The Fixer Study Guide

The Fixer by Bernard Malamud

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Contents

Introduction

Bernard Malamud based *The Fixer* on the case of Mendel Beilis, a Jewish bookkeeper for a brick factory who was accused of ritualistically murdering a Christian child. With very little evidence against him, the Russian government pushed for the conviction of Beilis in order to justify anti-Semitic policies that were being enacted at the time. The novel's protagonist, Yakov Bok, also works in a brick factory, and he is charged, for no particular reason except being Jewish, for a crime just like the one with which Beilis was charged. As in Malamud's fictionalized version, the actual case occurred between 1911 and 1913 in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev. The Beilis case is credited with being one of the main contributing factors in bringing about the Russian Revolution by raising the sense of distrust Russian citizens felt toward their government and the anger of people around the world. The political situation surrounding the case is hardly touched upon in *The Fixer.* Most of the book focuses on Yakov's life in solitary confinement, waiting for years in prison for the murder charge to be formally levied against him so that he can get on with the trial, *The Fixer* was published in 1966, more than fifty years after the Beilis case had been settled in court, but Malamud could count on his audience to be familiar with the circumstances of what had happened because the case was and is an important event in the history of the Jewish struggle for peace and security. The book won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, and is considered one of the finest in the canon of books by one of America's finest authors.

Malamud wrote three more novels in his lifetime: *The Tenants* (1971), *Dubin's Lives* (1979), and *God's Grace* (1982). *The Collected Stories of Bernard Malamud,* published in 1982, was considered a major event in the publishing world. Malamud died in 1986 in New York City. He is often categorized as a "Jewish writer" because many of the characters and themes in his books concerned Jewish history and especially the Jewish-American immigrant experience. However, he is also recognized as simply one of the best fiction writers of his generation, especially for his craftsmanship of the short story.

Author Biography

Bernard Malamud was born in 1914 in New York City, in a neighborhood that had become famous as the settling place of Jewish immigrants throughout the first half of the twentieth century. His parents, Jews who had emigrated from Russia, worked sixteen hours a day in their grocery store. Malamud spent his childhood in Brooklyn, attending Erasmus Hall High School. It was in high school that he first began writing, starting with short stories about the life he knew best, urban Jewish life. He attended City College of New York graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1936 and Columbia University, also in New York, where he earned a Master of Arts degree in 1942. While working toward his degree, he taught at high schools at night, and after graduation he continued to use his spare time writing and publishing short stories.

From 1949 to 1961, Malamud taught composition at Oregon State University in Corvallis. During this time, he wrote his first three novels: the first one, *The Natural,* was published in 1952 and made into a popular movie over thirty years later. It was followed by *The Assistant* in 1957, and *A New Life* in 1961, the latter about a Jewish writer from New York who moves to Oregon to teach composition, as Malamud himself did. His first collection of short stories, *The Magic Barrel,* established Malamud as a contemporary master of the form, winning him the National Book Award as well as international respect. In 1961, he moved back to the East Coast to teach at Vermont's Bennington College. It was while at Bennington that he published *The Fixer* in 1966. This novel won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, and was made into a movie by John Frankenheimer in 1968.

Plot Summary

Parti

The first section of *The Fixer* is divided into three chapters. The book's first chapter takes place at a point that is outside of the ordinary flow of time. While most of this book follows in chronological order, this chapter occurs after some of the plot events and before others. In the first chapter, Yakov Bok is already living at me brickyard when he hears the commotion of people running outside the factory gate because the body of a murdered boy, Zhenia Golov, was found stabbed to death. One of the drivers for the brickyard brings in leaflets from the Black Hundred, accusing the Jews of murdering the boy for his blood, which they would use for the making of Passover matzos. This chapter includes background information about other incidents of violence against the Jews. Within a year of Yakov's birth, his father had been killed by a pair of drunken soldiers out to shoot the first three Jews in their path, and Yakov himself had in his childhood survived one of the state-supported rampages against Jews, known as a pogrom. If this chapter were worked into the normal chronological order of the book, it would appear near the end of Part II, where the discovery of the boy's body, his funeral, and the public backlash against the Jews are recounted again.

The remaining two chapters of part I start with "five months ago, on a mild Friday in early November " Bok, whose wife has left him, is preparing to leave the Pale of Jews where he has been living to try to make a better life for himself in Kiev, possibly saving enough to go to Amsterdam and then to America. He has said good-bye to the few friends he had and traded the cow his wife kept for a horse her father used in his business, intending to take the horse and its carriage to the city, twenty miles away Along the road, though, when he stops to pick up an old woman who turns out to be a Christian, the carriage wheel breaks, and he is left to ride on horseback as far as the bank of the Dnieper River In order to get across the river, he trades the horse to an anti-Semitic ferryman. The first section ends with Yakov dropping his Jewish prayer things into the river.

Part II

The second section of the novel spans the five months between Yakov's arrival in Kiev and his arrest. On first entering the city, he lives in the Jewish quarter in the Podol district, working what few odd jobs he can find. One night, he finds a man drank in the snow and helps him get home. The man, Lebedev, offers him a job fixing up an apartment upstairs in his house. Desperate for work, Yakov takes the job, even though as a Jew he is not supposed to. He gives a false, Russian name to hide his Jewish identity and answers questions carefully so that his identity will not be revealed. While he is working, Lebedev's daughter, a lonely cripple, seduces him. When the apartment is fixed up, Lebedev is so impressed that he offers Yakov another job, as overseer of a brick factory that he inherited from his brother. Yakov tries to turn the job down, but

Lebedev keeps increasing his offer, with a free apartment at the factory and more and more money, until he accepts.

The workers at the factory resent him. They had been pilfering bricks and selling them on the side, and now must stop because Yakov has been put in charge of inventory. The foreman, Proshko, threatens Yakov carefully, alluding to his Jewish looks and asking about his work papers in order to convey the point that he knows Yakov could face legal trouble. When Yakov finds an old Hasidic Jew wandering dazed in the snow, having been hit with stones thrown by some boys, he takes the man up to his apartment until the snow stops, but when Yakov falls asleep, he dreams of killing the man. The next day news arrives that a boy has been found dead in a nearby cave, and after several days of rising violence against Jews, the secret police show up at the brickyard and arrest Yakov.

Part III

The book's third section concerns Yakov's early days in confinement. When he is visited in bis cell by the Investigating Magistrate, a man named Bibikov, he finds out how all of the events of his recent life have been twisted to make him seem guilty Lebedev has testified that Yakov misled him in order to get the job at the brickyard; Zina testified that he tried to rape her; and Proshko testified about seeing the old Hasidic Jew, which is interpreted as evidence that the murder of Zhenia Golov was part of a Jewish conspiracy. Bibikov admits that the evidence is weak and gives Yakov hope that he might not be charged with murder and might only serve a month for being a Jew without the proper documents for working outside of the Jewish quarter. The Prosecuting Attorney! Grubeshov, pursues a conviction, and his political influence is stronger than Bibikov's. At the end of this section Yakov is thrown into a jail cell with other criminals: they all claim their innocence, but when they hear that Yakov is the Jew accused of killing the Christian boy, they gang up on him and beat him.

Part IV

In this section, more testimony emerges, as people spread lies that conflict with reality as Yakov knows it, but no one except Bibikov will believe his version of the facts. Yakov has to listen to Proshko's testimony that Yakov had cheated the brickyard and that he sneaked Jews into the brickyard. In his version of the night Yakov brought the battered old Hasid home, "they both tied horns on their heads and prayed to the Jewish God." He also testifies to having seen the old Jew burn down the stable while Yakov was in jail to destroy evidence. The dead boy's mother, who seems to babble like a crazy woman, says that her son told her he had been threatened with a knife by Yakov and also lured with candy to Yakov's apartment. Yakov is taken to the cave where Zhenia was found, and his body is dug up and returned to the scene of the crime Father Anastsy, a local Catholic priest who has a reputation for being an expert on Jewish beliefs, spins a distorted history of folk tales and superstitions about Jews sacrificing Christian children

at Easter time, drinking their blood and cutting their victims in the precise ways that the dead boy has been cut.

PartV

Yakov still holds hope that he might not be charged with a crime, that the weakness of the evidence will protect him from prosecution. Put into a cell with other prisoners, he fears another beating, but instead finds that one of them, Fetykov, dismisses the allegations against Yakov as fabrications. Unlike the superstitious people Yakov has been encountering, Fetykov has worked with a Jew and knows that the charge about blood rituals is ridiculous. Another prisoner, Gronfein, talks confidentially to him, offering to mail a letter for him, but fifteen minutes after Gronfein's release, the authorities have the letters Yakov wrote. Accusing him of conspiracy, they throw him into solitary confinement. When Bibikov visits him there one night, he goes over the details of the case that is being prepared against Yakov. Bibikov makes it very clear that he does not believe any of the charges against Yakov and that he thinks a jury probably will not either. At the end of this section, though, Yakov finds Bibikov in the cell next to his, having hung himself from the cell bars, beaten by the conspiracy.

Part VI

This part chronicles the slow deterioration of Yakov's mind in solitary confinement. He suffers freezing conditions, infections in his feet, and subtle poisoning of his food. Forbidden anything to read or anyone with whom to talk, he occupies his mind by recalling psalm verses that he learned in childhood. At one point he is transferred to the courthouse and is told that the indictment against him is finally ready. However, in his meeting with Grubeshov, the Prosecuting Attorney offers to have him driven to the border and released in exchange for a confession, a deal that Yakov does not believe and rejects. He is then refused the indictment for which he has been waiting, and he is sent back to the numbing boredom of his cell again.

Part VII

During his long wait, Yakov is allowed to read a New Testament that one of the guards has given him as well as parts of the Old Testament from a phylactery given to him in order to make him appear more Jewish to visitors. He also is allowed to read a long, rambling letter from Marfa Golov, the mother of the murdered boy, asking him to confess to the crime and stating her foolish prejudices about Jews. His father-in-law, Schmuel, arranges to sneak into the jail one night and visit him. Schmuel urges Yakov to rely on his religion to help him survive his ordeal, but Yakov rejects religion, still bitter about the unfair miseries that he has suffered.

Part VIII

The guard that Schmuel bribed to get into the prison has been found out immediately and transferred away. In his place is a new, meaner guard. At the same time, Kogin, the guard who never gave Yakov any help, talks to him, overcome with sadness about events in his own life: his son has been arrested for committing a murder during a robbery gone bad, and will probably be sent away. An indictment is issued, and Yakov is heartened to find that it is full of the same rumors and assumptions that Marfa Golov had in her letter, not at all the sort of thing a jury could take seriously. The next day, though, the indictment is taken back and called a mistake. To Yakov's surprise, his estranged wife, Raisl, is allowed to visit him. She tells him that she had a child after living with him and was abandoned by the man who is the child's father. She states that the people of the village treat her poorly because of this, and asks Yakov to write a letter saying that the child is his, although they both know it couldn't be. He agrees, and writes the letter on the back of an envelope containing another confession that the Prosecuting Attorney sent for him to sign. On the confession he writes, "Every word is a lie."

Part IX

In the novel's final section, Yakov listens to one more request from Grubeshov, the Prosecuting Attorney, to confess. Grubeshov proclaims that social violence that results from his trial will hurt the Jews. "You can take my word for it that in less than a week after your trial, there will be a quarter-million fewer Zhidy (Jews) in the Pale." After his refusal, Yakov is allowed finally to meet his lawyer, Julius Ostrovsky, who tells him about the recent history of anti-Semitism in Russia. He also reveals that the government wants Yakov convicted in order to convince the public that the crumbling of the economy is all part of a Jewish plot.

As he is finally being taken to trial, Yakov, who is ready to leave the jail behind him at whatever cost, is called back in by the Deputy Warden to suffer the indignity of a strip search once more.

When told to take off his last stitch of clothes, his undershirt, he throws it defiantly in the Deputy Warden's face. As punishment for insulting a prison official, the warden tries to shoot Yakov However, his efforts are thwarted by Kogin the guard, and the warden shoots Kogin instead.

The carnage that finally takes Yakov to his trial is surrounded by mobs of Jews and anti-Semites In the pandemonium that ensues, someone sets off a bomb that damages the carriage wheel, but it speeds off for the courthouse. As a result of the indignities suffered upon him, Yakov realizes that he must continue to fight for freedom, resolving to never give up. The book ends with him on his way to his trial, with no clear indication of the outcome.

Chapter 1, Part 1

Chapter 1, Part 1 Summary

The novel opens with Yakov Bok watching from his bedroom window, as his townspeople flee. Concerned, he hides his money stash and goes outside to investigate. The people are all running toward a cave, where the murdered body of a young boy was found. As rumors circulate about the murder, a local group, called the Black Hundreds, accuses the Jews of killing the child.

Yakov grows very uneasy reading the propaganda against the Jews. A Jewish man himself, he is living in secret and working in an area where Jews are forbidden. He thinks back to his own encounters with Anti-Semitism and remembers how his father was murdered just for being a Jew. He remembers a horrible scene from his childhood where a Jewish man was murdered and left in the street, pork sausage stuffed into his mouth, while pigs ate his flesh.

Chapter 1, Part 1 Analysis

The book opens with a frightening image to set the tone for the rest of the story. A murdered young boy, stabbed in a cave, sets off rumors and racist hatred building on the fear of the townspeople. Yakov, a man in hiding, is gripped by his fear and this is shown through flashes of memory from his childhood. The gory scenes of the opening section prepare readers for a bloody journey to come.

Chapter 1, Part 2

Chapter 1, Part 2 Summary

The story flashes back five months to Yakov drinking tea with his father-in-law, Shmuel. Shmuel offered himself as dowry, when Yakov married Raisl and the men share an uncomfortable afternoon discussing Raisl's unfaithfulness. She had run away and left Yakov. Over the course of the argument, Yakov reveals bits of his past. He grew up starving in an orphanage after his father was killed. His wife was unable to bear children. He educated himself and knows several languages. After Raisl ran off with another man, Yakov sold everything and planned to move to Kiev to start a new life. He refers to himself as a fixer, a man who always needs to keep busy.

As Yakov prepares to leave his shtetl, Shmuel asks him not to go. Shmuel insists that Raisl might come back to him if he were more patient, more forgiving of her barren sorrow. Shmuel warns Yakov of the Black Hundreds and how life is for Jews in Kiev. Shmuel asks Yakov to go to Palestine if he must run off, to be among his own people at least. Shmuel and other beggars ask Yakov for money, as he rides off. Yakov is bitter over his poverty and has nothing to share.

It is Friday afternoon, as he Yakov sets off, and he muses on his life so far, as he watches people prepare for the Sabbath. Yakov is angry about his situation in life, angry even at God, which makes Shmuel very upset. Yakov is so frustrated that he draws blood from the horse beating it to go faster. Yakov feels badly staring at the bloody wound, as he they journey toward Kiev. He dwells on his sorry life and thinks how he can never catch a break.

Yakov offers a ride to an old woman walking, but a wheel on the wagon soon breaks. He tries carrying on with only three wheels, but soon, the other wheel collapses and he is in the middle of nowhere with a broken wagon, again cursing his rotten luck. As the old woman prays to Jesus, Yakov grumbles and loads his possessions on the horse's back. He climbs atop the pile and rides the nag, who still will not go very fast for Yakov. In the middle of the night, when Yakov is about to give up hope, they come to a river.

Chapter 1, Part 2 Analysis

This section uses visual detail to heighten the experience of sadness and desolation of the characters. As Yakov and his father-in-law discuss their heartache, readers see the yellow and barren fields outside their home. Their worn clothes and shabby possessions deepen the effect of Yakov's words describing their poverty.

Yakov's character becomes a bit tiring in this section, as he grumbles self-pity and bitterness throughout. His saving moment is, when he admits to this awful bitterness and feels badly for beating the horse so badly.

Chapter 1, Part 3

Chapter 1, Part 3 Summary

There is no ferry to cross the river, but the boatman offers to row Yakov across for a ruble. Yakov is upset at this sum. He had hoped to cross the river and stay in an inn. He is also upset that he must part with his horse. The boatman informs Yakov that it is many miles out of the way to a bridge and that the horse is worthless and about to die anyway. He convinces Yakov that he is getting a bargain by having the boatman take the stubborn nag off his hands at the riverbank.

As the fixer looks back sadly at the farting, stubborn horse, the boatman says he does not recognize Yakov's accent. Yakov has stopped speaking Yiddish and is using only Russian outside his shtetl and pretends to have lived all over the place. He is not ready to reveal that he is Jewish. Yakov pretends to be Latvian and the boatman is relieved, spitting out racial and ethnic slurs about Germans and Jews and Polish people. The whole way across the river, the boatman talks about how the solution to all Russia's problems would be to find all the Jews and murder them and burn their corpses. Yakov drops his prayer bag into the river and shivers with fear.

Chapter 1, Part 3 Analysis

Feet come up again and again in this section. Yakov's itching feet, he's been told, mean he is destined to travel far. His feet appear again, when the racist boatman insists all Jews have cloven hooves for feet. It is unclear at this point whether feet will symbolize a journey or fear and hatred or both, but it is quite evident feet are going to be an important metaphor in this novel.

Chapter 2, Part 1

Chapter 2, Part 1 Summary

Yakov is awed by Kiev. It is much grander and vibrant than his old shtetl. When he first arrives, he hides in the Jewish quarter and wanders the streets marveling at the colors and sights. Yakov is proud of his artistic appreciation of beauty, even though it adds nothing to his financial situation. Yakov is homesick, but will not return to his village. Desperately afraid of being discovered as a Jew, he speaks only in Russian and attends church, learning the customs of the people of Kiev.

Chapter 2, Part 1 Analysis

The visual descriptions in this section really emphasize the difference between Kiev and Yakov's village. The dreary browns are replaced with gold and vibrant descriptors. Even the elaborate church where Yakov lurks uneasily is described beautifully. In this chapter, Kiev is set up as a place pulsing with energy.

Chapter 2, Part 2

Chapter 2, Part 2 Summary

Yakov hates living in the dingy Jewish neighborhood in Kiev. The poverty reminds him of home and he seeks something better. He ventures further away from the neighborhood each day, as he searches for work and attempts to get a job where Jews are forbidden. He finds odd jobs but is not making very much money.

