JEWISH/CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN BERNARD MALAMUD'S NOVEL *GOD's GRACE*

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I

Besides being one of the major American authors of the postwar period, Bernard Malamud is also one of the leading representatives of contemporary Jewish-American fiction. Born a second-generation New York Jew, he belongs to the newly incorporated group of ethnic writers of Jewish descent who, in Leslie Fiedler's oft-quoted words, discovered "their much vaunted alienation to be their passport into the heart of Gentile American culture."[1] Sustained by the two traditions, Malamud's fiction both transcends the author's own ethnic and cultural origin and yet remains distinct from classic American literature. In many ways, his situation — even today — illustrates a tendency which Isaac Rosenfeld calls "the outsider's paradox."[2] By virtue of standing a little aside, Malamud — like several other prominent Jewish-American writers who have risen to a central position in American literature since World War II — has become a perfect insider who enjoys the critical advantage which, according to Rosenfeld, allows minority authors "to observe much that is hidden to the more accustomed native eye."[3]

More daring and more innovative than most of the major American writers of the immediate post-war generation, Malamud has been open to influences and challenges that have made his career exceptionally varied and intriguing. Despite the different degrees of formal experimentation and some audacious changes in subject matter, the thematic continuity of Malamud's novels has remained largely unbroken. The author's focus is always on the protagonists, who serve as the emotional and rhetorical constructs that Malamud uses as the vehicles of his repeated attempts to reconcile self and society.

All the protagonists from Roy Hobbs in Malamud's first novel *The Natural* (1952) to Calvin Cohn in his last completed novel *God's Grace* (1982)[4] are concerned with the search both for a new identity and for individual and social responsibility. Moreover, the changes within and between Malamud's novels are always related to the oscillations and shifting tensions between these two major themes. Much of the success in the author's best work stems from his ability to reconcile the moral imperatives of man's obligation to his fellow man with the identity theme, which in the course of his own development as a writer, becomes an increasingly conscious parallel to his own search for an authentic artistic self.

The ethnic aspects of Malamud's fiction are subordinated to his two major themes and they usually provide vital links between them. The author always develops the themes of individual and social responsibility with the help of an underlying moral construct which links spiritual growth, the precondition of a positive new identity, to productive suffering. Malamud's work is also characterized by a strong and consistent tendency to connect human suffering with Jewishness. Thus, the assimilation and integration of the positive value of productive suffering into a fictional hero's psyche ultimately leads to the internalization of the Jewish code of *Menschlichkeit,* the Jewish ethic concerned with mutual responsibility.

As Josephine Zadovsky Knopp points out, Malamud has stressed the importance of the *Menschlichkeit* code to the creative writer as well.[5] In one of his earliest public statements the author said: "The purpose of the writer... is to keep civilization from destroying itself."[6] Although all fiction by Malamud is consistent with his intensely humanistic assumptions, the words

gain new urgency when they are looked at in the light of *God's Grace,* a complex fantasy about a single human survivor and his animal companions set in the near future after a nuclear war in which the easily identifiable "Djanks and Druzhkies" have killed themselves.

Meant as a prophetic warning by the author,[7] the book describes the protagonist's attempts to appease God so that He would renew His covenant. After having recovered from radiation illness Cohn, a former palaeontologist, begins to explore the possibility of establishing a good society based on equality and mutual respect together with the surviving apes that inhabit a tropical island incidentally discovered by the shipwrecked protagonist. Inspired by his initial success among the collaborative animals Cohn makes grandiose plans for a totally new age, but his ruin is precipitated by the hubris and utter lack of self-knowledge that undermine the best of his intentions.

The novel is filled with literary references and biblical symbolism that mainly draws on *Genesis* and on the apocalyptic tradition fused with elements of Messianism. In the followings pages, I shall briefly discuss the genre problem of *God's Grace* by outlining some of its background in contemporary American fiction and then analyse the meaning and effect of Malamud's use of Jewish/Christian symbolism in the shaping of the central themes of the novel. In some of his earlier work Malamud uses Christian symbolism to enhance the valuable aspects of the Jewish inheritance. Even if the author's skilful intertwining of the different strands of biblical symbolism in *God's Grace* hints at the familiar potential for Jewish-Christian symbiosis, the novel as a whole is marked by deep scepticism. Malamud comments on the thoughts of Cohn on learning that Buz, an experimental chimpanzee capable of human speech, has been Christianized: "He thought that if one of them was Christian and the other a Jew, Cohn's Island would never be Paradise" (GG54).

