HON-H233 (33231) Great Authors, Composers & Artists: Adaptation: The German Approach
Marc Weiner
TuTh 9:30am-10:45am
BH 018

For a long time people have been arguing about which is better, the book or the movie, and about other works – literary or not – that provide the basis for another. We ask ourselves such questions as: Should the first one count as some kind of ideal original, against which any adaptation should be measured in terms of its adherence or faithfulness to the original, or do we feel that later re-workings should stand on their own or have the right to be judged by other criteria? Which do we prefer – the first work or the second, and why? What can we take into consideration when responding to one artistic form (say, a short story, poem, drama, or novel) that we might not take into account when responding to another form? What if the new formal possibilities eliminate some aspects of the original story and/or the original form? Should we consider the different time periods in which the different works were created, which opens up other issues such as the nature of their different audiences, or are such considerations incidental? These are some of the questions we will explore in the course of the semester.

With this in mind, the course has three goals: 1) to provide an introduction to major artistic works of German-speaking Europe from the late 18th century to the present day; 2) to examine how these works have been adapted into other aesthetic forms; and 3) to consider the questions we need to ask when looking at them. We will be analyzing poems, short stories, novellas, dramas, and novels, and their transformations when their major features (plot, character, mood, structure, etc.) reappear when re-used in other guises. For the most part, the transformations in question will concern literature into film, but also into other aesthetic forms – oratorio, ballet, opera, and music video. In order to understand the various questions that pertain to the transfer of one work into another, we will also be reading some discussions on the process of adaptation – it's pros and cons, questions of faithfulness or distortion, the new possibilities of stories told through different means, and others.

All texts will be read in English translation. No knowledge of German is required. No credit given in Germanic Studies.

Participation (not mere attendance) is essential to the class being successful, so it is important that all students come to class having prepared the assigned material and being ready to engage in its discussion. There will be three writing assignments, each ca. 5-8 pp. in length: 1) the first will concern a student’s response to a given work we will have discussed on the syllabus; 2) the second will discuss the degree to which a given work is a faithful adaptation of another; and 3) the third will discuss and analyze an adaptation of a work not found on the syllabus. Students will have the option of re-writing either paper I or II within a week of receiving its evaluation, and the second grade will replace that of the first. In the final weeks of the semester, students will present to the class their work on their final papers, the proposal of which the students and the Instructor will have agreed upon by the end of the 10th week of the semester.