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Characterisation and Thematic Analyzing of Howard Jacobson's *Kalooki Nights*

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Abstract:

Howard Jacobson's *Kalooki Nights* indeed weaves a rich tapestry of character, history, and cultural conflict, encapsulating the complexities of Jewish identity in the modern world. The main character, Sam Shimon, reflects on his life and the broader context of his friends' experiences, mainly focusing on Mannie's ultra-Orthodox Jewish family. This narrative explores the tension between traditional Jewish values and the challenges posed by contemporary secular Western society.

Keywords: Jewish, Kalooki, Holocaust, Gentiles.

Howard Jacobson is a British author and journalist. He is best known for writing comic novels that often revolve around the dilemmas of British Jewish characters. He is bright, bookish and intellectually ambitious, and studied English literature at Cambridge under the legendary F.R. Leavis. Jacobson has described himself as a Jewish Jane Austen. His protagonists tend to be Jewish Northerners or Jewish North Londoners of various kinds, deeply preoccupied with their own Jewishness, interested in literature and obsessed with sex. However, the order of these priorities may vary from book to book.

Kalooki Nights, Jacobson's ninth novel, is the story of two friends, Max Glickman and Manny Washinsky, who grew up in Crumpsall Park, Manchester. Aware of the crimes committed against his people, but unable to live a conformist Jewish life, Max moves away, marries out and, as a cartoonist, forges a career drawing strips about Jewish suffering. Manny is released from jail for having served a long sentence for gassing his Orthodox parents. Max is reminded of a world he thought he had left behind.

Kalooki Nights is not just a catchy title but an epitome: the game of Kalooki which Max's mother lives for calculation and empathy. A gala Kalooki Night is what Max has instead of a bar mitzvah. He never becomes what the word means, a son of the law. Redemption is fiction; there is only the playing- out of one hand and the dealing of the next.

Max grows up in the Manchester suburb of Crumpsall Park in a household consisting of his father Jack, his mother Nora, his sister Shani and his mother's half- brother known as Tsedraiter Ike to distinguish him from the other Ike's in the family. Jack, a former boxer with nose bleeds is the most Aryan Jew in Manchester. He despises any expression of religious feeling and hates to dwell on the Holocaust.

Nora, a beautiful mother whose ankles at eighty still arouse Max's admiration, remains a shadowy figure despite the book's taking its title from the game of Kalooki she plays night after night. Shani attracts little attention until her love affair with Mick, an Irish sailor comes to the light. Tsedraiter Ike is the only observant member of the house-hold, although he is later revealed to have a secret life behind his frequent absences to sit shiva.

The Glickmans pride themselves on their secularism, whereas their neighbours the Mannys are deeply orthodox. The novel shows the childhood days of Max and his two friends Manny and Errol. Manny is described as a weird orthodox Jew who accepts his fate and becomes an eternal isolate. Errol surprises in his super-sexed Jewishness and organizes an after school ring of ornartists. A factor that unites this unlikely trio is an unhealthy preoccupation with the Nazi death camps.

Max is the standard Jacobsonian male protagonist whose masterwork a comic history of the Jews is called *Five Thousand Years of Bitterness*. Max's two wives Chloe and Zoe are Gentiles. Max's third wife Alys is a Jew. His marriages are all failures. His career is not a success. Manny's sole act of distinction is to murder his domineering parents Channa and Selick Washinsky by gas when they sleep. The scene in which Max's mother tells him explains the strange nature of the deed. "Channa and Selick have been found dead.' / 'Christ!' / 'In their beds, Max. They think gassed' (49).

Max tells the readers from the very beginning that Manny has gassed his parents, making him a person who committed the double Jewish homicide in the history of Crumpsall Park. He is locked up for more than two decades, and on his release, Max renews their acquaintance at the request of a television producer who plans to make a film based on Manny's crime. Much of the novel concerns Max's attempts to measure Manny's motives on the

Holocaust. When arrested, he tells the police that he followed the SS officer Georg Renno, who claimed that turning the tap on was no big deal.

Years after when Manny is released from prison, where he served a token sentence, a TV documentary firm Lipsync Production's, convinces him to look him up and help him examine his past and find out the reason why he murdered his parents. Max makes up his mind that he is not supposed to interfere in Manny's deeds. Like a pair of rabbis, Max and Manny argue and discuss faith and community in half a dozen salt-beef restaurants and pizza parlours across London, but there is no satisfactory answer to any of it. Manny gassed his parents because they forbid his brother Asher to marry his lover Dorothy the Gentile. Max wonders whether Manny would have killed Jack and Nora if they were his parents, and he doubts whether he killed them because they escaped the Holocaust. Max finally enters the religion, and the community he tried to leave behind.

