

ALLEGORICAL TRACES OF THE TRAUMATIC IN CYNTHIA OZICK'S *THE SHAWL*

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Abstract

Despite the fact that Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl* is modelled in a manner that apparently runs counter the propriety imperatives that should guide Holocaust representations, this image-based recreation of the Nazi genocide has established itself as a canonical text. This is largely due to the fact that the book is intended to create awareness about the inner world of Nazi concentration camps. Ozick's purpose in writing the story is, moreover, to unveil the deadly meaning that survival acquired for those who, having stepped out of hell, found themselves in another kind of hell: the post-Holocaust world. In this sense, it is possible to argue that even if Ozick's text does not contain the same kind of truth available in historical documents it provides a no less valuable insight. Most importantly, Ozick's insight into the Nazi genocide is in compliance with the ethical principles ruling Holocaust representation.

Keywords: Nazi genocide, Holocaust representation, metaphor, *The Shawl*.

Resumen

A pesar de que *The Shawl*, de Cynthia Ozick, responde a un modelo discursivo que contradice los imperativos éticos que han de guiar las representaciones del Holocausto, esta recreación metafórica del genocidio nazi se ha consolidado como texto canónico dentro del género. La clave radica en que el libro pretende crear conciencia acerca de lo ocurrido en el interior de los campos de concentración nazis. Pretende asimismo desvelar el significado que adquirió la vida para los supervivientes, que, tras sobrevivir al infierno, se vieron envueltos en un nuevo infierno: la vida después. En ese sentido, hay que decir que, si bien el texto de Ozick no encierra la misma verdad que los documentos históricos, proporciona una imagen no menos valiosa. Y, lo más importante, encaja con los principios éticos que regulan las representaciones del Holocausto.

Palabras clave: genocidio nazi, representación del Holocausto, metáfora, *The Shawl*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the central role that Holocaust commemoration plays in Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*, both the power of the story, "The Shawl," and the novella, "Rosa," derive not so much from the content of this two-story volume but from its author's dense style. It is precisely on account of style that many critics praise the work—"every paragraph a poem," as Ozick (1976:4) herself once described an early work of hers. Were such description to refer to an account other than one that undertakes to give some insight into the Nazi ghettos and concentration camps, this would surely be an added value. Yet, when the Holocaust is at stake, ordinary standards of judgement fail (they are discarded on account of not complying with the minimal requirements of a discourse of ethics). Accordingly, to say that *The Shawl*—Ozick's direct confrontation with the Nazi genocide—oozes lyricism is to sound the alarm of inadequacy, the one that rings whenever a Holocaust-related artistic enterprise does not subordinate to the moral wisdom anchored in historicism, objectivity and immediacy of fact. Even if to suggest that Ozick has poeticised Auschwitz should be enough to conclude that she has gone beyond the limits that govern Holocaust representation, the truth is that this is only in the benefit of the kind of knowledge her two stories produce. Both the lyricism of her metaphors and the form chosen as a narrative mode, the short story composite, serve to enhance the content.

The Shawl should certainly not be read as a breach of moral decency. If there is someone that is concerned with Holocaust disinterest, misappropriation and denial, that is Cynthia Ozick herself. In the preface to *Bloodshed and Three Novellas*, she claims that "a story must not merely *be*, but *mean*," an injunction that resonates with special significance in relation to the Holocaust (1976:4). Aware of this, Ozick has worked hard to make her imaginative evocation of the Nazi genocide mean. Hers is not simply "an enterprise of essence" but rather one "charged with the power to sift through the light and the dark" (Ozick 1991a:224, 223). More precisely, it is built on the ideas of judgement and interpretation, for which she places memory, trauma and identity at the centre of her approach. These are, indeed, the three basic concepts through which she attempts an interpretation of the events that took place in Nazi Germany as well as of their consequences.

A brief summary of the events that define the two stories will suffice to illustrate this: "The Shawl," the account that opens Ozick's volume, tells the story of a woman called Rosa Lublin and of two girls, Stella (her niece) and Magda (her daughter), who are caught up in the Holocaust hell (first, the road on which Jews are obliged to march to their final destination and, second, in an unnamed concentration camp). This inferno is instanced, with piercing intensity, through

indirect references (notably similes, metaphors and symbols) to the inhumane conditions in which the three characters are forced to live but especially through Magda's brutal murder at the hands of a German officer. In "Rosa," which takes place some thirty years after this direct evocation of the European tragedy, we learn that both Stella and Rosa have survived the ordeal. Despite the lapse of time, it seems as if they were still living in "time during," in the ongoing memory of the events they lived through. Although Stella's survivorship is healthier than Rosa's, she still has not been able to find "the one thing she wanted more than anything, an American husband" (Ozick 1990:41).¹ As for Rosa, she has exchanged one form of death in life for another, which proves that she has found it all but impossible to adapt to life after her traumatic experience. However, her situation changes when, at a laundry, she meets Persky, who seems to have been sent by fate to rehabilitate her.

In what follows, I intend to analyse Ozick's use of figurative language in order to show the ways in which the use of this kind of language may contribute to pursuing an effective and at the same time moral, sympathetic approach to the Holocaust, one that is attentive to the suffering of the Other and that seeks to awaken our contemporary society to the dangers of totalitarian regimes. Taking a rather controversial line, I contend that metaphor is actually not a challenge to the principles of Holocaust propriety but rather a suitable means of accessing this incommensurable reality. Sustaining such a perspective requires that I align myself with the cognitive approach to language put forward by George Lakoff in his 1980 seminal study *Metaphors We Live By*, where he held the thesis that cognition is vitally dependent on metaphor. As I shall argue throughout this paper, such a theory serves to justify (and even approve of) Ozick's use of a pre-eminently metaphorical language in *The Shawl*, which, as a matter of fact, aims at opening a path through which to gain insight into a reality that is said to be irrepresentable (Adorno 1967; Wiesel 1976; Lang 2000).

