

ENGL 3246-880: Franchise Cultures

Benjamin J. Robertson



Twenty-first-century audiences have witnessed the birth and rebirth of countless tentpole properties and multimedia franchises. Old favorites such as James Bond, Star Wars, and Star Trek have continued to be popular even as they reboot themselves and challenge their own histories. New franchises such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the Twilight saga, and Assassin's Creed demonstrate again and again how Hollywood, major publishers, and video game developers have come to focus on big budget, sprawling narratives and worlds to the exclusion, and detriment, of smaller, more personal, and original productions. However, even as cultural production became increasingly focused on spectacle and seriality, blogs and social media offered fans and amateur critics opportunity and means to voice their opinions—often directly to the producers themselves—to a degree never possible during the twentieth century.

This class will study several franchises in the context of several related disciplines, including literary studies, cinema studies, and media studies and use these materials to ask several questions, including:

- What are the dimensions or contours of franchise as an aesthetic form?
- What does this form help us understand about twenty-first-century cultural production?
- How does franchise challenge conventional/historical scholarly assumptions about form, textuality, method, and so on?
- What new scholarly assumptions and methods must we develop to adequately address franchise?

Our primary texts will mainly be films and series on various streaming services with perhaps one graphic novel (*Watchmen*) thrown in. Secondary sources will come from contemporary media studies, game studies, comic studies, and related fields. Course evaluation will include formal writing assignments, presentations, and a project, the nature of which we will determine as a class.

For more information, please contact me at benjamin.j.robertson@colorado.edu.