Malamud's fourth novel, *The Fixer* occupies a special place among Malamud's novels. The themes of suffering and moral development of man that we saw grow in the earlier novels gain maturity in this novel. *The Fixer* images the physical and spiritual history of a Jew terribly caught up in Tsarist anti-Semitism. It presents the ordeal of Yakov Bok, a poor Jewish handyman, falsely accused of the ritual murder of a Christian child. The story is based on an actual court case of 1913 in Kiev. In this episode of Jewish persecution one Mendel Beiliss was accused of having killed a Christian boy for Jewish ritual purposes. Such a situation of false accusation has been faced by many other victims of injustice like Dreyfus, Auschwitz and, for that matter, negroes in White America. In *The Fixer*, the historical facts of the Beiliss case are mythologized and the protagonist, Yakov Bok is presented as a symbol of victimized, suffering mankind. Malamud asserts: "The book has a mythological quality. It has to be treated as a myth, an endless story, more than a case study. A case study couldn't be art.... I'll tell you this: If the book isn't about freedom, I don't know what it is about."¹

In *The Fixer* the dramatic concern of the author is not to relate the details of Yakov's physical suffering for two and a half
years in prison but to trace the process of moral growth in Yakov as engendered by his condition. Yakov undergoes intense physical and mental torture and in the process learns to be spiritually free though physically imprisoned. Malamud has said that his typical protagonist "is someone who fears his fate, is caught up in it, yet manages to outrun it." Thus we see "the crisis of moral consciousness in a pariah who has been forced to think for himself. He is forced out of animal cunning, out of the whimper of the animal to become little by little, a man."3

The theme of injustice and oppression which underlies the entire novel owes its origin to Malamud's unhappy awareness of the increasing persecution of the minorities by those who hypocritically profess to uphold equality and justice. Malamud tells: "After my first novel, I was sniffing for an idea in the direction of injustice on the American scene.... I became involved with the theme in a way that set off my imagination in terms of art."4 Within the novel one of the characters, Bibikov, observes, Society "has not changed in its essentials ... even though we tend loosely to think of civilization as progress"5 and "there's something cursed... about a country where men have owned men as property" (p.156). Such thoughts attest to Malamud's despair at the increasing hatred among fellow beings and the atrocities committed in the name of faith.

In his acceptance address for the National Book Award Malamud got for *The Magic Barrel*, he said: "I'm quite tired of
the colossally deceitful devaluation of man in this day; for whatever explanation: that life is cheap ... fragmented, abbreviated, other directed.... The devaluation exists because he accepts it without protest." It is with this in mind that Malamud has written *The Fixer*. Yakov Bok fights against the destructive forces of life and in the process grows spiritually strong.

Like all Malamud's former heroes we meet Yakov first when he is about to leave the shtetl in search of a new life in Kiev. He begins as every other protagonist does, with arrogance and self-centeredness, yet lost, an orphan who feels that his life so far has been wasted and his opportunities in the shtetl non-existent. Dissatisfied with the limitation of opportunities and possibilities in the confines of the shtetl, Yakov breaks out in quest of better possibilities abroad. He is a man full of wants he feels he will never satisfy in the shtetl. "It's time to get out and take a chance. Change your place change your luck, people say" (p.15), Yakov says; it is luck to gain material prosperity that Yakov seeks. He is sick of living a life of impoverishment and frustration and in Kiev he hopes to make a better living than he has in the past. He wants "a full stomach now and then. A job that pays roubles, not noodles. Even some education...," (p.15) and he "dreamed of good fortune, accomplishment, affluence" (p.25).
As always is the case with Malamud's heroes, Yakov is disillusioned and dissatisfied with his past; "the past was a wound in the head" (p.16). His niggardly existence at the shtetl has left him bitter and disgruntled. For thirty years he says he has had to dig with his finger-nails for a living and all it has amounted to is thirty roubles after selling everything he owns. Opportunity, he feels, is born dead in the shtetl. Thoroughly bitter, he says,

I've been cheated from the start... The shtetl is a prison.... It moulders and the Jews moulder in it. Here we're all prisoners, I don't have to tell you, so it's time to try elsewhere (p.14).

In his desperate search for a new life he rejects his Jewish identity and his God. To Shmuel's admonitions, Yakov, in pride and venom, retorts: "Who forgets who? ... What do I get from him but a bang on the head and a stream of piss in my face. So what's there to be worshipful about? ... Today I want my piece of bread,not in Paradise" (p.19).

