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"These Days" Are Still "These Days.":

A Study of Confidence Men and Women in
Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* and
The Market -Place

Shunji KUGA

I

In her discussion of Harold Frederic's masterpiece, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, Bridget Bennett presents Sister Soulsby as a typical confidence woman.[(1)] Basing her definition of the trickster upon Karen Halttunen's landmark study,[(2)] Bennett points out that, under the guidance of Mrs. Soulsby, the protagonist Theron "systematically tries to learn the tricks of a confidence man, studying the 'tricks' of pulpit oratory, and determining to master them."[(3)] Whether Theron actually makes a truly successful fraud, even after he leaves the pulpit, is a matter for argument. In the evaluation of the hero as swindler, however, one must not forget that he meets another confidence woman, Celia Madden. Regrettably, Bennett fails to analyze the interesting contrast formed by the hero's encounter with this femme fatale; Theron is first deceived by Celia and then saved by Mrs. Soulsby. In short, Theron is at once a victim and a disciple of a fraud.

Traditionally, a confidence woman, far more frequently than her male counterpart, casts a sexual spell upon her (usually inexperienced) victim, and leads him astray. Hence comes the title of Halttunen's book: "Confidential Men and Painted Women." Yet for young Theron, while Celia invites him into her private room with the meaningful remark "I will show you what is my very own" (150),[(4)] Mrs. Soulsby remains mainly a maternal figure, comforting him in his distress by saying "I will sit beside you till you drop off" (331). But let me first elucidate why the hero helplessly falls prey to Celia's coaxing.

"When the inexperienced young man first set foot in the city..., clergymen ... offered advice"[(5)] to him on the appropriate code of conduct. Quite ironically, the promising Methodist preacher Theron, presumably from some rural district, found himself astray in Octavius. His naïvete is all the more obvious because he admires the "modern" look of a town with the population of 10.000, nothing but a rather unstimulating local municipality. Among the novelties that impress the starry-eyed hero are the electric bells at the front door of Father Forbes' pastorate. The stereotyped image of Catholicism as conservative and outdated is irrelevant to Theron; as is well

known, Father Forbes, in concert with Dr. Ledsmar and Celia, initiates Theron into the secrets of academism and "illuminates" him. The hero's growing sense of unease in the strange town is not without good foundation. Theron has great difficulty in finding supporters in his church. The bigoted Methodists, arbitrarily judging his sermons as "too flowery to suit" (27) them, threaten him by saying "you won't last here more'n a twelvemonth"(33). The "strange ceremonial"(43) performed by the Catholics' at MacEvoy's deathbed fascinates Theron, firstly as an overall impression rather than by its details. The novelty of the service highlights its formal character. The hero realizes that his lack of a guiding principle at the pulpit jeopardizes his authority, and understandably envies the rigors and rituals of Catholics which, according to Mrs. Soulsby, automatically secure for clergymen "an authority of some sort"(174). Secondly and more specifically, Theron is attracted by the manuals with which Father Forbes manages the parish; he makes it a rule, for example, "not to go out at night unless they [= his parishioners] bring [Forbes] a physician's card with his assurance that it is a genuine affair"(45). One may safely assume that Theron from the early stages has sought practical manuals of advice without which, citing Halttunen, an ingenuous youth becomes vulnerable to "immediate approach by a confidence man."(6)

Actually, however, a painted woman has already approached MacEvoy's bedside and is ready to entice the hero with her bewitching voice: "Theron had stood face to face with death at many other bedsides; no other final scene had stirred him like this. It must have been the girl's Latin chant..., which so strangely affected him" (43). With her recitation and her refined piano performance of Chopin, Celia not only soothes the exhausted Theron but also awakens him, sensitively and sensually if not sensibly. His revived interest in music and consequent feeling of liberation from his constrained life as a Methodist preacher prompts him, rather casually, to curiosity about the scandalous relationship between Chopin and George Sand, which embarrasses Celia. Furthermore, the protagonist's inquisitiveness drives him to ask Celia, Forbes and Ledsmar about the (possibly sexual) relationships that underlie their intellectual personae. All three decide to drop Theron from their scholarly circle, yet not with straightforward

statements or actions; Ledsmar, for example, in Theron's taking leave from his mansion, refrains from offering a ceremonial "invitation to come again" (226), which Theron "misses" (226). Halttunen says that the etiquette manuals prevalent in the decades after 1830 stressed an elusive gentility, which encouraged "polite ways of terminating an undesirable acquaintanceship."(7) This sophisticated mode of severing a connection would be of no use unless supported by the other party's tacit comprehension. Theron's failure to notice Ledsmar's hidden intention exposes that the hero hardly shares the spirit of post-1830 manuals. Inevitably, therefore, Theron is easily made a fool of by Celia, an expert in this double-dealing code of conduct.

