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## The Cultural and Collective Memory of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956

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The Cultural and Collective Memory of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of History  
University of New Orleans  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
In  
History

By  
Ted P. Tindell

BS, Tulane University, 1970

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*“To get the full value of joy you must have someone to divide it with.”*

— Mark Twain

The joy I have received on this journey to become more knowable about history has made every cent, minute of time, and struggle for comprehension an inconsequential price to pay. I want to offer my heartfelt thanks and divide my joy with all those who have assisted on my journey: Dr. Günter Bischof, Dr. Robert Dupont, Dr. James Mokhiber, Dr. Andrea Mosterman, Dr. Connie Atkinson, Dr. Mary Mitchell, Royanne Kropog, Alex Kropog, Olivia Anastasiadis, Rita Millican, Joes Segal, Rhett Breerwood, and my fellow students at the University of New Orleans.

## Table of Contents

List of Images.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Introduction and Thesis.....	1
The Cultural Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.....	9
Conclusion.....	47
Bibliography.....	50
Vita .....	58

## List of Images

Figure 1. A photograph of the Hungarian flag with the Soviet Star removed.....	24
Figure 2. A photograph of the rebuilt sculpture <i>Stalin's Boots</i> .....	26
Figure 3. A photograph of Hungarian water polo player Evin Zádor.....	40
Figure 4. <i>Homage to Hungary</i> , a lithograph by Marc Chagall.....	42
Figure 5. <i>Torn From the Flag</i> , an etching by Gabor Koranyi .....	43
Figure 6. <i>Vice President Nixon Visits Andau</i> , a painting by Ferenc Daday.....	44
Figure 7. <i>301</i> , a poster by Péter Pócs (designer) and László Haris (photographer).....	45

## **Abstract**

This thesis will argue that the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 has been retained in Western cultural memory by the inclusion of events of the revolution in fiction and poetry, non-fiction, personal memory, music, films and documentaries, arts, and sports. Records of the revolution have noted the heroic efforts of the freedom fighters; the painful facts have been left to be reported by historians and downplayed in the cultural memory of the event. The loss, suffering, and damage which occurred during and after the revolution have been softened by artists focusing on the youthfulness and the sexual awakening of the freedom fighters.

**Keywords:** Hungarian revolution; 1956; cultural memory; fiction and poetry; non-fiction; personal memory; music; films and documentaries; arts; sports

## Introduction and Thesis

The author accepts that active memory extends beyond the three-generation model.<sup>1</sup> Aleida Assmann points out: “To be part of a collective group [...] one has to share and adopt the group’s history which exceeds the boundaries of one’s individual life span.”<sup>2</sup> History is influenced by memory, Sara Ormes notes “...past events happened in the way they have been remembered and told in the national historical narrative.”<sup>3</sup> History is remembered by “activists, politicians, citizens, artists, film producers, media magnets, custodians of museums and many other experts [...] engaged in [...] reconstructing and shaping the past.”<sup>4</sup>

Sara Ormes wrote the Swiss collective memory of World War II was shaped by “pragmatic leaders due to political necessity.”<sup>5</sup> The Hungarian revolution of 1956 was a failure, resulting in the political and military leadership fleeing, being imprisoned, or executed. The cultural memory was therefore primarily shaped through the efforts of artists. Not limited to the Hungarian diaspora, artists of many nations used their creative abilities to create and preserve a cultural memory of the revolution. Cultural memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 would be created for the musical stage, the concert symphony halls, in athletic events, in public spaces around the world, in the movies, and in the fiction section of a public library.

Why does the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 inspire so many artists, both of Hungarian and non-Hungarian descent to preserve the cultural memory of the revolution? What themes

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<sup>1</sup> First generation: survivors and eye witnesses; second generation: their children coping with the trauma of their parents by adopting it as an element of their identity; and third generation: grandchildren linking with grandparents to recover family heritage; Aleida Assmann, “About Geoffrey Hartman,” *Philological Quarterly*, Vol. 93 No. 2 (Spring 2014): 143-144.

<sup>2</sup> Aleida Assmann, “Transformations between History and Memory,” *Social Research*, Vol. 75 No. 1 (Spring 2008): 52.

<sup>3</sup> Sara Ormes, “A Masterable Past: Swiss Historical Memory of World War II” (Honors Thesis, The University of New Orleans, 2011), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Assmann, “Transformations between History and Memory,” 54.

<sup>5</sup> Ormes, 5.

inspire artists? This author proposes that the youth of the Hungarian freedom fighters, and the theme of sexual awaking, caused many artists to not focus on the terrible consequences of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, but instead to see only a romantic image of the freedom fighter. In the shaped cultural memory of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, a softened and romantic image has been drafted in which the freedom fighters become young heroes, awaking to life both intellectually and sexually. This author proposes the collective memory of the Hungarian revolution as retold in personal stories was influenced by the youth of the narrators at the time of the revolution and of fond remembrance of their sexual awaking.

This author proposes historical events have been downplayed. Rather than focusing on the bodies laying in the public streets, in cultural and collective memory the focus has been on the intellectual achievements and private sexual explorations of the young Hungarian freedom fighters. The Hungarian freedom fighter has been transformed into smart, sexy, failed heroes to stop the Soviet military.

Reliance on the artists' shaped cultural memory of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 has produced a distorted and inaccurate history. As stated by Aleida Assmann: "memory complements history, history corrects memory."<sup>6</sup> The reshaping of the cultural memory of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 has changed a failed coup attempt into an idealistic struggle for human rights fought by the young, educated and sexy.

It is well documented that the individuals who fled Hungary in 1956 were young and educated. A CIA report concerning the approximately 35,000 Hungarians who accepted asylum in the United States noted that 83 percent were under the age of 40, 64 percent were male, and

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<sup>6</sup> Assmann, "Transformations between History and Memory," 63.



the average education level of this group was almost 10 years with a literacy rate of 90%.<sup>7</sup> The approximately 200,000 people who fled Hungary in 1956-1957 represented only two percent of the total population of Hungary in 1956. Were the refugees representative of the entire Hungarian population or were they a subset lionized by Western intellectuals? Others will need to explore the profiles of the refugees who fled and compare them against the census of individuals who remained in Hungary. If the refugees who fled were exceptionally young and well educated, that might alter the cultural memory of the revolution as preserved in the West.

On October 23, 1956, a demonstration by university students in Budapest escalated into an uprising against the Soviet puppet government in Hungary. Students, young people, factory workers, and children battled in the streets against Soviet tanks in a desperate thirteen day attempt to reclaim their remembered Hungary from a Communist Party they perceived as clinging to rejected Stalinist Russian beliefs. The goal of the uprising was not to defeat Communism, but to reform the system to one compatible with Hungarian traditional ideals and beliefs.

The most obvious memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 are preserved at the sites in Budapest where significant events occurred. Sites such as the square in front of the Parliament building where the student's fourteen point demands were read, the radio station, where the first deaths of the revolution occurred, and the Killian Barracks and the Corvin Theater, where the struggle ended in death for many. Original and recreated Soviet-era public monuments have been erected or relocated to Memento Park in Budapest creating a new Hungarian Cold War site of memory.

Public and private museums both in Hungary and the United States, devoted

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<sup>7</sup> Guy E. Coridon, "Report on Hungarian Refugees," CIA Historical Review Program (1994). [www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol2no1/html/v02i1a07p\\_0001.htm](http://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol2no1/html/v02i1a07p_0001.htm) (accessed May 24, 2016).

either to the Cold War, military history or the Hungarian revolution, have created or will mount exhibits preserving artifacts from the revolution telling the story of the revolution. Exhibits in Budapest are located in the House of Terror Museum and the Military History Museum. In Kiskunmajsa, Hungary, the private 1956 Museum houses the owner's private collection of artifacts directly or tangentially related to the revolution.<sup>8</sup> In the United States, the Los Angeles based Wende Museum of Cold War artifacts is preparing an exhibit for September 2017 on Hungarian visual culture including photographs from the Getty Research Institute's collection. The exhibit will include one section on the revolution of 1956.<sup>9</sup>

Sites of memory often have been created by repurposing monuments to the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-49. On April 6, 2002, a plaque was unveiled in New Orleans' Lafayette Square to Lajos Kossuth. Kossuth, directing the 1848 revolution against the Austrian-Hungarian government, was the leader of the Hungarian government. On the New Orleans plaque, and at other monuments in Hungary and around the United States to Kossuth, symbols used during the nineteenth century conflict have been associated with 1956.

The memory of the 1956 Hungarian revolution is retained in English language literature in numerous novels. The novels merge historical events and actual individuals into fictional accounts, set in actual sites of the revolution and populated with imagined characters. Likewise, films and documentaries have been used to retell the story of the Hungarian revolution, employing actual film footage, recorded oral histories, and fictional stories. Biographies relate eyewitness accounts of the Hungarian struggle and the subsequent flight of refugees through imperfect memories.

Because of the evolution in communications, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was

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<sup>8</sup> Beverly James, *Imagining Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 124-134.

<sup>9</sup> Joe Segal, e-mail to the author, March 7, 2016.

followed in great detail in the media around the world. On October 25, 1956, the New Orleans *The Times Picayune* and in Baton Rouge *The Morning Advocate* printed long articles on the developments occurring in the streets of Budapest. On January 7, 1957, *Time* magazine selected the Hungarian Patriot as the “Man of the Year.”<sup>10</sup>

Special efforts have been made to collect and preserve oral histories of the revolution. Oral histories of some 1100 participants and witnesses have been collected by the 1956 Institute of History and Oral Archive and are currently housed at the National Széchényi Library in Budapest, Hungary. The Bancroft Library at the University of California, the Hungarian American Coalition, and Lauer Learning LLC also maintain collections of oral histories from the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Pierre Nora proposed a concept of recording history by using as a vehicle the distinction between history and memory. This vehicle for recording history was labeled *lieux de mémoire*. History being all that happened in the past and memory being that which is actively remembered forming the basis for the cultural memory of a group or a society.<sup>11</sup> Nora was concerned with the loss of values and memory in France, but other historians applied *lieux de mémoire* to exploring memory in different cultures and countries.<sup>12</sup>

Michael Rothberg notes that a criticism of Nora has been that Nora polarizes memory and history with an emphasis on memory as opposed to history, Nora holding the belief that memory is fading due to the impact of globalization and modernization.<sup>13</sup> A second criticism of Nora is

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<sup>10</sup> “Freedom's Choice,” *Time*, Vol. 69 Issue 1 (January 7, 1957), Cover, 20-28.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Memoire*, 7 Vols. (Paris, Galimard, 1984-1992). In English: *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, 3 volumes, under the direction of Pierre Nora, English language edition ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia UP, 1996-1998), and *Rethinking France*, under the direction of Pierre Nora, trans. Mary Trouille (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001-2006).

