

Calvin Cohn: Confidence Man

Interpreting Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace*

As a Parody of Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man*

by

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“What’s that about the Apocalypse?”
Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man*

“This is that story.”
Bernard Malamud, *God’s Grace*

“Trust but verify.”
Ronald Reagan, President and Former Actor

“Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge.”
Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis interprets Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace* (*GG*) as a parody of Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* (*CM*). It contrasts the two works in terms of historical milieu, setting, genre, plot, structure, and characters. Furthermore, it delves into a comparative thematic analysis, exploring such topics as God, theodicy, the Fall, evolution, an anti-Christian polemic, misanthropy, confidence (faith), deception, isolation, madness, imagery of the bottle, time, apocalypse, *Apocrypha*, slavery, and optimism and pessimism. My main conclusion is that there is overwhelming evidence to support a Melvillean reading of *GG*. I contend that Malamud deliberately modeled *GG* on *CM* and that *CM* is the most important source in a literary analysis of Malamud's final novel published during his lifetime. Malamud used other sources to be sure, but his reliance on *CM* is so painstaking and all-encompassing that no Malamud scholar can gain a full understanding of *GG* without reading and studying *CM* in depth.

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*For my brother John,
a friend in whom I have total confidence.*

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1. Introduction

After about two years on the island in Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace* (*GG*), Calvin Cohn and Buz engage in a conversation about stories. The narrator relates that Buz "wanted to know where stories came from." Cohn replies: "from other stories" (70). This brief exchange between the protagonist (Cohn) and his protégé (Buz) provides an important clue regarding how to properly interpret *GG* and points to the exploration I undertake in this thesis. Malamud's narrator reveals that no story stands alone. Every story depends, in one way or another, on other stories. What is true for the stories Cohn tells Buz is also true for Malamud in *GG*. Malamud's novel is full of intertextual references and allusions, both explicit and implicit, to a variety of texts and stories. Based on my analysis and that of others, Malamud relies on the *The Odyssey*, *The Old Testament*, *The New Testament*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Frankenstein*, *Moby Dick*, and Hebrew mystical writings (such as the *Kabbalah*) to weave his post-apocalyptic tale featuring talking chimpanzees and the earth's last man.ⁱ

But more than any other source, Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (*CM*) serves as the most important work on which Malamud patterns *GG*. This will probably come as a surprise to most readers of *GG*, because *CM*'s influence on *GG* is well hidden, but it unquestionably exists and I will provide ample evidence to

support my assertion. In fact, so pervasive is *CM*'s influence on *GG* that it is impossible to thoroughly understand Malamud's final completed novel without an in-depth knowledge of Melville's complex satirical work. Moreover, reexamining *GG* in light of this new evidence should prompt scholars to reevaluate and perhaps more greatly appreciate Malamud's novel for the complex literary work it is, because to-date no scholar has published an analysis of *GG* as a parodic imitation of *CM*. Interestingly, *GG* is not even the first work of Malamud to feature a confidence man,ⁱⁱ and *CM* is not the only Melvillean work on which Malamud draws in the creation of *GG*. *Moby Dick*, "The Encantadas," and *Clarel* also must be taken into account to understand the full extent to which Malamud deliberately opens himself to Melville's influence.

Actually this new Melvillean interpretation of *GG* should not come as a shock to Malamud scholars. During an interview Malamud once identified Melville as one of several authors who were major influences on his writing.ⁱⁱⁱ And in an interview with Pirjo Ahokas, the author even once described *GG* as "a Melvillean tale" (n370). In their writing, both Melville and Malamud concern themselves with serious topics, such as God, faith, and the human condition. They are also worried about the ultimate fate of humanity. This apocalyptic preoccupation is one place where *CM* and *GG* intersect, for both novels deal with the end of things—albeit in very different ways. This is not to say that Malamud simply rewrote *CM* for his audience in the late-twentieth century. On the contrary, there is much in *GG* that is inventive and unique to Malamud. But for any scholar to miss the imprint of *CM* on *GG* is to overlook the novel's single-most important source. And more importantly, to fail to see *CM*'s mark on *GG* is to miss what I believe is the *reason* Malamud chose to parody *CM*. The reason has to do with prophecy.

Melville was a prophet of a sort in the literary realm and Malamud delves into Melville's themes to issue a prophetic warning to American society and the rest of the world because, in 1982 (when *GG* appeared), humanity had (and still has) the capability to annihilate itself through the use of nuclear weapons. Malamud sought to add his voice to those calling for an end to the madness. His voice, though now silent, lives on in the pages of *GG*.

This thesis is divided into five sections: (1) this introduction; (2) a summary of the narratives of *CM* and *GG*; (3) an analysis of *GG* as a parody of *CM* with respect to historical milieu, setting, genre, plot, structure, and characters; (4) a comparative thematic analysis; and (5) my conclusion. Through my analysis I believe I fill in an important gap in the scholarship on Malamud and I hope my work prompts other Malamud critics to take another look at *God's Grace*.

2. Summary of the Narratives of *The Confidence-Man* and *God's Grace*

The Confidence-Man

Melville's *CM* is a vastly different novel from Malamud's *GG*, primarily because *CM* contains almost no action to speak of. Instead, Melville's work consists of a series of conversations between passengers on the steamboat *Fidele* as it makes its way down the Mississippi from St. Louis towards New Orleans. All the conversations deal, in one way or another, with the subject of confidence, which in the novel means faith (in man), trust, hope, good will, geniality or optimism. In fact, the word confidence appears on nearly every page of the novel, and on many pages it appears multiple times. With confidence as the main theme, Melville constructs a mysterious tale featuring an equally mysterious protagonist.

The entire tale happens on just one day—April Fool's—and the first character to appear at sunrise is a Christ-like deaf mute wearing cream-colours. He boards the steamer just as it departs from St. Louis and proceeds to write a series of Pauline inscriptions on a small slate. The inscriptions, taken from *1 Corinthians* 13, have to do with charity. The first one he writes is: "Charity thinketh no evil;" the second is: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind," and so forth (qtd. in *CM* 2-3). While the mute writes his inscriptions, the ship's barber appears and mounts a placard that reads: "No Trust" (4), eliciting no reaction from the crowd. The mute is then mistreated by his fellow passengers, who punch and push him, and nearly throw him overboard. The deaf mute then retires and goes to sleep under a ladder.

The next character of the novel is a "grotesque negro cripple" (10), who seeks alms from others onboard the *Fidele*. He succeeds in getting some coins from them, but

not before he has to humiliate himself by opening his mouth while passengers attempt to throw coins inside. A debate ensues among the travelers as to whether or not the cripple is truly deformed or if he is a fake. The cripple then supplies the skeptics with a list of references who can vouch for his authenticity. The list includes “a ge’mman wid a weed, and a ge’mman in a gray coat and white tie” (14), and several others. Most of these references appear in succession throughout the rest of the novel.

The man with a weed (John Ringman) appears next in the narrative. He immediately engages in a conversation with Mr. Roberts, a country merchant. Ringman claims that he already knows Roberts but Roberts at first says he has no recollection of him. After some cajoling, Roberts concedes that he may in fact know Ringman after confessing that he (Roberts) had a brain fever in the past, during which he had lost his mind completely “for a considerable interval” (24). Ringman then states he wants a “friend in whom [he] may confide” (25).

After Ringman tells his story to Roberts (which the reader learns the details of later), Roberts gives an unsolicited donation of an indeterminate amount of money to Ringman. This interchange constitutes the first swindle of Melville’s narrative—the first successful trick of the confidence-man (not counting the money obtained by the cripple). Ringman then makes reference to the president of the Black Rapids Coal Company, saying that the president is onboard and able to sell stock in the company and that now is a propitious time to purchase it. The merchant shows interest in acquiring some stock. This exchange sets up a recurring pattern in the novel, where one confidence-man speaks of another—either one to appear later in the tale or one who has already come and gone.

Roberts departs from the scene and in his place appears an anonymous collegian carrying a book. Ringman, upon discovering that the book is by or about Tacitus, engages in a long diatribe against the Latin author and encourages the young man to throw the book overboard. Ringman's main complaint against Tacitus is he has "not one iota of confidence in his kind" (34). The next confidence-man to emerge is "a man in a gray coat and white tie" (36), who was next on the list of references of the negro cripple. The man in gray proceeds to make unsuccessful requests for contributions from two gentlemen for the Widow and Orphan Asylum. A young clergyman, who appeared early in the narrative then comes by to inquire of the man in gray about the authenticity of the negro cripple. The man in gray comes to the cripple's defense while also fending off the verbal assaults of a one-legged man. The clergyman then gives a mite to the man in gray for the cripple, and also makes a donation to the Widow and Orphan Asylum.

In chapter VII, the man in gray comes upon an impeccably clean gentleman with gold sleeve-buttons wearing one white glove. The man in gray succeeds in obtaining a contribution of \$3 from him. He then mentions an invention of his called the Protean easy-chair, and his wildly ambitious plan to eradicate world poverty within 14 years through the establishment of the World's Charity society. His plan would raise a total of \$11.2 billion, a truly vast sum, especially by mid-nineteenth century standards. The man in gray continues his meanderings among the passengers and wins a small contribution from a woman in the ladies' saloon.

The next confidence-man to arrive on the scene is the aforementioned president of the Black Rapids Coal Company, who we later learn is John Truman. He and the collegian transact some business concerning the purchase of shares in the company.

Afterwards, Truman tries unsuccessfully to interest the collegian in a “new and thriving city” (65) in northern Minnesota called the New Jerusalem. Roberts shows up again and also purchases stock from Truman. The narrator then steps in to relate the sad story of Ringman, “the unfortunate man” (77), whose estranged wife Goneril^{iv} dies, but not before taking the couple’s daughter away from Ringman. We then learn that Ringman is still searching for his daughter.

The next confidence-man to show himself in Melville’s tale is the Herb-doctor—also on the negro cripple’s list. He confronts a very skeptical sick man who, after much resistance, finally yields and purchases six vials of the Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator. In chapter XVII, the Herb-doctor is peddling another remedy called the Samaritan Pain Dissuader, and has some luck selling it until he is literally struck by “the dusk giant,” (114) who we later learn is Pitch—the Missouri bachelor. The Herb-doctor then encounters a man on crutches (Thomas Fry), who feigns to be a veteran of the Mexican-American War. After initial skepticism, Fry buys some of the Samaritan Pain Dissuader. Then the doctor meets an old miser, who is also initially skeptical of his cures. But once again, the confidence-man triumphs and dupes another victim. This time, though, there’s a twist. Instead of handing the doctor real money, the old miser gives him worthless pistareens. The Herb-doctor spots the deception but lets it go. This is the only instance in the book where the confidence-man allows himself to be conned, but even here he scores another victory for the virtue of confidence itself.

The Herb-doctor next encounters his biggest challenge—Pitch, the Missourian farmer and employer met earlier. Pitch is a hardened misanthrope, and the doctor cannot persuade him to be otherwise. This is the first time in the book where the confidence-

man is unable to win over a major character to his way of thinking. The Herb-doctor exits the scene, only to be replaced by the Philosophical Intelligence Office (PIO) man, who specializes, interestingly enough, in finding workers for prospective employers. Pitch has sworn off all boys and men as inherent rascals, and seeks to replace the laborers on his farm with machines. After much disputation, the PIO man convinces Pitch to try a boy “for the sake purely of a scientific experiment” (171). So even the formidable Pitch succumbs to the glib arguments of the confidence-man. Structurally this marks the mid-point of the book, and it coincides with the geographical mid-point of the journey as the *Fidele* arrives at Cairo, Illinois.

The remainder of the book, while no less complex in terms of philosophical and theological topics, is simpler in that it revolves around two main characters: Frank Goodman (the international cosmopolitan) and Charlie Noble (his new boon companion). Goodman is usually considered to be the final confidence-man to appear in the novel. However, before meeting Noble, Goodman engages in a conversation with Pitch and asks him if he can hold Pitch’s watch, but then gives up on him as a hopeless cynic.

Then Goodman and Noble meet and become fast friends. Noble relates a long tale about Colonel John Moredock—the Indian-hater of Illinois. Afterwards the two new friends continue their conversation over a bottle of wine, but Noble drinks sparingly compared to Goodman (Goodman later suspects that Noble is trying to get him drunk). During their ensuing conversation they drink to the press and discuss *Hamlet’s* Polonius and the feeling of geniality. Then Goodman throws Noble a curve by asking him for a loan of \$50. Noble is initially shocked until Goodman says he was only joking. Goodman then tells the story of Charlemont—the gentleman-madman. Goodman is then

confronted by a mystic, Mark Winsome, and his disciple Egbert. Noble soon departs from the scene. What follows is that Egbert agrees to play the part of Noble in an extended mock conversation concerning the story of China Aster, which is about what happens when Aster accepts a loan from his friend Orchis.

As the narrative draws towards its conclusion, Goodman visits the barber just before midnight. The barber's sign, which reads, "No Trust," is naturally offensive to Goodman, who tries to convince the barber (William Cream) to remove it. The barber resists but finally agrees to do so when Goodman promises to cover any financial losses Cream may incur if he removes the sign. After receiving his shave, Goodman leaves the barber without paying, and Cream replaces his sign.

In the final chapter Goodman visits a pious old gentleman who is reading from Scripture in his cabin. The old man explains the difference between canonical and apocryphal texts. A boy shows up and sells the old man the traveler's patent lock and a money-belt, and leaves the Counterfeit Detector as a bonus gift. The boy departs, leaving only the old man and Goodman in the cabin lit by a solar lamp. The final scene features Goodman extinguishing the old man's lamp and leading him away into the darkness, with the old man carrying the items he bought from the boy, along with a life-preserver.^v

God's Grace

As *GG* opens, the nightmare scenario of a global thermonuclear holocaust has just occurred. All humanity, save the protagonist, has been wiped from the face of the planet, along with nearly all animals and plants. The sole surviving human is Calvin Cohn, a former rabbinic student turned paleologist, on the deck of the *Rebekah Q*, an oceanographic vessel adrift somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. God, speaking in double

quotation marks, has the first spoken words in the novel, and they are addressed to Cohn out of a “bulbous black cloud:” “ “Don’t presume on Me a visible face, Mr. Cohn. I am not that kind, but if you can, imagine Me. I regret to say it was through a miniscule error that you escaped destruction” ” (1). There ensues a contentious dialogue between God and Cohn, during which God declares his intention to “rectify the error” He made in overlooking Cohn, and states that He must slay him (6). Cohn complains about God’s broken promise by sending a second flood, quotes from Sanhedrin, and pleads for his life—all to no avail. The dialogue ends with God giving Cohn some unspecified grace period to compose himself before God makes good on his promise. God, or rather His voice, disappears behind a cloud and is not heard from again for several years. After some more fist-shaking and a shower of rocks, Cohn accepts God’s conditions and continues on his aimless way (7).

After being on the ship for only a few days or so and while he sleeps, Cohn passes an island and is never the wiser for it (10). After several more days spent apparently alone on the boat, Cohn discovers a companion on the vessel with him, a young chimpanzee named Gottlob, who Cohn soon renames Buz, much to Buz’s consternation (21). Buz wears a compress around his neck, which hides two wires sticking out. The wires are connected to an artificial larynx implanted into his neck by his “keeper” Dr. Walther Bunder. (It will be more than two years before Cohn furtively removes the compress and connects the wires, and he and Buz discover that Buz can speak [64]). After an indeterminate amount of time adrift on the ocean (from a few weeks to several months), and once again while Cohn is asleep, the vessel again approaches land, but this time runs aground, and breaks in half on what will later be named Cohn’s Island (26).

For a long while, Cohn and Buz are apparently alone together on the island. Cohn creates a home for himself and Buz in a cave. Cohn and Buz come down with radiation sickness (resulting from the fallout from the thermonuclear war), and Cohn is nursed back to health by a mysterious visitor (he later realizes it was George the gorilla). Cohn discovers that the island has divine properties and surveys the land, finding it to be in the shape of a flask, or bottle. It is at this time, after Cohn recognizes the shape of the island, that he decides to name it after himself (45).

After about two years on the island, a previous inhabitant of it emerges (60). Cohn names him George, and he is a large, black gorilla with silver hair on his back. Soon thereafter Cohn secretly removes the compress around Buz's neck and connects the wires protruding out, and Buz starts speaking immediately. From what he says, apparently he has never spoken before. Presumably Dr. Bunder had not had time to complete his experiment. Also, from what Buz does and says (e.g., Buz wears a crucifix, occasionally makes the sign of the cross, and speaks of "Jesus of Nozoroth"), Cohn learns that Dr. Bunder had Christianized Buz while caring for him (64-5).

Nearly another year goes by before further inhabitants of the island are discovered (94). Five new chimps arrive, and this time Buz usurps Cohn's role of naming them. The new chimps are Esau (the Alpha male), Mary Madelyn (the only female, who has not yet reached puberty), Melchior (an elderly chimp), and the youngsters Luke and Saul of Tarsus—who are twins. Buz quickly teaches the new chimps to speak.

About two more weeks pass, and in honor of the arrival of the new chimps and George, Cohn holds a Seder meal that becomes a farce in contrast to the high seriousness of a true Seder (Safer 112-13). At the Seder, Cohn shows Mary Madelyn seemingly

innocent affection (he pats her hand), and she reciprocates. Cohn then encounters an albino ape in an apparent dream, and next establishes a school for all who want to attend, and they all do (128-9). In his lessons, Cohn covers everything from the Big Bang to Darwin to man's nature to Freud to good and evil to God and Satan and atom bombs.

In a matter of just a few weeks, three more chimps (two males and an elderly female) arrive to join the island group (141). This time Cohn reasserts his Adamic role and names the two mature males Esterhazy and Bromberg, and the elderly female Hattie. The man-gorilla-chimp community is now fully established (eight baboons will be discovered later) and a time of relative peace ensues. Their brief time of peace is disrupted when Mary Madelyn enters estrus, but rather than yield to the pursuing male chimpanzees, she flees all in an attempt to preserve her virginity for the sake of a Shakespearian notion of romantic love she learned from Cohn and so fervently desires. A major plot twist occurs when Mary Madelyn then approaches Cohn with the idea of mating (152). At first he rebuffs her, but continues to show her affection. Through her persistent advances, he finally yields and proposes to her that the two mate. He does this supposedly not out of lust or romantic love, but out of a "daring plan" (165) to create a new species of super man-chimp. Cohn and Mary Madelyn mate and Mary becomes pregnant. The island enters into a semi-utopic period, coinciding with the gestation period of Mary Madelyn.

Meanwhile, Cohn's courtship of and mating with Mary Madelyn has angered Esau and Buz. Also, the group of baboons is discovered and Esau and some of the other chimps hunt and eventually kill three baby baboons in quick succession (188ff). Cohn's

and Mary Madelyn's female child (Rebekah Islanda) is born apparently healthy, and soon thereafter the island descends into killing and anarchy (217-18). The final scene is patterned in an inverted manner after the Akedah (the binding of Isaac by Abraham) in *Genesis*, but instead of Abraham only being tested by God, Abraham/Cohn is actually sacrificed by Isaac/Buz. The book ends ambiguously, with George chanting a Kaddish for Calvin Cohn.

3. Interpreting *God's Grace* as a Parody of *The Confidence-Man*

In building a case for the thorough influence of *CM* on *GG*, for each literary element analyzed I begin with *CM* and do so for two reasons: first, its publication precedes *GG* by 125 years and understanding *CM*'s historical milieu, setting, genre, and other elements is essential to discern how and why Malamud uses *CM* as his principal source; and second, it simply makes sense to begin with the antecedent text and then compare it with the later imitative text. The first factor for comparing the two works is the pair of contrasting historical and social milieus of the time periods in which *CM* and *GG* were published. It may be merely a series of coincidences, but I find many similarities between the America of 1855-56 (when *CM* was written) and the America of 1979-81 (when *GG* was written). These similarities may have influenced Malamud as he began researching and looking for ideas and models for the kind of novel he wanted to write.

America, in the years 1855-56, was, simply put, a divided nation. Besides the obvious division that existed between slave and free states, massive social and economic changes swept the nation in the nineteenth century, leaving America "a place of both vertiginous activity and radical uncertainty of direction" (Tanner xiv). Much of this could be attributed to large-scale migration from rural farms to the major cities, and the loss of traditional moral and economic support systems (e.g., the family, the church, and the tightly-knit rural community). Other elements of social upheaval included widespread political corruption and "laissez-faire industrial expansion" (Haltunnen xiv). The most feared outcome resulting from all this turmoil was that America was becoming, or had already become, what the urban sociologist Lyn Lofland calls a "world of

strangers” (qtd. in Haltunnen 33). The anonymity that went hand-in-hand with this world of strangers enabled antebellum America’s most dreaded vice—hypocrisy. On one of its many levels, this is precisely what *CM* is about—exposing what Melville sees as the hypocrisy of pretentious, so-called virtuous Christians.

The other side of the divided portrait of antebellum America was widespread optimism, fueled in part by the country’s looking back and seeing an idealized, nostalgic past. As Tony Tanner puts it, for America, “the euphoria of Independence had not yet been sobered by the Civil War” (xiii). As a result, it was caught in the throes of an ebullient optimism, largely founded upon fervent Christian millennialism. Though certainly not universal, there was widespread belief among Americans that Christ’s second coming was imminent and that the thousand years of peace to follow, as envisioned in the *Book of Revelation*, was right behind. This millennial fervor may have seemed discordant with the destructive apocalypse that would precede the millennium; however, devout Christians focused on what would follow the apocalyptic war and their heartfelt belief that their names were written in “the book of the living” (*Rev.* 20:12).

Millennialism was not limited to a small cult; it was widespread. There existed in America a type of madness associated with millennialism. In his journal written during his travel to the Holy Land shortly after the publication of *CM*, Melville describes “this preposterous Jew mania” (qtd. in Obenzinger xi), which possessed America like a madness. Melville was referring to the biblically-based belief that Jews would be restored to their homeland and converted to Christianity prior to the second coming. A “spirit of millennial hope and evangelical perfectionism” (Cook 5) ran freely among the American people, to the extent that 1843 was commonly predicted to be the year of

Christ's return. When the second coming did not happen as predicted, there was much disappointment. The millennialists were of two types: premillennialists and postmillennialists. Premillennialists believed in a literal interpretation of Scripture and that Christ's second coming would be a sudden apocalyptic event not contingent upon human effort, to be followed by His thousand-year reign on earth. Postmillennialists, meanwhile, believed in the gradual conversion of non-Christians and that humans could assist in the process of bringing about Christ's new kingdom on earth.

The millennial spirit that gripped America in Melville's time was extremely troubling to him. He thought that the country had literally gone mad with an optimism and religious fervor that was disconnected to the decadent reality he saw around him. In Lakshmi Mani's words:

Disturbed by a dark skepticism, Melville found it hard to subscribe to the optimistic world-view of his times: the belief of the nation at large that the millennium had arrived in America. What Melville feared most was that the apparent progress of his country was inducing a state of euphoria among the people which masked an underlying spiritual malaise (209-210).

Though Malamud first conceived of the work that eventually became *GG* in 1975 (Abramson 144), he didn't complete an outline of it until January 1979 (Nisly 38). The novel was eventually published in January 1982; this means that Malamud was writing *GG* for approximately three years—from 1979 through 1981. During this time, the United States and the Soviet Union were still in the thick of the Cold War, each with their multitude of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles targeted at each other's cities, their nuclear submarines on perpetual patrol, and their jets armed with strategic nuclear weapons constantly on alert in the air. The longstanding policy of mutual assured destruction (MAD) that existed between the two superpowers was still firmly in place.

Also, during the three-year time period of Malamud's writing of *GG*, several events occurred that added to the sense of nuclear peril that existed in the world.

First, in March 1979, the terrifying meltdown of the core nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania occurred (Walker 78-80). The second event was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. During his State of the Union Address on January 23, 1980, President Jimmy Carter made clear the U.S. stance toward the Soviets in the wake of this event:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force (3).

Carter in turn implemented the U.S. boycott of the Summer Olympics in Moscow in 1980, and placed an embargo on U.S. grain shipments to the Soviet Union. Third, though not an "event" per se, in 1980 future president Ronald Reagan campaigned on a promise to massively increase defense spending if elected, furthering the climate of friction between the superpowers. Paradoxically, Reagan also campaigned as a man of sunny optimism who saw a bright future for America. He became known as the great communicator and many Americans were influenced by his seemingly indefatigable belief in the promise of a better future. After being elected in a landslide, Reagan made good on his promise once he took office in January 1981. He immediately put into place a significant increase in the defense budget, and at his first press conference he audaciously questioned the legitimacy of the Soviet government.

During Reagan's first year in office, the actions of the Soviets did not improve matters. In December 1981, under intense pressure from the Soviets, the communist government in Poland suppressed the burgeoning Solidarity labor movement and

imposed martial law. To say that tensions were quite high between the Americans and the Soviets during the time of the writing of *GG* would not be an overstatement. All these events deeply affected Malamud, and almost certainly influenced his writing of *GG*. These years were both bleak and boisterous, dark and light, fearful and promising.

These two portraits of America—one from the mid-nineteenth century and another from the late-twentieth century—share a dualistic belief system: the paradoxical coexistence of doomsday threat (one religious-apocalyptic and the other thermonuclear-apocalyptic) and genuine optimism (one religious-millennial and the other political-societal). Both Melville and Malamud addressed this self-contradictory outlook in their novels, at times in similar and other times dissimilar ways. Thus, Melville's confidence-man delights in exposing the hypocrisy of folk who, while professing Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love, harbor secret feelings of distrust, cynicism, and even enmity. Malamud's protagonist, in contrast, is portrayed as a gifted man of brilliance—a jack-of-all-trades—but one who lacks even a glimmer of self-awareness, and no insight into how his actions are affecting the island community.

The second item that I would like to discuss is setting—both physical and temporal. At first sight the physical settings of the two novels may appear totally dissimilar, and to be sure there are distinct differences between them. Melville's entire narrative takes place onboard the steamship *Fidele* as it makes its way down the Mississippi River towards (though never arriving at) New Orleans. In contrast with *GG*, there is almost no physical description of the surrounding environment. Almost nothing is said of what lies on the shores of the Mississippi. Nearly all of the story's attention focuses on a series of interactions—conversations, to be more precise—between the

protagonist (the confidence-man) and a number of passengers. And while the setting may seem placid, in fact great danger lurks close by. Melville's setting is dangerous for several reasons: first, steamboats were dens of cheats, thieves, gamblers, robbers, and pickpockets, and home to many vices, and second, steamboat travel was not reliable, for the boats sometimes blew up.