II

When *God's Grace* was published, it received very mixed reviews and the novel is likely to remain one of Malamud's most controversial books. Part of the audience's puzzlement derives from the fact that with its grotesque characters and strange events *God's Grace* seems to defy definition. The first chapters in particular are characterized by such a high degree of zany humour that many readers may find the novel hard to take.

One way to look at the book and its plot is to classify it as a Robinson Crusoe story. Malamud's palaeontologist is saved from the nuclear catastrophe because he happens to be observing the sea floor in a submersile when the destruction takes place. Together with the tame chimp that he finds in the oceanography vessel Cohn is beached on an uninhabited island, and — like Defoe's practical hero and his numerous literary followers — he soon enough learns how to cultivate and enjoy the fruitfulness of the new environment. Faithful to his symbolical first name Malamud's protagonist even shares some of his devout predecessor's religiosity. The great and decisive difference, however, lies in the fact that in contrast to the traditional Robinson figures Malamud's shipwrecked hero is fully aware that his stay on the island can come to an end any time.

Malamud's narrative style also limits the usefulness of this line of comparison. Instead of only painstakingly striving after the minuteness of realistic verisimilitude *God's Grace* at times even parodies Defoe's conscientious devotion to details and presents itself as a tragicomedy that challenges the wildest imaginings. The most daring creation in the author's cast of actors in Cohn's personal divine comedy in reverse is the Master of the Universe, the invisible Lord, "light from which voice extruded; no sign of God-crown, silverbeard, peering eye" (GG 6). In the opening chapter that Robert Alter calls "a bravura performance"[8] the short-tempered Lord addresses Cohn through a crack in a bulbous black cloud saying that He has lost His patience, because mankind, after receiving the gift of life, has destroyed the world and then themselves. Since Cohn's survival is only an oversight, his reprieve will not last long:

> Yet because of my error, I will grant you time to compose yourself, make your peace. Therefore live quickly — a few breaths and go your way. Beyond that lies nothing for you. These are my words. (GG 6)

Placing the book in the American tradition seems to provide a more useful way of approaching Malamud's central themes and the religious symbolism that shapes them in *God's Grace.* There are at least two major literary contexts that make the novel appear more engaging. Alan Lelchuk writes in his review:

There are in this novel moments of lucid beauty beside moments of harrowing blackness — Eden and Apocalypse between two covers.[9]

To my mind much of the vitality of *God's Grace* that culminates in a new version of the biblical *Akedah* derives from its bold combination of the old myth of the American as a new Adam with the American preoccupation with the apocalypse.

The Adamic ideal that reflects the American faith in progress in the New World emerged as a leading national myth from the 1820's onwards. It optimistically stressed a divinely granted second chance for mankind, which, naturally, elicited counter arguments and stimulated a continuing dialogue in American literature.[10] Even in today's American fiction there is discernible evidence of the ongoing, energizing influence of the Adamic tradition.

The myth of the American Adam is one of the most significant narrative patterns to play a constitutive role in the text that extends from *The Natural* to *God's Grace.* With the exception of *A New Life,* Malamud scholarship with its emphasis on the author's employment of Jewish materials, has so far by and large overlooked the importance of this hero type in the author's novelistic output. Yet the fictional use of the American myth both links Malamud to the Hebrew tradition and allows him to question some basic assumptions of the American tradition to which, as a second generation American Jew, he is a newcomer. This double perspective colours Cohn's self-ironical monologue in the beginning of *God's Grace:*

"Do you see yourself as Adam?"
— If the job is open. (GG 12)

Cohn's readiness to take on the Adamic role is indicated by his eagerness to name his companions. A telling difference, however, sets him apart from the first man in the Bible: instead of calmly accepting the "fitting name, one that went harmoniously with the self he presented" (GG 21) Buz, the first animal to be named, violently disagrees with Cohn's choice and protests against his thinking that he has the right to decide about how to call others. Maybe it is one of the first signs of Cohn's increasing self-deception that while he emphasizes the value of naming Buz after one of the descendants of Nahor, the brother of Abraham the Patriarch, he forgets to mention that the name means "contempt" in Hebrew.

