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Cynthia Ozick's post-holocaust fiction: narration and morality in the midrashic mode

Meisha Rosenberg

- 1 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. What is the proper mode of representation for an event that is arguably unprecedented, not only in the history of the Jews, but in the history of humankind? Figurative discourse about the Holocaust has experienced considerable objections,¹ haunted as it still is by Theodor Adorno's famous pronouncement that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. This despite the fact that Adorno later qualified his statement.² Writers and artists today are still wary about approaching the subject, for fear that works classified as fiction about the Holocaust will only fuel the arguments of the all-too-prevalent Holocaust deniers.³ Fiction and art that is not rooted to historical reality can create distortion, saccharin morality tales about the "triumph of the human spirit", and at the worst, obfuscation and denial. One has to be suspect of, for example, a film about the Holocaust titled *Life Is Beautiful*. Life was distinctly *not* beautiful for the great majority of Jewish children that were gassed immediately as they arrived in the concentration camps, if they even made it that far.
- 2 However, extreme insistence on historicization is dangerous because it blocks imaginative entry into the event. This insistence privileges survivor testimony over the unwritten works of the dead; this can lead to another, more subtle kind of distortion in which all the stories we hear are from the perspective of those who miraculously lived through the horrors.⁴ It is easy to be shuttled emotionally between wanting to stay true to the reality of the Holocaust on the one hand— perhaps limiting one's intake of Holocaust representation to only a select few works of a documentary nature, for example those by Primo Levi, Anne Frank, and Elie Wiesel—and to desire on the other hand departures from the strictures of conventional narrative that confront us with

the extreme disjuncture of the Holocaust, for example the highly creative and disturbing cartoon *Maus* by Art Spiegelman.

- 3 Arguments on the side of artistic freedom do not necessarily oppose faithfulness to historicity, and it is my goal to point out how the two can and should dovetail. Furthermore, as the number of survivors dwindles, figurative representation becomes an even more important way of continuing to “bear witness”⁵. Fiction about the Holocaust can fill a void in the Jewish literary community left by the millions of stories completely lost to the genocide. Fiction about the Holocaust can go where history cannot, paying tribute to the personal experiences that have been silenced by mass murder.
- 4 However, narratives of any kind about the Holocaust—both fiction and nonfiction are susceptible—must not become blind to the realities of the genocide. Ozick’s use of the midrashic mode allows her in *The Shawl*, a short book that consists of two linked stories, to fictionally approach the subject of the Holocaust while never forgetting its historical reality.
- 5 Ozick’s works, 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”⁶. Midrash encompasses a vast body of text of distinct periods, beginning about the first to second centuries C.E., when it was transmitted orally by the rabbis in sermons or public teachings. It was only later written down, compiled at different periods and by different editors.⁷ Some writings are halakhic (having to do with Jewish civil law and ritual) and others aggadic (meaning allegory, exhortation, legend—in short, figurative expression).⁸ Midrash is usually in some way interpretation of Torah, whether it is direct exegesis, homily, or the more creative narrative. The midrashists’ project was to create a body of text that could guide the Diaspora after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.
- 6 What was created, however, was not a didactic reinscription of Torah, but rather a chorus of rabbinical voices debating, raising questions, and delighting in linguistic play. Because the midrashists could read Torah in Hebrew,⁹ they could create linguistically based interpretations in ways that later Christians—because they were dealing with once- or twice-translated text—could not. This allows for, beyond multiplicity of meaning, an almost infinite universe of interpretive departures, all stemming from the intimate interstices of words, letters, even the musical and numerical values of text. In addition, midrash is a practice in which fantasy and figuration are inseparable from context, history, and morality, and it is this nonoppositional approach that is essential in narrating the Holocaust. Daniel Boyarin has done much to argue that midrash simultaneously breaks and reinscribes tradition through strategies such as quotation—which both interrupts and bridges the source text—and a self-conscious intertextuality¹⁰ that stems from the interpretive philosophy that no text, including the Torah, is created *ex nihilo* by a “self-identical” subject.
- 7 In her essay “Bialik’s Hint” Ozick explicitly entertains midrash as a way to create a new Jewish literature. She interprets a statement of Chaim Bialik’s to mean that aggadah and halachah, the two components of midrash, are fused together,