<sup>12</sup> Stefan Berger et al., *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), 118.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Rothberg, “Introduction: Between Memory and Memory: From Lieux De Mémoire to Noeuds De Mémoire,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 118/119 (2010), 3-12.

his commitment to a linear and binary account of history and memory through “a starkly limited conception of the nation purged...of phenomena that trouble the linear narrative of historical progress and the stark opposition between history and memory.”<sup>14</sup>

To correct this perceived failing of Nora’s method, Rothberg proposed a modification of the *lieux de mémoire* with a new approach which he labeled *noeuds de mémoire* - knots of memory. Rothberg proposed including in retained memory physical places such as geographical locations, buildings and monuments. Rothberg also included in retained memory novels, newspaper reports, musical works, photographs, and the oral histories of individuals. Rothberg hoped to stimulate the study of “collective or cultural memory beyond the framework of the imagined community of the nation-state.”<sup>15</sup> Acknowledging the difficulties of his “transnational approach to collective memory,” Rothberg opined that with a “collaborative methodology [...] remembrance is freed from [...] the nation-state, potential links and references [...]” and will “[...] multiply beyond the grasp of any one scholar.”<sup>16</sup>

Ben Mercer observes that Nora came to his method to study history in a period of perceived loss of national identity in France.<sup>17</sup> Memories, according to Nora were located in the individual and not the group. Nora stated that “I do not believe that collective memory is disappearing because I do not believe there ever was a collective memory of which historians were the interpreters and guarantors. They themselves only ever expressed a group memory.”<sup>18</sup> Mercer further opined that many assumed that Nora’s memory studies were only possible in the somewhat limited realm of French thought and were not applicable to the United States where

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ben Mercer, “The Moral Rearmament of France: Pierre Nora, Memory, and the Crises of Republicanism,” *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 31 No. 2 (Summer 2013), 102-116.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Nora, “Mémoire de l’historien, mémoire de l’histoire: entretien avec J.-B. Pontalis,” *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*, Vol. 15 No. 16 (1977): 228, quoted by Mercer: 103-104.

memory would have a more varied and faceted basis because of the diversity of backgrounds of the population pool.<sup>19</sup>

Stephen Legg supported only the qualified use of Nora's concepts. Legg urges historians to the analysis of inconsistencies in Nora's definition of memory proposing that memory is subject to remembering and forgetting, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, that memory can lay long dormant and then be brought back to life leaving memory to be changed or altered when brought back to life.<sup>20</sup>

Hue-Tam Ho Tai opined that the genre in which Nora was deeply enmeshed evolved from a desire of French historians to move beyond nineteenth-century and Marxist inspired historical writing "without lapsing into the perceived elitism of the history of ideas." Hue-Tam Ho Tai described Nora as being interested in "a history in multiple voices . . . less interested in causes than in effects; [. . .] less interested in 'what actually happened' than in its perpetual re-use and misuse, its influence on successive presents [...]."<sup>21</sup>

Aleida Assmann is the principal theorist of cultural memory. Hoping to calm the dispute between history and memory, Assmann offered that history and memory "[...] are no longer considered rivals and more and more are accepted as complementary modes of reconstructing and relating to the past."<sup>22</sup> Assmann notes the first question for the historian is what has happened, but other questions include how "is an event, especially a traumatic event, experienced and remembered?"<sup>23</sup>

Marta Karkowska writes Aleida Assmann elaborated on the concept of cultural memory

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Legg, "Contesting and surviving memory: space, nation, and nostalgia in Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Environmental & Planning D: Society & Space*, Vol 23 No.2 (Aug 2005): 481-504.

<sup>21</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (June 2001): 906-922.

<sup>22</sup> Aleida Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer 2006): 263.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

developed by her husband Jan Assmann “to provide a theoretical framework for phenomena observed in very different cultures, times and places.” Exploring the usefulness of the concept of cultural memory, Karkowska explores the value and the limitations of the concept in an article on the contemporary community of Olsztyn, Poland.<sup>24</sup>

Tibor Glant in five essays attempts to review how the memory of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 has been preserved in the United States. The essays of Glant focus on how the revolution has been remembered by the media, in particular the *New York Times*; in political memoirs; in American history textbooks; in literature, personal histories and fiction; and in a painting by Ferenc Daday.<sup>25</sup>

Beverly A. James explores how the Hungarian revolution of 1956 has been preserved in Hungarian museums and public sites through the use of visual narratives with a particular focus on sculpture. She provides an in depth perspective of the history of the creation of the museum displays and monuments.<sup>26</sup>

In eight case studies, David Lowe and Tony Joel explore in a broader work how the Cold War is remembered in contemporary history. They examine museums and public sites of memory in Vilnius, Prague, Budapest, Warsaw, Hanoi, Washington D.C., Virginia (Cold War Museum), and California (Wende Museum). The case study of Budapest focuses in part on the cultural preservation in museums and in public spaces of references to individuals harmed prior to or during the revolution. The other portion of the Budapest case study focuses on Memento Park. In Memento Park, 42 of the socialist monuments of Hungary were recreated or placed to

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<sup>24</sup> Marta Karkowska, “On the Usefulness of Aleida and Jan Assmann’s Concept of Cultural Memory for Studying Local Communities in Contemporary Poland – the Case of Olsztyn,” *Polish Sociological Review*, Vol. 3 No. 183 (2013), 369-388.

<sup>25</sup> Tibor Glant, *Remember Hungary 1956: Essays on the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in American Memory* (Wayne, NJ: Center of Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2007).

<sup>26</sup> James, *Imaging Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary’s 1956 Revolution*.

permit the viewer the opportunity to observe the monuments both as symbols of authority and as works of art.<sup>27</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the active debate on the existence or nature of collective memory, or whether collective memory is “an umbrella term for different forms of memory [...] such as family memory, interactive group memory, and social, political, national and cultural memory.”<sup>28</sup> Susan Sontag, Maurice Halbwachs, Margaret Atwood, and Reinhart Koselleck all have offered opinions concerning the validity of the concept of collective memory.<sup>29</sup>

Also not addressed in this paper is the role of cultural memory in the field of foreign relations. Akira Iriye, Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht, and Robert D. Schulzinger all have explored the impact of cultural memory on foreign relations.<sup>30</sup>

The work of Glantz, James, Lowe and Joel, and this author compliment, overlap and diverge from one another. Glantz, James, Lowe and Joel, and the author all elected to not explore every area where the Hungarian revolution has been preserved in Western culture. Read in combination, the four works hopefully provide a deeper exploration of the cultural memory of the Hungarian revolution of 1956.

### **“The Other Youth Revolution:” Cultural Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Fiction and Poetry**

The web site [www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org) lists sixty-eight works of fiction in English, or in a English translation, which has a theme or storyline dealing with the Hungarian revolution of 1956. Novels were published between 1956 and 2014 at a rate of one to three a year. In

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<sup>27</sup> David Lowe and Tony Joel, *Remembering the Cold War: Global Contest and National Stories* (London: Routledge, 2013), 91-111.

<sup>28</sup> Assmann, “Transformations between History and Memory,” 55.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-52.

<sup>30</sup> Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 241-278, 336-352.

2006 (the fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian revolution), six novels were published.<sup>31</sup>

To review all these works of fiction or a significant portion is beyond the scope of this paper. The author will leave to other scholars a more complete and in-depth study of fictional works centering on the Hungarian revolution of 1956. But to provide acknowledgment of the importance of the Hungarian revolution in literature for cultural memory a few works will be briefly examined.

Rebecca McEldowney's novel *Soul of Flesh* examines how the impact of the revolution in many ways destroyed the life and future of a young man who participated on the losing Hungarian side during the revolution.<sup>32</sup> András Molnár as an old man, harboring bitter resentment for the brutal torture he suffered at the hands of the ÁVO (*Államvédelmi Osztály*, a branch of the Hungarian secret service – also known as the ÁVH or *Államvédelmi Hatóság*), when arrested as attempting to free his first love from the ÁVO prison in Budapest, he locates in the United States the daughter of his torturer. While Molnár's torturer has died and escaped his revenge, Molnár sets out to destroy the peaceful life of the daughter of the man who so brutalized his body and mind while Molnár was held in custody. Whether the torture scenes are based on fact or created in the imagination of Rebecca McEldowney, they preserve the impact of the defeat suffered by the Hungarian freedom fighters by acknowledging the physical and mental torment suffered during and after the failed revolution by the freedom fighters.

The ÁVO, or ÁVH, was an arm of the Hungarian government. Similar to a police force it was deeply hated because of their brutality. The ÁVH also assisted the Soviet occupiers of Hungary and were often viewed as traitors by their fellow citizens.

Paul Garrison's work *Concrete Statues* is a self-published novel in which the story begins just before the revolution in October 1956 and follows the life stories of two brothers.<sup>33</sup> Tamas

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<sup>31</sup> [www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org) (accessed July 8, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca McEldowney, *Soul of Flesh* (Port Orchard, WA: Windstorm Creative, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Paul Garrison, *Concrete Statues* (North Charleston, SC: On Demand Publishing LLC, 2015).



is a member of the Hungarian water polo team preparing for the Olympics to be held in Melbourne in December 1956. Peter, the younger brother, is a student who works on his university student newspaper. Peter is expelled for publishing a non-approved article in the student newspaper discussing political developments in Poland occurring among students, workers and the Soviet government. The novel follows the historical events occurring in Budapest in the fall of 1956 as seen through the eyes of the two brothers, their girlfriends, their friends and their family. The lives of Tamas and Peter diverge after the failure of the revolution as they pick separate life paths. Tamas elects to defect and begin a new life in the West. Peter decides to remain in Hungary but hides his identity and involvement in the revolution by assuming a false identity and moving to a remote area in Hungary. The two brothers, unaware that each is still alive, reunite thirty-four years later when Tamas returns to Budapest for a reunion of the Hungarian and Russian water polo team members.

