

NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATION

NE 426/CHID 498

ISRAELI IDENTITIES

Professor Naomi Sokoloff
Near Eastern Languages and Civilization
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This course examines fiction and film, as well as selected poetry, popular songs, and essays, to explore the experience of diverse groups within contemporary Israeli society. Among the topics to be considered: the sabra ideal; Holocaust survivors and the second generation; Sephardic/Mizrahi communities; religious/secular divides in Israeli culture; Israel's Arab minority; and questions of gender, including gay and lesbian life.

The readings include examples from the extraordinary boom of Hebrew fiction produced in the 1980s and 1990s. By looking at changing assumptions about Israeli identity, the course will consider changing voices in Israeli literature, changing literary norms, and artistic innovation and experiment, especially in narrative. One trend of particular note is the dramatic emergence of women writers onto the literary scene in recent years. Readings will also cover background information on Israeli history and society.

All readings will be in English. Students wishing to receive additional credits for doing work in Hebrew should contact the instructor.

Required Texts

David Grossman, *See Under: Love*
A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*
Anton Shammas, *Arabesques*
Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*
Photocopies

Recommended readings

Recommended readings are listed in the syllabus. These readings are useful for bolstering understanding of the primary material and as resources for the writing assignments.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to complete the reading assignments and be prepared to participate in class discussion. Students will be required to write three 5-6 page essays during the quarter (1250-1500 words).. Students will turn in drafts of their essays, receive feedback from the instructor and from classmates, and then revise and rewrite. Practice at drafting, revising and editing written work is one of the most valuable opportunities that a humanities course can offer.(This is a “W” course.) In addition, students will complete brief in-class writing exercises on a regular basis and take a final exam.

Due dates:

Essay #1 – Jan. 29
Essay #2 – Feb. 19
Essay #3 – March 11

NO CLASS:

Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Presidents Day

Final grades will be determined as follows:

In-class writing exercises and class participation: 10%
Essays: 75%
Final exam: 15%

Students who wish to have their final essays returned to them should provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services, 448 Schmitz, 543-8914 (V/TDD). If you have a letter from Disabled Student Services indicating you have a disability that requires academic accommodations, please present the letter to the instructor and discuss the accommodations you might need for the class.

WEEK I -- Reconsidering the Sabra Ideal

Required reading:

Moshe Shamir, *With His Own Hands* (1951/1970), pp. 1-2, 78, 89-90, 129-132
D. Zehavi, "Song of the Palmach;" N. Brand, "Rad Halailah;" Natan Alterman, "The Silver Platter"
Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots* (1995), pp. 60-76
Yizhak Lamdan, "Night Bonfires" from "Masada" (1927/1971)
Charles D. Smith, pp. 1-37

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Recommended reading:

Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, pp. 192-213; Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons*, pp. 139-193; Oz Almog, *Sabra* (1997/2000), pp. 76-82, 90-106; Gershon Shaked, "Shall We Find Sufficient Strength? On Behalf of Israeli Secularism," in *In Search of Identity: Jewish Aspects in Israeli Culture*, ed. Dan Urian and Efraim Karsh (1999); Alan Mintz, Introduction, *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction* (1997)

WEEK II -- Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation

Required reading

James Young, *The Texture of Memory* (1993), pp. 243-281
Yehuda Polliker, "Little Treblinka Station" (1988/2001)
Charles D. Smith, pp. 38-111

Film: Gila Almagor, "Under the Domim Tree" (1994)

Recommended reading:

Rachel Brenner, "The Holocaust and Its Fifty-Year Old Commemoration," *Books on Israel*, Vol. VI, eds. Laurie Z. Eisenberg, Neil Caplan, Naomi Sokoloff and Mohammed Abu-Nimr (in press); Dan Bar-On, "Transgenerational Aftereffects of the Holocaust in Israel: Three Generations," in *Breaking Crystal*, ed. Ephraim Sicher (1998); Ilan Avisar, "Personal Fears and National Nightmares: The Holocaust Complex in Israeli Cinema," in *Breaking Crystal*, ed. Ephraim Sicher (1998).