Kalooki Nights is an exploration of various themes such as love, death, relationship with women, Jewish identity, Holocaust, friendship, family bondage, forgiving and forgetting, separation, punishment, and responsibility for guilt. According to the novelist Howard Jacobson, the main reason for writing the novel *Kalooki Nights* is to restore and rebuild Jewish life.

Max, the novel's protagonist, is a failed cartoonist by profession. His three marriages are a failure. His first two wives are Gentiles, and the last wife is a Jew. All three of them leave him when they understand that a life cannot exist with him. Max loved all his wives. He could never tolerate their suffering. His infinite affection for them only at a later stage became a negative factor in his own life. He loved his first wife Chloe a lot. He spoke out whatever he felt she wanted him to say but never wanted him to say such things.

Asher, the elder brother of Manny, had a love affair with Dorothy, the fire Yekelte's daughter. Although he loved her a lot, he did not dare to take her home. Dorothy, on the other hand, took Asher home and introduced him to her father. Dorothy and Asher though they love each other a lot, move away from each other in the novel.

Max describes the love affair between Dorothy and Asher as "Love at first sight, anyway – Coup de foudre. A bolt of lightning striking both their hearts simultaneously, illuminating them and them alone and plunging everything else into darkness. Midnight in the Garden of Love and Trial" (141).

The place where, taking the long view – God's covenant with the Jews, etc. – all Dorothy's and Asher's troubles started and yet where, as the plastic surgeon who wouldn't work on my nose insisted, the reconciliation of every warning people would at last, in readiness for the final trumpet, be effected. If Asher and Dorothy were to be given a second chance of happiness before the world ended, Israel surely was the land to give it to them. (370)

Even though fate allows them to meet in Israel, they do not agree to be together and Manny, Asher's brother agrees to take care of her.

Ilse Koch, the wife of the Commander of the Camp, is called the Witch of the Buchenwold. Manny felt a liking for her. She beat the prisoners very badly and treated them like slaves. Manny felt a similarity between his mother Channa Washinsky and Ilse Koch. "She is a version of his mother in other ways. On both the skin hangs heavy, their mouths turned down a pendulousness in both their jaws, as though oppressed. For his mother, wherever she is now, this gravity made him weep" (106-107).

Death is repeatedly referred to in the novel. From the novel's outset, Max introduced the idea that Manny gassed his parents Selick and Channa Washinsky. Their death is recognized as a deed which Manny did as they were Jews. The readers also get an idea that he committed the crime as his parents were not killed in the Holocaust.

Throughout the story, various people die. The death of Selick and Channa Washinsky did not hurt Max a lot. Max commented that their death only gave him the sorrow which one would feel when one's pet died.

But because of the odour of mouldering prohibition in their house ...,because of all the junk there was to touch and kiss and start in superstitious trepidation from, I couldn't feel for Manny anything of what I should have felt. I couldn't anticipate his horror. Beyond a passing sadness for him, such as the death of someone's animal might bring, God help me, I couldn't participate in his 'grief. (55)

Nora Glickman, Max's mother, dies in the later part of the novel. Nora, though she loved her family a lot, is introduced as a character who loved to play Kalooki with her friends all the time. "For my mother this time. They all leave you. One by one, they all depart. Yisgadal veyiskadash shemey rabo, Be'olmo di'vero chir'usey. May his Great Name grow exalted and sanctified in the World He created as He Willed. Amen" (465). Nora did not die due to any illness, but she could not tolerate the fact that none of her friends accompanied her to play Kalooki anymore.

Tsedraiter Ike, the half brother of Nora, only at the time of his death was known to have a relationship with a mistress Dolly. He, being a calm person, can be characterised as a person who fears death. He had told Jack that the Nazis had tried to exterminate the Jews.

Relationships with women could be considered a predominant theme in the novel. Max is a person who has relationships with many women. His relationship with neither his wives nor the women he met is considered a long lasting one. He never hurts them, but they leave him alone and walk out of his life. Max can be considered a person who is not fit to be in contact with a woman. He is a person who himself commented that he always felt more when he left his wife's mother than his wife.

