REINVENTING BRUNO SCHULZ: CYNTHIA OZICK'S *THE MESSIAH OF STOCKHOLM* AND DAVID GROSSMAN'S *SEE UNDER: LOVE*

by

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Bruno Schulz, the Polish Jewish author of brilliant phantasmagoria, was gunned down by a Nazi officer in the Drohobycz ghetto in 1942. He left behind a small corpus of narrative work, published in English under the titles *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass.*[1] Another manuscript to which he had devoted several years, *The Messiah,* remained unfinished. Presumably it perished in the Holocaust, for it has never been recovered. Two recent novels, David Grossman's *See Under: Love* (*'Ayen 'erekh 'ahavah*)[2] and Cynthia Ozick's *The Messiah of*

1. Both works have been translated by Celina Wieniewska. *The Street of Crocodiles* (New York: Penguin, 1977) was originally published in Poland in 1934. *Sanatorium* (New York: Walker, 1978) first appeared in Polish in 1937.

2. Jerusalem: Hakibbutz hameuhad, 1986. All English translations in this essay are my own.

Stockholm),[3] both turn the influence of Bruno Schulz and an evaluation of the events of his life to explicit thematic focus as they engage, too, in an imaginative reconstruction of the lost work, *The Messiah*. Though they have written very different books in different languages, Ozick and Grossman both take the same constellation of tensions as the raw material of their texts, and they elaborate on this fundamental similarity of concerns as part of a meditation on the power of the imagination, the possibilities of artistic expression, and Jewish identity in the second generation after the Holocaust.

"The Messiah of Stockholm"

Ozick's novel is profoundly concerned with writing and fiction, all manners of telling and tales that serve as ways of ordering events, imposing meaning on the world, and arriving at self-definition. *The Messiah of Stockholm* brings these matters to the fore by amassing a series of plots. The sheer proliferation of fictions suggests that the world portrayed is one dominated by an impulse to invent. The various narrative lines, moreover, all deal with art, invention, or story. Preoccupied as they are with the valuation and, especially, the devaluation of art, the numerous plots privilege themes familiar from Ozick's earlier work and result in a contradictory text engaged in a struggle against itself as a piece of fiction.

Ozick takes as her point of departure a pattern familiar from many classics of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel: the hero's construction of his own life plot as a way of exploring questions of legitimacy, usurpation, paternity, and the transmission of tradition. This is a process by which, from Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* to Joyce's *Ulysses*, a young protagonist discovers possible paths of action open to him under the tutelage of older figures attributed with wisdom and authority. The role models are rarely biological fathers; many novels present their protagonists as orphans or otherwise remove the natural father and so allow the son to choose options. In this way, while undergoing initiation into society, the character creates his own story and comes to define his own authority.[4] Ozick's prota-

3. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

4. For an account of this concept of plot in the Bildungsroman, see Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

gonist, too, is an orphan. Having lost his parents in Poland during World War II, he was brought to safety and then brought up by a foster family in Sweden. Therefore, like many of his predecessors in the Bildungsroman tradition, this protagonist as well experiences a metamorphosis of cultural adaptation. His, however, is a peculiarly elective patrimony. Lars Andemening has picked his name out of a dictionary and, in addition, he contrives for himself a spiritual inheritance by conjuring the belief that he is the son of Bruno Schulz. While he spends much of his time seeking out evidence for his theory, his conviction is based not on fact but on a sense of affinity and admiration for Schulz's writing. In other words, Lars chooses as a life story an identification with art, and the art he values is a brand of fantasia. In this connection Schulz functions as an apt inspiration for father invention. At the center of his own work is the fantastic, highly imagined *pater familias* who becomes by turns a cockroach, a crab, a tyrant, and an unkillable generative principle.

Ozick early on presents an indication that Lars's brand of fanciful self-invention is not entirely admirable. Unlike his prototypes from the European novel, Andemening is not a youngster, but a middle-aged man already twice divorced. The fact that he retains a notable quality of youthfulness—"unripeness, a tentativeness, an unfinished tone"—is unbecoming and inappropriate, if not downright ludicrous. It brings him contempt from those about him, who often treat him "as if he were just starting out, heaving his greening masculine forces against life" (p. 4). He is mocked especially at the *Morgentörn,* the newspaper where he works reviewing books. While the other columnists deal with thrillers, cookbooks, and bestsellers, Lars has a penchant for the surreal and the existential. His enthusiasms for such writers as Kafka, Canetti, and Kundera seem to his colleagues misguided, overly serious, too imbued with a childish naiveté. Even more tellingly, the cultivation of literary interests for Lars means not just métier, but vocation and mission—defined by the narrator as worship at the "altar of literature" (p. 7). This expression, a loaded phrase in the context of Ozick's previous work, indicates that something is fundamentally wrong. In her essays the author has outspokenly rejected just such overestimation of literature as youthful folly.[5]

5. See *Art and Ardor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), for example: "The Lesson of the Master," pp. 291–297; "The Riddle of the Ordinary," pp. 200–209; and "Literature as Idol: Harold Bloom," pp. 178–199.

The simple if preposterous plot of the life Lars forges for himself (as son of Schulz cum priest of art) is subsequently challenged by another plot, in two senses. A counterpointed action unfolds which complicates Andemening's initiatives, and that action consists of a conspiracy, a scheme or plot led by someone he has formerly considered an ally. The only one to whom he has confided the secret of his imagined identity is Heidi Eklund, owner of a small bookstore. She provides him with obscure titles in foreign languages and helps him seek out assorted Schulziana in the form of book reviews, photographs, and old letters. One day Heidi brings him a woman who, claiming to be Schulz's daughter, announces that she possesses the original manuscript of *The Messiah*. Torn between believing and disbelieving, Lars longs for the Messiah but resents the intruder and her usurpation of his filial claim. A kind of detective story ensues as Lars seeks to uncover the connection between Adela (the purported daughter), Heidi, and her husband.

Gradually it becomes clear that the entire manuscript episode represents an intrigue engineered by Heidi and her two cohorts. Adela's father is not Bruno Schulz but Dr. Eklund, né Eckstein, a forger of passports and trafficker in illegal refugees. The three Eklunds have provided a sham account of their lives in order to impress Andemening and so engage his support in the literary establishment for their *Messiah*. The upshot of this plot is a disillusionment on Lars's part with the pursuit of art. The authenticity of the manuscript is never entirely disproved, but, convinced that the document is a fake, Lars in a fury burns the pages. Subsequently, no longer in thrall to Bruno nor trying to pattern himself after a mentor, the protagonist takes responsibility for his own life. In the process the binary opposition of values with which he once viewed the world—excellence/vulgarity, highbrow art/pragmatic realities—goes through a transformation; anguished over the elusiveness of cherished ideals, Andemening opts for palpable, outstanding success as a mediocrity rather than uncertainty in the realm of hopeful dreams. Devotion to art, cast in a dubious light from the start, here dissipates and falls into disregard as Lars grinds out trivial reviews with astonishing alacrity, soon surpassing his surprised rivals at the paper in popularity and professional status.

Even as this main plot charts the protagonist's changing relation to and estimation of art, a multiplicity of subsidiary plots in the novel also provide a forum for pondering questions of referentiality, authenticity in art, and the nature of illusion. Subplots and stories within the story explore a cluster of semantically related ideas bearing a range of connotations and values:

invention, artifice, illusion, fabrication, falseness, imitation, plagiarism, sham, fraud, lies, deceit, betrayal.

Invention on a small scale, in its most trivial and even degraded form, takes place in what the text terms "this little pond" (p. 13) of the Swedish literary scene: the "stewpot" world of translators, critics, editors, and writers. On one occasion, for example, a reviewer exposes a well-known poet as a plagiarist. Doing so, he exposes his own weaknesses as well. Previously he had praised the poet too highly, and now, by acknowledging the literary theft, he reveals himself to have been a careless, unprofessional reader. As one fraud surfaces along with another, gossipers add to the sum of dishonesties by proceeding to invent without regard for fact. To explain the poet's attempted ruse they wildly postulate all sorts of motivations; his, they say, was a case of "rage, malice, revenge, despair," or perhaps "puckishness, camp, comedy, dada. A postmodernist plot" (p. 63). By using the word "plot," the implied narrator advertently or inadvertently reinforces the emphasis of the entire novel on the making of tales as a way of conceiving the world—but one which is intimately associated with falseness.

