A Jewish writer not preoccupied with her character’s gender identity and more sure of her artistic identity is Cynthia Ozick. Finding the designation “woman writer” too confining and essentially discriminatory, she regards the entire range of human experience as the fit subject matter for her fiction. Exploring the consciousness of both male and female characters, she doesn’t mind being considered a betrayer to the feminist cause or a trespasser in male territory.

Her writings suggest that Jewish morality challenges the very assumption of art. They generally treat ethnic and language problems unique to the Jewish artist. She treats Judaism as a religious as well as an ethnic and social characteristic and her work displays an overt reverence for her heritage. Concerned with the creation of a distinctively Jewish literature Ozick has conceived of a “new Yiddish” which would be comprehensible to speakers of English yet preserve the inflections and tone of the waning Jewish language.

She is the most self-conscious writer. Yet she steadfastly shuns overindulgence of any sort and instead does what too few
contemporary fiction writers do on a regular basis-think. Ozick is obsessed with the words she puts on paper, with what it means to imagine a story and to tell it.

Ozick is recognized as one of America’s outstanding stylists and has received many honors and awards for her essayistic and fictional work. Among them are a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship (1968), the wallant award (1972), the B’ nai B’ rith award (1972), the Jewish Book Council award (1972, 1977)) the American Academy award (1973), the Hadassah Myrtle wreath award (1974), the Lampart prize (1980), a Guaggenhaim Fellowship (1982), the Struass Living award (1983) and the Rea award for short story (1986). She holds honorary doctorates from Yeshiwa University (1984) Hebrew Union College (1984), Williams college (1986), Hunter College of the City University of New York (1987), Jewish Theological Seminary (1988), Boston Hebrew College (1988), Adelphi University (1988), the State University of New York (1989), Brandeis University (1990), Bard College (1991), Spertus College (1991) and Skidmore College (1992). She has taught at New York University as instructor in English (1964-1965) and as distinguished artist – in – residence (1982). She was Stolnitz Lecturer at Indiana University at Bloomington (1972) and delivered the Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard University in 1985. In 1988, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.
MAJOR WORKS

When Ozick finished her novel ‘Trust’ on November 22, 1963, the day John F. Kennedy was shot, she had actually completed her third, novel. The first ‘Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love’ a philosophical work pitting the ‘Liberal-Modernists’ against the New Thomists, she had abandoned after 300,000 words and six years of labor. The second, ‘The conversion of John Andersmall’ she had written within six weeks, but never published.


version of which had appeared as a novella titled The Laughter of Akiva.


In the late 1980s, Ozick started to work on a play Blue Light. For this, she borrowed the plot line and some characters from The Shawl.

In the present thesis an elaborate discussion will be taken up on the following works of Cynthia Ozick:

Though *Trust* is Ozick’s first published book, it is the work of most precocious intellect. It teems with ideas which she develops with all of her rhetorical intricacy. She demonstrates what will become one of her greatest strengths: the ability to create contrasting fictional worlds each with its competing values, and the articulate characters who can make the necessary distinction between them. *Trust* is a satirical and symbolistic work about postwar America in the form of a growing-up novel. The narrator and nameless central character, a precocious, sharp-witted girl, is suspended between her amnesic socialite mother, *Allegra* and three father figures. Allegra’s first husband, *William*, a protestant wall street lawyer, represents Calvinist probity and American capitalism *Allegra’s* current husband, *Enoch*, a Jew, whose task as American envoy to Europe in 1945 is to record the names of those killed in the Holocaust, represents the intellectual and moral forces of Judaism originating not in faith but in an intense awareness of history.

The girl’s biological father finally *Gustave Nicholas*, an incarnation of pagan Greece, a worshipper of pleasure and beauty, plays ‘*Pan* to *Enoch’s* Moses and *William’s* Christ. Chronicling the narrator’s journey toward the discovery of her true father, the 600-page novel is an exhaustive probe into the nature of creativity. Ozick is best known for her intricate prose style and use of magic realism to illustrate the appearance of metaphysical realities in ordinary
lives. Much of her fiction concerns Jewish characters many of whom
discover the significance of, or are struggling to maintain, their
heritage in a predominantly Gentile world. Ozick often embodies
this conflict in the theme of a quest for identity, as in **Trust**
Deborah Heiligman Weiner remarked:

> Ozick sees the world divided in two, that is, with opposing forces pulling at each individual. Whether she terms in Nature versus History, Paganism versus Judaism, Pan versus Moses, or Magic versus Religion, she is talking about the same thing: the pull on the one hand of the easy life, and the pull on the other of order, sense and clarification.¹

This novel revolves around a quest for identity that drives the
unnamed illegitimate protagonist to alternately adopt the lifestyle
and values of the various father figures her superficial mother
presents her. The Protagonist lends her allegiance first to one and
then to the other of these extreme approaches to life before finding
her biological father. Her confrontation with this womanizer – the
male counterpart to her mother – provides the climax to this lengthy
philosophical novel. **Allegra Vand** is a very rich, very spoiled,
twice-married woman who has “alertness without form, energy
without a cause.” She had recklessly flirted with communism and
free-love in the thirties, and at the time of the novel, 1957, wishes to
regularize her affairs so that her present husband may be appointed
to an ambassadorship. Part of the necessary tidying up includes a
forced meeting between a daughter and her actual father, Allegra’s one-time lover from the thirties.

These events, interesting in themselves, exist to reveal the sensibility of the narrator, Allegra’s daughter. She is never given a name. Hers is the only voice we hear directly, whether scene and event occur in New York in the summer of 1957, or whether they occur in Germany after world war II when she was 10, or in England just before the war. The narrator begins at the moment of her graduation from college, when she finds herself simmering in envy over the coming marriages of her acquaintances. She longs to play some simple, easy feminine role herself. But she faces the fact that she is both appallingly intellectual and an emotional recluse. She has cultivated her wit, but has been unable to define her role as a woman. As she prepares to confront her father, we are made aware that the mother’s wish to protect her own reputation has stunted and twisted the daughter’s emotional life. We also learn that Enoch Vand, who married Allegra for her money and is an adjunct to her self-esteem, has always refused to acknowledge his stepdaughter as anything but a minor curiosity. Thus the daughter, at the age of 22, is eager for the prerequisites that should be hers as a woman, but is floundering badly in their pursuit.

The main body of the novel, Trust is a revelation of the narrator’s inner turbulent, psychic drama, which ends with her
reprieve. Her father has performed this small but believable miracle, naturally and inadvertently, by being for her what he has been for her mother and for all of his women: the sly, sexually provocative male animal. Those are an occasional, irritating marring of the novels carefully wrought prose. In the midst of setting forth perceptions and emotional states delicately balanced, Ozick sometimes gives us weedy passages of exposition that must be got through. These may serve as verbal equivalents of the narrator’s feelings. If the flow of images occasionally gets out of hand, this is at worst only a minor blemish. In ordering the difficult interplay of elements, characters observed simultaneously by the narrator and by the reader in somewhat different ways, the another is wholly successful. More important, she succeeds because her protagonist insists upon coming to terms with the recalcitrant sexual elements in her life and, by fictional. Extension in ours.

Trust is a novel of manner, illustrating the luxuriance manner can attain when exploited for its own sake, and the variety of manner at the disposal of striving young novelist. The debt is mainly to the high art and oblique characterization of 60 years ago. Allegra Vand is fairly established as a wealthy New York horror; but other figures we have to grope after. Some sort of moral game is being played at the same level of abstraction: the unnamed girl who narrates, Allegra’s daughter by a temporary lover, is a pawn of the
Vands, whose eyes are on an ambassadorship. The spectacle is one of an acquisitive society; with much of the surface of a fine society the talk extravagantly witty, motives rarely what they seem. It’s set up with some brilliance, but only for the purpose of demolition.

The narrator is a brave girl, in the distinguished line of American heroines whose trust is abused. But if she has a cool, discriminating manner, she also has another that wanders off allusively. He quest for self-discovery (unlike her observation of her mother) is largely conducted in the second manner, and not surprisingly its far from clear, after 560 pages, where the quest has led. It provides, however, a vision of a kind: the girl’s discovery of her real father (in a ruined mansion on an island) and an act of sex in which she feels she has “witnessed the very style of her own creation.” Quest for identity is an integral part of Jewish literature. Jews are the people who really strive to find their real identity. Cynthia Ozick has shown this plight of the Jews in Trust.

The language of Trust is always askew, always surprising or disappointing expectation. She want the arduous struggle for discovery, not the facile shock of recognition According to Eugene Goodheart,

The source of the trouble with Trust is its heroine. From the very beginning she speaks as if she has the taste of roughness in her mouth. She is not disillusioned because she was never illusioned.²
With the exception of Trust, Ozick’s work has always been extremely well received by critics. A major problem with Trust, critics contend is that the language is so opaque that it obscures the world Ozick tries to portray. In her subsequent work, Ozick controls her treatment of language so that, while it remains a dominant feature of her work, it does not get in the way of the story itself. In general, critics seem to feel that characterization and emotive qualities are the weak points of her work, while words and ideas are the strong ones.’ Some critics find a contradiction between Ozick’s desire for a uniquely Jewish literature, on the one hand, and her abhorrence of a uniquely feminine literature, on the other. But nearly all consider her handling of language superb and her intellectual prowess stimulating.

The Pagan Rabbi, Envy; or Yiddish in America, The Suitcase, The Dock-witch, the Doctor’s wife, The Butterfly and the Traffic Light and Virility comprises the volume, The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories. These seven stories are of a piece, variegated but not different because they are energized by common obsessions. Miss. Ozick breaks up familiar experiences and reconstructs them in such surprising ways that common passions- the wish to escape and the exaltation of fantasy into a life-saving reality, the overlapping estrangement of Jew and Gentile (taking different cultural forms, but
departing from the same quality of desperation) transcend towards new truths, revelations.

The short story is an extremely demanding medium. One, at the most two, preoccupations can be handled within its compass. The gift of compressing and conducting obsession into single themes, allowing principal characters to be consumed by their own ideas and retain credibility is exceptionally difficult. Most contemporary writers of the short story strive for the beautiful mood, the language elegant and lovely and precise, and one is left with a perfect sense of crushed flowers and mottled leaves, little definitions and small dreams. Or else, with the so-called “Jewish” writers, the reader receives sociologies rather than visions, for most Jewish writers use Jewish information like a duelist his poniard, good for little jobs and quick flight.

Cynthia Ozick comes forward in this masterful collection, not as a Jewish writer, but as a Jewish Visionary – something more. All of her characters are, to begin with, distraught, distended by the world, trapped by misunderstanding, incommunicativeness, loneliness, exhaustion. But their distraction is only a starting point, The stories are never simply descriptive or evocative.

In the title story, The Pagan Rabbi Isaac Kornfeld, the pagan rabbi surrenders to his lust for a mythological dryad he has conjured and in his passion to enforce upon her pure spirit the vividness of his
flesh, loses her and in grief is hung (hangs himself) by his trailing prayer shawl. The great public scholar of the law, husband of Sheindel who has survived the death camps, father of children (seven daughters), an upright and grave young scholar has pressed beyond the restricted order of the Jewish security system of girdles and fences wandering free has only found madness and death. The notes and letter that he leaves behind offer eloquent testimony to the pagan ideal of freedom and passionately declare the pleasures of natural loveliness, but the story is on the side of his pious widow who damns them utterly with the biblical term, “abominations.” Into the mouth of the errant rabbi the author has put part of her own aestheticist longing, raising worship of the beautiful to the highest philosophic and religious pitch, but only to oppose it finally, almost pitilessly, in the name of religious values.

