

ABSTRACT

GERSON, ERIC REED. Finding Her Own Voice: Cynthia Ozick's Female Protagonists And Orthodox Jewish Law. (Under the direction of Michael Grimwood.)

This thesis considers the perpetuation of the unfair biases that women writers suffer in critical reception and in Orthodox Jewish law. Orthodox Judaism expects women to remain in the home—to raise their children by ensuring the education of their sons while striving to raise daughters who will serve as proper wives (Bogdanoff 9). The assumption that women are intellectually and culturally inferior to men may be the basis for the traditional critical conception of women's fiction as inferior to male fiction. Ozick asks why stylistically and structurally well developed stories should suffer gender-biased interpretations.

I relate three short stories—"Levitation," "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," and "Virility"—to Ozick's experiences with misogyny in Orthodox Jewish law. Ozick expresses her background with misogyny and Orthodox Jewish law in the stories' narrative tone, their imagery, and their characterization of female protagonists. The female protagonists' situations suggest that the legal precepts that limit women in Judaism hinder the development of an unbiased society that should value intellectual merit over gender. Ozick leads readers to question their own opinions about men's and women's capacities in both Jewish and American culture.

Finding Her Own Voice: Cynthia Ozick's Female Protagonists And Orthodox Jewish Law

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DEDICATION

To my father

BIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine Cynthia Ozick's representation of women as writers and Jews in relation to Orthodox Jewish law. I will focus on three of Ozick's short stories: "Levitation," "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," and "Virility." Orthodox Jewish law treats women as intellectually and socially inferior to men. Ozick's female protagonists initially acquiesce to the roles Judaism traditionally endorses, implying that the narrators concur with patriarchal domination. As the female protagonists either realize others' judgment of them as inferior or surrender to a second-class status, the narrators' perceptions of the protagonists develop into a reaction against the effects of gender bias.

"Levitation," like several of Ozick's other short fictions, rejects Judaism's assumptions about women. Lucy Feingold, the female protagonist, is an author whose writing and social status seem inferior to her husband's according to religious principles. Lucy recognizes her secondary status, and therefore rebels against her husband, Judaism, and others' expectations of how she should behave. Like "Levitation," "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" satirizes male domination of women. The continuous professional demotions of Ruth Puttermesser, the female protagonist, demonstrate the priority society assigns to men. Though Puttermesser believes that men dominate her, her lack of independence is the precursor to her own demoralizing perception of herself. The short story "Virility" confronts the critical bias women's fiction suffers in comparison to fiction by men. The narrator Edmund recounts his memories of the plagiarizing poet Edmund Gate, who stole his aunt Tante Rivka's poetry to acquire worldwide fame. Critics consider Gate's poetry differently from Rivka's because of the author's gender. Rivka's second-rate success in comparison to the esteem critics lavish upon Gate is reminiscent of Ozick's inhibition when writing Mippel,

in which she strove to mimic Henry James. By correlating her own experiences as a writer with her characterization of Rivka as a disregarded female author, Ozick suggests the need for women to transcend their emulation of others and discover their own formulas for success.

The Jewish intellectual community received women's writing negatively before 1990. Judith Baskin asserts that "to become a Jewish woman writer was to become a cultural anomaly; often the price of such an achievement was equivocal exile from a male society profoundly uncomfortable with female intellectual assertiveness" (18). According to David Brauner, "the novel is the index of greatness in fiction. This immediately loads the dice against women fiction writers, who have often been [...] drawn to the short story form" (114). Writing in 1993, Elaine M. Kauver states that "to write a novel twenty-five years ago with a woman as the narrator was to risk exclusion from the ranks of serious writing. More precisely, it often meant being regarded as the author of a woman's novel; which is to say, a romantic, pulp, trivia" (Cynthia Ozick's Fiction 2). Ozick, however, according to Daniel Walden, believes that the term "'woman writer' has no meaning. To her, "'a writer is a writer'"; "she rejects the phrase 'woman writer' as anti-feminist" (35, 43). Walden quotes Ozick:

Woman's condition is the result of a deeply entrenched and very pervasive cultural (therefore political) decision that woman shall remain a person defined not by her individual talents, not by the development of her brain, or her will, or her spirit, but rather by her childbearing properties and her status as a companion to men who make and rule the earth. Woman, therefore, is defined as "feminine" when she is supportive, nurturing, kind, gentle, selfless, and giving—while the qualities one

would wish for oneself, like intelligence, bravery, ingenuity, creativity, or mastery, are seen as neither necessary or desirable. (38)

Joyce Antler observes that male and female Jewish writers depict selfhood differently:

[...] for Roth, Bellow, and Mailer, the quest was for a self-sufficient manhood. For Yeziarska, Olsen, Paley and other female writers, the goal was female independence, and independence expressed in relation to family and communal responsibilities [...] in creating themselves as authors, Jewish women have first had to defy tradition, religious and secular, in different ways than men. The struggles they experienced in becoming artists parallel many of their characters' conflicts as they express desires for independence that run counter to traditional responsibilities. (194-96)

Ozick's fiction affirms Antler's contention that Jewish women writers must transcend Jewish perceptions of female capacities to persuade the literary community of the importance of fiction by women.

Chapter 1 will outline Ozick's childhood, adolescence, and professional life as a basis for her representation of Lucy Feingold in "Levitation," for Puttermesser's creation of Xanthippe to ascend professionally in "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," and for Elia Gatoff's appropriation of his aunt's poetry to gain intellectual respect and fame in "Virility." From Ozick's childhood through her professional career, she encountered unfounded gender biases. Often, Orthodox Jewish law was the basis for Ozick's experiences with patriarchy. As a student of the Jewish faith while attending school as a child, Ozick felt "futility and worthlessness," despite her "unusual" intellectual abilities. Ozick "never really recover[ed]" from these anxieties (Kauver, "Interview" 385). When becoming a writer, according to Victor Strandberg, Ozick noticed that "no book of poetry by a woman was ever reviewed

without reference to the poet's sex" (13). The gender discrimination that Ozick suffered throughout her educational and professional life contributed to the generation of the imagery and the allusions she uses in her representations of Lucy, Puttermesser, and Rivka.

Chapter 2 will attribute Lucy's relationships with her husband and the Jews at her party in "Levitation" to Orthodox Jewish laws and to Ozick's background. Lucy believes that she must acquiesce to the expectations of Orthodox Judaism for the behavior of a proper housewife. However, when Lucy realizes that she forfeited her intellectual independence by marrying Jimmy, she rebels against her marriage and faith. Ozick compares Lucy's marriage with the gender biases that affect critical receptions of women writers. Ozick discusses in Art and Ardor critics' presumptions in regard to men's and women's fiction:

The political term *woman writer* signals in advance a whole set of premises: that, for instance, there are 'male' and 'female' states of intellect and feeling, hence of prose; that individuality of condition and temperament do not apply, or at least not much, and that all writing women possess—not by virtue of being writers but by virtue of being women—an instantly perceived common ground. (284)

Marginalizing women's intellectual capabilities perpetuates a separation of sexes that Ozick believes undermines the creative capacities women could contribute to the literary community.

Chapter 3 will examine Ozick's short story "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" as a treatment of gender inequality in Orthodox Jewish culture. Ruth Puttermesser is, according to the story, the first female golem creator. Her subconscious creation of the female golem Xanthippe represents her intellectual equality with male golem creators. Ozick's

characterization of Puttermesser as a dependent woman affirms the Jewish gender laws that limit women. Even in a position of power, a woman must rely on men to maintain control.

Chapter 4 demonstrates through the short story “Virility” Ozick’s attention to the negative attention critics accord women because of gender biases and how these perceptions inhibit female success. In an interview with Catherine Rainwater in 1983, Ozick states that “*Atlantic* and *Harper’s* have consistently sent back everything, in whatever form (verse, fiction, nonfiction), I have ever submitted, and this has been going on for about twenty-five years. In certain ways I am still a hopeful tyro; my psyche is fixed in that attitude, I believe. I have never recovered from early neglect” (3). Treating such gender-based critical discussions as a context for Gate’s appropriation of Tante Rivka’s poetry will identify Ozick’s attitude toward criticisms based on personal, patriarchal perceptions.

These three short stories—“Levitation,” “Puttermesser and Xanthippe,” and “Virility”—collectively represent Ozick’s portrayal of a patriarchal society that oppresses women. “Levitation” depicts marital oppression, while “Puttermesser and Xanthippe” evaluates professional politics, and “Virility” confronts literary criticism. This thesis will demonstrate Ozick’s advocacy for gender equality in American society, in fiction, and in Judaism.

CHAPTER 1

CYNTHIA OZICK'S PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

1.1 Ozick's Biography

During her childhood, Cynthia Ozick suffered segregation in both religious and public schools because of her gender and her Jewish identity. This religious prejudice and misogyny persisted when she attended college, and continued even after she became a university professor. Ozick learned that regardless of her age, her position, or her intellectual ability, her achievements were subject to gender discrimination. Her experience pertains to her representation of women in fiction, particularly to the characterization of Lucy Feingold in "Levitation," Ruth Pattermesser in "Pattermesser and Xanthippe," and Tante Rivka in "Virility."

Born in New York City in 1928, Ozick is the daughter of Russian Orthodox Jewish immigrants William and Celia Regelson Ozick (Kremer 265). In an interview with Elaine M. Kauver, Ozick recounts her childhood rejection from Jewish seminary due to the rabbi's insistence that she was only a girl and therefore did not have a reason to learn Jewish law or history (384). Ozick's grandmother, however, refused to accept the rabbi's decision, and insisted that Ozick receive a "standard [male] Jewish education" (Klingenstein 252). Ozick reflects that when her grandmother came to pick her up at the end of the year,

[...] the rabbi said to my *bobe*,¹ *Zi hot a goldene kepele* ("She has a golden little head"). That was the last time anybody ever told me I was intelligent for my whole school time until I got to high school, and since the praise came from somebody who was an opponent of girls' education, it was something I held onto. (Kauver, "Interview" 385)

¹ Yiddish term for Grandmother

Even as a child, Ozick changed her rabbi's perceptions of what girls are capable of intellectually.

During her time in public school, Ozick felt inferior not only because of her gender but also because of her Jewishness. According to Daniel Walden, between the ages of five and fourteen, Ozick was the only Jewish child in P. S. 71, a fact that led to “demeaning” and “baiting” reactions by her teachers and classmates (Rev. Greek Mind 886). During elementary school at P. S. 71, Ozick felt “friendless and forlorn. [She was] publicly shamed in Assembly because [she was] caught not singing Christmas carols and repeatedly accused of deicide” (Klingenstein 252)—of being a “Christ killer” (Kremer 265). Even in second grade Ozick met a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant girl who inquired into Ozick's faith—was she Catholic or Protestant? Ozick replied, “I'm Jewish,” but the girl repeated the same question. The WASP girl could not fathom that another faith could exist (Strandberg 6). Ozick claims that she felt “stupid,” that she was “never made aware of being good at anything. I had no sense of being intelligent” (Kauver, “Interview” 385). “‘I'm still hurt by P. S. 71,’ Ozick said in 1989; ‘I had teachers who hurt me, who made me believe I was stupid and inferior’” (Strandberg 6); and life “was very strange [for Ozick] to have two lives like this: on the school side, where I was almost always the only Jew, and in *cheder* where I was almost always the only girl” (385). In either setting, Ozick was the minority child who desired acceptance, but whose gender or religious identity led to misogyny and ridicule from the two institutions in her life, school and synagogue, that should have encouraged her.