Celia's first and last kiss to Theron, which he naturally interprets as an expression of affection, is later explained by her as a "good-bye order" (320). This duplicity, a component of mid-19th century etiquette and a regular trick of painted women as well, is consistently observed in Celia's treatment of Theron. By her suggestive behavior and provocative dress, she convinces Theron of her love while she unfailingly implies her unrelenting contempt for the occasional evidence of his ignorance or innocence. Therein lies the justification for her later condemnation of Theron for being ill-mannered; those who cannot interpret a coded intention correctly deserve to be roundly denounced. But however stylish Celia's apotheosis of aestheticism seems to be to Theron, its essential banality comes to light in the setting of the spirit of the times. Although she passes as erudite in this provincial town and establishes her mental (albeit not material) independence from her unlettered father ("... of books he knew nothing whatever, and he made only the most perfunctory pretence now and again of reading the newspapers" [86]), she merely echoes a popularized version of the Arnoldian dichotomy of Hebrew and Greek. This reveals the true nature of her intellectual circle; its members advocate either secondhand or outmoded ideas. Forbes, no longer preaching regularly, is virtually a retired clergyman. His inactivity discourages him from keeping up with the times. Ledsmar, similarly isolated as a doctor, resorts exclusively to his old book-learning when dallying with Theron's simplicity. Moreover, his eccentric viewpoints, represented by his hatred of music and his misogyny, reflect his perverse craving for attention in this small community, a

craving which had probably been unfulfilled in his earlier career in the city. Nevertheless, their trite and old-fashioned doctrines undeniably contribute to maintaining their respectability. They frequently make insinuations against each other, imperiling their delicate relationships, but readily resume their usual polished conversations full of jargon, thus deftly dodging Theron's rather straightforward questions. Their education provides the trappings with which these tricksters hide their true motive. They play a confidence game, the purpose of which may be taken to be sexual gratification. One ought not judge as groundless Theron's (as well as some of his congregation's) suspicions concerning the relation between Forbes and Celia. Nor does it seem implausible to explain Ledsmar's misogyny, which is directed especially at Celia, as the result of a homosexual attachment to Forbes.

Yet it would be safe to reiterate that their intellectual masquerade serves as no more than a cover for their personal complications. Their high-handed attitude often leads them to ignorance of the outside world, as is revealed in Forbes' nonchalance towards the misery of the majority of his flock and his concomitant optimism concerning the Irish-American future. Forbes and Celia, together with her elder brother Michael, urge Theron to return to the Methodist community, which again indicates how little they know about Theron's distress among his parishioners. Moreover, their advice is evidently contradictory since except for Michael, they had previously insistently encouraged Theron to join their group. Only Michael never wavers in his view of Theron as he ought to be: Michael says that Theron:

> "does not seek to make money for himself, or a great name, but ... is content to live humbly on the salary of a book-keeper, and devote all his time to prayer and the meditation of his religion, and preaching, and visiting the sick and the poor, and comforting them" (297).

But the defeat of Michael's idealistic view becomes apparent in his impending death, caused by his fight with his half brother Theodore, a reckless and drunken hoodlum, the very antitype of Forbes' as well as Michael's own positive image of the

