

UPDATED SYLLABUS JANUARY 25, 2016

Israeli Literature/English and Jewish Studies 5998/Dr. Holli Levitsky/Spring 2016

Office: 3863 University Hall/ Hours M 12:30-2:30 W 12:30-2 and by appt.

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“Or maybe this is not how it was, but simply the way it was etched in my imagination: living memory, like ripples in water or the nervous quivering of a gazelle’s skin in the moment before it takes flight, comes suddenly and trembles in a single instant in several rhythms or various focuses, before being frozen and immobilized into the memory of a memory.” Amoz Oz

Course Description and Objectives: In this course, we will investigate the modern and contemporary literature and film of the State of Israel. Who are the people of Israel and how do their identities shape the national literature? How does the national literature shape the identities of Israelis? How does the literary imagination shape issues of longing, ownership, exclusion, religious belief and practice, history, memory, trauma, diaspora, and others? What can individual texts tell us about the people and their lives in this vibrant land?

We will neither solve nor resolve the real-life issues imaginatively realized by these writers and filmmakers. Rather, we will complicate the issues by supplanting a single point of view with a multiplicity of views. Our focus will be on how these issues are presented, not whether someone is right or wrong. That said, we will pay close attention to what these representations—or stories-- can tell us about the people narrating them as well as the history and future geopolitical possibilities. The themes we will pursue include the Zionist dream, immigration and emigration, displacement, contact between cultures, agency or self-government, the absurdity of life in Israel, the diaspora, among others. We will be investigating these themes through the genres of fiction, poetry, memoir and film.

All films will be viewed in class until otherwise noted.

Prerequisites: Undergraduate with upper division standing or Jewish Studies minor or Graduate Student. Satisfies Comparative Literature or English Literature elective requirement for the English major and the Arts requirement for Jewish Studies minors. As a discussion-based course, students are required to participate energetically, to show an open heart, a generous spirit, and mutual respect at all times. Several of the required films will need to be viewed on your own.

Extra Credit:

UCLA ISRAEL STUDIES <http://www.international.ucla.edu/israel/home>

Wednesday, January 20 – Rock in the Red Zone documentary film. A tale of music and romance in the Israeli town of Sderot, on the frontlines of a never-ending war. Screening & discussion with the filmmaker, Laura Bialis.

Tuesday, January 26 – Balancing Security and Individual Rights in the Fight Against Terror: Lessons from the US and Israel. A panel of American and Israeli experts will discuss comparative legal approaches and lessons learned.

Tuesday, February 9 – Iran, the US, and the Changing Middle East. Dr. David Menashri, Israel Institute and Y&S Nazarian Center Visiting Professor, will analyze the connection between internal developments in Iran and the shaping of Iranian regional and international politics.

Please check the UCLA Israel Studies website for more details on these events, and new ones to come!

Student Work:

- #1 Close Reading Assignment. 250 pts
- #2 Midterm examination 150 pts [**covering material through 2/22**]
- #3 Group Presentations (2) 50 and 100 pts each [**Amichai and Keret**]
- #4 Digital Humanities project (“Mapping Literary Israel”) 200 pts. This project will incorporate the Close Reading assignment and include new individual and group assignments. Poster session, Monday May 2 4:30-6:30 pm
- #5 Final Examination [**Take Home Exam, covering the entire semester**] 150 pts
- #6 Class attendance, participation and in-class writing (including answer journal) 100 pts
Extra credit opportunities up to 100 pts

Reading List:

The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai, trans. By Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell
The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God and Other Stories, Etkar Keret
Tale of Love and Darkness, Amos Oz
Strongly Recommended: *Israel: A History*, Anita Shapira

Other readings include handouts distributed in class and posted on our course Blackboard site.

Weekly Schedule:

1/11: Introduction: The Literary History of Israel and
“An Interim Summary” from *Israel: A History*; Discussion of *Exodus* and *The Long Way Home*

January 18: No class. Martin Luther King holiday.

1/25: The Zionist Dream. Amos Oz, *Tale of Love and Darkness* chapters 1-15. Answer Journal: Compose 10 questions from your reading of the Oz selection. Film: *Body and Soul*. Close Reading paper assigned (Due March 14th).

2/1: Nation Building. Shmuel Agnon, “From Lodging to Lodging.” “ Film: *The Silent Exodus*. Begin “Mapping” project. Groups and project assigned for “Jerusalem, 1967.”

2/8: Jerusalem. Yehuda Amichai, "The UN Headquarters in the High Commissioner's House in Jerusalem" p 1-2; "Jerusalem" p. 32; "Jerusalem, 1967" p. 47. Answer Journal: Respond to each poem with a short (100-150 word) reflection on "how the poem made you feel" (3 responses). Each student group will present their assigned stanza from "Jerusalem, 1967"

2/15: Shifting Borders. Kanafani, "Return to Haifa," (handout); Oz, pp.311-339. Answer Journal: Compose 5 questions about each reading (5 for Kanafani and 5 for Oz = 10 total)

2/22: Security. Film: *Lemon Tree*. Take home midterm assigned.

February 29-March 4: No class. Spring break.

3/7: Absurdity of Life. Etkar Keret, *The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God and Other Stories*, (the entire book). Answer Journal: Pick 3 stories from the book that reveal similar ways in which the absurdity of life in Israel is revealed. Discuss these similarities in a 200-300 word essay.

3/14: The Russians. Film: *The Human Resources Manager*. Special event: **Maxim Shrayer (REQUIRED). Close Reading Assignment Due in class.**

3/21: Cultural Dissonance. Film: *Yellow Asphalt*.

3/28: Identity Issues. *Arab Labor* (Israeli Television). Amichai "Autobiography, 1952." Poem exercise.

4/4: Israeli culture. In class presentation.

4/11: Love and War. Oz, pp.365-388. Amichai, "When I Was Young, the Whole Country Was Young," "I Walked Past a House Where I Lived Once," "To My Love, Combing Her Hair," "You Are So Small and Slight in the Rain," "Half the People in the World." The Shoah in Israel (handout). Special event.

4/18: Contact between cultures. "West Bank Story." Film: *The Band's Visit*

4/25: Group presentations on Keret.

5/2: Final examination due. Poster Session for Mapping Project.

Seek peace and pursue it.

This document may be modified at any time by the instructor. Please pay careful attention to all requirements and any changes.

