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Jewish People as 'Other' in Jacobson's *The Finkler Question*

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By

Thakur Prasad Wagle

Roll No. 067/068/240

Regd. No. 13608-94

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Tribhuvan University

Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

Mr.Thakur Prasad Wagle has completed the thesis entitled "Jewish People as 'Other' in Jacobson's *The Finkler Question*" under my supervision. He carried out this research from December 2016 to April 2018. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva-voce.

……..

Mr.Hem Lal Pandey

Supervisor

Date……

Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Jewish People as 'Other' in Jacobson's *The Finkler Question*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Thakur Prasad Wagle has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research committee:

Members of the Research Committee

.....

..... Internal Examiner

.....

..... External Examiner

.....

..... Head

Department of English

Date……

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Abstract

Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* depicts the Jewish people who have been living in the United Kingdom as 'other' or the 'outsider' due to the stereotypical gaze of the non-Jewish English origin people. These migrated jews have been migrated long ago and have gone through a lot of cultural and racial fusion with other community. However, the traditional stereotypical gaze to look at them is same. It has not changed yet, and it has created the feeling of rootlessness, homelessness and alienation among Jewish people. Through its central character Julian Treslove, the author reveals the stereotypical gaze. He is non-Jews. However, he desperately emphasizes the Jews. Jacobson, depicting the multicultural setting of London composed of Jews and non-Jews, or more specifically, English Jews and English non-Jews, clearly shows that British Jewish people have gone through a sense of dislocation due to the stereotypical gaze of non-Jewish English people.

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I. Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* and British-Jewish Identity

British-Jewish writers are increasingly addressing the challenging question about what it means to be both British and Jewish in the twenty-first century. This chapter deals with an introduction to the significant issues in contemporary British-Jewish fiction and discovers how Jewishness exists together with a range of other identities in Britain. This research is about on Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* which attempts explore the Jewishness, or Jewish identity existed in contemporary British society exploring how they have been living like 'other' due to the stereotypical perception of English origin people. By questioning myths and stereotypes and looking at themes of remembering and forgetting, belonging and non-belonging, location and dislocation, this research examines the contemporary social and cultural identity of Jews as presented in *The Finkler Question*.

In the twenty-first century Britain, Jewishness is one difference among many. Jews are regarded as one of the different race and 'other' like other minorities in British society though they had a long history of enrolment in Britain and gone through cultural fusion with British people. Even today, Jews have been striving for their identity in Britain. Regarding the identity, the quest of the British-Jewish writer, Ruth Gilbert writes, "Contemporary British-Jewish writers are identifying the particularity of their difference, while also acknowledging that difference is always open to change, resignification and re-interpretation" (1). Going to the past heritage and seeking new identity as British-Jewish is one of the key features of such authors. Gilbert further asserts his view, "For many British Jews who question the status of Israel as an imagined home and who understand that the old Jewish world of Eastern Europe, or even the Jewish East End of London, no longer exists, the diaspora is where we belong" (1).

Howard Jacobson is one of the prominent contemporary British-Jewish authors who also seeks for his racial and cultural identity while living in the cross-cultural scenario of London. He finds his true British-Jewish identity in his sense of social/cultural/geographical dislocation as he recalls his childhood in 1950s Manchester, "we faced in opposite directions, we were our own antithesis" (3).

Sometimes this sense of dislocation is expressed as a yearning for wholeness. However, the awareness of in-betweenness, of not quite belonging, also generates a productive spirit of self-reflexive inquiry. For many contemporary writers in Britain, Jewishness is a trope. It signifies a collective history that has been marked by dispossession and suffering, but it also invokes a more postmodern sense of identities that are provisional, partial and performative. Regarding Jewish authors' search for racial/cultural identity Ruth Gilbert mentions, "In this respect, the diasporic condition allows interrogation of static notions of home, belonging and collective subjectivity" (2).

This research traces the British Jewishness or British-Jews identity in Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question*. *The Finkler Question* is a novel about three friends. Two of them are Jews, and one who decides to be a Jew is because he is influenced by Jewish culture. Among this close friend circle, Julian Treslove struggles with his newfound identity as a Jewish Gentile since he tries to convert himself to be Jews. Likewise, Libor Sevcik, a Jews, mourns his wife's death and Sam Finkler learns to cope with his feelings about being Jewish since it is not easy to adjust in Western European societies for the migrated Jewish from Eastern Europe. Among these three characters, the novel mainly reveals the ambivalent relationship between Treslove and Finkler since Treslove though being of English origin, aims to convert to Judaism. On

the other hand, Finkler, throughout the novel, feels guilty being a person of Jewish minority community in Britain.

Treslove's fascination towards Jewish people and culture is based on his stereotypical perception towards Jewish since he thinks them 'other,' 'another mystery' or 'something unexplored' and the same he aims to explore. His notion seems like the notion of a colonizer. Thus, his stereotypical gaze towards the Jewish people, who have been living in London, even places the Jews in the position of 'other' or 'outsider.' This notion never let feel belongingness in London. Thus, this research through the perception of Treslove towards Jewish people and culture aims to trace the social/cultural alienation of Jews in contemporary British society.

As the novel begins, after having dinner with Libor and Sam, Treslove is attacked by a woman. It causes him to become obsessed with his belief that she may have thought him Jewish and attacked. Both recently widowed, Libor mourns for Malkie, but Sam is unable to mourn for Tyler. When Julian Treslove tells Sam about the mugging, Sam believes Treslove invented it because he wants to be Jewish. After recalling his affair with Tyler, Treslove runs into Libor while searching for the attacker. Libor invites Treslove to dinner with a group of fellow Jews. Treslove attends his first Seder festivals of Jews', and he meets Hephzibah there.

At the same time, Sam has a falling out with the ashamed Jews. Despite Tyler's objections, he joins this group which is an academic group. Libor is asked for help in contacting media by Emmy, an old friend because her grandson lost eyesight in an anti-Semitic incident. On the other, Julian moves in with Hephzibah after a vacation in Itay and feels he is enjoying being Jewish. He is ready to help her set up the new Anglo-Jewish museum of which she will be a curator. Libor continues to grieve for Malkie.

Treslove invites Libor and Sam over for dinner. He is jealous of the way the three Jews interact. He feels he is excluded and will never understand their secret Jewish language and customs. Though Treslove studies Judaism intently, he fears he will never understand it. Hephzibah is both amused and frightened when there is vandalism at the museum. However, Julian does not possess the emotional flexibility to understand how she can experience both emotions at once. Libor informs Emmy that he cannot help her because there is no point in doing so. While Hephzibah worries that Julian is exhausting her of sadness and her Judaism, Julian suspects that Hephzibah and Sam are having an affair. Treslove confides in Libor about his suspicions and his affair with Tyler, and it makes Libor sad. He claims Julian Treslove, like everyone else, is an anti-Semite.

Treslove, Hephzibah and Sam go to a play and out for drinks to celebrate Treslove's birthday. Again, Treslove begins to think he has had his share of them. Hephzibah becomes nervous about the influx of recent anti-Semitic incidents. Treslove believes that he feels more for Jews than they do for themselves. He believes that Jews, like him, do not have a chance. Sam reads a letter Tyler left him in which he claimed his expectations for Jews are higher than for anyone else.