In contrast, the physical setting for *GG*, in one sense, is an annihilated world—in the immediate aftermath of an all-out nuclear war between the “Djanks” and the “Druzhkies” [read Yanks and Russkies] (3). In another sense the setting, for a short while, is an oceanographic vessel—the *Rebekah Q*—followed by several years on an equatorial, island off the eastern coast of Africa that is imbued with God's active presence. The vast majority of the narrative takes place on the island, and it is there that all of the important plot events take place. In contrast with Melville, Malamud takes great pains to describe the physical surroundings of the island, including its geography, plant life, and previous inhabitants.

In short, *CM* takes place entirely on a boat and *GG* takes place mostly on an island. Quite different settings? Yes, but only if taken literally. On a symbolic level, however, the settings are nearly indistinguishable. Both boat and island are common literary symbols for a nation, humanity, or even the entire world. For examples of the use of a ship as symbol for the world, we need only look to Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and appropriately enough, Melville's *Moby Dick*. For examples of the symbolic use of an island as the world, we need only look to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, or William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Therefore, though the settings are not physically identical, symbolically they are. In fact,

at one point the narrator of *CM* even states that from a distance the boat might be taken for “some whitewashed fort on a floating isle” (7). In any event, Melville and Malamud both have the world or humanity as their ultimate subject, and the deep moral, religious, and philosophical issues that confront people of all ages and locales. Their use of boat and island as common tropes for humanity only confirms their similar subject matter.

But there is more to the two settings than first meets the eye. Melville’s setting is the Mississippi, at the center of the country, splitting it between east and west, the known and the unknown. The Mississippi River represents the frontier, the wilderness, and the liminal region between what is familiar and what is unfamiliar. Moreover, with St. Louis as the starting point of the journey/quest, the country is further divided between north and south, free and slave, light and dark. John Dugdale notes that St. Louis is the “symbolic centre of a young nation” (339) still reaching to expand its western frontier and still split over the divisive issue of slavery. Meanwhile, *GG*’s setting, for the most part, is on an island off the eastern coast of “what had once been the Indian Ocean, perhaps off the southern coast of old Africa” (44). Significantly, being situated on the equator, Malamud’s setting splits the world in the same way that Melville’s splits the country. And given the fact that the world has been all but destroyed by the “splitting of the atom” underscores the importance of Malamud’s choice of an island in an equatorial region as his setting.

A final word on physical setting. In *CM*, Chapter XXIV, the international cosmopolitan (Frank Goodman), widely recognized by scholars as the last and most pivotal incarnation of the protagonist, engages in a dialogue with Pitch, the Missouri

bachelor already discussed. The conversation is filled with images that have several parallels in Malamud's novel. Upon spotting Pitch, Goodman says

‘Hark ye,’ jeeringly eyeing the cap and belt, ‘did you ever see Signor Marzetti in the African pantomime?’

‘No;--good performer?’

‘Excellent; plays the intelligent ape till he seems it. With such naturalness can a being endowed with an immortal spirit enter into that of a monkey’ ...[Pitch replies] ‘Who in the name of the great chimpanzee, in whose likeness, you, Marzetti, and the other chatterers are made, who in thunder are you?...By dispatching yourself, Mr. Popinjay-of-the-world, into the heart of the Lunar Mountains. You are another of them. Out of my sight’ (176-77)!

Merely coincidence? As should be clear by now, I think not. Rather, I believe this passage may have been one of the primary sources of inspiration for Malamud as he planned the writing of *GG*. The African pantomime occurs in Malamud's story (in reverse) when the albino ape pantomimes throwing a spear when he appears in his cave. I say in reverse because in Melville's tale, a man impersonates an ape, whereas in Malamud's tale chimpanzees (and later a gorilla) impersonate men (and women). Moreover, as in Melville's tale, Malamud's protagonist is referred to as a chimpanzee (a “white chimpanzee” [121] to be more specific) on more than one occasion in the story. Other elements of this passage from Melville have counterparts in Malamud. First, Goodman takes Pitch for a beast, while Cohn inverts this perception and sees the chimpanzees on “his island” as nearly human. Second, Pitch returns Goodman's favor (or insult) by implying that Goodman is a chimpanzee made in the image of the “great chimpanzee,” a rather obvious reference to God Himself. Conversely, in *GG* the chimpanzees call Cohn one of their own. Finally, the Lunar Mountains to which Pitch refers are “the legendary Mountains of the Moon in East Africa” (Dugdale 350). Given

my discussion on the setting of Malamud's novel, all these references add up to strong evidence in support of my interpretation.

A final comment on this passage merits mention. Malamud's novel, and to a lesser extent, Melville's, demands a discussion of the role that the theory of evolution plays in each work. I delve into this discussion in detail in section four but a preliminary perusal of some of the elements is called for here. Both Melville and Malamud were familiar with Darwin's famous theory, though Malamud—unlike Melville—had the benefit of over a century's worth of scholarly development of the naturalist's system of thought. But each author was forced to deal with the groundbreaking and controversial theory. The implications of Darwinism for science and religion are immense; the questions that it poses include: Did man descend from the apes (as Darwin suggested) or did God create him? What is the role that God plays in Darwinism? Is man (or humanity) destined to remain at the top of creation's pyramid? What is man's ultimate fate (eternity or extinction)? Does Darwin's theory necessitate progression and improvement, culminating in man's appearance? How does evolution fit, or fail to fit, in Jewish and Christian theology? These are some of the questions I address in section four; such a discussion seems better suited to that part of my thesis.

Regarding temporal setting, *CM* occurs in its entirety on April Fool's Day^{vi} in an unspecified year. However, it appears that Melville may have had the year 1855 in mind for his setting. I say this for three reasons: first, the author wrote *CM* in the years 1855-56, and second, Passover began on April 1 in 1855.^{vii} Given the important theological and philosophical subject matter of his work, it seems likely (and fortuitously for him) that Melville would choose 1855. A third reason is that William Thompson—the

“Original Confidence Man” (as dubbed by the newspapers)—reappeared (a parodic “second coming”) in late April 1855 (Cook 2).

GG’s temporal setting, in contrast, spans about three years in the late twentieth century. I am able to make this claim because of an historical character that appears *in absentia*, namely, Konrad Lorenz, who was Dr. Bunder’s teacher. The character of Lorenz links Malamud’s narrative to history because Lorenz was alive when Malamud wrote *GG*. Malamud may have incorporated Lorenz in his story to give a sense of reality and urgency to his otherwise allegorical tale.

By relating temporal setting to structure, a striking similarity reveals itself. As will be shown, the Seder meal lies at the structural center of Malamud’s tale and serves as its symbolic centerpiece. The Seder is the traditional Passover meal and occurs on the first night of the new moon and marks the most sacred of Jewish holidays. In the years 1979-81, during which *GG* was written, Passover fell on April 11, March 31, and April 18, respectively.^{viii} Assuming, then, that Malamud had in mind a temporal setting similar to the one in which he wrote his novel, the date on which the Seder is held is roughly equal to the temporal setting for Melville’s work.

Continuing on the topic of temporal setting, the total time elapsed during Melville’s narrative is approximately 1000 minutes, from sunrise on April Fool’s Day to around midnight (or slightly thereafter) the same evening. This cannot be considered a coincidence in a literary work so meticulously planned and executed. Melville has given his readers, in Mani’s words, “a false millennium” (207) of minutes in contrast to the biblical prediction of the 1000-year reign of Christ upon his second coming to earth, coinciding with the binding of Satan.

In comparison, though time is not meticulously measured in *GG*, there are sufficient clues within the text to estimate the duration of time periods and approximate the date of key events. For example, while onboard the *Rebekah Q*, the narrator recounts that in “a week the water supply was all but depleted” (23). Once on the island, similar clues are given regarding the passage of time. After a relatively short period of time, the narrator says, “[t]he rain went on, with a few dry periods, from possibly October to December, and March through May” (45). Using these types of clues scattered throughout the text, it is possible to estimate the elapsed time of the narrative. Based on my reading, I estimate that the time spent on the ocean was somewhere between two weeks and a few months. More importantly, the time spent on Cohn’s island amounts to about three-and-a-half years, of which about 1000 days occurs before the Seder and 300 after.^{ix} Thus, Malamud has written his narrative in such a way that time and structure correspond. In other words, roughly speaking, a post-apocalyptic millennium of days transpires prior to the crucial event of the Seder, after which the island community soon devolves into murder and mayhem—in effect, another “Day” of Devastation, like the thermonuclear one that has just occurred as the novel begins.

With the arrival of Mary Madelyn, Esau, Luke, Saul of Tarsus, and Melchior, the island company now numbers eight. Upon their arrival, Cohn lays out a few ground rules “for everyone’s mutual benefit.” Cohn expresses the hope that the island “will become an effective social community” (100). This may be seen, in effect, as the equivalent of the culmination of the millennium (or at least what appears to be the millennium). The narrator seems to confirm it as such when he (or she) states just before the Seder: “It seemed to [Cohn] that after a frightening period of incoherence, there was now a breath

of settled purpose in the universe” (107). That Buz had miraculously taught the new chimps to speak only added to Cohn’s enthusiasm.

So, to sum up this discussion, Melville presents a parodic millennium that ends with the symbolic extinction of Christianity. In doing so Melville appears to be ridiculing the blurred vision of Christians who see signs of Christ’s return while ignoring signs of America’s decadence. Malamud, in contrast, shows us another parodic millennium and then describes a post-millennial year or so that ends with the seeming extinction of humankind (see section four for a more detailed analysis of this issue). While mimicking Melville, Malamud seems to be trying to reawaken America and the world to the thermonuclear danger that has faded out of our immediate awareness. In any event, the crucial similarity between the two texts is that each contains a millennium—for Melville it is one of minutes and for Malamud it is one of days.

The next element of my comparison is the generic classification of the two texts. When *CM* was published it was largely unappreciated and misunderstood. With time, though, critics began to see the intricate design and literary greatness of the work. As the decades rolled by, a debate developed among scholars regarding how to interpret *CM*, which inevitably led to a discussion of its proper generic classification. Over time, *CM* was tagged with a wide variety of generic labels, including comic-apocalypse, fable, farce, quest narrative, realistic literature, satire, and religious allegory, or some combination of these terms. To this day there is a decided split among Melville scholars regarding *CM*’s genre. On one side of the debate are those who view *CM* as no more than a sharp, historically based, and realistic satire directed against Christianity, American society, and a number of specific individuals and philosophical schools of

Melville's time. One representative of this interpretation is Tom Quirk. Quirk views *CM* as "a book of ambiguities; and its ambiguous title character possessed a dramatic flexibility that permitted his creator to explore through him a wide-ranging suggestiveness too complex for simple allegory" (61). Joining Quirk in this "satirical" interpretation are Gary Lindberg and a host of critics from Melville's own time.

On the other side are critics who, while not denying the satirical reading of their peers, also see a deeper level in *CM*—that of religious allegory. On this deeper level, according to various critics, the protagonist represents either Christ, Satan, the Antichrist, Krishna, Vishnu, or some combination of these supernatural beings. On this allegorical level, the satire goes much deeper as well, penetrating into ultimate issues of belief in God, epistemology, the nature of man, and even our concept of reality. The pioneering critic who represents this allegorical interpretation is Elizabeth Foster. Foster, writing in 1954—nearly a century after *CM*'s publication—states that as a work of art, Melville's novel "has always been undervalued because its surface story seems aimless and without tension or climax, and because the central meaning and whole emotional freight of the novel, which give it form, are hidden in the vessel's dark hold" (xvii). For Foster and others who followed her (e.g., Richard Boyd Hauck, Lakshmi Mani, and Lawrence Thompson), Melville's last novel was grim comedy and an indictment of humanity itself, cast in supernatural light and darkness.

There are several scenes in the narrative that support an allegorical interpretation. One such scene is when Ringman is in dialogue with the sophomore about—what else—confidence. After bemoaning the sad state of a world bereft of confidence, the protagonist asks if the sophomore might not place confidence in him. The sophomore

ultimately declines the offer, but the narrator hints at a possible supernatural force at work. As narrated, from the outset, in vain had the sophomore “more than once sought to break the *spell* by venturing a deprecatory or leave-taking word. In vain. Somehow, the stranger fascinated him. Little wonder, then, that, when the appeal came, he could hardly speak, but, as before intimated, being apparently of a retiring nature, abruptly retired from the spot” (35). But without a doubt the most overwhelming evidence in support of an allegorical reading comes near the end of *CM*, when Goodman arrives at the barber’s. After the barber says that Goodman is “only a man,”^x Goodman replies:

‘*Only a man?* As if to be a man were nothing. But don’t be too sure what I am. You call me *man*, just as the townsfolk 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’ (299-300).

Then there are critics like Tanner who say that a generic label cannot be definitively affixed to *CM* because of its many ambiguities, misdirections, double-entendres, and anonymous characters. As Tanner puts it, the motives of the confidence man “are unknown and undiscoverable; we have no access to his interiority, if he has any. He has been called a satirist and a moralist, as he has been identified as Christ and Satan. But fixed identifications and classifications are just what this novel renders impossible” (xxiii). If Melville had a devilish purpose in writing *CM*—that is, to confuse and befuddle critics and readers—he succeeded. I see strong arguments on all sides, but in this thesis I analyze *CM* as a blend of three genres (in descending order of importance): satire, religious allegory, and apocalyptic tale. I will explain why.

Labeling *CM* as a satire is hardly controversial. I haven’t found a single critic who disputes this categorization. One doesn’t have to dig very deep in an analysis of the

novel to discover its highly satirical nature. The multitudinous targets of Melville's satire appear on nearly every page and include, among others: God/Christ, Christianity, American millennialism (Cook 74), cultic optimism (Mani 249), evangelism, Shaftesburyean benevolism, Benthamite utilitarianism, Enlightenment and Romantic cults of nature and progress, Emersonian individualism (Foster lxxxix), sentimentalism, sensationalism (Cook 25), the vices of deceit, gambling and cheating, the temperance movement (*CM* 161), an ideology of Providence and progress, the mudsill theory (*CM* 37),^{xi} hypocrisy, philosophical and reformist enterprises, education, the criminal and legal justice system, the political class-based system, the patent-medicine industry, Enlightenment perfectionism, laissez-faire capitalism, heartless intellectuals, the banking and monetary system, cosmopolitanism (Cook 93-94), and perhaps most importantly, as Carolyn Karcher notes, the institution of slavery (qtd. in Cook 25). There is overwhelming evidence to support a satirical reading of *CM*, perhaps none so clear as when Goodman says to pitch about midway through the narrative: " 'Irony is so unjust: never could abide irony; something Satanic about irony. God defend me from Irony, and Satire, his bosom friend' " (183). In this excerpt Melville seems to be poking fun at his own satirical writing style.

Let's turn to some other examples in Melville's text where the author takes satirical aim at his targets. In Chapter IX, John Truman converses with the collegian introduced earlier in the narrative: " 'Why, the most monstrous of all hypocrites are these bears:^{xii} hypocrites by inversion; hypocrites in the simulation of things dark instead of bright; souls that thrive, less upon depression, than the fiction of depression; professors of the wicked art of manufacturing depressions' " (63). In this passage the objects of the

author's scorn are stock market traders and perhaps, by extension, America's capitalist system at large.

These examples begin to show a pattern of overall contempt for humanity, and its tendency either to be naively duped by confidence-men or become so callous as to reject the Christian ideals of compassion for one's fellow men. As Quirk states, *CM* aims "to satirize a society that allows confidence men to flourish at its expense, and second, to satirize those individuals within it who were too skeptical or cold-blooded to be victimized" (32).

To conclude my analysis of *CM* as a satirical work, Jonathan Cook observes that *CM* serves as a bridge between previous works of satire such as Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* and Swift's *The Tale of a Tub* and *Arguments Against Abolishing Christianity* and absurdist literature of the twentieth century (19). Malamud's *GG* is part of the twentieth century absurdist literature to which Cook refers. Cook documents the linkage between satirical works preceding and following Melville's *CM*. However, Malamud did more than simply write in the same broad generic category as Melville; he consciously parodied his predecessor's work.

In contrast to calling *CM* a satirical work, to label it an allegory engenders much debate. I contend that Malamud interpreted it as such, and I believe such an interpretation is plausible, even if no consensus has been reached. At the center of the debate, of course, is the protagonist—the confidence-man. Is the confidence-man simply a man wearing different masks? Is he many men working in collusion with each other, each of whom is a different type of confidence-man? Is he a supernatural being (e.g., Christ, Satan, the Antichrist) who morphs from one shape into another? Or is he so

mysterious as to defy understanding and labeling? There is no irrefutable answer to the enigma of Melville's main character. For my purposes then, it is, in one respect, irrelevant whether *CM* is in fact an allegory. What matters is that *CM can* be and has been interpreted as such and, more importantly, that Malamud viewed it as one. This is one of the most important assumptions upon which my thesis rests. The allegorical genre enables Melville to launch his attack against God and Christianity by fusing good and evil in the protagonist (Christ/Satan). Similarly, the allegorical genre allows Malamud to meld good and evil (God and Satan) in the character of Cohn.

The apocalyptic genre is a vehicle for Melville to parody the millennialism running freely in mid-nineteenth century America and offer a dark contrasting portrait. Calling it a comic-apocalypse, Mani describes *CM* as Melville's "most devastating of all fictional apocalypses" (249). The steamboat on which the confidence-man and all its other passengers ride is an appropriate setting for an apocalyptic novel. Goodman himself alludes to the perils of this mode of transportation in the mid-nineteenth century, saying, "in this land, and especially in these parts of it, some stories are told about steamboats and railroads fitted to make one a little apprehensive" (334). Goodman's apprehension is no idle concern, as Cook notes, "for Western steamboat travel was plagued by serious accidents, with a snag, collision, fire, or (most feared) exploding boiler creating swift and sometimes apocalyptic destruction" (50). For many millenarian Americans, this danger seemed to be of little or no concern. Given their fervent belief in the imminent return of Christ, it seemed a small risk to travel at great speed down a river with the ever-present prospect of, as Ernest Sandeen reports, "being blown to smithereens" (qtd. in Cook 50). Adding to this doomsday mentality was the widespread

disarray in America's political, economic, and social spheres, where corruption in politics, instability in the economy, and divisions in society were part of the contemporary landscape.

As Cook notes, the final chapter of *CM* is replete with references—both direct and symbolic—to the *Apocalypse* (74). The solar lamp, which figures prominently in the chapter, can be seen as symbolic of the light of Christian revelation;^{xiii} with the extinction of the lamp at the end of *CM*, the implication is that humanity continues to survive in a post-apocalyptic/post-Christian world. The “horned altar” (320) alludes to that of Moses in *Exodus* 27:1-2 but also to Christ as the sacrificial lamb, who will return to usher in the millennium. The reference to the “bridegroom” (321) also alludes to Christ, who, as told in *Matthew*, will come at an unexpected hour.^{xiv} And the young homeless boy—who can be taken as a figuration of Christ—in his attempt to sell the old man “the traveller’s patent lock” (328), mentions “a soft-handed gentleman” who comes at “about two o’clock in the morning” (327). This is yet another allusion to apocalyptic times, for in *I Thessalonians* 5:2, it reads: “For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.” Cook discusses many more images and allusions to Christ’s second coming. The fact that this final chapter is filled with references to the final days is further evidence of the apocalyptic content and meaning of *CM*.

The final extinction of the solar lamp is highly significant in light of my analysis. At the end of the novel the light has been extinguished, but the world goes on. Hence, Melville posits a post-apocalyptic world that has been stripped of Christianity and doesn’t appear to be worse off without it. In Cook’s words, the conclusion of *CM* “hints at the fictive universe depicted by twentieth-century writers of the absurd” (80), placing it with

works like Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Galapagos*, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, and, as we will soon see, Malamud's *God's Grace*.

Now I turn to an analysis of the genre(s) of *GG*. In terms of genre, unlike *CM*, *GG* is not difficult to classify. Though Malamud himself seemed conflicted regarding how to label it, at one time calling it a fable (Lasher 89) and another time—as stated above—“a religious allegory” (qtd. in Nisly 39), scholars have reached a fair amount of consensus. The consensus among Malamud scholars is that the dominant genre of *GG* is the comic-apocalyptic/absurdist one. As Elaine Safer puts it, this genre, also called black humor and often set in apocalyptic times, pits the search for meaning against the distress at not finding it, with the result being a tone where “distress and joke, horror and farce collide” (105). Like other black humorists, Safer argues, Malamud attempts to disorient his readers by parodying or reversing traditional narratives. This disorientation is used like an anesthetic so the author can needle in the horrific facts about the world in which readers find themselves, both in the novel and the real world.

Despite this consensus on *GG*'s genre, some Malamud scholars have explored elements of other genres in the novel. For example, Gloria Cronin states, “by combining satire, realism, and allegory Malamud manages to convey seemingly chaotic polarities of human experience with the Divine” (119-20). Satirical devices found in Malamud's book, as presented by Cook, include a collection of stories or anecdotes (Bible stories and others), the list (Cohn's Admonitions), the large dinner party (the Seder), the legal brief (Cohn sometimes refers to the Covenant in legal terms), and the encyclopedia (Cohn's pocket encyclopedia and his encyclopedic mind) (18). According to extant allegorical criticism on *GG*, Cohn is viewed as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jeremiah, and other

biblical figures. In this allegorical vein, Buz is usually viewed as a Christ figure, Mary Madelyn as Eve, and Rebekah Islanda as a female Messiah. These are valid associations based on one level of interpretation. However, as I show later, there is another deeper layer of allegorical meaning that exists in *GG* due to its mimicry of *CM*, and this layer is what's missing from scholarly interpretation of *GG*.

The generic label that has been minimized by Malamud scholars, Cronin's comments notwithstanding, is satire. There is probably good reason for this, because unlike *CM*, no scholar has identified any specific historical individuals or schools of thought as objects of Malamud's satire. His satire is directed very broadly; his targets are the global superpowers (the U.S. and U.S.S.R.), mankind, the perplexities of human existence, relations between religions, and, perhaps most clearly, God. My interpretative framework, therefore, with respect to genre, will be, in descending order of importance: comic-apocalyptic (including a parody of *CM*), religious allegory, and satire. These three genres intersect—albeit in a different order of importance—with Melville's *CM*. This cannot be considered a coincidence; rather, it is a direct result of Malamud's conscious choice to parody Melville's novel. (Though Malamud also called *GG* a fable, because *CM* is not one, I will not focus on this particular genre. I will, however, discuss some of the elements of fable in my analysis [e.g., supernatural beings, the moral, and of course, talking animals]).

Malamud once stated that he meant to convey a “prophetic warning” by writing his book because he feared his nightmare scenario might come true. In a voice like that of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and the other prophets, Malamud “reveals” an imagined future in the hope of avoiding its fulfillment.^{xv} His oblique satire is directed against world leaders like

Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan, who, when discussing nuclear arms reductions with the Soviets, frequently said: “Trust, but verify” (5). This self-contradictory statement, made by a former actor, only adds fuel to Malamud’s satirical attack.

The next item for consideration is plot. Most critics agree that *CM*’s plot is broken into a bipartite configuration. In the first part, the first six (or seven, depending on which critic is being considered) manifestations of the confidence-man appear. In this opening half of the novel, with the exception of the lamblike mute, the protagonist succeeds in duping his marks out of pennies, raising money for supposedly philanthropic purposes, persuading customers to buy shares in bogus companies, selling phony medicine, or contracting for a boy’s labor.

To provide more detail, after Ringman has succeeded in obtaining a donation from Roberts, in Chapters VI and VII, the third incarnation of the confidence-man (the man in a gray coat), engages in a series of conversations with various passengers while coming to the defense of Black Guinea and soliciting contributions for the Widow and Orphan Asylum and the preposterous World’s Charity. He is first rebuffed by “a well-to-do gentleman in a ruby-coloured velvet vest” (36) and a “hard-hearted old gentleman” (37) before finding a more sympathetic ear in the young clergyman. The clergyman, however, is concerned about the Black Guinea, because he has been told the negro cripple is an impostor—a white masquerading as a black. Next appears the “wooden-legged man,” who tells a brief story of a “certain Frenchman of New Orleans” (39) who marries a beautiful girl from Tennessee. He hears rumors that his wife is being unfaithful to him but he pays no heed to the rumors until he sees with his own eyes that he has been cuckolded. We learn that this same wooden-legged man is the one who suspects Black

Guinea is an impostor. The man in gray engages in a debate with the wooden-legged man, in which the confidence-man states, “ ‘the devil is never so black as he is painted’ ” (41). The man in gray comes to Guinea’s defense, and seeks to bring him forward to provide proof that he is no impostor, only to be reminded by the clergyman that the man in gray escorted Guinea off at the last stop.

Undeterred, the man in gray attempts to convince his opponent of the negro’s authenticity through persuasion: “For I put it to you, is it reasonable to suppose that a man with brains, sufficient to act such a part as you say, would take all that trouble, and run all that hazard, for the mere sake of those few paltry coppers?” To which the wooden-legged man replies: “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?” The man in gray tells the clergyman as the wooden-legged man departs, “ ‘A bad man, a dangerous man; a man to be put down in any Christian community.—And this was he who was the means of begetting your distrust? Ah, we should shut our ears to distrust, and keep them open only for its opposite’ ” (42).

