

Daniel Sarioglu,

Dr. Kayle Nochomovitz,

Composition,

December 22, 2020

Exploratory Essay

Cynthia Ozick is one of the examples and archetypes of female Jewish American writers. Much like how García Marquez's face invokes the words "Colombian magical realism," or how Lovecraft suggests a sort of dank vastness, Cynthia Ozick's works can be easily synonymous to a representation of the post-war young female Jewish American experience.

As a first-generation American born in New York City to Russian Jewish immigrants, Ozick was brought up in a classically Jewish American household, as expressed by Chenoweth in her *Bibliographical Essay on Cynthia Ozick*. Upon graduation from New York University in 1949, she spent years reading and self-learning from the likes of previous Jewish American authors such as Henry James. In these years, she eventually published her first work: *Trust*, a novel about a young and wealthy New Yorker trying to find her father, extending between the 1930s and 70s. Ozick goes on about her first published work:

I do know in my deepest sinew that I will never again write so well, that I will never again have that high ambition or monastic patience or metaphysical nerve and fortitude. That belongs, I suppose, to the ambition, strength, and above all arrogance of youth. (Strandberg, 266-267).

Ozick is also known for her short stories. A critical inclusion would be *The Pagan Rabbi*, a story about a Jewish woman who marries a Rabbi who eventually commits suicide after many

magically realistic encounters with nature and supernatural beings. Although this story would arguably stray from the motif being proposed, of young Jewish American females, one can find a young Jewish American female in the Rabbi's wife. She had been a holocaust and concentration camp survivor before migrating to the United States. Although the main story arc follows the Rabbi until his eventual death, many of the undertones and ideas suggested throughout the story can arguably place the Rabbi's wife in the protagonist's seat.

Another of Ozick's eminent short stories is *The Shawl*, where Ozick writes about a young mother dealing with the terrifying conditions of a concentration camp while trying to keep her daughter and niece alive. In the following chapter called *Rosa*, the mother's daughter's name, Ozick deals with the same woman, now older, who had lost her sanity after surviving the concentration camp (without her daughter) and migrating to the United States. Clearly, this story is consistent with Ozick's writings, often involving youthful Jewish women facing adversity after the holocaust as Americans.

Furthermore, Ozick openly considered herself a feminist. When asked in an interview about the possibility of Judaism conflicting with feminism, she answered the following:

I really think the whole issue is nonsense. When writers write fiction, they are writing about one woman, one man, and the relation of one man to one woman, and the relation of one woman to one man. These are creations, inventions, and to attribute an ideological program to a writer who may not have such a thing in his head is utterly absurd and unjustified and makes a lot of mischief. (Kauvar, 371).

Ozick often writes about Jewish American women in the context of strong-willed as their experience is unique to their environment. Religious views and scripts can often be understood to

undermine women, and the Jewish American immigrants mainly had likely been close to a terrible life loss after WWII. As a young female Jew immediately during and after WWII, Ozick was captivated by this motif and probably could hardly write about anything else due to her personal experience being a female Jewish American.

Works Cited

Ozick, Cynthia. *Trust* 1966.

Ozick, Cynthia. *Pagan Rabbi* 1971.

Ozick, Cynthia. *The Shawl* 1980.

Kauvar, Elaine M., and Cynthia Ozick. *An Interview with Cynthia Ozick*. 1993.

Strandberg, Victor. *The Art of Cynthia Ozick*. 1983.

Chenoweth, Mary J. *Bibliographical Essay: Cynthia Ozick*. 1981