

Russell Berman
260-201
berman@stanford

Office Hours Tues 8:00-8:50 and Thurs 11:00-11:50 and by appointment. (It is best to email in advance).

Class Meetings TTh 1:30-2:50 in

Comparative Literature 37Q

Zionism and the Novel

Fall 2024

There are two sides to this course, one political-historical, the other literary and aesthetic: *Zionism and the Novel*. This course is very much about the relationships between aesthetics and politics.

Zionism emerged as a political movement in the late nineteenth century to establish a national homeland for the Jewish people, although it built on a much older history stretching into antiquity. It eventually led 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 Zionism has been treated in a range of types of novels and short narratives. The course examines this topic as an example of the intersection of politics and aesthetics. It invites you to think about both parts—history-politics and literature. Your interests may be primarily about, for example, Middle East politics, or you may be more interested in variations in the types of novel. Your mission is to think about how the two sides interact.

The goals of the course include:

- providing you with an opportunity to analyze different versions of Zionism
- enhancing your ability to read complex literary texts
- strengthening your capacity to make effective arguments in writing and in speech

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 this 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 a literary genre, explores the “homelessness” of the alienated hero (one classic definition), is there an echo in the substance of Zionism, i.e. the search for a homeland? What does it mean to be at home?

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

Distinguish among various conceptual elements in Zionism, such as understandings of diaspora, homeland, culture, religion and politics;

Recognize core elements of the novel as genre (plot, character development, role of the narrator, irony);

Describe how political and aesthetic dimensions interact with each other in specific novels;

Explain your own qualitative judgment on individual novels with regard to specific features of the works;

Communicate your interpretation of the novels effectively, making evidence-based arguments in speech and in writing.

Assignments:

- 1) **Two Oral Presentations:** Each student is responsible for making two ten-minute oral presentations on the assigned readings. You should make a claim about the text and support your claim by referring to evidence from within the text. Your presentation should not be primarily descriptive, nor should it be mainly plot summary. Instead, provide a critical account by identifying a conflict or problem within the text, and take a stance. The class wants to hear your point of view and how you defend it. Oral presentations normally include a slide set. (Be sure to familiarize yourself in advance with the technology available in the classroom.)

After each of your presentations, provide a written (email) self-evaluation to the instructor, addressing three points: what you think went well, what was less successful, and how you could present more effectively in the future. These self-evaluations do not have to be long, but they are an important part

of the learning process. They are due by the end of the day on which you make your presentations.

- 2) Two Essays:** Each student will complete two essays spread across the quarter. The first essay treats the course readings exclusively, as described below. The second essay must also incorporate some discussion of what scholars have published on the novels you choose to discuss; you will learn how to conduct research on literary scholarship by using the *MLA International Bibliography*. By reading what others have published on a topic, you can refine your own position. Learning how to work with published scholarly literature is an important step toward professional research.

For each paper, you will submit a draft, receive feedback, revise and resubmit a final version.

Essay #1: This four-page essay should compare the first two short readings of the class, Agnon's "Earth of Israel," and Modan's "Homecoming." How do they each treat ideas of home, return, and land? Can you frame them with regard to at least one of the programs of Herzl, Ahad Ha'am and Arendt? *You do not have to address all three perspectives although you may choose to discuss contrasts among them.* Alternatively you can write on the implications of the different genres/media—Agnon's mixture of traditionalism and sacred references in a first-person narrative versus Modan's graphic short narrative (at the end of the quarter we will look at a full length graphic novel by her).

Draft due: September 30 . **Revision due:** October 11.

Essay #2: This five-page essay can address any one of the texts from the class, or it can compare two of the texts. **You must draw on published scholarship about your topic and discuss it in your paper.** Instruction will be provided as to how to search for this critical literature. You have considerable latitude as to how to approach this assignment. Some possible directions include: How does the novel that you choose treat Zionism and the various topics related to it? How do different characters develop and what conflicts emerge between them? What distinctive formal aspects appear in the text and how do they relate to the historical and political issues at stake? These are just suggestions; you are free to take this assignment in other directions that interest you. Be sure to discuss your topic with the instructor at the latest by **October 28.**

Abstract due: November 4; **Final Version due:** December 6.

Grading:

You are expected to attend all classes and to complete all the reading and writing on time. You should also participate actively in classroom discussion.