This sequence of events reveals a two-fold pattern found throughout the first half of Melville’s story: first, the confidence-man shows his opponent to be a hypocrite (i.e., a Christian who lives by suspicion instead of faith), and second, the protagonist’s opponent serves as a guidepost for what I believe is the confidence-man’s true motive—not swindling, but the revelation of hypocrisy, false piety, and other vices among the passengers onboard the *Fidele*. Embarrassed by this display of distrust, the clergyman is induced to give something to the man in gray for the negro cripple, thus becoming a dupe of the confidence-man. This completes the fundamental cycle of paradox in Melville’s

novel. The clergyman is little (if at all) better than the wooden-legged man, because he shows himself as naïve to the wicked ways of the world, and serves as an indictment of Christianity—one of Melville’s primary targets. Thus the author presents the Christian with a no-win paradox: either live by distrust and show yourself as a hypocrite, or live by Christian virtues and show yourself to be a fool—ill-equipped to live in a fallen world. Hauck states the paradox of faith succinctly, “withholding confidence may prove the mark to be a misanthrope or unbeliever; having confidence may prove him to be a fool or hypocrite” (246).^{xvi}

In the second half of the novel, clearly dominated by Goodman, the plot shifts to the intellectual realm. In this part Goodman engages in conversation first with Pitch (a transitional figure according to Cook), then with Charlie Noble, a mystic (Winsome), the mystic’s disciple (Egbert), the barber, and finally, the old man. As will soon be seen in my discussion of structure, Melville divides his narrative into two roughly equal halves. The structural midpoint of *CM* occurs between Chapters XXII and XXIII. Chapter XXII ends with the words “at Cairo” (171), and the following chapter begins with the same two words: “At Cairo” (172). The bipartite structure also signals a shift in plot. As Mani observes, Melville was “fascinated” by the religious/philosophical notion of the Fall of Man (Mani 210). With Cairo as the midpoint of the *Fidele’s* journey, Melville symbolically portrays the Fall through a descent into slave territory, and features images of death, sin, corruption, and the loss of innocence. In addition, the author parodies the need for redemption by Christ. Based on this interpretation, in the second half of the book, Melville ridicules the naïve optimism of Christianity and other optimistic

philosophies. Leaving Cairo for the slave states can also be seen as a symbolic expulsion from Eden.

In contrast, Foster theorizes that there is a significant symbolic shift that occurs between Chapters XXVI and XXVII (just after the geographical shift at Cairo) with the story of Colonel John Moredock—an historical figure and Indian-hater par excellence. Foster states that, in contrast with the portrait of the Indian by Judge James Hall (also an historical figure), Melville offers an opposite portrait (despite using Judge Hall's writings as a source). Where Hall paints the Indian as more victim than savage, Melville "makes him the original and irreclaimable villain." Melville portrays the Indian as deceptive and malicious, hiding "beneath a mask of virtue and benignity in order to betray men and more easily wreak his hatred upon them" (lxvii). In the Indian, readers see (as Melville undoubtedly intends to show) another incarnation of the confidence-man.^{xvii} But why does Melville portray Indians in an unjust and historically inaccurate light?

As Foster sees it, the lesson of the first part of *CM* is that men are faced with a choice between two world-views: the Christian one of trust and love in their fellow men, or its opposite based on distrust. Christianity is subtly ridiculed as being ill-equipped for an evil world and hence is deemed "vicious" (lxix). But Melville is not content with this indictment of Christianity, because he is a humanitarian and knows that a world based on 'no trust' is not one he wishes to promote. With the entrance of the cosmopolitan the plot changes dramatically. While professing faith in human nature, Goodman detects Noble's trickery and therefore reveals his own hypocrisy. Furthermore, as Foster notes, "by giving [Goodman and Noble] Indian containers for their wine bottle and cigars, Melville meant to remind the reader that they are the Indians of the argument" (lxxii). Thus the

author's reason for the unjust portrait of Indians painted earlier is revealed. By showing even his protagonist as a hypocrite, he may be seen as indicting the entirety of American society (and he probably includes himself as well among society's hypocrites).

With respect to plot conflict, on the surface the conflict in *CM* is between the protagonist in his various guises and his intended and actual victims. The nature of the conflict is the winning of trust or confidence and token measures of that confidence. In the second half of the book, the conflict shifts because the protagonist meets his two most formidable adversaries—Pitch and Charlie Noble, who is *a* confidence-man himself (but not *the* confidence-man, i.e., the protagonist). Pitch is a misanthrope and embodies the fault of too much distrust. Noble, as a deceiver himself, tries to get Goodman drunk, presumably for the purpose of robbing him. In the midst of all this emerges the story of John Moredock—the most extreme of Indian-haters.

The plot of *GG* has much more external action than *CM*, but Malamud also tackles crucial theological and philosophical issues in his narrative. Conflict abounds in the novel. The conflicts include man versus man (resulting in the Day of Devastation), man (Cohn) versus nature (chimps), Cohn versus God, Cohn versus Buz, Cohn versus Esau, Cohn versus himself, Judaism versus Christianity, and the chimps versus the baboons. The Fall, so important in Melville's tale, has two counterparts in *GG*: the first fall is when humanity "fell from grace" (164) when he brought about the Day of Devastation. The second Fall occurs, as in *CM*, at the midpoint of the book, when Cohn shows Mary Madelyn affection, thus sending Cohn (as Everyman) on a course spiraling downward toward his destruction.

The structures of the two literary pieces, at first glance, may seem totally unlike. On closer inspection, though, they show discernible, even striking, similarities. Most critics of *CM* see Melville's work as being divided into two roughly equal parts: part one (Chapters I-XXII) traces the journey from St. Louis, Missouri to Cairo, Illinois. The arrival at Cairo serves as the midpoint of the narrative and signals a shift in plot, characters, themes, and satirical targets. Until Cairo, a series of confidence-men engage in successful attempts to swindle, deceive, or expose their "marks." As Cook notes, these confidence-men (who may in fact be only one man or supernatural being in different disguises, as will be seen later) "mimic various aspects of American society, and in doing so, expose various shades of hypocrisy" (9). Part two (Chapters XXIII-XLV), Cook continues, is dominated by Goodman. The switch, according to Cook, is that the confidence-man is now the victim of different confidence games. Part two is further distinguished from part one by the fact that Goodman is an international cosmopolitan, a figure somewhat out of place from the rest of the *Fidèle's* passengers. The presence of Goodman sets up a binary between city versus country, sophistication versus simplicity, and allegory versus realism. The international character acts as a finale to the drama and suggests, perhaps, that the struggle onboard the ship becomes symbolically universalized.

Looked at on a symbolic level, part one mimics the life of Christ while part two consists in a "displaced enactment" (Cook 71) of the final week of Christ's life. April 1 marks the beginning of Passover in 1855 (during which Melville wrote *CM*), lending support to this interpretation. Thus, Cairo signifies the turning point on these two and still other levels. It also signifies a shift from light to darkness (the journey begins at daybreak and ends just after midnight in darkness), and, in the context of antebellum

America, from freedom to slavery. Melville makes clever use of the city's name—Cairo—to signify the journey from a free state (Illinois) to a slave state (Missouri), a parodic inversion of the biblical journey of the Israelites from slavery (in Egypt, whose capital is Cairo—on the banks of the Nile River) to freedom in the promised land.

Divided into six unequal sections, with no geographical mid-point as in *CM*, *GG* might not appear to be similar to *CM* in structure. To conclude this, however, is to miss much of the real and symbolic action of Malamud's novel. On one level, *GG* is a farcical retelling of the story of *Genesis*. With Cohn as Adam and Mary Madelyn as Eve, they mate and bring forth a new species on the island—a human-chimpanzee that Cohn hopes will lead to a new super-ethical type of inhabitant on the earth. Cohn's "daring plan" (165) goes horribly wrong, though, by the end of the novel as the island community moves from semi-utopia to clear dystopia. Where does Cohn go wrong? Or, in terms of the *Genesis* story, when does the Fall occur? In my view, the Fall (or at least the beginning of it) occurs at the physical mid-point of the book, thus splitting the narrative into two halves—just like *CM*.

In the middle of Malamud's novel is the Seder meal, which commemorates the escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. It recalls a journey from bondage to freedom, the exact opposite of the journey of the *Fidele* in *CM*. In this way, Malamud mimics Melville's structure while reversing his symbolic movement. So, what happens at Cohn's Seder?—something very interesting and rather subtle. In a ceremony full of symbolic references to the ancient Israelites, Malamud's narrative makes ample use of symbols as well. Just before the Seder begins, Mary Madelyn (on Cohn's right), sniffs at a bone that Cohn has placed on her plate. The bone is a fossil of Eohippus, a prehistoric

horse. Cohn's stated reason for using this bone is to represent the charioteers of Egypt. However, horses are also symbols of the New Testament *Apocalypse*, and Malamud's use of this symbol portends the coming doom of his island "paradise."

But there is more to it than this. Immediately following this event, Cohn initiates the first physical contact with Mary Madelyn, "patting her hand, and she, affectionate creature," pats his (111). This seemingly innocent gesture occurs at the center of the novel and represents the fall from grace of Cohn—the comic-tragic hero. This simple exchange of affection leads to the eventual mating between man and beast, which contradicts every moral code ever known—whether Jewish, Christian, or otherwise. It also re-creates the Fall, as when Eve took the apple, at the urging of the serpent, in the garden of Eden. Cohn disrupts God's natural order by mating with an animal and depriving Buz, Esau, and the other young male chimps from the chance of mating with Mary Madelyn—one of their own kind, causing jealousy and, eventually, violence.

The next element to discuss in this pair of novels is the characters. To put it mildly, this is a complicated issue when it comes to *CM*. As Melville's full title suggests (*The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*), there is uncertainty surrounding who or what the lead character is, and whether he is just one man (or supernatural being) or many. Just as we saw in our discussion of genre, there is no consensus among scholars on this issue. Some, like Quirk, see the protagonist as nothing more than a mortal man who wears a total of eight different disguises during the course of the narrative (49). He bases his interpretation on a comparative analysis between *CM* and *First Corinthians 12* (61).

Based on criteria enumerated, but not invented, by Quirk,^{xviii} and adding (as Quirk does) the lamblike mute in the first chapter, the protagonist may assume as many as eight

disguises: (1) the Christ-like mute; (2) Black Guinea (the negro cripple); (3) John Ringman (the man with the weed—the one who mourns); (4) the man in a gray coat; (5) John Truman (the gentleman with the big book); (6) the Herb-doctor; (7) the Philosophical Intelligence Office (P.I.O.) man; and (8) Frank Goodman (the international cosmopolitan). At least one critic—Philip Drew—believes that all those on the list may be different men. Interestingly, Cook—while differing from Quirk by seeing the protagonist as a conflation of several deities—nevertheless lists the different manifestations of what he takes to be a supernatural being in the exact same manner as Quirk. But the crucial difference is that, for Cook, he is just one entity.

On the allegorical side, Foster sees the protagonist not as a god but Satan himself. In her view, Melville turns the world upside-down by presenting the “malicious Devil...grin and all” (xxi) as the hero of his work. For Foster, Satan uses his protean abilities to shift shapes and appear in various forms. But his appearances do not match the classic images of a two-horned, red-tailed demon carrying a pitchfork. Instead, his disguises are far more subtle; he is able to blend in with the other passengers unnoticed. As the man in gray himself says in Chapter VI, “ ‘the devil is never so black as he is painted’ ” (41). Still there are scenes described by the narrator, as in the opening of Chapter XXXII, where the Satanic nature of the protagonist appears to show itself:

The cosmopolitan rose, the traces of previous feeling vanished; looked steadfastly at his transformed friend [Noble] a moment, then, taking ten half-eagles from his pocket, stooped down, and laid them, one by one, in a circle round him; and, retiring a pace, waved his long tasselled pipe with the air of a necromancer, an air heightened by his costume, accompanying each wave with a solemn murmur of cabalistical words (241).

It is toward the end of the narrative, however, that the confidence-man's metaphysical nature seems to shine through, and allows the reader to glimpse his dark character, and in so doing provides what likely is the strongest evidence in support of an allegorical reading of the text. In Chapter XLII, in the opening dialogue with the barber, William Cream awakens to find Goodman standing before him. He says, " 'Ah!' turning round disenchanted, 'it is only a man, then' " (299). On page 27, I have recorded Goodman's full response; he concludes by saying, " 'You can conclude nothing absolute from the human form, barber' " (300). Unlike Quirk and Cook, Foster excludes the mute from her list of the shapes that Satan assumes. Furthermore, the lamb-like man is just that—a man. He symbolizes Christ, but he is not Christ Himself. In Foster's words, part of the author's message is that "God is unknowable. If he hears us, He gives no sign. The voice of our God is Silence. That is why the lamblike man is deaf and dumb" (li).

Other critics (e.g., John Schroeder, Hershel Parker, and Daniel Hoffman) join Foster in her "Satanic" interpretation. Others, like Leslie Fiedler and Malcolm O. Magaw, see the confidence-man as Christ. And Tanner, as we have seen, believes there is too much ambiguity in Melville's work to say who or what the title character really is. And this brings us to the view of Lawrence Thompson. Thompson sees the protagonist as God-like, but not in a benevolent light. Rather, Thompson sees the confidence-man as God's agent, playing a swindler role for God Himself, the "Practical Joker" (297). According to Thompson, by the time of *CM's* writing Melville had become thoroughly disillusioned with Christianity, the concept of an after-life, and what he believed to be a trickster-God. At its deepest level, then, the author's purpose is to attack what he sees as

the naïve gullibility of the multitudes of Christians in America and, more pointedly, God Himself.

There are variations on all these interpretations of the main character, of course, with each critic adding a different perspective to the wealth of criticism that exists. Some substitute other characters for some of the eight listed above, and still others add even Melville himself as the ultimate confidence-man as he confuses and mesmerizes his readers. At least one critic, Lakshmi Mani, sees the protagonist as Satan/Antichrist, erroneously equating the two mythical creatures (250). Hauck sees the confidence-man as a conflation of Christ and Vishnu, one of the major Gods of Hinduism (247). In any event, the wide consensus among critics is that the list of eight presented above, with the exception of the lamblike man, represents the various guises or incarnations of the protagonist. For practical purposes, then, the reader encounters seven or eight different appearances of the main character. This is not meant to be the authoritative last word on the issue, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will proceed on this basic assumption.

Because I am interpreting *CM* and *GG* as allegories and apocalyptic works, it is necessary to posit who or what Melville's protagonist is, and how many guises he assumes. The first matter to settle is who or what the deaf and dumb Christ-like figure is in the beginning of the narrative. The fact that he is both deaf and dumb suggests that he is not Christ Himself; rather he is either a caricature of Christ or perhaps the Antichrist.^{xix} But if he is the Antichrist, he is rather impotent and ineffective and clearly distinguishable from Christ Himself, which contradicts Scripture.^{xx} However, some of the other guises of the protagonist reveal characters significantly defective in other ways (e.g., the cripple, the widower). He is not listed among the Black Guinea's references,

but since he cannot talk, he cannot (literally) “speak for” the negro cripple; this may explain why the Guinea does not include him among his list of “ge’mmen” (14).

Importantly, the lamblike man is not referred to by any of the subsequent appearances of the confidence-man, nor does he seem connected to what follows in the narrative.

Therefore, my first claim regarding Melville’s characters is that the lamblike man is *not* the confidence-man; rather, he is a diminished Christ figure used to highlight the hypocrisy that is attacked during the remainder of the first part of Melville’s novel. This means that the protagonist assumes a total of seven disguises, as listed on page 42 (excluding the lamblike mute).

The next question that needs to be answered is: who is the confidence-man? Is he good? Evil? A conflation of both? Or is it impossible to know his true nature, as Tanner asserts? Again, because I am interpreting *CM* as an allegory and an apocalyptic tale, my choices for who the protagonist is are limited to these: Christ, Satan, the Antichrist, or perhaps some combination of these figures. I eliminate Christ easily, because I see no resemblance between the spiritual leader of the *New Testament* and the elusive, duplicitous protagonist created by Melville. Moreover, I eliminate the Antichrist because he does not appear in the *Book of Revelation*, which is, in large part, what Melville is parodying. This leaves me with the conclusion that the confidence-man is Satan, who is the ultimate enemy of God, Christ, and Christianity. Melville would choose no less a figure to incorporate into his tale. But my analysis cannot stop here because Melville saw Satan—the embodiment of evil—as fused with God (the traditional embodiment of good). Therefore, I see the confidence-man as God and Satan at one and the same time.

The *Fidele* is loaded with passengers, but other than the main character, only a few stand out. The first is the barber, William Cream, who plays a pivotal symbolic role in the narrative, appearing briefly near the beginning and prominently at the end. The next prominent character is Henry Roberts, a country merchant and Mason from Wheeling, Pennsylvania. Roberts is the first identifiable victim of the protagonist's confidence-games. The next character of note is the college sophomore, who engages in a lengthy discussion with John Ringman regarding the collegian's reading of Tacitus and other classical authors.

The next character we encounter is the only female of any import in the story. She is the widow who makes a donation to the man in gray, who is the third appearance of the protagonist. The preponderance of male characters in Melville's tale may have to do with the author's intended audience. As Rachel Cole describes *CM*, its narrator "seems to imagine a single ideal readership" (395), a class of rural young men who have found new freedom in America's cities. For Cole, the protagonist embodies an uninhibited lifestyle that is appealing to many of the young, male passengers onboard the *Fidele*. Again in Cole's words, "the confidence-man's strangeness elicits a resonance with the deep longings of a set of socially marginalized young men" (396). Perhaps best emblematic of this class of displaced young males is the sophomore just discussed.

Following the widow is the miser, who is initially distrustful of all people, but after much cajoling and persuading, finally surrenders money to purchase stock from John Truman, the fourth incarnation of the confidence-man. The next character that merits mention, and he is truly a colorful one, is Pitch—the Missouri frontiersman. Pitch places "confidence in distrust" (143) and represents one of the most dogged opponents of

the protagonist. He confronts the protagonist in three of his different disguises: the Herbdirector, the PIO man, and the cosmopolitan. The PIO man succeeds in duping Pitch, who quickly regrets his error in abandoning his creed of distrust.

Charlie Noble is the next passenger to play a prominent role. In fact, next to the protagonist (and the mute), Noble may be the most important character in the novel. What is most interesting about Noble is that he too is a confidence-man. Not *the* confidence-man (i.e., the protagonist), but *a* confidence-man nevertheless. Melville may have created the Noble character to draw a distinction between his allegorical protagonist and his human counterpart, or he may have wanted to underscore the prevalence of confidence-men on the Mississippi and, in so doing, show how easy it was for the protagonist to blend in among the other miscreants. Whatever the author's reason(s), Goodman and Noble engage in lengthy discussions over wine through several chapters, including stories-within-the-story, on a variety of topics, including the press, trust, and especially geniality. There are other minor characters I could mention, but they don't figure prominently in the narrative, nor are they of any import for the purposes of this analysis.

Now comes the fun (and difficult) part—identifying the counterparts in *GG* for the characters just noted in *CM*. But first, there appears in Malamud's tale an important character that has no easily identifiable counterpart in Melville's tale, namely God. To be more accurate, it is only the voice of God that is heard in the story. What's more, as Cronin states, He is no more tangible than a "quote within a quote" (121). Just who or what God is in the narrative is an important piece of the interpretive puzzle, but just how to interpret His elusive character is troublesome.

There is ample ambiguity to cloud the reader's perception of God's character. At the most fundamental level is the question: Does God exist in Malamud's novel? Or is He only alive in Cohn's mind? To put these questions in context, let us examine the opening dialogue between God and Cohn. God has the first spoken words in the text, communicating through "a glowing crack in a bulbous black cloud" (1): "The cosmos is so conceived that I myself don't know what goes on everywhere. It is not perfection although I, of course, am perfect" (1-2). After some protest on the part of Cohn and replies by God, the "Lord snapped the crack in the cloud shut" (6). After Cohn shakes his fist in anger at God, the narrator relates that the protagonist "danced in a shower of rocks; but that may have been his imagining. Yet those that hit the head hurt" (7). Thus we learn from the story's opening page that—contrary to conventional notions—God is imperfect. At an even deeper level, though, the reader is left to wonder whether God exists at all in the author's fictional world. God speaks only once more in the narrative, again in double quotations, and again in ambiguous terms.

On this issue, the critical interpretation of *GG* by L. Lamar Nisly offers invaluable and perplexing evidence for consideration. Nisly interprets the novel, at least in part, based on an outline and accompanying notes written by Malamud about three years before the novel's publication and obtained from the *Bernard Malamud Papers of the Library of Congress*. Nisly first focuses on the following "Religious Statement" dated January 7, 1979:

What would the religious statement be: that civilization fails without God. That God must be reinvented as a saving grace. But Cohn doesn't believe in God. Is it a gracious thing for a non-believer to teach God (a failed priest...) So he sets himself honestly to face God. There is some success until they stop believing in him. Where the representative of God fails to represent him, there is no belief in God (qtd. in Nisly 38-9).

This is a fascinating look into Malamud's thinking while planning to write *GG*. Nisly wisely recognizes that one must proceed carefully here, because Malamud's musings three years before publication may not match the Cohn encountered in the finished version of the text (39). Nevertheless, in this statement, while first saying that Cohn is a nonbeliever, Malamud then states that Cohn "sets himself honestly to face God." But how does a nonbeliever face God? Perhaps what Malamud means by belief in God here is not whether He exists, but whether He is worthy of Cohn's trust. In other words, perhaps Cohn believes in God's existence but holds Him in contempt for reasons that will become clear. Nisly continues probing into the author's thoughts. On November 15, 1979, Malamud writes:

What do I truly believe about our society? That we will destroy ourselves? What about God? He doesn't exist in the book, though Cohen [sic] tries to bring him to life. Is the message that there must be a [G]od? What is Cohen preaching?

Why can't he "sell" the spiritual life. His own weaknesses?: He has no God of his own, no God he is passionate about. He succumbs to the instinctual? He hasn't done as much as he ought to do? (qtd. in Nisly 39).

Now the picture becomes even blurrier. Malamud states that "[God] doesn't exist in the book, though Cohen [sic] tries to bring Him to life." Assuming for the moment that Malamud didn't change his mind about God's place in the novel, what does he mean by this statement? Is he saying that Cohn is an atheist, an agnostic, a tepid believer, or something else altogether? Can an atheist or an agnostic quarrel with a God in which he doesn't believe? Malamud reveled in ambiguity and these statements he made, and the published version of *GG*, contain plenty of it. We will probably never know for sure, any more than we can know Malamud's own religious beliefs—given his taciturn nature and

his cryptic comments on the matter^{xxi}—the answers to the questions raised in light of these statements by Malamud. Given Nisly's analysis, however, what do we make of the "religious" events that occur in the novel?

Given various happenings in the narrative, it seems reasonable to assume that, in the novel, God exists. Furthermore, God exists in Malamud's fictional world created in the novel, and not only in Cohn's mind. This is true if for no other reason than the divine nature of Cohn's Island. In an unnatural act, Buz swims in the ocean off the shores of the island. Flowers self-pollinate, fruits self-heal, coconuts go up but don't come back down, and a Pillar of Fire appears in the sky over the island. Moreover, in the space of about three years, Cohn transforms from a man in his late thirties into an old man with a long, white beard.

Regarding the protagonist's beliefs, Cohn quarrels with God in the opening pages and later, has internal dialogues with Him, says Kaddish for all the souls lost in the Day of Devastation, reads the Bible to the chimps and George, and holds a Seder with the island community. He recognizes the divine nature of the island, names some of the simian inhabitants after biblical figures, and calls the chimps' ability to speak miraculous. Moreover, angels appear to him in dreams, and he sits Shivah for tiny Sara (a baby baboon). Furthermore, on the very last page of *GG*, Cohn cries out his final words: "Merciful God...I am an old man. The Lord has let me live my life out" (223). Even if Cohn was an atheist at the beginning, he is clearly not one at the end.

To continue, I will simply state that, for some of Melville's characters, there are no counterparts in Malamud's work. The *Fidèle* holds scores of passengers while Cohn's Island holds only 21—including the eight baboons, who are minor characters. Moreover,

of the 13 remaining characters (including the elusive albino), only seven can be considered major characters. They are, in order of appearance, Cohn, Buz, George, Mary Madelyn, Esau, the albino chimp, and Rebekah Islanda. I include Rebekah because of her symbolic significance, despite her brief lifespan.

Malamudian critics have seen in Cohn a symbolic representation of many people—some mythical (Adam, Noah), some fictional (Robinson Crusoe, Prospero, Gulliver), and others historical (Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Job, Jeremiah). No critic to my knowledge, however, has linked Cohn to Melville's protagonist. In my allegorical interpretation, though, Cohn is clearly the counterpart of Melville's confidence-man. Consider his name for starters: Calvin Cohn. This name has baffled critics, who have struggled to make sense of this juxtaposition of the Christian zealot (Calvin), who espoused the doctrine of predestination with the Jewish surname Cohn. What critics have overlooked is that Melville was raised in (and later repudiated) the Calvinist tradition, and Malamud, who openly cited Melville as one of his major influences (Lasher 49), is making the first of many allusions to Melville and *CM* by giving his protagonist the first name of Calvin. Cohn's original first name was Seymour—which was with him while he was studying to be a rabbi (like his father and grandfather). What prompted his name change—and stark reversal of profession—is not absolutely certain. However, the narrator makes it fairly clear that Cohn's "trial of faith" was prompted by the sudden, accidental death of his wife and unborn child in a car accident. This traumatic event made Cohn lose interest in religion while maintaining a "more than ordinary interest in God Himself" (56). Moreover, John Calvin believed in salvation by faith (a synonym, more or less, for confidence or grace), as opposed to works, and was preoccupied with original

sin and man's Fall from grace. And the theme of the Fall, as we have already seen, figures prominently in both *CM* and *GG*.

Now let us examine the name Cohn. In Cohn the letter 'h' is silent, making its phonetic spelling con (with a long 'o'), which is quite similar to con (with a short 'o'), which can be defined as a verb as 'to deceive' or as a noun as 'a deception'—in other words, the art and/or end of a confidence man. What all this means is not idle word play. I contend that Malamud chose these names with great care and with a purpose to allude to Melville's novel and to the action and meaning of his own. The ambiguity of the word 'con' is particularly important in this context, for it can mean 'to deceive' or 'be deceived.' In my view, Cohn is both 'deceiver' and 'deceived.' How this plays out will now be discussed.

If we accept that Cohn is the confidence-man in Malamud's work, the obvious questions arise: Is he simply a mortal man or is he an allegorical figure representing God, Satan, or some other supernatural being? Or is he some combination of these figures? Like *CM*, *GG* is a work of considerable ambiguity. This ambiguity applies especially to Cohn. In some scenes, he appears as a benevolent, God-like man, as when he attends to Esau (his intermittent enemy) and bandages his head wound or gives him herbs for his infected tooth (170). He plays a creative role at times as well, as when he plants banana groves and other fruit trees. He seems genuinely interested in building a peaceful and flourishing island community and, for a time, it appears that he succeeds.