Both in graduate school and as a writer, Ozick suffered biased assumptions from her colleagues due to her gender. When attending graduate school at Columbia, according to Victor Strandberg, Ozick encountered misogyny in a seminar consisting of all men except for

one other woman, who was insultingly nicknamed “Crazy Lady” due to her loud voice and insistence on expressing her opinion (12). Her professor, a man of course, “couldn’t tell [Ozick and the Crazy Lady] apart” (13). To the professor, one woman was like any other woman. Acquiring a marketing job, Ozick received half the salary of men in the same position with the same education and experience (13). In Art and Ardor, Ozick discusses her prejudicial treatment by colleagues during her time as a university professor. She recounts that her male colleagues distrusted her opinions, since she was a “woman writer” and “woman teacher”:

I learned that I had no genuinely valid opinions, since every view I might hold was colored by my sex. If I said I didn’t like Hemingway, I could have no *critical* justification, no *literary* reason; it was only because, being a woman, I obviously could not be sympathetic toward Hemingway’s “masculine” subject matter—the hunting, the fishing, the bullfighting, which no woman could adequately digest. (266)

Even in an intellectual environment, where people’s contributions to the scholarly community rather than their gender should take precedence, Ozick “discovered two essential points: (1) that it was a ‘woman’ who had done the writing—not a mind—and that I was a ‘woman writer’; and (2) that I was now not a teacher, but a ‘woman teacher’” (226). Ozick’s experience with gender inequality throughout her educational and professional life contributed to the imagery in her writing.

Ozick was vexed by the prolonged writing of her first novel Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love—later abbreviated by Ozick to Mippel—in which she said she imitated Henry James rather than finding her own voice. According to Ozick, Mippel stole seven years from her life, and it ultimately went unpublished. When writing Mippel, she strove for the same

recognition and master status that James's novels arguably possess. However, Ozick later stated that, "If I were twenty-two now, I would not undertake a cannibalistically Jamesian novel to begin with [...] this seven-year period of 'madness' spent in pursuing of the 'ferocious dream' of writing a masterpiece on the order of James's *The Ambassador* Ozick calls 'my mournful, miserable start, which was a nonstart'" (qtd. Friedman 4). Ozick wrote for years and years without being read (Teicholz 180), and fifteen years passed between her abandonment of Mippel and the publication of her second novel, Trust.

Ozick recalls that while writing Trust, she read book reviews that discussed writers' genders:

Everything I was reading in reviews of other people's books made me fearful: I would have to be very, very cautious, I would have to drain my narrator of emotive value of any kind. I was afraid to be pegged as having written a "woman's novel" [...] no one takes a woman's novel seriously. (qtd. Strandberg 13)

Norma Rosen states in 1992, "not so long ago, any [female] writer worth her salt struggled to write herself free of the epithet 'woman writer'" (146). Ozick declares that the conception of "woman writer" originates from the belief that women require constant renewal of internal stimuli in order to write. She stresses that an "exceptional emotional strain" is irrelevant, but rather that women are no different from men; women "evolve as a partially independent organism through the vicissitudes of [...] emotional experience" (Art and Ardor 4).

1.2 Orthodox Jewish Law

“Blessed are You, God, [...] who has not made me a woman”²

Orthodox Jewish law imposes an inferior status upon women outside the home. In the home, according to Jewish law, women have authority over all aspects of children’s upbringing and education, and the husband must abide by the wife’s decisions. At the same time, “from its very beginning, Judaism has been outspokenly patriarchal” (Trepp 268). Jewish law expects women, regardless of their intellectual achievements or contributions, to submit to their marital obligations. Rabbi Sholom Estrin, of the Congregation Sha’arei Israel-Lubavitch in Raleigh, North Carolina, describes women’s maternal role as a means of ensuring and protecting their modesty. Rabbi Estrin states that Orthodox Judaism highly esteems women, and therefore avoids putting them in vulnerable situations: “by placing a woman in public, you in a sense are tainting her pureness.” Through her short stories, Ozick demonstrates that, regardless of the reasons, Jewish law impedes intellectually ambitious women.

Orthodox Jewish law requires segregation of men and women in study and synagogue attendance. According to Leonard Swidler, the Orthodox do not expect women to study the Torah or Jewish law: “the only connection with the study of the Torah that women could be expected to have was to send their *sons* and husbands off to study and to wait for them” (95). Women have been “kept ignorant of the processes of Jewish law” (Greenburg 10), and during synagogue services, women must sit separate from men, behind a “mehitzah,” or wall and screen, which divides the two genders (Trepp 271). According to Ozick, “my own synagogue is the only place in the world where I am not considered a Jew” (Harap 360-61). The message Jewish schools convey to boys and girls early in life is that “sons are valued

² The traditional prayer said by an Orthodox Jewish man upon awaking in the morning (Trepp 270).

more than daughters [and] that the education of sons is more important than that of daughters” (Schneider 284). Susan Weidman Schneider presents a story first told by Norma Fain Pratt, in relation to the experiences of the Yiddish poet Male Lee. Lee’s father, “a pious man, secretly burned her entire portfolio of poetry in the family oven because he believed it was against God’s will that a girl write” (151). In Orthodox Judaism, “if any man teaches his daughter Torah it is as though he taught her lechery” (Swidler 93), and therefore, women’s “intellectual endeavors don’t count. [Jewish women] want their *men* to read books, be ‘intellectual,’ because only what the men do and learn will change the status of the family as a whole” (Schneider 150). This conception that women are incapable of literate, intellectual endeavors is consistent with the Orthodox exclusion of women from the rabbinate. Within an Orthodox community, the rabbi is a symbol of wisdom and authority. However, regardless of women’s intellectual acuity or levels of education, according to Helene Rebecca Bogdanoff, the Orthodox refuse to accept them as rabbis (12). Rabbi Estrin states that women’s connection with rabbinical authority “is based on their husband’s position as the rabbi [... she] traditionally has always played a major role in the community [by] helping her husband lead.” Concurrently, Orthodox Judaism does not approve of women seeking or obtaining any other positions of authority.

The story of Lilith is one justification for the Orthodox limitation on women and for the contention that “feminism [is] a capital crime” (Swidler 103). According to the Midrash, two versions of Genesis exist, the first of which recounts the story of Lilith: “the first woman was Lilith. She stood before God, insisting on absolute equality with her husband, as both had been created in the same fashion and at the same time. This demand irritated God. Lilith then uttered the Name of God and became a demon to haunt mankind” (Trepp 268). Lilith’s

transformation into a demon conveys an image of deviance for women who demand equal rights.

Ozick's own experiences as a writer reflect her early submissiveness to Jewish legal expectations of women. In an essay, "Previsions of the Demise of the Dancing Dog," Ozick discusses the consequences of women usurping more than their traditionally assigned household responsibilities:

The mother is at home to take care of the helpless baby. That is right and reasonable. Everyone agrees—Nature agrees, the father agrees, Society agrees. Society agrees? That is very interesting. That too is an idea worth examination. It is very useful for society to have the mother at home. It keeps her out of the way. If, say, she stopped at only two children (but if she stopped at only two she would be in danger of reducing the birth rate, which now rivals India's), those two might be half-grown, and safely shut up in a school building most of the day, by the time she is thirty-five. And if she were thirty-five—a young, healthy, able, educated thirty-five—with no helpless baby to keep her at home, and most of the day free, what would she do? Society shudders at the possibility; she might want to get a job. (Art and Ardor 274)

Even though Ozick affirms that women should transcend their role as housewives, she admits that as an author she relied on her husband's support. While Ozick was writing Trust, and many subsequent works of fiction, her husband, Bernard Hallote, financially supported her. She jokes in an interview with Tom Teicholz that, while some people receive Guggenheim fellowships, she was on a "Hallote fellowship" (162). Despite Ozick's initial dependency on her husband, however, she stresses that "a wife can support a husband quite as capably as the reverse" (Teicholz 187).

The Orthodox Jewish faith forbids mixed marriages, since marriage is, according to Schneider, an “agreement between Jewish men, Jewish women, and God, so it’s thought that the contract can’t possibly make sense if one partner isn’t Jewish” (321). Lucy and Jimmy Feingold’s mixed marriage in “Levitation” represents an assumption that converted Jewish women must submit to patriarchy both in their behavior as wives and in their conversion to Judaism.

Along with Orthodox Judaism’s rejection of interfaith marriages, the Orthodox consider homosexuality wrong since every “sex act must in principle be capable of leading to a strengthening of the land through the increase of its inhabitants. It must be the kind that produces children” (Trepp 265). Basil F. Herring asserts that the Orthodox consider homosexuality as an undermining of the “family institution that is the basis of society as we have come to know it” (176). Orthodox law also considers transvestism as an affront against God. According to Leo Trepp, “the characteristics of men and women may never be blurred, even in dress [...] a woman must not put on man’s apparel, nor shall a man wear women’s clothing; for whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord your God” (266). If a family discovers that their child or sibling is gay or a transvestite, Orthodox Jews expect the family to disown the individual.

The reason Orthodox Judaism considers homosexuality and transvestism to be wrong may originate in the Orthodox Jewish definition of masculinity. According to Trepp, the commemoration of a Jewish boy’s path to manhood begins after he is circumcised (241). The circumcision establishes a covenant with God, which the boy fosters with a bar mitzvah, and which he completes by having a son of his own and ensuring that the son undergoes the same milestones. The bar mitzvah ceremony consists of a thirteen-year-old young man’s

recitation of a segment of Torah scroll along with the reading of a prophetic portion of the Torah (Trepp 242). After he completes the readings, the young man is responsible for his own actions and must perform mitzvot, or religious obligations. Since the youngster must execute adult responsibilities, Orthodox Jews view the bar mitzvah as a symbolic acknowledgment that the boy has become a man. For the boy's father, the bar mitzvah marks the conclusion of his parental obligations. If men are gay or transvestites, Orthodox Jews fear that they will fail to produce covenanted children.

Along with the circumcision and bar mitzvah rituals, intellectual merit is a prerequisite for Jewish masculinity. Aviva Cantor asserts that Orthodox Jews define their power through knowledge and learning. Jews therefore define manhood "in terms of commitment to and achievement in learning Torah," as well as in scholarly achievement (92). In "Virility," Edmund Gate's admission to plagiarism represents a complete loss of masculine power, since he becomes defined not by the stellar "Virility" poetry, but by his reliance on his aunt for intellectual achievement. His character suggests a dichotomy between men's and women's capacities for success.