Levin in A New Life had grown a beard to hide from his old self. Yakov shaves his off in order to hide from his Jewish identity and from his past. He has seen Jews suffer since childhood; his own father had been killed in a three day Cossack raid while he had lived through the terror and horror of it. It is this inevitable suffering that is associated with Jews that Yakov seeks to escape. As yet, little does he realize that "there is no escape
possible, no rationalization good enough to release him from his obligations to himself, his heritage and through that obligation to others." En route to Kiev, he drops his prayer books into the Dnieper when he meets an anti-Semitic boatman who is voluble in disparagement of the Jews.

Leaving the shtetl, however, does not give Yakov the freedom he seeks. "He thought his spirits would rise once he was out of the shtetl but felt no relief. The fixer was troubled by discontent..." (p.21). At Podol, the Jewish quarter in Kiev, Yakov continues to be a prisoner of his own unhappy self. He wants "better, at least better than he had had, too much of nothing" (p.33). It is through his experience only that Yakov will learn that freedom is of one's own making; what is required is a positive attitude towards life. The same dissatisfactions which make him leave the shtetl make him take up a job in an area forbidden to Jews, under false pretentions. His urge to satisfy his worldly desires makes him seek escape from the "responsibility of identity." He poses as a non-Jew under a new name and hopes that among the goyim his luck might be better; it couldn't be worse he thinks caustically.

H.Levin in the story "Lady of the Lake" wrongly thinks he must discard his Jewish identity in an illusory hope of a brilliant future. He changes his name to Freeman and hopes that with the change he will obtain freedom from his Jewish identity. Such an action in Malamud's world bodes ill. Levin does not even learn
from the many subtle warnings he is given. His denial of his share in a Jew's particular fate loses him Isabella whom he most desires. Isabella is a refugee from Buchenwald and she values her past while Levin seeks "freedom from the pain to which he was born." She will not marry him even when he tries to confess, for it is too late; "the issue is not finally poor Henry Freeman-née Levin's cowardice but his embarrassed avoidance of the history of Jewish suffering." Yakov too has seen the pain of Jewish history that he wants to escape. In Malamud's world to deny one's Jewishness is to deny one's humanity and to deny one's past is to deny the possibility of a fulfilling future. In bitterness Yakov has denied both, his past and his identity, and in doing so sinned against himself. He must accept the inevitability of his fate and thereby transcend it. "The character courageous enough to accept his ignominy without being crushed by it is the true hero of Malamud's opus." Yakov enjoys an illusion of freedom as for the first time he earns enough money for his needs. Yet he is vaguely fearful of what may befall him for his sin against himself. He rationalizes: "After all its only a job, I'm not selling my soul" (p.71), but to no great help. Though physically free he is mentally a prisoner of fears. He flaunts history and yet is fearful of the consequences "I am in history... yet not in it. In a way of speaking I'm far out, it passes me by. Is this good, or is something lacking in my character?" (p.58). Moreover, he fears the calamities that
Sure enough Yakov does get unmasked and his mendacity draws upon him grave punishment. It is an act of kindness that gets Yakov's troubles on foot. Though Yakov is embittered, egoistic and self-serving and he feels he has no charity to spare, we do occasionally see his humane self dominate his baser self. He helps an avowed Anti-Semitic Russian in distress and accepts service under him as a reward. His association with Lebedev involves him in a political situation he wants to avoid under all circumstances. Politics is not in his nature he has said often enough. Yakov's crime is that he lives without disclosing his identity in an area forbidden to Jews. But when a body of a murdered Christian boy is found in the locality he becomes a ready scapegoat for the anti-Semites who accuse him of having conducted ritual murder and with him hold all the Jews guilty of the crime. Yakov is arrested for a crime he is not guilty of and is thrown into prison where he spends years of gruesome, ever-increasing torture and humiliation while awaiting trial. As Robert Ducharme explains, "Yakov's destiny is foreshadowed by his name. Shepsovitch (son of sheep) Bok (goat). Both terms point to his victim status, his role as scapegoat to absorb the hatred of Gentiles for Jews."

One act of kindness sets Yakov on the road to trouble. Another act of kindness seals his fate. He once helps an old
Hasid who had been stoned by young boys. Yakov takes the old man to his room at the brick kiln, tends to his bleeding wounds and keeps him overnight. The bloody rags, the matzo and the orthodox Jew's very presence become the chief testimony against him when within the next few days he is arrested and charged with the crime of ritual murder of Zenia.

