



Title	The Assistant Revisited : Suffering as a Proto-Postmodern Value in Bernard Malamud' s Novel
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Citation	Osaka Literary Review. 2026, 64, p. 1-18
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/105007
rights	
Note	

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The Assistant Revisited:
Suffering as a Proto-Postmodern Value
in Bernard Malamud's Novel

SHINO Naoki

“America had become too complicated. One man counted for nothing”
——Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant*

Introduction

According to *DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition)* compiled by the American Psychiatric Association, the diagnosis of depression relies on whether patients' symptoms meet specific objective criteria, requiring them to display a set of quantifiable symptoms designated by the manual.¹ While such objective criteria facilitate differential diagnosis, they are also problematic in that they abstract—or at least neglect—society and community. In a similar manner, taking as an example the condition of what he terms “reflex impotence” among British university students, the English critic Mark Fisher states that their mental health problems become wholly privatized, cut off from social systemic causes (*Capitalist* 21). Fisher's *diagnosis* of society—the privatization of pathology and its removal from the social sphere—is not entirely new. Yet, rethinking mental illness within such a sociopolitical framework resonates with the theme of this essay and thus is useful; it also problematizes a contemporary (or postmodern) society that tends to dismiss as valueless the suffering that may lead to, or result from such conditions.

The spread of capitalism has coincided with an accelerated dissemination of a Benjamin Franklin-style ethic of self-achievement—essentially, an American moral code. As F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The*

Great Gatsby (1925) thematized, American literature has long grappled with the American Dream and its often ruinous consequences. The American Dream here is, in effect, nothing other than an embodiment of a WASP-coded ideal. Such values, however, undermine the balance between a diverse immigrant city like New York as both a place of refuge and a site of economic success, ultimately compelling individuals to pursue success in isolation. The spirit of Emma Lazarus's "Mother of Exiles" in "The New Colossus" (1883)—inscribed on the Statue of Liberty's pedestal "Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"—has been decisively lost. This intensely capitalist, and indeed contemporary, condition finds its reflection in the thinking of Morris Bober, the grocery-store owner in Bernard Malamud's second novel, *The Assistant* (1957). With the inequality of 1950s Brooklyn in mind, Morris opines that "America had become too complicated. One man counted for nothing" (206). His sentiment here points both to the rise of capitalist society and to the process by which the individual is dissolved within it. Morris's perspective here indicates a sense of alienation from—and resistance to—the dominant intellectual climate of the era.

When considering Malamud scholarship, it is worth noting that in a classic study, Iska Alter analyzes materialism in *The Natural* and *The Assistant*, concluding that "In Malamud's America, the attempt to liberate others is to confine oneself" (26). While Alter's analysis insightfully situates Malamud within the American social context, it does not fully explore the inner nature of "to confine oneself": namely, the act of suffering. Turning to major studies published since the 2000s, critics such as Ruth R. Wisse and Ezra Cappel have attributed positive ethical value to the experience of suffering, a tendency that continues in the more recent collection *Bernard Malamud: A Centennial Tribute* (2016).² In that volume, Pilar Alonso interprets suffering in Malamud's fiction as "the proprieties sought for

in a human being and acts as a metaphorical builder" (123), thereby expanding its meaning. In any case, Alonso's argument, like those of her predecessors, ultimately ascribes affirmative value to the act of suffering. This essay also acknowledges this positive valuation of suffering. However, it departs from these previous studies in its approach to the revaluation of suffering: specifically, it examines the issue from a more contemporary perspective—at the intersection of postmodernism and capitalism, as theorized by Fredric Jameson and Mark Fisher. In doing so, this study aims to illuminate how the collapse of community and social bonds, which Fisher diagnoses as a symptom of capitalist realism, parallels the disintegration of shared suffering represented in *The Assistant*. This shared suffering, I argue, functions as a proto-postmodern value that resists the privatization of emotional life under late capitalism.

Malamud's *The Assistant* depicts how the suffering of its characters is transformed into a resource that enables them to endure hardship. The background for this transformation lies in the fact that individual suffering was supported by the multiethnic community of Brooklyn at the time. This essay argues that the community's capacity to embrace those at risk of psychic breakdown situates *The Assistant* as a work on the eve of postmodernism and late capitalism.³ To substantiate this thesis, the present essay proceeds as follows. Section I identifies Morris's grocery store—and the Brooklyn streets it symbolizes—as a space imbued with historicity; argues that this space reflects the nature of the immigrant and multiethnic society of postwar Brooklyn, forming a diachronic community sustained through suffering. The second section examines Frank's process of becoming the spiritual successor to Morris after his death, elucidating how he transforms into a subject who draws strength from suffering. Frank's Judaization in the novel thus symbolizes the creation of a new kind of "value": an ethical practice for the sake of others that exists outside the logic of the economic order.

