



USE OF GÉRARD GENETTE'S HYPERTEXTUALITY IN THE WORKS OF HOWARD JACOBSON'S SHYLOCK IS MY NAME AND SHAKESPEARE'S THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the lives of Jews and their relation with literature. It also compares the writings of popular classic playwright William Shakespeare and the twentieth-century novelist Howard Jacobson and their take on Jews. It emphasizes the importance of history and its need to provide the readers with a crucial perspective for understanding the current problems of Jews. The collective consciousnesses of Jews are well explained through Gérard Genette's concept of Hypertextuality. This research takes the play *The Merchant of Venice* as hypo text and attempts to narrate the Jews' side of the story in the hypertext *Shylock is my Name*. It enlightens how the historic narration is used as a tool to manipulate and change the lives of a particular ethnicity forever. The prejudiced view fixated on Jews by non-Jews in the past still affects the present generation. The villainous portrayal of Shylock by a reputed Playwright like William Shakespeare resulted in labelling all the Jews as greedy, vengeful and heartless. Howard Jacobson seeks justice by including Shylock in his novel and characterizing him as someone who had been misjudged and manipulated in the past. Shylock had been shown as a guide to Simon Strulovitch, a twentieth-century confused Jew and made the reader clear that it is not the individual that gets ashamed but the whole clan endlessly. Jacobson's writing proved that until someone changed the narration of non-Jews on Jews, they remain the victim in the future as they were in the past.

Keywords: Anti-Semitism, Identity, Revenge and Acceptance

INTRODUCTION

Jews have been residing in England since Roman and Anglo-Saxon times and became a community after the arrival of William the Conquer in 1066. They were banished in 1290 after facing many persecutions from the native people of England. After Oliver Cromwell came to power, he presented a seven petition to the Council of State for the return of Jews to Britain. As a result, Jews who had been extradited from Holland, Spain and Portugal immigrated to Britain and became integrated into British Society. Jewish resettlement in Britain put an end to eras of estrangement.



When Hitler was a soldier in the German army, he couldn't accept the defeat of the German Empire by Jews. He hated Jews for the values they brought to the world. He blamed them for the Treaty of Versailles. He decided to exterminate Jews. When he came to power, the laws and measures against the Jews increased all the time. Nazi Germany and its collaborators massacred six million Jews across German-occupied Europe around two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population. He could be called the forerunner of the term Anti-Semitism. From then onwards, discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group become obligatory where ever Jewish people try to settle in.

Though the Jewish community seems to flourish in Britain in recent years, the increased number of anti-Semitism among British fascists and other far-right groups may prove otherwise. In the 21st century, anti-Semitism takes a different form on social either by rejecting the Israeli government or in the favour of Palestinian cause. Even among Jews, opinion is divided. Israeli education minister Naftali Bennett coined a new term called auto-anti-Semitism. He says "Auto-anti-Semitism is a social-psychological phenomenon in which a Jew develops obsessive contempt and hostility towards Jewish tradition, customs, and observant Jews."

British-Jewish writers showcase how Jews are facing social, political and religious problems in the settler's country. They share their feelings on a theme such as family, community and home. The writing will be mostly based on the stories of migrants and their migration. One such reputed British-Jewish writer is Howard Jacobson.

Howard Jacobson was born on 25th August 1942 in Manchester. His father's parents came from Ukraine and his mother's family from Lithuania. Even though he is born and brought up in Britain, his parents' Russian-Jewish heritage coerces him to write the complications of the present-day Jews. He is a British Novelist, Broadcaster and contributes a weekly column for *The Independent* newspaper as an op-ed writer. He has authored sixteen novels and five works of non-fiction.

He won the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Award in 2000 for *The Mighty Walzer* and then again in 2013 for *Zoo Time*. He was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2014 for the novel *J*. His 2002 novel *Who's Sorry Now?* and *Kalooki Nights* in 2006 were long-listed for the Man Booker Prize. *Kalooki Nights* have won the 2007 JQ Wingate Prize. He is been constantly compared to the American writer Philip Roth but he preferred to be known as a Jewish Jane Austen.

Howard Jacobson's novels articulate the terrors of Jewish people and the stigma around their historical past in a humorous and unswerving way. Even though he doesn't elaborate much on the holocaust or the Israel and Palestine war, the characters in his novel reflect the trauma in their day-to-day lives. The collective unconsciousness torments the current generation and leads them to question their identity in the present and the future. He also illuminates the fact that anti-Semitism is not only about enemies of Jews and how Jews end up hurting each other with their differences in perception.