Yakov finds a man passed out drunk, face-down in the snow one night on his way home. Yakov is afraid to get involved in any trouble, but turns the man over. The man is a member of the Black Hundreds, the violent anti-Semitic group in Kiev. Disgusted, Yakov almost does not help the man. As Yakov drags his body toward the house, he meets the man's crippled daughter. Yakov is invited to return to the house the next day to be properly thanked for saving the man.

In his rented room, Yakov debates whether to return. He is certain the man will offer him money for his help but feels uncomfortable taking money from such a person. Yakov decides it is fitting for a Jew to take money from an anti-Semite and returns to the house.

The man, Nikolai, and his daughter, Zina, ask Yakov about his trade and discover the man is unemployed. After Yakov lies about his origins, and answers a long string of questions about his education and upbringing, Nikolai reads aloud to Yakov from the New Testament. Yakov sneers, as he the man wells up reading about mercy and pretends to be moved. Nikolai then offers Yakov forty rubles to repair an apartment Nikolai owns. Yakov cannot refuse such a sum and accepts the work.

Yakov battles with himself over whether he is selling his soul. He decides it is ok to be paid for his work and tries to complete the job quickly so he can disappear from Nikolai's world. Yakov begins to wonder if the man is even really a member of the Black Hundreds, thinks perhaps someone stuck the pin on his lapel. Yakov cannot see how a man could be so emotional and remain involved in such a society. Yakov is afraid the man will ask to see his passport and will discover his religious background.

Yakov works late into the night each day, as he tries to finish the job as quickly as possible. Zina is shocked to find him still at work one night and invites him to eat with her since Nikolai was already passed out for the evening. She talks and Yakov listens nervously. Zina follows him back to the apartment and watches him as he works, still chattering to him. Zina tells him that he is much kinder than most Russian men.

Zina rambles on about how Nikolai is depressed and drinks all the time. Zina spends much of her time alone, finding the house staff too simpleminded. She prattles on and on and Yakov begins to wonder what it would be like to sleep with her. Yakov hurries to

finish the job and Nikolai comes to inspect the work. Nikolai promises not to forget the quality work Yakov has done and offers him a job at the brick factory as a bookkeeper.

Yakov insists he has no experience with bookkeeping and does not quite understand what the position would entail. Nikolai assures Yakov that honesty and hard work are all that would be required. He offers Yakov forty-five rubles a month and a rent-free apartment above the factory. Yakov cannot imagine such a sum and cannot refuse the job.

Nikolai and Yakov share a drink to seal the deal. Sometime later, Nikolai passes out and Yakov eats again with Zina. It is such a feast that Yakov does not even recognize some of the foods. Yakov thinks briefly of his departed wife, but soon forgets her, as he eats and Zina talks. Zina begins to flirt heavily with Yakov, who is nervous that she will discover his circumcision if they make love. Yakov decides to risk it and goes to Zina's bedroom. Yakov discovers that Zina has her period. He cannot have sex with her and she is disappointed. He is relieved and leaves the house.

Chapter 2, Part 2 Analysis

This section takes place almost entirely within Nikolai's home and Yakov's mind. The narrator reveals a great deal of Yakov's thoughts throughout the plot, showing his witty internal monologues and biting sense of humor. Yakov becomes a very well-rounded and likeable character through this section. He battles with indecision when faced with financial and romantic opportunities. He also questions the morality of hiding his background, and this makes him a very honest hero.

The use of Yakov's thoughts as a literary tool builds suspense in each scene. Though the action is very compact, the audience spends a lot of time anticipating Yakov's reactions to his offers from Nikolai and Zina and this feature makes the section very exciting to read.

Chapter 2, Part 3

Chapter 2, Part 3 Summary

The story moves ahead a few weeks to Yakov working in the brick factory. He is more and more uncomfortable in his work since he discovered he is living in a neighborhood where Jews are forbidden. When Yakov tried to back out, Nikolai offered three more rubles per month and Yakov reluctantly took the job. He sees a great deal of theft in the factory and discovers a great deal of his time must be spent watching over the bricks.

When Yakov talks to Nikolai, he cannot take his eyes off the Black Hundreds button the man wears on his jacket. Yakov considers telling Nikolai he is a Jew after one of Nikolai's praising speeches, but realizes that is a grave mistake. Yakov is already disliked by the truck drivers, particularly Proshko, because he refuses to let them steal the bricks. The driver pointedly asks Yakov if he has registered his papers for the new job yet. Yakov stammers and insists Nikolai took care of it. Afterward, he is too nervous to eat or sleep.

Yakov caught on quickly to the bookkeeping. The drivers refuse to turn in vouchers to him, so Yakov creates his own systems for counting the bricks. He goes to work before sunlight each morning to count and recount the inventory. Nikolai writes Yakov a long letter thanking him for his hard work. The other workers like Yakov well enough, because he pays them on time, but Yakov has no friends at work. Yakov spends his free time studying Russian. He reads newspapers and grammar textbooks and learns of horrible hate crimes going on throughout Russia. As Yakov begins to read history books, he learns terrible things about Russia's past.

Yakov receives a letter from Zina saying Nikolai has given permission for Yakov to court her. Zina tells Yakov not to be nervous about his peasant clothing, but insists he can probably afford to buy new clothes now. Yakov does not return the letter. Instead, he grows nervous that he has stopped working with his hands. He does not want to forget his skills. Yakov is in the process of getting false documents, but still cannot sleep with his fear and worries.

Yakov's mood is up and down through the months at the brick factory. He sometimes spends money excitedly and other times hides in his apartment in fear. Yakov begins to live very frugally, patching all his clothes rather than spend money. The narrator hints that Yakov has big plans for his growing savings.

One night, Yakov is returning from shopping and sees an old injured Jewish man. Yakov speaks to the man in Russian, but offers to help. He has been attacked by young boys throwing rocks and is lost. Yakov brings the man to his apartments and sadly discovers it is Passover. Yakov grows homesick. It is snowing heavily outside and Yakov invites the man to sleep over. In the morning, Yakov is very worried that the workers will see the man. The snow is still falling and the trucks of bricks cannot leave the yard. Yakov

secrets the Jewish man to a street car, and the driver promises to return the man to the Jewish district.

When Yakov returns to his room, he can tell that one of the men has been in it. He is very uneasy. He then reads in the newspaper that a young boy, Zhenia, has been murdered. Yakov recognizes Zhenia as a little imp, whom Yakov chased away from the brickyard repeatedly for making trouble. The story has returned fully to the present tense, with the villagers weeping in the streets and angry to find the murderer. As anti-Semitism rages in the city, Yakov tries to flee for Amsterdam or New York. On his way out of his apartment, Yakov is stopped by the chief of the Secret Police. They have come to arrest him. Yakov confesses to them he is a Jew.

Chapter 2, Part 3 Analysis

This section crams a lot of detail in to catch up to the scene which opens the novel. The relationships between Yakov and his coworkers are carefully detailed, so there is no question of the animosity between Yakov and the truck drivers. The negative relationship is used to foreshadow foul play throughout the section.

When Yakov yells and chases off the young boys, Proshko is carefully described as staring at Yakov. Readers are instantly suspicious of them, particularly when they are so vengeful on being stopped from stealing bricks.

The scene involving the old Jewish man is also heavily laden with dark foreshadowing. As Yakov looks continuously over his shoulder, he builds up the sense that something terrible is going to happen. Just as Yakov reads of terror and savagery in his Russian textbooks, a gruesome scene is beginning to unfold in Kiev. After another section of careful examination of Yakov's thoughts, the action comes to a startling head, when Yakov is arrested and must reveal his secret.

Chapter 3, Part 1

Chapter 3, Part 1 Summary

Yakov sits in a cell thinking back to how the police made him march handcuffed through the streets while people whispered and stared on their way to work. He is terrified. The people of Kiev think he is a "murdering Jew," and the guards march past his cell with weapons drawn. As Yakov sits tearing out his hair in despair, a well-dressed man comes down the hallway and orders the guards to leave him alone with Yakov.

The man introduces himself as a member of the secret police. He is B.A. Bibikov, in charge of the investigation. He asks Yakov his story and Yakov explains about his unfaithful wife and how he came to Kiev for a new start. Bibikov asks Yakov pointedly if he murdered the child. After Yakov insists he did not, Bibikov questions Yakov about the philosophy books found in his apartment. Bibikov says the philosopher Yakov reads is his favorite. He quizzes Yakov on his understanding of the text, which is about all men being free in their thoughts.

Yakov grows concerned that he will look like a traitor to the tsar. He stops speaking as freely in front of the official. Yakov feigns ignorance and Bibikov says he must read more. When Yakov replies that he will surely resume his studies when released from prison, the magistrate feels badly and offers Yakov a fancy cigarette. Bibikov leaves Yakov a questionnaire and tells him to have strength whatever happens. Yakov insists he is innocent, as Bibikov walks away, promising to return the next day. A guard sneers to Yakov that it will be a "long tomorrow."

Chapter 3, Part 1 Analysis

This scene prepares readers for the mind games and interrogation tactics the secret police will use with Yakov. The hopeless descriptions of the prison cell foreshadow much worse events to come. Readers at this point grow very fearful for Yakov's life.

The use of Yakov's fear and uneasy thoughts allows the readers to grow wary of Bibikov and the rest of the secret police. By the end of the section, the guard's ominous remark leaves no doubt that things are about to go very badly for Yakov.

Chapter 3, Part 2

Chapter 3, Part 2 Summary

Yakov is led to an interrogation room, where Bibikov speaks to him under the watchful stare of a painting of Tsar Nicholas II. Yakov is very uneasy, as Bibikov reads from a deposition of Nikolai. Nikolai gave official statements that Yakov was deceitful and nervous from the start. Nikolai told the officials that Yakov was twitchy and reluctant to accept generous offers from him.

Yakov requests to speak to a lawyer and is denied. Bibikov tells him the truth is all Yakov needs at this point. Yakov admits to hiding his religion and admits to taking Nikolai's favors with reluctance. He also tells Bibikov about his constant worry of being found out. Yakov then gets himself in a tight spot by telling Bibikov he has lost his faith. The two men twist words for a while, as Yakov insists he is not a religious man at all.

Soon, Bibikov turns the conversation drastically by asking Yakov to confirm or deny whether he is a revolutionary. They then begin to discuss political parties and passport stamps and registration. Bibikov picks at every detail of Yakov's life, from his illnesses to his marriage, and then moves on to discuss Zina. They are interrupted by the arrival of the prosecuting attorney and the colonel who arrested Yakov. Bibikov invites the men to sit in on the interrogation.

Zina has testified that Yakov assaulted her and forced her to talk to him, when she was uncomfortable. Yakov is outraged and yells at Bibikov that it is all lies. Zina testified that she saw his circumcision and screamed, at which point Yakov fled her house. Yakov heartily denies these statements and explains that Zina made the first move romantically.

When Yakov explains that he left because Zina was having her menstrual period, the officials begin to turn his words back on him. The attorney sneers that Jewish men long ago used to menstruate. Bibikov then notes that his staff has found letters of praise from Nikolai and a love letter from Zina. The officials decide not to charge Yakov with sexual assault. This angers the colonel and the attorney so much that they leave the room in a huff.

Bibikov says they normally would charge Yakov with having an assumed name, but since there are no papers to confirm this, the courts cannot make this charge, either. Yakov stammers his thanks for this kindness. Bibikov says Yakov is going to be charged with living in the non-Jewish neighborhood. This crime comes with a month's prison time. Yakov feels relief and begins to think about his life after the prison sentence.

Suddenly, the colonel and the attorney return to the room. Everyone looks grave and Yakov is frightened again. The attorney begins to ask the same questions as Bibikov.

When Bibikov points this out, the attorney and Bibikov argue. There is obvious tension between the two men. Yakov answers the questions again.

The colonel asks Yakov if he knows of mystical practices used to bring harm on gentiles. He forces Yakov to explain the Passover rituals, particularly the afikomen. Yakov attempts to explain them from memory and his persecutors carefully write down his stammered responses. The colonel pulls out a piece of matzo the old Jewish man had left in Yakov's apartment. They use it as evidence to accuse Yakov of being Hasidic, very religious.

The men insist Yakov bakes matzo since they found a bag of flour in his apartment. Yakov begins to plead that he is a fixer, a man who fixes things that are broken. The interrogators will not stop asking about the matzo. Then, suddenly, the colonel pulls out the bloody rag Yakov used to clean the old man's wounds. He turns the questions toward the young imps Yakov once chased from the brickyard. The colonel asks Yakov why he is shaking.

Chapter 3, Part 2 Analysis

This section features a typical interrogation scene. The angry men ask Yakov the same questions repeatedly, trying to trick him into altering his responses. They ask long, twisted questions and then demand yes or no responses and continually insist that the truth will set Yakov free.

The interrogators are described as larger than life and frightening. They have bulbous noses, red faces, and fierce, explosive reactions. Their arguments with one another give an impression of a carefully choreographed dance. It is as if everything they do is carefully scripted to make Yakov the scapegoat for this crime.

True to the form of a totalitarian arrest scene, the police bring up every single little thing in Yakov's life and use it to turn against him. They mess with his emotions, making him feel grateful for escaping little crimes before pouncing on him and making small things seem like great evidence that he is a murderer. This section adds to the sensation of impending doom for Yakov. As it ends with the trembling, readers prepare for something much worse in the next section.

Chapter 3, Part 3

Chapter 3, Part 3 Summary

Back in his cell, Yakov begins to question his circumstances. He is aware that he has lost his ability to make sense of the world and feels this is their plan. He is filled with panic. The two other men in his cell begin to describe their own interrogations and arrests. They are being held and abused on ridiculous charges like Yakov's - one man for holding a bag of pamphlets for a stranger and the other for being confused with an anarchist.

When Yakov tells them why he is being held, they attack him. The men insist he is a murderer of children and of Christ. They beat him senseless and Yakov awakes late in the night to see rats crawling on his body.

Chapter 3, Part 3 Analysis

This section adds to the despair of Yakov's situation. Anti-Semitism is so powerful in Kiev that even fellow prisoners spread the hatred and fear. Yakov's thought processes are intriguing again, as he they guide the audience through the action, indicating how to feel about the interrogations and other characters in the novel.

Chapter 4, Part 1

Chapter 4, Part 1 Summary

Yakov's old enemy, Proshko, tells the Secret Police that the stables burned down at the Brick Factory. Proshko thinks it's been done by evil Jewish magic. Yakov has been hauled to the scene, along with Orthodox priests and other secret police members. It has been a month since his arrest and Yakov does not even recognize himself any longer.

Proshko tells the officials he knew Yakov was a Jew immediately. He says he was suspicious from the start. Proshko tells the officials he has sneaked peaks at Yakov's account books and says Yakov was stealing from Nikolai from the first day, reporting all the numbers wrong. Yakov interjects that really the truck drivers were stealing the bricks and hated him for stopping them. Proshko continues telling a story of Yakov and an old man donning horns to pray in the stables. The other drivers back up his story. Proshko says he was the one who reported Yakov to the police for the murder. Proshko finishes by saying he had gone to Yakov's apartment to gather evidence, when he saw an old Jewish man run from the stables. Instantly, Proshko says, the place was aflame with magic fire that burned green and yellow. They could only save a few of the horses.

Chapter 4, Part 1 Analysis

This section sets up the story to turn into a sort of witch hunt. Malamud uses techniques similar to those used by Arthur Miller in *The Crucible* in that his characters build fantastical stories based on superstition and collected bits of unrelated evidence. The officials in this section take furious notes.

The story becomes very frustrating at this point. Great care is taken to describe Proshko as an unsavory character, untrustworthy. Thus, readers are agitated that the Secret Police believe his fantastical story without question, simply because they long to destroy a Jewish person in this country where Anti-Semitism runs so rampant. By this point, it is very clear Malamud is using the story to demonstrate how very wrong it is to hate people for their religious beliefs and backgrounds. The sheer folly of the evidence and mystical "proof" the characters give are ironic tools that show how ridiculous people seem, when they have such hatred.

Chapter 4, Part 2

Chapter 4, Part 2 Summary

The police take Yakov to the home of Zhenia. His mother, Marfa, identifies Yakov as the man who chased her son with a long knife. The police carefully note this hasty identification. They force Yakov to examine Zhenia's bedroom. Yakov is afraid and upset to enter the room, and the guards interpret this as guilty apprehension.

Marfa tells them all how desperately her son wanted to be a priest, when he grew up. Yakov stops paying attention and notices how colorful the city is outside the prison. He smells the lilacs blooming and is lost in thought, when the colonel commands him to pay attention. Marfa tells how she came home late from work to discover her son missing. She assumed he was with his grandmother and then grew very ill. When she finally got out of bed to report him missing, they had found him murdered in the cave.

Bibikov asks why she waited nearly a week to report her son missing. She responds that she was desperately ill and unable to leave her bed. The colonel commands Bibikov to be quiet while Marfa speaks. She tells the men that her son and his friend spied at the brickyard and saw Yakov and old Jewish men wearing traditional Jewish clothes and praying. She said her son was terrified of the Jews, because Yakov threatened to kill him. She continues, saying how her son saw bottles of blood, strange satchels at Yakov's apartment. She says Jews chased her son through the cemeteries.

At this Yakov is furious. He screams that the only thing on his table was raspberry jam. He is frustrated by the ridiculous accusations. The officials silence him and let Marfa continue. Again Bibikov steps in, asking her if she had personally seen the blood and why she never reported these things to the police. The woman shrugs and says she has had enough difficulty with police. Bibikov asks the woman questions about her known relationships with thieves, how she traffics stolen goods. The colonel interjects that these points are irrelevant. Bibikov continues that Marfa's boyfriend used to beat Zhenia very badly. The colonel forbids the woman to respond to such questions. She screams out "The Jew killed my child" and begins weeping, upset that Yakov is staring at her. She faints and the men leave her home.

Chapter 4, Part 2 Analysis

This section is a continuation of the hearsay and superstitious accusations. At this point, readers are very curious about Bibikov's character. From the start, he has seemed partially sympathetic to Yakov's case. At first, readers were uncertain whether he was playing mind games by pretending to be interested in Yakov's background and offering him cigarettes.

Now, it seems Bibikov is the lone voice of reason in this drama. Only Bibikov sticks up for justice and the law, attempting to show the true character of the so-called witnesses.

Frustration builds, as he Bibikov reveals the obvious facts that these people are building fantastical tales to condemn Yakov. With each of Bibikov's interjections, the colonel or the other Secret Police members silence him and forbid the truth to be spoken. The story at this point foreshadows Yakov's fate as very dark, indeed. In a world concerned with mysticism and hatred, Bibikov is Yakov's last hope.

