



Heir to the Glimmering World

Cynthia Ozick

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Cynthia Ozick has been known for decades as one of America's most gifted and extraordinary storytellers; her remarkable new novel has established her as one of the most enticingly readable as well. Heir to the Glimmering World received exuberant reviews after its hardcover publication, and Ozick, on her first-ever book tour, was welcomed by standing-room-only crowds. Reading groups, too, have embraced the novel, which was selected by Ann Patchett for NBC's Today Show Book Club. Set in the New York of the 1930s, Heir to the Glimmering World is an entrancing, richly plotted novel brimming with intriguing characters. Orphaned at eighteen, with few possessions, Rose Meadows finds steady employment with the Mitwischer clan. Recently arrived from Berlin, the Mitwischers rely on the auspices of a generous benefactor, James A'Bair, the discontented heir to a fortune his father, a famous children's author, made from a series of books called The Bear Boy. Rose watches as the refugee family's fortunes rise and fall, against the vivid backdrop of a world in tumult. Ozick's novel is a thrilling read that will undoubtedly gain this lauded author new readers in paperback.

Heir to the Glimmering World Details

Date : Published (first published 2004)

ISBN :

Author : Cynthia Ozick

Format : Kindle Edition 332 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, New York, Literary Fiction, Novels, Literature, Contemporary

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From Reader Review *Heir to the Glimmering World* for online ebook

Robin Friedman says

Cynthia Ozick's 2004 novel *"Heir to the Glimmering World"* is known as *"The Bear Boy"* in the United Kingdom. It is fitting that this complex difficult novel will take two, or perhaps more, appropriate titles. *"The Bear Boy"* refers to one of the many principal characters in the book, James A'Bair. As a child, James had been the subject of a successful series of children's book written by his father. James inherits a fortune when his father dies. He wanders aimlessly over the world before ultimately becoming the benefactor of the Mitwisser family at the heart of the novel. The title *"Heir to the Glimmering World"* is both more poetic and more difficult to explain. The heir is the young woman narrator, Rose Meadows, 19, of the story. The "glimmering world" could be one of several lost worlds described in the story: the world of the Karaites, discussed below, or the world of Germany and scholarship before WW II.

The story is set primarily in depression-era New York in 1933 -- 1935. The book is told with great allusiveness in form and content to British novels, including *"Sense and Sensibility"*, *"Middlemarch"*, *"Jane Eyre"* and *"Hard Times."* The early stages of Ozick's novel take place in Albany and upstate New York while the larger portion of the book is set in a relatively remote section of the Bronx. The novel tells loosely interrelated stories of refugees, outcasts, and rebels.

The narrator, Rose, is a quiet, bookish girl whose mother died when she was 3 and whose father, a teacher and a gambler, dies when Rose is 18 after he has put the girl in the care of a distant relation, Bertram, 36. Bertram is divorced, a pharmacist, and involved with radical politics. He is in love with an even more radical woman, named Ninel, who is not committed to him. Ninel essentially forces Rose out of her home with Bertram, and at age 18 Rose drops out of a teacher's college which bores her to answer a strange ad placed by a Professor Mitwisser. Mitwisser is a student of religious history who has been forced to flee Germany. His wife, Elsa was a research physicist and the colleague of Erwin Schrodinger. The couple have five children. Elsa is despondent and appears mad. Their eldest daughter, Anneliese, runs much of the household. In Albany, Mitwisser has been teaching at a small college by the kindness of the Quakers. He is a renowned scholar of the heretical Jewish sect known as the Karaites. The governor's of the school mistake him as a student of Christian Charismatics. There is little interest in Mitwisser's passion for the Karaites in the United States. The family moves to New York City to allow Mitwisser to study and write. They are supported by the mysterious James, *"The Bear Boy."*

The Mitwissers have difficulty, to say the least, with their new home in America. In Germany the family was wealthy and respected for intellect and knowledge while in the United States they are spurned. There is a sense of high culture -- or *"bildung"* in German which the family, especially Elsa finds lacking in the United States. Professor Mitwisser wants his children and family to adopt and adjust, to learn and use English, and to drop German and German culture. The narrator Rose, too, is a refugee and an outcast of a different sort as is the wealthy, dissolute, wandering James who has somehow adopted the Mitwisser family and is their apparent benefactor.