The rabbi is pagan but he wants to give birth to a rabbi. When he writes to the narrator:

Shiendel is well and Naomi and Esther have a sister.”
And still later; “Naomi, Esther, and Miriam have a sister.” And still later “Naomi, Esther Mirriam and Ophra have a sister.” It went on until there were seven girls. “There is nothing in Torah that prevents an illustrious man from having illustrious daughters,” I wrote him when he said he had given up hope of another rabbi in the family. “But where do you find seven illustrious husbands?” he asked. (P. 9, The Pagan Rabbi)

His male-dominant nature can be seen. The Pagan Rabbi offers at the outset, for example, a familiar, traditional
condemnation. “Idolatry is the abomination,” argues Isaac Kornfeld, the protagonist. But the tale itself deeply qualifies that simple given of Jewish law. Isaac is a serious scholar. But the story traces his journey from traditional texts to romantic poetry, from traditional familial responsibilities to illicit sexual passion, from traditional restraints to freedom—and then to suicide:

The Pagan Rabbi is a tale as balanced as the oxymoron of its title between alternative visions of Law and imaginative freedom that cannot be reconciled.

In Issac’s wife Sheindel, moreover the story offers an even more troubling image of loveless piety and traditionalism. The narrator’s attitude towards Sheindel changes drastically in the course of the story; he desires at first to court and marry her, remembering her beauty and vitality as a girl. But ultimately he leaves her, appalled by her lack of pity, her spitefulness, her ‘mockery and gall.’

Close reading of the story, then discloses not only Ozick’s familiar anxieties about imaginative freedom, but also her awareness that life may turn bitter, cold, and sterile in its absence. This story, though written in English, bears significantly on Jewish literature in both Yiddish and Hebrew. The Pagan rabbi of this story, shaped by that same Talmudic culture but inhabiting the contemporary world, sees in nature not a necessary corrective but a competing force that commands an allegiance as fierce as God’s. Her story unmarks the
ideal of beauty and shows it to be, for the Jew, a force as destructive as any the “Gentile” world can offer.

**Envy; or, Yiddish in America** is a portrait of *Edelshtein*, a Yiddish poet whose special curse is to remain without a translator in a country where the only glory is in being translated into English. He is tenacious in his struggle to be recognized but he is unknown and unwanted. People giggle and mutter at his lectures and are bewildered by his recitations. “He was a rabbi who survived his whole congregation,” and he is, credibly, the supreme Yiddishist, the last Jew Ms. Ozick is at her best in describing *Edelshtein’s* maniacal, self-consuming envy for, Yankel Ostrover, a short story writer ably translated from Yiddish to English, has won the admiration of everyone. *Ostrover* has a fleeting affair with *Mireleh*, *Edelshtein’s* wife, and in spite of the fact that *Edelshtien* loathes Ostrover, he:

> Noticed with self-curiosity that he felt no jealousy whatever, but he thought himself obliged to throw a kitchen chair at ostrover. Ostrover had very fine teeth, his own; the chair knocked off half a lateral incisor, and Edelshtein wept at the flaw. Immediately he led Ostrover to a dentist around the corner. (P.63, Envy)

At one of Ostrover’s hugely successful readings *Edelshtein* meets *Hannah* and later in an epistolary dialogue with the young girl sums up his dilemma, which is the dilemma of “Jewish writing”. He tries to persuade *Hannah* to be his translator and implies that in
doing so she will redeem her generation. Hannah refuses for the understandable reason that she doesn’t like the old man very much. Edelshtein’s delirium at the end is amply justified but not a wholly satisfactory conclusion to what is otherwise a wonderful and pointed tale.

This story is an excellent illustration of liturgical “New Yiddish”, since it is a parabolic comedy in which morality and humor are inextricably linked. She harshly mocks Edelshtein when he becomes the supercilious Yiddish purist. This is not to suggest that Ozick totally disagrees with his assessment of American Jewish literature. With the exception of Saul Bellow whom she respects as the “most purely and profoundly ideational” of the Jewish – American, novelists, she generally shares Edelshtein’s belief that they are largely ignorant of their Jewish heritage, get reviewers praise them for their ethnic wit and perception. Indeed, much of the story’s amusement stems from the fact that Edelshtein acts as the stringent literacy critic who, often expressing Ozick’s views, employs the quaint accent and syntax of yiddishized English to pronounce his unkind judgments. He deplores, for example, the cheap way Jewish- American novelists add Yiddish local color to their work. What Ozick finds most objectionable and worthy of satire about Edelshtein is his hypocrisy. Much as he mocks Ostrover, he prefers to be like him. He, too, would like to escape
from the “prison of Yiddish” if he could achieve fame. His hypocrisy is attacked, however, not by the author but by a twenty-three year-old Yiddish-reading woman whom Edelshtein implores to be his translator, though she is a devotee of Ostrover .... the readers are not to side with the young woman. Ozick sympathizes with his desire to communicate and be understood in an alien land. She can even forgive his envy of those who achieve a spurious kind of communication, she writes:

Yiddish is the language of auto emancipation. Theodor Herzl wrote in German but the message spread in mamaloshen. Naturally the important thing is to stick to what you learned as a slave including language, and not to speak their language, otherwise you will become like them, acquiring their confusion between God and artifact and consequently their taste for making slaves, both of themselves and others.4

This passage elaborates a theory of language which posits that for a Polish Jew to write in Polish amounts to giving up that element of one’s identity which is most crucial in establishing identity: Yiddish is the language of the slave, the underclass, an amalgam of Slavic and German, forged under the conditions of Jewish experience within eastern European culture and thus functioning as a signifier for Jewish difference. The heart of that difference for Ozick is that non-Jews represent their god with their art, literature, while Jews refuse, hence, the non-Jews, who have from this point of view the arrogance to play god in language, to repeat as Coleridge wrote,
the gesture of God’s infinite “I am,” represents someone who sees language as an instrument for mastering both the world and people.

Clearly, the story came out of the intellectual and emotional turmoil caused by Ozick’s immersion in Yiddish poetry. She was ashamed that her generation had been so incurious about their parents’ culture. She was pained by its brutal death in eastern Europe and yet she had been carried into the story by the “bliss of alphabet”, as well as by her discovery of an artistically and morally sophisticated literature.

The main character of the story, The Suitcase is a sixty-eight-year old German architect Mr. Hencke. Here, Ozick attacks the retired architect not for believing in history, but for ignoring it. A man who “no longer thought of himself as a German,” Mr. Hencke, who was a pilot for the Kaiser in world war I, lives in a yellow, brick house in Virginia and denies any “German thoughts,” save those appearing in a recurring dream. In his dream, Mr. Hencke rides naked and bareback on a stallion over a meadow he remembers from his childhood. Although aware of riding a stallion the dreamer sometimes replaces the horse with his dead wife and always cries out in German, “faster, faster.” He unconsciously associates a pagan sexuality with his life in Germany and that he has chosen to live in a yellow-brick house in America reveal Mr. Hencke’s German thoughts.
Mr. Hencke and his son Gottfried are reflections of each other. Genevieve’s scorn for the Germans could be seen from the following lines;

“Shredded Swastikas, that’s what,” Genevieve announced. “Every single damn thing he does. All that terrible precision. Every last one a pot of shredded swastikas, you see that?” (P. 109, Suitcase)

His subliminal hostility rises into consciousness as the architect listens to Catherine, his daughter – in-law and remembers how her depressing conversation always “gave him evil sweated dreams” when Mr. Hencke observes his son and his Jewish mistress Genevieve whispering to each other over a bowl of apples, the father understands an assignation is being arranged and, acting in the spirit of the old school, he undertakes, like God, to protect his son from Sin. In fact, Mr. Hencke seeks revenge on the Jewish woman who has released in him memories he had consigned to his dreams. As he becomes more German, Genevieve becomes more Jewish. At the end of The Suitcase, however, it is Genevieve’s ancestral certitude that prevails, and Ozick matches the Jewish woman’s victory with the Yiddish poet’s failure.

In The Dock-witch, Ozick changes her lens and fixes it on a gentile. The narrator works for a shipping line; he meets and eventually spends the night with Undine (or Sylvia) a vulgar middle-
aged sprite who at one point walks around the wharf area naked and carrying a lyre. When one has decided, hearing Undine claim that she sings in Phoenician, that the joke has gone far enough and is even becoming just the teeniest bit preposterous, one reads on to find Undine transformed into a wooden century – old figurehead on a sailing ship. Though she recounts his experience from a different angel, George, a lawyer and the narrator shares ‘Isaac Kornfeld’s’ conflict; together the two stories reveal that conflict to be one common to Jew and Christian alike. As the authority on Mishnaic history cannot reconcile his love of Nature with the demands of the law, so two impulses coexist in the lawyer. The first is rational and orderly; it has turned him into a “mad perfectionist who chewed footnotes like medicinal candy.” (P. 132, Dock witch)

The narrator is devastated by a water nymph. Once a churchgoer from Ohio, George is unlike his family, a “clan of inlanders”, for his love of the sea has drawn him away from the cornfields of Ohio to an apartment in New York city where he imagines the “mouth of the wide sea” and reads Conrad “far into the night” (P. 133) His desires opposed by his family as ferociously as betrayal. George finds himself seeing off relatives who are traveling abroad. At the dock with his uncle who is going to Greece, the narrator meets the “odd” woman who at first seems as trivial as a “crank” but who later dominates his fantasies:
Pinsker’s analyses of the fiction can also be illuminating. He explains the inferiority of “The Dock-witch” to The Pagan Rabbi, for example, by arguing that the secular character of The Dock-witch deprives it of dramatic tension, making it a portrait of Pan with no Moses for counterpoint.\(^5\)

In Dock-witch, Ozick links the artist’s world of imagination to the worship of Pan. It depicts the artist’s forfeiture of reality to the demonic power of art. This view of imagination is Keatsian, and in her description of Undine – Sylvia, Ozick alludes to those poems in which Keats depicts the enthrallment to the imaginary as not only ephemeral but deadly. Her long hair, her “darkly-ringed” eyes, her evil power – these suggest Undine’s resemblance to Keat’s nightingale, a “senseless traced thing,” to the Lady in the Meads, to La Belle Dame Sans Merci. Like the knight –at- arms, the narrator is left alone and palely ‘loitering; like the poet in Ode to a Nightingale, the lawyer must wonder at the whole experience; like, Lycius the lawyer is wasted “to a shade”. The escape into the magical realm renounced by the narrator of Trust is explored in The Pagan Rabbi and The Dock-witch as Ozick extends the battle between Pan and Moses into a contest between the imagination and the reason, between illusion and reality – a besetting predicament of art.

The Doctor’s wife involves two days, as decisive as those the narrator spends at Duneacres, in the life of a man about to turn fifty.
*Dr. Pincus Silver* regards women’s bodies as their life’s blueprints and scorns his sister for submitting to predetermined existences, for their ordinary marriages to men he cannot keep apart. Surrounded by the pitiful ignorance of his family, the incessant fury of his father, and the “Bedlam, waste, misery” in his waiting room, the doctor treats his patients, advises family members, manages to distance himself from the old recurrent groan of life and remains single. Like *John Marcher* in Jame’s *The Beast in the Jungle*, Pincus Silver is convinced that his most intense capacities his deepest consummations, lay ahead. As he rides through the streets with one of his brothers – in – law the night before his momentous birthday, the doctor is reassured by the child- like fragrance of lilacs which fills the air and which promises future fulfillment.

But Ozick’s allusion to Chekhov’s *Doctor Startsev* augurs the obverse. During the spring, the scent of life wafting from outside, *Dimtry Startsev* is introduced to *Catherine Turkin*, who seems to him the very breath of springtime and who so greatly attracts him that he takes seriously her joke that they meet in a cemetery. (Chekhov 228) *Stratsev* proposes to *Catherine* but is rejected.