But, symbolically he is associated with both God and Satan. For instance, at the Seder the narrator recounts that on Cohn's tumbler he "had portrayed the visage of Moshe Rebbenu,^{xxii} with his two-pronged beard. One might have mistaken it for the

likeness of God himself, if that was possible.” In the very same scene, though, the narrator states that from Cohn’s seat “he could easily reach to the fireplace ledge where he had baked the matzos and prepared the food” (111). Thus we have the conflation of the “two-pronged” symbolic nature of Cohn—as God (the Father) and Satan (next to the fires of hell). Also, we see Cohn working at the “red-hot kiln” built in the fireplace later in the narrative. The narrator states that Cohn heated the kiln “with homemade charcoal of ebony wood that got so hot the box glowed vermilion and took hours to cool” (146).

To explore further, an image of Cohn as Satan appears with the first arrival of George at the cave. In fear, “Cohn ducked into the cave, set down the lamp, and instinctively grabbed a shovel. As though he had touched hot metal, he tossed it aside and reached for an orange” (61). Often depicted with a pitchfork in the fiery depths of hell, this image and the description to accompany it conjure up Satanic (and parodic) allusions. At other moments, his evil nature appears real rather than symbolic, as when he threatens George after the gorilla eats one of his father’s records: “Bastard fool,” he yells, “I’ll shoot you dead if you ever again enter the cave without my permission” (82). His most Satanic act, though, is when he mates with Mary Madelyn. In doing so, he re-enacts the story of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. As Cohn himself remarks, according to the Talmud, the Serpent, upon observing Adam and Eve having intercourse in the garden, decided to ask Eve “for a bit of the same” (71). Another Satanic image of Cohn is shown after his second verbal encounter with God. After a contentious dialogue between God and Cohn, something knocks the protagonist off his teaching stool, leaving Cohn “writhing in dead leaves,” (137) thereby fusing images of the Serpent with death.

Therefore, like *GG*, Cohn is deceptively complicated and frequently misunderstood by critics. Nevertheless, I interpret him to be a complex conflation of God the Father and Satan, a bifurcated allegorical figure well suited to the dualities and ambiguities that appear in terms of plot, structure, and several themes. Moreover, and somewhat confusingly, Cohn even sometimes seems to represent Christ (as is discussed below).

The next question that should be addressed is: Which of Melville's protagonist's incarnations does Cohn embody? As I interpret *GG*, he embodies all of them—including the lamblike mute. First, insofar as Christ is typologically figured as the new Adam, so too is Cohn, as evidenced in the text. While still on the Rebekah Q, Cohn is in conversation with himself:

“What can one expect in this life of desolation?”
 —More life?
 “To be alive alone forever?”
 —It takes one rib to make an Eve.
 “Do you see yourself as Adam?”
 —If the job is open (11-12).

As Cook notes, Christ was born in a manger (61); so too the mute is, as *CM*'s narrator describes, “in the extremest sense of the word, a stranger,” (1) and hence evokes images of Christ's lowly beginnings. Cohn, meanwhile, lives in a cave and one of the chimps is named Melchior—one of the three wise men to worship Christ at His birth. Moreover, the slaughter of the innocents that follows Christ's birth in Scripture finds its counterparts in the chevaliers selling “books based on the lives of murderous Mississippi bandits” (Cook 62), and in the killing of the baby baboons late in Malamud's narrative. As the mute writes his five inscriptions from *First Corinthians*, Cohn posts his Seven Admonitions. Moreover, two of the other chimps are named Luke (one of the four

evangelists) and Saul of Tarsus (Paul), the historic apostle to the cities of Corinth, Rome, Ephesus, and others.

Christ's passion and crucifixion are paralleled in Melville's parody with the reference to "a large trunk" (5) carried by two porters, and in Malamud's novel with the appearance of a raging Esau at Cohn's cave with a log, symbolic of Christ's cross. Furthermore, the sacrifice of Cohn in the manner of the *Old Testament* story of the Akedah is allusive of Christ's crucifixion. Finally, the Resurrection is alluded to in Melville's story when the mute sleeps beneath the ladder (which, like Christ, ascends), and the narrator recounts that the mute lies motionless as "sugar snow in March, which, softly stealing down over night, with its white placidity, startles the brown farmer peering out from his threshold at daybreak" (5).

In Malamud's story, an image of the Resurrection is evoked with Cohn's last thought: "[m]aybe tomorrow the world to come" (223)? This symbolic identification of Cohn with Christ introduces two admitted inconsistencies: first, I do not identify Melville's mute as a guise of the confidence-man and yet I include Christ as one of Cohn's allegorical roles; and second, Cohn, Buz (and even Rebekah) all represent Christ in Malamud's tale. I do address these inconsistencies later in my analysis, but in the end ambiguity prevents a definitive interpretation of these and other characters.

Cohn resembles the Black Guinea insofar as he has no home and sleeps under the sun. Moreover, he's on an island off the coast of Africa, the birthplace of humanity and origin of the African race. Just as the negro cripple is described as having "black fleece" (10), again connoting Christ as the lamb, Cohn's sacrifice at the conclusion of Malamud's book conjures an image of a sacrificial lamb. Perhaps more than any other of

the guises of the confidence-man, Cohn most strongly resembles the second appearance of the protagonist—John Ringman. Like Ringman, Cohn is a widower in mourning. As already stated, he lost his wife in a tragic accident years ago, yet he still carries her ashes with him wherever he goes. His grief influences all his actions, most especially his seduction and mating with Mary Madelyn. Cook states that Ringman is emblematic of the Fall (63); in a similar way, Cohn (as a man consumed by grief) is the instrument of the Fall that begins during the Seder.

Next, like the man in the gray coat, who designed the “Protean Easy-Chair” to ease man’s suffering, Cohn is something of an inventor himself. Among other things, he makes a hammock for outdoor recreation and builds furniture for the cave. Similarly, the man in gray has outlandish designs for a “World’s Charity,” which will raise \$11.2 billion over 14 years (an enormous sum even by modern standards) and totally eradicate evil from the world (51);^{xxiii} in an equally preposterous scheme, Cohn plans to repopulate the earth with a new species—*homo ethicalis*—a hybrid of man and chimpanzee!

Like John Truman, the man with the big book, Cohn is also a man of many books, including the *Old Testament*, an encyclopedia, the complete works of Shakespeare, and others. Next, like the Herb-doctor aboard the *Fidele*, Cohn learns to make use of the natural herbs on the island, and cures himself and some of the others who have various medical complaints. As Cook also notes, the herb also alludes to the wild plants that Adam must eat after he and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit (*Gen.* 3:18). The PIO man also has a counterpart in Malamud’s protagonist. The PIO man is a philosopher—one who is unafraid of asking deep questions. Cohn too is an amateur philosopher and a diver—both literally and figuratively. As a paleologist he dives to the bottom of the ocean in search

of fossils; as a philosopher he dives into eternal questions such as, “Why does God permit evil” (91)? Finally, Cohn—like the cosmopolitan—is a philanthropist, at least sometimes. He spends much time and energy trying to make “his” island into a new Eden of sorts, and he labors to make his island home a peaceful habitat for all on the island.

While Cohn is the confidence-man in Malamud’s narrative, he is not identical to the shape-shifting creature of Melville’s novel. And though he actually creates masks in his Stygian cave, he does not assume multiple, distinct identities in Melville’s protagonist’s protean manner. Cohn is himself throughout the book, and is almost always identifiable as such. He is, as the title of Chapter V of Melville’s work suggests, both “a great sage [and] a great simpleton” (30). Allegorically, he is a conflation of God and Satan. On the surface level of the story, though, he is just Calvin Cohn—paleologist, former rabbinical student, and the last surviving human on the earth.

And now to Buz. As with Cohn, I begin my analysis of this character by analyzing his name. Buz (the one in the *Old Testament*), as Cohn notes in the narrative, was the son of Nahor—Abraham’s brother. However, I see much more significance in his name than this simple parallel. By adding another ‘z,’ we get the phonetically equivalent ‘buzz,’ which means, among other things, ‘gossip,’ ‘buzzword,’ or ‘buzzkill.’ As the buzzword (or simply the ‘word’), Buz represents Christ in *GG*, an interpretation already made by several critics. As buzzkill (meaning killjoy), however, Malamud makes a possible allusion to Buz’s future betrayal and killing of Cohn at the end of the story. Interestingly, in Melville’s tale, after the scene with the mute, the passengers are

animatedly engaged in “gossip,” talking about the mysterious stranger. They are also described as merchants at the Stock Exchange that “buzz” (6-7) on the ship’s decks.

According to orthodox Christian theology, Christ was of two natures: divine and human. In a similar way, Buz is also of two natures: one divine and one animal. When Cohn first encounters him onboard the *Rebekah Q*, Buz is hiding under the cabinet sink amid bottles of cleaning fluid. As the narrator describes him, Buz had “glowing, frightened eyes...[and] wore a frayed cheesecloth compress around his neck” (15). Being situated under the sink with cleaning fluid may be an allusion to Christ’s baptism by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan River. As the *Gospel of Luke* describes that event, “when Jesus too had been baptized and was praying, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove; and there came a voice from heaven, ‘Thou art my Son, my Beloved; on thee my favour [or grace] rests’ ” (3:21-22).

The cheesecloth Buz is wearing is commonly used as material for costumes, further suggesting that Buz is playing a role. In the same scene on the boat, Buz climbs into Cohn’s lap, and sits there “as though signifying he had long ago met, and did not necessarily despise, the human race” (17). Sitting on Cohn’s lap seems to allude to Jesus as God the Son, who sits in Heaven on the side of God the Father (i.e., Cohn). During this scene and for the first two years or so on the island, Buz cannot speak. In other words, he is a mute—just like the lamblike man in Melville’s work. Furthermore, at the end of Malamud’s novel, Buz returns to his previous state of muteness. This draws a fairly clear parallel between Melville’s mute and Malamud’s companion—both representations of Christ.

Another allusion to Christ occurs during a drought on the ocean as the drinking water is running low. In an apparent miracle, Buz bangs a copper frying pan “as though summoning a rain God.” In seeming response, “the wind [rises] with a wail” (23) and rain begins to pour from the sky. This corresponds (in an inverted way) to the story in *Luke* 8:22-25, when Jesus calms a storm. Ironically, this same storm rages beyond control and prompts another reference to Christ when Cohn ties Buz to the mast, an apparent evocation of the crucifixion. Yet another “miracle” occurs when Buz teaches the five new chimps to speak and explains to the amazed Cohn that the miracle occurred “because they hov faith” (106).

More allusions to Buz as Christ abound, as when he disappears for weeks into the forest upon arrival at the island, paralleling Christ’s forty days in the desert. When Buz emerges from his time away, Cohn observes him eating “passion fruit” (37), a possible suggestion of Christ’s passion and death. Furthermore, Cohn notes that Buz has been ill (due to radiation sickness), another possible reference to Christ’s fasting in the desert. Soon after Buz begins speaking, while studying the dictionary with Cohn, Buz “ate a few pages now and then” (67), strengthening the association between Buz and Christ as the Word. Perhaps there is an irony intended here as well as Buz has to “eat his words” later when he betrays Cohn after professing to dislike violence and preferring the *New Testament* (71). Furthermore, Buz says that he hates “snake stories” (70), a possible reference to Christ being tempted by Satan during Christ’s 40 days in the desert. Still more hints concerning Buz’s Christic symbolism happen later. When the five new chimps arrive prior to the Seder, Buz usurps Cohn’s Adamic role and names them—and several of the names allude to Christ and His followers: Mary Madelyn (an historical

variation of the name Mary Magdalene^{xxiv}), Luke (one of the four Evangelists and also the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*), Saul of Tarsus (the historic apostle to the ancient world), and Melchior (one of the three wise men who traveled to Bethlehem at Christ's birth). Furthermore, after Hattie, Esterhazy, and Bromberg arrive and Rebekah is born, the island company numbers 13 (including the albino and excluding the baboons). This is a possible allusion to Christ and his twelve disciples.

Buz is present for almost the entire narrative, and is a far more complex character than Melville's counterpart. Regarding Buz's dualistic nature, there is plenty of evidence to suggest he is "human" (or animal) as well as divine. For example, after Cohn and he have been on the island for about two years, Buz—now verbal—says to Cohn that, "the true purpose of life was to have as much fun as one could" (86). This hedonistic side of Buz reappears in a prominent way when Mary Madelyn enters puberty. Buz, along with Esau and the other young male chimps, pursues Mary through the trees in the hopes of mating with her. The chimps' efforts are frustrated until the very end of the novel, when Esau and Buz—now mute again after Cohn clips the wires in his neck that enable him to speak—finally mate with her. Before Cohn disables Buz's artificial larynx, however, Buz proclaims himself the new Alpha male, replacing Esau—who offers no protest. During this mayhem, Buz proclaims, echoing Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the chimpanzees...for they hov inherited the earth" (205).

To interject a brief interlude, with all this discussion of Christ and Christianity, we might lose sight of the fact that Malamud was a Jewish-American author. To be sure, Malamud incorporates many Jewish plot elements, including the Seder, Cohn's praying Shivah for Sara, and re-enacting the Akedah, but by choosing to parody *CM*, Malamud

has to address Melville's concerns, many of which deal with Christianity. Melville, as has already been noted, grew up in the Calvinist tradition, and much of what he writes about must be viewed in this light. So, as Malamud parodies Melville, he must blend the Jewish and Christian traditions, a task not easy to accomplish.

To resume my character analysis, I have established the primary opposition between characters in *GG*—Cohn, as a blending together of God the Father and Satan, and Buz, as God the Son (Christ), who is both divine and animal. So, in my reading of the two texts, there are clear counterparts to Melville's title character and the lamblike mute. But are there others? Turning to Malamud's next major character—George—I see no corresponding figure in Melville's work. George, like Buz, cannot speak when we first encounter him, and remains speechless until the very end of the book. As I interpret *GG*, George is a prophet, who “was a wanderer in the forest and wandered alone” (78). This identification as prophet is most obvious when George sits in Elijah's seat during the Seder meal that is held after the arrival of the five new chimps. Furthermore, the fifth section of the book is entitled, “The Voice of the Prophet.” At the very end of this section, after the cave has been destroyed by Buz, Esau, and others, the narrator states that, “in the place where the wrecked phonograph stood, a rabbinic voice recited the law” (218). Though George is not explicitly identified as being present, it seems clear that he is the one reciting the law.

George may play yet another part in this parody of Melville's *CM*—namely, God the Holy Spirit. Admittedly, I do not have as much textual evidence to support this interpretation. However, there are hints that he may indeed be seen in this light. When George makes his first appearance, the narrator says that it seemed to Cohn “he heard

someone mumbling, or attempting to sing in a guttural voice. It came out a throaty basso aiming an aria to the night sky, possibly pledging his heart and soul to the song of the impassioned cantor” (60). Compare this with the coming of the Holy Spirit as described in the *Acts of the Apostles*: “Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing...[t]hen they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched every person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak” (*Acts* 2: 2-4).

Later in the scene during George’s arrival, Cohn tells him that “they three were alone in the world and must look after each other” (63). Still later, Cohn says that George is “a family type” (80) and doesn’t like to be alone. Interestingly, Buz starts to speak just a few days after George’s arrival, as though George had bestowed on him the gift of tongues. Many months later, just after the five new chimps arrive, George interrupts a speech by Cohn to the five new arrivals, with “his head helmeted with cockleburs, making him look like Mars himself if not a militant Moses or Joshua” (97-98). Compare this with Peter’s message explaining the coming of the Holy Spirit: “ ‘God says: I will pour out my Spirit on everyone...There will be blood, fire, and thick smoke; the sun will be darkened, and the moon will turn red as blood” (*Acts* 2: 17, 19-20). In the Jewish tradition, Moses is regarded as the “Father of the Prophets” (Hertz 209), and the military similes describing George are consistent with the apocalyptic imagery of the passage from *Acts* 2. Moreover, the cockleburs adorning George’s head are indigenous to the Northern hemisphere and not the Equator, suggesting that George as a spiritual entity is not bound by time and space. Also, the tears that George sheds as the gospel story of the Prodigal Son is told (124) is indicative of the “gladness” and “joy”

that filled the early Christians at the coming of the Spirit (*Acts* 2: 26). Finally the fact that George sings^{xxv} in Hebrew (rather than English) at the end of the novel is suggestive of the singing of a bird (a dove is a traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit) and the gift of tongues (which is also associated with the third person of the Trinity).

All this textual evidence indicates that Malamud may have cast George as the Holy Spirit, completing the Christian concept of the Trinity before the arrival of the new chimps. At the end of the narrative, after Cohn has been slain and Buz has reverted to his animal nature (and shed his divine nature), George remains as a holy and prophetic presence on the island—conforming to an interpretation of the gorilla as symbolizing the Holy Spirit, who, temporally speaking, followed Christ and was present during the period after Christ's ascension to Heaven. The Jewish/universal counterpart to the Christian concept of the Trinity concerns time: past, present, and future. Symbolically, Cohn represents the past, for man's time seems to have passed. Buz symbolizes the present—especially when he assumes the role of Alpha male. And George, who has the last words in the novel (when all the other primates have lost their ability to speak) represents the future—whatever future that might be.

The arrival of Mary Madelyn, Esau, Melchior, Luke, and Saul of Tarsus is a significant event in *GG*, because of the pivotal symbolic roles of Mary and Esau. Quite clearly Mary Madelyn is, allegorically speaking, Eve—the quintessential Fallen Woman (in fact, the historical Mary Magdalene was a prostitute and also a fallen woman). Eve is the mythological agent of Man's Fall from grace and the reason Man is expelled from the Garden of Eden. In this role Mary Madelyn incarnates Eve and is tempted by Cohn as Satan to have sexual intercourse—in the hopes of creating a new, unnatural, and therefore

ungodly, species. To say that Cohn/Satan is the tempter might seem to contradict the events of the text. After all Mary approaches Cohn on three different occasions with a proposal to mate before Cohn subsequently approaches her with the same proposal.

Prior to her first proposition, however, two things occur that reveal Cohn/Satan as the true initiator and tempter. As we saw in the discussion on the comparative structures of *CM* and *GG*, Cohn initiates the first physical contact between Mary and him at the Seder. It is a simple patting of her hand, but she reciprocates and the tempter has started his seduction. In addition, just before this exchange of intimacy, the narrator states, “Mary Madelyn was an intelligent, attractive young female with silken hair, a somewhat heart-shaped, healthy face—a trifle pale—and an affectionate manner. Her sexy ears lay close to the head. She had almost a real figure, Cohn thought” (112). Cohn, therefore, knows her nature is affectionate before he begins his seduction of her. Ironically, Cohn/Satan devotes part of a schoolroom lesson to this very subject. In his words, “if Satan is allowed to go slithering around in Paradise, there’s bound to be serious conflict and conflagration. In essence, the old boy envies man, wants to be him. Didn’t he desire Eve when he saw her rolling bare-skinned in the flowers with Adam naked...He poisoned her apple after that. Broke her tree, it stopped singing hymns” (133).

Cohn continues his unconscious seduction of Mary by planting ideas and ideals of romantic love in her mind—based on *Romeo and Juliet*. By the time Mary asks Cohn to mate, Cohn has already succeeded in conning her. Like George, Mary Madelyn has no counterpart in Melville’s novel. However, as already stated, thematically the Fall is one of the central themes in *CM*. This theme is indirectly addressed in the conversation between the PIO man and Pitch. During their exchange, the PIO man says, “ ‘You are

merry, sir. But you have a little looked into St. Augustine, I suppose' ” (167). And Pitch replies, “ ‘St. Augustine on Original Sin is my text-book.’ ” As Dugdale observes, St. Augustine wrote no work by this title (i.e., *Original Sin*), but the idea of the Fall is the central tenant of his thought (349). In a sense, then, Melville’s treatment of the Fall is personified by Malamud in the character of Mary Madelyn as Eve.

Esau is the next character of importance in Malamud’s story. As Eve is the paradigmatic Fallen Woman of the *Old Testament*, Esau is the quintessential victim (or, as the victim is referred to by confidence-men, the mark). In the story of *Genesis*, Esau is the eldest son born to Isaac and Rebekah. His twin brother is Jacob, who deceives Esau twice—once when Esau returns hungry after an unsuccessful hunt, and another time as Isaac is dying. During the first con-job, Esau surrenders his birthright, and during the second deception, he is cheated out of his father’s blessing. In the latter scene, Jacob is assisted by his mother as he dons a disguise to fool his father into thinking that Jacob is Esau.^{xxvi}

In Malamud’s novel, the character Esau is described as a “gorilla-like, sour-faced, youthful male, who bristled at Cohn” (94). Esau is the surly Alpha male of the chimp group and is not afraid to show it—repeatedly. Like the Esau of the *Old Testament*, he is a hunter, and it is Esau who hunts and kills three baby baboons late in the story. In addition to being a hunter, he is a vulgar hedonist who desires nothing more than to find a female to mate with. As Alpha male he should have first mating rights with eligible females, meaning Mary Madelyn. Like his biblical counterpart, though, Esau is cheated out of his rights, in this instance by Cohn (and not by another chimp as might be expected).

In some respects, Esau—as quintessential dupe—represents all the victims onboard the *Fidèle*. All the victims of Melville’s confidence-man are swindled, deceived, or cheated just as Esau is cheated. But I believe Esau bears a strong resemblance to a specific character in *CM*, namely Pitch. Here is how *CM*’s narrator describes this colorful character: He “was a rather eccentric-looking person who spoke; somewhat ursine in aspect; sporting a shaggy spencer of the cloth called bearskin; a high-peaked cap of raccoon-skin, the long bushy tail switching over behind; raw-hide leggings; grim stubble chin; and to end, a double-barrelled gun in hand” (140). Pitch seems more beast than man, and Malamud may have had him in mind as he created the character of Esau. As I interpret *GG*, Esau may be the counterpart of Pitch, but he does not reach the allegorical level of a metaphysical being as do Cohn, Buz, George, and Mary Madelyn. Nevertheless, he remains an important character in Malamud’s tale.

The next character that appears is the albino chimp, and the first time Cohn encounters him is in an apparent dream. The albino is described as “fearsome” and Cohn fears that “the white ape might appear in his cave and make demands.” In the “dream,” Cohn searches for the albino with an iron spear for “three days and nights” (124), but meets up with an angel instead, who speaks in riddles and tautologies in the same manner that Melville does in his three meta-fictional chapters (i.e., XIV, XXXIII, and XLIV). The albino is almost certainly another reference to Melville, but this time the work alluded to is *Moby Dick* instead of *The Confidence-Man*. In Chapter Nine of *Moby Dick*, the biblical story of Jonah is recounted, who spent three days and nights in the belly of the whale (40). Furthermore, Ahab’s chase of the White Whale lasted for three days as well. And, of course, *Moby Dick* is a white (or albino^{xxvii}) whale.

Cohn's next face-off with the albino happens when he is awake (or so it seems). In their encounter, the albino has "grown a few feet," though it has only been about a month since they last met. The albino is, like Buz in the beginning, a mute, and remains one throughout the story. To try to scare off the ape, Cohn dons a black witch's mask that he has made. The albino, in turn, grabs the mask and holds it in front of his own face, thus "becoming a white ape with a black face" (155). (Parenthetically, this is a possible parody of the accusation some of the *Fidele's* passengers make of Black Guinea, namely, that he is a "white masquerading as a black" [40]). After a brief struggle, the albino hoists Cohn over his shoulder and takes to the trees. The episode ends when they come upon George, who threatens the albino with a coconut, whereupon the chimp releases Cohn, who falls through the ebony tree to the forest floor. Significantly, after this second encounter with the albino, Cohn's desire for Mary Madelyn awakens. In sequencing the plot in this way, Malamud casts the albino in the role of a messenger, who tries (in vain) to warn Cohn of his coming destruction. I will explore this in greater depth in section four.

The final encounter occurs near the end of the novel, after Esau has kidnapped Rebekah, who falls or is thrown to her death from a treetop. After this tragic event, the narrator states: "Cohn hunted Satan in the nightwood" (213). In Cohn's eyes, Esau (the quintessential victim) has become Satan (represented paradoxically by Cohn). In any event, Cohn throws his spear at who he thinks is Esau, but in reality is the albino. He finds the albino dead in the forest the following morning.

Of all the characters in Malamud's novel, the albino is the most difficult to interpret. As mentioned the albino bears symbolic resemblance to *Moby Dick* (the white

whale—not the novel). But other than their similar color, the albino whale and albino chimp are near-polar opposites. First, *Moby Dick* is painted by Melville as an infernal beast,^{xxviii} while Malamud presents the albino chimp as non-threatening. Second, Captain Ahab dies in his mad quest to kill the whale while Cohn kills the albino chimp by mistake during his Ahab-like quest for revenge against Esau, who Cohn sees as Satan. So, in a sense, Cohn kills his benevolent alter ego (as the albino chimp has been identified by Jeffrey Helterman [113]) as he tries to kill his malevolent allegorical self (i.e., Satan, who he mistakes for Esau).

As complex and ambiguous as *Moby Dick* is in Melville's classic tale, in this essay I will offer some thoughts on the albino ape as it relates to *CM*. As I have proposed, on the allegorical level, Cohn represents Satan. In apocalyptic literature, such as the *Book of Revelation*, Satan's opponent is Christ. But that role is already being filled primarily by Buz. Moreover, the albino never threatens Cohn and hence cannot be deemed his enemy. In my interpretation, the albino can be understood on both the surface and symbolic levels.