This article talks about the importance of Hypertext to understand the history of Jews in the past and its relevance in the present. The word Hyper is derived from the Greek word with the meaning 'above' or 'beyond' and it is stated by the French theorist Gérard Genette. Hypertext explains a text which offers a connection to the other texts that are outside, beyond and above itself. It elaborates the transformation of a text in which hypertext educes hypotext without mentioning it directly. It also explicates the interconnectedness of all of the literary works and their artistic interpretation. This helps to modify, elaborate or extend the present text



lot better than the earlier text. It can be viewed as the continuing and unsubstantiated meaning of its hypo text. It is the reason why the critics focus on the impact of one text on another rather than its presence. Hypertext is proof that texts are immortal and it blurs the line between the past and the present.

The research question of this article is why Howard Jacobson, a twentieth-century British writer creates a parallel plot with Shakespeare, a 16th century Elizabethan writer. The hypothesis states that the writer tries to prove that history tends to repeat itself in the present. Jacobson wants to show the inevitability of historic recurrence in the lives of Jews and argues nothing changed then and now. Jacobson takes *The Merchant of Venice* as a hypo text and has done a parody on his work *Shylock is My Name* to prove a point that the lives of Jews are still the same. The reader will be able to understand that they are politically, economically and emotionally under the threat of non-Jews.

Use of Gérard Genette's Hypertextuality in the works of Howard Jacobson's *Shylock is My Name* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

Shylock is My Name talks about Simon Strulovitch, a Jewish philanthropist and his political difference with the people around him. At the beginning of the novel, he meets Shylock at the graveyard and feels an immediate connection towards him. This is where Jacobson used *The Merchant of Venice* as hypo text and made it seem like a sequel of the same. He asked Shylock to come to his home and Shylock accepted the request. The one thing both of them have in common is their identity as Jews.

Portia: Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?

Duke: Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth.

Portia: Is your name Shylock?

Shylock: Shylock is my name. (*TMOV*, Act IV, Scene 1)

The above dialogues happen to be on the first page of the novel *Shylock is My Name*. At the court, Shylock wasn't introduced by his profession as they did for Antonio but rather by his religion. It is when the writer Howard Jacobson makes the reader see Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* from the perspective of Shylock. He is the way he was because of constant humiliation from the people around him who are not Jews. The court is where the identity of a person plays the least role since justice is given to an individual who committed a crime. Portia who disguised herself as a lawyer addresses him by his religion to shade his community on the whole.

Shylock disclosed that Antonio has belittled him and called him "misbeliever, cut-throat dog" and even spat on his "Jewish gabardine." They decided him a villain before he turned one. As a Jew, Shylock never received kindness or sympathy from the Venetians. The hatred and prejudice bothered Shylock and made him reflect the same on his enemies. Howard Jacobson continues to seek justice for Shylock through the novel *Shylock is My Name*. When this novel unfolds, the reader would realize that nothing changed so far and the lives of Jews are still in danger and unstable.

At first, the paper shows Strulovitch and Shylock's relationship with their respective partners. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Leah is the deceased wife of Shylock whose ring Jessica sold to buy a monkey. Shylock is more upset about her selling those rings because it symbolizes their Jewish culture. Though Shakespeare portrayed him as an individual with no feelings, mentioning Leah and her ring showcase that Shylock has love and humanity in him. Even in the beginning of *Shylock is My Name*, Shylock was visiting Leah in the graveyard regularly and it seems like her memory is the only companion he trusts in the whole world. They both share similar tastes in literature and philosophy. He believed that the spiritual



presence of Leah avoids him to fall into demonic ways. He blames his parenting style and believes that Jessica is the way she was because of the absence of her mother.

On the other hand, Simon Strulovitch did get married to two women but it was a short-lived one. Ophelia-Jane Smythson, his first Christian wife loved him and tried her best to make him fall in love. She married him to get to know the tragic experience of Hebrews. The tragic flaw of Strulovitch is his moral indecision for which she had to pay. This marriage even created a huge gap between him and his father. When the divorce paper has been finalized, like other non-Jews she also stigmatized Jewish people through her husband. "Happy now you've extracted your pound of flesh?" (*SIMN* -15)

His second marriage to Kay Kominsky wasn't fully successful since got a stroke on Beatrice's fourteenth birthday. It made his father happy whether it is happy or sad as long as he is married to a Jewess. He stayed in this bond because of a daughter that they share. Like Shylock, he also has the guilt of poor parenting since Kay is sick and bedridden. One of the doctors told him that his constant battle with Beatrice could have been the subfactor of Kay's sickness. Because of this, he doesn't go to her room often. At the end of the novel, after the elopement of Beatrice, he sat beside and cried out about his problems. Though she is non-responsive like Shylock's wife Leah, she did give him comfort by being silent which helps him to think straight about the eloping situation.

