

TRUTH IN HISTORICAL FICTION:  
THE FACTS BEHIND  
BERNARD MALAMUD'S *THE FIXER*

By

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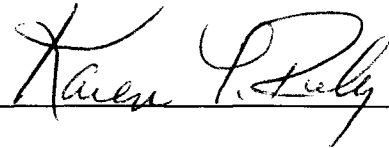
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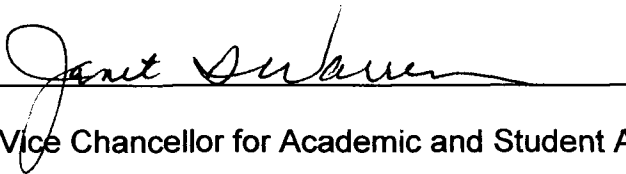
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## INTRODUCTION

Some of the greatest literary works are those known as historical fiction. With their art, authors attempt to make readers feel as though they are present during the action, and readers can imagine, to some extent, life during the given historical period. Because of this feeling, historical fiction can be a valuable tool in helping readers understand how events of the past impacted human lives by enabling them to imagine the feelings of people who lived and suffered through the events and the ordeals. Through the carefully constructed sentences that depict the time period and the dialogue created for the characters, historical fiction writers enable readers to experience, to some extent, how it possibly felt to be in the court of King Phillip of Spain or survive a battle as an American Revolutionary War soldier. While no one claims that the words chosen by the author are the exact words spoken by a historical figure, or the feelings expressed are the precise feelings of any character of the time, they are supposed to be reasonable words or feelings for someone living at that time or someone experiencing that situation. Because historical novels create such a feeling of sympathy or even empathy for the characters, they can be helpful in alerting people to deplorable actions or conditions that deserve condemnation, and they can be effective as calls for change. Many people, for instance, agree that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* influenced many readers to support abolition before the Civil War.

Many novels are called historical fiction, but the best ones are well-researched books containing historical facts that give them greater verisimilitude. *The Fixer*, a Pulitzer-Prize winning novel by Bernard Malamud, is one such book. His book creates for readers the sense of horror they might experience if falsely imprisoned and tortured for a despicable crime only because their ethnic background has made them a suitable target. The central character is Yakov Bok, a poor Jew whose luck goes from bad to worse. After moving to Kiev to begin a new life, he is falsely accused of the ritual torturing and killing of a Christian child in order to use the child's blood to make matzos, the unleavened flat bread eaten by Jews during the Passover, a holiday that commemorates Jewish liberation from Egyptian slavery. He is imprisoned for two years while his accusers literally create their case. To write the book, Malamud had to acquire a solid understanding of the period of time during which his book is set and knowledge of anti-Semitism and the specific propaganda, such as the blood libel, that helps sustain such hatred. In my thesis, I intend to show how Malamud uses facts to create a work of fiction that speaks truth.

What is the information that Malamud used to write his book, and what are the facts? First of all, the plot closely resembles the true story of Menahem Mendel Beilis, a Jew who was falsely charged in 1913 with killing an adolescent boy in Russia, even though all of the evidence in the case pointed directly to shady associates of the boy's mother. Because the book closely follows the details of Beilis's ordeal, some might question the historical fiction label, but there are significant differences between the true story of Mendel Beilis and the

fictional story of Yakov Bok. My thesis is that Malamud based *The Fixer* on a foundation of truth, and the Beilis case provides much of that foundation, but I want to be clear that *The Fixer* is not the story of Mendel Beilis. The central character of *The Fixer* is Yakov Bok, an impoverished young man who is bitter about many hardships he has suffered and continues to suffer. His parents died when he was quite young (in fact, his father was murdered because he was Jewish), Bok has been poor all his life, and he is childless. He believes his wife is sterile, and in response to his bitterness and his cold treatment of her, she has run away with another man. Of course, her flight has only added to his bitterness, and he rails against God for his miserable condition. Mendel Beilis, on the other hand, was the father of five children and had stable employment. In *The Fixer*, Bok has moved into an area of Kiev that is forbidden to Jews and passes himself off as a Latvian Gentile, but the financially successful Beilis had special permission to live in the forbidden district and was well-thought of by his neighbors, from whom he made no secret of his Judaism.

For a novel to be considered historical fiction, a work must, first of all, obviously be fictional, and it must be set during a notable period of history. Because the central character is definitely a creation of Bernard Malamud and because the work is set in Russia during the early 1900s, (actually the period between the 1905 Revolution and the eventual overthrow of the Czar), I consider the historical fiction label applicable. While Malamud was, no doubt, inspired by the story of Mendel Beilis, *The Fixer* is not Mendel Beilis's story. Having wealthy friends and a caring family gave Beilis advantages that Bok does not have in the

book. Many Jews throughout history have not had those advantages, so their stories usually had less positive outcomes. By using the facts behind the Beilis case but providing Bok's character with fewer resources, Malamud can speak to the condition of Jews less fortunate than Beilis, thus making Bok's story more representative of typical cases of anti-Semitism than the atypical Beilis case.

Throughout *The Fixer*, Malamud uses details that portray the condition of Jews in Czarist Russia. In my thesis, to demonstrate how *The Fixer*, although a work of fiction, creates a picture of the anti-Semitism that existed in early twentieth-century Russia and the condition of Jews living there, I will discuss the blood libel and propaganda that emasculates male Jewry or depicts Jews as sexually deviant, the political conditions in Czarist Russia, the attitude of the Czar towards Jews, and the anti-Semitism that existed in Russia during the early 1900s, because all of these issues are woven into the fabric of *The Fixer*. I will also discuss the support the central character receives from both Jews and Gentiles during his ordeal, and, most important, I will do a detailed study of the case that inspired *The Fixer*, comparing and contrasting the actual case and the fictional one. Malamud found that most of the propaganda used against Jews was put into play in Beilis's story. Because *The Fixer* actually began as an idea inspired by the ordeal of Menahem Mendel Beilis, a good place to start with a study of the facts behind the fictional book is with the original case that provided the foundation.

## THE BEILIS CASE AND *THE FIXER*

*The Fixer* begins with the protagonist, Yakov Bok, noticing from the window of his room in the brickyard, where he is the overseer, that an unusually large number of people are rushing in the same direction. His curiosity aroused, he asks and eventually learns that a murdered child's body has been found in a cave near the brickyard. The name of the dead twelve-year-old child is Zhenia Golov. He has died from multiple stab wounds that bled his body white. After the child's funeral, the Black Hundreds, a monarchist, anti-Jewish organization, circulates pamphlets that declare that the child was killed and drained of his blood for the making of Passover matzos.

The story at this point is almost identical to the story of Mendel Beilis. There are, however, some minor differences. Although Beilis looked out a window that faced the desk where he had worked as overseer for over fourteen years and saw the sight described in Malamud's book, Bok looks out a window over the brickyard where he has lived for only five months. Beilis felt his life was in very good order, and he had every reason to feel that his future would be filled with "peace and happiness" (Beilis 32). Bok, however, lives in an almost constant state of unease. He has recently come to Kiev to start his life over after his unfaithful wife, Raisl, has left their childless marriage, and he is convinced that God has forgotten him. He rails, "What do I get from him but a bang on the head and a stream of piss in my face" (Malamud 17).

Beilis was well-known in the area of Kiev where he lived as “the Jew with the beard,” and he legally lived outside the Pale of Settlement, the area to which Jews had been restricted to live since the reign of Catherine the Great. Beilis had been granted special permission to live outside the Pale because his employer, Jonah Zaitsev, was one of the wealthiest men in Russia. Beilis’s cousin ran a hospital funded by Zaitsev. Zaitsev bought a brickyard solely for the purpose of funding the hospital, and, not knowing anything about the business of making bricks, he needed someone to run it. Beilis’s cousin recommended Beilis to Zaitsev.

Beilis was well-liked by the Christians who knew him, and in 1905 the local priest had insisted that a guard be provided to Beilis during a period when pogroms were frequent. Beilis felt that God had been good to him. He had a good job, friends, and a happy family. One of his sons had even been able to attend a government school. As already stated, Bok passes himself off as a Latvian to live in the restricted area. He is uncomfortable with his position at the brickyard. The job is practically forced on him by a member of the Black Hundreds whom he has found passed out drunk in the snow. The job is Nikolai Lebedev’s way of rewarding Bok for his help, but it is a reward that serves Lebedev, too. He cannot stay at the brickyard, and he knows the employees are stealing from him. He needs Bok to live there above the stable to keep an eye on the employees.

The men whom Bok supervises resent the fact that he will not overlook their incessant stealing, and he is fearful that his ethnic identity will be



discovered, for it is illegal for him to live in the district. As stated earlier, Malamud wanted Bok to grow emotionally from his ordeal, so the character cannot be a man with every reason to expect peace and happiness. His character needs to be representative of the many thousands of poor and persecuted Jews, but while the central character is significantly changed, the situation that Bok finds himself in is much the same as the one Mendel Beilis awoke one morning to face.

Malamud faced the task of placing pertinent facts into his story, but he had to trim down the cast of characters in Beilis's history to make the book more manageable. The murder victim in the Beilis case was a child named Andryusha Yushchinsky, known to friends and family as Andrei. The name of the twelve-year-old child in *The Fixer*, Zhenia, was the name of Andryusha's friend. Zhenya Cheberyak was the son of the woman, Vera Cheberyak, who was most likely behind the death of Andryusha. In *The Fixer*, there is no Zhenya or Vera Cheberyak because the evidence points to Zhenia Golov's mother, Marfa, as being responsible for her own son's death, or at least involved in the cover-up. She is the fence for a dangerous gang of thieves, as Vera was in reality. Malamud fused the two women and therefore had to fuse Zhenia and Andryusha, but in reality, Zhenya Cheberyak also met a tragic end connected with the conspiracy to convict Mendel Beilis.

Officially, Zhenya Cheberyak died of dysentery, but his death as well as his sister's came after his mother brought him home from the hospital against his doctor's advice, and this circumstance, coupled with the fact that he objected to

the stories that his mother insisted he tell about encounters with Mendel Beilis, makes his death very suspicious.

The character Bibikov, the Investigating Magistrate in *The Fixer*, is also a composite of two people who played roles in Beilis's ordeal. Bibikov believes Bok is innocent, and is quite sure that Marfa Golov is behind her son's death. He assures Bok that it is actually the prosecuting attorney who ordered Bok's imprisonment (Malamud 166). Later, because he continues to pursue evidence to prove Bok's innocence, Bibikov is falsely accused of embezzlement and imprisoned himself, quite close to Bok's cell. After several days of attempting to communicate with Bok, he either commits suicide or is murdered (180). Vasili Fenenko was the Investigating Attorney who assured Beilis that State Prosecutor N. Chaplinsky was pushing for Beilis's arrest, but it was Inspector Nikolai Krasovsky who was accused of embezzlement to prevent his investigation of Cheberyak's gang. Fortunately, neither of these men died before the trial, as the fictional Bibikov does in *The Fixer*, and both were able to testify in court on Beilis's behalf.

To include information that emphasizes the absurdity of blood libel charges, Malamud used a different technique. A man who shared Beilis's cell was summoned to talk to the warden and the district attorney because they hoped to get him to spy on Beilis. When he returned to the cell, he was laughing, so Beilis persuaded him to tell what had transpired in the meeting. Beilis's cellmate told him that he informed the warden and district attorney that he had grown up from the age of six in a Jewish home. An orphan, his relatives had

apprenticed him to a Jewish locksmith. From the locksmith's family, he learned the Jewish customs, including the restriction against the consumption of blood. He told the prosecuting attorney that the family would not eat an egg if it had a spot of blood in it. He had learned that meat was salted to draw out all the blood. He finished by saying, "when they tell me that Beilis has murdered a Christian child to use his blood, I, as a Christian who believes in the cross, can tell you that all these stories are a set of despicable lies" (Beilis 83). Malamud used this information in Bok's rebuttal to Father Anastasy when Grubeshov, the prosecuting attorney, takes Bok to the cave where the murdered boy was found. After Father Anastasy describes the alleged uses of Christian blood by Jews, Bok shouts, "How can it be so if the opposite is true?" He then speaks of how his own wife throws out eggs containing even a spot of blood and salts meat to remove all traces of blood (132).

It is also during this trip to the cave that Grubeshov points out the short distance and straight path from the brickyard to the cave, while Bibikov in turn points out that the road is even straighter and shorter from the murdered child's home to the cave (Malamud 130). This is another case of Malamud adapting facts from the Beilis case for his fictional work because it was during the Beilis trial that the jury was taken to the cave, and the lawyer for the prosecution, S. Schmakov, made the comment about the short, straight road from the kiln to the cave, at which time N. B. Karabchevsky, one of Beilis's attorneys, pointed out the shorter, more direct route from Cheberyak's house. Malamud uses the cellmate from Beilis's account himself in *The Fixer* when Bok is beaten because

the prisoners think he is a spy. Once he learns that Bok is the Jew accused of killing a Christian child, the man who beats Bok tells him that he would not have hit him had he known he is a Jew because he had been apprenticed to a Jewish blacksmith as a child (Malamud 152).