The naming issue has further consequences. Emulating Cohn Buz goes ahead and names the five new chimpanzees that he encounters in the island garden of Eden. He calls a brutal chimpanzee who tries to pretend to be a big and strong gorilla Esau. Like his namesake in the legends of the Jews, the hedonistic chimp places the earthly life of material pleasures above everything else and persists in pursuing his evil inclinations in spite of Cohn's attempts to inculcate in him the rudiments of responsible behaviour. The name given by Buz is also a bad omen for Saul of Tarsus: together with his twin brother Luke he becomes one of Esau's most faithful supporters and a hater of Cohn.

Malamud also uses the story of Creation that Cohn teaches to Buz to prefigure the future events in *God's Grace.* On the Edenic island the role of Eve is played by a nubile female chimpanzee Mary Madelyn who becomes romantically involved with Cohn. Soon enough the Satan-like Esau's jealousy of the protagonist's undeserved luck is challenged by Buz's resentment to the extent that Cohn cannot help comparing the adolescent chimpanzee whose hungry eyes follow him and the island's only female to the serpent lurking in the original paradise. Needless to say, sexual rivalry undermines the new Adam's and Eve's bliss.

Suspended between the Day of Devastation and the wilful sacrifice of the last remaining human being, *God's Grace* incorporates a number of Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic elements in the main body of its narrative structure. Although Robert Alter claims that the novel that deals with the moral opposition between good and evil moves "into an entirely new mode of post-apocalyptic fantasy,"[11] the apocalyptic underpinnings of *God's Grace* suggest that with certain reservations it can also be classified as a representative of apocalyptic fiction. For instance, John R. May in his book *Toward A New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel* uses the symbolism of catastrophe, judgment and renewal, the three constitutive elements of traditional apocalypse, as the basis of his study. Furthermore, May states that he considers a novel apocalyptic if it contains at least the specific symbolism of catastrophe and judgment.[12] By this definition, *God's Grace* qualifies as apocalyptic on much better grounds than many contemporary 'apocalyptic' novels or than some books included in May's own analysis.

Instead of grappling with the vagueness of the various apocalyptic definitions offered by

American literary scholars who strive after maximum inclusiveness,[13] it is ultimately more illuminating to look at *God's Grace* in conjunction with some other novels that draw on apocalypse. I will return later in this paper to Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray,* which appeared as his first book in the United States in 1943. More recent works that combine an apocalyptic impulse with Jewish concerns include novels like E.L. Doctorow's *Book of Daniel* (1971) and William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* (1979). Malamud's deliberate mingling of the terrifying with the comic, however, sets him far apart from Doctorow's and Styron's more conventional treatment of recognizable apocalyptic symbolism.

In his seminal article "Days of Wrath and Laughter," R.W.B. Lewis isolates the genre of comical apocalypse in 19th century American fiction and discusses the common characteristics of some of its most representative descendants in the contemporary era that has experienced World War II and the universal threat of the atom bomb. According to Lewis who regards the American-Jewish author Nathanael West as an important shaper and transmitter of the earlier tradition, it is the pervading sense of the absurd that distinguishes the apocalyptic novels of the 1950's and '60 from their predecessors.[14] In spite of the obvious differences between *God's Grace* and the more postmodernistic novels by "comic apocalyptic" authors like John Barth, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon, Malamud's fable-like work is informed by a similar spirit of the preposterous. Moreover, the absurd qualities of *God's Grace* are enhanced by the writer's use of biblical parodies, the comic strip and science fiction, all of which belong to the standard materials of new experimental literature. The affinities are strengthened by shared motivation. In Lewis's estimation, the vision of contemporary fictional apocalypses is generated by a genuine apprehension of catastrophe. Thus "the sense of the comic is at once the symptom and the executive agency" of a humane imaginative sensibility "rooted not quite in hope but in a hope about hope."[15] Like Malamud in *God's Grace,* the absurdists then are reasserting the human, giving it one more chance.