The value of Aggadah,” he asserts, “is that it issues in Halachah. Aggadah that does not bring Halachah in its train is ineffective.” If we pause to translate Aggadah as tale and lore, and Halachah as consensus and law, or Aggadah as the realm of the fancy, and Halachah as the court of duty, then what Bialik proposes next is

astonishing. Contrariwise, he says, Halachah can bring Aggadah in its train. Restraint the begetter of poetry? "Is she not"—and now Bialik is speaking of the Sabbath— "a source of life and holiness to a whole nation, and a fountain of inspiration to its singers and poets?"¹¹

- 8 This statement is central to an understanding of Ozick. She believes that law and morality inspire the imagination. Normally, one would think of "restraint" and law as antithetical to the anomie of creativity, but Ozick asserts the opposite. Like the rabbis who composed midrashim, Ozick allows for what might seem paradoxes to the contemporary mind to flourish.
- 9 Some scholars have proposed that *The Shawl* be considered literally as midrash. Joseph Lowin reads "Rosa" as a midrashic commentary or gloss on "The Shawl"¹². Joseph Alkana, in an enlightening paper, argues that *The Shawl* is actually a midrash on the story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac.¹³ These readings are insightful and important in adding to our understanding of Ozick's text and the possibilities of post-Holocaust fiction. However, Ozick herself has said that, when it comes to creating a contemporary Jewish literature, midrash alone is not enough, because of its "dependence on a single form." Midrash, she says, usually means "a literature of parable".¹⁴ However, I'd like to propose that we look at midrash not as a single limiting form that demands we read texts as literal midrashim or as parables, but rather as a mode, a way in to a Jewish literature that thrives on dialectics and multiple interpretations.
- 10 Midrash is unique in its all-encompassing array of topics—from what one is to do when Pesach falls on the Sabbath and how many goats one man might owe another, to profound questions about suffering. Midrash, in its ability to take in minutiae as well as epistemology, is especially useful as an approach to thinking and writing about the Holocaust, which must be regarded as a historical as well as a philosophical and a personal cataclysm.
- 11 *The Shawl* was actually written in 1977—Ozick said it was her fear of making art out of the Holocaust that prevented her from publishing it.¹⁵ *The Shawl* is a slender book that contains two stories, one titled "The Shawl," the other, "Rosa," both concerning the same character, Rosa Lublin. Already in the fact that the two stories present two different views of the same life we have a midrashic mode of writing.
- 12 Ozick tackles the challenge of representing the Holocaust in several ways characteristic of midrash. (1) She uses a compressed narrative voice in "The Shawl," the first of the two stories, that invites the reader, as an active participant, into the text; (2) she draws inspiration from the uncovering of neglected historical perspectives, a move characteristic of midrash, which fuses history and lore; (3) she draws attention to silence as a metaphor, thus allowing for the alternate, radical discourse possibilities that reside outside of her narrative; (4) she creates a symbol, the shawl, that stands for figuration itself and provides a vehicle for the question of how one can figuratively represent the Holocaust; and (5) she narrates the moment of horror in "The Shawl", the first story, from the very human point of view of Rosa, the main character, as a way of simultaneously showing the necessity and the impossibility of portraying the terrors of the Holocaust.
- 13 First, as part of her midrashic, liturgical approach¹⁶ Ozick collapses narrative distance in "The Shawl," the first story of the pair, placing the reader inside the experience. Scholar Berel Lang has called for "intransitive writing", a concept of Roland Barthes, in

the representation of the Holocaust, a modernist form that attempts to close up the distance between reader, writer, and characters. Lang uses the Passover Haggadah—large parts of which are actually midrash—as an example of intransitive writing. In the Haggadah Jews are called upon to retell the events of the Exodus as though they had been there themselves.