Chapter 4, Part 3

Chapter 4, Part 3 Summary

The police now drag Yakov to the cave where Zhenia was murdered. The colonel notices there is a road from the rocky cave that leads to the brickyard. Bibikov notices the road to Zhenia's house is even shorter and more direct. The priest begins to speak, explaining why Jews ritually murder Christian children and drain their blood. The priest explains that the Jews believe this will bring the Messiah. He says Jews need to drink Christian blood to prolong their own lives. He goes on to explain magic numbers and their use in crimes and sacrifice. Yakov screams that the story is a "fairy tale" and is quite afraid for his life.

Yakov tries to reason with the officials. While the priest claims the Jews need blood, Yakov explains how the bible forbids them to eat blood, inviting them to examine the Old Testament and dietary laws. Yakov insists he is just a simple man, a fixer, who has never harmed a child in his life. The officials spit after his story and say his little fit was useless. The colonel puts the story together and says Yakov should confess to luring Zhenia into the stable with candy and then ritually murdering him to drink his blood and use it for Passover rituals before hiding the body in the cave.

Yakov grows faint with despair and searches for Bibikov, who is no longer at the scene. In the cave, the officials pull out Yakov's tool kit and insist Yakov used the bloody rag to wipe evidence from his knife and awl. Yakov blinks and notices they have dug up the body of Zhenia and arranged him in the cave for the interrogation. The priest points to the body and says it has been stabbed in magic number groupings. He begins to pray.

Chapter 4, Part 3 Analysis

The interrogation builds to a climax and Bibikov disappears from the scene. The secret police have gone so far as to dig up a dead corpse to arrange it at the crime scene for their production. It is now evident they will listen to myths and fairy tales as evidence, will find any object in Yakov's home and use it to build a case against him. As Yakov is a Jew, they want to kill him no matter what and will stop at nothing to make him appear guilty of atrocious crimes. By the end of this chapter, the Secret Police and most characters in the book have lost all credibility. Readers emotionally attach to Yakov and the struggle of the Jewish people to overcome these horribly stereotypes and this hatred that has plagued them for centuries.

Chapter 5, Part 1

Chapter 5, Part 1 Summary

Yakov suffers in prison while the officials wait for his period to start. If he does not bleed soon, the police will try to pump the menstrual blood from his penis with a faulty device known to suck victims dry sometimes. Yakov is sent to visit the prosecutor, who offers him an easier sentence if Yakov admits the Jewish Nation convinced him to commit the murder. Yakov can do nothing but repeat his innocence. He does not wish to blame innocent Jews, even if he no longer subscribes to their religious beliefs.

The officials show Yakov a book they are developing of Jewish physical characteristics. When they point out a Jewish nose that resembles Yakov's, Yakov responds by pointing to a Jewish nose that resembles the prosecutor's. The officials respond with threats of hanging. The guards begin to beat Yakov and they declare Yakov will beg for mercy after murdering the Christian boy.

Chapter 5, Part 1 Analysis

Once again, the Russian officials are described in great detail. These characters have no redeeming qualities and do nothing but inspire anger and frustration for Yakov's cause. They represent the evil qualities of oppressors, serve as a symbol of persecution.

In this segment, Yakov questions the officials' intelligence in believing in the myths presented about the Jews. They respond that all of Russia will soon believe these things, because Yakov is going to take the fall. The evil characters in this novel are again being used to demonstrate the power of hatred while Yakov gives a human face to the oppressed.

Chapter 5, Part 2

Chapter 5, Part 2 Summary

Yakov has been moved to a bigger prison to await his trial. Things go very badly for him here as well. Yakov is quite a celebrity criminal, and all the dingy prison workers come to threaten him and sneer at him. The prison is filthy, filled with garbage and rot everywhere. He is placed in a crowded holding cell to await either trial or movement to another prison. Yakov sits in the corner of the cell, alone, and thinks about his dismal situation.

Chapter 5, Part 2 Analysis

This section transitions Yakov into a new horrible environment. There are little hints of negativity to come, foreshadowed by the descriptions of garbage and decay throughout the prison facility. The fact that all the employees take special care to degrade Yakov speaks of maltreatment to come.

Chapter 5, Part 3

Chapter 5, Part 3 Summary

As the prisoners fight over three buckets of dingy, rodent-filled soup, Yakov is pushed aside and not allowed to eat. His name is never entered on the bread list and he begins to starve. Yakov senses mass hatred from the other prisoners and fears they will gang up on him to kill him.

During their exercise recess, one prisoner tells Yakov the men do not like him, because he sits away from them. Yakov decides he had better act friendly or he is done for. Remembering his troubles in the last prison, Yakov does not tell the others what crime he has been accused of. Instead, he just explains that he is new to prison and does not understand the social graces.

A prisoner named Fetyukov is sent to speak to Yakov. The man explains how he is a murderer and then beats Yakov with a long stick. When Yakov awakes from his beating, he is instructed to clean his wounds before the guards see or he will be beaten to death. When the guards arrive, they tell the other prisoners who Yakov is and what crime he supposedly committed. Afterward, Fetyukov apologizes to Yakov. Fetyukov used to work for a Jewish man and understands that Jews are not inherently bad people. Fetyukov laments his crimes and tells Yakov not to lose hope - that the truth will emerge. Yakov responds by asking "what of my wasted youth?"

Chapter 5, Part 3 Analysis

Despite the horrible conditions in this prison, a ray of hope appears in the book in the form of Fetyukov. In an environment equally filled with hatred as the rest of Kiev, Fetyukov is a man of reason. His befriending Yakov after the beating foreshadows an upswing in the story. Yakov might have hope of surviving this incident after all.

Chapter 5, Part 4

Chapter 5, Part 4 Summary

Yakov has been in prison for three months. He ponders his situation, wondering how an innocent fixer just trying to make a living should end up in this situation. Yakov begins to hate the gentiles for their senseless anti-Semitism. This section then moves to a montage of Yakov's life to this point interwoven with the events since the murder.

Yakov had been an orphan, when he married Raisl. Her family became his only family. He was such a good man before that he feels certain nobody would accuse him of the horrible acts had they known him in his village. Yakov is angry that he did not listen to Shmuel and stay in the village. He is now the randomly selected Jew the Russians will surely sacrifice.

One day, a fat prisoner enters the holding cell. He is wealthy and shares his packages from the outside with the others. One day he speaks to Yakov in Yiddish. He is also Jewish and tells Yakov there are rumors throughout the Jewish district that a Jew has been arrested as a martyr for them all. He offers Yakov further hope. Soon, the men share their life stories with one another.

A few days later, the man, Gronfein, tells Yakov that the Black Hundreds are wreaking havoc in the Jewish district. Jews are fleeing Kiev in droves. Gronfein's money and excellent lawyer have allowed him to be released from prison. Before he leaves, Gronfein gives Yakov ten rubles and offers to mail a letter for him. Yakov has been expressly forbidden from writing to anyone, but writes anyway. Yakov decides he wants to tell the world a name to put with the Jew who has been incarcerated.

Later that evening, Yakov is called into the warden's office. Gronfein has acted as a spy for the warden. He is sitting in the office and translates the Yiddish letters. Gronfein has also written a letter to say Yakov bribed him to keep quiet about a confession for the murder. Yakov is dragged to solitary confinement, cursing Gronfein's treachery, as he goes.

Chapter 5, Part 4 Analysis

This section had a very surprising ending. Due to the positive message at the end of the previous section, readers expect Gronfein to be a help to Yakov and another positive glimmer in his case. Instead, Gronfein cooperates with the Secret Police to save his own family. After reading this section, readers are no longer sure who to trust and start to doubt the security of Yakov's future again.

The symbolic mention of feet comes up again in this section. Yakov mentions many times how badly the prison shoes hurt his feet. In previous chapters, feet always came

up before great changing events. Their return in this section could possibly indicate a turn in the action.

Chapter 5, Part 5

Chapter 5, Part 5 Summary

Yakov roasts in solitary confinement for three days before he is dragged out in the middle of the night. Bibikov has come to question him while the warden is on vacation. He secures a private meeting with Yakov and begs forgiveness for not discussing the obvious poor treatment Yakov is receiving. Yakov understands but begs only for a pair of shoes, as he the prison issued ones hurt his feet terribly.

Bibikov begins to tell Yakov how much he wants Yakov to be free. Bibikov has recently traveled to the capital to tell the Minister of Justice that Yakov's only crime has been living illegally in an area forbidden to Jews. Bibikov explained how the evidence has been mystical and circumstantial, but the officials expect Bibikov to prove Yakov is guilty. The Russian government wants Yakov's head. Bibikov lives in as much fear as Yakov. He senses he is being followed and closely watched by the Secret Police.

Bibikov feels great pressure to indict Yakov for murder. The prosecuting attorney is perhaps Yakov's greatest enemy in all this. Bibikov tells Yakov he will slip some information to the press and hopefully raise awareness of the situation, but he must also formally indict Yakov. Yakov thanks Bibikov and is relieved to have at least one person in the world who knows he is innocent.

As he leaves the prison, Bibikov tells Yakov his theory. Bibikov believes Marfa and her gang of criminal acquaintances performed the murder. The child had threatened numerous times to turn his mother in for her crimes and Marfa's boyfriend definitely wanted revenge for being blinded during a fight with Marfa. Bibikov is working to get neighbors to testify to that effect and also to admit to seeing Zhenia's body in a bathtub, draining of blood, before being moved to the cave.

Bibikov and Yakov discuss the prosecuting attorney and how desperate the man is to advance his career. Bibikov fears the man will one day end up a chief justice. They also discuss how such ludicrous stories of Jews and blood crimes have been outlawed in Russia. The stories have also been denounced by the Pope, so Bibikov is disappointed to see them taken seriously by the Russian government. Bibikov also confides that the priest from the cave had been excommunicated by the Roman Catholics for embezzlement and now works for the Orthodox Church. Bibikov promises to get Yakov a good lawyer eventually and tells him to continue to believe in the power of the truth. Bibikov leaves, stating that if the law fails Yakov it will eventually fail Bibikov.

Chapter 5, Part 5 Analysis

Finally, Bibikov is revealed as an ally in this situation. He finally acknowledges the ridiculous statements being given by the other supposed witnesses to Yakov's crimes. His acknowledgement of the witch hunt against Yakov is very comforting at the same

time it is deeply chilling. If Bibikov has revealed the facts to the government and they still persecute Yakov, it means they truly are coming after him just for being Jewish.

Bibikov again hints at trouble with the Russian government and reminds Yakov of their conversation about free thinkers and revolutionaries. He leaves Yakov alone again to ponder his situation, but this time with a definite ally in an important place to actually let the truth be known.

Chapter 5, Part 6

Chapter 5, Part 6 Summary

Yakov is going mad in solitary confinement. He gets a neighbor for a few days and they attempt to communicate with banging and shouting, but are unable to. After a few days, the neighbor is silent and Yakov is frightened and alone again. The guards who deliver the food are often drunk and one morning, the drunken guard neglects to lock the door to Yakov's cell.

Yakov steps into the hallway, afraid of what might happen. He keeps opening the door, stepping near the exit, and then retreating and waiting in fear. Yakov eventually walks into the hall toward the other open door and stops to peek into the neighbor's cell. He sees Bibikov hanging silently from the ceiling from his belt, dead.

Chapter 5, Part 6 Analysis

The book is beginning to show a pattern of sections. Every other section brings hope, then despair. In this last chapter, Yakov has been incarcerated in the Kiev prison and been raised up to hope for the future only to be beaten down again into seemingly worse situations each time. The loss of Bibikov hangs heavily, as he this was the only man who believed Yakov's innocence and had the power to do something to help.

Chapter 6, Part 1

Chapter 6, Part 1 Summary

Yakov is truly beginning to go mad. He sees Bibikov's ghost, has horrible visions of death and thinks he is perched at the top of a grave. He spends his hours pacing the cell until his feet become dreadfully infected from the nails in his shoes. Eventually, the warden has no choice but to take him to the infirmary or Yakov will die of gangrene. Yakov begs for his friend Fetyukov and discovers the man has been shot for disobeying a guard.

Yakov is forced to crawl through the prison to reach the infirmary. He is bleeding from his hands and knees, dripping with sweat and miserable. He is being led there during prison recess, so the other inmates stare and make fun, as he crawls. Yakov sleeps in his first bed in three months and awakes to an operation being performed on his feet without anesthetic. He spends a troubled night in the infirmary, struggling to breathe and suffering horrible nightmares.

Chapter 6, Part 1 Analysis

Once again, Yakov's feet have caused a great change in his situation. He is no longer in solitary confinement. Though he is very ill, he is in a bed receiving medical attention. Even though everyone he comes in contact with is cruel to him, his situation is looking less bleak at this time.

Chapter 6, Part 2

Chapter 6, Part 2 Summary

The warden moves Yakov to a cell closer to his office. Yakov begs for a cellmate or a pet to keep him company. The warden scoffs at this idea, and Yakov is alone again, only this time in a bigger, colder cell. Winter is nearing again. Yakov's asthma acts up again in the cold weather. He sleeps on a lumpy, moldy mattress and has only a thin blanket to fight the cold. His cell is dingy and filthy like the rest of the prison. Yakov now hopes for indictment rather than freedom, feeling that official paperwork will at least relieve his present conditions.

Yakov spends most of his time spying on the guards outside his cell. He listens to them talk about their families and he begs them for firewood or candles or other comforts. One day, the Deputy Warden comes to the cell with firewood. The man frightens Yakov, has only four fingers on one hand and looks evil. The guards let Yakov light and relight the fire during the coldest times of day and tell him the Deputy Warden has plans to further manipulate Yakov. Yakov is still not permitted to get his head shaved like the rest of the prisoners. The Deputy Warden plans to make Yakov appear like a Hasidic Jew, with ear curls and a long beard and long hair.

In mid-winter, the warden starts visiting Yakov's cell to take body samples, such as fingerprints, hairs, etc. The warden is now helping to investigate the crime and they claim to have found new evidence on Zhenia's body. Worse, the Deputy Warden comes into Yakov's cell twice a day and performs a total body and cavity search. Yakov thinks it is the worst thing to happen to him yet.

Chapter 6, Part 2 Analysis

Since the death of Bibikov, Yakov has stopped hoping for great things. He hopes for smaller and smaller things as more of his human rights are stripped away. Rather than dream of freedom, he now wants only some firewood and some better toilet paper. The officials have held him nearly a year with no evidence, indictment, lawyer, nothing. They have whittled down his dignity until he has almost lost hope. This section is a very foreboding one, as readers watch Yakov slip further and further away from the man he once was.

Chapter 6, Part 3

Chapter 6, Part 3 Summary

Yakov opens this section in despair. He believes his life is over. One of the guards takes pity on Yakov, as he the prison grows colder. Yakov suddenly has meat in his food and ample firewood. Yakov dreams of food and is always hungry, even after the heartier rations. In a week, Yakov is very sick and nauseous. His is not allowed to go to the prison hospital, because he has already taken a turn in the infirmary.

Yakov suffers greatly from diarrhea. The prison doctor eventually comes and insists nothing is wrong that fasting will not cure. Yakov is very weak and cold, but relieved that the cavity searches have stopped while he is so ill. Yakov has nightmares of being hunted, of Jews being slaughtered. One night he wakes up to the realization that he is being poisoned.

Yakov refuses to eat, violating prison regulations. The guard, Deputy Warden, and warden all argue with Yakov to no avail. Eventually, the warden insists the other Jews are poisoning Yakov, not the prison staff. Yakov fasts for days while the guards describe the regulations he is breaking. Yakov is not allowed to go to the kitchen for his meals, because other prisoners are forbidden to look at him. Eventually, Yakov's hunger strike pays off and the kitchen workers are made to turn away while Yakov ladles his meals from the common pots.

Chapter 6, Part 3 Analysis

The whittling away at Yakov's spirit continues. The prison staff has now found a way to manipulate Yakov's trust in the very food he eats. The section ends with a small feeling of accomplishment at Yakov sticking to his hunger fast, but there is the constant reminder of the cruel and unjust conditions that make the small victory seem somehow calculated by the officials.

Chapter 6, Part 4

Chapter 6, Part 4 Summary

Yakov starts begging now for something to do. His fixer hands are idle and this makes him the most uneasy, he thinks. He starts conversing with Zhitnyak, the guard who is on his side. Through these conversations, Yakov learns the Deputy Warden thought to poison Yakov to draw out a confession. The warden discovered the plot and was furious. Zhitnyak brings Yakov a broom.

Yakov now spends the majority of his time sweeping his cell thoroughly. He still goes to the kitchen twice a day for his food, even though the warden personally assured Yakov of his safety. The warden is just as eager as the rest of the officials to try Yakov and convict him and needs him alive until that can happen. The payoff for the kitchen trips is three cavity searches per day.

During the year of prison, Yakov has been allowed only two or three baths. He has lice, dirty nails, and smells terrible. The prison guards collect his fingernail clippings for analysis. One day, the guards deposit a prayer shawl and phylacteries in his cell. Yakov dons the shawl for warmth but is uneasy by the appearance of these items. As his clothes become more pitiful, Zhitnyak gives Yakov a needle to sew them. Yakov hides the needle in his stove. One day, out of boredom, Yakov piles his wood near the window to climb on top and look out. He sees nothing but gray sky.

Chapter 6, Part 4 Analysis

Small things are beginning to happen to Yakov that possibly predict a turn of events again. Yakov's feet have healed entirely and he is given standard prison shoes. The mention of the feet again alerts the readers to a change of events to come. Yakov secrets away the needle and has now discovered he can climb his firewood to access the window. This section brings the now familiar humiliation and degradation of Yakov, but hints at something positive glimmering in the distance.

Chapter 6, Part 5

Chapter 6, Part 5 Summary

During his imprisonment, Yakov ponders all the things he studied before his capture. He thinks through biology and philosophy and religion lessons. He has nothing to do with his mind and pieces together bits of psalms that he now recites in Hebrew every day in his cell. The guards listen to him chanting in Hebrew, but Yakov does not care. He has grown bitter and laughs at God.

Chapter 6, Part 5 Analysis

This brief segment continues to develop Yakov's unease with his situation. It shows that his mind is still active and unsettling, because Yakov is finally turning to his Jewish roots that he has spent the novel thus far trying to escape.