III

As the symbolism of Calvin Cohn's name shows, he is an acculturated American Jew, in whose thinking the Puritans' heritage of perfectibility joins hands in a very peculiar way with the idea of eternal progress toward a new, harmonious order in Jewish Messianism. Although Malamud's hero, a former rabbinic student, claims to have lost his interest in religion, he has maintained "a more than ordinary interest in God Himself" (GG 56). Even after the judgment in the beginning of the book he keeps constantly looking for signs of His change of mind, and soon enough it turns out that Cohn's apparently madcap activities among the resourceful apes are partially caused by his wish to avert the impending doom.

In his description of God's and Cohn's relationship, Malamud invokes the ancient Jewish tradition of a partnership between God and man in which man is given the opportunity for autonomy. Appealing to this pact the only human survivor — who appears in turn as a mock Noah, a Job, a Moses, a Joshua, an Abraham and an Isaac — exercises his right to argue with Him and criticizes Him for being unjust. The greatest subject of controversy in the novel is the question about man's imperfect nature. Cohn refuses to understand why man was not created to be godlike:

> "In other words," Cohn desperately ran on, "why should the Lord's imperfect creation have spoiled His originally extraordinary idea? Why hadn't He created man equal to whom He had imagined?" (GG 135)

In the ensuing scene between God and Cohn, Malamud depicts with ironic bemusement the awesome consequences of Cohn's interference with the Lord's intention. Irony indeed — to quote Ihab Hassan — continues to be "the key to Malamud's attitude toward man, to his estimate of him"[16] throughout the bizarre central action of *God's Grace.*

Left alone with his fellow survivors on the island Cohn begins to teach the chimpanzees with the aim of inspiring a strong community feeling in them. According to Joseph C. Landis the code of *Menschlichkeit* that is rooted in Jewish Law reflects a view of Messianic redemption as "a hope for an earthly paradise of love and learning, and a Utopian vision of a region of social justice and decency..."[17] Undoubtedly the idea of actively developing a similarly ideal society looms as the highest goal of Cohn's pedagogical task. Therefore the topics of his lectures at the foot of the schooltree that he establishes for the animals not only include the origin of species,

selected periods in human history and the principles of American democracy, but above all, he tries to enlighten his pupils about human values and their significance in daily life. At the heart of the lessons lies a Jewish ethic defined by Morris Bober in Malamud's novel *The Assistant* as follows: "to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. This means to other people" (A 99). True to the meaning of his "priestly" surname Cohn also talks about God and provides his companions with samples of Jewish worship: he plays a record of his cantor-father praying and arranges a *seder* for them. However, it is evident that Cohn's good works do not spring from a good heart only. Having internalized God's disapproval he silently hopes that the good society for the benefit of which he is toiling might be the answer to his expectations.

It is difficult to say exactly at which point the activities on the island begin to remind one of the Jewish Messianic movements that Gershom Scholem, for example, describes in some of the essays in his collection *The Messianic Idea in Judaism.* The schooltree clearly bears a resemblance to its counterpart in the midst of the primal garden. It symbolizes the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil even in the light of Cohn's teaching about the separation between the permitted and the forbidden. Gradually, the differentiations, however, begin to recede and the messianic symbolism of the purely positive, redemptive Tree of Life makes itself felt in *God's Grace.*

The first hints of the utopian elements in Cohn's thinking centre around the possibility of the future good society producing a descendant, "some chimpy Father Abraham" (GG 128) who might be well-pleasing to the Lord. Malamud makes the idea seem like a passing whim until Cohn's affection for the feminist girl chimpanzee grows so strong that he decides to sew a "bridal gown" of white canvas for her. The scene is surrounded by some of the most touching and baffling passages that transfer the action onto a totally new level.