Such gossip sessions also become an opportunity for self-castigation and mocking excoriation of others about the inauthenticity of Swedish culture. Significantly, Lars's colleague Gunnar fills his articles with American expressions. These terms, artificial because borrowed and alien, are referred to as "velveetisms" (p. 68): not a natural product but a processed, manufactured one. In a world fraught with the phony and the fake, writing depends on imitation. When Lars finally makes an accommodation to that world by composing ordinary reviews of popular fiction, there arise comparable concerns with originality and fakery. He begins his first piece, the one that sends him to the top of the professional heap, with remarks on a title called *Illusion*. In this bestseller about deceit and ambition, an elderly spinster falls in love with a younger man. She is a talented artist too modest to exhibit her paintings, and the man marries her on the condition that she let him claim the paintings as his own. She does; he presents her art to the public with great success, then abandons her for another woman. This embedded narrative, like the main plot of the novel, associates illusion both with art or mimetic pretension and with fraud or betrayal, inextricably linking the two phenomena.

The most important embedded narrative in this text is, of course, the alleged *Messiah*. Presumably the pinnacle of serious art, for Lars the potentially redemptive moment, this fiction, too, reveals deep misgivings about

the imagination and its creative powers. First the pseudo-text envisions a Drohobycz populated solely by idols: all human beings who remain alive have been scattered about the globe. The idols are given to self-aggrandizement, competition, and the exaltation of their own false values by the worship they demand from one another. Reminiscent of the tailor's dummies that come to life in *The Street of Crocodiles,* these creatures combine inspiration from Schulz with Ozick's own recurring interest in golems and idols—specifically, her moral abhorrence of idolatry and of the contemporary tendency to adore creativity and creation in a way that eclipses worship of the Creator.[6]

Arriving on this scene, the Messiah turns out to be a strange contrivance which consists of ordinary inanimate material (cotton or cardboard perhaps), but more closely resembles a body organ. Neither he, she, nor it, the Messiah is "alive, organic, palpitating with wild motion and disturbance—yet not like a robot, not like a machine." The text tells us that "it was as if a fundamental internal member had set out to live on its own in the great world—a spleen say, or a pancreas, or a bowel, or a brain" (p. 109). The Messiah also resembles a book (the book in *Sanatorium* that Schulz likens to a cabbage rose), has numerous flippers which may be pages impressed with a kind of cuneiform ("the letters of an unknown alphabet" such as Schulz had always sought; p. 110), and emerges out of a synagogue basement. Finally the Messiah self-destructs and then gives rise to the flight of a single bird. (See Appendix A.)

What is the reader to make of these bizarre passages? To begin with, the clumsy, heaving assortment of mismatched parts which is "dimly frightening but also somewhat hobbled and limited" surely serves more as a comic parody of Schulz's irrepressible inventiveness than as a serious emblem of redemption. At the same time, the scene is more motivated by idea, by the conceptual dictates of a thesis, than by enthrallment, like Schulz's own, to transmogrifications, metamorphoses, and febrile imaginings. Here there is a clear architecture of renewal; one kind of imaginary construction follows another, producing succeeding layers of organicism (idol, quasi-biological contraption, then bird). A sequential rejection of the man-made results finally in a simple instance of living vitality. No doubt there is also here

6. Ozick's own essay on Bruno Schulz in *Art and Ardor* (pp. 224–228) is informative in this regard. Identifying in his art a "religion of animism" through which things come alive "with spiteful spirit force," this essay directly associates Schulz's fiction with idolatrous qualities.

some suggestion of post-Holocaust Poland in which many have died and many have been exiled, where a true, living, organic Jewish culture is a thing of the past. This passage therefore presents a product of the imagination as correction to a prevailing situation or human order, and art is envisioned as an antidote to spiritual and moral bankruptcy. Emerging out of a synagogue, the Messiah is associated furthermore with Jewishness, and this is ostensibly one of its virtues.

Like the golem of Prague, though, the Messiah is not purely a source of solace and comfort but in part a menacing and ill-fated invention. As the narrative remarks, the creature/contraption is only erroneously connected to a character named "Moses the Righteous." Furthermore, upon close inspection the writing on the flippers proves to consist of images, pictures of those very same idols described before. Reconfirming suspicions about this Messiah's credentials, the entire vision later turns out to be intimately associated with a lie—it is part of the Eklunds' scheme, and so it, too, like the earlier stages of the revelation, is undermined and in good measure invalidated. In Schulz's narratives there always comes a moment when, after indulging in unfettered flights of imagination, the narrator repudiates the ficitional world just devised. Magnifying this principle in her own text, Ozick consistently leaves open the possibility of undercutting illusion. While the outcome at the level of narrated events (the lie in the main plot) suggests that this *Messiah* is indeed a false one, the deliberately distortive purposes of parody at the level of narration (in the framed tale) leave little room for doubt. Poking fun as it does at Messiah invention, Ozick's lampoon contributes to a scene which reconfirms her familiar opinions on art as something inimical to Jewish values.

Portraying art as an ineffective cure for social ills, this scene constitutes a key to the novel and prevents *The Messiah of Stockholm* from becoming simply another text about textuality which playfully calls attention to the making of fictions such as itself. Not purely a meditation on art, the book reinscribes questions about writing in debate about social circumstance—particularly, Jewish self-definition and the ways in which the second generation from the Holocaust relates to that tragic past. Lars, for example, identifies with his Jewish roots through love of Bruno Schulz, but his seeking of spiritual fulfillment through an embrace of art represents false salvation; Andemening believes Bruno's creations to be of more importance than the fact of Schulz's murder, and so this character seems incapable of keeping priorities straight, of acknowledging the importance of the collective history

of destruction the Jewish people has suffered. Consequently he arrives at troublingly insubstantial identity. Putting into relief the error of confusing art or artifice with life, other refugees who populate this novel also confound make-believe with reality, invention with identity. Individuals who must forge a new life for themselves, these characters sometimes go further and concoct their own life stories. Not the protagonist alone, but also Heidi, her family, and all the figures who walk into her shop search for predecessors or make them up. Some, like Lars, do so naively, and others, like Adela, cynically. The blatant imposters fabricate their origins to inflate their social status, and this *modus vivendi* has become common practice since authenticity of identity is impossible after the Holocaust. Too much social past has been destroyed and the stories cannot be verified. For these reasons contemporary Sweden, with its influx of Polish Jews since 1968, provides a setting which allows Ozick to muse conveniently not just on Nobel prizes and literary greatness, but also on counterfeit transfigurations of identity and dubious self-conceptions as a collective phenomenon.

Troublingly insubstantial identity is a problem Ozick has frequently discussed and so ties *The Messiah of Stockholm* in with the author's earlier work. As the novel puts into relief a series of questionable tales which take on currency and prominence due to a lack of legitimating, authoritative context, it recalls her belief that, in an absence of religious commitment and firm ties to the past, many contemporary Jews have turned to a series of unsatisfactory substitute expressions of Jewishness—including the celebration of fiction and contemporary Jewish writers. Offering a view of art as just such a form of ersatz community, a weak substitute for shared social values and customs, the novel expresses dissatisfaction with a Jewishness that, after the Holocaust, depends on imagined or adopted affinities with Jewish ancestors rather than on a natural process of succession, the inheriting of traditions and a sense of self from previous generations.[7] *The Messiah of Stockholm* ends with a renunciation of art: partly because of the hateful petty treacheries of the literary world, and partly because art is an inappropriate alternative to religion, but above all because in a cultural void self-

7. To be sure, Ozick has discussed these matters mainly in connection with what she perceives as the parochialism, superficiality, and inauthenticity of much American Jewish life. Her treatment of the Swedish locale in this novel should be understood as an echo of such concerns with assimilation. Not only is the protagonist a highly assimilated Jew; in addition, Sweden as a whole here represents a small nation or people torn between its own genuine traditions and the allure of a larger, cosmopolitan culture.

invention cannot take the place of a more substantial common heritage. Though a tale of multiple plots, thoroughly concerned with fiction, this is a novel that disallows the validity of plot and invention in a context devoid of referential certainty.