Rabbi Estrin notes that the personification of God and his creations through writing, whether by men or women, is essentially idol-making, in the Orthodox tradition. Ozick affirms Estrin's observation in her interview with Kauver when she declares that "the clash of monotheism with image-making [characterizes] the poet as God-competitor" (380). Though the Orthodox faith limits male writing in regard to the personification of God, men may possess a stronger connection to God through their ability to read from the Torah and study scripture, acts from which women are expressly prohibited. Ozick stated in a speech delivered in the Bar-Ilan University in the summer of 1978 that "failure to allow Jewish

women to participate has meant ‘the mass loss of half of the available Jewish minds’” (Harap 360). Ozick names the “missing commandment” as “Thou shalt not lessen the humanity of women” (Schneider 40), and she calls upon Orthodox Jews to overcome gender stereotypes or else expect Jewish women to look elsewhere for acceptance.

1.3 Critical Reception

Negative critical opinions of Ozick’s fiction and the fiction of women writers may contribute to Ozick’s characterization of her female characters as submissive to male authority. In “Levitation,” Ozick discusses a performance by a female anthropologist at which Lucy Feingold is seemingly the only female in attendance and the only individual listening to the anthropologist’s speech. During Ozick’s time as a university professor, she witnessed a similar occasion, when a female anthropologist was ridiculed for her intelligence and her feminist opinions. The anthropologist and two male instructors, one of history, the other of psychology, conducted a debate before a large audience. The anthropologist focused on women’s domestic and professional opportunities and problems. She believed that women not only should be educated but should use their education to benefit society. Ozick suggests that, though the anthropologist’s views were controversial, she was nonetheless “reasoned and reasonable.” The two male professors following the anthropologist cracked sarcastic jokes about the consequences of women’s emancipation. For Ozick, the male professors’ ignorance is not the issue, but the fact that the coed audience was also laughing: “They are not laughing at the absurdly callow topic”; rather, they are “laughing at the futility of an educated woman. She is the absurdity” (*Art and Ardor* 272-73). The debate reinforced the reality that women’s education can be the subject of mockery.

As a professor, Ozick assigned her students Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. She recalls in Art and Ardor that during the class discussion, she referred to O'Connor as "she," and the class's astonishment was the agent for their redefinition for their opinions of O'Connor's work. Since a woman wrote *Wise Blood*, her gender "somehow put a different cast upon the narrative and their response to it" (266). Writing in 1971, Ozick believes that two hoary views of woman perpetuate from within the same tradition of criticism that influenced her students' reactions to O'Connor's works. "One: she is sentimental, irrational, overemotional, impatient, unperseveringly flighty, whimsical, impulsive, unreliable, unmechanical, not given to practicality, [and] perilously vague; [men, however, are] unsentimental, exact, rational, controlled, patient, hard-headed, mechanically gifted, meeter[s] of payrolls, firm of purpose, wary of impulse, [and] anything but a dreamer" (268-69). Her second view is that women will either "wander too much or she will wander not at all. She is either too emotional or not emotional enough. She is either too spontaneous or not spontaneous enough. She is either too sensitive [...] or she is not sensitive enough." Such negative characteristics of women's emotional and mental capabilities, Ozick asserts, are the reasons that women fail to obtain high political, professional, or literary positions (269).

One explanation for women's secondary status to men may be Tillie Olsen's argument that "women writers, women's experiences, and literature by women, are by definition minor" (9). Critics tend to treat men's fiction more favorably. Helen Benedict, in discussing Bernard Malamud's novel *The Assistant*, regards it as "stoic, self-abnegating, mildly hysterical, passionately familial" and associates the text's style with the precision found in Saul Bellow's and Philip Roth's writings. Though there are certainly reviews of

male-written fiction that focus on gender constraints and male-versus-female characterizations, the response to men's fiction is less prone to gender-inflection than that of women's fiction. According to Kristie S. Fleckenstein, for women to be producers of knowledge, they must "be like men, think like men, speak like men" (115), and even in such cases, the knowledge of the stories' authors still prevents the works from receiving fair criticism.

Novelist Norma Rosen presents her personal grievances over her critical reception. According to Rosen, a woman's first book is praised for "charm, for playfulness." The critical response of her second book typically opens with an "Anthony Burgess quote: He prefers books with 'a strong male thrust, an almost pedantic allusiveness and a brutal intellectual content.'" The third book finally is assigned to a female reviewer, but the critic nonetheless claims that "one cannot read this novel without stumbling over queries about the female condition" (146-47). In Joyce Antler's review of Anza Yeziarska's work: "feminist scholars have elaborated several interpretive strategies for elucidating the gendered meanings of [her fiction]" (198). Women's reviews of female-written fiction present no less alienating attention to gender than men's.

Reviews of Ozick's and Tillie Olsen's stories also contain sexually based conclusions. Victor Strandberg points out that the reviewer of Ozick's novel Trust in the *New York Times Book Review* wrote of "the narrator's longing for 'some easy feminine role,' allowing a 'coming to terms with the recalcitrant sexual elements in her life.' *Time* magazine called Ozick 'a housewife'" (14). Tillie Olsen, who, according to Joe Holley, is "a chronicler of the working class whose few published works included some of the most critically acclaimed stories in Modern American literature" (B6), chose to place her family over her

career. Holley states that Olsen's first book, *Tell Me A Riddle*, was not published by Rutgers UP until she was fifty years old. Olsen placed the "demands of motherhood" over the demands of writing, and did not seek publication until later in life (B6). Neither Ozick nor Olsen is capable of escaping criticism that focuses on women's supposed domestic roles.

In "Previsions on the Demise of the Dancing Dog," Ozick equates women who display intellectual acuity and seek positions outside their homes with the spectacle of dogs performing unusual actions. Ozick cites Dr. Johnson's remark concerning women preachers: "she reminded him, he said, of a dog dancing on its hind legs; one marvels not at how well it is done, but that it is done at all" (Art and Ardor 267). For Ozick, Dr. Johnson's statement reinforces her contention that women's contributions, regardless of their range, are merely an exhibition for male intellects to wander over. Ozick, further, quotes a review by a *New York Review of Books* critic of five books, three by women, which declared that "women novelists, we have learned to assume, like to keep their focus narrow." Other than the evidence that "we have learned to assume," according to Ozick, the critic fails to offer a reasonable case as to why the authors' genders should influence perceptions of their works (Art and Ardor 268).

The act of basing literary judgment on gender is what Ozick calls the "Great Multiple Lie." The "Lie" affects all women, and it supposes that a "female nature" exists in women's art. The "Lie" assumes that all women write in the same prescribed verse or prose style, and that all women possess an inferior psychological and emotional temperament. Further, "[the lie] assume[s] a set of preoccupations appropriate, by nature, to female poets and novelists," and that women's reproductive abilities influence their writing sensibilities. "The lie" supposes that women's imagination is sexually determined and that their gender "inherently circumscribed and defined and directed the writer's subject matter, perspective, and

aspiration” (Art and Ardor 288-89). Since such ignorance exists in critical reviews of fiction, Ozick writes fiction and essays that identify the irrationality of judging individual creativity on the basis of beliefs about the capacities of both genders.

CHAPTER 2
“LEVITATION”

Cynthia Ozick’s experiences of misogyny and Jewish tradition probably affected the personal and theological separation between Lucy and Jimmy Feingold in “Levitation.” In “Levitation,” a writing couple, Lucy and Jimmy, throw a party for A-list literary intellectuals, only to have no one but second-class artists attend. Both Lucy and Jimmy consider the party a failure without their intended guests. Out of boredom and a desire to flaunt his knowledge, Jimmy draws the conversation in his living room to the Holocaust. Listening from the hall, Lucy cannot empathize with Jimmy and the other Jews’ feelings about their vexed history. She envisions the Jews levitating toward the ceiling before she walks to the dining room to converse with the atheists who have gathered there. Lucy’s experiences as a Jewish writer are similar to Ozick’s experiences of misogyny. The Jewish writing community generally did not take women’s writing very seriously when Ozick wrote “Levitation,” and critics expected women writers to conform to male-written fiction’s patterns in order to gain acceptance. Lucy is a Catholic who converted to Judaism in order to marry Jimmy. Ozick’s critical reception depended on her gender. Lucy’s marriage to Jimmy depended on her conversion to Judaism. Because Lucy refused to write in a prescribed style, her conversion mirrors Ozick’s writing. The separation of Lucy and Jimmy at the party, and Lucy’s purported inferiority as a writer within the Jewish literary community generally, along with the inferiority she experiences in her marriage because of Orthodox Jewish law, represent Cynthia Ozick’s real-life effort to overcome stereotypical assumptions about women’s place in Jewish-American fiction.

Ozick characterizes Lucy as a convert in order to critique women's social identity in Judaism. In the opening paragraph of "Levitation," Ozick creates the impression that Lucy is, in her writing, equal to her husband, to foreshadow their separation later in the story:

A pair of novelists, husband and wife, gave a party. The husband was also an editor; he made a living at it. But really he was a novelist. His manner was powerless; he did not seem like an editor at all. He had a nice plain pale face, likable. His name was Feingold. (3)

The narrator's identification of Lucy and Jimmy as *a pair* of novelists implies that they are equal in their vocations. However, though both he and Lucy are writers, he is also an editor. Even with an editorial job that brings enough money to allow them to "[make] a living," Jimmy's nonchalant attitude towards his editing—he is really a novelist—undermines Lucy's passion towards her fiction because, aside from her maternal role (Lucy has a son and daughter), she is just an unsuccessful novelist.

Lucy's description of her protagonist's apartment in her first novel reflects Ozick's mindset when she wrote Mippel. Lucy's lack of authorial confidence stems from her lack of success with her first novel. Lucy describes the apartment as oddly designed, with "rooms with doors that go nowhere [...] Editors. Critics. Books, old, old books, heavy as centuries. Shelves built into the cold fireplace; Freud on the grate, Marx on the hearth, Melville, Hawthorne, Emerson. Oh God, the weight, the weight" (6). The luminaries—Marx, Melville, Hawthorne, and Emerson—who Lucy believes overwhelm her, indicate Ozick's criticism of the self she had been when she wrote Mippel. She tried in vain to achieve the stylistic distinction of such authors, particularly Henry James, but she failed to complete Mippel. The narrator expresses contempt for Lucy's first novel by stressing that it is "the

published one, not the one she was writing now” (5-6). As her only published work, its lack of success, its dismal style, and its reception depend on Lucy’s inexperience as an author.