On the surface, the albino can be conceived of as Cohn's other-half, or maybe his unconscious. To expand on Helterman's idea, the albino first appears immediately after the Seder, when Cohn's first physical contact with Mary occurs. He comes to Cohn in an apparent dream and, though Cohn doesn't recognize it as such, the albino is meant as a warning not to play the part of the seducer. His next appearance immediately precedes Cohn's awakening desire for Mary Madelyn, and hence is meant as another warning. Throughout the narrative Cohn remains in the dark regarding the consequences of his actions. The albino, by contrast, is in the light, and attempts to bring Cohn to conscious

awareness. He fails, and Cohn's semi-utopia comes to a bloody end. On the symbolic level, the albino represents Melville's white whale and maybe even Melville himself. Because Malamud deliberately patterned *GG* after *CM*, he may have chosen to create the albino ape as a reference to Ahab's iconic nemesis and as a tribute to Melville, a writer he greatly admired. So, to sum up, the albino is a complex conflation of Cohn's alter ego, a messenger from God or Cohn's unconscious, and the Malamudian equivalent of Moby Dick, the albino whale, and perhaps even Melville himself.

The final major character of Malamud's novel is the offspring of Cohn and Mary Madelyn—Rebekah Islanda. Her name, like most of the names in the tale, has symbolic significance. First, Rebekah is the name of the vessel from the beginning of the novel, thus connoting either the circularity and/or approaching completion of the narrative. Second, as we saw above, the biblical Rebekah was an accomplice to the deception of Esau. Similarly, the infant human-chimp is the result of Cohn/Satan's seduction of Mary Madelyn/Eve.

When Rebekah is born, Cohn looks at "a fuzzy white baby with human eyes" (178) and runs out of the cave because "he thought he had affronted God; then he ran back because he felt he hadn't" (178-9). The narrator states that Cohn felt "more optimistic than he had been since arriving on the island" (179). He thinks that her birth heralds the start of a new civilization, and that she may someday be "the mother of a new race of men" (182). Cohn's brightest hopes for Rebekah and the future are quickly dashed, though, as Esau and others soon go on the hunt for baby baboons. They end up killing three in quick succession. Cohn's dream of a peaceful island is shattered. Rebekah's life is all-too-brief; she is only a few weeks old and has already begun

learning to speak and count when Esau kidnaps her and she falls or is thrown from a treetop and dies.

Given the male-dominated cast of *CM*, there is no character in Melville's novel to which Rebekah corresponds. But there is no male-domination of the cast of characters in *GG*. In fact, one scholar—Pirjo Ahokas—detects a feminization of Malamud's narrative, and attributes this feminization to the birth of Rebekah. In his view, Rebekah is associated with redemption and, in line with Jewish mystical literature, may be viewed as “a female Messiah” (356). Seeing her as the Messiah may seem to contradict my interpretation, given that I have already put Buz/Christ in this role. However, Buz/Christ goes through a parodic inversion when he, in the manner of Judas, betrays Cohn. Thus, in a sense, Rebekah can be seen to replace, however briefly, Buz in a Messianic role. Moreover, in Jewish apocalyptic literature, the coming of the Messiah heralds the binding of Satan and the ensuing millennial Messianic reign. If Rebekah symbolizes the Messiah, at least part of the apocalyptic vision is fulfilled. Cohn/Satan is bound (in the manner of the Akedah) and then sacrificed, ushering in a new age of a world without the presence of men. Rebekah's death muddles this interpretation, but considering the high ambiguity and intermittent confusion in Malamud's work, I believe this reading of Rebekah's symbolic nature is plausible.

This completes my analysis of the seven major characters in *GG*. Two minor characters, though, also merit mention, namely, Saul of Tarsus and Luke. First, Saul of Tarsus may correspond to Melville's Egbert, who is, as Cook interprets him, a mock version of St. Paul (169). This is not to say that Cook disputes the traditional reading of Egbert as a caricature of Thoreau (with Winsome as Emerson). Rather, Cook sees this

interpretation of Egbert as another layer of Melville's meaning. For Cook, in contrast to St. Paul's notion of *agape* (love of humanity) as expressed in *I Corinthians* 13, Egbert espouses "a forbidding version of agape that sees friendship or brotherly love as an impossibly exalted relation not to be soiled by the everyday needs of living human beings" (171). Significantly, in *GG*, Saul of Tarsus accompanies Esau to Cohn's cave when they kidnap Rebekah. The text states that Saul of Tarsus, along with Esau and the others, is wearing a "clay [mask]" (208) as he enters the cave. Furthermore, Saul of Tarsus is likely among the "gang of chimps" (217) who, along with Buz, betray their former teacher. This seems to support an interpretation of him as a mock St. Paul, just like Melville's Egbert.

Second, while I see no corresponding character in *CM*, I believe *GG*'s Luke deserves brief mention. Luke is one of the four evangelists and also the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*. This fact alone is significant since *Luke* and *Acts* both contain apocalyptic references. Moreover, Luke has been associated symbolically with an ox or bull in the Christian tradition, thereby alluding to Christ's passion and sacrifice on Golgotha. Also, Luke is with Esau and the others when they kidnap Rebekah and later when they betray Cohn and take him to the mountain to be sacrificed.

Before I move on to a thematic analysis of the two novels, I want to make some brief remarks about the eight baboons in *GG*. They are minor characters to be sure, given that they appear late in the story, do not speak, and are basically at war with the chimps. When they are first spotted, they are described as "afraid of the dark," and covered with a "black stain" (178). They don't even seem to recognize each other. Esau says that "baboons don't belong to our tribe...[and]...all they are is goddam strangers" (185). On

a symbolic level, then, the baboons may represent the multitude of strangers in a society who are not trusted by the majority population. This sounds a lot like the many strangers onboard *CM's Fidele*. The steamboat is literally teeming with strangers, most of whom do not know or trust each other. Many of the characters we meet in *CM* are never known by name, only by descriptions of their clothing that can easily be changed. Even some major characters remain nameless, including the mute, Black Guinea, the man in the gray coat, the Herb-doctor, and the PIO man. The stranger/anonymity motif is an important theme in *CM*, and the baboons appear to fill the roles of strangers in *GG*.

This completes my interpretation of *GG* as a parody of *CM*. The work I have done in this section serves as a foundation for the thematic analysis to follow in section four. The analysis I have done thus far in terms of historical milieu, setting, genre, plot, structure, and characters allows me to explore many common themes that Melville and Malamud develop in the two novels under examination. I will show that the two writers sometimes approach these themes in similar, and other times dissimilar, ways.

4. A Comparative Thematic Analysis

I begin my thematic analysis with the deep theological/philosophical concerns that both authors share, and how these concerns are manifested in their fictional works. Melville, as previously stated, was raised in the strict Calvinist tradition. By the time he was an adult, he had abandoned Calvinism and Christianity altogether. In fact, he even seems to have given up on the idea of an afterlife. His friend and fellow author Nathaniel Hawthorne—a man that Melville venerated for his artistic abilities^{xxix}—relates that, during a visit, Melville informed him that he had “pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated” (qtd. in Foster xxviii). In saying this Melville is not confessing to suicidal thoughts. Rather, he is stating that he no longer believes in life-after-death.

To state the obvious, Melville was a deep thinker and was unafraid to confront what he came to see as the truth, no matter where this led him. To begin with, Melville’s concept of God is quite complex, and consistent with beliefs outside orthodox Christianity.^{xxx} His idea of God is complicated due to a conviction regarding “the individual’s inability to know God” (Cook 66), juxtaposed with the author’s assertion that God’s being entails a fusing of both good and evil. Though Melville has been called an atheist, he still believed in God while maintaining a deep disdain for Him and for Christianity. Paradoxically, for Melville God is unknowable; yet the author believes Him to be a trickster who toys with man like a child plays with its playthings, and is therefore a being to be reviled and satirized as the author does. In Cook’s view, the two-part structure of *CM* reflects the author’s dualistic idea of God. Part one shows God as Satan; part two, conversely, shows that Christ can “incarnate a faith of the heart that provides the necessary basis for human fellowship and so may redeem the evil in man” (10). And

though Cook doesn't say it, *CM*'s message seems to be that Christians have failed miserably to truly follow Christ's example.

Another critic goes so far as to say that Melville hated God and viewed Him as the "truly Original Sinner" (Thompson 327). But if this is true, what is God's sin? In a word—deception! For Melville, God is no better than the confidence-man of his novel. He dupes humanity into having faith in Him amid what Melville sees as an evil and irrevocably fallen world. In short, God is no more than an actor playing various and contradictory parts. To the questions that the man in gray poses, namely, "Does all the world act? Am I, for instance, an actor" (41), Melville appears to reply with a resounding "Yes!"

In comparison, who or what is God in Malamud's tale? Like the concept of God in *CM*, He is not easily understood in Malamud's story either. While Malamud was mysteriously taciturn about his own beliefs, Cohn's idea of God bears considerable resemblance to Melville's. With him and Buz adrift on the ocean, Cohn muses about God's nature: "What makes him so theatrical? Cohn wondered. He enjoys performance, spectacle—people in peril His most entertaining circus. He loves sad stories, with casts of thousands" (24). This shows God, in Melvillean fashion, to be a trickster and an actor.

If God is unknowable for Melville, for Malamud (in the persona of Cohn) He is shrouded in ambiguity and highly elusive. It is not certain He even exists in the novel, or perhaps He is alive only in Cohn's imagination. Section four of *GG* opens with three words: "God was silent" (91). For the vast majority of the novel, this is the case. Cohn, for the most part, is free to live his life as he sees fit. When God does speak, He claims to be perfect, yet Cohn's very existence belies God's claim, because God had intended to

destroy all life on earth through His second flood. (After Buz and the rest of the apes are discovered, it simply presents more evidence of God's imperfection). God dismisses Cohn as "a marginal error" (5), one that He promises to rectify. In the midst of all this ambiguity, Cohn discovers the island to be imbued with God's divine power. As previously noted, in his mind, Cohn had guessed, "the Lord Himself had creatively taken over" (43). Perhaps Malamud is trying to say that this is part of the human condition—living in a state of uncertainty.

At the deepest level, though, what is at issue for Malamud is one of the most fundamental philosophical problems of the ages, namely, the problem of evil (otherwise known as theodicy).^{xxxii} But first let's look at how Melville addresses this issue. In Melville's narrative theodicy is an implicit theme throughout, as God/Satan makes sport with the "faithful" passengers onboard the steamboat. At times, though, the problem of evil is brought somewhat closer to the surface, as in Chapter IV. In this chapter, Ringman converses with Roberts to dupe him into giving Ringman money based on his fraudulent tale of woe. During the first part of their conversation, Ringman tries to convince Roberts they have already met about six years ago. Upon receiving a negative reply, Ringman audaciously asks whether Roberts had ever received some sort of brain injury that would have wiped out his memory. After more cajoling Roberts confesses to having had a brain fever that might account for his lapse in memory. The chapter concludes with Roberts furtively giving money to Ringman and being set up for the next incarnation of the confidence-man: the man in the gray coat.

This interchange between Ringman and Roberts, according to Cook, illustrates how Melville resolves the problem of evil in the world. For the author, the problem of

evil consists in the presence of unmerited suffering in mankind. In this exchange, unmerited suffering takes the form of the brain fever that had wiped out Roberts's memory and temporarily made him lose his mind. Cook believes that Melville resolves theodicy by "a paradoxical conflation of good and evil, Christ and Antichrist, in the confidence-man" (61). Exactly how Ringman can be construed as good is not explained by Cook. He presents an appearance of good, but at heart he is a deceiver. Perhaps this is Melville's ultimate statement concerning God's allowance or perpetration of evil upon humanity. God dupes men into believing He is good, but in reality He is both good and evil intertwined. In its simplest terms, this is solving the classic problem of evil by denying God's perfect goodness.^{xxxii}

However, in Chapter XIII, in the exchange between Truman and the merchant, theodicy resurfaces and the resolution of the problem contradicts Cook's thesis. After the narrator recounts the story of the unfortunate man (Ringman), and his troubled relations with his deranged wife Goneril, Truman tries to soften the harsh realities of the acrimonious relationship between Ringman and Goneril by suggesting that there were probably "small faults on both sides, more than balanced by large virtues." When the merchant opposes Truman's views, the confidence-man says, "this would never do; that, though but in the most exceptional case, to admit the existence of *unmerited misery*, more particularly if alleged to have been brought about by unhindered arts of the wicked, such an admission was, to say the least, not prudent; since, with some, it might unfavourably bias their most important persuasions" (italics mine)(84).

Here the protagonist suggests another of the classic resolutions to the problem of evil—the denial of its existence. So, is Cook wrong in offering his interpretation of

Melville's resolution to theodicy, namely, through the conflation of good and evil? I don't think so. I believe that the denial of evil offered by Truman still fits into Cook's interpretive framework. How? Just as the Devil can quote Scripture and remain the Devil, so too can the confidence-man pretend to deny evil while really believing in it—indeed even perpetrating it. The protagonist can do this because he believes that, at heart, men know that unmerited suffering exists, and that its existence is deeply disturbing to them (either consciously or unconsciously). In this regard psychological repression comes into play, since repression involves the active suppression of unwelcome thought. According to this line of thinking, some may repress the very existence of unmerited suffering because to admit its existence might cause a crisis of faith.

In keeping with this reading of the text, Truman tries to lighten the merchant's lugubrious mood over champagne after the dreary tale of Ringman and Goneril. During their drinking, the merchant suddenly solemnizes:

‘Ah, wine is good, and confidence is good; but can wine or confidence percolate down through all the stony strata of hard considerations, and drop warmly and ruddily into the cold cave of truth? Truth will *not* be comforted. Led by dear charity, lured by sweet hope, fond fancy essays this feat; but in vain; mere dreams and ideals, they explode in your hand, leaving naught but the scorching behind’ (87)!

This appears to be the voice of Melville speaking through the merchant. For the author, confidence (faith), charity (love), and hope, the three Pauline virtues of *First Corinthians* 13, are “mere dreams and ideals” that cannot mask the cold truth that dwells in the human heart. In Melville's eyes, it seems that “the stony strata” of hypocrisy, hubris, and self-deceit work to obscure human perception of the truth. (These themes are all present in *GG*).

I must pause here and offer a brief interlude regarding Cohn's cave in *GG*, since this seems an appropriate place to do so. In Malamud's tale, much of the important symbolic action occurs in Cohn's cave. In it Cohn lives with Buz, creates his masks, holds the Seder, meets the albino, mates with Mary Madelyn, and is betrayed by Buz. In contrast with the merchant's imagined "cold cave of truth," Cohn's cave is a place of deception. Where the merchant's cave yields insight into life's dark reality, Cohn's cave is lit by a fire, yet Cohn (as a man) is still in the dark about what motivates him and what the true consequences of his actions are. Thus Malamud employs yet another parodic inversion of Melville's novel. Where in Melville's tale the image of the cave allows a glimpse into the dark reality envisioned by the author, in Malamud's Cohn's real cave depicts man's unconscious self-deception and self-betrayal.

It is Goodman, more than any other appearance of Melville's title character, who subverts faith in God and man (Cook 49). Much of Goodman's preeminence results from his sheer dominance of the second half of *CM*. But he does more than simply take up narrative space. In addition, he attempts to dismantle several sophisticated philosophical schools of thought present during Melville's time, including Emersonian Transcendentalism, as seen below.

There is still another thinly veiled solution offered by Melville to the classic philosophical conundrum of evil, and it appears late in the narrative. As Goodman engages in a make-believe conversation with Charlie (played by Egbert), the transcendentalist disciple states, " 'Help? to say nothing of the friend, there is something wrong about the man who wants help. There is somewhere a defect, a want, in brief, a need, a crying need, somewhere about that man' " (274). Melville is satirizing

Emersonian Transcendentalism here (Dugdale 357), but in doing so, he presents a second philosophical opening to the riddle of theodicy. The solution given is that man is defective—that he is imperfectly made—and by implication, God is also imperfect in creating man in this manner. This solution differs from fusing good and evil in the deity; in this scenario God is imperfect because of His flawed creation. By extension, it may be that He is not all-powerful or perhaps not all-good; in either case God is flawed.

This argument reappears in more explicit terms—albeit in slightly altered form—in the final chapter of the novel. In it, the old man speaks to the cosmopolitan concerning distrust: “ ‘No, sir, I am not surprised,’ said the old man; then added: ‘from what you say, I see you are something of my way of thinking—you think that to distrust the creature, is a kind of distrusting the Creator’” (325). These are the words of a supposedly model Christian, who is exposed, however, as lacking trust (or faith) in his fellow man and, following his own logic, his Creator. All of Melville’s solution(s) to the problem of evil ultimately lead to a distrust of God, who, in the author’s mind, is the cosmic Confidence-Man.

Writing in the late twentieth century, some forty years after the Holocaust, it is not surprising that Malamud, a Jewish-American writer, is concerned with the problem of evil. The Holocaust turned an abstract philosophical/theological problem into a real dilemma for Jews and Gentiles alike. So theodicy figures as a central theme for Malamud as well, but where Melville disguises the problem in veiled imagery and elusive dialogue, in *GG* it is blatant and explicit. The problem is stated plainly from the start. In the opening contentious dialogue between God and Cohn, the protagonist lodges a complaint: “ ‘After Your first Holocaust You promised no further Floods. “ ‘Never again

shall there be a Flood to destroy the earth.’ ” That was Your Covenant with Noah and all living creatures. Instead, You turned the water on again. Everyone who wasn’t consumed in fire is drowned in bitter water, and a Second Flood covers the earth.’ ” In response, God says that all that was “pre-Torah,” and that the present flood is just the result of “cause and effect” (4). After more acrimonious dialogue between the two, God disappears into a bulbous cloud. From this interchange, it appears that God is being blamed for breaking His promise, but the implication is that God is not all-good. By breaking His promise, He continues his retributive ways of old. In terms of classical theodicy, Cohn implies that God is not all-good or that He is a combination of good and evil. In this respect—at least on the surface—Malamud’s solution to the problem of evil matches Melville’s. But as we have already seen, on the allegorical level Cohn is both God and Satan and therefore is the melding of both good and evil.

Later in the narrative, in an imagined dialogue between God and Cohn, theodicy comes front and center when Cohn asks: “ ‘Why does God permit evil?’ ” To which God replies: “ ‘How could I not?’ ” Cohn then adds: “Touché” (91). This comic exchange and God’s ambiguous reply affords an opportunity to further explore how theodicy is presented and resolved. God’s reply can mean one of three things: first, that He is not all-good (as already discussed); second, that He is not all-powerful, or third, mankind’s free will is to blame. Regarding the second possibility, we have already observed that God is not omniscient, because He meant to destroy all life on earth following man’s nuclear holocaust, but erroneously overlooked Cohn and several primates. If we accept, then, that God is not omniscient (and the text unambiguously supports this), then by inference it is reasonable to state that neither is He all-powerful.

Regarding the third interpretation, Cohn dismisses this option during a schooltree lesson on the topic of evil: “ ‘Never mind free will. How can [man] be free if the mind is limited by its constitution? Why hadn’t the Almighty—in sum—done a better job?’ ” Cohn’s basic critique of God is that He is fundamentally flawed. Not only is He not omniscient, but neither is He a perfect creator. Regarding the latter, Cohn describes Man as “the Lord’s imperfect creation” (135). For Cohn, God is flawed and created Man in a flawed manner, because Man was unable to overcome his animal nature. The third interpretation of God’s reply, then, is simply restating Cohn’s contention that God is not all-powerful. This corresponds to the classic denial of the proposition that God is omnipotent. Therefore, Malamud (in the persona of Cohn) surpasses even Melville in his indictment of God, for he finds God lacking in all three of His classic attributes: omnipotence, omni-benevolence, and omniscience.

A theme closely related to theodicy, for both authors, is the Fall. As I have already discussed and as Mani states, Melville was fascinated with the Fall. For the author, the Fall is a resolution of the problem of evil insofar as it implies the use of man’s free will as the cause of the Fall, but it becomes more complicated because Satan can be viewed as God’s agent and as God’s instrument of temptation. Since Melville conceived of God as a combination of both good and evil, then the Fall is as much God’s doing as it is man’s. This, of course, conflicts with orthodox Christian thought, which insists that God is omni-benevolent. By the time he wrote *CM*, Melville had become disillusioned with this teaching, and he uses the novel to satirize what he saw as the naïveté of Christian theology. So, in part one of his work, the confidence-man reenacts the Fall each time he deceives one of his victims. His protagonist, in a sense, de-masks his marks

and reveals them to be nonbelievers masquerading as people of faith. His victims *fall* because they cannot conceive of the confidence-man as God and Satan combined in one entity. Their belief system cannot accommodate such complexity.

Malamud also deals with the Fall in his novel, and we have already seen that Cohn, as the confidence-man, initiates the island's descent into anarchy. For Malamud, the Fall appears inextricably linked to Cohn's hubris—his inability to see beyond his own egotistical ways. In a real sense he is blind to what is actually happening on the island; he cannot see how his actions are the cause of his own destruction. Cohn, because of his lack of self-awareness, acts as his own angel of death and unwittingly self-destructs. In this light a familiar passage from *Proverbs* seems especially apropos: “Pride leads to destruction, and arrogance to downfall” (*Prov.* 16:18).

Evolution and evolutionary theory are also central themes for both Melville and Malamud. I have already quoted the most pertinent passage from *CM* on this important issue. In the exchange between Goodman and Pitch about Signor Marzetti, Goodman says Marzetti “plays the intelligent ape till he seems it. With such naturalness can a being endowed with an immortal spirit enter into that of a monkey?” Pitch responds by referring to “the great chimpanzee, in whose likeness, you, Marzetti, and the other chatters are made” (176-77). This exchange is an obvious reference to Darwinian theory, with which Melville was familiar. To consider evolution and Melville's response to it, I have to make a slight detour in my analysis, because Melville scholars look not to *CM* for Melville's dialogue with Darwin, but to three of Melville's other works: *Moby Dick*, *The Encantadas*, and *Clarel*.^{xxxiii}

Let us begin, then, with *Moby Dick*. Eric Wilson interprets Melville's masterpiece, at least in part, as "an allegory signifying the rise of Darwin and the consequent dethroning of man, the victory of evolution over essentialism" (131). One of the underlying premises of essentialism, one of the theories Darwin challenges, is that man and other species, while appearing to change, remain essentially the same, according to their "pre-ordained, God-given essences" (132). Also, according to essentialism, God's design decreed that man "sits atop and controls the great chain of being" (131). Darwin's theory refutes essentialism's anthropocentric view and places man among other creatures amid an "inextricable web of affinities" (qtd. in Eric Wilson 131). One of the most important implications of Darwinian thought is that natural selection—not divine design—determines the random evolution of man and all other creatures. A corollary to Darwin's theory is that man has no absolute control over his environment; instead, he evolves in response to "environmental factors beyond [his] control" (141).

According to Wilson, in *Moby Dick*, Ahab represents the essentialist system of beliefs that is replaced by evolutionism, which is represented by Ishmael. The scholar goes on to claim that *Moby Dick* can thus be read as evidence of the affinities between Melville and Darwin in terms of evolutionary thought. As enlightening as Wilson's analysis is, there is one major shortcoming in it—it leads one to believe that Melville wholeheartedly embraced Darwinism and all its implications. But this is not the case.

The Encantadas is proof of Melville's critique of Darwin. This is not to say that Melville refutes Darwin's entire system in *The Encantadas*; it just means he had serious objections to some implications that result from Darwinian theory. Published in 1854,

The Encantadas (or *Enchanted Isles*) is widely regarded as a parody of Darwin's *Voyage*, the journal that describes Darwin's visit aboard the *Beagle* to the now-famous *Galapagos* Islands off the Ecuadoran coast. Melville uses the bleak volcanic scenery as described by Darwin and exaggerates it to create a Melvillean version of Dante's *Inferno*. "Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot," Melville begins, and "imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas" (2). Further on, in an apparent attempt to ridicule Darwin, Melville writes in Sketch Third, "And truly neither fish, flesh nor fowl is the penguin...without exception the most ambiguous and least lovely creature yet discovered by man...[a]s if ashamed of her failure Nature keeps this ungainly child hidden away at the ends of the earth" (19).

While Melville was accurate in placing a species of penguin in the *Galapagos* (showing that he did in fact travel there aboard the *Acushnet*), he may not have chosen the right species to pick on, for the penguin demonstrates how one species morphed from a bird into a pseudo-fish to ensure its survival. What Melville cites as nature's failure, Darwin would use the penguin's case to support his theory of evolution. Though the penguin might appear "ungainly" to Melville, Darwin would delight in its uncanny ability to adapt to its environment.

Of particular significance in light of this thesis are the few characters that populate the islands, as expressed in the title of Sketch Tenth: "Runaways, Castaways, Solitaires, Gravestones, Etc" (94). The characters, the Creole, Hunilla, and Oberlus, are all solitary people living on their own island worlds. In the fashion of *Robinson Crusoe*,

these solitaires lead desperate lives in unforgiving environments. As we shall soon see, however, they differ significantly from Calvin Cohn and his environment.

I turn now to *Clarel* to show how Melville takes further issue with Darwin. In Melville's view, Darwin's paradigmatic shift in understanding man's role in the world still left fundamental questions concerning faith and free will unanswered. His epic poem *Clarel*, which Benjamin Lease calls the writer's "vast allegory of faith" (538), ends with a meditation on the vexing issues Darwin raises. "If Luther's day expand to Darwin's year,/ Shall that exclude the hope—foreclose the fear?/... Yea, ape and angel, strife and old debate—/The harps of heaven and dreary gongs of hell?/ Science the feud can only aggravate—/ No umpire she betwixt the chimes and knell:/ The running battle of the star and clod/ Shall run for ever—if there be no God" (qtd. in Lease 538). For Melville, man is caught between being a mere Darwinian beast and a near divine being. As a creature man is no more than a being responding instinctively to his environment; as an angel man is able to exert his will to rise above what might appear to be his fate. One of the most profound questions of human existence still persists, even after the advent of Darwinian thought: What is man? As Lease expresses it, for Melville, "there can be no answer—except human courage in the face of eternal mystery" (538).

Like most themes in *GG*, Malamud's approach to evolution is both complex and ambiguous. The starting point of the narrative is the immediate aftermath of a global flood caused by God, which was immediately preceded by a worldwide thermonuclear holocaust caused by humankind. God had intended to destroy all life on earth through His flood, but through a minor oversight (or Providence), He has allowed Calvin Cohn and a few primates to survive. So to begin, Malamud's narrative starts after the near-total

extinction of all life on the planet in two successive cataclysmic events, on a scale Darwin probably could not have imagined.