1. The Store and the Street as a Diachronic/Historical Community

Most of the scenes in *The Assistant* develop in the Brooklyn grocery store run by the owner, Morris Bober. There, his wife Ida and daughter Helen live, and Frank Alpine, the assistant, helps the shopkeeper with his work. For the Bober family, the store is not only the base of their livelihood but also a space where conversations and social interactions take place. The nature of such a space stands in sharp contrast, for example, to the large chain stores of which Morris says, "The chain store kills the small man" (33); or to the ambitious young Jewish man Nat Pearl, whose aspiration is described as "to be somebody" (133). As Morris's words suggest, in this era, larger stores came to kill off small shop owners like him—as if a chain were strangling him. Thus, it is fitting that Morris likens his store to "a prison" (33). Unlike young Nat destined for economic success as a lawyer, Morris is bound to his shop, with the two characters placed in striking contrast. Then, if the commercialism of chain stores and Nat's elitism pursue immediacy, efficiency, and the production of economic surplus, conversely, Morris's grocery store can be seen as a site that generates a different kind of surplus: not financial, but a surplus of sociality—of conversation, relationships, and communal presence that lies *outside* the logic of the economic system.

Such conversations unfold between the store owner and his suppliers, customers, or clerks. As for the suppliers—many of them Jewish and seen by Frank as "born prisoners" (86)—we may note Al Marcus and Breitbart. Al, who is afflicted with cancer and looks "as if he had just lapped up cyanide," continues to work hard despite suggestions from fellow shopkeepers that he retire, saying, "This way let him [death] at least move his bony ass around and try and find me" (86–87). By personifying death as "somebody in a high hat" (87), Al transforms the suffering of cancer into a humorous narrative. Although he possesses "a comfortable pile" (86), and thus could live

without working, Al nonetheless keeps working. His actions are not driven by economic profit but by a desire to reframe his terminal condition—in short, Al invents a narrative uniquely his own. In this sense, Al's wording about personified death reflects his psychological reality: he plays with death, as if adopting the role of a trickster-like character. Suffering, then, is not meaningless for Al; it becomes a source of agency. As for Breitbart, who lives with his young son Hymie, he went bankrupt because of his brother's gambling debts. Carrying electric bulbs on his back as he goes peddling, he is depicted as one whose "hair had turned white and acted like an old man" (87). One day, burdened with suffering, Breitbart confesses his past to Morris, and they wept together (87–88). Breitbart takes on burdens not his own, most notably his brother's debt, which compels him into extreme poverty and physical exhaustion. As a peddler, the two boxes of bulbs cut into "his lean and itchy shoulders" (87–88). The description of Breitbart's hard work, "Every day, in his crooked shoes, he walked miles" (87) evokes religious figures such as a pilgrim or ascetic. As discussed in Section II, Morris esteems the Law, that is, the Torah's principle as he interprets it—one suffers for the sake of others (123–25). In this context, Breitbart also emerges as a practitioner of the Law; thus, Morris empathizes with him so deeply that he is moved to tears. The act of suffering for others is a profoundly ethical act. When Frank observes "No wonder they [Jews] got on his nerves" (88), his remark not only betrays his pangs of conscience but foreshadows the possibility of his own transformation. Al and Breitbart could not have endured hardships if they had been completely isolated. Though "metropolitan New York Jews are in danger of sliding back into the shtetl of exile" (Baumgarten 387), it is precisely because there existed others who suffered with them that Al, Breitbart, and Morris could continue to live. In other words, suffering provides the basis for connection and community, a point that becomes crucial when we consider Brooklyn's multiethnic society in

the 1950s, especially in the context of the Jewish community.