*Pincus Silvers’s* fate, Ozick suggests replicates that of *Dimtry Stratsev*. The allusions to stories by *James* and *Chekhov*, both of whom provide related perspective on the unlived life, become in
Ozick’s revisionist reading elements of an arresting obsession the storyteller’s version of idolatry. The emotions that create it emerge in Pug’s thoughts later that night when the doctor has an autumnal vision of his life. He recalls that when he was in the fourth decade of his life, he was in love with a woman whose photograph he had seen in a biography of Chekhov. Entitled Unknown Friend, the photograph extracts from Pincus Silver his complete adoration, which results in his failure ever to find a palpable and identifiable woman. In this worship of a woman in a photograph around which he constructs a consuming fantasy that resists the intrusion of real possibilities.

On the morning of his birthday, he meets his sister Frieda at the super-market and learns she has invited an available woman to his birthday party. At that news Pincus Silver is not very pleased. At the part he feels choked with Gerda Steinweh and forced to hide his coldness. When his sister introduces Gerda to him, he laments inwardly,

Life, life, where are you, where did you go, why didn’t you wait for me? Let me live! (P.No. 202, Doctor’s wife)

Unwilling at fifty to liberate himself, Pug becomes a conscious dissembler when he uses the features of Unknown Friend against Gerda to contrive the image of a marriage he has developed in the darkroom of his mind. It is the tyranny of illusion the
sacrifices it demands, and the failures it promotes that Ozick penetrates in. The Doctor’s wife. In Virility she satirizes the brilliant, though ephemeral, success of an illusion. The perils of paganism links The Pagan Rabbi to The Dock-Witch, the conflict between generations Envy to The Suitcase. In The Doctor’s wife and Virility a lie determines futures of the main characters. Matching thematic similarities in the two tales, Ozick sunders them in tone and balances the grimness of one with the playfulness of the other. For disparate reasons, neither man succeeds in constructing a future; if one has excised his history, the other never made one.

History is crucial for the narrator of Trust, and history makes an immediate appearance in the first paragraph of The Butterfly and the Traffic Light, in which Jerusalem serves as a contrast to the places where time has not yet designed to be an inhabitant. A “phoenix city” with a history of histories, a city where no one is a stranger, Jerusalem illuminates the true meaning of the past rather than the fabricated one exemplified in the Midwestern American town that is the story’s setting. Wanting the college town to have historical allusions, the mayor named one of the town’s streets after the “Bigghie diaries”, a traveling salesman’s forged records. And Big Road, as it can be spelled, occasions Fishbein’s lectures to Isabel. For Fishbein the uniformity of lamp-posts in America evinces its dreary sameness, the diverse lamp-posts in Europe its
individuality. But Isabel sees them as some kind of religious icon belonging to an advanced religion monotheism. Hers is an opinion Fishbein disputes:

The index of advancement is flexibility. Human temperaments are so variable, how could one God satisfy them all? The Greeks and Romans had a God for every personality, the way the church has a saint for every mood. Savages, Hindus and Roman Catholics understand all that. It’s only the Jews and their imitators who insist on a rigid Unitarian God. (P. 214-215 The Butterfly)

The Jew’s refusal to obey Antiochus IV’s decree to set up a statue of Zeus on the altar of the temple of Jerusalem caused the Maccabean war, but that altogether unintelligible occasion, Fishbein tells Isabel, come of missing an imagination of not accommodating Zeus and God under one roof. The second metaphor emerges in one of Fishbein’s lectures:

Looking at butterflies gives pleasure. Yes, it is a kind of joy, but full of poison. It belongs to the knowledge of rapid death. The butterfly lures us not only because he is beautiful, but because he is transitory. The caterpillar is uglier, but in him we can regard the better joy of becoming. The caterpillar’s fate is bloom. The butterfly’s is waste. (P. 217, The Butterfly)

Fishbein’s metaphors echo Keats’s idea of beauty in the Ode on Melancholy, There the death moth is linked to Psyche, whose emblem Fishbein adopts. His name and his allusion to psyche invokes Venus, the role the goddess of love played in the Cupid and Psyche story. In the later story Ozick explores the consequences of what Fishbein deems a harmless affair bringing Zeus together with
God, whereas in Trust and The Butterfly and the Traffic light, the dichotomy between Judaism and Paganism is represented by two separate characters.

The last story of the volume is Virility. The narrator of the story is quite aged. The one hundred six year old (centagenerian) narrator observes:

Now it is the stars which dictate fame, but with us it was we who made fame, and we who dictated our stars. (P. 222 Virility)

Envisioning a future bereft even of the memory of Byron and Keats and preoccupied with moon pilots and Mohole fishermen and algae cookies and anti-etymological reformed spelling, Ozick satirizes not only the idea of fame but the destiny of high art and the present fashionable indifference to history. Her aged narrator begins his tale just as the narrator of The Pagan Rabbi does, in the present. The narrator of Virility is driven to return to history to recount the reasons Edmund Gate jumped off a bridge at twenty-six. He was born Elia Gatoff and began life auspiciously. A boy during Czarist times, Elia was sent to live with an old aunt in Liverpool on a forged passport until his family could be reunited there. But a pogrom murdered the entire family and it fell to Tante Rivka an intellectual spinster to care for and teach her great nephew. To support him, she worked in a millinery shop sewing on Veils – an occupation that becomes metaphoric in the sewing Harems, and taught the young
boy English. He rewarded her toil with abandonment and journeyed to America unaffected either by the fate of his family or the future of his aunt. Ambitious to be a poet, *Elia* arrived in America wanting contact with written material and came to the office of the narrator’s newspaper for a job, which he was given despite his lack of preparation and in spite of his indifference to his past. Rapidly divesting himself of it by taking the narrator’s name, *Edmunal Gate*, *Elia Gatoff* becomes an impostor and Cynthia Ozick posits a theme with which the first novella in her second collection is concerned and which continues to appear throughout her fiction – the issue of impersonation.

*Margaret* supports the confidence *Elia* has in his future recognition. After the publication of his first volume of poetry, titled *Virility* by *Margaret*, *Virility II* and *Virility III* follow rapidly along with an infant whom *Margaret* names *Edmund*.

At their nub, all the stories in *The Pagan Rabbi* are concerned with art and tradition. Ozick has adduced the conflict between religious belief and the religion of art, lamented the disparagement of history. Her first volume of tales embodies that anxiety in the tension between the generations in *Isaac Kornfeld’s* and *Hershal Edelshtin’s* competing desires in *Pincus Silver’s* ruling illusion. She ends the volume with *Virility* a tale whose subject is
impersonation and whose satirical elements summarize the vital concerns of the entire volume.

Cynthia Ozick’s second collection of short stories comprises of four stories. The title of this collection is *Bloodshed and Three Novellas* *A Mercenary, Bloodshed, An Education and Usurpation* (other people’s stories) are the titles of the four stories.

The central figure of the first story *A Mercenary* is *Stanislav Lushinski* a Pole and a diplomat. Historical event has determined him to welcome the paganism of the tiny African country he represents. From the girls he pressed down under the trees, he learns the language of that country. A native of the land Lushinski has adopted, compares his boyhood to the diplomat’s and in the parallel events of their lives, Ozick establishes them as secret sharers and ultimately unmasks the mystery – the man, the diplomat claims to have killed – at the core of Lushinski’s existence. If Lushinski has traveled to Africa and learned its argot, *Morris Ngambe* his assistant holds an Oxford degree in Political Science and talks to the diplomat in his office about his childhood. We are shocked to read about his mother’s cannibalism. The ritual cannibalism of Morris’s mother a worshiper of plural gods and a believer in animism, transformed her into the goddess *Tanake – Tuka*, a goddess who could perform miracles. Having partaken of the principal sacrament the nose, *Morris* prays to his mother’s picture. What has drawn Lushinski to
Africa emerges in a television interview. But designed as mockery and parody, Lushinski’s story elicits laughter and disbelief not only from the television audience but from Morris Ngambe. Only Louisa, the diplomat’s German mistress, does not doubt her lover’s veracity, for it has often shaken Lushinski out of nightmares and comforted him with the reminder that he was now a figure the world took notice of. One the telephone, Lushinski addresses Louisa first as Tanake-Tuka then Lulu (a German name) She resembles Morris’s transformed mother. Lulu has less strength than the goddess and submits to every wish of her lover, though she knows how the word Jew restored him to fear, because he is a Holocaust survivor. But he is reminded of his Judaism by a letter that discusses an imprisoned Japanese terrorist who tried to become Jewish by circumcising himself in prison. While Lushinski is affected, perhaps offended, at being reminded of his Jewish history, we are left uncertain as to the direction of his response.

Captivated by Africa, the Lushinski at the end of the story knows himself to reside in the land of burning pitch described by Isaiah the land on which the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness are stretched. Exchanging the savagery of Poland for the paganism of Africa, Lushinski becomes a mercenary, the Prime Minister’s gaudy pet – a way – paid slave kept for pleasure. Ozick explores with uncommon acuity the reasons for impersonation and
its consequences. Pursued by crud adults as a child Lushinski ends by identifying with them. Africa becomes an adult version of Poland, only with a crucial difference: Lushinski transforms himself from the person who was terrified into the person who terrifies. He makes a war ostensibly to raise prices: he victimizes as he was once victimized. History, the memory of the past, and Lushinski are, as he tells Lulu, one and the same.

The first of the stories in Bloodshed and Three Novellas are concerned with the problem of Jewish identity after the Holocaust, A Mercenary makes plain that a fabricated identity neither liberates nor ennobles: “cultural accommodation” succeeds only in victimizing.

In the title story Bloodshed, a Jewish fund-raiser visits his distant relative in a newly established Hasidic community outside New York suspicious of fraudulence in others, he is forced, during the course of an interview with the rebbe, to acknowledge his own deceit and his own demonic capacities. Not an impersonator, Bleilip the protagonist calls himself a secularist:

The secular Jew is a figment; when a Jew becomes a secular person he is no longer a Jew.  

But Bleilip feels himself to be part of society at large. “If he (the Jew) does not judge what he finds, if he joins it instead, he disappears.” (P. 59, 58; Bloodshed) In fact, Bloodshed is divided in
half; in turn, each half contains matching episodes and repeating images which ultimately expose the central character’s intentions, That he considers the town of the Hasidim alien is evident in his first glimpse of his cousin Toby, who Bleilip thinks is a convert, an ordinary girl who has been transferred into something freakish. To his questions about whether she likes her life, one he, a lawyer and a professional fund-raiser, thinks insular and primitive, she responds,

Why do you keep asking? Don’t you like your own life? (P. 56, Bloodshed)

Including himself in society –at- large, away from her shtetl, he thinks he enjoys his life excessively, but as Yussel observes, Bleilip is looking for something. He and the Hasidim exemplify the difference between the Jewish idea and the word –at- large, between cultural rootedness and cultural marginality. That Yussal has survived the death camps arouses special expectations in Bleilip. From a survivor, he wanted some kind of haze, a nostalgia for suffering perhaps, he presumed survivors had a certain knowledge the unscathed could not guess at. But his attitude toward the Hasidim is sharply divided. Bilieving Toby crazy to follow deviants, not in the mainstream even of their own tradition Bleilip is nonetheless lured by the very group of Jews he thinks actually christologized. A movement that transformed and dominated Jewish religious life throughout the nineteenth century. Hasidism
proclaimed devotion to the Zaddik (righteous person, or the Hasidic rebbe) and his teachings as the corridor to inner redemption, The rebbe brings to his reading of the Torah passages from the Talmud and other sources, and the traditional texts receive the fresh interpretation that induce a religious act of intense personal devotion – spiritual elevation. It is that experience that Bleilip means to observe as he fits his haunches into a boy’s chair and tries to catch a glimpse of the rebbe, whose face Bleilip imagines is a patriarch’s face – the father of a large family. In the rebbe’s optimism and in Bleilip’s despair, Ozick renders contrary psychological reactions and antithetical theological responses to the human condition after the Holocaust. The rebbe and Yussel, whose name and that of his wife recall Tibi and Yossi, the two boys in night who want to keep together for strength, represent two views of life after the Holocaust, two answers to the question the rebbe poses in his sermon “how is it possible to live?” At the heart of contemporary Jewish theology, that issue encompasses not only post-Holocaust problems but all contemporary problems with faith and doubt.