The entire novel *The Finkler Question* goes through the issues of Jews who have been living in England in one hand. On the other, the central character of the novel Julian Treslove aims to be a Jews although his society does not entertain the Jews identity. He sympathies Jews because there is antic-Semitic movement in Western Europe that keeps the Jews in marginal and vulnerable position in society. However, his perception towards Jews is stereotypical that regards British Jews in the position of 'other,' not within the British people and community.

In this sense, Jacobson's authorship is the ability to render this sense of fragmentation and in-betweenness of Jews and other racial people in Europe. His writing reconnects the entire British Jewish culture to the tradition of Jewish humor. However, he evokes the British-Jewish position or nowhere in their social and cultural identity. It is due to the stereotypical gaze of non-Jewish community in Britain. Julian Treslove represents the non-Jewish gaze upon Jewish people and culture though he always tries to convert him to Judaism. It is a bitter irony through which the novel can raise the issues of the Anglo-Jewish soul which is caught in an eternal rivalry between its Jewish and its British components.

Howard Jacobson himself belongs to the British-Jewish identity. British education places him within the British tradition, even if, as already said, at the margin of it. What might be the theme and politics of the fractured identity of the British Jewish community in his novel *The Finkler Question?* Hasn't he exposed the struggle of Jewish in the Western European frontier? Isn't the issues of Jewish reflected in the novel is a quest for own cultural identity?

Jacobson, in the novel, not only brings the cultural in-between migrated Jews and other original British people in Western European frontier by bringing the struggle of Jewish in such situation but also deals with the quest for his own Jewish racial identity. He also explores the discriminatory gaze of the non-Jewish community of Britain which has been placing the Jewish community in the position of 'other.' The primary purpose of this study is to bring the novel *The Finkler Question* by Howard Jacobson into the dimension of its study. For this purpose, this research will deal with the issue of Jewish racial, cultural, social and political identity. It analyses the social, cultural and political obstacles faced by British-Jewish who have

been living in the cross-cultural scenario. Finally, this research aims to trace the quest for Jewish identity in the novel.

Jacobson typically embodies the dilemma of being steeped in British culture while feeling alienated from it. The beginning of his academic career in Australia in the Sixties intensifies this sense of faceted marginality, recasting him as a double outsider. However, it was not until he came back to England and started considering his Jewishness as a particular element of his experience and worth writing about, that he found his real inspiration.

Already in this early work are the germs of Jacobson's humorous style, aimed to address the peculiar and precarious condition of living in the in-betweenness of Britishness and Jewishness. Jacobson masterfully directs his mockery against his Jewishness, by repeating, like a refrain, the justifying expression “being Jewish” (18). He was used to temptation and, being Jewish; he was used to a quick capitulation to it. He often struck Sefton as resembling a little English garden bird, through which garden bird Sefton Goldberg, being Jewish, could not be expected to know.

According to Cheyette, instead of finding definite answers, the pretext of the journey further complicates things by interweaving more general questions of cultural identity with personal questions regarding the genealogy of his family. The relationship with his father and the importance of remembering and of accepting one's own roots:

> I had been brought up to notice pain, and I had Jewjewjew pains in my eyes. Pains like those you get when you've stopped arguing with yourself … Had Jujujudaism dumped on me the way Cacacatholicism dumps on other writers, as a punishment for forgetting that I had been mostly the thing I never knew I was when I was my own antithesis? (7)

Not always is Jewishness and cultural dislocation at the centre of Jacobson's narrations. Other relevant fields of investigation are sexuality, the neurotic male reasoning, jealousy. These themes he has consistently explored throughout his literary production.

With the publication of *The Finkler Question* in 2010 Jacobson gained international acclaim and a long-awaited Booker Prize, the prestigious British literary award. He is the first British Jewish author to receive it. The themes outlined so far reach here full maturation in that not only the differences between Jewishness and non-Jewishness emerge. The three protagonists go through a process of recognition that their vision of the other is coated with a fixed set of preconceived ideas. Through consistent use of self-addressed humor, Jacobson thus investigates the categories of Jewishness and non-Jewishness. He blurs the already faint borders that separate them, confusing the attributes normally attached to the one or the other. In this way, the difference between the two categories is ultimately lost, and what is left is only the humanity of the characters' existences.

Likewise, critic Ruth Gilbert connects the diasporic experience in Jacobson's writing. She mentions it as:

> Again Jacobs' words are suggestive of this sense of identification in terms of absence, 'I come from nowhere,' he writes, 'and go nowhere.' In a far more ironic sense, this search for belonging, in 'a land without dream', informs Howard Jacobson's 1993 memoir/travel book *Roots Schmoots*. Jacobson, however, sets out to deconstruct any lazy nostalgia and sentimental attachment to the notion of an original homeland for British Jews. 'I had', he explains, 'been feeling rootsie, I do not deny that. Aggressively rootsie. Rootsie-tootsie.' (9).

Ruth focuses on the desire to find a sense of belonging within author's writing. There is, he explains, “a giddying romance in the idea of homelessness” (10). Ruth Gilbert and other most of the critics have focused on the sense of dislocation of Jewish writers who have been living in the western frontier. However, there is not only the sense of social/cultural/geographical dislocation in their writing but also a feeling of the quest for social/cultural identity among these writings. This research tries to trace their quest for Jewish identity based on Jacobson's *The Finkler Question.*

Similarly, the use of humor allows Jacobson to cope with some clichés attached to the idea of Jewishness. Turning them over through irony, showing at the end the impossibility to engage one's identity into fixed, essentialist categories, presenting an idea of identity which is ultimately fluid and hybrid, in the formation of which the individual is always questioned. Keeping all these Jewishness of Jacobson's writing into the consideration, this research aims to observe the novel *The Finkler Question* through the perspective of Jewish racial and cultural identity in Britain. For this purpose, this research uses the ideas from cross-cultural perspectives to trace how the stereotypical gaze of non-Jewish have been pushing Jewish community towards the area of 'other' marking them as 'outsider' in British society.

In the same manner, this research aims to use the theoretical methodology of Jewish racial identity to observe the novel *The Finkler Question.* Regarding these issues, Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus present their views,

> "The result is a hall of mirrors in which opposing gazes reflect each other, where Englishness and Jewishness, Jewishness and non-Jewishness, even Jewishness and anti-Semitism are no longer opposites, but, they are – with Cheyette's words – cross-cultural identities, mirror images of each other. (2)

According to them, while the Jew is still an object of desire and repulsion for the non-Jewish onlooker, it is the gaze of the non-Jew who gradually reveals itself to be deformed and distorted.

The trans-national and trans-cultural nature of English-speaking Jewish literature makes it a fertile field to study through the means offered by postcolonial studies, in that English becomes a vehicle of expression of different diasporic situations, as Stahler remarks:

> A suggestion concomitant with this is that Anglophone Jewish literature, itself variously situated within cultural contact zones of a 'postcolonial' character, reveals some analogies to postcolonial literature, and that the two not only engage productively in processes of mutual stimulation but that this also indicates the useful interchangeability of the respective tools of critical enquiry. (4)

It may be added that as much as Jewish literature may be profitably studied through the instruments offered by postcolonial theory, in reverse, postcolonial theory has fruitfully borrowed many concepts which are usually key markers of the Jewish imaginary.