Morris's interactions are not limited to Jews. For instance, he shows kindness to a Polish woman who repeatedly buys on credit (3–4) and even overlooks the theft committed by a young Greek immigrant, Mike Papadopolous (48), precisely because Morris understands their immigrant backgrounds. As Iska Alter puts it, a large part of the immigrant characters is depicted in a locus "closed, rigid, without opportunity or economic progress" (8). Particularly noteworthy is his attitude toward this Polish woman. Even while still recovering from the injury inflicted by a robbery, Morris disregards Ida's warning, and insists on opening the store early in the morning. For Morris, as his remark "For fifteen years she gets here her roll, so let her get" indicates (32), it is his responsibility to provide bread for a poor customer who has come for so many years. In other words, Morris's mission is not to generate economic surplus but rather to provide the basic means of living to the socially vulnerable. Ida refers to her as *die antisemitke*, with her words suggesting the woman does not conceal her anti-Semitic sentiments. Yet Morris remains unconcerned. In his view, "She had come with it [a sense of antisemitism] from the old country, a different kind of anti-Semitism from in America" (32); such prejudice is, at least for Morris, part of the hardship she carries as an immigrant. From this perspective, Morris's grocery store embodies the ethos of earlier immigrant communities, re-enacting on a small scale the spirit of hospitality and tolerance expressed in Lazarus's "The New Colossus" quoted in the Introduction; in an interview, Malamud himself states, "Morality begins with an awareness of the sanctity of one's life" (Stern 61). As a site of conversation, a store is thus essentially a place where one person's historical background is revealed to another. In this sense, Morris's store constitutes a diachronic community—that is, a milieu in which historical memory is shared and mediated through suffering.⁴

Morris's store nevertheless carries negative connotations. It is

described as “a long dark tunnel” (4) and “a prison” (33); Morris himself even thinks, “In a store you were entombed” (6). Toward the end of the narrative, gas leaks in his upstairs room, leaving him unconscious: “Morris lying on the floor, his underwear soaked, his face the color of a crooked beet, flecks of foam in the corners of his mouth” (178). In the end, this gas accident indirectly leads to his death, thereby realizing Morris’s own word “entombed” in a literal sense. Such a relation between Morris and the store inevitably evokes for the reader the Holocaust. In other words, the process within the store—from being “imprisoned,” through “gas,” and finally to being “entombed”—calls forth the image of Jewish suffering in concentration camps during World War II. Precisely for this reason, as will be discussed in the second section, the store becomes for Frank a site of severe trial, what Edward A. Abramson calls “a training monastery” (“Zen” 69). It is in this place that the son of Italian immigrants—historically associated with the Axis powers during World War II—can enter into a spiritual exchange with Jewish victims of persecution. In this light, the store’s negative valence is itself indispensable for the text to acquire historicity.

When we keep in mind that the store is a place where individual backgrounds are shared—diachronic and historical—the most noteworthy episode is Morris’s account of his experiences in Russia, which he shares with Frank. In those years, pogroms frequently occurred in Russia, and immediately before he was drafted into the army, Morris’s father urged him to escape to America.⁵ One day, after letting his sergeant become intoxicated, young Morris attempted to flee:

So on that day, Morris said, he told the sergeant, a peasant with red eyes and a bushy mustache which smelled of tobacco, that he wanted to buy some cigarettes in the town. He felt scared but was doing what his father advised him to do. . . .

Then the soldier stopped to urinate into a ditch in the road. Morris pretended to wait but he walked on, every minute expecting a bullet to crash through his shoulders and leave him lying in the dirt, his future with the worms. But then, as if seized by his fate, he began to run. (82–83)

Morris recounts this episode to Frank with striking precision, as if reliving the moment of escape and the near-certainty of death: “expecting a bullet to crash through his shoulders and leave him lying in the dirt, his future with the worms.” Shortly after his account of Russia, Morris warns Frank with words of regret: “A young man without family is free. Don’t do what I did” (83). The crucial point here is not only the warning itself but the act of sharing his suffering as a means of building a communicative bond with his clerk. Moreover, in the cited passage above, young Morris practices “what his father advised him to do.” Here, the father-son pair of Morris and his father parallels the relationship between Morris and Frank. This structural repetition implies that, within the overall narrative design, Frank is destined to enact the moral lessons he learns from Morris. Thus, Morris’s recollection of his life in Russia and his conversation with Frank together foreshadow the formation of a quasi-father-son relation between the two. Frank’s reaction, however, is telling: he feels “uncomfortable” and thinks, “His pity leaks out of his pants” (83). Frank’s unease does not negate Morris’s gestures; rather, it demonstrates that the act of sharing suffering is never simple; it unsettles as much as it connects.⁶ What becomes clear in their conversation is that, by narrating his own pain, Morris forges a bridge to Frank, and in so doing transforms a personal ordeal into part of a larger historical memory.⁷ Unlike Ezra Cappell, who describes *The Assistant* as “ahistorical” (42), Morris’s act of storytelling thus affirms the store as a site where individual histories are woven into history itself, a diachronic community sustained through suffering.⁸

As discussed above, the store in *The Assistant* functions diachronically or in a historical mode, as a community where characters can share their suffering. While such historicity reflects the immigrant society of New York at the time, it also stands in sharp contrast to the values of the postmodern age that Jameson characterizes as “a crisis in historicity” (*Postmodernism* 22). In postmodern culture, the past is consumed as mere surface styles or fragmented images, whereas in Morris’s store, the characters share the lived historical backgrounds of others. In this sense, the store embodies a pre-postmodern value, one in which historicity is still tenuously sustained.