An Education, the earliest and the least successful of the four novellas, is a heavily ironic treatment of a prize student who tries, and fails, to understand life by the same ideal systems of grammar and definition that can be used in Latin declension.
Una Meyer, the central figure enters her college Latin class, by twenty-four she has acquired a master’s degree in classics and most of a Ph.D. She is pure and innocent, while describing her innocence Ozick writes:

Her brain is deliciously loaded with Horace – wit, satire, immortality – and even more deliciously with Catullus – sparrows and lovers and a thousand kisses, and yet again a thousand, which no mean and jinxing spy shall ever see, Una has kissed no one but her parents, but she is an intellectual and the heiress of all the scholars who ever lived. (P. 75 Education)

Calling herself a Platonist, who believes in the perfectibility of man, Una argues against the idea of cultural relativity. When her friend Rosalie introduces her to Clement and Mary Chimes and tells her about their card catalogue, Una thinks she has discovered perfection. What Una fails to understand about Clement is that in changing his name from Chaims the word meaning life in Hebrew, to Chimes like what a bell does, he signals his cultural relativity. For him the word “Holocaust” means nothing more than an opportunity to pun: of “Heidegger and the Holocaust” he makes the joke, “Heidegger and the Holy Ghost” (P.80 Education). That Ozick refers to Heidegger in this context adds another dimension to the title of her story. A member of the Nazi party for a year, Heidegger cultivated educational reform in the classroom as the model for society, a concept of education valued by
the Nazis who invoked “Greek paideia to justify… their racial elitist notions of Kultur”.7

The enrollment of Chimes in the seminary, his wife’s name Mary, their decision to call their child Christina these suggests an attraction to Christianity. The man who lacks the courage to be himself is the man who changes his name and disavows his heritage. Clement Chaims has not sold his birthright, he has disclaimed it. Ozick records his pursuits sardonically. Enthralled to her adopted parents, she forgoes her Fulbright, takes over Mary’s responsibilities for Christina, writes Clement’s letters, works at Woolworth’s so he can write, pays a good amount of rent and sometimes feels that she wasn’t an imposition on the chimese after all. Her education is in enslavement, Una is unmarried, but she performs all the chores of a married person. Then she meets the equivalent of her namesake’s Knight, the student in her college Latin class who was ignorant of the genitive case. Boris Organski. In spite of Boris’s admonitions, Una cannot forget the Chimeses. And the Chimeses have not forgotten their Jewish origin is indicated by the presence of a rabbi at Christina’s funeral.

Neither repaired not reconverted by her education, Una refuses to marry Boris because “there’s no education in it” and decides to complete her Ph.D. at a Midwestern university. A winner of a Fulbright to study certain Etruscan findings in southern Turkey,
Una Meyer ends up on the faculty of a small college in Turkey, New York surrounded by colleagues who are domesticated. A guest at weddings, the narrator of Trust evinces her interest in marriage on the last pages of the novel, but the forty two year old Una, who visits her married friends, lacks the passion for ordinary human, entanglement. The issue for Jewish identity bridges An Education to A Mercenary and Bloodshed.

The fourth and last novella of the collection is Usurpation (other people’s stories). In this Cynthia Ozick mocks herself as author for pilfering other writer’s fiction. The novella’s narrator – protagonist is a woman who has plagiarized from the works of male writers. One of the purposes of Usurpation other than providing the true confessions of a story thief is to ridicule the writing of fiction itself. It is revealed not as a miraculous process whereby the finished product emerges fault – free from the divinely inspired head of the creator. Ozick’s narrator – protagonist is a vain, short-tempered opportunist who values public renown over the perfection of her craft. For her, no edifying relationship exists between tradition and the individual talent. She is too busy exploiting the talent of others to appreciate tradition and to cultivate her own creativity Ozick disapproves of the art of fiction not only on aesthetic and ethical grounds. For a Jewish writer, fashioning a Make-believe reality through words is an idolatrous act, in direct violation of the Second
Commandment. But her greatest objection to story-telling is its usurpation, since the author appropriates from God the role of creator.

Against her apprehension – that the writing of stories is an offense against the Second Commandment – is her lust after stories more and more. But such a conflict, though Ozick claims it for Jews, “is at least as much Christian as it is Jewish.”:

Drawn not to the symbol, but to the absolute Magical act…. To what is forbidden (P. 134 Usurpation)

The narrator of Usurpation recalls the Yiddish poet and his secret desire for western civilization. But in this novella Ozick is concerned with the “relation between the usurper and the idolator. What obsesses her tale is the writer’s clash with tradition; what signals that conflict is the presence of the father. The first story, the “prey” of usurpation is Bernard Malamud’s “The Silver Crown” which concerns a father whose son, a teacher, seeks a cure for his dying father from a Miracle – working rabbi. Promising a magical, healing silver crown, the rabbi extracts the teacher’s money and the father dies, but the rabbi exposes the lifelong hatred the teacher has harbored against his father. The narrator suggests the underlying theme of Ozick’s story, the storyteller’s concern for the father as transmitter of tradition and preserver of continuity, values, Ozick adduces in her essay “Innovation and Redemption.”
In the guise of critic and “unfamiliar with the laws governing plagiarism” the narrator robs the goat of his story just as he complained the famous writer had. Ozick very cleverly links her narrator and the writer who approaches her to Pan the Greek god who had goat’s horns and legs, and both writers to the renowned writer, who stole his tale from a newspaper. Her story, ostensibly a retelling of the goat’s is in fact based on elements gleaned from Malamud’s *The Silver Crown* and David Stern’s *Agnon : A Story* the story, and her vision of those tales constitutes the story -within- the story, the moral point of *usurpation*.

Though she seeks “to reproduce a purely transmitted inheritance, free of substitution or incarnation though she strives not to compete with the “creator” and to maintain an unbroken chain of tradition descending from God’s revelation at Sinai, the storyteller risks violating those values when she creates her own world and rebels against her predecessors. The many references and allusions to fathers in *Usurpation* the idea the narrator has of having the sick father in *The Silver Crown* recover in her own story the allusion to Hamlet, the false rabbi’s story- suggest simultaneously the desire to emulate the patriarch’s stance and the wish to displace it. A metaphor for inheritance, continuously low-all that the artist can subvert – the father in *Usurpation* symbolizes an ineluctable conflict. Such strife inhabits the deepest layer of the novella, and its
other title and the references to *Hamlet* imply. The ending of *Usurpation* is conditioned not only by her dread of idolatry and her desire to adhere to the teachings of the patriarchs but by her enduring lust after stories. *Usurpation* unfolds the last and most serious betrayal of Judaism and most then upholds obedience to its decisive commandment. In that confirmation resides Ozick’s conviction in a more strenuous moral experience and a meditation on the loss of values and beliefs threatening contemporary life. Concerned as they are with rootlessness, disbelief, and idolatry, the fictions in *Bloodshed* pertain directly to our times.

*Levitation Puttermesser*  
*Her work History, Her Ancestory, Her Afterlife, Shots, From a Refugee’s Notebook and Puttermesser and Xanthippe* are the five fictions of this volume, *Levitation : Five Fictions*. In the title story, *Levitation* Ozick satirizes the New York literary scene through a party given by two undistinguished novelists. The only unusual occurrence at this dull gathering transpires when one of the guests, a survivor of the death camps, begins to speak of his experiences and he and his listeners float up into the air. This variously interpreted event is deemed by some critics as an indication, typical in Ozick’s work, of the moral superiority of Jews. Feingold and his non Jewish wife Lucy, both are novelists. Each had published one novel. Hers was about domestic life; he wrote about Jews. Lucy believes she and Feingold have the
same premises, but from the very beginning of *Levitation*, Ozick clearly differentiates Lucy’s premises from Feingold’s he didn’t wanted to marry a Jew therefore he married Lucy, a Christian and a minister’s daughter. Unknown and excluded from the ranks of famous writers in New York, the Feingolds delight in their productivity. On one principle they concur: the “importance of never writing about writers” (P. 4 Levitation)

Lucy reads only Jane Austen’s “Emma” she has refused her father’s gift of transmission. In fact the minister’s reading of a psalm determined Lucy to convert to Judaism, yet to her “Jews and women were both beside the point.” Professing to be an Ancient Hebrew, Lucy is as indifferent to history as an Ancient Greek. But Feingold is drawn to history, owns volumes and volumes of Jewish history and writes about Jews. His attraction to the middle ages one of the darkest eras of Christian Europe when Jews were persecuted, humiliated, and massacred. He has chosen as the subject for his novel Menachem ben Zerach, a survivor of a fourteenth – century massacre in Spain.

“From morning to midnight he hid under a pile of corpses, until a compassionate knight (this was the language of the history Feingold relied on) plucked him out and took him home to find his wounds. Menachem was then twenty; his father and mother and four younger brothers had been cut down in the terror. Six thousand Jews
died in a single day in March. Feingold wrote well about how the mild winds carried the salty fragrance of fresh blood, together with the ashes of Jewish houses, into the faces of the murderers. It was nevertheless a triumphant story: at the end Menachem ben Zerach becomes a renowned scholar.” (P.5 Levitation) Captivated by the massacre, Feingold is drawn mainly to the compassionate knight for whom the novelist plans to write a journal, thereby converting the knight into a writer.

But Lucy is against Feingold’s way of thinking. She dislikes his views about the compassionate knight and remarks that Feingold’s compassionate knight is only another writer. Lucy closely resembles Jane Austen’s protagonist at the beginning of ‘Emma’, the only book Lucy reads:

Jane Austen records the growth of her heroine’s morals, the progress of Emma Woodhouse’s perceptions, the young woman’s burgeoning comprehension of the world and the human beings who inhabit it. Her novel focuses on marriage, is unconcerned with religious issues, and provides sharp commentary on Lucy Feingold and her world.8

Like Lucy’s, Emma’s world is narrow; both women judge people by their power, which in Emma is manifested by class and property. If Ozick calls attention to Lucy’s eyes, Austen dramatizes Emma’s misperceptions which diminish with moral progress. Lucy, however, makes less and less moral progress as Ozick’s story proceeds, and the marriage that ends Emma happily and represents
the fulfillment of its protagonist’s maturity is in Levitation exposed as a relationship based on conflicting premises. Unable to leave her father even to marry Mr. Knightley, Emma is attached to her father as Lucy is detached from hers. If the adoration Emma lavishes on her father is, as Mark Schorer believes an emotional insufficiency, the breach between Lucy and her father is a cultural deficiency.

The Feingolds are unnoticed in New York. Therefore to grab attention, they invite a number of luminaries to a party, none of them attend. But they unexpectedly learn about power from the refugee a friend brings to the gathering. Divided into three party-rooms which shine like a triptych, the Feingolds’ apartment emphasizes the tripartite structure of “Levitation” and befits the story’s concern with artists. Lucy feels uneasy because everyone in the living room was a Jew. Ozick divides Lucy from the guests in the living room and allies her with the ones congregated in the dining room. It is filled mostly with gentiles.