This novel, like several novels (and films), uses the Hungarian revolution of 1956 as a backdrop for the characters and storyline in the novel (or film). Major and minor characters in the novels and films are youthful, idealistic, politically involved and experiencing the awaking of adulthood and the impact of first love or of first sexual relations. These characteristics can be identified in the actual personalities and histories of participants in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 thus providing the novels and films a degree of realism.

Street fighter Zsuzsa Eastland was twelve years old in 1956.<sup>34</sup> Eva Szabo was a young wife and mother.<sup>35</sup> Laszlo de Roth was a 15 year old orphan who gathered bottles to

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<sup>34</sup> Zsuzsa Eastland, interview by Virginia Major Thomas, transcript, 2005. Survival: Lives of Hungarians under Communist and Capitalist Governments 1956-2006: Oral History Series. <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/hungary> (accessed September 16, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Eva Szabo, interview by Virginia Major Thomas, transcript, 2005. Survival: Lives of Hungarians under Communist and Capitalist Governments 1956-2006: Oral History Series. <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/hungary>, (accessed September 12, 2016).

manufacture Molotov cocktails.<sup>36</sup> Ágnes Fülöp, András Pongráz, and Julius Várallyay in interviews given to the Freedom 56 Oral History Project, related memories of being students who observed or participated in the revolution.<sup>37</sup>

The fictional Gavin Cartwright, an American foreign correspondent and a Socialist, records the Hungarian revolution from a different perspective in Vincent Brome's novel *The Revolution*.<sup>38</sup> A runaway from a failing marriage, Cartwright is disillusioned, a hard drinking man, attempting to report the developing revolution realistically. Cartwright perceives the realities facing the freedom fighters and is able to distinguish the idealistic young fighters from the thugs and criminals who are using the fighting for personal gain. This novel attempts to relate the difficulties experienced both by the Hungarian fighters and the press corps in attempting to cover the story for the international press.

Cartwright becomes a victim of love, but not first or young love. Perhaps he hopes to reclaim the idealism of his youth by engaging with a much younger Hungarian woman. That the love affair will end badly is not unforeseen by Cartwright. But he justifies the affair because it momentarily lets him reclaim his lost youth and idealism. Cartwright sees his younger self in the freedom fighters in the streets and he accepts that the possible loss of everything will be the price to be paid for a brief feeling of being again young and idealistic.

This novel uses the most poetic language of the novels reviewed. In a brief sample of the novel, Cartwright ponders how the revolution will be recorded and remembered:

I don't know how the academic historians will record it. They will count the heads, read the documents, probe the archives, analyze motives, but they will miss that glow of the liberated human spirit which permeates this city now as I write and comes

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<sup>36</sup> Laszlo de Roth. [www.hungarianpresence.ca/Anniversary/Documents/2fr\\_InTransit.pdf](http://www.hungarianpresence.ca/Anniversary/Documents/2fr_InTransit.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Ágnes Fülöp, András Pongráz, and Julius Várallyay, interview transcripts. Freedom Fighter 56 Oral History Project, <http://www.freedomfighter56.com> (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Vincent Brome, *The Revolution* (London, Cassell & Company Ltd, 1969).

into this ancient room of mine to make me falter in my writing and put down an inadequate pen.<sup>39</sup>

Cartwright, a poet besides being a newspaper reporter, preserves the “liberated human spirit” he has observed in Hungary by placing lines of poetry on paper. Cartwright writes the liberated human spirit will not last.

It is a frail spirit.  
It is an emotional deception.  
It will die as quickly as it was born. If it was ever born.  
But for the moment the illusions live-and lives in me.<sup>40</sup>

David Pryce-Jones’ novel, *The Stranger’s View*, also explores the Hungarian revolution through the eyes of non-Hungarians.<sup>41</sup> Two English public school friends set off for Budapest to deliver a used ambulance filled with medical supplies for the benefit of the freedom fighters. This novel relates the response of idealistic young men to the revolution. Restless young men using the trip to Hungary as an escape from their boring lives, in an attempt to further their careers, and as an opportunity to have an adventure. The ambulance becomes a ghostly presence in Budapest, racing from one place to another for unclear purposes. The sightings of the ambulance soon become mythical. The white ambulance became the *Flying Dutchman* of Budapest, allegedly seen everywhere but never confirmed as being in any one place.<sup>42</sup>

David Brierley in his novel *Shooting Star* probes the impact of the Hungarian revolution on two Hungarians pulled apart by the revolutions who meet again twenty-five years later in London.<sup>43</sup> Istvan fled Hungary and became a successful photographer. Ilona chose to remain behind and worked in the Hungarian communist system becoming a privileged and indulged star of modern dance. Carrying in his heart the young love he felt for Ilona, Istvan urges her to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> David Pryce-Jones, *The Stranger’s View* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1967).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>43</sup> David Brierley, *Shooting Star* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1983).

defect and during a long night of conversation challenges her beliefs in the system that has provided her comfort and fame. Giving as good as she gets, Ilona points out the emotional poverty of Istvan's life and points out how the material possessions found in the West are a poor substitute for love.

As in *Concrete Statues* - young love, first sexual encounters, youthful idealism and youthful hopes find a significant voice in the novel. But here the author explores whether once experienced and consigned to the past can those feelings be rekindled to create again the same feelings years later. The conclusions reached in *Concrete Statues* and *Shooting Star* could not be more different.

The young playing a significant role in the Hungarian revolution is highlighted by Brierley. He writes of Istvan returning home after a night of doing battle in the streets, but Istvan is unable to open his apartment door as his parents have given him no key to the apartment. "He had changed the course of history and yet his parents ordered his coming and going."<sup>44</sup> Later when we explore oral histories of freedom fighters we will discover that Istvan's parents are not unusual in keeping a tight hold on their children.

Brierley also acknowledges the impact of young love during the revolution:

There was the other youth revolution too: it was the beginning of the freedom to love. Nowadays it was so accepted, so commonplace, that it was hard to credit that their actions as children had been a beginning. They'd had good reason then: they had found love because at any moment they might find death. Their love hadn't been casual; only death had been. It had been a first love, intense and heartbreaking. It had the power to hold and twist their destiny for years.<sup>45</sup>

In the novel *Boy with a Gun* written by James Dean Sanderson we follow Pál through the streets of Budapest during the revolution in Hungary 1956.<sup>46</sup> Working with the same themes –

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>45</sup> Brierley: 149-150.

<sup>46</sup> James Dean Sanderson, *Boy with a Gun* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1958).

the Hungarian revolution, youth, sexual awaking – Sanderson creates a bleak novel which finds little glory or romance in the Hungarian revolution, only pain, suffering and death. The central character of the novel, Pál, is a deeply religious fifteen-year old boy living in Budapest being trained as assassin by his invalid father. Pal's father is an intellectual and former opposition politician who believes that assassinating the head of the ÁVO will lead to a revolution and the reform of communism in Hungary, a style of communism similar to the one developed in Yugoslavia by Tito, or later aspired to in the "Prague Spring of 1968."

Through Pál's eyes the reader experiences the horror of the revolution. Pal's father excited by the shooting in the street fires his old rifle out the window and is in turn shot dead. Pál's older brother is hung from a lamppost because he was a member of the ÁVO. Pál watches the hanging unable to prevent the death of his brother. The ÁVO membership of Pál's brother causes the rape and murder of the wife of the brother. Pál's childhood sweetheart unable to wait for Pál gives herself sexually to a slightly older street fighter.

Pál does get to experience his own first sexual experience in the arms of an older woman neighbor before Pál meets his death at the end of the novel in a dramatic explosion on the roof of his neighborhood church.

Perhaps the most famous novel in this brief survey of novels including the Hungarian revolution of 1956 is *In Praise of Older Women*.<sup>47</sup> The novel was later adapted for the movie screen. Written by a Hungarian who participated in the revolution and then later fled to the West, it is an extremely graphic novel of the sexual awaking of a young boy and his sexual pursuit and conquests of women considerably older than himself. The central character of the novel András Vajda is a student at the university in 1956. András is filled with Hungarian pride

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<sup>47</sup> Stephen Vizinczey, *In Praise of Older Women* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965).

and a deep hatred of Russians. Fleeing across the Austrian border in December 1956, he is faced with the decision of picking a new country in which to live after reaching the decision to turn his back completely on Hungary. This novel has less to do with the Hungarian revolution and more to do with a young Hungarian Don Juan exploring his relationships with older women.

The authors of the surveyed fiction displayed a remarkable knowledge of the actual events occurring in Hungary during late October – early November 1956 and an understanding of the political issues giving rise to the revolution. They all were able to provide a voice to the goals and aspirations of the freedom fighters while weaving true events into the lives of fictional characters. The common themes developed in the novels were the youthful age of the freedom fighters, the parental control of children, and the sexual awakening of young men and women in the midst of a revolution. The excitement of revolutionary activity is juxtaposed with the first encounters of sexual awakening.

The cultured and educated Hungarians also made use of literature and poetry to express feelings and memories of 1956. Limited by the inability to read Hungarian, this author has had to rely on translations. Others without this limitation may be able to explore in greater depth the literature and poetry written with the revolution of 1956 as an inspiration or a theme. The literary scholar Mihály Szegedy-Maszák has opined that the writings of Hungarian authors “[...] in or around 1956 has political, historical, or documentary but no aesthetic value.”<sup>48</sup>

A frequent event during the revolution was the citation of the poems of Sándor Petőfi, the young poet killed after the 1848 revolution against Hapsburg control of Hungary. A contemporary poem widely circulated in 1956 was Lajos Tamási’s “*Piros a Vér a Pesti Utcán*” (*Red is the Blood in the Streets of Pest*):

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<sup>48</sup> Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, “Hungarian Writers in the 1956 Revolution,” *Hungarian Studies*, Vol. 20 No.1 (2006): 75.