Irish.[8] Michael appears nostalgic and even anachronistic confronted with the harsh realities represented by Theodore, and Forbes, involved in the fight and insulted by the hooligan, also risks losing his authority over the Catholic congregation. Ironically, therefore, Forbes and Michael personally demonstrate the impossibility of withdrawal into an idealization of the present. And this holds true whether it be for Catholics or Methodists; for the latter, moreover, escape into the past also seems impossible. Theron is physically separated from his idyllic past; even though he claims to be from a farm, his family is never mentioned. Nor does he have any connection with his wife's family, who regard his Methodism with suspicion. Alice, also from the countryside, but virtually cut off from her parental home, wishes to return to her rural days but in vain. Stopped by one of the stubborn church trustees from wearing a flower on her bonnet and disappointed with her husband's acquiescence in this, she devotes herself to cultivating the backyard as if to make up for her lost country life. Yet frost withers in one single night her cherished plants and flowers, thus shattering her dream. Despite the impossibility of living in an imaginary past, the couple refuse to live in the present either, at least in the present Octavius. Theron came to Octavius with a pre-1830 moral outlook and was at first amazed at the "townscape" of this undistinguished settlement. But in due course he notices the backwardness of the town and its inhabitants, and Alice has virtually withdrawn herself from parish life. Their final decision to leave Octavius suggests that Theron, accompanied by the submissive Alice, has outgrown the spiritual climate of this provincial town, where progress is truly under way, but tends to be retarded by the conservative believers. The logical consequence, following Halttunen, is that an "illuminated" Theron, no longer bound to the pre-1830 code of conduct, should embrace the now dominant mode of duplicitous ethics.

That etiquette, advocated by frauds, firstly requires its devotees to improve their outward appearance. Naturally, Theron comes to care about his looks, buying a book on the treatment of hands and finger-nails and seeking to make a favorable impression on his congregation. Little wonder that he emphasizes to Mrs. Soulsby "the best sermon I ever preached in my life, I preached only three weeks ago,..." immediately before some people "said that [I was] degenerated" (332). Once he has succeeded in

capturing the audience with his well-kept features and ardent gestures, he can control their minds at will. Unrestrained contempt for the shallow and obedient Methodists facilitates his manipulation. In short, the more that Theron furtively discards his professed piety, the more brilliantly his sermons at the pulpit seem to shine to the tamed parishioners. But now that his "degeneration" has been exposed, Theron can no longer pass for a faithful clergyman, at least among those who exposed it, such as Michael, for example. In other words, as a clergyman he has failed in his swindling. At the same time he has already grown too "illuminated" to remain humbly among the crass Methodists. As it is, in leaving Octavius, he also leaves the ministry, but luckily has now acquired the secular technique of "a showman" (251).

It is well known that Harold Frederic once intended to end this novel with the protagonist's suicide. But there were good grounds for his abandonment of his original plan; simply because his hero has mastered the fashionable lifestyle of a confidence man, the author decides to let him survive as such. And Mr. Soulsby, the husband of Theron's mentor, advises him to go to Seattle.

> ... it was Brother Soulsby who bore the burden of the conversation. He was full of the future of Seattle and magnificent impending development of that whole section. He had been out there, years ago, when it was next door to uninhabited. He had visited the district twice since, and the changes discoverable each new time were more wonderful than anything Aladdin's lamp ever wrought. He had secured for Theron,...the super-intendency of a land and real estate company.... (342)

The mentor's husband chooses exactly the right place for Theron the trickster to start a new life. A con man, even after he has once failed, can wipe the slate clean with ease by inventing a fresh past (leaving out any inconvenient truths) and hunting new victims. For this, however, he needs to move to a place where no one knows his shady past. Obviously, the farther, the more desirable. As William Lenz states, the remote West provides frustrated swindlers from the East with new and ideal opportunities for "self-definition" or "self-creation."[9] Moreover, the land speculation in which Theron

will be engaged is itself associated with a confidence game, as Gary Lindberg remarks[10]; one sells worthless property as if it holds promise while attempting to purchase valuable property at rock-bottom prices, for which the con man's techniques are likely to prove very useful.[11]

Towards the end of the novel, one observes a Theron, now completely practical in his outlook. His painful longing for academic knowledge seems to have subsided. He was branded as "a bore" (321), as having little of what it takes to qualify for erudition. But he has found the truth: what matters is not whether one is in reality intellectual but whether one appears so, and Theron seems to have firm confidence in his appearance. Furthermore, the sensitivity seen in his admiration of natural beauty and infatuation with music has disappeared without trace in his progress towards pragmatism; in the final scene, Theron pays little heed to the returning spring blossoms as he indulges himself in his visionary future of gaining fame as a charismatic statesman, the next step from a successful businessman. It seems quite natural that Samuel C. Coale points out the ambitious Theron's dearth of moral conflicts.[12] But Coale is mistaken in judging this to be a blemish of the novel. Frederic deliberately remains detached, and both the absence of any ethical struggles in his characters and his own refusal to comment on this absence serve to render faithfully the degeneration of the modern society in which materially preoccupied tricksters do, in fact, prevail.