Some of the persecutions that Mendel Beilis suffered in prison also find their way into Malamud's book, but for the most part, while no one should downplay the ordeal that Beilis suffered, conditions are much worse for Malamud's fictional character. While Beilis was enroute to the prison and accompanied by guards, he was embraced and affectionately encouraged by a friend, Zakhartchenko, the owner of the house where the Cheberyaks lived. He said, "I myself am a member of the Double-Headed Eagle, but I tell you that the stones of the bridge will crumble and the truth will win out" (Beilis 55). The Association of the Double-Headed Eagle was an organization like The Black Hundreds. It was notoriously anti-Semitic, and like The Black Hundreds, the association instigated pogroms against Jews and possessed considerable political power. The organization was behind the leaflets distributed after Andryusha's funeral. That Zakhartchenko, a member of the Double-Headed Eagle, would embrace and encourage a Jew might seem baffling, but the incident demonstrates that racial or ethnic hatred is for *unknown* members of minority groups. Zakhartchenko knew Mendel Beilis as a person and obviously thought well of him. Zakhartchenko should not have been allowed to touch him, so the act also indicates the great influence the members of the Double-Headed Eagle had at their command: the guards, seeing the badge of the Double-

Headed Eagle on his coat, not only let him embrace Beilis, but afterwards, one of the guards was moved to purchase fruit for Beilis because the Jew would not have had such food to eat in prison.

An incident that happened during the ordeal of Mendel Beilis that made its way into the book, *The Fixer*, is the burning of the stable at the brickyard. This incident, too, shows the high regard felt for Beilis by Christian workers who knew him. In *The Fixer*, Bok does not have this warmth from the men who work with him. Proshko, a foreman at the brickyard who dislikes Bok because the Jew does not let him and the other employees steal from the owner, describes the fire that burned down the stable as unnatural. He claims it is the result of Jewish sorcery, because of the strange way it burned, insinuating that the fire was set by Jews to destroy evidence (Malamud 115).

Beilis's workers told a much different story about the fire that burned down the Beilis house. It is true that the anti-Semitic newspapers claimed that Beilis's relatives had set the fire to destroy evidence, stating as proof of this that the furniture in the house had been removed. The employees said the newspaper stories were not true. They said that the fire broke out at midnight, and they would have died in the flames if they had been asleep. Fortunately, one of the workers had gotten drunk and was so sick that he began to scream, waking everyone else up. Someone noticed smoke, and then fire, coming from the part of the house where the Beilis family was asleep. As one worker said, "If we hadn't rescued the Beilises, they all would have been burned to ashes" (Beilis 160).

The treatment experienced at prison is also different for Bok. Beilis had his hair cut, but Bok does not. The officials in the fictional work want Bok to stand out immediately. Not having his head shaved makes Bok suspicious to his fellow prisoners. His unshaven head causes them to believe that he is an informer placed there to spy on them, which, in turn, causes him to receive a beating from a fellow prisoner. Beilis was also administered a similar beating, apparently a traditional treatment for new inmates called "analysis," which was intended to see if newcomers were informers, but whereas Bok's beating is expected and desired by the prison officials, the man who administered Beilis's beating received one in turn from the guards and a prison official. Then Beilis was moved for his protection. This does not mean that Beilis was treated well in the prison. He was taunted as a child-killer and threatened often. The six daily invasive searches that Bok experiences in *The Fixer* were certainly suggested by the ones to which Beilis was treated. The last search before the trial in *The Fixer*, in which the assistant warden comes back for a second search after the Cossack guard has signed a receipt for the prisoner, differs only slightly from Beilis's account. The main difference between the two incidents is that in *The Fixer*, a sympathetic guard is killed while attempting to protect Bok.

Another way in which Beilis's treatment in reality was somewhat less severe than Bok's was that Beilis was not as isolated. On several occasions, Beilis requested a cellmate to have someone to talk to, and his request was granted by the warden. Bok at one point requests at least to be allowed to keep a cat because he is so lonely. The warden replies that on Bok's rations, they

would both starve or one would eat the other. Bok's existence in prison is as cruel for his loneliness as it is for the physical brutality to which he is subjected. He lives in solitary confinement, and he is denied visitors. His father-in-law manages to bribe his way in to see Bok once, and for this "crime" that Bok's father-in-law commits, the warden orders Bok manacled in his cell, day and night, until just before his trial begins. At another time, the Prosecuting Attorney gives Bok's wife, Raisl, a confession for him to sign, and for this reason alone she is allowed to see him. Her visit is an important point for Bok as part of his spiritual growth because he learns that Raisl is not, after all, sterile. She has given birth to a son, and to prevent her and the child's persecution for the boy's illegitimate birth, Bok writes a letter claiming the boy as his own. In contrast, Beilis was allowed visits from his wife, and in spite of regulations forbidding it, he was even allowed to hold his young and crying son after he appealed to the fatherly feelings of the guards.

In addition to being allowed visits, Beilis was allowed to receive food packages from home once a week, another advantage that Bok does not have. This advantage led to a scare for Beilis that Bok is also subjected to in a more concrete way. During a visit from his attorney, Grigorovich-Barsky, Beilis was asked not to accept food from home anymore because there were stories being circulated by the Black Hundreds that the Jews would poison Beilis to keep him from confessing and "proving" the truth of the blood libel charge, as well as implicating other Jews in the act. Grigorovich-Barsky believed that the Black Hundreds might arrange the poisoning so the case would never be tried, and the

Jews would be blamed for Beilis's death. Though no attempt to poison Beilis was ever made, Beilis decided that if the Black Hundreds wanted him poisoned, they could arrange it in the prison because his food was brought to him separately, not with the other prisoners' food. Malamud uses a poisoning scare in his book, but he has the deputy warden decide on his own to poison Bok in the hope that Bok's sickness will cause him to confess. When Bok becomes sick, he accuses the guards of poisoning him, and the warden replies with the same argument used by the Black Hundreds: Jews were poisoning Bok for fear he would slip up and implicate them or confess. In response to the poisoning scare, Beilis refused food. He did not accept food again until he was allowed to take it from the same bucket from which the other prisoners took their food, rationalizing that no one would poison so many men just to kill one Jew. Beilis's hunger strike worked, and he was allowed to take his food from the "common bucket." In *The Fixer*, Bok also goes on a hunger strike with the result that is he also eventually allowed to take his food from the common bucket.

Malamud also duplicates the tricks played by the anti-Semitic conspirators against Beilis to get him to attempt to communicate with his family through letters. Beilis was not allowed to write to his family, but on two occasions, the temptation was laid before him to have someone deliver letters for him. When he wrote the letters to be delivered to his family, they were instead turned over to the warden, and Beilis was punished. Malamud uses these events in *The Fixer* as well. For his punishment, Beilis was taken to a small and bitterly cold room without so much as a mattress on which to sleep. When he asked for



one, the guard told him that he would see about it the next day, but it would not matter because Beilis would most likely be dead. In contrast, Bok is sent to a small, hot room where he is nearly cooked to death. During his stay in the stifling room, Bibikov comes to see him. In Bibikov's conversation with Bok, Malamud works in more of the truth of the murder case. Bibikov tells Bok that Zhenia's dead body had been kept in the bathtub in the child's home (170). At the Beilis trial, a man who had known Beilis for many years testified that friends of his had to move to the United States for their own safety after the wife discovered Andryusha's dead body in the Cheberyak bathtub (Beilis 156).

Malamud ends Bok's story on the way to his trial, but before he does, he adds another detail from Beilis's ordeal. Bok's carriage is guarded by cavalry on each side. As they make their way through the streets, someone throws a bomb. Bok is unharmed, but one of the young guards loses a foot. Such an event also occurred during the Beilis case, and it shows the passions that were aroused by this infamous trial. Why were people so inflamed by the charges leveled at Mendel Beilis?

Blood libel charges were made against Mendel Beilis during a politically unstable period in Russian history. It was later proven that even the Czar was aware of the conspiracy. This thesis will next turn its focus to the Czar and the political environment in Russia at the time of the Beilis trial to explore how and why the monarchy tried to set up an innocent Jew as a scapegoat.

## THE POLITICAL WORLD OF *THE FIXER*

Mendel Beilis says in the first chapter of his book that “when Czar Nicholas II ascended the Russian throne, the Jews were most hopeful that it would bode well for them. It was rumored that Nicholas had been chastised by his own father, Czar Alexander III on account of his friendliness toward the Jews” (29). The chastisement must have gone very deep into the heart of Nicholas, because it turned out that Nicholas’s ill treatment of the Jews made his own father’s appear kind by comparison.

Nicholas ascended to the throne of a country going through a politically unstable period, which was the direct result of long-term oppression. For his own part, Nicholas increased the oppression significantly. His father had worked diligently to reverse his own father’s reforms. Under Alexander II, some Jews had been allowed to enter universities, and their successes and social advancements had been met with hostility by the Russian people. Upon his ascension to the throne, Alexander III began striving to restore absolute power to the monarchy (Schwartz 19-20). He perceived the Jews as an impediment to this goal, and many historians believe that his solution (which proved to be singularly unsuccessful) to remove this perceived impediment was to cause “one-third of the Jews to assimilate, one-third to emigrate and one-third to perish” (Schwartz 20).

According to Michael Aronson, in his article entitled “The Attitudes of

Russian Officials in the 1880s Toward Jewish Assimilation and Emigration,” Konstantin P. Pobedonostsev, the director general of the Holy Synod and adviser of Alexander III and Nicholas II, was the man generally attributed with making the statement concerning the ultimate purging of Russian Jewry through death, assimilation, and emigration (1). Aronson dismisses the idea that Russian officials deliberately sought the deaths of Jews, but he finds evidence that on various occasions, statements were made by government officials that emigration might be the solution for the desired reduction of Russian Jewry. Prior to 1890, the government pretended merely to tolerate the departure of Jews from Russia, but during the 1890s, the government quit pretending and gave public sanction to Jewish emigration (Aronson 6). Hundreds of thousands of Jews took the cue and departed, many of them coming to the United States.

During Alexander III’s reign, violence against Jews was officially deplored, but in a report dated 1883, the Czar wrote, “very sad, but I see no end to this; these Jews make themselves too repulsive to Russians, and as long as they continue to exploit Christians this hatred will not diminish,” thus revealing his private, deeper feelings (Aronson 3). The fact that he held such feelings could not have been hidden, regardless of his verbal expressions, from those who worked in close association with him, and many of them were known to be anti-Semitic.

Verbally deploring violence against Jews and actually trying to stop it are two very different actions, and the fact is that when Russians did commit violence against Jews, many Jews died as a result -- too often without anyone

taking effective measures to stop the bloodshed or punish the culprits. Michael Aronson says that although Minister of the Interior Nicholas Ignatiev was accused by some writers of supporting anti-Jewish violence, in his official capacity, he publicly condemned all violence, even when it was directed against Jews (Aronson 4). His condemnation did little to help the Jews. Count Dmitrii Tolstoy, Minister of the Interior from 1882 to 1889, however, apparently sincerely wanted to put an end to anti-Jewish violence, so he issued a circular that stated that local officials would be held personally responsible for such outbreaks. The warning was amazingly effective because anti-Jewish violence quickly ended during his administration, proving that there had always been a workable solution to violent anti-Semitic outbreaks if anyone in authority had seriously wanted to find one; therefore, prior to Tolstoy's circular, anti-Jewish violence was sanctioned by the government (Aronson 3-4).

Perhaps it was not Alexander III's intention that anyone should deliberately kill Jews, but he was apparently not opposed to Jews dying. By refusing the emancipation of Russian Jews and forcing them to remain segregated in the Pale of Settlement, many Jews starved simply because of their economic situations. Shari Schwartz contends that the terrible poverty, made even worse by a famine in 1891, and the ruthless treatment from the monarchy, caused many Jews to turn to militancy (21); but in spite of emigration, pogroms and starvation, the goal for ridding Russia of Jews was not realized. In fact, Jewry thrived. By 1900, the number of European Jews had risen from the 1800 figure of less than 2,000,000 to 8,700,000 (Baron 1), while the population of the

Pale of Settlement alone had grown to 5,000,000 by the late 1800s, in spite of death and emigration (Schwartz 19). Their own history of oppression made Jews particularly suited for urban life and as a result, their numbers increased at a higher rate than did their Christian counterparts (Baron 52).

Nicholas II came to power in a country with a huge Jewish population and a peasant population that feared and resented the Jews. The situation was compounded by the fact that some of the Jews were more formidable than they had ever been before. Alexander Orbach describes in his article, "The Jewish People's Group and Jewish Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1906-1914," how beneficiaries of Alexander II's reforms used the education they had been able to obtain to support Jewish interests in the courtroom and in business, while others were drawn to social and welfare matters (Orbach 1). Some of this new breed of Jews became politically active and worked for reform. While some Jews were drawn to the Marxist-based Bund, those who had reaped the benefit of Alexander II's concessions hoped for the democratization of Russia, and, willing to tread carefully as they worked toward that freedom and legal rights, they formed The League for the Attainment of Full Rights for the Jews of Russia (Orbach 3). No wonder Nicholas saw the fast-growing Jewish population as a threat to his monarchy, but education and political activism were not all that made Nicholas's Jewish population seem problematic. Some of the Jews had financial power.

Because Jews had long been restricted from owning land or farming, they had concentrated on commercial activities, with the result being that they were

particularly well-equipped for the transformation from a medieval society to a more modern one. They were, in short, “some of the most effective entrepreneurs of the new period” (Baron 54). Anti-Semitic Russians (as well as other anti-Semitic people around the world) apparently enjoyed being able to despise Jews for their poverty; perhaps there was a psychological comfort in what they considered evidence that Jews were an inferior people. Certainly there was comfort for anti-Semites in thinking that Jewish poverty was proof of God’s displeasure with Judaism. With the increase of Jews who were enjoying success in the business world, this psychological comfort was being lost. Where was the divine punishment for the killers of Christ? Now anti-Semites hated Jews on two levels. They had been accustomed to hating the impoverished Jews, but now they also hated the successful Jews of business, and particularly those who had managed to become quite wealthy. There was no psychological comfort in the knowledge that so many gentiles failed when some Jews found success. For Nicholas, this dissatisfaction on the part of the anti-Semitic population meant more social tension in Russia, but Jewish wealth also brought Jews a certain amount of political influence, as Nicholas was no doubt unhappily aware. It was Nicholas’s misfortune that the peasantry was also tired of the monarchy and its oppression. It was not a good time to be Nicholas II and the Czar of Russia, but he hoped to use the same technique that had worked for other leaders before him (and what worked for Hitler after him). He directed Russian anger at the Jews, and away from the monarchy.

