

The Dilemma of Social and Cultural Aspect of the Immigrant Jews: A Study on Select Works of Cynthia Ozick

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Abstract

Cynthia Ozick, an innovative and original writer of the New American Jewish explores the problem of Jews in the American diaspora. She attempts to express her artistic vision in Jewish terms. Her works mainly focus the social and cultural aspects of the immigrant Jews. She is aware of the tension and difficulties of the Jews and her works portrays the two cultural issue of conflicting identities.

Cynthia Ozick's fiction supports the judgment of history and tradition. She promotes Judaism, Judaic affirmation and renewal. In an interview to Kauvar Ozick admits that "Judaism is a major and universal philosophy and underlies the moral and intellectual foundation of western civilization" (378). She values culture and contributes to its vibrancy by creating a body of literature. In all her works, She deals with Jewish subjects and their fate in the American Literature. Venkateswalu opines that she constantly attempts to renew her dialogue with Jewishness by exploring a mediating ground between her Jewishness and the need and inevitability of communication with Christian America.

The Process of assimilation has been a seminal concern for the Jews in America. The Jews have wanted to become a part of the America as soon as possible after they have arrived there. Americanization demands a complete acceptance of American ideals, values and morals. The issue of assimilation has ever been present in Jewish history which influence it creatively, at other destructively, but also profoundly. It is in their long history of entering one culture after another and the Jews acquired culture traits that they made their own. Sociological evidence proves that their new generation is being gradually removed from the basic tents of Judaism. It gives birth to a new class of Jews, indifferent Jews, who related to the fellowship of "Jewishness" but not to the traditional values. It also questions about the survival of Judaism itself in the light of the changing idea of a Jewishness. Assimilation also threatens the Jews with the etiolating of Jewish culture.

As a Jewish American writer Cynthia Ozick focuses on the desire of the Jews to acculturate and accimatise themselves to American society, but she makes it clear that such an act would invariably lead to the degradation of the Jews. In her works, she reflects the change of religions customs, the relationship in Judaism between reforms and the conservative branches as well as the relationship to christianity and other minority religions. The predominant themes in Ozick's writing are the conflicts between Hebraism and Hellenism, between past and present, between artistic imagination and responsibility between Jews and Gentiles.

In Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy* Joseph Brill aspires for freedom from tradition of any kind there by retaining a superficial connection with both his nation and his spiritual identities. To Ozick, Brill's impulse towards an inclusive duality is

a movement away from Judaism. In *The Shawl* Rosa attaches magical powers to the shawl and believes that it would save her infant by virtue of its supernatural powers – it is something that is forbidden in Judaism. Ozick stresses the need of tradition and culture. Like Eliot, Ozick urges a return to tradition, a celebration of the singularity of culture. She shares it in her essay *T.S. Eliot at 100*.

The predominant themes in Ozick's fiction and short stories are the uneasy coming together of the American and the Jew, the enormous problem of acculturation and assimilation conflict between pan versus Moses and the radical questioning of the tradition and values of both cultures. In her story, *The Pagan Rabbi* Strandberg observes, Ozick's protagonist, Issac Kornfeld, lives in a porous postmodern society where all the demarcations and boundaries seem to become blurred and indistinct threatening to destroy the traditional notion of definite culture domains and coherent – cultural identities (54). Kornfeld attempts to amalgamate 'Greek latitude and Jewish identity in oneness to reconcile the generations old contention between Hellenism and Hebraism, between Athens and Jerusalem. However such an attempt turns out to be fatal. In *Puttermesser* the protagonist is troubled by the warring forces of the human heart full of its pagan erotic desires and its Judaic call of conscience.

History past and tradition stand for inheritance. Inheritance is very crucial to Judaism, it defines and distinguishes the Jews from the rest. Ozick's commitment to history explains her praise for a "purely transmitted inheritance". Her fictional world deals with the issue of inheritance. In *Trust* the unnamed daughter is on the quest to discover her father and her legacy, in *The Messiah Of Stocholan Lar's* fabricates and borrows patrimony as he has none in "virility" Gatooff, without any foundation of the part, takes no time in stealing the name his friend. Ozick believes forth that the Jews are able to survive innumerable atrocities as they inherit the strength of preservation from their culture and tradition.

Ozick focuses the significance of heritage and inheritance. In *Heir To The Glimmering World* which draws on Victorian literature to explore a variety of inheritances, including literary legacies that invite and problematize the meaning and validity of interpretation (Sharon 3) *Heir to the Glimmering world* is an evidence of Ozick's transformation from her earlier work in which she regards art as a kind of idolatry. She now regards art as a kind of interpretations of the divine (Klinegenstein 102-4).

Cynthia Ozick as a foremost leading writer shows her works uphold Jewish tradition and identity. She believes in the celebration of the inherent and inherited Jewishness which according to her is the essence of Judaism. Her works also reflect her strong desire to crave a distinct identity for the Jews to be unique and special with their distinct identity and she traces it throughout her works. Though the Jews face socio – cultural conflicts Ozick does not allow her protagonist to surrender to it, she needs the Jews to survive and they must gather their rich culture and tradition.

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