This corruption manifests itself in the perverted function of speech. The pedantic trio employ their verbosity wholly as a means to conceal their underlying intentions or in order to play on Theron's artlessness. Sister Soulsby's hyperbolic and sentimental moralizing in reality aims to cheat the congregation out of their money as much as possible. Words that are spoken seldom have their original meaning. They become hollow and meaningless signifiers. Even Theron's own summation, that "Talk is what tells, these days" (344), is slightly misleading; it is never the content of the talk which "tells," but *how* one "talks" greatly "tells." Theron's pompous gestures and emotionally charged voice exalt the audience to the point in which they pay little attention to his utterances. Ultimately, the characters' shared skill at speaking without meaning threatens to eviscerate the title of the novel of its significance, both in the American

version: "The Damnation of Theron Ware," and in its British counterpart: "Illumination." One wonders whether the hero is truly "damned." He may have been unanimously "damned" by those around him, and left the ministry as a result. But as his final nonchalant optimism indicates, he takes the ordeal in his stride. His expanding ambition and aggressiveness make one suspect that he considers his "damnation" a minor stumble, if not indeed a necessary step towards success. But is he, then, "illuminated?" He may once have been "illuminated" by the intellectuals, but his subsequent experiences seem to have obliterated all traces of this. Indeed he received instruction from Sister Soulsby about swindling techniques, but one naturally doubts if such a dubious lesson deserves the term "illumination." As mentioned above, Frederic is deeply absorbed as a spectator of the situation, and while nullifying all his characters' moral pretensions, he nevertheless abstains from offering any frame of reference upon which an ironical standpoint could be based. Consequently, it seems no exaggeration to say that the contrasting words "damnation" and "illumination," hardly colored by any ironical tinge and yet almost bereft of their original solemn or spiritual implications, are close to nonsense, and in their nonsense virtually become "synonyms." It is emblematic of the world in which confidence men and painted women compete with each other to achieve their respective goals. They pay little attention to sincerity or authenticity in making speeches which are not designed to be understood, and spare no rhetoric so long as it pleases their victims and helps to win their confidence. They are the chosen people, the favored few, in a world where not straightforward but counterfeit "talk is what tells."

II

At the end of *The Market-Place* Celia summarizes the life of the protagonist, Thorpe: "Crime was his true vocation" (401).[13] Truly Thorpe entered the novel as a genuine confidence man. He cheated his old friend into buying worthless bonds, and moreover, waged a battle against the professional London speculators as if the bonds had been still his, eventually making a fortune. One may also say that he won the fight

against a metaphorical trickster, Lord Plowden. Restraining his profound contempt for upstarts like Thorpe, the nobleman seeks to win the commoner's favor with the flattering comment that he welcomes the dominance of new entrepreneurs in society. Plowden assumes that his courtesy to the parvenu will help him realize his long-cherished dream: release from undeserved poverty. Nonetheless when Thorpe, the son of a book seller, off-handedly says that "I'm going be an English country gentleman,"

> Lord Plowden visibly winced a little at this announcement. He seemed annoyed at the consciousness that he had done so, turning abruptly first to stare out of the window, then shifting his position on the seat, and at last stealing an uneasy glance toward his companion. Apparently his tongue was at a loss for an appropriate comment.
>
> Thorpe had lost none of these unwilling tokens of embarrassment. (55-56)

Plowden's defeat as an adulatory con man becomes evident later at the scene in which Thorpe openly expresses what he has noticed in the aristocrat: his incorrigibly high-handed attitude towards him.

> "That day that you took me shooting," he [=Thorpe] said, with the tone of one finally exposing a long-nursed grievance, "you stayed in bed for hours after you knew I was up and waiting for you – and when we went out, you had a servant to carry a chair for you, but I – by God! – I had to stand up" (305-6).