Bernard Malamud knew about the political situation the Czar was facing

and about the poor decisions the Czar made in response to it. In *The Fixer*, the Czar visits Bok's dreams. He tells Bok, "don't envy me my throne. Uneasy lies the et cetera. The Zhidy would do well to understand and stop complaining in a whining tongue. The simple fact is there are too many Jews -- my how you procreate! Why should Russia be burdened with teeming millions of you?" (251). Just as Alexander III's note on the report blamed the Jews for pogroms against them, Bok's nightmare Czar Nicholas says, "You yourselves are to blame for your troubles, and the pogroms of 1905--6 *outside* the Pale of Settlement, mind you, were proof positive . . ." (251). Malamud also has the prosecuting attorney, Grubeshov, tell Bok, "A government has to protect itself from subversion, by force if it can't persuade" (301), thus drawing into his work of fiction the fact that Jewish people were becoming politically active and creating for themselves a voice that challenged the monarchy. The author also depicts for the reader the exodus of the vast number of Jews leaving Russia when attorney Julius Ostrovsky tells Bok, "Rich or poor, those of our brethren who can run out of here are running" (305).

In *The Fixer*, Malamud makes it clear that the Czar is aware of the investigation into the death of the murdered Christian child when he has Chief Prosecutor Grubeshov tell Bok that, "His Majesty has taken an active interest in this case since he read of Zhenia's murder in the newspapers" (221). Historical documents containing evidence were discovered by Alexander Tager that prove the Czar was, in fact, taking an interest in the Beilis case, thus proving the fact behind Malamud's fiction. Malamud does not suggest that Nicholas was aware of

the tampering of evidence in the case, but the author could have done so, for such evidence exists. Malamud depicts only the deliberate blindness on the part of Grubeshov and others to the evidence that points to the real murderers, and Grubeshov's rabid enthusiasm for any shred of anti-Jewish suggestions that come into view. It is clear in Malamud's book that once the unbiased Bibikov is removed from the case, as well as from the world of the living, politically motivated men run the investigation. They reject any possibility of Bok's innocence or the truth that the blood libel is a creation of anti-Semitic minds. These men go to any length to bury evidence that might clear Bok, while fabricating, if necessary, whatever "evidence" it takes to convict him.

Malamud uses a trip to the victim's house to demonstrate the deliberate obtuseness of Grubeshov. Bibikov wants to question why Marfa Golov waited six or seven days to report that her son was missing. Grubeshov dismisses Bibikov's incredulity at her explanation that she was so ill that she could not stir herself, and he wants to return to her stories quickly, which are all of questionable value because they are secondhand in nature. She describes events that she claims Zhenia had told her about, but Bibikov wonders why she has never reported any of them to the police. After she spins her tale of Jews at the brickyard, a bottle of blood on Bok's table, Bok chasing Zhenia and subsequently threatening him, Bibikov again wants to question Marfa. He asks her if it is not true that she receives stolen goods from a gang of thieves, if one of those thieves has been or still is her lover and visits her home, and if she threw carbolic acid into his eyes, permanently blinding him. Grubeshov, as Bibikov's superior in rank, demands



that Bibikov cease his questioning. Grubeshov has no desire to consider the possibility that criminals, especially criminals with grudges, might have had access to Zhenia in his own home, and he does not want any of the assembled listeners in the room to consider it, either (122-127).

Bibikov tells Bok later that he has told the Minister of Justice that all of his evidence points toward Bok's acquittal of Zhenia's murder. The minister replies with a shrug of his shoulders, suggesting to Bibikov that the minister thinks he "had not yet achieved true wisdom" (168). Bibikov proceeds to tell Bok that Grubeshov has demanded an indictment of Bok, and Bibikov has refused to give the prosecutor one. He admits that he will eventually be forced to indict Bok, but he also promises that when that time comes, he will discreetly reveal his own findings to the press and already has intentions of "leaking" some information to certain journalists (168-170). It is after this conversation that Malamud takes liberties with Bibikov's character to make the point that those determined to have a Jew convicted of Zhenia's death are willing to do anything to prevent the truth from coming out. A prisoner is confined in the cell next to Bok's. The prisoner tries to communicate with him through the wall. He and Bok bang on the wall to one another, but they are unable to communicate anything intelligible. Bok awakens one night to moaning from the other cell, and then he hears a smothered cry and the sounds of footsteps in the corridor. The next morning, the guard who delivers Bok's food "forgets" to lock his cell door. Thus, Bok is allowed to find Bibikov's lifeless, hanging body in the neighboring cell (176-180). It is important for Bok to feel that there are powerful forces working against him and

that no one can help him.

Such drastic measures were not taken in the historical case of Mendel Beilis, but there were indeed powerful forces working to convict Mendel Beilis on ritual murder charges. The state prosecutor, N. Chaplinsky, did, in fact, summon Vasili Fenenko, the investigating magistrate, and pressure him to arraign Mendel Beilis. Fenenko refused to do this and told Chaplinsky that he had discovered “the fallacy in the testimonies of witnesses who attempted to implicate Mendel Beiliss [sic]. This fallacy . . . is so evident that there is no ground for an accusation against Beiliss [sic].” Four days after Fenenko refused to arraign Beilis, Chaplinsky made up his mind to order him to proceed with the arraignment (Tager 77).

Chaplinsky took even stronger measures with the supervisor of the Kiev police, Nikolai Krasovsky, than he did with Fenenko. Krasovsky had complained to Investigating Magistrate N. A. Mashkevich that there was too much interference from the “Right” in the case, interference that was preventing the case from progressing smoothly. He claimed that the Right organizations wanted the death of the Yushchinsky boy to be considered a ritual murder case, even though all of the evidence he uncovered showed that the murder was the work of an ordinary band of criminals, carried out for revenge. His candor led to his arrest the next day and imprisonment for a crime he allegedly committed some nine years earlier (Tager 190). Chaplinsky had more to handle in Krasovsky, however, than he fully understood. Krasovsky had an impressive record as an investigator. The Kiev Supreme Court acquitted Krasovsky, who then,

determined to restore his reputation, joined the journalist Brazul-Brushkovsy in pursuing the truth in the Yushchinsky case (133).

In Malamud's novel, the forces that are working against Bok are keeping Nicholas informed, as Grubeshov claims, and this was also true in the historical case of Mendel Beilis. The people involved in trying to convict Bok, just as those who attempted to convict Beilis, did so, if not at the command of the Czar, at least in the hopes of pleasing him. Malamud makes this point in *The Fixer* when Grubeshov tells Bok that he has informed Nicholas that the murderer of Zhenia has been apprehended, and the murderer is a member of a fanatic Jewish group (Malamud 222). Similarly, one month after Prosecutor Chaplinsky used his official position to force Fenenko to arraign Beilis, and Chaplinsky had submitted a report to the Ministry of Justice, he was able to present to Nicholas II a report emphasizing the ritual murder aspect of the Beilis case. In *The Fixer*, Grubeshov taunts Bok that the Czar is pleased to hear his news. No one knows how the Czar responded to Chaplinsky, but it is possible to guess that he was pleased, based on what is known about the Czar.

Malamud wants the reader to understand that, historically, the Czar had reasons for wanting a Jew convicted of such a heinous act. Julius Ostrovsky, Bok's attorney, explains to him that after the Winter Palace Massacre, Nicholas II had reluctantly made concessions to calm political unrest. Immediately there was talk of abolishing the Pale of Settlement, not to mention warning on the part of Rightists that his power was slipping. The Czar had begun taking back the concessions, one by one. Still, there was progress for Jews, and still there was

talk of abolishing the Pale of Settlement. To Nicholas, it must have seemed an act of Providence at such a politically stressful time that a Christian child was found dead, drained of blood (308-309). Ostrovsky suggests that this child was exactly what the monarch thought he needed to prevent a vote on the Pale of Settlement. Grubeshov warns Bok that a guilty verdict will result in a “quarter-million fewer Zhidy [Jews] in the Pale” (301), suggesting that the forces behind Bok’s imprisonment believe that a conviction in the case will transform anti-Semitic sentiments into pogroms.

Malamud’s fictional character, Ostrovsky, is correct about the convenient timing of Zhenia’s death. On February 9, 1911, the Imperial Duma voted 208 to 138 to discuss in committee the abolition of the Pale of Settlement (Rogger 617), and Tager confirms that it was the aim of government officials to stir up anti-Jewish violence. He says, “Czarism was compelled to start a death struggle and to find other means of defense beside the quite powerless bureaucracy and the army . . . . The one way which remained for Czarism in such a situation was the organization of the Black Hundreds and the instigation of pogroms . . .” (5).

There can be no question that Nicholas was anti-Semitic. Even when Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin advised that diminishing of Jewish restrictions would be wise and helped to compile a list of concessions, Nicholas waited two months and then returned the list with a letter that said:

I am returning to you the resolution on the Jewish question without my confirmation . . . . I have thought about this long and hard.

Despite the most convincing of arguments in favor of a positive

decision in this matter, an inner voice keeps insisting more and more that I do not take this decision upon myself. So far, my conscience has not deceived me. Therefore, I intend in this case also to follow its dictates. I know that you too believe that “the heart of the tsar is in God’s hands.” (Rogger 623.)

In this instance, Nicholas should have heeded reason instead of his heart, for his heart probably led him down a path that led ultimately to his own destruction and that of the monarchy. Had he concentrated more on solving the political problems in his country, beginning with lifting the restrictions against the Jews that kept them separate and alien within Russia, instead of trying to redirect the Christian population’s hostility against the scapegoat Jews, he might have been able to retain his crown and his life. Instead, he pursued a course of action motivated by anti-Semitism. Further proof of his hatred of Jews was his reaction when his friend and counselor, Prince V. P. Meshcherskii, advised him to soften his Jewish policies. The Czar told him never to speak to him again on that subject (Rogger 624). Just as the “nightmare Nicholas” blames the Jews in *The Fixer* for the pogroms against them, in a letter to his mother, the Dowager Empress, the Czar Nicholas wrote, “Nine-tenths of the troublemakers are Jews, the people’s whole anger turned against them. That is how the pogroms happened” (Lambroza 294).

Between 1905 and 1916, Nicholas’s government permitted the printing and distribution of over 14 million copies of 3,000 anti-Semitic publications, and it is alleged that he personally contributed over 12 million rubles from his private

fortune for the publication of *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* and other hate literature, thus helping turn anger against the Jews (Lindemann 178-179). No wonder Shlomo Lambroza and others have come to the following conclusion:

The attitudes of Nicholas II and his ministers created a perception among local officials that excesses against Jews were tolerable and condoned, albeit unofficially. It is not surprising then that local governors, police prefects and the gendarmerie hoped to further their own careers by pogroms or that peasants and workers, believing they carried out the tsar's wish, persecuted the Jews of the Pale. (293)

It is not surprising, either, that the local officials ignored evidence against guilty parties in order to indict an innocent man on ritual murder charges. Nor would they have any scruples about bribing witnesses, preventing other witnesses from testifying, or preventing evidence to make its way to the defense team.

Much of what Malamud implies in his book about Czarist bureaucracy conspiring to convict Bok for political reasons was actually proved during Beilis's trial. The "evidence" that was presented in the trial that inspired *The Fixer* was so obviously concocted that not even all the members of the Black Hundreds, who were already prejudiced against Jews, found it credible. The prosecution tried very hard, however, to put together a winning case, and they paid good money for their evidence.

First of all, it was necessary to prove that Yushchinsky's death was a ritual murder if it were to have the desired effect and send angry Russians to the Pale to murder Jews. It was necessary, then, for the wounds to be of the kind that would result from someone placing them where they would supply a sufficient amount of blood, according to what the "experts" said Jews required for their matzos; therefore, the autopsy report needed to state that the wounds were carefully placed to achieve this purpose.

Two autopsies were done, but neither revealed what Chaplinsky wanted. On March 31, 1911, Doctor A. I. Karpinsky did an autopsy, and then on March 26, another was performed by Professor Obolonsky and Anatomist Tufanoff. On March 31, the Kiev Metropolitan, Flavian, sent a report to the Supreme Synod that said, "the official autopsy in the anatomical theatre showed that the murderer cruelly tortured the defenseless victim. After this, on the demand of the State Attorneys, a second autopsy was made on the corpse of Yushchinsky. . . . Both the first and the second autopsies refuted the suppositions of a sexual or ritual motive in the crime" (Samuel 81). These autopsies were not acceptable if the prosecutor wanted to prove his case. This report was therefore concealed from the judges and the jury by the conspirators. Chaplinsky hoped that Obolonsky and Tufanoff might reconsider the autopsy or find new information that would corroborate the ritual nature of the murder, but by the end of 1911, the best they could offer Chaplinsky was the following:

The strongest flow of blood was from the left side around the temple, evidently from an artery; from the wound in the parietal

region which opened the venous sinus; and also from the side of the neck which caused an abundant flow from the veins. It must, therefore, be supposed, that it was most convenient to collect the blood from these wounds, if the blood was really collected from the body of Yustshinsky [sic]. (Tager 43)

While this report was undoubtedly more suitable for his purpose than the first, Chaplinsky was still not satisfied. It was necessary, then, for Chaplinsky to go shopping for someone who could provide him with what he needed. Professor Obolonsky died, giving Chaplinsky an opportunity to replace his “expert” opinion. He found, in Petersburg, Professor D. Kossorotoff, a specialist in forensic medicine. Kossorotoff had no problem declaring that the wounds inflicted on the murdered child were for the purpose of “obtaining the biggest quantity of blood, possibly for some special purpose” (Samuel 83). Kossorotoff was willing to say what Chaplinsky needed him to say, and the government could have his testimony for the price of 4,000 rubles, with one half to be paid up front and the other half to be paid “when his attitude at the trial became known” (Tager 57).

