

Pain and Suffering of Women in Cynthia Ozick's Select Novels

V. Karpagavadivu and Dr. T. Deivasigamani



Cynthia Ozick

Courtesy: <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2693/cynthia-ozick-the-art-of-fiction-no-95-cynthia-ozick>

Abstract

Cynthia Ozick is a Jewish novelist, essayist and short story writer. Ozick writings focuses on the double victimization of women, of being not only Jewish, but Jewish women, the child bearers who alone had the ability to carry on the Jewish “race”. Cynthia Ozick’s novels represents the pain and suffering of women in Jewish world. The Jewish law treats women as intellectually and socially inferior to men. Cynthia Ozick has emerged as an influential contemporary writer of the American Jewish writers along with Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Issac Bashevis Singer and Philip Roth. Ozick's fiction and essays are often deals about Jewish American life. Much of her work explores the disparaged self, the reconstruction of identity after immigration, trauma, and movement from one class to another. Her novels depicted psychological, sufferings and frustrated mind of the challenged Jewish people. This present paper discusses about the problems, challenges, and their struggle to prove their identity to the society. In her works she focused the problem of women who search for their identities and domination of women towards the women in the Concentration camps.

Keywords: Cynthia Ozick, psychological, immigration, trauma, identity.

Introduction

Cynthia Ozick was born in New York City on April 17, 1928, the second of two children. She was moved to the Bronx with her parents, Celia (Regelson) and William Ozick, who were the proprietors of the Park View Pharmacy in the Pelham Bay section. Her parents had come to America from the severe northwest region of Russia. They came from the Lithuanian Jewish tradition of that region. That is a tradition of scepticism, rationalism, and antimysticism, opposed to the exuberant emotionalism of the Hasidic community that flourished in the Galitzianer [Galician] portion of Eastern Europe. She began her reading with fairy tales. From her older brother, she received the perfect birthday present—books. These books had a magical effect, transforming her from a doltish schoolgirl into “who I am”—a reader, and perhaps a writer. Ozick underwent a cultural transformation during that period. She became a Jewish autodidact, mastering for herself much of the Jewish textual tradition. Cynthia Ozick’s novels represents the pain and suffering of women in Jewish world. The Jewish law treats women as intellectually and socially inferior to men.

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Jewish Identity

Judaism is the dominant force in Ozick works; and Jewish identity is her major theme. Understanding Cynthia Ozick, her novels focus on the various ways in which her fiction fulfils stated purpose to judge and interpret the world. The major themes revolved around cultural assimilation, anti-Semitism, holocaust, and Zionism. In her essays, as well as her fiction, Ozick has repeatedly returned to a handful of themes connected with problems created by being Jewish in a secular society. The major Jewish writers of the post war era have all been acutely attuned to political history and to its characteristic modern themes: War, brutality, depression, and unemployment, the implications money, class and ideology and especially the individual sentiments and sensibilities that grow out of such a history.

Midrashic Mode

Cynthia Ozick’s writings can be viewed in light of a midrashic mode by virtue of her need to sustain Jewish tradition in the wake of great devastation—the Holocaust. Ozick’s works,

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in their blending of literature and law, return to a traditional form of Jewish literary and religious inquiry known as “midrash.” The meaning of the root for the word “midrash” is “to search” or “to inquire Ozick novel. The Jewish men and women are not allowed live equal life in America like white people. Jews were torn from their homeland and brought to another world as slaves. Silence plays an important role in the life of Jewish women. In the concentration camps men were also suppressed but women were suppressed by the Nazist in different way by sexual harassment and humiliation. Women are the only oppressed group in our society that lives in intimate association with their oppressors. Ozick depicts this fact through the domination and violence upon them. Through her novels she appeals that a Jewish woman could overcome all the atrocities on them. This paper is a study of the tragic condition of Jewish women.