- 10% Discussion participation
- 20% Oral presentation 1
- 20% Oral presentation 2
- 20% Essay 1
- 30% Essay 2

Stanford as an institution is committed to the highest quality education, and as your teaching team, our first priority is to uphold your educational experience. To that end we are committed to following the syllabus as written here, including through short or long-term disruptions, such as public health emergencies, natural disasters, or protests and demonstrations. However, there may be extenuating circumstances that necessitate some changes. Should adjustments be necessary we will communicate clearly and promptly to ensure you understand the expectations and are positioned for successful learning

Sept 24: Introduction: Politics and Aesthetics

What is Zionism, what is a novel, and what do they have to do with each other?

Key figures in the Zionist movement were in fact novelists—we will read one of them, Theodor Herzl's *Old-New Land*, later in the quarter. But let's start with some short programmatic statements describing different approaches to Zionism.

Please come to our first class having looked at these examples: Herzl's "political Zionism" with a focus on establishing a state, Ahad Ha-am's aspiration for a "cultural Zionism," both from the 1890s, and Hannah Arendt's appeal to political action, coupled with ancient history, in the midst of the Holocaust.

Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (1896)

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

Hannah Arendt, "For the Honor and Glory of the Jewish People" (1944)

You can find these texts in the files section of this site.

Optional Readings: This course has been offered for several years, due to high demand, but the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023 significantly changed the context. The pieces below discuss the cultural consequences of the attack:

Ran Baratz, "The Spirit of '48"

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/the-spirit-of-48>

Gadi Taub, "Do You Have Any Other Place to Live?"

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/israel-patriotic-citizens-privileged-elites>

Dara Horn, “Why the Most Educated People in America Fall for Anti-Semitic Lies.”
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:5628cdd5-3513-4251-94fa-fb52240e6f2a>

Sept. 26: Short Fictional Narratives of Homecoming

Last time we looked at some non-fiction texts, different advocacy essays for variants for Zionism that can provide some conceptual tools for the analyses we will undertake during the quarter. Today we turn to fiction: we’re not yet at “novels,” which are longer and attempt to encompass more. Instead to get the ball rolling, we begin with two different short stories relevant to Zionism.

Because Zionism envisions—one way or another—a return to a national homeland, it implies a stance of nostalgia or homesickness. In aesthetic terms, the aspiration to return can be expressed as narrative, a sequence of events involving movement from one place to another, a search or a journey. . The genre of the novel typically involves an extensive account of a “world”—whether as a long itinerary or as a wide horizon. In contrast, short narratives are necessarily more economical.

The short texts we look at today are 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). Note: Our last text in this course will be a graphic novel by Modan, *Exit Wounds*; you may want to take a look at it in advance, especially if you’re interested in this genre.)

Background:

Concerning the contemporary context, please look at the BBC report on comments by Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority (in files “Outrage...”). For a consideration of the relationship between Jewish identity and

Zionism, you may want to read the 1962 lecturer by Leo Strauss, “Why We Remain Jews”

https://d31kydh6n6r5j5.cloudfront.net/uploads/sites/227/2019/11/Ch.7_Jewish_Philosophy022.pdf

In order to gain a grasp of some of the political documents relevant to this course, you should also look at some items in the files:

The Balfour Declaration (1917)

The Peel Commission Report (Summary) (1937)

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel (1948)

Palestinian National Charter (1964/1968)

Hamas Covenant (1988)

[Hamas Charter 2017](#)

Sept 30: Essay 1, Draft Due

Oct 1: Zionism, Anti-Zionism and the Novel: Harold Jacobson, *The Finkler Question* (1)

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 with 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? How does humor address serious topics?

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

[The Finkler question](#)

Oct 3: No Class: Rosh HaShanah

Oct. 8: Zionism, Anti-Zionism and the Novel: Jacobson (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? How does *The Finkler Question* navigate between discussions of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism?

Jacobson, *The Finkler Question*, pp. 137-307.

Oct. 10: Judaism, the Shoah and the Novel: A.M. Klein *The Second Scroll*

While the Zionist program 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 grapples 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? The novel concludes with a recognition of conflict between Jews and Arabs; in that context, consider Diana Muir's examination of the debate over a controversial slogan.

A.M. Klein, *The Second Scroll* (1951)

[The second scroll](#)

Diana Muir, "A Land Without a People for a People without a Land," *Middle East Forum*, Spring 2008, pp. 55-62

<https://www.meforum.org/1877/a-land-without-a-people-for-a-people-without>

October 10: The Utopian Novel: Theodor Herzl's Old-New Land (1)

Theodor Herzl is often regarded as the founder of modern political Zionism, the project to establish a state. We have already looked at a short programmatic text by Herzl. Here we examine his "utopian novel." Written in 1902, it describes a Jewish state as he imagines it existing twenty years later. What is the cultural crisis described in part one? How does it motivate the Jewish protagonist to leave Europe? What is his relationship to his traveling companion? Pay attention to the differences between the description of Palestine in part 1 and part 2.
pp. 7-89 (parts 1 and 2)

FYI:

<https://www.nysun.com/article/herzl-prophet-of-israel-is-celebrated-at-one-of-the-diasporas-crown-jewels>

Oct 11: Revision of Essay 1 due.