WEEK III -- Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation

David Grossman, "Momik" from *See Under: Love* (1986/1989)

Savyon Liebrecht, "Excision;" and Leah Aini, "Until the Entire Guard has Passed" in *New Women's Writing from Israel* (1998)
Charles D. Smith, pp. 112-148

Recommended reading:

Gilead Morahg, "Breaking Silence: Israel's Fantastic Fiction of the Holocaust," and Robert Alter, "Magic Realism in the Israeli Novel," both in *The Boom in Contemporary Israel Fiction*, ed. Alan Mintz (1997); Dina Wardi, *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust* (1992).

Assignment: Essay #1 (due Jan. 29)

WEEK IV -- Sephardi/Mizrahi Experience

Required reading:

Eli Amir, *Scapegoat* (1983/1987), pp. 62-68, 106-145, 208-218
Charles D. Smith, pp. 152-178

Documentary film: *Tekumah* – "The Ingathering"

Recommended reading:

Nancy Berg, "Sephardi Writing: From the Margins to the Mainstream," in Mintz, *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*: 114-142; Nancy Berg, *Exile from Exile* (1996).

WEEK V -- Sephardi/Mizrahi Experience

Required reading:

A.B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (1990/1992), chapters 1-3
Charles D. Smith, pp. 179-226

Recommended reading:

Arnold Band, "The Archaeology of Self-Deception," *Prooftexts* 12:3 (1992):231-244; Bernard Horn, *Facing the Fires* (1997): pp. 7-32; Robert Alter, *Hebrew and Modernity* (1994), pp. 1-23.

WEEK VI -- Sephardic/Mizrahi Experience cont.

Required reading:

A.B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, Chapters 4-5
Charles D. Smith, pp. 227-241

Assignment: Essay #2 (due: February 19)

Recommended reading:

Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, pp. 81-152

WEEK VII -- Religious and Secular Divides

Required reading:

Amos Oz, "Thank God for his Daily Blessings," in *Here and There in the Land of Israel* (1983/1983)

Yehuda Amichai "The Radius of the Bomb" (1978); "The Real Hero of the Sacrifice" (1983); "What Entanglement in this Small Country" (1983); "My Son" (1985); "Gods Come and Go, Prayers Remain Forever" (1994); "Between the Eve of the Holiday" (1998)

Haya Esther, "Nechama Gittel" in *New Women's Writing from Israel* (1998)

Hava Pinchas-Cohen, "Remembering Our Fathers" (1990)

Etgar Keret, "The Bus Driver Who Wanted to Be God" (1998/2001)

Recommended Reading:

Ruth Kartun-Blum, *Profane Scriptures*, pp. 1-14

WEEK VIII -- Israel's Arab Minority

Required reading:

Anton Shammas, *Arabesques*, pp. 1 -110 (1986/1988)
Charles D. Smith, pp. 242-280

Recommended reading:

Reuven Snir, "Hebrew as the Language of Grace: Arab-Palestinian Writers in Hebrew," *Prooftexts* 15, 2 (1995): 163-183; David Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire* (1993), pp. 250-277; Rachel Brenner, "In Search of Identity: The Israeli Arab Artist in Anton Shammas' *Arabesques*," *PMLA* 108:3 (1993)

WEEK IX– Israel's Arab Minority, cont.

Required reading:

Anton Shammas, *Arabesques*, pp. 110-263

Assignment #3: (Due March 11)

WEEK X -- Gay/Lesbian/Transgendered Life

Required reading:

Lee Walzer, *Between Sodom and Eden* (2000), pp. 141-77
Yossi Avni, "The Last Crusades," (1996)
Dana International, "*Ani lo yekhola biladeykha*" [Without You I Can't] (1994)

Film: "Hitchhikers" (1998)

Recommended Reading:

Lee Walzer, *Between Sodom and Eden* (2000), pp. 114-140