The face of the Jesus, the refugee reminds Lucy of her father. But the voice of the refugee commands attention to modern times, to the time when the eyes of God were shut, the time which Feingold has ignored and about which Lucy can feel nothing:

The refugee was telling a story, “I witnessed it, “he said, I am the witness”. Horror, Sadism; corpses. As if – Lucy took the image from the elusive wind that was his voice in its whisper – as if hundreds and hundreds of crucifixions were all happening at once. She visualized a hillside with
multitudes of crosses, and bodies dropping down from big bloody nails. Every Jew was Jesus. That was the only way Lucy could get hold of it; otherwise it was only a movie. She had seen all the movies; the truth was she could feel nothing. (P.14 Levitation)

The refugee’s horrifying memories evoke nothing but a mind picture in Lucy. For her “Holocaust” is only a movie. She transforms his harrowing story into an aesthetic experience. Emerging from beneath her illumination, she strains after the faint voices of the Jews in the living room; but she knows they mainly speak of the Holocaust. In unabashed boredom she recoils from the atrocities of the Holocaust, considers Feingold diminished and joins to the repetitive horrors of the death camps her father’s iterated hymns, dismissing them all as “tiresome.” From the room in which she has been abandoned, Lucy turns in relief to the dining room where the humanists – all of them compassionate knights – congregate and discuss the impact of romantic individualism, but the real impact has been made in the living room where “All the Jews are in the air” (P. 19,20 Levitation) and here ends the fiction.

Like Toni Morrison Cynthia Ozick combines a superb ability render her own cultural heritage with a plainly limited comprehension of the majority culture that encompasses/oppresses it. Although there is no mystery about a Black or Jewish writer’s lack of empathy for things White or Christian, art requires emotional discipline to avoid turning into propaganda. Such discipline may be
too weak when Ozick’s hatred of “the whole – the whole” of western civilization” (a claim resembling Morrison’s statement that “my hatred of White people is justified”) produces the hypocritical William of Trust, the cartoonlike evangelist at the end of “Envy” and the more serious but inadequate effort to characterize Lucy as a Christian in Levitation. It is nonetheless appropriate to ask, regarding this failure of imagination how many Gentile writers have rendered the figure of the Jew to better effect than Ozick has rendered her Christian (Lucy)? Chaucer, Marlowe, Dickens, Hemingway—as we glance back through the centuries the portraiture of the Jew by Gentiles has not presented much solid ground from which to attack Cynthia Ozick’s portrayals of Christian characters particularly as viewed after the Holocaust.

Puttermesser: Her work History, Her Ancestry, her Afterlife is biography of a thirty-four year old lawyer Ruth Puttermesser. She is unmarried, something of a feminist – while she is living in her family’s apartment in the Bronx. Ruth is assistant corporation counsel in New York’s department of receipts and disbursements, “not quite a civil servant and not quite not a civil servant. Twice a week she visits uncle Zindel the stingy for Hebrew lesions. Ozick introduces to note that Zindel died before Puttermesser was born. Called into being out of her need to claim an ancestor, because a Jew must have an ancestor, Zindel is her fancied
surrogate father who unlike Puttermesser’s father, possesses a tradition to transmit. Her personal history testifies to a clash between the law and the imagination. Although she never denies her Jewishness, she remains in the “back office” hunting up “all-fours cases for the men up front,” noting the exclusion of Jewish men from athletic clubs, observing the men’s growing anxiety at not being moved into the front offices, and witnessing the men’s departures from the firm she is convinced discriminates neither against Jews nor women. At her farewell meal with the firm’s partners at a club barring women, she becomes aware of their anti feminism; their “anthropological” interest in the rites of her tribe, confronts her with their anti-Semitism:

We’re sorry to lose you, one said and the other said, “No one for you in this outfit for under the canvas hah? The canvas?” Puttermesser said, “Wedding canopy,” said the partner. With a wink, or do they make them out of sheepskin – I forgot. An interesting custom. I hear you people break the dishes at a wedding too,” said the second partner. (P. 27 Puttermesser)

In her next job with New York City in the department of Receipts and Disbursements, she discovers civil bureaucracy, patronage lists, and witnesses the transience of power. Away from the municipal building, Ruth studies Hebrew grammar in bed. The permutations of the triple-lettered root elate her. The capacity of the Hebrew’s Verb’s three letters to “command all possibility simply by a change in their pronunciation, or the addition of a wing-letter fore
and aft impresses her “as a code for the world’s design.” While working in the municipal building she had a luxuriant dream, a dream of *gan eydn* – a term and notion handed on from her great–uncle Zindel. The tree of Life stationed in the center and filled with a myriad of trees, *gan eydn* was thought to consist of seven divisions corresponding to the seven classes of the righteous who in turn were ranked by degrees, “one higher than the other,” and allotted an appropriate dwelling in paradise. To its third division belong the great scholars whose devotion to the study of Torah provided them in paradise with the “solution of the intellectual difficulties which had beset them on earth.” Whatever division they occupy in *gan eydn*, the righteous will be served the flesh of Leviathan at a feast.”

At the moments of discrimination. Puttermesser’s thoughts about Dreyfus are significant, for his obliviousness to the upsurge in anti-Semitism was connected to his assimilation into a society to which he was loyal and in which he felt secure. A warning to assimilationists who sought to become undifferentiated people in the modern world, the Dreyfus case prompted many Jews to return to Judaism and rekindled the Zionist idea. Ozick has incorporated into the lawyer’s dream of *gan eydn* the reward accorded to the third class of the righteous and changes the principal course of the banquet, transforming the traditional vision of paradise into a mirror
of her character’s psyche. Puttermesser needs to own a past because she is a Jew. Discovering herself “in the world without a past” with a mother “born into the din of Madison Street” and a father “nearly a Yankee,” Puttermesser not only presupposes an afterlife, she “dares to posit her ancestry.” Her biographer records a conversation between Puttermesser and her uncle Zindel, from whom she is learning Hebrew, assures us the lawyer has “not much imagination” and “is literal with what she has,” and then reveals Zindel died before Puttermesser was born.

To know herself, to learn her name, the narrator of Trust must uncover her past and discover her father; to own a past, to learn the meaning of her name, Ruth has to invent an ancestor and secure a link in the chain of tradition. The product of her fancy, Zindel epitomizes the freedom of the imagination, its power to redeem the past and so ensure a future. Declaring Puttermesser an “essence”, not an “artifact”, her biographer detaches herself from the lawyer’s life, announces the lawyer “is henceforth to be presented as a given” and concludes this chapter of Puttermesser’s life. But the last line of the story – “Hey! Puttermesser’s biographer! What will you do with her now” – promises another chapter of Puttermesser’s biography.

In Shots, the attachment the narrator has to photography reflects her commitment to history and her capacity to restore memory. The title of the story plays on two meanings of the word
“Shot”. By producing a photographic record of what is seen, the photographer’s shot preserves life; by killing his prey, a Marksman’s shot shatters life. The competing senses of the word appear repeatedly throughout the story; they are deployed to incarnate the story’s essential conflict, and they are illustrated precisely by two photographs. The unnamed narrator, who is a photographer carries an old photograph she calls the Brown Girl in the pocket of her blouse and in a pocket of her mind:

I could keep her even though she was dead…… I could keep her, just as she used to be, because someone had once looked through the bunghole of a box and clicked off a lever. (P. 42, Shots)

However, at a public symposium she attends, her camera captures the very moment the simultaneous translator is killed; and her photograph, preserver of time, registers “death the changer, the collapser, the witherer” (P. 41, shots)

Both pictures mark a photographer’s intimate involvement with time. The narrator’s accidental discovery at age eleven of an old and browning photograph suddenly brings awareness of time’s existence and recalls the passage at the beginning of Trust where, after her commencement exercises the graduate inadvertently learns how time is revealed and recognizes the moment as the beginning of knowledge. At first, Brown Girl evokes the young narrator’s wish to defy time: “if only she had
been halted, arrested, stayed in her ripeness and savor!” older, the photographer realizes that what she had seen in the photograph “was time as stasis, time at the standstill, time at the fix; the time…. Of Keats’ Grecian Urn” (P. 40, 41 Shots). Linking the fixed time of Keats’ Urn to the arrested time in a photograph, Ozick establishes a congruence between art and photography and intimates the dilemma of both: like the figures on the urn who are immobile, imperishable, and unfulfilled, the photograph rescues a moment from the ravages of time, but consigns it to unchanginess, the curse of perpetuity.” Art and photography possess the ability to preserve life by representing it; yet their magical powers are potentially perilous, for they can become idolatrous. Having linked art and photography, Ozick renders their apt connection into her central metaphor.

Her metaphor is transformed into a parable about art when she recounts the relationship the photographer has with Sam, a married tenured professor of South American history. Their story demonstrates the deep affinity existing between art and history and examines the fate of the artist. The narrator meets Sam when she is assigned to follow him through some public symposia he is chairing. Although at first she didn’t care about one thing in Sam’s mind, “she becomes infatuated with him, attends to everything he says, and finds herself wanting more. Ozick relates the narrator’s infatuation with Sam to the photographer’s discovery of photography: I came
to photography as I came to infatuation with so special talent for it, and with no point of view” (P. 39, Shots) After meeting Sam’s wife, the narrator reflects that infatuation comes on like a “bullet in the neck” (P. 51 Shots) A bullet in the neck is how the simultaneous translator, whose picture she took, was murdered, and she thinks telling Sam how “between the exposure and the solution, history comes into being” would make her “bleed, like a bullet in the neck” (P. 52, shots). The appearance of that phrase within the contexts of infatuation, photography and history raises vexing questions.

And the ambiguity implicit in the story’s title persists. Immediately after Sam tells her that his wife Verity is so remarkable that he will never have mistress, the narrator, though “silent about the orphaned moment” they are living asks to take his picture under a dripping linden tree” so that she can keep him forever. Although the narrator has mused that history comes into being during the process of photography, her picture now seems “finished on the spot” (P. 54 Shots) The photographer’s infatuation with history does not generate history; the photographer stops time but she “shoots” history. Her photograph of Sam who “now resembles a Greek runner resting,” recalls her reference to the time of Keat’s Urn. (P. 54, shots) Both the urn and the camera possess fixative powers: they stop time’s erosion but suppress the very movement in life that leads to fulfillment and decay. And the picture of Sam under the wet
linden tree symbolizes the meaning of history, for the linden, whose heart-shaped leaves account for its traditional erotic overtones, was respected as a guardian of pregnant woman and regarded as a life–index. Mostly present when Sam and the narrator walk, rain, as it does in Trust, signals moments of revelation.13

By associating Sam – an allusion to the last biblical judge – with the dripping linden tree, Ozick suggests that history clarifies the past, vitalizes the present and presides over the future; by having Sam invite the photographer to observe his life with Verity, Ozick reveals that history’s truth is enacted in the palpable reality of time, not in the factitious rendering of time. After the narrator sees Sam and Verity’s apartment, watches Verity sewing, and sees what her “polishing and perfecting” fingers have achieved, she concludes “Verity resurrects” Indeed, Verity resurrects a dead nun’s brown clothes, dresses the photographer in them, and converts her into a living “period-piece”; the work of truth differs from the effort of representation. Her image reflected in the mirror attached to a bedroom door, the narrator sees herself “all in brown, as brown as leaves” and, identifies with the Brown Girl.