The focus of the New Jewish Cultural Studies on the recognition of pluralism; the enhancement of differences; the rejection of a universalist version of identity makes this critical orientation particularly profitable for the development of this thesis. Moreover, it will be applied here especially in following Bryan Cheyette's rereading and reinterpretation of the classical texts of British literature to unveil the Semitic discourse hidden in them. (45) On the contemporary scene, Cheyette also underlines the “programmatic nature of Jewish writing in Britain – neither wholly multicultural, nor ethnic, nor postcolonial” (46) emphasizing the relative freedom

with which diaspora writers can overcome the homogenising atmosphere of British culture. Thus, Jews have their own identity in western frontier which could be different from the universal diaspora. The experience of Jewish in their writing is a form of their quest for cultural/racial/social identity. It could be studied under Jewish studies. This research is an effort to find out the cultural quest and their sense of dislocation due to the stereotypical gaze of non-Jewish community in Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question.*

In *The Finkler Question* by looking at Jews, the non-Jew English Julian Treslove in the novel constructs his own very personal Jewish world. Though he is fascinated by Jewish people and culture, these are like mysteries for his. In this sense regards them in the category of 'other' where he aims to go. However, both of races have been living within the same community since the history. Even though, Jewish people are other. There is a century-long stereotyping tradition. Jewishness becomes for him “a topic of learning, discovery, practice” (71) but it is also “the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements” (113). Only at the end, he realises that the world he has imagined perfect for him is only a hologram of his own delusions, of his hallucinated projections. Reality is far from perfect; it is fluid, ambiguous, slippery, and the Jewish world which he would have like to be part of is maybe not so alluring. Reality is more contradictory, ambivalent, and sophisticated than his simplified, schematic, comforting vision due to the racial and cultural difference between Jewish and non-Jewish.

In this sense, the novel *The Finkler Question* centres on the issues of the Jewish experience in the western European frontier where they have to struggle and survive with other non-Jewish community. By keeping these issues into the consideration, this research aims to observe the novel through the perspective of racial

identity in particular Jewish identity in Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question.* The first chapter of the novel gives a general introduction about author Howard Jacobson, his novel *The Finkler Question* and general background of Jewish writing. The second chapter analyses the novel through the perspective of the racial identity of Jewish and final chapter concludes the novel as the quest of Jewish identity in *The Finkler Question.*

II. Jew as an Outsider in British Society in Jacobson's *The Finkler Question*

This chapter analyses Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* by revealing the cross-cultural experiences of Jews who have been living in the United Kingdom throughout the generation. It seeks to explore this question by taking the novel into account with the relation of Jews' cultural identity, diasporic experience and their cultural in-betweenness. Jews have resided in England since their readmission in 1656, and although British Jewry has been explored from a variety of perspectives, beyond literature, its cultural output has been virtually ignored. As a consequence, there is almost no visibility of Jews and Jewishness in public and mass cultures in Western European scenario. Jews themselves have been living in cross-cultural juncture that is why this section brings the references from the diaspora and cross-cultural experience as references.

Homi K. Bhabha's analysis of the colonial subject, especially his concept of "almost the same, but not quite" (123) is useful in considering the position of the British Jews. Stratton writes, "Where 'Jews were, more or less, accepted as white' in the United States, the 'imperative to whiten the Jews', owing to a lack of large-scale immigration and economic need, did not occur in the UK" (198). Consequently, Jews could be considered as "[a]lmost the same *but not white*" (128) as told by Bhabha. With the result that, in cultural terms, they have adopted what Bhabha calls mimicry.

According to his formulation, "mimicry is like camouflage not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance" (128). By using the notion of mimicry, it could be explored how these ideas are played out in the British context, in particular how the Jew/ess bears the brunt of "the difference between being English and being Anglicized" (Bhabha, 128). In this sense, Jews

living in the United Kingdom even today have been living like an outsider. They have not complete assimilation with the Western European frontier. In Bhabha's terms, they lack "the forms of authority" in the mainstream British culture and society (130).

Cultural dislocation of British Jews is presented in Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* since it presents a satire of a segment of Jewish life in contemporary London in the context of rising anti-Semitism and an increasingly bitter anti-Israel discourse. The humor derives significantly from the portrayal of the obsessive protagonist, Julian Treslove. He is a non-Jew who desires desperately to become Jewish. He does so despite his several Jewish friends who complicate his stereotypical expectations. He envies, admires, and competes with his friend Sam Finkler.

The novel opens up with a correct focalization on Julian Treslove's perspective which, however, remains hugely vague throughout the novel. The impression is given to Treslove's life and thoughts. Everything that concerns him seems to attain the sphere of dream and imagination. The vagueness of Treslove's character is indicative of his identity. Treslove has none. Treslove's absence of any identifying sign of recognition is remarked on every aspect. He lacks his fixed identity in his facial features, in his job, in his attitude towards his sons and their mothers, in his friends. The loss of his personal belongings during the mugging is only further confirmation of his lack of anything that could define him as a specific identity.

Treslove is nobody, in particular, a blank board on which everything must be still written out. He has managed to arrive at the end of his forties, and have two children. Jacobson mentions, "Treslove had inadvertently fathered two that he knew of" (11)). Jacobson tells this without ever really getting involved in what he has done. He is a man who has cultivated an inner world of romance and daydreaming. Jacobson further tells about his fantasy, "His fantasy is mainly based on the model of

Italian melodramas, where he imagines being the tragic hero crying on the dead body of his beloved one" (24).

The reference to lyrical operas is quite pertinent. A melodrama celebrates mythology of suffering and idealizes the tragic side of life. The stress on Treslove's celebration of suffering is opposite than Jewish tendency "to laugh at suffering and the Christian tradition of exalting suffering" (294). Thus, this nature of the protagonist places him nowhere. He lacks the belongingness.

Likewise, the three protagonists go through a process of recognition that their vision of the other is coated with a fixed set of preconceived ideas. Through consistent use of self-addressed humor, Jacobson investigates the categories of Jewishness and non-Jewishness. He blurred the already faint borders that separate them, confusing the attributes usually attached to the one or the other. In this way, the difference between the two categories (Jewishness and non-Jewishness) is ultimately lost which shows cross-cultural experiences where people cannot belong to a fixed category.

The result is a hall of mirrors in which opposing gazes reflect each other. Jacobson plays well with dual identity where Englishness and Jewishness, Jewishness and non-Jewishness, even Jewishness and anti-Semitism are no longer opposites in the novel. It is the cross-cultural identity. According to Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, it is "a mirror image of each other" (281). Jew is still an object of desire and repulsion for the non-Jewish onlooker. Likewise, it is the gaze of the non-Jew who gradually reveals itself to be deformed and distorted. By looking at Jews, the non-Jew like Julian Treslove constructs his own very personal Jewish world, where things are where exactly he is. It is a century-long stereotyping tradition. In Bhabha's idea,

Jewishness becomes “a topic of learning, discovery, practice” and also “the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements" for him (113).