Oct 15: The Utopian Novel: Herzl's Old-New Land (2)

What are the political differences discussed, e.g. the critique of Geyer? What is the standing of science in the utopian society? References are made to other utopian novels by Samuel Butler (*Erewhon*) and Theodor Hertzka (*Freiland*). Find out what they are about (Some of you may want to write your final paper on utopian novels.). What are the advantages and disadvantages of a "utopian novel"? What does this novel say about the future of antisemitism? Why does the novel present the ritual Passover meal, the Seder? What is the connection to the topic of the novel? How is

land acquired? What is the socio-economic system? individualist/socialist? or? What is a “cooperative of cooperatives?”

pp. 93-228 (parts 3, 4, 5 and epilogue)

Oct 17: Subjectivity and Description of the City: Yehudit Katzir

Yehudit Katzir, born 1963, writes both short stories and novels. As form, the short story contrasts with the “long form” novel that we have just read. Pay attention to how a short text organizes material more tightly than an expansive novel. In “Closing the Sea,” Katzir explores the differences *within* the Israeli/Zionist experience by contrasting two cities and two women as she provides an alternative to heroic history or utopian programs. This is also a very personal narrative, about interior life and emotions. Is the “personal the political?” Always? How should we understand accounts of personal experience when this course poses an explicitly political framework? Is it fair to ask political questions about a text that seems so intensely subjective?

Oct 24 : The Novel of Israeli 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. Pay attention here and elsewhere how component parts of a narrative fit together to form a whole (if they do). Is this really a collection of short stories or, alternatively, the representation of a fragmented society? 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? How does the array of characters encompass Israeli society? What “types” are represented? And which characters have psychological depth that makes them more than mere “types”?

Available at: [Scenes from village life](#)

Oct 28: Discuss Final Paper Topic by this Date

You should read through the full syllabus and decide which text(s) you want to explore in your final paper. You may want to write on a text that comes up later in the quarter. By this date either speak or email with me about your topic. You may still modify it later, but you should have a good initial plan in place by now.

Oct 29: The Novel of Palestinian Disillusionment: Samir El-Youssef

Born in a Palestinian refugee camp in Southern Lebanon, El-Youssef moved to the United Kingdom where he has published at least three novels. *The Illusion of Return* (2007) has some autobiographical features, with its reminiscences of Lebanon from the vantage point of the Heathrow airport in London. The text explores the narrator's conflict with activists in the frame story, while incorporating several intratextual narratives of friends and their pasts. Can one ever return home? This is both a political question and an existential one for El-Youssef. In terms of genre, the text is sometimes referred to as a "novella" rather than a novel. Is this simply a question of length?

Oct 31: The Novel of Passing: Sayed Kashua

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 across gender roles and framed by a fantastical story of passing. What lines divide Arab and Jewish societies, and how are they crossed? What is the place for Israeli Arabs in the Zionist narrative?

Sayed Kashua, *Second Person Singular* (2010) (whole novel)

[Second person singular](#)

AND

Arab Intellectuals and Israel

Born in southern Lebanon in 1945, Fouad Ajami was a prolific commentator on Arab intellectual, cultural and political affairs. He spent most of his adult life in American academia, including as a Senior Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. One of his most important books, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs*, is an extended criticism of some of the illusions that have plagued political and intellectual life in the Middle East. This excerpt discusses Arab intellectual response to the prospects of peace with Israel and opposition to it. Within the context of our course, this text is not itself a novel but rather a description of the thinking that shaped literary life at a particular historical juncture. When you study literature, you not only read the primary texts themselves but you also also examine the debates among literary authors, such as those described here by Ajami.

Fouad Ajami, "Orphaned Peace," from *Dream Palace of the Arabs* (1998) (in files)

Nov. 4: ABSTRACT OF SECOND PAPER DUE

An abstract is a summary of the project you are undertaking. In a completed article, the abstract summarizes the method and results. Here however you are submitting an abstract in the sense of a proposal of what you have yet to write. Some of this involves guesswork, since you have not yet completed the research. However you should have a fairly clear idea of the text(s) you have chosen to treat, the question that you will try to answer and how you think you will present an argument (your “hunch”). The abstract should state why the topic is important and should be about 250 words.