Noblemen's manners and habits of thought are so sophisticated that they exist merely for form' s sake. Thorpe cannot emulate these professional formalists. But while the quasi-American Thorpe(14) shares with Theron an aggressiveness, by virtue of which they can achieve their ends, the aristocrats either lack such potential or fail to realize it. The privileged make up for their fearsome void of enthusiasm (as the Duke of Glastonbury confesses, they "are the tired people" [394]) with an elaborate mannerism. Yet the more exquisite their social code becomes, the more it risks

collapse. Therein lies the reason for Plowden's blunder in his treatment of Thorpe. The frustrated Plowden, who ought to have been more meticulous about such "mere trifles" (306), endeavors to transform himself from a figurative swindler into a literal one.[15] Yet the confidence game played between the former partners again ends in the victory of the veteran; Thorpe deceives Plowden into putting his signature on the fatal document which corroborates the latter's crime.

Even after the protagonist has secured his social standing by marrying Lady Cressage, he remains a literal fraud, as Celia's last words testify. Thorpe is not content to live as a courteous (but hypocritical, therefore figuratively fraudulent) man of rank like Plowden. Regarding his grand acquaintances as an alien species, Thorpe treats them with a mixture of scorn (for their incompetence) and cool consideration (for their potential as prey). In a sense he represents a throwback to the original embodiment of the confidence man, and this atavistic streak also emerges in Thorpe's unusual primal energy. He demonstrates his acute animal instinct in hunting, a form of the struggle for survival as entertainment, and also, rejuvenated at forty, he preserves an immense sexual vitality; he overwhelms his wife with his "native, coarse, imperious virility" (386), and gives her a masochistic sense of "happiness through terror" (273). Cressage's passively achieved fulfillment, however, actually results from her active choice of her partner, which makes a striking contrast with her previous marriage; in the preceding novel *Gloria Mundi*, meekly following the rule: "There is a matrimonial market, of course, and girls offer themselves in it to the highest bidder" (154),[16] Cressage married an aristocrat who was later found to be "a worthless creature – a violent, ignorant low-minded fellow" (153). Although she regrets that "I humiliated and degraded myself to win a great prize in the world's lottery – and I did not bring it off" (265), she puts the blame not on herself but her relatives: "...they led me to be married to the beast" (266), and shies away from the "matrimonial market" over the course of the novel.

In *The Market-Place*, on the other hand, she willingly assesses her own value as a matrimonial commodity, and deals shrewdly in the market on this basis. De Grave defines this as the attitude of 20th century painted women:

> In the twentieth century, writers have dared to tell stories about confidence women who "do" speak unhesitatingly and who market themselves boldly.... Twentieth-century writers became more ready to examine women,...those who did not escape from the market but who packed themselves for sale to the highest bidder.[17]

Cressage capitalizes on the title left to her as a consequence of her former marriage, an object of desire for parvenus like Thorpe. She frankly reveals what she wants in return, when expressing what she hates: "To me poverty is the horror – the unmentionable horror!" (166). She thus refuses a poor man with a title (which she already has), Plowden, and marries a commoner of fortune (which she needs), Thorpe. In contrast, one finds her close friend, Celia, to be a typical confidence woman of the 19th century in De Grave's terms:

> In the nineteenth century, on the other hand, literature tended to concentrate on the women who tried to escape their role as commodity...they took themselves off the market, or at least changed their market value.[18]

In *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, Celia, the daughter of a rich industrialist, flatly refused Theron's idea of "American heiresses going to Europe and marrying dukes and noblemen," and proudly declared "That is the old-fashioned idea" (254). Celia secludes herself in a room filled with decadent art objects, from where she weaves her webs of amoral hedonism and tempts a Methodist minister. As a dedicated artist and emancipated "new woman," she differentiates herself from ordinary young ladies in her refusal of marriage, or from housewives such as Alice in her refusal of domesticity. Ironically in *The Market-Place*, she has become "old-fashioned" placed in the context of Lady Cressage. Exactly as Theron had predicted, Celia comes to "Europe," but does not take the logical next step of finding an aristocratic husband. Compared with the "happy" Cressage, Celia has apparently exhausted her appeal as a

defiant painted woman, and she herself realizes it. She retracts her outright scorn of her unsophisticated and unlettered father. Admitting that "I must have been an extremely trying daughter" to him, Celia frankly admires "nobility of mind and temper" that she found in him (181-2). From this daughterly affection for her father, it seems only one step for her to accept the traditional feminine idealization of family life. Yet unlike Cressage, Celia remains single, and a mere bystander at her companion's marriage. Celia's sarcasm occasionally becomes more unsparing, especially when aimed at Thorpe, but it gains all the more reckless force for the disappointments she has endured as an avowed rebel against social convention.