2. From Assistant to Owner; or, Revaluing Suffering

What *The Assistant* thematically depicts is the process through which the Italian American clerk Frank becomes “Jewish.” Frank’s “Judaization” carries a double meaning: on the one hand, it refers to Frank’s literal conversion to Judaism; on the other, it signifies his inheritance of the ethical sensibility embodied by Morris, the owner of the grocery store. Yet Frank’s becoming Jewish should also be understood as a metaphorical act—a symbolic reconstruction of identity. Put differently, Frank does not merely adopt a set of religious practices or moral codes; he reconstitutes the very foundation of his being. As Daniel Walden observes, “The grocery store is his [Frank’s] prison, but it is symbolically the locus of his regeneration” (*Menschen* 170). The decisive moment in this transformation lies in Frank’s re-evaluation of suffering: he comes to see it not merely as something to be avoided but as an experience to be recognized and shared. The second section first examines Morris’s characterization within the novel, then analyzes how Frank decodes his ethical sensibility and installs a new one within himself. Finally, this essay considers how Frank’s newly acquired ethos—cultivated in the local space of the Brooklyn grocery store—may be extended into broader

ethical relations with others in postwar American society.

As discussed in the first section, Morris exhibits a compassionate attitude toward others—particularly those who, within the immigrant community of Brooklyn in the 1950s, suffer social and economic hardship. For example, the early narration, “The world suffers. *He* felt every *schmerz*” (7; *sic*), succinctly captures Morris’s empathetic disposition. After his death, the rabbi’s eulogy, though somewhat exaggerated, nonetheless conveys the core of the shopkeeper’s character: “And for this reason that he worked so hard and bitter, in his house, on his table, was always something to eat. So besides honest he was a good provider” (229). Shaped by the context of the Jewish funeral, the rabbi’s emphasis falls on Morris’s honesty and diligence primarily as virtues directed toward his family and his fellow Jews. In practice, however, these virtues transcend ethnic boundaries. Particularly noteworthy is the rabbi’s phrase “a good provider.” Morris certainly worked hard to support his family, but his labor at the store was also directed toward the socially and economically vulnerable—the poor Polish woman and others who struggle to live. In this broader, more universal sense, Morris was indeed “a good provider” to his community. Considering these facts, we may say that Morris, in his daily life, truly embodies what it means to feel “*every* *schmerz*.” What defines Morris’s compassion is precisely his ability to empathize through suffering—to render the pain of others intelligible within his own moral framework. Following Victoria Aarons’s remarks, “Malamud’s characters are given the opportunity for acts of compassion, acts that connect the characters in a uniquely human enterprise” (101). And it is for this reason, and not merely because of his Jewish identity, that Frank ultimately inherits his ethos.

The turning point that enables Frank to inherit Morris’s ethical disposition takes place in their mid-narrative dialogue (123–25). After Morris explains, “The important thing is the Torah. This is the Law—a Jew must believe in the Law,” the most crucial exchange

unfolds as follows:

“What do you suffer for, Morris?” Frank said.

“I suffer for you,” Morris said calmly.

Frank laid his knife down on the table. His mouth ached. “What do you mean?”

“I mean you suffer for me.”

The clerk let it go at that.