Nov. 5 Democracy Day

Nov. 7: The Post-Modern Novel: Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (1)

While conventional novels depend on plot structures that lead to (more or less) definitive conclusions, the post-modern novel can explore multiple conclusions. Authors can play out different possibilities in order to explore outcomes in competing fictional universes. 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*), an exploration of gender roles, and with a focus on the connection between political and personal allegiances.

pp. 3-49 (“Basel”)

Nov. 12: The Post-Modern Novel: Roth, *The Counterlife* (2)

The brother presumed dead in the previous section returns to explore a counterlife: if he had not died, what might have happened instead? For Henry, the West Bank is a counterlife to his comfortable life in New Jersey. What arguments does Nathan mount in order to try to convince him to return? And then, in “Aloft,” what arguments does Nathan face from an obsessive admirer?

pp. 50-181 (“Judea” and “Aloft”)

Nov. 14: The Post-Modern Novel: Roth, *The Counterlife* (3)

In *The Counterlife*, Zuckerman appears initially 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 and his world view. 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 aesthetics and politics

pp. 182-324 (“Gloucestershire” and “Christendom”)

Nov. 26: Detective Novel, Interior Life, Refugees: Ayelet Gundar-Goshen

The detective novel is a distinct type of narrative. It is often treated as part of “popular culture,” a judgment that implicitly treats this type of novel as less serious than other texts to which a higher aesthetic standing is attributed. How can one make this sort of qualitative distinction between types of novels? More generally, novels are often expected to provide extensive descriptions of society, a feature that might appear to echo a detective’s search for clues. In Ayelet Gundar-Goshen’s *Waking Lions*, what is the balance between representations of external circumstances (visual description) and interior life? Can you think about the balance (or tension?) between objective and subjective aspects of this and other novels?

Ayelet Gundar-Goshen, *Waking Lions* (2014), pp. 3-170

Nov. 28: Gundar-Goshen (2)

Is Zionism a question in *Waking Lions*? Think about the relationship between private life (e.g., family) and national identity. Where is the State? How does the novel treat minority groups and refugees? Are they included in the novel’s “world”? What about gender roles? What kinds of insights (if any) does this novel provide into Israeli life—or is it just providing entertainment as a detective story?

Ayelet Gundar-Goshen, *Waking Lions* (2014), pp. 171-341

Dec. 3: 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 (famously 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) (on reserve)

Dec. 5: Concluding Discussion

In our final meeting, you can raise any remaining questions you may have. I would also like each of you to be prepared to announce briefly to the class the topic of your final paper and summarize your findings. Your statement should be brief to allow time for a question or two for each of the participants.

Dec. 6: FINAL PAPER DUE

This quarter this course takes place in the context of considerable controversy on campus and beyond (see "The War at Stanford" in the Files section of the Canvas site). It is therefore important to emphasize that participants should treat each other respectfully even if there are disagreements. Discussions will be managed by the instructor who will call on individuals to speak and determine when they must cede the floor. Disruptions of classes may lead to referrals to the Office of Community Standards. Please review university policy on campus disruptions: <https://bulletin.stanford.edu/academic-polices/student-conduct-rights/campus-disruptions>

Since you are in this class, you should keep up on news about the Middle East. Read newspapers (not only American, use your other language skills!) voraciously. And read skeptically. There is lots on twitter, of course. Some specialized sites that I find useful sometimes include:

Al-Monitor The Pulse of the Middle East

Tablet (tabletmag.com)

Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (spme.org)

Daily Alert (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs) dailyalert@list-dailyalert.org

Association for Civil Rights in Israel, https://www.english.acri.org.il/post/__152

Books for this Course have been requested through the bookstore and placed on reserve in Green Library. Some materials (required and optional) are in the files section of this site.

Harold Jacobson, *The Finkler Question* direct link: [The Finkler question](#)

A.M. Klein, *The Second Scroll* direct link: [The second scroll](#)

Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland: The Old-New Land*

Amos Oz, *Scenes from Jewish Life* direct link: [Scenes from village life](#)

Samir El-Youssef, *Illusions of Return*

Sayed Kashua, *Second Person Singular* direct link: [Second person singular](#)

Philip Roth, *The Counterlife*

Ayelet Gundar-Goshen, *Waking Lions*

Rutu Modan, *Exit Wounds*

Supplementary Reading

Some historical documents to consider:

The Balfour Declaration (1917)
The Peel Commission Report (Summary) (1937)
The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel (1948)
Palestinian National Charter (1964/1968)
 Hamas Covenant (1988)

A lecture on the term “settler colonialism”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vyde00hVjUQ>

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

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, *Bliss: A Novel*

Do you have others to add?