him (her husband) to be permanently committed for a lunatic" (Chapter XII). Her husband fled her, and as a result, has been wandering around with inadequate funds, living (poorly) by his wits. Her story sheds light on the atrocities committed in the United States, and it also ties to the chapter with the Judge's obsessive rant about so-called "Indian hating."

**Pitch, the Missourian:-** In Chapter XXII, after they leave Cape Girardeau, a verbose man starts ranting about how you can't trust anyone, and that rascally men start out as rascally boys. None can be trusted, and he knows – he's been all over the world and has worked with all kinds of people, including "American, Irish, English, German, African, Mulatto; not to speak of that China boy sent me by one who well knew my perplexities, from California; and that Lascar boy from Bombay." The challenge and the moment of "confidence" for Pitch has to do with being asked to have confidence enough to hire a fifteen-year-old boy recommended by the stranger (the confidence man) – and to pay a three-dollar fee.

**The Judge:** In Chapter XXVI, the Judge goes into a long narration about the "metaphysics of Indian-Hating" which is a kind of inverse of Bartolome de las Casas's idea of the "noble savage." He discusses the backwoodsman's view of Indians, and justifies why people hold on to prejudices and race-hatred. In doing so, it becomes clear that the Judge is actually talking about how what seems to be a strong position (hating Indians) is actually a weakness – not only for moral and ethical reasons, but because it makes a person weak. The prejudiced person who is filled with an easy-to-spot race hatred is easily manipulated and "convinced" to do things will affirm his warped beliefs (even as he is being conned out of money). The judge could be the stranger in disguise.

**The Barber:** In Chapter XLVII, the Cosmopolitan and the Barber meet. The barber has a sign requiring everyone to pay in cash in advance. This bothers the Cosmopolitan. The barber, who is considered an honest man, requires all to be honest with him. The Cosmopolitan chats with him and asks the barber why he considers him a "man" – "You call me man, just as the townfolk called the angels who, in man's form, came to Lot's house; just as the Jew rustics called the devils who, in man's form, haunted the tombs. You can conclude nothing absolute from the human form, barber." The barber does not really

respond to the Cosmopolitan's lengthy arguments about the nature of philanthropy, and how distrust will cause one's generosity to dry up. He replies that the Cosmopolitan can be as philosophical as he wants. It will not change him. He has a family and has to be practical.

**A Gentleman with Gold Sleeve Buttons:** A man in gray is attempting to raise money for the "Seminole widows and orphans," he takes out a large pocketbook takes out bank notes. and "now three of those virgin bills in the applicant's hands, he hoped that the smallness of the contribution would be pardoned." (Chapter XII). When asked why by the gentleman with the gold sleeve buttons why he's raising money, the man in gray responds that he is doing it to "pay back" and in gratitude for the good fortune and the millions earned after inventing the "Protean Easy Chair." The man in gray goes on to explain how much money he made after contributing money to a great cause. The Gentleman with the Gold Sleeve Buttons is convinced to contribute to the cause – not for the cause itself, but in order to prime the cosmic pump, and have financial success.

### Discussion Questions

The initial slate board placard that communicated a message to all the oncoming passengers was either ignored or treated with derision. The man's message was that charity is a virtue. But, most of the people who read it would argue that charity is a weakness. How did Melville demonstrate that charity for selfish purposes was a weakness, but true charity was a strength?

One of the attributes of 19<sup>th</sup> antebellum Americans that is revealed in *The Confidence Man* is materialism. It is particularly evident in calls for charity. How does the man in gray's story about his invention of the Protean Chair show how even charity was considered to be a part of getting ahead, and getting rich.

Many critics have considered *The Confidence Man* to be a social satire, and as such, a rather harsh critique of the beliefs and values of pre-Civil War (antebellum) America. It is also a satire of the prevailing religious and philosophical beliefs of the time. How do the characters reflect that mindset? For example, how is Mark Winsome a parody of Ralph Waldo Emerson and how does he twist or ironize the notion of self-reliance?