“If a Jew forgets the Law,” Morris ended, “he is not a good Jew, and not a good man.” (125)

What Morris articulates here is a Jewish relation that not only signifies the communal bonds mediated by suffering, as discussed in the previous section, but also foregrounds the reciprocal dynamic whereby one’s suffering evokes that of another. The statement “I suffer for you” implies a hypothetical and anticipatory act of bearing the pain of the other. In other words, if “I suffer for you” naturally leads to “you suffer for me,” it presupposes that the other will also suffer on one’s behalf. Such an assumption, in turn, signifies a kind of *unconditional* trust. As Alphonso Lingis notes, “Trust, which is as compelling as belief, is not produced by knowledge. In trust one adheres to something one sees only partially or unclearly or understands only vaguely or ambiguously” (*Trust* 64).⁹ Like Lingis, the Morrisian—or Malamudian—proposition of “I suffer for you” exists beyond the realm of given logic or pre-established conditions. Moreover, through Morris’s deliberately ambiguous mode of speech, the Jewish code of the Torah operates in a way that transcends ethnic boundaries, thus assuming a kind of universality. Also significant here are “His mouth ached” and the description that immediately follows, “His brow was covered with sweat” (125), indicating that Morris’s words penetrate Frank’s interior, eliciting not merely a rational but a bodily and affective response.¹⁰ In this sense, the scene

provides Frank with a decisive moment of transformation—the opening of a pathway toward becoming a subject who lives for the other. Within the context of this essay, such a moment carries a dual valence: the Morris–Frank dialogue not only dismantles Frank's American moral code rooted in the dream of economic success but also restores within him an ethical disposition oriented toward the other.¹¹ Through Frank's inner transformation, Malamud foregrounds “the importance of moral responsibility and human goodness over materialism” as Abramson puts it (*Revisited* 36).

The sins Frank commits in this novel can be broadly divided into three categories: first, the robbery of Morris's grocery store; second, pilfering money from the cash register after he begins working there; and third, the quasi-coercive sexual act with Helen. At first, Frank sought to confess these transgressions in the hope of being forgiven and absolved. Indeed, Frank wavers at great length over whether to confess his sin (89–93). In this scene, Frank's narration repeatedly shows his impulse toward “confession”: “the confession had to come first” (89); “he would someday confess it all” (91); and “he would someday soon have a dirtier past to reveal” (93). While this intense desire for confession reflects Frank's Catholic background, the act of confessing can easily turn into a means of averting one's own culpability.¹² Frank, however, comes to inherit Morris's sense of “the Law.” Already struggling within the moral space of the grocery, he thus does not confess—precisely because he has entered the process of acquiring the Law.

In the latter half of the novel, Frank turns away from confession and begins to confront his guilt through practice—above all, by contributing to Morris's store and supporting his family. In effect, each of Frank's transgressions finds a form of reparation: the money he stole is answered by his financial support, his assault on Helen by his dedication to her education, and the robbery of the store by his labor to preserve the very place he once sought to jeopardize. After

Morris's death, when Frank offers to help the family and support Helen's college education, he explains to Helen his motivation: "In your father's name. If not for you, then for him" (239). As this dialogue makes clear, Frank is no longer dependent on external frameworks such as social approval or economic success. Rather, he acts autonomously and responsibly for the sake of others. His labor is not teleologically directed toward profit or reward; instead, even when burdened by suffering, he turns it into a *resource*, choosing to live for the other without preoccupation with the outcome. In this sense, Frank, the Italian American clerk, has fully embraced the ethics embodied by the Jewish grocer Morris, thereafter undergoing "the experience of redemption through and not from suffering" (Alonso 133-34).

Frank's entry into a community sustained by the mutual support of suffering subjects culminates in the novel's closing line: "After Passover he became a Jew" (246). On one level, the phrase indicates the fact that Frank likely marries Helen and inherits the store, thereby becoming Jewish in an ethnic and religious sense. More importantly, however, Frank also becomes Jewish in an ethical sense. In short, Frank has transformed himself into a Morris-like "I suffer for you" subject. Indeed, Frank's kindness toward the Polish woman who comes for "her three-cent roll" (244-45) parallels Morris's earlier gestures (3). Within the overall narrative structure, this correspondence between the two confirms the ethical transformation of Frank's subjectivity. Malamud frequently portrays his Jewish characters with layered meanings, and in *The Assistant* the symbolic weight of Jewishness is borne by the figures of Morris and Frank. Their "Jewishness" comes to signify an ethics that resists the dominant values of capitalist society, generating an alternative form of value *outside* the economic order. This revaluation of suffering, and the creation of a community in which suffering subjects sustain one another, illuminates the distinctive significance of Malamud's Jewish

characters: they embody ethics that both critique capitalism and affirm the possibility of communal solidarity.