Red is the blood in the streets of Pest,  
The rain beats down, washing the blood,  
But it remains on the stones  
Of the streets of Pest.<sup>49</sup>

### **Cultural Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Non-fiction**

Bobbie Kalman was a nine year old child living in Magyaróvár, Hungary in 1956 and tells the story of the Hungarian Revolution through the eyes of a child. *Refugee Child* is a book intended to tell her story to a younger reader.<sup>50</sup> Written from the perspective of a nine year old child no effort is given to explaining political or military events but relates the observations of a child as she is caught up in an adult maelstrom. The book is filled with colorful illustrations, maps and photographs of Kalman's family. The book provides the young reader details of Hungarian family life, the history of Hungary, Hungarian cultural traditions and the life of the author's family.

Kalman narrates the October 26, 1956, massacre of protesters by the ÁVO on the streets of Magyaróvár through her own observations of the wounded on the streets and by retelling the witness accounts provided by her family members. Not being direct eyewitness observers of the events occurring in Budapest, those historical occurrences are shared by family members who had access to newspapers, radios and second hand accounts passed from mouth to ear.

Magyaróvár was a city close to the Austrian border and a steady stream of refugees flowed through the town fleeing to the West. Slowly members of Kalman's family reached the decision that because of their activities during the revolution they also needed to cross the border. One by one, relatives packed and left. In late November 1956, Kalman's parents

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<sup>49</sup> Lajos Tamási, "*Piros a Vér a Pesti Utcán*," quoted in James, *Imagining Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*, 105.

<sup>50</sup> Bobbie Kalman, *Refugee Child* (New York: Crabtree Publishing, 2006).

arrived at the same decision and began making preparations to make their escape from Hungary. Their first attempt was a failure, they were stopped by Soviet troops, and the family was forced to return to their home. Finally on December 2, 1956, the family made their second and successful crossing into Austria. The family adventures and travails continued until they arrived in Halifax, Canada, on February 6, 1957.

Laszlo Beke (an assumed name) published his remembrances of the revolution in *A Student's Diary: Budapest, October 16-November 1, 1956*.<sup>51</sup> In early October, he participated in student meetings demanding the dismissal of pro-Stalinist professors from the staff at the university. Beke had his student stipend revoked and was expelled from the university. Even after being expelled Beke does not desist from continuing to be actively involved in student protests and, in fact, was one of the founding members of the Free Council of university students in Budapest.

Involved from the beginning when street battles after the revolution began, Beke helped to secure military weapons used in the storming of the radio station in an attempt to wrest control from government forces. During the takeover of an ÁVO building, Beke was in the crowd that forced members of the ÁVO from the building and he stood watching as a major in the ÁVO was strung up by the ankles and set on fire.<sup>52</sup> So much hatred was directed toward the ÁVO because of the oppression and torture of Hungarians by the ÁVO. Members of the ÁVO were often attacked, arrested, or killed.

Beke confirmed in his eye witness account the young age of the Hungarian freedom fighters. He wrote of small schoolboys in the firefights, of young people acting as messengers, of college students with guns, and of a fourteen year old girl working at an emergency hospital.

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<sup>51</sup> Laszlo Beke, edited and translated by Leon Kossar and Ralph M. Zoltan, *A Student's Diary: Budapest, October 16-November 1, 1956* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



He saw teen-aged boys and girls, little boys, young men eighteen or nineteen, killed or dead in the streets during the chaotic days of the revolution in Budapest.

In his memoir *Journey to a Revolution*, Michael Korda, who in 1956 was an Oxford University student of Hungarian heritage, writes of setting off with three other young men for Budapest in an old Volkswagen convertible loaded with medical supplies.<sup>53</sup> There are striking similarities between Korda's memoir and the novel *The Stranger's View*. In both the central characters (imaginary and factual) have participated in intelligence work for the British Army, attended English public schools, in 1956 are working toward degrees at universities, and all set off for Budapest in a vehicle loaded with medical supplies.

The story of a vehicle being draped with a flag for protection as told by Korda also appears in oral histories and various novels. Korda relates how they were given a Union Jack in Vienna and advised to place it on their car for a bit of protection from becoming a target for gunshots on the road to Budapest.<sup>54</sup> Tom Rogers was the First Secretary at the United States Legation in Budapest in 1953.<sup>55</sup> He remembers riding through streets of Budapest in an automobile draped with an American flag. In his novel, *The Stranger's View*, Bryce-Jones writes of a van parked outside the British Legation with a Union Jack tied over the top.<sup>56</sup>

Korda and his traveling companions reached Budapest on October 30, 1956. In his telling of the story of the adventures of the four in his memoir the privileged backgrounds of the four become fused with events. The four check into a luxury hotel and proceed to wander about Budapest behaving like war zone tourists - drinking with journalists, attending press conferences,

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Korda, *Journey to a Revolution: A Personal Memoir and History of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-120.

<sup>55</sup> Tom Rogers, interview transcript. Freedom Fighter 56 Oral History Project, <http://www.freedomfighter56.com> (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>56</sup> Bryce-Jones, *The Stranger's View*, 139.

and exercising in the hotel pool. They do assist with street barricades, but also spend time chatting with Hungarians, both old and young, about the revolution, about English authors, and about life in Budapest before World War II. Realizing the deteriorating conditions in Budapest, Korda and his companions went to the British Legation. They were soundly reprimanded for their foolhardy trip and were directed to depart for Vienna in a convoy of British dependents and journalists.

Korda still foolish and privileged fifty years later wrote about revolutions: “Those who live look back on them with wonder, amazed that they could ever do, or experience, such a thing.”<sup>57</sup>

James A. Michener’s work *The Bridge at Andau* is billed as a historic account, a true story.<sup>58</sup> Michener was gathering material by the use of translators in Austria. He gathered material from multiple sources, combining stories and identities, and created fictional names for the individuals mentioned in his work. In 1957, with the initial publication of the work this was allegedly done to protect the individuals who related their stories to Michener, preventing persecution of relatives and friends who chose to stay in Hungary. In 1957, there may have been some justification for this literary device. For future historians the work perhaps would have been more useful had the composite characters and fictional names been removed and the work rewritten to tell true events as experienced by identified actual eyewitnesses.

Rather than progressing day by day recording events, Michener divides the Hungarian revolution into three parts. For Michener part one begins on October 23, 1956, and ends October 29, 1956. During part one the overwhelmed Russians almost surrender to Hungarian freedom fighters and withdrew from Hungary. October 30<sup>th</sup> to November 4<sup>th</sup> represents part two

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<sup>57</sup> Korda, *Journey to a Revolution*, 205.

<sup>58</sup> James A. Michener, *The Bridge at Andau* (5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1957).

when the Hungarians believed they had prevailed. Part three of the revolution began on November 4, 1956, when the Russians reentered Hungary and struck back with their troops, overwhelming the revolution and launching a reign of terror designed to punish Hungarians attempting to reclaim their freedom.<sup>59</sup>

Michener broadens the tale of the Hungarian revolution beyond just the efforts of students by including the stories of workers and soldiers who joined the struggle. While giving credit to students as the group responsible for launching the revolution, he points out the contributions of workers and soldiers who provided brawn and the knowledge of military tactics to the struggle.

An imaginary lifespan was created by Michener for the young freedom fighters, emphasizing how remarkable these young people were, who felt the need to struggle for a new form of government. A twenty year old in 1956, would have only been eight years old when the first impact of the Nazi occupation and the crisis of World War II struck Hungary. The arrival of Russian troops after the war and the establishment of a Stalinist form of communist government would have resulted in a decade of indoctrination. At ten years old a boy would be provided two hours a week of indoctrination on how wonderful Russia was; this boy would be provided with free passes to attend propaganda movies. At fourteen years old the study of the theory of communism began with an emphasis on hating the West. Older students were given military training to fight America one day. “Therefore, any Hungarian youth who had reached the age of twenty had spent the first half of his life in war, starvation and insecurity, and the second half in the bosom of communism, coddled and tempted.”<sup>60</sup>

It will be left to other historians to explain by studying the impact of Polish worker

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 174-178.

struggles, the repressive nature of the ÁVO and the Stalinist leaning government of Hungary, and the denunciation of Stalin in 1956, why communism failed in Hungary to achieve to create a significant body of individuals dedicated to Russian communism.

Michener continues his fondness for portioning up events and people as he divides the nearly 200,000 refugees who fled Hungary after the failure of the revolution into three waves. The first wave is described as being composed of prostitutes, young adventurers from unstable homes, and cowards. He describes the second wave as being composed of the elite of the nation – young people containing a high percentage of engineers, doctors, and well-trained technicians. Michener’s second wave was the group he met on the bridge at Andau. The third wave, by far the largest, though they may have taken part in the revolution he dismisses as being simply middle-class people who hated communism and who were only seeking a more rewarding lifestyle. Chastising the third wave; Michener accuses them of “walking away from [...their...] homeland and its future [...] a pathetic thing for a patriot to do.”<sup>61</sup>

Michener fell in love with the Hungarian freedom fighter, his novel oozes admiration. It provides background and some information, but historians will certainly want to look for confirmation in other sources that take a more balanced view of the Hungarian events of the fall of 1956.

### **Personal Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956**

The Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was a project of the Hungarian government, turned over in 2012 to the National Széchényi Library. The goal of the Institute is to collect oral histories and to be a publishing house for historical works concerning the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. They have acquired over 1100 oral histories from

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 233-239.

participants and eyewitnesses. Twenty-one have been transcribed, edited, translated into English and are available online.

One of the common symbols in the memory of survivors was the removal of five pointed red stars from the Hungarian flag. The five pointed red star, an emblem of the Soviet Union, had been placed on the flag of Hungary, printed on Hungarian official documents, attached to Hungarian military uniforms, and had been mounted to public and private buildings. Hungarian flags with holes where the red star had been cut out were to become a common sight during the short period of the revolution. Béla Takács was surprised when he first saw hanging from a building a Hungarian flag without the red star.<sup>62</sup> Ágnes Sylvester Fülöp remembers seeing a truck load of young people flying a Hungarian flag with a hole in it where the Soviet symbol had been cut from the flag.<sup>63</sup> József Bácsi told of the star being taken down from a fire station and being smashed by the fall to the street.<sup>64</sup> Zsuzsa Eastland was a twelve year old student in 1956 when she saw the removal of a red star from a military building. She remembers the event as being exciting, fantastic, and providing relief.<sup>65</sup> A young wife and mother from Szeged, Eva Szabo, also remembered the removal of red stars, confirming such events were not limited to Budapest.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Béla Takács, interview by János M. Rainer, editors: Györgyi Bindorffer and Pál Gyenes, translator: Adrian Bury, transcript, 1988. [http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index\\_eng.html](http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index_eng.html), (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>63</sup> Ágnes Sylvester Fülöp, interview transcript. *Freedom Fighter 56 Oral History Project*, <http://www.freedomfighter56.com> (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>64</sup> József Bácsi, interview by András Vágvolgyi B., editor: Zsuzsanna Kőrösi, translator: Adrian Bury, transcript, 1989. [http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index\\_eng.html](http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index_eng.html) (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Eastland interview.

