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## Comparative Literature 37Q

### Zionism and the Novel

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Zionism emerged as a political movement in the late nineteenth century to establish a national homeland for the Jewish people. It would eventually lead to the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. The novel is the predominant genre of narrative fiction, often understood as describing a search for meaning or a protagonist's itinerary through a world of estrangement. This course explores how the topic of Zionism has been treated in a range of types of novels.

The goals of the course are twofold: providing you with an opportunity to analyze different versions of Zionism, while enhancing your ability to read complex literary texts, in particular works of literature that examine the political movement of Zionism.

The course poses questions such as the following:

- 1) How do different novels describe variations in the Zionist project and the motivations behind them?
- 2) How variable is the novel as form, and how do different forms of the genre lend themselves to the exploration of Zionism?
- 3) How do the aesthetic concerns of literature resist or enhance the treatment of an explicitly political topic?
- 4) If the novel, as genre, explores the "homelessness" of the alienated hero, is there an echo in the substance of Zionism, i.e. the search for a homeland? What does it mean to be at home?

### **Assignments:**

- 1) For each session, a response to the reading (250-300 words), submitted electronically by 9:00 AM on the day of class. How does the reading describe Zionism? How does it differ from earlier readings?
- 2) In the course of the quarter, every student will be responsible for making two oral presentations on the class readings. Presentations should be no more

- than ten minutes in length: you should briefly report on the content of the reading and then build an argument supporting your own interpretation.
- 3) Due by **February 11**: a five-page paper draft either on *The Second Scroll* or on *Mr. Mani*. How does the novel address Zionism or the relationship to Israel? You will receive it back with comments and be expected to submit a revised version.
  - 4) Due **March 15**: a ten-page paper on a text of your choice (or a comparison of texts). More specific guidelines for your papers will be announced in class. Please submit a one-page abstract of your plans by March 2.

### **January 5: Introduction.**

What is Zionism, what is a novel, and what do that they have to do with each other? Overview of the course.

### **January 7: Zionist appeals.**

Although some of the leaders of Zionism in fact authored novels—Theodor Herzl, Vladimir Jabotinsky, and Joseph Hayyim Brenner—the Zionist agenda circulated initially through appeals or tracts designed to organize a political movement with the goal of promoting Jewish emigration to a national homeland. The texts under discussion today display a range of perspectives. How does the Zionist agenda vary among them?

Leo Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to His People By a Russian Jew* (1882)

Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (1896)

Ahad Ha-am, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem," (1897)

### **January 12: Short Narratives of Homecoming**

Because Zionism envisions a return to a national homeland, it implies a stance of nostalgia, homesickness. The aspiration to return can be expressed as narrative, a sequence of events involving movement from one place to another. The genre of the novel typically involves an extensive account of the world—whether as a long itinerary or as a wide horizon. In contrast, short narratives are necessarily more economical. In this session, we discuss short texts from two very different phases in Hebrew literary history. S.Y. Agnon shared the 1966 Nobel Prize for literature with the poet Nelly Sachs. Rutu Modan is a contemporary Israeli graphic novelist. How does each treat the topic of return and homecoming? Where is Zionism in each of the stories?

S.Y. Agnon, "Earth of Israel" in *A Dwelling Place for My People: Sixteen Stories of the Hasidim* (Hebrew publication: 1932);

Rutu Modan, "Homecoming," in *Jamilti and Other Stories* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2008).

### **January 14: Judaism, the Shoah and the Novel**

While the Zionist program (Pinsker, Herzl, Ahad Ha-am) developed in the context anti-Semitism and poverty in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe, it was only in response to Nazi Germany and, especially, in the wake of the Shoah that major waves of immigration to Palestine took place. The difficult calculus of evaluating the relationship between the Holocaust and the foundation of Israel involves interpreting and judging two distinct historical events. Canadian author A.M. Klein visited Israel as early as 1949. His 1951 novel describes a journey to Zion that tries to grapple with contemporary history through the lens of a mystical Judaism. How does Klein incorporate elements of Judaism and religious writing into this description of his protagonist's travels?