Twenty-five years later, staring into a mirror, the thirty-six-year-old photographer sees the same aging spinster’s face and thinks about growing old, about dying. “Lovesick” and “dreamsick” the way Brown Girl must have been and tripping “over …… [her] nun’s
hem”, the photographer seizes her camera – an “ambassador of desire”, a “secret house with its single shutter,” a “chaste aperture a dead infant the “husband of “ her bosom” – catches the reflection of Sam’s and Verity’s heads,” negatives of each other …. in their daughter’s mirror” and shoots into them, exposing them; making them “stick forever” (P. 56-57 Shots) If Verity and history are negatives of each other, married to each other’s reflections, they can experience the better joy of becoming the spring that defies time’s dominion, and the photographer who has reproduced their image has contributed to history. However, the photographer’s “intimate involvement with the subject matter necessitates detachment” from it and her photograph freezes the “Spontaneity of life without leaving traces of his presence”. The relationship of photography and history and the necessity for continuity persists in the two fragments that constitute From a Refugee’s Notebook. Published in 1973, ‘Freud’s Room’, the first fragment, bears as’ important an affinity to ‘Usurpation’, which was published the same year, as to ‘Levitation’ and ‘Shots.’ Spanning a six-year period, the fictions record Ozick’s evolving ideas about art. Found behind a mirror in a vacant room for rent on the west side of New York City, the notebook containing the fragments recalls the kind of student from an earlier generation. Though the author of European or perhaps South American origin, remains unidentified, the fragments have been written by a refugee
suggests they will contain truths as powerful as those uttered by the
refugees in *Bloodshed, Usurpation* and *Levitation*.

‘*Freud’s Room*’ introduces the unidentified narrator: a person
who has never visited Vienna because of an antipathy to any land
which once suckled the Nazi boot, but who has nonetheless
“dreamed over photographers of those small rooms where Sigmund
Freud wrote his treatises …… met with his patients …… and kept his
collection of ancient stone animals and carved figurines. (P. 59
From a…) the ‘literal minded’ refugee describes two photographs of
Freud’s room. One is of Freud sitting at his desk surrounded by
books and “hundreds of those strange little gods”. Though at first
glance the second photograph seems to be filled with ‘Victorian
clutter’, upon a closer look, the picture reveals that everything in the
room is necessary. Especially the Gods: The photograph produces a
curious juxtaposition of the stone Gods Freud collected and the
couch where he analyzed his patients. Seeing through the
photograph, the narrator apprehends that the stone gods “represent
the deep primitive grain of the mind” Freud sought, that the patient
“on the couch was an archaeological enterprise”, that Freud lusted
“to become a god absolute as stone.” ‘*Freud’s room*’ joins spirit or
imagination which means Image-making, which is to say idolatry to
stones, tyrants and kings. The men in history whom the refugee lists
as sharing Freud’s wish to become a god – the Pharaohs, Napoleoan,
Hannibal – are idolaters; that Freud is among them reveals another facet of Ozick’s remonstrance against the Viennese psychoanalyst. Her refugee once again relies on history to illuminate the nature of Freud’s mind and implies that Freud became one with “spirit” and contravened nature.

The second fragment *The Sewing Harems* shows the refugees’ concern for maintaining the ordinary rhythms of life, his scorn of Freud for disrupting them as well as for reinventing the principle of death. The first sentence of the fragment:

> It was for a time the fashion on the planet Acirema for the more sophisticated females to form, themselves into Sewing Harems (P.65 *The Sewing Harems*)

Immediately establishes the fragment as a parable; drenched in metaphor: The refugee’s pen unleashes a Swiftian reflection on the self-indulgence of so-called enlightened women in Acirema, America spelled backwards, and on the country’s choice of artifice over naturalness. Just as Swift’s descriptions of Lilliput and Brobdingnag have lessons for Gulliver, the refugee’s description of the planet Acirema possesses moral truths for its readers. Just as Swift’s savage tone in ‘A Modest Proposal’ demonstrates his deep moral concerns for humanity, Ozick’s satirical tone in *The Sewing Harems* marks a profound regard for continuity.

Because they considered children as unwelcome interrupters of personal development and frustrators of rational population
reduction, the females of Acirema have organized Sewing Harems in order to prevent conception without relinquishing sexual delight. Hired by all the cities on the planet, the Sewing Harems fared poorly in the under developed countries where they were rarely found and where less innovative practices prevailed. Since they were taught that they were at the root of the planet’s woes and deemed ‘pariahs’ the children of the Sewing Harems turned themselves into irrational demons. ‘Idolized motherhood’, transformed the Madonna of Love in ‘Levitation’ into a ‘Superior Goddess’ called ‘Mom’, From their worship of her came the birth of more savage pariahs. Idolators, the offsprings of the Sewing harems not only murdered Sewn women, they erected huge statuary in the shapes of vulvae to honour their goddess. Life on the planet continued in this way until technology improved the thread for sewing, making it virtually unsnippable, ensuring the permanence of the stitches until death.

Ozick’s parable not only traces the implications of the Freudian attitude toward women but addresses those radical feminists whose zeal for egalitarianism eventuated in the very segregation they sought to dispel. And thinking deeper The Sewing Harems like Levitation, Shots and Freud’s Room concerns art. With consummate wit, the parable clarifies and dissolves the commonly held view that childbearing is tantamount to the toil of the artist.
The two works in the middle of the book Levitation and Five Fictions are the furthest from story form. From a Refugee’s Notebook consists of two fragments supposedly left in a rented room by a European or South American refugee. The first is a meditation on the subject of Freud’s room, the burden of which seems to be that Freud, in his attraction to the cauldron of the unconscious to the irrational, wished to become a god. The second fragment The Sewing Harems discusses the fad of Sewing Harems on the planet Acirema. These women who sewed up their vaginas but occasionally managed to conceive anyway when they rented themselves out for the pleasure of wealthy businessmen. Most of this Swiftian exercise focuses upon the unfortunate children, who band together in Momist sects, produce offspring of their own and in time come to spread their totems, “great stone vulvae”, over the surface of the globe. This fiction is less sterile and recondite than it is private – by which I mean it reveals nothing of the personality or situation of the refugee, its putative author. We are refused entrance to a fictional world.

This fragment is surprisingly leaden fantasy about a craze, on the planet Acirema (which no doubt should be read backwards), for Sewing Harems: groups of women who can be hired to sew themselves together. These fragments contain the ingredients of Cynthia Ozick’s successful fiction, but willfully separate them into
one piece of non-fiction and one aimless improvisation. The feminist
Ozick, a more cheerful sort, takes on Anatomy as Destiny, “If
anatomy were destiny, the wheel could not have been invented; we
would have been limited by legs,” she snaps in “The Hole/Birth
Catalogue,” a masterly demolition of Freud on women. She is
outraged by sentimentalists who patronize women by comparing
housekeeping or pregnancy to artistic creation. This imaginary
fragment shows that Ms. Ozick has a complicated as well as
revolutionary mind. She has also proved that she is not only a
Jewish philosopher but also a feminist.

Ozick is much tougher on a new character, Ruth,
Puttermesser, who makes her appearance in two of Levitation’s five
fictions. We first meet her as a thirty-four year old single lawyer in
Puttermesser: Her work History, Her Ancestry, Her Afterlife.
This is a funny study in contrast between Puttermesser’s current
WASP work environment and her New York Jewish family as a
child: when we meet brainy Puttermesser again in Puttermesser
and Xanthippe, she is forty six and still unmarried, and employed
by New York’s city Department of Receipts and Disbursements. In
an act of frenzied worry about corruption in New York City, the
rationalist Puttermesser creates a female golem, an animated human
figure made of clay. This creature, self- named Xanthippe, helps
Puttermesser to become mayor of New York and to clean up and
reform the city. But soon thereafter the golem’s libidinal drives run amok, and Xanthippe destroys the paradise she had helped to build. Like Rabbi Loew in seventeenth-century Prague the most famous creator of a golem in Jewish lore, Puttermesser is forced to undo her own creation in order to regain control over it. During a talk at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1988, Ozick called Xanthippe a “metaphor for art”. Art, her story claims, unfolds its destructive potential as soon as it leaves the realm of the imagination and enters the real world.

Puttermesser and Xanthippe is the last and longest of the five fictions. Puttermesser, pushed beyond fantasy, creates a golem – an artificial creature of Cabalist lore- out of the earth in her potted plants. When Puttermesser is fired the golem, who insists on: being called Xanthippe after Socrates’s shrewish wife, gets her elected mayor of New York. Under Puttermesser’s rule, the city is transformed………

Again Ozick returns to the theme of creation that runs through her stories:

Puttermesser made Xanthippe, Xanthippe did not exist before Puttermesser made her: that much is clear enough. But Xanthippe made Puttermesser Mayor, and Mayor Puttermesser too did not exist before. And that is just as clear. Puttermesser sees that she is the golem’s golem. (Puttermesser P. No. 30)\textsuperscript{16}
Golems turn on their makers. Xanthippe, who like all golems has not stopped growing, discovers sex, becomes insatiiable and thereby, in hilarious fashion, destroys Puttermesser’s administration. Puttermesser disgraced, unmade-unmakes Xanthippe. New York is delivered back unto chaos.

Like Ozick, Puttermesser is an intelligent rationalist. Puttermesser makes a golem; Ozick makes up stories. Ozick equates the magic in her stories with the magical process of writing fiction. So writing about rooms levitating and golems becomes writing about writing, about making magic. For Ozick fiction is also magic.

The golem set loose within the bureaucracy of modern-day New York City is a non-human creature made of earth but sprung, full-blown from Ruth Puttermesser’s overactive imagination. It is the offspring of her imagination. Ruth, the first name of Puttermesser means faithful in Hebrew. The difficulty with Puttermesser is that she is loyal to certain environments. In fact the forty-six year old civil servant’s situation remains unchanged; still avowedly single and intellectual, Puttermesser feels attacked on all sides. Her married lover Morris Rappoport had left her after she had read aloud Plato’s *Theaetetus* instead of making love. She has developed periodontal trouble and her office life was not peaceful.

The inventor of a visionary city and an imaginary being, Ruth Puttermesser, like all of the central characters in *Levitation*, is an
artist beset by the conflicts her creator ascribes to the enterprise of art.

Throughout Levitation, Ozick upholds the necessity of maintaining Jewish tradition. She also embodies the relationship between art and tradition. Robert R. Harris commented on the stories in Levitation: Five Fictions:

Ozick writes magically about magical events, but she distrusts sorcery, the stock in trade of fiction writing. This irony gives her work a thought-provoking dialectical quality. Her stories are elusive, mysterious and disturbing: They shimmer with intelligence, they glory in language, and they puzzle. 

The Cannibal Galaxy was published in 1983. The protagonist of the novel is Joseph Brill, principal of an ambitious, dismal, private elementary school somewhere in Middle America. Brill is a French Jew, a refugee from the Holocaust. It is his conceit that a school might develop what he calls ‘Dual Curriculum’ half Talmudic studies, half European culture. Such an education would embrace a passion for the ideal and a passion for sardonic detail. Brill is a bachelor, a failed astronomer, “a melancholic a counter of losses…. used to consorting with the Middle.” His students are middling and so is his faculty, which is given to assigning long lists for memorization. Ozick puts him at age 58, confronting the mother of a dull student. The mother, Hester Lilt, is European, too a formidable philosopher: “an imagist linguistic逻辑ian. Brill grew
up in Paris. He attended the Sorbonne where he learnt to worship serenity, absorption, civilization, intellect and imagination. During World War II, Brill is saved from history by a group of nuns who hid him in the basement of their convent. There, in his damp, smelly dungeon he discovered a cache of books, and the books – a motley assortment included everything from catechisms to Corneille – gave him an inspiration. Brill thought that if he survived the war, he would find a school based on a marriage of Hebrew and European Enlightenment cultures.

Brill establishes his school on the banks of one of the great lakes. But instead of achieving a synthesis of two great cultures (Jewish and secular European), however his school seems to specialize in mediocrity. Frustrated in his attempts to find a prodigy – that one special child whose talents he can nurture and mold, Brill himself begins to decline. Then, one day, Hester Lilt a formidable woman who has achieved intellectual celebrity as an “imagist linguistic logician” arrives in Brill’s life and enrols her daughter, Beulah, in his school. Infatuated with the mother’s air of seriousness and disdain, Brill remains oblivious to the daughter’s gifts. She falls through a hole in his school’s carefully constructed system, and he dismisses her as ordinary, as dim, as remarkably unexceptional. In doing so, of course, he makes a great mistake – a mistake as Ms. Ozick reveals through several swift cranks of the narrative
machinery that will reveal the narrow way of Brill’s own life and mind.