2. UNWINDING THE THREADS OF MAGDA'S SHAWL

Cynthia Ozick's carefully wrought prose is nowhere exemplified as in "The Shawl;" in no more than 2,000 words, she recreates the horror of the Nazi genocide without mentioning once the word "Holocaust." In learning this, the question that

¹ *The Shawl* comprises two stories: "The Shawl" (1990:3-10) and "Rosa" (1990:13-70).

comes to mind immediately is: How is it possible to give an account of this event without explicitly referring to it? The clue is indirection, which is, moreover, the outstanding quality of her tale. Suggestiveness is basically achieved through the use of a myriad of similes, metaphors and symbols, which permeate the whole story and which led Joseph Lowin (1988:107) to describe “The Shawl” as follows: a prose poem in which “Ozick, like a French symbolist poet of the nineteenth century, paints ‘not the thing itself’ but the *effect* produced by the ‘thing’.” In other words, Ozick does not dwell upon thorny and unpleasant details; instead, she disguises reality by setting side by side unlike things and making us see the likeness between them. Most important for our purposes here, this allows her to express a similar concept to the one she has in mind without the need to revive the tragedy.

This capacity of hers is particularly useful when the goal is to invoke the Holocaust in the full horror of its immediacy, which is the case of the first story included in *The Shawl*. “The Shawl’s” seven and a half pages cluster together the abominable events that will sear Rosa’s memory in the story’s sequel, “Rosa.” The reader, however, has limited access to the demonic world which Rosa was forced to witness while imprisoned. On the one hand, facts are narrated by a limited omniscient narrator who recounts events from Rosa’s point of view. Moreover, there is, strictly speaking, not a single line of dialogue through which characters may introduce a different historical perspective. On the other hand, linear time is suppressed and replaced by a terrifying feeling of timelessness. In this way, Ozick implies that the identity of Holocaust survivors was determined in such a way that for them time has come to a halt; they are stuck at a particular point in history, Nazi Germany.

“The Shawl’s” chilling opening sentence, “Stella, cold, cold, the coldness of hell” (Ozick 1990:3), provides no orientation whatsoever as to time or place; nor does the information that comes next. What follows reveals, firstly, that three main characters, Rosa, Magda and Stella, were walking on the roads and, secondly, it unfolds the effects of that hell on them. Stella, “[a] thin girl of fourteen,” is ravenous: her knees are “tumors on sticks” and her elbows “chicken bones” (*ibid.*:3). We also learn, through the narrator, that she was jealous of Magda, Rosa’s daughter, because she too “wanted to be wrapped in a shawl, hidden away, asleep, rocked by the march” (*ibid.*:3). Rosa, who “never stopped walking,” is referred to as a “walking cradle” because she carried baby Magda curled up between her breasts. There, mistaken for the mound of Rosa’s breasts, Magda sucked her mother’s sore nipples. Yet “[t]here was not enough milk” and, hence, Magda “sometimes [...] sucked air” (*ibid.*:3).

Not until the second paragraph, when she refers to the yellow Star of David, does Ozick disclose that Rosa, Magda and Stella are Jews on a march leading to a

Nazi concentration camp. From then on, Ozick unfolds details about the activities that Nazi soldiers carried out in these death factories in a similar way; that is, through metaphorical allusions and indirectness. For instance, the description which the narrator provides of "The Shawl's" three female characters unveils that Nazis starved prisoners to death. As regards Stella, she was "a growing child herself, but not growing much" (Ozick 1990:5). Magda's belly was full and round, yet "[i]t was fat with air" (*ibid.*:5); and her legs were "little pencil legs" that "could not hold up her fat belly" (*ibid.*:7, 5). As for Rosa, who "gave almost all her food to Magda" (*ibid.*:5), her "weight was becoming less and less" (*ibid.*:6) to the extent that she no longer menstruated. The malnutrition from which the three of them suffer is so acute that for Stella and Rosa walking is an activity that requires intense physical effort: "On the road they raised one burden of a leg after another" (*ibid.*:5).

Nowhere in the story do we read that camp prisoners were eradicated with Zyklon B. Nevertheless, there are hints on the part of the narrator that make it evident that "the place without pity" where Rosa, Magda and Stella are imprisoned harbours crematoria (Ozick 1990:5). This can be inferred from "the bad wind with pieces of black in it, that made Stella's and Rosa's eyes tear" (S 6), from "the ash-stippled wind" (*ibid.*:7) and from "the stink with a bitter fatty floating smoke that greased Rosa's skin" (*ibid.*:9). In this way, Ozick denounces the inhumanity of a programme that dissolved Jewish families by sending mothers, babies and the old to the chimneys, whereas the rest were saved as slave labour. Ozick's greatness as a writer lies, indeed, here. She does not dwell on details about the nasty mass-murder operations which Nazis carried out against Jews and other "racially-inferior" people; rather, she challenges the reader to guess for her/himself.

We know that Rosa, Magda and Stella are Jews not only because of "the Star sewn into Rosa's coat" (Ozick 1990:4) but also because this symbol, the Star of David, is implicit in Stella's name –a medieval name which means "star" and is derived from the Latin title of the Virgin Mary *stella maris* ("Star of the sea"). Furthermore, the use of the personal pronoun "they" and the possessive determiner "their" as opposed to an implicit "we" establishes two distinct groups. On the one hand, there is the group of Jews (i.e. the innocent) embodied in Rosa, Magda and Stella. On the other hand, there are the German officers (i.e. Holocaust perpetrators) who are set apart by referring to them as "they." It should be noted that Magda's blue eyes and blonde hair connect the infant to the Nazis to the extent that "[y]ou could think she was one of *their* babies," that is, an Aryan (*ibid.*:4). This other strain in Magda –her German origins– shows itself in her "horribly alive" eyes, which are said to be "like blue tigers" (*ibid.*:6), and in an episode in which she becomes "as wild as one of the big rats that plundered the barracks at daybreak looking for carrion" (*ibid.*:7).