Yakov had discarded his religion and his Jewish identity but it is as a Jew that he now has to suffer. He "finds himself in history with a vengeance. His search for a new freedom of opportunity has brought him to the most literal prison in Malamud's work." Yakov despairs at his fate and is very fearful of the fanatical authorities bent upon convicting him for the crime he is not guilty of. His frustrated innocence outrages him. He is unjustly accused and yet unable to give proof or be believed. He curses his fate that condemns him to be a scapegoat. "That he was a Jew, willing or unwilling, was not enough to explain his fate. Remembering his life filled him with hatred for the way things went and were going. I'm a fixer but all my life I've broken more than I fix" (p.96). Why did it have to happen to a poor, half ignorant handy man, he asks himself over and over again. He undergoes "torture by his own instrument—pain of body on deep depression" (p.167). The prison authorities inflict physical torture on him and he creates his own mental anguish by despairing.
Time blew like a steppe wind into an empty future. There was no end; no event, indictment, trial. The waiting withered him. He was worn thin by the struggle to wait, by the knowledge of his innocence against the fact of his imprisonment.... He cried out of the deepest part of him, a narrow pit, but no one appeared or answered, or looked at him or spoke to him, neither friend nor stranger. Nothing changed but his age (p.215).

He feels abandoned and helpless, his torture complete.

However, with the passage of time Yakov begins to face the reality of his situation. His first reaction is self-hatred for his misdoings: "He had stupidly pretended to be somebody he wasn't, hoping it would create 'opportunities,' ... and was paying for learning.... He blamed also egotism and foolish ambition, considering who he was, and promised himself it would be different in the future" (p.68). In Malamud's fiction, repentance is the first step to salvation.

The extremity of the degrading conditions to which he is subjected do not kill his spirit. While physically he is powerless to attain freedom, spiritually he struggles to rise above the binding powers of despair. Once Yakov is able to accept his situation and move beyond self-pity, he refuses to accept victimization. This is what makes Yakov different from Malamud's earlier schlemiel heroes. Unlike them, he never accepts the unjust victimization to which he is subjected; he actively rebels against his persecutors. Yakov's growing maturity of mind is seen in his changing attitude towards the prison authorities. At first he is fearful and conciliatory but as he grows stronger morally he
becomes more resilient. His fear gives way to hatred for the unjust authorities. "Something in myself has changed. I'm not the same man I was. I fear less and hate more" (p.286), Yakov thinks. His dauntless resistance brings upon him increased physical suffering at the prison, but Yakov struggles for his rights and in doing so fights for the rights of the Jews. By insisting on his innocence of the accusation of ritual murder, Yakov insists on the innocence of all Jews of such crimes. Thus Yakov's quest rises above personal concerns to unselfish concern for others.

It is suffering in one way or another which brings him to the knowledge of his role in history. Yakov had tried to make his destiny with happiness and success by discarding his own history and the history of his community because both are full of misfortune and pain. It was an illusory hope, Yakov realizes through experience; history has a way of catching up with the defaulter. "Being born a Jew meant being vulnerable to history, including its worst errors. Accident and history had involved Yakov Bok as he had never dreamed he could be involved" (p.141). Yakov's personal history is linked with the history of his Jewish compatriots. His fate will affect the fate of millions of his brethren. If he is held guilty, so will also all the Jews be considered guilty and pogroms will be conducted all over the country, millions of innocent people would be tortured and murdered. One's choice, Yakov realizes is decisive: "Once you
leave you're out in the open; it rains and snows. It snows history, which means what happens to somebody starts in a web of events outside the personal" (p.281). Yakov realizes the need to take on the responsibility of his race even if it means having to face worse conditions in prison. Yakov is no longer the same person who said that being a Jew is "an everlasting curse" and had defined history as "the world's bad dream."

Yakov's immersion in history causes Malamud to alter his concept of suffering. He recognizes the difference between useless suffering caused by injustice and necessary suffering which is unavoidable. Yakov's suffering becomes meaningful because through it he expresses his oneness with others — the sharing of the Jew's fate. Yakov's suffering is, as Marcus Klein says, "good will and deliberate acknowledgement and acceptance of the common life of man. It is expression of the way in which men are bound together, in their loss." 13

