

Introducing Márta Mészáros

Autobiography,
Film, and Politics

Early Life

- Born 1931 in Budapest, Hungary
- Emigrated to USSR in 1936 with painter mother and father, sculptor László Mészáros
- Father arrested and imprisoned in 1938 purge
- Mother died of typhoid
- Returned to Hungary in 1946
- Studied film at Moscow's Russian State Institute for Cinematography (VGIK) in mid 1950s, as [no woman yet enrolled in Hungarian film school](#)



Image source: [Film Reference](#)

Early Career

- Assistant at Studio Budapest, producer of newsreels, 1954
- Directed documentaries at studios in both Hungary (1965-1956, 1959-1968) and Romania (1957-1959)
- Joined Mafilm 4 Group film unit in 1966
- Begins directing fiction feature films in 1968
 - *The Girl* (*Eltávozott nap*, 1968) is first feature in Hungarian film history made by woman



Image source: [Zobacz Wiecej Foto Enh 2009](#)

Partial Filmography

- [Riddance](#) (1973)
- [Adoption](#) (1975)
- [Just Like at Home](#) (1978)
- [Diary for My Children](#) (1982)
- [Diary for My Loves](#) (1987)
- [Bye-Bye, Red Riding Hood](#) (1988)
- [Diary for My Parents](#) (1990)
- [Little Vilma: The Last Diary](#) (1999)
- [The Unburied Man](#) (2004)



Still from *Adoption*. Image source: [Senses of Cinema](#)

Tension with Western Feminist Film Theory

- Mészáros resisting categorization of “feminist,” despite films’ empathetic focus on female protagonists’ experience and point of view
 - “I tell banal, commonplace stories, and then in them the leads are women—I portray things from a woman's angle.”
 - “I don’t want to make speeches about women’s emancipation, because I’m not part of that movement, but [filmmaking by women] represents a different kind of sensitivity. If you interpret my films as strictly political, you see that I approach power relations differently from the way they are portrayed by male directors”
(Portuges, *Screen Memories*, 9)
- Views political and historical content and focus on individual lived experience as primary

Political Context: Communism in Hungary

- 1919: Brief communist revolution and Hungarian Soviet Republic under Béla Kun
- 11/1919: Counterrevolutionary forces under command of Miklós Horthy seize control of government
- 1920: Horthy becomes Regent and Head of State (until 1944)

Political Context, Cont'd

- 1945: Provisional government (American/Soviet/British)
- 11/1945: Elections, with independent Smallholders Party dominating
- 1947-1948: Hungarian Communist Party gaining control of government (Mátyás Rákosi head of party)
- 1948: Social Democratic Party merges with Hungarian Communist Party to become Hungarian Worker's Party

Political Context, Cont'd

- Rákosi purging intellectuals and other critics (2,000 executed, 100,000 imprisoned 1948-56)
- Rákosi replaced as Prime Minister by Imre Nagy in 1953

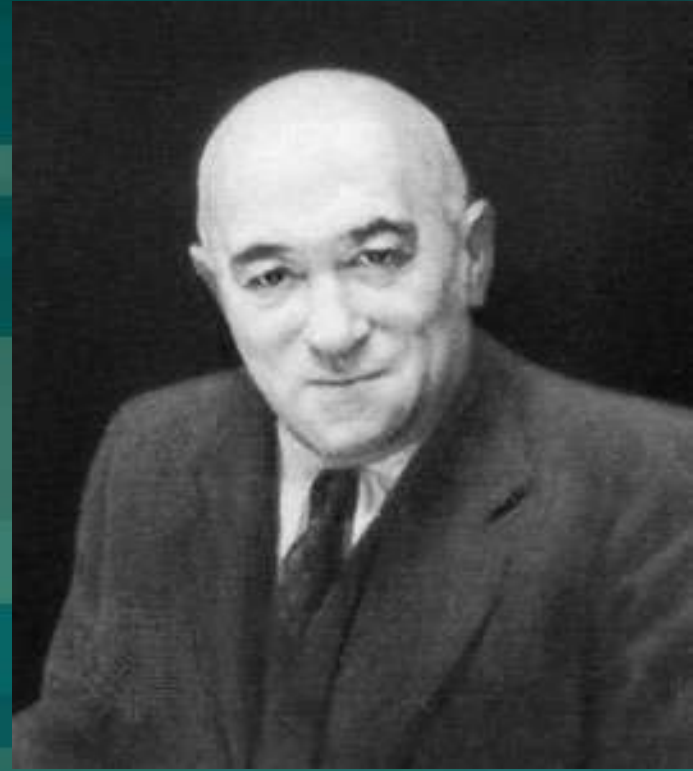


Image source: [History Learning Site](#)

Political Context, Cont'd

- Nagy instituting political and cultural reform; removed as Prime Minister in 1955
- 1956: Nagy reinstated as PM
- [1956](#): Uprising against government and Soviet suppression of uprising
- 1958: Nagy executed on charges of treason



Image source: [BBC News](#)

Class Questions:

Additional Resources

- Communism, Nazism and Fascism
 - Professor Brad DeLong’s “[Alternatives to Capitalism and Democracy](#)” page outlines the major tenets and compares Nazism and Fascism
- Josip Broz Tito, leader of Yugoslavia, 1943-1980
 - Professor Charles Evans provides [background](#) on Tito’s break with Stalin and links to articles on the split, like [this one from a 1949 issue of TIME](#)
- Hungarian political history, post uprising
 - PBS has a [succinct timeline](#)