Chapter 6, Part 6

Chapter 6, Part 6 Summary

Yakov is remembering his ex-wife. He describes her very vividly, as he reflects on his life to this point. He thinks back to his simple and happy life with Raisl. Even then, Yakov was a free thinker. He convinced Raisl it was ok to have premarital sex and not to be afraid of the synagogue.

She always begged Yakov to flee Russia, but he wanted to save money. They grew estranged by the end of their marriage and stayed in separate rooms. Neither of them was happy with life and Yakov thinks now it was wrong to convince her to marry him. His was the wrong future for Raisl.

Chapter 6, Part 6 Analysis

This section completely changes point of view. It is told from first person with Yakov's perspective. The language and syntax and sentence structure are altered to use Yakov's voice rather than that of the narrator. It works to build sympathy for Yakov's character and also to offer further insight on the things that deeply affect him in his situation, such as his unfaithful wife and his dead family. He mentions his revolutionary thought processes, but they do not register with Yakov as being that dramatic and he does not emphasize them.

Chapter 6, Part 7

Chapter 6, Part 7 Summary

Yakov describes his great pleasure in the small things in life. He enjoys eating eggs and potatoes with sour cream. He likes his work and his ambition. All of this weighs on him now, as he has nothing to do, even nothing to do with his mind.

Yakov uses splinters and sticks to keep track of the days. He thinks it might be January, but he is a month ahead. No one will tell him what time of year it really is. Yakov is depressed in the low light of Russian winter. It is dark by around three in the afternoon. One day, Yakov loses his cool. He shreds his ragged clothing and finally screams out in fury against the hateful prison officials. They bring him more clothing, but the brief time spent naked makes Yakov chilled for weeks.

Chapter 6, Part 7 Analysis

The point of view again shifts, this time to second person. Yakov is now speaking directly to the audience about his situation at the beginning of the section. The point of view returns to the narrator halfway through to explain more of Yakov's mental journey. The section ends with an image of Yakov shivering on his mattress waiting for the unknown.

Chapter 6, Part 8

Chapter 6, Part 8 Summary

Yakov is finally to be indicted. He is given his clothing back and taken to court. People in the trolley recognize Yakov as the murderer. Yakov enjoys the break in the monotony but is sad at their reactions and fantasizes over speaking to a lawyer.

In the courtroom, the prosecuting attorney is as cruel to Yakov as before. He says a lawyer will be of no help to Yakov and that the Tsar himself wishes Yakov to be convicted of this horrible crime. Yakov is looking at a lifetime of solitary confinement. The prosecutor reads the absurd evidence again and says the Tsar has read it all, as well. In addition, they accuse him of confessing in his sleep and produce notebooks full of the guards' notes while Yakov dreamed.

They urge him to confess his horrible crimes. They infer that things will go very poorly for other Jews in Kiev unless Yakov confesses. The prosecutor describes Bibikov's arrest and suicide, as he well as that of his assistant. He then accuses Yakov of membership in the Jewish Kahal, a secret society attempting to overthrow the Russian government. They do not give Yakov his indictment and he is taken back to prison.

Chapter 6, Part 8 Analysis

The prosecuting attorney has returned to his mind games with Yakov. He now informs Yakov that even the Tsar has been convinced by the mythology they are citing as evidence. Without Bibikov to speak as a voice of reason in the scenario, the villains have no recourse. Yakov is back where he started, only in worse physical and mental stability and now without an ally at all.

Chapter 6, Part 9

Chapter 6, Part 9 Summary

Back in his freezing cell, Yakov wails. He runs and screams and bashes his fists against the wall until ordered to be silent. He compares his scenario to a black horse following him throughout life. Weary of the Jews' burden, he mentally disassociates himself completely.

Chapter 6, Part 9 Analysis

This brief segment serves to show the true depths of Yakov's despair. He recalls how the Tsar himself has become convinced of his guilt and has now given up hope entirely.

Chapter 7, Part 1

Chapter 7, Part 1 Summary

Spring has come in the prison and Yakov still has no indictment. He is desperate with boredom and cracks open one of the phylacteries to read. Zhitnyak catches him reading and confiscates the scrolls. The Deputy Warden is excited over the "new evidence" against Yakov. Zhitnyak later sneaks Yakov a New Testament to read. Yakov is very moved by the stories of Jesus Christ. He feels he is in a similar situation to Jesus.

Yakov quotes scripture to the guards, asking how they take communion each week yet think he is guilty of murdering a boy for blood. Yakov retaliates with their own religious words and they are fascinated by his spin on the Bible's teachings. Kogin, the interested guard, is comforted when Yakov reads the Bible. However, he declines, when Yakov asks for a pencil and paper to write a letter.

Chapter 7, Part 1 Analysis

Yakov is beginning to use his captors' weapons against them. First he did it with the kitchen trips after the poison and now he is finding a way to make positive use of the phylacteries they shoved in his cell to make him seem like a Hasidim. Slowly and surely, Yakov is building a small network of allies within the prison. The guards are emotionally on his side.

Chapter 7, Part 2

Chapter 7, Part 2 Summary

A priest comes to comfort Yakov. He has begged the guards to be allowed in, having had a vision where he must help this suffering Jew. The priest says if Yakov converts to Orthodox dogma, he will be released from prison. Yakov retreats to the shadows and puts on the prayer shawl and straps on the phylactery.

The priest runs out screaming and Yakov is searched for a fourth time that day. His New Testament is confiscated. He is later given a pile of pages from the Old Testament with missing pages and blood stains.

Chapter 7, Part 2 Analysis

This brief segment seems to be a transition section. Change is clearly in the air again for Yakov Bok. The compassion of the guards seems to foretell a positive change, but past patterns in the novel could indicate an abrupt turn for the worse.

Chapter 7, Part 3

Chapter 7, Part 3 Summary

Yakov's broom has fallen apart from overuse. As he claimed he got the New Testament from his trips to the kitchen, he is forbidden to go there any more. Now that it is springtime, he has no more stove to tend in his cell. He is back where he started, with nothing to do and no small things to look forward to.

Yakov stopped keeping track of the days. He refused to keep counting after one year. He now spends his time re-reading the Old Testament bits he has been given. The Old Testament stories of suffering fuel Yakov's rage. He thinks evil thoughts about Tsar Nicholas for keeping him imprisoned like this.

Yakov starts blacking out for long periods of time. While he blacks out, he paces his cell and wears out his shoes. Yakov thinks often of Raisl and finds comfort in the book of Hosea, who married a harlot.

Chapter 7, Part 3 Analysis

As Yakov's situation turns for the worse again, readers see another mention of Yakov's feet. Always on the move in his cell, Yakov paces through his life's happenings once more. He wears out his shoes, as he learns to mentally escape his cell, even during the cavity searches.

Chapter 7, Part 4

Chapter 7, Part 4 Summary

Yakov receives a letter from Marfa. She is being accused by her neighbors of unsavory acts, which Bibikov indicated she did commit. She begs Yakov to confess. The current theories insist Yakov was put up to the crime by the Jewish leaders of a fanatical political party, so Marfa insists that Yakov just needs to accuse those leaders and all will be set right.

In the letter, Marfa says she secretly had Yakov followed after he chased her son from the brickyard. She says she now has evidence that Yakov was a leader on a smuggling trade route, to draw suspicion away from herself. She goes on for pages about how Jews are born evil and feel nervous, when they are not committing wrong acts. She then insists that Yakov molested her son before murdering him.

Yakov's reaction to the letter is excitement at a pending trial where he will finally get to speak with a lawyer and defend himself. Yakov is also excited that Bibikov's predictions are somehow being investigated. The next morning, the letter has been taken from Yakov. He later has a vision where she enters his cell and lies naked on his mattress, promising sex in exchange for a confession.

Chapter 7, Part 4 Analysis

The disturbing letter from Marfa takes her crimes and manages to accuse Yakov of committing them. Yakov is subject to further abuses by the guards, who have most likely drugged him again in order to steal the letter and most likely drugged him during this visit from Marfa. The ending of the chapter makes readers anticipate some sort of drug induced confession or other act that will work against Yakov somehow with the officials.

Chapter 7, Part 5

Chapter 7, Part 5 Summary

Yakov now has regular hallucinations in his cell. He sees Zhenia singing, begging for clothes. He sees dead farm animals, Shmuel's horse. Yakov cannot tell if he is going mad or if he is being drugged again. He has constant visions of his people being murdered by the Black Hundreds, of himself mixing matzo. He has imagined conversations with the Tsar and in his mind is moved to many different cells.

One day, Yakov awakes in his normal cell. His furniture is gone, but his other possessions and location are the same. He asks Zhitnyak what happened and learned Yakov had a fever and smashed his furniture while he raved. Yakov is uneasy and begins constantly staring out through the peephole in his cell door.

Chapter 7, Part 5 Analysis

Yakov has clearly either gone mad or been drugged for some time so that the guards could record him saying something he would not other wise say. The images of the eyes through the peephole and the pacing and restlessness of the guards indicate something dramatic is about to happen in the prison.

Chapter 7, Part 6

Chapter 7, Part 6 Summary

Shmuel comes to visit Yakov in prison. At first Yakov thought he was imagining things again, but it is really he. Shmuel sold beets to Zhitnyak's brother, who arranged the visit. Shmuel knew of Yakov's situation, when he read of the nameless Jew arrested in Kiev. This was confirmed, when Gronfein finally lived up to his word and told everyone in the shtetl the truth.

Shmuel has been trying to contact Yakov, but the authorities are denying Yakov is in there. They are deliberately keeping him nameless to intimidate the Jews. Shmuel asks how Yakov came to be in there. Yakov says it is, because he lied about his papers and Shmuel says this is what happens, when a person denies his god. He scolds Yakov for pride.

Yakov retaliates that he has nothing to be proud of. He scoffs his god and Shmuel. Shmuel encourages Yakov to look in the Torah for salvation. The men argue over the story of Job and Shmuel encourages Yakov to repent and read the Torah. Zhitnyak comes to shoo him away. Shmuel tries to give Yakov a pickle, but Zhitnyak takes it away. Yakov asks after Raisl, but Shmuel is running off.

Chapter 7, Part 6 Analysis

Shmuel's visit is certainly a turn of events for Yakov. Surprisingly, he does not bring news of movement to free Yakov but instead uses his entire time to encourage Yakov to embrace his faith and read the scripture. Zhitnyak risks his life and Shmuel's to smuggle him in for the visit, so readers grow assured he is a good man and on Yakov's side. The visit brings change for Yakov, the knowledge that people on the outside are beginning to know who he is and what is going on. Yakov can also rest assured that Gronfein came through in the end, though he is now suspected of being dead. As Shmuel runs off at the end of the chapter, he leaves behind a sense of hope for Yakov after a long turn for the worse in a miserable situation.

Chapter 8, Part 1

Chapter 8, Part 1 Summary

After Shmuel's visit, Yakov is excited and eager for freedom. The warden crushes his plans by discovering the visit. Zhitnyak is arrested and Yakov is interrogated again, for planned escape and conspiracy. Yakov's cell is reconstructed with heightened security, including a shackled bed. Guards patrolling the outside are doubled to fight off an escape plot by the Jews.

Yakov spends his days chained to the wall. Zhitnyak's replacement is a former soldier who pretends to shoot Yakov periodically for his own amusement. The cavity searches now number six per day. Despite his torture, Yakov still hopes something might happen for him. It is winter again in Kiev.

Yakov is freezing to death in the icy cell. Now he must depend on the cruel guards to light his stove and tend the fire, and they are not eager to do so. Yakov paces the lengths of his chains - one step in each direction - to keep from freezing. Chained as he is, Yakov can no longer even use the bathroom on his own.

Yakov uses his meal spoon to dig at the concrete holding his chains. He is discovered and his cell is searched. The guards find the needle he hid long ago and Yakov must stand in his chains rather than sit. Yakov now thinks back to the days of sweeping and reading the Bible as good times. He is utterly without hope. He finally finds pleasure in thinking of death. The narrator reveals Yakov had thought of death since he stole the needle. He thought to pierce his own veins late in the night. Now he must think of a new way to kill himself, since even hunger strike is out of the question.

Yakov realizes that the torturous conditions are being used against him. The officials want him to die of "natural" causes waiting for trial. Yakov decides to force them to shoot him or beat him to death. He thinks this is his last weapon.

Chapter 8, Part 1 Analysis

For the first time in the book, Yakov's spirit is so defeated he thinks of death. Even though the narrator says Yakov has been considering it for awhile, suicide has not been mentioned until this last despair. It would seem as though Yakov has finally been defeated in every possible way. He is finally determined that death is his only escape from this torture and hatred.

Chapter 8, Part 2

Chapter 8, Part 2 Summary

Kogin offers Yakov cigarettes, as he talks through the cell door. He asks Yakov to recite more scripture, because he is depressed. Kogin's son has been arrested for theft and sentenced to twenty years in Siberia. Yakov asks Kogin to release him from the chains. Kogin responds by saying he sympathizes with Yakov and tries not to think about the man in the chains, as it is too difficult to think that he had put Yakov in that pain.

At night, Yakov dreams of Shmuel in a coffin. He wakes pleading with God to let Yakov die for Shmuel. Yakov decides if he kills himself, he cannot die for anyone and decides to suffer. Rather than attack the Deputy Warden during a cavity search to get shot, Yakov steels himself to live. Life becomes his new challenge in prison.

Yakov convinces himself that dying in prison would be letting them win. He would die in anonymity and the Jewish people would still be persecuted. Yakov finds rage again and starts to scream out in his cell once more. He screams that he will continue to live no matter what they do to him. The replacement guard, Berezhinksy beats him terribly, begging him to die. Yakov blacks out, hallucinates, but will not die. Kogin tells Yakov that his son has committed suicide.

Chapter 8, Part 2 Analysis

Yakov's last remaining motivation to live is rage. He feels more compassion for his people now than ever in his life, as he refuses to die. He refuses to allow the Russian government to make the murder of the child speak for all Russian Jews. As he suffers his beatings and unthinkable torture, Yakov forms a mental alliance with the Jews and survives, despite the officials' best efforts to kill him.

Chapter 8, Part 3

Chapter 8, Part 3 Summary

The warden finally delivers Yakov's indictment. It reads as a fantastical tale. Even the details of the crime are different from reality. The arrangement and number of the stab wounds has changed to represent mystical and magical number groupings. There is a long section about Marfa, and how she was arrested and interrogated before being released and found innocent. Yakov reads the tale eagerly, though he can hardly believe the detailed lists of reasons he had been suspected, details of the crime, and lists of evidence.

Yakov is confused at the omission of the ritual murder information. He suspects the prosecuting attorney could not prove such ridiculous fantasies and turned instead to create tales of molestation and other crimes now included in the indictment. Yakov decides he has been imprisoned this long, because they could not find anything to prove against him. He decides he will certainly be let free and that this indictment holds no water in court.

Chapter 8, Part 3 Analysis

Yakov's thought processes, as he reads the indictment are very helpful for readers to contemplate the weight and meaning of what he reads. Yakov very smartly analyzes the specific additions and deletions to the indictment and ends the segment with hope again. He has hope, because the fantastical elements have been removed from the document and all that remains are the ravings of Marfa, who is a questionable person. Yakov feels certain that he can gain his freedom.

Chapter 8, Part 4

Chapter 8, Part 4 Summary

Raisl Bok comes to visit Yakov in prison. For several days before her visit, Yakov is groomed, bathed, and released from chains. He cannot understand this and feels uneasy. He asks not to see his wife, but is forced to. Yakov and Raisl are both very emotional. She is frantic at his horrible condition, horrified that they gave him ear curls and a beard as evidence against him. Yakov explodes in anger at her for leaving him. They argue over their failed marriage.

Raisl said she no longer wants to fight with him. She has been begging to see him for over a year. She is only allowed if she agreed to bring a document from the Prosecuting Attorney for Yakov to sign. If he agrees to sign it, they say they will free him the next day. Raisl hands him the confession, insisting she only brought it as a means to see him. Raisl tells Yakov she has a child and has returned to the shtetl.

She is miserable there and everyone blames her for what happened to Yakov. They call her whore and her son a bastard. Yakov is insane with anger again. He asks her for the confession form, which states that he witnessed the murder, that the Jewish people killed Zhenia. Yakov writes in Russian that the confession is a lie and on the envelope, in Yiddish, he writes that he sired Raisl's son and asks the people to be good to her. As Raisl leaves, she begs Yakov to come home.

Chapter 8, Part 4 Analysis

Outside the prison, Yakov's father-in-law is doing his part by spreading the news of Yakov's imprisonment. Slowly, one bit at a time, things are moving in Yakov's direction. The fact that the confession form they want Yakov to sign only states that he witnessed the crime adds to Yakov's suspicion that the government has no evidence against him and must now convict him or lose face. Raisl's appearance and her unsettling news fuels Yakov's fire to live and he leaves the chapter angry and fired up to be free. Given the past few chapters of hopelessness and despair, this rage is a positive turn for Yakov.

Chapter 9, Part 1

Chapter 9, Part 1 Summary

When Yakov has been in prison for two full years, a man comes into the cell. He tells Yakov that in honor of the three-hundredth anniversary of the House of Romanov, the Tsar has agreed to pardon Yakov and let him return home. Yakov will have none of it. He refuses to be pardoned as a criminal without a fair trial. All the guards and officials are furious. They pour urine on his head and punish him for his insolence. Yakov decides that things are never as bad as they can be, because each day the officials find a way to make his life worse.

The warden returns with a new indictment. This time, they have restored the mystical accusations and removed the ravings of Marfa. Yakov is now indicted as a ritual murderer. This time the indictment describes his worship habits in prison, detailing his use of the prayer shawl and phylacteries. Yakov is worried. One day, among his newspaper scraps used for toilet tissue, Yakov finds a headline that reads "The Jew is Doomed."

Chapter 9, Part 1 Analysis

The prison officials are back to their old tricks of mind manipulation. Yakov is on to them now and suspects everything that happens to him. He will not allow himself to be worked up over the indictments, because he thinks they will come back every few days with new ones to wear him down. Yakov cannot help but agree with the headline he sees on the newspaper shred, but continues to be determined and hope for justice.

Chapter 9, Part 2

Chapter 9, Part 2 Summary

The prosecuting attorney comes to see Yakov in the middle of the night. He tells Yakov that the Jews had better stop pressing him to go to trial before he has gathered all the evidence. Yakov refuses to stand any longer before this man, savoring his few hours of respite from the chains. He tells the prosecutor to shoot him if he wants to. Yakov is scolded for insolence. He is threatened with a massacre on the Jewish people if he does not cooperate. He tells Yakov the Jews are already being watched and the Tsar has been notified to watch for an uprising. Yakov calmly demands to be brought to trial. He mentions the death of Bibikov and the attorney leaves in a huff.