Conclusion

In *The Assistant*, Malamud depicts the importance of an individual's capacity to enact ethics within society. This concern reaches its fullest expression in *The Fixer* (1966), where the confrontation between the individual and systemic injustice is narrated with even greater intensity. The ethics depicted in *The Assistant* and *The Fixer* may sometimes seem overly directed toward the other. However, this emphasis should be understood as integral to Malamud's project as a Jewish American writer. By representing the Jew as an executor of ethics, Malamud provides a symbolic figure whose significance extends beyond its immediate ethnic or religious framework. This act of representation remains suggestive, as it has rendered Malamud's work an enduring ethical point of reference for contemporary Jewish American writers.¹³ In short, it is a novel that generates insights when placed within a contemporary framework. This essay thus has sought to contribute to such a rereading by situating *The Assistant* on "the eve" of postmodern capitalist society.¹⁴

Notes

This study was supported by JSPS KAKENHI grant number 25K12952.

1. For instance, *DSM-5* prescribes that the patient must exhibit at least one of the following: A1—"Depressed mood," or A2—"Loss of interest or pleasure in almost all activities." The diagnostic criteria for depression referenced here are quoted from a summary table found on *the NCBI Bookshelf* rather than drawn directly from *DSM-5*.
2. For more details, see Wisse's *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey through Language and Culture* (2000) and Cappell's *American Talmud: The Cultural Work of Jewish American Fiction* (2007), respectively.
3. The argument of this essay owes much to Marxist critic Fredric Jameson. As discussed later, the sentence here is especially shaped with reference to

his pathbreaking analysis of our contemporary world, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

4. While Morris's store may be understood as diachronic and historical, it should be recalled that in postmodern culture, historicity is always marked by its absence. Taking cinema as his example Jameson observes: "Yet this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way" (*Postmodernism* 21).
5. A pogrom is an organized outbreak of violence, looting, or massacre directed against a minority group, most often Jews in the Russian Empire and Eastern Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
6. Although beyond the scope of the present discussion, Malamud's narrative technique in *The Assistant*—a structure that allows the painful history to permeate the text—resonates, though in a somewhat different context, with Fredric Jameson's well-known remark: "Conceived in this sense, history is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its 'ruses' turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention" (*Political* 88).
7. The process by which suffering creates a channel for others may be considered as an essential aspect of a community. As Alphonso Lingis argues, "Community forms when one exposes oneself to the naked one, the destitute one, the outcast, the dying one. One enters into community not by affirming oneself and one's forces but by exposing oneself to expenditure at a loss, to sacrifice" (*Community* 12). His account approximates the dynamics of Morris's store.
8. Fisher's view on mental illness also reverberates with my discussion here: "The current ruling ontology denies any possibility of a social causation of mental illness. The chemico-biologization of mental illness is of course strictly commensurate with its depoliticization. Considering mental illness an individual chemico-biological problem has enormous benefits for capitalism" (37).
9. Morris's ethical vision here resembles less that of Martin Buber—whose emphasis lies in dialogical reciprocity—than that of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas identifies ethics with the encounter with the "face"—*visage* in the original French—of the Other, as calling one to infinite responsibility. For further discussion, see *Totality and Infinity* (1979).
10. Pre-linguistic responses, frequently portrayed through Frank and other

characters in *The Assistant*, can be analyzed from an affect-theoretical perspective. For further discussion, see Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2005) and Paul Huh's *American Terror: The Feeling of Thinking in Edwards, Poe, and Melville* (2015).

11. Jeffrey Helterman offers illuminating remarks on Frank's recovery of his inner ethics: "Each act of suffering for Bober and the rest of mankind strips away Frank's worldliness so that his act of becoming a Jew is, in St. Francis's terms, true *imitatio Christi*" (50). While Frank is clearly associated with St. Francis, it may not be accidental that Morris's figure evokes, even if not explicitly, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who is well known for his exploration of the "philosophy of dialogue" in *I and Thou* (1958).
12. Frank's urge to confess his sins may be linked to his Italian Catholic background. In the Catholic tradition, the practice of confessing one's sins—commonly known as confession—plays a central role.
13. Concerning its ethical value, Jonathan Safran Foer, one of the representative third-generation Jewish American writers of the Holocaust, states as follows: "While *The Fixer* isn't a book *about morality*, it is a *moral book*. That is, rather than offering a flimsy detective, it presents the reader with a forceful question: Why aren't you doing anything?" ("Introduction" xi ; *sic*)
14. If added, in light of ongoing violence in contexts such as Israel and Gaza, *The Assistant* should be reread as a text that probes "what it might mean to live ethically as a Jew."

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“Table 9, *DSM-IV* to *DSM-5* Major Depressive Episode/Disorder Comparison.”
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