Lucy’s choice to abandon her fiction temporarily to work with Jimmy on his novel may be Ozick’s representation of her tribulations with Mippel. Lucy’s first novel has been unsuccessful and critically ignored, and she herself finds her second novel utterly lacking in story and character. She is afraid of failing again, so she attempts to help Jimmy compose his novel about Menachem ben Zerach, a “compassionate knight” who survived “a massacre of Jews in the town of Estella in Spain in 1328” (5). Lucy, who writes about “domestic life,” hopes that helping Jimmy may ease the difficulty she has in “seizing on a concrete subject” (4). She lacks sufficient confidence to create a successful novel and believes she must cling to the writing of a minor male author—Jimmy—to gain credibility, since critics will at least seriously read his work. Ozick’s characterization of Lucy as a dependent author articulates her own experiences when working on Mippel. Ozick—like Lucy, who works on her husband’s story without credit—wrote Mippel with a quasi-Jamesian voice rather than establishing her own identity as an author.

When the Jews in the living room levitate without Lucy, the narrator asks, “why did it not take her too?” (15)—to which the narrator responds that only “Jesus could take her” (15), but Lucy’s inferiority points to gender inequality. The catalyst for the levitation is a Holocaust survivor’s narrative about the conditions that Jewish people in Europe suffered. Lucy believes that she cannot comprehend the atrocity of the Holocaust and the pain of being Jewish because she is not truly Jewish but a convert. Lucy could not participate in the discussions held by the Jewish men in the living room, and thus the men’s levitation literally

embodies her metaphorical segregation. Ozick turns the lack of acceptance of her early writing into Lucy's separation from the Jewish men.

Analyzing Jewish gender laws in conjunction with Ozick's characterization of Lucy confirms that Lucy's gender is a catalyst for her separation from the male Jews. By concentrating on Lucy's domestic responsibilities to entertain guests, take care of children, and cook, rather than focusing on her vocation as a writer, Ozick presents Lucy as a proper Jewish woman whose career is secondary to family. The narrator introduces Lucy as Jimmy's wife, yet, despite the fact that she is the protagonist of the story this introduction defines her more as his spouse than as his intellectual equal. And what of Lucy's first novel? "[Jimmy] wrote about Jews," but Lucy's only published work is about "domestic life" (4). Ozick's description of Lucy's writing in relation to her role as Jimmy's wife conforms to the traditional status of women in Orthodox Jewish law.

Lucy's abandonment of her hostess responsibilities at her party and her rebellion against Orthodox Jewish laws express Ozick's belief that women should not rely on men for support. Lucy's hostess duties confine her to the outskirts of the party since she only serves food and cleans after the guests rather than participating in their conversations. Lucy's eyes "swam by blank-eyed" (10) while she served a platter of cheeses during the beginning of the party. Her figurative segregation from the guests in each of the three rooms where the party takes place arises out of her responsibility as a Jewish wife. According to Leonard Swidler, "Jewish women were not only to be seen as little as possible; they were also to be heard and spoken to as little as possible" (123). Jewish wives are not to converse with the guests, but to ensure that they have enough food and that their home is clean. During the party, Lucy speaks only to Feingold until the concluding paragraphs. When Jimmy grabs her arm, and

declares that the party is a “waste [...] no one’s here” (10), he focuses his concern on the absence of his preferred, “elite” guests rather than on Lucy’s alienation. The narrator establishes in Lucy’s actions of “gazing back” silently and rocking “a stump of cheese” (10) that, at the beginning of the party, Lucy submits to the Orthodox law that women should remain unseen. Thus, Lucy initially submits to the Orthodox perception of a quiet housewife.

The significance of Lucy’s inability to feed her guests properly is intensified by the fact that she is a Jewish convert, as her performance will receive more scrutiny than if she were raised Jewish. Ozick estranges Lucy from the party to establish contempt for the Orthodox Jewish law that women should remain silent when among Jewish men. Lucy lingers in the center hall, alone, as the men have fun, eat the food, and discuss art. The center hall has been “swept clean” (10), so Lucy has performed her womanly duty to maintain a proper home. In the living room, Lucy notices the rabbi who performed her conversion, and she sees that only scraps of food remain for him: the potato chips are gone, carrot sticks devoured, and “of the celery sticks nothing [is] left but threads” (11). Lucy’s unease around the rabbi, “as if every encounter was like a new stage in a perpetual examination” (12), likely stems from the small amount of food left for him and the other male guests in the living room. This characterization of Lucy as involved in such trivialities as food quantities signifies her belief that, as a woman and a Jew, she has failed to maintain what she believes Jewish laws define as a proper home.

Lucy rejects both her husband’s influence and the authority of Jewish law by retreating to the dining room and cubing the remaining slice of cake for the male guests in the living room. Lucy sticks “a square of chocolate cake in [Jimmy’s] mouth” (13) to end his

retelling of the bloody history of Jews and the many atrocities that befell his people. The food that had previously represented Lucy's performance of her obligations as a proper housewife becomes the means for her to reduce Jimmy to a silent figure at a party of relative nobodies. The guests at the party also engage in suggestively misogynistic practices. One of them, whom the narrator calls "pragmatic" (13), eats cake from a paper bag that his wife provided him, which though not directly misogynistic does bear anti-feminist qualities. The narrator does not directly indicate whether his wife accompanies him to the party or not. Regardless of whether she is in attendance, the "pragmatic" guest's wife is merely a means by which he is properly fed, advancing the Orthodox Jewish perception that Jewish wives should remain silent and unseen while ensuring their husbands' well being. Lucy rebels not only against her husband's personality and their marriage, but also against her role as a Jewish wife.

Lucy's realization that her gender impedes her intellectual and creative independence occurs when she leaves the living room and the levitating Jews. She notices the failure of the party in the dining room. The Jewish guests in the dining room—"the unruffled, devil-may-care kind: the humorists, the painters, film-reviewers who went off to studio showings of *Screw on Screen* on the eve of the Day of Atonement" (12)—are only "playing with the cake crumbs on the tablecloth" (19). However, Lucy no longer feels responsible for the failure of the party. She realizes that she has "abandoned nature [for] the God of the Jews" (18), and in seeing another faith that does not limit women, she rejects the Jews who levitate in the living room.

Jimmy's levitation metaphorically represents marital separation between himself and Lucy. In Orthodox law, women are declared "*argunot* (bound)—neither officially widows

nor divorced”—if the husband leaves without a trace, in which case a woman cannot remarry (Schneider 38, 321). Though she knows Jimmy’s whereabouts, and he will theoretically descend from his levitation, for the moment Jimmy has left Lucy. Without her husband, she feels, she can choose how she will behave at the party. When she notices that a saucer has tipped over and she goes to clean it up, she believes that cleaning the mess, though a womanly duty, has now become a choice rather than an obligation. With the Jews in the air, and their words reduced to “specks” (20), she no longer feels bound by Jewish law.

As Lucy witnesses her husband and the other Jews floating higher and higher into the air, she becomes overwhelmed by a vision, through which she comes to understand the relationship between religion and nature. In the vision, she stands in a small park and witnesses a musical performance. An anthropologist from the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., stands on the stage. The anthropologist introduces a troupe of male musicians. These performers have sexually connotative accessories such as “long strap[s], which [they] rub.” The anthropologist suggests that the songs are “mainly erotic [...] the dances are suggestive,” the “up-and-down dancing can also be found in parts of Africa” (17). Unfortunately, the audience has filled mostly with men: “Italians—greenhorns from Sicily, settled New Yorkers from Naples” (17). As the dancing, singing, and narration continue, these Italians’ behavior overshadows the anthropologist’s speech, and she suddenly vanishes “out of Lucy’s illumination” (18). Lucy’s vision confirms the reality that male performances displace women’s, regardless of women’s intellect.

Ozick’s inspiration for Lucy’s vision may have been the debate she had witnessed concerning female education in which a female anthropologist attempted to discuss a serious matter, only to be ridiculed for her intelligence. The audience in the debate, like the Italians

in the park, chanted, laughed, and mocked the female professor's argument that women deserve the same educational opportunities as men. When Lucy's vision ends, she mentally returns to the living room and sees how high and "small" (19) the Jews have become, levitating above her. All that matters to the Jewish men in the air is "death and death and death" ("Levitation" 19). Jimmy and the living-room Jews' discussions of the Holocaust become tiresome and meaningless to Lucy: "she is bored by the shootings and the gas and the camps, she is not ashamed to admit this" (19). Lucy wonders how long they can discuss such morbidity. Their desire to recall pain and death reduces the air-borne Jews to animals, chewing their morbidity like cud (19)—their words more like an "animal's cry" than human dialect. "As the Jews soar up and away," Strandberg argues, "[Lucy] comes to a realization. Essentially she is not Jewish nor Ancient Hebrew nor Christian: she is a pagan, a believer in the Dionysian gods of earth" (98); she rejects all patriarchal religions for the worship of nature.

The dancing men's performances in Lucy's vision suggest male homosexuality, which conflicts with Judaism's tenet that homosexuality represents an affront against God; the Orthodox Jews believe God intended sex only for procreation. A dozen men fill the platform, most middle-aged, some young, and one old. One young man begins the ritual by churning butter, while others follow by blowing into pipes (16-17). This performance figuratively implies sodomy in the butter churning and fellatio in the pipe blowing. The songs produced by these "instruments" are "suggestive"; and with only men performing them, and with the female anthropologist—the only woman on stage—disappearing out of the vision, the men's dancing seems to represent their indulgence of homosexual desires: "a pair of [male] dancers seize each other. Leg winds over leg, belly into belly, each man

hopping on a single free leg. Intertwined, they squat and rise, squat and rise. They send out elastic cries” (18). By watching this dance, Lucy feels “glorified [...] exalted. She comprehends” (18). The men are free to express their passion for each other because they celebrate the “Madonna of Love” (18), a God of the earth and not of heaven. Jewish law considers homosexuality sinful, and witnessing non-Jewish men publicly engage in suggestively homosexual acts reveals to Lucy the limitations Orthodox Judaism imposes on its followers. The Jewish laws pertaining to women limit Lucy’s artistic freedom, and thus she sees that without religion, she, like the men in her vision who nourish their sexual desires without religious scrutiny, would be free to express herself.

In accepting that she was mistaken in her conversion to Judaism, Lucy rejects the Jewish laws that have impeded her artistic progress; no longer will she have to rely on her husband’s creativity. During the party, the guests in the living room inquire about the candlesticks and the fireplace, both of which, Lucy reveals, are never lit (11). Sarah Blacher Cohen argues that the unlit candlesticks and fireplace represent the lack of a continual Jewish spirituality: “the blessing of the Sabbath candles, the hallmark of Jewish observance, does not take place in this home [...] what gives these living-room Jews a newfound sense of Jewish identity is hearing about the Holocaust atrocities” (71). Along with the Holocaust refugee’s account of the atrocities of the War, the fireplace points to the ovens in the concentration camps. When the living room ascends, Lucy is free to leave it for the dining room without feeling as if she is “crossing no-man’s-land” as she had earlier in the party (11). Since so many Jews died in the Holocaust, the literal and figural separation between Lucy and Jimmy represents Ozick’s opinion that the Jewish religion can no longer exclude

women; to do so would mean to ignore half of the Jewish population, and thus to hinder the progress of Jewish society.