Elaine M. Kauvar has argued that this dichotomy between the innocent and the evil is also signalled by opposing air and ground. The opposition takes a clear-cut form –the air is the domain of the innocent, whereas the ground is the domain of those who partook of the harrowing events (1993:180-181). Rosa, who belongs to the group that does not perform evil, “who is already a floating angel, alert and seeing everything” is “not touching the road”; rather, she is “in the air” (Ozick 1990:3-4). The metaphor of flight appears again at the end of the story: Magda, the innocent infant, is high up “swimming through the air,” while her executioner walks across the square towards the electrified fence (*ibid.*:9). In this way, Ozick separates those for whom the Holocaust happened (the victims) from those that made it happen (the perpetrators). It is them that are ready to shoot if Rosa moves out of line or if she runs “to the spot where Magda had fallen from her flight against the electrified fence” (*ibid.*:10).

This event –Magda’s death at the hands of the Nazis– is the event towards which “The Shawl” inexorably moves. Although this is the greatest expression of evilness, the story contains other instances of brutal piercing intensity. As a matter of fact, death is an omnipresent background in the story. From the very beginning, there are dozens of hints that point towards the inevitability of baby Magda’s death: Rosa did not step out of line because “they might shoot” (Ozick 1990:4); “Stella gazed at Magda like a young cannibal” as if “waiting for Magda to die so she could put her teeth into the little thighs” (*ibid.*:5); “[Rosa] was afraid she would smother Magda under her thigh” (*ibid.*:6); “Rosa saw that today Magda was going to die” (*ibid.*:7). Possibility of life is further denied when the narrator states that both Stella and Rosa “did not menstruate” (*ibid.*:5). Curiously, all these references to death are offset by a series of powerful associations by means of which words, concepts and emotions are mapped into another, different context, one which transports the reader out of the bleak reality of the camp. It is through them that Ozick succeeds in blending harsh reality with moments of breathtaking lyricism. For instance, Magda, wrapped in the shawl, is “a squirrel in a nest” and her tooth, which sticks out from her mouth, is an “elfin tombstone of white marble” (*ibid.*:4); the duct-crevice of Rosa’s breasts being extinct, her teats are “a dead volcano, blind eye, chill hole” (*ibid.*:4); the shawl, capable of nourishing Magda for three days and three nights, is “[the] milk of linen” (S 5); “the grainy sad voices” that come from the fence are meant to stand for those who bore witness to the world’s greatest infamy (*ibid.*:9).

The language of metaphor not only enables Ozick to ease the unpleasantness of death, it also allows her to create a world larger than the one portrayed in the text. Rosa escapes horror by fantasising about a world outside the confining space of the barracks and away from the evil perpetrated in them. Her musings represent a moment of great lyricism during which the narrator creates “another life.” In this world, which is “[o]n the other side of the steel fence, far away, there were green

meadows speckled with dandelions and deep-colored violets; beyond them, even farther, innocent tiger lilies, tall, lifting their orange bonnets” (S 8). This charming world contrasts greatly with the reality of the concentration camp, with “the excrement, thick turd-braids, and the slow stinking maroon waterfall that slunk down from the upper bunks” (Ozick 1990:8-9). In relation to this, it should be noted that whereas this world brims with bright colours, the world of “The Shawl” is dominated by depressing blackness. For example, Rosa’s complexion is “dark like cholera” (*ibid.*:4); the wind has “pieces of black in it” (*ibid.*:6); when Rosa goes to fetch the shawl, “[she] enter[s] the dark” (*ibid.*:8); the soldier that carries Magda wears “a pair of black boots” (*ibid.*:9). This is not to say, however, that there are no allusions to light; yet, unlike on the other side of the steel fence, where sunlight fosters bloom and life appears to be placid and mellow, in the pitiless world of the barracks it is perilous –to the extent that it is possible to argue that in the concentration camps, the sun lacks its ordinary benefits. What is more, it is the harsh sunlight of the roll-call arena that exposes the defenceless infant –Magda’s “pencils faltered at the barracks opening, where the light began. Rosa saw and pursued. But already Magda was in the square outside the barracks, in the jolly light” (*ibid.*:7).

Just like darkness protects Magda, the shawl conceals the baby in an attempt to delay the event towards which “The Shawl” moves. This piece of cloth, around which the story revolves and which serves as a title for the book, is the tale’s central motif. It functions symbolically on many levels. First of all, it stands for a shelter. It is meant to be a life-preserver amidst a sea of death –while being “inside the little house of the shawl’s windings [...] no one could reach [Magda]” (*ibid.*:4). In other words, the shawl serves to keep the baby hidden from the Nazis, whether it is in the barracks or disguised as the “shivering mound of Rosa’s breasts” (*ibid.*:6). In its capacity to “nourish an infant for three days and three nights,” the magic shawl is a pacifier as well as a covering (*ibid.*:5).² Since in Rosa’s breasts there was “not a sniff of milk” left, “Magda took the corner of the shawl and milked it instead” (*ibid.*:4). The shawl, therefore, pacifies the infant so that she will not cry out of hunger. It should be noted that Ozick doubles Magda’s milking the shawl with Rosa’s unconscious stuffing the shawl into her mouth at the end of the story. In addition to being the substitute for her mother’s teat, the shawl is also “Magda’s own baby, her pet, her little sister” (*ibid.*:6). Furthermore, when blown, “the wind made a clown out of Magda’s shawl,” which made Magda laugh (*ibid.*:7). This provides a moment of tragic comic relief to the misery of their lives.

² Because the shawl keeps Magda alive for three days and three nights, the infant becomes for Rosa a holy baby that conjures in her mother the infant Jesus Christ (Kauvar 1993:188).