Chapter 9, Part 2 Analysis

As the formerly imposing characters continue to harass Yakov, he is no longer afraid of them. Yakov now has nothing left to lose and is as rude and insolent as they are to him. He knows they will not shoot him, only find new ways to torture him. Yakov has decided he can live through their torture and continues to demand a fair trial despite the government's best efforts to hide him away.

Chapter 9, Part 3

Chapter 9, Part 3 Summary

Julius Ostrovsky is Yakov's lawyer. He finally visits with Yakov and tells him the worst news is that everyone, including the government, knows Yakov is innocent. As he is being kept in increasingly hateful, torturous Anti-Semitic conditions, the government must find a way to prove his guilt or they are admitting their own incompetence. Ostrovsky says there is a committee dedicated to Yakov's cause, but there is a long way to go. Ostrovsky also reports the Shmuel is dead. Yakov weeps at this news and asks to hear more about his case.

Jews are fleeing Kiev in droves in fear of the Black Hundreds, who are raising quite a ruckus over Yakov's case. Ostrovsky assures Yakov that everyone knows the real murderers of Zhenia, but is turning away from the facts in eagerness to condemn Yakov. New facts have come to the surface, including a life insurance policy for Zhenia, further indicating Marfa in the crime. A newspaper reporter is on Yakov's side and reported all the factual details of the case, raising awareness, until the government shut down the paper.

Ostrovsky has a signed affidavit from Marfa's neighbor, who saw Zhenia's body draining in Marfa's bathtub after the murder. Ostrovsky warns that the case grows more dangerous, as he they build more evidence of Yakov's innocence. The Tsar is losing power as unrest grows throughout Russia. The Black Hundreds blame the Jews for the unrest and they blame Yakov for inciting the Jews to act. Right when the Christian boy was discovered murdered, the government was discussing getting rid of some political rights for the Jews. Yakov represents a Jewish political uprising, a civil rights movement, in a tsarist nation. This is not good news for the fixer.

Ostrovsky tells Yakov not to despair, because some non-Jews are on his side, as well. Medical Societies and other newspaper are printing news and contesting the situation. As quickly as Yakov's supporters are disbanded, new ones sprout up throughout the country. Ostrovsky warns Yakov that some witnesses will lie in court, but a jury is a human group and they have a chance. Their strength lies in the diversity of a jury and that shopkeepers and innocent folks also disbelieve the fantasies concocted by the prosecuting attorney.

As Ostrovsky leaves, he says he cannot be Yakov's lawyer but will instead be a witness. The government has found a way to accuse Ostrovsky of bribery, because he is a good lawyer, so he has found a suitable replacement for himself. He tells Yakov not to die, because this will help the government enormously. Yakov says he wants to live.

Chapter 9, Part 3 Analysis

Outside the prison, things are going well for the civil rights advocates. The citizens of Russia are beginning to see the horror of hatred and what it can do to a country. As the people band together, they are even encouraging other Russians to join their cause. Even though people fear for their lives, they are still standing up for what they believe is right. As Yakov suffers in prison, he gathers friends on the outside and things are finally going his way. Yakov has become a symbol to the Jewish people of determination and hope against the hatred.

Chapter 9, Part 4

Chapter 9, Part 4 Summary

Yakov's chains are removed from his cell and he sits on his bed and thinks about his situation. He wonders why he has been chosen to be a political symbol in unsettled times. He thinks if he had stayed in the shtetl this would not have happened, but remembers if he had stayed there nothing at all would have happened. He also reflects that his parents stayed in the shtetl and were still murdered for being Jewish.

The new lawyer, Suslov-Smirnov, comes to see Yakov several times and warns him to walk on eggshells and tread softly while they try to hurry the trial along. Yakov asks if they know the government killed Bibikov and is warned again to tread softly, that this type of talk will get him into more trouble. Suslov-Smirnov writes down the detail about Bibikov and never returns again to Yakov's cell. As Yakov paces his cell, his legs swell again until the warden finally comes and announces Yakov's trial.

Chapter 9, Part 4 Analysis

This section deals mostly with Yakov's mental journey processing his position as a martyr and political symbol. He is upset that he has been chosen to suffer and works a long while reaching a point where he decides someone must do something to confront the hatred. By the time the warden announces the trial, Yakov is ready to fight not just for himself but for all of the government's wrongdoings.

Chapter 9, Part 5

Chapter 9, Part 5 Summary

As Yakov prepares to go to trial, he sees visions of dead prisoners. Yakov sees them as political activists, even if their crimes were petty and small. Yakov's visions grow frightening, as he denies himself sleep. In his dreams, he sees the Tsar and then Bibikov. Yakov tells Bibikov he is no longer afraid but angry instead. In his last dream before morning, Yakov sees Zhenia and tries to rouse him from the dead.

On the day of his trial, two and a half years after his illegal imprisonment, Yakov is given a hearty breakfast. Yakov is too nervous to eat. He is allowed to wash with warm water and cries at how the water feels. The barber comes and finally shaves his head so nobody will see that he has been kept with lice-ridden long locks. The guards say he is to appear as if he has been treated like all the other prisoners. He is given his own clothes from years ago and they hang from his emaciated body.

The guards beg Yakov to eat, but Yakov says he is fasting for "God's world." Yakov reiterates that he does not believe in God, but is standing up for those who do. As they prepare to march Yakov to his trial, the warden reads Yakov a newspaper article about another Jewish man being held for similar charges. The warden says one of the two of them will be convicted. As they are about to leave, the Deputy Warden rushes in and demands Yakov not be given special privileges. Yakov has not been searched this morning.

The captain escorting Yakov to court insists he has searched Yakov personally. The Deputy Warden says the search order comes right from the Tsar and the warden wants to know why he was not informed. The Deputy mutters that he had warned the warden of this. Yakov furiously protests, as he they drag him back to his cell for the search.

Yakov struggles to contain his rage, as he is stripped and searched in the cell. He refuses to take off his undershirt and watches as if from afar, as he rips it off and hurls it at the Deputy Warden. The Deputy Warden says this act allows him to shoot Yakov. Kogin protests and sticks up for Yakov, saying he has had enough humiliation. Kogin shoots his rifle into the ceiling, as the deputy shoots him. The others burst into the cell and Kogin falls dead.

Chapter 9, Part 5 Analysis

In this section, Yakov is fully established as a political activist. Though he does not even believe in god, though he is a self-proclaimed free thinker, he will fast for religious purposes for the rights of those who wish to do so. Yakov has come far from the beginning of the novel, when he never wanted to raise notice and just wanted to live simply as a fixer who liked things to be in working order and felt restless, when things

were broken. Yakov has finally discovered that what is really broken is the political atmosphere in Russia and is working to fix that.

Finally on the brink of an ending, the author pushes readers to the brink of anticipation and drags them back into despair. Nothing can go right for Yakov in this case. When hatred is involved, men become desperate. On the edge of this last humiliation, Yakov finally loses his control. Luckily, his determination and steadfast suffering have made him a friend in Kogin and the man sacrifices himself for Yakov's cause, as he the novel reaches toward a close.

Chapter 9, Part 6

Chapter 9, Part 6 Summary

Yakov is removed from the prison and driven to trial. He makes note of the nature outside the carriage windows, as he rides away and thinks of all the seasons he has missed in prison. He is stunned to discover masses of people on the streets, as his carriage drives by. The soldier escorting him yells out Yakov's name to the crowd and Yakov yells his innocence to them. Yakov smiles.

When he arrives at the court, Yakov is nervous at the sight of the oppressive crowd. He envisions a discussion with the jury, when a bomb explodes outside the carriage. It has killed the young soldier and the horse he rode. Yakov envisions himself back in the shtetl, as chaos ensues. The rider's foot has been blown off by the bomb.

The sight of the missing foot enrages Yakov. As the carriage hurries onward, Yakov envisions himself talking to the Tsar. He and the Tsar discuss fatherhood and the power of gossip and the power of the people. In the vision, the Tsar asks Yakov if his suffering has taught him mercy.

Yakov responds that his suffering has taught him that suffering is pointless. Yakov accuses him of the hate crimes, and the Tsar says he is blameless. Yakov picks up a revolver. The vision of Bibikov in the background protests, but Yakov shoots the Tsar. Yakov decides that all men must be political, because the alternative is to see men destroyed. As they reach the courthouse, the crowd continues to cheer and Yakov decides liberty is worth fighting for.

Chapter 9, Part 6 Analysis

Even in his hallucinations, Yakov is fully established now as a political activist. The novel ends with his thoughts that all men must stand up for their beliefs and that all beliefs are worth fighting for. The transformation of Yakov from an apolitical, uninvolved man who hid from hatred into a symbol of hope for an oppressed people is complete. Yakov finally sees that he is part of something much larger and he cannot just remain a small man in a small world. The men dying for him, who are losing their restless feet, are the same as him. Yakov and all the people of Russia are in this fight for justice together. Malamud's message in this final scene is one of unity and hope, as he people band together to fight for justice.

Characters

Father Anastasy

Father Anastasy is the priest who offers moral support to Marfa Golov. He is a priest of the Orthodox Catholic Church, and is considered a specialist in Judaism. When the investigative party goes to the cave where the body was found, Father Anastasy gives a long, pseudo-scholarly history of ritualistic murders supposedly committed by Jews throughout history, giving twisted understanding of Jewish scripture as a basis of proof. "In the past," he says, "the Jew has had many uses for Christian blood. He has used it for sorcery and witches' rituals, and for love potions and well poisoning, fabricating a deadly venom that spread the plague from one country to another, a mixture of Christian blood from a murdered victim, their own Jewish urine, the heads of poisonous snakes, and even the stolen mutilated host□the bleeding body of Christ himself."

Berezhinsky

The guard who replaces Zhitnyak, Berezhinsky is an ex-soldier "with swollen knuckles and a broken nose." He taunts Yakov, pointing his gun at the prisoner and shouting "Bang'" to indicate how willing he is to shoot him. He is as cruel to Yakov as the Deputy Warden wants the guards to be, showing less mercy than Zhitnyak, but, in the end, when Yakov is leaving the jail to go to his trial, Berezhinsky tells him, "good luck and no hard feelings."

B. A. Bibikov

Investigating Magistrate for cases of extraordinary importance in Kiev, Bibikov is the person who questions Yakov after he is first arrested, and he turns out to be the only person of official capacity who is willing to believe that Yakov might be innocent. When he questions him in his cell, Bibikov is friendly, asking questions about philosophy, offering cigarettes, and even mentioning his own child's sickness. The next day, though, the interrogation in his office, in the presence of other Russians, is much more aggressive. Bibikov is divided between his suspicions that the case against Yakov is weak and the pressure from his superiors in the legal hierarchy, who want him to accept Yakov's guilt without question Later, he visits Yakov in his cell to confide that there is little evidence against him, but that the authorities are set on having him found guilty. He promises to speak to a prominent lawyer about defending him. Soon after his visit, though, Yakov hears another prisoner being thrown into the cell next to him and tortured. Sneaking out of his cell, he is able to look into the other cell and see Bibikov hanging from his belt from the bars. Grubeshov later tells Yakov, "He was arrested for peculating from official hands. While awaiting trial, overwhelmed by his disgrace, he committed suicide."

Colonel Bodyansky

A military officer who is present when Yakov is interrogated by Grubeshov, Bodyansky threatens the suspect frequently with violence

Yakov Shepsovitch Bok

Yakov is the "fixer" to whom the book's title refers. Thirty years old, he is despondent in the book's beginning because his wife has left him and run off with another man. Having nothing to live for in the "Step," the Jewish settlement in the countryside, he leaves for the city of Kiev, hoping to make enough money to someday immigrate to a country where Jews are treated more fairly. In Kiev, he first finds himself surprisingly lucky□a man he meets, Lebedev, gives him a job overseeing a brick factory. He is, however, a Jew in an area where Jews are not supposed to live or work. When a boy is found murdered nearby, others take advantage of Yakov's social disadvantage, and arrange to have him arrested. The workers under him want him out of the way so that they can continue the petty thievery they had practiced before he came, and the real killers, presumably the boy's mother and her boyfriend, use him as a scapegoat (the name "Bok" means "goat" in German).

At first, Yakov believes that his time in jail will go quickly, that the murder charge will be dropped and he wil] only be punished for living in the non-Jewish area, but as the novel progresses he finds out that the authorities intend to convict him for this crime. As time goes on, the evidence against him changes: witnesses claim to have seen him and other Jews holding ritualistic practices, to have seen him threaten the victim with a knife, and to have seen him with a body-shaped package on the night of the murder. For over two years, Yakov remains in jail, awaiting the formal indictment will start his trial. His health deteriorates, and he nearly goes crazy in solitary confinement. He is poisoned by the authorities and humiliated daily. Throughout this time, he learns that his religious faith, which he made light of before all of this trouble, is necessary in order for him to persevere. In the end, he accepts the fact that the government has made him a symbol of all Jews, and he vows to fight injustice at whatever cost, in the name of freedom.

Deputy Warden

The Deputy Warden is never called by name in this book, but he is Yakov's chief antagonist. His first words to Yakov are "Hello, blood-drinker, welcome to the Promised land ... Here we'll feed you flour and blood until you shit matzos." He is the one who gives Yakov's guards their orders: when they feel some sympathy toward Yakov, they must take care that the Deputy Warden will not show up and prosecute them for disobeying. The Deputy Warden objects when Bibikov visits Yakov in jail, and soon after Bibikov is himself arrested and tortured. The Deputy Warden tries to make Yakov uncomfortable□holding out on firewood for his stove in the winter, keeping him chained to the bed, keeping him isolated, and strip-searching him several times a day. In the end, he pushes Yakov to the point of breaking, of openly rebelling, which would give the

Deputy Warden a legal right to shoot him. One of his subordinates, Kogin, becomes tired of witnessing all of this cruelty and he intervenes, and the Deputy Warden kills him instead.

Yakov Ivanovich Dologushev

See Yakov Shepsovitch Bok

Fetyukov

Fetyukov is the murderer who shares Yakov's first jail cell. He is prepared to kill Yakov when he thinks the fixer is a stool-pigeon who has been put in the cell to spy on the prisoners there, but he believes Yakov when he says that he did not kill the child. Drawing from memories of a Jew for whom he had once worked, Fetyukov is too sophisticated to believe the gossip that the state presents as evidence for Jews' willingness to kill and drink blood.

Marfa Vladimirovna Golov

Marfa is the mother of the boy who was killed. She lives in a squalid little house near the backyard. The story that she tells the prosecutors is inflated from the experiences relayed earlier in the book□for instance, she says that Yakov threatened her son with a knife, and that her son and another boy saw ajar of blood on Yakov's table (it was actually strawberry jam). Although the details of her life make her testimony suspicious□such as the fact that she blinded her lover, Stepan Bulkin, by throwing acid into his eyes but later reunited with him□the prosecutors still believe her over Yakov. As Yakov stares at her, wondering if she is insane, she shouts to the policemen to make him stop looking at her. Later, while Yakov is in jail, he receives a long, rambling letter from Marfa that alternates between begging him to confess to the crime and insulting him and all Jews. When the first indictment is handed down, Yakov suspects that the charges in it are based on the irrational claims in Marfa's letter.

Gregor Gronfein

A counterfeiter who is in jail with Yakov, Gronfein listens to Yakov sympathetically and gives him a pencil and paper with which to write letters to people who have not found out about his arrest. Gronfein offers to mail the letters, but instead he hands them over to the Warden, who is outraged. Yakov also finds out that Gronfein has claimed that Yakov spoke of being part of a well-connected conspiracy and that his friends would bribe Marfa Golov to change her testimony.

Grubeshov

Grubeshov is the Prosecuting Attorney in the case against Yakov and the Procurator of the Kiev Superior Court. While Bibikov is friendly toward Yakov and tries to assure him that the case against him is weak, Grubeshov is firm about seeking a conviction, threatening Yakov when he asks questions or gives answers that do not support the state's conspiracy theory.

Kogin

The less talkative of Yakov's two guards, he has worries on his mind□sometimes he mentions his troubled son, who steals from him. It is Kogin who keeps a diary of Yakov's mutterings in his sleep, and although nothing from them is incriminating, his cries are nonetheless taken as signs of a guilty conscience. In the end, Kogin takes the one courageous act of anyone in the novel. Tired of watching the Deputy Warden abuse Yakov and distraught about his own son being in jail, he prevents the Deputy Warden from killing Yakov for insubordination by drawing his gun on the man. The Deputy Warden shoots Kogin dead.

Ivan Semyonovitch Kuzminsky

Kuzminsky is Bibikov's assistant. After being told that Bibikov is dead, Yakov asks to speak to Ivan Semyonovitch, hoping that he would have the notes that were compiled in the case, but he is told that the assistant was sentenced to a year in the Petropavelsky Fortress for failing to remove his hat when a band played "God Save the Tsar" at an Agricultural Fair.

Aaron Latke

Latke is a printer's assistant When Yakov first moves to Kiev, he stays at Latke's flat while looking for work.

Nikolai Maximotitch Lebedev

Yakov helps Lebedev to his feet one night after finding him lying drunk in the street, despite the fact that he is wearing a double-headed eagle insignia on his coat□the sign of a society that hates and persecutes Jews. Lebedev does not realize that Yakov is Jewish, and as a gesture of appreciation hires him to paint an apartment in his building. Impressed with his work, Lebedev goes on to offer him a job as an overseer at the brick factory that he owns. Later, after his arrest, Lebedev testifies in his deposition that he had been suspicious of Yakov all along, but that he had been tricked and lied to.

Zinaida Nikolaevna Lebedev

The daughter of Yakov's employer in Kiev, Zinaida is a cripple, and lonely. She invites Yakov to have supper with her several times because her father, who drinks heavily, goes to sleep early. She then invites him to make love to her, but when he sees that she is menstruating, he cannot consummate their relationship, and so, apologizing, he leaves. After her arrest, she says in her deposition that he had tried to rape her that night in her room, despite the fact that a letter from her was found in his room asking him to come and see her again.