Other experts that the prosecution considered essential to their case included a defrocked priest named Justin Pranaitis, who claimed to be an expert on the Talmud and ritual murder, and a psychiatrist named I. A. Sikorsky, who amazingly was able to look at the wounds of young Yushchinsky and determine that they had been inflicted “for racial vindictiveness” by the “Sons of Jacob against the members of another race” (Tager 48). It was not until Pranaitis was put on the stand that his value as an expert on Judaism was fully revealed.



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When asked, “When did Baba Bathra live and what was her activity?,” this expert could only answer that he did not know, to the amusement of the Jews in the courtroom. Although Baba is Russian for grandmother, the Baba Bathra is a well-known tractate of the Talmud that deals with property laws--something an expert on the Talmud should certainly know (Linneman 188). That Pranaitis was not the expert he professed himself to be was easily revealed by the excellent defense for Mendel Beilis.

Sikorsky was actually shown to be something of a charlatan before he ever made it to the trial. After his expert opinion was published, the government was busy quelling the outpourings of outrage from other professionals who called his “expert opinion” nonsense. The government warned newspapers not to print anything negative about Sikorsky and dissolved medical societies that protested Sikorsky’s conclusions (Tager 52).

When Sikorsky presented his expert opinion in court, it was so obviously unscientific that it appeared more like anti-Semitic propaganda than expert opinion. While the conspiratorial officials in the case publicly defended Sikorsky, and one even referred to him as “This wise old man,” the employees of the Department of Police sent telegrams to Petersburg, saying, “The evidence against Beiliss [sic] is very weak . . . Because of the low level of the personnel of the jury, they will probably find Beiliss [sic] guilty *on account of racial hostility* . . .” (55). Even though Sikorsky’s “scientific opinion” had been denounced by the scientific community as anti-Semitic phlegm, he served his purpose well, for his presence in court had permitted the dissemination of anti-Jewish stories that,

while having nothing to do with the case, fanned the flame of anti-Semitism. That was as much as the prosecution could hope for with the case. One famous criminologist said that historians who read the reports later would wonder why the judge did not make him stop (Tager 54), but the conspirators for Beilis's conviction made sure that Sikorsky was allowed to give his testimony without interruption.

Fedor Boldyreff was chosen to be the judge at the Beilis trial precisely because he was a person of "quite definite right orientation" (Tager 170). He had been the President of a Superior Court in Uman, and his reputation was such that the conspirators for a Beilis conviction could not help but consider him perfect for the job of presiding judge at Beilis's trial. Boldyreff was promoted to President of the Kiev Superior Court, and he proved his suitability to preside over the Beilis case by serving as chairman of the Kiev committee that reviewed complaints and protests during the campaign. By exerting great effort in achieving the election of Right candidates from the city of Kiev and confirming the protests of Governor Girs to exclude some 2000 voters, he convinced Girs that he was the right person to serve on the bench of Beilis's trial.

Boldyreff performed his service to his masters admirably. In his charge to the jury, he did all he could to insure that the members of the jury went to their deliberations with prejudiced thoughts in their head. He warned them that the trial:

touched upon a matter which concerns the existence of the whole Russian people. There are people who drink our blood. There are

many things that have happened here that you must not take into consideration, neither the witnesses who wanted to whitewash Beilis, nor the experts who stated that the Jews do not use Christian blood. And you certainly must not take into the account any of the stories about Vera Tchebiriak's [sic] guilt. You must disregard all this testimony and remember just one thing: a Christian Child has been murdered. It is Mendel Beilis who is accused of this crime, and it is Mendel Beilis who stands before you on the defendant's bench (Beilis 204-205).

Boldyreff's instructions were simple. Ignore anything in Beilis's favor, and accept as fact the perjured testimonies of the prosecution's witnesses and "experts." Boldyreff received his promised reward. He was promoted to President of the Kiev Supreme Appellate Court, and the Czar also expressed his gratitude to the judge with a gold watch (Leikin 219).

The bureaucrats who wanted so badly to insure a guilty verdict against Beilis also had to insure that evidence that might be beneficial to Beilis did not make it into the courtroom. One such piece of evidence was verification of *papal bulls*, official communications from previous popes, repudiating blood libel accusations against Jews. Lord Rothschild of London wrote to the Vatican requesting such verification, and Cardinal Merry del Val, the Secretary of State, was obliged to comply with the request. However, it was necessary that the Cardinal's signature be authenticated by the Russian embassy at the Vatican. D. Nelidov, the Russian ambassador, postponed the authentication until it was

impossible for the verification to arrive before the trial was over. His part in attempting to thwart justice was revealed in a letter in which he bragged that he agreed to transmit the document “provided the word ‘duplicate’ was inscribed on it. When this was done, the copy could no longer have any significance for it could not reach Kiev until after the announcement of the verdict in the Beilis case” (Leikin 224).

Alexander B. Tager searched through Russian documents and recovered the evidence that shows clearly how far Russian bureaucrats and government officials were willing to go to serve their Czar by convicting an innocent man of the blood libel. If Nicholas did not seek a Jewish scapegoat on whom Russians could vent their social and political dissatisfaction, neither did he order an end to the conspiracy. A Soviet text quoted by Hans Rogger claimed that the Beilis affair was not the “creation of some mad, provincial satrap [but] the deed of the whole tsarist government and of the classes on which it was based. It is enough to indicate that the Ministers of the Interior and of Justice, Nicholas Maklakov and I. G. Schcheglovitov, were involved in it [,]. . . that the latter reported on it to the Tsar and, without doubt, received his sanction . . . ” (616). When Nicholas learned that Beilis had been acquitted, he issued the paradoxical statement: “It is certain that there was a ritual murder. But I am happy that Beilis has been acquitted, for he is innocent” (Rogger 622). The Czar could speak with confidence about Beilis’s innocence, knowing the efforts that had gone into framing the innocent Jew, but his statement is curious. If Beilis had been convicted, would he have been *unhappy*? Would knowing Beilis’s innocence

have tarnished the Czar's satisfaction in getting his Jewish scapegoat?

It is strange that Nicholas claimed to be certain that Yushchinsky's death had been a ritual murder. Was he truly so convinced of the blood libel and other propaganda against Jews, or was it merely political expedience? Of course, no one knows the answer to that question; it is only a thought to ponder. Even though it seems strange today that an educated man could have believed such bizarre ideas, Nicholas lived in a different time and place. Nicholas lived in a world where anti-Jewish propaganda abounded, and he had also done his part to disseminate it. The vicious propaganda of ritual murder and the blood libel is the basis of *The Fixer*, so this thesis will explore the origins of this propaganda.

## RITUAL MURDER AND THE BLOOD LIBEL

In times of economic or social unrest, people always try to blame something that they can understand. The process of industrialization upset Russian society and everything the Russian peasantry had ever known, but Jews were an alien presence, and, as already discussed, they were better suited for urban life and a capitalistic society than their Russian Christian counterparts. Over the centuries, they had been forced to adapt to live in cities and learn to survive by their wits and business enterprises. Although Russian Jews certainly did not enjoy easy lives, to uneducated Christian Russians, Jews might have seemed to be surviving remarkably well under the circumstances, while some Jews, such as Mendel Beilis's employer, even attained wealth.

Through no fault of their own, Jews were also separated, for the most part, from the rest of society. The millions of unassimilated Jews were foreign, with different customs and religious beliefs. Russian Christians did not often encounter and interact with Jews on an individual basis. It is not surprising that many of Mendel Beilis's non-Jewish neighbors and co-workers, who came to know him as a man, liked and admired him; but the millions of Jews living in the Pale of Settlement were not given the opportunity to become friends and neighbors with Russian Christians. Confined to the Pale of Settlement since the reign of Catherine the Great, and with their movements restricted, Jews did not interact with other Russians. Russian Christians, however, could tell one another

the stories they had heard about the strangers living in their country, and there was the sense that the Jews were not only strange, but a threat to God-fearing Christians.

The first charge that was ever laid by Christians against Jews was that Jews had murdered Christ. According to the New Testament, on which Christians base their faith, this belief is true. This original complaint against Jews is strange, however, because Christ's ultimate sacrifice was preordained, and without it, there would be no Christian salvation. If Christians believe that they must be saved by the blood of Christ, the blood had to be spilled. Chapter 27 of Matthew in the New Testament tells us: Pilate saith unto them, "What shall I do, then, with Jesus which is called Christ?" They [the Jews] all say unto him, "Let him be crucified." And the governor said, "Why, what evil hath he done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let him be crucified" (Matthew 27:22-23). If the New Testament account is true, the Jews were unwittingly playing their assigned role. Blaming Jews and their descendants for Christ's death means blaming them for Christian salvation, but ironically, Christ's blood flows through the most damaging anti-Jewish propaganda.

As Bibikov explains to Bok in *The Fixer*, pagans of the first century called the early Christians "blood drinkers" and made the same accusations against them that came to be made against Jews later (172). The fictional character Bibikov is speaking the truth, and pagan people did believe that early Christians drank blood, a confusion, as Bibikov explains, caused by observance of the Mass. Bibikov further explains how primitive people believed that blood



possessed extraordinary powers, a statement that David S. Katz also makes in his paper, "Shylock's Gender: Jewish Male Menstruation in Early Modern England." Katz lists many ways that, according to Jewish sources, blood, particularly menstrual blood, can be used, and he adds, "It is not surprising that Jews, like everyone else in medieval and early modern Europe, should be fascinated by the supernatural powers of blood" (452).

According to Katz, many cultures, if indeed not all cultures, shared the belief that menstrual blood could be used in making love potions. It has also been believed to cure the bite of a mad dog, epilepsy, agues, birthmarks, and red spots. Even in German monasteries, menstrual blood was believed to have healing properties, for St. Hildegarde, a Rhineland abbess, wrote that it was a cure for leprosy (444). According to rabbinic lore, an Egyptian Pharaoh stricken with leprosy believed his condition could be cured by the blood of Jewish children, and to obtain this cure, he had 300 children a day slaughtered and drained of their blood so he could bathe in it twice daily (Malkiel 86).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in *The Fixer*, Grubeshov has no desire to listen to allegations about a band of thieves or a grudge-bearing lover who might have wanted to harm Zhenia, yet he listens intently to the words of the charlatan Father Anastasy, a supposed expert on the blood libel, while Anastasy expounds on the Jewish uses of Christian blood. According to Anastasy, Jews use the blood for almost everything, including love potions, well-poisoning, and prolonging their lives (132). Father Anastasy is the fictional equivalent of the "expert" Pranaitis in the Beilis case, and his knowledge is

equally limited.

As Katz explained, many cultures believed that blood, particularly menstrual blood, could be used for love potions and medicinal purposes. Over time, these beliefs transformed into something more threatening and became tools for fueling anti-Semitism. Anastasy's character is the means for displaying how common people could be duped by such nonsense and moved to mob violence. The belief that blood had special medicinal values was not new and therefore was easy for uneducated, common people to accept. Anti-Semitic propaganda only had to build on this foundation. That Jews might put the medicinal powers of blood to sinister uses was easy enough to believe when a priest claiming to be an expert on the subject discoursed on it with confidence and authority. Because Malamud never takes Bok to court in *The Fixer*, Anastasy provided the mechanism to explain the ignorant beliefs that fuel the charges of the blood libel and the way people of Anastasy's ilk could convince others that Jews were a threat to them and their families.

Cecil Roth discusses the origins of the blood accusation in his essay, "The Feast of Purim and the Origins of the Blood Accusation." He connects it in a roundabout way to the past practice of celebrating the Purim holiday with the burning of an effigy of Haman. Haman was a foe of the Jews during the Fourth Century B.C.E. who was outwitted by the beautiful Jew, Esther, with the help of God and Esther's cousin, Mordechai. Haman had plotted to destroy the Jews living in the 127 provinces of Persia, and the victory over this enemy is celebrated with the Feast of Purim. In the past, the celebration could be very

crude, with singing and jesting while the effigy burned, so Roman Emperors Honorius and Theodorus found it necessary to forbid the celebrants from hanging the effigy of Haman on a cross (520). Omitting the cross, the celebration sounds similar to Guy Fawkes Day in England or a pre-football game pep-rally in the United States, neither of which causes dark suspicions or paranoia.

Roth admits, however, that the victim during these celebrations was not always an effigy. A description of an event that occurred in 415 A.D. suggests what might have been a Purim celebration that got out of hand. Roth quotes a fifth-century church historian named Socrates who reported that at a place called Inmestar, the Jews were accustomed to “celebrating certain sports among themselves” with “many foolish acts.” On one occasion, however, the celebrating went beyond foolishness to despicable behavior when they decided to tie a Christian child to a cross. They began with verbal abuse, but eventually in their state of inebriation, they lost all self-control and killed the unfortunate child (522). Obviously, this was not a ritual planned and carried out by some prescription hidden in the *Torah*, but the act of a group of men who committed a cruel and unconscionable act in a state of drunkenness. Roth calls this event the “earliest antecedent for the mediaeval Ritual Murder accusation on record” (522).

In 1191, there was another documented case in which Jews spared an effigy and used a living human being for their “Haman.” It was in Northern France that Jews asked their sovereign, the Countess of Champagne, to be allowed to punish a Christian vassal of the French king. The vassal had killed one of their own. She gave her consent, and the king’s vassal played the part of Haman in

the Purim procession. According to the account (and Roth does not accept the recorded account as the undeniable truth), Jews tied his hands behind his back, placed a crown of thorns on his head, and scourged him through the streets. Augustus, the King of France, heard the story and responded by burning more than eighty Jews at the stake. Only children under the age of thirteen were spared, and they were forced to convert to Christianity. Because, as Roth admits, Augustus might have been chiefly motivated by the desire to assert his authority over the Countess, the account might have undergone some revision to cast the king's actions in a better light (521-522).