<sup>66</sup> Szabo interview.



Figure 1. Hungarian flag with Soviet Star removed ©gettyimages.com © Fairuse

Another event of the revolution often reported was the pulling down of the 26 foot tall, 6 and one half ton statue of Josef Stalin. Formed from the bronze of statues damaged during or removed for political reasons after World War II, the gigantic statue was a gift from the people of Hungary or more correctly from the Stalinist government of Hungary to Stalin in celebration of his seventieth birthday. Designed by Sándor Mikus, it was erected on a thirteen-foot-high limestone pedestal supported by a twenty-foot-high viewing platform. The total height of the monument was fifty-nine feet or approximately six stories. The statue was despised from the beginning by the citizens of Budapest. After denouncing the cult of Stalin the statue was under consideration for removal by Hungarian authorities when the events of October 1956, sent the statue crashing into the street.<sup>67</sup>

In oral histories, novels, and memoirs, the removal of the statue becomes a notable event. The tale of the pulling down of Stalin's statue made it into the novels of Brierley and Garrison, and was retold by Michener, Korda and Kalman. Béla Takács was there to watch the struggle to

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<sup>67</sup> James, *Imaging Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*: 41-53.

pull the statue off its base.<sup>68</sup> Many people tried to pull down the statue, struck it with mallets; it would not budge until passing workers with welding torches assisted in the attack. Cut off at the top of Stalin's high boots the statue was then pulled over. Takács made a point of checking his watch when the statue fell so he could remember exactly when the statue came crashing down.<sup>69</sup>

András Pongráz, a seventeen year old studying steel structures was in his final year at the Eötvös Loránt Technical School, remembers the toppling of the Stalin statue slightly differently. He remembers students climbing up the statue and placing cables onto the statue, then using four or five trucks to pull on the statue in futile attempts in bringing it down. Pongráz recalls students then going to the nearby technical school and returning with welding torches with which to cut the statue under the knees. Then using the trucks with "a great roar of crunching and snapping" to pull over the statue of Stalin.<sup>70</sup>

After it fell, the crowd went to work braving up the body of the statue to have a keepsake of the event. Sándor Pécsi secured the right hand and buried it in his garden for thirty-five years. His widow eventually sold it to the Hungarian Contemporary History Museum.<sup>71</sup> Tamás Aczél claims to have fled Hungary with the nose, then selling it for thousands of dollars to an American millionaire.<sup>72</sup>

The boots, still standing on the base, for years remained there before eventually being removed. After the collapse of the Soviet Union a full scale model of the boots was rebuilt in

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<sup>68</sup> Takács interview.

<sup>69</sup> Takács interview.

<sup>70</sup> András Pongráz, interview transcript. *Freedom Fighter 56 Oral History Project*, <http://www.freedomfighter56.com> (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>71</sup> James, *Imaging Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*, 59.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Memento Park, located on the outskirts of Budapest, to preserve the memory of the pulling down of the statue.<sup>73</sup>



Figure 2. Stalin's Boots © [www.aviewoncities.com](http://www.aviewoncities.com) © Fairuse

Following the initial protest meetings on October 23, 1956, and after the students marched through the streets of Budapest; the goal was to broadcast over the radio a list of demands drafted by the protestors - the Sixteen Points. Different sets of demands were prepared in different cities and by different groups of students – some were ten, fourteen or sixteen points. For clarity the author will only refer to a set of sixteen points.<sup>74</sup>

The sixteen points set forth radical demands: all Soviet troops to be removed from Hungary; the election of new leaders of the Hungarian Worker's Party; a new government to be formed; the trial of former government leaders; new elections; the right for workers to strike; a revision of relations with the Soviet Union and with Yugoslavia; the reorganization of the Hungarian economy; Hungarian uranium be traded freely for hard currency; subsistence wages; new trials in political and economic legal cases; the freedom of opinion and speech; the Statue of Stalin to be removed; and the restoration of the old Hungarian coat-of-arms. The points also voiced solidarity with the workers and students of Poland, and called for the organization of a

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<sup>73</sup> Lowe and Joel, *Remembering the Cold War: Global Contest and National Stories*, 104 -105.

<sup>74</sup> Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, János M. Rainer, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (New York: Central European University Press, 2002), 188-190.



Youth Parliament in Budapest.<sup>75</sup>

By broadcasting the demands, it was hoped that they would be spread to the rest of the people in Hungary, individuals not able to hear the points as they were read at the street rallies or who were unable to obtain a printed copy. Julius Várallyay, a second-year student of civil engineering at the Technical University in Budapest in 1956, remembers students returning to the dorms to type through the night copies of the sixteen points using carbon paper to be handed out the next morning on the streets.<sup>76</sup>

The Budapest radio station became the location where thousands flocked demanding the reading of the Sixteen Points over the airways. Miklós Péterfi noted on the way to the radio station: “I was carried by the crowd as drops of water are carried by the current of the Danube.”<sup>77</sup> The radio station refused to broadcast the Sixteen Points and the crowd attempted to take over the station. The battle for the radio station on October 23, 1956, became the location of the first shootings of protestors and the first deaths associated with the revolution. The killing of citizens occurred in the streets and led to the shooting of ÁVO defenders. The deaths added resolve to the crowds standing in the street to fight harder and caused the ÁVO to struggle with greater zeal as the ÁVH became fearful of what the crowd would do to them if they were captured.

Béla Takács was in the crowd in front of the radio station and was an eyewitness to the events that inflamed the emotions of the crowd. After the shootings, he witnessed the arrival of an ambulance. “Uniformed, armed blue ÁVH were sitting in the back where the stretcher would usually be. The man sitting in the driving seat had a white coat on, but everyone could see from his neck that he had a uniform on underneath. The collar insignia were showing. The people

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Julius Várallyay, interview transcript. Freedom Fighter 56 Oral History Project, <http://www.freedomfighter56.com> (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>77</sup> Miklós Péterfi, interview by Gyula Kozák and Imre Mécs. Editor: Gyula Kozák, transcript, 1982. [http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index\\_eng.html](http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index_eng.html) (accessed September 12, 2016).

were enraged by the fact that they'd used an ambulance to get there. They hadn't come in the ambulance to rescue people, they [had] come to kill them. By then, I could see the crowd threatening them with fists and yelling, 'Down with the ÁVH!''<sup>78</sup>

The Hungarian and Soviet leadership, strongly influenced by Stalinist ideas and tactics, failed to adequately realize the impact their behavior was having on the Hungarian population. The population while inclined to leftist politics was seeking reform, not looking to return to the old rule of the aristocrats and the moneyed class. Pál Kabelács was not surprised when the revolution broke out in October as the unhappy state of domestic affairs had led him to expect one.<sup>79</sup>

Péter Kende, no longer a communist but still considering himself a socialist, noted that after the crushing of the revolution in November much shifted in Hungarian society... "political differences between groups became blurred...the dividing line ran between good, honest Hungarians on the one hand and traitors on the other...everybody who still sided with the revolution (was) a good Hungarian. The traitors were the handful who sided with the Soviets from the outset."<sup>80</sup> Kende opined that the crushing of the revolution by the Soviets launched a long war between the two countries. The arms used in the conflict were politics, and resulting in a Hungarian victory after the collapse of the Soviet system.<sup>81</sup>

Oral histories confirm the youthfulness of the Hungarian freedom fighters. Pál Kabelács was nineteen in 1956 and fought with his younger and older brothers, as well as his brothers-in-

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<sup>78</sup> Takács interview.

<sup>79</sup> Pál Kabelács interview by László Eörsi. Editors: Györgyi Bindorffer and Pál Gyenes, transcript, 1988. [http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index\\_eng.html1988](http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index_eng.html1988) (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>80</sup> Péter Kende interview by Gyula Kozák. Editor: Gyula Kozák. Translator: Elemér Boreczky, transcript 1987. [http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index\\_eng.html](http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/index_eng.html) (accessed September 12, 2016).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

law. Some fighters in the streets were not yet teenagers.<sup>82</sup>

But even older fighters had to answer to the house rules established by their parents. Péterfi Miklós was twenty-six in 1956. After spending a day in the streets confronting Hungarian and Soviet soldiers with guns he “went home about 10, as I was still bound to do what my parents told me[...]<sup>83</sup> Miklós retold the comments and actions of other young men - “Ugh, I’ve got to go home now. God, what’ll I get from my mum for this?’ And with that, he’d put down his pistol and dash home, so as not to be late for lunch [...] there were 500,000 mothers in Budapest ordering their lads to be home for lunch.”<sup>84</sup>

The youth of the fighters was also confirmed in surveys taken of those who chose to flee Hungary after the revolution. The majority of the refugees were in their twenties or early thirties, but younger fighters were not uncommon. The fourteen male refugees who were settled in Albany, Louisiana, ranged in age from fifteen to nineteen years old.<sup>85</sup>

Only the young had the strength or the vitality to keep the struggle going. Kabelács does not remember going to sleep between October 25, 1956 and November 4, 1956. He only kept going by drinking phials of caffeine all the time.<sup>86</sup> Miklós remembers going for twenty hour days only getting four hours of sleep a night.<sup>87</sup>

The young freedom fighters frequently failed to appreciate what could be the consequences of their actions. Takács noted the people in the streets during the revolution were lacking a fear of death.<sup>88</sup> Kabelács watched while one of his brothers bled to death in the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Péterfi interview.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Royanne Kropog, *The Story of Arpadhon, Hungarian Settlement, Louisiana, 1896-2006* (Baton Rouge, LA: Moran Printing, Inc. Emprint Document Solutions, 2008), 212-216.