Jewish Identity is yet another theme. Jack never appreciated any of the family members being Jewish. He never even appreciated Max receiving a bar mitzvah, given to a Jew when a boy reaches a particular age. Mick, the husband of Shani, is a Gentile. As Shani's family is a Jewish family, he wants to learn all the Jewish customs and traditions. Mick wants to learn even about the Jewish eating habits, the customs and practices of daily life led by a Jewish person. Max, when he understands that Holocaust is one of the reasons for Manny gassing his parents, recognizes the fact that he too is a Jew. He develops a Jewish identity within himself. He recalls how Jack never appreciates Jewish customs.

The Holocaust is a significant theme. Tsedraiter Ike, the half-brother of Nora who stayed with Nora and Jack, commented in the novel that he feared the Nazis would exterminate them. The Holocaust has a severe impact on almost all the characters in the novel. The Holocaust, right from the beginning, is introduced as an act where the Jews are exterminated which brings in fear in the Jews.

The word gassed, which is linked with the Holocaust, is generally never said to Jews. Max felt that these words should be struck out of the human vocabulary for almost a thousand

years. "Gassed, camp, extermination, concentration, experiment, march, train, rally, German words made unholy just as ground is made unholy" (49).

Manny tried to hide his crime by revealing the fact that Renno had told that turning the tap on was not a big deal. Even Manny's lawyers had commented that Manny would have done the deed due to abnormality. Gassing the parents is not a deed that any normal person would do. "No normal person, however engrossed in the history of the Holocaust, would have taken research to quite such lengths" (59).

The Holocaust in which the Jews are killed brutally can be compared to the Buchenwald Camp in the novel where the prisoners are killed brutally. The wife of the Camp Commander is referred to as the Witch of Buchenwald. She beats all the prisoners very badly. She makes them walk bare bodied in front of her. Manny is the character who introduced the book *The Scourge of the Swastika* to Max. In the book, the pictures of how the people suffered a lot in the past, are shown. The people were murdered in large numbers. Max and Manny decide to write a book named *Five Thousand Years of Bitterness*. In the book how the Jews suffered before, is described. Max, being a cartoon illustrator, also drew pictures in the book.

Manny could never digest that Asher was sent away from home for falling in love with Dorothy. The readers at a particular stage wonder whether that was the reason why Manny killed his parents.

Friendship has a significant place in the novel. Max and Manny have been friends from childhood. They also have a friend named Errol Tobias who is from the same street. Max, when he is with Manny, despises the friendship of Manny. The reason for this feeling is that both were completely different persons. Their ideas constantly clashed. They could never accept each other. Max, during his childhood, did not like to have a friendship with Manny.

We had moved in the opposite side of the street (part of my family's downward social spirit), and as he was the only kid in the immediate vicinity my age - immediate vicinity meaning within my mother's melodic shouting range – I was persuaded to make a friend of him. I wasn't keen. He looked too historically Jewish for my liking. Too

persecuted and unhealthy, his skin yellow and waxy, the colour of old candles. (41)

Like friendship, family bondage is a theme in *Kalooki Nights*. Shani, sister of Max, is described as a very reserved person who never appreciates the company of others. She plays *Kalooki* along with her mother and her friends. She never interferes in family matters. Max comments that even when she remains silent and secluded from others, she likes to see the boxing that Jack and Max play. Though Shani is a very reserved person at the beginning, during the last days of Jack she takes care of him. She never expects Nora and Max to take care of him. Jack calls Shani as his *shaineh maidel* which means beautiful girl. Nora, the mother of Max, is introduced as a character who, unlike the present generation mothers who give themselves to taking care of the family, develops an interest in a card game called *Kalooki*.

Max, when he goes to Manny's house, is jealous after seeing the affection that Manny and his parents have. Max recalls how they used to be together with great love and affection. He wishes that his life was similar to Manny's life. "I wished my life were more like Manny's. I would then secretly envy Manny his mother, too, Channa Washinsky on the doorstep looking out for their return, halo'din cooking fumes, her head covered by a scarf, wearing spells from under it" (38).

Dorothy, the lady who loved Asher, had a deep bondage with her father. Dorothy took Asher to her home to meet her father, Albert. The moment Albert came to know that Asher was a Jew, tears flowed from his eyes. "So when he heard that his daughter was in love with a Jewish boy, the son of a family his wife made regular expiation to on his behalf, he shaved twice, put on his best shirt, attached the double cuffs with the links his mother had given him for his fifteenth birthday" (177). Albert could not control his tears when he saw Asher, "In comes Asher, not just the damson jam but the damson orchard entire, and is it any wonder Albert Beckman's tears pour from him like waters from the rock Moses smote when the Israelites were thirsty" (178).