Tsar Nicholas II

Tsar Nicholas is the Monarch of Russia. Yakov imagines that the tsar visits him in his cell as he is awaiting trial. In the book's final, chaotic scene, Yakov imagines that Tsar Nicholas II is in the coach with him on the way to his trial. In this fantasy, he takes a gun and shoots the tsar through the heart.

Julius Ostrovsky

Ostrovsky is Yakov's lawyer, whom he is not allowed to meet until the final chapters of the book. In the course of explaining his chances for acquittal, Ostrovsky explains the social background, how Jews had been treated in Russia in recent decades and the significance that the government is putting on convicting Yakov.

Proshko

Proshko is the foreman at the brick factory. He resents Yakov from the start, because Yakov's presence makes it difficult for him to cheat his employer, Lebedev, by selling off some of the merchandise on the black market. Proshko suspects Yakov of being a Jew□"a man with a nose like that ought to be careful where he puts it," he says, as a veiled threat He asks Yakov for his working permit, but Yakov lies and tells him that it has already been taken care of, fueling Proshko's suspicion further.

Shmuel

The father of Yakov's wife, Raisl Shmuel is ashamed of his daughter for having run away, but he is of a more forgiving and compassionate nature than Yakov, as evinced when he tries to borrow money from Yakov to give to a beggar. Before leaving the province for Kiev, Yakov trades his cow for Shmuel's horse and carriage Shmuel visits Yakov in his cell one night, having bnbed the guard and taking a chance with his life to do so. He continues to encourage Yakov to have faith in religion when all Yakov can feel is despair.

Zhitnyak

Zhitnyak is the guard who seems most compassionate to Yakov: he talks to him and shows interest in listening to Yakov recite the bible verses he has memorized. He shows some slight decency, trusting Yakov with a needle and thread to fix his raggedy clothes. It is Zhitnyak who, for a hefty bribe, allows Shmuel to visit Yakov in his cell, an infraction that is found out almost immediately by the Deputy Warden. Zhitnyak's fate following this event is unknown.

Zina

See Zinaida Nikolaevna Lebedev

Themes

Freedom

Yakov starts out very limited in his freedom and as the novel progresses finds he is losing more and more. From the beginning of the novel, he is limited in where he can live or travel or work since he is a Jew, Briefly, because he is willing to deny his Jewish heritage, he is free to go beyond his confines. However, this freedom does not last long and he is soon falsely accused of murder. While in jail, a period that makes up the bulk of the novel, Yakov becomes more and more confined. He loathes the first cell he is in because he is at the mercy of the other prisoners, but the solitary confinement he moves to is even worse. When he becomes accustomed to solitary confinement, his movement is limited further by being chained to the bed. And throughout it all the sadistic Deputy Warden conducts full body searches, looking in Yakov's mouth and anus while fully knowing that there is no way Yakov could have obtained a weapon: even the inside of his body is not free at this point. During his last days in jail he gives up on any hope of freedom, but on his ride to the courthouse, looking out of the carnage at all of his fellow Jews lining his route in defiance of the Tsar's government, he comes to believe in freedom. "Where there's no fight in it there's no freedom," he thinks. "Death to the anti-Semites! Long live revolution! Long live liberty!"

Religion

The political struggle between Christians and Jews depicted in this book has little to do with the actual beliefs of each group. More significant is the personal growth of Yakov as he goes from his initial disillusionment to embracing his identity as a Jew. In the beginning of the story he leaves the Pale of Jewish Settlement because he does not feel he belongs. "Torah I had little of and Talmud less," Yakov tells his father-in-law, Schmuel, "though I learned Hebrew because I've got an ear for language." With little work available, and his wife of six years having run away, he does not trust the consolations of his religious heritage. Instead, he has faith only in himself, as symbolized by his keeping his tool kit and dropping his prayer things into the Dnieper River

Ironically, it is the authorities who try to force a Jewish identity on Yakov while he is in prison. They force him to grow his hair long, in the Jewish style. They give him phylacteries, small leather boxes containing parchments with Hebrew scripture quotations, which Orthodox Jews wear strapped to their heads and arms; he reads them eagerly to alleviate boredom. They give him a prayer shawl, which he clings to for warmth. Their purpose m giving him these things is to make him seem more likely to be part of an Orthodox Jewish conspiracy, but as he stays in jail Yakov learns to value his Jewish identity. This point becomes clear in the end, when he objects to having the Orthodox ringlets cut from his hair.

Class Conflict

In. general, the classes represented in this book correspond to religious affiliations, with the Russian Christians comprising the dominant social order and the Jews kept in the lower class by government constraints. There are, however, significant cases in which religious differences are put aside and people relate as class peers. When Yakov first comes to Kiev, for example, Lebedev is impressed with him as a person and as a worker, and offers him the position as an overseer in the brickyard based on what he sees in him. He tells Yakov that he also worked up from poverty, establishing a bond based on recognition.

Later, when Yakov is in jail, he fears that his cellmates will blame him for the child's murder of which he is accused. However, the convictJFe-tyukov shows that, despite Yakov being from the lower class, he knows better than to believe superstitions about Jews. "When I was a boy I was apprenticed to a Jew blacksmith," he explains. "He wouldn't have done what they say you did. If he drank blood he would have vomited it up." A Christian Russian of a higher social class would not have had a similar contact with anyone Jewish, and would therefore have accepted rumors as truth. The most telling case of class affiliation overriding religious affiliation is Kogin's sacrifice at the end of the book. Because his own son is in jail, Kogin is able to empathize with Yakov more than with the Deputy Warden, even though he and the warden are in a sense coworkers. After treating Yakov indifferently through most of his confinement, Kogin, despite religious differences, ends up giving his life in order to save Yakov, feeling that if the system can treat one prisoner harshly it is just as likely to be unfair to his son.

Civil Rights

Modern American audiences often are outraged to read this story of a man held in prison for a crime he did not commit with no access to any help from outside. Because the U.S. Constitution specifically names the right to a speedy trial, and because organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union diligently watch out for abuses of this right, Americans take for granted basic civil rights that simply are not recognized in repressive, totalitarian countries. Many countries offer no guarantee of the right to legal representation: in some, political prisoners are left to rot in jail while their families are not even told whether they are alive or not. Political prisoners are often killed in jail with the transparent excuse that "they were trying to escape," as Ostrovsky warns Yakov against in the book, while others are tortured and then left with the means to commit suicide, as is Bibikov. One sign of Tsarist society's recognition of the rights of prisoners is that in this novel nobody questions the fact that Yakov will have a trial once his indictment is handed down: a society without rules would not be bound by any such commitment.

Style

Point of View

Most of this novel is written in the third person limited point of view. This means that characters are referred to as "he" or "she." The narrator is not a character in the book and does not refer to him- or herself. The point of view is "limited" in that the narration is not free to describe anything that happens anywhere, but can only tell us about events and thoughts that are experienced by Yakov. Ideas in the minds of other characters, for instance, are beyond Yakov's knowledge, and so cannot be told to the audience. For instance, the book's narration cannot directly explain the political situation outside of the jail because Yakov would have no knowledge of what is happening. Since the narration is limited to what he knows, any background information is told to Yakov by Ostrovsky. The author uses this device to bring information into the novel that otherwise is beyond its range. Another element of the point of view is the tense: for the most part, this novel is told in the past tense describing the action as being in the past, as in "Yakov Bok *saw* people running," or "The fixer *remained* mute."

There are exceptions to the general point of view. The sixth chapter of section VI starts with Yakov himself functioning as the narrator, speaking in the first person ("I") present tense. The following chapter begins with one paragraph in the second person ("you") present tense. The first chapter of section VJI starts with one sentence in the present tense form: "He waits." All of these have the effect of conveying Yakov's sense of reality unraveling as he sits in his cell, his mind deteriorating. Present and past, "me" and "you" and "him," all meld into one unclear frame of mind in his boredom.

Setting

Unlike some novels, which focus on the personal lives of their characters, the story of *The Fixer* places great emphasis on the time in which it takes place. Kiev, Russia, from 1911 to 1913, had just the right balance of political sophistication with peasant superstition; of dedication and corruption; of freedom and severe political consequences. Other settings have been dangerous for religious, political, and ethnic groups that were persecuted, but they have not ended in a few years with violent revolutions, and so they would have lacked the sense of hope that this story implies in the end.

Symbolism

Little is made of the fact that Yakov is a "fixer," other than the constant use of this word to refer to him. The term has literal significance in this story in that he is indeed a fixer, a handyman, as he proves with the work he does on Lebedev's spare apartment. As his troubles grow and freedom becomes less and less likely, he thinks of his tools more often. It is somewhat ironic that this novel is named *The Fixer* in spite of the fact that

Yakov is trapped in his situation and for most of the book is unable to do anything to fix it. In the end, though, the purpose of the title becomes clear enough. In the last scene, he is hurtling along in a carriage with a broken, wobbling wheel that needs fixing (which echoes the wagon wheel that broke when he was first leaving for Kiev), trapped in a political system that also needs fixing. With his tools Yakov could fix the carriage, and by allowing himself to be a symbol of Jewish oppression he can further the growing revolution that might fix the corrupt government.

Folk Tale

Malamud has described this novel as a "folk tale." The key element of a folk tale is that, true or false, it is repeated frequently within a culture because, whether they know it or not, it helps people define who they are. Malamud mentioned that the story of Mendel Beilis, upon which this novel is based, is a story that his father told him when he was a little boy. A story like "Cinderella," for instance, has elements of tragedy (such as the death of the natural mother, the stepmother's cruelty, and the father's insensitivity), but it also ends in triumph, with the stepsisters defeated and the prince declaring his devotion.

The Fixer follows a folk tale pattern in that it starts with a man leaving his home and traveling to a place with which he is unfamiliar□a different world. In this case, he is moving from the Jewish Step to the Christian-dominated Kiev. By leaving out the trial and its outcome, though, the novel takes a turn toward abstraction that a folk tale would never take. There might be a good intellectual reason to leave the ending open, so that the reader will have to think about it and perhaps even look up the history of the case it is based on. However, folk tales, even when they are mysterious, seldom leave the reader with unanswered questions about what happened. Folk tales are repeated by listeners who have heard them and found them complete, they never leave readers unsatisfied.

Historical Context

Tsar Nicholas II

Nicholas II (1868-1918), who makes a brief appearance in Yakov's dream near the end of this novel, was the last tsar of Russia (the word is also translated as "czar"). He was driven from the throne and executed shortly after the events of *The Fixer* take place. To a large extent, it was Nicholas's arrogance and foolishness that brought about the Communist Revolution in Russia, although it is also likely that the country's weak economy would have crumbled under even the most competent monarch. Nicholas was a descendant of the Romanov dynasty, whose rule reached back to 1547, when the grand duke of Muscovy, Ivan IV (1530-1584), had himself crowned czar (the Russian word for "caesar"). His grand nephew, Ivan VI (1740-1764), was the first tsar with the Romanov name, a name that was passed down to Russian rulers until Nicholas was deposed. Nicholas himself became tsar in 1894, when his father became ill and died suddenly. Nicholas, then twenty-six, was unprepared for the throne, a fact that became clear almost immediately when thousands died attending his inauguration, trampled to death due to poor crowd control.

As the nineteenth century came to an end, while countries around the world were entering the Industrial Age, Russia struggled to end a feudal social order that locked peasant farmers into slave-like conditions With the change in social order came massive poverty. From the 1870s on, revolution was in the air, with labor strikes and peasant revolts occurring frequently. Nicholas's answer to social unrest was to blame it on "outside agitators." In 1904, Russia went to war with Japan in a small dispute over land on the Korean Peninsula-one of the tsar's advisors had told him that "a victorious little war" would unite the population Unfortunately and unexpectedly, Russia lost, further straining the economy. Strikes, demonstrations, and violence became common.

In 1905, hundreds of peasants, gathered outside the tsar's Winter Palace to present their grievances, were shot down by soldiers. To quell the public outrage that followed, Nicholas set up the Dumas, a Russian Parliament He did not give the Dumas any political power, though, and the protests continued until later that year when he organized a second, functional Dumas. The public's distrust of the tsar and his family intensified in the following years as he came to rely on advice from Rasputin, a mystic known as the Mad Monk, who had won the Romanovs' trust by being able to treat their son Alexis's hemophilia. When Russia suffered heavy losses after World War I began in 1914, the fate of Nicholas II and his family was sealed. After the 1917 revolution led by Lenin, Trotsky, and others, the tsar abdicated his throne, and a Communist government was established in Russia. In 1918, Nicholas, his wife, and his children were executed, although unsubstantiated rumors persist to this day that one of his daughters, Anastasia, escaped.

Blood Libel

The myth that Jewish people murder Christian children to use their blood for mystical rituals is called a "blood libel," and has existed for hundreds of years. Similar accusations were levied against early Christians, who were a small, persecuted cult in the early centuries after the death of Jesus. The first record of a blood libel against the Jews dates back to the death of William of Norwich, who was found beaten to death in the woods on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter) in 1144. The proximity of the high Christian holiday certainly added to tensions between Jews and Christians, while the specific details about the Easter cycle□the bloody death of Jesus, the offering of bread and wine as "'body and blood"□are thought to have fueled imaginations about secret mystic rituals.

While blood libel stories existed for centuries, the first recorded one that had official church recognition was the "Cult of Anderl," which started in 1462. The cult celebrated the sainted Anderl von Rinn ("Anderl" is a Germanic form of "young Andrew"; Rinn is a city in the Tyrolean Alps). The death of Anderl, allegedly at the hands of Jews, became a part of the local folklore, handed down from generation to generation. In 1614, Dr. Hippolyt Guarinoni wrote a book, *Triumph. Crown, Martyrdom and Epitaph of the Holy Innocent Child,* recording the story of Anderl as he said it came to him in a dream. The cult of Anderl continues to this day. In 1985, in an attempt to end this anti-Semitic cult, the Bishop of Innisbrook had the boy's remains removed from the church and put into a grave, but followers still conduct annual processions to the boy's grave.

The blood libel has such deep roots in Christian folk tradition that the Brothers Grimm, German scholars who are famous for fairy tales like "Hansel and Gretel" and "Cinderella," wrote a version of it in the 1400s. Their story "Der Judenstein" (The Jewry Stone) is about a father who sells his son to Jews, who kill the boy in a ritualistic fashion, tying the boy to a stone wheel and draining his blood The blood libel has been authorized by Pope Sixtus V, who in 1588 gave official recognition to the martyrdom of Simon of Trent, allegedly tortured and murdered by Jews a hundred years earlier. To this day there are people who, like the Russian peasants in *The Fixer,* swear that Jewish people put the blood of young Christian boys into the Passover matzos, citing the longevity of the blood libel as proof that it is true.

Mendel Beilis

The story of Yakov Bok is almost identical to the story of Mendel Beilis (also "Beiliss"), a bookkeeper in a brick factory in Kiev who was arrested in 1911 for suspicion of killing a Christian boy, Andrei Yushinsky. Beilis was held in jail for two years while the government tried to incite public anger against Jews. When Beilis finally did come to trial in October 1913, the jury unanimously declared him not guilty. Unlike Yakov, Beilis had a large family with whom he was reunited upon his release. The Russian government's attempt to distract citizens from the country's economic woes by stirring

up religious conflict backfired, instead inciting international outrage against the government's anti-Semitic stance.

Critical Overview

The Fixer has always been considered Mala-mud's best work by literary critics. Specific arguments, however, have arisen regarding its strong ethnic cultural heritage and the disturbing imagery it presents. In 1965, the year before *The Fixer* was published, Sidney Richman wrote a book-length survey of Malamud's fiction up to that point, in which he examined the author's popularity and growing reputation. Richman experienced the uneasiness that critics often encounter when discussing works by authors with distinct social or religious backgrounds. On the one hand, Richman wanted to separate the literature from Malamud's heritage and discuss it in its own right, but he also acknowledged that doing that would be impossible, that Jewishness was part of the fabric of the author's works.

During the early 1960s, as Richman pointed out, works by Jewish authors were in vogue, with the best-seller lists being topped by works by Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Harvey Swados, Herbert Gold, and others. He applauded the writers, including Malamud, for using Jewishness "to effect an imaginative entry into American literature." If, at the time, many more Jewish writers were making it to the best-seller lists than ever had before, then Richman was right to wonder whether Malamud's popularity was part of an overall trend or fad. However, Richman quickly dismissed this notion in his introduction and went on to offer a serious examination of the themes in each of Malamud's works. As Richman concluded prophetically, "Despite the evidence of his and our senses, he manages to affirm man, to find the vision through which the elusive and enigmatic sense of life's possibilities counters (all reality to the contrary) man's fall from grace."

Critics such as Dorothy Seimen Bilek have pointed out that *The Fixer* is an exception among Malamud's works. While many of his writings deal with characters that retain unassimilated Jewish values and who deal with the Nazi Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s secondhand□through the window of history□*The Fixer* is rare in the immediacy of the horrors it recounts. Despite the difference in setting from Malamud's usual contemporary America, Sheldon J. Hershinow explained that there are many thematic issues that remained the same in *The Fixer.* "Bok is another of Malamud's poor Jews whose life seems to be an unending struggle to make ends meet," he explained. Hershinow went on to take note of a common criticism of the novel□that the characters, except for Yakov, are rather superficial and one dimensional, emphasizing the historical and symbolic over good writing. He agreed with this charge, pointing out as an example the character of Grubeshov, who is so fanatical in his anti-Semitism that he is willing to harm his career to persecute Yakov but at the same time is portrayed as a political opportunist. After recognizing this criticism, Hershinow countered by noting that providing more realistic opponents for Yakov would have made his experience less surreal and, therefore, less terrifying.

Other critics found the situations described in *The Fixer* to be less than compelling, in part because they are so cruel and difficult to experience, even from the distance of a reader's perspective. Whitney Balliet, writing for *The New Yorker* found the constant

abuses of Yakov to be repetitive: "Human misery does not catalogue well," he observed wryly, to which critic Gerald Hoag responded in the *Western Humanities Review,* "If someone had long ago convinced Dostoevsky and some others of that principle, perhaps Malamud would not have found himself nose-to-nose with *The New Yorker* today." Hoag's point was that great writers always used human misery as subject matter, so it gives no reason to dismiss the quality of a work

In fact, the disgusting details of Yakov's ordeal add to what critic Alan Warren Friedman, in *Bernard Malamud and the Critics,* referred to as the "Gothic" strain that could be found throughout Malamud's works. The unappealing nature of life is a fundamental part of the Jewish spirit that Malamud writes about, according to Friedman. In his essay 'The Hero as Schnook," he summarized the relationship between the two. "The universe, the given, is impossibly antithetical to human dignity and worth, and its impoverished creatures struggle gamely to make a go of things."