At first Yakov had categorically stated that he suffers for no one except himself, this was when pre-occupied in selfish concerns he felt no communion with his fellow sufferers. But once he himself suffers as a Jew he begins to feel the pain others suffer. He develops a sense of belonging or identity with the persecuted race and he begins to hope his suffering will not have been useless: "Suffering I can gladly live without, I hate the taste of it, but
if I must suffer let it be for something" (p.245). Yakov realizes that no man can isolate himself from history when misused power holds the right to condemn innocent people to death. While at first he had in selfishness stressed his non-political status, "I am not a political person ... Politics is not in my nature" (p.45), Yakov through his own experience of suffering develops a social and political conscience. He now asserts: "One thing I've learned,... 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" (p.299). Yakov enters politics to fight the evil officials who subject innocent Jews and Russians to inhuman tortures. Being a political person means being involved with others, caring for their needs above one's own needs. In The Fixer the "process of moral and spiritual regeneration inevitably entails the transmutation of the private personality into political self." 14 Malamud himself affirms the importance of politics when he says: "Every man must be political or where is your freedom?" 15 However, political involvement entails suffering; Yakov suffers "as a scapegoat so that others will suffer less; he suffers too so that he may learn, so that he may be purged, so that his innocence may be renewed; ... but because he is a man, he can also choose, as Yakov increasingly does, to validate his suffering, to make it meaningful." 16

Yakov has little choice, still it is better than no choice. It is by choice Yakov continues to suffer in prison: "Where there's opposition to reaction there's also regression; but better repression
than public sanction of injustice" (p.278). His tormented life
gains value for on him depend the lives of millions of Jews;
he alone can prove their innocence by proving his own innocence.
"There is, however, no suggestion that the affirmation of human
beings as the embodiment of suffering and struggle implies a
masochistic seeking after suffering."17

Yakov suffers because he is a Jew. It brings to mind
Morris' words:"They /Jews/ suffer because they are Jews ... If
you live you suffer.... I think if a Jew don't suffer for the
Law, he will suffer for nothing." However, Yakov has not this
attitude towards suffering. Yakov has no attachment for Judaism,
so the Law holds no significance for him. He finds no justification
for his suffering in his moral attitude towards life. Even when
he does accept his Jewish identity and the fate of a Jew in history,
Yakov actively resists the suffering imposed upon the Jews.
Suffering is distasteful to him though a necessity in his case.
His attitude is a drastic contrast from Morris Bober's attitude
towards suffering. Morris made himself a victim; Yakov fights
those who try to victimize him. While Morris had the will of
a victim ("no will to speak of"), Yakov rebels against his
oppressors with unyielding determination.

Malamud's changing attitude in exploring the theme of
suffering may be shown by a comparison of Yakov's experiences
with the suffering Morris undergoes. While Morris accepts suffering
as his inevitable fate and he takes pride in knowing how to suffer, Yakov does not submit to suffering, rather he transcends it by adopting an attitude that does not elevate suffering to a position of value. Morris' suffering brings only suffering and has no meaning to it; it is almost a virtue to suffer, Morris believes, for it is a Jew's fate to suffer and as a good Jew he must accept it unquestioningly. Morris grows in nobility by passively accepting his suffering. Yakov, on the other hand, gains dignity by resisting the unjust suffering inflicted upon him. He draws no stoic consolation from the fact that he is a Jew, therefore, designated to suffer so he might as well accept it. Neither does he see any justification in the idea that suffering is God's will that ought not to be questioned. It is this morality of unjust, meaningless suffering which Yakov refuses to accept. Though he suffers like Job, Yakov rejects Job and Job's God. Unlike Job who accepts the Divine Will and suffers all without losing his faith in God, Yakov laments his fate and curses endlessly. Against God, he says in bitterness:

To win a lousy bet with the devil he killed off all the servants and innocent children of Job. For that alone I hate him, not to mention ten thousand pogroms. Ach, why do you make me talk fairy tales? Job is an invention and so is God... Still, whatever reason a man has, he's got to depend on (p.232).

Thus, we see that "the same ordeal which was meant to teach Malamud's earlier heroes to accept their fate is now intended to instruct [Job] to resist it." Yakov wants instantaneous justice;
he finds no consolation in the thought of reward at the end of time. In this aspect he is unlike most Jews who are people of acceptance. Nevertheless, Yakov does show his "Jewish capacity to suffer, to achieve a sort of dignity in suffering as a substitute for success and freedom." Yakov, in spite of his own denials, is a Jew. He refuses to accept his chosen status as a Jew, and yet, his Jewishness lies in his endurance of suffering.

Upto the last Yakov suffers, yet rejects it as a value; "pain is essentially destructive and that to prize such masochism is hideous folly." To his lawyer who says it would be his honour to be in Yakov's place, he answers it is dirty suffering without honour. When the Czar asks: "Surely, it has taught you the meaning of suffering?" 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" (p.298). Although Yakov's suffering has taught him the uselessness of suffering, it has also "toughened his character, and will, stripped him of arrogance and false pride, and increased his compassion and charity, thereby enabling him, as Shmuel has admonished, 'to fix his heart.'"