These major thematic concerns are bound up with two prominent artistic qualities of the novel: a move away from verisimilitude in characterizaion and a pronounced, though uneasy treatment of metaphor. At least one critic has found the protagonist here to be more concept than character: lacking psychological density or vividness, Lars functions as an abstraction while the novel remains devoid of the resonance of real experience. Ozick, the argument goes, seeks "to compensate for the thinness of novelistic imagination by sheer force of stylistic razzle-dazzle."[8] Similar kinds of comments constitute a familiar criticism of Ozick's work. Others, too, have remarked that her prose is often mannered or overwritten and that her fiction, veering away from lived and shared experience into fantasy, is not grounded in a sociologically recognizable Jewish community. Nonetheless, whether or not the reader welcomes the whimsical quality and artifice of Ozick's various pieces, both her methods of characterization and her prose in *The Messiah of Stockholm* can be accounted for as an integral part of the text and an expression of the basic motivations at work in this novel. While the text presents its main character clearly as idea, it employs a proliferation of wild metaphors and a language sometimes abruptly divorced from the objects of representation. Both features emerge out of the underlying concern of the text with invention and with fiction as spurious make-believe.

To argue this point it is incumbent to keep in mind first that the novel is not without cognizance of its characters' cerebral qualities. On the contrary, the text flaunts their inner emptiness and inverisimilitude as related phenomena, twin mainfestations of inauthentic identity. The choice of Lars's name testifies deliberately to this effect. "Andemening" signifies spirit, both in the sense of intellect or imagination and also in the sense of ghost or specter. This is a character who conceives himself as idea: he has made himself up and dubbed himself a phantom. The remnant of a destroyed culture who disguises his own Jewishness through assimilation and then seeks a specious reconnection with the Jewish past, Lars is a specter of his true identity. Leading to similar implications, a conversation late in the narrative reminds

8. Robert Alter, "Defenders of the Faith," *Commentary* 84, no. 1 (July 1987): 52–55.

Lars of the fictive nature of his own experience. When, after the burning of the manuscript, Adela comes back to see him, he speaks to her of his daughter and she disbelieves his stories. As he himself acknowledges, his word is not trustworthy, for a "father inventor can just as easily invent a child." Adela therefore chides him, "Isn't anything of yours stuck in the here and now? You should ask yourself if *you* exist. Maybe you're only someone's theory?" (p. 141). Recalling the protagonist's ghostly, insubstantial quality which derives from his deracination, this passage also reminds the reader that Andemening is but a character in a novel and his life, in more ways than one, a fiction. In a comparable episode Lars calls attention to the fictive status of other characters. He notes that Heidi is named after a character from a book and the name Adela is taken from the tales of Bruno Schulz. Andemening reflects that there is something inappropriate in dignifying figments of the imagination by calling people after them, and through such remarks the narrative airs the conviction that fiction should remain clearly subordinate to a greater, more compelling reality. All of these developments demonstrate that the text directs effort away from achieving persuasive representations of complex personality and so reinforces attention to lack of authenticity. (Significantly, at the end Adela calls herself "Olga"; her discarding of the earlier name attests to the flimsiness and superficiality of that first persona.)

In parallel to the abstract characterization, Ozick emphasizes another kind of abstraction: she deliberately refrains from a bold engagement with fictional constructs in the reproduction of *The Messiah*; reticent to endorse the legitimacy of that most important fiction within her fiction, Ozick does not create the actual words of a messianic text or unleash her own powers of invention without qualification or disclaimer. Instead, she summarizes and analyzes, providing an abstract of the work in question. The implication is that a messianic text per se is (or should be) beyond the reach of her artistry. In addition, when trying to vivify the Messiah through comparisons, the narrative hastens to qualify its assertions. Ozick notes that the creature/thing resembles an "internal member," but immediately adds,"this is only by way of hint and suggestiveness, not analogy or example" (p. 109). Unwilling to breathe life into the metaphor, Ozick at once produces the trope and repudiates or withdraws it. Similarly, she describes the Messiah as having sails "like the arms of a windmill" (p. 110) and then quickly interjects, "But these numerous 'arms' were, rather, more nearly flippers." The quotation marks around the word *arms* underscore the point made by the

retraction itself: that the verbal description is inadequate to the circumstance. By the same token, the label "cuneiform" for the markings on the flippers is at once ventured and canceled out by the assertion that this script was "unreadable" and indeed not writing at all but pictures. The entire passage, in effect, presents a series of equivocations about the referential power of its own words and the efficacy of metaphor or simile to describe the Messiah. While the opening of the paragraph recalls Schulz's own dependence on metaphor, his comparison of the "holy original Book" to a petal rose, Ozick's ensuing remarks are all set up to undermine the means of such an aesthetic.

In a related move, Ozick reinforces similar points by providing a lengthy description of *The Messiah*'s compositional qualities. Dwelling on a comparison with the ocean, she notes that Lars reads *The Messiah* and thinks of mountain ranges along the bottom of the sea. He imagines a sea

> so platonically dark and deep that even the cuttling blindfish swim away, toward higher water—but within this overturned spittoon of an abyss are crisscrossing rivers, whirlpools twisting their foaming necks, multiple streams braiding upwards, cascades sprouting rivulets like hairs, and a thousand shoots and sprays bombarding the oceanscape's peaks. (p. 106)

Having provided this conceit, Ozick undercuts its worth: "But this understanding applied only to a consciousness of system. The Messiah was a waterless tract." Emphasizing a troubling dissociation of form and content in the manuscript (and so implying that the oceanic capaciousness may be just so much stylistic razzle-dazzle), the author also commits herself to metaphor only in the restricted context of formalistic analysis. In her discussion of substance, as demonstrated above, she is much more hesitant. It should be noted, too, that in the passage just cited the use of metaphor is ambivalent; the trope sabotages itself from within. To liken the manuscript's organization to "a spittoon of an abyss" is to deflate any sense of awesome grandeur, any attribution of magnificence to the text's expansive, oceanic dimensions. Metaphor here seems at once to beckon, to prove duplicitous or unsatisfactory, and to erode its own value.

This kind of ambivalence expressed toward metaphor—as a tool at once effective and ineffective—carries over into many aspects of *The Messiah of Stockholm* as a whole, especially characterization. Given to hyperbole, the

prose of this novel functions both as a reflection of Lars's excessive admiration for Bruno and as a parody of Schulz's own writing. Take, for example, the following scene in which Lars is composing a review:

> He wrote it straight off, a furnace burning fat. It was as if his pen, sputtering along the line of rapid letters it ignited, flung out haloes of hot grease [. . .] He was a dervish, he penetrated everything. When he was within sight of conquest he began to fuzz over with vertigo; he was a little frightened of all he knew. A greased beak tore him off his accustomed ledge and brought him to a high place beyond his control. Something happened in him while he slept. It was not the sleep of refreshment or restoration. He had no dreams. Afterward his lids clicked open like marionette's and he saw: what he saw, before he had formulated even a word of it, was his finished work. He saw it as a kind of vessel, curved, polished, hollowed out. In its cup lay an alabaster egg with a single glittering spot, no, not an egg; a globe, marvelously round. An eye. A human eye, his own; and then not his own. His father's murdered eye. (p. 8)

Lars experiences his hallucination as visionary truth and a sign that he, like Schulz, is a broker of extraordinary insights. The reader must view his illusions in quite another way; the exaggeration with which Ozick describes his intensity suggests that Lars takes himself entirely too seriously. However, while effective in this way, the description also proves problematic. The sheer proliferation of mixed metaphors grates on the ear (Lars is at turns dervish, furnace, conqueror, marionette), and erodes the coherence of the passage as psychological portrait. Since the choice of imagery and the diction here are not clearly ascribed to Lars's own discourse—that is, since it is not necessarily Lars who sees himself here in inflated, contradictory terms—the disjointed incongruities and the excess threaten to function less as an exposé of Lars's shortcomings than as a recreation of those same discordant, overstated qualities in the authorial voice.