The 'radical' sectarians of the Sabbatian messianic movement that rose in the 1660's and persisted for over a century and a half developed a strange doctrine of the holiness of sin that according to their beliefs was connected with higher principles revealed only to them. Cohn's thoughts suggest the Sabbatians' determination to transgress biblical prohibitions when after much hesitation he makes up his mind to violate ancient commandments written down in the Third and Fifth Book of Moses. A new epoch is ushered in when he starts a family with Mary Madelyn. From now on Cohn concentrates all his eschatological hopes on primate evolution, and as a consequence of his freedom from the old restrictions he actively plans his own role in it. The author's description of Cohn's rationalization provides grim comedy centred on the plan to develop man-apes. Like the radical Sabbatians, who leaving the old Torah behind felt duty-bound to acts of redemption through sin, Malamud's father to-be makes believe:

> "...He himself, possibly, had inspired the revolutionary impulse in Cohn's head — (His vessel) — that he mate with a lady ape; despite which act He would omit cursing, and thereafter killing the innocent "beast," such primeval punishment null and void in these ineluctably post-Torah times?..." (GG 166)

Thematically it is a short step from these incidents to Cohn's idea to compose the Seven Admonitions. Although he tries to convince himself that he is not rewriting the commandments, the similarities are striking: Cohn bakes each letter in clay and sets the Admonitions up on the face of an escarpment for all to see.

In his novel *Satan in Goray,* Singer relates how the tormented inhabitants of a poor seventeenth-century village in Poland become infected by the messianic fervour. After the arrival of two disciples of Sabbatai Zevi, the Messianic pretender, they choose one of them for their leader and begin to live in the happy anticipation of leaving the life in the village behind and flying off on a cloud to the Land of Jerusalem. Like Goray under Reb Gedaliya, the Sabbatian leader, the tropical island prospers once Cohn gives the Admonitions. The chimpanzees begin to call themselves "men" and they vote Cohn "teacher-for-life and honorary chimpanzee" (GG 173). Cohn's happiness is increased by Mary Madelyn's pregnancy. In Singer's book Rechele, a feeble-minded woman whose prophetic powers her lover exploits, is impregnated by her vision of Satan. Mary Madelyn, for her part, gives birth to a perfect chimpanzee-human baby girl. Called Rebekah after the ship that saved Cohn and Islanda after the island that guarantees everybody's survival the daughter is associated with redemption. In her father's imagination, she will not only be the ark that will carry the community into a better future but she seems to be destined for even higher things. Thanks to her extraordinary ac-

complishments the little Rebekkah suggests some of the beliefs held by the Sabbatian Frankists. Drawing on the expansion of the Kabbalah of the concept of the Shekhinah the sect held that one of the three human forms in which the Godhead incarnates will be female.[18] The idea of the supremely gifted daughter as a symbolical female Messiah is reinforced by her sacrificial death.

The period of rejoicing is equally short-lived in Goray and on Cohn's Island. With great skill Malamud allows the line of division that separates Cohn's privileged family from the rest to grow almost imperceptibly. The chimpanzees' teacher is actually the last one to notice that it is he who began to set up the first social barriers in the new paradise. Although he finds the island together with Buz, he — true to the Orwellian dictum that some are more equal than others —names it "Cohn's Island." Characteristically, Cohn's initial assumption of leadership is based on his innate sense of men's superiority to the apes. The heavy gate that he begins to construct as soon as the first native chimpanzees show up epitomizes all the invisible barriers. The chimpanzees again treat the other animals as if they were unconsciously imitating and magnifying Cohn's shortcomings. One of the key characters in *God's Grace* is George, a big peace-loving black gorilla, who falls an easy victim to the chimpanzees' racial prejudices. In contrast to most of the name symbolism in the book, his name has only positive connotations. While Buz, who is very condescending toward the gorilla, significantly suggests Adolf, Cohn chooses George both in honour of his gentle father in-law and of George Washington. The other members of the marginal group include the scorned baboons, the lowest caste on the island.

