“When I write, I am free. I am as a writer whatever I wish to become. I can think myself into a male or a female, or a stone or a raindrop or a bloc of wood, or a Tibetan, or a spine of a cactus. In life, I am not free. In life, female or male, no one is free. . . . My freedom is contingent on need. I am in short, claimed” (“Literature and the Politics of Dissent,” 285).

This statement represents Cynthia Ozick’s artistic credo, her declaration of independence as an asexual, secular writer. Throughout her career she has vehemently resisted the label “woman writer” as too restrictive, since she believes that a woman’s body does not generate its own exclusive culture, its own set of unique values, its own special style and point of view. She also resents being considered a second-class literary citizen, consigned to the inferior women’s section in the stadium of Literary Giants.

Thus in Trust, her first novel, Ozick tried to avoid writing a “woman’s novel,” which no one would take seriously. The first-person narrator Ozick thought she had created was a “bloodless device, fulcrum or pivot, a recording voice, a language-machine [which existed] for efficiency only, for flexibility, for craftiness, for subtlety, but never, never as a ‘woman’” (“We Are the Crazy Lady and Other Feisty Feminist Fables,” 289). Therefore, she attempted to neuter her narrator, to drain her of “emotive value of any kind,” to strip her “of everything, even a name” (289).
But if we trust the tale and not the teller of the tale, the narrator we encounter in *Trust* reflects Ozick’s conflicted authorial intentions. The figure she creates is not merely a well-wrought, fine-tuned thinking machine, but a very-much-alive human being, radiating sensitivity and intelligence. Adept at weaving together “metaphor and irony,” which, Ozick believes, “are nearly art’s everything” (Rainwater and Scheick, 263), her narrator is an astute registrar of impressions and assessor of facts. Fashioned in the Jamesian mold, she is that singular young woman upon whom nothing is lost.

In *Trust*, Ozick also tried to avoid the literary territory allotted to female authors: the circumscribed domestic sphere, with its protean intrigues of courtship and the labyrinthine entrapments of marriage. She took history as her subject, “not merely History as an aggregate of events, but History as a judgment on events” (“We Are the Crazy Lady,” 289). By effacing the woman in her narrator, she hoped reviewers would regard *Trust* for what she primarily intended it to be: a Jamesian Jewish novel of ideas. Ozick’s hope was not realized. The *New York Times* book review, titled “Daughter’s Reprieve,” was accompanied by “a picture of a naked woman whose bottom was covered by some sort of drapery” (“We Are the Crazy Lady,” 289). It contained the following misreadings: “These events, interesting in themselves, exist to reveal the sensibility of the narrator.” “She longs to play some easy feminine role.” “She has been unable to define herself as a woman.” “The main body of the novel, then, is a revelation of the narrator’s inner, turbulent, psychic drama” (Stevenson, 29).

Despite Ozick’s efforts in the early part of her career to prevent critics from wedding her literary talents to her gender, she was consigned to the ezrat nashim, the gallery of women writers, separated from the male preserve of sacred texts. No matter how complex and sophisticated Ozick made her early protagonists, she was still judged by “the ovarian theory of literature” (“Previsions of the Demise of the Dancing Dog,” 266), which restricted the development of her literary creations.

Cynthia Ozick in subsequent fiction refused to be judged by such a reductive theory. She declared herself not an adherent of the “new feminism,” which she described as “biologically based self-confinement.” Rather she claimed to be an advocate and practitioner of “classical feminism”—i.e., feminism at its origin . . . [which] rejected anatomy not only as destiny, but as any sort of governing force . . . [which] rejected the notion of ‘female sensibility’ as a slander designed to shut women off from access to the delights, confusions, achievements, darknesses, and complexities of the great world” (“Literature and the Politics of Sex: A Dissent,” 288). Of late, Cynthia Ozick has also balked