<sup>86</sup> Kabelács interview.

<sup>87</sup> Péterfi interview.

<sup>88</sup> Takács interview.

street.<sup>89</sup> While Bácsi saw the power of the crowds in the street and witnessed the successful shooting down of a Soviet aircraft, he later listened to the distress of frightened men in prison. He also had to listen to the last words of men on their way to the gallows.<sup>90</sup>

### **Cultural Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Music**

Sir Tim Rice, lyricist for *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971), and *Evita* (1978), had long wanted to create a musical about the Cold War. During the mid-1970s, he had discussed writing a musical about the Cuban Missile Crisis with his usual collaborator, composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, but that idea never came to fruition. In the late 1970s, Rice conceived the idea to tell his Cold War story through the prism of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, by showcasing the United States and Soviet chess rivalry. Rice had become fascinated by the political machinations of the 1972 ‘Match of the Century’ between the American Bobby Fischer and the Russian Boris Spassky. Composers Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus from the Swedish group ABBA agreed to write the music.

The musical opens at a chess match in the Italian city of Merano. Anatoly, the Russian world chess champion, falls in love with his American opponent's assistant Florence, a child émigré who escaped Hungary during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Anatoly defeats the American (Freddie) and defects to the West to be with Florence. The second act takes place in Bangkok, where Anatoly defends his title against his next challenger, a Russian.

The musical *Chess* - by using characters of Russian, Hungarian and American backgrounds - becomes a musical metaphor retelling the history of Cold War conflicts with a nod to the events of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Florence in a musical sequence flashes

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<sup>89</sup> Kabelács interview.

<sup>90</sup> Bácsi interview.

back to the Hungarian uprising of 1956, and the image of her father, a patriotic freedom fighter, being arrested and being taken away. Florence accuses Molokov, Anatoly's second (and probably a KGB agent) of having the blood of her father on his hands. Anatoly's Russian wife (Svetlana) and his son are taken away to become prisoners after his defection. They are destined to be used as emotional blackmail to get Anatoly to return to Russia.

Molokov is keen to get Anatoly back to the motherland. Initially he thinks Svetlana might do the trick, so the KGB flies her to Bangkok. When this fails, the KGB concocts a story about Florence's father wanting to leave communist Hungary for freedom in the West. Appealing to Anatoly's altruism, the KGB succeeds in persuading Anatoly to return to Russia in exchange for the freedom of Florence's father. In reality, Florence's father had died some time ago. At the end of the musical, the deceptions of both the KGB and the CIA are revealed. The KGB gets Anatoly to return home to Russia, and the person actually released from prison is a CIA spy - not Florence's father. Anatoly, Svetlana, and Florence are merely pawns used by the KGB and the CIA in a Cold War chess match.

The duet "*I Know Him So Well*" sung by Svetlana and Florence in the final act reflects the struggle of the Cold War. Svetlana and Florence in doing battle for the affections of Anatoly, stand for the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. In a musical metaphor, Svetlana represents the Soviet Union, Florence the United States, and the love conflicted Anatoly represents the world. In the duet, one can see how Svetlana and Florence were struggling for the affections of Anatoly, just as the United States and the Soviet Union, were struggling for the hearts and minds of the entire world. Both nations were hoping for global hegemony.

Nothing is so good it lasts eternally  
Perfect situations must go wrong

But this has never yet prevented me  
Wanting far too much for far too long.  
Looking back I could have played it differently  
Won a few more moments who can tell

Both women sing how their love for Anatoly (capitalism versus communism) is so perfect it can last forever. At times, each has had the upper hand, but during a long struggle neither was able to foresee that they were attempting to accomplish too much in a complicated world. Perhaps both might have been more successful in their goals by making different decisions.

On May 14, 1986, the musical opened in London and ran for three years to warm reviews. During those three years, the individual musical numbers “*I Know Him So Well*” and “*One Night in Bangkok*” rose to be hits on the billboard charts in the UK, US, France, Australia, Belgium, Austria, South Africa, Denmark, Israel, West Germany, Switzerland, Holland and Sweden. On April 28, 1988, a New York production, significantly revamped because the original London version was thought to put the Americans in a bad light, opened at the Imperial Theatre. The New York run lost \$6 million dollars and closed after only 68 performances. However a rewritten concert version performed at Carnegie Hall was a critical success. In 2002, still another version of *Chess* was translated into Swedish and released on a DVD.<sup>91</sup>

The best received musical number from the musical was “*One Night in Bangkok*.” In moving from Eastern Europe to the Far East, Rice would make a nod to the portion of world where the conflicts of the Cold War continued long after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 had been crushed.

The chess match in Bangkok represents the Indo-China War. Bangkok is a representation of Vietnam where the hard, tough French and the lean, mean Americans were

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<sup>91</sup>Sven Erik Thor Liebstaedter, <http://www.thorsven.net/Divers/Chess/Chess2.htm> (accessed November 13, 2016).

humbled. Both the French and Americans believed they were all powerful but soon learn the impossibly high cost of trying to maintain political, economic and military dominance. Both supported the wrong group of political leaders and the wrong governments. Leaders and governments through actions and behavior were to become as evil as the devil to local populations. *Chess* opened in New York at the wrong time.

“*Chess*, the musical, has been in development for so long that the Cold War, which was still on during the show’s early years, had already ended. .. Without the Cold War and with a declining interest in the game ...*Chess* may have suffered a loss of relevance and appeal to American audiences in 1988.”<sup>92</sup>

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was likely also memorialized by Dmitri Shostakovich in his Eleventh Symphony, *The Year 1905* (op.103). Shostakovich’s Eleventh, dated August 4, 1957, was first performed in September, and premiered in October.<sup>93</sup> To have the Eleventh Symphony publically performed in Russia and escape governmental censure, it has been suggested Shostakovich disguised the Hungarian inspiration for his work by alluding to the events of January 9, 1905 - the Russian “Bloody Sunday.”<sup>94</sup>

In his own words Shostakovich stated: “I wrote it in 1957 and it deals with contemporary themes even though it is called ‘1905.’ It is about people, who have stopped believing because the cup of evil has run over.”<sup>95</sup> Contradicting himself, Shostakovich in February 1956 wrote he was now writing his Eleventh Symphony, “...dedicated to the “First Russian Revolution, to its unforgettable heroes.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Blogcritics.org/the-story-of-chess-the-musical (accessed December 2015).

<sup>93</sup> Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 201.

<sup>94</sup> “Bloody Sunday” is the name given to the events of Sunday, January 22, 1905, in St Petersburg, Russia, when unarmed demonstrators were fired upon by soldiers of the Imperial Guard as they marched towards the Winter Palace to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. The shooting provoked public outrage and a series of massive strikes. The massacre on Bloody Sunday is considered the start of the Revolution of 1905 and one of the key events which led to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

<sup>95</sup> Dmitri Shostakovich, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dimitri Shostakovich* related to and edited by Solomon Volkov, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Limelight Editions, 1979, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 2004): 8.

<sup>96</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich*: 199.

To the audience at the premier, the Eleventh was thought to be about the Hungarian revolution... “an elderly lady was overheard saying: ‘Those aren’t guns firing, they are tanks roaring, and people being squashed.’ And when this was related to Shostakovich, he is reported to have replied: ‘That means she understood it.’”<sup>97</sup> Even Shostakovich’s son, Maxim - a pianist, conductor, and one time musical director of the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra, is reported to have worried that the reference to the Hungarian revolution was too clear, asking his father “Papa, what if they hang you for this?”<sup>98</sup>

Harlow Robinson, a biographer of Prokofiev, also supported the idea that the events of the Hungarian revolution inspired Shostakovich.<sup>99</sup> However, Shostakovich biographer Laurel E. Fay finds little to support the concept that the Eleventh is really about the Hungarian revolution of 1956. She quotes Khentova, Shostakovich’s Russian biographer, who states he was told in 1974 by Shostakovich that the Eleventh was about 1905 and Russian history.<sup>100</sup> Solomon Volkov, Shostakovich’s editor, noted the symphony was about people and rulers, their juxtaposition and the execution of defenseless people.<sup>101</sup>

But Elizabeth Wilson states to Soviet audiences the analogy to the events to Hungary would have been unmistakable.<sup>102</sup> David Hurwitz notes the confusion concerning the inspiration for the symphony - “some regard it as an ideological betrayal, an embrace of Socialist

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<sup>97</sup> [www.markwigglesworth.com/notes/marks-notes-on-shostakovich-symphony-no-11](http://www.markwigglesworth.com/notes/marks-notes-on-shostakovich-symphony-no-11) (accessed July 22, 2016).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Richard Freed, *Program Note*, [www.kennedy-center.org/artist/composition/2875](http://www.kennedy-center.org/artist/composition/2875) (accessed July 22, 2016).

<sup>100</sup>Fay, *Shostakovich*: 330.

<sup>101</sup>Shostakovich, *Testimony*: xi-xii.

<sup>102</sup>Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994): 550.



Realism [...] or [...] a response to the events of the 1956 Hungarian uprising (Shostakovich suggested as much to his inner circle).”<sup>103</sup>

The final resolution of Shostakovich’s inspiration, goal in writing the Eleventh Symphony, and composition will need to be further researched and resolved. Maybe we will never know whether he meant Russia in 1905 or Hungary in 1956, to be his inspiration.

No such doubts concern the composition *Elegia-1956* for voice and organ by András Gábor Virágh of Budapest. In response to a call for commemorative music by the “Remember Hungary 1956” committee, the piece was judged the prize winner and was performed in California in 2006.<sup>104</sup>

### **Cultural Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Films and Documentaries**

As with writers of fictional literature, the Hungarian revolution of 1956 inspired numerous makers of films and documentaries. *The Forgotten Faces* (1961), a short directed by Peter Watkins, re-creates events from the revolution; *Szerelem* (1971), directed by Károly Makk, tells the story of an old woman and her daughter-in-law, the effects on them of their husband's imprisonment after the revolution and of the husband’s return home from prison; *Hazatérés* (2006), directed by Réka Pigniczky, tells the story of two sisters who attempt to discover what their father did as a freedom fighter.<sup>105</sup>

*Love Film* (1970), written and directed by the famous Hungarian filmmaker Istvan Szabo, tells the story of two Hungarians meeting again years after the revolution. In flashbacks the movie tells the story of two childhood sweethearts who became sexually active while they

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<sup>103</sup> David Hurwitz, *Shostakovich Symphonies and Concertos: An Owner’s Manual* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006): 137.