Only at the end, he realizes that the world he has imagined perfect for him is only a hologram of his delusions. It is his hallucinated projections. Reality is far from perfect. It is fluid, ambiguous, slippery, and the Jewish world which he would have like to be part of is maybe not so alluring. It is somewhat more contradictory, ambivalent, and sophisticated than his simplified, schematic, comforting vision. The two main characters thus go through a process of reconceptualization and re-articulation of the concept of identity, through which they understand that identity is not an immutable unchanged monolith but, borrowing Hall's words:

> Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions . . . constantly in the process of change and transformation. (4)

Hall tells that identities never unified somewhat fragmented and fractured in the cross-cultural scenario. As told by Hall, the characters both Jewish and non-Jewish, as well as both English and non-English, go through the fragmented and fractured identity in *The Finkler Question*.

In the novel, at the same time, also the world of non-Jewishness is observed, this time by a Jew Samuel Finkler who would like to dismiss the signs of his difference, blending in the texture of British society. He even reaches the tops of the British intellectual elite. By emulating the life of a non-Jew, also the Jew learns to see the distortions not of what he sees but of his own eyes. It is the projections of century-long prejudices which he has acquired and absorbed into his thinking. He is on a

journey of re-discovery of his Jewish roots and self-explanation. By going back to his roots, he is finally able to give a name to the unknowable sense of shame. It has victimized him. He can divest himself of his continuous sense of guilt and self-hate and to accept the contradictions and uncertainties of life. Thus, if at the beginning of the novel he is a neurotic, fractious man, in the end, he has at least partially learnt how to cope with an incredibly complex identity. He has a heritage of a painful past that must be accepted and elaborated by him. He can do this.

Although the theme of identity emerges powerfully in the novel, it is also true that the novel finds new creative resources elsewhere. As Jacobson himself has said, *The Finkler Question* is more than anything else a book about loss. Indeed, at the centre of its narration there is the theme of widowhood, of male friendship, old age and death, so that humor is intermingled with deep feelings of uncertainty and anxiety facing the big uncomfortable questions of existence. It is due to being in a new land with another culture and race. No definite answers are given, and probably more is lost than gained in the end. However, it is the journey, rather than its results, which is maybe the real subject of the book. It is the Jewish journey in pursuit of loss which sounds like a sort of enlightening anticipation. Jacobson mentions:

> Go on a Jewjew journey. Not with the ambition of repossessing the sensation of belonging, but rather with the much more voluptuous expectation of repossessing nothing …There is giddying romance in the idea of homelessness. It's out of envy for our homelessness that so many artistic non-Jews have tried to pass themselves off as us this century. In peacetime, naturally. So there is absolutely no contradiction in the idea of a Jewish journey in pursuit of loss. (286)

While reversing the trope of the Jew who aspires to be a Gentile or is forced to convert to Christianity and become a Gentile, it is well explored in Michael Ragussis's text *Figures of Conversion: The Jewish Question and English National Identity*. He writes, "the theme of a Gentile who wants to be a Jew or is mistaken for a Jew, though little trodden as it may be, is not a new one and, on the contrary, appears to be quite exploited in post-War Jewish fiction" (24). Brauner argues that these novels fictionalize the ambivalent relationship between the Jew and the anti-Semite.

The observations carried out by Brauner can well applied to *The Finkler Question*. Although, in this case, it is the non-Jew who keeps a positive point of view on the Jewish world, the Jew is the apparently anti-Semitic character of the situation. So, Jewishness and anti-Semitism enter into ambivalent negotiations with each other.

The title of the novel itself refers to the ambivalent process of stereotyping. The Finkler Question is the Jewish question. It is Treslove who decides to extend his Jewish friend's name, Finkler, to the entire Jewish people, substituting the word 'Jew' with the less threatening word 'Finkler.' He does so because he thinks it takes away the stigma. Jacobson writes:

> Finkler was almost orange in colour and spilled out of his clothes and that is how Treslove likes to think about Jews. Thus, while the word 'Jew' rings with more secretive and mysterious resonances, 'small and dark and beetling' as it sounds, the word 'Finkler' sounds funnier, with its resemblance to 'splinkers,' reminding Treslove of his friend's self-assurance, extravagance, and cleverness. (17)

By renaming the category of the entire Jewish people with a less connoted word, Treslove unconsciously starts a process of questioning what the word 'Jew' automatically drags with itself. At the same time, though, 'the Jew' is his friend and

rival Finkler, Jewishness is, thus, connected with a precise individual, towards whom he feels ambivalent.

By thinking that all Jews are like Finkler, Treslove does not realize that he is substituting a stereotype with another. Still, he is connected to his perception of what Jewishness is, falling back into the same labeling process. In this sense, even Jewish have been stereotyping even by their non-Jewish close friends and circle. It means Jewish in the United Kingdom have been like an outsider though they have a long history there.

Treslove desires to become a real Jew. The world of Jewishness is partially revealed, and the veil of his stereotyping gaze partially lifted up by revealing a more authentic, fragmented and contradictory version of Jewishness. Opposite than Treslove, Finkler rejects his Jewishness, and he attempts to cope with the feeling of shame. While other aspects of Jewishness are revealed through his journey, the discrepancies and incongruities caused by the rejection of his cultural belonging are also unveiled. A crucial theme in the novel is rooting it within contemporary English society. However, it also shows the dramatic consequences of a stereotyping language and attitude is the theme of anti-Semitism. The context of a London is also equally appreciable since London is heated by the ongoing debates on the 2009 Israeli Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, the time, while the novel was being written.

The surging anti-Zionism, caused by the disapproval of Israeli policy against Gaza, dangerously verged on a new wave of anti-Semitism, which Jacobson described with much realism and worry. All the characters experience some anti-Semitic attack, which will contribute to the modification of their attitude towards Jewishness.

With his amount of tears and sorrows, Treslove does live in a very personal melodrama of his own, in which he sentimentalizes every small accident of his life

with the only exception that none of it is real. When he equals himself with his friends' widowhood, this seems very overt. While they mourn the tragic death of their wives, he also feels his level of suffering is equal if not superior. He says, "it is terrible to lose a woman you have loved, but it is no less a loss to have no woman to take into your arms and cradle before tragedy strikes" (6). The fact that he equals his friends' widowhood with his bachelor's status gives an idea of the discrepancy between his perception of the world and reality. In fact, there is a crease into Treslove's celebration of suffering. He always avoids it.

Untimeliness is another sign of Treslove's incompleteness, something which, will wrap up the course of events in the end. Jacobson mentions, "Treslove's clocks were all wrong" (3) and "He was framed for calamity and sadness but was always somewhere else when either struck" (5). Furthermore, Jacobson mentions:

> Framed to be another Orpheus who would retrieve his loved ones from Hades, who would at the last, look back over a lifetime of devotion to her, shedding tears of unbearable sorrow when she faded for the final time in his arms – 'My love, my only love!' – here he was instead, passing himself off as someone he wasn't, a universal look alike who didn't feel as others felt, reduced to swallowing the fragrances of parks and weeping for losses which, in all decency, were not his to suffer. (29-30)

About his mimicry lifestyle, Jacobson says, "Treslove starts working as a lookalike for celebrities at parties, becoming the double of no one in particular" (10). In this sense, he lacks total absence of any definite identity. Treslove is nobody in particular. He has managed to escape from real experience. Instead, he runs after the number of consequences and responsibilities. Throughout his existence, he lives

vicariously by other people's (his friends' mainly) lives and experiences those suggested by drama and literature.