A metaphor offered at the end of the novel seems to provide a response to this scene and to indicate some of the generative aesthetic tensions of the narrative. In the final paragraphs of the novel Ozick's protagonist explicitly reveals a propensity for metaphor-making that recalls the author's own extravagant imagery. In this way the novel lays bare and addresses the question of its narrative technique. During the course of events Lars has been haunted by a burning smell; he offers various possible explanations to account for the odor, but is unable to pin down its origins. Perhaps it emanates from his own sweat, perhaps from the factories of Stockholm. The

smell intensifies, and finally the following explanation invites interpretation as metanarrative commentary:

> It was as if Stockholm, burning was slowly turning into Africa: the smell, winter or summer of baking zebra.
>
> He knew this was a hallucination—it was a sort of hallucination—Heidi would have insisted it was a hallucination—it was a fancy. (p. 143)

In other words, the smell, which is something pervasive, deeply resistant to rationalization, leaves Lars with a displaced, unmotivated image that fails in its referential force. His metaphor is finally less enigmatic than simply inappropriate, and the text recognizes it as such. This dynamic suggests a failure of mentation to capture and account for reality and so directs an accusation at the writer or intellectual who assigns too much worth to the imagination or the capacity of words to conjure a novel reality. That the all-pervasive smell of ashes in the air cannot but recall for the reader the chimneys of Hitler's death camps reconfirms this reading (Nazi brutality has been mentioned recurrently throughout the text). In Lars's world, what remains ultimately significant is something more trenchant, more mundane and palpable, than whimsy. The last lines of the novel underscore such a conclusion: Lars grieves as he envisions a man with a metal box, the one in which the Messiah had been stored, "hurrying and hurrying toward the chimneys" (p. 117). The human being falling victim to the Holocaust—this alone is undeniable and not literature, fantasy, or a self-proclaimed heritage of artistic merit.

Ozick's relationship to metaphor in this novel, then, remains uneasy. As it retreats from engagement with mimetic persuasiveness and debunks the making of metaphors, *The Messiah of Stockholm* conveys skepticism about the capacities of fiction. As such it circumvents any possible attack arising out of its author's own misgivings about the confusing of art and life. At the same time the novel runs the risk of enacting a self-fulfilling prophecy. At once giving rein to whimsical metaphor and announcing the dangers of just such a move, the text constructs itself out of cross-purposes and at times divests itself of referential force. To be sure, these matters represent aesthetic questions and so, arguably, a brand of criticism not suitably applied to a book that insists on the insubstantial significance and worth of aestheticism. Moreover, as a fiction that decries amoral literature, the text opens the pos-

sibility of asserting its own worth as fiction with a moral.[9] Yet there remains a nagging contradiction as the novel flirts with self-subversion: this is a novel which undercuts the value of imaginative writing as a way to recover the past or define oneself, even as the text grapples in its own right as a piece of fiction with questions of self-definition. Ozick therefore poses a dilemma: by which criteria, aesthetic or moral, should this narrative be judged?

"See Under: Love"

David Grossman has created a fiction about Bruno Schulz which, like *The Messiah of Stockholm,* is centrally concerned with narratives and the telling of stories as a way characters define their lives and negotiate personal interactions. Grossman, though, has written a text in many ways opposed to Ozick's. Creating multiple plots that revolve overtly about art, the imagination, and their power or powerlessness against horror, his story entails a struggle with mimetic limitations and the inadequacies of language. Finally, however, he endorses fiction as a genuine expression of the self and a way to come to terms with the Shoah. By contrast with *The Messiah of Stockholm,* Grossman's work engages less in parody than in reverent imitation of Schulz and so reveals, on the part of its author, a very different relationship to the literary predecessor along with a different perspective on love, writing, and the role of the artist.

These issues work themselves out in "Bruno," the second chapter of *See Under: Love.* This text can be read effectively as a self-contained narrative, but depends in part for its intelligibility on its relation to chapter 1. The first section of the novel presents an account of a child growing up in Israel who is the son of Holocaust survivors. Preoccupied from a young age with his parents' traumatic past, he dreams of one day becoming a writer. The remaining three segments of the novel, which grapple in diverse ways with attempts to approach the Holocaust in art, can be understood as an outgrowth of the protagonist's early experience and as an example of his forays into writing.

9. In a paper presented at the 1987 MLA Convention in San Francisco ("Bruno Schulz and Cynthia Ozick's *The Messiah of Stockholm*"), Sarah Blacher Cohen dealt with the novel as fiction protesting the amorality of fiction. However, she saw Lars's relation to Schulz less as an evasion of the Holocaust than as an attempt to claim a pedigree of suffering.

From the start of chapter 2 Grossman's approach diverges from that of Ozick. While *The Messiah of Stockholm* opens by focusing on the ghost of Bruno Schulz (the writer's influence on a ghostly second generation and a search for a phantom father), Grossman begins by introducing Schulz directly into his story as an active agent of the plot. "Bruno" takes as its point of departure the Polish writer himself taking his own departure from the world of the everyday. Pursued by the SS, this character dives from the end of a pier into the ocean near Danzig. Schulz claims he is fleeing not primarily from fear of the Nazis but from disillusionment with a life of conformity and anonymity. Brutality is but one more aspect of this depersonalized world he shuns, which the pen, his own writing, cannot redeem. Reflecting on the manuscript he has abandoned, Bruno realizes belatedly that "the Messiah will not come in writing [. . .] in the letters of this language stricken by elephantiasis" (p. 79). Consequently he searches out "a new alphabet" in a realm of perception never before experienced. Even as Grossman takes the plunge into fictional imagination and a reinvention of Schulz's life, his character plunges into the sea, and gradually becomes a fish. For Ozick the ocean serves in the capacity of an "as if," a half-heartedly endorsed metaphor for the abundance, depth, complexities, and fluidity of Schulzian writing. Grossman actualizes the metaphor as he actualizes Bruno Schulz, turning him into a dramatic character. The dissociation from experience, the cerebral quality manifest in *The Messiah of Stockholm,* here accedes to a wealth of visual imagery and dramatic actions which constitute an overt attempt to capture with immediacy the extraordinary richness of an imagined reality. While Ozick looks askance at "fishy" stories (p. 58), Grossman revels in portraying fishly existence.

For Bruno, being a fish is like being born again. The sea offers vast new panoramas and is teeming with novel possibilities of sensation.

> יש ריח למים אתה חש זאת פתאום ואין זה הריח שיחוש בו האיש העומד על החוף או על גדת הנהר יש ריח למים וריח אחר הוא מכל הריחות כשם שקולות הים אחרים בתוכו כשם שצבעיו כשם שמחשבות בתוכו אחרות נגנבות בידי הרוכלים הזריזים עבדים של הים רצרצי הגלים וחחרות כמין הד מתנחשל מתעגל בשאון המקציף התוסס של השוק המימי כיריד המוני ריחני כי יש ריח למים . . . (p. 111)

> there's a smell to the water suddenly you sense it not the smell you get standing on the bank or the shore there's a smell to the water distinct from all others like the sounds of the sea different inside it like colors like thoughts which are different inside it stolen by peddlers agile slaves of the sea those murmuring

> waves and they come back as an echo tempestuous billowing to break on the foaming roar of the tide bubbling in the watery markets like a fair fragrant crowds there's a smell to the water. . .