Beulah is a very quiet child. If Hester Lilt humbles Brill, Beulah unseals him. Beulah is mute and vacant, an underachiever. Brill struggles to arouse her but Beulah doesn’t give any kind of response. Hester refuses to treat her daughter as a problem to be worked upon. Instead she sends Brill her latest paper, an essay on the fertile and significant properties of silence. Years later, a kind of answer comes. Beulah has become an avant-garde painter, a Parisian sensation. Asked about her childhood education in America, she says she doesn’t remember it.

Ozick has made her meaning plain. If Beulah’s muteness was the seed of Hester’s brilliance, it is a glory not a shame. It is life, the willingness to respond to it, that preserves the intellect from its own corruption. The premise of The Cannibal Galaxy is the uneasy condition of the Jewish heritage in the prevailing Gentile culture a subject that can be fully viewed only in the shadow cast by the Holocaust. The book’s governing metaphor is the cannibal galaxy, in astronomy, one of the vast colonies of stars that devour smaller galaxies. The cannibal stands for Europe, devouring its Jewish citizens such out of the way images spring naturally from Ozick’s prodigious erudition. This novel like her earlier short stories and novellas, is dense with metaphor, often drawn from the rich Jewish
resources at her command: the Hebrew Bible, the Midrashim, or Jewish homilies and the mystic texts of the Kabbalah. At the same time, she navigates the currents of other world cultures with the sure-handedness of a true lover of ideas.

The Cannibal Galaxy seems to suggest that it is all but impossible for Jews to break into the surrounding culture with their heritage intact. Their loss and the world’s of such a vast and distinctive tradition would be a tragedy:

Cynthia Ozick’s new novel, The Cannibal Galaxy is so rich in its tapestries that it can be read variously as an incisive through ironic evaluation of the American private school system as a commentary on the problems of assimilation increasingly faced by Jewish day schools, as a wry report on the aggressiveness of Jewish mothers asserting the educational prerogatives of their children; or as a book dealing with Jewish marginality, power and powerlessness, and generational conflict; or as a study in the ‘second lives’ of Holocaust survivors, who have lost one family, created another, and breathe always the tragedy of the past with the hope of the future in the monomania of the present. To drive her point home about the dangers of allowing western culture to supplant covenant and commandment, Ozick has borrowed from the world of physics the concept of larger, ‘cannibal’ galaxies swallowing smaller ones whole. This concept she turns into a metaphor for the threat facing the survival of Diaspora Judaism, and develops from the metaphor an illuminating and entertaining parable which will likely be one of the best books of the year.18

The Cannibal Galaxy is based on Ozick’s novella The Laughter of Akiva. Joseph Brill withdraws from the restraint and responsibility of Judaism when he marries Iris Garson and only dangles ‘on the rim of infatuation’ with Hester Lilt (P. 77 Cannibal
Galaxy). He chooses a pagan goddess instead of a Jewish heroine. The fleet – footed and winged messenger of the gods and goddess of the rainbow that touches both sky and earth, Iris bore a resemblance to the Harpies and the birdlike sirens. The pervasive bird imagery in the novel such as at the end of the novel when Brill finally reads Hester’s manuscript ‘Structure in silence’ he discovers that its last section is ‘School mistress’ about the pelican and the stork, about birds and their young. As if to mark a final distinction between the philosopher and the principal, Ozick turns his mockery of motherhood into the philosopher’s accusations. These explain why Brill remains a bachelor almost all his life, why he pursues only inappropriate women, till he meets a truly appropriate woman.

Brill as a principal is not very good at Beulah. But his misapprehensions are instructively similar and they coincide with the misjudgements of Brill, the father. Ravished by genius, the principal attends to his son Napthali’s first text ‘Bright eyed…. ambitious beyond anything,’ ingenious lists…. Where Brill habitually counts the losses he incurred during the war, Napthali compiles a ‘Biographical Scrapbook’ containing the “life story, from birth to death, of every person who ever had anything to do with the American Revolution” (Cannibal Galaxy P. 140) where the young Joseph Brill dreamt of founding a school, the young Napthali dreams of becoming a teacher. The father disdains the chaotic, the
disorderly; the son loved orderliness (Cannibal Galaxy P.148) But
the son’s ‘protean’ nature renders the pedagogue’s judgment from
early performance” a nullity, Napthali decides not to teach but to
major in business administration, not to study at the Sorbonne but to
enroll in Miami University.

Ultimately, Napthali journeys, as his father once did, to
another place where instead of founding a school to “bring together
all his visions,” he thought he would found companies, induce them
to accrete, and then forcibly amalgamate them.

The philosopher Hester Lilt disappears from the novel save in
Brill’s intractable belief that she had ruined his life, or else in her
daughter’s immense achievements, which continue to besiege him.
Envisioning Hester Lilt, “swallowed” up in the ‘belly of Paris’, Brill
associates her with the Cannibal galaxies, those megalosaurian
colonies of primordial gases that devour smaller brother-galaxies-
and when the meal is made, the victim continues to rotate like a
Jonah- dervish inside the cannibal, while the sated ogre-galaxy its
gaseous belly stretched, soporific, never spins at all motionless as
digesting death”. (Cannibal Galaxy P. 69). A galactic phenomenon,
the cannibal galaxies are a summarizing metaphor for the various
kinds of cannibalism in the novel: schoolmaster devouring student
parent plundering child, one civilization engulfing another
civilization.
THE MESSIAH OF STOCKHOLM

In 1987, Ozick’s third novel, The Messiah of Stockholm appeared. It tells the story of a Swedish book reviewer, Lars Andemening, who is deeply in love with literary art, imagines himself the son of the Polish Jewish writer Bruno Schulz. Schulz was shot dead in Nazi-occupied Poland in 1942, and the manuscript of his unpublished novel The Messiah disappeared in the chaos of the war. Ozick’s plot revolves around its reappearance in the possession of woman claiming to be Schulz’s daughter. Lars is introduced to her by a German exile, the mysterious owner of his favourite bookstore. It is home to a wonderfully Jamesian family of con artists who try to convince Lars to announce the resurrection of The Messiah in his book – review column. Infatuated with Schulz, Lars very much wants the manuscript to be authentic, but in the end he escapes the snare and declares it to be a fake. The con artists disband. Despite its many hilarious scenes depicting the narrow, inbred world of book reviewers, The Messiah of Stockholm is a tightly constructed novel of ideas in which Ozick spells out her theory of western aesthetics. Through the concept of idolatry she links Paganism, Christianity, Romanticism and Nazism as ideologies that indulge western aesthetic sensibilities at the expense of historic perspicacity and moral commitment.
The Messiah of Stockholm is dedicated to Philip Roth. The central character of the novel Lars Andemening is middle-aged, twice divorced solitary and alienated. He has convinced himself that he is the son of Bruno Schulz. He learns Polish to read Schulz in the original, and he achieves a sense of reality only when he discusses with Heidi Ekund, the mysterious owner of his favorite bookstore that he frequents. The difference between Lars and her previous protagonists resides in the subtle internalization, in this novel, of the author’s preoccupations. Lars never thinks of himself as being Jewish and scarcely understands that his fantasy of being Schulz’s son is a quest for a lost identity, for belonging to a people. Beyond question, and yet with superb, almost Jamesian.

Very little seems to happen in The Messiah of Stockholm, yet no one would wish to it to be shorter. The only event, carefully prepared from the first paragraph on, is a deft conspiracy involving Mrs. Eklund, the bookstore owner, her enigmatic husband, Dr. Eklund a dealer in manuscripts; and a woman purporting to be Schulz’s illegitimate daughter (he never married) who calls herself Adela, the name of the formidable and sexually menacing housemaid in Schulz’s stories. Adela comes bearing the supposed manuscript of her father’s lost book, The Messiah, which the Eklunds offer to Lars to read, translate and publicize. In the novel’s most extraordinary scene, Lars reads through the manuscript in the
presence of the Eklunds and Adela and then in a rage burns it. *The Messiah* goes up in Smoke, a final sacrifice after the six million.

Even before the act of destruction, Lars has lost his sense of identity as Schulz’s son, though he sees clearly that Adela is the Eklund’s daughter and not Schulz’s. But then was the manuscript a forgery? It is left to the readers to decide. Lars is left in doubt, though mostly persuaded that Dr Eklund, a forger of passports for refugees, himself wrote *The Messiah*:

“A reader will take away from *The Messiah of Stockholm* the memory of a powerfully rendered person in Lars who not only is a student of losses, but is himself a grand loss, blighted version of what would Lars been an eminent Jewish critic but for the sorrows of history. Yet a sensitive reader will take away something more heartening as well. Ms. Ozick shyly has restituted us for Schulz’s loss *Messiah* by composing her *Messiah of Stockholm*. The humor of that title is her wry commentary both on her own daring and on the problems of trying to maintain and extend Jewish literature in the post–Holocaust era.”

The interplay between point and nimbus in *The Messiah of Stockholm* may achieve a subtlety or muted compatibility rather new in Ozick’s work from an overly reductive view, Lars’s story can be seen as another variation on and reversal of the “mistaken life” theme that we have noticed in Bleilip and Brill. Like the narrator of *Trust*, Lars is on a paternity quest, but his peculiar genius is to have fathered himself, choosing his name from a Swedish dictionary (as a refugee orphan, he is Lazarus Baruch). He has elected as his father Bruno Schulz, the Polish Jew exterminated in Drohobyz, who left
behind him a slender oeuvre and the rumor of a lost novel in manuscript, entitled The Messiah. Religiously obsessed with literature at its most intensely symbolic, Lars strips himself of the trappings of life like an unwanted skin two wives, one daughter, the quotidian furniture of domesticity. His aim is to pursue without distraction his role as suppliant – worshipper of the sacred words. Most particularly he seeks the lost words of his putative father in what is for Ozick a demonically comic, curiously heroic, idolatrous action. The plot of the novel – an ironic consequence of the plotting of the Eklund clan to use Lars as the discoverer / introducer of the lost Schulz Messiah – works to release the forty-two – year old Lars from his prolonged egglike boyhood, as he burns the manuscript, abjures his obsession with Schulz and literature, and embraces mediocrity and commonplace existence.

Lars Andemening’s experience bears a remarkable resemblance to an episode in Cynthia Ozick’s life, which ozick recounts in The Lesson of the Master, an essay she published three years before completing The Messiah of Stockholm. Describing herself when she was half Lars Andemening’s age and under the spell of Henry James, she discloses, an imagery echoed in her novel, the effects of his influence:

I had become Henry James and for years I remained Henry James…….. I carried the Jamesian idea, I was of his cult, I was a worshipper of literature, literature was my single altar, I
was, like the elderly bold-leaded James, a priest at that altar; and that altar was all of my life. Like John Marcher in *The Beast in the Jungle*, I let everything pass me by for the sake of waiting for the Beast to spring – but unlike John Marcher, I knew what the Beast was…. The Beast was literature itself (Art and Ardor P. 294-95)”

Two themes have preoccupied Cynthia Ozick throughout her career as a critic and as writer of fiction: the dangers of idol worship (that is, the violation of the second commandment “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image”) and the difficulties experienced by the Holocaust generation in coming to terms with the compromises of contemporary American society. Both these themes lie at the heart of the two interconnected stories in *The Shawl*. These stories are *The Shawl* and *Rosa*; both of which won O. Henry prizes after appearing first in *The New Yorker*. The two stories stand, at once, as dazzling philosophical meditations and beautifully crafted works of fiction.