In a sense, then, the slate has been wiped clean and Cohn and the primates are free to begin anew. We soon learn, however, that the island on which they live differs drastically from the world as it was prior to the Day of Devastation. Unlike the former world, God controls the island environment. As Cohn discovers, God has miraculously intervened in the habitat on the island. This turns evolutionary theory on its head, because according to Darwin, man and all other species are forced to adapt to an ever-changing environment. On Cohn's island, however, the environment is unnatural, at least in the conventional understanding of what is natural and unnatural.

Under normal circumstances, independent of divine oversight, the entire island population would be doomed to extinction. Cohn, who is executed at the novel's conclusion, would be the end of humankind unless mankind could make a comeback through evolution. But that would be next to impossible according to Darwinism. That is because Mary Madelyn is the sole female chimp able to bring forth offspring. Though Buz, Esau, Luke, Saul of Tarsus, Bromberg, and Esterhazy could all impregnate Mary Madelyn, the small population size would mean that inbreeding would occur and bring with it a high chance of the "depression of life" and "extinction" (Edward Wilson 235). George the gorilla has no mate so his species would also go extinct. And the baboons are being devoured by the chimps soon after they are born. The sum total of this bleak scenario is the total extinction of all life on the island, and hence the planet as well.

But as noted, Cohn's Island is under God's control so all bets are off. Darwinian theory does not apply here. God is controlling the environment and He can also control

the reproduction of the three species that exist on the island. And, if God is all-powerful, He can also bring forth other species to restore the earth to its former (or new) conditions and repopulate the planet. So, Cohn's demise at the conclusion of the narrative need not be as pessimistic as at least one critic suggests (Safer 115).

The next theme I will explore is the attack made on Christianity in both novels. Foster observes that Christianity and faith are both continuously ridiculed throughout Melville's narrative. In her words, "religion itself is weighed and found wanting on every page of the book" (xxxv). But in this tale told by Melville, the author's assault is masterfully disguised—just like his protagonist. First of all, as I have posited, by fusing God and Satan in his protagonist, Melville lays siege to the foundational concept of God as all-good. The writer does not stop here, however. During the course of his narrative he repeatedly parodies Scripture and takes aim at his perceived naiveté and gullibility of believers, their shallow faith (indeed the very idea of faith), their hypocrisy, their misanthropy, and their illusions. At the heart of Melville's attack is his perception that the truths of the Christian religion "have been distorted to suit the purpose of a materialistic society" (Mani 265).

The Christ-like mute in the very beginning of the work lays out the confidence-man's agenda. The passengers almost immediately suspect the Christ figure of lunacy and call out various harsh epithets about him, such as 'Odd fish,' 'Humbug,' even 'Escaped convict' (6). Then the barber posts his 'No Trust' sign above his shop (4). To this the passengers pay no mind whatsoever. Here, in this opening scene, is one of the fundamental accusations that Melville makes against believers, namely, their hypocrisy.

They have contempt for the mute who writes inscriptions from their Scriptures, yet accept without question the policy of 'No Trust' displayed by the barber.

The novel proceeds through a series of interludes between the confidence-man and his marks, as the protagonist nearly always succeeds in duping his victims and/or revealing their contradictions and hypocrisy. The "faithful" passengers are shown demeaning Black Guinea, making sport of him by trying to toss pennies into his mouth. Previously, I have discussed how Ringman cons Roberts, snidely stating how Roberts' memory has been "quite erased from the tablet" (23). The man in the gray coat verbally assaults the sophomore for reading Tacitus and other classics, and quotes from the *Apocrypha* (without the collegian's spotting the deception).

John Truman, president of the Black Rapids Coal Company, sells shares in "hell" (symbolically speaking), which are deemed by his customers to be of more worth than stocks in a real estate development called the New Jerusalem. The Herb-doctor sells vials of useless medicine to his victims, while spinning rhetorical circles around them to disorient them, as when he says to a sick man: "From evil comes good. Distrust is a stage to confidence" (109).

One of the author's sharpest attacks comes from the protagonist himself. In conversation with Pitch about the sick, old miser, the Herb-doctor pleads: "'Granting that his dependence on my medicine is vain, is it kind to deprive him of what, in mere imagination, if nothing more, may help eke out, with hope, his disease' " (145)? What seems obvious here, is that the "medicine" in question here is a thinly-veiled disguise for the Christian faith, which, according to the Herb-doctor himself (a parody of Christ as a healer), is no more than a placebo for the young, the weak, or the dying. As the Herb-

doctor says later to Pitch, “ ‘Yes, when as with this old man, your evil days of decay come on, when a hoary captive in your chamber, then will you, something like the dungeoned Italian^{xxxiv} we read of, gladly seek the breast of that confidence begot in the tender time of your youth, blessed beyond telling if it return to you in age’ ” (146-47). This is another veiled reference to Christianity as the passage parodies the concept of rebirth.

Even Pitch, a formidable opponent of the protagonist, finally succumbs to the PIO man’s relentless barrage, though he later regrets it. Pitch agrees to hire a boy from the PIO man, but after the confidence-man departs, he begins to suspect he has been duped. The narrator states that Pitch was like one “beginning to rouse himself from a dose of chloroform treacherously given” (172). The rough frontiersman is among the most recalcitrant of the protagonist’s victims, but even he cannot withstand the assault. And finally the cosmopolitan engages in a series of attacks on Transcendentalism, millennialism, and biblical revelation.

In the final scene Goodman extinguishes the symbolic solar lamp of Christian light, and leads the old man (also exposed for his hypocrisy) into the darkness of oblivion. The narrator relates that “the waning light expired, and with it the waning flames of the horned altar, and the waning halo round the robed man’s brow” (336). The implication, as Mani writes, is that Christianity is a “dying creed” (265). In all these ways and more, the confidence-man exposes the lies, deceptions, and hypocrisy of the *Fidèle’s* pilgrim passengers. In the guise of a man of faith, the protagonist subtly reveals that his victims are the true deceivers; they are the hypocrites; they are the perpetrators of

fraud. But who are their victims? For Melville, they need look no farther than in the mirror.

So, what, if anything, does Melville offer as an alternative to the Christian religion he finds wanting? One might argue that Melville's answer lies in a single word—truth. For the gifted author, Christianity is a naïve theological and philosophical system for navigating through a harsh, materialistic world. The Gospel according to Melville preaches against naive faith, hope, and love; it loathes hypocrisy; and it appeals, instead, to truth, experience, and the heart. But his appeal to these nearly synonymous terms should not be confused with Christian charity, as when Christ admonishes his listeners during the Sermon on the Mount to “turn the other cheek” (*Matthew* 5:39). In the author's view based on “truth,” this is foolishness, as is the notion that there is in the universe, as Goodman ironically claims, “ ‘a ruling principle of love’ ” (211). Melville, one unafraid in his pursuit of the truth, might say, like Pitch, that “ ‘truth is like a threshing-machine; tender sensibilities must keep out of the way. Hope you understand me. Don't want to hurt you. All I say is, what I said in the first place, only now I swear it, that all boys [and men] are rascals’ ” (159). For Melville, man is fallen and irrevocably so. The ways of the world, as expressed by Noble later, are “ ‘[c]heating, backbiting, superciliousness, disdain, hard-heartedness, and all that brood’ ” (211). The proper response to such behavior may be suggested in Chapter I, in which the passengers nearly throw the Christ-like mute overboard.^{xxxv} It may be that Melville, in *CM*, carries through on this threat and throws Christianity overboard, for it has no place in a world of selfish hypocrites.

As ambiguous and multi-layered as this novel is, there may be no satisfactory answer to this issue or any other question raised in the narrative. But Hauck convincingly makes one argument. For Hauck, the readers of the book are in “the same bind” as the potential marks of the confidence-man, namely, whether to put trust in him. In other words, readers want to know the real confidence-man, but they are denied the gratification. All that we can know of the protagonist is “the complex indefiniteness of his character, and it is his masquerade which is the behavior we must try to understand” (246). This puts Melville in the role of a humorous “trickster-novelist” (248), toying with his readers as he conceives of God toying with men.

One plausible assertion that results from an examination of the text is that “charity can be known only emblematically, as a show of confidence, and can never be proved to be authentic” (248). This, in turn, leads to the disturbing possibility that “fictional characters and real persons are analogous in that the mystery of their essential identity is impenetrable” (250). In the end, according to Hauck, the message of the novel, if there is one, is that “simple faith is best because the authenticity of its motive is not subject to proof” (257). The alternative is to venture into the realm of uncertainty, which leads inevitably to a realization that “faith is by definition absurd” (257). Hauck claims that Melville’s moral is that confidence—faith—is required as a foundation for charity, no matter the risks involved. Not Christian faith, of course, but faith in the goodness of man and the universe. The twin risks, of course, are being “defrauded or being thought a fraud” (281). But one might object to Hauck’s final conclusion by asking: after all Hauck has said about the confidence-man’s elusive and ambiguous character, how can he make

such an assertion? How can he claim to know what Melville's moral is? Hauck himself said the protagonist is unknowable. Has Hauck fallen prey to his own need for certainty?

To continue my discussion of the attack against Christianity, in comparison with *CM*, Malamud's attack is rather mild. Cohn's conflict with Christianity takes place within the confines of his relationship with Buz. On one level, their bickering represents a conflict between Judaism and Christianity, and it begins nearly from the moment they first meet. When Cohn first discovers the young chimp on the vessel while adrift on the Pacific Ocean, he immediately changes his name from Gottlob (meaning 'Praise God' in German) to Buz, after Abraham's nephew. To this change Buz protests (nonverbally at this stage).

Cohn soon learns that Buz had been Christianized by his former master and thus begins the conflict between the Jewish and Christian religions that sporadically colors the narrative. While repeatedly stating that "Jews [do] not proselytize" (54), it is apparent that Cohn secretly hopes that Buz will convert to Judaism (perhaps this is another example of Cohn's self-deception). At any rate, after making just such a statement, the narrator says: "Cohn figured that when the chimp hit what might be the equivalent of thirteen years of age, he would offer him a Bar Mitzvah" (54). Buz, for his part, while not trying to convert Cohn, repeatedly makes reference to "Jesus of Nozorothe" (66), makes the sign of the cross at the Seder (to Cohn's annoyance), and tries to give a cross to Cohn on more than one occasion. Moreover, while Cohn is of the mind that God is not love, Buz repeatedly affirms that He is. Their conflict builds throughout the narrative (though as we have seen there are other factors involved) and culminates in Buz's apparent Judas-like betrayal of Cohn. Buz's betrayal may be interpreted as an indictment

of Christianity, but given the other plot events (including Cohn's mating with Mary Madelyn) that occur, such an interpretation is rather dubious.

So, though there is an undercurrent of an anti-Christian polemic in *GG*, it does not permeate the story as it in *CM*. Cohn's quarrel is primarily with God rather than Christianity or religion in general. It may be that the anti-Christian undertone in *GG* is simply a result of Malamud's mimicry of *CM*. Then again, given the historical treatment of Jews by Christians, it is understandable how this tone might appear in Malamud's work.

As Melville's list of targets expands, it becomes fairly clear that his focus paradoxically narrows to a single point: humanity itself. Beneath this myriad of individuals, groups, systems of belief, and occupations lies a deep-seated contempt for humanity—in a word—misanthropy. Melville's misanthropy is a consistent theme throughout, sometimes disguised and other times obvious, as when the narrator lists the types of passengers aboard the *Fidele* early in the narrative, among them "fame-hunters; heiress-hunters, gold-hunters...and still keener hunters after all these hunters... blacklegs;^{xxxvi} hard-shell Baptists^{xxxvii} and clay-eaters^{xxxviii}...In short, a piebald parliament, an Anarcharis Cloots congress^{xxxix} of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man" (8-9). The narrator continues this misanthropic tone in the following chapter featuring the Black Guinea. In it the narrator recounts the words of Lysander from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: " 'The will of man is by his reason swayed' " (13).^{xl}

With respect to characters, the misanthropic theme appears early in Melville's novel. The wooden-legged man, while arguing with the Methodist minister about the negro cripple's authenticity, sets the misanthropic tone of Melville's work, crying to his

fellow passengers: “ ‘You fools!’ ... ‘you flock of fools, under this captain of fools, in this ship of fools’ ” (17)! Because the passengers symbolically represent all of humanity, Melville seems to be ridiculing the entire human race.

Later in the story, Pitch—the archetypal misanthrope who places “confidence in distrust” (143)—captures this theme in an interior monologue of self-reproach and renewed suspicion after being duped by the PIO man. The narrator relates, “To what vicissitudes of light and shade is man subject...He revolves the crafty process of sociable chat, by which, as he fancies, the man with the brass plate wormed into him, and made such a fool of him as insensibly to persuade him to waive, in his exceptional case, that general law of distrust systematically applied to the race” (173). By letting down his guard, even the formidable Pitch falls prey to the confidence-man; as a result, it seems the Missouri bachelor will never be duped again in his life.

In his confrontation with Goodman, when the cosmopolitan first appears in the narrative in Chapter XXIV, Pitch is even more on his guard. During their interchange, Goodman asks to hold the Missourian’s watch, and is immediately rebuffed: “ ‘Look you,’ thumping down his rifle, ‘are you Jeremy Diddler No. 3’ ” (181)? The cosmopolitan valiantly tries to sway Pitch, but Pitch will have none of it. Their brief association ends on a sour but revealing note, with Pitch seeing through the confidence-man’s disguise. When Goodman offers to be brothers, the Missourian states: “ ‘As much so as a brace of misanthropes can be...I had thought that the moderns had degenerated beneath the capacity of misanthropy. Rejoiced, though but in one instance, and that disguised, to be undeceived’ ” (184). This passage shows that Pitch: (1) sees through the

disguise of the protagonist, (2) correctly identifies him as a fellow misanthrope, and (3) holds misanthropy above the cultured moderns.

As noted earlier, no passenger embodies the misanthropic spirit more than Pitch. His very name connotes the “fallen” nature of humankind, for “to pitch” means, among other things, “to fall.” Pitch is a paradox, though, because he despises the human race while embodying the failing in men that makes them so despicable: distrust. But one cannot judge Pitch too harshly, because his distrust is based on years of experience with boys and men who proved themselves unworthy of trust. In fact, in a way Pitch is more fool than misanthrope, because he kept hiring one worthless worker after another until finally turning surly. Yet the PIO man dupes him again. In this way Melville seems to suggest that men are either hopelessly naïve (like Pitch) or irredeemably suspicious (also like Pitch).

Misanthropy, for Pitch, arises from an experience of man as a faulty creature; perhaps chief among man’s many faults is his unreliability—that past conduct is no assurance of future behavior. In short, man cannot be trusted; he is not worthy of one’s confidence. Noble captures this idea succinctly during his conversation with Goodman. He says, “however indulgent and right-minded I may seem to you now, that is no guarantee for the future...the difference between this man and that man is not so great as the difference between what the same man be to-day, and what he may be in days to come” (295). The author here questions the continuity of a man’s nature and character.

Much later in the novel, during a conversation between Goodman and Noble that drifts into the relationship between misanthropy and disbelief, Frank states: “ ‘I do not jumble them; they are co-ordinates. For misanthropy, springing from the same root with

disbelief of religion, is twin with that...what is an atheist, but one who does not, or will not, see in the universe a ruling principle of love; and what a misanthrope, but one who does not, or will not, see in man a ruling principle of kindness” (210-11)? While Goodman’s logic is less than convincing, this passage seems autobiographical, in an ironic way, for the author who sees good and evil coexisting in the ruling principle of the universe (i.e., God) and mankind as fundamentally flawed and fallen. In any case, the roots of Melville’s misanthropy can be found in his Calvinist background. The “traditional Calvinist belief in human depravity and inability to intervene in the divine narrative” (Obenzinger 31) more than likely influenced Melville. This belief clashed, in a violent way, with “America’s Enlightenment belief in man as a perfectible being” (Cook 44). This collision of beliefs may have been part of Melville’s motivation for writing *CM*.

The theme of misanthropy also exists in Malamud’s tale, though it is considerably toned down compared to Melville’s. The theme first emerges early in the story while Cohn is on the ocean and before he “speaks” to God for the first time. As he ascends from the ocean floor and plops onto the deck of the *Rebekah Q*, the narrator recounts that when Cohn realizes what had happened, he “felt sick horror and a retching contempt of the human race” (9). But from the very beginning Cohn’s scorn for humanity is bound up with his anger at God. To his complaints, God says: “ ‘I made man to be free, but his freedom, badly used, destroyed him’ ” (5). (Cohn will later dismiss this free will defense of God’s). At the end of this first encounter with God, Cohn screams out his chief complaint, “ ‘God made us who we are’ ” (6). This, in a nutshell, is the crux of the

problem for Cohn. God failed when he created man; His creation was imperfect and thus man was doomed from the start.

Later, during a schoolroom lesson, the protagonist expands on his ideas. In Cohn's words, "[m]an had innumerable chances but was—in the long run—insufficient to God's purpose. He was insufficient to himself...[a]nyway, in all those ages he hardly masters his nature enough to stop the endless slaughter...he never mastered his animal nature" (133). During the same lecture, the narrator relates that Cohn "speculated that man failed because he was imperfect to begin with" (135). Thus, in Cohn's mind, while despising the human race for destroying itself, his most savage anger is saved for God. This lesson prompts God's second and final speech during *GG*. In it He wrathfully reproaches Cohn, saying: " 'I am the Lord Thy God who created man to perfect Himself' " (137). Even still, this response is not satisfactory for Cohn; he blames God as much as man for the Day of Devastation.

This leads to an important discussion of what is the central theme in *CM*, namely, confidence, and its antithesis—distrust. In Melville's work, confidence is more or less synonymous with the Pauline virtue of faith. The word confidence appears literally hundreds of times in the text, almost to the point of monotony and absurdity. On some pages the word crowds the text, acting almost hypnotically on the characters as well as the reader. In part one of *CM*, the protagonist—while seeming to promote the triad of Christian virtues (i.e., faith, hope and love)—actually works to ridicule and undermine them. In the crucial Chapter III featuring the negro cripple, the theme of confidence immediately appears. After the Black Guinea's credibility is called into question by several passengers, he numbers the oft-quoted list of men who can vouch for him:

‘Oh yes, oh yes, dar is aboard here a werry nice, good ge’ mman wid a weed, and a ge’ mman in a gray coat and white tie, what knows all about me; and a ge’ mman wid a big book, too; and a yarb-doctor; and a ge’ mman in a yaller west; and a ge’ mman wid a brass plate; and a ge’ mman in a wiolet robe; and a ge’ mman as is a sodjer; and ever so many good, kind, honest ge’ mman more aboard what knows me and will speak for me, God ‘bress ‘em’ (14).

Setting aside the critical controversy surrounding this list,^{xli} by having some passengers require verification of Black Guinea’s worthiness, Melville sets the stage for part one of his novel. The hypocrisy of so-called Christians is immediately called into question, for, rather than being moved by charity to assist the unfortunate cripple, many of them suspect him of fraud (i.e., of being a white man masquerading as a black).

For example, the country merchant wonders how they are to find “ ‘all these people in this great crowd.’ ” Even the Episcopal clergyman “ ‘half-rebukefully’ ” echoes the merchant’s complaint. The sternest of the passengers present, though, is the man with the wooden-leg, who dismisses any search for these character references as a “ ‘[w]ild goose chase.’ ” In response to the Methodist minister’s appeal to his charity, the man sardonically replies: “ ‘Charity is one thing, and truth is another’ ” (15), implying that one precludes the other. Shortly thereafter, the wooden-legged man continues, “ ‘To where it belongs with your charity! to heaven with it...here on earth, true charity dotes, and false charity plots. Who betrays a fool with a kiss, the charitable fool has the charity to believe is in love with him, and the charitable knave on the stand gives charitable testimony for his comrade in the box.’ ” What the wooden-legged man is saying, in essence, is that Christian charity is for fools, who are betrayed by their own ignorance of the true ways of the world—which are wicked. Melville digs even deeper to suggest that charity is an illusion. The wooden-legged man states, “ ‘[l]ooks are one things, and facts

are another' ” (16), suggesting that Christian charity is incompatible with the “facts” of the world. For the wooden-legged man, Jesus was “a fool” who was betrayed “with a kiss,” thus lodging a direct assault on the inadequacy of Christian doctrine, according to Melville.

In the conversation between Ringman and the sophomore in Chapter V, Melville’s critique of Christian faith is all-too-clear. The protagonist says, “ ‘[f]or, comparatively inexperienced as you are, my dear 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’ ” (34). At his satirical best, Melville cleverly uses satire’s bosom mate—irony—to drive home his pointed attack against the Christian religion and its precepts. And then, to test his hypothesis, Ringman asks, “ ‘Could you now, my dear young sir, under such circumstances, by way of experiment, simply have confidence in me’ ” (34)? Hence, after listening to Ringman’s diatribe against the absence of confidence in the world, the collegian is challenged to disprove the confidence-man’s hypothesis. That the sophomore ultimately rebuffs Ringman gives the author a chance to reveal Christian hypocrisy and berate any intellectual system that excludes charity.

As already noted, after offering much resistance to the PIO man, Pitch finally agrees to hire a boy on an experimental basis. Soon after the transaction has been completed, Pitch begins to think he has been duped. As the narrator recounts this pivotal scene, “the Missourian eyes through the dubious medium that swampy and squalid domain; and over it audibly mumbles his cynical mind to himself, as Apemantus’^{xlii} dog

may have mumbled his bone. He bethinks him that the man with the brass plate was to land on this villainous blank, and for that cause, if no other, begins to suspect him” (172). Melville’s abundant use of the term confidence may signify his intention to weaken its meaning through overuse. The reader may become mesmerized by the term to the point of being susceptible to deception—the ultimate weapon of the confidence-man. On a more cynical level, as a synonym for faith the author seeks to undermine the shallow beliefs of the ‘faithful’ passengers onboard the steamer. As noted, the book ends with the protagonist extinguishing the solar lamp, symbolic of the extinction of the light of Christian faith.^{xliii} Cook goes so far as to see in the final chapter a figurative “act of decide, the ultimate subversion of authority on Melville’s ship of fools” (76). Melville’s vastly diminished belief in God and the Christian faith lies just beneath the mask of confidence. In the cold cave of the writer’s truth is a belief that “all man faces at death is physical corruption and spiritual annihilation” (Cook 79).

Though Cohn is the Malamudian equivalent of Melville’s confidence-man, he operates in a very different manner than his Melvillean counterpart. Cohn is a man of tepid faith and admits to having doubts from the very beginning of the novel, while making it clear to the Almighty, however, that he is not “a secularist” (7) (though he does not specify exactly what being a secularist means). Buz is the purported person of faith in the novel, though he winds up betraying Cohn. Cohn’s ability to dupe Mary Madelyn and cheat Buz and Esau out of mating rights centers on qualities of self-deceit and, most importantly, hubris. It is Cohn’s pride that makes him name the island after himself (despite its divinely-bestowed properties); it is his arrogance that allows him to name the island’s inhabitants (though Buz sometimes usurps his role); it is also his pride that gives

him the nerve to embark on his “daring plan” to bring forth a new human-chimp species; and it is his hubris that blinds him to the true intentions of all his actions. Where Melville uses his narrative to belittle the shallowness of Christians’ faith, Malamud uses his to show man’s sin of pride, which prevents him from seeing the horrific consequences of his actions. Where Melville takes aim at man’s hypocrisy, Malamud targets man’s naiveté and lack of self-awareness.

This leads me to an interlude in which I would like to explore the nature of deception in Malamud’s novel. Unlike Melville’s protagonist, Cohn does not systematically try to victimize and deceive his fellow creatures on the island. True (as I will briefly show), he does mildly quarrel with Buz over religion, and he does cheat Esau and Buz and the other eligible male chimps out of their rights to mate with Mary Madelyn. But for the most part, Cohn’s struggle with deception is an internal one. In this light, there are two startling passages in Melville’s work that merit analysis. First, in the conversation between Ringman and Roberts in chapter IV, Roberts states: “ ‘I hope I know myself.’ ” To which Ringman answers: “ ‘And yet self-knowledge is thought by some not so easy. Who knows, my dear sir, but for a time you may have taken yourself for somebody else? Stranger things have happened’ ” (22). Then, in Chapter XVIII, an unnamed passenger speculates about the character of the Herb-doctor: “ ‘He is not wholly at heart a knave, I fancy, among whose dupes is himself. Did you not see our quack friend apply to himself his own quackery? A fanatic quack; essentially a fool, though effectively a knave’ ” (117).

These short exchanges in Melville’s novel give us a penetrating look into *GG*. On the surface of Malamud’s narrative, Cohn is a brilliant man. He is a scientist and scholar,

an inventor; he is also creative and imaginative. He is able to survive in conditions when most others would perish. But there is one sphere of intelligence where Cohn's mind is a blank slate—self-knowledge. I have carefully read the book many times and I cannot find a shred of self-knowledge in Cohn. In my view, he is unaware of the source of much of his anger at God, namely, the tragic death of his wife and their unborn child. This event prompts his abandonment of the rabbinate and causes a crisis of faith. He notices that the island has divine properties (e.g., self-healing fruit, self-pollinating flowers) and yet he names the island after himself (instead of, say, God).

Furthermore, he is unaware that he is seducing Mary Madelyn and upsetting the fragile experiment underway on the island. His ultimate act of self-deception, though, is when he mates with her—a chimpanzee! As he wrestles with his thoughts about his daring plan, Cohn first wonders whether God Himself had planted this radical idea in his mind. Later he rationalizes that if Lot's daughters could sleep with their father, why could not Cohn, "a clearheaded, honest man" (167), mate with Mary Madelyn. After entertaining doubts that the act might produce a "monster,"^{xliv} he then considers the "eschatological living trauma the Lord had laid on the world" (168), referring, of course, to the Day of Devastation and its aftermath. This final thought decides the issue for him. Cohn's lack of self-awareness is so profound that in a matter of moments, he moves from hypothesizing that God has implanted this mad idea in his head to a visceral contempt for Him for the devastation resulting from the recent worldwide nuclear holocaust and flood. So, Cohn's cloudy thoughts mingle with repressed anger and perverted desire to set him on a course of his own destruction.