The dichotomies on the island are mirrored in Cohn's relationship to Buz. It is crucial that after finding the chimpanzee on the oceanography vessel the protagonist thinks: "They'd be like brothers, if not father and son" (GG 26). Malamud's work abounds in symbolical father-son relationships. Whatever forms they take deep down they reflect the traditional Jewish view of mutual respect: the father is a benevolent teacher and the son an obedient student. Cohn's opting for the father-son alternative, however, implies his hidden wish to dominate. I have already referred to the religious conflict between Malamud's hero and his adoptive son. Before the Day of Devastation Buz belonged to Dr. Bünder, an eminent scientist "with a rectilinear view of life" (GG 18). The ominious symbol connected with Dr. Bünder is the "fine, exquisitely sharp, French saber from the Franco-Prussian War" (GG 42) that Cohn saves from his cabin. A little later when the protagonist begins to teach religion, it turns out that ironically enough the chimpanzee has already been converted to his first adoptive father's version of Catholicism. Buz's instinctive bonding with the aggressive Esau also comes between him and Cohn. It is based on their shared conviction "that the true purpose of life was to have as much fun as one could" (GG 86). The racial conflict on the island is connected with the young chimpanzees' hunger for amusement but slyly Esau also exploits the theory of the survival of the fittest as his justification for harassing others. In *God's Grace* as in some other works, Malamud combines racism with religious prejudices. "I will break every Jewbone in your head" (GG 201) Esau threatens Cohn who accuses him of wanton murder.

The formation of the different factions in *God's Grace* parallels the process of group disintegration in Goray. In Singer's book the stand upon Sabbatianism effectively divides the Jewish villagers into two conflicting camps, and later on the internal doctrinal disputes further divide the faithful Sabbatians. In the fictional Goray, the era of the mystical Torah, the Torah of *atzilut,* is ushered in by Reb Gedaliya's lifting the ban on polygamy and cancelling "all the strict 'Thou shalt nots,' as well"[19] in order to hasten the end of the days of exile. It is ironical that despite Cohn's reticence Malamud's chimpanzees do not fail to decipher the secret meaning of the Seven Admonitions. Instead of yearning to learn about good and evil at the school-tree they begin to insist on their right to enjoy the fruit of the Tree of Life.

Although Cohn's growing hypocrisy and the chimpanzees' rude counter arguments create comical effects in the remainder of *God's Grace,* the mood turns increasingly sombre. The chimpanzees' first acts of cannibalism, their violation of the First Admonition, portend the proximity of the end of days. Similarly, Cohn's fight with Esau takes on apocalyptic connotations that are carried over to the scene in which Buz — standing high up on the escarpment — preaches to the apes. Buz's altering of the Seventh Admonition makes him suggestive of an Antichrist or a False Prophet. Although the revision involves adding a Christian emphasis on God's love, Buz's subsequent appearance as a Judas figure ironically

confirms that, like Cohn, he does not practice what he preaches.

An atmosphere of senseless waste pervades the last scenes of the novel. The chimpanzees' riots multiply the number of meaningless killings, and not even Cohn can escape committing a murder. The apes understandably protest against the apparent contradictions in the "honorary chimpanzee's" advice to sublimate their sexual desire. With horrifying appropriateness the atrocities against him culminate in the lifting of the sexual taboo on the consenting Mary Madelyn and in demolishing their home. Common language is the instrument that enables Cohn to begin his work for a "better civilization, a more idealistic and altruistic one" (GG 211). Preposterously he seals his own fate when he snaps the wires of Buz's artificial larynx as a punishment for his aiding the chimpanzees in achieving their anarchistic utopia. The other chimps' English was an act of faith in Buz, and from now on the silence that surrounds Cohn has an ever deepening apocalyptic ring.

The action in the apocalyptic town of Goray ends in the birth of a dybbuk. In *God's Grace,* an equally grotesque end is prefigured by Cohn's frequent references to a connection between the Holocaust and the Day of Devastation. In the beginning of the book, the author acknowledges his debt of gratitude to Shalom Spiegel's *The Last Trial,* a study on the *Akedah.* While the inclusion of the story of Abraham and Isaac enriches the symbolical significance of the novel, it also complicates the interpretation of Malamud's deceptively simple fable by alluding to both the Jewish and the Christian reading of the events on Mount Moriah. Throughout *God's Grace,* Malamud manipulates biblical patterns in the direction of the Freudian family romance. The intricacies of the last chapter, a Beckettian endgame, are increased by the father's and son's reversal of the traditional roles: Buz offers the aged Cohn on an altar he builds on a mountain.