The narrator's tone initially appears to sympathize with Orthodox Jewish law's contention that women are inferior to men. When the story begins, the narrator describes Jimmy more compassionately than Lucy. To the narrator, Jimmy is a mellow author of religious fiction, while Lucy, possibly out of jealousy since she is facing travail in writing her second novel, is cold and insulting toward Jimmy's work: "Your compassionate knight is only another writer. Narcissism. Tedium [...] bald man, bald prose" (5-6). The narrator focuses on Lucy's complaints to Jimmy about her life and writing. When the narrator discusses the dangers of living in New York—"they risked their necks if they ventured out to Broadway for a loaf of bread after dark" (8)—Lucy gripes about their inadequate lives, and Jimmy focuses on his writing. He is unconcerned about his stature in life or his status in the writing community. For the narrator, Lucy is childish and insecure, while Jimmy is complacent and, as Orthodox law purports men should be, centered on his work and his studies.

The narrator reveals the futility of religious traditions that subjugate women when she discusses Lucy and Jimmy's patriarchal relationship. Before Jimmy's Holocaust discussion, the narrator has considered Jimmy to be very mild (7), but once he begins his rendition of the atrocities that befell Jews in the past, the narrator sees Jimmy as monstrous: "Feingold was crazed by these tales, he drank them like a vampire" (13). The narrator's contempt for Jimmy grows not because he discusses the Holocaust, but because he inadvertently excludes Lucy from the discussion and from the party. Lucy cleans, maintains food supplies, and stands silent in the center hall away from the guests while Jimmy socializes and ignores her

loneliness. As Jimmy's and the other male Jews' discussions continue, the narrator realizes along with Lucy the intensity of the Jews in the living room:

They all listened with terrible intensity. Again Lucy looked around. It pained her how intense Jews could be, though she too was intense. But she was intense because her brain was roiling with ardor, she wooed mind-pictures, she was a novelist. *They* were intense all the time; she supposed the grocers among them were as intense as any novelist; was it because they had been Chosen, was it because they pitied themselves every breathing moment? (14)

As a convert, Lucy believes that she cannot experience the same passion as the male Jews, but can merely interpret their intensity metaphorically. Like the narrator, Lucy, even though she is Jimmy's wife, is only a spectator at the party.

When the narrator examines Lucy's vision of the female anthropologist who is unfairly excluded from a male performance, the narrator's tone toward Lucy changes from contempt to sympathy for Lucy's unfair marital status. While the Jews in the living room ascend to the ceiling, Lucy hears the word "Holocaust," and the narrator assumes that the speaker must be Jimmy. Such discussions become for both the narrator and Lucy "as tiresome as prayer [...] if you said the same prayer over and over again, wouldn't your brain turn out to be no better than a prayer wheel" (19). When Lucy leaves the living room and the Jews, the narrator also abandons the living-room Jews' wearisome existence. The narrator, just like Lucy, experiences relief when hearing the discussions of the atheists in the dining room. For the narrator, the atheists become "compassionate knights." In an interview with Catherine Rainwater, Ozick stresses that she considers her works parables (262). In terms of Lucy Feingold and "Levitation," the moral and spiritual truth Ozick attempts to convey is

that people who reject influence, and rather discover for themselves how they wish to live, are heroes, the true “compassionate knights” who represent a society that does not limit individuals based on out-dated religious traditions.

CHAPTER 3

“PUTTERMESSER AND XANTHIPPE”

Cynthia Ozick’s “Puttermesser and Xanthippe” represents its main female protagonist, Ruth Puttermesser, as a woman who is intellectually and professionally inhibited by gender-based insecurities. After her boss, Alvin Turtleman, in the New York City Department of Receipts and Disbursements, repeatedly demotes her so that her positions will be available for men, Puttermesser creates the first female golem,³ which she calls Leah but who prefers the name Xanthippe. Xanthippe possesses all of Puttermesser’s intelligence and desires, and the knowledge of how to fulfill those desires. Actualizing Puttermesser’s hopes, Xanthippe fashions a “PLAN” to reinvigorate New York by arranging for Puttermesser’s mayoral election. Despite Xanthippe’s intellect and her drive to save Puttermesser from professional ruin, Xanthippe’s sexual desires overcome her reason, and her feverishness destroys Puttermesser’s administration. Xanthippe has an affair with Puttermesser’s ex-lover, Morris Rappoport, and when Puttermesser attempts to stop the affair, Xanthippe betrays her by having sex with the men in every high-level administrative position in Puttermesser’s mayoral cabinet. Since these men become obsessed with Xanthippe, they lose their focus on performing their jobs, and the city loses the harmony that Puttermesser and her administration had established. Disparaged and defeated, Puttermesser solicits the assistance of Morris Rappoport to destroy Xanthippe in order to prevent the golem’s growing sexual urges from causing further problems. Puttermesser’s political rise and fall result from Xanthippe’s influence. However, since Xanthippe’s “PLAN” arose from Puttermesser’s knowledge, which she transferred to Xanthippe through her breath, the story suggests that

³ Golems are mute humanoids who solve their creators’ dilemmas. The creators of golems are usually men, forming them through the combination of clay, breath, and the utterance of God’s name.

Puttermesser could have changed her life, except that the insecurities engendered in her by patriarchy inhibited her.

Puttermesser's professional descent does not end until she submits to Jewish laws concerning marriage and motherhood. Though Puttermesser, in violation of Orthodox Jewish laws, has compiled an impressive educational and professional record, including the "highest score in the entire city on the First-Level Management Examination," "editor-in-chief of Law Review at Yale Law School," and a *summa cum laude* degree in history from Barnard, her job is usurped by Turtleman's New York University buddy, Adam Marmel, who majored in Film Arts (87). Puttermesser's relegation may reflect Ozick's encounters with misogyny in her professional life. While in a marketing position, according to Strandberg, Ozick received half the salary of men in the same position with the same education and experience (13). Though Puttermesser possesses significantly more experience and education than the men replacing her, these men nonetheless usurp her position only because of their gender.

Unlike the narrator of "Levitation," who originally describes the protagonist Lucy Feingold with satirical contempt, only to express empathy when witnessing Lucy's patriarchal marriage, the third-person omniscient narrator of "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" initially establishes sympathy for Puttermesser's gender-biased vocational demotions. Ozick states in an interview with Kauver that, when writing "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," she wanted to make a demonstration through an antithesis, expressing ironically "the density of human entanglement" (391). Ozick wished to demonstrate the opposite of Orthodox Judaism's marital principles through Puttermesser's spinster lifestyle. Additionally, through both Puttermesser's treatment of Xanthippe and Puttermesser's lack of confidence in her

ability to be Mayor of New York without Xanthippe, Puttermesser does represent Ozick's antithesis to female independence since Puttermesser is superficially the opposite of Orthodox Jews' idea of a proper married woman. The narrator is at first complacent toward Puttermesser's affair with Morris Rappoport and her periodontal problems—Puttermesser suffers from a sixty percent bone loss in her jaw (79). By stressing that she has severe dental problems, the narrator invites compassion for Puttermesser from the reader. The narrator further develops an understanding for Puttermesser's professional, sexual, and personal dilemmas by characterizing her as a victim of patriarchy when Turtleman demotes her so that less qualified men can claim her position. The narrator wants the reader to distrust male authority, and to hope that Puttermesser acquires redress for her grievances.

When Puttermesser creates Xanthippe, the narrator suggests that Puttermesser will gain retribution since she creates a golem who will correct the mistakes from which Puttermesser suffers. Additionally, while Puttermesser reads about golems after first creating Xanthippe, the narrator focuses the reader's attention on the tribulations men endured while creating their golems. Rabbis supposedly spent entire nights with their students in the wilderness fashioning clay bodies and praying for their golem's creation, while others failed to create true golems and instead produced only small calves or homunculi (100-04). Puttermesser, however, creates Xanthippe easily and unconsciously. Without realizing what she is doing, Puttermesser molds the dirt from her houseplants into the shape of a young girl, and the following day, finding her creation, effortlessly performs the basic ritual for creating a golem, and thus gives birth to Xanthippe. Puttermesser's creation of Xanthippe, in the narrator's initial view, indicates female superiority to men since Puttermesser easily accomplished what takes men countless hours of labor to perform.

When Puttermesser becomes Mayor of New York just as easily as she created Xanthippe, the narrator's tone changes to impatience with Puttermesser's ineptitude. While Puttermesser is at the Department of Receipts and Disbursements, the narrator recounts only her continual complaints to Alvin Turtleman and Mayor Mavett over her demotions, while Xanthippe tirelessly writes a "PLAN" for Puttermesser's mayoral election. When the city elects Puttermesser, the narrator abruptly opens the chapter by stating, "And so Puttermesser becomes Mayor of New York" (126). The narrator's tone shifts from earlier complacency to outright irritation with Puttermesser's apathy while Xanthippe acquired "fourteen thousand five hundred and sixty-two more signatures than the law calls for" to petition for Puttermesser's election (128). Puttermesser, whom the narrator initially hoped would transcend gender constraints, has accomplished her mayoral status and stability only through the assistance of others. After Puttermesser destroys Xanthippe, and her quasi-utopian New York returns to its corrupted state, the narrator realizes how insulting Puttermesser's dependency is to feminist goals. She visits the dentist after destroying Xanthippe, and her dental problems prompt a root canal operation that exposes Puttermesser's skull and "the secret hollow of her head, just below the eye socket" (158). Ozick deems mortality as a reference to the "dictums of Society" (286) that are beyond control. Puttermesser is capable of everything she, Xanthippe, and her administration established during her mayoral term, and since Puttermesser continually relies on others to maintain her life, her incompetence as Mayor and her root canal symbolize Ozick's belief that people should accept what they cannot control in society, and "quarrel with the rest" (286).

Puttermesser's supposed dependence on Xanthippe, Rappoport, and the men of her administration resembles Lucy's reliance on Jimmy's work to obtain critical attention in

“Levitation.” She unconsciously creates Xanthippe hoping to actualize her desire to become Mayor of New York, redeem her decrepit city, and escape male authorial control. Both Xanthippe and various men impede her abilities to actualize her goals since they eventually lead to Puttermesser’s mayoral fall, and because of her attention to such inhibition, she must continually rely on others to unleash her capacity. In “Levitation,” Lucy also thinks she must conform to male expectations to receive critical respect when she abandons her second novel to work on Jimmy’s. Only when Jimmy and the other Jews levitate above her does Lucy realize that her subordination to male expectations hinders the actualization of her intellectual potential.

