

## **Wintersession**

### **LIT 392 W01: Topics in Literary Themes: Revisions and Retellings**

Our contemporary cultural landscape is littered with “adaptations” of previously told tales. Depending on our geographic, cultural and temporal specificity, we may not even be able to identify the “original” tales that have been reworked for our consumption. We can never, according to arbiters of what counts as a narrative, tell a completely new story, but the question remains “What do we do with these narratives that take up the ‘told already’ to ‘tell again’?” We would perhaps be better served by asking why a particular narrative is taken up and retold in a specific historical moment. Analyzing retellings within contemporary popular culture, this course investigates revisions and reimaginings of previously told tales and asks students to get beyond the question of whether or not there is an original text that should be preserved, but to critically engage with what are not always obvious politics of revision, translation, and adaptation.

To “adapt” a narrative is to translate a text from one form into another. Many often read the products of adaptation as being less than satisfactory. We are all too familiar with forms of critique along the lines of: “It’s just not as good as the original” or “It’s not as good as the book.” Perhaps if we shift our critical lens just a bit, we might rework our own strategies of narrative telling by thinking of adaptation as helping “their source(s)... ‘survive’ ... changing environments and changing tastes” (Stam 3). If we think of adaptation in these terms, outside of a binary frame of “good” or “bad,” then we can consider how “retellings” function in a given historical moment to contribute to our understanding of the way cultural texts move and transform along with particular forms of knowledge. Students will read across multiple genres—folk tales, poetry, novels, films, graphic novels, games, spoken word performance and music. To help us get started, we will read some examples of “adaptation theory” to understand current debates surrounding this practice but move quickly to the work of the texts.