Be that as it may, physical and mental torture give no respite in “The Shawl”: “When Magda began to walk Rosa knew that Magda was going to die very soon, something would happen” (Ozick 1990:6). The fateful day takes place when Stella, Rosa’s niece, in an attempt to keep from freezing, takes Magda’s shawl and, in turn, she causes the infant to cry for “her pet, her little sister” (*ibid.*:6). Magda’s cries, “a long viscous rope of clamor” (*ibid.*:8), betray her as she walks out of the barracks during the *Appleplatz*, roll-call. Rosa is faced then with a tragic dilemma –to run for the baby or to run for the shawl. At this crucial moment, the narrator steps into Rosa’s mind, so that we get to know the following:

A tide of commands hammered in Rosa’s nipples: Fetch, get, bring! But she did not know which to go after first, Magda or the shawl. If she jumped out into the arena to snatch Magda up, the howling would not stop, because Magda would still not have the shawl; but if she ran back into the barracks to find the shawl, and if she found it, and if she came after Magda holding it and shaking it, then she would get Magda back, Magda would put the shawl in her mouth and turn dumb again. (Ozick 1990:8)

Rosa decides to grab the shawl and run back out into the sunlit arena. But, it is too late –a German officer has already discovered Magda. By the time Rosa reaches the arena, she barely manages to see that her daughter is “riding someone’s shoulder. [...] Above the shoulder a helmet glinted. [...] Below the helmet a black body like a domino and a pair of black boots hurled themselves in the direction of the electrified fence” (Ozick 1990:9). At this moment of greatest horror, Rosa hears voices coming from the fence. These “grainy sad voices” direct her “to hold up the shawl, high; [...] to shake it, to whip with it, to unfurl it like a flag” (*ibid.*:9). These commands, Joseph Lowin argues, are to be interpreted as an attempt to transform lament into an act of courage, for the voices within the wire urge Rosa to overcome her maternal instinct and to turn distress into a liturgical voice of triumph (1988:109). Rosa, nevertheless, “did not obey” the electric voices; instead “she took Magda’s shawl and filled her own mouth with it, stuffed it in and stuffed it in, until she was swallowing up the wolf’s screech” (*ibid.*:10).

Throughout the tale, it is silence that saves: “Every day Magda was silent, and so she did not die” (Ozick 1990:7). Similarly, Rosa knew that to cry out was to be shot; or, put the other way round, she knew that silence was the key to life. Rosa’s decision to remain silent while her daughter is being brutally murdered points at the central subject in “The Shawl”: Survival. Throughout the story, Rosa has struggled with this instinct of self-preservation constantly. At the story’s outset, the narrator has access to Rosa’s mind while she ponders whether or not she should pass Magda to an onlooker. This is her train of thought:

She could leave the line for a minute and push Magda into the hands of any woman on the side of the road. But if she moved out of line they might shoot.

And even if she fled the line for half a second and pushed the shawl-bundle at a stranger, would the woman take it? She might be surprised, or afraid; she might drop the shawl, and Magda would fall out and strike her head and die. (Ozick 1990:4)

Rosa realises that, in passing Magda to a bystander, she would risk her own life and she would still not guarantee the baby's safety. Therefore, rather than probable death for herself and uncertainty for her daughter, she chooses survival for the two of them. Survival is, likewise, the reason why Stella takes the shawl from Magda. Stella, in an effort to cling to life, covers herself with the shawl because she "was cold" (Ozick 1990:6). It is this same instinct for self-preservation that prevents Rosa from running, from "pick[ing] up the sticks of Magda's body" and from "let[ting] the wolf's screech ascend," when she witnesses Magda's electrocution (*ibid.*:10). Just like Magda, who had learned not to cry when she was hungry, Rosa contains her maternal instinct in order to survive. The shawl, which once nourished Magda, now stifles the mother's involuntary scream— "the wolf's screech" which would bring instant death. In this way, the mother resembles the daughter: Magda "sucked and sucked [...] [t]he shawl's good flavour" (*ibid.*:4-5) and "Rosa drank Magda's shawl until it dried," in an attempt to suppress the wolf's howl that was rising "through the ladder of her skeleton" (*ibid.*:10). Rosa, therefore, makes the same use of the shawl that Magda and Stella had previously done—she uses it as a life-preserver. Successively nourishing Magda, warming Stella and saving Rosa, the shawl becomes a potent symbol of life, a talisman—an emblem which is maintained all through "The Shawl's" sequel, "Rosa."

Drinking the shawl in imitation of her murdered daughter, Rosa tastes "the cinnamon and almond depth of Magda's saliva" (Ozick 1990:10). This fragrance adds a further meaning to the shawl's symbolism. Throughout "The Shawl," the narrator refers twice to the distinctive smell and taste of Magda's saliva and in Miami, some thirty years later, Rosa still recalls "the holy fragrance of the lost babe" (*ibid.*:31). The pleasant aroma of cinnamon and almonds, which seems so out of place in the demonic hell of the death camps, is a means of attenuating the chilling events that Rosa experienced and witnessed while imprisoned. This peculiar aroma evokes the *besamin* (spice) box, a decorative box used since the sixteenth century during the *Havdalah* service. During this ceremony, which marks the outgoing of the Sabbath, Jews recite four blessings. The second one is recited over fragrant spices, which are contained in the *besamin* box and which Jews have to sniff as a compensation for the loss of the special sabbath spirit.³ By using the imagery of the spice box, Ozick is implying that despite the gloominess of the historical moment portrayed in "The Shawl," this is not the final chapter in Jewish

³ The spices commonly used are cloves, cinnamon and bay leaves.

existence: Stella and Rosa, because they survived the concentration camps, symbolise the eternity of Israel (Friedman 1991:115).

3. THE TRAUMATIC AFTERMATH OF ROSA'S LIFE-SHATTERING EXPERIENCE

The unbearable pain that follows the survival of the German hell is made achingly apparent in "Rosa," which takes place approximately thirty-five years after the events described in "The Shawl." After literally smashing up the antique store which she owned in New York, Rosa has moved to Florida, where she finds herself in another hell three decades after the German one. Indeed, because she was unable to rescue her daughter from the Nazis, Rosa has kept herself alive but at a terrible cost –she has come to regard the gloominess of the death camps as a permanent condition. The very place where Rosa lives recalls the dark barracks of the camp: "She lived [...] in a dark hole" (Ozick 1990:13). While in the camp it was the SS guards who starved Rosa, now she starves herself by eating "toast with a bit of sour cream and half a sardine," "a small can of peas" and "two bites of a hard-boiled egg" (*ibid.*:13-14). As in "The Shawl," the sun is perilous; in fact, it is "an executioner" (*ibid.*:14). "It is," Elaine Kauvar (1993:185) observes, "as if Rosa has revived the past in the present, for the 'killing' sun in Florida –a murdering 'sunball' which 'fried' the elderly 'scarecrows'– conjures up the perilous sunlight in the arena and its emaciated victims."