However, the excessive torture inflicted on Yakov makes Philip Roth declare that the book is "a relentless work of violent pornography." He states:

... I know of no serious authors whose novels have chronicled physical brutality and fleshy mortification in such detail and at such length, and who likewise have taken a single defenseless innocent and constructed almost an entire book out of the relentless violations suffered by that character at the hands of cruel and perverse captors, other than Malamud, the Marquis de Sade and the pseudonymous author of The Story of O."
Philip Roth fails to understand that Malamud's intent is not to catalogue Yakov's ever-increasing torture during his twenty-six months in prison or to eulogize suffering. Malamud believes that suffering, when inevitable, can be made meaningful if endured for the sake of another and if it teaches the protagonist selflessness and responsibility towards others.

It is through suffering that Yakov learns responsibility towards others. While in Malamud's earlier novels the theme of love and responsibility was restricted to the protagonists' own personal circle, with A New Life we see the sphere widening. Levin takes upon himself the responsibility of creating a liberal atmosphere in college, his humanistic ideal is to keep civilization from destroying itself. Yakov, though initially self-centred grows to bear the burden of responsibility for his whole race, in fact of all the suppressed and suffering masses of Russia. Like Levin, Yakov passes from self-love to "love of life, anybody's life." Like Levin, Yakov "finds himself championing a struggle against repressive annihilative forces." Like Levin, as a teacher wants to be a liberator; Yakov's lawyer tells him that he suffers for all. He has realized that "there is no way of keeping the consequences of his death to himself. To the goyim what one Jew is what they all are. If the fixer stands accused of murdering one of their children, so does the rest of the tribe" (p.245). He decides: "He will protect them to the extent that he can. This is
his covenant with himself. If God's not a man he has to be. Therefore, he must endure to the trial and let them confirm his innocence by their lies. He had no future but to hold on, wait it out" (p.246).

This social action of the "hero as proletarian fuses with the regenerative role of the hero as mythic savior." Yakov is a Christ-like character who takes on the suffering of others and becomes a kind of deliverer. He saves others from suffering by undergoing grave suffering himself. Yakov's suffering compares with Christ's passion. The difference lies in the fact that Yakov unwillingly suffers all that Christ has willingly suffered to redeem his fellow beings. Christ had asked forgiveness for those who trespassed against Him; Yakov emphatically states: "I forgive no one" (p.213). He cannot love his enemies like Christ did. Again, unlike Christ who willingly sacrificed his life for his people, Yakov considers himself an accidental choice for the sacrifice. Others consider Yakov a martyr but he considers himself a victim and sees no meaning in his suffering. To him it stinks and yet he suffers to redeem his people.

Yakov feels no emotional involvement with the Jews but when he is offered freedom if he testifies against them, Yakov refuses. "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 live in the world like men. He is against those who are against them" (p.246). In suffering and in despair Yakov is often
tempted to testify against the Jews; the anti-Semitic authorities promise leniency if he does so. Yakov resists the evil temptation for it will condemn innocent people to dire suffering for the sake of his own physical comforts. When through Raisl they offer Yakov "pardon" if he signs the confession which attributes the crimes to his Jewish compatriots, Yakov signs with the statement that every word is a lie. He does not want his freedom at the cost of others' lives. Besides, he wants his freedom as an innocent man, not a pardon for a guilty man.

The anti-Semitic establishment makes all efforts to break his spirit and obtain a confession but when the officials fail to do so, make the prison conditions so unbearable that Yakov is often tempted to commit suicide and thus end all his suffering. He sees no ray of hope for himself when he realizes what a huge fanatical force that is up against him. When Bibikov, the one Russian official who believes in his innocence, commits suicide on being thrown into prison on a false charge, Yakov thinks of following suit. But the realization that if he commits suicide, the Russians will "work up a pogrom in celebration of his death" (p. 245) makes him hesitate. When in a dream sequence Yakov sees Shmuel dead, he grieves and in unselfish concern for a man who loves him exclaims "Live, Shmuel,... live. Let me die for you" (p. 245). Yakov decides to accept his living death in prison so that Shmuel and his fellow Jews may live. He rationalizes, "What do I get by dying, outside of release from pain? What have I earned if a single Jew dies
because I did? Suffering I can gladly live without, I hate the taste of it, but if I must suffer let it be for something. Let it be for Shmuel" (p.245). Yakov has developed a feeling of fraternity with his Jewish compatriots and it shows an affirmation of the values of life and the human spirit. With absolute freedom of choice Yakov chooses a life of imprisonment and suffering. He refuses the false freedom of a pardon because it does not concede that he and his race are innocent of the crime of which they are accused. He does not seek freedom through death either, for that too will not establish his innocence and will impinge upon the innocence of his race. Yakov wants justice for himself and others who suffer with him. "I'll live, I'll wait, I'll come to my trial" (p.247), he decides.