- 14 As with the intransitive voice, in “The Shawl” the reader finds herself plunged into the very real, harsh world of the camps without a friendly interpreter. This is how it should be. The lack of verbs and severely elliptical structure¹⁷ creates an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness. The first sentences of the story are not complete sentences and are posed as an unasked question:

Stella, cold, cold, the coldness of hell. How they walked on the roads together, Rosa with Magda curled up between sore breasts, Magda wound up in the shawl.¹⁸

- 15 The asyndeton of the first sentence is followed by the periodic phrase “how they walked on”, which, contrary to expectation, does not end with a question mark. The question of how they walked on—and how they suffered—can barely be asked and cannot be answered. The midrash *Lamentations Rabbah* relates that three important prophets began prophesies with the word “how”: Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.¹⁹ This is a very important word used to address the people of Israel in times of crisis. The very first word of the book of Lamentations is “how,” in Hebrew, *Eikhah*, which Chaim Raphael points out has a “mournful ring, like ‘alack,’ or ‘woe.’”²⁰ The first line of the book of Lamentations reads, “How lonely sits the city that was full of people!” (Lam. 1:1.) Raphael also notes that the first word of a book of Torah is often referred to by its first word, so in this case, “How” stands in synecdochally for the entire book of Lamentations. In the Midrash on Lamentations, it is written that “R. Eleazar said, ‘The word is made up of two syllables, which read individually mean ‘where is the ‘thus?’”²¹ If we pause at R. Eleazar’s contribution, we gain considerable insight into Ozick’s use of the word. It mourns and asks the ultimate question, “where is the ‘thus?’”; in other words, where is the meaning to this horror? Simply: Why did this happen?

- 16 The rhetorical device of periodicity in “The Shawl” causes the reader to anticipate this unanswerable question. “The Shawl” is marked by incomplete sentences, as in “One mite of a tooth tip sticking up in the bottom gum, how shining, an elfin tombstone of white marble gleaming there” and “The little round head. Such a good child, she gave up screaming, and sucked now only for the taste of the drying nipple itself”.²² The narrative of “The Shawl” is also marked by a verbless poetic rhythm punctuated by the occasional exclamation.²³ “Staccato phrases”²⁴ are joined by semicolons in a chainlike construction that is more like constriction, as in the line “There was not enough milk; sometimes Magda sucked air; then she screamed.”²⁵

- 17 “The Shawl” may well approximate Lang’s definition of the “intransitive voice”; however, there are problems with this approach. Even assuming “The Shawl” is an example of the intransitive voice, how does this, or a midrashically informed literature for that matter, ensure a moral, non-mythopoeticizing²⁶ literature of the Holocaust? One can’t help thinking that, while Jews in America were reciting Haggadah—an example of Midrash and of intransitive writing—in Europe the very kind of thing this recitation admonishes against was occurring. Intransitive writing, indeed any prescribed literary form, is no guarantee that the reader will avoid the mistakes of “mytho-poeticization” and immorality. Many writers and critics have expressed dismay at the fact that the Holocaust occurred in one of the most literate cultures of the time.²⁷