Here, as in Ozick's Stockholm, smell is part of those dimensions of life which defy verbal description. However, while her novel indicated referential inadequacies of language by proffering disjoint, unmotivated metaphor, this text attempts to stretch the mimetic capacities of narrative convention. Developing lengthy, unpunctuated, rhythmically repetitive sentences, Grossman engages in formal experiment to convey the fluidity, monotony, rich dreaminess, and generally unbroken peace of oceanic life. In short, he creates a stream of consciousness designed to represent Bruno's consciousness in the stream.

To be sure, this is a realm of being which defies ordinary expression. Bruno in fact meditates openly on a fundamental premise of the entire episode: that language is an impoverished medium not commensurate with the world of experience he lives.[10]

> ריבונו־של־עולם, אמר ברונו (שמעולם לא היה דתי), לשם מה אתה מעביר את מיליוני הסלמונים האלה סביב העולם כולו במעגלים אינסופיים? מדוע לא יכולת להסתפק בסלמון אחד? בזוג סלמונים? הנה, אפילו בני־האדם, האכזריים שבבעלי־החיים, למדו את חוכמת השימוש בסמלים: אנחנו אומרים „אלוהים," „אדם," „ייסורים," „אהבה," „חיים," ודוחסים כך לתיבה קטנה את כל ההוויה. מדוע אנחנו מסוגלים לכך ואתה לא? מדוע אינך יכול למנוע את הדברים מלהיברא עד תומם משהם אך חולפים במוחך השופע? מדוע כל סמליך מפורטים ובזבזניים ומכאיבים כל־כך? האם זה משום שאנחנו כבר מוכשרים ממך לנחש את הסבל והכאב המקופלים בכל תיבה כזו, ומעדיפים להשאיר אותה חתומה? (p. 120)

> Lord, said Bruno (who was never religious) why do you send all these millions of salmon around the world in endless circles? Couldn't you suffice with a single fish? a pair of salmon? Why, even people, the cruelest of animals, have learned the wisdom of using symbols: we say "God," "man," "sorrows," "love," "life," and so put the whole experience in a little compartment. How is it we are able to do this and not you? Why can't you prevent things from being created fullblown, from the moment they pass through your teeming thoughts? Why are your symbols so detailed, why such profligate, painful

10. Grossman pursues similar themes—the distance between words and actions; the search for a secret, highly personal and intimate language; and the difficulties of narrating one's life—also in his earlier novel, *Hiyukh ha-gedi* [The smile of the lamb] (Tel Aviv, 1983).

> abundance? Is it because we are more capable than you of guessing at the suffering and pain contained in that little box, and so prefer to leave it sealed?

At work here, then, are both a bold engagement with fictional constructs and a simultaneous retreat back to consider the limitations of art and language. Later this ambivalence intensifies in a number of ways. First the text introduces another protagonist—Shlomo, the child of Part I now grown up and become a young writer. He discusses with his wife the difficulties he has had in writing about Bruno. By naturalizing the Schulz section as a product of Shlomo's imagination, *'Ayen 'erekh* deliberately undermines the suspension of disbelief called for by the episode portraying Bruno in the sea. Subsequently, complicating the picture further and disallowing any simple legitimation of Shlomo's context as the determinative one, the narrative also presents the young man in extended conversation with the sea. More than simply an imaginative space for plot development or an arena for Bruno's reflections on language, the ocean is personified as a woman at turns coy, coquettish, capricious, passionate, domineering, beautiful, and powerful. She has fallen in love with Schulz and takes Shlomo as a confidant because he, too, is profoundly drawn to Bruno. (Having read everything that author wrote and having copied long passages word for word, Shlomo has sought to confuse his identity with Schulz's no less than does Lars Andemening.) This man later reciprocates the ocean's confidences by sharing with her accounts of his domestic troubles: his alienation from his wife and from the lover he passionately desires who has left him. As an active partner in dialogue, the ocean creates a narrative frame that incorporates, absorbs, or swallows the writer and so functions as an in-between reality, mediating between Bruno's plot and the plot of Shlomo's life.

By providing the sea with a voice of her own, both in her talks with Shlomo and in extended monologues addressed to Bruno, Grossman once again makes a demonstratively fictional move that imbues the imaginary realm with verbal immediacy. Here, for example, is the ocean speaking to Bruno:

> אני לא שוכחת, ברונו, ואני אף פעם לא אשכח את דרגע שבאת לתוכי, את העריבה שאני הרגשתי ברגע שזינקת מהמזח, ומהגוף שלך יצא אז המון חוב, והיה שם גם עוד משהו שאז לא ידעתי מה, ובהתחלה חשבתי שזה הריח של הייחום שלך ושל יצוריקים, כמוך, ורק אחר כך התברר לי שזה פשוט ריח של ייאוש (p. 102)

> I haven't forgotten, Bruno, I'll never forget the moment you entered me, the tremor I felt the moment you dove from the wharf, and your body exuded that

> warmth and there was also something else that I didn't know then, at first I thought it was the smell of little creatures like you in heat, and only after that I found it was simply the smell of despair . . .

The attitude reflected by this approach is quite different from that of Ozick's narrative; while her text undermines or devalues the powers of the imagination, Grossman grants the realm of the fictive striking vitality and body—most keenly and literally by means of personification. This move is one that claims for fictive creations a legitimacy and integrity of their own. Consequently, while *See Under: Love* self-consciously plays on the issue of artistic convention, it never invokes a distrust of fiction comparable to that demonstrated in *The Messiah of Stockholm*.

The dialogic exchanges Grossman devises (Shlomo-sea, Shlomo-wife, sea-Bruno) indicate the most salient differences between the two novels, as they define for the entire "Bruno" segment the properties, purposes, and values of narration. For Ozick's characters writing is something done to acquire status. It is a transaction, at best a transmission assuring continuity between generations, but more often a hypocritical posturing for the sake of garnering power and celebrity. In Grossman there prevails a confessional mode: writing and telling are avenues to intimacy and self-expression. This distinction informs the formal structure of each work. *The Messiah of Stockholm* depends on varieties of plot, layers of narrative lines, and fiction that bring to the fore increasing exposés of inauthenticity; *See Under: Love,* by contrast, features interrupted plots which accentuate ever-renewed, sometimes anguished attempts to delve deeper into the self and the emotions. The text offers shifting narration that starts and stops as it introduces varying speech situations and speakers who endeavor to arrive at insight via introspection and highly charged exchanges of views.

Significantly, one account does not discount any other. Switches from obtrusively fictional portions of the text to sober memoirs and authorial self-awareness alternate with the intermediary zone of the oceanic conversations. The latter feature plausible meditations (entertained by the main character) and also entirely implausible responses (from beyond the world of familiar possibility, i.e., from the sea). There is no ending to this process, no moment of closure from which one can place a framework around any other passage and so determine what is more real or meaningful, what is less. The final paragraphs find Shlomo refusing to tell the sea any more tales about Bruno, while she successfully cajoles him, against his will, to enter

once again into the cycle of narrating. Not without self-conscious cuteness Shlomo remarks at one point that the story of encounter between him and the sea is one of *hatḥala, 'emza ve-ḥof* (p. 88), "beginning, middle, and shore." A pun on the Hebrew word for "end," this formulation suggests that there is no definitive version of plot in this narrative, but rather ongoing interaction; a space of interminable ebb and flow, approach and retreat, rather than decisive start and finish. What matters is personal truths, not verification, sincerity and not authoritative stances.

Altogether, while both texts are obsessed with the telling of tales, one is concerned with public discourse and the other with private, one with deception and the other with pursuit of candor. The separate emphases of the novels develop importantly in the treatment of the erotic. In Ozick's novel Lars, Heidi, and Adela research Bruno's liaisons with women in the hope of establishing the legitimacy of his (albeit illegitimate) offspring. Who is the usurper and who entitled to claim Schulz as a father?—these are the urgent questions. The characters of *See Under: Love,* though, trade accounts of their inner lives as a way of reassessing their past, bringing to expression the inmost recesses of their being, and seeking mutual understanding. The quest for intimacy becomes so central to this novel because it is part of an overall celebration of the irreducible value of each unique human being. The desire to know someone else, the search for understanding, is presented as a response to the Shoah, which was terrible above all, in Shlomo's estimation, for its flagrant disregard of individual human lives. Whereas in Ozick's world story usually means evasion, retreat, or denial of painful truths about the Holocaust, here art, telling, and loving are all aspects of a single, more constructive preoccupation: a need to appreciate one's self and others in all their particularity, as a way of reckoning with the indiscriminate, mass destruction the Holocaust wrought on incomprehensibly large numbers of people.