Thus, what the novel "finally affirms, is that the freedom to live, to discover a new life, is not merely the freedom to experience, but also, ironically, the freedom to struggle and the freedom to suffer."25 Such maturity of attitude has been cultivated by Yakov through a slow painful process. As his physical freedom is curtailed degree by degree Yakov's mental attitude becomes more positive. Benevolence replaces bitterness and misery. Though a prisoner of circumstances, he seeks freedom for himself by changing his attitude towards the imprisoning forces. Malamud in an interview said: "I was very much interested in the idea of prison as a source of the self's freedom.... A man has to construct, invent his freedom. Imagination helps. A truly great man or woman extends it for others
in the process of creating his/her own." Such an idea formed out of his experience as a Jew, "a heightened sense of prisoner of history." He added, "I conceive this as the major battle in life, to transcend the self — extend one's realm of freedom." This is exactly what Yakov does. As his physical freedom gets curtailed, he tries to find "true" freedom in thought. Once again he thinks of something beyond his own suffering. "The first indication of his new desire to live is his new interest in food — not for subsistence merely but for the enjoyment of the experience of eating." He has fantasies of sumptuous meals and relishes his meagre meals, "He worked every spoonful of soup over his tongue, each pulpy cabbage bit and thread of meat, taking it in very small sips and swallows, at the end scraping the bowl with his blackened spoon" (p.178). These are moments of freedom from his desperate thoughts of his entrapment in suffering. In his increasing efforts to bring some sort of form and value in his life, Yakov begins to take renewed interest in it. He is once again excited by ideas and he is ready to make the most of his limited freedom. He reads whatever he can lay hands on even if it is a piece of newspaper which is given to clean himself.

Yakov tries to free himself from his miserable state by wilfully creating, in imagination, experiences he would enjoy:

You sink into your thoughts and try to blot out the prison cell. If you're lucky it dissolves and you spend a half-hour out in the open, beyond the doors and walls and the hatred of yourself. If you're not lucky your thoughts can poison you. If you're lucky
and get out to the shtetl you might call on a friend, or if he is out, sit alone on a bench in front of his hut. 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 (p.193).

Thus slowly Yakov frees his thoughts from constant despair and pain. He realizes that the first step to freedom is to come "out in the open beyond doors and walls and the hatred of yourself." Once again he begins to live rather than lead a death-in-life existence as he has been doing in the past. He accepts the physical limitations that his life involves and decides to make the best of the little freedom he still has. "There was cleaning out ashes, and making and lighting the stove. There was the sweeping of the cell to do, urinating in the can, walking back and forth" (p.194). It is ironic that when Yakov had been actually free in the shtetl he had not appreciated his freedom, but now when his freedom is curtailed he learns to value it and his sensibility grows to make the best of it. In imprisonment he finds liberation: "Tormented in solitary confinement, he struggles with his tsarist tormentors, with his Jewish heritage, with his god. Querulous, impotent, quixotic, the minimal hero finally emerges from a prison into which all men are born."\(^\text{28}\)

With his growing integrity of character grows the dignity of Yakov in our eyes. Yakov is helpless but "determined to remain a human being, innocent and unbroken, under conditions specially devided to crush out life and spirit."\(^\text{29}\) Shukhov, the protagonist of One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich has like Yakov been
unjustly imprisoned and made to undergo subhuman treatment and yet, like Yakov, he does not break under the torture. Even eight years of such treatment do not turn him into a jackal; on the contrary the longer he stays at the camp the stronger he makes himself. Like Yakov, he refuses to accommodate with the authorities, not even for his own personal comforts. Moreover, Shukov has learnt to live fully within his limited life. Like Yakov, he learns to relish the few things he has the freedom to do. Shukov can even enjoy the hard labour of building a wall even in desperately cold weather. His joy is at a work well done and it fills him with warmth. Thus, both have learnt to make the best of the little they have and thereby transcend the limitations of their lives.