Following Xanthippe’s birth, rather than utilize her abilities, Puttermesser uses the golem as a domestic servant, thereby contradicting Puttermesser’s ardor for gender equality. Puttermesser alienates Xanthippe by hypocritically ignoring her full potential, and sets her to cook and clean. She adamantly expresses her disdain for male authority in her civil service position through numerous letters to her predecessor, former Mayor Malachy “Matt” Mavett. In one letter, she questions the “treatment of [female] professional staff” despite the women’s experience, to make way for less qualified men (88-89, 117). Puttermesser’s letters to Mayor Mavett express her belief that men and women should be judged on merit rather than on gender. However, she herself treats Xanthippe not as an intellectual equal, but as a Jewish wife who should clean and stay quiet. Even when Puttermesser becomes Mayor of New York due to Xanthippe’s “PLAN,” though she praises Xanthippe as “cheerful and efficient, an industrious worker,” the praise is analogous to Xanthippe’s “zealous” cooking ability (127). Puttermesser treats Xanthippe as a house servant, so she inadvertently affirms the proposition that women are inherently inferior.

Just as Puttermesser treats Xanthippe as a house servant, Xanthippe considers men sexual servants, and her nymphomania following her first sexual experience represents the dangers of female sexuality. According to Lawrence S. Friedman, “Xanthippe’s feverish but ultimately sterile sexuality is an exaggerated representation of the affinity between a golem and its creator. A golem cannot procreate; neither can Puttermesser. Yet they share the longing for daughters that can never be” (137). Elaine M. Kauver asserts that “Puttermesser [...] has delivered the offspring born of her own soul—an opposing self” (Cynthia Ozick’s Fiction, 135-36). Puttermesser falsely believes that, by creating Xanthippe, she can obtain the daughter to whom she “sometimes thought that she would never give birth” (91). Golems manifest their creators’ innate desires and knowledge, so Xanthippe’s heated sexuality inversely represents Puttermesser’s sexual repression. Though Puttermesser represses her sexual desires, she manifests them in her unconscious creation of Xanthippe. Additionally, since Puttermesser longed for a daughter as well as for professional success, her creation of Xanthippe accomplishes both aspirations without egregious personal effort on her part. When Puttermesser fashions Xanthippe, she transfers her sex drive to her. Shortly after Morris Rappoport takes Xanthippe’s virginity, introducing her to sex, she dismisses him to seek “illustrious men” (141). Xanthippe’s nymphomania is an exaggerated expression of the conflict between Puttermesser’s sexual and professional lives. Puttermesser hungers for what Susan Sulieman describes as “oppositional terms.” When women try to obtain both “motherhood and creativity [...] women can do one or the other, but not both” (qtd. Rubin 45). The fall of Puttermesser’s utopian New York happens not because of Xanthippe’s nymphomania, but because of Puttermesser’s contradictory desire to be both mother and

savior when creating Xanthippe, thereby transmitting her repressed sexual urges to an unstable creature.

Puttermesser and Rappoport's collaboration in destroying Xanthippe, though implying gender cooperation, actually signifies continued female subordination and dependency on men. Puttermesser's opinion that destroying Xanthippe is too difficult an act to perform alone, and her reliance on Rappoport's assistance, further suggest that Puttermesser cannot accomplish anything by herself. Puttermesser created Xanthippe subconsciously, and she thinks that "the golem has destroyed her identity" (144). However, Puttermesser relies on Rappoport to perform the destruction ceremony. To de-create a golem, the executioner must walk seven times around the creature in the opposite direction from that in which the creator walked when giving the golem life, and must then remove from the golem's head the *aleph* from among the three Hebrew letters—*aleph, mem, tav*—which together mean truth. Without the *aleph*, "the remaining letters, *mem* and *tav*, spell *met*—dead" (101). Rappoport follows the ritual perfectly, and with a small knife scrapes from Xanthippe's forehead the *aleph*. He performs most of the work, so, though he and Puttermesser theoretically collaborate in Xanthippe's death, Puttermesser, as in her creation of Xanthippe and as in her mayoral rise, remains disengaged from performing positive steps to further her own ambitions.

Puttermesser's treatment of Xanthippe contradicts her declared aspiration for equality. Through Xanthippe's last words the narrator establishes redemption for Puttermesser. Ordinarily a golem is mute. Golems can speak only if their creators possess pure souls. According to Gershom Sholem, "sinless beings would be able to transmit the soul of life, which includes the power of speech, even to a golem. Thus the golem is not

mute by nature, but only because the souls of the righteous are no longer pure” (193).

During the de-creation ceremony, Puttermesser sentimentally stares down on Xanthippe, and Xanthippe utters the words “my mother” (155). Since Xanthippe is capable of speech, if Ozick is overtly following Scholem’s principle, Puttermesser must contain a pure soul. By indicating that Puttermesser is “pure,” Ozick establishes Puttermesser’s transcendence compared to past golem creators whose golems were mute. Puttermesser’s superiority metaphorically implies her already existing leadership potential.

CHAPTER 4

“VIRILITY”

Cynthia Ozick’s “Levitation” and “Puttermesser and Xanthippe” satirically examine how Orthodox Judaism inhibits female success. Lucy Feingold believed that, as a female writer and Jewish convert, she could never receive the same critical respect as her husband. Puttermesser felt disrespected by men in her civil service position because, despite her superior education and experience, less qualified men replaced her. The characters’ religious identifications in “Virility,” however, are not clearly classified. This religious uncertainty suggests a general preference that critics grant male authors. “Virility” advocates against male success over female success by confronting more directly than the other stories the gender bias in literary reputation, and by incorporating Ozick’s reflection on the distress she herself felt when writing Mippel, in which she tried to mimic Henry James’s style. Ozick presents “Virility” through a first-person, male, non-Jewish narrator, pretending to be male and gentile possibly in order to articulate how her initial adoration for James inhibited her growth as a writer. The male characters’ shifting masculinities reflect Ozick’s eventual disapproval of James as her model of authorial success. Ozick does not portray her characters positively, and accordingly, the story doesn’t offer a solution concerning sexist critical reactions, or a positive character portrayal that exhibits how writers should behave. Rather, the characters’ negative personas demonstrate gender biases in literary discourse. In her impersonation of a male narrator, in her depictions of her characters’ metaphorical dual genders, and in the parallels between her male characters and Henry James, Ozick treats gender so ambiguously that she suggests that gender categories themselves are obsolete.

Written in 1971, “Virility” opens in the early twenty-first century, when the 106-year-old narrator Edmund stands before the gravestone of his longtime acquaintance Elia Gatoff. The narrator reminisces about his relationship with Gatoff in the twentieth century.⁴ Then the story concludes in the cemetery, where the narrator meets a transvestite claiming to be Gatoff. The transvestite asserts that the gravestone is his, and he clutches his testicles while proclaiming that he is a man, despite his attire. After their meeting, the narrator finds no trace of the transvestite, or of anyone besides himself in the cemetery. The narrator’s advanced age and his uncertainty about whether he saw or merely imagined meeting a transvestite undermine his reliability. In his undependable reminiscence, he recollects meeting Gatoff while working as a newspaper editor. Gatoff, apparently a Jewish immigrant from England, originally from Poland, whose family had been massacred during a pogrom, had tried to acquire a job in the narrator’s firm.⁵ The narrator grudgingly hired Gatoff as an office boy, then promoted him to proofreader, and finally to be a reporter assigned to a police station to “call in burglaries off the blotter” (230). When the narrator returned from the Caribbean after covering a small war, Gatoff has become a famous author by publishing poetry—actually the work of his Jewish spinster aunt, Tante Rivka—under the pseudonym Edmund Gate. The poetry gains immense critical esteem and worldwide fame despite Gate’s own inability to write respectable poetry. Gate’s success results from plagiarism. He steals his poetry from his aunt, and he relies for his professional name and his public relations as the “poet” Edmund Gate on the narrator’s family. He takes the first name of his only friend,

⁴ The story does not mention exact dates, but the narrator refers to Franz Joseph, the emperor of Austria in the beginning of the twentieth century, as having existed early in the characters’ lives (224).

⁵ Gate’s faith is not directly specified. However, since Rivka is identified as Jewish, and since she is from his mother’s side (223), and since Judaism associates children’s religions with their mother’s religion, along with the fact that his family was massacred by a pogrom (a term denoting riots in Russia that directed their violence against Jews), then more than likely, Gate is Jewish.

the narrator Edmund; and the narrator's sister, Margaret, becomes Gate's manager, who decides the titles of his poetry and the details of his public appearances. Various editors publish five successive volumes of Gate's—that is, Tante Rivka's—poetry under the same title, "Virility." Margaret, already a married mother of three, gives birth to Gate's two sons following the publications of his second and third "Virility" editions, respectively. Gate begins using Rivka's poems only after she dies, and he eventually uses all but a few. With only a small number of her poems remaining, Gate finally admits his plagiarism to the narrator. After acknowledging his duplicity to Margaret and his reading public, Gate stages his suicide by jumping off a bridge, and Margaret publishes Rivka's remaining poems under Rivka's name and a new title, "Flowers from Liverpool." When critics read the poems in the knowledge that a woman wrote them, rather than afford her poetry the same praise they had extended to Gate's fraudulent "Virility" collections, they dismiss the works as weak, "feminine" art. Even though the poetry's original author was a woman, the story supposes that the critical appreciation her poetry received resulted from its male identification. Regardless of poetic quality, gender dictates critical opinion.

Ozick's decision to write her story through a first-person, male narrator demonstrates a blurring of the categories that define masculinity and femininity. Gate's poetic success is contingent on his appropriation of his aunt's work. The transvestite Gate, who had once epitomized masculinity, comes to represent both anatomical manhood, in his testicles, and superficial femininity, through his clothing. Ozick, as the author, is paradoxically similar to this Gate. As a figurative transvestite, Ozick attempts to blur the categories that define masculinity and femininity. This gender distortion in Ozick's narrative voice, Gate's

appearance, and the image of Gate's gravestone as the last written record of his masculinity represent Ozick's metaphorical burial of virility as a masculine privilege.

Just as Ozick tried to imitate Henry James's style when writing Mippel, her use of a male narrator in a story about the fraudulent primacy of a masculine presence confirms that masculinity is not a sure indicator of proficiency; just because the narrator is male does not mean that he is trustworthy. Ozick alleges in her essays that women writers are sometimes perceived as unreliable, sentimental, and perilously vague storytellers (Art and Ardor 268). The narrator's self-contradictory reminiscence adheres to these purportedly feminine characteristics, undermining his supposed reliability as a male storyteller. The narrator admits that centenarians such as himself are "unreliable as to recent chronology" (221), yet he expects his readers to accept his version of events that occurred decades before. The narrator states that he himself wrote Gate's epitaph "I am a man," implying that he was aware Gate's funeral occurred, yet he admits that he knows the year Gate died only from the headstone (223). He proposes that Rivka's final collection of poetry is just as strong as Gate's collections although he expressed shock that Rivka was the author of what he considered masculine poetry. When Gatoff claims in the cemetery to be Edmund Gate, regardless of the narrator's assurance to Gate that he died at age 26, the narrator asserts that "genuine madmen always contradict themselves" (269), yet he has just told a story containing multiple contradictions. He stresses that senility has been eliminated from his modern society (270), yet, though claiming to have spoken with a transvestite alleging to have been Edmund Gate, even after an "indefatigable search of the Cemetery area [...] not so much as [Gatoff's] pointed heel-print [had] been discovered" (270). The narrator lacks a stable reminiscence. Since he presents a story that conforms to Ozick's contention

concerning how audiences sometimes perceive feminine writing, the narrator's unstable reminiscence demonstrates the irrelevance of gender as a requisite for respect.