On the scalding streets of Miami Beach, Rosa's memories of the concentration camp and of the lost baby are thus continually awakened. This is so because the events that Rosa experienced while imprisoned in the German abattoir remain poignantly fresh. Be that as it may, Rosa does not disclose her past in a linear manner. Actually, the main parts of her biography are unveiled following not chronology but the associations made by the psyche: "Ozick forges the links among the events indirectly, the way they appear in consciousness when ordinary sights and objects evoke deeper and more disturbing thoughts from which the mind turns in wincing pain" (Kauvar 1993:189). Most significantly, this works as the textual representation of the untidy and unpredictable way in which memories of trauma crowd into the head of a traumatised person. The interplay between memory and trauma shows itself clearly when Rosa sets herself out to register "certain definite facts" so as to make sure that people do not forget about Jewish suffering at the hands of the Nazis (Ozick 1990:66). As in "The Shawl," Ozick does not use the

word "Holocaust" in print, which shows that her capacity to suggest is still at work. However, the tortures and the psychological consequences of the massacre are put before the reader in a more overt way because she wants to bear witness to "the cruelest and most demonically inventive human degradation" (Ozick 2000c:75). It is the indifference with which this historical event is very often looked at nowadays that moves Ozick (and, for that same reason, Rosa) to invoke history. She fears that indifference, an attitude which "is not so much a gesture of looking away –of choosing to be passive– as it is an active disinclination to feel," might turn into amnesia (Ozick 1996:203).

Since the people coming into the antique store that Rosa owned in New York were indifferent to her story about the "during," she decides to write it down in letters for Magda to read it. In this way, we learn some additional information about Rosa's, Magda's and Stella's traumatic experience in Nazi Germany. In "The Shawl," the site of their confinement is described in simple terms: "[A] place without pity" built upon barracks, a roll-call arena and an electrified fence (Ozick 1990:5), whereas here we are told that the electrified fence was built around "the most repulsive slum, deep in slops and vermin and a toilet not fit for the lowest criminal" and that "half a million people, more than double the number there used to be in that place" were confined in "rotting old tenements" (*ibid.*:67, 66). Furthermore, we listen to Persky, Rosa's suitor, call the place of Rosa's, Magda's and Stella's misery by its name, that is, "a camp" (*ibid.*:58). Oppressors are no longer referred to by the personal pronoun "they"; now they are explicitly identified as Hitler, the Nazis and the SS guards. Moreover, we read about some of the tortures that German officers inflicted on prisoners: "Murdered. Thrown against the fence, barbed, thorned, electrified" and "brutes force[d] the innocents" (*ibid.*:31, 45). Finally, there are several allusions to the psychological burden which life in the camps caused on prisoners. The narrator accesses Rosa's musings and observes that "[n]o one could guess what hell she had crawled out of" (R 33) and, later on, the narrator insists on the same idea: "No one knew [...] what had happened to her" (*ibid.*:49).

Like so many of Ozick's characters and like her own mother, who was a poet, Rosa is a writer, something which is hinted at several times throughout the novella. At the outset of the story, the narrator states that "[Rosa] had lately taken to composing letters" (Ozick 1990:14); as a high school student in pre-war Warsaw, "[o]ne of her teachers [...] praised her for what he said was a 'literary style'" (*ibid.*: 20); Stella also acknowledges that her aunt is a writer when she calls her a "parable-maker" (*ibid.*:41); and, in Joseph Lowin's (1988:112) opinion, Cynthia Ozick herself "intervenes in the story (using a free indirect style of quotation) to comment on the linguistic power accorded to [Rosa]." In her capacity as a writer, Rosa formulates at a certain point in the story her own theory about writing, which is also

Ozick's literary theory. She asserts that writing is "[the] power to make a history, to tell, to explain" (R 44). And adds: It is the power "[t]o lie" (Ozick 1990:44). This gives us the clue to suspect that in the two letters that Rosa writes to the long-dead Magda she reinvents the past the way a storyteller creates a fiction. When reading Rosa's letters, we should, accordingly, be cautious –they are part biography, part fiction. For instance, Rosa pretends that Magda is still alive by envisioning various lives for her daughter: She fancies Magda is "a beautiful young woman of thirty, thirty-one: a doctor married to a doctor" (*ibid.*:35); later on, Magda becomes "a professor of Greek philosophy at Columbia University in New York City" (*ibid.*:39); towards the end, Rosa pictures her daughter as a talented "girl of sixteen" (*ibid.*:64), whom she would love to see "paint[ing] in watercolours" or "seiz[ing] a violin" (*ibid.*:65). Rosa also sweetens her past when she denies the suggestion made in "The Shawl" that Magda could be the child of a SS guard. She admits having been "forced by a German, and more than once," but she asserts that she was "too sick to conceive" (*ibid.*:43): Magda's father, Rosa insists, is Andrej, the son of a converted Jew who led a most "respectable, gentle, cultivated" life and whose family, like Rosa's, "had status" (*ibid.*:43).