- 18 Rather than adhering to a formula for representation, one must, as a writer of Holocaust literature, insist on bringing to light the contradictions of language itself. What comes close to describing how Ozick does this in "The Shawl" is Jean-François Lyotard's description of the warping of language that occurred as a result of the concentration camps' denial of the pronoun "we." The command given by the Nazis to the Jews "to die", he says, did not allow for any comprehensible relationship between addressee and addressor. The assumptions of discourse have been challenged at their foundations.
- 19 Indeed: "where is the 'thus'?" Therefore, as we grapple with the Holocaust we must struggle in the realm of language and representation. Lyotard defends the position that the Holocaust, in addition to being a historical reality, must be considered an "experience of language." One cannot write about the Holocaust adequately without addressing the instabilities of language.
- 20 In "The Shawl," to use Lyotard's phrase, "Auschwitz has no name." There are no last names in the story, no direct references to the Holocaust as such, nor mentions of German or Jew. But, as Lyotard also says, "One must...speak"²⁸, and this is the tragic paradox of victims of the Holocaust, for whom it often feels impossible to speak of their experience at the same time that it is essential.²⁹
- 21 The second, and a crucial tactic Ozick uses to represent the Holocaust without mythopoeticizing is to stay true to the historical facts.³⁰ She wrote *The Shawl* upon reading a historical work: William Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, which described the Nazi practice of throwing babies against electrical fences. Another source was a conversation with Jerzy Kozinski, in which the two writers discussed the reality of those assimilated Jews who were not "shtetl Jews" yet suffered the same fate. In this way, the genesis of the pair of stories results from bringing to light historical reality.
- 22 Further, Ozick places the two stories chronologically—first is "The Shawl" and World War II, and then "Rosa" in contemporary Miami. This is a choice that emphasizes historicity and creates tension with Rosa's need, in "Rosa" for the creation of an elaborate fantasy life in which she imagines Magda still alive. One might argue that the two stories stand dialectically opposed, because while "The Shawl," with its spare narrative style and minimalist use of language and detail might stand for historical representation, "Rosa", with its more colorful array of characters, place, fantasy, and allusions, could stand for figurative representation.
- 23 However the two stories are too intertwined for such a simplistic assignment. One could also argue, conversely, that because the story "Rosa" takes place in an identifiable time and culture, it stands for historicity, while "The Shawl", with its abbreviated structure and poetically informed disruptive tropes stands for figuration.
- 24 In actuality, each story contains within its center—like a mother with child—the other story. Rosa does not admit to herself the story of "The Shawl" until the end of "Rosa", the second story. In this way, we as readers are left, not with "Rosa", but with the first story, "The Shawl", and the Holocaust. So it is not a linear, evolutionary history we are left with. The two stories inform one another in a narrative circle, and thus emphasize that the Holocaust, while it must first and foremost be remembered as history, must also allow for figuration.
- 25 In a third midrashic strategy, Ozick uses silence and muteness to symbolize the unspeakability of the crimes of the Holocaust. By pointing a textual arrow to silence,

Ozick allows for the radical unspeakability of suffering that lies outside her text.³¹ The matter of silence and speech is a leitmotif in *The Shawl*, as in midrash, where rabbis confront the silences to Torah. Rosa is preoccupied by her baby Magda's muteness, and the child's expression when she can't find her shawl is a primal scream. Her wail is the ultimate, prelingual expression of the horrors of the Holocaust. Ozick makes this inarticulate cry Magda's only direct speech by way of entertaining the possibility that this is the only true way to represent the horror of the premeditated genocide. At the end of the story, Rosa stifles her own scream using Magda's shawl, leaving us with a deafening silence.

- 26 The shawl itself is, as a physical object for stifling cries, a chronic reminder of silence in both its harmful and its comforting manifestations. Using the shawl as her central symbol is the fourth, and most straightforwardly midrashic, strategy, because the object of the shawl comes to resemble the signifiers of so many Jewish traditions.
- 27 For Rosa the shawl is a "magic" shawl, reminiscent of the miraculous oil of the *hannukiah*, because it could "nourish an infant for three days and three nights." It smells of Magda's "cinnamon and almond" saliva, perhaps a reference to "the *besamim* which Jews sniff at the end of the Sabbath"³². The "cinnamon and almond" smell is also a midrashic link to a famous Yiddish song, *Rozhinkes mit Mandlen* (Raisins and Almonds) that is referenced in the story "Rosa"³³. The shawl additionally represents the Jewish prayer shawl, or *tallis*. So in this way, the shawl now also takes on the extra-heavy weight of signifying belief in God, or at least a wish to believe in God. As Magda's transitional object, it represents the child's first attempt to project self onto the world outside the mother. As such, the shawl represents the child's first imaginative act.³⁴ The shawl is additionally a fake shroud for Magda, and a symbol for the death all around them. Because the shawl is a conduit for so many, contradictory symbols, it begins to stand for figuration itself. It is through her creation of a symbol for figuration that Ozick is able to engage the question of how to represent the Holocaust.
- 28 Magda is hidden underneath the shawl and doubly hidden under Rosa's clothing. She is additionally hidden in her "Aryan" features. When Rosa stops lactating, Magda turns to the shawl, also a symbol for the breast, which she "milks"³⁵. The shawl is like the placenta, a powerful image of motherhood's sole creative power. Rosa, distancing herself from fellow Jews, begins to see herself as a kind of Virgin Mary and Magda as the child of an immaculate conception, although as we learn later Rosa was raped by a Nazi.
- 29 Because of the illogical and inflated symbolism enforced by the Nazis, the shawl obtains a too-powerful control over Magda's fate. It is at this point that Ozick deals with the most difficult task of representing the Holocaust: that of directly showing her readers the horror of the genocide. In my argument, her fifth strategy is to narrate this charged moment through Rosa's point of view, and thereby show us two alternate pictures of the atrocity. Ozick deliberately problematizes this moment. For a Holocaust representation not to become a soothing story of the "triumph of the human spirit" the artist must, within the work itself, raise and confront the question of how one can represent unimaginable atrocity.
- 30 When Magda runs out to find the shawl that Stella, Rosa's neice, has stolen, Rosa is faced with an impossible decision. Rosa decides to do the only thing she can do; she tries to retrieve the shawl and then find Magda. When Magda totters out in search of her stolen shawl, she is seen by an SS guard, who is described only in metonyms:

But the shoulder that carried Magda was not coming toward Rosa and the shawl, it was drifting away, the speck of Magda was moving more and more into the smoky distance. Above the shoulder a helmet glinted. The light tapped the helmet and sparkled it into a goblet. Below the helmet a black body like a domino and a pair of black boots hurled themselves in the direction of the electrified fence. The electric voices began to chatter wildly.³⁶

- 31 Magda's actual moment of death is described in the passive voice. The Nazi is signified by a helmet. The sun turns the helmet into a goblet—a primitive drinking vessel. A goblet is also a religious item, and here we see Rosa begin to aestheticize this horrifying moment. The black boots “hurled themselves.” German agency in the Holocaust is a medusa, impossible to look directly in the face. The most disturbing and powerful element of the story is the following description of Magda's death:

All at once Magda was swimming through the air. The whole of Magda traveled through loftiness. She looked like a butterfly touching a silver vine.³⁷

- 32 This is the moment of horror in “The Shawl.” Is the description “a butterfly an aestheticization of the Holocaust? Or does it describe an ascension to heaven? This moment is suspended in the text as Magda is suspended above ground. Human comprehension cannot pass beyond this moment of suspension. We know that Magda cannot possibly fit into this image because of the consciously mixed metaphor, “swimming” through “air.” Rosa, as we begin to see, is flawed, that is to say, she is a human being, who imagines, instead of death, that her daughter has become a butterfly.³⁸ It is this emphasis on the failure of human comprehension that returns us to a midrashic mode in which Jews are constantly striving and yet never succeeding at apprehending God.³⁹
- 33 We do not find out in “The Shawl” whether or not Rosa will die, and this is an important omission. As at least one possible “ending” for the story cycle, “The Shawl” leaves us with the possibility of death or worse than death for its main character, and this—as well as the undeniable presence of silence as a force in the story—makes a strong argument for fiction that represents the experiences of those who didn't survive, or those who survived too damaged to tell their own stories.⁴⁰
- 34 Although I do not have the space here to discuss “Rosa”, the second story of the volume, in full, I will say that it continues to operate in the midrashic mode, yet by way of entirely differing narrative strategies. Departing from the elliptical style of “The Shawl”, Rosa is given, to borrow a phrase from Isaac Bashevis Singer, an “address”—a place in time and culture. “Rosa” operates midrashically by constructing a dialogue between Rosa and Simon Persky, who take the sides of alternately, “truth” and “lying,” or “history”, and “fiction.”
- 35 In conclusion, Ozick uses many midrashic techniques in order to tackle the task of representing the Holocaust figuratively. The Holocaust presents a radical loss and disjunction from Judaic theology, culture, traditions, and language itself. Attempting to rebuild a shattered culture, writers like Ozick and others must reach back to traditions like midrash, which, because it is open-ended, invites us into its infinite world of interpretations, profound questionings, and paradox.

NOTES

1. Lawrence Langer's book *Preempting the Holocaust* still maintains a position of strict adherence to "literalist," unsentimentalized treatments of the Holocaust. As well he should, he argues vociferously against the works of Judy Chicago and Tzvetan Todorov, among others, who attempt to draw out of the Holocaust a watered-down moral lesson that caters to a contemporary American fad of victimization. Langer insists that, to try to comprehend the Holocaust, one must "start with an unbuffered collision with its starkest crimes." Langer, Lawrence, *Preempting the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 1. Langer's tactic is to present the reader with the most horrific details told by survivors, in order to strike home his point that no "ideals" can be supported by atrocities such as a German ripping a baby in half in front of its mother, or Jews being boiled alive in acid.