It is for this reason that Shlomo, for example, pursues his career as a writer. For him, to experience the vividness of the imagination is to counteract the forces of annihilation by reclaiming the power of personal thought. In addition, writing provides him a kind of therapy as it allows him to think through problems of deindividualization. Joining Bruno up with a school of salmon, the writer can ruminate on relations between the weak and the strong, the loner and the crowd, the value of remaining true to oneself (pp. 129–135, for example). In his daily life Shlomo is less successful at dealing with these same issues. As the son of survivors, keenly aware of his own heri-

tage of persecution, he constantly questions how it is possible to go on living after the terrible knowledge of what happened to the Jews in Europe, how it is possible to have faith in human life and not to be paralyzed by fear or hatred. The intensity of art offers him some relief, but is only a partial solution to his quandaries. While it beckons him, he also retreats from it, for he fears his own vulnerability and sensitivity. Bracing himself for the next catastrophe, he steels himself not to love too much, not to feel so much, and so not have so much to lose (p. 95). This is why he declares he must fight against Bruno's influence and turn away from the world of imagination. Explaining this outlook in some detail, he confesses to his wife that at times his awareness of life's intensity overwhelms him, especially when he is caught in a crowd.

> אני הולך ברחוב ומרגיש שהזרם העצום של החיים של כולם מטביע אותי. הדמעות, למשל. „סליחה?" אני מביט בפרצופים, ויודע שמאחורי עשירית המילימטר של עור אנושי דק נמצאות הדמעות בתוך שק הדמעות. „אנשים לא בוכים כל־כך מהר." אבל הדמעות נמצאות שם. לפעמים, כשאוטובוס נעצר פתאום ברחוב, אני מדמיין לעצמי את שקשוק הדמעות. כל הבכי שנשאר בפנים. ולא רק הדמעות. גם הכאב. והשבירות המפחידה של כל איבר בגוף. וגם ההענוג, בהחלט. התענוגות שמבקשים להתממש. כל־כך הרבה מטענים מסוכנים בגוף קטן שכזה (p. 143)

> I walk in the street and feel that the enormous stream of life is drowning me. The tears, for example. "Excuse me?" I look at the faces, and know that behind that tenth of a millimeter of thin human skin are the tears, in the ducts. "People don't cry so easily." But the tears are there. Sometimes, when the bus stops suddenly in the street, I imagine the sound of those tears, all the weeping that stays inside. Not just the tears. Also the pain. And the terrible fragility of every limb of the body. Also the pleasure, of course. The pleasures that want to be realized. So much dangerous cargo loaded in one small body.

The relation of potential to actuality here parallels the problem of mimesis and artistic realization. Shlomo welcomes but also fears all the hidden richness, the wealth of experience and perceptions inside people that are most often trammeled by conventional behavior as by ordinary language and narrative convention.

Part of the reason for Shlomo's retreat from sensitivity is the broken love affair with Ayala. He is still smarting from her rejection, for she made him feel alive, filled with the energy of that other dimension of living which Bruno represents, and she brought him the mixture of mystery, intimacy, and creativity he so desired. Ayala understood his obsession with the Holo-

caust better than anyone else and, in addition, the erotic attraction she held for him brought out in Shlomo a kind of creative power; his love, like his writing, allowed him to conjure things into being, materialize ideas with a touch. "Despite my many shortcomings," he remarks, "I was gifted with the surprising talent of being able to turn Ayala into a vase" (p. 113). In his hands she sprouts handles and her lips become oval, the mouth of a jug saying "drink me, drink me" like Alice's magic bottle in Wonderland. As her lover he can work marvelous transfigurations, converting her at turns into a strawberry or cotton candy. In effect, with her he produces sweetness, a fluidity of interaction, and metamorphoses akin in their vitality to Schulz's transformative inventions.

Shlomo's wife in less tempestuous ways also tries to infuse her life with creativity and intimacy. She, too, demonstrates that inventiveness and imagination are invoked in this novel less as ruse or evasion than as commitment to actuality. Ruth explains to Shlomo, for example, that the same forces which impel him to art impel her to preserve her marriage despite her husband's infidelity. At stake is not living for art, but the art of living, of leading one's life as a creative and sensitive engagement with the individuals whose lives she touches. While Shlomo immerses Bruno in the ocean, seeking for both of them a new kind of fulfillment and rebirth in the imagination, Ruth talks about the stream of life and attempts to integrate beauty into her daily routine. Further drawing a parallel between fiction and life, she compares her marriage to a novel; playing on the notion of *roman* in Hebrew as both romantic love and textual object, she notes that matrimony differs from a *sippur*—a love story or affair. Like a novel, marriage stays with the characters for a long time after the initial rush of feeling is over. It is this kind of compromise, this coming to terms with more modest possibilities, that ultimately constitutes a precarious resolution to the narrative. Ayala disappears while the wife provides more solid, permanent support for Shlomo, and he in turn must learn to make his peace with this situation. In art too he must resign himself to compromises, and this issue comes to a head in the presentation of the "Messiah."

Building toward a climactic moment of confrontation with the sea and with Bruno, Shlomo presses the ocean to produce the text which he feels must be hidden in her depths. Just as Schulz thematized the pursuit of a "holy original Book," the one text which might be entirely his own, so Shlomo searches for the one wholly original sentence that encapsulates the essence of Bruno's art. As Shlomo pushes very hard to achieve a revelation

via art, Grossman's prose most exhibits a Schulzian quality thanks to hyperbolic description, the hallucinatory intensity which animates the inanimate realm, and thematic emphasis on phantasmagorical journeying to a realm of imagination which finally discloses a book.

והיא נואקת ויורקת, ומעמידה פנים כאילו היא משליכה אותי מתוכה, ומנסה להטיל עלי פחד בצלליות של עדרי כרישים שהיא יוצרת סביבי בקמטי עורה, או ברעמים מחרידים שהיא מפיקה על ידי נפיחה גסה לכל אורך מיצר גיברלטאר, אבל לי כבר אין מה להפסיד, ואני מכה בה בידי וברגלי, „את הספר," אני צועק אליה מבעד למשברים הנוהמים, „את המסקנה האחרונה, את תמצית מה הקיום שלנו!" והיא מייבבת, ומכה ראשה בסלעים ומפצחית אותם כקליפות ביצים, וסורקת את גופה עד כאב בצלעות שלדיות של אוניות טרופות, ותוחבת אצבע מימית ארוכה לתוך גרונה ומקיאה עלי נחשולי דגים מחים ושברי ספינות מעוכלות למחצה, ואחר־כך היא נאספה לתוך עצמה, ובבת אחת מושכת אל גופה את כל שמלות המים ואת אלף תחתוניותיה. וחושפת לעין השמש הנדהמת את ערוות היבשות הטבועות תחתיה, את הערבות הצחיחות של הטין המאובן, ולרגע אנחנו מרחפים כולנו באוויר היבש—דגים, סרטנים, רשתות, אוניות מפרש, עוללות טבועים, קונכיות, חרבות עתיקות של שודדי־ים ובקבוקים צופני מכתבים שנשלחו בידי ניצולים שכבר מתו מזמן על אייהם הבודדים, וכעבור רגע מחפרצים המים לשוב בנהמה אדירה, מכסים על היבשות הטבועות, מערבלים לבוץ את אבק הזיכרונות הקדומים ביותר, ומעלים למולי באיטיות גיליון ירוק, עצום ממדים, המרחף עירירי בשכבות העמוקות שמתחת לי, מואר בקרני אור בודדות, שנוגהות כאילו מתחתיו, זוהר באלפי בועיות אוויר קטנות שנתהוו בשוליו, גיליון מהורהר, נזירי, מטיל דכדוך סתום בלב להקות דגים הנר־תעות מעליו, ואני איני יודע את נפשי, מרחף מעליו, צוחק ובוכה, וקורא במאמץ את אותיות הכותרות העשויות ממארג צפוף של אצות ירוקות „המשיח." (p. 156)

