

Midterm Paper

Topic 1

Your paper will have 11 or 12 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font, do not submit your papers with a different size) no more, no less. Do not imagine that you are “talking to me (M.V.)” in this paper. Your paper will target people who know little or nothing about Central Europe, but are familiar with the American and some European film production – you might find it easier if you decide that you are writing for a fairly knowledgeable audience in this respect and that your readers will know most of the non-Central European films that you want to mention. Your paper will be based on the films numbered ①–⑧ in the syllabus for this course. You may include any other ones, foreign or American, you saw in this class or on other occasions.

You will begin your paper with a review of the history of Slovakia (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland) in the past 50 years to provide a background to your discussion. The way you balance the length of this and any other section in your paper is part of how it will be evaluated. You do not want to make a historical treatise out of it, but you also understand by now that the broader cultural context, which includes history, is part of what makes a film comprehensible to the audience although it sometimes appears to us that we discuss a film and perhaps judge it as good or bad on its own merits. You therefore want to use this section to select and tell your readers what they need to know to understand your subsequent discussion. You may find it useful to write, or rewrite the introduction after you have written the rest of your paper when you will know for sure what aspects of the historical background you need to include. But regardless, the introductory section must give a basic review of the whole period. You may refer to any films in this section, but want to keep in mind that you are using those references to tell your readers about the background to Central European filmmaking, not the other way around.

The rest of your paper will be a review of how films have been made in east Central Europe, how they were perceived by the audiences and the authorities, and what films were made. You may use any ideas and actual passages from your weekly assignments, but your midterm paper must not be a series of reviews of individual films, or dwell on one film for any length of time. You should assume that the films and the way they were made are representative of some of the trends in Central European filmmaking in the past 50 years and explain what they were to your audience. You may include any contrastive analysis with American filmmaking or perception of films that will help your American readers understand what you have to say about your topic.

Although the general thrust of your paper must be as described above, you may focus on particular aspects of the topic and reflect it in the title of your paper.

Topic 2:

Your paper will have 11 or 12 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font, do not submit your papers with a different size) no more, no less.

You will discuss the films *Birds, Orphans and Fools* and *Closely Watched Trains*. No background on these two films will be provided in class. You may use anything you have learned in classroom discussions of other films and their context. You may find and use any secondary sources (do not forget to note them in your footnotes or bibliography, you would be committing plagiarism otherwise). You must give approximately equal weight to both films, and their analysis (along with their broader cultural context) must be the primary focus of your paper. Your discussion may refer to any other films you saw in this course or elsewhere if it is relevant to your topic.

You will choose the title of your paper. Your paper must show that you know enough about Central European film and cultural context to discuss what place a film you have seen for the first time may have within that context. Your paper may include contrastive analysis with the situation in the US, as well as a discussion of Central European filmmaking in more general terms.

Closely Watched Trains received an Oscar in the past and you should be able to find references to it in a variety of sources. *Birds, Orphans and Fools* was the last film made in Czechoslovakia as a result of the liberalization in 1968. It was actually filmed after the Soviet-led invasion but before the authorities took notice. Several Slovak and Czech critics consider it the best Slovak film ever made. It was banned after only a few days in theatres. The director, Juraj Jakubisko, was not allowed to work in film for the next 10 years. Among the films he directed once he could work again was *A Thousand-year-old Bee*. As always, you need not like either of the films. The merit of your paper will rest in how you organize your discussion and support your arguments with evidence.