I fully support Langer's criticism of those who use the Holocaust to support an agenda of political correctness or universalism that departs from suffering. However, there is a danger in insisting, so forcefully as Langer does, decontextualized narratives of atrocity on the reader. Such a tactic threatens to 1) rob documentary narratives of their full implications and context and 2) duplicate the cruelty of the Nazis without providing a foundation of morality from which to condemn their crimes. As Jurek Becker, a survivor and fiction writer says, "What is the reason for meeting and remembering that fifty years ago the Nazis burned books? Just for remembrance? That's not enough for me. I am not interested in these memories; they are not so great—I can imagine better memories....The only important and good reason to remember is to ask ourselves what attitude was behind that happening, and where do we find that attitude today?" From *Art out of Agony*, Lewis, Stephen (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1984) 101-102.

Berel Lang, another scholar wary of figurative representation, insists on "deference to the conventions of historical discourse as a literary means" (*Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 135) in representation of the Holocaust. He posits that historical chronology is the "point zero" of narrative, both historical and figurative, recognizing that in most all historical representations—even chronologies—lie elements of figuration and narrative. "The Representation of Limits," in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 307.

Hayden White modifies Lang's position, arguing that "What all this suggests is that modernist modes of representation may offer possibilities of representing the reality of both the Holocaust and the experience of it that no other version of realism could do." From "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Saul Friedlander. While I agree with White that to construct an artificial opposition between history and figuration is problematic, I find his solution (that is, modernist writing in the "intransitive" or "middle" voice) equally troubling, because insisting on modernism, a particularly secular, Western creation, still limits Holocaust representation. I start from the other end of the argument—why begin with the assumption that limitations on representation are necessary? I take White's inclusion of fiction into Lang's model further to suggest that figurative language fulfills a particular task in representation unfulfilled by "objective" historical representation.

2. Lang, "The Representation of Limits," 317.

3. Sara R. Horowitz notes that "To protect their respective projects from the kind of assaults mounted by historical deniers, and to assert the truth claims of their work to an uninitiated readership, [Art] Spiegelman [author of the cartoon/documentary *Maus*] and [Claude] Lanzmann [filmmaker of *Shoah*] insist upon the "nonfictionality" of Holocaust art." Horowitz, Sara R., *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997) 12.

4. Of course, there also exist works that somehow survived that were authored by those who did not, in the most obvious example, the Diary of Anne Frank. However the fact remains that once she was deported her voice was silenced. As I later suggest, perhaps this loud silence is the most powerful tribute to the dead.
5. Alan L. Berger makes an important distinction between “witnessing” and “bearing witness”: “[Elie] Wiesel, the best known and most widely read witnessing writer, now emphasizes that the next generation must bear witness.” “Bearing Witness: Theological Implications of Second-Generation Literature in America,” in *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz*, ed. Efraim Sicher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998) 259.
6. Hartman, Geoffrey H., and Budick, Sanford, eds., *Midrash and Literature*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 363.
7. Midrash, as Barry W. Holtz points out, is usually seen as falling under three categories: the exegetical (interpretive), the homiletical (based on sermons), and the narrativial (the most creative category, often stories or “re-written” Torah). There is no one “Midrash,” as Holtz relates, but rather collections of midrashim compiled over the centuries, beginning as early as the second century C.E. The “flowering” of midrash is considered to have been from 400 to 1200 C.E. From Holtz, Barry W., “Midrash,” in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. Barry W. Holtz (New York: Summit Books, 1984) 177-211.
8. Hartman and Budick, 363.
9. Dan, Joseph, “Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah,” *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 128. Joseph Dan points out that the rabbis used, as tools for interpretation, the shapes, sounds, musical signs, decorative flourishes, frequency, and the numerical values of letters and words, among many other non-ideonic exegetical techniques.
10. Boyarin, Daniel, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
11. Ozick, Cynthia, “Bialik’s Hint,” *Metaphor and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989) 228.
12. Lowin, Joseph, Cynthia Ozick (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1988) 109.
13. Alkana, Joseph, “‘Do We Not Know the Meaning of Aesthetic Gratification?’: Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl*, *The Akedah*, and the Ethics of Holocaust Literary Aesthetics,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 43:4 (1997) 963-990.
14. Ozick, “Bialik’s Hint,” 238.
15. Heron, Kim, “‘I Required a Dawning,’” *New York Times Book Review*, 1989.
16. For discussions of the liturgical nature of Ozick’s writing, see Gottfried, Amy, “Fragmented Art and the Liturgical Community of the Dead in Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl*,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 13 (1994) 39-51; Rose, Elisabeth, “Cynthia Ozick’s Liturgical Postmodernism: The Messiah of Stockholm,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 9:1 (1990) 93-107; and by Ozick herself, “Toward a New Yiddish,” in *Art and Ardor*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1983) 151-177.
17. Kauvar, Elaine, *Cynthia Ozick’s Fiction: Tradition and Invention* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 180.
18. Ozick, Cynthia, “*The Shawl*,” *The Shawl* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990) 1.
19. *Lamentations Rabbah: An Analytical Translation*, ed. Neusner, Jacob (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) *Lamentations I:1, Parashah XXXV.i. A*, p. 108.
20. Raphael, Chaim, *The Walls of Jerusalem: An Excursion into Jewish History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968) 92.
21. *Lamentations Rabbah*, ed. Neusner, Parashah XXXV.ii.B, p. 109.
22. Ozick, “*The Shawl*,” 4. Later in the text is another example of a period phrase, or sentence, prefaced by the word “how”: “How far Magda was from Rosa now, across the whole square, past a dozen barracks, all the way on the other side!” In this case, the question mark has been replaced by an exclamation mark, meant to denote the extremity of her distance and her situation.