Likewise, Treslove is also a man who believes in destiny or Fate although he does not believe in God. He is fascinated by the hero on an imaginary melodrama. That is why his encounter as a teenage boy with a gipsy fortune-teller during a school trip in Barcelona represents a decisive event for him. It is an event which will shape his expectations of tragedy in the years to come. It is at this moment that the until-then insignificant syllable "Ju" suddenly becomes extremely important for him as an unwritten destiny. The fortune-teller predicts him that there will be a remarkable woman in his life, a Juno, or something similar, Judith, Judy, Julie etc. Thus, linking Treslove's first name Julian with that of the woman of his destiny.

After the fortune-telling, he goes back to his school friend Finkler to relate this remarkable episode. He becomes the buttress of Finkler's wordplay on the word "Ju," “D'jew knows Jewno was a scar that had never healed” (57)). He overcharges the simple syllable with multilayered meanings, connecting indissolubly and unmistakably the question of Jewishness. Finkler's wordplay is at the expense of Treslove, who do not understand Jewish humour and considerably envies the Jewish ability to bend words and their meaning at their will. This ability is one of the things Treslove will try to attain during his attempt to become a Jew. Jacobson writes:

> Do you know anyone called Juno?' Treslove asked. 'J'you know Juno?' Finkler replied, making inexplicable J noises between his teeth. Treslove didn't get it. 'J'you know Juno? Is that what you're asking me?' Treslove still didn't get it. So Finkler wrote it down. D'Jew know Jewno? Treslove shrugged. 'Is that supposed to be funny?' It is to me,' Finkler said. But please yourself.' 'Is it funny for a Jew to write the

> word Jew? Is that what's funny?' 'Forget it,' Finkler said. 'You wouldn't understand.' 'Why wouldn't I understand? If I wrote Non-Jew don't know what Jew know I'd be able to tell you what's funny about it.' There's nothing funny about it.' 'Exactly. Non-Jews don't find it hilarious to see the word Non-Jew. We aren't amazed by the written fact of our identity.' And d' Jew know why that is?' Finkler asked. 'Go fuck yourself,' Treslove told him. 'And that's Non-Jew humour, is it?' (16-17)

From that small event onwards, Treslove is so much enthralled by the inevitability of destiny. He lives waiting for a Juno to appear and disrupt his life. Since then, the sound *ju* represents something meaningful. It is mysterious in his life, something towards which his sense of foreboding and waiting is directed.

Similarly, throughout his life, all of the women he loved had names starting with *ju*: Julie, June, Joia, Jocelyn, etc. However, none of them will prove to be the Juno predicted by the fortune-teller. Only when the Jewish Hephzibah will appear in Treslove's life, renamed by close friends as Juno, Treslove sees how much the prediction of many years before was connected to the question of Jewishness and his alleged Jewishness. This process of realization comes only after the decisive event of the attacking. The attack, Treslove assumes is the meaning to the syllable *ju* and sanction his entry into the Jewish world.

After a dinner with his widowed friends Libor and Finkler, while walking home, mulling over the sadness of a lonely life, Treslove is crashed against the window of a music shop and stripped of his watch, wallet, fountain pen and mobile phone, leaving him shaking and shocked. This aggression is doubly meaningful. On the one hand, it doubles Treslove's lack of any fixed identity. If since the very

beginning Treslove was a “modular, bits-and-pieces man” (7) and “his incompletion, his untogetherness, his beginning waiting for an end, or was it his end waiting for a beginning, his story waiting for a plot” (10). The vent of the mugging concretely leaves him short of any real sign of recognition.

First of all, through his blurred memories, Treslove thinks he remembers he has been mugged by a woman. That the aggressor is a woman is of no small consequence, as in this novel all significant changes, all significant realizations come from women. These women act as staples, bearers of truths, in a world where reality and truth can be bent and recreated at one's will and where identities can be exchanged overnight, where anti-Semites and Jews can easily get mixed up. Secondly, this woman has apparently pronounced the mysterious words "*you ju*." Little does the rational explanation that the woman knew his name, or that she was looking for his "*jewels*," or any other possible explanation.

Treslove convinces himself that the mysterious aggressor has undoubtedly mistaken him for a Jew and that what he heard was the two syllables, "you Jew." The fact that Treslove's memory of the mugging is very vague and that he is not sure of what he has actually seen or heard well accords with his living within an imaginative dimension where his altered perception of reality allows him to become somebody completely different, to do a new identity like a new dress and decide to be a new person.

The episode of the mugging acts as the gate through which Treslove makes his formal entrance into the world of Jewishness. Brauner writes, "in Arthur Miller‟s *Focus*, the Gentile character finds himself irremediably mistaken for a Jew since the moment he starts wearing glasses" (45). When he wakes up on the following morning, his ordinary sense of loss and mourning is gone, replaced by an inexplicable

sense of direction and almost cheerfulness. The mugging arouses immediately existential rather than practical questions as if there must be some supernatural explanation to the attack.

Besides, he had things he needed some mental space to think about. Such as why he had been attacked. Not only to what end, if neither his credit cards not his mobile phone had been used, but why him? There was an existential form this question could take. He questions himself, "Why me, O Lord? And there was a practical one: Why me rather than somebody else?" (50).

The fact that he feels exhilarated, “like a man on the edge of a discovery” (50) convinces him further that the aggression is a divine sign which needs interpretation. Unfortunately for him, when he asks for advice to his friend Finkler, Finkler ruthlessly deconstructs Treslove's presuppositions, accusing him of having invented the details of the mugging, because he has always secretly desired to be a Jew. The conversation goes like this:

> 'You can't be us. You shouldn't want to be us.' 'I don't want to be you,' 'Somewhere you do. I don't mean to be cruel but there has always been some part of us you have wanted . . . Now you want another part of us. Now you want to be a Jew.' Treslove almost choked on his tea. 'Who said I want to be a Jew?' 'You did. What is all this about otherwise? Look, you're not the only one. Lots of people want to be Jews.' 'Well, you don't.' (67)

The dialogue between the two friends is noteworthy because it sets the two categories of Jewishness and non-Jewishness as entirely apart from one another. The two characters will have to go through a painful realization that borders are not so definitely clear-cut and that their differences are on a more human level.

The impression that Jewishness is not exactly something which characterizes physically, but something more spiritual, as Finkler says, “a matter of spirit and essence” (67). It is already possible to notice that Treslove has some preconceived ideas about Jews, he has already determined in himself what Jewishness is and what is not. These remarks punctuate the text, and gradually reveal how much Treslove's idea regarding Jewishness is fixed, based on determined immutable truths. However, they are not only Treslove's point of view. They are common knowledge shared equally among Jews and non-Jews alike, as the following items can well show:

> Finkler opened wide his arms Finklerishly. Infinite patience beginning to run out, the gesture denoted. Finkler reminded Treslove of God when he did that. God despairing of His people from a mountaintop. Treslove was envious. It was what God gave the Finklers as the mark of His covenant with them – the ability to shrug like Him . . . It was precisely this diffidence that put the seal of non-Jewishness on him. Who had ever met a shy Jew? (67)

The novel, thus, basically focuses on the cross-cultural experience between Jewish and non-Jewish. Jacobson mentions, "Jews, Treslove thought, admiringly. Jews and music. Jews and family. Jews and their loyalties" (94). Jacobson, through the friendship between Treslove and Finkler, reveals the dualistic position of Jewish. Jewish is regarded other or outsider or even a mysterious by the non-Jewish community. It is their stereotypical gaze. These lines reveal how the non-Jewish thinks about Jews, "'Do Jewish women sleep with Arabs?' 'Darling, Jewish women, sleep with anybody' 'Interesting, though,' Rodolfo said. 'If I discover I am half Jewish will I suddenly become half clever?'" (107).