Tsedraiter Ike, the half-brother of Nora, also resides in their home. Nora took care of him and looked after the factor that Jack never disappointed him or hurt him. Jack and Tsedraiter Ike used to have small quarrels between them.

'Since when did any Nazi try to exterminate you, Ike? You personally?

Had I thought the Nazis were after you I'd have told them where to find you years ago'. Upon which my uncle, who had lived with us for as long as I could remember, would turn white, accuse my father of being no better than Hitler himself, and flee to his room to hide. (4)

Forgiving and Forgetting also emerges as an important theme. Manny could never forgive his parents for sending Asher away just because he loved Dorothy. According to Asher and Manny, it was not a mistake but the parents could not consider the fire yekelte's daughter as their daughter in law. If Manny could have forgiven his parents, then the ugly murder would never have occurred in the novel.

Max likes Manny, but he does not contact Manny after he hears about the murder. He feels that it is better for him to stay silent rather than ask Manny why he did the deed. Max is not able to forgive Manny, so he decides it is better for him to forget the existence of such a friend. However, in the course of the novel, Max contacts Manny with the influence of the two sisters Francine and Marina who persuade him to find out the reason why Manny gassed his parents. They wanted to make a documentary based on the details. Though Max and Manny meet in various restaurants, he cannot tell any reason for the deed he committed.

Ilse Koch, the wife of the camp commander at Buchenwald, is a harsh and rude character. She beats all the prisoners mercilessly. Though she beats Manny, he develops a liking for her. When she calls him, he is happy as he considers it as a time that he gets to be with her. When Manny's parents hear about Asher's love affair with Dorothy, they cannot forgive his son. They want him to leave her by all means. According to them, that is a relationship that they can never accept.

Manny in the beginning of the novel advises Max that the Ten Commandments should be strictly followed by everyone; and, breaking one is equal to breaking all of them. He, later in the novel, breaks the Ten Commandments. "It's a commandment' Manny told me. 'Remember the Sabbath day to ...' 'I know all that. But next to 'Thou shalt not kill; remembering the Sabbath day is a bit unimportant, isn't it? We don't say "Remember not to kill". Because forgetting wouldn't be any excuse" (21).

Separation is a motif in the novel. When Asher is sent away from his home, he leaves Dorothy and walks out of her life. He decides to leave her. Even though they meet in Israel,

they do not decide to live together but walk away from each other's lives. In Max's life, no woman has a permanent position. His life is lonely. His marriages end in separation. None of his marriage is a long lasting one. All his women find their own life and walk away. Though Jack and Nora stay together, their life could be considered as a separated life as she is completely involved in her Kalooki card game and not interested in the family matters.

Responsibility is another idea that runs through the story. Shani looks after her father in his death bed. She considers it her duty to look after her father. She does all that he wants. She never complains a word to either Nora or Max. Nora takes care of Tsedraiter Ike as it is her responsibility. Nora's and Tsedraiter Ike's father is the same but their mothers are different. Nora takes utmost care that Jack never hurts him in any way. Nora, though she is involved very much in her Kalooki card game, still takes care of him.

Max at the end of the novel thinks that he has to take care of Manny as it is his need. Though he refuses to go to Manny at first, he later feels that he should meet Manny by all means as he is his friend. When Asher and Dorothy are separated, Manny, Asher's brother, cannot tolerate the fact that Dorothy is alone. He decides to take care of her until his death. Dorothy tells Max that her life is not destroyed but Max and Manny's life is destroyed. She tells him, "My life?" She seemed astonished I should suggest such a thing. My life's just a life. It's your lives that are ruined'" (472).

In *Kalooki Nights*, Jacobson has dealt with many themes like love, death, relationship with woman, Jewish identity, Holocaust, friendship, family bondage, forgiving and forgetting, separation, responsibility and guilt. However, the most significant one concerns being Jewish and Holocaust. In the novel, Jacobson has used the word Jew frequently.

Kalooki Nights is a darkly complex novel written in explosive prose. Jacobson has emotional identification with his characters, presenting them instead as case studies for analysis and debate. Glickman is an aging and relatively unsuccessful cartoonist. His masterpiece, a cartoon history of the Jews, is called *Five Thousand Years of Bitterness*. Glickman's roots like Jacobson's are in a suburban Manchester ghetto called Crumpsall Park, but he now lives in London. He has married three times, the first two to shikshas named Chloe and Zoe and the last to a depressive Jewess named Alys. The various women he has relationships with will have an umlaut in their name.