The point of this discussion on self-deception in *GG* is to highlight one of the clear differences between Melville's and Malamud's narratives. In *CM*, the protagonist is wily and clever and able to make marks of many of the *Fidele's* passengers. According to some critics, he is later duped by others in the second half of the book. And though Melville's protagonist may engage in some self-deception, it is not a dominant theme in *CM*. In contrast, as we have seen, in *GG* Cohn is drowning in self-deceit. I believe this is one place where satire shows itself in Malamud's novel. By showing Cohn—the representative of mankind—as clueless about his own actions or intentions, Malamud may be indicting humanity for its careless and destructive ways. History is replete with examples of mankind's barbaric actions and Malamud seems to suggest that, if men (and women) cultivated more self-awareness, they might think more before they act. And that we'd all be better off for it.

The theme of isolation and its relationship to madness is visible in Melville's novel and becomes a major theme in Malamud's. Paul McCarthy writes that, more than any other of Melville's work, *CM* “reveals the writer's years of preoccupation with the forms and nature of insanity” (109). Not surprisingly, the related themes of isolation and madness, like everything else in *CM*, are linked to confidence. The message of the text is that without confidence a person ends up distrusting everyone, leading to solitude, isolation, and then madness. The twin themes of isolation and madness emerge early in Melville's story, with the appearance of the wooden-legged man in Chapter III. A misanthrope to rival Pitch, the wooden-legged man is deemed by the Methodist as being “mad,” made so by “his evil heart of unbelief.” The Methodist goes on to paint a horrible scene that he has witnessed of “ ‘mad-houses full of tragic mopers, and seen there the end

of suspicion: the cynic, in the moody madness muttering in the corner; for years a barren fixture there head lopped over, gnawing his own lip, vulture of himself; while by fits and starts, from the corner opposite came the grimace of the idiot at him' ” (18). Later, the confidence-man himself (Ringman) is judged to be “a little cracked” (60), due to his extreme state of grief.

In the dialogue between Goodman and Pitch in Chapter XXIV, the cosmopolitan wonders whether the Missourian leads a solitary life. Pitch responds: “ ‘Solitary?’ starting as at a touch of divination.” Goodman replies, “ ‘Yes: in a solitary life one insensibly contracts oddities,--talking to one’s self now’ ” (178). The implication is that an excess of solitude may lead to a type of madness. For Pitch, this madness takes the form of misanthropy, which for Goodman is equal to infidelity, as is expressed in his conversation with Noble in Chapter XXVIII. In other words, disbelief in man is “twin” to “disbelief of religion” (210). The confidence-man thus cleverly lays a trap for Pitch to admit that, since he has no trust in man, neither can he have faith in God, and Goodman’s ultimate aim is to dissuade Pitch from having faith in God.

Before I delve into the themes of isolation and madness in *GG*, I first want to explore an image used by Melville in his novel, namely, the bottle. I make this digression because Malamud makes the bottle (or flask) a central image in his narrative, and it is wedded to the themes of isolation and madness. The word ‘bottle’ appears numerous times in *CM* and holds significant symbolic value. We saw earlier in the exchange between Truman and the merchant in Chapter XIII that the bottle (of wine) is associated with the heart and the truth. The merchant intones that “[t]ruth will *not* be comforted. Led by dear charity, lured by sweet hope, fond fancy essays this feat; but in

vain; mere dreams and ideals, they explode in your hand, leaving naught but the scorching behind.” Truman is or feigns to be shaken by these words, and takes the bottle from the merchant, saying “[w]ine was meant to gladden the heart, not grieve it; to heighten confidence, not depress it” (87).

Three thoughts come to mind as I reflect on this passage: one, the merchant momentarily glimpses into the elusive nature of reality as envisioned by Melville, where perceptions are faulty and certainty is impossible; two, the bottle symbolizes truth because it alters normal perception; and three, this scene is filled with sexual innuendo, with phrases like “explode in your hand,” “burst,” and “popping out.” Granted they are drinking champagne, so these phrases can be taken literally; still, the sexual layer of meaning is present. We will see how Malamud blends sexual plot events with the image of the bottle, but there is more in Melville’s novel to explore regarding this image. The bottle image reemerges in Chapters XXIX-XXX when Goodman and Noble begin a long conversation over wine. Of note during this interchange is that Noble attempts to use the bottle to betray Goodman—presumably so that he can rob or con him in some way. Goodman, however, detects Noble’s game and throws him off guard with a request for money, and then later convinces Noble it was done only in jest.

The final appearance of the bottle image on which I would like to focus is in the final chapter of the book. This time, though, it is not a wine bottle; rather, it is the solar lamp that the confidence-man extinguishes just before he leads the old man into the darkness. Cook, along with many other critics, notes that the solar lamp is symbolic of the light of Christian faith. He also observes that “[t]he image of the lamp also derives from the conclusion of Rabelais’ *Fifth Book* describing the Oracle of the Holy Bottle, an

affirmative revelation of Christian faith that Melville parodies” (74).^{xlv} By evoking this imagery Melville parodies Christian revelation while also alluding to apocalyptic extinction.

Malamud takes the themes of isolation and madness and develops them into major elements of his story, and intertwines them with the image of a bottle or flask.^{xlvi} Cohn is no less than brilliant, with an encyclopedic mind containing knowledge of many fields (37). He can invent, recall information, and solve difficult problems. He is conversant in the Torah, Talmud, Midrash, and Sanhedrin. His own field of specialty is paleology, a Malamudian invention, supplemented by knowledge of psychology, literature, history, anthropology, government, and philosophy. His gifts are not limited to academics, as he shows abilities in craftsmanship, pottery, painting, woodcarving, sculpture, agriculture, and natural medicine. It is not Cohn’s intelligence that ruins him; rather, it is his judgment, his amazing lack of self-awareness, his interference in God’s island experiment, and his diminishing sanity.

Given the circumstances that Cohn faces, most anyone would be pushed to the brink of madness. Emerging from the ocean’s bottom to find all humanity destroyed, and initially thinking that no other life survived the nuclear holocaust, it is no wonder Cohn’s mind eventually snaps. It is remarkable he keeps his wits intact as long as he does. The first inkling we get of Cohn’s encroaching madness is when he is onboard the *Rebekah Q* during a storm and considers throwing Buz overboard to save himself (23). (Besides showing the dire straits in which Cohn finds himself, this scene also alludes to a similar scene in *CM* when the *Fidele’s* passengers nearly throw the lamblike mute overboard.) The storm and the crisis pass and they soon land on the island. After about two years on

the island, Cohn entertains thoughts of immortality (49). Living forever alone, though, may be more curse than blessing. Soon thereafter, speaking to the still nonverbal Buz, he laments:

What I want to say is that the situation is getting on my nerves. I mean we're alone on this island and can't be said to speak to each other. We may indicate certain things but there's no direct personal communication. I'm not referring to existential loneliness, you understand—what might be called awareness of one's essentially subjective being, not without some sense of death-in-life...I'm talking, rather, about the loneliness one feels when he lacks companionship, or that sense of company that derives from community (51-2).

Unlike Pitch, Cohn did not choose a life of solitude, but the fact of his isolation presses upon him and is pushing him toward losing his reason. The idea that isolation leads to madness is as true for individuals like Cohn as it is for nations, as isolation between the superpowers was almost certainly a contributing cause of the Day of Devastation. But Cohn gathers his wits and goes on with the business of survival. A few days later he again is in “conversation” with Buz. As if to reassure himself that he is still alive, he reflects: “[I]f I talk to him and he listens, no matter how much or little he comprehends, I hear my own voice and *know I am present*” (55 italics mine). Here is a man struggling to maintain his reason.

Cohn keeps his pregnant, dead wife's ashes with him, which serve as his strongest connection with his former life; they also help keep him rational for a time and bind him to what he believes is right and true (26). Losing his wife in a car crash with him as passenger caused a crisis of faith in Cohn, and he subsequently made a 180-degree turn in life direction. He abandoned the rabbinate and went into paleology, but he reassured Buz that he maintained a keen interest in God Himself. As the story unfolds, it becomes

apparent that Cohn has a monumental chip on his shoulder and holds an enduring grudge against God for his loss.

Cohn's capacity for violence again surfaces when George arrives at his cave. Upon seeing George for the first time, Cohn grabs a shovel instinctively (61). A few days later Cohn connects Buz's neck wires and he begins to speak. One of the first things out of Buz's mouth is: "Sholl I call you moster" (66)? With Buz's accent he is obviously asking: "Shall I call you master?" However, given future events, it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to read *monster* in Buz's question. For Cohn, as a man, when he mates with Mary Madelyn, does become a monster and a mad scientist as well. In fact, prior to the mating, Cohn himself entertains fears that the child conceived of their union might be a monster (167).

Picking up where I left off, as already discussed, George prompts a wrathful response from Cohn when he eats one of Cohn's records. "Bastard-fool," Cohn shouts at him. Later, Cohn and Buz explore the far end of the island. Cohn carries his rifle out of what he admits is an atavistic fear (82-83). During the exploration they find an unknown animal spoor, again inspiring fear. Cohn, seemingly in response to their discovery, practices firing his rifle (85).

A somewhat comical image of Cohn as mad scientist appears after the discovery/arrival of the five new chimps, including Mary Madelyn and Esau (94). They arrive at his cave from which Cohn emerges in his laboratory apron holding an ape's fossilized leg bone (98). The sight terrifies the chimps and they scatter. Two weeks later, seeking to communicate with the new chimps, Cohn contemplates performing surgery on them in the manner that Dr. Bunder (Buz's former master) had on Buz,

implanting artificial larynxes (102). Cohn abandons the thought because of an absence of electronic voice boxes, but he feels “vaguely stirred, vaguely dissatisfied” (102).

Immediately afterwards, he begins building a gate for his cave, though there exists no known threat. The gate remains unused (for lack of a metal pin on which to hang it) until later.

During the Seder meal, a revealing exchange occurs between the participants. Mary Madelyn states in her lisping voice: “[Buz] towd us his dod was a white chimpanzee, and no one bewieved it untiw we met you” (121). Cohn cryptically replies: “God’s Grace” (121). This is a curious response. It is highly significant if for no other reason than it is the title of Malamud’s novel. In this context, though, the phrase might mean that Cohn has become deluded enough to think of himself as “God’s Grace.” A short digression is in order here. As previously mentioned, Melville was raised in the Calvinist tradition. John Calvin states in his seminal work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, that “salvation is gratuitous” (256). In other words, salvation comes through God’s grace. So, God’s grace can be thought of as God’s free and unmerited gift of salvation. By extension, since an attribute of God can be considered the essence of Him, God’s grace can also mean God Himself. So, a plausible interpretation of Cohn’s response to Mary is that he (Cohn) considers himself to be God. This conforms to an allegorical reading of the novel and it also shows the full extent of Cohn (the man’s) hubris. And it is not a far stretch from extreme hubris to madness.

Interestingly, the albino first appears to Cohn in a dream after the Seder. Among other things, the ape’s whiteness can be seen to symbolize Cohn’s mind, the purity of which is beginning to slip away like disappearing fog (156). Cohn continues his

egocentric ways and keeps usurping God's role on the island. He presumes to know that God wants him to create civilization on the island, with him, of course, at the top of the pyramid. "(T)he Lord would surely agree," he muses before he plans to institute the schooltree (128). After many lessons on a wide range of subjects, Cohn has the audacity to tell his students: "The future lies in your hands" (134). In reality, though, Cohn has not and will never voluntarily relinquish control over "his" island. It will take his death to accomplish this. Cohn then creates several masks, which, while being another allusion to *CM*, may also represent a further fragmentation of his personality (146).

Mary Madelyn then enters estrus and asks Cohn to mate. He refuses but, two days later at the schooltree, with the other male chimps (except Esau) watching, Cohn brazenly kisses Mary Madelyn's fingertips (154). After having been rebuffed two nights earlier, she must have been confused by this gesture. What, if anything, is going on in Cohn's mind is unknown. Soon Cohn encounters the albino again. As Cohn's alter ego, the albino may symbolize Cohn's struggle to hold on to reality and not go "schizoid." Given past and upcoming events, it seems obvious that the dream is meant as a warning. His unconscious (or God) is trying to "[yank]" (155) or "shake" (156) him back to his senses, because his precarious hold on reality is slipping away. The effect of isolation is taking its toll. His need for human companionship is about to overtake his judgment. Mary Madelyn has proposed they mate, Esau has threatened him, and Cohn's grip on his sanity is loosening.

Significantly, immediately after this second encounter with the albino, Cohn's "disturbing desire" for Mary Madelyn takes possession of him. Cohn is of two minds about his feelings, but "affection grew against his will" (156). Once again, just as he had

initiated affection with her during the Seder, he begins to court her after a schooltree class. At some unconscious level he may know where this will lead, but he cannot stop himself. Thus continues the “Fall” from grace, like Adam and Eve’s Fall and subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and Cohn’s fall through the ebony tree in the dream of the albino.

Cohn’s mating with Mary Madelyn is clearly the cause of the Fall. Buz and Esau are rightfully jealous and angry with Cohn for mating with a female outside his own species. No blood is spilled until after the mating occurs, and their human-chimp daughter is born. Later, Cohn tells Buz that he and Mary Madelyn are “sort of affectionately in love” (157). As remedy for their instinctual urges, all Cohn can offer Buz, Esau and the other males is sublimation (158). Buz then moves out of the cave (158). Within a short period, Mary Madelyn approaches Cohn twice more with offers to mate. Cohn refuses both advances yet continues to court her. Over the next few days Cohn lectures on Darwin, evolution, and, significantly, the genetic similarities between humans and chimpanzees (161-65).

Then one night “a daring plan” (165) slips through his mind. (It is important to note that his plan comes to him in the dark, which also describes Cohn’s mental state.) If he and Mary Madelyn mate, he thinks, perhaps a new species, with the best genes from both parents, might develop and lead to a quantum leap in evolution. He has the impudence to think of this possible new species as his own invention, and that it might succeed “*if God did not interfere*” (italics mine). In an extreme act of rationalization, he speculates that maybe God had planted this idea in his mind (166). He then compares himself with Lot’s daughters, who slept with their father in the wake of Sodom’s

destruction to preserve mankind's future. In idle thought, he considers renaming the island Cohn's Lot (167). This word-choice is significant, as lot can mean *disaster*. It also has a connotation with gambling, and it certainly applies here.

Cohn, who often appears childlike in his thought processes, then entertains, however briefly, serious, adult-like doubts about his scheme. What if the child were a *monster* (italics mine)? Wasn't such a plan a "mad act" for a hitherto responsible scientist (167)? (Perhaps Malamud has inserted a pun by naming Cohn's partner Mary MADelyn.) Cohn's final ruminations, and what ultimately decides the matter, is his anger at God for the "eschatological living trauma" (168) He has inflicted on the world. In a feat of mental gymnastics, Cohn has shifted from an internal, intellectual debate to a visceral contempt for God. In a matter of a few brief moments, he moves from thinking that God has planted this idea in his mind to anger at God for what Cohn believes to be His fault in the Day of Devastation. Such is the dark state of confusion in Cohn's mind. One cannot help but speculate that Cohn still blames God for the death of his wife and their unborn child, and this mad act is his revenge.

Cohn then approaches Mary Madelyn and proposes they mate, and she assents. During the mating Cohn keeps his thoughts "level," as though engaged in a scientific experiment rather than an act of lovemaking. As he climaxes he feels an "instant electric connection" (169), again evoking scientific imagery. (One can't help but recall that, in popular film versions of Mary Shelley's classic, electricity brings Frankenstein to life.) After Mary Madelyn falls asleep, Cohn takes his wife's ashes and buries them. This act is highly significant and supports the interpretation offered in this thesis. Cohn, having gained his revenge against God, can now lay his wife and unborn child to rest. Shortly

thereafter Esau returns, and Cohn posts his 7 Admonitions, the second of which stands out: “Note: God is not love, God is God. Remember Him” (171). Given his recent thoughts, this concept of an unloving God should not be a surprise. Then begins a short time during which the island prospers, and a relative calm enfolds the community. This time coincides with the gestation period of Mary Madelyn.

The island’s semi-utopic period is all-too-brief, coinciding with the arrival of the eight baboons mentioned earlier. After Rebekah is born, Cohn builds rollers for the gate he had previously constructed, and thereby fashions a workable wall at the entrance of the cave, perhaps sensing the coming danger and/or acting out of paternal instinct. Soon thereafter, Esau and others hunt and kill Sara (one of the baby baboons) (188). As Sidney Richman has observed, the killing is fueled, in part, by the resentment and sexual repression caused by Cohn’s exclusive relationship with Mary Madelyn (207).

After Sara’s killing, Cohn flies into a rage and threatens exile for Esau and the others, similar to the expulsion from Eden, should such an act reoccur. After a second baboon is killed, Cohn fulfills his threat and banishes Esau, Esterhazy, and Bromberg from Cohn’s part of the island, thus completing the Edenic expulsion (200). Buz, showing his Christian upbringing, then rebels against Cohn and preaches to the other chimps. He changes the second admonition to read, “God is love,” and proclaims, “Blessed are the chimpanzees...for they hov inherited the whole earth” (205). Cohn and Buz, like father and rebellious son, square off in an angry debate over Christianity and the Day of Devastation. They do not, however, resort to violence.

That same evening, Cohn and Mary Madelyn are in their cave, the strong wooden wall in place. Despite recent events, Cohn, incredibly enough, speaks to her of the need

for breeding more daughters. Against all reason and without seeing any connection between his mating with Mary Madelyn and the killings that have occurred, he is planning to mate again (206)! Such is the height (or depth) that Cohn's madness has reached. But Cohn and Mary's plan to mate again will never be fulfilled. Buz throws a rock against the wall and, after some hesitation, Cohn lets him in. In a matter of minutes, Esau appears in the cave. Cohn accuses Buz of betraying him. Buz proclaims his innocence, saying he had only heard a rumor that Esau had returned from exile (208). Several others join Esau in the cave and seize the infant. The kidnappers take Rebekah and flee to the forest. They play a perverse game of catch in the trees, tossing Rebekah back and forth. Despite Cohn and Mary Madelyn's desperate pleadings, Rebekah eventually is thrown/falls out of the tree onto a boulder below, after which Max and Arthur (two adult baboons) immediately flee with her corpse (213).

Cohn, in a murderous rage, hunts Esau but instead accidentally kills the albino, who turns out to be all too real (214). This act of Cohn is representative of his total abandonment of reason, the death of his purer self (i.e., his unconscious), and portends his eventual demise. Then Cohn takes his revenge on Buz for his perceived treachery by clipping the wires in his neck that enable his speech, but not before he reclaims his former name—Gottlob (215). Immediately afterwards, as though by magic, the rest of the chimps also lose their ability to speak. Mary Madelyn, no longer Cohn's Juliet, then crouches low for Esau and Buz, who proclaims himself the new Alpha ape (216).

To summarize this discussion of isolation and madness in *GG*, mankind's collective madness^{xlviii} led to a thermonuclear holocaust that literally broke the island in an earthquake that followed the explosion of the bombs. Similarly, Cohn's "mad act" of

mating with a chimpanzee (brought on, in part, by isolation) disrupted God's island experiment and brought about the end of Cohn's brief semi-utopia. Cohn repeats mankind's fall from grace through the sins of hubris, self-deception, and toying with the secrets of creation. Mankind toyed with the atom and brought about the Day of Devastation. Similarly, Cohn toyed with genetics and brought about the end of his brief Eden-like paradise, along with himself, thus extinguishing humanity (at least temporarily).

As stated, like Melville Malamud intertwines the themes of isolation and madness with the image of a bottle. During a land survey conducted early in the narrative Cohn likens the shape of the island to a bottle or flask. In the narrative, as it seemed to Cohn, the island "was shaped like a broken stubby flask...its bottom had split off" (43). The island had been broken by an earthquake resulting from the recent Day of Devastation. Further on, the narrator states:

The island, [Cohn] figured, was about twenty miles in length, and maybe six miles across, except at its midpoint where it seemed to bulge to nine or ten; and at its northeastern end, where it shrank to two across for three miles or so—the mouth of the flask (44).

The word flask has many meanings, but, as becomes clear later, Malamud uses it to denote a glass bottle—the kind used in laboratory experiments. The author employs this image to highlight a central theme: the role that humanity plays in God's creation.

Contrary to Cohn's decision to name the island after himself, it would be better named "God's Island," because, as previously stated, Cohn himself discovers that on this island flowers self-pollinate, fruits heal themselves, and coconuts go up, not down. However, Cohn is too blinded by grief, rage, and hubris to see what is occurring on God's Island, and his actions interfere with God's work. What Cohn fails to recognize throughout the

novel is that God is conducting an experiment on His Island that involves the very act of creation, and when Cohn arrives the experiment is already underway. The baboons discovered three years later have been reproducing all along and without Cohn's help—hence the bulge in the flask.

For Malamud, the flask symbolizes the island, and the island symbolizes the world. Malamud uses the flask as a central image to bring cohesion to a somewhat complex narrative, and to illustrate man's destructive role in God's fragile creation. Cohn says to Buz nearly two years after they conducted their survey, "(T)he island [is] shaped like a short, stubby bottle" (51). Buz, not yet verbal, insists through sign language it resembles a banana. This exchange makes clear what Malamud means by the term flask, namely, a bottle—the kind used in scientific experiments (more specifically, experiments in reproduction). Moreover, though the bottle is broken, God is still able to perform His work on the island (or in the bottle).

Just as Sara is killed, the image of the flask reappears, only this time more subtly. Buz comes to the cave to warn Cohn of the hunt underway and, not finding him, in frustration throws a mango pit inside and hears the "noise of glass breaking" (188). This moment represents the culmination of Cohn's brazen meddling in God's island experiment. With Sara's death, the broken flask has now been shattered; in an act of madness Cohn has violated Jewish law by mating with an animal, thereby bringing chaos to God's new order. Contrary to Cohn's fears, it is not God who interferes in his work; rather, it is Cohn who interferes in God's. The moment the glass shatters is the same moment of Sara's death and represents the completion of the Fall, and the beginning of the end of Cohn's semi-utopian community. Also of symbolic significance is the mango

pit, which symbolizes God's order, because the pit contains a seed, and we saw earlier that fruit on the island self-heals, as it is bestowed with God's power. When the pit shatters the glass, it foreshadows the shattering of Cohn's unnatural creation—the death of Rebekah. Moreover, this event signals that God's order, as J.P. Steed describes it, will be restored (26).^{xlviii}

The next theme I would like to explore is time—not in terms of temporal setting as I have already discussed, but in terms of the very nature of time as conceived by Melville and Malamud. In Melville's work, time is conceived of in conventional western and linear terms. The narrative begins at sunrise on April Fool's Day and ends around midnight the same day. The story progresses from light (with the sun of a new day) and ends in darkness (after sunset and with the extinguishing of the solar lamp).

For Malamud, in contrast, time takes on several layers of meaning. On one level time is conventionally linear as conceived by Melville. Cohn, as Everyman, is symbolically born in the water as he emerges "from the hatch," (9) lives out his life on the island, and dies an "old man" (223). On another level, the world progresses from death (as a result of the Day of Devastation), to a rebirth of civilization on the island, to another cycle of death (in the killing of the infant baboons), and rebirth of a new order coinciding with Cohn's death. On this level, time is shown to be circular. A circular view of time matches the equatorial setting where fruit is available year-round, in contrast with the linear view of time of the upper part of the northern hemisphere—which is the spatial setting of *CM*.

Two of the most important themes of Melville's work are the *Apocalypse* and the similarly sounding *Apocrypha*. The Herb-doctor makes the first indirect reference to the

apocrypha in a conversation with an auburn-haired gentleman. He names Asmodeus, who, as Dugdale points out, is a demon in the book of *Tobit* in the *Apocrypha*.

Furthermore, Asmodeus is a character in Alain-Rene Le Sage's *Le Diable Boiteux* (*The Devil Upon Two Sticks*), who can fly and reveal men's secrets (346). In this way, Melville plays on the meanings of the words apocalypse (revelation) and apocrypha (hidden). And while they are highly significant themes, neither is explicitly mentioned until very late in the narrative. In fact, it is not until the last chapter that these nearly-homophonic themes become overt. In a dialogue with the pious old Christian, the cosmopolitan shows distress over some passages from the *Apocrypha* that suggest distrust. "Take heed of thy friends" (*Ecclesiasticus* 6:13), is a source of great consternation for Goodman.

Until the old man explains that the passage is non-canonical, the cosmopolitan is uneasy. During their discussion comes the humorous ejaculation from a hidden passenger, "What's that about the Apocalypse?" (324), that I used as my first epigraph. This is not simply word play for Melville (though it is that as well). Apocalypse is synonymous with "revelation" while Apocrypha is synonymous with "hidden" (among other meanings). Thus the two words can be, in effect, antonyms of each other. The *Apocalypse* reveals while the *Apocrypha* hides. The apocryphal (hidden) passenger asks about the *Apocalypse* (revealed). The author is cleverly playing with words and their meanings to inject humor and disorient his readers.

When the word apocalypse is mentioned, it usually evokes images of massive destruction on a worldwide or even cosmic scale, with Stygian wars, epic battles, and supernatural beings in opposition to each other. Yet the word apocalypse, put simply,

means nothing more than *revelation*. The reason apocalypse has come to mean cosmic war and destruction is due to the substance of the revelations from the Jewish and Christian traditions about the end of the world.

For some readers, this disorientation may lead them to question what is apocryphal (non-canonical) and what is non-apocryphal (canonical). The ultimate conclusion that Melville made in his own life is that the whole Bible, both canon (including the *Apocalypse*) and *Apocrypha*, is unworthy of confidence. Goodman's remark later in this same scene, upon noting that the Bible has hardly been used, suggests Melville's own disdain for all things Biblical when he says, " 'I may err, but it seems to me that if more confidence was put in it by the travelling public, it would hardly be so' " (333). This only underlines the hypocrisy of Christians that has been under satirical attack throughout.

But there is yet another level of mesmerizing satire at work in this scene, because the apocryphal passages come from *Ecclesiasticus*—otherwise known as the *Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach*. How are Christians to discern the difference between the *Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach*, and the *Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Joseph and Mary*? And why does the Church include the *Apocrypha* in the Bible; moreover, why does it place it between the *Old* and *New Testaments*? A plausible answer is that it was difficult to decide which books should be considered canonical and which apocryphal, so they placed some borderline books side-by-side with the approved canon.