A.M. Klein, *The Second Scroll*

### **January 21: The Founding of the Jewish State: Documents**

Zionism, understood as an aspiration for a homeland for the Jewish people, arguably predates the initiation of a specifically Jewish nationalist movement in the late nineteenth century and draws instead on wider sources in the Jewish literary canon. Moreover, Zionist literature is hardly limited to the Jewish literary tradition itself, as George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* makes clear. Nonetheless the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 obviously is the single most important moment in the history of Zionism. How is the Jewish homeland represented in these historical documents?

The Balfour Declaration

The Peel Commission Report (Summary)

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel

Palestinian National Charter

Hamas Covenant

### **January 26: Zionism, the Novel, and Jewish History**

A familiar version of the novel is the "family novel," that relates the story of a family over several generations. It may resemble the "historical novel," that provides an extensive description of a past period, while attempting to explore underlying currents that connect the past and the present. Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua borrows from both strands in *Mr. Mani*, which is made up of five distinct chapters or conversations, involving different generations in the Mani family, Sephardic Jews at home in the eastern Mediterranean. The five sections are arranged in reverse chronological order, from contemporary Israel to the mid-nineteenth century, and each is made up of a conversation in which the reader hears only one side, leaving the rest to our imagination. Much more than a description of the distinct periods,

Yehoshua's novel tries to grapple with an internal logic in Jewish history, including the crucial question for Zionism, the relationship to the Arab neighbors. The first conversation addresses generational differences in Israel: what are they?

A.B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (1989), First Conversation, pp. 1-73.

### **January 28: Yehoshua, continued**

Moving backwards in history, the second conversation takes place during the Second World War during the Nazi occupation of Crete. The third section takes us to early mandatory Palestine. The narrator is a Jewish soldier in the British army, a lawyer for the general staff, who discusses the case of one Yosef Mani, accused of spying for the Turks and agitating the Arabs.

A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (1989) Second and Third Conversations, pp. 75-201.

### **February 2: Yehoshua, continued**

The fourth conversation takes place in 1899 and describes a trip of Polish Jews to Jerusalem, as well as their departure, and the fifth is the confession of Avraham Mani to his rabbi in Athens in 1848. How does Yehoshua intertwine political historical topics (as in conversation three) with family history (as in conversation five)?

A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (1989), Fourth and Fifth Conversations, pp. 203-363.

### **February 4: The Novel of Disillusionment: Amos Oz**

In *Scenes from Village Life* (2011) Oz structures the novel through a set of interlocking stories, tracing connections among the lives of the inhabitants of a village. A general sense of foreboding pervades the novel, as well as variations in forms of unhappiness. Are there general conclusions to be drawn? What does a novel made up of individual stories convey (in contrast, for example, to Mr. Mani's generations)?

Amos Oz, *Scenes from Village Life* (2011), pp. 3-81.

### **February 9: The Novel of Disillusionment: Amos Oz (2)**

Take another look at *Scenes from Village Life*. Does the array of characters encompass Israeli society? What "types" are represented? And which characters have psychological depth that goes beyond mere "types"? How do the concerns in *Scenes* differ from the view of history in *Mr. Mani*?

Amos Oz, *Scenes from Village Life* (2011), pp. 83-182

## **February 11: Arabs in Israel: Sayed Kashua**

From very early stages of the Zionist movement—at least since the writings of Ahad Ha-am—it was clear to Jewish writers that the immigrants would encounter a local Arab population. Yet Zionism has also been a topic of concern for Arab novelists. For this session, we look at a background briefing concerning Arabs in Israel, as well as a short story by an Israeli Arab, Sayed Kashua, who writes in Hebrew that addresses Zionism in a direct, if surreal manner.

Elie Rekhess, *The Arab Minority in Israel: An Analysis of the 'Future Vision' Documents* (2008)

Sayed Kashua, "Cinderella," [Herzl Disappears at Midnight] *Haaretz* October 2, 2005  
<http://www.haaretz.com/news/cinderella-1.171186>

## **February 18: Arabs in Israel: Sayed Kashua (2)**

Within the terms of Israeli democracy and despite legal and judicial expectations of non-discrimination, considerable inequality persists between Jewish and Arab Israelis, as well as within each community. Kashua explores these contradictions, as they are refracted as well across gender roles and framed by a fantastical story of passing. What lines divide Arab and Jewish societies, and how are they crossed? Is there a place for Israeli Arabs in the Zionist narrative?

