

Hebrew 241  
Culture of Modern Israel  
Dr. Matthew Silver  
Ohio State University  
Winter quarter: 2009-2010

The course surveys dominant topics in the culture of Israel, beginning with the pre-state period of the British Mandate, and then from 1948 to the present day. Israel's historical and cultural development has proceeded under the shadow of prolonged conflict with the Palestinians and Arab states, and the reading materials and class discussions in this course will refer to the Israeli-Arab conflict both indirectly and directly. Its main focus, however, will be on the spiritual lives, ethical orientations and ongoing cultural life of citizens of Israel – the military and political dispute are part of this cultural complex, but not all of it. Topics to be surveyed include: religious perspectives in Israel and religious-secular relations; the impact of the Holocaust in Israeli culture; minority cultures in Israel; the heritage of Labor Zionism; military culture in Israel; immigration and Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations; post-Zionism and the future of Zionism.

**Course requirements:** Each student will be required to read **one** of the major novels listed in the course plan below, and write a paper about the novel. These novels are:

*Only Yesterday*, S.Y Agnon  
*Victoria*, Sami Michael  
*Arabesques*, Anton Shammas  
*Blue Mountain*, Meir Shalev

Reading of articles, short stories and other materials listed in the course plan is required of all students

Each student will write a second paper referring to a film, short readings and discussions on a second topic covered in the class. There will be a final examination.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- \* Two papers (40%)
- \* Final exam (40%)
- \* Attendance and participation (20%)

### **Lesson Schedule**

#### **Topic 1: Pre-State Israel**

Lesson I: "Israel before Israel" – overview of Zionism, modern history of Palestine/Eretz Israel, legacy of British Mandate period, the Holocaust and its impact on Israel

Required reading: Haim Hazaz, "The Sermon," in Alter, Robert (ed.) *Modern Hebrew Literature* (New York, 1975)

Theodor Herzl, "A Solution to the Jewish Question," in Mendes-Flohr, Reinhartz (eds.), *The Jew in the Modern World* (second edition), pp. 533-538

**Novel for this unit (lessons 1&2): *Only Yesterday*: Agnon**

Lesson II: Background to Israel's establishment (continued from lesson I) + the Independence War and its Aftermath

Required Reading: A.B. Yehoshua: "Facing the Forests," in *Modern Hebrew Literature*

Film clip: "Exodus" film

**Topic 2: Immigration and Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations**

Lesson III : Mass waves of immigration after Israel's establishment

Required reading:

Dowty, Alan, *The Jewish State: A Century Later* (Berkeley, 2001) chapter 7

Shohat, Ella, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish victims," in McClintock, Mufti and Shohat (eds.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis, 1997) pp. 39-68

**Novel for this unit: *Victoria*, Sami Michael**

Lesson IV: Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations, continued + Film: "Sallah Shabati"

**First Paper Due**

**Topic 3: Judaism and Israeli identity: Religion in Israel**

Lesson V: Secular and Religious Jews in Israel; the rise of Religious Zionism

Required Reading: Dowty, *The Jewish State a Century Later*, chapter 8

Charles Liebman and Bernard Susser: "Judaism and Jewishness in the Jewish State," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 555 (Jan. 1998), pp. 15-25

*Recommended Reading*: Menachem Friedman, "The State of Israel as a Theological Dilemma," in Baruch Kimmerling (ed.), *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers* (Albany, 1989), pp. 165-215

**Topic 4: The Holocaust and Israel**

Lesson VI: Israeli attitudes and responses to the Holocaust: a Survey

Required Reading: Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, chapter 6 (The Eichmann Trial), pp. 323-387

Applefeld, Aharon, *Badenheim 1939* (short story version) (Syracuse, 2001)

**Topic 5: Minorities in Israel**

Lesson VII: Life in Israel after the Naqba – from military government to the peace process; contemporary issues

Required Reading: Sammy Smooha, "Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype," *Israel Studies*, vo. 2 no. 2 (1997) 198-241

*Recommended Reading*: Abu-Baker, Rabinowitz, *Coffins on Our Shoulders: The Experience of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel* (Berkeley, 2005)

**Novel for this Unit: *Arabesques*: Anton Shammas**

### **Topic 6: Military Culture in Israel**

Lesson VIII: Life with the military: Is Israeli culture militarist?

Required reading: Ben-Eliezer, Uri, *The Making of Israeli Militarism* (Bloomington, 1998) pp. 1-18, 223-231;

Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force* (Stanford, 1992) pp. 353-371

Film: Waltz with Bashir

### **Second Paper Due**

### **Topic 7: Zionism and its Discontents: the Heritage of Labor Zionism and the post-Zionist debates**

Lesson IX: the Post-Zionist Debate

Required Reading:

Morris, Benny, "The New Historiography: Israel Confronts its Past," in Morris, Benny (ed.) *Making Israel* (University of Michigan, 2007) pp. 11-29

Kabha, Mustafa, "A Palestinian Look at the New Historians and Post-Zionism in Israel," in *Making Israel* 299-319

Pape, Ilan, "The Square Circle: the Struggle of Traditional Zionism," in Nimni, Ephraim (ed.) *The Challenge of Post-Zionism* (London, 2003)

### **Novel for this Unit: *Blue Mountain*, Meir Shalev**

Lesson X: Post-Zionism, continued; review for final exam