Screening Literature: 
Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Kurosawa

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Course Description:

The course will discuss the problems of screening literature and translating literary works on film, as well as their own filmic and literary merits. We will discuss the works of Shakespeare (Macbeth, King Lear) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (his novel The Idiot), among others, and films by one of the greatest film-makers of all times, Japanese director Akira Kurosawa (Throne of Blood, Ran, The Idiot, Dersu Uzala, Seven Samurais). Particular attention will be given (discussed and screened in the class) to other successful transpositions of Shakespeare’s plays on film, particularly MacBeth, by Roman Polanski, as well as the MacBeth rendering as comedy, Scotland, PA. Films will be screened in the class and also made available on reserve. Some other films that are particularly successful transpositions of literary texts will be screened as well for comparison, like Andrei Tarkovski’s Solaris, (based on the novel by Stanislav Lem). Grigorii Kozintsev’s Russian adaptations of King Lear and MacBeth were deemed by critics to be “the best film screenings of Shakespeare, ever.” Together with Solaris, they will be discussed and shown in the context of the Communist period in the Soviet Russia, as a point of reflection on the issues of political power, in comparison with the post second world war and post-nuclear Japan that provided the political and historical context for Akira Kurosawa. Themes of war, sovereignty, madness, state, nuclear and political terror, as exemplified by these works of art, will be given particular analyses.