It is Spinoza who has helped Yakov develop his new spiritual freedom. Yakov confesses: "When I was reading Spinoza I stayed up night after night. I was by now excited by ideas and I tried to collect a few of my own. It was the beginning of a different Yakov" (p.192). The different Yakov is the one who grows in maturity to the extent that he can transcend the reality of his imprisonment. He had said to Raisl (without understanding the meaning of the words himself): "Don't be superstitious.... If you want to be free, first be free in your mind" (p.191). It is only after he gains maturity that he applies this idea for his own good.

Spinoza is to Yakov the same as St.Francis is to Frank. Yakov tries to model his life on the teachings of Spinoza. He
tells Bibikov: "he /Spinoza/ was out to make a free man out himself — as much as one can according to his philosophy, if you understand my meaning — by thinking things through and connecting everything up, if you will go along with that, your honour" (p.71). Frank had spoken of St. Francis in a similar manner and had tried to fashion his life in accordance. Having rejected God, Yakov looks towards Spinoza for the explanation of his situation. "Spinoza does perhaps help Bok to tackle the burden of history — not with applicable percepts but by the example of resistant mental activity." At first, Yakov from his little knowledge of Spinoza is conscious of the fact that freedom is difficult to obtain because of "something called necessity" (p.72). Yakov when still immature in mind, realizes how hard Spinoza's philosophy is to put into practice: "The fixer's thoughts added nothing to his freedom; it was nil. He was imprisoned in a cell.... Necessity freed Spinoza and imprisoned Yakov. Spinoza thought himself into the universe but Yakov's poor thoughts were enclosed in a cell" (pp.187-188). Bibikov reminds Yakov: "He /Spinoza/ also thought man was freer when he participated in the life of society than when he lived in solitude as he himself did. He thought that a free man in society had a positive interest in promoting the happiness and intellectual emancipation of his neighbours" (p.73). Yakov seeks freedom of thought by applying the principles Spinoza employed to escape necessity and by the end does learn (as Frank and Levin had learned) that physical freedom does not give "freedom to feel free" as Levin says. Levin
in *A New Life* also says: "I suddenly knew, as though I was discovering it for the first time that the source of freedom is the human spirit." This is what Yakov learns — to be a free man he must seek inner freedom, freedom from self. Yakov also learns that the purpose of freedom is to create it for others. Bibikov urges Yakov not to "withdraw from the task if he has some small thing to offer," for if he does so it will be at "the risk of diminishing his humanity" (p.157). Thus, what we trace in *The Fixer* is "the imprisonment of Yakov Bok's psychological and moral self... and his gradual emergence from that spiritual confinement."31

With spiritual freedom comes objectivity. He learns to view his experiences dispassionately and rationally. He accepts the irrational forces of the world: "True, the world was the kind it was. The rain put out fires and caused floods. Yet too much had happened that didn't make sense.... Things go badly at a historical moment and go that way, God or no God, forever" (pp.139-140). Yakov finds consolation in Ostrovsky's words that "those who persecute the innocent were themselves never free" (p.232). His attitude towards his Russian persecutors also changes; while at first he had raged in hate against them, he now says "the truth of it is he is in his heart no one's enemy but his own" (p.246). By the end he is mature enough to reflect: "It had happened — he was back to this again — because he was Yakov Bok and had an extraordinary amount
to learn. He had learned, it wasn't easy.... Still, it was better than not knowing. A man had to learn, it was his nature" (pp.282-283).

Yakov succeeds where Levin had failed. Levin, unable to compromise his personal commitments with his social responsibilities, had failed in his social role of teacher as liberator. Yakov, on the other hand, has given top priority to his social role as a redeemer of his downtrodden race and has succeeded in living up to his role. Yakov also succeeds in fulfilling his responsibilities in his personal life and is thus morally the most victorious of Malamud's heroes.

In his private life, Yakov's growing maturity is to be seen in his changing attitude towards his wife who has cuckolded and finally left him. At first he is petty and vindictive towards his unfaithful wife, he curses her with every breath and holds her wholly responsible for their broken marriage. He takes their childlessness as her fault and his humiliation. However, after suffering much he grows in maturity and with time becomes less vehement against her. Her realizes that he too is guilty for the failure of their marriage. His gross neglect of her had forced her to leave him. He had denied love to her in egoistic pre-occupation; he had considered her barren and therefore not worth loving. It is ironic to learn later in the novel that Raisl has had a bastard child thus shattering Yakov's egoism. Once Yakov admits his share of
irresponsibility he no longer feels hatred towards Raisl. He admits: "At first I cursed her like somebody in the Bible curses his whoorish wife.... But now I look at it like this: "She had tied herself to the wrong future" (p.193). When Raisl visits him in prison he is considerate towards her. He not only accepts her, he accepts her bastard child as his own as well. Her tears of repentance move him, he has learned about tears. He tells Raisl, "I've thought about our life from beginning to the end and I can't blame you for more than I blame myself.... What more can I say, Raisl? If I had my life to live over, you'd have less to cry about, so stop crying" (p.259). Thus we see "freedom of the spiritual self is a necessary condition for freedom in a relationship with another."  