In denying the truth about Magda's creation, Rosa seeks to put aside the memories of a painful sexual experience –violent rape– which she refers to as "degrading. The shame. Pain in the loins. Burning" (Ozick 1990:34). Furthermore, she is trying "to prove herself pure: a madonna" (*ibid.*:59), a process whereby Rosa attempts to transform Magda into a holy baby brought forth not from rape but from an immaculate conception (Kauvar 1993:194). In this way, Ozick is making apparent the serious effects of madness, melancholy, rage and sorrow that the Holocaust has had upon survivors' human psyche. In spite of doing so in a direct way, both the novella and the story that precedes cannot conceal the author's beginnings as a poet. Commenting on this, A. Alvarez (1986:53) claims that "[Ozick] still has the poet's perfectionist habit of mind and obsession with language as though one word out of place would undo the whole fabric." In "Rosa," which is dotted with poetic instances, Ozick returns to the major metaphors of the previous story, to which she adds some new allegorical innovations.

Magda's shawl continues to play a central role in Rosa's life. Indeed, despite the thirty-year lapse, the shawl has kept the meaning it last acquired—a talisman: "Magda's shawl!", "Magda's swaddling cloth," "Magda's shroud" is Rosa's sole means of keeping in touch with her beloved daughter (Ozick 1990:31). In fact, it is the shawl that has Magda's smell stamped on it, "the holy fragrance of the lost babe" (*ibid.*:31), and that has the capacity to "instantly restore Magda" (*ibid.*:62). The shawl, therefore, has a touch of the supernatural. It is precisely because of its powers that it has become for Rosa a religious icon which she feels the urge to kiss,

to the extent that Rosa becomes an idol-worshipper. In a letter to Rosa, Stella puts it this way:

Your idol is on its way, separate cover. Go on your knees to it if you want. You make yourself crazy, everyone thinks you're a crazy woman [...]. What a scene, disgusting! You'll open the box and take it out and cry, and you'll kiss it like a crazy person. Making holes in it with kisses. You're like those people in the Middle Ages who worshiped a piece of the True Cross [...]. (Ozick 1990:32-33)

Stella is not very much mistaken. The acts of receiving the object of her idolatrous worship and of opening the package containing the shawl involve a meticulous ritual. First, "[Rosa] had asked Stella to send it" by registered mail (Ozick 1990:30). Second, before opening the box she had to clean the room and make herself look nice: "She tidied all around" and "put on her good shoes," "a nice dress," "arranged her hair," "brushed her teeth" and "reddened very slightly" her mouth (*ibid.*:34, 44).

Although it is Magda's shawl that establishes the greatest link between "The Shawl" and "Rosa," there are other evocative images that serve to make clear the relationship between the two stories. For example, at the outset of "The Shawl" Stella is said to be a cold jealous person, an idea on which the narrator, who focalises through Rosa, insists over and over again: "And afterward she was always cold, always. The cold went into her heart: Rosa saw that Stella's heart was cold" (Ozick 1990:6-7). In "Rosa," the narrator is also a limited omniscient narrator: Even though at the beginning s/he detaches him/herself from Rosa, gradually s/he moves close to the main character's point of view. Through the narrator we learn that "[t]o pacify Stella, Rosa called her Dear One, Lovely, Beautiful; she called her Angel; she called her all these things for the sake of peace, but in reality Stella was cold. She had no heart" (*ibid.*:15). Throughout the novella, there are some other references to this: "She had no one but her cold niece in Queens, New York" or "[Stella] has no heart" (*ibid.*:17, 42). It is through references such as "the Angel of Death" (*ibid.*:15, 23, 39) that Stella is most clearly described as unemotional and insensitive. This metaphor also serves to remind the reader that it was Stella who caused Magda's death. Continuity is also established in setting side by side these two phrases: "Stella gazed at Magda like a young cannibal" and "[s]ometimes Rosa had cannibal dreams about Stella" (*ibid.*:5, 15). In order words, in the concentration camp Rosa believed that her niece had dreams of cannibalising baby Magda. By contrast, in Miami it is Rosa who has dreams of cannibalising Stella.

As mentioned above, the world of "The Shawl" is dominated by depressing blackness. In "Rosa," black is even more pervasive –it is everywhere. Rosa's room is described as "a dark hole" where "[s]quads of dying flies blackened the rope. The sheets on her bed were just as black" (Ozick 1990:13-14). The *kosher* café, to

which Persky and Rosa go to drink a cup of tea, has “black plastic seat[s]” (*ibid.*:24). Rosa refers to “Stella’s black will” three times. In addition, black prevails the flashback in which Rosa re-enacts the horrors she lived in the camp; these are her memories: “Darkened cities, tombstones, colorless garlands, a black fire in a gray field, brutes forcing the innocents, women with their mouths stretched and their arms wild, her mother’s voice calling” (*ibid.*:44-45). Black is not repeated at random; rather it has a clear purpose. This image establishes a depressing atmosphere that recalls constantly the traumatic ordeal through which Rosa, and other six million Jews, went through.

This is in line with the use of the word “hell.” The oxymoron with which Ozick opens “The Shawl” –“Stella, cold, cold, the coldness of hell” (Ozick 1990:3)– bears testimony to the wincing pain prisoners had to endure. Although in “Rosa” Nazi hell has been away for almost thirty years, its psychological burden has not, to the extent that post-Holocaust life is hellish. More precisely, Rosa sees Miami as an updated version of a concentration camp. The narrator explicitly asserts that “[Rosa] felt she was in hell” (*ibid.*:14). It should be noted that Rosa’s feeling is a well-known sensation to most Holocaust survivors. Paraphrasing Primo Levi in an essay entitled “Primo Levi’s Suicide Note,” Cynthia Ozick (1991b:35) states that “hell in fact did not end when the chimneys closed down, but was simply freshening for a second run –Auschwitz being the first hell, and post-Auschwitz the second.”