Given the messianic symbolism of the novel, Buz's terry-cloth turban serves as an ironical reference to Sabbatai Zevi's conversion to Islam. This time, however, the symbols seem to derive from the biblical tradition. The pleading beggar himself reminds the reader of the suffering Messiah in Isaiah ch. 53 while the meeting and the questions to which it gives rise suggest a similar scene in the Jewish apocalyptical work called *The Book of Zerubbabel.*[20] The number seven, a recurring apocalyptic symbol in *God's Grace,* reappears with the beggar. One may ask if Cohn's lack of self-knowledge has not caused the others suffering and if he is not too hard even on the beggar, but these questions seem to have lost their relevance. Even though Cohn has the sense to inquire if the beggar is a Messiah, his "bony seven-fingered hand" (GG 221) indicates that the period of grace has come to an end. Hence, no angel appears when the speechless Buz lights the fire and wields the stone knife.

Yet one should not hasten to conclude that Malamud has denounced the premise of humanism that is implicit in all his writings. As in *Satan in Goray,* the desire to press the end linked to the yearning for redemption destroys Cohn and his fictional world. The blame, however, is not on the guiding religious and moral principles but on their misinterpretation and deliberate distortion. The grotesque appearance of George in the last lines of the novel also shows that like the representative books of the comic-apocalyptic tradition, *God's Grace* is firmly rooted in "a hope about hope." Wearing a discarded yarmulke George — a ludicrous honorary American Adam and a self-appointed Jew — sits in a tree chanting a Kaddish for Calvin Cohn. Epitomizing the outsider's paradox he alone has internalized the code of *Menschlichkeit,* and finding a viable existence within the tradition he takes on the burden of the past.

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1. Leslie A. Fiedler, *Waiting for the End. The American Literary Scene from Hemingway to Baldwin* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 72.
2. Isaac Rosenfeld, *An Age of Enormity,* ed. Theodore Solotaroff (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 68.
3. Rosenfeld 1962, p. 69.
4. Malamud was working on a new novel at the time of his death on March 18, 1986. According to his publisher the book will either be published separately or parts of it will be included in a posthumous collection. Mervyn Rothstein, "Bernard Malamud, Author, Dies at 71," *The New York Times* (Thursday, March 20, 1986), D 26. GG-abbreviation for Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982) and A-

abbreviation for Bernard Malamud's The Assistant (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957). Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the text.

5. Josephine Zadovsky Knopp, *The Trial of Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Writing* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 109.
6. Joseph Wershba, "Not Horror but 'Sadness,'" *New York Post* (Sunday, Sept. 14, 1958), M 2.
7. See Robert Alter, "A Theological Fantasy," *The New Republic*, Vol. 187, Nos. 12 & 13 (September 20 & 27, 1982), p. 38.
8. Alter, p. 38.
9. Alan Lelchuck, "Malamud's Dark Fable," *The New York Times Book Review*, August 29, 1982, p. 14.
10. See, for instance, R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam. Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 1–10.
11. Alter, p. 38.
12. John R. May, *Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p. 38.
13. For a critical overview of several recent definitions, see Douglas Robinson, "Visions of *No* End: The Anti-Apocalyptic Novels of Ellison, Barth, and Coover," *American Studies in Scandinavia*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1981), pp. 2–3.
14. R.W.B. Lewis, *Trials of the Word. Essays in American Literature and the Humanistic Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 185.
15. Lewis 1966, p. 235.
16. Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence. Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 162.
17. Joseph C. Landis, "Reflections on American Jewish Writers," *Jewish Book Annual*, Vol. 25 (1967-8), p. 145.
18. Gersholm Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971), pp. 124–125. See also Geoffrey H. Hartman, "On the Jewish Imagination," *Prooftexts. A Journal of Jewish Literary History*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1985), p. 206.
19. Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray* (New York: Noon Press, 1979), p. 147.
20. Nils Martola, "Serubbabels bok," *Nordisk judaistik/ Scandinavian Jewish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1972), p. 10.