When it comes to fatherhood, both of them are sharing the same disappointment and love-hate relationship. Howard represents his female characters especially Jewess as a doubly marginalized people by society. Shylock also believed that Jewess was being viewed as a commodity and the non-Jews as collectors. Though Jacobson is showcased as a rebellious daughter against a strict father, Shakespeare portrayed Jessica as an intelligent woman who is independent enough to choose her partner wisely. Lancelot defines her as the "most beautiful pagan, most sweet Jew" (*TMOV* II.III.11-12).

Shylock's love for Jessica is complex because when Jessica took the ring and eloped, Shylock mourned for the loss of the ring more than her elopement with Lorenzo, a penniless Christian. He is afraid that the Christians would take away his belongings and it is exactly what happened in the end. Once she married she converted to Christianity and hid in Portia and Bassanio's house. Antonio also promised to give some money to Jessica which he got from Shylock by defeating him in the court.

In the novel, *Shylock is My Name*, Shylock continued to stay mad at his daughter and ashamed to talk about her even to his dead wife. Until Strulovitch questioned the trustworthiness of Tubal who informed that he saw Jessica at a hotel in Genoe for fourscore ducats, it didn't strike Shylock that Tubal might lie to him. As Tubal heard it from someone, Shylock didn't question him at first.

Later only he developed guilt by asking the question himself what if Tubal exaggerated and stereotyped the whole situation? The only possession of Shylock is his daughter and the ring. Losing his people and the thing makes him blind to the political vendetta and believing what other assumes. "The Jews were a people without sensuous appreciation, they insisted. What they saw they saw second-hand, through the eyes of others." (*SIMN*- 242) It is the reason why Shylock warned Strulovitch to not neglect his daughter's side of the story.

Strulovitch is stricter with his daughter Beatrice and tries to take life decisions for her. His controlling nature is what makes her rebellious and stubborn. He agrees that his frustration with society is misplaced and reflected on to his daughter. He takes what he gives to her. He disapproves of every guy she meets and blames them for dating a teenage girl. What triggered Strulovitch much was, when she eloped with Gratan Howsome, a Christian guy. He hates her for forgetting the roots and getting attracted to Non-Jew. Though Strulovitch is not religious enough, he wants to maintain his Jewishness through his future generation. One could say that he doesn't want Beatrice to be grown like him. Beatrice also stayed with Gratan not because



she was in love with him but because she used him as a tool to stand against her father's parenting style. All she wanted from her father was love and undivided attention as normal parents do.

Gratan, a poor Christian caught up in a pickle by falling in love with Jessica. D'Anton being the philanthropist he is, took Gratan under his wings and tried to protect him as much as possible till the end. Gratan was assumed as a Nazi because of his infamous parody of the salute. His ignorance about the whole Jew situation came to light when Strulovitch asked him to do circumcision. Though he enjoyed the company of Beatrice, Gratan realized that she is not worth shedding part of his skin. This is when D'Anton entered into the chaotic situation and agreed to do circumcision on behalf of Gratan. Gratan's selfishness is revealed at the climax, where he dissociates from the whole circumcision and lets D'Anton take the blame. This is where the writer brings in the quality of a Christian who is unbothered about the demands of a Jew and only enjoys the benefits received from a Jew.

Like Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*, who benefited from the luxury of Shylock through Antonio, at the same time plots ways to defeat Shylock with his girlfriend Portia. Bassanio is a penniless and irresponsible Venetian who demands money from his best friend Antonio so that he can court a wealthy heiress Portia in the way she likes to be courted. Since Antonio invested his money in foreign exports and imports, he asks for help from Shylock. Looking through the glass, one will be able to realize that Bassanio is in love with Portia with the financial help he received from Shylock. Antonio gets into pound-fleshing trouble with Shylock because of Antonio.

In *Shylock is My Name*, D'Anton helps people who are friends with them and gets in trouble because of them. At first, he becomes friends with Anna Livia Plurabelle Cleopatra's A Thing of Beauty is A Joy Forever Christine. He makes her life better by adding aesthetic things to her home and giving constant companionship when she needs the most. He also helps her boyfriend Barnaby to improve their relationship. D'Anton writes a letter to Strulovitch for Solomon Joseph Solomon, a painting that Barnaby believes will fix all the problems in their relationship. The difficulty here is D'Anton and Strulovitch didn't like each other in their first meeting itself where D'Anton refused Strulovitch's idea of building a place in their family name. D'Anton also takes Gratan as his ward and tries to enrich his life by fulfilling his small and big needs. Plurabelle and D'Anton together fix Gratan with Beatrice since he is into Jewish girls.