Maxie Glickman who grows up in Manchester, though a Jew by birth, gets more linked to the English society, and is also obsessed by the Holocaust. At the impressionable age of 11,

he swaps a stack of comics for a book called *The Scourge of the Swastika: A Short History of Nazi War Crimes*. Max's mixture of shame and transgression is hilarious and reveals a convincing character beneath the caricatures. At the heart of Max's story is an explanation for why he has made so many disastrous choices. Max's friend Manny kills his parents by gassing them. On the day he is released from prison two sisters Francine and Marina from Lipsync Production ask Max to find out the reason why he killed his parents.

Max explains how if a cartoonist or artist does not give proper information about the character, the people would mistake the character for the cartoonist. "It's a mistake commonly made with cartoonists. People confuse the matter with the man... Everyone thinks you must be joking all the time, and in the end, if you are not careful you must be joking all the time yourself" (8).

Max regrets how when he is with his first Gentile wife Chloe, he utters whatever is not in his mind to his wife. He talks out thinking that she wanted him to say that but actually she did not want him to tell that. Max comments that the reason he drew is that he wanted the world to adore him: "I took up crayons, Because I liked the oily smell of them... And because I wanted people to admire and adore me" (11).

Max is named after a boxer in his father's pantheon, Maxie Slapsie Rosenbloom, who is known as a hit and run fighter. Maxie's happy that he's not called Slapsie. Max after visiting Manny's house wishes that his relationship with his parents were similar to that of Manny's relationship with his parents: "I wished my life was more like Manny's" (38).

Max comments that he could not feel for the death of Manny's parents. He felt only the sorrow that one would feel on hearing the news about the death of someone's animal. Max when he leaves a wife is worried more about the wife's mother. He feels that his bondage with his wife's mother is stronger. "Leaving women's mothers was always harder for me than leaving the women themselves" (82).

A failed boxer, Max's father spends his life trying to exert a kind of muscular Zionism on his family. Driven by a desire to reject the old traditions with all their gruesome tragedy in favor of un-Jewish future, he forbids Max a Bar Mitzvah, preferring instead a boxing tussle in the garden as an induction into manhood. Max's father is against the Jews, and he is not interested in Jewish matters. "Jew, Jew, Jew, Why, why. why, as my father asked until the asking killed him, does everything always have to come back to Jew, Jew, Jew?" (7).

Jack is described as a boxer whose nose bleeds easily, an atheist who despises God, and a communist who likes to buy his wife expensive shoes.

In appearance he resembles Einstein without the hair. He has globe-eyes, a preoccupied Jewish look. Einstein, presumably is thinking $E=mc^2$ when he stares into the camera. Max comments that his father usually thinks of ways to make Jewishness less of a burden to the Jews $J \div J = j$. “Let the dead bury the dead, was his position. The way to show them the Reverence they were owed was to live the life that they had not. (7)

In boxing, Jack’s favourite is Benny Leonard. Max feels that the reason is that he has nosebleeds and once he was stopped from going boxing by the referee. Jack never shows interest in his wife Nora’s card game Kalooki. He always stays away from the game. Jack is never fond of the presence of Tsedraiter Ike, Nora’s half-brother, at home. When Tsedraiter Ike explains how the Nazis tried to exterminate them, Jack tells as a sort of joke that if he knew that Ike is hiding from the Nazis then he would have shown the Nazis that he was there years ago. Max feels that Jack has a particular liking for Shani, Max’s elder sister. He calls her his shaineh maidel, the lovely person. Max wonders whether his name has any beautiful meaning.

He doubts whether Jack’s greater liking for Shani has aroused any jealousy in him. Jack finally dies in the story, and Max doubts whether his friend Manny’s parents were Jack and Nora would he have gassed them.

Nora, the mother of Max is introduced as a character always held up with her Kalooki game. Her main interest is dressing up and arranging Kalooki nights for her friends. Even when Max reaches age according to the Jewish custom she arranges a gala Kalooki night for him.

Nora’s original name is Leonora Axelroth. She always scolds her daughter Shani. When a party is arranged, she selects dresses for Shani. Max’s description of Nora and Jack is, “Both my parents had loud voices, earnest of good lungs and therefore, you would have thought long lives; my mother’s a lovely honeyed contralto” (12).