Today, Malamud is remembered as much for his short stones as for his novels, possibly because his production of short stories stayed strong throughout his life, while his novel production became less frequent. *The Fixer* is still considered atypical for him because of its setting, but it is still among his most respected works, possibly because of the awards that it won. Most readers recognize Malamud's name as the author of *The Natural,* an early novel about baseball that was even more unusual than *The Fixer.* However, people are more aware of *The Natural* as it was successfully adapted into a blockbuster Hollywood movie starring Robert Redford and Glenn Close

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and drama at Oakton Community College. In the following essay, he examines how the aspects of identity and responsibility inherent in parenthood are implied throughout The Fixer.

"Permit me to ask, Yakov Shepsovitch, are you a father"'

"With all my heart."

"Then you can imagine our anguish," sighed the sad-eyed Tsar

This exchange, coming at the end of Bernard Malamud's most harrowing novel, *The Fixer,* represents a staple in the articles of faith followed by fiction writers: that the truth one feels is more significant than the sum total of what has gone on in life. Yakov Bok is charged with the mutilation of a twelve-year-old boy, a charge that the Tsar's government hopes will create social unrest between Christians and Jews and distract them all from the government's near collapse In actuality, Bok has no children. Nor does he have any reason to lie and say that he has. This discussion takes place during a fantasy en route to the court date that will decide his fate, after two years of pointless abuse and humiliation. If we assume that he has no reason to answer other man truthfully in his fantasy, and that he is not mistaken about offspring (a subject that is so close to his heart throughout the book that he surely would remember), then we have to conclude that he is telling the truth; if not the literal truth, then a psychological truth.

There are other moments that shine throughout the final chapters of *The Fixer,* that leap out at the reader, that suggest themselves as the Key to What All of This Suffering Has Been For. There is the sacrifice that Kogin the guard makes, for instance, putting his life on the line when he cannot witness any more torture, or Yakov defiantly throwing his filthy undershirt in the nameless Deputy Warden's face, or his exclamations in praise of liberty and revolution and "Death to the anti-Semites." These are all memorable dramatic moments, satisfying to readers who have spent several hundred pages waiting for something to happen. They all represent changes Yakov has gone through, and that the world had gone through because of him. All of the various dramatic moral twists come together in the question of fatherhood. In this novel, fatherhood represents both identity and responsibility, the two ways of knowledge that Yakov Bok has to accept if he is ever to escape his suffering. Responsibility is every parent's fate: it is in acting as a conduit, of conveying the identity of Judaism from previous generations into the future, that he fails and fails again until his sufferings have finally taught him better.

There is every reason for the thread of Jewish identity to die out with Yakov. Early in his life he learned the lesson that Judaism is trouble for its adherents. His father was killed for being a Jew, during an act of random violence that targeted him for nothing more than his religion Yakov was raised in an orphanage, and, as if the story of his father's death hadn't been enough, experienced one of the periodical frenzies against Jews that swept over the Russian countryside in the late 1800s□a pogrom. Like a mythic hero, he

had emerged from underground after three days, to take in the image of a Jew murdered and humiliated, his body being eaten by a pig. Of course nothing would be sacred for him. He had no religious training□"Torah I had little of and Talmud less," he explains of the orphanage he was raised in□but he was well trained in the social consequences of being a Jew.

One striking aspect of the early chapters of the novel, in Book I before Yakov leaves the shtetl, is the rapport that he has with his father-in-law, Shmuel. "A father-in-law's blood was thicker than water," he thinks regarding the uneven trade of his milking cow for the old man's decrepit horse Still, it is not a blood relationship, but is founded on something that would seem even less substantial: their point of intersection is the wife who ran away from Yakov, and as a result one might expect his relationship to be even worse than an average m-law bond, not better. Yakov lets no opportunity pass to curse Raisl for leaving, and though it plainly hurts Shmuel he continually tries to soften his son-in-law, to make him a more forgiving man and consequently a better Jew, "What she did I won't defend□she hurt me as much as she did you," he tells Yakov. "Even more, when the rabbi says she's now dead my voice agrees, but not my heart ... I've cursed her more than once but I ask God not to listen."

In no small way, Shmuel's relationship with Yakov mirrors the way Shmuel feels about his daughter: they both hurt him, but he absorbs it. It is not his religion that tells him how to accept misfortune, but instead he uses religion as a tool to put up with his lot. It is almost impossible to not see him as a father figure to Yakov, in the way that he frets, cajoles, bickers, pleads, and prays that the fixer will become a better man. When he visits Yakov in jail, though, his message is rejected. At the height of his tribulation, the last thing Yakov wants to hear is that faith will make his misery worthwhile. "Ach, why do you make me talk fairy tales[9]," he asks, rejecting his people's faith while at the same time showing the speech pattern taught him by his culture. In the end, though, Yakov sees the full significance of his responsibility to Shmuel for what he has taught him about himself: "If I must suffer," he thinks, "let it be for Shmuel "

There are minor father figures among the Russians. When Bibikov first interrogates Yakov, he mentions as he is leaving, "I have to hurry now. My boy has a fever. My wife gets frantic." At the time, his domestic concerns might seem small to Yakov, faced with a fabncated murder charge, but in the greater scope of the novel Bibikov's intact family stands out as a healthy concern, especially when he is compared to the Russians who spend their time persecuting Jews. The fact that he mentions this small detail shows the closeness and confidentiality that he feels toward Yakov which, ultimately, is what gets him killed, Lebedev's relationship with his daughter is inverted: he has become, through alcoholism, the child that has to be watched after, to be found in the streets when he doesn't come home, and tucked in when he does, and she in return is promiscuous. Marfa Golov's nightmarish relationship with her young delinquent son, Zhenia. whom she insists was a saint, proves abusive from her own over-sweetened testimony, even without any proof that she was actually involved in his murder. It is the guard Kogin, though, who teaches Yakov the most about the suffering that must be borne in parenthood. Increasingly throughout the story, he expresses his worries about the trouble his son Trofim will get into, a fear that turns out justified when Trofim kills a man

while robbing his house. "He came to an end I had predicted for him. all of a father's love gone for nothing," Kogin tells Yakov. and then he commits his most humane act toward his prisoner, offering him a cigarette. In the end, he takes responsibility for saving Yakov's life, the way he once took responsibility for his son, because he identifies with him: "] know his sorrows,'" he says while defending him.

While *The Fixer* moves upward, from the absent father figures introduced in the first chapter to fathers who accept their children and are willing to suffer for them, there is also a rise in the instances of child-images in Yakov's life. Chronologically, his story starts back even before the incidents that are described in the book. The chain of events is set into motion by his wife Raisl's abandonment of him, once it was determined that they could not conceive a child together. Early in the story, when her father asks him why he quit sleeping with her. he responds, "how long can a man sleep with a barren woman? I got tired of trying." His despair about being childless has led to Raisl leaving in frustration, which makes Yakov himself leave the shtetl. Departing from his religious surroundings gives him the illusion of freedom that makes him walk into the danger of working in an area where Jews are forbidden, which makes him a suspect. Much as he regrets not having children, he is not ready for fatherhood at the beginning of the novel. He is more prepared to be a drifter, lacking identity and lacking responsibilities. He is well suited to excel as a modern urban man, with no family to tether his career, free to excel at his own pace. By going to Kiev instead of sitting around waiting for Raisl to come back or staying anchored within his religious community, he is making the most of his situation.

There are several ironies about his idea that Raisl is barren. First and most obvious is the fact that she is perfectly able to have children, proven by the fact that she becomes pregnant a few months after leaving Yakov. If the arc of events described in the novel springs from the idea that she could never conceive, it is sprung in error. Despair in itself is sad enough, but the despair that Yakov took for granted, the empty future he predicted, is a hoax in itself. Another twist of fate is that the family that would have held them together comes at a time when they can least use it: Yakov is in jail, and Raisl is struggling to make enough to feed herself and her father. Still, with no better reason than a growing sense of moral obligation, Yakov writes out a lie claiming responsibility for the child, an act that comes along with his refusal to lie about the truth of his guilt on a confession. Raisl's child, Chaiml, is Jewish, contrary to what Yakov has always suspected about the man with whom she ran away.

The one image of a child that shows readers that Yakov has come around to the mature sensibilities required by parenthood is the identification he has with the young Cossack soldier who is mutilated outside of his carriage during the chaotic final scene. Yakov notices him, riding on a gray mare, trying to keep the crowd in order, "[a]nd though he had no reason to, he smiled a little at the Cossack for his youth and good looks, and for being, as such things go, a free man, give or take a little." In the next minute, a bomb explodes, and as the smoke clears Yakov sees that the young man's foot has been blown off. As they carry him away Yakov feels empathy for this boy who is everything he is not□young, free, Catholic. He is able to understand the soldier's hurt and confusion, which mirrors his own suffering: "he looked in horror and anguish at

Yakov as though to say, 'What has my foot got to do with it,'" showing a sense of absurdity with which Yakov could certainly identify.

From this experience, Yakov realizes that the fight is not between practitioners of different faiths or classes. He is as responsible for the young Cossack as he would be for his own son, and, when, in his fantasy, the Tsar tries to make himself a sympathetic figure by talking of his own son, Yakov realizes that he has a duty to all those who are suffering because of the privileged class. In his dream, he shoots the Tsar, so that in his reality he can make the world safe for the children of future generations.

Source: David Kelly, m an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following article, Farber evaluates the film version of The Fixer, *finding that it "inherits all of the weaknesses" of the "disastrous" novel that preceded it.*

The movies invariably "discover" a novelist just after he produces his poorest work. Bernard Malamud is a gifted writer, and *The Assistant* seems to me a remarkable achievement, subtly controlled, tartly observed, harrowing, yet a genuinely poetic and compassionate vision of human pain. In *The Fixer* Malamud abandoned a world he knew firsthand to grapple with the Jewish Problem and the indomitabihty of the human spirit: a fictional-ization of the case of Mendel Beilis, a Jew accused of the ritual murder of a child in czarist Russia. The result was a pretty disastrous novel, but a natural for the best-seller list, with just enough pretension for the Pulitzer committee and plenty of lurid thrills for the hungry suburban sadomasochists. The prison scenes in the novel, savored in rancid detail, are as sensational and as revolting as in any piece of porno-violence I can imagine, but since Malamud's reputation had already been secured, sophisticated readers were quite prepared to suffer along with Yakov Bok. Even the novel's tepid liberal sermon about injustice and conscience is a fraud. Ostensibly a protest against hate and prejudice, *The Fixer's* cartoon-simple pageant of Russian sadists and bigots reveals exactly the kind of small-minded stereotyping that it pretends to deplore.

Now John Frankenheimer, one of the most talented American filmmakers working today, has fallen victim to the material. His film of *The Fixer,* though well photographed and well acted, inherits all of the weaknesses of the original. With a little less reverence for Malamud the film *might* have worked. The most interesting element m the novel was the characterization of Yakov Bok, particularly in the opening scenes. (These turn out to be the best scenes in the film too□Alan Bates perfectly captures Bok's timidity and self-deprecating sense of humor.) Malamud had done this character more fully before, and so had Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Bruce Jay Friedman, and other Jewish writers But to film audiences the character of the *schlemiel,* introverted, anxious, masochistic, may still be relatively fresh; only this past year, in Sidney Lumet's underrated *Bye Bye Braverman,* the first half of / *Love You, Alice B. Toklas,* moments of Barbara Streisand's performance in *Funny Girl,* have American movies begun to absorb some of the ethnic inflections of Jewish-American folklore.

But it was not the *schlemiel* hero of *The Fixer* that attracted Frankenheimer to the material. His films almost always deal with extreme forms of degradation, persecution, oppression, whether it is parental oppression in *The Young Stranger* and *All Fall Down,* political oppression in *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seven Days in May,* or weird, inexplicable, almost preternatural oppression in the science fictional *Seconds.* And he has even done one other film about a man in solitary confinement, the excellent *Birdman of Alcatraz.* Frankenheimer is obsessively drawn to the figure of the victim, isolated, utterly defenseless, but struggling desperately to reassert his freedom against monstrous forms of tyranny. To say that there is something paranoid and masochistic in Frankenheimer's temperament is probably true, but those psychological labels do not help to understand his art. The pertinent point is that out of profound personal anxieties,

he has created at least twice□in *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seconds*□brilliant, original filmic nightmares of persecution. I felt that if anyone could salvage *The Fixer,* he could. I was not particularly looking forward to the film, but I thought it might turn out to be the definitive study of man in captivity Instead, it remains a sluggish, morbid, pompous preachment.

The crucial question to be asked about the film, as about the novel: Why was it made[1]? What is the purpose of *lingering* on the suffering of an abused Jew in pre-Revolutionary Russia? This may seem like a naive question; many people assume that the most awesome and uncompromising art concerns man's past barbarisms to his fellow man. I am not so convinced of the automatic relevance of watching the savagery of another era, and I should say that I am just as uneasy about most of the films that treat the Nazi experience: I resent the grim, gratuitous (though visually inventive) Czech film *The Fifth Horseman Is Fear* for essentially the same reasons that I resent *The Fixer.* It is supposed to be bracing to know of the atrocities that men have committed out of fear and hate and ignorance in this twentieth century. But we all do know by now. Does every reminder deserve our respect' Is it unreasonable to ask for some fresh insight, some illumination of our own society, or the human condition, or even the possible explanations for these atrocities? Just to *present* the atrocities is not illuminating.

Some of the best films ever made are historical fictions, but they do find a way of implicating us. Even simple horror films sometimes upset our complacency; *The Fixer,* gruesome as it is, only intensifies it. Audiences do penance for a couple of hours, devoutly acknowledging the wretchedness of the 1910 Russian Jew's existence, and then, cleansed of guilt, return to their newspapers and TV sets as stupefied as ever. The film doesn't connect with their own experience□it's too narrowly about a specific, remote time and place, and at the same time, paradoxically, too "universal", too general. It has no resonances, no aftertaste.

Of course it's easy enough to come up with some ringing statements about what *The Fixer* "really" means, but these probably don't have much to do with the experience of watching the film For *The Fixer,* seizing at the prestigious laurels of High Art, in fact trades on the emotional responses of the very lowest. Who doesn't cringe at the closeup of a swollen, bloody foot or moan when a man is beaten to unconsciousness? Just as instinctively, the audience applauds when Yakov, ever humiliated, manages to score a minor point against his tormentors□identifying the Prosecuting Attorney's nose on a chart of "Jewish noses", or dressing up in prayer shawl and phylacteries to frighten off an idiot priest. The Torture Scene, The Triumph of the Underdog, even, for catharsis, The Martyr Thronged by Cheering Crowds□*The Fixer* is filled with familiar staples of pulp melodrama These are the *easiest* responses a film can attempt, and the fact that *The Fixer* gets them should not be counted in its favor. The pity is that it so rarely tries for more subtle responses.

The screenplay was written by Dalton Trumbo, and it may not be farfetched to perceive an allusion to his own suffering under the notorious Hollywood blacklist of the McCarthy period: the scapegoat, innocent of all crimes, victim of a government's paranoid "international Jewish conspiracy" theory (the words are from the film), imprisoned and

tormented because his ideas are alien. There are some leaden nuggets of political theory□ people are united by hate, not love, and it serves the government's purpose if they hate the Jews rather than the czar□but it makes just as much sense to interpret the film's solemnity as Trumbo's self-pitying identification with the innocent man subjected to monumentally inhuman treatment. This interpretation does not, of course, make the film any more interesting Trumbo, always interested in themes of social significance, may have influenced the film in another, less obvious, but very important way. The express message of *The Fixer* is that Yakov Bok, through his suffering, develops for the first time a social and political conscience, a hitherto unfelt loyalty to the Jewish people, a sense of responsibility to his fellow man As he tells the minister of justice "Something in me has changed. I fear less and hate more.... If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature, it's the lesser evil to destroy the state". His own degradation is supposed to have transformed him from a nonpolitical man into a quiet sort of political revolutionary But at another point late in the film, Yakov's lawyer gushes, "It's a great honor to defend you", and Yakov replies determinedly, "It's just a dirty suffering. There's no honor in it". In fact, this is how the film looks to us□simply one dirty humiliation after another, without honor, without meaning. But then Yakov's passionate, defiant speech to the minister of justice seems incongruous. Is the imprisonment "just a dirty suffering" or is it a semi-heroic endurance that leads to a significant spiritual awakening[1]? The film cannot really play for both cynicism and inspiration. It would be extremely difficult to dramatize an inner conversion, a growth of conscience and political involvement in any film But it is *impossible* when another strain of the film□the desire to make the imprisonment look as dirty and gruesome as possible□is working directly against the conversion story It is easy enough for Trumbo to write a few lines of dialogue in which Yakov *asserts* that a transformation has taken place, but film is a visual medium, and we believe what we see, not what we're told. A novel has an advantage in this respect because it *can* render the workings of consciousness. But the conversion motif was the book's biggest weakness too. Malamud tried to build the sense of Yakov's inner maturation through lengthy passages in which the fixer struggled with Spinoza, History, and Necessity or spoke sociology with a fantasized czar. These were the worst pieces of writing in the novel, because they did not belong to the consciousness of an ignorant handyman but were imposed from without, and written, besides, with all of the gassy awkwardness that usually overwhelms an artist when he wants to prove that he is also a philosopher. These monologues are luckily missing from the film, but nothing is there to replace them. Frankenheimer has been unable to find a way of visualizing an intellectual conversion, and so that conversion seems, as in the novel, merely a sop to the audience□a flimsy rationalization for all of the morbidity. Malamud and Trumbo and Frankenheimer piously raise their eyes to heaven at *The Fixer's* finale; our eyes, unfortunately, are still on the shit on the prison floor.

What destroys the film is that Frankenheimer, fascinated by images of extreme suffering, cannot quite explore that obsession because he is burdened with Malamud's, and Trumbo's, and undoubtedly his own social pretensions. In a strange way I would have more respect for the film if it were a relentless, grotesque, hysterical study of confinement□ in other words, more sadistic□because then the film would be truer to Frankenheimer's personal vision of oppression; and only this kind of intense personal document, even if shrill and overwrought, could unsettle us by touching on the

unspoken terrors that we are share. But the film is too "tasteful", too "responsible" to abandon its flat message about political commitment for fullscale cinema of cruelty. That is *The Fixer* is not quite harrowing enough to involve us deeply, not quite cruel enough to be invigorating; it is just cruel enough, basted with unctuous moral fervor, to be unpleasant and offensive.