As Treslove's thoughts seem a form of stereotyping Jewish people, it becomes increasingly clear how much for Treslove the question of Jewishness has turned into a question of Finkler. Therefore, he is profoundly intertwined with a question of rivalry with his friend. It is not casual that just after the night spent with Kimberly, his thoughts go back to the extra-marital affair Finkler's wife Tyler had with him shortly before her illness. The revelation of Treslove has already gone out to conquer Finkler's world.

Treslove's interest for the Jews is profoundly influenced by the relationship to his friend. The episode of his first sexual encounter with Tyler is worth attention because Treslove is convinced that Tyler is Jewish or, as he calls her, a Jew*ess*. Thus, to have intercourse with her as he says, "the eternal Finkler woman is" for Treslove "the possibility "to penetrate the moist dark womanly mysteriousness of a *Finkleress*" (75). All about Jewishness is for Treslove something "secret, dark, mysterious, exactly like the word Jew itself, which was “small and dark and beetling" (17). The Jewish world is for him a "mysterious world," whose gates are closed, whose code he needs to crack (177) to enter and finally understand it.

Likewise, the erotic triangle between Treslove, Tyler and Finkler is also a form of cultural in-between-ness between Jewish and non-Jewish. Throughout the relationship between these characters, Jacobson reveals contemporary stereotypical gaze of non-Jewish. Treslove's perception towards Jewish, though he seems with them is his look at the outsiders. The impression that Tyler is Treslove's way to 'conquer' Finkler is expressed by Tyler herself who is very aware of the rivalry between the two men. It baffles the expectations raised by this triangular relationship. First, Treslove assumes he has finally intimately known the secret of Jewishness. Later, he finds out that actually, Tyler is not a Jewess at all. She is a Catholic who converted to Judaism

when she married Finkler. It disrupts Treslove's system of interpretation. Tyler's explanation of things is that while Finkler was marrying a Shiksa to conquer the Gentile world, thus following a well-established pattern, she was doing the same. She wanted so much to be part of the Jewish world that she became more Jewish than her husband. The two processes perfectly mirror each other. Finkler is a Jew who wants to be Gentile and she is a Gentile who wants to be a Jew.

The relationship between Finkler and his wife also marks the cultural in-between-ness between Jewish and non-Jewish as well as the influence of one to another. Tyler says, "'I'm another version of him, that's why. We were each out to conquer the other's universe. He wanted the goyim to love him. I wanted the Jews to love me. And I liked the idea of having Jewish children. I thought they'd do better at school. And boy, have they done better!" (77). However, it is only a form of mimicry as Jacobson mentions, "Her pride in them – wasn't that Jewish as well?" (77).

Also, Treslove is a Gentile who wants to be a Jew, but he entirely misses the target as Tyler is not Jewish. Tyler is shown as having a profound insight and clairvoyance as regards her husband's incongruity and Treslove's envy of the Jewish world. As already noted, in this novel the women represent stability, a balanced point of view in the complexity of the Jewish question. Tyler's words as regards her Jewishness already question the existence of fixed contours between Jewishness and non-Jewishness. Fuelling it with ambiguity, something that Treslove and Finkler will have to experience at great cost, only after her death, Tyler knows earlier, "I'm the Jew of the two of us even if I was born a Catholic. I'm the Jewish princess you read about in the fairy stories, only I'm not Jewish" (78). Tyler's contradictory statement recalls contradictory declaration of own identity, something which makes categorization of her and fixes identity is impossible.

Likewise, Treslove's almost obsessive reasoning as regards the mugging leads him to realize that his mind is 'disordered' and that he has become "an unreliable witness to his own life" (82). This admission sheds light on the subsequent development of events, which sees him revive into a new Jewish existence. He discovers only in the end that the discrepancy between reality and imagination is too wide for him. In the heated attempt to understand the mysterious reasons of the mugging, he inspects all aspects of his life and compares them with all he knows about Jewishness.

Finally, he assumes it happened due to being mistaken for another one. It again shows that how much his ideas on Jewishness are based on stereotypes. For instance, he starts wondering if it was his behavior to have encouraged the mugging. Treslove is here playing on the well-established notion "that there must be some responsibility on the part of the Jews, who invite persecution with their own culture and behavior" (Kushner, 234).

The fact that he has been mugged and mistaken for a Jew becomes for him proof that he probably acted like that. He looks up on the Internet to see the daily rate of anti-Semitic aggressions in the world, and he finds out that anti-Semitism is something still menacing today. It mainly happened much at a time when the rhetoric of anti-Zionism is spilling over into anti-Semitism, through the violence and virulence of its language.

Treslove's conversation with Libor finally reveals the conviction he is gradually forming into his mind. Maybe he is indeed a Jew. The elements he discusses as evidence of his alleged Jewishness further reveal that he takes commonplaces about Jewishness literally to decide upon his identity. Treslove thinks he is a Jew because he was a musical boy. Jews are traditionally music lovers. He obeyed his father, but in

this sense, he probably would be more convincingly a Jew if he obeyed his mother. His father forbade him to play the violin. Probably, he assumes, to protect him from their Jewishness. He assumes, finally because his father was a broken-hearted man, and Jews are knowingly people of sorrow.

Likewise, even his surname, Treslove, which is the least Jewish surname one could find, may prove that his father changed their surname to hide his Jewishness and spare his family. The very fact that until he met Finkler, he had never seen a Jew in his house shows. According to him, his father was a Jew trying to save him from Jewishness, even if Libor's explanation to this is very different, "And when I brought him home, my father told me he didn't think he made a suitable friend. 'That Finkler,' he used to ask me, 'that Finkler, are you still kicking about with him? Explain that.' 'Easy. He was an anti-Semite'" (97).

Again, the borders between Jewishness and non-Jewishness, even the borders between Jewishness and anti-Semitism are very fragile. Like communicating vessels, the two categories fluctuate from one to the other side. They mix each other and confuse themselves so that it is not possible to distinguish them anymore. Jacobson narrates, '"Be grateful. A man can live a good and happy life and not be Jewish.' He paused. 'Look at Sam Finkler.' They both laughed wildly and wickedly at this" (97). In this sense, Jacobson reveals the cross-cultural experience of Jews who have been living in the United Kingdom. However, these Jews have been facing the stereotypical gaze of the non-Jewish community.

So, if Finkler can pass off as a Gentile, why can't Treslove decide to be a Jew? Little do Libor's protests that these speculations do not make him a Jew. Now that Treslove has made up his new identity and created a brand-new Jewish genealogy for him based on mere conjectures. He can finally learn how to be one and feel that "old

sensation of exclusion lifting up, living him free to enter into this new world" (83). Libor invites him to a dinner with some Jewish friends, where Treslove gets to know from experience all those aspects of Jewishness he has always seen from afar. He feels jealous of his friends of their sense of inclusion and mutual belonging. Treslove will approach the question of Jewishness, or the 'Finkler question' as he calls it, from a religious, linguistic, cultural, sexual, political point of view, testing on first-hand experience his preconceptions on what it means to be Jewish.