The way Nora is described by Max in the novel is, “My mother- born Leonora Axelroth- an euphonious as her name, tall and tapering, legs and ankles if anything too thin, like an Ethiopian’s, her hair almost bronze in colour, her skin, the minute it was exposed to sun, the same. A burnish on her, which made her look expensive, of the highest quality” (14).

Nora explains to Jack that she arranged a Kalooki Night for Max as she felt that he is worried and not in his nature as usual. Nora feels that Jack is fed up with being Jewish. “I was

sorry to my soul for him. Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew-he was sick and tired of the whole business. It was like an illness which he thought had been suddenly eating at his bones again" (134). By the end of the story, Nora dies. Nora is characterized as a different kind of mother who is considered to be more interested in card games rather than the needs of her own family.

Shani, like Nora, is mainly interested in dressing. She spends a lot of money on dresses. Max comments that because of Shani, Jack became poor. She buys many dresses but never wears them. She gives her mother company in the Kalooki card game. When Jack is on his death bed, Shani takes good care of him. She who is silent and prefers to remain shut in her room later takes complete care of her father. She never complains. Max and Nora are surprised at her change of behaviour. She marries a man named Mick, who is a sailor. Mick wants to learn the Jewish habits and customs and asks Max to teach him the various Jewish customs.

Max, the protagonist describes Manny as having squiggly ear-locks making his new moon face appear as though someone has scribbled on it. Max remembers how Manny tells him in the past that the Ten Commandments are fundamental, if a person breaks even one it is equal to breaking all. "The rabbis said that breaking one was equal to breaking them all. A commandment was: Thou shall not kill" (21).

Manny's actual name is Emmanuel Eli Washinsky. No one calls him Emmanuel which has the meaning God is our protector, God is ever with us. The word Eli means God. In the novel, he is called Manny. Manny is the person who introduces Max to the word Final Solution. For Max, Manny looks like a person who seems too historically Jewish. "Too persecuted and unhealthy, his skin yellow and waxy, the colour of old Candles" (41). Manny is considered guilty of manslaughter based on diminished responsibility in 1973. The same year is Max's first divorce. The same year Syria and Egypt coordinated a surprise attack against Israel on Yom Kippur, a big year for Jews. Manny gasses his parents to death. He gets arrested. The later part of the novel is how Max tries to understand why Manny kills his parents. Max starts to understand about the influence of Holocaust and thus a Jewish identity develops within him.

Manny's friendship never makes Max happy. Max feels that he continues a friendship with Manny just for the sake of a friendship. Max's view about Manny is, "He was for all of us- the Orthodox no less than the secular- the Jew we didn't want to acknowledge as our own. He was a throwback, and we were moving on" (59).

Manny's deed of gassing his parents is considered as a case of abnormality by his lawyers. Manny during the trial explains that he followed the example of the Austrian-born

euthansiasist and flautist Georg Renno, who is the deputy director of the SS gassing institution at Harthiem. Renno in the past made a statement for which his name has always been remembered. He said that turning the tap on is not a big deal. It seems as though Manny's deed is correct. Manny's lawyers never approved his deed. "No normal person, however engrossed in the history of the Holocaust, would have taken research to quite such lengths "(59).

Max comments that Manny is a different kind of German. When he is in prison, he compiles lists and tables. He is not good at drawing maps but he draws the tree that shows the interconnectedness of German responsibility from Martin Luther to the triumph of time. Manny is not a person who responds well to pressure. If a person demands anything of Manny he will hold his breath for half an hour. Manny, as a character, is odd as a child, angry as a teenager and locked up in prison as an adult for a hideous double murder.

Max's family, the Glickmans pride themselves on their secularism, whereas their neighbours, the Washinsky, are deeply orthodox. Living in a shabby house that betrays their contempt for the material world, the Washinsky's have two sons, Asher, a rabbinical student whose love affair with the Christian Dorothy causes the family to split, and Manny, a strangely obsessive boy of whom one contemporary claims that it is because of him that they march off to camps.

Max comments that Manny and his parents, Selick and Channa Washinsky are religious. Max remembers how Manny or his parents when they pass through the front door use to put a finger to their lips and then to the mezuzah on the door frame. Max knows of the mezuzah as one was there in the front of their home, put by a Jewish family who stayed there in the house before. The appearance of Washinsky's home makes Max feel as though a wild animal has let him into his lair. Max when he sees Manny go along with his father to the synagogue wishes that he is Manny. Max also envies Manny's mother when Manny and his father return from the synagogue she prepares food for them and waits for them and waits for their return.

