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Confidence Men and Painted Women
A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830–1870

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To John L. Thomas
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“Why do you tremble at me alone?” cried he, turning his veiled face round the circle of pale spectators. “Tremble also at each other! Have men avoided me, and women shown no pity, and children screamed and fled, only for my black veil? What, but the mystery which it obscurely typifies, has made this piece of crape so awful! When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!”

Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Minister’s Black Veil”

“For, comparatively inexperienced as you are, my dear young friend, did you never observe how little, very little, confidence, there is? I mean between man and man—more particularly between stranger and stranger. In a sad world it is the saddest fact. Confidence! I have sometimes almost thought that confidence is fled; that confidence is the New Astrea—emigrated—vanished—gone.” Then softly sliding nearer, with the softest air, quivering down and looking up, “Could you now, my dear young sir, under such circumstances, by way of experiment, simply have confidence in me?”

Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade

We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Experience”
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