Rose has an ambiguous role in the family as a companion to Elsa, a nanny to the children, and a scribe or *"amanuensis"* for Mitwisser. Although the Mitwisser family is not religious, Mitwisser is the greatest scholar of the Karaites. The Karaites are a Jewish sect originating in the early Middle Ages. The Karaites broke away from mainline traditional Judaism because they refused to accept the authority of the Jewish Oral Law --, the Mishnah and the Gemmorah which comprise the Talmud. Instead, the Karaites accepted the authority

only of the 24 books of the Old Testament. Traditional Judaism rejected the Karaites as heretics and the sect became marginalized and obscure. Many of the leaders of the sect wrote voluminously and provocatively. Mitwisser, in this novel, is their scholar. As Rose comes to describe the Karaites as she learns about them from Mitwisser:

"They are dissidents; therefore they are haters. But they are also lovers, and what they love is purity, and what they hate is impurity. And what they consider to be impurity is the intellect's explorations; and yet they are themselves known for intellect." (p.73)

Professor Mitwisser loves the Karaites for their independence, their heresy, their obscurity, and their religious passion and feeling. His love, alas, is at the expense of much else in life, including his wife and children. Professor Mitwisser is pursuing threads regarding an earlier leader of the sect who, Mitwisser believes, travelled to India where he studied and became enamored of the Bhagavad-Gita. Ultimately Mitsisser's research program is dashed. Rose and Ozick in particular take a much more distanced position from the Karaites than does Mitwisser.

Elsa has a madness that derives from the wife in Jane Eyre. But she also sees certain things clearly. A physicist, she was also the lover of Schroedinger. She undergoes significant changes during the course of the book.

The book has the feel of a difficult coming of age story as Rose, who narrates the story from a distance, ultimately uses what she has learned from living with the Mitwissers to begin her own independent life.

Ozick has written a cerebral, thoughtful story of refugees, outcasts, and the life of the mind and its limitations. There is a skeptical tone towards political messianism and radicalism, in the person of Ninel and in Bertram's early life, and towards religious freethought and heresy, as exemplified by the Karaites. The author also turns a skeptical eye towards what she sees as the thoughtless, materialist character of American life. Some of the threads of the story do not come together well, and there is a sense of coolness and detachment towards the characters. This a challenging but rewarding novel.

Robin Friedman

Sara says

This was a reasonably satisfying read -- good stuff for curling up in bed during a cold night -- but the story of a wildly disaffected, almost schizoid nanny in the house of a family of German immigrants coughs and sputters at its core. The narrator's complete lack of affect is supposed to do something, but exactly what is never clear. Equally unclear is what the poorly disguised retelling of A A Milnes' own alienated son is doing in this book. If you approach it as a sweet compendium of idiomatic behavior, you'll enjoy this just fine.

William2.1 says

Brilliant. A wonder and a joy! It's the mid-1930s and Herr Professor and Frau Mitwisser, being Jews, have fled Hitler's Germany with their big family. Thanks to the charitable Quakers, known for their tradition of religious tolerance, the Mitwisser Family is brought to New York, to Albany, where the professor begins to

lecture at the Quaker college. Mrs. Mitwisser is deeply depressed, however, sometimes verging on the delusional, having had to abandon her high-profile scientific pursuits. (She'd worked closely with Erwin Schrödinger). She has now withdrawn from the rest of the family and lies inert in a remote sitting room. Our narrator, eighteen-year-old Rose, answers an ad in an Albany newspaper and comes to work for the Mitwisser. Actually, the ad is hilariously vague as to just what Rose's duties are going to be, but she answers it anyway because she has to get out of her cousin Bertrand's apartment since he's fallen in love with loudmouthed Communist Ninel (Lenin spelled backwards), and Rose has fallen for Bertrand who, though very kind, just thinks of her as a "kid," which she resents.

The Mitwisser household also includes sixteen-year-old Annaliese, three younger boys (Heinz, Willi and Gert) and a toddler daughter (Waltraut). Soon they move to the Bronx because the professor, torn from Europe's great libraries due to the imminent war, has to continue his scholarly study of a heretical group of tenth-century Jews, the Karaites, at the New York Public Library. Interlarded with the story of the Mitwissers and Rose and the Karaites is the story of The Bear Boy. As a child, during the decade of The Great War, this fellow became the model for his father's dazzlingly successful series of children's books. Now in mid-life he's a lost soul who hates his immense wealth and lives a semi-debauched, drifter's existence. That's pretty much the setup, so I'll leave you hanging there. Suffice it to say, the novel's language is rich without being daunting, its plot sprightly, and its structure awe inspiring. I really came to care for these vividly drawn characters, even the cynical Bear Boy, whose influence as patron of the Mitwisser household causes major friction between the professor and his wife. Cynthia Ozick is my new favorite writer. I plan to read everything she's written. Also exquisitely good are her *The Messiah of Stockholm* and *The Puttermesser Papers*, both of which I have reviewed.