When Strulovitch tries to convert Gratan to Christianity by asking him to sign for circumcision, D'Anton is the one who comes forward and does it for Gratan since he didn't return with Strulovitch's daughter Beatrice. He didn't hesitate for a moment to do circumcision. To D'Anton, his love for Gratan is far bigger than his own body. D'Anton has a soft corner for men for they were forced to be the stronger sex than the other. Especially his concern for Barnaby goes beyond friendship and he thinks that his love for Barnaby is much bigger than Barnaby's love for Plurabelle. His melancholic nature and helping tendency may help the people around him but it only caused him pain and sacrifice. Apart from getting a painting from Strulovitch for him, Barnaby forces D'Anton to take the blame for losing Plurabelle's ring. The answer to his character may have been revealed at the end when everyone realizes that he had gone through circumcision in his childhood which is common among families who live in hot countries.

Antonio from *The Merchant of Venice* shares the same quality as D'Anton. In order to help his penniless friend court his girlfriend, he asked for financial help from his mortal enemy Shylock. Though he is kind and generous to Bassanio, he is blunt and aggressive towards Shylock. His relationship with Bassanio is indefinite and viewed as more than friendship. It is his melancholic nature that made him agree to a suicidal bond where he has to give a pound of flesh if the money is not paid on time. Portia did come in time to save him from the trap of



Shylock. The court not only asked half of his wealth to be submitted to the state and the other half to Antonio, Antonio demands Shylock that he should change his religion to Christianity as a punishment for his cunning scheme. Once Portia wins the case in disguise, she asks for Antonio's gloves and Bassanio's ring as her gift. At first, Bassanio refuses and a little push from Antonio made him give up. It is understood that Bassanio loves Antonio more than he loves Portia.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare portrayed Portia as a bright, beautiful and wealthy woman. At the beginning of the drama, she is limited by her father's dying wishes to marry someone who passes the test of three caskets. Though she is bound to obey her father, she asks Bassanio to wait so that she can figure out the casket's secrets and helps him secretly through her song which contains many words rhyming with the word lead. Once she conquers this battle, she proves her intelligence once again in the court and defeats Shylock by finding the loophole in his will. She argues that he could only take a pound of flesh without drawing a single drop of blood from Antonio. Portia shows her compassionate self by helping Jessica and Lorenzo to hide at her place after their elopement. Shakespeare depicts Portia as a strong and wilful female character.

Whereas Plurabelle in *Shylock is My Name* has a rich father who left the world with a bizarre will of whom she should marry. Jacobson illustrates her as a carefree and independent woman who also inherited sadness from her dead father. Unlike Portia, Plurabelle decided that her father's wish is impracticable and threw it in the bin. In order to make life meaningful, she tries many things in her life including a television programme called "The Kitchen Councillor" where they cook and discusses other people's issues. Her friendship with D'Anton added aestheticism to her life. In order to please him, she plays cupid between Beatrice and his ward Gratan. Strulovitch isn't able to accept that Beatrice is intimate with Plurabelle and he blamed her for his daughter's bad decisions. When Beatrice eloped with Gratan Howsome, Plurabelle is the one who gives her house for them to crash. When D'Anton agrees to be the scapegoat of Gratan and reveals the reason behind it to Plurabelle, she tries to get popularity by planning to telecast the whole circumcision incident on her tv show. She also tries to use the public platform to humiliate Strulovitch and rejoice in it.

Shylock is the most misunderstood character in literature. He has been used and humiliated by almost all the characters in *The Merchant of Venice*. At the beginning of the drama, Antonio verbally abuses Shylock for his identity and choice of living. At that time, no one came to support or demand justice for Shylock. When Antonio realized that he has to plea for money to Shylock on behalf of Bassanio, he approaches him without any kind of apology for his past behaviours. This attitude might have aggravated Shylock to lend three thousand ducats with the gruesome condition of taking a pound of flesh from Antonio if the money is not paid on time. Even when Bassanio warned against this bond, Antonio signed with full confidence that he will receive money from the ship business. As one can see, nobody forced him to sign the bond. When the time comes, Antonio's ship business lost some money. Since he was not able to pay the money, the case is eventually taken to court. Ironically, everyone sympathizes and forgets the fact that Antonio is aware of what he gets into. Using her lawyer skill, Portia finds a loophole in the bond and made Shylock return half of his money to Antonio. It shows that the law of the court is not stronger in protecting Jews against Christians.