If Cressage thus offers one perspective into the 20th century, the protagonist provides another: Thorpe's lust for conquest ranges from his wife ("who would smile upon him at his command" [261]), through the stock market, to society in general. And at this latter point, he becomes a representatively problematic 20th –century hero. He embarks on a campaign to save the destitute of London, but this is unquestionably an excuse for starting a political career with the final goal: "Rule England!" (386). Thorpe unhesitatingly says that "people are hogs,... they're ... only tools" (393). He is unlikely to consider individual suffering. Indeed he little cared about his old acquaintances, Tavender and Gafferson, and used them without compunction in his bogus speculation. He was utterly indifferent to the former's pitiful end, and once even showed himself quite prepared to have the latter murdered. This coldhearted buccaneer does not seem to worry over any contradiction in his cruelty towards the unfortunates who he concludes get in the way of his charitable cause. His inclination towards revenge, nourished in his past adversity, may manifest itself at any time to anybody, even those to whom he originally intends to be generous. Standing at the end of the 19th century and looking into the future, Thorpe might be treated, as Stanton Garner suggests,(19) as a 20th century protagonist. Although we must accept that there are some grounds for Austin Briggs' more specific comparison of Thorpe with Theodore Roosevelt,(20) Thorpe differs essentially from democratic heroes; even apart from his tenacious anti-Semitism, which expresses his cruelty most clearly, one might discern fascist tendencies in this ostensibly philanthropic autocrat. But the enduring relevance

of the various types of confidence men and women discussed above might reside paradoxically, in their very atypicality, as will be explained in the concluding section.

Ⅲ

Noting duplicitous conduct in the middle classes, Halttunen metaphorically applies the terms confidence men or painted women to those who practice such hypocrisy. Theron will abide by the code of gentlemanly ethics, and will play his tricks within its boundaries. He will never dream of doubting the rules of democratic society. On the other hand, with his staggering fraudulent skills Thorpe poses a threat to democracy. In *The Market-Place*, it is not Thorpe's incisive critic, Celia, but the languid Duke of Glastonbury who comments on his benevolent venture; the Duke cites the miserable outcome of “the System,” the feudalistic but charitable community which his relative operates, and mildly discourages Thorpe. But the Duke's half-hearted attitude, fitting for a “tired” aristocrat and conducive to apathetic resignation, leads him to say that “The record of these – generally a very faulty and foolish record – we call history” (393). Such predictions of defeat are unlikely to deter the confident Thorpe. The cliché that history repeats itself paradoxically seems to guarantee his validity.

History might seem to repeat itself also for confidence women; De Grave's two categories of 19th and 20th century confidence women should be seen not as phases in a chronological evolution but as different aspects of a consistent attitude; De Grave remarks that “women play a unique role in the capitalist economy, both as unpaid worker in the home or commodity on the exchange market.” (21) Objective circumstances hardly determine the attitude of confidence women; whereas women who believe in the possibility of defiance against this normative “capitalism” aim to oppose it, the less optimistic proceed to take advantage of it. In the latter case, their purposeful feminine charm provokes masculine vitality, as shown in Thorpe. In contrast, according to some critics, defiant confidence women tend to feminize men; Fritz Oehlshraeger, for