It is more than likely that there were other incidents between the years of 415 and 1144 A.D. involving children, but it was the case of William of Norwich in 1144 that began the "continuous history of the Ritual Murder libel" (523). William probably suffered a cataleptic fit and was buried alive by his parents, and then family members accused the Jews in an effort to throw suspicion away from the family. A priest named Godwin, who also happened to be the child's uncle, addressed the Synod and claimed the murder was carried out by the Jews in imitation of the Passion of Christ (523). Godwin, a priest married to the sister of the boy's mother, was apparently the first one to begin laying the blame for the child's death on the Jews. His behavior at the time of the boy's death was somewhat unusual. He opened the child's temporary grave in Thorpe Wood, and though canon law specified that the dead should be buried in their home parishes, Godwin did not take the boy's corpse to a proper resting place. Instead, he did no more than uncover the child's face to identify him, presumably

offered a prayer, and then closed the grave, leaving the child buried there in the wood (McCulloh 734).

According to Thomas of Monmouth, Godwin told the Synod that William's murder was "an outrage which has been done to the whole Christian community," and declared that Jews were "the enemies of the Christian name" (734). The apostate Theobald of Canterbury added the claim that Jews "must sacrifice a Christian in some part of the world to the Most High God in scorn and contempt of Christ" (Roth, "The Feast of Purim" 523). If one remembers the power that the Church had over the lives of people at this time, it is easy to understand how such claims could be accepted as truth.

The parishioners of Norwich had been prepared by Herbert Losinga, the first Bishop of Norwich, to expect ruthless behavior by Jews toward children. He had delivered a sermon on Christmas Day that included the story of a Jewish father who put his son into a heated furnace for having taken communion on Easter with his Christian friends. The mother had to get Christian neighbors to break open the oven. Miraculously, the child was unharmed, and he claimed that he had been protected by the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus (McCulloh 738). A sermon with such anti-Jewish content prepared Christians to accept monstrous stories about Jews as warnings to look to their own safety, and, according to McCulloh, the Bishop treated his flock to another anti-Jewish message on Palm Sunday, which concluded that Christ "humbled himself before the Jews so that he might be crucified by those same Jews" (738). The Jews were relative newcomers to Norwich, probably only settling there ten years or so before

William's death. It is not difficult to see why, after the stirring sermons delivered on holidays, the peasants viewed their neighbors with suspicion.

The case of William of Norwich was followed by the death of Harold of Gloucester in 1168. Reports say that Harold was stolen about February 21 and held captive until March 17, when he was murdered. It is interesting that Harold was held captive for so long without his neighbors descending on the Jews in search of the child, but at least they found his body (Roth, "The Feast of Purim" 523). Neither the case of William nor Harold contains any mention of a blood requirement, but both incidents fell near holidays that supposedly gave them religious significance.

The questions that Cecil Roth raises in his essay, "The Medieval Conception of the Jew," are how could a practice that had been associated with Purim become a charge connected to Passover, and why was the alleged victim almost always a boy? Roth explains that Godwin claimed that William of Norwich's alleged murder took place when it did because of the Christian holiday, not the Jewish holiday. He claimed that the murder was an imitation of the Passion and therefore not connected to Passover. For this reason, according to Godwin's explanation, a girl is not suitable to play the role of Christ, so most victims of ritual murder would, of course, be boys. Roth explains that it was later, after it was noted how closely together that the Christian holiday and the Jewish holiday fell on the calendar, that the two were connected (Roth, "Medieval Conception" 306).

Roth also explains in his essay that, although the terms "ritual murder"

and “blood accusation” are often used interchangeably, they are actually two different conceptions that have merged ( “Medieval Conception” 305). The ritual murder charge involved the practices already described, in which a Christian victim dies, no longer as a scapegoat for Haman, but for Christ. The blood accusation involves obtaining and using Christian blood for some purpose. Usually, but not always, the blood was supposedly obtained by murdering a Christian (305).

The ritual murder charges against Jews did not include the blood accusation until the public was already well-acquainted with the charge of ritual murders. In 1235, a group of Jews were tortured in Fulda, now Hesse Nassau, and forced to confess that they had killed a miller’s five children in order to obtain blood for the purpose of healing (Roth, “The Feast of Purim” 524). As I have already explained, the belief that blood possessed healing properties was not unusual, so the explanation was readily accepted when offered during torture. The Jews were quickly put to death for the crime, but Frederick II ordered an investigation that absolved them of any involvement in the deaths of the children (524); nevertheless, the falsely accused Jews were dead, and blood had been introduced as an ingredient for future charges against members of their faith.

The blood accusation needed something more, however. Since blood’s healing properties were a common belief among people of all races and ethnic backgrounds, there had to be a particular reason, a specifically Jewish need, that explained why Jews would commit an act so monstrous as killing a child.

Necessity is the mother of invention, so when the explanation for the Jewish

need for blood was offered, it was perfect. It even linked the Jewish need for blood to the crucifixion of Christ. The explanation's potential for inciting hatred of Jews could not have been higher.

Matthew 27:25 in the New Testament tells how the Jews cried out, when Pilate washed his hands of Jesus' blood, "Let his blood be on us and on our children." Irven Resnick, in his essay, "The Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses," mentions that Thomas de Cantimpre, a thirteenth-century anatomist, connected this response to the Jewish need for Christian blood. Cantimpre tells how a man respected by the Jews as a prophet warned them that they could only be cured by Christian blood of an affliction that tormented them. According to Cantimpre, the Jews, ever stubborn to reject Christ, deliberately misinterpreted the prophet's meaning to believe he meant *any* Christian, when in fact he was speaking of the blood of Christ in Holy Communion. So, rather than accept Christ and be baptized to participate in Holy Communion, Jews capture an innocent child and drain him of blood, just as Bok is accused of doing in *The Fixer*. What is this affliction that Jews supposedly suffer that sends them out to murder innocent children, this affliction that is supposedly specifically Jewish? The affliction is not so Jewish after all. It is hemorrhoids.

It is incredible, of course, for anyone to suggest that hemorrhoids is a Jewish affliction. Hemorrhoids can afflict anyone, but hemorrhoids is apparently what led to the notion that male Jews menstruated, and that myth about Jews made its way into *The Fixer*. Resnick quotes Hugh of St. Cher's exegesis that



explains the origins of the affliction:

He smote his enemies in their posteriors . . . So too it is (I Sam 5) that mice bubbled up from the earth and the Lord struck Ashdod in the secret place of their buttocks, [the anus?], and the mice gnawed the tumors which protruded from their rectums. It was *everlasting shame* because an infirmity of this type is most vile. And some say that the Jews endure this shame because they suffer a flux of blood as a vengeance for the passion of the Lord, and that is why they are so pale. (251)

This affliction offered much to satisfy the anti-Semitic mind. It offered a seemingly plausible explanation, which some gullible anti-Semites found credible, as to why Jews ritually murdered young Christian children and drained their blood. An additional bonus was that the explanation afflicts Jews with a medical problem referred to as a “bloody flux,” which Hugh was convinced was a punishment from God.

Women are supposedly punished by God for Eve’s transgression in the Garden of Eden, where she willfully disobeyed God by eating of the forbidden fruit. According to Genesis 3:16 of the Bible, God told Eve that he would “multiply thy sorrow and thy conception.” This verse is the Biblical explanation for why women bear children in pain, and therefore it is the explanation for why they have a monthly menstrual cycle. For those who blame Jews for the torture and death of Jesus, it probably seems fitting that Jews should be stricken with a similar affliction.

Many of the explanations that medical science offered as to why women had periods were also applied to explain why Jewish males had hemorrhoids. Hippocrates said that women's bodies were colder than men's bodies, and women were more sedentary (Katz 442). The adjective "sedentary" also appears in Bernard de Gordon's *Lilium Medicinae* (1305), quoted by Katz, describing Jews and explaining why they suffer from hemorrhoids:

The Jews suffer greatly from hemorrhoids for three reasons: first, because they are generally sedentary and therefore the excessive melancholy humours collect; secondly, because they are usually in fear and anxiety and therefore the melancholy blood becomes increased, besides (according to Hippocrates) fear and faint-heartedness, should they last a long time, produce the melancholy humour; and thirdly, it is the divine vengeance against them (as written in PS. 78:66) . . . .(Katz 4)

The "fear" and "faint-heartedness" that Bernard de Gordon attributes to Jews are words also used in descriptions of women during this period and for many centuries later.

The feminine characterization of male Jewry extended to the feminine benefits. Although a bloody flux might be womankind's punishment from God for eating the forbidden fruit, it came to be viewed as a natural mechanism for ridding the female body of excess blood, whereas men were forced to hire the services of doctors and undergo bleeding (Katz 445). A contemporary of Albert the Great, an Englishman known as Bartholomew, saw hemorrhoids in a similar

way. Just as a woman's cycle expelled excess blood, hemorrhoids performed the same service, and for that reason, the condition at least offered what was considered one small benefit (Resnick 254).

In spite of the small advantage that hemorrhoids supposedly offered at a time when medical science incorrectly believed that excess blood caused illness, during the Inquisition, the painful condition was a danger in more ways than the most obvious ones. Circumcision was one way to identify Jews, but what about those Jews who claimed to have accepted Christ but were not sincere, or who had gone back to the religion of their births? Dr. Juan de Quinones had the answer to such a problem:

If any are found to have this flux of blood they should be handed over [to] the Inquisition, since they cannot have ceased to be Jews or apostates. For if they have it they are not baptized, since with baptism it disappears; and if they are baptized and it happens to them each month, they are apostates . . . (Katz 451)

Quinones even believed that bleeding hemorrhoids could identify people with "Hebraic leanings" (451). Quinones was fortunate that this test was not used against him. Katz includes in his essay a quotation from Quinones's own physician, the converted Jew, Isaac Cardoso, who wrote about treating Quinones for the exact ailment that Quinones claimed was the damning mark of either a Jew or a person with Jewish "leanings." According to Cardoso's account, the doctor told Quinones, "Your honour must also be liable in the sin of that death [i.e. of Christ], for we see in you the same affliction, and just as you have written

that the Jews have a tail and blood, you too have the same” (451).

Obviously, as Quinones must have come to realize, having hemorrhoids is not a Jewish identifier; however, in *The Fixer*, it does not seem that the ignorant Russian guards were looking for hemorrhoids when they were watching for Bok to begin his menstrual period; or perhaps they were simply enjoying themselves by taunting him that if his period did not start soon, they would pump the blood out of his penis with a special machine that “sometimes sucked every drop of blood out of the body. It was used exclusively on Jews; only their penises fitted it” (139). Ignorant peasants could certainly have become confused about what orifices passed blood when they were told that Jewish men suffered menstrual periods, and this is yet another example of how stories about Jews were spread, and in the passage, the stories became transformed into utter nonsense.

Nevertheless, the belief that male Jews had menstrual cycles also reflected a vision of Jews, even the males, as feminine; and it was easy enough to move from viewing male Jews as feminine to depicting them as homosexuals. Homosexuality was considered deviant in the early 1900s. There were other forms of sexual deviance that were, and still are, part of the body of propaganda used to inflame the passions of the public against Jews. The next focus of this thesis will be other propaganda that is part of the history that Malamud used to weave fact into the fiction of *The Fixer*.

## THE SEXUALLY ABNORMAL AND DEVIANT

### IMAGE OF THE JEW

In the minds of many anti-Semites, Jewish males are not only likely to be feminine, even homosexuals, but also lascivious. When the conspirators of the Beilis Affair were trying to put together their case against the Jew, one of their first ideas was to insinuate a sexual relationship between Beilis and Cheberyak, the woman whose gang probably killed Andrei. She was well-known in the area as an unwholesome woman, and fencing stolen goods was one of the milder accusations made against her by her neighbors. The conspirators would have liked to couple the Jew with such a woman: "the notorious woman and the Jew, the very good friend who used to visit her" (Samuel 66). The combination was just too unlikely, so the idea was abandoned.

In *The Fixer*, Zinaida Lebedev accuses Bok of attempting to rape her, although she is the one who attempts to seduce him. When Bok denies Zinaida's accusation, Grubeshov is visibly displeased that Bibikov believes him. It is obvious that Grubeshov would like to pursue the accusation further, but Bibikov produces letters that he has recovered, written by Zinaida and her father, that disprove the allegation. In *The Fixer*, Malamud also introduced another form of deviance for an insinuation against Bok that the conspirators never develop. In the novel, Bok receives a letter from Marfa Golov, who writes, she claims, to ask him to confess. She mentions in her letter, however, that she knows:

the sordid part of the story. Zhenia told me about the times you enticed him to come to your room in the stable and there with the promise of bonbons and sweets you got him to open the buttons of his pants and with your hand caused him intense excitement. (245-246)

Bok believes that the letter is meant to make him see how effectively Golov can lie, and Bok is afraid that she can make others believe the falsehood she tells. It is also an attempt to coerce him to confess. The letter is an implied threat that more charges can be added to the charge of ritual murder. In fact, the prosecution later threatens Bok with a phony indictment, alleging sexual molestation of Zhenia before his death. In other words, Grubeshov and his cohorts threaten to charge Bok not only with the child's murder, but also pedophilia.

In his novel, Malamud could use almost any kind of sexual deviance that has ever been dreamed of, because all forms of deviance in the past have been used to stir hatred against Jews. Certainly some Jews might be lascivious, and some might be pedophiles or homosexuals, for such people can be found in any segment of the population. Anti-Semitic propaganda, however, is aimed at all Jews. Such propaganda does not suggest that out of the many Jews, an occasional Jew might exhibit deviant behavior, but that Jews, as a whole, are deviant.