<sup>104</sup> Tibor Glant, *Remember Hungary 1956: Essays on the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in American Memory* (Wayne, NJ: Center of Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2007), 213.

<sup>105</sup> [americanhungarianfederation.org](http://americanhungarianfederation.org) (accessed June 15, 2016).

participated in the 1956 revolution. The girl fled to France after the revolution while the young man elected to remain in Hungary. Though the spark of young love remained, their different lives after the revolution has set the girl on one life path in the West and the young man on another, which required he return to Hungary to his wife and child.

*Colossal Sensation* (2004), directed by Robert Koltai, is a tale of brotherly love spanning nearly a lifetime. The twin brothers born in 1903, one crippled as a child, are raised in a family of performers. They grow up to become magicians and clowns in the circus. Their life stories, set in Hungary, include the periods before and during World War I, the interwar period, and the period of Nazi and Russian occupation. During a performance, the crippled brother damages a watch, a personal gift of Stalin, of an important Hungarian official. The other brother claims responsibility and is imprisoned. Using the street fighting of 1956 as cover, the crippled twin frees his brother and they both flee to the west. *Colossal Sensation* is a story of brotherly love set against the history of twentieth century Hungary.

The oldest film reviewed was *The Journey* (1959), directed by Anatole Litvak and filmed in Austria. It was the second film in which Deborah Kerr and Yul Brynner starred. Actual footage at the beginning of the film shows the red star being cut from Hungarian flags and Budapest street cars being turned into street barricades. The film follows a bus loaded with international travelers as they flee from the fighting in Budapest on their way to the Austrian border. Kerr, playing an English aristocrat, is attempting to smuggle her lover Paul – a Hungarian street fighter and a famous scientist (Jason Robards) – from the country. Brynner is the Russian commander at the border who develops an attraction for Kerr. Brynner discovers the true identity of Paul, but because of his humanity and affection for Kerr permits the two lovers to cross the border.

*The Company* (2007), directed by Michael Salomon, was a four part television mini-series and was a Hollywood invention simply using the Hungarian revolution as backdrop for a CIA spy thriller. In part one of the series, a CIA agent (Chris O'Donnell) is sent to Budapest to urge the leader of the Hungarian student movement to slow down the revolution from occurring for twelve to eighteen months. The CIA agent is captured by the ÁVO and tortured, being released when the freedom fighters storm the prison where he is being held. O'Donnell joins in the street fighting, exposes a Hungarian government mole in the ranks of the students, and then flees across the border to Austria.

A documentary, which touches on the revolution, is *No Subtitles Necessary: Laszlo & Vilmos* (2008) was directed by James Chressanthis. László Kovács and Vilmos Zsigmond were students who met in film class in Budapest, filmed the 1956 Hungarian Revolution with borrowed equipment, and smuggled the film out of the country during their flight from Hungary after the revolution was crushed. Carrying the film on their body was at personal danger to of them because Soviet troops considered all cameras a type of weapon. The small amount of film footage shows the Soviet invasion, the hanging of ÁVO agents, and street fighting. In interviews this documentary chronicles their beginning in the film industry and follows their rise to success in Hollywood.

This film has many threads: social, political and artistic. It is a Cold War story, an American immigrant story and a glamorous, Hollywood success story where dreams do come true. This is an intimate portrait of two giants of modern image-making and their deep bond of brotherhood that transcended every imaginable boundary. Two heroes. One road.<sup>106</sup>

Used as a theme more than once is the water polo match at the 1956 Olympics.

*Szabadság, szerelem (Children of Glory)*, is a 2006 semi-fictional film by Hungarian director

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<sup>106</sup> Rob Nelson. "No Subtitles Necessary: Laszlo & Vilmos," review of *No Subtitles Necessary: Laszlo & Vilmos*, directed by James Chressanthis, *Variety* (June 4, 2008).

Kriszta Goda, which portrays the effect of the 1956 Revolution on members of the 1956 Hungarian Olympic water polo team. *Freedom's Fury* (2006), directed by Colin K. Gray and Megan Raney with narration by Olympic swimmer Mark Spitz, is a documentary in which both Hungarian and Russian Olympic water polo players are interviewed relating remembrances of the famous *Blood in the Water* match at the Melbourne Olympics in December 1956. In the documentary, participants from both water polo teams recounted their memories of the match, linking the goal of winning the contest to the street battles which had occurred in Budapest.

On the internet (YouTube) can be located newsreels narrated in English of film footage of the actual “*Blood in the Water*” match held on December 6, 1956 including *Eredeti felvételek az 1956-os Magyarország - Szovjet Unió vizilabda meccsről* (Footage of the 1956 Hungarian vs. USSR water polo match).<sup>107</sup>

### **Cultural Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Sports**

Hungarians loved sports. In 1956, Hungarians did not have a lot of outlets for entertainment such as television or movies; neither did they enjoy the freedom to travel by their Stalinist leaning government. The Hungarian water polo team was one of the best in the world, having won three gold medals in a row at the Olympics preceding the 1956 games.

A water polo team consists of seven players and a match lasts for four quarters. The Hungarians were famous for their team tactics, so much so that the Russians had sent their teams to study Hungarian tactics and methods by practicing with the Hungarian national team. To maintain their domination of the sport, when the Russians were no longer practicing with them, the Hungarians developed new zone defenses.

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<sup>107</sup> *1956 Olympics Hun vs. USSR water polo*, Vinylize by Tipton, published on Apr 23, 2012, [www.historypod.net](http://www.historypod.net) (accessed Dec 5, 2015).

In Melbourne, Australia, during the December 1956 Olympics, one semi-final water polo match was played between the teams of Hungary and the Soviet Union. The Hungarian team on their arrival in Australia removed from their uniforms all Communist symbols and replaced them with Free Hungary banners. The Hungarian team wanted to use the match to provide revenge for friends and family at home.<sup>108</sup>

Water polo is an extremely physical sport requiring the participants to be swimming, or treading water for the nearly the entire match. To keep in top physical condition they often participated in cross training with other sports. However, because of the events in Hungary, the water polo team has been unable to train and had not practiced in the water for over a month. In addition, the team had been isolated in a training camp outside Budapest unable to contact friends and family at home, and had limited information of the events occurring.<sup>109</sup>

At the semifinal match between the Hungarians and Russians the bleachers alongside the pool were filled with expatriate Hungarians as well as Australians and Americans, some of the strongest and most vocal Cold War opponents of the Soviet Union. The Hungarians were upset not only because of the events that had occurred in Hungary, but also because they believe they had been cheated in Moscow by the Russians in a match preceding the Olympics. The captains of each team refused to shake hands, and the game quickly became violent and physical. The Hungarians developed a strategy to put the Soviets off their game by taunting and provoking the Soviet team. From the beginning of the match, kicks and punches between the two teams were exchanged under the water. The Russians grew angrier believing the Swedish officials were

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<sup>108</sup> Simon Burton, "50 stunning Olympic moments No 7: Hungary vs. Soviet Union: blood in the water," *The Guardian*, December 28, 2011, [www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2011/dec/28/olympic-hungary-soviet-union-blood-water](http://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2011/dec/28/olympic-hungary-soviet-union-blood-water) (accessed September 15, 2016).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

biased against them and were upset that the Hungarians were able to achieve two points on penalty scores.<sup>110</sup>

In the second half of the match, a provoked Soviet player, Valentin Prokhorov, struck Hungarian Evin Zádor. Zádor was the youngest member of the Hungarian team. He was only nineteen years old in 1956, having joined the team at age seventeen. Zádor climbed out of the water with blood streaming from a gash on his face. His bleeding face was the final straw for a crowd already in frenzy. Angry spectators jumped to the edge of the pool, shaking their fists, shouting abuse and spitting at the Russians. Police and Olympic officials held the spectators back, but for several minutes the shouting and jeering continued. The game was stopped with one minute remaining and with Hungary leading four to zero was declared the winner. Pictures of the bleeding Zádor were published around the world, leading to the "*Blood in the Water*" label being applied to the match.<sup>111</sup>



Figure 3. Evin Zádor ©gettyimages.com. © Fairuse

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<sup>110</sup> *Freedom's Fury*, 2006. WOLO Entertainment, Cinergi Pictures Entertainment, Moving Picture Institute. DVD.

<sup>111</sup> Burnton, *ibid.*

Several Hungarian Olympic team members used the opportunity of the Australian games to stay behind in the West. Over forty Hungarian Olympians defected including over half of the water polo team.

The “*Blood in the Water*” match is an often repeated element in cultural memories of the Hungarian revolution of 1956. In the novel *Concrete Statues*, one of the main characters is on the water polo team. Oral histories as recorded in documentaries relate the history of the water polo match from both the Russian and Hungarian sides. In films the match is incorporated into fictional stories while on the internet are actual film footage taken during the match.

### **Cultural Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in the Arts**

The author suggests that art, except for sculpture and images on stamps, is a cultural representation used the least to preserve or remember the Hungarian revolution. During the revolution itself, because of the difficulty of printing, street posters were more in the nature of broadcast sheets or public announcements with wording and little imagery.<sup>112</sup>

The Russo-Frenchman Marc Chagall in 1956 did create a primitive style lithograph entitled *Homage to Hungary*. The allegorical work includes a dove of peace, a mother and child, and a burning city.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> “Small Prints of 1956 private collection,” The National Széchényi Library.  
<http://www.mek.oszk.hu/04000/04056/html/plakat/datum.html> (accessed May 27, 2016).

<sup>113</sup> Marc Chagall, “*Homage To Hungary*,” (1956; France), [www.wikiArt.org](http://www.wikiArt.org) (accessed June 22, 2016).