23. Examples of these exclamations are "Again!" (8); also Magda's utterance, "'Maaaa...aaa!'" (8) Ozick, *The Shawl*.
24. Klingenstein, Susanne, "Destructive Intimacy: The Shoah between Mother and Daughter in Fictions by Cynthia Ozick, Norma Rosen, and Rebecca Goldstein," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 11:2 (1992) 162-173. Klingenstein points out how the incomplete sentences and thought fragments in "Rosa," when Rosa receives the shawl and recalls her dead daughter, taken together, form a poem.
25. Ozick, "The Shawl," 1. For another example of these asyndetonic, chainlike sentences, see especially Rosa's interior monologue when she comes close to what might almost be hope as Magda utters her first sound in a long time: "Rosa believed that something had gone wrong with her vocal cords, her windpipe, with the cave of her larynx; Magda was defective, without a voice; perhaps she was deaf; there might be something amiss with her intelligence; Magda was dumb." Ozick, "The Shawl," 7
26. Kim Heron.
27. Sara Horowitz points out that "The flourishing of atrocity among a highly literate people particularly disturbs [George] Steiner, undermining his trust altogether in the literary endeavor." *Voicing the Void*, 19.
28. Lyotard, Jean-François, "Discussions, or Phrasing, After Auschwitz," *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1989) 1.
29. Primo Levi has spoken of this; and Elie Wiesel, despite his dedication to bearing witness, has expressed its impossibility. See *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*, Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) 14, 28. Sara Horowitz sums it up well: "At the heart of Holocaust narrative resides an essential contradiction: an impossibility to express the experience, coupled with a psychological and moral obligation to do so." Horowitz, 16.
30. That Ozick draws on historical references is not to say that she privileges historicity, as Berel Lang does (interpreting it to mean realism and therefore morality), over figuration. "For me," says Ozick, deconstructing this opposition between morality and imagination, "with certain rapturous exceptions, literature is the moral life." "Innovation and Redemption: What Literature Means," *Art and Ardor*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1983) 245.
31. Horowitz writes that Holocaust fiction has been marked by a "tropological muteness." (29) She is also one of the few critical voices to argue outright for the necessity of fiction about the Holocaust, saying "For it is the absent story made present by radical imagining that confronts the mass murder." (14) She also notes that in some ways, fictional representation is ahead of critical discourse when it comes to apprehending issues of Holocaust representation. (29)
32. Berger, Alan, *Crisis and Covenant: The Holocaust in American Jewish Fiction*, quoted in Gottfried, Amy, "Fragmented Art and the Liturgical Community of the Dead in Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 13 (1994) 46.
33. Wirth-Nesher, Hana, "The Languages of Memory: Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*," in *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 320. Wirth-Nesher points out a fascinating link between, among other texts, "Todesfuge," by Paul Celan (the epigraph of *The Shawl*) and *Rozhinkes mit Mandlen*. This would further suggest that there exists an intertextual and therefore midrashic relationship between Ozick's *The Shawl* and many other, primarily Jewish-centered narratives. One might posit that the lines of Celan's poem that appear as epigraph serve as the proof-text for Ozick's midrash.
34. Drawing on theories of Lacan, Wirth-Nesher has pointed out that Magda's first words, "'Maaaa—'" constitute the ultimate demand the child makes to the mother "out of which the entire verbal universe is spun." Lacan as quoted by Wirth-Nesher, "The Languages of Memory," 317.