Suffering has softened Yakov's embittered heart and taught him compassion. Yakov's willingness to accept his wife and illegitimate child shows his moral growth as it had shown Levin's when he took upon himself the burden of another man's wife and another man's children. When Yakov acknowledges Raisl's child as his own in order to save him from suffering of a stigma in society, he makes his best affirmation. He has become a father of a child not his own and this in Malamud's fiction is a major step in moral development. Raisl says whoever acts the father is the father; Yakov acts the father with all his heart.
Yakov has become a spiritual father only after he learns to accept his own spiritual fathers from whom he learns much. From his spiritual fathers, by their example of responsibility towards their own children and towards Yakov (their adopted son), Yakov learns the "necessity of denying the ego and assuming a responsible role in a larger (familial and political) community." Kogin, Yakov's guard "adopts" him when his own son dies in Siberia so much so that he dies in defence of Yakov. The investigating magistrate, Bibikov, in his whole hearted campaign for Yakov's cause shows a father's care, the same as he shows his own ailing son. He too dies (though indirectly) for Yakov. Shmuel who shows great paternal concern for Yakov, is at first rejected by Yakov. In his first flush of enthusiasm to make a better living for himself, Yakov is scornful of Shmuel's passive acceptance of his impoverished life. "The old man from time to time commented on life without accusing anyone" and because he "had nothing to give so he gave favours, service if possible..." (p.9). Yakov rejects Shmuel and all that he embodies, giving no heed to the good advice the old man has to offer to him. But when Shmuel at great personal risk comes to visit him in the prison Yakov's love for him awakens and when in a nightmare he sees Shmuel dead he grieves intensely. When Yakov eventually discards the thought of suicide and decides to accept his fate to suffer, he prays that his suffering be meaningful — that it be for the sake of Shmuel. Thus slowly Yakov has learned to respond to Shmuel's love and by the end
Shmuel holds the dearest place in his heart. Shmuel's role in his life is similar to Morris' role in Frank's life. Both act as spiritual fathers who help in the moral development of these characters.

Yakov is expected not only to accept his spiritual father but also to destroy the false father — Czar Nicholas. In his last dream sequence Yakov shoots the Czar for he holds him guilty for all the injustice and the suffering in the country: "In you... is missing ... the sort of insight, you might call it, that creates in a man charity, respect for the most miserable. You say you are kind and prove it with pogroms" (pp.298-299). There are ways by which history can be reversed Yakov says for he has come to the conclusion: "You can't sit still and see yourself destroyed.... What is it Spinoza says? If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature it's the lesser evil to destroy it. Death to Anti-Semites! Long live revolution! Long live liberty!" (p.299).

Yakov's shooting of the Czar in his dream sequence stands for the death of the old and impotent king of the waste-land of the mythic world. Now once again the land will be rejuvenated and there will be justice done. Thus Yakov's role is redemptive. By killing the Czar, Yakov gives vitality to the land.

Unlike Malamud's earlier novels Yakov's affirmation at the end is in no way ironic nor does it lie in passive submission to
life. Frank sought a new life in passivity and in suffering. Yakov seeks regeneration by actively revolting against the unjust authorities. In the end we see Yakov on the way to the court for the trial. Whether Yakov is acquitted or sentenced is of little importance, for what Bernard Malamud was interested in was to trace the growth of man in adverse conditions. Yakov's real trial was in prison. Now, whether he will win his physical freedom in the trial at court we do not know but we know he has won spiritual freedom for himself already.

Yakov Bok is Malamud's most fully realized character. He is as Granville Hicks puts it, "one of the most fully rendered characters in modern literature." Bibikov speaks for us when he says: "I respect man for what he has to go through in life, and sometimes for how he does it" (p.157). Yakov indeed earns our respect for the amount he has to suffer for the sake of truth and the way he grows morally strong in his struggle to establish the innocence of his persecuted race.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


Marcus Klein, p.263.


Haskel Frankel, p.39.


Giles B. Gunn, p.31.


24. Ibid., p.60.


32. Ibid., p.150.

33. Robert Ducharme, p.76.

34. Granville Hicks, p.38.