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

#### **The Herb-Doctor** (Persuasive)

**Character:** The herb-doctor, like the stranger (the confidence man, who is also the cosmopolitan), is many things to many people. The herb-doctor has interactions with almost everyone onboard, and encounters people who are lame, who are sick (with a bad cough), who have pains in their legs (the soldier of fortune), and also those who are sick of spirit (the miser and various other people). In most of the cases, the individuals are either feigning their malady in order to convince people to give them special treatment (and sometimes money). However, in other cases, the individuals were really ill. For the malingerers and the hypochondriacs, the herb-doctor asked very high prices. He justified it by saying that the essentially needed to have confidence in themselves -- just as he knew he needed to have confidence in his own wares. In other words, the power the mind is what healed. He was selling placebo effects. For the one truly ill person he met, an elderly lame man, the herb-doctor gave his best possible product, asked him to have faith, and then did not charge a single penny. At first, the herb-doctor seems to be the worst kind of charlatan. At the end, however, he emerges as the most positive character of all, and one capable of helping people transform themselves. He explores all the positive connotations of "confidence" and his philosophical notions really go into explorations of the nature of reality. As opposed to the stranger (also known as the confidence man and the cosmopolitan), whose notions of confidence are ultimately nihilistic, and he encourages people to believe in what is not there at all, but an illusion, usually constructed of their own greed or desire, the herb-doctor helps people create positive energy, and to put their faith into action. With faith, they learn to move mountains.

**Parallels** The herb-doctor creates a potion that does essentially what the customer wants it to do. In that way, it is not much different than powerful potions used by many characters in literature.

In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Eve*, Puck sprinkles pansy juice in different people's eyes, and when they open their eyes, they fall in love with the first thing / person they see. The pansy juice is a love elixir that King Oberon concocted to play a vile trick on his wife.

In Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*, the misbehaving rogue, Dulcamara, gives a love potion Nemorino, who wants to enchant Adina.

In Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, Tristan drinks what he thinks is a lethal poison, but in reality it is a love elixir, which causes Tristan and Isolde to become even more besotted with love.

### **Illustrative Passages**

*Persuasive* The stranger, confidence man, in disguise, speaks to the miser, suffering from pain, cough, and thirst: "What a shocking cough. I wish, my friend, the herb-doctor was here now; a box of his Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator would do you good." (Chapter XV). It may be that the stranger is collaborating with the herb-doctor. The reader is led to think so, but then later, it appears that the herb-doctor is not working with anyone. He is not really even interested in money. He is more interested in having encounters with the people who are suffering from either a physical or emotional malaise, and then offering them what they most want.

#### *Pretends to be compassionate*

The herb-doctor took a sealed paper box from his surtout pocket, and holding it towards him, said solemnly, "Turn not away. This may be the last time of health's asking. Work upon yourself; invoke confidence, though from ashes; rouse it; for your life, rouse it, and invoke it, I say." (Chapter XVI)

*Master of disguises* Again, the sick man appeared not unmoved. He seemed to be thinking what in candid truth could be said to all this. At length, "You talk of confidence. How comes it that when brought low himself, the herb-doctor, who was most confident to prescribe in other cases, proves least confident to prescribe in his own; having small confidence in himself for himself?" (Chapter XVI)

*Arouses expectations and hope* The herb-doctor goes into a kind of ante-cabin on board the Fidele. There is a group of respectable-looking men and women, all of whom appear to be in fairly good health, listen politely to him. He changes his facial expression from the one he had with the miser and with the sick man. "Ladies and gentlemen, I hold in my hand here the Samaritan Pain Dissuader, thrice-blessed discovery of that disinterested friend of humanity whose portrait you see. Pure vegetable extract. Warranted to remove the acutest pain within less than ten minutes. Five hundred dollars to be forfeited on failure. Especially efficacious in heart disease and tic-douloureux. Observe the expression of this pledged friend of humanity.—Price only fifty cents." (Chapter XVII) Since it is a large crowd, he uses a broad-based appeal to a wide range of afflictions. The name, "The Samaritan Pain Dissuader" appeals to the largely Christian audience by evoking the idea of the Good Samaritan (which he would like people to think he is). But he is no Good Samaritan – the herb-doctor is only a projection, and the only efficacy that could possibly occur would be through the actions of the people. If their afflictions are in their own minds (feigned or hypochondriacal) his useless medicine could work. Melville suggests here that the clash of frauds can result in a restoration to a natural state. It is a nihilistic notion at the core.

### **Discussion Questions**

As the herb-doctor moves around the riverboat, he engages in numerous conversations. As he listens to the people and observes their problems, he offers his potions, many of which have long names, which seem to have been invented on the spot, to respond to the specific medical complaints of the people he meets. What are some of the names of the herb-doctor's potions? How do they reflect the ailments of the people he encounters? What is their deeper significance?