Figure 4. *Homage to Hungary* © 1956 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris  
Used with the permission of the Artists Rights Society

On occasion, works of art are reimagined to memorialize the events of 1956 in Hungary. An exhibit at Budapest's Military History Museum entitled "*Thirteen Days... October 23 – November 4, 1956*" is partially based on the painting "*Finch Downed by a Hawk*" by Tivadar Kosztká Csontváry. The finch is used to symbolize Hungary, while the hawk represents the superior military powers located near the borders of Hungary.<sup>114</sup>

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary remembrance ceremonies around the world inspired the commissioning of works of art on paper. Gabor Koranyi created a limited-edition etching, "*Torn From the Flag*," incorporating in the background the Hungarian flag with the communist symbol removed while in the foreground is "a stream of people filing through history's timeline [...]. From the left [...] faceless beings through the shadows of prison bars, downcast and repressed. As they file past the torn center of the flag, a cleansing and empowering ray of hope shines through them, and they look upward. This experience allows them to emerge as free and

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<sup>114</sup> James, *Imaging Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*, 126-127.



vibrant individuals looking straight toward a promising future, and a world now filled with hope.”<sup>115</sup> The bottom of the etching is filled with a map of Hungary.

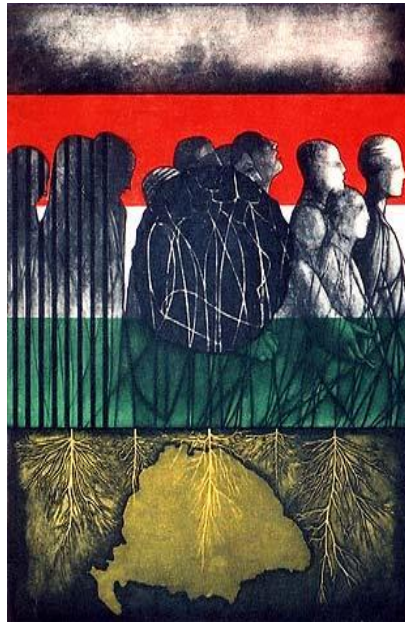


Figure 5. "Torn From the Flag" © Fairuse

In December 1956, Vice-President Richard Nixon was sent to Austria to report back to the Eisenhower administration on the condition of Hungarian refugees who were fleeing into Austria from the crushing of the revolution by Soviet troops. On December 21, 1956, at 3:30 a.m., Nixon visited the border between Austria and Hungary.<sup>116</sup> Riding on a trailer pulled by a tractor, bundled in blankets against the cold, Nixon and his party approached the boarder at Andau. Nixon and his party encountered several escaping Hungarian refugees and assisted them on their journey to a safe house in Austria.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> [http://www.gimagine.com/gimagine/Torn\\_from\\_the\\_Flag/Gabor\\_Koranyi.htm](http://www.gimagine.com/gimagine/Torn_from_the_Flag/Gabor_Koranyi.htm) (accessed May 12, 2016).

<sup>116</sup> Glant, *Remembering Hungary 1956*, 151.

<sup>117</sup> Irwin F. Gellman, *The President and the Apprentice: Eisenhower and Nixon, 1952-1961* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015), 355.



Figure 6. *Vice President Nixon Visits Andau*

Used with the permission of the The Richard Nixon Library, Yorba Linda, CA.  
Gift of Elizabeth (daughter) and Ferenc Daday, Richard Nixon Foundation, 1991.003.001.

This visit to the boarder was commemorated in a Ferenc Daday painting. A large canvas, approximately twelve feet by ten feet, it was unveiled in 1972. It had been commissioned by the Hungarian community to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the revolution. The painting was presented to President Nixon to thank him for his efforts to increase the number of refugees allowed during the “*Project Mercy*” resettlement of Hungarian refugees into the United States.<sup>118</sup> The painting is currently in storage at the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library and Museum.<sup>119</sup>

Daday was not present when Nixon visited Andau and combines in the painting a structure destroyed by the time Nixon arrived at Andau with images of refugees behaving in ways unlikely to have occurred and which would have been physically dangerous. However, the painting is a reminder of a little remembered event and of Nixon’s assistance to Hungarian

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>119</sup> Olivia Anastasiadis, Supervisory Museum Curator, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, e-mail message to author, September 12, 2016.

refugees.<sup>120</sup>

The continued Soviet influence in Hungary until the fall of the Berlin wall may account partially for the lack of works of art in Hungary dealing with the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. An online virtual gallery dedicated to fine arts of Hungary from the beginnings in the Romanesque period up to the mid-20th century (<http://www.hung-art.hu>) for the time period 1951-1975, lists only 195 pieces of art held in various public and private collections in Hungary. Of the 195 pieces none can be associated by title with the events of 1956. A search for “1956” in the title of any work produced no results and a search for “Revolution” in any title only located a statue created in 1918.

A 1989 poster by Péter Pócs and László Haris entitled “301” links the suffering of Christ with that of Hungary by imposing a crucifix of nails over a blood stain in the shape of Hungary. The title of the work refers to the cemetery plot where Nagy and other political victims were buried in an unmarked grave.<sup>121</sup>



Figure 7. *301* © 1989 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / HUNGART, Budapest  
Used with the permission of the Artists Rights Society

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<sup>120</sup> Glant, *Remembering Hungary 1956*: 180-181.

<sup>121</sup> James, *Imaging Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*, 105.

Photographic images of the revolution are numerous owing to the substantial number of professional and amateur photographers who were in Budapest during the revolution. Family photographs are in the possession of the Korda, Kalman, Crabtree, Nagy, and Huber families. Photographs taken by professionals can be located in museum and photographic archives.<sup>122</sup>

Reg Gadney in his day by day narration of the events of October-November, *Cry Hungary: Uprising 1956* includes numerous photographs credited to various photojournalists and photographic image services.<sup>123</sup> The photojournalist Erich Lessing arrived in Hungary from Vienna in late October 1956 in a convoy of forty automobiles filled with journalists. He later published his stark photographs in *Revolution in Hungary: The 1956 Budapest Uprising*.<sup>124</sup>

The pulling down of Stalin's statue on October 23, 1956, or the remaining boots, was an often reprinted photographic image. Korda, Gadney and Lessing all had various photographs of the event and its aftermath in their books.

### **Cultural Memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Sculpture**

Memorials and sculpture commemorating the Hungarian uprising of 1956 may be the most common artistic expressions of remembrance in both Hungary and the West. In Budapest the reconstructed boots of Stalin can be found in Memento Park while in 2006 at the original site of the Stalin statue was erected a contemporary memorial on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the events of 1956. In front of the Hungarian parliament building there is a memorial designed by Maria Lugossy, a symbolic grave over which a flag with a hole cut out of it is on

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<sup>122</sup> Getty Images, Inc., The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Wilson Center Digital Archive, Alamy Inc., Magyarország Baratai Alapıtvany, Draco Books, FineArtAmerica.com, 56Films Bt., libcom.org, www.flickr.com, EST&OST, PESTER LLOYD, and Framepool Inc.

<sup>123</sup> Reg Gadney, *Cry Hungary: Uprising 1956* (New York, Atheneum, 1986).

<sup>124</sup> Erich Lessing, *Revolution in Hungary: The 1956 Budapest Uprising* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2006).

permeant display. In addition in Parliament Square there has been erected a memorial to Prime Minister Imre Nagy who led Hungary during the revolution.

On October 23, 2003, a bust of Hungary's Jeanne d'Arc, Ilona Tóth, was unveiled. Tóth, a medical student during the revolution who ran a first-aid station, was executed in 1957, for allegedly brutally killing a member of the ÁVO. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the story of Tóth became part myth, part legend retold in tales, articles, books, and documentaries mingling Christian allusions including guardian angel, virginity, resurrection and redemption.<sup>125</sup>

In addition public sculptures to the Hungarian revolution are located in Los Angeles and Boston. On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hungarian revolution, the 1986 bronze and granite sculpture in Boston was designed by Gyuri Hollosy and was funded by Hungarian Society of Massachusetts. A female figure atop the sculpture raises her baby skyward, while standing on rubble mixed with the bodies of young demonstrators as a wounded man waves the Hungarian flag. On the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hungarian revolution, the statue in Los Angeles was dedicated on October 22, 2006, and is topped by the mythical Turul bird, a symbol of modern Hungary.<sup>126</sup>

## Conclusion

The cultural memory of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 is captured and preserved in numerous mediums. Novels and films tell stories of children and young adults, often students, taking to the streets to fight to change the government of Hungary. The cliché of youth and purity is often developed by cloaking the young freedom fighters in romance with only just motivations. The youth and purity of the freedom fighters is further emphasized by including

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<sup>125</sup> James, *Imaging Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*: 83-92.

<sup>126</sup> Glant, *Remembering Hungary 1956*, 214, 216-217.

narrations of their first sexual encounters (“The Other Youth Revolution”).

The quest for change is noted by retelling stories of the removal of Soviet stars from flags and buildings. Narration of street battles preserves the ambition and gallantry the freedom fighters inserted into the struggle. The retelling of group efforts in pulling down Stalin’s statue preserves the memory that the revolution was a collaborative effort.

The complex moves on the board game chess compares with the intricate decisions of battle plans and diplomatic activities.

Music relates both the complexity and the noise of battle. The complex arrangement of notes could be viewed a metaphor for battle and battle plans. The wail of instruments duplicates the din of battle, the cries of the wounded, and the vocal laments of the survivors for the fallen.

The water polo match between the Hungarian and Soviet teams proposes that group effort and youth would have been a winning combination had Western nations assisted the freedom fighters as did the Swedish Olympic officials who ruled for the Hungarian water polo team.

Visual arts and sculpture attempt to preserve memories and honor the participants. By focusing on individual and collective participants, visual arts attempts to honor and preserve the memory of the one and of the group.

But others suffered during the revolution. Young Soviet soldiers were injured or killed in Hungary in 1956. Their bodies, covered in lye, were left in the streets while the bodies of the fallen Hungarians were given burials. The turmoil in 1956 permitted some Hungarians to settle personal or political scores with other Hungarians. Hungarians were exceptionally well behaved during the revolution, but they also behaved in terrible ways - killing, maiming, bent on achieving political goals at all costs.

The author admires the Hungarian freedom fighters for their bravery, courage, and sacrifices. It is understandable that Hungarians remaining behind and the diaspora of refugees would want the comfort of a cultural memory of 1956 which focuses on the brave, the best of motives, and the valiantly of the participants. But the author finds the creation of a cultural memory of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 that is wrapping the memory in a cult of youth and sexual awakening, is less than honest and admirable to remember the heroes of 1956.

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