From Dostoevsky to Samurai to Spaghetti Western:
Adaptation and Akira Kurosawa

Instructor: Olga Solovieva
Seminar: Tue/Th 9:40 am-11 am
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Course Description:
Why are films and literature constantly remade and adapted from culture to culture across differences of time and space? What is at stake? What is gained and what is lost in cinematic remakes and adaptations? And how do cultural, historical and narrative conventions transform the adapted stories? Focusing on Akira Kurosawa’s cinematic adaptations of literary works, for example Ran, based on Shakespeare, or Hakuchi, based on Dostoevsky’s The Idiot; and on remakes of Kurosawa’s own films, such as Sergio Leone’s “spaghetti” Western A Fistful of Dollars, Georg Lucas’s Star Wars episode "Phantom Menace" and Sturges’ Western The Magnificent Seven, we will discuss how originals relate to remakes and how films transform their literary counterparts. The course is an introduction to the cinema of Akira Kurosawa and its international afterlife as well as to the problems of intercultural adaptation. Course books are available at the Seminary Co-op. The films and other readings will be viewed independently through links posted on Canvas.

Requirements:
Attendance and active participation; small group discussions of course material, reports and comments on Canvas; a final paper (ten pages).

Grade Breakdown:
Attendance and participation – 20%
Small group discussions and reports – 30%
Final paper – 50 %

Required Books (available from the Seminary Co-op):

Shakespeare, King Lear (Dover Publications)
Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, and other stories, translation by Nicolas Pasternak Slater, Oxford World’s Classics.
Arseniev, *Dersu the Trapper*, translated by Malcolm Burr
Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, translated by Audie Bock

**Course Schedule**

**Week One** *Rashōmon* (1950) and Akutagawa

March 30 Discussion of Kurosawa’s *Rashōmon* and Akutagawa’s short stories “Rashōmon” and “In a Bamboo Grove”

**Readings:** Akutagawa’s “Rashōmon,” “In a Bamboo Grove,” Alexandre Astruc, “Camera-Styló” (Camera-Pen); excerpts from Dower’s *Embracing Defeat*; Sumana Roy, “Beyond the Guilt Tax: Revising the Postcolonial Syllabus” on Canvas. [https://thepointmag.com/criticism/beyond-the-guilt-tax/](https://thepointmag.com/criticism/beyond-the-guilt-tax/)

April 1 Small Group Discussions: The discussion question posted on Canvas.

**Week Two** *Hakuchi* (The Idiot) and Dostoevsky

April 6 Discussion of *Hakuchi* (*The Idiot*, 1951) and Dostoevsky’s novel *The Idiot*


April 8 Small Group Discussions: The discussion question posted on Canvas.

**Week Three** *Ikiru* (To Be) and Tolstoy

April 13 Discussion of *Ikiru* and Tolstoy’s short-novel *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

**Readings:** Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*; Sho Konishi, Tolstoy article

April 15 Small Group Discussions: The discussion question posted on Canvas.

**Week Four** *Ran* and Shakespeare

April 20 Discussion of *Ran* (1985) and Shakespeare’s “King Lear”
**Readings:** Shakespeare’s “King Lear”  
April 22 Small Group Discussions: The discussion question posted on Canvas.

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**Week Five**  
Yojimbo (1961) and Sergio Leone’s Fistful of Dollars  
April 27 Discussion of Yojimbo and Fistful of Dollars  
**Readings:** Martinez, Remaking Kurosawa.  
April 29 Small Group Discussions: The discussion question posted on Canvas.

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**Week Six**  
The Hidden Fortress (1958) and George Lucas, Star Wars Episode I: Fantome Menace (1999)  
May 4 Discussion of The Hidden Fortress and Fantom Menace  
**Readings:** Martinez, Remaking Kurosawa.  
May 6 Small Group Discussions: The discussion question posted on Canvas.

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**Week Seven**  
Seven Samurai (1954) and Sturges’ Magnificent Seven (1960)  
May 11 Discussion of Seven Samurai and Sturges’ Magnificent Seven  
**Readings:** Selçuk Esenbel, Even the Gods Rebel: The Peasants of Takaino and the 1871 Nakano Uprising in Japan (Introduction and Chapters 1 &2); Martinez, Remaking Kurosawa;  
May 13 Small Group Discussions: The discussion question posted on Canvas.

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**Week Eight**  
Dersu Uzala (1975) and Arseniev, Dersu Uzala  
May 18 Discussion of Dersu Uzala and Arseniev’s book  
**Readings:** Arseniev’s Dersu Uzala; Andrew Barshay, “Painted GULAG.”
May 20 Small Group Discussions: The discussion question posted on Canvas.

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**Week Nine** Kurosawa’s *Something Like an Autobiography*

May 25 Discussion of Kurosawa’s *Something Like an Autobiography*

**Readings:** Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*

May 27 Continued Discussion of Kurosawa’s *Something Like an Autobiography*; and Course Review