The herb-doctor is a transformative character because he is the only one that shows people how to have how to have faith and hope in the future, albeit by means of a proxy (his patent medicines). We do not

see that he has actually harmed anyone with his herbal potions, but that they benefit with a placebo effect. How does the herb-doctor's philosophy mesh with that of Ralph Waldo Emerson or the fellow passenger, Mr. Winsome?

### **The Cosmopolitan (who is also the stranger, and the confidence man)**

(Manipulative)

**Character:** The cosmopolitan is one of the passengers on the Mississippi River steam engine-driven paddleboat. River boats were notorious for attracting passengers of all sorts, and they often gave the impression of being something like the Hieronymus Bosch painting, *Ship of Fools*, which is full of the young, the old, the virtuous, the vicious – basically all walks of life, thrown together on what could be either Noah's Ark and a vessel to safety or salvation, or the ferry boat on the River Styx, taking dead souls to Hades. His role is essentially a nihilistic one: he captures people who want something for nothing, and when he takes money from people, he essentially exploits their greed, envy, or vanity. In the meantime, he convinces the skeptics through long disquisitions about the need for confidence.

As time goes on, and he encounters more people on board, many of which seem to be at the end of their careers, love, or health, the possibility that he represents, not only the Devil (as the tempter, seducer in the Garden of Eden), but also Charon, the ferryman who takes dead souls across the River Styx. It is quite possible that all the people on board are not alive at all but are souls and are now represented by the quality that most distinguished them in life.

**Parallels** The confidence man is a trickster and tries to convince people that he is what is not. The reader is never quite sure if a person who appears might be the confidence man in disguise. Was he the lame man? The Duke and the Dauphin in *Huckleberry Finn* and the trickster figures in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night Dream* are evoked (primarily Puck). The fact that the confidence man spends times speaking about the nature of confidence, reality, and the workings of fortune makes one think a bit of *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius and "Lady Fortune." The confidence man moves from person to person to listen to them and prey on their weaknesses, and essentially reveals that the American self-assurance in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the notions of boundlessness, were essentially easily tricked because they were not underlain by the values purported to be held by the majority of Americans, but instead, were devoid of moral integrity. The devil only conned those who had no true values or belief or faith. It is not clear if Melville ever read Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), a scathing account of being on a riverboat on the Mississippi where among her fellow passengers were at least two con artists or patent medicine elixir peddlers. The structure of her narrative and the description of the passengers have much in common. Later, Mark Twain started, but never finished, a novel, *The Mysterious Stranger*, which contains a mysterious character called "No. 44" or "Satan." Following the notion of a religious person who is a manipulator and a cheat, Sinclair Lewis wrote *Elmer Gantry*.

### **Illustrative Passages**

*Schadenfreude; malicious glee at others' misfortunes* A man pretending to be a veteran of the Mexican battle-fields presents himself. His name is "Molino del Rey, Resaca de la Tomba" which means Meat-Grinder for the King; Hangover from the Grave. He tells his saga to the Herb-Doctor while the Cosmopolitan listens, smiling ironically at the idea that this is not a veteran of foreign wars at all, and if he is a "Soldier of Fortune" he is only one in the sense that he's a "Soldier of Life's Misfortunes." (Chapter XIX).

*Opportunistic* The Cosmopolitan encounters a widow who has recently lost her husband. She is clearly quite vulnerable in her grief. The Cosmopolitan seizes upon that and asks her for twenty dollars. She immediately asks: "Tell me, sir, for what you want the twenty dollars?" The cosmopolitan responds: "And did I not—" then glancing at her half-mourning, "for the widow and the fatherless. I am traveling agent of the Widow and Orphan Asylum, recently founded among the Seminoles." He quickly folds up the bank notes she gives him, and then he says (probably with irony): "Good-bye; you have confidence. Yea, you can say to me as the apostle said to the Corinthians, 'I rejoice that I have confidence in you in all things.'" (Chapter VIII). Here, the cosmopolitan reveals himself to also be the man in gray, who claimed

to have made a fortune with his healing chair invention (which was at best a tall tale). He shows no compassion toward the recently bereaved woman. In point of fact, Melville's novels have very few women in them except for the gorgeous Fayaway in *Typee*.