By figuratively transforming Gate into a woman as a result of his appropriation of a woman's creativity, Ozick—appropriating the creativity of her male narrator—demonstrates in Gate's representation of both genders a distortion within the concept of transvestites, and how these perceptions affect critical regard. Gate, because of his masculinity, enjoys more critical favor than his female counterpart Tante Rivka. Though he wears feminine clothing, his transvestism is nonetheless reminiscent of a masculine identity. He clutches a red stick that “seemed to be a denuded lady's umbrella,” and wears “queer old-fashioned women's shoes with long thin heels like poles” (268). The red stick and the pole-like heels, though feminine accessories, are phallic symbols, and Gate's feminine garments paradoxically establish a masculine identity. He clutches his testicles while in drag, suggesting an attempt to retain the masculinity that enabled his success: he clings to his only physical attribute that is undeniably male. Lawrence S. Friedman describes Gate's gesture of grabbing his testicles as a “pathetically ironic recourse to masculinity as a counter to poetic impotence” (75). By dressing as a woman so long after his writing career ended, Gate attempts to rekindle the formula—the combination of his masculinity with the appropriation of femininity (Rivka's poetry)—that led to his success. He resorts to a physical manifestation of his Edmund Gate identity. As a transvestite, Gate is symbolically a lady with a man inside, while Ozick, as the author speaking through a male narrator, is a woman hiding behind a male voice. His transvestism may allude to Ozick's early experience with critics who believed that authors cannot examine masculinity without either pretending to be male or being male.

The transvestite Gate paradoxically embodies Ozick's assertion that critics attribute a "female nature" to women writers. In Art and Ardor, Ozick defines this female nature as a subsidiary of the "Great Multiple Lie," which assumes that women writers possess a distinctive, and inferior, perception of art compared to men (288-89). Ozick discounts these gender assumptions, and asserts that women writers who focus their attention on their sex rather than on their intellect reflect the "Great Multiple Lie got up in drag" (Art and Ardor 290). According to Ozick's description of the Lie, a writer's gender defines his or her subject matter, and assumes a psychological temper peculiar to gender (288). Gate's gender enabled critics' affirmative assumptions about the "Virility" collections while Rivka's gender triggered negative assumptions. Gate's reputation depended on his masculinity, and even as a transvestite, his assertion that he is Edmund Gate while in the presence of his own tombstone, rather than his attire, warrants the narrator's uncertainty toward Gate's sanity.

Like Gate, Ozick is metaphorically cross-dressing by writing as a male. In her study of transvestism, Marjorie Garber finds that psychologists and psychiatrists deny the existence of female transvestites, "alleging that any woman who consistently cross-dresses as a man is actually a transsexual" (Vested Interests 44-45). Though Ozick's story constitutes a transgender narration based on Ozick's male impersonation, whether Ozick writes as herself, through a third-person narrator, or through a fictional first-person male narrator, her gender nonetheless triggers an unfair preference for male creativity while disregarding feminine assertiveness.

Ozick demonstrates through the critical response to Rivka's poetry an imbalance between critics who negatively criticize women who assert independence, and those who recognize men's intellectual contributions only because of their gender, thereby also

indicating an imbalance in Orthodox Jewish perceptions of both genders' potentials. The main evidence that Rivka is Jewish is Margaret's statement when she learns that Rivka is the original author of the "Virility" poetry: "a lady wrote 'em [...] an old Jewish immigrant lady who never even made it to America" (263). Judaism defines femininity by marriage, by procreation, by the maintenance of the home, and by support of a husband's career. Ozick also recognizes that Jews define themselves through their covenant with God and through their commitment to Judaism (Art and Ardor 123). Jewish men, not by choice but rather by virtue of being men, are automatically covenanted when circumcised. Women, however, do not enjoy the privilege of circumcision, nor are their intellectual talents relevant to their domestic tasks. Aviva Cantor defines Jewish masculinity through achievement in scholarly professions and through the desire for education (92). Critics and the narrator initially concur that Rivka's poetry is brilliant and full of masculine imagery when journals publish them under Gate's pseudonym, so despite Rivka's gender, she is just as smart and talented as critics perceived Gate to be. Her hard, lonely life of suffering through poverty and hunger signifies her ability to endure hardships. Her creativity adheres to a definition of Jewish masculinity. Yet, when Gate reveals that he stole his poetry from Rivka, the narrator eventually seeks to convince the reader that the reception of poetry should be the same regardless of an author's gender. The narrator's estimation of Rivka's work represents the unbiased judgment Ozick wishes critics would adopt. He responds to Rivka's final collection by stating that the work "was sublime [...] the quality [was] exactly the same [as in the five "Virility" volumes]" (263-64). After the revelation that the poem's author is female, however, most critics change from viewing the poems as masculinity personified, to viewing them as "thin feminine art [...] a lovely girlish voice reflecting a fragile girlish soul: a lace

valentine [...] the typical unimaginativeness of her sex” (266). Rivka emigrated to England, and lived as an unmarried loner who taught herself English. Gate, similarly, emigrated to America and lived as an unmarried loner who never directly sought out women and who taught himself English. Gate’s persona as a self-taught loner advances the appreciation of the “Virility” poems. Rivka’s same lonely self-motivation, by contrast to Gate, depreciates the same poetry. This disparity between the positive critical reception afforded to Gate, and the negative critical reception Rivka received, suggests that women, regardless of whether they adhere to the expectations of their gender or try to transcend them, nonetheless are marginalized as second-class intellectuals.

Rivka’s negligence of marriage, of having children, and of publishing represents an abandonment of the Orthodox Jewish definition of women’s maternal roles while ignoring their intellectual insights. Rivka resided in Liverpool, England, much of her adult life, and as a single woman, she neglected to fulfill her religious obligation to procreate. Without a husband or children, and as an artist capable of writing original poetry, Rivka represents the contrast between what Orthodox Jews expect women to be and what they are actually capable of being. As a loner in England, Rivka has no one with whom to share her art. Gate, a single man, who is probably Jewish but who shows no sign that he recognizes the religion, can publish her poetry under his name and receive worldwide acclaim. As a woman who failed to accept the obligations of her Jewish tradition, Rivka represents female independence. However, her tragic life and the ultimate critical rejection of her poetry indicate the consequences of her spinsterhood.

As the only other female character aside from Rivka, Margaret’s role as a mother and as Gate’s manager signifies that feminine success does not depend on masculinity. In an

interview with Tom Teicholz, Ozick asserts that a “wife can support a husband quite as capably as the reverse” (187). Orthodox Jewish law, however, alleges that a wife should only support her husband’s career. E. Anthony Rotundo contends that in American society, “the doctrine of the spheres⁶ enshrined individualism as a male privilege, making men’s sphere the locus of individualism and women’s sphere the place where a woman submerged her social identity in that of her husband” (290). Gate’s masculinity submerges Margaret’s social identity since she works to support his career, unseen by the populace who admire Gate’s poetry. Margaret’s dual characterization as the mother of Gate’s children and the mother of his public image implies that she does more than procreate, but her gender inhibits her ability to be more than a tool for Gate’s success. She exhibits strength and intelligence as Gate’s agent. Yet the narrator characterizes her only as a mother of an overflow of children (262). Gate exerts no effort to coordinate his career or to participate in his children’s upbringing, and the children are, accordingly, Margaret’s accomplishment. When Gate’s career ends, Margaret seemingly displays her independence as a successful businesswoman by acquiring a new male baritone as a client (266). Though Margaret continues her business without Gate’s virile persona, even with the baritone, Margaret’s status as a supporter of male talent does not change. Margaret may not be married to Gate or her male client, but like a Jewish wife, she is still the foundation that helps stabilize these men’s careers. Despite her male influences, Margaret does represent opposition to patriarchy since she controls the men’s vocations and manages her business without direct male assistance. Her ability to be both the “mother” of so many children and the mother of her male clients’ public images

⁶ Rotundo discusses the doctrine of the spheres as society’s perception that two distinct opinions about men and women’s potentials exist. He believes that “the relationship [of the spheres] to the idea of individualism is crucial for understanding the power relations between the sexes” (290).

indicates that Margaret possesses a dual-gender persona that conveys women's capacities to direct their own lives both maternally and professionally.

Gate's supposed masculinity and his probable Jewish identity dually represent the fraudulence of gender biases. Margaret's regard for Gate's vigor initiates for the reader his transformation from an uneducated immigrant into his faux-virile Edmund Gate identity. She believes in his potential as an artist despite his lack of education and experience. She also attributes "genuine manliness" to Gate based on her belief that he is a good father and because she thinks he survived the pogrom in Poland that killed his family. According to Leo Trepp's analysis of Jewish law, "a Jew without a wife is homeless" (277). As a Jewish man, Gate must marry for personal fulfillment and to have children. Orthodox Judaism measures masculinity through the completion of a bar mitzvah, through marriage, through procreation, through the demonstration of intellectual merit, and through preparation of sons for the same milestones. Gate's inability to write respectable poetry, his failure to marry, and his disregard for his children's religious upbringing demonstrate his failure as a man, from a Jewish perspective. Friedman correlates Gate's masculinity with "his literary fertility [since] the birth of his children accompanies the publication of his poetry" (72). But Rivka wrote the poetry, and his children lack Jewish identities. Despite Gate's failures, however, as a Jewish man, he can potentially rectify his disregard for these Jewish traditions while Jewish women's disposition is to be overlooked regardless of their achievements. Gate's failures and Margaret's belief that he possesses genuine manliness exemplify gender biases that unfairly attribute personal virtue to men on the basis of their gender without regard to the reality of their actions.