In his essay, "A Ready Hatred: Depictions of the Jewish Woman in Medieval Antisemitic Art and Caricature," Henry Abramson correlates the hatred

of Jews with the hatred of women, but while he focuses primarily on the way women are depicted, the “art” Abramson discusses in his essay is anti-Jewish propaganda that is not gender-specific. He introduces the topic with the statement, “Both Jews and women occupied secondary, often exploited positions in society, both were feared for their connections with the Devil and witchcraft and both were persecuted for various transgressions of the androcentric Christian order” (1). The medieval art to which he refers is a lesson in pictures of how Jews were viewed as sexually dysfunctional, and it runs the range of deviance.

Abramson begins his discussion with the discomfort experienced by Christians with Jesus’ circumcision. Apparently, some people are not comfortable with Jesus’ participation in this Jewish ritual. First of all, the idea that Jesus was circumcised emphasizes his Jewish origins, something many anti-Semitic Christians prefer to forget; but also, circumcision is viewed by some gentiles as a form of emasculation (3). This view of circumcision as emasculation is rich in what it has to offer anti-Semites. There is the belief that Jews were not content to crucify Christ, but even before the crucifixion, they emasculated him. Then, there also existed the awareness that all male Jews underwent this operation; therefore, all Jewish males are emasculated (3). Abramson notes that the alleged victims of ritual murder are almost always small boys, which emphasizes the womanly weakness of the people accused of these murders, Jews; and pedophilia, which is also a frequent accusation against Jews, is also consistent with the image of weak, feminized but oversexed, Jewish males (4).

The medieval art discussed in Abramson's article, however, goes beyond emasculation. The same explanation that was offered as a reason why a Jewish male would experience menstruation -- their colder, feminine natures -- served also as the sixteenth-century explanation for hermaphroditism. A cold nature allowed female characteristics to develop before birth, thus resulting in the birth of hermaphrodites (3-4). Such Jewish hermaphrodites are depicted in a sixteenth-century drawing used as the title page of *Der Juden Erbarkeit (The Decency of the Jews)*. The drawing shows a demon, identified as Jewish by a rouelle on his clothing, with a visible dagger-like erection and grotesque breasts. He is accompanied by the devil and another demon playing a bagpipe while mounted upon a vomiting pig (4-5). The message is clear. The Jew is in league with the devil, and he is sexually abnormal, possessing features of both sexes.

The feminization of Jewry is complete with the personification of Synagogue as a woman. In many of these depictions, she is not only a woman, but a slut. A stain-glass window in Marsburg, Germany, displays Synagogue grasping a ram's head by the horn and directing its mouth toward her genitalia. She is smiling, and the blindfold, symbolic of her blindness, has slipped, showing an eye and thus revealing her duplicity. The Church looks on with disgust from the left panel (12). This image also incorporates bestiality, suggesting sexual interaction between Jews and animals. Another illustration that suggests bestiality depicts Jewish men with a pig. One is eating the pig's excrement, another is sucking its teat, while yet another is sitting on his back, holding up the pig's tail. Satan is also pictured, encouraging the man to eat the excrement; and



in the background, a Jewish woman watches as she holds a ram by the horn and cups her own breast as though sexually aroused (16-17).

Abramson explains that the depiction of Jewish males as “oversexed predators preying on innocent Christian women” is a post-medieval portrayal (3). It was the image of the oversexed Jewish male that tantalized the conspirators in the fabrication of the Beilis affair when they considered the possibility of connecting the Jewish father of five with Cheberyak. These horrible stereotypes and prejudices were present during the Beilis trial and also were used after the case ended.

Hitler was particularly vexed by these “oversexed males” when he was supposedly trying to safeguard the purity of the Aryan race, and he devoted “significant personnel and resources to the racial education of girls and women” in an effort to prevent their being “defiled and lured into depravity by the treacherous wiles of the lecherous Jewish man” (Szobar 152). The passage of the Nuremberg Laws, aimed at protecting the purity of the Aryan race, brought many couples into court. One Aryan woman brought into court on such a charge played to the stereotypes of both the pure German maiden and the lascivious Jewish male when she testified against her Jewish lover: “I am convinced today that he took advantage of my innocence and my purity in the crudest possible way, and that his only desire was sexual gratification. His sexual perversity has left me psychologically damaged” (Szobar 154).

The Nazi authorities who were charged with investigating these crimes of defilement of the Aryan race obviously believed Jewish males were capable of

maintaining their sexual prowess indefinitely. Patricia Szobar relates how one couple claimed to have ended the sexual portion of their relationship but continued to see each other nearly every day. The court remarked, "There is no apparent reason why the relationship, which lasted many years, should have come to an end in 1933. The defendant's explanation that he had grown old cannot be taken seriously" (157).

The image of the lecherous, Jewish male was also found to be alive in the United States. About two years after Beilis's ordeal began and six months before a verdict was rendered, Leo Frank in Georgia faced charges of killing an adolescent named Mary Phagan. Most of the damning testimony was supplied by an African American, Jim Conley, who was probably the real murderer. It did not help Frank's case that a local madam reported that Frank was a regular at her establishment, where he was only interested in "perverted" sex (Lindemann 250), nor that some women who worked for Frank testified that he had made improper advances to them. However, at least one testified that Frank was kind and well-liked by the female employees (246).

The solicitor general in the Frank case, Hugh Dorsey, relentlessly pursued a conviction of Frank while ignoring the more likely case against Conley, behaving in a way reminiscent of Grubeshov in *The Fixer*. He also behaved much like Judge Boldyreff, who presided over the Beilis case, in his summation. He named known Jewish criminals and a political boss with the reputation for "insatiable sexual appetites," thus focusing the jury's attention on the allegations that Frank had killed Phagan when she rejected his advances (252).

Dorsey cleverly focused on one aspect of the stereotype of the Jew-- the image of the perverted, oversexed Jew. Phagan's body revealed that she was not a virgin, but neither had she been raped. Many of the local people were convinced that her murder was somehow connected to sex (244). If Frank were interested only in "perverted" sex, who knows what that might have been? According to Conley's testimony, he had often served as a lookout during Frank's sexual trysts at the pencil factory. He claimed that Frank had struck Phagan when she refused to give in to his desires (254). Conley's story made Phagan into the victim of an oversexed Jew. Leo Frank, who was probably innocent of murder regardless of his sexual preferences, which were never proven, was lynched as a result of these charges, making him, like Yakov Bok in *The Fixer*, and Mendel Beilis, another victim of anti-Jewish propaganda.

The case against Mendel Beilis was held together by the old lies passed down through the ages and new ones invented by false witnesses. This travesty is precisely what Malamud wanted his readers to understand when they read *The Fixer*. Beilis was lucky that not everyone believed the fabrications with which his persecutors attempted to convict him. As it turned out for Beilis, he had unknown friends, and there is hope the same is true for Bok. The attorney, Julius Ostrovsky, who visits Bok in prison, tells him, "You're not alone" (Malamud 304). This thesis will next examine who supported Beilis.

## THE SUPPORT FOR THE ACCUSED

In *The Fixer*, when Bok finally gets to see his lawyer, Julius Ostrovsky, he is told of the seriousness of his situation, but Ostrovsky assures Bok, "You're not alone" (304). Ostrovsky implies that there are people working for Bok. He tells him, "Many luminaries of literature, science, and the professions have objected against the blood ritual slander. Not so long ago the Kharkov Medical Society passed a resolution protesting your imprisonment, and the next thing that happened the society was dissolved by the government authorities" (310). Ostrovsky also tells him that newspapers were being fined because of their investigations into the case and editorials. Members of the bar are also convinced that Golov was behind the murder of the child (310). Then, Ostrovsky has to inform Bok that he cannot actually represent him, but will instead serve as a witness in his case, because Golov claims that the attorney has tried to bribe her. Instead, Bok receives counsel from Suslov-Smirnov, a former anti-Semite who now fiercely defends Jewish rights. Ostrovsky assures Bok, "Believe me, he will know how to deal with these people" (312).

It is important to recognize that a well-known non-Jew, a former anti-Semite, represents Bok in *The Fixer*. In the Beilis case, only one of the panel of lawyers who represented Beilis was, in fact, Jewish. Many non-Jewish attorneys volunteered to serve as counsel for the accused man. The amount of Jewish support from around the world, however, cannot be overstated. "The Jewish

Response,” Sora Bulka’s appendix of *Scapegoat on Trial: The Story of Mendel Beilis*, explains the use of *adam* in reference to Jews, while non-Jews are called *anashim*. Rabbi Meir Shapiro sent a letter to Rabbi Jacob Mazeh, who was responsible for refuting the testimony of the alleged expert, Pranaitis, at Beilis’s trial, because he understood the nature of one question that would be raised in the proceedings. What he says in the letter applies here because it explains the Jewish response to Beilis’s plight. Shapiro wrote:

The Torah states that *kol Yisrael areivim eh lazeh*, all Jews are responsible for each other. (*Shevuos* 39) According to this principle, it stands to reason that the fate of Mendel Beilis, for example, which is in essence the fate of one single Jew, touches the entire Jewish people. . . . What would have been the reaction of the gentile world if one specific gentile had been accused of a similar crime and was standing trial in a faraway country? Clearly, no more than the people of his own town would show any interest in the libel. . . . This, therefore, is the difference between the Jewish people and all other peoples. The Jews are considered *adam*, the singular form of the word man, an indication of the extreme solidarity of the Jewish people . . . . (qtd. in Bulka 258-259)

World Jewry responded strongly in support of Beilis, but it was not a show of complete solidarity. The leader of the Bund claimed that the strongest support for Beilis had come from them. The Bund and Poale-Zion argued over which of them had first posted a resolution in favor of Beilis. The Parisian Bund attacked

the passive methods of protesting the Beilis trial. Rudolf Rocker, the editor of the *Arbajter Frajnd* of London, attacked everyone who disagreed with using the Beilis trial for revolutionary propaganda (Szajkosski 17-18). Other Jews were disturbed by the internal Jewish conflicts centered around the trial. The notice for a meeting on May 11, 1912, in Brussels pled, "Jews! In such a moment, when a terrible danger hangs over the heads of our entire Jewish people . . . Let us abandon the settlement of our private or political accounts and make heard our courageous and mighty cry of protest! (Szajkosski 18).

As Ostrovsky tells Bok in *The Fixer*, the Kharkov Medical Society spoke out against the blood libel, just as, during the Beilis trial, the Society responded to I. A. Sikorsky's opinion that Andrei Yushchinsky's death was the result of "racial revenge and vendetta of the Sons of Jacob" (Samuel 82). The members of the Society passed a resolution that the Society "considers it shameful and degrading to the high standards of a physician to display racial and religious intolerance and to attempt to base the possibility of 'ritual murders' on pseudo-scientific arguments" (85) The obvious prejudice in Sikorsky's opinion, not to mention the absence of any scientific support, outraged many people.

In his report, Sikorsky wrote that he agreed with "the well-known adversary of anti-Semitism, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu." In doing so, he hoped to give his opinion the veneer of scientific endorsement by an enemy of anti-Semitism (Tager 49). Upon learning of Sikorsky's actions, Leroy-Beaulieu immediately replied in a Petersburg newspaper:

A false interpretation is given to my book, and my thought is

entirely distorted. I will never tire of repeating that I consider the ritual murder charge against the Jews as a barbarous invention, and only ignorant people, capable of being easily deceived, may perhaps believe in such a thing . . . A statement that the Jews have an inclination toward such a mode of revenge and that it is this tradition of racial animosity which explains the ritual murder legend --constitutes an opinion which is not justified in any way and with which I cannot permit my name to be associated in the slightest degree. And I cannot but believe that an accusation which one attempts to support with the aid of such arguments must be without foundation (49).

Other luminaries followed Leroy-Beaulieu in denouncing Sikorsky's report. Professors V. M. Bekhtereff and A. I. Karpinsky were called as experts to analyze and refute the report during the trial. Professor Vladimir Serbsky declared that:

Jewish ritual accusations never appear in places where the Christians do not believe beforehand in the existence of ritual murders among the Jews. The same is true here as in stories of ghosts or phantoms; they appear only where they are believed in . . . Sicorsky [sic] undoubtedly transgressed the limits of objective judgment and was directed by thoughts which sprang from his unbridled imagination and not from a cold and critically thoughtful intellect . . . (50)

The editors of the *Journal of Neuropathology and Psychiatry* joined the voices that condemned Sikorsky's abuse of his position by saying that he "compromised Russian science and brought down shame on his own gray head." The All-Russian Congress of Physicians, the International Medical Congress in London, and the Congress of Naturalists and Physicians in Vienna all protested Sikorsky's "expert conclusion" (50).

Sikorsky might have come to the conclusion that he had not only jeopardized his professional standing, but perhaps his safety as well, by pursuing his personal hatred with his pseudo-scientific report on Yushchinsky's death, for he wrote the Minister of the Interior, Alexander Makaroff, and suggested that the attacks against him had a depressing effect on the Russian population and excited the "Jewish masses" (51). Makaroff responded by sending the letter to the Department of Police and had a conference with its director, who then instructed Governor Girs how he should proceed. Girs in turn contacted one of the local newspaper editors and made it known that no further attacks on the professor or his report would be tolerated in the newspapers.

Societies that spoke out against Sikorsky's opinion were dissolved immediately, as was the case with the Kharkoff Medical Society. Two associate professors who were members of a committee appointed by the Society of Psychiatrists to analyze Sikorsky's "expert" opinion were warned by the Chief of the Military-Medical Academy that "if disturbances occurred among the students" in connection with the opinion, they would be removed from their positions (53).

