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New Vistas

Volume 12, Issue 1, 2026 UWL Annual Doctoral Students' Conference 2025

Abstract

Since his harsh captivity and execution in 1738, the life of the court Jew Joseph Süß Oppenheimer has been (mis)represented numerous times. In this presentation, I will share insights into my PhD research, which aims to reframe both our understanding of this important historical figure and the nature of adaptation. My PhD encompasses a thesis and a feature film script that break away from a centuries-long tradition of distortion. The screenplay portrays Süß as a visionary entrepreneur driven by his wish for personal acceptance who is scapegoated for the power claims of his patron, Carl Alexander, the Duke of Württemberg. My narrative, grounded in historical research, allows the thesis to explore how storytelling for screen with historical accuracy can provide a creative method for challenging antisemitic stereotypes. To this end, my thesis first traces the similarities between previous Süß misrepresentations. Focusing on how the concept of vampires, and their deployment in a specifically antisemitic mode, has shaped the evolution of Süß portrayals, my research highlights the adaptive nature of stereotypes.

Research Questions

- How do previous Süß misrepresentations adapt the Jewish vampire stereotype, to an extent that they can be considered as adaptations of each other? How do they relate to the portrayal of vampires across various media?
- How can Creative Practice in the form of a more accurate screenplay counter the Jewish vampire stereotype?
- How can the script for a new screen portrayal of Süß draw on historical source material while telling the story for a contemporary audience? To what extent can such an approach be considered historically authentic?

Keywords

Jewish history, Screen adaptation