Course Curriculum

ISGAP-Oxford Summer Institute 2023

by

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Course Title

Representation of Jews in British English Literature: Past and Present

Course Description

The course “Representation of Jews in British English Literature: Past and Present” delves into the multifaceted portrayal of Jewish characters and communities across centuries of British literary tradition. Divided into five units, spanning from the early medieval period to contemporary times, this comprehensive exploration offers students a nuanced understanding of how Jews have been depicted in British literature, examining themes of identity, religion, culture, and societal attitudes. Beginning with the Anglo-Saxon period, students will explore early representations of Jews in Old English literature. Through close reading and critical analysis, students will uncover the ways in which Anglo-Saxon works (including their translations) depicted Jews and Jewish communities, considering the influence of religious and cultural factors on these representations.

Moving through the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, the course will explore the shifting portrayal of Jews in British literature. Students will examine texts such as Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, Marlowe's The Jew of Malta and Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, grappling with complex themes of otherness, prejudice, and stereotype. Through discussions students will explore how historical events such as the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290 and the Reformation influenced literary representations of Jews during this time. As the course progresses into the modern era, students will analyse the portrayal of Jews in 19th and 20th-century British literature in the context of changing social and cultural landscapes. Topics of exploration will include assimilation, anti-Semitism, and the emergence of Jewish identity in modern British literature.

In the contemporary period, students will explore the diverse ways in which Jewishness is represented in modern British literature. Through comparative analysis and seminar discussions, students will critically examine the intersections of race, religion, and identity in contemporary literary representations of Jews. The last unit will also steer towards an
introduction of the Holocaust and exploring the role of India during that period through specific examples. This will be done in order to ensure that the Holocaust was not an alien event of a far off land. Throughout the course, students will develop their critical thinking, analytical, and research skills through close reading, seminar discussions, and writing assignments.

Course Outcomes

By exploring the representation of Jews in British English literature across different historical periods, students will gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which literature reflects and shapes cultural attitudes towards marginalized communities. By the end of this course, students will also be able to critically analyse the historical context, manifestations, and impact of anti-Semitism, that eventually fuelled the hatred and culminated into the Holocaust, and demonstrate empathy towards the experiences of affected individuals and communities.

Course Duration: 20 Weeks (60 classes)

Course Breakup- Unit I-III- 4 weeks each
Unit IV- 3 weeks
Unit V- 5 weeks

Course Requirements

End Semester Exams- 75 Marks
Internal Assessment- 25 Marks
   Attendance- 5 Marks
   Brief Presentations- 10 Marks
   Class Test- 10 Marks

Course Audience: University Students.

Course Contents

UNIT I
Anti-Semitism: Definition and Emanation

In the first unit students will delve into the complex phenomenon of Anti-Semitism, its definition, historical roots and the need to study it.

Readings

UNIT II
The Anglo Saxon and Medieval Period (450-1500)

This unit will explore the manifestations of Anti-Semitism during the Anglo Saxon and Medieval periods, focusing on the socio-cultural, religious and political factors.

Readings


UNIT III
The Renaissance Period (1500-1660)

This unit investigates the depictions of Jews in Renaissance literature, art and drama including stereotypes and negative imagery.

Readings


UNIT IV
The Neoclassical Period to Edwardian Period (1660-1914)

This unit, while exploring the experiences of Jews in England spanning from the late seventeenth to early twentieth centuries, will also analyze the historical context of the readmission of Jews to England in 1656 under the rule of Oliver Cromwell.

Readings

UNIT V
The Georgian Period (1914) to 1950

This unit will deal with the experiences of Jews in England from spanning a time marked by significant social, political and economic upheaval, including the world wars, rise of fascism and the Holocaust.

Readings