Edith says

This book was NOT the thrill I anticipated after listening to Ann Patchett recommend it on NBC's Book Club. She RAVED about this story effusively, calling it "all books for all people". The story line sounded interesting...a displaced immigrant Jewish family in 1930's New York state needing to hire a young girl for unspecified help....and had me running to the library to find this book.

I just do not get it. I found myself having to doggedly PLOW through this story (Julia's words of "never not finishing a book" ringing in my ears). I had to work at it; I just found the writing frequently awkward and odd. The flow felt erratic, the descriptions often had a weirdness to them, there was needless repetition; it was difficult to identify with any of the characters. Yet this author is touted as brilliant. This book left me shaking my head quizzically.

I should say that one of the characters in the story is based on the real Christopher Robin of A. A. Milne fame. The grown-up Christopher Robin was an unhappy man who was alienated from his father who had used him as story fodder. I found that to be very sad.

I finished this book with a sigh of relief. (less)

Jeanette says

Superb writing and enthralling family and character study of these refugees and the narrator who is hired as

the father's "aide". It's a tremendous analysis of intellectualism, culture, hierarchy, economic power, language change and esteem alteration- you name it. All within desperate times of change. This is not the particular time period, place, or type of voice that I usually prefer- but the writing of this place and of these people is spot on to a masterful reveal of essence, emotion, and their reality of choices to chosen survivals. It doesn't much miss any of the Bronx locale nuance for that particular period either. Excellent read!

This author writes in a classic mode, sometimes you must tease the unsaid meanings out of her. What is unsaid, being sometimes understood in a much deeper way than if it was detailed. It can seem slow for that reason to some, but this one is in a class of literature with the big L. I especially liked her politico characterizations and her view into "sane" self-identification reactions of the Mother. She, in her own estimation, did not compromise her "place" of esteem deserved.

As a person who has heard English spoken by people who never heard a word of it until they were out of their teens, or by some whose 3rd language is English- I was flummoxed by this author's skill in German nuance and placements. EXCELLENT and so few can do it. I can understand how many readers would be turned off by this as a read because they find it is odd or awkward, not flowing prose. I understand the density for them and the plodding to get anywhere here. Yet that feels, to me, authentic- and worth the slowness of this period piece.

Lena says

Would have given four stars because Ozick's writing kept the pages turning. There were some interesting premises within the novel that could have been separate novels in and of themselves. But I gave three stars because the relationships among the characters never really went anywhere and the plot clumsily bumped along until the end just sort of arrived. Ultimately, I felt like all the great writing went to waste.

Lark Benobi says

This novel was completely unpredictable and not like anything I had ever read before and that in itself makes it worth reading. But beyond that the prose is beautiful.

Saleh MoonWalker says

Onvan : Heir to the Glimmering World - Nevisande : Cynthia Ozick - ISBN : 618618805 - ISBN13 : 9780618618804 - Dar 336 Safhe - Saal e Chap : 2004

Lori says

Has to force myself to read half ... and then realized I could stop.

Lori says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and am sorry to finish it. It's one of those dreamy books that creates such a particular world. It's very well-plotted, and the characters are unique and real, but it's the richness of the created world that makes me love this one. Ozick has made me know just how those teacups, the china ones with yellow roses, feel in my hand; just how Waltraut's dolls sound on the stairs; just how the Professor's study feels when you enter it; just how Bertram fills up the kitchen, and creates a home from the awful house the Mitwissers inhabit. It's like she gave me the memories and experiences of those people and that place, even the ones she didn't include in the book. Somehow she gave them all to me.

Don't read it expecting to find a page-turner, a book you get all electrified by -- it's not that. Expect to soak in it, let it soak into you. It's one that leaves you tinted with its memories.

Lisa says

Listening to the audio of *Heir to the Glimmering World*, narrated by the amazing Julie Dretzin, was a wondrous and rich experience. Rose Meadows, exiled from Albany, arrives in the Bronx to serve as a caretaker/secretary for the Mitwisser family, refugees from Hitler's Germany. The plot meanders amongst the Mitwissers, Rose, her "cousin" Bertram and James A'Bair who brings tumult to their household. Ozick's use of language is stunning and her control of the narrative is brilliant. I loved this novel!

