

**Book Review: Howard Jacobson, *J: A Novel*. New York: Hogarth, 2015. ISBN: 978-0553419559 (Paperback). 352 Pages. Paperback. \$15.00.**

**Reviewed by George S. Diamond<sup>1</sup>**

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Howard Jacobson's latest work titled *J: A Novel* ("J" from here on out) calls to mind Winston Churchill's description of Russia, as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." To be sure it is a fascinating piece of work—troubling, obscure, and remote—whose essential meaning seems mysterious, although it may or may not be. In narration, characterization, setting, plot, and tone, "J" is a fascinating exercise in fiction whose meaning and significance seem just slightly out of reach. It was a finalist for the Man Booker Prize, a prestigious, yearly literary award for the best original novel published in the United Kingdom and written in English.

Jacobson had previously received the Booker in 2010 for *The Finkler Question*, a comic novel that concerns one Julian Treslove and his misadventures, romantic and otherwise. Treslove, a Gentile (or perhaps simply a non-Jew), is friends with and enemies of two successful, elderly Jewish intellectuals, Libor Sevick and Sam Finkler. Treslov is also the victim of a mugging which he presumes to be anti-semitic in nature. Although the work is too complicated and intricate to be discussed here, its central conceit is the Finkler question, itself—what does it mean to be a Jew in the contemporary world? What this does bring to mind, however, is the question: is "J" a sequel to *The Finkler Question*? Or is it a refutation, if such is possible?

What "J" certainly is is a bizarre, dystopian novel with what might be a warning of things to come. And perhaps it is all of these things—or perhaps none! But to quote the author, "Let us go and make our visit."

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