Sikorsky presented his conclusion in court, or at least he discoursed on



ritual murder. V. D. Bonch-Bruevitch gave his evaluation of Sikorsky's testimony by writing, "This good-natured old man, this timid Sikorsky, becomes a quite different person--malicious and shrewd--when it comes to the question of rituality . . . His entire opinion is a misunderstanding from the scientific point of view . . . ."

(54). Bonch-Bruevitch's opinion as a person who observed Sikorsky's performance in court could not help but shape the attitudes of readers who followed the trial in the papers.

Aside from the people who were writing letters and newspaper articles and passing resolutions, there were people who were actively working to prove Beilis's innocence, sometimes at great risk to their own welfare. The work of Krasovsky and Brazul-Brushkovsky had a tremendous impact on the course of the trial. Neither of the men was Jewish, but neither was willing to sit idly by and allow such a tremendous injustice to pass. A young revolutionary by the name of Sergei Makhalin, horrified by a pogrom at the age of thirteen or fourteen, also played a significant role in Beilis's defense.

The conspirators put Krasovsky's pupil and able subordinate, Evtikh Kirichenko, in charge of the case after Krasovsky was returned to his job as Head of the Rural Police, something that turned out to be a mistake on their part. The conspirators were not content, however, simply to force Krasovsky back to his position as head of the rural police; they managed to have Krasovsky put out of the service. After that, Krasovsky not only had a desire to see justice done for Mendel Beilis, but he also had a personal interest in the case. Krasovsky returned to Kiev to clear his name, and when he resumed the investigation, he

ritual murder. V. D. Bonch-Bruevitch gave his evaluation of Sikorsky's testimony by writing, "This good-natured old man, this timid Sikorsky, becomes a quite different person--malicious and shrewd--when it comes to the question of rituality . . . His entire opinion is a misunderstanding from the scientific point of view . . . ."

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had a loyal man inside the police department. Kirichenko secretly began to help his former boss (Samuel 141).

Brazul-Brushkovsky was a journalist convinced that he could get to the bottom of the Yushchinsky murder case. His wife was Jewish, and therein lay part of his motivation, but he also hoped to achieve fame and an increase in salary (143). He acted imprudently in the beginning because he thought he could trust Vera Cheberyak. He did not heed the warning of a colleague who spent half an hour with her: "This woman probably always lies. She lies even when she tells the truth, and if she talks in her sleep she probably lies then, too" (143).

Brazul-Brushkovsky attempted to cultivate Cheberyak's friendship for six months, giving her small sums of money in the belief that she would use her connections with the criminal world to help him uncover the identities of the real killers. She led him down false trails time and again. She told him at first that her French lover, Pavel Miffle, had killed Andrei, and that Miffle's sister had poisoned Cheberyak's children. In fact, she implicated not only Miffle, but also his brother and the step-father of Yushchinsky. Brazul-Brushkovsky's gullibility in the case where Cheberyak was concerned had its positive aspects and negative aspects. When Brazul-Brushkovsky's story in the newspaper suggested that Miffle was connected to the murder, Miffle decided it was time to settle old scores with his former lover. He went to the police and informed against her for two unsolved crimes, and she was sentenced to a short prison term. When Chaplinsky insisted on presenting her in court as an honorable woman and grieving mother, the role did not fit her well, so few were deceived by her performance (Tager 120-121).

On the other hand, Brazul-Brushkovsky's trips down false trails lengthened Beilis's ordeal in prison.

It was bad enough that Brazul-Brushkovsky was deceived by Cheberyak, but he also drew Beilis's attorney, A. D. Margolin, into her web. She convinced Brazul-Brushkovsky to take her to Kharkov, where she said one of the men involved in Yushchinsky's murder would be found. Brazu-Brushkovskyl convinced Margolin, who was usually much wiser, to meet with Cheberyak. The result was that Cheberyak accused Margolin of offering her 40,000 rubles to confess to the murder of the boy. Just as Ostrovsky tells Bok in *The Fixer* that he will not be representing him, but will instead be a witness in the case, Margolin, too, found himself barred as an acting attorney from the defense team. He, too, became a witness in the case. (Samuel 145).

Up to this time, Brazul-Brushkovsky's involvement in the case was not aiding Beilis, but once Krasovsky realized there was someone else investigating the case, he offered his assistance (Tager 121). Sergei Makhalin, a self-professed revolutionary, also read Brazul-Brushkovsky's article accusing Miffle of involvement in the death of Yushchinsky. Makhalin had already decided that he wanted to expose a government conspiracy, for he was sure there was one, and the idea of another pogrom was something he did not want to contemplate. He decided to contact Brazul-Brushkovsky, and he had in mind someone who he thought would be very useful in rooting out the real murderers (Samuel 146-148).

Makhalin had Amzor Karayev in mind. Karayev was a little older than Makhalin and, at the young age of twenty-five, had already served four prison

sentences (Samuel 148). Makhalin arranged a meeting with Karayev, and when he explained what he wanted Karayev to do, there was a tense moment when it seemed that merely suggesting to Karayev that he inform against another criminal, or as Karayev saw all criminals, another revolutionary, would cost Makhalin his life. Makhalin finally convinced Karayev that the real murderers of the boy were in league with those who caused pogroms, and therefore undeserving of the name "revolutionary." Karayev then reluctantly agreed to help (Samuel 149-150).

It is almost comical to imagine the bungling journalist, the former supervisor of the Kiev police, and two convicted criminals who considered themselves revolutionaries in league together to exonerate the Jewish father of five. The strange team was effective, however, because Karayev managed to get Peter Singayevsky, the half-brother of Vera Cherberyak, to confess to the murder of Andrei Yushchinsky and also reveal that Boris Rudzinsky, another member of Vera's gang of thieves, was the one responsible for the multiple stab wounds found on Andrei's body (151). It is true that Karayev did not get to testify at the trial. He was arrested and sent to Siberia. Karayev, however, made a deposition of Singayevsky's confession; it was read in court, and Makhalin was present in court to corroborate it (153).

Another interesting character in *The Fixer* is the attorney, a former anti-Semite, who Ostrovsky tells Bok will be handling his case. Mendel Beilis had a team of lawyers, and Oscar Gruzenberg (besides Margolin, who was barred from acting as legal counsel) was the only Jewish member. Gruzenberg had a degree

of fame for having defended a Jew named Dovid Blondes, who had been falsely accused of attempting the ritual murder of a servant girl. On an appeal, Gruzenberg had secured an acquittal for Blondes (Samuel 176-177). However, the member of the defense team who stood out the most was Vasily A. Maklakov, whose brother Nikolai was the Minister of the Interior. Because the Minister of the Interior was deeply involved in the attempt to secure a ritual murder conviction against Mendel Beilis, it is probably safe to say that he was an anti-Semite, so his brother, Vasily, might have inspired Malamud's attorney, who "was in his youth anti-Semitic" and who would "know how to deal with these people" (Malamud 312). His summation was considered outstanding, and the author V. G. Korolenko polled some of the jurors after the trial and found that they considered Maklakov to have been the most impressive member of the defense team (Samuel 178).

The other attorneys who worked on Beilis's behalf, A. S. Zarudny, B. Karabchevsky, and D. Grigorovich-Barsky, were also excellent lawyers who brought their talents to the defense. Samuel identifies them as being politically conservative liberals and constitutionalists who viewed their opponents as both "politically contemptible and personally unclean" (181). They fought not only to save an innocent man, but Russia, which, in their view, was being shown to the world in an unfavorable light.

Beilis was fortunate that so many men of honor and decency were willing to risk their careers, if not their lives, to defend him and what was right and ethical. It has been nearly one hundred years since Mendel Beilis was accused

of killing Andrei Yushchinsky, and forty-two since Malamud wrote *The Fixer*. Have conditions improved since Beilis's ordeal? Does Malamud's novel, *The Fixer*, promote understanding of anti-Semitism that will encourage people to avoid such despicable acts in the future?

## ANTI-SEMITISM TODAY

It is pertinent to explore if conditions for Jews have improved since the Mendel Beilis case or the writing of *The Fixer*. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, writers of good historical fiction create accurate pictures of a time period that enable a reader to imagine life during that era. What would be the purpose of such vicarious living if the reader is not to gain some insight into the events of the time period? It can hardly be called entertaining to experience with a character the humiliation of an invasive body search, or any of the other dehumanizing experiences that Bok is forced to endure. Who enjoys imagining himself cold and hungry, or beaten? No person without an appetite for pain would want to experience any of these feelings with a character.

People want, however, to understand the events of historical periods or to see events through different eyes. Often, such understanding or perception gives them the impetus to want to correct wrongs, or at least alter their own misguided conceptions. In the case of historical fiction such as *The Fixer*, a novel that describes horrible conditions in the past, readers can hope that such conditions have improved. Do people have a better understanding of the cruelty that is perpetrated against Jews, or any other minority group, because of a misunderstanding, or worse, a conspiracy, that is hundreds of years old? Before *The Fixer*, there was the actual case of Mendel Beilis. What has happened after Beilis's acquittal?



The trial of Mendel Beilis ended with a verdict that was only half satisfactory. Thankfully, an innocent man was not convicted, but unfortunately, Jews were. The verdict that was rendered acquitted Mendel Beilis of murder, but at the same time, the jury decided that a ritual murder had taken place. Only a month after Beilis's acquittal, the conspirators were hard at work trying to build another ritual murder case. A murdered boy of eleven or twelve was found, and although the boy was actually Jewish, it did not stop the conspirators from trying to identify the boy as a Christian child in order to have a victim for another ritual murder trial (Tager 221-222).

According to acting Chief Procurator Volodkovich, Ephraim Pashkoff, the father of the Jewish murder victim, had possibly killed a Christian child and buried him as his son, Yosel. The monarchist press reported that Pashkoff's son, meanwhile, had gone to America with Beilis. The grieving father was arrested and charged with ritual murder. Three different people viewed the corpse of the boy, and each one identified him as a different Christian child who had allegedly "disappeared." Fortunately for Pashkoff and Russian Jews, Nicholas Chebysheff was appointed to fill the vacant post of Chief Procurator. He was an honest man who did not want any part in the crooked proceedings, so suddenly, all three lost boys were suddenly found alive. Pashkoff was released, and the actual murderer was found to be a man with ten previous convictions on his record (Tager 222-223).

Bernard Malamud wrote *The Fixer* in 1966. In the years between the writing of the book and the Beilis case, European Jews experienced hope and

the Holocaust. The Bolshevik Revolution ended the reign of czars in Russia and created a Communist government, and two World Wars took place. The rise of Communism in Russia might appear to have been a change for the better for Russian Jews, because Karl Marx, on whose ideas Communism is based, denounced anti-Semitism; on the other hand, Adolf Hitler, who proved far more effective than Czar Nicholas in blaming Jews for economic and social problems, decimated European Jewry during World War II. What has been written about Hitler could, no doubt, fill a library, so this thesis will not dwell on that famous anti-Semite. Events in Russia, where *The Fixer* is set, however, deserve further study.

In *The Fixer*, Yakov Bok grows as a human being. He realizes that even though he had tried to avoid problems, problems had always found him, anyway. His mother and father had stayed in the shtetl, but they had not been safe there. He realizes that as a Jew, he is not free because “the government destroyed his freedom by reducing his worth” (Malamud 315). No matter what he does, or where he is, Bok realizes that he cannot be safe. He carries on his back a “condition of servitude, diminished opportunity, vulnerability” (315). Bok’s new awareness of his vulnerability suggests that, should he be acquitted, he will no longer be a man who plays it safe. He tells Bibikov’s ghost, “Something in myself has changed. I’m not the same man I was. I fear less and hate more” (319). If acquitted, Bok will probably become a political activist like Makhalim, but equality for Jews is something not even a revolution can insure.

In his essay, “The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism: An

Analysis,” William Korey writes that, “If the revolutions of 1917 ended official anti-Semitism, popular myths about Jews were by no means uprooted” (111). Lenin instituted policies to provide opportunities for Russian Jews and allowed them to move to urban areas (Gibson and Duch 3), but no one could erase the minds of the people who had grown up with a tradition of anti-Semitism. Korey explains that Soviet studies of popular anti-Semitism were nonexistent, but he studied data provided by the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, conducted in 1950-1951. This is a series of lengthy interviews with former Soviet citizens who had become refugees in the United States. Studying the interview data, Korey found that 10 percent of the people interviewed maintained a violent hatred of Jews. Another twenty-five percent held negative stereotypical images of Jews, ranging from a belief that Jews occupied a privileged position in Soviet society to the notion that they were cowards who only served in the rear of the army (Korey 112).

The official position toward Jews changed again in the 1930s with Stalin’s rise to power. Once again, Jews became the scapegoats for social problems. Stalin went so far as to claim that Jewish doctors were trying to murder high-ranking Soviets with a “doctor’s plot” (Gibson and Duch 3). According to John Armstrong, in 1942, the Soviet authorities secretly ordered quotas for Jews in prominent posts, and Ilya Ehrenburg claims that Alexander Schcherbakov, the head of the army’s Political Commissariat, instructed him in 1943 to understate accounts of Jewish exploits in the Red Army (117). A defector, Igor Gouzenko, related that in 1939, he was told that a “confidential” decree setting quotas for

the admission of Jews was sent to all directors of educational institutions, and in 1945, the Central Committee began removing Jews from responsible positions in Soviet factories (117). If Russian Jews had hoped that the Russian Revolution would bring a better day for them, one that would see them treated equally, they were disappointed.

In 1985, the situation for Russian Jews eased again when Mikhail Gorbachev brought to Russia a more liberal administration, and with the more open society, it seemed, had come greater tolerance. James L. Gibson and Raymond M. Duch analyzed the findings from a survey conducted with residents of the Moscow Oblast during two months in 1990, and they found, surprisingly, that even respondents with anti-Jewish sentiment supported policies against anti-Semitism (24).