I have written about the film at this length partly because I dislike it, but also because I admire Frankenheimer and am concerned about his career. Even in *The Fixer* there are sequences that show unmistakable cinematic talent□the violently edited pogrom at the start of the film, a tense scene in which an old Hassid guiltily, embarrassedly eats a piece of matzo in Yakov's room, the startling cut from dark prison cell to the brightly lit palace of the minister of justice or, later, to the open air of Yakov's village as he escapes in a moment of fantasy. Frankenheimer does beautiful things with editing, and he can make just the sudden appearance of sunlight very moving. But like most American directors, Frankenheimer is at a tremendous disadvantage, in comparison with European directors, because he does not write his own scripts. He is at the mercy of other men's ideas. And he is all too susceptible to the Socially Significant theme, as he has already demonstrated in *The Young Savages* and *Seven Days m May.* The careers of our talented directors are likely to be crippled because they are rarely given complete freedom to explore themes that concern them; they rarely have an opportunity to experiment or to grow. They must buy best-sellers, and work from scripts by men whose concerns may be subtly different from their own. It is little wonder that so many American films are so messy. Of course some of the mess in *The Fixer* can be attributed to Frankenheimer's own uncertainties. It may be a personal desire to imagine the victim's triumph over tyranny that leads him to put so much false emphasis on Yakov Bok's internal transformation. *The Fixer* is not the first of his films to have an uplifting ending. (It may not be irrelevant that his two best films, *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seconds,* are tragedies.) But the commercial system in which American films are made□the stress on properties from other media, the hostility between the Writers Guild and the Directors Guild, the pressure to make large statements that can make millions quiver□places an unnatural burden on the creative artist. Any artist may fail because of his *own* confusions; but the artist-in-Hollywood has to reckon with the confusions of too many other people. *The Fixer* represents a particularly sad example of what the outcome is likely to be.

Source: Stephen Farber, in a review in *Hudson Review,* Vol XXII, 1969, pp. 134-38.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Hicks presents Malamud's The Fixer *as a work containing literary greatness, dealing with a man who suffered injustice and who learned both to endure and to resist.*

If I say, as I am prepared to do, that Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* is one of the finest novels of the postwar period, I don't see how there can be much argument. If, however, I go on to agree with the publishers that it is a "great" novel, I may be in semantic difficulties. Recently I asserted that there is greatness in John Barth's *Giles Goat-boy,* which I believe to be true. Robert Scholes, on the other hand, writing in the *New York Times Book Review,* admitted of no qualification; he said flatly that it is "a great novel." He made a good case, too, but at the end he brought in an argument that I found disturbing. Barth's audience, he said, "must be that same audience whose capacities have been extended and prepared by [James] Joyce, [Marcel] Proust, [Thomas] Mann, and [William] Faulkner." He continued: "For some time we have been wondering what to do with the training given us by those giants of modern fiction, wondering whether we were really meant to expend our hard-earned responsiveness on such estimable but unexciting writers as C. P. Snow and Saul Bellow. The answer now seems clear. The difference between competence and genius can hardly be made clearer. And Barth is a comic genius of the highest order".

Who are the "we" who have been wondering? Mr. Scholes, I gather, and probably other academic critics. This calls to mind what Bellow said in his address to the recent International Congress of the P.E.N. Club. He complained that various critics in university posts had laid hold of the avant-garde heroes of an earlier generation, using their work to set a standard by which contemporary writers could be judged and condemned. In the version I read, in the *Times Book Review,* Bellow's argument wasn't completely clear, but I think I understand at least part of what he was saying. When Scholes calls Snow "estimable but unexciting," I can follow him, for Snow has deliberately adopted old-fashioned techniques, and the wonder is that he has managed to do as much with them as he has. But Bellow has constantly experimented with the form of the novel and has developed a powerful style that is peculiarly his. Bracketing Snow and Bellow tell us nothing about Barth-□though something about Scholes.

What I am saying, of course, is what I have said before that there are more kinds than one of literary merit and even greatness. I think *Giles Goat-Boy* and *The Fixer* are both unusually good and unusually important novels, though they have little in common except their excellence Malamud has told a straightforward story in language of the greatest austerity. Although he began his literary career with a novel based on myth, *The Natural,* and has often introduced elements of fantasy in his short stories, *The Fixer* is realistic in the most precise sense of that term. But the story is told so purely and with such power that it has the large meanings□what some people call the "universal" meanings□of legend.

Malamud tells about a Jewish handyman who was arrested in Kiev in 1911, was charged with having committed a ritual murder, and suffered greatly for more than two years before being tried. To begin with, before I had read the book, I wondered why Malamud should expect his readers to be concerned about what happened to this one Jew half a century ago, in view of what had happened to six million Jews during the Second World War. It did not take me long to realize that Malamud had deliberately set himself this problem. Six million was a figure, but a man was a man. If he could tell this story well enough, he must have decided, this one unprepossessing man, this Yakov Bok, could represent not only the martyrs of Belsen and Auschwitz but all victims of man's inhumanity. We the readers could be made to feel for this one man what we could not possibly feel for the six million.

Malamud has written: "After my last novel I was sniffing for an idea in the direction of injustice on the American scene, partly for obvious reasons□this was a time of revolutionary advances in Negro rights□and partly because I became involved with this theme in a way that sets off my imagination in terms of art." He thought of civil rights workers in the South, of Sacco and Vanzetti, of Dreyfus, of Caryl Chessman, and then he remembered Mendel Beiliss, about whom his father had told him, and something happened. "In *The Fixer,"* he explains, "I use some of his [Mendel Beihss's] experiences, though not, basically, the man, partly because his life came to less than he paid for by his suffering and endurance, and because I had to have room to invent. To his trials in prison I added something of Dreyfus's and Vanzetti's, shaping the whole to suggest the quality of the afflictions of the Jews under Hitler. These I dumped on the head of poor Yakov Bok So a novel that began as an idea concerned with injustice in America today has become one set in Russia fifty years ago, dealing with anti-Semitism there. Injustice is injustice."

Yakov Bok is nobody but Yakov Bok, and he is one of the most fully rendered characters in modern literature. An odd-job man, a Jack-of-all-trades, a fixer, he lives in a small Jewish community near Kiev. His wife, by whom he has had no children, has deserted him, and he finally makes a deal with her father and sets out for the city with the latter's horse and wagon. He is poor, proud, and bitter, with a fine sardonic wit. When his father-in-law tells him that, in going to the city, he is looking for trouble, he replies, "I've never had to look." When his wagon collapses, he asks, "Who invented my life?" Although he has had almost no formal education, he has read Spinoza and tried to understand him, and he calls himself a freethinker.

Even before he has reached Kiev, Yakov has encountered a violently anti-Semitic ferryman, and from the first he feels the hostility of the city. Bitter as he is, however, he has compassion for mankind, and when he sees a drunken Russian dying in the snow, he rescues him even though the man wears the badge of the Jew-hating Black Hundreds. Nikola Maximovitch, though he would exterminate the Jews, is capable of crying over the death of a dog, and he wants to reward his benefactor, whom he does not know to be Jewish. Thus Yakov is given a job, which he badly needs, in a brickyard. Because he is living in a district forbidden to most Jews, he is ill at ease, but he has to have money to live on.

When he is arrested, Yakov assumes that he is to be punished for some minor offense, and it takes him a while to grasp the horrible nature of the charge against him. Only when he is confronted with the witnesses for the prosecution, mostly men and women who are using anti-Semitic prejudice to conceal their own crimes, does he realize that he is the victim of a monstrous conspiracy. And he asks, as who wouldn't, why me?

Because the prosecution's case is so weak, Yakov's trial is postponed for two years, during which time his miseries multiply. Lodged in filth, never adequately fed, bowed down with disease, given little or nothing with which to occupy his mind, systematically tortured by the guards, finally chained to the wall of his cell, he endures such suffering as the reader is loath to contemplate. But Malamud, without sensationalism, without high-pitched emotionalism, makes us feel what we would prefer not to feel. Having himself fully entered into Yakov's ordeals in an extraordinary feat of empathy, he forces us to go at least some distance with him.

One of the ways in which Malamud compels realization of Yakov's suffering is to let him compare present with past. The life in the shtetl, which had once seemed to him poisonously narrow and dull, now takes on an idyllic aspect: "You can smell the grass and the flowers and look at the girls, if one or two happen to be passing by along the road. You can also do a day's work if there's work to do. Today there's a little carpentering job. You work up a sweat sawing wood apart and hammering it together. When it's time to eat you open up your food parcel□not bad The thing about food is to have it when you want it. A hard-boiled egg with a pinch of salt is delicious. Also some sour cream with a cut-up potato. If you dip bread into fresh milk and suck before swallowing, it tastes like a feast .. After all, you're alive and free Even if you're not so free, you think you are".

But later the miseries that made Yakov's pre-Kiev life appear a paradise come to seem a kind of happiness: "Yakov thought how it used to be before he was chained to the wall. He remembered sweeping the floor with the birch broom. He remembered reading Zhitnyak's gospels, and the Old Testament pages.... He thought of being able to urinate without having to call the guards; and of only two searches a day instead of a terrifying six. He thought of lying down on the straw mattress any time he wanted to; but now he could not even lie down on the wooden bed except when they released him to.... Yakov thought he would be glad if things went back to how they had once been He wished he had enjoyed the bit of comfort, in a way of freedom, he had then".

Throughout the days and months and years of pain and despair, Yakov faces two temptations. What the anti-Semites in the government, from Czar Nicholas down, want to prove is that ritual murder is an essential part of the Jewish religion and that therefore all persecutions of the Jews are justified. More than once they promise Yakov that if he will testify that the boy was murdered by Jews for reasons of ritual, he himself will be treated leniently. Although he has never felt close to the Jewish community and has rejected the Jewish faith, he refuses to lend himself to so evil a conspiracy, even when his wife is sent to his cell with a confession for him to sign.

The other temptation is suicide. The idea inevitably occurs to him as soon as he understands the power of the forces drawn up against him. When the one Russian official who has shown a rudimentary sense of decency in his dealings with Yakov is framed because of that fact and sent to Yakov's prison, where he hangs himself, the poor persecuted Jew thinks of following his example. But he realizes that suicide would also be a betrayal of millions of people. "He's half a Jew himself, yet enough of one to protect them After all, he knows the people; and he believes in their right to be Jews and to live in the world like men He is against those who are against them. He will protect them to the extent that he can". "I'll live", he cries out in his cell, "I'll wait, I'll come to my trial".

All that he has endured has strengthened Yakov. Always a thinker in his uneducated way, he has recognized his historic role and, though he laments its being forced on him, he accepts it "We're all in history", he thinks, "that's sure, but some are more than others, Jews more than some". As skeptical as ever about the existence of God, he believes that it is incumbent on men to stand for what they believe. Although in some ways more tolerant, for instance of his wife, he has not become saintly "I'm not the same man I was I fear less and hate more".

The climax of the novel comes in an imaginary dialogue between Yakov and the Czar After describing his own misfortune, the latter says, "Surely it [suffering] has taught you the meaning of mercy"? Yakov replies, "Excuse me, Your Majesty, but what suffering has taught me is the uselessness of suffering, if you don't mind me saying so." He reminds the Czar of his failures as a ruler: "You had your chances and pissed them away. There's no argument against that. It's not easy to twist events by the tail but you might have done something for a better life for us all□for the future of Russia, one might say, but you didn't" While a carriage brings him closer to his trial, Yakov thinks: "As for history, there are ways to reverse it. What the Czar deserves is a bullet in the gut. Better him than us". "One thing I've learned, he thought, there's no such thing as an unpolitical man, especially a Jew. You can't be one without the other, that's clear enough. You can't sit still and see yourself destroyed". There the book ends, and, when one remembers what was in Malamud's mind when it was conceived, rightly ends. Yakov has learned not merely to endure, If I may use William Faulkner's favorite word, but also to resist.

Source: Granville Hicks, "One Man to Stand for Six Million," m *Saturday Review,* September 10, 1966, pp 37-39.

Topics for Further Study

Conduct a trial for Yakov Bok. Elect representatives from your class to play prosecutors, defendants, and witnesses

Some people have asserted that the 1994 murder trial of former football star O. J. Simpson was motivated by racism, making him a representative of blacks in the same way that Bok is made to represent all Jews in this novel. Research the facts of the Simpson trial and make a case for or against this theory

Interview some police officers or prison guards and see how they feel about prisoners who might be innocent. How much sympathy do they feel they are allowed to show the prisoners in their care?

Compile a list of myths and superstitions that people have about others of different races, religions, and classes. What do these ideas tell you about the people who hold them?

Make a chart comparing the rights that Jews had in Tsarist Russia, in Stalin's Soviet Union, and in Nazi Germany.

Research a modern form of the pogroms that the Russians held against Jews, such as the "ethnic cleansing" campaigns in Rwanda, Serbia, or East Timor. Point out the similarities and the differences in the methods used to discredit the oppressed people.

International awareness of the Nazi Holocaust made it possible and necessary for Jews to form their own country in 1948. Report on the Zionist movement, which had fought for a Jewish homeland since 1898, and how that led to the formation of Israel

Compare and Contrast

1913: Tsar Nicholas II, political leader of Russia, follows a policy of persecuting and suppressing Jewish citizens in response to social unrest.

1966: Leonid Brezhnev, premier of the Soviet Union, supports an official propaganda campaign to blame Russian Jews for the country's economic troubles.

Today: With the economies of former Soviet countries unsettled, old questions of ethnic identity lead people to identify themselves with smaller groups and to also demonize other groups.

1913: The American Cancer Society is formed at a time when 9 out of 10 patients diagnosed with cancer are destined to die.

1966: The Surgeon General releases findings that smoking causes cancer, as well as numerous other health problems. Cigarette companies deny this claim.

Today: Although the chances of surviving cancer has improved dramatically since 1913, the number of incidents of cancer has also increased, making it the second leading cause of death in America.

1913: Distraught Russian citizens, upset with the country's backward economy and the government's inability to do something about it, not frequently. The government fuels anti-Semitism in order to keep angry citizens distracted

1966: Race riots blaze across many major American cities, including Cleveland, Chicago, and Atlanta.

Today: Violent displays against social injustice have become rarer in the United States, having been replaced by more sophisticated forms of economic pressures

1913: The Russian government can hold a suspect in custody for as long as it wants without proceeding with a trial.

1966: The U.S. Supreme Court rules in the case of *Miranda v. Arizona* that failure to allow suspects to have a lawyer present dunng questioning violates the Constitutional right against self-Incrimination. At the same time, civil rights abuses are legendary in the secret workings of the Soviet Union's government.

Today: The Soviet Union no longer exists, having given way to more democratic forms of government. Amnesty International is a respected worldwide organization that monitors abuse of political prisoners.

1913: Before the First World War devastated their economies, the countries of Europe were the center of the world's finances

1966: In the middle of the Cold War, the world was defined by the competition between two Super Powers: the United States and the Soviet Union.

Today: Since the Soviet Umon voted to dissolve itself in 1991, the United States is recognized as the world's leading economic and military power.

What Do I Read Next?

Austrian writer Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial,* first published in 1925, set the standard for novels about naive protagonists sucked into a complex, nightmarish legal system Kafka's Joseph K. is so confused about of what he is supposed to be guilty that the term "Kafkaesque" has come to represent impersonal, irrational bureaucracy.

Malamud has described *The Fixer* as a folk tale. Many of his shorter works fit this description. They have been collected in *The Stories of Bernard Malamud,* published by Farrar Straus Giroux in 1983.

Isaac Bashevis Singer was a Polish-born Yiddish writer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. Most of his stories take place in Jewish communities in rural Europe, and, like *The Fixer,* most of Singer's stories were written in a folktale style. Singer's first published novel, *Satan in Goray* (1935), deals with seventeenth-century pogroms in which Jews in Poland were brutally massacred by Cossacks.

The case of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer who was unjustly imprisoned for treason in France from 1894 to 1899, is mentioned in *The Fixer.* Of all that has been written about the case, which has come to be known as "The Dreyfus Affair," it is 'TAccuse," an 1898 letter about the case written by novelist Emile Zola, that has stood the test of time as a great work of literature.

Bernard Malamud's friend Philip Roth is said to have patterned the character E. I. Lonoff, protagonist of his novel *The Ghost Writer,* on Malamud.

Mendel Beilis, the man who was the model for Yakov Bok in this book, published an autobiography of his ordeal in 1926. Originally published as *The Story of My Sufferings,* it is currently available under the title *Scapegoat on Trial.*

Another author, Sholom Aleichem, also wrote a novel based on the Mendel Beihs case, *The Bloody Hoax,* published by the University of Indiana press in 1991

Throughout *The Fixer,* the protagonist refers to his readings of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza's best-known work, his *Ethics,* is available in paperback from Everyman Press.

Further Study

Salo Wittemayer Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets,* MacMillan, 1976.

This highly regarded book is out of print but still on the shelves of many school libraries

Joel Carmichael, *The Satanmng of the Jews- Origin and Development of Mystical Anti-Semitism,* Fromm International, 1993.

This book examines the history behind the attitude that allowed the population of Kiev to be stirred up against Yakov and made them believe that, because of his religion, he would have perpetuated a ritualistic bloodletting.

Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews,* 4th definitive revised edition, T. Yoseloff, 1973

Dubnow is a greatly respected Jewish historian, and this work, originally published in Russian, contains the bulk of his life's work.

Robert Ducharme, *Art and Idea in the Novels of Bernard Malamud- Toward* The Fixer, Mouton Publisher, 1974. One of the most thorough scholarly books written about *The Fixer,* examining it from all possible angles.

Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism,* Harper and Row, 1966.

This book, published the same year as *The Fixer,* is part of a study that was being conducted by the Anti-Defamation League of B'Nai B'nth, a Jewish service organization.

A S. Tager, *The Decay of Czansm The Beihs Trial,* The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1935

This early history of the Mendel Beihs affair was written when the Soviet Union was still young and old bitterness still seethed

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Sheldon J Hershinow, *Bernard Malamud,* Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1980

Gerald Hoag, "Malamud's Trial *The Fixer* and the Critics," *Western Humanities Review,* Winter, 1970, pp 1-12

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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