The uncertainty of the narrator's religion in accordance with his condescension toward Gate resonates with how critics receive female authors. Gate suggests that the narrator follows a Jesus-centered faith when he mentions that Regina, the narrator's secret lover, stayed with the narrator the previous Easter (238). However, such evidence is too circumstantial to indicate the narrator's religious affiliation directly. Regina could have been Christian and stayed with the narrator during her vacation. As a general holiday, Easter could merely have been a time when both the narrator and Regina were available for each other. Without a specified faith, the narrator's criticism toward Gate and Rivka represents general, non-secular opinions. He grants Gate a non-gender specific explanation for why he disregards Gate's initial attempts to write poetry, and a gender-specific reason for why he shows surprise when discovering that Rivka wrote the "Virility" collections. He describes Gate as an uneducated immigrant with a "regular salad of an accent" (225). His derision when he learned that Gate wanted to write poetry, and his condescending puns concerning Gate's efforts—" [Gate] is working in a new vein [Margaret declares, to which the narrator replies] hasn't he always worked in vain" (246)—suggest that the narrator's disapproval of Gate is an intellectual critique. Gate failed as a poet because, according to the narrator, he didn't have "the brain for it" (231). For Rivka, however, despite the narrator's eventual appreciation of her work, his first reaction when learning she wrote the poems signifies gender bias. Critics considered Gate's poetry to personify masculinity, so when the narrator learns about Rivka's involvement, he denies that she wrote "even the one—not the one about the—" (260). His statement exhibits the same obscurity that the story assigns to the characters' genders and religions since the narrator does not specify to which poem he refers, or a direct reason for his surprise that Rivka wrote it. However, her poetry's anonymity, like

the lack of direct evidence concerning the narrator's faith, also suggests that her poetry's negative reception is a demonstration of all female writers' works that suffer similar disregard.

The characters' obscure religious affiliations and the indirect examination of Judaism in the story may imply a trans-religious exploration of male writing as a context for Ozick's own experience of gender bias. Just as Lucy abandons her novel, her husband, and Judaism in "Levitation" because of patriarchy, Ozick deserted Mippel because she failed to replicate Henry James. She may have avoided a distinctly Jewish story in "Virility" in order to demonstrate that success should not depend on religion any more than on gender. The combination of a male narrator with a cross-dressing, emasculated male protagonist, as well as secondary female characters who depend on their male counterparts, represents Ozick's attempt to communicate how intensely her admiration for James repressed her creativity. Ozick desperately tried to mimic James, and in doing so, she came to believe that this adoration wasted her youth (Art and Ardor 293). Gate, too, wasted his youth pretending to be a talented poet, when in fact he was only wearing the guise of Rivka's creativity. As a story that is indirectly religious and favors men, "Virility" testifies to the prejudices that hinder the development of successful women. Rivka's acknowledgment depends on Gate, Margaret's success depends on her male clients, and Ozick's attempts at success once depended on her veneration for James and her effort to impersonate his writing.

Ozick demonstrates a paradox between her and the narrator's genders through her impersonation of a male narrator who represents how male influences inhibit women. The narrator's statement that Gate had "proved his virility at the cost of [the narrator] demonstrating [his]" and that "[he] had lost Regina; but he still had all his poetesses" (241) is

reminiscent of Ozick's belief that James inhibited her. For the narrator, the only emotional connection he possesses, and the only person in the story he seems to care for, is Regina. Gate forced the narrator to stop seeing her by threatening to reveal their affair to Margaret. Regina, an intangible character, doesn't make a direct appearance in the story. Ozick, similarly, does not directly speak or interact with the characters. For the narrator to lose Regina because of Gate, Ozick demonstrates the loss of her self-worth as an author. Regina is a symbolic expression of Ozick's youth and the metaphorical loss of Ozick's personal integrity in overlooking her own worth. Ozick declares that "influence is perdition" (Art and Ardor 297), and her self-imposed limitation and her reliance on James for inspiration undercut her own potential as an author.

Ozick utilizes the attention the narrator devotes to Gate's appearance to articulate a possible parallel between Gate and Henry James in order to denote how her initial reverence for James could have affected her perception of authorship. As Edmund Gate, Gatoff's physique—his tall body and bald head—suggest an image of a "giant lingam; one of those phallic monuments one may suddenly encounter [...] on a dusty wayside in India" (244). The portrait of Gate as a primal male correlates with the putative virility of his poetry, yet, with the onset of his confession, Rivka's femininity circumvents the intellectual, masculine mirage Gate projected as an artist. In Ozick's essay "The Lesson of the Master," she correlates her initial adoration for James with his physical appearance. James' heavy chin, his tender paunch belly, and his balding head were attributes she associated with scholarly distinction (Art and Ardor 294-95). With the advent of her knowledge that James was not always the master writer she revered, but rather had once been just as young and inexperienced as her twenty-two-year-old self trying to write Mippel, her initial veneration

grew to detestation. Ozick asserts that as a young woman, she admired the old Henry James, “in his scepter of authority [...] she] believed that what he knew at sixty [she] was to encompass at twenty-two” (Art and Ardor 295). She came to realize, however, that to try to become James would undermine her own art and shroud her own voice. After Gate admits to plagiarism, his demeanor, which was initially associated with positive images of the phallus, becomes an expression of his failure: “I observe him in his underwear, with a big hairy paunch, cracked browning teeth, and a scabby scalp laid over with a bunch of thin light-colored weeds” (223). Gate’s appearance parodies Ozick’s description of the elderly James. Gate’s masculine presence as a poet concealed the truth of his plagiarism and his lack of poetic talent. James’s writing suggested for the young Ozick a false impression of what constitutes literary success. Gate’s confession revealed his inadequacy as a poet, and Ozick’s epiphany that James was not always the articulate writer she revered represents the misconstructions readers and critics associate with literary interpretation.

The paradoxes between male and female identities in “Virility” evince the distinctions gender elicits in critical judgment. Gate’s transvestism demonstrates the attention to gender and to physical appearance that critics and readers confer on authors. The narrator’s inconsistent story, his questionable mental health, and his obscure religion demonstrate the general dilemmas of gender preferences. Rivka’s and Margaret’s second-class status, in contrast to that of their male counterparts, echoes the subjugation Ozick, Lucy, and Puttermesser believe they confront. Ozick initially tried to obtain the same master status she attributed to Henry James. Failing, Ozick transmits her insecurities to Lucy’s anxiety about her writing, and to Puttermesser’s aspiration to overcome patriarchal derision and obtain professional success. Ozick expresses in her fiction the need for writers to

transcend their attention to others' successful writing formulas. Ozick declares that "what happens when we misread the great voices of Art, and suppose that, because they speak of Art, they mean Art [...] is a lesson about misreading" (Art and Ardor 296). Ozick means that authors must discover for themselves their own writing styles rather than emulating models.

CONCLUSION

Cynthia Ozick purposely creates an impression of her female protagonists' personalities as subservient to the male influences in their lives to ridicule gender separation based on religious provisions or false literary standards. According to Lillian S. Kremer, "writing by women has traditionally been devalued in male-dominated critical discourse" (272), and Ozick satirizes through her stories the intellectual suppression of women by male authority. Ruth Rosenberg categorizes Ozick's fiction and essays as "impassioned literary criticism" (43), and Steven J. Rubin states that Ozick's collective works are "serious religious inquiry, speculating on questions of religious law and morality" (8). Critical examination of women's positions in fiction and critical discourse reveals Ozick's passion for the nullification of gender-based stereotypes.

Ozick's family condoned the assumptions Orthodox Judaism places on gender by raising Ozick with the hope that she would become a housewife. In an interview with Elaine M. Kauver, Ozick recounts that her earliest childhood desire was to be a writer, but because of her gender, her family didn't take her goal seriously: "it really didn't matter what I did because I was going to get married and that would be that. So I think that in a way being a girl gave me a kind of freedom to become a writer" (386). Ozick learned, however, that the "political term *woman writer* signals in advance a whole set of premises: that, for instance, there are 'male' and 'female' states of intellect and feeling, hence of prose" (Art and Ardor 284). Ozick counters this idea that *woman writer* fulfills gender-related assumptions by stating that "there is a human component to literature that does not separate writers by sex, but that—on the contrary—engenders sympathies from sex to sex, from condition to condition, from experience to experience [...] literature universalizes; it does not divide"

(Art and Ardor 285). Ozick characterizes her protagonists Lucy Feingold, Ruth Pattermesser, and Tante Rivka as inherently strong female intellectuals who through circumstance believe in their own inferiority. Ozick establishes her characters as heroines, anti-heroes, or narrative ciphers who serve satirical functions. Lucy represents Ozick's hero since she reaches an epiphany concerning her marriage and writing, and by taking steps, both literally in her abandonment of the levitating Jews, and figuratively in her dialogue with the atheists in her dining room, she overcomes her inhibitions. Pattermesser, however, demonstrates anti-heroic characteristics since she is unable to recognize her inferior opinion of herself, continually relies on others, and therefore fails to grow as a person. Tante Rivka represents the second-rate critical judgments Ozick believes women suffer in Jewish literary discourse. Ozick uses Rivka as a narrative cipher to demonstrate male dominance in literature. The three women's stories express Ozick's desire for women to transcend the identities Jewish laws prescribe.

Ozick ironically subscribes to the devaluation of women in her fiction to exemplify opposition to gender assumptions. "Levitation" expresses gender biases through Lucy Feingold's unfair treatment. Since she is incapable of writing estimable fiction herself, Lucy assists her husband, Jimmy, in writing his novel, thinking that since he is a male author, he will at least attract some critical attention. However, Lucy comes to realize the futility of trying to achieve recognition as a Jewish woman writer since she must compromise her Catholic upbringing in order to do so. In "Pattermesser and Xanthippe," Pattermesser can acquire vocational success as Mayor of New York only through a magical golem. Pattermesser's reliance on Xanthippe seems to imply that powerful women are mythical, but actually suggests that inferiority is contingent on individual perceptions. In "Virility,"

literary critics perceive a female poet, Tante Rivka, as unqualified to write powerful verse because of her gender. Critics consider her poems weak and colloquial when under the impression that Tante Rivka wrote them, but under Gate's pseudonym, they view the poems as hard and robust expressions of masculinity. Ozick's male characters' uncertain genders and religious affiliations demonstrate the fraudulent impressions masculinity creates, and the shortcomings male authors may possess, thereby suggesting both the irrelevance of patriarchal preferences critics bestow upon men, and the irrelevance of gender as a requisite for critical esteem or literary success.

Ozick's motivation for articulating these characterizations of women who transcend gender assumptions to change their lives demonstrates the need for readers to ignore their preconceived expectations about how an author's, narrator's, or character's gender affects critical interpretations. According to Kristie S. Fleckenstein, "a writer outside the text is always embedded within a cultural system that dictates and constrains options for material and rhetorical identity, and women writers are culturally situated in circumstances sharply divergent from those of men" (110). Fleckenstein further asserts that "to gain discursive authority, [women] have had to cultivate the voice of masculine privilege—creating a masculine writing figure inside the text by erasing expressive elements or subjectivities that reveal feminine signature or identity outside the text" (114). Ozick, however, rejects this idea that women writers must remove all feminine signs from their works. She stresses in an interview with Catherine Rainwater that narrative tone must be allowed to rule absolutely, "without authorial interference, manipulation, or will" (260). Regardless of whether readers or critics recognize that the stories' authors, narrators, or protagonists are men or women, their focus should remain on the quality of the text rather than on how gender influences the

stories' meanings. Therefore, Ozick continues to write stories and novels that assert her hope that gender will no longer influence readers' judgments.

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