The same disappointment occurs to Strulovitch in *Shylock is My Name*. D'Anton and Strulovitch had a rough start with the differences in their aesthetic sense but not of ethnicity. Strulovitch himself says that he imagined people are not getting along with him because of his identity, when in reality that is not the only reason non-Jews hate them for. "Better, Strulovitch thought, when our enemies wore their loathing on their sleeves, called us misbelievers, infidels, execrable dogs, whipped us, kicked us, dishonoured, disempowered, dispossessed us, but at least didn't deliver the final insult of accusing us of paranoia." (SIMN-119) Things between



them went south because of Strulovitch's daughter dating Gratan which D'Anton is fully responsible for. Strulovitch made D'Anton sign a bond where he mentioned that Gratan should do circumcision if he plans to continue his relationship with Beatrice after their elopement, failed to do so D'Anton should take the blame and go through the process of circumcision himself instead of Gratan. Since Gratan refused to return, D'Anton becomes the scapegoat and agreed to the bond. On that day only, the doctor informs that circumcision cannot be performed on D'Anton since he has been circumcised already in his childhood. Little did everyone know except Plurabelle that D'Anton planned to betray Strulovitch, the moment he agreed to sign the bond. Strulovitch accepted the loophole in the law and the humiliation that comes with being a Jew.

CONCLUSION

This paper throws light on the injustice that happens to Jews irrespective of the century they belong to. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare illustrates Shylock as a revengeful money lender. Everyone in the play including Antonio ridicules his way of living. Though Shakespeare exposed the political background of the drama through characters, he overlooked the struggles of Jews like the rest of the writers. He didn't see eye to eye with Shylock and understand why he behaves the way he is or what made him to. Shylock's tragic flaw can be considered as the flaw of the society whose preconceived notion of Jews being ambitious and greedy painted him as a typical villain. The history of Jews was misrepresented and flourished through the writings of great playwrights like Shakespeare.

In *Shylock is My Name*, Howard Jacobson seems to be seeking justice for what happened to Shylock in the past and gives space for him to share his side of the story in the present. The reader comes to know that Shylock is not as wicked as the Gentile who humiliated Jews in every possible way they could. Howard Jacobson portrays Shylock as a loving husband, protective father and responsible citizen who embraces his identity dutifully. Shylock is the one who was able to make Strulovitch understand the reason for his never-ending tragedy. Shylock was a living conscience of Strulovitch when Beatrice eloped with Gratan. He disagreed with the circumcision act and warned Strulovitch that he would get hurt in the end. As someone who had lived long enough to see the different kinds of torment undergone by Jews in every era, it just made his Jewishness stronger and wise to let go of the past and accept the present.

On the other hand, Strulovitch is a Jew existing in modern days with an updated problem. At first, he seemed to be confused about his Jewish identity, thus his marriage to his first wife Ophelia-Jane Smythson, whose Christianity roots divided his relationship with his father. After marrying Kay also, he was on and off about his Jewish beliefs and ideologies. He is aware of the danger that comes with it, so he alienated himself from the rest of the world. After he met Shylock, his cultural loneliness took a back seat and he was able to connect with his lineage. As Shylock said, "I'm not sure that the distinction between "I" and "us" quite works. The individual Jew brings the collective Jew with him into any room." (SIMN- 67) Like Shylock, Strulovitch was scared of his daughter Beatrice's future as Jewess in the anti-Semitic world. More than the misunderstanding he has with D'Anton, the vilification projected on him by Gentiles made him aggressive and act very rude at the end of the novel. Strulovitch got convinced that he must go to war for his community more than his love for his daughter. It is the reason why he wants to do circumcision on D'Anton knowing very well that it is not going to bring his daughter or the guy she eloped with. At last, Strulovitch got tricked by D'Anton and Plurabelle as it was done to Shylock by Portia and Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*. The paper concludes by proving that Jews are not capable of being revengeful and inflexible. Even if they tried to do, they will be humiliated by the non-Jews in the end. The paper states that until the false narrative about Jews has been rewritten, Jews will always be



marginalized and mocked as they suffered in the past as mentioned in *The Merchant of Venice* and still do in the present as elaborated by Jacobson in *Shylock is My Name*.

WORKS-CITED

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