Regarding Selick Wshinsky, it is said, "He was pale, no more. Pale and poor. As for the greedy blindness, a sewing machine does that. It makes you pinched of sight, it makes you peer and stoop and count. Put any man behind a sewing machine and he will resemble an old myopic Jew" (61).

Asher is Manny's older brother. When Manny's parents hear of Asher's relationship with Dorothy, they send him to Gateshead. Max considers that he looks more old-fashioned

(orthodox). "Hollowed out was how he had looked to me, great black volcanic gouges for eyes, and a sunken tubercular chest" (50).

Asher goes to Max's school to teach the children Hebrew. He looks after the Jewish kids when the Gentiles sing hymns to the saviour in the hall. Max recalls how the students chant a few letters of the Hebrew alphabet and then throw chalks at him. "When a piece of chalk hit him, he would smile and put it in his pocket. He was unnerving. He was somewhere else in his head" (50).

Asher who is six to seven years older than Manny never has conversation with Manny and Max. When Asher is a teacher at a Talmud Torah somewhere in the Midlands, such is his popularity that children cry to go to his lessons. Asher is claimed as a shy boy by Dorothy's father. When he meets Dorothy's father, he gets struck by the idea that he is a German which is the reason for the end of the Washinsky's world. Though Asher and Dorothy meet at Israel by the role of fate they do not decide to stay together, when Asher leaves her and walks off, Manny considers it his responsibility to take care of Dorothy.

Dorothy is a Christian by religion, daughter of the fire yekelte who comes to Manny's house for lighting the fire on Shabbes day. Max describes Dorothy thus: "A blonde as you'd expect. When the devil wants to make trouble in a Jewish Family he does it as a blonde" (141).

Errol Tobias is the neighbor of Max, two to three years older than Max. He gets angry very fast. When he is angry it seems as though God is watching through him and reacting. Errol Tobias's mother is a hairdresser. His father has no separate job. Errol remains calm in his work. He shows Max the photos that are missing in the book. He has a job pulling out the unwanted plants from his and others' gardens.

Max considers Errol as a snake in the garden who whispers of fruits. In the novel Tobias has a relation with Max's wife Zoe, and he shows his obscene pictures. She leaves Max and goes away because of Errol's relation to her.

Among the women characters, is Chloe. Chloe is Max's first Gentile wife. Max marries two Gentiles and one Jew. All three marriages are failed marriages for him. When he talks with Chloe, he says whatever she does not want him to tell. "I blurted out whatever I thought she wanted me to say, which was always the opposite to what she wanted me to say" (9). Regarding her appearance, it is said, "Chloe Anderson's finely etched brows arched further from her eyes

than most people's, which gave her a look of perpetual disapproval. Her nose too, was constructed on a disdainful tilt..." (69).

Zoe is Max's second Gentile wife. Zoe wants Max to crop his nose. She gives him various orders to follow. "Grow a moustache, shave your moustache; wear a tie, don't wear a tie; try being sweeter to people" (24). Zoe narrates to Max how in her childhood a family named Krystals came next to her family. They used to be very caring. When Zoe reaches a particular age Leila Krystal asks her to go as a prostitute.

Alys is the last wife of Max. She is the first Jewish wife of him. She is the granddaughter of Tsedraiter Ike's mistress, Dolly. At a stage she too leaves Max. Francine and Marina are the two ladies who meet Max to find out the details why Manny committed the murder. Francine always wears her hair long and blonded, in glamour- girl flounces. Marina is not good at keeping her figure or her face.

Ilse Cohen is a woman among Nora's friends who come to play Kalooki at her home. She has Anarchic Hand Syndrome. "The poor woman had had a stroke, as a consequence of which the right part of her brain had become disconnected electrically from the left, leaving her right hand in a state of enmity with the rest of her" (44).

Max, the central protagonist of the novel, is referred to as a person whose life failed both as a cartoonist and as a person. All his three marriages can also be considered as a failure to a certain level as none of them lasted more than a year.

Tobias in the beginning of the novel is introduced as a character who likes to frighten others by bullying them. He was considered as the leader of the children in the street. When he grows up his life is not discussed in the novel.

Though the characters have minor role to play throughout the novel, without their presence, the novel would not be complete. Manny's deed which introduces a Jewish identity in Max can be considered an important incident in the novel, along with Manny's double murder. Max, Manny and Asher are the major characters as their presence can be felt right from the first page of the novel until the last page either directly or indirectly.