A final note on the *Apocrypha*. Taken literally, it only means hidden. It doesn't mean unorthodox or un-Christian—just hidden. By juxtaposing *Apocrypha* and *Apocalypse*, Melville may be suggesting that the meaning of the *Apocrypha* is only

hidden to those who cannot see the real truth about the world—namely, that man can't be trusted. And if the *Apocrypha* is true, then by extension the *Apocalypse* (and the rest of the *New Testament*) must be false.

In contrast, in Malamud's narrative, neither apocalypse nor apocrypha is ever explicitly mentioned. However, the *Apocalypse*, in many ways, defines the novel. As the story begins, a worldwide Day of Devastation has just occurred, surpassing even the cataclysmic destruction as prophesied in the *Book of Daniel* in the *Old Testament* and *Apocalypse* in the *New Testament*. This thermonuclear devastation was unimaginable in Melville's day, and the potential for its realization provided much of the impetus for Malamud to write his comic-apocalyptic work. In addition, within the text are several allusions to apocalyptic creatures and events. For example, after two years or so on the island, the narrator reports that Cohn "stared into the primeval night and saw nothing. An essence, unformed and ancient in the night's ripe darkness, caused him to sense he was about to do battle with a dinosaur, if not a full-fledged dragon" (58). In this way the author evokes images of the distant past ("primeval" and "dinosaur") together with apocalyptic images of the future ("dragon"). In the book of *Apocalypse*, the dragon features prominently in the destruction that precedes the coming of the Messiah. Interestingly, however, the dragon does not appear in the *Old Testament*. It does appear, though, in the *Apocrypha*, in *The Story of Bel and the Dragon*.

The dragon image reappears much later in the story during a schooltree lesson. Cohn is lecturing about prehistoric times and is describing "a dinosaur attempting to defend itself in a bloody swamp against a rapacious flying reptile" (149).^{xlix} It is interesting to note that Malamud again melds together the same two images—one from

the distant past and another from the apocalyptic future. In so doing, the author creates a dynamic tension between the past and the future, perhaps to underscore the peril that confronts those caught in between—the people living in the here and now.

The number seven figures prominently in the narrative, first at the Seder when Cohn's community includes himself and seven apes (six chimps and George). It reappears toward the end of the story, when Cohn posts his 7 Admonitions. The number seven is no accident in Malamud's story, because it is highly symbolic of the *Apocalypse*. In the book of *Revelation*, there are letters to the seven churches (1.9-3.22), the scroll with seven seals (4.1-8.1), the seven trumpets (8.2-11.19), and the seven bowls of God's anger (16.1-21). These things are relatively well-known. What are not as well-known are the Seven Commandments of Man (also known as the Seven Commandments of Natural Religion, which applied to non-Jews living among the Israelites), which appear in the book of *Genesis* (Hertz 33). Whether intentional or not, this evocation of the past with the future again reinforces the urgency that faces those living in the present. We should also keep in mind many critics identify seven manifestations of the protagonist in *CM*.

Ahokas suggests that Rebekah Islanda, holding the hopes of the fragile island community, is symbolic of a female Messiah, whose male counterpart appears in the book of *Apocalypse*. In *Apocalypse*, a woman gives birth to a boy, who the dragon (Satan) tries to devour. Satan is defeated by the Messiah, clearing the way for the millennium of Christ's reign. The obvious difficulty with Ahokas's interpretation is that Rebekah dies a very early death. This is inconsistent with what occurs in *Apocalypse*. Therefore, my understanding of her role in Malamud's story is that the author is

parodying Melville, who in turn parodies *Apocalypse*. The result is that, contrary to Ahokas' view, Rebekah represents the Antichrist, who appears nowhere in *Apocalypse* but does appear elsewhere in the *New Testament*. In *1 John*, for example, we read: "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (2: 18-19). As the offspring between man and beast, Rebekah "does not belong" in God's natural order. Since she does not belong, her "going" is foreordained. As the product of Satan's (Cohn's) seduction of Eve (Mary Madelyn), Rebekah, like her father, is doomed. Despite her cute and cuddly appearance, she may be, in effect, the antichrist in an allegorical and apocalyptic reading of the text. Her death, then, is consistent with *New Testament* apocalyptic literature.

On another level, though, in Rebekah, Malamud again fuses past and future time to reinforce his prophetic warning to the people of his own day. Rebekah's genetic make-up is half-human, half-chimp. In the novel, man's time has passed; it is up to the chimps and the other primates on the island to chart a course for the future. On this interpretive level, Rebekah's death signifies the eradication of mankind's disrespectful meddling with God's creation. By killing off Rebekah, Malamud suggests that it may be time to begin again with a new genesis, leading to a new world through a new cycle of evolution. In reality, this may require a spiritual rebirth for the human race Cohn represents. George's mysterious Kaddish intoned at the end of the narrative hints that religion, or perhaps spirituality, needs to play a larger role if man is to survive.

Given that Melville completed *CM* only five years before the start of the Civil War, it would be difficult to imagine him excluding slavery from his satirical targets.¹ And, of course, he doesn't. The issue appears several times in the novel, sometimes in a veiled way, and other times overtly. I will focus on two such references. First, the depiction of the negro cripple in Chapter III conforms to the demeaning stereotype of blacks as child-like dependents of whites (Cook 35). According to Karcher, Black Guinea "fulfills Melville's vision of an America tainted by Negro servitude and [is] thus deserving of the alleged judgment figured in the apocalyptic structure of the novel" (qtd. in Cook 35). That Guinea may be a white masquerading as a black stands as a judgment of the shallowness of white society, which is quick to degrade and dehumanize the "negro" based on mere resemblance.

Second, the slavery issue reappears in Chapter VII in the meeting between the man in gray and the man with gold sleeve buttons. As Karcher points out, this encounter symbolically pits the North against the South (qtd. in Cook 36). The man in gray symbolizes the missionary spirit of the North while the man with gold sleeve buttons represents Southern patriarchal conservatism. The Southern gentleman's apparent "spotlessness" (*CM* 46) is Melville's satirical attack upon the "mudsill theory" (Cook 37), which held that higher civilization required a class system in which whites were above blacks, who were permanently condemned to servitude to support the white's supposedly superior culture.

As Malamud was writing more than a century after the Civil War and Lincoln's freeing of the slaves, the issue of black slavery in America does not directly figure into his novel. However, on a symbolic level, slavery is a central theme in *GG*. We have

already examined the importance of the Seder in the story and how it parodies the escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. By structuring *GG* so that the moment of the Fall occurs during the Seder, Malamud cleverly introduces the Fall from grace into the captivity of sin in the midst of the celebrated remembrance of the escape from the Pharaoh's armies. But there is another, more subtle sort of slavery that exists in Malamud's book.

When Buz first acquires the ability to speak, his first question to Cohn is, " 'Shall I call you master' " (66)? In so doing, Buz alludes to the nature of Cohn's relationship to him and all the other primates that appear in the story, namely, one resembling the relationship between a master and slave. Contrary to the claims of some critics, Cohn holds firm to his control over 'his' island. He considers operating on the chimps to install artificial larynxes, institutes the schooltree to indoctrinate his pupils in the lessons mankind has learned, posts his 7 Admonitions, and, most importantly, takes sexual advantage of Mary Madelyn in the same manner that slave-owners abused their female slaves in American history.

I will conclude this section with some reflections on the themes of optimism and pessimism in the pair of works under consideration. After studying *CM* along with a portion of the vast amount of criticism available on the text, it is hard to arrive at any other conclusion except that Melville has written another "wicked book."ⁱⁱ I make this assertion, because under the guise of traditional Christian virtues, Melville's protagonist systematically works to undermine them in his marks or expose his dupes as materialistic frauds. Perhaps what the Methodist minister says about the wooden-legged man applies to Melville as well: " 'There he shambles off on his one lone leg, emblematic of his one-

sided view of humanity' ” (17). For the author, Christianity is ill-equipped to deal with the corrupt world, represented by a steamboat teeming with thieves, hustlers, and hypocritical Christians. The novel ends in darkness, and with the end of the light of Christian faith. Yet the confidence-man remains to continue his masquerade. Who his future victims will be remains a mystery—perhaps other false creeds and their adherents.

Malamud presents a more complex picture on this issue. As *GG* story begins, an all-out thermonuclear war has destroyed all life on the planet, except for one man and a few primates. Cohn, both brilliant and childlike simultaneously, attempts to build a new life for himself and the primates on a broken, yet divine, island. After some success, Cohn mates with a female chimpanzee, Mary Madelyn, in a “mad act.” At the same time, though Cohn fails to grasp the connection, the chimpanzees resort to their beastly natures and kill several baby baboons, along with the offspring of Cohn and Mary Madelyn. They then destroy Cohn’s cave and all remnants of man’s civilization, and finally slay Cohn on a mountain. Given the exceedingly dark tone of these events, it is difficult to escape a pessimistic reading of the text.

Critics are nearly unanimous in their assessment of *GG* as it relates to this issue. Freese views the novel in an almost completely pessimistic light, as it alludes to some of the worst of mankind’s historical atrocities. He highlights Malamud’s rendering of the Akedah as the basis for his pessimistic interpretation. Citing Malamud’s admitted increasing pessimism, Richman believes the novel represents “a crisis of faith” (205) for the author. He also feels that the central message of the work is that man and his civilization are “doomed” (204), due to the limitations inherent in both. He further finds

that the failure of the chimps in the narrative is that they have not acquired a sufficiency of human character, presumably just as man himself has not (207).

In contrast, Buchen believes that through *GG*, Malamud demonstrates that he has genuine concern for the future of the world and the human race. For the critic, the prophetic warning the author seeks to give is that mankind is precariously close to annihilating itself. These comments notwithstanding, Buchen sums up by saying that the overriding tone of “Malamud’s darkest book” (33) is one of mourning. Safer’s conclusion is perhaps the direst of all. Given the novel’s bleak ending, Safer thinks that “Malamud may indeed be indicating that God would not be diminished if in fact mankind was eliminated” (115). With grim humor, she states, Malamud is trying to avert such a fate.

Despite the overall tragic tone of *GG*, some critics find reason for hope. Freese and others see a fragile hope for the future of mankind symbolized in George’s Kaddish chanted at the end of the novel (167). George’s singing shows that God’s altered universe is still viable and that anything is possible, including the return of humanity. It is Steed who sees the text in the most optimistic light. For him, Malamud’s premise is for humanism and against nihilism. Malamud believes that in the real world mankind will survive (18), and this premise is affirmed in the novel. Despite writing in the absurdist/apocalyptic genre, Malamud turns the genre upside-down to avow God’s order, and offer mankind a possible future.

5. Conclusion

In *God's Grace*, published in 1982 during a tense period of the Cold War, Malamud sought to impart a prophetic warning to his fellow humans. His warning then is still valid now. Times have changed, but weapons of mass destruction, along with many other man-made dangers, still threaten the planet and all its life. Malamud's anti-hero—Calvin Cohn—represents both the brilliance of the human species and our great ability for self-deception and hubris. These shortcomings in us have already had devastating results, whether they be the use of thermonuclear bombs or mad acts of genetics. Human history has already witnessed both.

In my thesis, I believe I have provided a convincing case of the great extent to which Melville's novel exerts an influence on Malamud's text. In my opinion, Malamud consciously and deliberately models *God's Grace*—in large part—on Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. It is not his only source to be sure, but I can say with *confidence* (pun intended) that it is his most important one. As I hope I have shown, Melville's influence shows itself in terms of historical milieu, setting, genre, plot, structure, characters, and themes. He had great admiration for Melville, and on the deepest level, Melville is represented in the character of the albino ape. Malamud was not afraid to take risks in his writing career, and *God's Grace* represents one of his most daring. In writing *God's Grace*, he mimics one of the giants of American and world literature; in addition, he takes on what is often considered to be Melville's most forbidding text.

I summarize here what I take to be my most important contributions to Melvillean and Malamudian scholarship. First, *GG* is multi-layered. It can be read on any one of

several levels: an adult Swiftian-type fable featuring talking apes and a semi-utopic paradise under God's care that goes horribly awry; as a Defoe-like adventure story about a lone man struggling to survive on an isolated island; or as an allegory featuring complex divine beings embroiled in conflict, with the fate of humanity and the world hanging in the balance. These layers and modes of generic interpretation contribute to the considerable ambiguity of Malamud's novel, which leads to my second point.

GG, like *CM*, is highly ambiguous. This ambiguity is perhaps inevitable given the uncertainties inherent in *CM*, but it also mirrors the world in which Malamud lived at the time of *GG*'s writing, where massive stockpiles of apocalyptic-type weapons were viewed as a source of strength and a leader could say, "trust but verify," and be considered a great communicator. The most ambiguous element of *GG* is the nature of the island. Malamud may have made the island divine so that it would fit the allegorical genre of the novel, or he may have had other designs in mind. Despite Cohn's weak faith, perhaps Malamud is suggesting that a world devoid of religion or spirituality is as doomed as his protagonist. Complicating the beneficence of the godly island is a wrathful yet elusive God who speaks in double quotations marks, and has unleashed an apocalyptic flood to wipe out humanity. How to reconcile these two images of God is perhaps the most difficult element posed when trying to interpret *GG*. And though it is easier to read, *GG* is almost as vexing to interpret as *CM*. Reading *CM*, with the help of scholarship, is difficult but, in the end, more satisfying than reading *GG*. After reading *GG*, one is left with more questions than answers.

Third, Malamud deliberately and thoroughly models *GG* on *CM*; moreover, he writes *GG* as a parody of *CM*. I believe he does this to underline the prophetic warning

he intends to impart in his comic-apocalyptic tale, which is that the power and confidence exhibited by the superpowers through the possession of thermonuclear weapons is ultimately as illusory as Melville's protagonist. In a way Melville's confidence man is no more than a cipher^{lii} or a phantom, a character created by the author to reveal what he took to be the delusion and hypocrisy of the America of his time. Malamud's Calvin Cohn functions in much the same way, a character both brilliant and idiotic simultaneously. Cohn is an exaggerated figure; his capacity for self-deception is so vast as to be almost unbelievable. And though he does not change appearance in the same stark ways as his Melvillean counterpart, his transformation from a humble and brilliant paleologist into a mad eugenicist is even more dramatic than any of the mutations the confidence-man undergoes.

Fourth, *GG*, again like *CM*, is prophetic. Malamud fits in the line of poet-prophets, joining the likes of Blake and Wordsworth, though I am not suggesting he reaches their stature. In *GG*, Malamud presents a vision of one possible future for humanity and the world in the hopes of averting it. Writers have considerably more freedom than politicians, and they can cut through the double-speak to scream out a warning to stop the madness—whether it be thermonuclear stockpiling or fooling with nature's genetic blueprint. Writers like Melville and Malamud can craft hopeful messages, sometimes disguised as dire predictions.

Fifth, and finally, both works are deceptive, and I don't mean this as a rebuke. They are deceptive in that casual readers likely will miss much of the undercurrent of action and meaning lying below the surface of the narratives. Neither of these novels can be fully appreciated if read only on the literal level. This is especially true of Melville's

work, but it also applies to Malamud's. To state the obvious, these kindred writers are deep thinkers, and each writer's struggle to reach his readers is a labor of love. Cook believes that Melville, ultimately, is a man of the heart. A man of uncertain faith, he could still see the goodness in Christ and hold him up as a model to live by. Malamud, also of dubious belief, is Jewish and yet looks to Melville as one of his greatest influences. What the two men share in common is a love for humanity, and a passion for using words to cry out like prophets in the American wilderness.

I close this thesis with three passages—two from *CM* and one from *GG*—that show the striking similarity of these two novels separated by a century-and-a-quarter. The first passage is taken from a conversation between the PIO man and Pitch. In it, the PIO man says:

'[S]upposing, respected sir, that worthy gentleman, Adam, to have been dropped overnight in Eden, as a calf in a pasture; supposing that, sir—then how could even the learned serpent himself have foreknown that such a downy-chinned little innocent would eventually rival the goat in a beard? Sir, wise as the serpent was, that eventuality would have been entirely hidden from his wisdom.' [To which Pitch replies:]

'I don't know about that. The Devil is very sagacious. To judge by the event, he appears to have understood man better than the Being who made him' (162).

Now a corresponding passage from Malamud's text, in a conversation with Buz,

Cohn says:

'The snake saw Adam and Eve having intercourse amid the flowers. The snake afterwards asked Eve for a bit of the same, but she indignantly refused. That started off his evil plans of the betrayal of man. I've read you the story where he tempted Eve with the apple. She could have said no, but the snake was a tricky gent. He got her confused by his sexual request' (71).

And to close—I offer the last sentence of *The Confidence-Man*:

"Something further may follow of this Masquerade" (336).

Notes

ⁱ Other possible sources include *Lord of the Flies*, *The Tempest*, *Dr. Doolittle*, *Animal Farm*, and Aesop's *Fables*.

ⁱⁱ In *The Assistant*, Frank Alpine (the assistant to Morris Bober) behaves very much like a confidence man, though he does suffer pangs of conscience and converts to Judaism at the end of the novel.

ⁱⁱⁱ Some others included Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, William Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, and Ernest Hemingway (Lasher 49).

^{iv} Melville apparently alludes to Shakespeare's *King Lear* and his eldest wicked daughter here.

^v Apart from the narrative, Melville interjects three meta-fictional chapters (i.e., XIV, XXXIII, and XLIV).

^{vi} Some critics suggest that there is ambiguous textual evidence that the narrative may spill over into the first few minutes of April 2.

^{vii} My source for this calculation is the Easter Sunday/Jewish Passover Calculator at www.phys.uu.nl/~vgent/easter/easter_text2a.htm.

^{viii} Source: Passover calculations: 1979-81.

^{ix} My estimates are based on the following textual clues:

Textual Clue/Event	Days Elapsed	Page
On ocean	1	6
Pass first island	2	10
	2	12
Cohn considers throwing Buz overboard	7	23
Buz tied to mast	1	24
Total Time on ocean	~13	
Arrival on Cohn's Island		26
Buz leaves	7	33
	10	34
	2	36
Buz returns	2	37
	1	40
Boat gone	7	41
Island as "flask"	14	43-44
October to May	240	45

Late Autumn	180	48
Spring	150	49
Four months	120	49
Island as “bottle”	1	51
Buz leaves	2	52
	1	54
	1	58
	2	59
George appears		60
	1	61
	1	63
Buz speaks		64
	2	77
	1	81
Spring	234	82
Five chimps arrive		94
	2	98
Cohn considers operations on chimps	14	102
Time on island until Seder	~995	
Seder		107-24
Schooltree	21	128-38
Three new chimps arrive		141
	5	144
	4	149
	2	154
	5	157
	1	161
	1	162
Cohn and Mary Madelyn mate	1	169
Rebekah is born	240	178
Shivah for Sara	7	191
	1	192
	1	202
George disappears	7	203
	1	215
	1	221
Cohn is sacrificed/End of story		223
Time on island from Seder to end	~298	

^x In addition, Melville is almost certainly alluding to Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” and all manner of religious typological allegory.

^{xi} The mudsill theory was a racist, class-based theory that placed the white man above slaves, who were seen as a menial race and divinely ordained for subordination.

^{xii} John Dugdale names the bears as stock market traders “who sells stocks in the expectation of a fall in price” (343).

^{xiii} See *Matt. 5:16*: “[L]et your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

^{xiv} See *Matt. 25:1-13*.

^{xv} Richard Boyd Hauck posits that the mind “organizes past and present events and projects future possibilities by reconstructing experience into a continuously evolving history, or mental recapitulation” (273). In writing *GG*, Malamud projects an undesired future in the hope it will be prevented and not become part of reconstructed human history.

^{xvi} Christians can easily refute Melville’s attack by pointing to any number of *New Testament* passages that show Jesus as a shrewd observer of the world and not simply the naïve pacifist that Melville satirizes. See, for example, *Luke 20: 45-47*.

^{xvii} Elizabeth S. Foster states that Melville purposefully altered Hall’s account and even contradicted his own views on Indians, which were far more benevolent than appear in the novel (lxvii).

^{xviii} Tom Quirk lists the four widely-accepted criteria among critics for who or what constitutes an accepted disguise, manifestation, or incarnation of the confidence-man: “(1) they must be identifiable as individuals by Black Guinea as gentlemen who will testify to the beggar’s honesty; (2) they must be fraudulent characters; (3) they must appear successively and those appearances must never overlap; and (4) they must occupy a central position in the episodes in which they are presented” (51). However, some critics add the lamblike mute of Chapter I as the first manifestation of the protagonist.

^{xix} The *Gospel of John* refers to Christ as the Word, so it seems that a deaf and dumb man may be a mock version of Christ (*John 1: 1-14*).

^{xx} Interestingly, the Antichrist does not appear anywhere in the *Book of Revelation*, though he is mentioned elsewhere in the *New Testament*. *2 Thessalonians 2: 4, 9-10*, for example, reads: “[The Antichrist] will even go in and sit down in God’s Temple and claim to be God...[he] will come with the power of Satan and perform all kinds of false miracles and wonders, and use every kind of wicked deceit on those who will perish.”

^{xxi} Once, during an interview with Helen Benedict, when Malamud was asked whether he believed in God, he mysteriously replied: “ ‘I think it was Carlyle who said whether he believed in God was his business and God’s’ ” (Lasher 133).

^{xxii} Moshe Rebbenu translates as “Moses, our Teacher” (www.nishmas.org/chassidus/holidays/lgbomr57.htm).

^{xxiii} The amount sought by the man in gray is \$11.2 billion. In 1913 (which is as far back as I could find a calculation for) this amount is equal to approximately \$247.08 trillion today (2009). (Source: minneapolisfed.org/research/data/us/calc/)

^{xxiv} Source: The *Oxford English Dictionary* Online.

^{xxv} Though it appears, from the previous discussion, that George can speak as well.

^{xxvi} See *Gen.* 25:31-33 and 27:1-46.

^{xxvii} In fact, Melville once refers to Moby Dick as the “Albino whale” (140).

^{xxviii} Ahab even goes so far as to think of the whale as the devil (132).

^{xxix} It is also interesting to note that Malamud considered his other primary source of influence to be Hawthorne—a friend of and source of inspiration for Melville.

^{xxx} Lakshmi Mani states that the author was intimately familiar with many systems of belief that fused good and evil in the deity, including the Marcionite and Gnostic Christian heresies, along with Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Manichaeism (210).

^{xxxi} The problem of evil arises for any philosophical or theological belief system that affirms all three of the following propositions: (1) God is omnipotent, (2) God is perfectly good, and (3) evil exists. Assuming that evil exists (some belief systems deny its existence as illusion), it seems either that God wants to destroy evil and is unable to—and thus his omnipotence is denied—or that God is able to obliterate evil but does not want to—and thus his perfect goodness is denied. Theodicy can be solved by denying any one of these three propositions. James F. Ross puts the problem succinctly in the form of a question: “assuming that God is both good and powerful, why is there evil in the world” (223)?

^{xxxii} According to Jonathan Cook, in Melville’s Calvinist heritage, “the deity unofficially subsumed the function of the devil, inexplicably condemning some individuals to damnation and others to salvation according to an inscrutable plan...Melville turned the punitive features of the Calvinist God into an indictment of God as an evil or amoral creator” (9).

^{xxxiii} Scholars have also analyzed *Billy Budd* in light of Darwinism. See, for instance, Eric Goldman, “Bringing out the Beast in Melville’s *Billy Budd*: The Dialogue of Darwinian and “Holy” Lexicons on Board the *Bellipotent*.” *Studies in the Novel* 37.4 (2005): 430-443.

^{xxxiv} Dugdale states that the dungeoned Italian referred to is the Abbe’ Faria in Alexandre Dumas’s *The Count of Monte Cristo* (348).

^{xxxv} Compare this passage with *Jonah* 1:15-17, in which Jonah is thrown into the sea and is swallowed by a large fish, where he spends three days and three nights. This, in turn, alludes to Christ’s three days in the tomb before his resurrection, Ahab’s pursuit of Moby Dick for three days and nights, and Cohn’s pursuit of the albino chimp for an equal period of time.

^{xxxvi} Dugdale identifies blacklegs as professional gamblers (340).

^{xxxvii} Dugdale translates this as rigidly orthodox (340).

^{xxxviii} This practice was particularly associated with the South (Dugdale 340).

^{xxxix} Dugdale cites Carlyle’s *The French Revolution* (1837), in which he says that de Cloutz was a Prussian nobleman who led a delegation including representatives from several countries to the National Assembly in 1790 (340).

^{xl} As Dugdale points out, this scene from Shakespeare actually shows man to be a fool swayed by Puck’s magic juice instead of his reason (340).

^{xli} Critics disagree whether the protagonist appears in all these guises during the narrative; furthermore, critics also disagree whether the list is comprehensive.

^{xlii} Dugdale reports that Apemantus was a philosopher-cynic who was contemptuous of worldly wealth and convention, as well as friend to the hero of Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*. Dugdale also notes, significantly, that ‘cynic’ comes from the Greek word for ‘dog-like’ (349).

^{xliii} See *Matt. 5:14*: “You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.”

^{xliv} Compare with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (178).

^{xlv} Significantly, Rabelais’ story is set in Egypt, which, as we have seen, is of symbolic importance for both Melville and Malamud.

^{xlvi} For a full exploration of these themes, see my article, “The Shattered Flask: Creation Gone Awry in Bernard Malamud’s *God’s Grace*.” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (Dec. 2008): 49-58.

^{xlvii} It’s probably just a coincidence, but I can’t help but note that the policy of nuclear deterrence between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. was and is known as mutual assured destruction (MAD).

^{xlviii} Steed overlooks the “divine” nature of the island, which differs from the usual understanding of what is natural. Moreover, the fact that George sings at the conclusion of the narrative suggests that the island will continue in its “unnatural state.”

^{xlix} Dragons have often been portrayed as winged reptiles (Mode 267).

^l Carolyn Karcher goes so far to suggest that Melville wrote his novel as an “apocalyptic judgment on the national ‘sin’ of slavery” (qtd. in Cook 25).

^{li} In a letter to Hawthorne dated November 17?, 1851, he says of *Moby Dick*, “I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb” (Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne 1).

^{lii} I am indebted to Dr. Corey E. Andrews for offering this insight into Melville’s protagonist.

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