In *The Shawl* Ms. Ozick sets down, in short intense, takes an account of what happened to Rosa Lublin and her baby daughter, Magda, during their internment in a concentration camp during world war II. Both of them, along with Rosa’s niece, Stella, are starving. Rosa worries that Stella wants Magda to die so that she can eat her tiny body; she, meanwhile tries to placate her baby’s hunger by giving her a linen shawl to chew on.
When Stella steals Magda’s Shawl, the distraught infant toddles out of the barracks – until then, Rosa has kept her alive by keeping her hidden and she is spotted by a soldier who brutally murders her by throwing her into an electrified fence. Rosa simply stands there “because if she ran they would shoot, and if she tried to pick up the sticks of Magda’s body they would shoot, and if she let the wolf’s screech ascending now through the ladder of her skeleton break out, they would shoot.”

Fierce, concentrated and brutal, The Shawl burns itself into the reader’s imagination with almost surreal power. In contrast, the story Rosa which takes up Rosa’s life some thirty years later – achieves its power through the accumulation of seemingly naturalistic details, immersing us persuasively in its heroine’s new life.

Having survived the war and its aftermath, Rosa has been living in New York. Recently, however, she has given up her antiques business – she made headlines in the papers by abruptly demolishing her own store – and moved to Miami, where she lives in an old people’s hotel grudgingly supported by Stella. It is a squalid circumscribed existence. She rarely ventures outside her room, rarely speaks to her neighbors. Speaks to her neighbors. The present holds no interest for Rosa. She dwells, obsessively, exclusively, on the past, on what happened to her and Magda so
many years ago in Poland; on what happened to all the hopes and dreams she once cherished as a young woman.

The Proustian Madeleine that summons up the past for Rosa in Magda’s magical Shawl. With the Shawl, Rosa can actually conjure up Magda’s presence: she will hold the shawl, cradle it and suddenly the room will be ‘full of Magda’. Sometimes Magda appears as a teen-ager, wearing one of Rosa’s lovely sky-blue dresses. Sometimes she is a beautiful young woman of thirty, a doctor married to another doctor with a large house in Mamaroneck. Sometimes she is a professor of Greek philosophy at Columbia University.

In Ms. Ozick’s fictional world, Rosa’s obsession with the shawl and her fantasies about Magda make her guilty of idol worship. Like Lars Andemening in The Messiah of Stockholm, Rosa has created a fictional world of her own; a tiny solipsistic system of thinking that excludes everyone and everything else. As a result she has cut herself off from reality, excluded herself from the mundane satisfactions of ordinary life and in the process she has become a madwoman:

The Shawl is not a book about the Holocaust, but about men and women who have survived it. Therein lies its depth; therein one encounters its truth. Normally, the survivors of such a catastrophe which we call – so poorly – the Holocaust, should not be normal. Having seen the collapse of their universe with its system of values and networks of cultural alliances and social loyalties, having approached the abyss where their existence was swallowed up, it is inconceivable that their sprit
remained whole. How can they believe in the power of intelligence, while, for so long, they witnessed the triumph of brutality? How can they invest in the future while, together with the past, it is buried under ashes? And yet, after the torment, miraculously, men and women found the strength in themselves to affirm life, and the sanctity of life. Hardly had the flames been extinguished, when in the DP camps, marriages were already celebrated, schools reopened, as if to announce to the entire world: in spite of everything, love exists faith, too and also hope.  

For Ozick, the past confronts the present, in oedipal literary history the present destroys the past. Her fiction disrupts this everyday idolatry to which many of her characters and much of her audience are devoted. The purpose of this disruption is ultimately, to bring the past into a living relationship with the present, a move which Ozick understands as desperately necessary for the continuation of a viable and recognizable Jewish community. Rosa in a certain sense embodies the past because her experience in the camps particularly witnessing the brutal murder of her small child has left her incapable of functioning in the present. As she says to Persky, the retired button maker who chooses to court her:

Before is a dream
After is a joke
Only during stays.
And to call it a
life is a lie. (Shawl P. 58)

While serving tea to Persky in her room, she opens a package that she thinks contains the shawl that she had used in the camps to protect her daughter Magda. When she discovers that the package contains instead a book sent to her by Dr. Tree – a social
psychologist interested in doing statistical studies on Holocaust survivors, she flies into an uncontrollable rage, destroys the teacups that she had set out and accuses Persky of being a thief. Understandably Persky exits. This incident in the story talks about the mentality of the people who wanted to earn degrees, name and fame on the sorrows and plight of the sufferers.

When the package with the shawl finally arrives she holds that shawl as she speaks with Stella over the telephone using the shawl, Rosa turns the telephone into the image of a living thing and worships that thing at the expense of relationships with human beings. Rosa, of course may not realize all this consciously. However, the realization seems to be at last, a memory that does not pull her helplessly into the past but begins to help her construct a feasible way of living in the present and future. Immediately upon the admission that she attempted to dominate others, several events begin to reconnect her to the world. The telephone begins to ring, the Cuban receptionist of the hotel announces that Persky was downstairs, waiting to see her. For the first time Rosa responds not with rejection but with willingness to see and speak with others.

Rosa allows Persky to come; takes the shawl off the phone. This is the first moment in the story where memory begins to work as metaphor to draw people together rather than as a screen to keep them apart. Persky, in fact had a wife in an institution in New York
and through that experience is able to empathize to some degree with Rosa’s emotional outbursts. While Rosa is self-deprecating, the practice of memory allows Persky and Rosa to come together with some hope for the future. The final lines of the story clearly affirm a life of commerce between past, present and future:

Magda was not there shy, she ran from Persky, Magda was away. (Shawl P. 70)

Of separating the victims of the Holocaust from its perpetrators Ozick has written:

The Holocaust happened to its victims. It did not happen in them. The victims were not the participants. The event swept over them, but they were separate from it. That is why they are ‘sanctified’ because they did not perform evil…. And if there is one notion we need to understand more than any other, it is this principle of separation. The people for whom the Holocaust ‘happened’ were the people who made it happen. The perpetrators are the Holocaust; the victims stand apart.  

CONCLUSION

Cynthia Ozick’s novels, stories and novellas are not only steeped in internal Jewish life and lore to a degree that sets them apart from the work of her contemporaries and predecessors; they are actually Jewish assaults on fields of Gentile influence. Though she admires the transforming magical kind of art, Ms. Ozick is, in fact an intellectual writer whose works are the fictional realization of ideas. Her reader is expected at the conclusion of her writings, to have an insight, to understand the point of events rather than to
respond to their affective power. Because she is a Jewish writer who prides herself on the ‘centrally Jewish’ quality of her work, she has hit a curious snag.

The writer who can achieve ‘truth of feeling’ produces universal art whatever the ethnic stuff of his or her subject, but a writer of ideas requires a community of knowledge and shared cultural assumptions. As a prophet of an indigenous Jewish culture in the English language, she might have been expected to hail the failure of the critics to understand Jewish terms given in her work as a milestone – an authentic breakthrough in the creation of a distinctive Jewish literature. Instead, determined to have both the cake and the eating of it she anxiously becomes her own translator. If her kind of art is not inherently universal, she is apparently prepared to provide ‘art with an explanation’ in order to spread the splendor wide. Saving herself from a lonely ethnic fate, Ms. Ozick appears not simply as an author but as cultural impresario of a new Jewish literature in America.

Being a Jewish writer she is also keen on Jewish feminism. As rabbi, Ms. Ozick’s chief target is idol worship, whose ramifications, she argues, include the Holocaust, Jewish assimilation and much modern literature, all of which are the result of substituting ‘aesthetic paganism’ for moral seriousness.
When a Jew becomes a secular person he is no longer a Jew. she writes in Towards a New Yiddish; he is merely a neuter, an “envious ape” of gentile culture.\textsuperscript{23}

The feminist Ozick, a more cheerful sort, takes on Anatomy as Destiny:

If anatomy were destiny, the wheel could not have been invented; we would have been limited by legs.\textsuperscript{24}

She snaps in The Hole/ Birth catalogue a masterly demolition of Freud on women. She is outraged by sentimentalists who patronize women by comparing housekeeping or pregnancy to artistic creation.

The centrality of Jewish historical memory to Ozick’s imagination suggest her commitment to the central traditions of Jewish religious thought and practice. The collective memories of the Jewish people were a function of the shared faith, cohesiveness, and will of the group itself. The decline of Jewish collective memory in modern times is only symptom of the unraveling of that common network of belief and praxis through whose mechanisms… the past was once made present. Therein lies the root of the malady. Thus Ozick’s call for aesthetics of memory rooted in Jewish tradition may be a call sounded in a vacuum if those memories are as broken and fragmentary as Ozick.

These problems with the loss of memory and the possibilities or impossibilities of repairing that loss are foregrounded everywhere
in Ozick’s fiction. Ironically, though the structure of her thinking about ethnicity emphasizes descent, Ozick’s historical situation places her in the role of evangelist or prophet, calling for an alternative form of consent by which her Jewish audience and whatever gentiles are moved to do so, or might come to inhabit Jewish memory anew.

Throughout Ozick’s fiction, memories of the past or characters who embody the past appear in fantastic guess to warn of the consequences of forgetfulness or to provide some fragmentary instruction about the past. *Ruth Puttermesser*, a character to whom Ozick has returned in several stories, is one character in need of such cautionary reminders. Puttermesser is a character in search of history, or more precisely, an ancestry a living connection to the past that will give her life beyond her mundane efforts in a civic bureaucracy.

This discussion on Ozick’s works i.e. some of her novels and short stories suggest that the Jewish relationship to tradition has been far more mobile and creative. To be sure, the situation of American Judaism in the post-Enlightenment and post-Holocaust period brings with it a unique historic problematic, However, that there is a challenge to memory does not mean memory has failed utterly. Rather, it means that history again forces Judaism into a creative appropriation of the past.
Ozick’s works represent one form of creative response to this historical rupture. Her texts are a call to cultural memory and are themselves threads of cultural memory, threads that lead readers backwards and forwards to other threads of tradition while her work does not by itself heal or rejuvenate Jewish collective memory it is a mark of that memory and a force that speaks the continuity of Jewish tradition in contemporary world.
Notes:

5. Sanford Pinsker, How Philip Roth and Cynthia Ozick Reimagine Their Significant Dead, Modern Fiction Studies 35, No. 2summer 98, P. No 234.
9. Toni Morrison`S Comment appears in her interview with Tom Le Clair in the New Republic, 21March 1981, 29
11. This explanation is based on A Cohen`s discussion, The Hereafter 383-89.
13. Strandberg Victor, The Art of Cynthia Ozick (P. 280) Ozick`s use of Frazer`S the Golden Bough in Trust is discussed. This is discussed. This juxtaposition of human and tree into a revelation of larger import is seen elsewhere in Ozick`s fiction and is used symbolically in each context. For Ex. The narrator`s realization in front of a blazing tree in Trust (P. 480) and Isaac Kornfeld`s suicide on the branches of a tree.
14. About the closing scene in “Shots”, Joseph Cohen (103) comments “the narrator picks up her camera, which Ozick describes in vaginal terms to remind us that relativity remains a seductively potent creative force, and takes a picture of the reflection of Sam and verity in their daughter`s
mirror. This concluding act acknowledges the primacy of the marriage between human kind and Newton`s laws.


18. Joseph Cohen, Cannibal Galaxy by No ordinary Teacher in The Jewish News (Copyright © The Jewish News Publishing Co.) October 21; 1983, P. No.2


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2. *An Interview with Cynthia Ozick* conducted by Elaine M. Kauvar, Contemporary Literature Vol. 34, No. 3 The University of Wisconsin Press Fall 1993.