In delineating characters, the author has to imagine himself inside another person and create character traits. Physical traits refer to the characters appearance like looks, style of clothing and body language. Personality traits are habits and quirks, vices, psychological or emotional problems, and behaviour. Identity includes occupation, education, and hobbies.

Social traits define how a character interacts with others and his or her code of ethics. To catch the interest of the readers, characters need to be three dimensional and unique instead of flat and stereotypical. Every major character should have his or her look, pattern of speech, personality, mannerisms, strengths, weaknesses, hopes, fears, goals and motivations.

Like real people, characters in fiction grow and change. The events in the plot affect the characters, and character and plot development are wrapped around each other. As each event of the plot happens, the character grows and as the character grows in strength, the plot is pushed forward. In the art of constructing the plot, evolving themes, and creating characters, a literary artist employs appropriate style and techniques.

Kalooki Nights can be considered as a novel both angry and entirely comic. It mixes both the elements – the comedy and the anger, which can be viewed in the conversation between Max and his second Gentile wife Zoë.

Now Zoë was wondering why I had to look quite so Jewish quite so much of the time.

‘Because I am fucking Jewish’, I reminded her.

‘All the time?’

‘Every fucking minute’.

‘Stop swearing’ she said.

‘I’ll stop fucking swearing when you stop asking me why I look so fucking Jewish.’ (25)

In Guardian, Jacobson expressed his opinion about the use of jokes in the novel. He hopes that comedy could embrace the most painful subject matter. Laughing at death is the test, said Jacobson quoting Hamlet speaking to Yorick’s skull. According to Nicholas Lezard, “Jacobson is quite simply a master of comic precision.... That the things he is joking about are so dark and dangerous makes the jokes even better. And it dawns on you that the book isn’t really just about being Jewish at all. It’s about being human”.

Jewish Chronicle has praised *Kalooki Nights* as a work of genius. The writing is considered flawless. Howard Jacobson is considered as an expert who blends comedy and tragedy. *Kalooki Nights* is considered as a darkly complex novel written in starkly explosive

prose. Jacobson has emotional identification with his characters. He presents the characters as case studies for analysis and debates. According to Michael Arditi in *Kalooki Nights* humour is blacker and deeper than in other novels.

The influence which Jacobson got for writing *Kalooki Nights* was his encounter with a Rabbi who officiated Howard Jacobson's 2005 wedding to Jenny de Yong, his third wife. Max, the protagonist of the novel, resembles Howard Jacobson.

Like Howard Jacobson, Max too has three wives. Howard Jacobson had friendship with a neighbour and he stopped the relation with him on account of him being orthodox. In the novel Max too leaves his relationship with Manny just because he gassed his parents. In *Guardian*, Jacobson commented that *Kalooki Nights* is the most autobiographical thing he has ever written.

According to Jonathan Derbyshire, the novel is beautifully structured and Max's first person narration is the perfect vehicle for exploring the thought in Jacobson's book. Howard Jacobson has used the word Jew in almost every sentence in the novel. The reason he gives for using the word Jew a lot is that he meant to describe the life of Jews who thought about Jews.

According to *Tablet Magazine* the reason for Howard Jacobson using the word Jew frequently is,

That's what he wanted to write. Jew, Jew, Jew, joke, joke, joke, the world as seen entirely through the eyes of Jews for Jews. There are some Jews who live like that. To a degree, there is a possibility in every Jew he ever met, for them to live like that.

Jews thinking about Jews talking about Jews to Jews written by somebody who is a Jew, who is obsessed by the subject, has some crazy obsession, who wants to get to the bottom of this obsession and wonders where this obsession comes from. And will deploy every kind of act of the mind to think about it, including primarily, what Jews do best, which is make jokes. No one makes jokes like Jews.

In *Kalooki Nights* though the Jewish themes are serious, Jacobson uses a bit of humour to make it more light, not to make light of catastrophe, but to bring every resource of intelligence to bear on it, to understand it fully, and to affirm the energy of life in the face of horror. Laughter might, in the end be the only care for the poisoned heart of memory.

Max the protagonist of the novel comments that it is hard to get people to laugh at the Holocaust. The novel is finally not able to make a distinction between the living and the dead, between who went through the Holocaust and those who only thought they did. Clark Collis in *The Entertainment Weekly* explains about the novel *Kalooki Nights* as, “Yes, Jacobson’s good taste may be debatable, but not his ability to summon up rich, colourful characters including a boyhood acquaintance of Glickman’s whose patricidal ways drive the novel’s plot and the cartoonist’s mother whose obsession with the card game *Kalooki* explains its title”.

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