Jessie says

Finally an author with a masterful command of the beauty and intricacies of the English language. Half the book follows the narrator, hired as half scribe half caretaker. A fine portrait of the various stark disenchantments of childhood, the woundedness of exile of all kinds, and the inscrutability of the ones who are supposed to guide us. The author is unsentimental about children and describes the mind-numbing nature of the options left to girls of lower middle class upbringing, the obscure rules of servitude, and the lives of refugees among other topics. The discussion of the unusual sect of Jews was hard to penetrate in context but worth the intellectual challenge. The other half of the novel follows the itinerant child and muse of a popular children's book author and his shameless acts of spite.

El says

The Mitwisser family are exiled Germans living in upstate New York during the Depression, and Rose Meadows, the narrator, answers an ad in the paper looking for rather vague household help. Her duties wind up being different things for different members of the family, depending on their needs. The Mitwissers's benefactor is James A'Bair, a malcontent who is popular because of his father's children's story books about the Bear Boy, ie James. James is loosely based on Christopher Milne, the son of A.A. Milne, who is immortalized as Christopher Robin in Winnie-the-Pooh, something Christopher was sadly never able to remove himself from.

I'm happy to be reading authors whose writings are better read personally than explained to someone else. Ozick's *The Puttermesser Papers* felt similarly to me - I enjoyed the entire reading process but didn't find myself analyzing or reviewing or editing it in my head as I read. To find an author like that, who can take me away completely, is exciting for me and I want to tell everyone to read her. But don't make me explain why. Ozick has a way with words and a style entirely her own, but as a strong female writer it's hard not to lump her (despite everything I believe in *not* lumping writers together based on gender or topic) with Angela Carter or Susan Sontag. Perhaps the fact that I'm reading more of these authors all around the same time has more to do with the categorization than anything else.

Roko says

I have only read one other novel by Cynthia Ozick, the *Puttermesser Papers*, and this book has a very different feel. I preferred the *Puttermesser* book, which struck me as being very inventive and in the realm of magical realism with a dash of New York Jewish humor. This novel doesn't have that kind of fantasy aspect. In other words, everything that happens in the novel could actually happen in real life. Also, it's more serious, and kind of sad.

However, I did enjoy reading this book, which I read with a book group and the discussion about it was spirited. The plot is very unusual, and the main characters are well drawn and fascinating. There is a beautiful line from the book describing the house with its characters as "a house of bruises," as all of the main characters are all bruised from life. However, it is a gentle book, and takes the characters and their victimized lives and examines their pain, and Ozick's elegant writing helps us understand their pain and their motives.

The end, which I won't reveal, was a real surprise to me.

Lemunty says

I picked up this book in Delhi, off a pavement seller peddling second-hand books for a pittance, primarily because it looked interesting and light, and I thought something cheerful would be nice. I would hesitate to call this either cheerful, or light, but it wins on the interesting scale. *Heir to the Glimmering World* is not, as the title might suggest, a book about fantasy or adventure, or even about inheritance (well, at least, not much).

It's about a girl, working as a governess to the Mitwischer clan, a strange and chaotic family patronised by the young, wealthy and mysterious James A'Bair. Does the governess end up happily married to the young millionaire? No, she doesn't, and that alone should pique your interest. Herr Doktor Professor Rudolf Mitwischer himself is a scholar of an ancient Jewish sect, a field of study of interest to no one but a small group of like-minded scholars and his patron. James A'Bair, heir to the fortune built by the sale of childrens' books written by his father, and based on him, is sulky, whimsical, and charming all at once, the sole reason that the entire family isn't on the streets, begging. The rapidly deteriorating mental state of Mrs. Mitwischer, the acting out of her younger children in a desperate bid for attention, her daughter's frantic desire to escape the familial trap of poverty, create a cast of characters that our protagonist, Rose, deftly picks her way through.

This is a book that contains neat touches of humour amidst the quietly understated misery of many of the characters. One is left with a feeling of despair, but not an overwhelming one - a sense that this too is something that be absorbed, tolerated, learned. The Mitwessers are refugees in the New York of 1935, escaping Nazi Germany. With their background and Rose's orphanhood, this is as much a novel about trying to fit in, as it is about love, and desperation. I very much liked it, and I'm not sorry at all for judging the book by its cover.