The image of hell portrayed above is reinforced by several references to fire. In “The Shawl,” the narrator states that “Rosa’s two palms, her fingers were on fire” (Ozick 1990:7). This has an exact parallel in “Rosa,” where we read that “[Rosa] received the paper between burning palms” (*ibid.*:60). There are many other allusions to fire: In Florida “[e]very day without fail it blazed and blazed” (*ibid.*:14). Later, the narrator, borrowing Rosa’s syntax, insists over the same idea: “The world is full of fire! Everything, everything is on fire! Florida is burning!” and “Florida was glutted with fake fire, burning false hair!” (*ibid.*:39, 50). However, it is Rosa’s sad memory of the lost infant that provides the most striking instance of a fire-based metaphor: Rosa refers to her daughter as “the child on fire!” (*ibid.*:31). The mother’s lament provides a powerful image metaphor for the guilt that assails every parent who has lost a child through abuse, illness or death. In other words, it is the expression of a parent’s projected self-reproach heightened by the very meaning of the word “Holocaust” –a word of Greek origin meaning “sacrifice by fire.” It also serves to put forth the inexplicability, the ineffability, as it were, of death itself.

“The Shawl” should not be taken to be the precedent for all metaphors in “Rosa.” In reality, the second story contains new instances of figurative language

which enliven the narrative. Ozick's prose consists of a flow of images through which she manages, impossible though the task may seem, to transform grieve into something beautiful. In relation to this, Ozick (2000a:29) herself admits, in an essay entitled "The Posthumous Sublime," that "[i]t's art sacred ancient trick to beautify pain, to romanticize the shadows of the irretrievable." In this particular case, she writes about "[b]lue digits on the arm" rather than overtly stating that camp prisoners were indexed with tattoos (Ozick 1990:36). By saying "when your bones get melted into the grains of earth," the narrator spares the reader a direct reference to death (*ibid.*:36). Similarly, "parasites on the throat of suffering!" is a powerful metaphor to describe the attitude that Dr. Tree, a psychologist interested in treating Rosa from PTSD, has towards survivors (*ibid.*:37).

4. ANIMAL IMAGERY: GIVING MEANING TO METAPHOR

Ozick's two stories contain interesting animal-related imagery. In "The Shawl," the creatures alluded to are chickens, squirrels, tigers, lice, rats, butterflies, moths and wolves. Although the range of animals that are mentioned seems to bear no relation to one another, subsequent readings point to possible connections between them. On the one hand, there is a set of animals to which we usually associate a negative connotation. On the other hand, there is a second group which either occupies a high hierarchy in the animal kingdom or carries a positive connotation. As regards lice and rats, they contribute to recreating the humiliating site where prisoners are confined. Stella's elbows are said to be "chicken bones," reinforcing further the severity of life in the concentration camps (Ozick 1990:3). Similarly, when Magda is being carried aloft by a helmeted soldier, she is "no bigger than a moth," that is, a dark spot in the distance (*ibid.*:9). By contrast, when Magda is safely hidden in "the shawl's windings," she is not compared to an insect but rather to a squirrel. Moreover, when Rosa thinks about other lives outside the camp, she portrays a world populated not with rats and lice but with butterflies. For Rosa "[t]he sunheat murmured of another life, of butterflies in summer" (*ibid.*:8). Finally, there are references to two animals that occupy a high hierarchy in the animal kingdom, tigers and wolves. Tigers are mentioned in relation to baby Magda, who, the narrator hints, was the child of a German officer and who had horribly alive eyes "like blue tigers" (*ibid.*:6). The comparison is not without significance, especially if we take into account that tigers are reputed for their ferocity, a term which serves to describe Nazis with accuracy. Tigers thus point clearly towards the "other strain" in Magda –her "German strain." In this sense, it should be noted that Rosa herself grows "a little suspicious of Magda, because of

the other strain, whatever it was, that ran in her [...]. The other strain was ghostly, even dangerous” (*ibid.*:65). The allusion to wolves comes at the end of the story when Rosa stuffs her mouth with the shawl so as to “swallow up the wolf’s screech” (*ibid.*:10). Wolves, which are also extremely ferocious animals, howl for several reasons: To communicate with each other; to declare the boundaries of their territory; and to protect their pack in cases of danger. Rosa’s sudden urge to screech when she sees that Magda is about to be flung against an electrified fence, resembles a wolf’s reaction. However, as noted above, in this case, instinct for survival prevents her from “let[ting] the wolf’s screech ascend” (*ibid.*:10).

Although “Rosa” is also rich in animal imagery, the creatures referred to, except for “butterflies,” have no precedent in “The Shawl.” As in the previous story, the sample is varied and includes flies, lionesses, bloodsuckers, snakes, calves, storks, dogs, tapeworms, bees, water animals, cats and butterflies. These are both low and high hierarchy animals. Be that as it may, the equation established in “The Shawl” (low means negative, while high means positive) is no longer at work. It is true that both “lioness” and “butterfly,” used to refer to Magda, are intended as positive. The former stresses certain aspects of Magda’s character –her bravery and her courage– whereas the latter enhances her beauty. Except for these two cases, the rest of animal allusions are either neutral or entail a negative connotation. A few examples will serve to illustrate my point. Throughout the novella, Rosa cannot help seeing bloodsuckers, creatures that suck blood from wounds, everywhere. As a matter of fact, when Persky assures her that if she “[l]ook[s] around, [she]’ll see human beings’,” Rosa replies: ““What I see [...] is bloodsuckers”” (Ozick 1990:58). She uses this word to refer to those who make a case study of the psychological consequences of survivors’ traumatic experience at the camps; they are bloodsuckers because they make money (i.e. suck blood) by intruding into people’s suffering (i.e. wounds). As regards high-hierarchy animals such as storks, they are deprived of their positive qualities (i.e. elegance and beauty). For instance, in a passage in which the narrator compares Rosa to a stork, s/he says that she was the “[r]eflection of a ragged old bird with worn feathers. Skinny, a stork” (*ibid.*:23). The same holds true of dogs; it is Rosa herself who, in her first letter to Magda, draws the pejorative comparison. These are her actual words: “I am always having to write to Stella now, like a dog paying respects to its mistress” (*ibid.*:40).