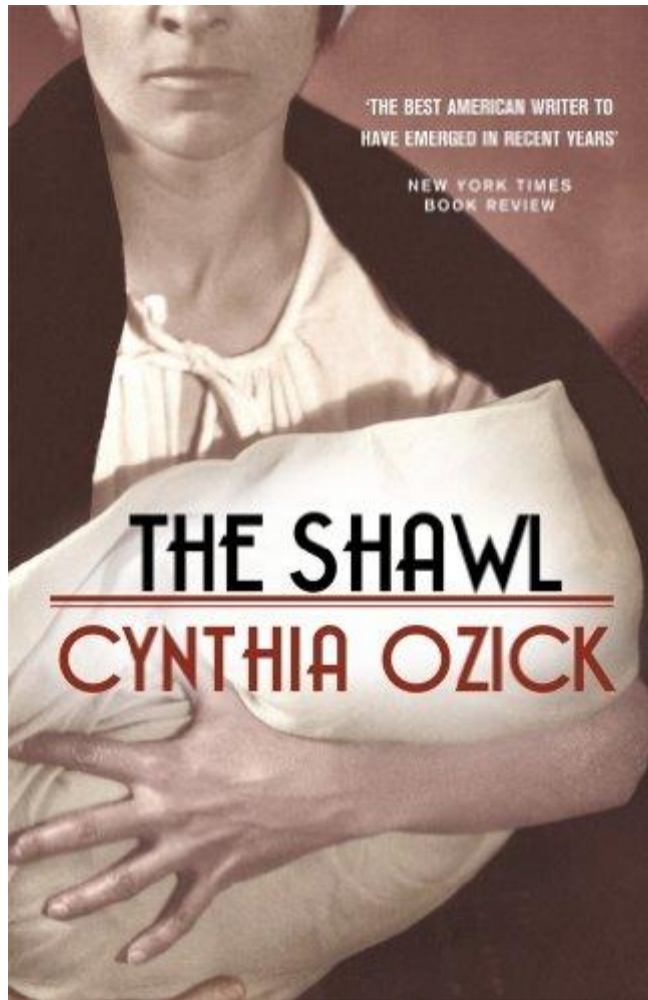
Erica Jong

Erica Jong is an American novelist and poet in her remarks: “Women in camps during the Holocaust didn’t menstruate and didn’t ovulate. They were Starving; they were terrified. Why emulate that condition? It’s Nonsensical to me” ([https:// www. good reads. com/ author/ quotes/ 6085. Erica Jong](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/6085.EricaJong)). In her novel *Trust* (1966), Ozick takes us to the plight of the Holocaust victims. The novel is unfolded in the form of the present struggle of the protagonist to trace her origin. She searches her father, with whom her mother lived for a while as a victim of the Holocaust. She is dissatisfied with her mother’s nature. Her mother does not even think of attending her graduation ceremony. She comments: “No aunt, cousin, mother father had come to see the commencement of this strange diaspora” (Trust 15). Because of her mother’s illegal life, she has lost her identity. Her name has been continually changing because of her marriages. She is bent upon meeting her father: “I pretended that some oddity of intuition, or else an accidental and unremembered word, had brought me to my father’s identity” (Trust 25). Being born to a immoral lady the small girl faced many problems like she lost her parental care, love and affection. The daughter considers her mother as “fastidious,” and “no one could satisfy her visions” (Trust 35). Her name has been continually changing because of her marriages. The girl accepts her mother’s misbehavior and her birth as pity. She says: “I hated my step father, my true father, my almost father, my mother who had bedded with each of these, because they were the world” (Trust 321).

Not Following Mother’s Way

The protagonist does not want to follow her mother’s way or behaviour. Her mind is always full of thoughts of her father. Being born in a Jewish community she has travelled from one place to find out her father’s identity. In this novel Ozick sketch out the problem faced by the girl in search of her father’s identity. In her another novel, *The Shawl* portrays the gruesome predicament of an ‘infant,’ during the Holocaust. The mother is anxious to carry it to safety, but her efforts prove fruitless as the ‘child’ enwrapped in the shawl is identified and thrown by the Nazi guards over the fence to be electrocuted. The fiction conveys information about concentration camps. The shawl plays an important role.

The Shawl



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Shawl-Cynthia-Ozick-ebook/dp/B008BD9TAA>

This fiction is about a woman haunted by her experiences in the Holocaust. Sukrita Paul in her article remarks, “When the humans are unable to sustain life, the shawl does the job, it is a magic shawl, a shawl that provides the child with food and security, even though it is a make – believe” (48). This unusual story approaches the horrors of the holocaust through intimate point of view of two women Rosa, the mother of an infant, and her teenage daughter Stella.

The story opens with the sentence, “Stella, cold, cold the coldness of heel (The Shawl 1). Stella, the thin girl of fourteen can’t bare the chillness of the cold. Magda the small baby fifteen-month old baby is wrapped with a shawl. The shawl is a little cradle for the baby. She sucks the air. There is no proper food for three human beings. The small baby lies in the cradle like a small squirrel. Rosa, the mother does not live in wants her baby to live in starving, so she decides to give the baby to the villagers, but she is not able to do it: “If she moves out of the line they may shoot her” (The Shawl 4). Without the permission of the soldiers in the camp, they must not do anything. There is no chance for their own thinking, desire, love, and so on. They are treated

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like slaves. Every mother wants her child to live but because of the cruel poverty, the child lacks nourishment: “Her knees were tumours on sticks, her elbows chicken bones” (The Shawl 1).

Mensuration is a natural thing given to females by God. Mensuration cycle is not proper because of weakness. Because of the limited food given in camps, Jews unable to live normal. With patience and compassion, Rosa has undergone such suffering. The teenage girl Stella is ripe without fruit because of the lack of strength. Victor Frankl desperately remarks: “without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete” (27). He Jews cannot open their mouth. There is no word to explain their sufferings. ‘The silence ‘takes an important role in life of the victims. As Elie Wiesel aptly observes, in the holocaust novel “Silence is always a character and the word is always its subject matter” (5).

Pathetic Lives of Jewish Women

The women Holocaust writers faced the tension of breaking the silence, determination to speak, and the coercion to preserve. Ozick novels *Trust* and *The Shawl*, depicts the brutalizing conditions under which the Jewish woman lives. Ozick’s great imagination helped her to recreate the life at the death camps with the help of a mother and daughter characters. This paper expresses the daily lives and the problems of Jewish women in the concentration Camps and quest for their identity.

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