She groans and spits, making a face as if to cast me out and plants fear in me with the silhouettes of sharks she has spring up around me in the wrinkles of her skin, or with the frightful noises she makes by swelling up rudely all along the Strait of Gibraltar, but I no longer have anything else to lose, and I hit her with my hands and legs, "The book!" I shout at her over the pounding surf, "the final conclusion, the very essence of our being," and she howls and hits her head on the rocks and cracks them open like egg shells, scraping her body painfully on the skeletal ribs of wrecked ships, sticking a long watery finger in her throat and vomiting on me waves of dead fish and the wreckage of boats half rusted out, and afterward she gathers herself in and all at once pulls up her watery skirts and all their thousand undergarments, exposing to the astonished sun the nakedness of sunken continents beneath her, the barren plains of petrified silt, and for a moment we all hover in the dry air—fish, crabs, nets, sailboats, submarines, shells, ancient ruins, pirates, coded letters sent in bottles by shipwrecked sailors who died long ago on desert islands, and after a moment the water bursts forth coming back in a mighty roar, covering the sunken continents mixing ancient memories into the dust and raising before me slowly a green page of tremendous proportions which hovers forsaken,

> lonely, barren in deep layers beneath me, is lit by isolated rays of light that shine as if from under it, splendor flashes, reflected in the thousands of small air bubbles gathering on the margins of a meditative, monastic text, casting a vague depression in the heart of schools of fish who scurry from it, and I am beside myself, floating about it, laughing and crying, reading with effort the letters of the title made from an intricate web of green algae—"The Messiah."

The stylistic pyrotechnics prepare the way for presentation of the messianic text; in contradistinction to Ozick's novel, water here is not a metaphor for system, but, rather, vividly presented as the genuine article, the very realization of the "Messiah" itself. Subsequently, again at odds with Ozick, Grossman quotes the actual discourse of the imagined text. (See Appendix B.) Playfully extending the notion of approaching Schulz on his own terms—here not just stylistically, but dramatically—Grossman brings his character face to face with Bruno. It happens this way: in the "Messiah," that is, within the embedded narrative itself, Shlomo notes that Bruno's books "speak" to him like no others ever have before (p. 157); then, reading a passage from *Sanatorium,* feeling himself immersed in Schulz's reality, Shlomo suddenly realizes that Bruno in person has appeared before him, and the two enter into a conversation. The outcome of this story within a story is that Shlomo, finding himself inside the text of *The Messiah,* finally finds himself and, like Grossman, the author, eventually eschews simple imitation of the precursor he once sought out.

This process of discovery unfolds in the Drohobycz square at Passover-time, as Shlomo talks with a Bruno Schulz who moves backward and forward in time. Appearing alternately as a grown-up and a child, this Schulz resembles Shlomo: earlier on the young man, too, had been singled out as a creature part-child and part-adult. Too wise for his years as a youngster, he grew into adulthood not entirely consonant with maturity. This is a state of being which Grossman presents as typifying the artistic personality; though it represents a social maladjustment or difficulty, it is also characterized by a highly esteemed creativity. Unlike Ozick, who creates a peculiar child/man determined to outgrow incongruous youthfulness, Grossman reveals a continued devotion to childhood as a symbol of wonder and maintains faith in the possibility of art and the imagination.[11] Accordingly, the underwater

11. The association of the child with the artist is one well entrenched in Western tradition. George Boas presents a history of this concept in *The Cult of Childhood* (London, 1966).

Bruno who oscillates back and forth from one age to another serves as a genuinely redemptive figure. The introductory moment when Shlomo joins him in the text ushers in the arrival of the Messiah. Minimally described as riding on a donkey, the Messiah quickly disappears, but his impact is clearly felt. The donkey remains and, working spiritual upheavals with a whisk of its tail, makes those present in the square forget everything they have previously known. Experiencing the world anew in a perpetual present governed solely by the value of creation itself, they continually construct their languages, their loves, even the coming moment. In short, they have become "artists of life," making the musicians, painters, and writers of the past look like poor imitations, and the art works of the past—a miserable plagiarism.

This scene of life as artistic creativity is cast as a genuine ideal and a vision of true originality. All the people are happier than before. They enjoy heightened consciousness of their own vitality, the immediacy of existence, and the miracle of creation. Furthermore, no violence or brutality can exist here, being contrary to the entire spirit of the place. And yet, the outcome of this episode is that Shlomo finally cannot accept such a paradise for himself. The writer decides he must fall back on the world of conventions and consensus. It is not, as was the case in Ozick's novel, that art is false, but that the character cannot tolerate the intensity of pure art. The very particularity and abundance he has yearned for too closely approximate psychosis.

The lesson Shlomo has learned—to opt for compromise in art—applies most importantly with regard to the Shoah. At the heart of the Schulzian paradise, this character gets to the heart of all his concerns by asking about Anshel Wasserman. An elderly survivor disabled by his suffering, and the catalyst for Shlomo's early childhood curiosity about the Holocaust, Anshel always mumbled to himself as if telling a story.[12] The adult Shlomo wishes

Ozick's other works do not always proffer the same stance on the child as artist. In *The Cannibal Galaxy*, for instance, a young girl served as a triumphant if somewhat ambivalent symbol of artistic expression, nonconformity, and undefined potential. For discussion of that character and two different views of her function in the novel, see my essay "Interpretation: Cynthia Ozick's *Cannibal Galaxy*," in *Prooftexts* 6 (January 1986): 239–257, and Janet Handler Burstein's article "Cynthia Ozick and the Transgressions of Art," in *American Literature* 59, no. 1 (March 1987): 85–101.

12. Wasserman's name indicates that he, too, is a man of the water and the depths. Early in chapter 1, perhaps foreshadowing Shlomo's sense of identification with both Anshel and Bruno in the sea, Wasserman is described as gesticulating his arms wildly, swimming like a fish in the air (p. 9).

to write Anshel's story, and so, as it were, restore his life. Penetrating into the ceaseless, hallucinogenic doings and undoings of the messianic realm, the young writer gains a clue about how to tackle such a difficult task. Bruno tells him that Anshel's is a story everyone repeatedly learns and forgets. It is the most intimate, elusive of tales, recalcitrant to narrative formulation because it unravels itself as quickly as it can be intuited. Approaching the writing of this tale is where madness begins. In other words, to confront the Holocaust through art, to imagine the unimaginable, is impossible. Nevertheless, finding a way both to grasp and to cope with the horror is something each individual must discover for himself. Consequently, no longer attempting to copy Bruno Schulz, Shlomo decides he must return to his own depth and struggle in his own art—both within and against the narrative conventions available to him—in order to begin understanding and telling the story his own way. The result, presented in Part III, offers drastic differences both stylistically and conceptually from the text of Part II. In this manner not only the character but the novel as a whole moves beyond the search for a precursor.[13]

Schulz therefore fulfills a different function and has been reinvented in a very different way in this novel than in *The Messiah of Stockholm*. Ozick draws on both his phantasmagoria and his inclination to deflate illusions, but she mainly pursues imitation of Schulz to produce parody and to foreground her theme of plagiarism. Perceiving the status of the intertext as something both troubling and potentially dishonest, her novel presents the impetus to seek out predecessors as willed inauthenticity—both artistic and personal. Grossman, on the other hand, esteems Schulz's imaginings and incorporates his predecessor's aesthetic of fantasy into his own creative domain, making it a point of departure for himself even as it provides a kind of apprenticeship for his main character.