Jon Stratton writes in his *Coming Out Jewish*, ". . . The claim to authenticity depends on a belief, a feeling of identification, a certainty of identity, and that, as for Jews there is no national site for identification, this comes in many and varied forms" (7). Treslove's process of identification with the Jews seems to follow a similar pattern. He is unable to perceive "a certainty of identity," he decides to base a new identity on his perception and interpretation of the mugging, "its very arbitrariness was the proof of its authenticity" (108).

The event of the mugging can thus be interpreted as a gate through which a new Jewish identity opens up for him. It is relevant to Stuart Hall's ideas of identity, "identity to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects that can be spoken" (5-6).

In other words, the mugging becomes the point of suture between all the constructed ideas of Jewishness Treslove has absorbed and the expectancy to test these preconceptions against experience and subjectivity. Treslove's attempt to become a Jew even reflects the stereotypical perception of non-Jewish to Jewish. It

evens makes Jewish mysterious with the question of what a Jew is. The test on which Treslove measures his progress is that mythic 'Jew' of Western culture, that mix of fixed stereotypes, representations and images constructed by the Western imagination for centuries. Treslove's representation of the Jew is idealistic. This lives with imaginary discourses on Jew where he connects Jewish identity with the traumatic experience of the Holocaust. He argues that what has remained of Jewish identity after the Holocaust is only an absence, a void, an empty category, and any attempt to define or reassert Jewish identity is only the "flaunting of a void. But I find no lasting comfort in such liberty, for my inner life is empty" (305).

This emptiness can be linked to Treslove's lack of identity and to his effort to fill this void with everything he knows about Jewishness. Jews are geniuses; they are funny, witty, preposterous in a positive way, they have close-knit and warm families, and so on. Treslove's tendency to take partial aspects of Jewish culture is the symbol of the Jewish identity as a whole. However, he knows nothing or very little. It is coterminous with Bhabha's theorization of the act of mimicry. Bhabha describes mimicry as "a metonymy of presence, in which only parts of the colonial subjects – those which are objects of the colonial desire – are taken into account while the colonial subject as a whole, in its complexity, is disavowed, or even threatened" (91).

Such contradictory articulations are racist stereotypes, statements, jokes, myths. These all are not caught in the doubtful circle of the return of the repressed. They are the effects of a disavowal that denies the difference of the other but produces in its stead forms of authority and many beliefs that alienate the assumptions of civil discourse. At a closer look, Treslove's attitude towards Jews is metonymic. The very name he has chosen to refer to Jews is indicative of this. He knows Finkler, and all the Jews become "Finklers" Tyler, Finkler's wife, is the Jewish until he finds out that she

is not Jewish after all, so Hephzibah replaces her and becomes the real thing, the exact Jewish. The novel is crowded with statements related to the way Jews are supposed to be. The fact that Treslove's representation is all positive does not diminish the perception that his idealization still places the Jew as other, different, as an object of the beholder's gaze, and therefore still as an object of stereotyping and discrimination.

Treslove's idealization still works within that 'Semitic discourse' theorized by Bryan Cheyette, which includes an anti-Semitic and a Philo-Semitic stance. What is interesting is that although Treslove chases "the illusion of a 'mythic Jew' – exotic, mysterious, desirable – what emerges is rather the image of 'the very incoherence of the Jew, as 'a potent expression of the impossibility of fully knowing anything" (9).

The more Treslove tries to be a Jew as he imagines it, the more this myth becomes vague and unattainable, thus proving what Cheyette calls the "protean instability of the Jew" (8). The inner indeterminacy of the concept itself, the ultimate slipperiness of these constructions "every time he met a Finkler they changed the rules to which Finklers were meant to adhere" (164). Cheyette's words are very appropriate here, "The Jew, like all doubles, is inherently ambivalent and can represent both the best and worst'of selves" (12).

In the absence of a proper, determined identity based on an individual and authentic experience, Treslove goes fishing in this mishmash of the mythic 'Jew' where he can find everything he needs. The result is that "the Jew remains unacknowledged, a racial commonplace, another of Tresloves silent doubles" (12). Thus, Treslove's first attempt to discover the Jewish world is religious and happens during a Seder festival service at Libor's house. At the dinner, through Treslove's estranged eyes, everything appears exotic, mysterious, and secret. Everything exudes a sense of warmth and closeness. He looks with astonishment at the others ability to

read in Hebrew from right to left, as if they had some powers of secret knowledge and necromancy. He marvels at the monotony of religious formulas, reveling in their repetitiveness, wondering if his sense of elation for prayer might be further proof of his Jewishness. When he is asked to recite the Four Questions, he feels too self-conscious about the way he should read them. Is there a Jewish way to read the Four Questions? He wonders:

> How did he know how to ask Jewish questions in a room of Jews he has never before met? Were the questions meant to be rhetorical? Were they a joke? Should he have asked them as Jack Benny or Shelley Berman might have asked them, with the *bitter herbs* comically inflected? Or hyperbolically to denote the extremity of Jewish grief? The Jews were a hyperbolic people. Had he been hyperbolical enough? (128)

As noted elsewhere, Treslove is already in search of some Jewish gist, of something inherently and univocally Jewish which could make him like them. The author is very able to characterize Treslove's perception of inclusion and exclusion through the use of pronouns.

Jacobson writes, "Treslove still looks at the Jews present at the *Seder* with a sense of extraneousness and longing, yet he already refers to them as *his* people" (129). On the other hand, while he does his best to feel and be included, the other Jews around him recognize him as not part of them. The perception of difference is thus on both sides. Jacobson further narrates, "'Don't idealize us,' she warned, waving her ringed hands at him. 'Us.' He melted into the word. 'Why not?' . . . 'For all the usual reasons. And don't marvel at our warmth. Our.'" (132-33). This alternation between the Jewish sense of 'us' and Treslove's longing for inclusion will run

throughout the novel. Treslove sees them as different from him and as an object of desire, but also the Jews around him look at him as 'other' from them, and they somehow resist his presence. The narration says, "'He shouldn't be here,' says the oldest lady of the group" (127).

What finally sanctions Treslove's integration into the Jewish world is the presence of a woman, who reminds him again of the mugger who first called him Jew. It is Hephzibah Weizenbaum, whom Treslove thinks, "swathed in all her veils and scarves hiding her stoutness, smells like the Euphrates and suggests the Middle East" (130). Likewise, Jacobson mentions, "with his tendency to daydreaming he already imagines himself married to her and growing her children although he cannot conceive to be with such a healthy woman"(132).

