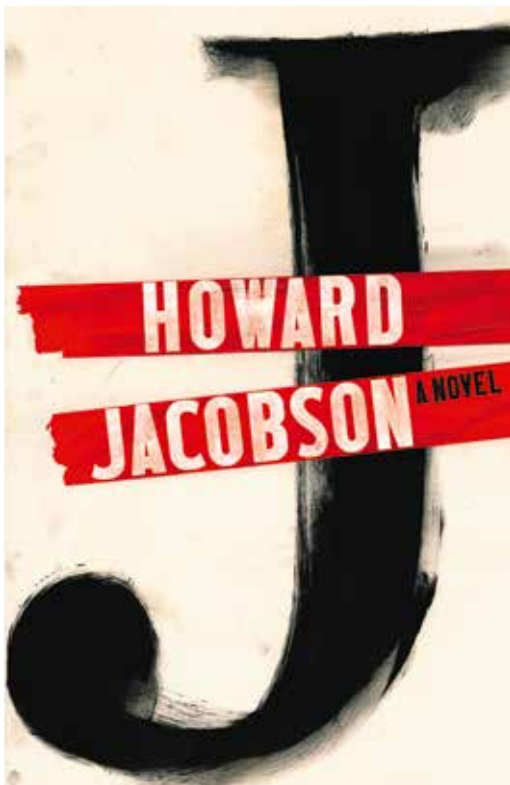


The Man
Booker
Prize

2014

Reader's Guide



Other novels by Howard Jacobson

Coming From Behind (1983)
Peeping Tom (1984)
Redback (1986)
In the Land of Oz (1987)
The Very Model of a Man (1992)
No More Mister Nice Guy (1998)
The Mighty Walzer (1999)
Who's Sorry Now (2002)
The Making of Henry (2004)
Kalooki Nights (2006)
The Act of Love (2008)
The Finkler Question (2010)
Zoo Time (2012)

J Howard Jacobson

Jonathan Cape

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About the author

An award-winning writer and broadcaster, Howard Jacobson was born in Manchester in 1942, brought up in Prestwich and was educated at Stand Grammar School in Whitefield, and Downing College, Cambridge, where he studied under F R Leavis.

He lectured for three years at the University of Sydney before returning to teach at Selwyn College, Cambridge. Howard Jacobson now lives in London.

J

Set in the future, a world where the past is a dangerous country, not to be talked about or visited, *J* is a love story of incomparable strangeness, both tender and terrifying.

Two people fall in love, not yet knowing where they have come from or where they are going. Kevern doesn't know why his father always drew two fingers across his lips when he said a world starting with a J. It wasn't then, and isn't now, the time or place to be asking questions.

Ailinn too has grown up in the dark about who she was or where she came from. On their first date Kevern kisses the bruises under her eyes. He doesn't ask who hurt her. Brutality has grown commonplace. They aren't sure if they have fallen in love of their own accord, or whether they've been pushed into each other's arms. But who would have pushed them, and why?

Hanging over the lives of all the characters in this novel is a momentous catastrophe – a past event shrouded in suspicion, denial and apology, now referred to as WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED.

Discussion points

At the start of the novel Kevern Cohen performs a ritual before leaving the house, checking his phone twice, rumpling the hallway runner, locking and double-locking the front door and peering through the letter box to check that all is as it should be. What role does paranoia play in the book?

Throughout the book there are references to WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED? What exactly do you think happened, and how did it start?

'Forcing brutish kisses on people you neither knew well nor cared much for wasn't confined to men. Both sexes broke skin when they could.' Discuss the portrayal of violence in *J*.

J is made up of fragmented narratives, letters, songs and fables. Did you enjoy this approach?

Kevern isn't sure if he has fallen in love with Ailinn of his own accord. Does it matter whether love is caused by fate or engineered?

Themed reading

George Orwell *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
Aldous Huxley *Brave New World*
Franz Kafka *The Castle*
Philip K. Dick *The Man in the High Castle*
Margaret Atwood *The Handmaid's Tale*

Useful links

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<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/howard-jacobson>