example, sums up his chronicle of Theron's life with the claim that "Theron becomes progressively effeminized throughout the novel,"[22] and similarly Lisa MacFarlane, regarding Celia as "virile" and emphasizing Sister Soulsby's "muscular neck...and her masculine mind," states that "Theron's feminized self is so dominant that he plays the role of the female in his relationship with other women."[23] Indeed, Theron capitalizes on his innocent looks with Celia and Mrs. Soulsby, meanwhile profiting much at the pulpit from his well-kept appearance. More elaborately, even Father Forbes, a virtuoso of confidence art, makes the most of the paradoxical sexual appeal of his celibacy to Celia; prohibited masculinity at once ensures safety, stimulates compassion and provokes a defiant yearning to violate the taboo. One may thus wonder whether Theron and Forbes intend to be a painted woman rather than a confidence man.[24] Conversely, Sister Soulsby certainly partakes of masculinity; Theron says "the word 'Amazons' ... remembered you [= Mrs. Soulsby]" (333). Exactly like the Amazons, for example, she bravely (but in this case unfairly) helps Theron clear the heavy debts of his church. In Frederic, the conventional categorization as seen in the title of Halttunen's book: "Confidential men and Painted Women," therefore, does not always hold true. The power of his confidence men and women, rather, lies in their making even gender negotiable.

Joyce Carol Oates remarks that Theron's unequivocal reliance upon his oratorical skill is compelling even today,[25] and she guarantees Theron's modern success: "He [=Theron] will not only survive but succeed."[26] Theron's credo in life: "Talk is what tells, these days" is demonstrably insincere and mendacious as explained before, but in an age sensitized to the importance of smooth self-presentation and slick communication there is much resonance in the portrait of a man who depends entirely upon his powers of eloquence. One inevitably recalls Theron addressing the voters from his imaginary political platform; by his calculated "cadence of his voice" and "stretching forth his hand with the pale, thin fingers gracefully disposed, and passing it slowly before him from side to side, in a comprehensive, stately gesture," he effortlessly charms his "rapt, eager" and "credulous" audience (344). Oates says that with the help of this speech technique "Theron Ware has adjusted to altered

circumstances and a new environment."[27] But in my terms, the hero's glib- tongue is the key to his adjustment; he adapts successfully precisely because he is a protean confidence man. Moreover, Theron's fraudulent lifestyle is common to the other main characters of Frederic's two masterpieces, as we have seen. As Michael S. Gietl said in 2002, "the scholarly trend to revive Harold Frederic from obscurity, which began in the 1960s, has proven now, forty years later, to be only semi-successful."[28] Indeed, there appears to be less scholarly research on Frederic published these days.[29] But despite the possible declining popularity of Frederic, the viability of his characters, especially as confidence men and women, is only slightly impaired. It seems that "talk tells" more than ever, and Theron's "these days" are therefore still "these days."

Notes

(1) Bridget Bennett, *The Damnation of Harold Frederic: His Lives and Works* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 192-5.

(2) Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982).

(3) Bennett, p. 195.

(4) *The Damnation of Theron Ware or Illumination* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986). All the quotations from *The Damnation of Theron Ware* hereafter will be from this edition. Page references will appear parenthetically in the text. The same style will be used for *The Market-Place* and *Gloria Mundi*.

(5) Halttunen, p. 1.

(6) Ibid., p.2.

(7) Ibid., p.113.

(8) One may wonder how to evaluate Jeremiah Madden, the father of Celia and Michael. The omniscient author almost always depicts him favorably, seemingly leaving little room for ironical interpretation. His anguish in his native land and his subsequent hardships as an immigrant, including the painful experiences of his relatives' untimely deaths, epitomize the misfortunes of the 19th century Irish. His whole-hearted devotion to Catholicism and modest life as a successful owner of a wagon industry thereafter seem to support Michael's idealistic

and Forbes' optimistic view of the Catholics. Even Jeremiah's incorrigible ignorance is presented with affection. If our sympathy is evoked from his past life, while his main role is that of the merciless manager whose whimsical order causes a worker's death, adding another sad chapter to the Irish community's tragedies. Even though Jeremiah, like Michael, might qualify as an embodiment of wistful past, he hardly occupies a position as a guiding principle for the present life.

(9) See William Lenz, *Fast Talk & Flush Times: The Confidence Man as a Literary Convention* (Columbia, Mo: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1985), pp. 1-28.

(10) See Gary Lindberg, *The Confidence Man in American Literature* (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), pp.116-122.