But it is only when she tells him that her friends call her "Juno" that Treslove finally finds the prediction of the fortune-teller fulfilled and his destiny. He finally realized it. Like the woman who attacked him and showed him the direction of his destiny, Hephzibah is his passageway to Jewishness, his single ticket to a brand-new identity. The two soon start a relationship. Treslove is galvanized by her, but it appears increasingly clear that what fascinates him is not Hephzibah, but the fact that she is Jewish. To be Jewish, for Treslove, is to possess a series of qualities Jews are supposed to have. So maybe, by being with her, he could learn and become really like one of them. One of the qualities Treslove tries to attain from Hephzibah is the use of language and humor. Treslove sees in Hephzibah the representative of the Jewish genius, "'You were waiting for the roof to fall in.' He went to kiss her. 'And it did', he said with exaggerated courtliness. She pushed him away. 'I'm the roof now!' He thought his heart would break with love for her.

This little refrain, "She was so Jewish," runs through the text and always accompanies Treslove's declarations of love for her, revealing how much his love is instrumental to his longing to be like her. However, a veil falls between Treslove and Hephzibah when he realizes that no matter how much he tries, he will never become a full-fledged Jew. He feels "as if he has failed a test" (208). Treslove's attempts to be like a Jew prove increasingly unsuccessful, doubling his sense of not-belonging. Moreover, his failures go hand in hand with his progressive realization that the image he has constructed of the Jewish Hephzibah does not correspond to the real woman he has near him. The discrepancy between the 'abstract Jew' and the 'Jew next door' cannot be filled. For instance, when they move together, "Treslove is disappointed to find out that her flat is an ordinary English flat, not revealing anything particularly Jewish or, as he says, not overlooking the Wailing Wall" (160).

Another aspect of Hephzibah which puzzles him is the colour of her skin. While he expected a colour evoking 'belly dancers and bazaars,' he finds that she is extremely light in colour, almost Baltic or Scandinavian, modeled on some Norse sagas. The fact that Treslove's infatuation of Jewishness is a projection of his own emotional or personal lacks becomes increasingly evident. In Bhabha's words, "the stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow" (82). Treslove's perception towards Jews is completely based on his stereotypical perception of society. About his complex relationships with Hephzibah, Jacobson mentions:

> And more than that a hunger for gloom, as though there wasn't enough to satisfy him in his own person and he had come to suck out hers. Was that, at bottom, all that his Jewish thing was really about, she wondered, a search for some identity that came with more inwrought

> despondency than he could manufacture out of his own gene pool? Did he want the whole fucking Jewish catastrophe? (224)

Hephzibah's insight recognizes that his obsession with Jewishness, with all its distortions and incomprehension, is very close and actually mutually shared by those who would like to kill Jews rather than be like them, as the distinction is very subtle. Jacobson mentions, "He wasn't the first, of course. You could divide the world into those who wanted to kill Jews and those who wanted to be Jews" (224).

Things precipitate when Treslove starts suspecting Finkler and Hephzibah of having an affair. Treslove's suspicions are not based on anything concrete. Treslove fears is because of their Jewishness which simultaneously connects them and excludes him. Jacobson narrates:

> It disconcerted Treslove – her Julian or not – to watch the two Finklers go on eyeing each other up and verbally trying each other out. He felt like piggy in the middle. Hephzibah was his woman, his beloved, his Juno, but Finkler appeared to believe he had an older claim. It was as though they spoke a secret language. The secret language of the Jews. I must learn it, Treslove thought. I must crack their code before I'm through. (177)

Treslove even thinks that their 'strange and secret sexual powers' may be ascribed to their Jewishness. Thus, Treslove falls back into the century-long stereotype of the Jew by the non-Jewish community. The naivety of his attempt to be a Jew, thus, appears as a much more threatening operation than it looked like at the beginning, it is at one resemblance and menace, an act of colonial appropriation. Homi K. Bhabha says, "Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices. It is a much more ambivalent text projection and

introjections, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity. (87). Treslove's thoughts after one year spent trying to be a Jew indeed enlightens his perception of Jews as an inassimilable, indefinable problem.

III. Jewish Community as 'Other' Community in Britain

Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* depicts the stereotypical gaze of the non-Jewish community toward the Jewish community in contemporary British society. Throughout the perception of its central character Treslove, who is very fascinated with Jewish culture and community, Jacobson is able to reveal the exact reality of Jewish identity in British society. The novel presents a satire of a segment of Jewish life in the context of rising anti-Semitism and an increasingly bitter anti-Israel discourse. The humor derives significantly from the portrayal of the obsessive protagonist, Julian Treslove. He is non-Jews. However, he desires desperately to become Jewish. He does so despite his several Jewish friends who complicate his stereotypical expectations. He envies, admires, and competes with his friend Sam Finkler, a Jewish who himself feel odd to be Jewish in London.

Considering the novel as a whole, Jacobson very clearly depicts the multicultural setting of London where the mainstream British culture and minorities like Jews go forward together. The Jewish community is only one of the manifold ethnic minorities cohabiting and coexisting within English multicultural society. British multicultural society itself is one of the most ancient, one of the most assimilated and integrated within British texture. But the pluralism of today's English society makes one wonder how the novel also relates to other minorities, to the multicultural world in which the story is set.

In the novel, Jacobson's world is composed of Jews and non-Jews, or more specifically, English Jews and English non-Jews. It is clearly focused on the issue of British Jewish identity basically being centered on their sense of dislocation due to the stereotypical gaze of non-Jewish English people. The new generation of British Jews have been tackling the theme of Jewishness and Jewish identity nowadays. Unlike

Jacobson, who strongly feels the opposition between Britishness and Jewishness and the difficulty sometimes to compose mutual differences into a harmonic whole, a newer generation seems to deal much more easily with the plurality of their identities.

In this sense, Jacobson has appeared as one of the last of his own generation, considering the Jewish community as the most prominent one to be settled in English mainstream. He has depicted a generation that ill adapts to the sense of marginality in which they have been relegated by the arrival of other minorities from postcolonial countries. It has somehow stolen their prominence.

Going back to the novel, it is interesting to notice that while the male characters like Finkler and Treslove have to go through a painful journey in order to become aware of the ambivalence at the heart of their perception of Jews. Their dual relationship is coated with layers of stereotypes and projections. Both of them are too judgmental towards each other. Likewise, the female characters Tyler, Emmy, and Hephzibah seem to have fully accepted the complexity and contradictoriness of language, dual cultures. They somehow easily adjusted in the mix-cultural scenario. They seem to be able to fuel words with that component of comprehension and acceptance of the lights and shadows of things and they seem to be able to give a more lucid interpretation of the conflict. It is thanks to the women's intervention that the male world gradually learns to see things from a more inclusive, less judgmental stance.

There is an ambivalent relationship between Jews and non-Jewish in the novel. Both of them influenced each other and again both of them have stereotypical gaze towards each other. Treslove desires to become a real Jew. The world of Jewishness is partially revealed and the veil of his stereotyping gaze partially lifted up by revealing a more authentic, fragmented and contradictory version of Jewishness. Just opposite

than Treslove, Finkler rejects his Jewishness and he attempts to cope with the feeling of shame. While other aspects of Jewishness are revealed through his journey, the discrepancies and incongruities caused by the rejection of his cultural belonging are also unveiled. A crucial theme in the novel is rooting it within contemporary English society where Jews have been living like an outsider since non-Jewish British origin people regard them as 'other' with their stereotypical perception. This 'other'-ness somehow generated the feeling of rootlessness, alienation, homelessness and non-belongingness for the Jewish community though they have been living there since the history and have gone through a lots of cultural fusion with native origin British people.

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