Notably absent from the entire pursuit of Schulz in Grossman's "Bruno" is any direct consideration of Jewishness. In Ozick's novel the lack of Jewish context corresponded to a concern over absence of cultural authenticity in a second generation to the Holocaust divorced from its own tradition. Here, instead, the question is how a Jew, after the massive catastrophe, can go on being a human being, accepting ordinary human con-

13. In a review of *'Ayen 'erekh: 'ahavah* after the novel first appeared, Gershon Shaked succinctly analyzed the relationship of each narrative segment with the central thematic tensions between imagination, innocence, and horror. *Yedi'ot 'ahronot*, July 3, 1986.

straints, vicissitudes, and creative impulses. The deemphasis on Jewishness and the attention to generalities about reclaiming a measure of humanity in an inhuman world do not suggest a naive or indiscriminate universalism on Grossman's part. Rather, the author is free to pursue the question of art in chapter 2 of his novel because the question of identity has already been dealt with extensively in chapter 1. There the portrait of Shlomo's childhood was centrally concerned with milieu and the particulars of the character's background.[14] Through his gradual discovery of his parents' past the boy confronted head-on, within the limits of his own childish perspective, the question, "who is a Jew?" Knowing that his parents were persecuted for being Jews, and realizing that their lives deviate sharply from the conception of the strong, fearless sabra touted by his own Israeli culture, he sets out to methodically gather information on the Shoah, to decode the mystery of his mother's and father's identity, and so to figure out what his own heritage entails. (The boy addresses the question of Jewish identity pointedly and concretely; he keeps a notebook with the data he has researched "so he'll remember what a Jew looks like, how a Jew looks at soldiers, how a Jew fears, how a Jew digs a grave"; p. 62). By the time Shlomo gets to chapter 2 he has already struggled with his sense of self, situated as he is between diaspora experience and Israeli expectations. The adult Shlomo therefore can turn to philosophical discussion and generalities about art without feeling that such concerns are a duplicitous camouflage obscuring his true identity.

This freedom to engage in meditations on art and artistic experiment accounts not just for differences of thematic emphasis between *See Under: Love* and *The Messiah of Stockholm,* but also for the pleasure of invention that marks Grossman's novel. Though there emerge many moments of reservation, a frequent undercutting of fictional illusion, Grossman like Schulz takes joy in producing gargantuan dimensions of spectacular inverisimilitude. To be sure, the Schulzian wildness appropriated into his own narrative has led, as with Ozick, to complications in the critical reception of the novel. "Bruno," among all the parts of *'Ayen 'erekh 'ahavah,* has been perceived most by its public as rough going. (More than one reviewer admitted publicly to not finishing this portion of the novel.) The idiosyncratically dense descriptions, the intricacies of at first seemingly disparate threads of

14. For a discussion of chapter 1, "Momik," see my essay "The Holocaust and the Discourse of Childhood: David Grossman's *See Under: Love.*" *Hebrew Annual Review,* in press.

plot, the long-winded speeches of the sea are all techniques that rely on excess. This is a text about private imagination which relies on innovative, fanciful, highly personal artifice. (Perhaps it is for this reason that the author has singled this section out as a personal favorite of his own.) It is a narrative, however, that finally yields a satisfying coherence and which maintains a lively exuberance and thematic richness. And, while it attempts a very ambitious task of infusing fantasia with substance, of creating a realm of imagination more vibrant than everyday life, it also soberly recognizes and warns the reader that art, of necessity, accomplishes only more modest goals than salvation.

The Messiah of Stockholm and "Bruno," then, are finally two texts divided by common themes. Reflecting divergent degrees of faith in the imagination and different estimations of Bruno Schulz, both novels attempt to move beyond commonplace formulation of the relationship between art and the Holocaust—that inexpressible horror defies expression. Both Ozick and Grossman consider how a second generation after the Holocaust can view the expressive potential of art to help them deal with the grisly past which constitutes their inheritance. Ozick, though, does so disillusioned, bringing recriminations against her craft; Grossman's burden of doubt is mitigated by hope and affirmation of his role as an artist.

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Appendix A

The idols believed that Moses the Righteous One's hay was somehow stuffed into the inmost composition of the Messiah, like a scarecrow. This was false. More than anything else, the Messiah (Lars noted) resembled a book—The Book, in fact, that in one of the tales in *Sanitorium pod Klepsydra* had been likened to *a huge cabbage rose; the petals, one by one, eyelid under eyelid, all blind, velvety, and dreamy.* This book had also been set forth as *a postulate*; and again as *the authentic Book, the holy original, however degraded and humiliated at present.* In appearance it seemed to be fabricated of various commonplace inanimate materials, none of them costly or in any way precious—cotton, cardboard, glue, thread, and not a whisp of hay any-

where. Its locomotion was dimly frightening, but also somewhat hobbled and limited: it had several hundred winglike sails that tossed themselves either clockwise or counterclockwise, like the arms of a windmill. But these numerous "arms" were, rather, more nearly flippers—altogether flat, freckled all over with inky markings, and reminiscent, surely, of turning pages. The flippers did indeed have the moist texture of petals, however, and their peculiar tattoos certainly put one in mind of some postulate recorded in an archaic signification—a type of cuneiform, perhaps, though it was impossible to say what this unreadable text might be proposing as thesis or axiom. When examined with extreme attention—better yet, when scrutinized through a magnifying glass (the author's assertion; there were no human eyes on the scene to do this)—the inky markings showed themselves to be infinitely tiny and brilliantly worked drawings of these same idols that had taken hold of the town of Drohobycz. It was now clear that Drohobycz had been invaded by the characters of an unknown alphabet.

Appendix B

לרגע אחד השתחררתי מן הכלא. ועמדתי „רחוץ ונקי וריחני על סף כיכר השילוש הקדוש של דרוהוביץ', בודד לחלוטין על שפת הקונכייה הגדולה, הריקה, של הכיכר, שבה קלחה תכלת השמים הנטולה אור שמש. הכיכר הגדולה, הנקייה הזאת, נחה בשעת אחר הצהריים כמו מכל זכוכית, כמו שנה חדשה שעוד לא התחילו אותה. ניצבתי על שפתה אפור וכבוי לחלוטין , ולא העזתי לנפץ על ידי החלטה כלשהי את הכדור המושלם הזה של יום, שעדיין לא עשו בו שימוש."

יורם ברונובסקי תירגם זאת לעברית.

מאחד החלונות הבחנתי בילד קטן, צנום, בעל גולגולת משולשת מעט: מצח רחב וגבוה, וסנטר חד. ובתחילה היה נדמה לי שאני הוא המשתקף אלי מאחת הזגוגיות, אבל אז הכרתי את ברונו, את הנער הקטנטן, המופלא, הלוהט תמיד ברעיונות שאינם לפי גילו.

הוא קרא אלי ואמר: „אנו לבדנו עכשיו בכיכר כולה, אני ואתה." וחייך חיוך עגום והוסיף ואמר: „כמה ריק הוא העולם. יכולים היינו לחלקו, ומחדש לכנותו בשם . . . בוא, עלה לרגע, ואראה לך את הציורים שלי. אין איש בבית, מומיקו!" (pp. 157–158)

For a moment I felt liberated from the prison [of routine] and I stood, "clean, freshly washed and fragrant at the edge of Holy Trinity Square in Drohowicz, alone entirely by the empty seashell of a square in which there flowed the blue of a sunless sky. The square, big, clean, rested in the afternoon hours like a glass vessel, like a new year not yet begun. I stopped, gray

and extinguished, and I didn't dare to shatter through any decision of my own the perfect sphere of a day, not yet used."

Yoram Brunowski translated this into Hebrew.

From one of the windows I sighted a small boy, thin and slender with a slightly triangular head, a high wide forehead and sharp chin. At first it seemed to me that I was he, reflected back to myself in the glass panes, but then I recognized Bruno, that marvelous young lad always afire with ideas beyond his years.

He called me and said, "We're alone now in the square, you and I." And he smiled a melancholy smile, saying, "How empty the world is. We could divide it up, and name everything anew. Come up for a moment, I'll show you my drawings. No one's at home, Mumik."