(11) Critics hold differing opinions concerning the ideal heaven (or haven) for con men; Lenz, for example, suggests the developing West, while Halttunen and Kathleen De Grave attribute the rampancy of swindlers to the appearance of developed urban cities; Lenz, pp. 1-28; Halttunen, p. 1, and Kathleen De Grave, *Swindler, Spy, Rebel: The Confidence Woman in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia, Mo: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1995), p. 18. But the point is that relocation either from the country to the city (which Theron had done) or from the East to the West (as he will do) makes it easier for con men to discard or alter their past, thus giving them a chance to "persuade each other who they in fact are" as Lindberg points out (Lindberg, p. 5). Similarly, Theron's weak familial ties will assist his new start, as John Blair states; John Blair, *The Confidence Man in Modern Fiction, A Rogues Gallery with Six Portraits* (London: Vision Press, 1979), pp. 24-5.

(12) See Samuel C. Coale, *In Hawthorne's Shadow: American Romance from Melville to Mailer* (Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1985), pp. 54-6.

(13) *The Market-Place* (NY.: Frederic A.Stokes Company, 1898).

(14) As Lord Plowden repeatedly points out, Thorpe, though English, characterizes himself as a typical American.

(15) As is widely known, the term "confidence man" was popularized through William Thomson, a swindler who would stop a stranger on the street and ask if he had enough confidence in Thomson to give him his watch. If the stranger complied, Thomson walked away with the watch laughing at the stranger's innocence. The scene was New York, in 1849. Therefore, the term may appear distinctive to Americans. But as Halttunen starts her book on American con men by referring to the fact of "nineteenth-century English men and women...becoming hypocrite" (Halttunen, 'Preface' xiii), one reasonably finds the origin of the concept in England.

It should be also noted that already in the time of William Thompson, the term "confidence man" was employed figuratively. *Literary World*, for example, as early as 1849 compared young smart politicians and dubious entrepreneurs to confidence men. (*Literary World* V, 18 August 1849, p. 133) Moreover, some people regarded stock dealing as essentially fraudulent: See Johannes D. Bergmann, "The Original Confidence Man," *American Quarterly*, 21 (Fall 1969), 565-6. But as Halttunen explains, it can be inferred that as time progressed the term "confidence man" must have been used more extensively with metaphorical connotations in expressing hypocritical disconnections between a person's actions and their beliefs.

(16) *Gloria Mundi* (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1980).

(17) De Grave, pp. 235-6.

(18) Ibid., p. 235.

(19) See Stanton Garner, "The Other Harold Frederic," ed. Frank Bergman, *Upstate Literature: Essays in Memory of Thomas O'Donnell* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1985), p. 139.

(20) See Austin Briggs Jr., *The Novels of Harold Frederic* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969), p. 199.

(21) De Grave, p. 235.

(22) Fritz Oehlshraeger, "Passion, Authority, and Faith on *The Damnation of Theron Ware*," *American Literature*, 58:2 (May 1986), 244.

(23) Lisa Watt MacFarlane, "Resurrecting Man: Desire and *The Damnation of Theron Ware*," *Studies in American Literature*, 20 (1992),132,135,139.

(24) In a useful paper Clay Motley also describes the feminized Theron exhibiting such features as "dissonance between surface and essential" (191), "the valuation of words over actions, false sentiments over actual beliefs" (198), "surface appearances and outwardly displays more than inner spirituality" (200), or " (being) concerned with 'show' rather than substance" (211).: Clay Motley, "Turn-of-the-Century Perceptions of Manliness and Religion: Frederic's Jeremiad in *Theron Ware*," *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 31:1 (Spring 2004). Motley, however, does not refer to the concept of confidence men in his discussion of Theron. Nor does he mention the other characters' fraudulent attitude.

(25) See Joyce Carol Oates, "Fall From Grace," *New York Times Book Review*, December 1995, pp. 24-25.

(26) Ibid., p. 25.

(27) Ibid., p. 25.

(28) Michael S. Gietl, *The Novels of Harold Frederic: A Study of The Damnation of Theron Ware*

and Development in Earlier Novels (Phd. diss. Univ. of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2002: Ann Arbor: UMI, 2002, 3057547) ('Preface'), 1.

(29) *MLA International Bibliography*, for example, has listed only two scholarly studies on Frederic since 2000, those of Motley (n.24) and Gietl (n.28).