35. Wirth-Nesher among others identifies the shawl as shroud (323), and by extension, death. The shawl stands for both life and death.
36. Ozick, "The Shawl," 9.
37. Ozick, "The Shawl," 9.
38. Ozick, "The Shawl," 8.
39. This is arguably the central tenet of the Jewish religion, i.e., that human beings cannot apprehend God in any direct manner; hence the need for an infinity of interpretation.
40. Documentary testimonies are crucial, and in fact there would be little fictional representation worth mentioning without them. Some liken documentary testimonies to Torah and, by extension, "second-generation" literature, to midrash. To be sure, the story "The Shawl" is midrashically linked to documentary narratives like those of Primo Levi and Aharon Appelfeld. However, to ascribe sacredness to texts that document atrocity is to invite sacralization of the Holocaust itself, a dangerous proposition indeed. Instead of sacralizing Rosa's experience in the camp, *The Shawl* points to the flawed humanness of Rosa as a character, and thereby negates our ability to mythologize her or commit idolatry. Humanizing her also prevents the dangerous opposition we might pose between "strong" survivor and "weak" victim, an ideological system too closely linked with Nazi hierarchies. Any figurative representation that does not somehow pay tribute to documentary narratives and/or problematize the relationship between documentary and artistic representation is liable to stumble into the murky waters of denial.

RÉSUMÉS

Pour répondre à la question urgente que pose la représentation de l'Holocauste dans des œuvres de fiction, Cynthia Ozick, dans « Le Châle », adopte le mode du commentaire rabbinique de la Bible, connu sous le terme de midrash. Il s'agit d'une tradition ancienne qui allie l'explication de la loi (halakhah) et la narration d'histoires édifiantes (aggadah). La disparition du Temple et l'émergence de la diaspora avaient rendu nécessaire ce mode midrashique, comme pour marquer à la fois la rupture et la continuité avec une tradition qui, elle, n'avait jamais cessé d'exister.

La représentation de l'Holocauste dans des œuvres de fiction (aggadah) aussi bien que dans les documents qui témoignent de l'histoire (halakhah), est nécessaire car, pour une grande partie, l'Holocauste est fait d'un terrible silence, c'est-à-dire d'absence. Les œuvres de fiction qui traitent de l'Holocauste sont cruciales car elles attirent l'attention sur ceux qui n'ont pas pu – ne peuvent pas – parler. Ozick relève donc le défi de représenter l'indicible. Aussi adopte-t-elle des stratégies typiques au midrash : (1) elle utilise une voix narrative condensée dans « Le Châle », la première des deux histoires, qui invite le lecteur à prendre une part active au texte ; (2) elle trouve son inspiration en découvrant des perspectives qui échappent à l'historien, démarche typique du midrash qui mélange histoire et fiction ; (3) elle attire l'attention sur le silence en tant que métaphore, prenant ainsi en compte les autres possibilités discursives radicales extérieures au récit ; (4) elle fait du châle un symbole qui matérialise l'Holocauste et qui en même temps sert de véhicule à la question de la représentation figurative de l'Holocauste ; (5) comme pour montrer la nécessité et en même temps l'impossibilité de représenter l'Holocauste, le moment d'horreur est raconté du point de vue on ne peut plus humain de Rosa, le personnage principal.

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