Sayed Kashua, *Second Person Singular* (2010)

## **February 23: Refugees and Displacement: Samir El-Youssef**

Samir El-Youssef was born in 1965 in a Palestinian refugee camp in Southern Lebanon and moved to Cyprus in 1989. Today he lives in London. He writes both in Arabic and English. In the *Illusion of Return* he explores the perspectives of the Palestinian diaspora, the role of politics and the narratives of national identity.

Samir El-Youssef, *Illusion of Return* (2007)

## **February 25: Zionism and the Post-Modern Novel: Philip Roth**

While conventional novels depend on plot structures that lead to (more or less) definitive conclusions, the post-modern novel sometimes involves the possibility of multiple conclusions. This allows authors to play out different possibilities in order to explore outcomes in a competing fictional universe. A long-standing and controversial commentator on the American Jewish community, Philip Roth turns here to questions of a Jewish homeland and anti-Semitism—the combination of themes that occupied Zionism from its start. These questions overlap with a competition between brothers (reminiscent of *Second Person Singular*), with an

exploration of gender roles, and with a focus on the connection between political and personal allegiances. In our first session devoted to this novel, pay attention to the decision to move to settle in the West Bank.

Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (1986), pp. 1-140.

### **March 2: Zionism and the Post-Modern Novel: Philip Roth (2)**

In *The Counterlife*, Zuckerman appears to condemn his brother's decision to join the settlers, opting instead for a seemingly idyllic life in England. Yet his rejection of Hanoch's Zionism suddenly runs into an anti-Semitism that upends his plans. How does Roth balance the books between the judgments on Zionism and anti-Semitism, and how does this problem echo deeper currents within the Zionist tradition? Finally how does the specific form of this novel, with its multiple plot possibilities, complicate the discussion of literature and politics

Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (1986), pp. 141-324.

### **March 4: Zionism, Anti-Zionism and the Novel: Harold Jacobson**

In his prize-winning novel, British author Harold Jacobson takes on the question of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, exploring the complexities of European attitudes to minorities and to the Middle East conflict. Surprisingly he is able to grapple these issues in the medium of a comic novel, another variant of the genre. How does Jacobson locate Jewish identity in the political debate? How does the novel establish a hinge between political debate and personal lives? What is the function of Julian Treslove's perspective in the novel?

Harold Jacobson, *The Finkler Question* (2010), pp. 3-133.

### **March 9: Zionism, Anti-Zionism and the Novel (2)**

In the second half of the novel, there is a broadening of the vision. How so? How are questions of Jewish and Zionist identity addressed in comparison to what we saw in *Counterlife*? How does *The Finkler Question* navigate between discussions of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism?

### **March 13: The Graphic Novel**

The graphic novel has emerged in recent years as a prominent new variant on the genre, drawing on comic book aesthetics that merge illustrations and text. Graphic novels have taken on complex and serious subjects, such as the Holocaust (in *Maus*). We conclude the course by returning to Rutu Modan to look at one of her full-length works, a story of a search for a lover and a father in the context of suicide bombings in Tel-Aviv.

Rutu Modan, *Exit Wounds* (2007) (or reserve)

## Supplementary Reading

These are some other novels that address Zionism that you may want to explore.

Abraham Mapu, *Love of Zion (Amnon, Prince and Peasant)*

George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*

Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred, or the New Crusade*

Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto*

Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land*

Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The Five*

Joseph Hayyim Brenner, *Out of the Depths*

Arthur Schnitzler, *The Road Into The Open*

Gertrud Kolmar, *The Jewish Mother*

Lion Feuchtwanger, *Josephus*

S.Y. Agnon, *Only Yesterday*

S.Y. Agnon, *To the Day*

Arnold Zweig, *De Vriend Goes Home*

Arthur Koestler, *Thieves in the Night*

Leon Uris, *Exodus*

Yaakov Shabbtai, *Past Continuous*

Eshkol Nevo, *Homesick*

S. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizah*

S. Yizhar, *Preliminaries*

Y. Kenaz, *Infiltration*

Amos Oz, *My Michael*

Sayed Kashua, *Let It Be Morning*

Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun*

Samir El-Youssef, *Treaty of Love*

Etger Keret/Samir El-Youssef, *Gaza Blues*

Jonathan Wilson, *A Palestine Affair*

Emuna Elon, *If You Awaken Love*

Michael Chabon, *Yiddish Policeman's Union*

Ronit Matalon