

Freedom and responsibility in the fixer



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* depicts the constant tribulations of Yakov Bok during the pre-Russian Revolutionary era. The plot follows the life of Jewish repairman: Yakov Bok, in finding an occupation that will allow him to venture off into a world of luck, luxuries, and overall better living. However, in the midst of the highest point in his career, life and its ills of corruption and avarice entangle him in the murder of a young Christian boy: Zhenia Golov. As a novel written in a first person-limited writing style, Malamud establishes and surrounds the themes around the changes in Yakov's life, situation, and relationships. In the passage "You think not.... I am a fixer" (184-186), Malamud establishes freedom and responsibility as coexisting and sometimes contradicting elements that aid individuals in alleviating the tolls of a facile society through characterization, mood, and metaphor.

In the novel, Bibikov, the Investigating Magistrate for Cases of Extraordinary Importance is the only character that righteously fulfills his moral and societal responsibilities. Malamud carefully decides Bibikov's profession in order to emphasize not only his importance in the world of Russian Law but in the course of the novel as well. His title not only characterizes him as the Investigating Magistrate, which in itself is already a profession of high importance but further emphasizes the profession and overall importance of the character by adding the title, Cases of Extraordinary Importance. In fact, the role that Bibikov fulfills is of extraordinary importance, as he is the one who establishes not only a moral high ground for Yakov's character but is there to guide him. By characterizing Bibikov in a state of martyrdom after his death, not for religious purposes, but rather for preserving justice, Malamud emphasized the death of Bibikov as the destruction of one of

Yakov's only resorts, the hope of freedom also fades away. Without Bibikov's work and guidance in Yakov's case of extraordinary importance, being Yakov's freedom, it establishes a new goal for Yakov, which is to focus on responsibility rather than freedom to better the lives of others as well as his.

Malamud emphasizes Deputy Warden's antagonistic nature and personality; by emphasizing the connotations behind the characterizations, Malamud associates him. Similar to how the name of Bibikov emphasizes his role in the novel, Deputy Warden's also becomes an important contributor to Yakov's life. In this case, Deputy Warden is the character that encourages and fuels the failures of Yakov in both achieving a sense of freedom and admitting to a crime that he is not responsible for. Since his character is the antagonist of the novel, his characterization characterizes him in a light that exceeds the cruelty of any other antagonistic character. "This time you overreached yourself, Bok. You'll wish you had never laid eyes on this other conspirator. We'll show you what good outside agitation will do. You'll wish you had never been born." (Malamud 262)." Since Deputy Warden's character intertwines all of the negative characteristics of other antagonists, he forms a collective representation and reminder of what Yakov Bok needs to fix or repair in Russia's society. This is because his societal status of a Warden establishes him as not only a Warden of the jail but also a Warden that prevents and destroys Yakov's possibility of freedom and sets new definitions for responsibility. In being an antagonist, Deputy Warden's freedom, and characterization of his power are ultimately futile, because he is a slave to a higher power that will never allow him to achieve the kind of freedom Yakov is still able to obtain. In being reliant on a higher power, due

to the accepting perspective on cruelty, Deputy Warden changes the definitions of responsibility and freedom to achievable goals for Yakov.

Throughout the course of the novel, the mood's somber state remains constant, thus establishing the mood as a metaphor for the continuity of Yakov's misfortunes. The format in which his tribulations present themselves is also very systematic, and therefore static. The continuity of the somber mood, emphasize the difficulty of changing society's unwritten rules. These misfortunes eventually foreshadow Yakov's inability to escape the world that treats him inhumanly due to the lack of both genuine freedom and responsibilities that encourage the individuals to pursue life and goals.

Yakov's title as The Fixer, not only acts as a description of his occupation but also a metaphorical description in the novel. The novel follows his transition from a repairman into the individual that becomes responsible for fixing the ills of society. The Fixer is a metaphor for his work in fixing Russian society. After Bibikov commits suicide, Yakov's thoughts entangle themselves and eventually make Yakov realize that his hopes for his freedom in a literal and emotional sense will never manifest themselves during his lifetime. He realizes that even though he cannot be a repairman, he can be The Fixer in the lives of Jewish individuals, the very people whose religion he questions, but decides to be part of because he knows that the society has no right in treating them. In being the fixer of society, he is able to refrain from blaming Jewish individuals for the absence of God's work in his life. His restoration not only tries to reinstitute morality into the justice system, society's moral values, and Christian actions. His work emphasizes the idea that a society can succeed with tolerance towards religious values.

In a society in which the dominating factor is avarice and the acceptance of this factor is effectively there, it is only the works of individuals that know and often times struggle with the adverse effects that can change the course of society. Yakov, being a character through the course of his life, experiences the gain and the loss of responsibility and freedoms in forms that are meaningless until his final responsibility as the fixer of society, thereby proving freedom and responsibility as the most important factors in creating and restoring a proper functioning in society.