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 Więcej Foto Enh 2009
Partial Filmography

- *Riddance* (1973)
- *Adoption* (1975)
- *Just Like at Home* (1978)
- *Diary for My Children* (1982)
- *Diary for My Loves* (1987)
- *Diary for My Parents* (1990)

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• Views political and historical content and focus on individual lived experience as primary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
Rákosi purging intellectuals and other critics (2,000 executed, 100,000 imprisoned 1948-56)

Rákosi replaced as Prime Minister by Imre Nagy in 1953
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