It seemed that Jewish progress suffered another reversal in 2005, when a letter was published in a Russian fundamentalist newspaper that was signed by 500 Russians, including 19 members of Parliament. The letter demanded that the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation open an investigation into Jewish organizations and put an end to subsidies for these organizations, claiming they provoked ethnic strife. The letter was divided into chapters with titles such as "The Morality of Jewish Fascism" and "Jewish Aggression as an Expression of Devilry." Blood libel was described in the letter as "a ritual murder of Christian children *that has been proved in the courts*" (Galili 1). Thus, the decision rendered by the jury in the Beilis trial is still influencing people in Russia today.

As a result of the letter, prosecutors in Russia began an investigation of the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia. The organization plays a role in publishing and distributing Russian translations of the *Shulchan Aruch*, a code written by Rabbi Joseph Caro during the sixteenth century, that Russian nationalists say incites ethnic hatred. The investigation, however, was subsequently dropped, possibly because Prime Minister Putin “is committed to the Jewish community,” as Rabbi Berel Lazar, who traveled with him to Israel, claimed (Solomont 1-2). Perhaps the day of Jewish equality in Russia has finally arrived. It is hard to say. Anti-Semitism might be fading away, or it may simply be waiting in the shadows.

Anti-Semitism still lurks in the shadows in the United States where Bernard Malamud wrote *The Fixer*. The United States officially condemns anti-Semitism, but what would happen if an American newspaper were to carry a story such as the one that declared that Bok killed Zhenia Golov, or the one that claimed that Pashkoff had murdered a Christian child and buried him under his own son’s name? How would people in the United States react? Leo Frank was not hung in Kiev. He was lynched by a mob in Georgia, and although he was not charged with ritual murder, his death shows that Americans are as prone to irrational behavior as the people in any other country.

In 1928, in the town of Massena, New York, a little girl became lost, and the citizens of that town proved that Americans have, in fact, entertained the belief that Jews commit ritual murders. Barbara Griffiths’s brother had gone into the woods to get willow branches for making whistles, and four-year-old Barbara

was sent by her parents to bring him home. Only minutes after she left, her brother returned without her. Her father waited, expecting her to return on her own, but when she did not, he went looking for her without success. Shortly after her disappearance was reported, a Greek immigrant in Massena with a known anti-Jewish bias suggested that there was a Jewish holiday approaching, and perhaps the Jews needed blood. His comment was initially as effective for casting suspicion upon the town's Jews as the leaflets circulated by the Black Hundreds in *The Fixer* were against Bok. The mayor took the insinuation to heart and ordered searchers to investigate. They began searching Jewish businesses, and Rabbi Berel Brennglass was summoned to the city hall, where he was interrogated by State Trooper Mickey McCann. Understandably, Jews became very concerned when a group of vigilantes, including Ku Klux Klan members, began collecting at the city hall. Fortunately, before the situation could get worse, the little girl came home.

Barbara explained that she had been unable to find her brother, and when it got dark, she laid down in tall grass and fell asleep. When she awoke, she started home but lost her way. She eventually met up with two older girls from town, and they brought her home. Her return should have been the end of the matter, but as the Jews of Massena were gathering for the prayer service on the eve of Yom Kippur (the most solemn Jewish holiday, known in English as the Day of Atonement), their path was blocked by a mob that taunted them with the words, "Scared you into returning the girl, didn't we?" (Leikin, "A Brief History of the Blood Libel" xxv).

The incident in Massena happened a long time ago, but it demonstrates how people harboring secret prejudices react when confronted with unpleasant situations or frightening possibilities. Stressful situations and frightening possibilities have occurred in the United States since the incident in Massena, and people have reacted to them, as well.

In her essay, "A Tale Told Too Often," Florence H. Ridley writes how the aforementioned story of the Jews at Inmestar, who allegedly murdered a Christian, sowed the seeds that bore the crop of the ritual murder allegations. She correlates that story with its enduring myth of Jewish ritual murder to an urban legend that sprang up in the United States in 1965.

In Southern California, a rumor began that a little white boy was assaulted and mutilated by a band of adult African Americans in a public restroom. The story spread, with the location and skin color of the perpetrators changing to match the neighborhood where the story was retold. If the story spread near an African-American neighborhood, the perpetrators were black, but if there were Mexicans in the neighborhood, the perpetrators became Mexicans. The story traveled from the West Coast to the East, always finding gullible people willing to listen and cast suspicious eyes on the minority groups in their area (Ridley 156).

Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, met with resistance from some groups before and after it appeared in theaters. There was a fear that it would promote anti-Semitism because the movie faithfully followed the account of Christ's crucifixion found in the New Testament. According to that account, Jews demanded that Jesus be crucified. As this thesis has already explained,

the story that Jews demanded the crucifixion of Christ led to the charge that Jews commit ritual murder and other preposterous anti-Semitic propaganda that is mentioned in *The Fixer*.

Most Christians do not doubt that the account of Christ's crucifixion in the New Testament is accurate. The Bible contains its own warning against disputing with its contents. Revelations 22:19 says that ". . . if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." That warning is strong enough to keep many Christians from asking too many questions and to accept the Bible as the Holy word of God. Christians accept that the New Testament is the inspired work of Christ's followers without considering whether it might have undergone revision centuries before it became available for their purchase. To such Christians, the people complaining about Gibson's movie seemed unreasonable.

An essay written by Morris Siegel in 1942, however, shows that the concerns about Gibson's movie are not unreasonable. In his essay, "Horns, Tails, and Easter Sport': A Study of a Stereotype," Siegel writes about the anthropological field research he did among Guatemalan Indians. He found that although the Indians had never known Jews, they had notions about Jewish appearance and behavior. The Guatemalan Indians believed that "the Jews killed Christ," and nearly every year, during their Easter celebration, they enacted a dramatization of Christ's crucifixion (382-383).

Because the Indians in the remote region of Guatemala, where Siegel did



his research, had never interacted with Jews, the only explanation for their concept of Jews is that it had been handed down from generation to generation. Part of this inherited concept is the belief that Jews possess horns and a tail. The Guatemalan Indians could not elaborate on what Jews look like, and Siegel wrote that it is “as if they can hardly credit such reports themselves,” but he suggests in his essay that this image probably resulted from a confusion of Jews with Satan that dates back to the Spanish Conquest and Catholic proselytizing (383).

Their concept of Jews is further demonstrated by their creation myth. According to the myth, when the Virgin Mother delivered “Our Father God,” her brothers, the Ancient Men, were puzzled and resentful, so they began to persecute him. When the Ancient Men tried to burn him to death, however, God turned the Ancient Men into monkeys. The Indian word for Ancient Men is *Pei Vinaj*, and this is the word they use when speaking in their native language. When the Indians tell the story in Spanish, however, they always say “the Jews,” instead of *Pei Vinaj* (383).

The Indians put on their crucifixion reenactment with twelve of them dressed up in garish costumes to play the part of Jews. They ran around in the plaza, growling, snarling, and yelling, “Stick him.” They captured people in the plaza and forced their captives to pay a ransom to be released. These antics lasted a day; then on the second day, the Indian playing Jesus appeared. The festivities culminated with a crude reenactment of the crucifixion while someone read from the New Testament. Their dramatization demonstrated that the

Indians equated the Jew with evil, and their reenactment of the crucifixion helped them maintain the mental image of the Jew as Christ killer, but it was very crude. Imagine what impact could be achieved with a Hollywood budget. No wonder some Jews and other concerned people worried about the effect Mel Gibson's movie might have on people who already have a negative image of Jews.

Although Gibson claimed that his movie is not anti-Semitic, when he was arrested for driving intoxicated, he stated that Jews were responsible for all the wars in the world. Since then, he has apologized, and he claims that he does not actually believe that all wars have been caused by Jews. He says that the comment he made during his arrest was an "outrageous, drunken statement" that might have been influenced by the residual anger he felt because of the commotion about his movie (Silverman 1). Like the Czar in *The Fixer* and Russian history, Gibson blames the Jews for his bad behavior.

*The Fixer* is a powerful story that can serve as a warning about prejudice and political corruption, but *The Fixer* cannot improve society. People who read the book are certainly affected by it. The fact that someone wants to read the book shows that that person wants to gain insight into another person's feelings and sufferings; thus, such a person is already a little distanced from those who make up the mobs that participate in pogroms, lynching, or cross burnings. Still, in a nation whose people consider themselves enlightened, there are white supremacy groups, neo-Nazis, skin heads, and the Ku Klux Klan. Middle-Eastern tensions have only made matters worse. In 2002, pro-Palestinian groups decided to use the blood libel to advance their cause. At San Francisco State University

in 2002, a group plastered posters around campus that depicted a can labeled with a picture of what appeared to be a blood-smeared, dead child. The caption beneath the picture read, "canned Palestinian children meat, slaughtered according to Jewish rites under American license" (Zoloth 1). These are the facts after *The Fixer*. What more can be said?

## CONCLUSION

As I write in the introduction of this thesis, historical fiction rates among the greatest literature because historical fiction can aid a reader to better understand the experiences of individuals who lived during a historical period. Books about William the Conqueror, George Washington, and Napoleon Bonaparte make these men seem much more than mere historical figures -- real people with feelings, faults, and concerns. Of course, people who never became famous are also part of history, and some historical fiction, such as Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, also depict a period of history, and though *A Tale of Two Cities* does not focus on well-known historical figures, the literature allows readers to imagine life during The French Revolution. By reading *A Tale of Two Cities*, people can better understand how they might feel to be accused of something that is not true, and unable to defend themselves against the allegations. The same thing can also be said about *The Fixer*.

Yakov Bok is not a real person, but his fictional experience in Kiev faithfully depicts the conditions of a Jew in Russia, when framed for ritual murder, because of the way Bernard Malamud used not only his knowledge of social and political conditions in Russia, but also his understanding of the blood libel and anti-Semitic propaganda to explain how and why Bok is being framed as a scapegoat.

In the introduction, I state that I will explore the truth behind Malamud's

story takes place, and the different propaganda that fed the suspicions and hatred that caused Russian Christians to believe Jews participated in ritual murder and the blood libel. Although Yakov Bok is not a real person, the situation that Malamud used to write *The Fixer* was indeed real, and in my thesis, I examine how Malamud changed a few details to make his story more representative of the many poor Jews who were accused of blood libel in the past.

The true story of Menehem Mendel Beilis provided Malamud with a perfect plot for his story about the imperfect plot concocted by Russian bureaucrats to convict an innocent man of ritual murder. I write that I will compare the fictional story and the true story of Beilis, because I do not believe that Malamud was telling Beilis's story, but a story that Malamud wanted to use as representative of the majority of Jews rather than just the few with family and financial support. With my thesis, I show that there are significant differences between Malamud's fictional story and the historical story of Beilis, and the changes that Malamud made in his fictional work did, in fact, make the more isolated Bok, with his limited social connections, an easier target for government conspirators.

This thesis also explores how Malamud used the dialogue between characters to discuss the absurd propaganda used to create ethnic hatred of Christians toward Jews, as well as the social and political situations in Russia that motivated government officials to incite such hatred. In one chapter I discussed the conditions in Russia that might have led Russian bureaucrats to

decide that a pogrom against Jews was needed to alleviate some of the social tensions and the growing threat to the monarchy. In my research, I have learned that the Jewish population in Russia was increasing at a faster rate than the Christian population, but not only were Jews increasing in numbers, but also in wealth and thus political power. Russian Christians, who did not know or understand their Jewish neighbors, were suspicious of them. Czar Nicholas III, who was anti-Semitic, saw the strengthening Jews as a threat to his monarchy and probably hoped to end discussion in the Duma of abolishing the Pale of Settlement. This thesis shows not only that government officials had the motive to frame a Jew for ritual murder, but to what extremes certain officials went to convict Beilis.

Because the character Yakov Bok is accused of ritual murder, in another chapter, I explore the history of ritual murder and blood libel. It is important, I believe, to understand the origins of ritual murder and the blood libel accusation to better appreciate the way in which Malamud reveals the fallacy of such accusations in his book. In a separate chapter, I discuss propaganda that depicts Jews as sexual deviants, as well as how this propaganda was used by Malamud in *The Fixer*. In *The Fixer*, Bok is accused of both attempted rape of a Christian woman and pedophilia. Historically, anti-Semitic propaganda has depicted Jews as being licentious as well as pedophilic.

Malamud reveals Bok's thoughts in a variety of ways to help create for the reader an interest in the fictional character who is forced to endure a horrible ordeal for no other reason than that he is available and Jewish. Readers

experience with the protagonist the shock when he is accused of murdering a child, his fear of what will happen to him because of the accusation, his amazement that people could believe the preposterous things that are said about those of his ethnicity, and his helplessness because there is nothing he can do to defend himself. Readers can sympathize with his anger because of his impossible situation, and even if they cannot agree, readers can also understand when Bok comes to the realization that he has learned to fear less and hate more.

Although this thesis focuses on a work of historical fiction, the work tells the truth about a problem that has existed for centuries. People direct their anger and hatred against minorities when social tensions become acute. Any minority group can become the focus of such anger and hatred, but Jews have been the most enduring targets since the birth of Christianity. Malamud does not preach in his novel about hatred. He simply tells the story, and the reader can see for himself how an innocent man is persecuted for an act that he did not commit, while the officials who should be working to bring the real criminals to justice occupy themselves with trying to make the evidence point to their desired victim. I do not believe that Malamud's novel would be as effective if the author had not used the truth to give his work authenticity. As this thesis shows, not only the plot of *The Fixer* is believable, but even the dialogue between characters speaks the historical truth.

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