*Revealing* After the Cosmopolitan tells a story to a fellow passenger after dinner, the listener asks if it is true. The Cosmopolitan replies, "Of course not; it is a story which I told with the purpose of every story-teller—to amuse." In that passage, and in others, the Cosmopolitan reveals the way that truth is often discarded in the service of a larger purpose or point. In this case, he discusses the need to amuse. But, he is quite capable of harnessing his stories and spinning tales for more sinister purposes, the most benign of which have to do with separating people from their money.

*Skeptic* The cosmopolitan knows that there are counterfeit three dollar bills drawn on the Vicksburgh Trust and Insurance Banking Company. There are many ways in which such a bill would not be legal tender. First, it's a three-dollar bill. Second, it has been drawn on an institution whose books are being audited and is under indictment for fraud. But, if that's not enough, someone has invented a Counterfeit Detector which is seen on "every desk and counter." The Cosmopolitan has a conversation with a young boy and an experienced old man in one of the staterooms. They discuss the idea of counterfeits. "No; but the Detector says, among fifty other things, that, if a good bill, it must have, thickened here and there into the substance of the paper, little wavy spots of red; and it says they must have a kind of silky feel, being made by the lint of a red silk handkerchief stirred up in the paper-maker's vat—the paper being made to order for the company." (Chapter XLV).

*Empirical* The Cosmopolitan takes a stroll around the deck of the grand river steamer, the paddleboat, and he is accosted by a fellow traveler, a "mystic" who is also the "stranger." The cosmopolitan starts to discuss the fact that he believes that beauty must equate to virtue, and that anything beautiful must be virtuous, and yet the existence of the rattle-snake presents a convincing refutation of that notion. The stranger, who is claimed to be a mystic, but shows himself to be an incarnation of the Devil, describes the powerful psychological thrill that an evil sociopath feels: "When charmed by the beauty of that viper, did it never occur to you to change personalities with him? to feel what it was to be a snake? to glide unsuspected in grass? to sting, to kill at a touch; your whole beautiful body one iridescent scabbard of death? In short, did the wish never occur to you to feel yourself exempt from knowledge, and conscience, and revel for a while in the carefree, joyous life of a perfectly instinctive, unscrupulous, and irresponsible creature?" (Chapter XXXVI)

*Philanthropical* He's not, but he likes to say he is. He tells the barber, probably ironically (at least to himself) "I am Philanthropos, and love mankind. And, what is more than you do, barber, I trust them." (Chapter XLIII). In order to prove that it's a good idea to trust people, the Cosmopolitan (Frank Goodman), signs an agreement with the barber and states: "The first hereby agrees to make good to the last any loss that may come from his trusting mankind, in the way of his vocation, for the residue of the present trip; provided that William Cream keep out of sight, for the given term, his notification of No Trust, and by no other mode convey any, the least hint or intimation, tending to discourage men from soliciting trust from him, in the way of his vocation, for the time above specified; but, on the contrary, he do, by all proper and reasonable words, gestures, manners, and looks, evince a perfect confidence in all men, especially strangers; otherwise, this agreement to be void." (Chapter XLII) Then, he borrowed fifty dollars from the barber, and disappeared. Once the Cosmopolitan left, the barber came to his senses, walked to the drawer where he had put the agreement, and tore it up.

## Discussion Questions

How does the cosmopolitan treat the women passengers in contrast with the men? How does he respond to the story of Goneril? And, when he (in the character of The Judge) begins to talk about Indian-hating, how might it also reflect his attitude toward women?

In one of the most revealing passages of the novel, the "mystic" discusses the rattle-snake, and how it illustrates a paradox of nature. As opposed to classical Greek tradition, the beautiful is not good. Instead, it is evil. In a rather jarring and unsettling passage, he describes the psychology of the viper – what we

might now call a psychopath or a sociopath: "When charmed by the beauty of that viper, did it never occur to you to change personalities with him? to feel what it was to be a snake? to glide unsuspected in grass? to sting, to kill at a touch; your whole beautiful body one iridescent scabbard of death? In short, did the wish never occur to you to feel yourself exempt from knowledge, and conscience, and revel for a while in the carefree, joyous life of a perfectly instinctive, unscrupulous, and irresponsible creature?". After you read that passage and all of Chapter XXXVI, what do you think that the speaker is saying about conventional morality and ethics? Also, how is he also drawing a parallel to what he is doing aboard the riverboat, the Fidele?

#### Reference

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