Animals, therefore, play an important role in *The Shawl*. As hinted above, the number of metaphors that are built upon animal imagery is, indeed, large, which is the reason why I infer that they have a special meaning in the interpretation of events. More specifically, I believe that these linguistic expressions work, using Zoltán Kövecses’ (2002) terminology, as “micrometaphors” of an “extended metaphor” or “megametaphor” that runs through both stories. Before going into

particulars, I shall clarify what a micrometaphor and a megametaphor are. Zoltán Kövecses (2002:51) explains these two terms in the following way:

Some metaphors, conventional or novel, may run through entire literary texts without necessary “surfacing.” What one sometimes finds at the surface level of a literary text are specific *micrometaphors*, but “underlying” these metaphors is a *megametaphor* that makes these surface micrometaphors coherent.

My point is that, in coming back repeatedly to the same source domain, Ozick must have a hidden purpose. In that sense, it is not accidental that underlying these evocative images or micrometaphors is the conceptual metaphor: PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, though this conceptual metaphor does not occur in language as such;⁴ hence, nowhere in *The Shawl* is there such a phrase. Following the conventions of cognitive linguistics, capital letters are used to signal the particular wording that is at the root of a whole set of metaphorical or linguistic expressions (i.e. words, phrases or sentences that are the surface realisation of the conceptual metaphor). In this particular case, the equation accounts for a series of linguistic realisations or manifestations all of which explain human behaviour in terms of animal behaviour. For instance, the narrator compares Rosa's heavy breath to that of a panting dog: “She panted like a dog in the sun” (Ozick 1990:28). Later in the novella, the comparison is drawn between people and water animals: “She took off her good shoes to save them and nearly stepped on the sweated faces of two lovers plugged into a kiss. A pair of water animals in suction” (*ibid.*:48). Cats are also compared to human beings. Rosa explains to Persky that Stella believes that “‘in America cats have nine lives’.” However, in Rosa's opinion, “‘we're less than cats, so we got three. The life before, the life during, the life after’” (*ibid.*:58).

⁴ “Conceptual metaphor” is a new conception of metaphor developed by George Lakoff in his 1980 seminal study *Metaphors We Live By*. In the traditional view, metaphors were considered to pertain, exclusively, to the domain of language; yet, not to everyday conventional language but rather to poetic language. This classical theory was challenged by Lakoff, whose thesis, known as “the cognitive linguistic view,” held that metaphor is “not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason” (1980:208); that is, it is part of our conventional way of conceptualising the world. If metaphor is, indeed, pervasive both in thought and everyday language, this means that the traditional assumptions about metaphor were false. As a matter of fact, in “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor,” Lakoff denies the classical theories of language according to which “[m]etaphorical expressions were assumed to be mutually exclusive with the realm of ordinary everyday language: Everyday language had no metaphor, and metaphor used mechanisms outside the realm of everyday conventional language” (1980:202). Attending to Lakoff's work, Kövecses (2002:4) explains what a conceptual metaphor is. He says that “[a] conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another.” More technically, metaphors can be understood as a mapping (i.e. a set of ontological correspondences) from a source domain to a target domain. These correspondences allow us to reason about a domain, which is most typically an abstract concept (the target), in terms of a more concrete or physical domain (the source).

Ozick recurs to this conceptual metaphor so as to be able to draw the comparison between these two entities without explicitly saying “people are animals.” It is the common features that human beings share with animals that serve her as the basis for the comparison. Both are organised living creatures endowed with sensation and the power of voluntary motion whose lives depend on the intake of food and oxygen. Despite these shared characteristics, they differ in an important aspect: Human beings are characterised by superior intelligence, articulate speech and erect carriage, whereas animals lack all of these qualities. By putting the two side by side, Ozick is, however, denying the features that make human beings supposedly the most highly developed species.

If humans are, indeed, rational beings, how is it that somebody came to design the factory of inhumanity that was the Holocaust? How is it that somebody came to design a plan “incarnated as ‘racial purity’, as ‘the Aryan ideal’?” (Ozick 1983:236). How is it that somebody came to design a programme which meant annihilating all traces of Jewish civilisation? Earlier approaches to the Holocaust, among which Elie Wiesel’s *La nuit* stands out, questioned whether a God can exist in a world that permits such aberrations. As for Ozick, she does not raise the question of whether one can believe or not in God after the Holocaust. Instead, she states that a world that allows not only “the destruction of lives” but also “the complete erasure of Jewish academies, libraries, social and religious bodies—the whole vast and ancient organism, spiritual and intellectual, of European Jewish civilization” cannot be inhabited by highly developed species (Ozick 2000b:117). Amidst the darkness of unreason, Ozick’s way of trying to look for an explanation is to assume that the German onslaught was not the product of human mind but rather of people acting as led animals –of people who have been deprived of their capacity for reasoning. Although this notion is sustained throughout both stories, it does not surface overtly. However, in “Rosa,” there are two comments on the part of the narrator that point towards this idea. First, it is said that “[i]n the street [Rosa] plodded beside [Persky] dumbly; a led animal” (Ozick 1990:22). That is, Rosa demonstrates no control over her life; rather, she lets herself be swept along by Persky, an idea which is reinforced by the following remark: “Like a calf, Rosa followed” (*ibid.*:23).

5. CONCLUSION

As I have been trying to put forth throughout this paper, allegory is the basis upon which Cynthia Ozick builds both “The Shawl” and “Rosa.” Faced with a historical event that seems beyond human register, Ozick relies on rhetoric devices as a means to bear witness to the enormities of the European cataclysm. Coinciding with Tresa Grauer (2006:2298), she believes that “the ‘reality’ of the Holocaust is fundamentally inaccessible,” so that “conventional means of understanding simply do not apply.” This is the reason why Ozick resorts to metaphor, which is an ideal medium to denounce not only the state-sponsored murder of approximately six million Jews but also the annihilation of all traces of Jewish civilisation. And because metaphor is a cognitive mechanism through which an abstract, complex domain is understood in terms of a concrete, simple domain, it follows that metaphor is an appropriate device to deal with the darkness of unreason, that is, the Nazi genocide. Most importantly, it enables Ozick to deal with such an unpleasant topic without focusing on thorny information.

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